ABSTRACT

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MARRIAGE INTENSIVES: A MULTI-PERSPECTIVE INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF COUPLES’ POST INTENSIVE EXPERIENCE

Tara Elizabeth Lalonde
Center for Counseling and Family Studies
Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia
Doctor of Philosophy in Counseling

At a time when divorce rates remain at 50% regardless of treatment efforts, this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) explored and compared how couples made sense of their marriage experience one year after intensive marriage therapy for couples who found it significant and were able to maintain gains, and for couples who initially found it helpful but were unable to maintain gains. Three couples in each category were interviewed and compared resulting in six themes emerging from each group. Two additional overarching themes of regenerated versus disheartened and intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation and change emerged to clearly distinguish the two groups studied. Finally, the themes of this study were found to corroborate previous common factors research and future recommendations were provided.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Terms</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage Intensive</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-perspective</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective Marriage Counseling Treatments</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Marital Therapy Formats</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage Education</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative Marriage Intensive Therapy</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locating Myself as Researcher</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of Remaining Chapters</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective Conjoint Marriage Counseling Treatments</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS .......................................................... 84
Overview .............................................................................. 84
The Participants ................................................................... 85
Demographic Information .................................................. 86
Participant Stories .............................................................. 92
Sadie and Bill ................................................................. 93
Anne and Mitchell ........................................................... 95
Julie and David ............................................................... 96
Mackenzie and Aaron ....................................................... 98
Jim ................................................................................. 99
Michelle ........................................................................ 101
Themes of Group 1: Maintained Group ............................................. 103

Maintaining Gains Theme One: Intensive Factors ......................... 104

Quality Package ........................................................................ 104

Group Dynamics ........................................................................ 109

Getting it All Out ...................................................................... 112

Individual Healing First ............................................................. 116

Maintaining Gains Theme Two: Personal Responsibility .................. 122

Owning Personal Contributions to the Problem ............................. 122

Responsible for Change ............................................................... 128

Practicing the Tools .................................................................. 131

Maintaining Gains Theme Three: Faith ........................................ 136

Faith Experienced at NIM ........................................................... 137

Faith Personalized at Home ......................................................... 141

Work in Process Theme One: Intensive Factors ............................. 144

Intensive Not Enough ................................................................. 144

Work in Process Theme Two: Change Takes Time ....................... 146

Need Patience ........................................................................... 147

Still Struggling / Working At It ................................................... 151

Work in Process Theme Three: Outside Factors ............................ 154

No Model ................................................................................. 154

Work ....................................................................................... 157

Personalized Life Stressors ......................................................... 161
Group Similarities: Practicing Tools / Helpful Tools ........................................ 233
Group Similarities: Owning Personal Contributions to the Problem ............ 234
Group Similarities: Responsible for Change .................................................... 236
Group Similarities: Faith .................................................................................. 238
Group Similarities: Intensive Not Enough ....................................................... 240
Group Similarities: Still Struggling – Working At It / Not Enough Change .... 242
Group Differences: Group Dynamics / Group Prevents Focus ................. 244
Group Differences: Purging – Getting it All Out / Not the Root ............... 246
Group Differences: Owning Personal Contributions to the Problem / Not 
Enough Change .............................................................................................. 247
Group Differences: Need Patience / Discouraged by Time & Not 
Committed to Persevere .............................................................................. 248
Group Differences: Unmatched Subthemes ................................................. 251
Chapter Summary .......................................................................................... 255

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND
RECOMMENDATIONS ..................................................................................... 257
Significance: Engaging the Literature .......................................................... 258
Connections to Group and Intensive Literature ............................................ 258
Common Factors Connected to Maintenance As Well As Outcome .......... 260
Implications for NIM ...................................................................................... 269
List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Research Summary of Meta-Analyses for Marital Therapy Effectiveness Studies ................................................................. 20

Figure 2.2: Research Summary of Follow-up Studies ......................... 23

Figure 2.3: Research Summary of Group Marital Therapies .................. 27

Figure 2.4: Research Summary of Marriage Education Meta-Analyses ........ 34

Figure 2.5: Research Summary of Single Marriage Education Studies ........ 38

Figure 2.6: Research Summary of Marriage Intensive Therapies ............... 41

Figure 2.7: Research Summary of Integrative Marital Intensive Therapy Studies 46

Figure 4.1: Maintained Gains Theme 1 – Intensive Factors ................. 107

Figure 4.2: Maintained Gains Theme 2 – Personal Responsibility .......... 123

Figure 4.3: Maintained Gains Theme 3 - Faith ................................. 138

Figure 4.4: Work in Process Theme 1 – Intensive Factors .................... 145

Figure 4.5: Work in Process Theme 2 – Change Takes Time ............... 148

Figure 4.6: Work in Process Theme 3 – Outside Factors ..................... 155

Figure 4.7: Gains and Positives Theme 1 – Intensive Factors ............. 164

Figure 4.8: Gains and Positives Theme 2 – Personal Responsibility ....... 173

Figure 4.9: Gains and Positives Theme 3 - Faith ............................. 183

Figure 4.10: Overwhelming Difficulties Theme 1 – Intensive Factors ...... 188

Figure 4.11: Overwhelming Difficulties Theme 2 – Change Takes Time .... 198

Figure 4.12: Overwhelming Difficulties Theme 3 – Outside Factors ......... 214

Figure 4.13: Comparing Themes in Response to Question 1 - What, if any,
gains have been sustained and how? .......................... 219

Figure 4.14: Comparing Themes in Response to Question 2 - What, if anything, has made it difficult to maintain gains? .......................... 220

Figure 4.15: Comparing Themes in Response to Question 1 - What, if any, gains have been sustained and how?  Theme 1: Intensive Factors ........ 221

Figure 4.16: Comparing Themes in Response to Question 1 - What, if any, gains have been sustained and how?  Theme 2: Personal Responsibility 222

Figure 4.17: Comparing Themes in Response to Question 1 - What, if any, gains have been sustained and how?  Theme 3: Faith ...................... 223

Figure 4.18: Comparing Themes in Response to Question 2 - What, if anything, has made it difficult to maintain gains?  Theme 1: Intensive Factors ...... 224

Figure 4.19: Comparing Themes in Response to Question 2 - What, if anything, has made it difficult to maintain gains?  Theme 2: Change Takes Time / Change Takes Too Much Time ........................................ 225

Figure 4.20: Comparing Themes in Response to Question 2 - What, if anything, has made it difficult to maintain gains?  Theme 3: Outside Factors ...... 226

Figure 4.21: Overarching Theme 1 ......................................................... 230

Figure 4.22: Overarching Theme 2 ......................................................... 231

List of Tables

Table 4.1: Demographic Information ................................................. 87

Table 4.2: Summary of Themes for the Maintained Group ......................... 105
Table 4.3: Summary of Themes for the Difficulties Group .............................. 162
Table 4.4: Theme Similarities and Differences ........................................... 228
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the latter half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century divorce rates escalated to their highest levels and then stabilized at approximately 50\% of marriages ending in divorce in the Western world (Lebow & Gasbarrini, 2009). To make matters worse, according to Birch, Weed, and Olsen (2004) divorce not only impacts couples and families, it also impacts society in profound ways, resulting in “medical, legal, social, physical and mental health consequences” (p. 495). Growing awareness of this prompted the US government to invest in the development of numerous marriage initiative programs including Marriage Savers (2013), First Things First (2013), and Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI, 1999-2013) in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s. For the most part these programs are community based educational programs for either premarriage or marriage enrichment. According to Dion (2005) the idea was to educate couples in the areas of communication, …conflict management, and problem-solving skills, …intimacy and friendship, family-of-origin issues, empathy, commitment, forgiveness, negotiation and compromise, power and control, expectations, finances, anger and stress management, self-care, identifying destructive behaviors and patterns, self-awareness, emotional literacy, trust, mutual respect and responsibility, and roles, values, and beliefs. (p. 141)

Many states began studying the results of these initiatives, comparing the communities who participated in the initiatives to those who did not. Results seemed promising, but
upon closer inspection there were challenges with the evaluations due to lack of controls and the inability to randomly select and assign participants (Doherty & Anderson, 2004).

At the same time, in the last two decades many marriage therapies have been developed in different theory modalities with empirical research to support them (Lebow, Chambers, Christensen, & Johnson, 2012; Lebow & Gasbarrini, 2009; Shadish & Baldwin, 2003; Shadish & Baldwin, 2005; Shadish & Montgomery, 1993; Shadish, Ragsdale, Glaser, & Montgomery, 1995; Wood, Crane, Schaalje, & Law, 2005). In 1995, Diane Sollee, an experienced marriage and family therapist developed the Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education, Smart Marriage Conferences, and the SMART marriage website containing published articles, information on marriage and divorce education, government legislation, and resource lists including community initiatives and available marriage intensives (Doherty & Anderson, 2004; SMART Marriage, 2013).

Although many of these therapies and initiatives seem to have very promising results, one of the pertinent challenges apparent in the marriage counseling field is approximately 50% of marital problems are likely to return even after effective couples’ therapy (Lebow & Gasbarrini, 2009). Further, though there has been a substantial growth in marriage therapies, there has not been a significant reduction in the national divorce rate (Corliss, Steptoe, Bower, van Dyk, & Cole, 2004).

Nonetheless, even with the fairly high relapse rates and the lack of impact counseling and education seem to be having on the divorce rate, many couples in trouble are seeking counsel in growing numbers. In fact, Lebow and Gasbarrini (2009) suggest that the old stigma around going to counseling for marital issues seems to have shifted to
the reverse; couples who do not seek counsel before considering divorce are becoming stigmatized instead of those opting for counseling before divorce. With this shift, there has been a growth in the number of marriage intensive programs (particularly in the religious sector, but not exclusively) offering condensed therapy lasting two to four days rather than weekly 50-90 minute therapy for a number of months (e.g. Atlanta Center for Marriages, 2012; the Clearing, 2009; Marathon Couples’ Therapy at the Gottman Institute, 2013; Grace Cirocco Inc Couples Retreat Weekend, 2012; the Hideaway, 2013; Marriage Recovery Center, 2012; Marriage Rescue Associates, 2013; the National Institute of Marriage, 2012; Sanctus – Marriage Enrichment Weekend, 2013; and WinShape Retreat, 2013). While many of these programs are based on sound counseling theories, few have been empirically tested. Despite this fact, like the marathon groups of the 1960’s and 70’s (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) many of these groups are claiming astounding success rates of between 80-95% (e.g. the Clearing, 2009; Marriage Recovery Center, 2012; Marriage Rescue Associates, 2013; and the National Institute of Marriage, 2012).

Based on reviewing these marriage intensive websites and other articles looking at intensive programs or weekend retreats, few have collected data beyond the completion of the program. Those who have report positive, but more realistic, success rates over time. Included in the programs that have collected long range follow-up data are educational programs like Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills (PAIRS) (Eisenberg, Peluso, & Schindler, 2011), a long in-patient intensive program lasting seven weeks in Netherlands (Bout, Sytema, & Rankin, 2008; Sytema & Bout,
2006), and the National Institute of Marriage providing intensive two or four day counseling retreats (Burbee, Sparks, Paul, & Arnzen, 2011).

Of the programs that focus on intensive marriage counseling (versus education programs) in North America, only the National Institute of Marriage (NIM) has reported to collect response data beyond the retreats. Burbee and associates (2011) report that at 24 months approximately 84.5% of their couples are still married, compared to the national divorce rate of 40-50% noted above. Even so, like all other therapies in this field, it is not clear why some couples are able to maintain their gains and others are not. Because of their existing commitment to research and their existing research participant pool that NIM is regularly in contact with during the first two years after treatment, it made sense to partner with NIM to further develop the research understanding of marriage intensives through studying what happens for couples within that first year after an NIM intensive. Because it was important to understand this program more fully, details are provided in Chapter Three on Methods.

The next question that needed to be explored related to the type of study that best fit this kind of inquiry. As noted above, much quantitative research has been conducted on marriage therapy in general with positive results, but the reasons for high relapse rates remain a mystery. Because there are no studies to date exploring what really happens after marriage intensive therapy, this opened a void that was ripe for empirical study. When looking to explore and understand the experience of a phenomenon like marriage after therapy, qualitative phenomenological studies provide a fitting option (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009). In contrast to quantitative studies that try
to reduce experience down to measurable and quantifiable factors, qualitative studies look at the experience of the participants in order to better understand the richness of the lived experience in thick, multilayered detail. Kazdin (2003) describes the purpose of qualitative studies this way: “to describe the experience… but to do so in a way that captures the richness of the experience and the meaning it has for the participants” (p. 333). Like quantitative studies, there are many different forms and types of qualitative studies. Because this study looked to understand more than simply the description of what happens in and after marriage intensives, a model that includes some interpretation of meaning was also needed.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was a good fit for this study because it seeks to understand how participants of a particular and significant life experience make sense of what they have gone through and its impact on their lives (Smith et al., 2009). Further, IPA also allows for bolder designs that can investigate and compare two different perspectives on one experience. What makes IPA different from other more descriptive forms of phenomenological study are the theoretical underpinnings that create a three-fold focus to the inquiry. First, IPA is phenomenological, seeking to understand an experience from the perspective of the participants. Second, it is hermeneutic in its attempt to facilitate participants’ reflection on the meaning the experience held for them in their lives. This multi-perspective study examined the meaning couples prescribed to the marriage intensive and why some couples experienced gains in their marriages while others did not. Finally, IPA is idiographic, meaning it is focused and concentrated on the particular. This meant looking
for detailed accounts and perceptions of two groups of participants who had very similar intensive experiences and who could elucidate their own experiences and sense making about the experiences, and then be compared and contrasted with one another as a means of looking for patterns, shared experiences, and divergences. More detail about IPA and its theoretical underpinnings is provided in Chapter Three in the Research Design section.

**Purpose of the Study**

In light of the clear need for research in the area of marriage intensives and in the area of understanding what happens with couples post treatment, the current study attempted to fill this void by looking at the lived experiences and meaning making of couples who have gone through marriage intensive therapy. Therefore, the purpose of this IPA study was to understand and compare how couples made sense of their marriage experience one year after marriage intensive therapy for couples who found the intensive significant and were able to maintain gains, and for couples who initially found the intensive helpful but were unable to maintain gains.

**Significance of the Study**

It is expected that the significance of this study will be experienced in three distinct areas. The first is in the area of the research community. Because there is very little research in the area of marriage intensives specifically, and in the area of what happens with couples post marriage therapy in general, it is expected that this study will open up a number of new research questions and areas for further study in both of these
areas. In addition, this study is expected to have a practical impact for clinicians working with couples either in an intensive format or in a conjoint format. Themes emerging from this study have the potential to inform clinicians of areas that could be changed in order to deliver more effective treatment and post-treatment care in order to equip couples going forward from couples’ therapy. Finally, this study has the potential to impact couples who have experienced couples therapy, or are considering couples therapy, through reading about other couples and their experiences. The findings from this study may serve as a normalizing agent for couples who have had similar experiences or as an encouragement to couples looking for things they can integrate to assist in making their experience have a more lasting impact. Thus, it is expected that the results of this study are extremely significant and potentially impactful to researchers, clinicians, and couples alike.

Research Questions

Flowing out of the purpose to understand and compare the meaning couples espouse to the ongoing success or failure of intensive therapy in their marriages post treatment, the key research questions this study sought to answer were:

1. How do couples who have gone through four-day marriage intensive therapy perceive and make sense of the impact or lack of impact this treatment has had on their marriages?

2. What, if any, marital gains do participants believe have been sustained and how?
a. What, if anything, do participants believe helped achieve and maintain any gains?

b. What, if anything, do participants believe has made it difficult to achieve and maintain gains?

**Definitions of Terms**

In order to bring clarity to this study, the terms marriage intensive, multi-perspective, effective marriage counseling treatments, group marital therapy formats, marriage education, and Integrative Marriage Intensive Therapy (IMIT) have been operationalized.

**Marriage Intensive**

The description “intensive” has been used to describe intense therapy that looks deeply at client issues (e.g. Boas, 1962). It has also been used to describe educational programs that are shortened into a weekend or multiple-day formats (e.g. Sager & Sager, 2005). However, in this study, “marriage intensive” or “intensive” was used to describe psychological therapy or counseling that occurs in a 2 to 5 day format in general.

**Multi-perspective**

In a typical IPA study, researchers focus on one homogeneous group of up to six participants (Smith et al., 2009). However, there is room for bolder designs that can accommodate larger sample sizes and more than one particular group as long as the
groups are also homogeneous and closely related so as to maintain the idiographic focus. Therefore, in this study, the term multi-perspective was confined to the unique perspectives of two very specifically defined groups. Criteria for these groups and exclusionary criteria are described in detail within the Participant Selection section of Chapter Three.

**Effective Marriage Counseling Treatments**

Over the last twenty years many marriage counseling treatments have been developed and empirically tested (Lebow et al., 2012). Specifically, when referring to effective marriage counseling treatments in this study, the researcher referred to treatment modalities that have been delivered in a conjoint format and have been empirically tested with results showing significant couple improvement. Due to the plethora of available marriage counseling treatments that have been empirically tested, the focus in this study was on meta-analyses comparing effective marriage counseling treatment studies.

**Group Marital Therapy Formats**

Marriage therapy has also consisted of a number of group formats that have also been empirically tested and found to be effective (Montag & Wilson, 1992). In this study marital group therapy formats were conceptualized as multiple couples meeting with one or two trained therapists in a group format to discuss and therapeutically work through their marital discord. This is in comparison to educational groups that provide information on how to deal with marital issues but do not specifically address the
personal relationships of the couples within the groups and may not be run by trained therapists. Education is certainly a part of these groups; however, the focus is on the participants and delivering treatment that purposely meets their lived experiences and needs.

**Marriage Education**

Marriage education is similar to group marital therapy, but educational programs are often run by non-professional lay-leaders, and follow a set curriculum based package rather than providing client specific treatment (Dion, 2005). Mentorship programs and support group formats run by clergy or non-professional leaders may also fit into this category. Thus, the main difference between group marital therapy and educational group formats is the training and qualifications of the group leaders and the therapeutic focus versus educational/curriculum based focus to the groups.

**Integrative Marriage Intensive Therapy (IMIT)**

Although intensive groups have been discussed in general throughout the first two chapters, specifically when speaking about the participants of this study, “intensive” referred to Integrative Marriage Intensive Therapy (IMIT) at the National Institute of Marriage. This program is a four-day marathon group consisting of between four and five couples. The theoretical framework of IMIT draws from family therapies, experiential couples therapies, and cognitive therapies. Participants learned to recognize their interactional dances, to take responsibility for their own journeys, and to partner
together to reach mutually agreed upon decisions (Burbee et.al, 2011). Details about this program are described in the Participant Selection section of Chapter Three.

**Locating Myself as Researcher**

As part of quality qualitative research, it was important that the author be transparent about assumptions, motivations, and presuppositions going into a research study as well as throughout the study as it unfolded (Carcary, 2009; Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999; Yardley, 2000). Pyrczak and Bruce (2007) note that this ‘revealing of oneself’ is an important aspect in qualitative research because it recognizes the subjective interplay between researcher and participant that is so integral to qualitative inquiry. More has been discussed on additional ways this transparency is accomplished throughout the project in a later section on trustworthiness. However, this current section provides the reader with the author’s motivations and presuppositions going into this project.

As a Christian and a marriage therapist, my interest in this study came from numerous places. Initially, it came from my sadness over the dissolution of so many marriages in our society, and at the same time, my encouragement of some to overcome these odds. On a personal level I had watched divorce touch the lives of dear friends and family members, and I had watched how others have somehow skirted it. In my private practice I had also seen this phenomenon occur and wondered at how some couples can find success and restoration, while others do not. Finally, my interest in this particular
The study came from my shared Christian beliefs and having had the relationship of dear friends transformed by an intensive marriage experience.

My story began with the impact of my parents who were one of the couples I watched go through significant trials but were able to work through it and come out the other side stronger and more in love. In my late teens and early twenties I watched powerlessly as my parents endured what appeared to be a little over half a decade of intense struggles before they were able to turn things around and build what is now a strong and deeply loving relationship. Through hard work and their commitment to their marriage they were able to make it back from a place where others give up when they reach it. They both had solid Christian upbringings and would say today that their struggles brought them deeper in their relationship with God, and that in turn helped them to take the steps they needed to turn their marriage around. Though their marriage struggled, their commitment to it and God remained strong. Watching their experience from the periphery had shaped my values and perspective on marriage and the solid beliefs I hold that troubled marriages can be restored, and even more significantly, they can be transformed into something better.

While, to my knowledge, my parents did this without counseling, I work with many courageous couples who are facing trials and are not willing to give up, but do not have the resources to know how to change things. As a Christian and a counselor I hold great hope in the resiliency of the human soul and the capacity for change that is wired into our brains and being. People can change and relationships can be restored. Through my work as a marriage therapist I had seen many couples fight cultural norms that pulled
them into self-centeredness and the need for immediate gratification. These valiant couples risked being vulnerable again and learned to reconnect with one another in new and restorative ways. I had also worked with couples who, though they bravely came week after week and seemingly made shifts in the office, struggled with applying these shifts outside of sessions. Somehow their new experiences do not hold.

In addition to watching this with clients, friends of mine had a similar experience. They are strong Christians and value marriage intensely but could not seem to get past their challenges, even with weekly marriage counseling from a colleague of mine. In an effort to find something that would bring the needed shift, they decided to go to a marriage intensive for four days of concentrated work on their marriage. When they returned they spoke of the shifts that happened while they were there and how these were the very things they felt they needed to get unstuck. Not only did they learn about their interactional dances, they had experiences where they could try new ways of being with each other and created a new level of safety with one another that was not there prior to the intensive. While the intensive did not remedy every problem, they said it gave them strategies and in-the-moment experiences enabling them to really learn what they needed to work through issues as they came up and apply them in their everyday life.

My own Christian faith also played a significant role in understanding marriage in a very different light from popular culture. My counseling education had been in Christian institutions that regularly sought to integrate Christian theology with solid psychological practices. Further study also included reading books on Emotional Focused Therapy (EFT) (Johnson, 2004; Johnson et al., 2005) expanding my knowledge
of the interactional dance and the need for emotional connection, and Integrative Marital Intensive Therapy (IMIT) (Smalley, 2004, 2006; Smalley & Paul, 2006) outlining an integrated philosophy that includes EFT, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), and Christian perspectives. I had felt connection with these theories and had attempted to integrate their tools into my practice.

Additionally, as I personally drew deeper in my relationship with God and gained greater understanding of the joy of both dying to self and taking responsibility for myself and my actions, the truths of how to create a solid marriage took on new meaning. Instead of insisting on having my own way, I was inspired in my own marriage to first remove divorce from my possible options, and then to always strive to understand my husband as he is and to work through the issues that inevitably arise in every relationship. I felt so privileged to have the strong witness my parents gave me of what can happen when couples fight to make things better and the blessing they reap through that effort.

I have a passion for solid, enduring marriages, and I longed to see them achieved by more and more couples. Prior to my friends’ experience I was interested in doing research on what qualities made enduring marriages work. After their experience, I wondered if some of my couples who seemed stuck could benefit from an intensive format instead of weekly sessions. I wanted to understand marriage intensives in general and to study the experiences of couples who had gone through an intensive experience like my friends. I also remained troubled by the couples who do experience change through therapy but are still unable to maintain those gains over time. As my research continued, this interest was further refined to become a growing need to understand what
happens to couples after therapy and how some couples are able to maintain gains while others are not.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has sought to provide a compelling case for qualitatively researching the experiences and interpretations of marriages by couples who have experienced intensive marriage therapy the year before. The stage was set by looking at the dire need for effective marital therapies in the United States. From that point the case unfolded through the reference to many seemingly effective therapies being offered, and yet the sobering recognition that gains obtained are not being maintained for many couples. Because of the paucity of research answering the question of what happens to couples after seemingly effective treatment and the void in literature investigating marriage intensive therapies, qualitative IPA research made the most sense as a first effort in answering this question with this population. To make this point, IPA and its theoretical underpinnings were introduced. In addition, the purpose of this study and the corresponding research questions were presented, and definitions of key terms were provided. Finally, as with any quality qualitative study, the researcher provided personal reflections within a description of her journey leading her to this study.

**Organization of Remaining Chapters**

The following two chapters will expand on the literature review, providing a strong case for the placement of this study in existing literature (Chapter Two), and then
will provide a detailed account of the methods that will be used in this study (Chapter Three). Thus, Chapter Two will present further detail on the literature review by exploring different formats of therapy delivery including meta-analyses of conjoint marriage counseling therapies, group marital therapy formats, marriage education formats, and finally marriage intensive formats including IMIT. Chapter Three will then elaborate on the research design, providing further detail on the theoretical underpinnings of IPA and the IMIT program at NIM, as well as a detailed outline of the methods that will be used including participant selection and data collection and analysis, followed by sections addressing quality and ethical controls that will be engaged. Chapters four and five then go into detail about the results of this study (Chapter Four) and a summary, conclusions, and recommendations going forward (Chapter Five). A one page research summary is included in appendix A.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review can have different purposes, but in an empirical study its purpose is to provide a thorough overview of the current research leading to the need for the present study (Pan, 2008). This review sought to provide this rationale through investigating the research studies available in the areas of effective conjoint marriage counseling therapies, group marital therapy formats, marriage education formats, marriage intensive formats, and finally studies using Integrative Marital Intensive Therapy (IMIT) specifically. Through this review, the researcher sought to explain the steps taken and results found that led to the focus of this qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of couples who had gone through IMIT one year prior.

To begin with, this research inquiry began with searches for empirical studies focused on marriage intensives, but the search yielded minimal research in this area. Subsequently, the search expanded using search engines EBSCOhost, JSTOR, APA PsycNET, ProQuest Central, and Google and included both published articles and unpublished dissertation research. Reference lists and bibliographies were also scanned to find additional research. Searches included key words such as marriage intensive, intensive couples therapy, marital therapy and intensive, marriage therapy and intensive, intensive marriage counseling, marriage education, marriage group, couple* group therapy, couples retreats, and Smalley marriage intensive. Though some studies were found using the wording “intensive” (Birch et al., 2004; Boas, 1962; Bout et al., 2008;
Brand, 2012; Burbee et al., 2011; Doherty & Anderson, 2004; Eggerichs, 2010; Eisenberg et al., 2011; Knabb, Vogt, Brickley, & Newgren, 2011; Leiblum & Rosen, 1979; Lynema, 2011; MacKenzie, 1991; Sager & Sager, 2005; Sytema & Bout, 2006; Verhulst, 1975; Vogt, 2001) only eight fell under the operational definition of intensive counseling performed in a condensed week or less format (Brand, 2012; Burbee et al., 2011; Gottman & Ryan, 2003; Knabb et al., 2011; Leiblum & Rosen, 1979; Lynema, 2011; Verhulst, 1975; Vogt, 2001). All others were either educational focused or had a different concept of intensive therapy. Group therapy for marriages was also explored with minimal outcome study results (Brooks, Guerney Jr., & Mazza, 2001; Kirby & Baucom, 2007b; Marett, 1988; Montag & Wilson, 1992; Sisson, Gray, & Carpenter, 1977; Stith, Rosen, McCollum, & Thomsen, 2004; Zimmerman, Prest, & Wetzel, 1997). Therefore, with the paucity of research directly related to marriage studies using an intensive group format, this review began with grounding the study in general marital counseling theories including research on marital group therapy, and then follows the development of educational marital intensives, and concludes with a focus on intensive marriage counseling programs in general and IMIT specifically.

**Effective Conjoint Marriage Counseling Therapies**

The field of marriage therapy is well studied, including the building of a database of meta-analyses comparing published and unpublished studies (Lebow et al., 2012; Shadish & Baldwin, 2003). In order to see an overview of the marriage counseling field to date, a number of meta-analyses and peer reviewed articles reviewing and evaluating
current reportedly effective marriage counseling approaches were explored (Christensen, Vu, Baucom, & Stanton, 2005; Lebow et al., 2012; Lebow & Gasbarrini, 2009; Shadish & Baldwin, 2003; Shadish & Baldwin, 2005; Shadish & Montgomery, 1993; Shadish et al., 1995; Snyder, Castellani, & Whisman, 2006; Wood et al., 2005). All studies pointed to the general effectiveness of marital therapies particularly, Wood and associates (2005) highlighted, when compared with no treatment.

Looking more specifically at the research, Christensen et al., (2005) identify in their research summary that most studies show the efficacy of behavioral couple therapy (BCT), cognitive behavioral couple therapy (CBCT), insight-oriented couple therapy (IOCT), emotion-focused couple therapy (EFT), and integrative behavioral couple therapy (IBCT). In two meta-analytic studies Shadish and Montgomery (1993) and Shadish et al. (1995) found statistically significant results in controlled marital studies, with virtually no difference between therapy approaches. Wood et al. (2005) also point out there seems to be no difference between approaches, though they note there is often more attrition with more severely distressed couples. See Figure 2.1 for summaries of these three meta-analyses.

At the same time, when unpublished dissertations are included in the analyses, Shadish and Baldwin (2003) found that only around 40-50% of clients reach clinically significant effects. They suggest this could be due to how the research is conducted as much as it is due to the treatments analyzed. Snyder and associates (2006) also found success rates to be modest in their summary, claiming that many interventions have been
### Figure 2.1: Research Summary of Meta-Analyses for Marital Therapy Effectiveness Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th># Studies</th>
<th>Published?</th>
<th>Randomized</th>
<th>Treatments</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shadish &amp; Baldwin (2005)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Behavioral Marital Therapy (BMT)</td>
<td>Same effect sizes as other martial therapies due to including UP studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadish &amp; Montgomery (1993)</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Behavioral And Psychoeducational; Systemic; Humanistic; Psychodynamic; Eclectic; Unclassified</td>
<td>Behavioral outperformed Humanistic, eclectic, &amp; unclassified; Behavioral no difference from systemic; All but Humanistic marital treatments significantly better than controls; No difference between family therapy and marital therapies; No difference between conjoint and group formats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood, Crane, Schaalje, &amp; Law (2005)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT); Behavioral Marital Therapy (BMT); BMT components; Mixed (others with EFT or BMT); Other (CBT, Systemic)</td>
<td>No significant difference between full treatment groups but EFT was significantly different from BMT components for moderately distressed Significant difference compared to no treatment, No compared to other treatments for mildly distressed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
shown to be effective, but a large number of couples (approximately one third of both spouses and up to one half of couples where one spouse differs) do not improve. It is also noted that impacting moderators that could provide further understanding of these findings have not been adequately studied (Shadish & Baldwin, 2003).

Even so, Lebow et al. (2012) point to the 50% divorce rate (half within the first seven years of marriage) and note that in response to this great need, approximately 70% of therapists treat couples, though few are properly trained specifically in couple therapies. This brings to question the external validity of efficacy studies overall. While many of these studies claim marital approaches to be efficacious based on controlled studies, clinical effectiveness has not been adequately studied (Christensen et al., 2005; Lebow et al., 2012; Shadish & Baldwin, 2003; Shadish & Montgomery, 1993; Shadish et al., 1995). Rogge et al. (2006) suggest that selection controls used in intervention research also reduce external validity by reducing, if not eliminating, cultural diversity, socioeconomic differences, and more severely distressed couples. Further, even in the studies showing efficacy, concerns about relapse are noted frequently.

Christensen et al. (2005) note that even in the studies where statistical efficacy is reached, many couples do not maintain gains of therapy over time. Snyder et al. (2006) found that within the couples that do improve, relapse or deteriorating gains occur in 30-60% of couples by second year follow-up. Lebow and Gasbarrini (2009) quote rates of 50% relapse for marital issues and Shadish and Montgomery (1993) identify deterioration of results occurring at one year follow-up. In addition to these relapse and deterioration
rates, it is also noted that mediators determining how or why change occurs have not been adequately studied (Christensen et al., 2005; Lebow et al., 2012; Snyder et al., 2006).

Four studies looked specifically at relapse rates and each indicated relapse rates increase with time. See Figure 2.2 for a summary of these studies. At five year follow-up Christensen, Baucom, Atkins, and Jean (2010) found that while there had been differences between treatment groups initially, significant differences disappeared by the five year point. They note that in both treatment groups relapse or deterioration was around the 50% mark and separation or divorce rates were between 25% and 28%. Similarly, Jacobson, Schmaling, and Holtzworth-Munroe (1987) found that at the two year point deterioration rates of full BMT were no longer significantly different from two BMT component treatments.

At the same time, two other studies indicated that some treatments may be superior to others in maintaining gains, though some deterioration naturally occurs. In comparing couples who found resolution through EFT and those who did not fully find resolution, Halchuk, Makinen, and Johnson (2010) found that marital adjustment, reduced pain, and forgiveness rates were maintained statistically for resolved couples at the three year point, whereas couples who were not resolved at end of treatment deteriorated more and increased levels of avoidant attachment styles. Similarly, when comparing BMT to insight-oriented marital therapy (IOMT), Snyder, Wills, and Grady-Fletcher (1991) indicated the BMT group showed significantly more deterioration of gains, distress, and divorce rates than IOMT at the four-year point. These studies
### Figure 2.2: Research Summary of Follow-up Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Study Type</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Max Years Follow-up</th>
<th>Treatments</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christensen, Baucom, Atkins, &amp; Jean (2010)</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>Marital satisfaction; Still married</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Traditional Behavioral Couple Therapy (TBCT); Integrative Behavioral Couple Therapy (IBCT)</td>
<td>IBCT significantly greater satisfaction at 2 yr follow-up; No difference at 5 yr follow-up; 45.9% TBCT &amp; 50.0% IBCT maintained statistically significant gains at 2 yrs; 27.9% TBCT &amp; 25.7% IBCT separated/divorced at 2 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halchuk, Makinen, &amp; Johnson (2010)</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>Dyadic adjustment; Relationship trust; Avoidant attachment; Anxious attachment; Attachment injury</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT)</td>
<td>Marital adjustment maintained for resolved couples; Higher avoidant styles at follow-up compared to pre-test for unresolved couples; Maintained forgiveness and reduced emotional pain for resolved couples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacobson, Schmaling, &amp; Holtzworth-Munroe (1987)</td>
<td>Experiment: Marital satisfaction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Behavioral Marital Therapy (CO); Major components only: Behavior Exchange (BE) &amp; Communication/Problem-Solving Training (CPT)</td>
<td>CO maintained more improvement than BE and CPT groups at 1 yr and 2 yrs (no longer significant differences that had been observed at 6 months); By 2 yrs a trend towards increased deterioration was apparent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snyder, Wills, &amp; Grady-Fletcher (1991)</td>
<td>Experiment: Marital distress/happiness; Married/divorced</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Behavioral Marital Therapy (BMT); Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy (IOMT)</td>
<td>Significantly more BMT deterioration of gains, distress, or divorces, than IOMT at 4 year follow-up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
indicate that while deterioration is still a major issue in marital therapy, there may be some treatment modalities that allow clients to maintain gains more easily. However, why that is remains unclear.

In light of these findings it was clear that there is a definite need for effective marital therapies, and that most empirically studied approaches are in fact fairly effective, at least in the short term. What was less clear in this research is why change occurs, whether efficacious treatments translate into clinical effectiveness, and what is going on with couples post treatment that either allows them to maintain gains they achieved in marital therapy or causes them to relapse. It was also apparent that there was a need for clinically relevant studies with actual self-selected clients, as would be the case with actual clinical populations. Narrowing the focus, group formats will now be described as they relate directly to the focus of this study.

**Group Marital Therapy Formats**

Unlike the strongly controlled studies noted above, many of the marital group studies that have been conducted tend to use volunteer selections (e.g. Brooks et al., 2001; Sisson et al., 1977), and some even allowed volunteers to choose whether they preferred treatment groups, wait list groups, or no treatment groups (Brooks et al., 2001; Zimmerman et al., 1997). Other studies did not have comparison groups at all (e.g. Kirby & Baucom, 2007b). Results of these studies will be described below. In general, there have not been many outcome studies comparing groups to either individual or conjoint
therapies. Even so, Marett (1988) noted that historic outcome studies suggest couples’ group therapy are typically better than no treatment.

When looking specifically at studies where outcomes were assessed, all published studies indicate similar results to those noted in Marett’s (1988) review. To begin with, Sisson and associates (1977) performed a study that looked at the interaction between self-esteem and marital satisfaction. Participants in the group were self-selected and interested in joining this group run by an established religious counseling center. The control group for the study was randomly selected married students of a local university counseling theories class. Unfortunately, the researchers only used assessment instruments to determine self-concept and relied exclusively upon verbal self-reports to assess marital satisfaction improvement. This meant that statistical inferences could not be achieved for marital satisfaction, unlike typical outcome studies. Nonetheless, they reported that improvements were experienced in both areas as a result of the group therapy and were not present with randomly selected married students who served as the control group in this study. See Figure 2.3 for a summary of this study.

The Brooks and associates (2001) study was also a quasi-experimental design conducted in an existing clinical practice, where rotating groups for either treatment group or wait-list groups who transitioned into treatment groups after 12 weeks were investigated over a two year period. Results indicated statistically significant gains in trust and intimacy, communication, and dyadic adjustment, but only mixed results in the area of problem solving. Because this study was conducted with a pre-established clinical practice, authors noted that the dropout rates were lower than their typical
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Study Type</th>
<th>Variables/ Themes</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Treatments</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brooks, Guerney Jr., &amp; Mazza (2001)</td>
<td>Quasi-experiment</td>
<td>Trust &amp; intimacy; Communication; Marital adjustment; Perceived ability to solve problems</td>
<td>Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS); Interpersonal Relationship Scale; Marital Communication Inventory; Handling Problems Change Scale</td>
<td>Relationship Enhancement Therapy</td>
<td>Statistically significant improvements in all areas at post-test and 3 month follow-up; Note: less difference at follow-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirby &amp; Baucom (2007)</td>
<td>Quasi-experiment</td>
<td>Emotion regulation; Relationship skills; Interplay of emotion and relationship dynamics</td>
<td>Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), Beck Depression Inventory II, Beck Anxiety Inventory, State-trait Anger Expression Inventory - revised, Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (individual and partner versions), Positive &amp; Negative Affect Schedule, Efficacy Questionnaire, Client Satisfaction Questionnaire</td>
<td>Group integrating Dialectical Behavior Therapy &amp; Cognitive Behavioral Couple Therapy</td>
<td>Groups too small for inferential statistics; Reported decreases in depressive symptoms, Improvement in emotion regulation (continued at follow-up); No change in anxiety; Increased relationship satisfaction for partners but not DBT grads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>Marital satisfaction; Positive/negative verbal behavior; individual functioning; Marital adjustment; Dysfunctional cognitions about relationship; Customer satisfaction</td>
<td>Dyadic Adjustment Scale, Marital Interaction Coding System, Relational Beliefs Inventory, Marital Happiness Scale, Irrational Beliefs Test, Beck Depression Inventory, Symptom Check List 90-R, Consumer Satisfaction Questionnaire</td>
<td>Group Behavioral Marital Therapy (BMT); Group Cognitive-Behavioral Marital Therapy (CBMT)</td>
<td>CBMT statistically better than BMT and waitlist for improvement in marital satisfaction but both treatment groups showed and maintained improvement 6 month follow-up; Statistically greater improvement in negative verbal behaviors maintained at follow-up; No difference for positive behaviors; All groups including waitlist (WL) significantly improved in individual functioning and maintained at follow-up; BMT statistically better than CBMT and WL but not maintained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montag &amp; Wilson (1992)</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>Self-concept; Marital Satisfaction</td>
<td>Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, Self-report</td>
<td>Combined Transactional Analysis &amp; Gestalt Therapy</td>
<td>Statistically significant improvements in self-concept; Self-reported improvements in marital satisfaction in one-month follow-up interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisson, Gray, &amp; Carpenter (1977)</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>Self-concept; Marital Satisfaction</td>
<td>Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, Self-report</td>
<td>Combined Transactional Analysis &amp; Gestalt Therapy</td>
<td>Statistically significant improvements in self-concept; Self-reported improvements in marital satisfaction in one-month follow-up interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Variables</td>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stith, Rosen, McCollum, &amp; Thomsen (2004)</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>Marital satisfaction; Attitude about wife beating; Levels of aggression; Recidivism</td>
<td>Conflict Tactics Scale (R), Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, Inventory of Beliefs about Wife Beating</td>
<td>Integrated Solution Focused Marital Therapy (incl. Narrative Theory, Systems Theory, &amp; CBT) (conjoint format versus group format)</td>
<td>Statistically significant improvements for the group format only in all variables; at 2 year check in less recidivism was found for group format but no difference between no treatment group and conjoint format</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson, Bornstein, &amp; Wilson (1988)</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>Marital satisfaction; Relational distress</td>
<td>DAS, Marital Satisfaction Inventory, Marital Happiness Scale, Marital Interaction Coding System</td>
<td>Behavioral Marital Therapy (BMT) (conjoint format versus group format)</td>
<td>Significant improve compared to waitlist (WL) for both variables; No difference between treatment groups; gains maintained at 6 month follow-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimmerman, Prest, &amp; Wetzel (1997)</td>
<td>Quasi-experiment</td>
<td>Marital adjustment / distress</td>
<td>DAS, Marital Status Inventory</td>
<td>Solution-Focused Couples Therapy</td>
<td>By end of study experiment group approached the adjustment levels of self-selected no treatment control group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
conjoint therapy treatments even though both used Relational Enhancement Therapy. See Figure 2.3 for a summary of this study.

Kirby and Baucom (2007a) recommend a group therapy program that integrates Dialectical Behavior Therapy and Cognitive Behavioral Couple Therapy based on a pilot study (Kirby & Baucom, 2007b) that revealed improvements in marital satisfaction for partners of individuals who suffered from severe emotion dysregulation due to individual psychopathology. Unfortunately, this study did not have a comparison group and the test group was too small to effectively use inferential statistics. Montag and Wilson (1992), on the other hand, compared group Cognitive Behavioral Marital Therapy with group Behavioral Marital Therapy (BMT) and a wait-list group and found that both therapy groups were statistically better than no treatment but did not significantly differ from each other. Further, they indicated that many gains were maintained at six month follow-up. See Figure 2.3 for a summary of these studies.

In an earlier study, BMT was investigated using both conjoint therapy and group therapy formats compared to a wait-list group (Wilson, Bornstein, & Wilson, 1988). This study revealed similar significant results for both formats compared to the wait-list group and no significant difference between the two formats. This leads to the suggestion that group therapy format may be a more cost effective route to providing equally effective marital treatment. Wilson et al. (1998) recognized this but suggested caution when working with couples who deal with violence as part of their dysfunction. See Figure 2.3 for research summary of this study.
Stith et al. (2004) specifically studied couples with mild to moderate physical violence using an integrated solution focused marital therapy approach that incorporated narrative theory, systems theory, and CBT. The study randomly assigned couples to conjoint, group, or no-treatment groups and used the same therapy modality in both treatment groups. Interestingly, the group therapy group results indicated more significant improvements in marital satisfaction than the conjoint group and significantly less recidivism rates compared with both of the other two groups at six months and two years.

In another study using solution focused couples therapy, Zimmerman and associates (1997) found a group format to be effective in improving marital satisfaction almost to the point of a self-selected no-treatment group who had minimal marital stress going into the study. See figure 2.3 for a summary of these studies.

Other studies were also located that looked at treating related issues in a couples group format but were not specifically looking at treating marital dysfunction or dissatisfaction. Issues studied include dealing with alcohol problems (Bowers & al-Redha, 1990; O'Farrell, Kleinke, & Cutter, 1998; O'farrell & Choquette, 1991; O'Farrell & Cutter, 1984a; O'Farrell & Cutter, 1984b; Steinglass, Davis, & Berenson, 1977), sexual issues (Adelson & Peress, 1979; Golden, Price, Heinrich, & Lobitz, 1978; McNaughton-Cassill et al., 2000; Ravart, Trudel, Marchand, Turgeon, & Aubin, 1996; Trudel et al., 2001), self-esteem issues (Sisson et al., 1977), mental health issues like schizophrenia and bipolar, mania, and depression (Croake & Kelly, 2002; Davenport, Ebert, Adland, & Goodwin, 1977; Leff et al., 2000), and dealing with medical diagnoses such as breast
cancer and multiple sclerosis (Katz, Bösch, & Herzog, 1998; Witte & Baker, 1977). Because these studies did not focus on martial improvements, summary charts have not been included in this study. However, in all of these studies group formats have been touted to be as effective, if not more effective, as individual or conjoint formats. This can be explained through family and systems perspectives that recognize the importance of treating the couple or family as well as the individual, even when dealing with individual issues (Metcalf, 2011; Rolland & Walsh, 2009). The addition of a group format creates a learning environment where couples on either side of an issue can feel supported, validated, and challenged by others going through similar things.

This was further supported by the different articles describing group treatments as cost effective approaches to treat many different marital related issues (Ferguson, 2010; Garfield, 2012; Harkness, 2012; Hoffman & Rosman, 2004; Mouritsen & Rastogi, 2013; Marcuse, 1974). In addition to the cost effectiveness of a group format, other noted benefits included the normalizing effect of the group where members realize they are not alone and others experience very similar things in their marriages, feeling supported and challenged by others in the group, being able to learn vicariously from others’ experiences as they observe others working things out in the group (this also reduces reactivity and defensiveness), and learning relational skills in the moment with one’s spouse and also other group members.

In sum, the research on group therapy formats to improve marital satisfaction clearly indicated group format is at least better than no treatment and often has been shown to be as effective as conjoint formats. Because group formats tend to be less
expensive, this certainly created interest in developing more studies to look at group marital therapy and how it impacts couples. Even so, like the research for marriage therapies in general, the question remained as to what helps couples maintain gains after treatment and what causes them to relapse. Most group studies either do not have follow-up data or are restricted to six months, similar to marital therapies in general.

**Marriage Education Formats**

In addition to group therapy formats, there is also a large pool of educational programs that couples can look into in attempting to improve their marriages. Likely due to the abovementioned benefits, the cost effectiveness, and the educational model of classroom teaching, most marriage education programs have adopted a group format for their programs. Since the late 1980’s and early 1990’s focus on marriage has grown in the United States, prompting the development of educational groups for marriage preparation and enrichment (Doherty & Anderson, 2004). While it is suggested that many of these programs improve marital satisfaction and communication skills, in a meta-analysis including both published and non-published studies Fawcett, Hawkins, Blanchard, and Carroll (2010) found that results were no longer significant when non-published studies were factored in (see Figure 2.4 for summary details of this and the following meta-analyses listed in this section). However, it is noted, particularly with communications variables that assessment type may be a moderating factor in the lack of significant effects for unpublished studies. In fact, Blanchard, Hawkins, Baldwin, and Fawcett (2009), confirmed that self-report assessments of communication were found to
Figure 2.4: Research Summary of Marriage Education Meta-Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th># Studies</th>
<th>Published?</th>
<th>Randomized</th>
<th>Treatments/ Programs</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blanchard, Hawkins, Baldwin, &amp; Fawcett (2009)</td>
<td>97 reports (143 studies)</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Most frequently: Couples Communication (CC); Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP)</td>
<td>Observational reports reveal more significant differences than self-reports; Modest but significant effects for distressed couples as well as non-distressed; 12 studies showed significant effects maintained at follow-up at least 7 months later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fawcett, Hawkins, Blanchard, &amp; Carroll (2010)</td>
<td>28 reports, 48 pre-post studies</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Unspecified MREs</td>
<td>Marital satisfaction: No significant difference with control group studies or single group pre-post studies; Significant differences found if unpublished (UP) studies excluded and significant difference found between published (P) and UP; Communication: Control groups and pre-post had significant difference; UP studies did not but could be due to other differences in designs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Reports</td>
<td>Independent Studies</td>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Couple Relationship Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin, &amp; Fawcett (2008)</strong></td>
<td>86</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Unspecified: Noted most with well-known programs like Couples Communication</td>
<td>Relationship Quality: Significant effects for experimental studies; Non-significant effects for quasi-experimental studies; Effects maintained at follow-up; Communication Skills: Significant effects for both experimental and quasi-experimental but greater effects with experimental; Effects maintained only for experimental studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hawkins &amp; Fackrell (2010)</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Unspecified marriage &amp; relationship education programs (MREs)</td>
<td>Small but significant improvements in marital quality and communication skills in low-income couples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hawkins, Stanley, Blanchard, &amp; Albright (2012)</strong></td>
<td>148</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Unspecified MREs</td>
<td>Settings: Institutional setting significantly stronger communication effects than religious settings; No significant difference for relationship quality (religious slightly higher); Dose: No significant effect for low dose; Moderate dosage significantly larger effect than low and same as high; Institutional status: No effect; Primary content: Significant for communication skills; Not significant for marital quality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
foster significantly lower effect sizes than observational assessments. They noted this could be due to observational assessments evaluating targeted skills whereas self-report assessments may more specifically target generalization of skills into interactional patterns in every-day life. Further, they assessed distress levels as a moderator and found that, with the few studies they were able to evaluate this factor, distress level did not seem to have a significant impact on effect sizes.

In a similar meta-analysis, Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin, and Fawcett (2008) found significant effects for both marital quality and communication improvements that were typically maintained at follow-up for experimental designs. However, while quasi-experimental designs did foster smaller but still significant effects for communication, they did not produce significant effects for relational quality and did not maintain gains the same way experimental designs did. Further, they noted that while these results are generally positive, most studies are focused only on White, middle class couples. While this was a possible untested moderator in this study, Hawkins and associates tested for other moderators and found dosage to be a significant factor.

Hawkins, Stanley, Blanchard, and Albright (2012) who conducted a meta-analysis specifically to assess for moderators impacting educational programs also confirmed that dosage was an important moderator. In fact, they found that moderate dosages (between 9 and 12 contact hours) were significantly more effective than low dosages (1-8 hours) and not different from higher dosages. They also found that there was no difference between institutional versus religious settings when it came to increases in marital quality. However, institutional settings as well as primary content emphasis were found
to make a difference for improvements in communication. Even so, it is noted that
differences in program setting may be due to assessment type as most studies using
religious settings used self-assessments, while institutional settings were more likely to
include observational assessments (differences noted above).

In a further but much smaller meta-analysis considering only studies related to
low-income families, Hawkins and Fackrell (2010) found small but significant
improvements in marital quality and communication skills in low-income couples. They
note that more extensive studies are in the works but this at least provides a preliminary
look at non-White, middle-class populations. Other studies also showed favorable
outcomes for marital education programs. Eisenberg et al. (2011) found the Practical
Application of Intimate Relationship Skills (PAIRS, 2012) program fostered significant
improvements on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) that were sustained at 12 month
follow-up. Sager and Sager (2005) found the Sanctus marriage enrichment program
(Sanctus, 2013) brought about statistically significant changes in the areas of support,
relationship, and intimacy in relationships with self, God, and others. See Figure 2.5 for
summaries of these studies.

In addition to outcome studies, Birch et al. (2004), Dion (2005), and Doherty
and Anderson (2004) provided an overview of many of the community marriage
initiatives (CMI) and educational programs available. In these reviews it was noted there
has been some research on effects but no rigorous testing had been conducted (Birch et
al., 2004). Doherty and Anderson (2004) suggested some of the challenges with studying
these programs include population differences, difficulty in creating community control
### Figure 2.5: Research Summary of Single Marriage Education Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Study Type</th>
<th>Variables/ Themes</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Treatments</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eisenberg, Peluso, &amp; Schindler (2011)</td>
<td>Quasi-experiment</td>
<td>dyadic consensus, satisfaction, cohesion, and affectional expression</td>
<td>Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS); Relationship Pleasure Scale</td>
<td>Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills (PAIRS)</td>
<td>Significant improvement recorded for all variables; Gains remained significant at both 6 and 12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sager &amp; Sager (2005)</td>
<td>Quasi-experiment</td>
<td>Relationship w/ God, self, spouse; Communication; Intimacy; Commitment to marriage; Typical behaviors</td>
<td>self-report surveys</td>
<td>SANCTUS marriage enrichment</td>
<td>Significant changes in relationships, communication, &amp; intimacy; Not significant for commitment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
groups, and difficulties in delivering consistent intensity and quality in multiple communities. Nonetheless, in general when communities running these programs were compared with communities who do not offer CMIs, they appeared to have reduced divorce rates approximately 2% or more per year.

Programs included Bringing Baby Home (BBH, 2009), a two day workshop followed by a six month support group; Marriage Savers (2013), a community initiative involving clergy committed to support and strengthen marriages through training policies and couple-to-couple mentorship programs; PAIRS (2012), a psychoeducational program focusing on communication, conflict resolution, and commitment; Relationship Enhancement (RE, 2012), a 13–14 hour program focusing on communication and problem solving; Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP, n.d.), a 15 hour group program focusing on communication skills, expectation management, fun, and friendship; PREPARE (PREPARE/ENRICH, 2005-2013), a questionnaire used by clergy and counselors to determine and inform couples of the areas in their relationships where there may be potential problems; and Marriage Encounter (National Marriage Encounter, n.d.), a mainly Catholic weekend retreat led by clergy and lay leaders to foster marriage and spiritual renewal (Dion, 2005; Doherty & Anderson, 2004).

Overall, studies and meta-analyses indicated that marriage and relational education (MRE) programs are at least somewhat effective in helping couples to learn better communication skills and improve marital quality. Some factors that may moderate the effectiveness of these programs included dosage, assessment techniques
used to evaluate effectiveness, and publication biases. The next section further narrows the focus to explore marriage intensive formats.

**Marriage Intensive Formats**

While some educational programs are also run in intensive formats, this section looked at programs that are not only educational but also have counseling or therapeutic components to them. Unfortunately, published empirical research using marriage intensives is minimal. Nonetheless, this section reviews research and articles that address using intensive counseling groups.

One example of an intensive study by Leiblum and Rosen (1979) considered outcomes for two weekend psychoeducational sex therapy groups and then noted differences with their regular weekly groups. The groups were primarily psychoeducational but also provided some group discussion time that could be considered therapeutic. In this study the groups were effective in the areas of improved communication, positive attitude changes, and frequency of sexual interactions. Further, marital satisfaction improvements were noted, but significance levels were unclear throughout the study. When compared with longer, weekly groups both resulted in improvements but seemed to be impactful in differing areas. Authors indicated that for specific sexual dysfunctions the longer format was likely to be more effective, whereas in the areas of marital enhancement and increased receptivity to novel sexual expression the weekend format seemed superior. See Figure 2.6 for a summary of this study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Study Type</th>
<th>Variables/ Themes</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Treatments</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gottman &amp; Ryan (2003)</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>Emotional Inertia (ability to be influenced by partner); Un-influenced Steady states (what each partner brings); Influenced Steady states; influence functions; Repair attempts</td>
<td>Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test; Couple's Problem Inventory; Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF)</td>
<td>Proximal change interventions: Improve Friendship (IF); Manage Conflict (MC); Both (B); Relapse Prevention Therapy B+T; Bibliotherapy control (BC)</td>
<td>Only B+T statistically reduced inertia but for wives only; Only B+T statistically increased positivity for wives and husbands; IF and B+T significantly reduced negative states and likelihood of negative cycles; Only B had significant increase in positive influenced steady states/positive cycles; Wives in B group and husbands in B and if groups showed significantly less success in repair attempts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leiblum and Rosen (1979)</td>
<td>Quasi-experiment</td>
<td>Marital satisfaction; Improving couple communication; Attitude change; Frequency of sexual encounter; Improved specific sexual dysfunction</td>
<td>Life History Questionnaire; Locke-Wallace Scale of Marital Adjustment (MAT); Sexual Interaction Inventory (SII); self-report surveys</td>
<td>Psycho-educational sex therapy</td>
<td>Significant improvements in couple communication; improvements in marital satisfaction noted but statistical data not included; Significant improvements in male and female acceptance of female and maintained at 2 month follow-up; reports of increased sexual encounter frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Outcome Measures</td>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Findings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sytema &amp; Bout (2006); Bout, Sytema, &amp; Rankin (2008)</td>
<td>Quasi-experiment</td>
<td>Problem solving skills; Diagnostic symptoms</td>
<td>Symptom Checklist-90-Revised (SCL-90-R); Interactional Problem Solving Inventory (IPSI)</td>
<td>7 week in-patient treatment including group, individual, couple/family sessions; Significant improvements in problem solving skills for marital only group; Psychiatric group: less marital improvement; 80% still married at 18 month follow-up; Those divorced at follow-up maintained significant improvement in SCL-90 scores</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In another article, after adding intensive weekends to long running groups, Marcuse (1974) noted the benefit of using a marathon or intensive type weekend as part of the group experience allows for deeper emotional feeling and expression. At the same time, he cautioned using intensives exclusively due to the inability to process emotionally intense experiences post intensive. Thus, he suggested combining weekly group sessions with weekend intensives allowing for the benefits of both models.

Even so, most current intensive programs seemed to run between two and four days in length and are disconnected from on-going weekly groups. At the same time, there were also a few studies exploring intensives that had much longer and much shorter treatment scopes than this norm. Sytema and Bout (2006) and Bout and associates (2008) discussed a study conducted in the Netherlands with distressed couples having a history of multiple failed attempts to improve their marriages. Internal assessments spanned nine years and evaluated couples who attended seven-week in-patient treatment that included group, individual, and couple sessions. Most significant results occurred with couples who went for marital issues only, whereas couples dealing with only psychiatric issues found less marital improvement. See Figure 2.6 for research summary.

On the other end of the spectrum, Brand (2012) presented results of a qualitative study with couples who went through the Gottman (2013) couples one-day workshop. At one month follow-up couples reported that the workshop had been helpful in the areas of connectedness, communication, acceptance and conflict resolution.

Another unpublished study using the Gottman workshops conducted by Gottman and Ryan (2003) compared full two day workshops (Both) with two one-day component
workshops (Improve Friendship, IF; and Manage Conflict, MC), full two day workshops with nine booster marital therapy sessions (Both + Therapy), and a bibliotherapy control group who were assigned to read Gottman and Silver’s (1999) *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*. While both of the component groups reduced negative reciprocity, the IF group also reduced the likelihood of negative cycles, indicated by the reduced number of influenced stable steady states. The groups who received both components also increased positive affect and were more likely to have more positive cycles. In a later unpublished report, Gottman (2003) noted that at one year follow-up friendship gains and wives improvements in shared meaning were only maintained for the Both plus Therapy group. Other gains were not maintained at a statistically significant rate. See Figure 2.6 for study summary.

One other study used an intensive program. Recovery of Hope, an intensive program similar to that defined here was used in this study, but the design explored personality factors impacting marital adjustment prior to going through the intensive program, rather than outcomes resulting from the treatment (Knabb et al., 2011). Research summaries are not included in this text because this study was not an outcome study and did not look at couples’ adjustment post-treatment.

Two articles were also found that provided descriptions and theories of two intensive programs along with proposed reasons for their successful evaluations. The first article (Vogt, 2001) described the Recovery of Hope five-day program consisting of 3-4 hours of counseling per day. During therapy couples addressed communication skills, personal responsibility, empathy, and assertiveness. At the time of the article,
post-treatment evaluations indicated that 95% of participants were glad they attended. Suggested reasons for this feedback included clients feeling better equipped with more adaptive communication skills and abilities to see alternative interpretations for their partners’ behaviors, thus leading to less blaming and defense. The second article (Verhulst, 1975) simply described a model for three-week intensive marriage treatment consisting of daily 1.5-2 hour conjoint sessions and 3-4 hours of educational group sessions.

Though there was a great lack of empirical studies looking at outcomes of intensive programs, the ones that were located revealed hopeful findings. Specifically, communication skills and interactional patterns often contributing to marital satisfaction were found to be positively impacted by intensive programs. Further, it was interesting to see that follow-up sessions in the Gottman (2003) research also impacted maintenance of gains. In addition to the studies discussed in this section, two studies were located relating directly to the IMIT program that this study used. The following section provides details for these studies.

**Integrative Marriage Intensive Therapy (IMIT)**

While there is minimal research on marriage intensives in general, and even less when looking for empirical studies that tested or evaluated condensed three to four day marriage therapy (as opposed to educational programs), the following two studies were found using IMIT. See Figure 2.7 for a summary of these studies. Burbee and colleagues (2011) described their quasi-experimental research using an extensive
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Study Type</th>
<th>Variables/Themes</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Treatments</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burbee, Sparks, Paul, &amp; Arnzen (2011)</td>
<td>Quasi-experiment</td>
<td>Marital satisfaction; Still married; Depression (pre-test only)</td>
<td>Demographic Survey, Beck Depression Inventory, Index of Marital Satisfaction, Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, Quality of Marriage Index, End of intensive satisfaction survey</td>
<td>Integrative Marital Intensive Therapy (IMIT)</td>
<td>Statistically significant improvements in marital satisfaction at post test, 3, 6, 12, and 24 follow-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynema (2011)</td>
<td>Quasi-experiment</td>
<td>Length of marriage moderator for marital satisfaction</td>
<td>Demographic survey, Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale</td>
<td>IMIT</td>
<td>No effects of length of marriage on marital satisfaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
database of pre-test and post-test self-report measures collected for all intensive participants between the years of 2004 and 2007. Follow-up intervals occurred at 3, 6, 12, and 24 months. At the end of the intensive 94% of participants indicated satisfaction with the program. Results of the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) indicated “statistically significant increases in marriage satisfaction occurred at all four intervals” (Burbee et al. 2011, p. 46). Further, at 24 months, 84.5% of couples who had attended the intensive were still married. This is compared to the 50% national divorce rate. In a second study, Lynema (2011) considered length of marriage as a moderator in treatment outcomes using IMIT and found no significant differences in either pre-test or post-test assessments.

Once again the research relating to marriage intensives was in line with the research supporting marriage therapy and group therapy. At the same time, it was also clear that there was a great need for further studies exploring efficacy of intensives as well as what factors contribute to maintained gains and/or loss of gains over time. The current study used IMIT to explore client’s perspectives on their own maintenance or loss of gains over the first year post treatment.

**Chapter Summary**

In light of this review, it appeared that marital therapy in general, marital therapy provided in group formats, and intensive marriage therapy is generally effective in treating distressed couples, at least in the short term. A few studies also indicated that gains are sometimes maintained in follow-up studies even five years out. Even so, no
research in any area had been found that explained what happens after therapy and what is involved in maintaining gains achieved in therapy, regardless of treatment modality. Further, with the paucity of research in the area of marriage intensives, and the draw couples have to them due to the reduced cost of a group format and the appealing truncated time commitment, it seemed worthwhile to develop a study that explored this modality specifically. Because no research had yet been conducted on understanding what happens in relationships post therapy, a qualitative study that explored the couples’ perspective and what they interpreted impacts maintaining their gains was a natural direction to take the research. Therefore, this study sought to do exactly that. The next chapter provides a detailed description of the research design and methodology that was used to conduct this qualitative study.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Every quality study includes a methods section outlining the research design and the procedures that were used in performing the study (Cone & Foster, 2006; Williams & Morrow, 2009). Therefore, this chapter first provides an in-depth summary of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) including the three key theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. In addition, procedures used for participant selection are specified including details about the intensive program that participants had gone through, details about the theoretical framework of Integrative Marriage Intensive Therapy (IMIT), information about the location, values, and vision of the National Institute of Marriage (NIM), and specific procedures that were used in selecting participants. A further section covers procedures that were employed in the data collection and analysis stages, in accordance with the IPA design. Finally the chapter ends with two sections detailing the steps that were taken to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the study and ethical compliance of the study.

Research Design

IPA is a qualitative research method that has gained popularity in the last decade due to its clear methodology and practical guidelines (Smith, 2004). Smith (2011) described it this way, “IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of personal lived experience, the meaning of experience to participants and how participants make sense of
that experience” (p. 9). Thus, this model allowed for not only descriptive phenomenology, but also an interpretative hermeneutic that was idiographic in that it looked in detail at a small number of participants to gain a deeper and richer understanding of couples lived experience. Smith (2004) described IPA research as a double hermeneutic because it looks at “the participant… trying to make sense of their personal and social world… [while] the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world” (p. 40). The theoretical underpinnings of the three major components of IPA (i.e., phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography) and their rationale are more fully explained below.

**Phenomenology**

IPA is phenomenological, seeking to understand an experience from the perspective of the participants. Shinebourne (2011) pointed out that phenomenological inquiry originated with Husserl who emphasized moving from non-reflective living to attending to experience as it registers in consciousness. Husserl (2011) teased apart real or actual things (i.e., events, interactions, phenomena) from interpretations located in the conscious mind, particularly as experiences unfold. At the same time, Larkin, Watts, and Clifton (2006) clarified that this is not intended to be a dualistic view of reality and cognition, but rather a recognition that in reality human access to objectivity is only available through consciousness. Further, Husserl (2011) was interested in finding the essence of an experience that would be experienced by anyone who participated in the same kind of phenomenon.
When turning from Husserl’s (2011) phenomenological philosophy to phenomenological study, Giorgi (1997) developed a method that first brackets out (recognizes and sets aside) past knowledge in order to look freshly at an experience, beyond naively taking what is known for granted; then describes the experience in the language of the participants; and finally searches for the essence of the experience that can be found within all participants’ experiences. The essence can be described as the constant element(s) within an experience that would be experienced by everyone having that particular experience, thus making these elements essential for the experience to be identified as that experience. For IPA, the focus on phenomenology means the research necessarily was inductive, allowing the description and meaning of the experience to emerge from the participants, rather than imposing predetermined constructs or prior knowledge onto their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). However, unlike Giorgi who remains closely connected to Husserl’s focus on finding the essence of a lived experience as presented by the participants, IPA also draws from interpretive hermeneutics (e.g. Van Manen, 1997) as well.

**Hermeneutics**

In addition to the phenomenological focus, IPA also involves hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation. Key philosophers that IPA draws from include Heidegger (Heidegger & Stambaugh, 1996; Heidegger & Van Buren, 2002), Merleau-Ponty (as cited in Larkin et al., 2006; Shinebourne, 2011; Smith et al., 2009), and Schleiermacher (as cited in Smith et al., 2009). First, hermeneutic philosophy recognizes the grounding
of experience in particular historical, social, and cultural contexts. Each of these factors impact how individuals experience and make sense of what is going on around and within them. In fact, Van Manen (1997) pointed out that even description is actually a form of interpretation because it involves reflection and making sense of an event in order to put words to it. Further, making sense of experiences also draws from and is contextualized by previous experiences (Shinebourne, 2011). Larkin and colleagues (2006) also noted that humans cannot remove the self to see how things really are; thus, “What is real is not dependent on us, but the exact meaning and nature of reality is” (p. 107, emphasis existing). They further pointed out, based on Merleau-Ponty philosophy, that communicated accounts not only reveal information about the account, but also the communicator as well. To this point, it must be recognized that in research, the researcher does not ever have direct access to the experience, unless he or she has personally experienced the phenomenon; instead one can only have access to what and how the experience is being described by the participant (Willig, 2008).

When looking at hermeneutics in IPA, Smith (2011) talked about the double hermeneutic noted above, “the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them” (p. 10). Therefore, IPA necessarily moves beyond description to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning that participants derive from their experiences. Thus, this study not only explored the essence of how participants described the marriage intensive, but rather, it sought to understand how participants made sense of what happened to them and what impact the intensive had on their marriages. Were there things that made it significantly meaningful and thus more
impactful in the long term? Why and/or why not? Further, the researcher also brought added insight and history that added to the interpretive process. Based on the philosophy of Schleiermacher (as cited in Smith et al., 2009), recognizing the value of the hermeneutic circle which overlaps the interpretations of the researcher back into the perceived interpretations of the participants was an important part of developing a more in depth and rich understanding of the experience. This was a careful skill requiring rigorous dedication to the original transcripts, thus allowing intended and expanded meaning to emerge from the text.

When looking at the considerable hermeneutic dynamic of IPA, bracketing became a cyclical process that not only addressed what the researcher initially brought to the study, but also developed throughout the project as new awareness of pre-knowledge and assumptions emerged (Shinebourne, 2011). Larkin and associates (2006) pointed out the interpretive process involves the hermeneutic circle as perspectives continue to be revised, elaborated on, and evaluated through interaction with the participants and their stories. Blind spots were revealed and recognized. Smith (2007) further described the hermeneutic circle as a process where the researcher first brackets out current knowledge and preconceptions in order to focus on the participants’ stories; then, after thoroughly engaging in the transcripts, the researcher records freshly how his or her perspective has been changed and furthered through this new experience of understanding the participants’ stories; focus then returns to the transcripts as the researcher asks new questions of the data or the participants themselves through asking new questions and
discussing new insights with them; this back and forth continues until a deep and rich understanding of the meaning of the experience solidifies.

This is significant in the current study because the focus was on understanding what, if any, impact a marriage intensive had on individuals and couples and how they made sense of their experience post treatment. Attention was given to what Smith and associates (2009) called deliberate controlled reflection (the intentional reflection or making sense of what happened), rather than simply an unconscious descriptive reflection of what happened. Including the hermeneutic circle mentioned above, the ongoing reflective process involved the researcher’s back and forth reflecting on the reflections of the participants individually and the study as a whole.

Willig (2008) called this on-going process reflexivity. She discussed how the researcher necessarily influences the process, but through the researcher’s acknowledgement and making known personal biases that emerge, the reader is then able to evaluate and make his or her own interpretations. Reflexivity will be discussed further in a later section on trustworthiness in qualitative study. However, it should be noted, in IPA this reflexivity is not simply bracketing out of assumptions and presuppositions, but rather the researcher uses these acknowledged and recognized assumptions to advance understanding through further interpretation and new questions that develop into a rigorous idiographic focus.
**Idiography**

In order to emphasize the attention needed and rigor of hermeneutic analysis involved in IPA study, Smith and associates (2009) determined in their philosophical underpinnings of this design that IPA must also be idiographic, or concerned with the particular or detailed reflective specifics of the participants’ interpretation. In fact, both Smith (2011) and Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) note in their evaluations of IPA studies that the idiographic focus and rigor is often a key factor missing in lower quality IPA studies. Because of this recognition, it is stressed that good IPA design focuses in on a small number of participants so that this in-depth analysis is possible (Smith et al., 2009). Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) suggest that 3 to 6 participants are ideal for novice researchers and up to 4 to 10 participants would be appropriate for professional doctorate studies due to the difficulty involved with larger numbers.

Further, this idiographic focus must permeate the entire methodology and reporting of the study (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011; Smith 2011). For instance, the interview structure of an IPA study is intentionally short, containing open-ended, broad, and general questions, so as to not impose parameters or pre-set understandings on interviewees (see Appendix B for the interview schedule of this study). Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) stress IPA studies need to be focused and interview schedules should not be too long or too detailed. In fact, Smith and associates (2009) recommend between six and ten questions only, followed by possible prompts to encourage more detail. In addition, this plays out in analysis through continued processing until themes have been reduced to a focused few (Smith 2011). Good reports then include vivid
analyses of experiences including themes that are grounded in examples from at least half of the participants. Complexities, ambiguities, and nuances were identified and addressed, and insightful analyses were crafted using evidenced themes supported by sustained and convincing accounts from participants.

Because this was a bolder and more complex IPA design than the typical single group designs, having two very homogeneous groups who have experienced similar IMIT but who have differing post treatment responses, the analysis of this study was structured into two separate phenomenological, hermeneutic, and idiographic analyses prior to comparing and contrasting one to the other. Therefore, participant selection was intentionally small in both groups in order to gain the depth and richness of analyses from both groups. The specifics of how this analysis worked within an IPA design is discussed below.

**Selection of Participants**

As with most qualitative research, purposeful selection of participants (Creswell, 2009; Pyrczak & Bruce, 2007; Williams & Morrow, 2009; Willig, 2008) was administered. In keeping with the idiographic focus of this study and the IPA requirement that participants have shared a very similar experience, participants were taken from a pool of couples who had completed IMIT at the National Institute of Marriage (NIM). In order to provide clarity and thorough understanding of the experience, this section describes the specifics of the IMIT program participants participated in, provides perspective on NIM as an agency, and describes the theoretical
framework of IMIT, before outlining the details about the participants and their unique selection.

The Intensive Program

According to the NIM website (NIM, 2013), the particular program that couples had gone through is the Premium Intensive Marriage Counseling Program. In their study, Burbee and his associates (2011) referred to this program as the Couples Intensive Program. The program is limited to five couples who participate in group counseling led conjointly by two professional therapists. Group sessions run from 9:00 am to either 8:00 pm or 5:00 pm depending on the day, with meals and breaks interspersed as appropriate. Further, it is an all-inclusive program incorporating accommodations for five nights, meals for five breakfasts, four lunches, and four dinners, approximately 32 hours of therapy, two follow-up calls, and take-home resources.

Theoretical Framework of Integrative Marriage Intensive Therapy (IMIT)

The theoretical framework for Integrative Marriage Intensive Therapy (IMIT) pulls from numerous counseling theories that intentionally integrate a Christian faith worldview. Burbee and colleagues (2011) describe IMIT as a combination of family therapies, experiential couples therapies, and cognitive therapies set into a marathon group format. The family systems perspective provides the understanding that with any relational issue there is more going on than simply the issues with the individuals in the relationship. The marriage itself is also an entity needing to be recognized and worked
with. Experiential therapies including emotional focused therapy (EFT) provide perspective on the interactional cycle occurring in the marriage relationship that supersedes the content of arguments and sets up a familiar dance where the steps are repeated even as the content changes. Experiential therapies also contribute through the perspective that change often occurs most effectively when clients experience and express emotional vulnerability in the moment rather than simply talking about it. At the same time, the cognitive flavor of IMIT addresses beliefs, expectations, and perceptions as they relate to self, spouse, and the marriage. Cognitive restructuring is a key element in the IMIT process. Finally, the group format facilitates learning not only through experiencing, but also through vicarious learning by watching others and realizing that their own experiences are not as unique as they once had thought.

The founders fashioned a multi-theoretical program to develop a systematic and intentional therapy protocol that includes developing five key components: personal responsibility, safety, self-care, emotional communication, and teamwork within the marriage (Smalley, 2004; Smalley & Paul, 2006). The first task is to facilitate safety, and then couples are encouraged to create that same safety in the group and more importantly with their spouses going forward. Personal responsibility and the need for self-care are taught and expanded on while clients are invited to engage emotionally and risk being vulnerable with one another in a safe way. Each couple is taught to map out their “fear dances” and take responsibility for their own buttons and triggers. Emotional communication includes setting aside triggers so that the listener can hear the heart of the other’s communication and pay attention to the underlying emotions behind the words of
his or her spouse. Finally, through practicing learning to really hear and understand one
another couples are taught to create a “no-losers policy” that encompasses mutual
understanding and seeks to find a win-win, rather than a compromise that may not feel
like a win to either party. With this new way of communicating and connecting in an
intimate and safe way, the hope is that clients will be able to work through challenges as
they arise by using these skills that they have experienced and embraced in treatment.

As mentioned above, mainstream evangelical Christian theology is also a part of
the theoretical framework of IMIT, but it is never used as a means of indoctrinating
clients (Burbee et.al, 2011). Instead, the Christian aspect of IMIT is undergirded with the
core tenets of the Christian faith as described in the Bible, but more specifically it focuses
on the integration of faith as it relates to the value of self, others, and relationship.
Smalley (2004) outlines the theological underpinnings of IMIT by describing the three
key beliefs coming out of the Christian faith as they relate to restoring marriages: “1. You
are made for relationships. 2. You are made with the capacity to choose. 3. You are made
to take responsibility for yourself” (p. 20). Here being made for relationship
encompasses relationship with self, others, and God. The capacity to choose reminds
clients even not choosing is a form of choosing, and there are always options even if
someone does not like the options available. Finally, taking responsibility for oneself is a
key part of faith, life, and counseling, and puts the responsibility where it must be rather
than passing it off on others by means of blaming them for one’s own actions and
choices.
As a final point it should be noted, acknowledging God’s hand in the intensive process is explicitly shared with potential clients during the screening process so this integration would come as no surprise to participants. While being a Christian is not a requirement for attending NIM intensives, clients become aware of the integration of faith and therapy through one key screening question that is always asked prior to acceptance into the program: “If God were to do a miracle in your marriage—even if the miracle is similar in magnitude to the parting of the Red Sea—would you be willing to receive that miracle?” (Smalley & Paul, 2006, p.7).

**National Institute of Marriage (NIM)**

The NIM, located in Branson, Missouri, started out as the Smalley Marriage Institute in 2003 but changed names due to national interest and popularity (Smalley & Paul, 2006). This is an expressly mainstream evangelical Christian organization that is not-for-profit and does not specifically align with any one denomination (Burbee et.al, 2011). Even so, spiritual issues and connections are intentionally explored and incorporated into the intensive experience, and Christianity is offered as one practical option in understanding and inspiring positive change for the marriage. NIM’s published vision statement is “Pursuing excellence in the integration of Christian faith and professional discipline, the National Institute of Marriage will find innovative and effective ways to influence our world toward God-inspired lives and marriages” (NIM, 2013).
The Participants

In addition to participants sharing the experience of IMIT at NIM, further selection criteria was necessary to comply with IPA’s idiographic requirement of specific and homogeneous participants (Smith et al., 2009, Willig, 2008). Because this study sought to explore the full experience of post intensive marital life within the first year after treatment, two distinct groups were necessary. The Gains group, was comprised of couples, having completed IMIT, who claimed the intensive had been impactful and who had been able to maintain gains achieved through treatment. The Difficulties group met the same initial criteria but instead of maintaining gains, initial gains had markedly deteriorated within the first year.

In order to keep the groups of a manageable size for in-depth analysis (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011), three eligible couples were selected for both groups. Initially, for consistency sake, both partners in each couple were required to participate in order to be involved in this study. However, in the selection process of the Difficulties group, most couples were not willing to participate at all; in fact, only one couple was found with both partners willing to participate. In order to complete the selection process, alterations to the design were made to allow for couples with only one partner participating in the study.

In addition, because this study required clients to be reflective and open about their thoughts and experiences, couple selection necessitated that all participants were articulate, willing to share openly, and capable of deliberate reflection (Willig, 2008). While this fostered the limitation that this study was likely not be overly generalizable,
the goal in IPA is to be an idiographic and detailed interpretation of the meaning participants derive from an experience; thus it aimed to be transferable, but not necessarily generalizable per se (Hefferon, & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011).

Another detail that ensured as much homogeneity as possible was the time elapsed between the intensive and this study. Because many studies have not sought feedback beyond six-month follow-up, this study interviewed couples who participated in IMIT at least one year prior. Though this could have opened the opportunity for distorted memory recall of the intensive and perceived gains, it had the potential to provide a true picture of what happens for couples in their marriages in the first year after an intensive therapeutic treatment. If memory distortion was a major factor, this would be helpful for treatment providers to understand, allowing them to create more effective follow-up resources for their clients.

Another possible limitation of this timeframe could have been the possibility for decreased homogeneity of the group. This was significant when considering IPA’s focus, and yet the main shared experience was of couples who had completed the intensive a year prior, so the emergence of both similarities and differences are valuable data in an IPA designs (Smith et al., 2009). If no similarities were found and the groups are significantly diverse, that too is useful information in considering the impact of intensives for these couples. Even so, it was expected that there would be particular similarities that differentiate the two groups that would be helpful in understanding the post-treatment experience, even if contributing factors had nothing to do with treatment what-so-ever. In fact, this was part of the reason qualitative methodology was selected. The design is
intentionally inductive in its approach, seeking to understand the participants’ experience without forcing pre-determined constructs onto their interpretations (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009).

To facilitate the development of the two groups, once Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval had been obtained (see Appendix C for approval letter), initial selection was determined by one year follow-up surveys collected by NIM that indicated current marital status and marital satisfaction. As mentioned above, the Gains group was made up of couples who had experienced IMIT, found it significant in their marriage, and had been able to maintain their gains at the one year point. The Difficulties group was made up of couples who experienced the same marriage intensive format, found it helpful initially, but over the course of the first year were not able to maintain the gains they achieved at the intensive. Couples who did not find it initially helpful or who did not fall expressly into one of the two specified categories were excluded.

In order to maintain client confidentiality, gatekeepers (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009) from NIM were asked to make initial contact with potential participants in order to obtain informed consent before the researcher had access to their names or contact information. According to Smith and colleagues (2009) and Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011), sample sizes between 4 and 10 are optimal for the level of detail required in IPA at the doctoral level. Because this was a comparative design as part of a professional doctoral degree, overall participant numbers could be slightly higher, as long as attention to detail and rigor were maintained. Therefore, in this study a member of the NIM research team contacted and invited potential couples who met the selection criteria until
three couples for each group had been secured (6 couples in total; 6 participants in the Gains group; 4 participants in the Difficulties group).

In the initial contact, couples who indicated in post-treatment surveys that they believed their intensive experience was impactful were asked if they would describe their current relationship as having maintained gains achieved at the intensive. The response to this question determined which group they potentially fell into. If they met the required initial criteria (until each group is filled), NIM provided them with a brief description of this study and asked if they would be willing to participate. Upon another affirmative response, detailed research procedures, participant expectations, and risks of involvement were sent to them, and consent was obtained for the researcher to contact them directly. The NIM gatekeeper then forwarded a list of potential participants and their telephone contact information to the researcher. This list was filed separately from all other data collection in a locked and secure cabinet until it could be destroyed 3 years after the project was complete. More detail regarding record storage and destruction will be included in the ethics section.

During the initial telephone contact between potential participants and the researcher, any further questions were answered by the researcher. Upon further agreement to participate in this study, formal signed informed consent was obtained via fax or e-mail from confirmed participants (See Appendix D to view Consent Form). With the consent of the participants, other demographic information contained in the NIM database, including age, race, number of years married, whether this is a first marriage or not, number of children, and religious affiliation, was also forwarded to the
researcher. This information was immediately coded to remove names and identifying information and then downloaded into NVivo 10, a qualitative research software package that links and organizes qualitative data for analysis (Creswell, 2007). Mutually agreed upon interview times via videoconference meetings were also set up with participants during the initial call from the researcher. Further details regarding the videoconference and data storage will be discussed in the next section. Participants were also given the opportunity to revoke participation in the study at any time by contacting the researcher via e-mail or telephone if they did not wish to continue.

Data Collection and Analysis

While the primary form of data collection in IPA is semi-structured interviews with participants because this provides rich descriptive and reflective perspectives of the participants’ lived experience (Smith et al., 2009), the addition of a journal (Larkin et al., 2006; Van Manen, 1997) can also provide a source of secondary data that enriches the data compilation. In this study the addition of a pre-interview reflective summary of their marriage experience since the intensive was requested by e-mail from all participants. Each participant was asked to e-mail the researcher a brief outline of their marriage experience since the intensive, including how they had made sense of the significance or lack of significance the intensive had on them or their marriage. The purpose of this summary was to facilitate greater reflection in the interview process as well as gain individual accounts that could have contained additional information that couples were less likely to include in a conjoint interview. These summaries were requested to be
returned prior to the scheduled conjoint interviews, although a few came in after the interviews. Upon receiving these summaries, they were also coded and then uploaded into NVivo 10. This software allowed for all data to be stored together in one place. Further security was ensured by running this software and storing all collected information and analysis on a password protected and encrypted laptop and backing it up on USB sticks that were stored in a locked cabinet.

For the primary data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all couples. Interviews took place in participants’ natural setting where they were most comfortable (Creswell, 2009). This meant meeting with couples in their homes via videoconference. All videoconferences were recorded using Skype and SuperTintin software (2007). Recordings were immediately downloaded into NVivo 10 and deleted from original locations. This ensured all recorded data was secured within one location and connected with the all other collected data and analysis. Additional information on data storage and subsequent destruction will be discussed in the ethics section.

Having participants interviewed in their own homes increased the ecological validity of this study, because it meant they were not impacted by being in an artificial environment as they discussed their marriage experience (Willig, 2008). Further, as noted above, unless only one participant was involved in the study, initial interviews were conducted with both partners present in order to obtain shared experiences and for the researcher to observe how the couple interacted with one another. Individual interviews were conducted with the two single spouse couples in the Difficulties group.
According to Smith and associates (2009), in-depth interviews are typically an hour or more in length and follow a semi-structured format with open-ended questions and follow-up prompts to draw more detailed information where appropriate (See Appendix B to view the interview schedule for this study). Follow-up questions were sent and answered via e-mail correspondence with individual partners in order to gain more detailed information from each partner, to clarify data, or to gain feedback on emerging interpretations.

Couples were reminded that all data collected in the interviews could be included verbatim in the final written report so complete confidentiality could not be possible. However, as part of the initial interview, participants were invited to select pseudonyms that have been used to code all data and analysis to ensure anonymity. The list of names connecting pseudonyms with participants was filed separately with the contact information and securely stored in a locked cabinet separate from all other back-ups. Further, they were not contained on the laptop containing active study files. As is noted by many, anonymity is really the most that can be offered in a qualitative study (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2008). However, Darlington and Scott (2002) noted that an additional layer of anonymity could be provided through the disaggregation of information by dispersing participant quotes under categorized themes, rather than including large discourses from individual participants in unified sections. Further, participants were given the opportunity to read the final report before submission in order to validate that the researcher captured their experiences accurately and to provide opportunity for them to request any changes/additions to their quoted
portions. This allowed some empowerment of participants to make any revisions and clarifications to their transcribed disclosures, without burdening them with the possible embarrassment and stress of having to read through long complete transcripts (Mero-Jaffe, 2011).

**Research Questions**

The research questions in this study were: 1) how do couples who have gone through marriage intensive therapy perceive and make sense of the impact or lack of impact this treatment has had on their marriages?, 2) what, if any, marital gains do participants believe have been sustained and how?, 2a) what, if anything, do participants believe helped achieve and maintain any gains?, and 2b) what, if anything, do participants believe has made it difficult to achieve and maintain gains? However, in IPA the actual research questions are not asked directly to participants (Smith et al., 2009). Instead a semi-structured interview was designed to ask specific, open-ended questions that in turn answered the research questions by the end of the study. The interview schedule including questions and prompts that were asked is included in Appendix B.

**Data Analysis**

Once the interviews were completed, the researcher imported the audio-video recordings into NVivo 10 qualitative research software (Creswell, 2007) and used this software to assist in transcribing and analyzing interviews. While it was still required that the researcher manually go through and type each line in a transcript, ease of coding
and connecting data within the software allowed for uncomplicated searching, sorting, and analyzing. Further, this software allowed recordings to be slowed down to ensure all recordings were transcribed accurately according to what was being played back. Creswell (2009) also noted that software packages such as NVivo allow for more efficient organization and manipulation of qualitative data and recommended using it over more laborious manual coding and data organization.

The first step in IPA analysis began with recording personal reactions and reflections about the interviews as a means of bracketing them out so that fresh attention could be given to the data exclusively (Smith et al., 2009). Next the researcher listened to the tape of the first interview while reading the transcript in order to immerse herself in the interview and personally connect with the participants. This first step also involved further reading and rereading of the interview transcript in an effort to really understand the participants’ perspective. Initial ideas and connections were recorded at a high level before step two continued the process by further refining the earlier notes to include linguistic content and usage exploration. Through the quieting of the mind by recording early connections in step one, the researcher could look for deeper and more analytical connections in step two; though Smith and associates (2009) note, these steps are often more interconnected than distinct steps.

Willig (2008) suggested this first stage (steps one and two) involves wide-ranging unfocused note taking that could include “associations, questions, comments on language use, absences, [and] descriptive labels” (p. 58). However, while these notes may be unfocused and open-minded, Smith and colleagues (2009) note they should also be as
detailed as possible. Larkin and associates (2006) further stress that this early stage is concerned with immersing the researcher in the participants’ worlds, and as such, it seeks to stay as close to the participants’ descriptions as possible. This does not mean that interpretation is not part of the process, however.

Smith (2004) discussed multiple levels of interpretation that are possible in IPA analysis. Pulling from the philosophy of Schleiermacher (as cited in Smith et al., 2009), this kind of interpretation not only looks at the content of the description, but also the very words chosen to communicate the description. In these choices, greater understanding of the phenomenon and the participant could be found. Thus, paying attention to the language used was a key factor in this interpretation. Examples of things the researcher looked for included: the words used changing in tense, leading to interpretive questions and exploration as to what these shifts could mean; metaphors explored for their significance; and/or social comparisons investigated to further understand the experience of the participants.

Step three involved pouring over the notes and transcripts, looking for themes and patterns that emerged from the data. Smith and associates (2009) described these themes as “phrases which speak to the psychological essence of the piece and contain enough particularity to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptual” (p. 92). Therefore, use of psychological terminology was appropriate in this stage (Willig, 2008). In step four, examination of emerging themes, connections between the themes, and identifying the most interesting and pertinent themes relating to the research questions were the foci. This initial organizing, however, did not need to be overly thorough as later steps
organized the themes more comprehensively (Smith et al., 2009). Even so, Willig (2008) encouraged the use of a summary table containing theme labels, quotes and key words (in vivo), and page and line numbers from the transcripts. Doing this facilitated later comparisons and analyses of themes.

After completing each of these steps for the first case or couple in the first group (Maintained group), step five repeated steps one through four for each of the subsequent cases in the first group (Smith et al., 2009). Initial bracketing in these cases also included setting aside themes and ideas gleaned from previous cases in an effort to examine each case freshly and to allow for new themes to emerge. In the final step for the Maintained group, the themes from all cases within the group were thoroughly explored and patterns emerging throughout were organized and presented in Chapter 4. At this point, as Willig (2008) suggested the researcher looked for patterns in individual clusters across cases and checked higher order themes against the transcripts in a cyclical process. This also included checking to see if themes in later cases could be found in earlier transcripts as well.

This entire process was repeated for the second group (Difficulties group) with findings reported in Chapter 4, and a final comparative step was engaged to explore and interpret the similarities and differences between the two groups (findings reported in Chapter 4). This final comparative analysis involved further review and refining of the themes found in the individual groups along with continuing the hermeneutic circle of checking back with the transcripts to ensure that the new refined themes still reflected the experiences and interpretations of the participants. Throughout the process participants
were contacted via e-mail for clarifications or to gain further data needed to make sense of their experience; and once all of the analyses were compiled, participants were asked to review the proposed themes and presentation of interpretations in order to verify accuracy of their described experiences and provide clarification as needed. These suggestions and clarifications were then included in the final presentation of this study. The next section details steps taken to ensure the quality of this study.

**Trustworthiness in Qualitative Study**

While validity and reliability are the terms used to describe quality in quantitative designs, in qualitative designs it is more common to look at trustworthiness (Kazdin, 2003). The specifics of trustworthiness in qualitative designs are widely debated but in general, trustworthiness refers to the level of rigor and diligence used in creating and carrying out qualitative designs (Williams & Morrow, 2009). This is both determined by the intentional efforts of the researcher, and also the ability of the readers to track and discern the rigor and comprehensiveness of the efforts to create quality research. Of the various possible criteria that can come together make up a quality trustworthy design, this study focused on clarity of methodology, transparency and coherence, sensitivity to context, transferability, commitment and rigor, reflexivity, grounding in examples, providing credibility checks, attention to impact and importance, and resonating with readers (Carcary, 2009; Elliott et al., 1999; Shinebourne, 2011; Smith, 2011; Williams & Morrow, 2009; Willig, 2008; Yardley, 2000). Steps specific to quality IPA studies were
also considered and are discussed below. While some of these overlap and others can be clustered together, each is described and steps that have been taken are outlined below.

**Clarity of Methods**

Clarity of methods encompasses a number of these criteria, but in essence it relates to providing clear and detailed descriptions of the study’s design, similar to that of a quantitative design (Carcary, 2009; Williams & Morrow, 2009; Willig, 2008). As has been included in the current study, sections including overview, purpose of the study, research questions, literature review, methods, data analysis, results, and summaries provide evidence of a well-planned and structured study.

**Transparency and Coherence**

Transparency and coherence are very similar to clarity of methodology because they directly relate to the detailing of all steps taken throughout the data collection and analysis phases of the research in order to reveal the rationale and process to the readers as well as the fit of the research question to the philosophical underpinnings (Yardley, 2000). Transparency is the clear presentation of the steps taken in all stages of the research (Shinebourne, 2011). This is similar to Carcary’s (2009) audit trail in that steps were recorded and outlined in the presentation of the study, but the records were not as detailed as a full audit. Even so, attention was given to providing rationale for interpretations in plausible and convincing ways (Smith, 2011; Yardley, 2000). Transparency was also achieved through the presentation of clear examples using exact
excerpts from the participant transcripts in order to allow the reader to determine the appropriateness of the interpretations and themes.

Coherence is similar to transparency in that it provides the rationale for the fit of the interpretations as well as the explanations for the fit of the research questions within the philosophical underpinnings of the design (Yardley, 2000). This was achieved through the skillful art of writing a compelling account of the research that presented themes and interpretations in a structured way that flows and makes sense to readers (Willig, 2008; Yardley, 2000). Included in this criterion is the ability to present ambiguities and contradictions in a coherent way that enhances the understanding of the data instead of creating confusion (Shinebourne, 2011). As it relates to the fit of the research questions to the philosophical underpinnings, coherence provides enough description of both for the reader to be able to recognize the rationality behind the design choice. In this study IPA fits the research questions because it specifically addressed the meaning participants derived from particular situations, such as making sense of what happened in marriages after intensive marriage therapy for these participants. Descriptions of IPA and its underpinnings were also provided so readers can assess the fit themselves.

**Sensitivity to Context**

Yardley’s (2000) sensitivity to context also addresses the grounding of the study in the philosophical underpinnings of the design as well as assessing the thoroughness of the literature review in order to allow readers to determine the appropriateness of the
study in relation to existing literature and the research questions. It also relates to the researcher connecting the interpretations back to the relevant literature as part of the finished work (Shinebourne, 2011). In this study, these connections have been made clear in the summary of the results chapters below.

**Commitment and Rigor**

Also closely related to clarity of methodology, commitment and rigor address criteria that deal with both the researcher’s diligence and the readers’ ability to recognize that diligence. First, Yardley (2000) suggested “commitment encompasses prolonged engagement with the topic…, the development of competence and skill in the methods used, and immersion in the relevant data” (p. 221). While this was not observed by the reader, the evidence of it is made clear through the completeness of written presentation of this study.

Rigor is part of that completeness in that it specifically addresses the comprehensiveness of data collection and analysis. The attention to the appropriateness of participant selection, including ensuring that participants were reflective and articulate enough to provide thorough enough data was part of rigorous data collection (Yardley, 2000). Carcary (2009) also noted that analysis needs to be systematic and rigorous. This is in complete alignment with IPA’s idiographic underpinning. It also involved the completeness of interpretation, allowing for multi-leveled analysis to occur before the interpretive process was finished (Smith, 2011; Yardley, 2000). Therefore, in relation to the participants, commitment and rigor involved sensitivity and perseverance when
accessing participants; in relation to the collected data they required commitment to meticulous analysis and interpretation (Shinebourne, 2011).

**Transferability**

Part of providing rigorous data to assist readers in their assessment of the study, transferability (Willig, 2008) or situating the sample (Elliot et al., 1999) refers to including detailed information about the participants including demographic information. In this study demographic information was gathered from NIM in order to situate the participants within their lived context. Further, the theoretical framework of IMIT, the values of NIM, and the details about the intensives that participants went through were also made evident. By providing these details, readers are able to both determine the relevance of the findings, as well as explore how the findings could be applied beyond the confines of this study.

**Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is another major way that readers are brought into the process and allowed to evaluate the interpretations of the researcher. Reflexivity refers to the regular back and forth of the researcher into the data, and back out to note reflections, assumptions, and personal reactions (Carcary, 2009; Elliot et al., 1999; Williams & Morrow, 2009; Willig, 2008). Smith (2007) conceptualizes this process in relation to the hermeneutic circle, noted above. Thus, the researcher began with bracketing out her previous knowledge and preconceptions before entering into the world of the participants.
Throughout, she reviewed and made explicit her role as researcher and the reflections that occurred to her (Willig, 2008). As part of this process she kept a reflective journal (Van Manen, 1997) in order to record insight, reflections, and ideas, thus allowing them to become part of the interpretative process.

**Grounding in Examples**

Another way to provide background to the reader is to ground themes and interpretations in verbatim examples from the participants (Elliot et al., 1999; Smith, 2011; Willig, 2008). Smith (2011) pointed out that this is a very important element in a robust IPA study and strongly recommended that examples be provided from at least one-half of the participants to support each theme. This permits the reader to personally evaluate whether the words of the participants lend themselves to the interpretations and labels put forth by the researcher. Therefore, this researcher kept this guideline in mind when selecting and documenting overarching themes that emerged from the data and sought to ensure enough strong examples were provided from at least half of the participants in each group.

**Providing Credibility Checks**

Another quality check for the appropriateness of interpretations and themes is to check in with the participants themselves (Elliot et al., 1999; Williams & Morrow, 2009). This too became a key part of the final stages in the analysis and documentation. Willig (2008) called this sensitivity to negotiated realities and noted where interpretations differ
from participants, they do not necessarily need to be removed unless participants feel strongly that researcher interpretations go against their experiences. However, when differences in interpretation are not changed, participant feedback must be taken into consideration. This researcher made these checks with participants as needed and particularly before submission of the final report.

**Attention to Impact and Importance and Resonates with Readers**

Attention to impact and importance and resonates with readers are important criteria because they relate to the overall value of the study and its presentation (Shinebourne, 2011; Williams & Morrow, 2009; Willig, 2008; Yardley, 2000). In this study attention to impact and importance focused the researcher’s mind on the intended audience: couples counselors, the research community, and possibly couples. For couples’ counselors, this study was intended to bring light to what happens after clients leave the office; in other words, outcome. The hope was that this information will enable counselors to consider new ways to assist clients post treatment. For the research community, it was expected that this study would open doors for further study to determine key factors that impact clients and their treatment maintenance. For couples who could read these results, it was the researcher’s hope that they would feel validated in their experiences and encouraged by possible things they could do to increase the maintenance of gains they may have received. Part of the researcher's ability to connect with these audiences came from her efforts to write in such a way that the data came to life and provided insights and understanding in a new way (Willig, 2008).
Quality in IPA Specifically

Finally, Smith (2011) and Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) identify and emphasize a number of guidelines to foster high quality IPA studies in particular. Many have been noted above and throughout this paper. Attention to and ensuring a small sample size was key in generating rigorous interpretation and not simply descriptive themes (Hefferon, & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). Interview schedules were intentionally short with clear open-ended questions and possible prompts to gain added detail. The write-up was focused and supported with strong data (Smith, 2011). The rigor of the data analysis stages was made clear through the selection of multiple extracts that included divergences as well as convergences in themes, and themes were sufficiently elaborated on to allow the reader to really see how these themes emerged. Further, the interpretative flavor of the study was evident and strongly communicated throughout a clearly written paper. In addition, always running in the background of any quality research study was the attention to the ethical concerns of the participants. This is addressed more fully in the next section.

Ethics

Ethics in research refers to the intentional care given to make sure no or minimal harm is experienced by participants and their rights are properly upheld by the research (Cone & Foster, 2006; Kazdin, 2003; Shaw, 2008). In this qualitative study, the level of risk for harm was no more than that of what would be experienced in everyday life, but
violation of participant rights was a possibility. Issues of power differentiation were also a risk that needed to be addressed. Thus, a number of steps were taken to reduce these risks and offer as much power to the participants as possible.

First, prior to participant selection, this study underwent approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that participants were not harmed (see Appendix C for IRB approval letter). The first step after IRB approval was employing gatekeepers (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009) to make first contact with potential participants. In accordance with confidentiality agreements between NIM and their clients, this ensured client safety and maintained confidentiality before the researcher had any access to them as potential participants. Even though NIM clients had already signed consent that they may be contacted for further research when they accepted treatment from NIM (see Appendix D), only after the NIM gatekeeper received subsequent specific consent from participants, was this researcher provided names and contact information for potential participants in this study.

Once that initial consent was given, all potential participants were required to carefully read and sign an informed consent form (see Appendix D). This document briefly outlined what was expected of participants, possible risks, benefits, and limits of confidentiality. In all research and counseling situations informed consent is a necessary requirement to begin ensuring participants’ rights are being respected (Cone & Foster, 2006; Elliott et al., 1999; Kazdin, 2003; Shaw, 2008). However, Shaw (2008) aptly noted that in qualitative design, because it is inductive, full understanding of what will transpire is not possible prior to hearing participants’ stories. Further, it was not possible for
clients to give prior consent to what would be reported before the interview and analysis were complete. Thus, later credibility checks (Elliot et al., 1999; Williams & Morrow, 2009; Willig, 2008) were engaged to gain feedback from participants on what was being shared and how the researcher had interpreted their stories. All efforts were taken to respect participant feedback and meaning making throughout the entire study. This reduced the risk of violating participant rights and reporting descriptions or interpretations that were counter to the participants’ views. It also increased participant collaboration and increased quality by forcing the researcher to remain close to the participants’ conceived meanings (Williams & Morrow, 2009).

In addition to getting participant approval and feedback, this researcher attempted to decrease the power differential by allowing participants to choose the pseudonyms to be used to identify them throughout the project study (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Smith et al., 2009). Although it was not possible to ensure confidentiality because participant stories and exact words made up a large portion of the presented data, coding and then removing all personal identifying information from the collected data (including tapes, transcripts, notes, etc.) as well as the final report provided some level of anonymity (Cone & Foster, 2006). Further, the researcher sought to protect participants through separately storing all data records in a locked and protected location, separate from identifying information, and then destroying all of it within three years of completion of the study. Video recordings were destroyed immediately upon completion of the study.

In addition to confidentiality and power differential issues, there was also the emotional risk of sharing personal experiences and stories (Van Manen, 1997). Although
initially participants could have been comfortable with the idea of sharing their stories, as they actually did it feelings of anxiety, discomfort, exposure, guilt, and self-doubt were possible. This researcher attempted to reduce these effects through providing a safe interview setting by having interviews conducted with participants in the comfort of their own homes, through empathetically engaging and seeking to understand participants’ stories the way they see them, and through encouraging participants to ask questions, provide feedback, and debrief with her as needed. They were also given the open opportunity to revoke participation in this study at any time. Had they decided to do this, their data would also have been removed from the research and stored separately until it could be deleted three years after the completion of the study. Therefore, through the efforts listed above, this researcher hoped to take ethical research concerns seriously and put in place as many protections as possible for participants.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a thorough explanation of the research methods that were used in this study. It began with setting the stage by detailing the theoretical underpinnings of IPA, including phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. This was followed by a section outlining important details about participant selection. Included in this section were the discussions about the intensive program that participants had gone through, the theoretical framework of IMIT, information about NIM, and finally the specific procedures that were used in participant selection. Procedures for data collection and analysis were also described in detail and in accordance with IPA design.
This was followed by a section detailing steps that were taken to ensure trustworthiness, as well as a section on the ethical steps that were taken in this study.

The following chapters capture the results, summary, conclusions and recommendations. Chapter 4 outlines the demographic information collected by NIM prior to the intensives, and then provides the results and themes identified for both groups separately, and finally compares and contrasts the two groups with one another. Finally, Chapter 5 describes the conclusions and makes recommendations based on these findings.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Overview

IPA qualitative research seeks to understand the meaning that participants make of the lived experiences they have gone through. This study has sought to understand how participants who had found the National Institute of Marriage (NIM) marriage intensive helpful upon completion, made sense of their marriage experience one year after the intensive. Couples in two groups were studied and compared to gain a deeper and richer understanding of what happens in marriages after NIM intensives. The Maintained group was made up of couples who were able to maintain their initial gains, whereas the Difficulties group was made up of couples who, although they initially thought the intensive had been helpful, were not able to maintain those gains.

After a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the data collected from both groups, this chapter details the themes and interpretations that emerged from the data and resonated with the researcher. Because this was an IPA design, both the interpretations of the participants, and those of the researcher were important. At the same time, to remain phenomenological and idiographic, these interpretations have been intentionally kept as close to the participants’ interpretations as possible. In addition, the idiographic aspect of this design required that participants’ data be explored rigorously and themes be presented in such a way as to reveal an in depth understanding of each couple and/or participant. To remain close to this idiographic focus, during the analysis stage the two groups were first examined individually and analyzed as though they were independent.
studies. Once this was complete, they were brought together, and further analysis allowed for comparing and contrasting the two groups and additional refinement of the themes in light of the findings in the other group.

As a result, this chapter first introduces the participants generally through the presentation of group-focused demographic information that had been collected prior to their intensive experiences. This is followed by more personalized presentations of the participants and their marriage experiences to allow the reader to connect with the participants and to contextualize the analysis that emerged from their interpretations. The remainder of the chapter explores in detail the themes and interpretations of both groups separately, followed by a comparison of the two groups detailing shared themes and contrasting perspectives. Please note, at times lengthy quoted passages have been reduced in size by eliminating small, less relevant sections of the original data, indicated by the insertion of two square brackets “[ ]”.

**The Participants**

For the purpose of transferability, to begin this analysis it is important to introduce the participants and some of their demographic information. While it was the initial goal to have two equal groups of three complete couples each, after a long search for willing participants and a revision to the selection criteria (approved by the IRB), three complete couples were found to represent the Maintained group, but only one complete couple was located for the Difficulties group. Because no other complete couple was found to be willing to participate, the additional two couples in this group
were represented by one spouse each. In both cases, the non-represented partners were not willing to participate in the study, even if the interviews could have been conducted independently. This resulted in two groups of three couples each, but with six participants in the first group and only four participants in the second group. This section first reviews all of the demographic information that had been collected in a pre-intensive survey before the couples went to NIM. Reporting is noted based on groups and only included survey answers for the actual participants of this study; non-participating spouses were excluded to protect their privacy and confidentiality. Following this demographic comparison of the groups, each couple is introduced in order to give readers a sense for their marriages and stories going into the intensive.

**Demographic Information**

Demographic information included 21 factors that have been considered and summarized below (see Table 4.1 for details). The first points related to simple personal information about the participants. To begin with, while the group sizes were slightly different, the rest of the demographic details for each group differed minimally. In fact, the two individual spouses willing to participate in this study included one male and one female, thus providing the same number of males and females represented across this study. The date of the pre-intensive surveys for the Maintained group were received between May and June while the Difficulties group were all received in August of the year. The mean age for the Maintained group was 42, ranging from 32 to 53, and for the Difficulties group it was 45, ranging from 37 to 52. All participants were Caucasian,
Table 4.1: Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Couple</th>
<th>Date filled out pre-intensive survey</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Highest Education</th>
<th>Gross family income</th>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Importance of Faith</th>
<th>Years Married</th>
<th>How long Lived Together before</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SB</td>
<td>June 2012</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>$80+ K</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2 yr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB</td>
<td>June 2012</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Grad School</td>
<td>$80+ K</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3 yr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>May 2012</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>$20- K</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>May 2012</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>$20- K</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>mo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD</td>
<td>May 2012</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Grad School</td>
<td>$80+ K</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD</td>
<td>May 2012</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>$80+ K</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Aug 2012</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>$30-60 K</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Aug 2012</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>$30-60 K</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm alone</td>
<td>Aug 2012</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Grad School</td>
<td>$80+ K</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>mo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi alone</td>
<td>Aug 2012</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>$80+ K</td>
<td>not indicated</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Demographic Information (cont’d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Couple</th>
<th>time dated before marriage</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>previous divorce</th>
<th>Living situation</th>
<th>Commitment level</th>
<th>More Interest in Therapy</th>
<th>How Hopeful</th>
<th># prior counseling sessions</th>
<th>Satisfaction w/ marriage</th>
<th>Satisfaction w/ other as spouse</th>
<th>Satisfaction w/ your relationship w/ spouse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SB</td>
<td>2 y 8 mo</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>SHSR**</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB</td>
<td>2.5 y</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>SHSR**</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>&quot;a bunch&quot;</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>1 y 3 mo</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>SHDR*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>6 mo</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>SHDR*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD</td>
<td>2 y 4 mo</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>SHSR**</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD</td>
<td>2 y 4 mo</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>SHSR**</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>9 mo</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>SHDR*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12-15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>8 mo</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>SHDR*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm</td>
<td>alone</td>
<td>13 mo</td>
<td>2 y</td>
<td>SHDR*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi</td>
<td>alone</td>
<td>12 mo</td>
<td>2 n</td>
<td>SHSR**/SHDR*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SHSR: same home, same room  *SHDR: same home, different room**
except for one African American woman in the Difficulties group.

In relation to education and income, the groups again did not differ substantially. The highest education accomplished in both groups ranged from one participant in each group having a high school diploma to two participants in the Maintained group and one participant in the Difficulties group having graduate degrees. The other participants completed college degrees. When considering gross family income at the time, most couples in both groups claimed they fell within the $80,000 or more range. One of the couples in the Maintained group was temporarily in the $20,000 or below category, but noted that was temporary. Only one couple in the Difficulties group reported income between $30,000 and $60,000.

In terms of religious affiliation and importance of faith going into the intensive, all participants indicated that they were Protestant except one participant in the Difficulties group who did not indicate religious affiliation. However, all participants in that group indicated faith was very important to them. Similarly, in the Maintained group four participants indicated that faith was very important and two indicated that it was only somewhat important, though they said in the interview that this had increased to very important as a result of the intensive.

NIM also collected information about the couples’ relationships before getting married. In both groups only one participant had been previously divorced, while this was the first marriage for all others. In the Maintained group two couples dated for approximately two and a half years before they got married and one couple dated for a year. Likewise, in the Difficulties group one couple dated for a year and 9 months while
the other 2 couples indicated that they dated for around one year. In addition, two
couples in the Maintained group lived together between 1-3 years and one couple in the
Difficulties group lived together for approximately 3 months before they married. The
other couples in both groups did not live together before marrying.

At the time of the pre-intensive survey, the mean number of years couples had
been married in the Maintained group was 15, ranging from 8 to 15 years and 16, ranging
from 6-23 in the Difficulties group. In addition, all couples had between two children
and four children. Most of the children were fairly young while one couple in the
Maintained group had grown children. Further, all of the couples in the Difficulties
group and one of the couples in the Maintained group were living in the same house but
sleeping in different rooms before going to the intensive. One of these couples in the
Difficulties group also indicated occasional times of sharing the same room. In the
Maintained group the two other couples were living in the same house and sharing the
same room; because the sample size of this study is so small it is not clear if this
difference could be significant or not as it related to outcomes a year later. In future
studies this could be something to explore to rule out any preceding factors that
determine couples’ abilities to maintain gains or not.

Couples’ perspectives on their marriage and the intensive were also collected
preceding the intensive. In the Maintained group, commitment seemed to be quite mixed
with three participants in the middle of a 5-point scale (1 = pursuing separation/divorce, 5
= divorce isn’t an option), two indicating a level 2 commitment and only one showing a
4. The same diversity was evidenced in the Difficulties group with all four participants
choosing different levels of commitment, ranging from 2 to 5. Similarly, couples ranged from 2-5 in the Maintained group and 2-4 in the Difficulties group in the How Hopeful They Are That They Will Achieve Marital Satisfaction category.

Further, while five participants in the Maintained group indicated they believed they were both equally interested in therapy and one indicated being slightly more interested, the ratings for interest in therapy were all different in the Difficulties group. On a 5-point scale (1= mainly me, 3 = both, 5= mainly spouse) one indicated a 3, one indicated a 4, another a 1, and another a 2. This too could be an important difference between the groups if in a larger sample most couples who were able to maintain gains were predominantly both equally interested in therapy and the majority of couples who found it difficult to maintain gains did not rate this way.

Similarly, the Difficulties group seemed to have had more previous counseling, with a range of 5-40 previous sessions, than the Maintained group with a range of only between 3-4 previous sessions. This also may be something further research could look into to see if this trend plays out in larger samples. However, as mentioned above, with such a small sample size it is impossible to make any conclusive statements related to demographic details.

Finally, current marital satisfaction was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1= extremely dissatisfied, 7 = extremely satisfied) going into the intensive. In the Maintained group couples averaged a 3, ranging from 1-5 when considering overall satisfaction with their marriages, whereas couples in the Difficulties group only indicated a mean of 1.25, ranging from 1-2. When rating their spouse, the Maintained group
indicated a mean of 2.67, ranging from 1-4 and the Difficulties group only indicated a 1.75 mean, ranging from 1-2 again. However, when rating themselves as a spouse, the Maintained group indicated a mean of 2.2, ranging from 1-4 and the Difficulties group indicated a mean of 2, ranging from 1-3. While their ratings of themselves seem to be fairly similar, it would appear that the couples in the Difficulties group went into the intensive somewhat more dissatisfied than the couples in the Maintained group. This, too, could be something to consider in further research.

Participant Stories

For each couple a brief description of their marital journeys leading up to the intensive is included followed by some details of events that occurred in their lives since the intensive. Couples Sadie and Bill, Anne and Mitchell, and Julie and David in the Maintained group are discussed first, followed by Mackenzie and Aaron, Jim, and Michelle (all pseudonyms) of the Difficulties group.

It should be noted, though the names of the participants have been changed, the stories and insights of these participants are real and encompass how these couples made sense of their painful marital experiences leading up to their intensives and the journeys they traveled since their intensives. For some, the year since the intensive had been challenging but also rewarding in light of the changes and gains they were able to accomplish. For the others, the past year had been marked with more struggles and pain and little if any rewards. Though words on a page cannot fully capture their experiences, these courageous couples were willing to share how they made sense of their stories and
struggles in their most intimate relationship in order to help others who travel similar roads and long for restoration.

**Sadie and Bill.** Sadie and Bill were a small-town rural couple with four young children. Their marriage had been marked with turmoil and conflict almost from the start. Bill recalled, “we'd become professional at hurting each other”. In addition, Bill grew up with work as the “supreme law” and goal of a husband, so this tended to dominate his life to the point that he was rarely home. Sadie said, “even though we were living in the same town, ah, seven miles basically from his office, he was not here, I mean he was gone”, and Bill followed up with, “long hours and then when I was here it was so much, so awful I wasn't checked in, I mean I was totally checked out when I was here”. By the time of the intensive they had been living basically separate lives and making separate decisions, even to the point that when Sadie went in for two surgeries to remove potentially cancerous lumps, Bill did not go with her. At the time of the interview the memory of that time still hurt Sadie. She said, “I harbored a lot of resentment about that, even still, I try not to… but yeah, that's a... that was a pretty awful thing for me... to go through alone”.

Compounding this complete disconnect was the conflict between Sadie and Bill’s parents who were constantly and overtly disdainful towards her. Sadie’s own lack of knowing her real value (as evidenced by her not feeling like she deserved the prayers of the women in her NIM group) and Bill’s conflict with being in the middle of his parents and his wife only made things worse for both of them. Then, to add a final blow, Bill
engaged in an emotional affair with one of Sadie’s few friends whom she risked getting close to her. Immediately after this came to light the affair ended and they went to NIM to make one last effort before they separated, something they previously had sworn they would never do.

Coming out of the intensive, Bill experienced a major shift in his faith and recognized his role in what had happened in the marriage. He said, “I don't think I realized until the intensive that we were doing this to each other if not consciously than certainly deliberately. That to me was a pretty humongous revelation”. He said he was ready to push forward but Sadie was still deeply wounded and hurting. That year was a year of discouragement, but also patience-building as Bill continued to draw closer to God and work on changing the things he knew he had to change. He said, “Since that time I have been intent on not being that way. I can't say I have always been successful, but after seven years, change doesn't always come easily”.

Sadie spent most of that year struggling to come out of depression and watching to see if the changes Bill was making were real and trustworthy. She recalled that time this way, “I stayed in bed, that was what I did for months even after the retreat, because I still was very depressed and uncertain, I guess, …not of the marriage but just (crosstalk Bill: everything) life in general”. Then, after months of hiding, the night before their anniversary, around one year after finding out about the affair, she decided it was time to risk taking down her walls and working on the marriage again. She wrote him a card letting him know this and promptly started making efforts not only with him but also with
his mother. The efforts with her were not as successful but things with Bill have been getting better.

Anne and Mitchell. Anne and Mitchell also shared a marriage with ups and downs. Although in general theirs was not as tumultuous as Sadie and Bill’s, their own histories were wrought with pain and wounding preventing them from really being able to love themselves and one another. Immediately after marrying they were thrust into public worship ministry and continued to work in ministry for most of their marriage. Anne’s early life traumas became fodder for her speaking career even though she hadn’t fully worked through how it all impacted her adult life and marriage. Mitchell also was in ministry but his personal pain came from being lied to his whole life by his family. When Anne found out about the lies she felt she had to be honest, but this shattered Mitchell’s sense of self. Instead of getting easier, Mitchell said “as the years went by it got heavier and heavier and just weighed more”. Anne noted, “Having been in ministry, um, and in high profile ministry, and we, we just never had the time to tend to the wounds … and then this one issue kept piling up on it and other issues”.

The issue Anne referred to was the one that finally pushed them to NIM. Over their 27 years of marriage and while raising three children into adulthood, three times Mitchell had reconnected with an old girlfriend and engaged in an emotional affair. Anne shared, “I had told him 10 years ago that if you ever are connected with her again that I'm done, so my immediate response when I realized what was happening was I'm done, that's it”. So when it happened again she said, “We were getting ready to move out
of the house we were living in”. Divorce was not an option for them but living fully separate lives had become a very real next step.

As a final effort to stop the generational cycle of divorce in both of their families of origin, Anne found NIM and they went. Since the intensive they had both changed jobs and relocated from the West coast to the East coast of America. The transition left them for many months living in different states and only seeing one another every few weeks. With the trust issues going into the intensive, this made it challenging to maintain the gains they had made. Even so, Anne noted, “that was tough but I don't know if it helped because it feels different now, I don't feel like we're in crisis mode anymore in our marriage”.

Even with the distance, this couple was diligent to practice the tools they learned at the intensive and continued to reinforce the personal healing that they had experienced. Of all the couples, Anne and Mitchell were most excited about this program and the impact it had made on their marriage because of what they learned and were able to implement.

**Julie and David.** Julie and David, the final couple in the Maintained group, had a different journey than the other two couples in this group. They did not have huge fights and there was not any one big event that really pushed them to the intensive. They had been married for eight years and had two children. During their entire courtship and marriage they had never really taken time for just the two of them and did not have a model for how healthy couples spend quality time together. Their time together had
always been spent with extended family and/or friends, so when people started to move away and others to pass away, this added a strain on their marriage that neither really knew how to process. David shared, “we'd had a lot of deaths in our family and we'd lost a lot of our family and friends and that was very, very hard on us both as a couple and then also on us each individually, personally”.

In addition, when issues in their marriage would come up, they would avoid them and then never fully resolve things when they tried to discuss them. Julie put it this way, Instead of like, coming at it early on it would just... we'd sort of let things pile up then when we'd have the discussion there was never a, ‘this is what I'm upset about’. It would be more of a laundry list type thing.

Further, David had always worked at a job that required frequent traveling, leaving Julie alone with the kids. This made things hard on her and on David who was expected to make things better for her. When things got to the point where they were feeling pointedly disconnected, they started looking for help and found NIM.

Since the intensive Julie had found part-time work which she admitted made it easier for her not to put as much pressure on David. At the same time, both of them had realized their own contributions to the growing disconnect and had been working on changing their own behaviors to make things better. Julie was taking responsibility for her own hurts and well-being and David was making efforts to engage and be present with her and the family more when he was home. Even so, they both admitted there is still work to be done. Julie put it this way, “We both knew we need to do a better job of
taking care of our marriage, we just didn't really know how, and that's the, that last part which we, we need to figure that part out.”

**Mackenzie and Aaron.** Mackenzie and Aaron were the first couple in the Difficulties group. Their relationship became difficult about 10 years into their 23 year marriage, and they had never really been able to recover. Around that time Mackenzie found out that Aaron struggled with pornography, and she was devastated. He admitted, “It's just been a hard thing and I don't think I've done a great job of really kinda rebuilding, you know, rebuilding bridges across. Kinda like I'm, I'm over it so she should be over it”. Mackenzie, on the other hand, believed she had been left behind and had never been heard or understood. In the pain she still felt she shared, “[It was] the whole thing of just feeling just like not, that I just have not been heard, my heart has not been heard, um, at all”.

After reaching the point of feeling like she could not keep doing this they tried two local therapists who also did not seem to understand the significance of Mackenzie’s pain. In an effort to find something that might work, she persisted in her search and found NIM. While both Mackenzie and Aaron continued to adamantly claim in Aaron’s words, “NIM was one of the best things [we’ve] ever done quite frankly, it was very, very powerful”, at the point of the interview, significant change had not yet been actualized. At different points throughout the interview both were able to recognize the need for personal healing before significant change could happen in their marriage, but they also admitted how very difficult that journey had been.
This was not a couple who gives up easily, however. Since their marriage intensive they had purchased and used additional coaching calls and also returned to NIM for a conjoint intensive to try to get things back on track after they were derailed again by a series of arguments. Even so, slow efforts to bring personal changes had been discouraging for this couple. Mackenzie described the struggle this way.

I see, you know, the, the things that I'm doing that are contributing to not being able to move ahead, because… again, a lot of it because of just my woundedness and just not really knowing what to, to do, or things that I try to do and then it just seems like it doesn't work, and then I, you know, I kind of run for cover again.

Similarly, Aaron also admitted,

Until [personal change] happens I don't know if we are going to be, you know, I don't think we're gonna be that good together, so, and that's part of the, I guess and that's the thing, like with the stuff I learned at NIM, it's like I agree the stuff that they're teaching and I believe it, um, but, I'm not there, that's for sure, I'm not there.

**Jim.** Jim, on the other hand, was in the midst of separating and trying to figure out how to find a new and sustainable normal at the time of his interview. He and his wife had been married 15 years and had two children. As Jim talked about their marriage leading up to the intensive he shared about how they were very different right from the start. He said, “We were kind of opposites in many ways”. Their issues began with different ways of handling conflict but over time he shifted and engaged in her yelling
and name-calling behaviors. By the time of the intensive their arguments had become toxic and were impacting more than just their marriage. He recalled how many of their friends were impacted.

As things got worse and worse, you know, all of our, a lot of our friends just didn't want to be around us anymore, you know, I mean it's like ‘aah… we don't want to be around you, you guys are just miserable and toxic and fight’ and so I think, you know, we kinda just lost a lot of those friendships.

In addition to the toxic fighting, Jim spoke of the pain he felt in the marriage living with someone who had completely different expectations and desires for their marriage. He wanted more simple time together, but it seemed to Jim that his wife always wanted to be doing exciting and active things. To make things worse, although he longed for affection including physical and emotional intimacy, she seemed to not need either. From Jim’s perspective, when he would try to communicate about things she would simply listen but not share, and when it came to physical intimacy, she would simply say she did not need that. He said, “One of the things I think we identified… I like touch, affection, that kind of stuff, and that was just never demonstrated in her family, and you know, she has no need for that whatsoever”. Jim also mentioned that his faith was important to him but was not something he could really connect with his wife about. He said “with her, I think it was cultural”.

After the intensive, change only occurred for a short time when they both were trying not to argue as much. However, things quickly reverted back to the fighting and
distance when not enough change was experienced by the other partner. Jim described
the decline this way,

I think over time that ability to identify a fight and not want to fight just kinda
wore off and so it's 'okay, let's fight' um, and then I think it was in August or
September, I forget what the exact date [of the intensive] was but then, you know,
by January she filed for divorce, so um, you know it kinda just... deteriorated
again I guess.

At the time of the interview they were still living in the same house, trying to
figure out the finances of how to separate and still provide a similar lifestyle for their
children. It was not easy and Jim admitted to basically living at work during the week to
avoid fighting with his wife. The weekends were harder; he said, “On the weekends
it's… usually a fight so, but you know, you've gotta live somewhere on the weekends,
you can't just stay at work”.

Michelle. Michelle was also moving toward divorce from her husband after
having separated soon after the intensive. As she looked back on her six-year marriage
she recounted how it was doomed from the start. Three days in she found out more about
his financial instability and as she recalled that time she said,

So the respect I was, should have been able to give my husband to help him
become everything that God had called him to be as far as being head of the
household, I was never able to give him um, and I guess, that, that, I mean, I, I
saw my, my family owns a business and um, my financial stability has pretty much always been there for me, so I really felt like I was a means to an end.

Throughout their marriage she recalled having good times and enjoying each other when they only had to focus on surface things. Unfortunately, when things needed serious attention, she found it impossible to rely on her husband. This led to what she called toxic fights where she would emasculate him, and he would degrade her. In describing the toxicity she said, “there were a lot of arguments, a lot of arguments, the arguments became, they, we couldn't control the arguments, they were spilling out in front of the children”. That was when she decided things needed to change. They had been to many counseling sessions prior to NIM but she said she had always wanted to try an NIM intensive so this became her last effort.

Unfortunately, when the efforts her husband seemed to be making at the intensive did not translate into their relationship post intensive, she quickly decided she needed to separate. She recalled,

It started to um, impact my oldest son, when his daddy would raise his voice he would stand between us and like push us apart, he never saw any physical altercations but just that horrible, that verbal, that tension in the verbal conversation was enough for him to know something wasn't right and that's when I made the decision that it's just time to separate.

Even though she had hoped things would change and they seemed to be making a difference while at the intensive, as soon as they left things went back to the old patterns.
She explained, “I think we were willing while we were there, I don’t think we were willing to come home and do the hard work that was required”.

In order to provide context and familiarity with the couples in this study, the preceding two sections introduced the research participants by providing general demographic information and introducing the marriages of each couple. While their stories are different, as will be revealed in the next section, how they made sense of the impact of their intensive experiences was surprisingly similar. See Appendix F for a list of referenced and quoted passages in this section.

The remainder of this chapter provides a detailed rendering of the themes and interpretations that emerged from the interviews of these brave couples. The first section includes the five themes from the Maintained group broken down into two main superordinate themes answering the two key research questions; the next section includes the five themes from the Difficulties group, also broken down to answer the research questions; and the final section details the similarities and differences between the groups.

**Themes of Group 1: Maintained Group**

In order to answer the research questions of how couples made sense of the impact or lack of impact the NIM intensive had on their marriages, two key questions were explored: 1) What, if any, gains have been sustained and how? and 2) What, if anything, has made it difficult to maintain gains? Themes emerging from the participants
of the Maintained group in answer to these questions included three themes with nine subthemes in answer to the first question and three themes with six subthemes in answer to the second question. The themes answering the first question have been grouped under the heading Maintaining Gains, while the themes answering the second question have been grouped under the heading Work in Process. See Figure 4.2 for summary. This section details the findings and explicate these themes and subthemes.

Maintaining Gains Theme One: Intensive Factors

In the first theme, Intensive Factors, participants described things about the intensive and what happened while at the intensive that they believed made a difference in their being able to maintain the gains they achieved there. Four subthemes were found to bring clarity to this theme and tie the meaning-making reflections of the participants back to their intensive experiences. These subthemes included Quality Package, Group Dynamics, Getting it All Out, and Individual Healing First. See Figure 4.1 for graphic depiction.

Quality package. Five of the six participants in this group, representing all three of the couples, discussed multiple aspects of the intensive that they believed made it effective and helpful in their maintaining gains in their marriages. These included environmental factors as well as facility hosts and therapist factors. To begin with, for
Table 4.2 Summary of Themes for the Maintained Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th># Participants Supporting Theme</th>
<th># Couples Supporting Theme</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intensive Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Things that happened at the intensive that they said helped them maintain gains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Package</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The intensive itself was of high quality for multiple reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Dynamics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The value of gleaning from others in the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting it all out</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The need for honesty and choosing to be really open, actually getting to the root of the issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Healing First</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The need to focus on personal healing before marital healing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Responsibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on personal changes needed that impact and bring marital changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owning Personal Contributions to the Problem</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The recognition that they personally contributed to the marital issues, regardless of what the other also did</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible for Change</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Taking responsibility for personal change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Tools</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Intentionally practicing the tools and working on the marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Importance of personal faith to help make changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced at NIM</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The importance of faith they experienced at NIM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalized at Home</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The importance of faith at home in general and since the intensive (motivator for change)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q2: What, if anything, has made it difficult to maintain gains?
A: Theme Set: Work in Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th># Participants</th>
<th># Couples</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intensive Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Things at the intensive that made change difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive Not Enough</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>It was hard to do it on their own coming out of the intensive without local supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Takes Time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Real change was slow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need Patience</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Things did not change immediately out of the intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still Struggling/Working At It</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Change was on-going and still a struggle at times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Things outside of the couples’ control that made it difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Model</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Did not have a healthy relational model growing up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Work stressors for one spouse as an added stressor for the couple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalized Life Stressors</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Each couple spoke of other factors in their lives that made it difficult</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

gains to be maintained, they had to be achieved and experienced at the intensive. David summarized the experience as a formula that was intentionally assembled to meet clients where they were and help them to feel safe and cared for as they worked through the things they needed to. He said,

I mean I think the whole formula of the intensive is good from top to [bottom],
you know, from beginning to end in that it's all the little things. It’s the [hosts],
you know, it's the people that are there you just, you feel like when you get there
that you're being loved. [ ] It's just a very welcoming environment. You feel the
Holy Spirit, you feel that this is, you know, that this is good. [ ] That's one good
part of that formula and the other thing is certainly the facility is outstanding, um,
so it's just a very nice place. And then when you get into the, you know, the
sessions... again they were effective in that, um, you know, they've got their
framework, but I think it's different with every time because there's different
couples, there's a different dynamic to the room. [ ] It was very much a, hey, if we
go off on this tangent, let's go and see where this takes us and you know if they
needed to bring it back a little bit, they would [ ] so that was, you know, that was
good.
So many things in the experience were impactful; David seemed to jump from one thing to another, not fully able to articulate the entirety of the formula. It all came together as a whole formula he repeated, something greater than simply the sum of the parts. Because the intensive itself was such a quality package, enduring change became possible.

Anne also tried to capture how it was more than just one thing that made participants feel safe and cared for there. She described it this way after being prompted by Mitchell to share her experience, saying “She’s got the best story. [ ] She walked in and immediately felt safe”,

Oh, okay, yeah he's right, it, I mean immediately when you walk into their facility, everything is purposeful, every piece of furniture, everything on the wall. [ ] But everything they did was extremely purposeful on making sure that when you walked in you knew that you were loved and embraced and there was no judgment.

Not only was there a clear formula, Anne stressed a couple of times, it was purposeful. Nothing was left to chance. Anne interpreted this purpose as making people feel safe and cared for, with no judgment. Mitchell went on to say “It was safe and then the people inside made it even safer, you know.” Later he noted “there was no judgment”. This was very significant for these couples. They were going in at a time when it felt like their marriages were falling apart and things were not as they had expected or hoped. Shame and self-judgment were certainly there for these couples as will be explored further in other themes, so the idea of experiencing this acceptance became an important aspect of being able to do what they went there to do.
Sadie and Bill also talked about the care and quality of the NIM program. Sadie shared, “I wanted to bring… [the hosts home] with us because, you know, I had never had anybody...take care of me like that”. This experience was different and impactful, simply in how they were cared for. That in itself was the beginning of healing. In addition, when speaking about the therapists she said they are “qualified psychologists and mental health counselors [ ] who are knowledgeable enough to point people in the right direction” and Bill wholeheartedly agreed saying “yeah, they were [ ] top notch folks”. In order for sustaining change to take place, the couples of this group agreed, the quality package provided at the NIM intensive was needed to create the environment where couples could actually focus on what they needed to focus on.

**Group dynamics.** All of the couples also mentioned the dynamics of the group being helpful in normalizing their issues and in creating the further safety needed to be vulnerable by the way they were also vulnerable. However, going into the intensive all couples also noted in different ways their discomfort and apprehension about the group format. Anne shared that they originally didn’t want the group format due to their apprehension about sharing:

*We wanted to do a private one because we thought well we've got some really horrible things and ah, we decided, how on earth are we going to go there and share in a group of people we don't know, and the [ ] intake counselor on the phone, she said I promise you, you will not regret doing the group intensive, and I*
said okay, I'm going to take your word for it and ah, I wouldn't have changed that for anything in the world.

The experience of the group changed her perspective on the value of a group experience. She later elaborated on what the significance of the group experience was for her and how it changed how she saw and responded to Mitchell. She shared,

I was able to see [the other husbands] through the eyes of Christ as a Christian sister, so what I was able to do was look at Mitchell through the eyes of Christ as a Christian sister, and not as a cheating husband ...and that really helped me see him differently, because the other wives were looking at him with mercy and compassion, I was looking at their husbands with mercy and compassion, I'm like oh come on forgive him, you know.

Through seeing how she was rooting for the other husbands and the struggles their wives had in forgiving their husbands she was able to turn her perspective of Christian love towards her husband. If she was able to have mercy and compassion for the others, and the others had compassion and mercy towards Mitchell, perhaps she could respond to him in love as a Christian sister as well. Seeing him through the eyes of others allowed her to see him for who he was, instead of through her own pain. Her claiming she wouldn’t have changed it could be related to this idea that more was gained through the interactions with the others in the group than would have been possible in conjoint therapy alone.

Others also shared how their apprehension turned to appreciation of the group format. Julie said, “I was originally concerned how that was going to work out”; but
then, having experienced the group, she changed her perspective on the experience saying,

It was really good because, [ ] when you first got there it's like these people are nothing like us but then at the end you realize how similar, even though your problems are different problems, it's the same innate problem is that you're having trouble communicating and how are you dealing with it. We haven't kept up with the people, we originally thought we would, but I still, listening to them talk, I learned as much as when it was my own turn to talk.

As with Anne, the shift came through the experience of sharing the intensive with others, hearing their stories, relating to them, and learning as much from them as from dealing with their own personal issues. This shift in perspective was important in their being able to really be open and share what they needed to share, even as others risked sharing and learning from one another.

Bill and Sadie described together how sharing in the group was normalizing for them and how seeing others share was more effective in opening them up to consider each other than conjoint therapy would have been.

Bill: The ability to kind of, purge some of our stuff with other people that were carrying around a lot of the, not the same stuff but similar stuff, so we could kind of all get it out there and…

Sadie: You didn't feel so isolated

Bill: Yeah, and nobody could judge anybody else because we all could, you know,
Sadie: We'd all screwed up

Bill: We're all screw-ups in there so

Sadie: Honestly that is [ ] very important, [ ] It made me feel at least, you know, okay... I can relate to what she's saying, I can relate to what she's saying, I could relate to everyone's story and when you sit in a counseling session with just the counselor, and you and the husband, it is all about blame.

As described by the others, after experiencing the group format, Bill and Sadie were able to recognize the group format was more impactful for them than traditional conjoint therapy. It allowed Sadie to not feel as isolated, which may have been what was needed to open her up and allow her to share her pain and her journey. They felt understood instead of judged. Again, that feeling was so important to allow these couples to really do the work they needed to do. It shifted the perspective from blame to understanding each other and truly looking at what they needed to look at to bring change.

**Getting it all out.** All participants in the Maintained group agreed and emphasized how crucial being honest and getting it all out was to enabling real enduring change, both at the intensive and beyond it. Due to the safety that had been created through the quality package NIM created and the willingness of group members to be open and not judge one another, deep and genuine sharing was possible. The participants in the Maintained group stressed this opportunity must move from simply a possibility to a requirement for real and enduring change to occur.
When asked what advice they would give other couples going into NIM intensives, all noted the need to be honest and deeply open up. Simply put, Mitchell and Anne said, “you better go in there open and honest”, “completely honest”, “or it won’t work”. They went on to describe friends they gave this advice to, but one spouse kept a secret that came out a mere two weeks after the intensive. The couple divorced and Mitchell and Anne were convinced it could have been prevented “had he revealed that two weeks prior in the intensive and dealt with it”. This reveals how strongly they believed being open and getting it all out was a key aspect of maintaining gains achieved at NIM. Without this, even the gains that were achieved could easily be undermined and thwarted.

Bill and Sadie shared the same advice and a similar story of a couple in their group who were not open and did not make it.

Bill: I’d say if you're considering it, you have to go... at least with some level of openness, ah, because, I think if you're completely closed off then... it, you're wasting your time. It won't work. [ ] At least with our group everybody there was in pretty bad shape.

Sadie: and unfortunately one couple, you know, was not open. One of the parties was not open.

Bill: and you can tell.

Sadie: and they did divorce, and you can tell, um ah, you could tell with them, you know, [ ] the minds had already been made up, you could tell.
Again, this couple attributed their enduring change to being genuinely open and honest, and the inability to bring change in the other couple was attributed to not being open at the intensive. They believed even if one partner would not open, it would not work.

Earlier in the interview Bill elaborated on what they meant by real openness and honesty. He described,

> It was like cleaning out an infection, you know, just have to get all that stuff out that had been bottled up, that we had bottled up, that everybody else in the room had bottled up. So, I mean, I think that was very important though. I think that was a really good thing for us. I know it was for us. Just to get it, just like purge all of that, get it, get it out here in front of us lay it on the table and yeah it's nasty and it's ugly and we did that (crosstalk Sadie: but hey they’ve done it too and…)

Yeah, we’re not the only ones who have ever done bad things and lived.

In this passage Bill and Sadie expressed the rawness of the experience for them. It was not simply sharing at a distance, they were emotionally engaged and fully letting their issues come out. Bill used three rich metaphors to paint this picture. The first was of cleaning out an infection. This is a painful process that must be fully engaged in to allow for healing to take place. None of the infection can be left unaddressed. At one point Mitchell was ready to leave because the pain of cleaning out his marriage’s infection was almost unbearable. He expressed it this way:

> I just felt like [ ] there was noth'n left… for me to… be. There was noth'n left for me to pick up the pieces and move on, I was, I was broken, I had done all of the hurt and I didn't want to hurt, I didn't want to hurt anybody anymore and so, the
the week went on, you know, every day is a root canal. How many root canals can you get before you're tired of them, you know? And, for every tooth that was…pulled out of me, four [were] pulled out of her, and I was just...I was just tired of it, I was, I said I, I don't deserve this person, I don't want to hurt her any more so it's just better if I go.

This was not something Mitchell took lightly. Everything was exposed and as he described this lowest point in the intensive for him, he struggled to find the right words to capture the excruciating pain of facing everything once it had been revealed. He had to come face to face with his regret, pain, and personal brokenness. In that moment it was almost too much to bear, as can be the case with cleaning out infections.

Another metaphor used in Bill’s passage was the idea of all their pain and infection being “bottled up”. It was still fully contained within them and had never been resolved. Issues and pain, the infection, continued to build and grow. In Julie’s interview, she used the metaphor of a laundry pile building up. She shared,

Instead of like coming at it early on it would just, we'd sort of let things pile up then when we'd have the discussion there was never a, this is what I'm upset about, it would be more of a laundry list type thing. It wasn't healed or fixed it was just [put] away 'til the next time we had time to look at it and then there would be other stuff we'd add to it, so that sort of I think is where we used to be.

Bill’s third metaphor provided the picture of what needed to happen at the intensive to address this infection that kept being bottled up inside. He said they needed to “purge all of that, get it, get it out here in front of us lay it on the table and yeah it's
nasty and it's ugly”. This brings to mind the idea of vomiting out an infectious poison. Further, due to the type of infection or poison it was, it had to be looked at and sorted through to make sure they got everything. Even though it is nasty and ugly, it must be looked at and acknowledged before it could be set aside or resolved. If things were left out then the infection could continue to fester once couples left the intensive. Even things that had been addressed could be called back into question due to the parts that had been held back. All of these couples stressed in their own ways, everything must be exposed and at least looked at; even if they could not be fully resolved at the intensive, they must be put on the table and revealed.

Relationally, Bill noted that doing this in front of the others in the group was also healing. Instead of feeling judged, they felt understood because they weren’t the only ones who had made mistakes, even big ones, and lived. The ugly, nasty infections could be tolerated when they were exposed in the safe confines of a non-judgmental group of people who had experienced similar journeys. The infections were not terminal after all. However, if they remained unspoken, that healing realization could not be experienced.

**Individual healing first.** A major part of why participants said this cleaning out of the infection was so important relates to the next theme of Personal Responsibility. However, before moving from Intensive Factors, five of the six participants also noted how important coming to see the need for their own personal healing, instead of focusing on the marriage exclusively was an important aspect of this intensive experience, leading
to continued personal focus beyond the intensive. Part of that personal focus involved individuals being broken down and really seeing their own issues.

While earlier Mitchell spoke of his being broken down to the point of wanting to leave the intensive, he later admitted the process allowed him to see he had value regardless of his poor choices. That was a significant shift for him that changed everything in his perspective. He could finally then take responsibility for his actions because he knew the value God had given him, and it meant he had choices to act differently. Anne called it true humility when she said,

I think the coolest part about the whole thing was, I'm not as good at this as Mitchell is, but Mitchell in my opinion found true humility and ah, his humility, that was just like released, um, to me, just shed the shame off of him, 'cause he was living in shame his whole life.

Later Mitchell talked about how this had changed his life. Though he was expecting to be “destroyed... crushed, and, you know, [to] be swept out in a dust pan and that's the end of Mitchell”, instead, by opening up and allowing that healing process he claimed,

I think... by me doing that, [it] allowed me to... not only… um, be broken but yet rebuilt at the same time, um, what was the most significant part was that... they took time to know me, you know, and that there was an actual person... that mattered.

As he shared this experience he got choked up and allowed the significance of this shift to come through in his emotion. Two key components were revealed here. First,
Mitchell acknowledged again the importance of truly being vulnerable and getting it all out, even if one expects the sharing will come to the destruction of self. Secondly, what he stressed later as the most powerful part of this for him, was the fact that others actually took time to know him, to see him even in his brokenness and to reveal to him that even there, he mattered. As noted above, this learning, though it very much related to his own personal healing, could only have been provided that powerfully through the experience of others in the group genuinely affirming him.

Sadie also spoke of the importance of her being broken down at the intensive. However, for her, deep healing took longer; in fact, at the time of the interview she admitted she still struggled with the idea of God’s unconditional grace and mercy. Even so, as she made sense of her journey, this point in the intensive served to be the most significant for her because it was the beginning.

Sadie: So [the counselors] spent an afternoon just basically break'n me down, um to all the things I had buried, I guess, um, I, you know, ugly things that had happened, um, things that I didn't understand, um... mmm... I don't know reasons that I guess I'd lost faith. I don't understand grace and mercy. I still, it was not preached um, in the church that I grew up in. [ ] But man that night was hard for me. Everybody in the room was crying, everybody in the room was crying, and to hear people praying for me personally, I didn't, I was uncomfortable um, I didn't feel like I deserved, um, their prayers, um I didn't go to dinner that night, I just had to go, I had to go sleep because I, I just... couldn't take anymore.

Interviewer: Pretty exhausting night…
Sadie: Yeah, it was exhausting, and so that was probably the... biggest thing for me, was when they broke me down to show me... why I shut myself off from people. [ ] So that was probably the biggest thing for me, was breaking it down so I understood where my... personal issues were.

As Sadie remembered that night and the impact of it, she was transported back to the significance and impact it had on her. Her speech contained pauses as she thought back and got in touch with that experience. It was excruciating for her as well, and while Mitchell was freed by the love and acceptance of the group members, Sadie struggled with accepting the unconditional nature of their care. She said grace and mercy were still a mystery to her. Unlike Mitchell and Anne, these were not part of her faith experience up until the intensive; thus, healing would take longer for her. This new way to see herself and even God was so overtly counter to how she was taught that it would take longer to believe it was actually possible for her. Even so, she saw this experience at the intensive within her group as marking the beginning of the healing journey for her personally, and she said multiple times, “that was probably the biggest thing for me”.

In addition to the faith component, this passage also revealed the very real relational struggle Sadie had. That was all part of breaking her down, but even the events of the experience created deeper understanding of just how difficult it had been for Sadie to let people get close to her. She repeated “everybody in the room was crying” and added emphasis to “everybody” the second time. These people were given a window into her vulnerability and understood her pain to the point of crying with her. While it was safe and good, Sadie seemed overwhelmed by the nearness of it all. The whole
experience of letting all of these people in and then receiving that kind of grace and mercy from them was something completely foreign to her before that time. This was the beginning of seeing herself and relationships in a completely new light. Naturally, that was something that would take time to really take root, but for Sadie as she made sense of her experience, that night at the intensive and the things she learned through that experience were things she would go back to again and again as she worked through the changes in her life and marriage.

Although Julie’s journey is completely different from Sadie’s, she also commented on how seeing things she had not realized about herself at the intensive allowed for the shifts she needed to make personally in her life and marriage.

They really do give you time to work through stuff and then it's, some of it you, you don’t know, I mean I think having the time to focus on yourself you realize things that you might not have realized. [ ] It made me realize that I need to take better care of myself, um, and it made me [ ] realize that I’m not the only person that has hurt, that David has hurt too.

These two realizations were significant for Julie. With the busyness of her life and trying to manage the growing “laundry pile” in her marriage with keeping herself distracted, she did not realize that she was not taking care of herself at all. She also admitted she was so focused on her own pain that she honestly did not realize that David was also feeling the pain and strain of their relationship. David noted these shifts in Julie as well in his reflective summary. He said, “Julie told me after the intensive that until the intensive she didn't know that I had a heart. Julie also didn't tend to her heart at all.”

120
mentioning it separately from Julie lends weight to the significance of these revelations for her. They later admitted to her trying to have David meet all of her needs and how he felt pressured and resentful of this. Having this realization at the intensive allowed Julie to go back into her life looking at things differently.

Similarly, although Anne was aware of her personal issues on some level, and had been using them as a major part of her testimony for years, she also found a new perspective about her history and how it impacted her present, particularly as it related to expectations she put on Mitchell. She expressed,

I've shared my story many, many times, and I speak at women's retreats, it's all based on my traumatic life story and um, God uses it, and I'm very thankful for that. But I live this story, it's not just a story, it's *me*, and for the first time in my life I was able to realize, I was able to be in touch with the fact that this is *me* this happened to. [] It wasn't just a story, it was me and I was able to, be in touch with that and what it did was it helped me to... understand my own responsibility of handling my past. It wasn't Mitchell's responsibility; it never was and it never will be.

While Anne had told her story and allowed God to use it as part of her testimony to reach other women, up until the intensive she had been disconnecting herself from the pain and impact of her past. The significance of that realization can be seen in her repetition and intonation stressing that her story was “*me*”, not simply a story. At the same time, while she had disconnected herself from her story, she had been expecting Mitchell to take care of her pain and make things that had nothing to do with him okay for her. At the
intensive she really realized it was not his responsibility, and this meaningfully changed how she would later relate to him in her marriage. Her story and pain were hers and she could no longer separate herself from them or place them on Mitchell to make better. As she told of this experience, it became clear that for her, this personal realization at the intensive was pivotal in her being able to maintain the marital gains they made at the intensive going forward.

**Maintaining Gains Theme Two: Personal Responsibility**

Leading directly out of this first theme was the second theme of Personal Responsibility, not simply as realized at the intensive, but as an overarching guiding principle in realizing, maintaining, and furthering the gains achieved at the intensive. This theme was broken out into three subthemes that captured the different aspects of taking personal responsibility that was expressed by the participants of the Maintained group. These included Owning Personal Contributions to the Problem, Responsible for Change, and Practicing the Tools. See figure 4.2 for graphic depiction.

**Owning personal contributions to the problem.** To begin with, every participant in the Maintained group took ownership for how they personally contributed to their marital problems. Even when one partner had clearly violated trust in the marriage, the other also owned personal contributions to the marital issues. Bill and Sadie are a prime example of this. Bill, humbly admitted,

I was absolutely in the wrong. I was just... I was just, it was just wrong... I, I
mean I think, I feel like I guess anything I could say would sound like an excuse and I don't want to make excuses for what I did 'cause it was wrong, and I shouldn't have done it. [ ] I don't know, this sounds even horrible saying it too, but it was a totally selfish act on my part, you know it wasn't about, it wasn't about having a relationship with someone else, it was about me wanting to satisfy myself, selfish. You know what I mean? I mean like scratch my own itch so to speak, feel, feel good about myself…

The repetition of the words wrong and selfish, along with the intensity of Bill’s tone in this passage indicated how strongly Bill felt about the choices he made. He was not defending himself, and he did not want to make excuses. In addition, he did not point to or blame Sadie at all in the interview as the cause of the decisions he made. Instead, he openly admitted his choices were purely to satisfy his own desire to feel good about
himself. The analogy of scratching his own itch calls attention to the intense self-focus he was experiencing, like when an itch grabs one’s attention and insists on being scratched before focus can return to anything else.

To further make the point that Bill’s taking personal responsibility had contributed to his being able to maintain the gains he achieved at the intensive he noted in a section from his reflective summary,

One last thing that has been influential to me is to use ‘I’ and ‘me’ rather than ‘you’. I was always directing the blame back at Sadie for everything. When I focused on making it not about what she did or didn't do, it opened up the way for us to heal and not constantly be so antagonistic.

Here he revealed his interpretation of the importance of owning his responsibility. Only when he stopped blaming Sadie and focused on himself did things change for them.

Even so, Sadie also recognized her responsibility in taking time to soften, and in how she had treated Bill before all of this happened. “I began to soften slowly, um, I move at snails’ pace, I don’t like change and I’d spent many years being… a witch but you know… to put it nicely, a witch.” It took Sadie a lot longer to initiate change in her side of the marriage, but by the time of the interview she was able to admit and take responsibility for taking the year to be willing to work towards change, and for her contribution to some of the problems that happened in their relationship before the affair. She, too, was not blaming Bill for the things she had contributed.

Mitchell also took responsibility for his emotional affair and explained the roots of his selfishness came from not knowing his value. He admitted,
I didn't fully understand [that my choices impact positively or negatively] prior to [the intensive], because every decision that was made around my life never took me into consideration, so why should I take other people into consideration when I make decisions. That's the way I lived, because that's the way I knew. And so, coming out of that, it gave me a sense of value and, and saying to myself, I don't need to act like that, nor do I want to act like that. I'm better than that. I have this wonderful person next to me, and I need to value that, because now I value me, and I understand that value means something.

Here he fully recognized and owned the fact that he had not been taking Anne or their marriage into consideration at all when he behaved as he did. Interestingly, he made sense of those choices by connecting them to his family of origin and learning that because others did not take him into consideration he did not have to take others into consideration. Instead of this being a selfish focus on Mitchell’s part, it originated from his lack of recognizing his value, which translated into medicating his pain through trying to do things that felt good at the time. He learned that because he mattered, his actions mattered, and that changed everything for him. It also allowed him to take responsibility for his actions separately from the mistaken beliefs he had come to accept as true about himself. Owning personal contributions to the problem opened understanding for what lay behind those choices and allowed for new perspectives on how things could be different.

For Anne, as detailed above, owning her contributions to the problem was significant in recognizing that she could not keep putting the responsibility of healing her
pain onto Mitchell. She recognized, too, that blaming and judging him for what he did was not helping the situation either. “I have judged him off and on, but I don't think it's to the degree that I used to um, and I see that it frees him more.” In addition to recognizing her own responsibility, she also came to see how reducing her judgment of Mitchell also impacted him in positive ways.

Julie and David also owned their contributions to the problem, which became particularly clear to them when they learned about their fear cycles. David shared,

The whole concept of the whole fear cycle was definitely pretty interesting of the, you know, she says this, here's how I respond, like, you know, I go to my office, you know, hide out. That was good for us to see that on paper and to talk through that. [ ] And then again now, we don't have that nearly to that extreme of what it used to be. You know, it's still there because that's how I'm engrained, but now I catch myself and I go wait a minute, is this really what I want to do, this is just gonna set up the next thing, so here's, here's, you know, what do I want?

Okay here's what I want. Alright let me go turn this around and not do this.

Here David recognized in their relationship his going off to his office and hiding actually contributed to their relational dance, and thus made things worse in their relationship instead of better. This idea of hiding was a strong one for him. Instead of being able to stay engaged and work through issues as they arose, David retreated and took shelter in his office. In a later passage he noted this hiding related to his fear of not being able to adequately do or be what Julie was expecting of him and yet feeling powerless to do anything else. He said,
[I] felt like Oh God, I've gotta take care of her even though she won't be happy with me, because I won't take care of her properly, but my God I've gotta at least try so that when she tells me how sucky I am, I can at least say I tried.

In this segment it would appear that the idea of owning personal responsibility for the problem also needed to include knowing one’s value even when the other did not see it. This concept did not come up in David and Julie’s interview specifically, but can be seen above in the others and may be evidenced subtly here as well. David made sense of taking responsibility for his side of the problem by resonating with the idea that a relational dance occurred with his wife, and he alone needed to change his side of that dance to bring about change. He needed to recognize his value, release Julie’s well-being to her, and then take responsibility for remaining in contact and not hiding, even if she did not like that he was not taking care of her the way she may have wanted.

On the other side, Julie was able to recognize how her own anger and pain was her responsibility and not David’s. In her reflective summary she said “My big take away was I was so tired and angry, but I never stopped to take care of myself. I expected David to do that.” In the interview she shared the realization, “No one's intentionally sitting around trying to be mean to me, which is what I used to think [said chuckling], it's just how life is, and if I can take care of myself then I'm better”. Thus, for Julie, taking ownership for her side of the problem meant taking ownership for herself rather than blaming David for her not being taken care of well enough.
**Responsible for change.** This theme had five participants, representing all three couples who directly spoke of the importance of taking responsibility for change. This could be due to its close relationship and natural outpouring from the last subtheme. In light of taking responsibility for their contribution to the problem, these participants pointed out the natural progression was to also take responsibility to bring about change as a result of this recognition. This was evidenced by Julie and Anne who repeatedly stressed the biggest change in their lives and relationships was realizing they were responsible for taking care of themselves.

Julie said, “I don't make taking care of me his responsibility so that I'm not mad at him as easily as I would have been prior”. Whereas before she was left alone and feeling helpless, by taking responsibility for her own self-care, she no longer had reason to be mad at him when he did not meet those unrealistic expectations. Anne also stressed numerous times that the most significant thing for her coming out of the intensive was coming to understand her own responsibility for herself. In the following passage she emphatically stated this.

I think the most helpful were the main points of we are all responsible. After we are out of our parents' care, and for me, I did not have that, I didn't have parents care as a child so that was kind of irrelevant for me, but the point they make is once you're out of your parents' care, *you* are responsible for your own value, *you* are responsible for your own vulnerability, and *you* are responsible for your own happiness.
Here Anne strongly stressed this importance of taking personal responsibility. The repetition and emphasis on the word “you” as she spoke indicated how important this point essentially was for her. This emphasis revealed how strongly understanding of this concept impacted her; she could no longer put the responsibility for her own happiness, value, or vulnerability on Mitchell or anyone else. She also indicated this was a message she regularly spoke on and taught informally to other women; believing this, over anything else, was key to the success of her marriage going forward. The very purpose of marriage had changed for her in this understanding. Her husband was no longer expected to meet her needs and make her happy or provide her well-being. That responsibility remained fully in her hands. Further, by referencing the fact that she believed it to be irrelevant that she did not have anyone taking care of her as a child and did not have a model for taking care of herself, she acknowledged even still, it was her responsibility now. Whether or not one was given effective care and tools growing up, once a child becomes an adult, responsibility for happiness and well-being reside in the individual alone. It can never be expected that one’s spouse take on that responsibility because it would not work.

Mitchell also acknowledged, as noted earlier, that regardless of his earlier wounds, he needed to take responsibility for recognizing he had value first. Out of that value he further realized he was responsible for his actions as well. Bill’s story was similar; out of receiving unexpected forgiveness from God, he could look at himself differently. “There was so much focus on faith and ah, grace, you know, that that
forgiveness was available, which to me I was desperate for at the time”. Later, after Sadie talked about how impactful it was for her to see him being baptized, he said,

Bill: For me, ah, coming back I knew I had been pretty much a complete screw-up with everything, terrible husband, I had been a terrible dad, really just not a very good person generally speaking, ah, [ ] and I guess another thing that [I] realized, ah, was that, just because I had been that way didn't mean I had to continue being that way, [ ] you know, and that, that was, it was my choice to act awful, it also my choice to not act awful

Interviewer: Was that new for you, coming out of the intensive, I don't have to keep doing this?

Bill: Yeah. Yeah, I think so, I mean I thought that, you know, that I, my course had kinda been set for me, and that, kinda come hell or high water, that was the way I was, but I didn't have to be.

Bill echoed Mitchell’s realization that mistaken beliefs do not have to govern the future. Change was possible and he no longer had to believe his “course had been set”. This is a nautical term, used to set a direction for a ship. Once it is set the ship continues along that trajectory until it is intentionally changed. Before the intensive Bill did not realize that his course could be changed; however, once he came to that realization, it was freeing to know he could be different and maintain his self-dignity. Change was not out of reach; instead it became his responsibility to govern his choices going forward. In his reflective summary he admitted, “Since that time I have [been] intent on not being that way. I can't say I have always been successful, but after seven years, change doesn't
always come easily.” Now that he knew he could, he was taking that responsibility and intentionally trying to change his ways.

Thus, change is not something that simply happens to someone. Attending a quality intensive program is not enough to execute lasting change. It must be an intentional effort that is worked at regularly. Further, the only one who has any power over change is the person seeking to make the change in oneself. David also spoke of intentional efforts to change his behavior.

I intentionally come out of my office, and come and find Julie, and engage with her whether it's just for, you know, a second or more but at least I do intentionally say okay I need to emerge from my cave, and go and find my people, and make sure that they know that I'm, I'm still around.

In light of his realization that his hiding was contributing to the problems in his marriage, David conveyed that he recognized his responsibility in making changes, and this meant coming out of his hiding and engaging his wife and family. The repetition of the word “intentionally” expressed the importance of this recognition to him. This does not come naturally for him, but if he wanted things to be different in his marriage he must take responsibility for his actions and be intentional about connecting, even for a few seconds, with his wife.

**Practicing the tools.** Being intentional about using the tools and making efforts to continue to work at the marriage also emerged as a subtheme of Personal Responsibility, expressed by at least one participant in all three couples. Anne and
Mitchell spoke most passionately about practicing the tools but the others spoke on this topic as well. In a particularly clear passage, in response to what advice they would give to couples coming out of a marriage intensive, Anne said:

The number one thing I would say is practice the check-ins every day, make it a priority, um, pray together every day, do your devotion together every day, and you’ll have a great chance of this sticking with you and, and take your fear cycle portrait that they draw with you with their colored sharpies and put it…we had it on our bedroom wall and ah, just keep this a part of your life.

Again, this theme pointed to the intentionality of bringing about change. It simply did not happen without practice. She encouraged people to keep the tools available and even post them on the wall so they are visible reminders daily. It would be easy to leave an experience like an intensive and over time forget what was learned if it were not intentionally practiced and integrated into one’s life. Earlier in the interview they spoke of how they did all the things Anne recommended here. “Work the program” she called it. Mitchell continued that thought using the analogy of learning to use a pencil and a pen.

It's kind of like your pen and pencil you know they are always there and you know what they are for, you know. When we were a kid we didn't know what a pen was for (chuckles) until we were taught, and now it's a part of our life, you know.

Going to the intensive was like learning to use a pen. Now that they had been taught and had practiced using the tools regularly, they could access them any time. At
another point he referred to some of their change as “subconscious change”. This idea flows from that regular practice that in turn resulted in being able to catch oneself without as much effort because the tools became part of how they thought and did things. Julie and David also discussed this idea of being intentional as well as it becoming more subconscious.

I think for me one of the things I've been really trying to do is really just trying to take better care of myself by getting enough sleep and then also not... not getting hurt. [ ] So I feel like when I do feel [ ] like I'm upset about something, I stop to think is this really, you know, is this really something, or is this just me being afraid about something else? Is this him or is this really my thing that I've now put on him? And then I tell him about it, and so I can find out; which I think [ ] that's been a big helper for me, 'cause most of the times it's nothing but at least [he] knew and it's, then it's gone it's not like we're holding on to it for a later date.

Using the tools for Julie meant instead of falling back into old thinking patterns that led to the fear dance, she was intentionally catching herself, doing the self-talk she learned, and then returning to David to talk through what happened. As mentioned above, rather than building a laundry pile of hurts, she owned responsibility for her well-being and was practicing the tools to change her interactions with her husband. In the dialogue she described with herself, she was also showing evidence of a new openness to the possibility that her triggers could be her own issues and not necessarily David's at all. This new openness revealed the reality of her taking responsibility and the actual
integration of her learning, allowing it to intrinsically change her way of thinking and interpreting things.

By contrast, David, who earlier admitted to working on individual things intentionally, also noted that they could be doing more in the area of being intentional about practicing the tools and focusing on the marriage.

I think everything's a process, and I think we've been working through those things somewhat organically, um, I mean we have done it, it just hasn't been by the book, and this that and the other, but I think this [interview] might be good too to help us to re-track [ ] you know. Okay let's, let's figure out a plan, you know, let's pick up where we left off.

Even though they have been intentional about some things, talking about all of this in the interview served as a reminder to help them to refocus on the tools and lessons they had learned. Like Anne had noted, without practice and keeping these teachings at the fore, life can distract couples from really integrating all of the tools they valued at the beginning. Maintaining all of the gains takes practice and intentionality in every aspect. However, even when that intense focus and intentionality was focused primarily in the area of personal change, it still brought about positive change in the marriage. David recognized this as well when he said, “I think it's because we are better with ourselves, so therefore you can, you are, you're just, you don't have to think about it, it's just coming natural to take care of each other better”.

While Sadie and Bill’s first year post-intensive experience had been more challenging than the others, Sadie also mentioned how they continued to practice using
the heart talk, and how she continued to practice working on the individual things she needed to learn.

Heart talk or the cycle that they take you through, I refer back to that a lot, um especially if we start to get off track... I will say, you know... Bill practices heart talk a lot, he does that better than I do. He will sit and reflect and say I hear what you are saying, and then I am more um, inclined to say okay you're forgetting my stressors, you're forgetting the things that trigger my emotional responses.

This passage illustrated how important it was for even one person to be able to apply the tools to the relationship. Both Sadie and Bill recognized how the dance works and Sadie was clearly trying to identify her own stressors and how they could be triggered in the fear cycle. However, because Bill was able to implement active listening and seeking to understand her side, the heart talk was able to move them forward to work through the things they were in conflict about. Throughout the interview Sadie openly admitted areas where Bill was better at things or further along in his healing journey than she was.

At the same time, Sadie had not given up and continued to be intentional with practicing the personal tools she was given as well. One example of her taking responsibility for her own change and practicing the tools came in the form of her reminding herself of what she had learned personally.

I still to this day have a hard time with grace and mercy, um, but I did buy the [ ] little bracelets like we bought our daughters, I bought the [ones] that said grace and mercy [for me] and it is, [ ] rarely a day that I, um, go without them...
reminders. And I laugh and it's like, you know, which one am I going to put on
[ ] closer to my heart today, and it would be the one I needed.

Personal healing for Sadie had been a long road that continued even at the point of the
interview. Even so, she persisted in practicing the tools she learned at NIM and was
intentional about trying to allow the truths she learned to sink in and give her the healing
she longed for. This was a daily focus for her, and she had not given up on her practice
and focus. At that point in her journey, her healing was still focused on realizing her
ultimate value and acceptance, which for her, would come through understanding her
faith more personally and deeply.

Maintaining Gains Theme Three: Faith

Faith was an overarching theme that permeated all three couples, whether they
went in with an existing faith or not. Bill and Sadie talked about it as overtly significant,
while the others talked about it as an important part of the intensive, but not the
determining factor that it had for Bill and Sadie. Likely, the reason for this diversity
stemmed from the fact that the others went in with a strong faith perspective that
remained essential for them in their intensive experience, while Sadie and Bill did not
have a strong faith foundation going in, and this changed for them because of the
intensive. Throughout the interview they often referenced how this aspect became the
most significant for them while they were there and since being there. This theme was
broken into two subthemes Faith Experienced at NIM and Faith Personalized at Home, to
capture the different nuances of the significance faith had for these couples. See Figure 4.3 for graphic depiction.

**Faith experienced at NIM.** For all of the couples going to an intensive that had a faith component was important. For the couples who had strong faith in their lives, it was essential because they wanted faith integrated in the counseling they received. This was also important to Bill and Sadie in principle, based on how they filled out the pre-intensive survey, but Bill explained how their faith was developed and encouraged at the intensive in a new and impactful way.

Sadie grew up with a very strong spiritual background and me, not so much, but we have both felt a very strong pull all our lives. Our counselors encouraged all of us to embrace a relationship with God, ask Him for help and accept that He [is] capable of healing all the damage that had been done. After the intensive, Sadie and I have both recommitted ourselves to the Lord and that has been the single biggest change in both our lives. We are finally on the same page working to the same end and are both in the faith. [ ] I think our faith has been the only thing that has allowed us to turn back from the path we were on and start working to rebuild our relationship.

For them, the intensive resulted in Bill committing his life to God and Sadie returning to Him after having fallen away. As they talked about the significance of that experience and the meaning it has had for them since the intensive, it became clear developing this healing faith had changed everything for them, and particularly for Bill.
Bill: There was focus on...faith and ah, grace you know, that, that forgiveness was available which to me I was desperate for at the time.

Sadie: and I had given up on it

Bill: And Sadie had given up on it, and [ ] I went and ah, talked to [our counselors] just for a briefly for a few minutes so, and they kind of assigned me for my homework to, to learn about that 'cause I had not ever, you know, I'd never, and didn't grow up in church.

Bill was at a very low point in his life when he went to the intensive. He knew he had made mistakes and desperately wanted forgiveness, though he did not know it was available to him. Desperate is a strong word choice. He was not simply interested or seeking forgiveness, there was an extreme desperation he felt, revealing his recognized
need for this release. As noted earlier, learning he was forgiven at NIM, and therefore he was able change his course was the biggest shift in perspective he could have had. While the significance of this faith shift would naturally impact his marriage, first and foremost, it impacted his own life powerfully.

Conversely, the other couples had strong faith going in, so the faith aspect was not surprising or challenging, but rather it was the focus they appreciated and intentionally sought out. Both David and Anne spoke about feeling God’s presence and experiencing Him there. David expressed it this way:

You feel the Holy Spirit, you feel that this is, you know, that this is good. There's, the people here aren't trying to control things, they're letting go and letting [ ] God work this plan through the facility and through them and through this and through that so… And I'm big on that, in that, you know, I'm big on getting a feeling of whether this is going to be good or it's going to be bad, and whether there's good stuff happening in this place with these people. [ ] So I got that good feeling and the good vibe out of everybody there.

Feeling God’s presence and His leading throughout the intensive was a vital part of David’s experience at NIM. “I’m big on that” he said, expressing the importance he puts on God’s leading in situations like this. This feeling allowed him to relax and let the experience impact him going forward. Anne also expressed how significant the feeling of God’s presence was for her while she was there.

I remember when we left the room, the actual [counseling] room, not even the whole house, um, you know we, everybody hugged and it was time to go to [ ] our
last dinner together... and... everybody walked out and I remember me, I couldn't leave the room. It was the safest place I'd ever been in my life, and I never ever had felt safe, ever, 'cause I had been so abused and left alone throughout my entire life, and hurt, and vulnerable, and so I said I'm going to fluff the pillows, you know. [ ] I just wanted to be the last one to look at that room and say thank you God, you know. And it, for me, gave me a little glimpse of heaven and what it's going to mean to be in the presence of true authenticity, no holds bar, nothing... no surprises to God and no surprises to Jesus, and we're all gonna know each other and love each other the way we are, and that's what I said when we both felt like for the first time we ever experienced what the church is truly supposed to be.

In contrast to the life Anne had lived prior to NIM, even with her strong faith, this was the first time she had ever really felt safe. It was a place where everyone could be authentic, truly real, and be accepted at the same time. This safety was impactful because it created the environment for healing and renewed hope. She used the analogy of heaven, saying it gave her a glimpse of what heaven would be like. Heaven is understood to be a place where there is no more pain and everyone there is fully accepted and loved. The faith environment that was created at NIM became that heavenly environment for Anne here on earth. That was also evidenced in her nostalgic tone and the way she described that experience; watching her it seemed to transport her back to the time of this fond memory. This idea of heaven and the safety she felt was almost palpable in her description of that day.
Faith personalized at home. In addition to the significance of faith as it was experienced at NIM, Faith Personalized at Home was also a strong subtheme that permeated the perspectives of each couple. For Bill and Sadie it was a continuation of growth and change that had begun at the intensive. Seeing Bill’s faith grow and develop became an important influence in allowing Sadie to soften and allow herself to risk opening up to him again after feeling so betrayed. She shared,

Sadie: After [Bill’s] baptism and you know, we kind of got back on the same page
Interviewer: That's what started to soften your heart, the baptism?
Sadie: Probably, seeing his efforts to, um, learn more, I, I, oh, believe me there were many Sundays where I sat there and went, he's not going to keep this up, you know, this is just for show, he's just doing this to keep me... But then it was just, you could just really, it, as I listened to him speak more, speak out more and listened to the knowledge that he had gained, I was like, okay, this is for real.

Because her pain was so strong, it took almost a year to be able to trust that the changes she had been seeing in Bill were real. However, if Bill had been doing these things just for her, they likely would not have lasted that long; in fact, this can be seen later in some of the stories of the couples in the Difficulties group. But, because his changes were real, over time Sadie was able to see the change, and this brought them back to being on the same page. This is the same language Bill had used in his reflective summary to describe how faith had impacted their marriage after the intensive. It brought them back on the same page.
The faith changes that came out of the intensive and continued in that first year had also been significant in Sadie’s healing as well, though it had been a slower process of return for her. She said seeing Bill’s faith and effort had encouraged her to “want to be a better person”. In addition, others in their church had been important protective factors for their fledgling faith and recreated marriage. Together they expressed,

Bill: There's several women at the church that, that have kinda,
Sadie: mothered me
Bill: mothered Sadie in a good way and I, I think they've, you know, kinda taught her and helped kinda bring her up and bring her back to where she wants to be.

Because Sadie still struggled with the idea of grace and faith, these church “mothers” had been there to support, encourage, and help her back to God. Others had also become close with them, and watching their journeys with God as loving and active in their lives had helped Sadie to grow and consider the possibility of a loving God instead of the judging, punitive one she experienced growing up. Again, this focus, at least for Sadie and Bill, had been the key factor in their continuing to be able to maintain and build on the gains they achieved at NIM.

In the interviews with the other couples, faith was not talked about as a key factor in any significant way outside of the context of the intensive, but Anne noted they had been in active ministry since their wedding and talked about how they were determined to break the generational sin from their families of origin. This language indicated a strong Christian focus and motivation for persevering and making things work in their marriage.
Anne: We were both very committed to doing everything possible to stop the generational sin of, my mother was married technically eight times, his mother was married, his adopted mother, four, three or four times

Mitchell: Yeah

Anne: So, there was a lot of motivation, spiritually.

Julie noted one of her big “take aways” was related to how they broke down the Bible verse from Mark 12:30-31 “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these”. She acknowledged,

It's my job to take care of myself. The thing they did was, the one thing, they broke up the Bible verse love the Lord your God with all your heart, your mind, your soul, there was one more [ ] but [they] broke it down into the different ways how, if you’re not taking care of these four areas, then you’re not, you can't love God properly, you can't love yourself, you can't love [your] partner, and so it was like, there you go, that, you know, that was the big, for me the big take away.

Once again, though in this passage she did not directly claim that her faith and the faith aspect of NIM had been instrumental for her continued maintenance of her gains, it was clear in the language and examples she used that her faith and that perspective remained an important aspect of her journey going forward.
Work in Process Theme One: Intensive Factors

In answer to the second research question, what made things difficult, three themes emerged in the Maintained group. The first was Intensive Factors: Intensive Not Enough. See Figure 4.4 for graphic depiction. While this was the weakest theme for this group, having only been commented on by two of the couples; it gained strength in the overall study due to the fact that it also appeared as a strong subtheme coming out of the Difficulties group, with all participants from that group also expressing that the intensive was not enough as they left. Thus, it is included here as a theme for the Maintained group as well.

**Intensive not enough.** The only intensive factor that couples in the Maintained group expressed made maintaining gains more difficult was the fact that the end of the intensive did not allow for enough time to provide comprehensive understanding of how to apply the tools, which left them on their own to figure that part out. This was also expressed by pointing out that after leaving NIM there were no local supports or counselors who followed the NIM program to help them with this missing piece. Julie and David said specifically, “the end part was some of it (crosstalk David: a little rushed) was a little rushed, and that I feel like that's the part where that part would have been a part that helped us”. Later David said, “That's where it's a shame that there's no counselors in our area that follow their program. So that’s where it kinda falls on us”. This couple had gone to other therapists before going to NIM and did not find them as
helpful as what they experienced at the intensive. The idea that “it falls on us” connotes a picture of the burden placed upon them. While they would have wanted more support and guidance going forward, they found the burden of continuing the program and understanding how the tools applied to them personally landed on their shoulders. For Julie and David this made things harder to carry on the program and maintain all of the gains they had hoped they would.

Similarly, Sadie and Bill noted how they live in a rural area and though there were counselors, none provided the integrated faith-psychology perspective that NIM had.

Sadie: [My NIM counselor] has helped me to understand that, you know, there is forgiveness, and there is grace, and there is change, and I would love to see her more but, you know, it's expensive and

Bill: It's a long ways away
Sadie: it's a long ways away, and it was hard to get [ ] to you know, to maneuver the children. We don't have those type of resources, um in the rural area. [ ] I do have a mentor here but [ ] she's a clinical therapist, she's not religiously based.

Bill: Yeah

Sadie: And I think we need a religiously based [counselor].

Once again, the importance of having a faith focus was expressed by this couple. Living in a rural area they were not able to find a counselor who could provide the combination of quality therapy from a faith perspective. Because some of the main things Sadie still struggled with related to understanding grace and mercy from her faith perspective, not having that available in her area had made continuing to heal and build on the gains she achieved at NIM much more challenging, and may have added to the journey taking longer for her. She did return to see one of the NIM counselors for a few months, but, as noted in this excerpt, to do that on an on-going basis was not feasible for them. Thus, the fact that things could not be completed while at NIM, and then there were no local therapists following the NIM program appeared to be a factor in making things more difficult for these couples.

**Work in Process Theme Two: Change Takes Time**

The second theme under Work in Process for the Maintained group was Change Takes Time. All of the couples admitted the intensive alone did not fix things, and they were still working on some things and struggling with other things at times. For some it came out in the subtheme of Need Patience, while for others it was stronger in the
perspective that they were Still Struggling and Working on things. See Figure 4.5 for graphic depiction. Nonetheless, for all couples this theme was present and a very real part of the year following the intensive for them.

**Need patience.** Looking at the first subtheme, needing patience was an important part of being able to maintain gains. However, it was difficult to do in the day-to-day of the journey.

Bill: I think, coming out of it, [ ] I think the word would be patience. I think you have to [ ] have some patience to allow things to kind of percolate and stew, and… work on ya some, you know, [ ] it took us seven years to get as bad as we were, you know it, it was gonna take more than four days to get good again.

Sadie: But, look at what, you know, in a year…

Bill: Yeah, and I'm not saying [ ] it's gonna take seven years, ooh I hope not [laughs] but I, you know, I don't think, yeah I kind of had hopes, you know, I kind of got real jazzed while I was there and I came home and I was like, [claps] let's go baby we're good but, no…

Sadie: It wasn't like that for me. No, I had to…

Bill: Well it took you a year.

Sadie: It took me a year, it took our anniversary, well it, it took a year. It took a year from finding out about, you know, whatever, to the next year and I literally spent that year… hiding.

Bill: Healing.
Sadie: He says healing and I say hiding because I didn’t, I, I, was not, I did not want to leave the house.

This extended dialogue revealed that change occurred at different rates for them and continued to take time, even at the point of the interview. For Bill, change occurred quickly initially, but he used the metaphor of allowing things to percolate and stew to indicate his realization that deep sustaining change also took time. These pictures conjure up cooking images of a mixture of different meats and vegetables simmering for long periods of time in order allow the flavors to marry and sink in to everything else in the pot. This takes time. Percolating is also an image of letting flavors seep through and permeate. Julie also used this language of needing time to let things sink in when she said, “It takes a while for some of this stuff to really seep in and to realize, you know,
what was happening there.” Therefore, it can be said that even though Bill’s significant change seemed to occur early, real and profound change took patience and time to really sink in and develop into meaningful change. The year of learning to have practice and committing himself to his faith allowed for this percolating to occur.

For Sadie, it took a year to be able to begin allowing change to happen for her. The repetition of “it took a year” may indicate how much patience was actually needed for them. It had been a long year of hiding and healing for her. In fact, this stewing and percolating time was more pronounced for Sadie as she was not ready to let the change really sink in at first. She needed time to hide and heal personally before she could risk letting change happen in the marriage. After about a year, she was finally able to see that Bill’s changes were real, but that only marked the beginning of her journey to be able to risk opening up to him again. In a card she wrote her commitment to begin that journey.

I'm gonna take down all my walls and be raw with you. I'm tired of hiding my feelings. I'm tired of being afraid of my feelings. I'm just, you know, your gonna have to suck it up and listen to me cry and moan, and if I'm unhappy, I'm gonna tell you I'm unhappy, and if I'm happy, you, you're gonna know I'm happy. I'm gonna quit being a robot.

While this was a significant shift for her and them relationally, it was the beginning for her, and patience would still be required as they navigated through that next phase in this healing process. Change takes time and at the time of the interview, they were still in a period of needing patience. Bill recognized this and was no longer pushing or rushing her. He admitted, “I think we've still got a long way to go, I mean
'cause there's still all this stuff, you know, I mean it still hurt her so you can't, you can't heal from the wound overnight.”

In a more subtle way, Anne and Mitchell faced the same need for patience in their journey. In their interview they appeared to be doing very well and as though real change had occurred, and yet, they were also very honest about the everyday challenge of needing patience and perseverance.

Our marriage is constantly in process of even getting, I mean [ ] every day it's a learning process. I, every day we go through moments of, I do, I shouldn't say we, I'm like why am I doing this, and then I go back to what I personally learned, and then I'm able to go, that's why.

Here Anne acknowledged change takes time for her and though she was working at it, it remained a learning process. This kind of learning was not something that came easily, it took effort, practice, and time. Her repetition of “every day” also indicated the need for perseverance and dedication to this process. It was not something that could be periodic, she needed a daily reminder to keep refocusing on the new things she had learned and the impact they had on her. It took patience to go through this every day, but as she remembered what she had learned she was reminded it is worth the daily effort. There was also reference to her personal focus again in this passage. This was not about needing Mitchell to change, this was about her journey and having patience with herself. She could not speak about his personal journey, only her own.
**Still struggling / working at it.** In addition to patience, Change Takes Time was experienced in personal journeys as still struggling and working on things. As evidenced in the last excerpt from Anne, these two subthemes tend to overlap. At the same time, in the following passages the idea of still struggling came across stronger than simply recognizing patience and perseverance were needed. To begin with, Anne spoke of still struggling with her buttons being pushed and how to deal with that.

I still struggle with um, feeling, like some of my buttons still feel like they are being pushed, like not being loved or um, a couple of others, but then some of the buttons aren't pushed at all anymore. So, it's a slow process, but I, I imagine 10 years from now, if I look at that chart, I think I can go, okay this button when pushed isn't as severe, 'cause they, what they told us is buttons will always be pushed but I don't feel it as much because I learned how to respond correctly.

In this passage she admitted she still struggled with her buttons being pushed. Before moving to her more positive perspective on this topic, it is important to look at what this meant for her. She noted it is a slow process. While she would like to be further along with some buttons, and clearly was with others, it took time for these changes to happen and that was a struggle sometimes. Struggle connotes an internal battle, wrestling and pushing for something. This was not easy for her, even if she could be gentle with herself and the process by remembering the positives and where it was leading.

At the same time, Anne was gentle with herself in this passage in that she was able to remember the counselors telling her there will always be buttons pushed. This would not go away so the struggle was to be expected. Even 10 years down the line they
would still be there. While this could be discouraging, Anne chose to focus on the fact that by then, they would likely not be as much of a struggle because she would have learned to deal with them correctly. Even so, at the time of the interview the struggle remained.

Sadie also shared about how parts of her journey were still a struggle, and it was still difficult to put into practice some of the things she had learned. She confessed, “I harbored a lot of resentment about that, even still. I try not to, but yeah, that's a... that was a pretty awful thing for me to go through alone so...” The idea of struggle discussed above was illustrated by the strong language used here by Sadie. She admitted to harboring a lot of resentment that remained even at the time of the interview. This was not something that she had been able to get to the other side of; it remained a struggle of trying not to but still feeling it. However, her relationship with Bill was not the only struggle Sadie admitted to still be wrestling with. The deep personal struggle in her faith relationship was also clearly evidenced when she said,

I'm still working on it, it's a daily thing for me, I, I still don't understand the concepts of it, you know it's still very hard 'cause I, I grew up with a preacher that was hell-fire and damnation, you know, it was, God is not loving, God is a scornful. God, you know, [ ] if you don't follow exactly to the ‘T’ everything that's [ ] said, you know, you have no chance.

Similar to Anne, she identified this was a daily thing for her. It was not something that simply sinks in on its own. It required effort and attention daily. She was taking responsibility for it and continuing to work at it but the journey was long and hard.
This may be part of the reason she still battled with resentment for Bill as well. Because she struggled to understand grace and mercy as it related to herself, it was also difficult to extend these virtues to Bill who had so deeply hurt her.

Further, the magnitude of her struggle was made clear in this passage, not only in her overt admission of it being very difficult, but also in the language that she used to describe it. As she spoke of the teaching she grew up with her language initially was in the past tense, but as she got to the teachings about God she slipped into the present tense, “God is not loving, God is scornful”. This could indicate how strongly these beliefs still remained with her. She was trying to see God differently in light of what she had been taught and experienced at NIM, but the ingraining from her old pastors was strong.

Although Julie and David’s struggles were not as openly discussed, they also indicated that they were still in the process of change and that were still working on things as well.

Julie: There were things that I learned about David that I didn't know, you know, [ ] and I mean I still think there's stuff you're working through.

David: Oh totally. I'm still, I mean that's the thing, [ ] it's not like you leave there and you're fixed, I mean it's all...it's a process. Yeah sure, 'course there's stuff I'm still working on I'm sure there's stuff you’re still working on.

Julie: yeah.

Again, the language of process emerged. Change takes time, and every couple in different ways pointed to the process and journey of change that was slow and
intentional. It was difficult at times to still be struggling with things, but each couple in this group were clearly committed to persevering even though change continued to take time, even a year after the intensive.

**Work in Process Theme Three: Outside Factors**

In addition to the fact that change takes time, other outside factors impacted the couples making maintaining gains more challenging. These included not having a good model to follow growing up, work challenges that impacted efforts to work on the marriage, and other personalized life stressors that each experienced differently. See Figure 4.6 for graphic depiction.

**No model.** The first subtheme that was discussed by every participant was not having a healthy model growing up. As they tried to create a new healthy marriage experience, the fact that they had no reference point other than what they learned at NIM was challenging for all three couples. Anne and Mitchell discussed this dynamic and how it continued to impact them as they made efforts to do things differently.

Anne: Marriage is completely a mystery to me, I, we've been married for 29 years and if I get it on the day I die it will be a miracle, I, I just, I don't um, know if we really…

Mitchell: Can I try?

Anne: Oh yes.
Mitchell: The reason that it's hard for me too is 'cause we didn't have a model of a marriage,

Anne: Ever.

Mitchell: Neither one of us, so we don't have anything to base it upon, are we getting it or are we not, 'cause we don't know…

Anne: Is this what it is? What it's supposed to be? We just don't know.

Even after the intensive and learning a model that they had assimilated and were trying to implement, Anne and Mitchell were not sure if what they were doing was what it was supposed to be like. Because they had no point of reference at all, it felt like a mystery to them. The significance of this shared experience for them was accentuated by their back-and-forth agreeing and underscoring what the other had said, particularly when Anne added “ever” and Mitchell confirmed “neither of us”. The repetition of “we don’t
know” and the idea of mystery further emphasized the profundity of this experience for them. Maintaining gains was challenging because in reality they were not sure what change was actually supposed to look like.

While Julie and David echo this sentiment directly in their interview, Bill and Sadie reference this challenge more subtly by talking about the dysfunction they grew up under. For Bill, identity came from working. He said,

My family is strange and to have, just very hard people, you know, they're just hard. [ ] They're not warm. They're not. I mean for them it's all about work; work, work, work, work, work, you know, your work ethic is what defines you.

This passage provided a window into how Bill was before the intensive and how this life focus passed down from his family of origin would be a difficult pattern to break. The model he had was of “very hard people”; they were not warm or compassionate. Work was the only focus so relationships were not a priority. The repetition of “work” multiple times served to stress the singular message he received as a child. As further emphasis he finished with saying the work ethic was what defined them. Changing to be more focused on family and relationship was a stark contrast to this childhood model and that made it difficult.

In speaking about her own parents, Sadie admitted her relationship with her mom was never a good one.

Sadie: My mother is now very um, shoo, she used to be a lot like Bill's mom…

Bill: hard.

Sadie: hard, harsh, um, temperamental,
Bill: bitter.
Sadie: bitter and ah, she has changed since her dad died, which has been very difficult for me to see that 180 in her. So she'll say things now that I'm like, who are you? Because this is not, I don't even know what to do with you, you know. Although Sadie’s mother had changed in the last few years, growing up she did not have a model of loving care, forgiveness, or gentleness. Added to the judgmental teaching she received in church, this constant messaging from childhood continued to make it difficult for Sadie to make these radical shifts she saw as possible for the first time at NIM, and desperately longed for in her own life. For Sadie, having no model not only made marital changes difficult, it also continued to make personal changes more challenging as well.

Work. Another outside factor that made things more challenging for all of the couples was work. Each couple talked about this challenge and how it had made things more difficult, although each one had a different experience of the stresses from work. As noted in the last subtheme, for Bill it was the pull to work all the time. He openly admitted that, “I'll be pulled to wanna stay at work for long hours and things like that so yeah, I mean we still have a ways to go yet”. Even though he was aware of the dysfunction he experienced in his family of origin and wanted things to be different for his family, he still struggled with the pull to work more and make that the priority.

For Anne and Mitchell it was the fact that work was changing and meant living apart for large periods of time. Until Mitchell finished out the job he had in a school in
California, he could not move to be with Anne in the new ministry work they would do together in New York. Anne described it this way.

I mean he was there from February to June and I was going back and forth, so I would be here [in New York] for three weeks and then go back there for a week, then be here for three weeks, and that was tough, but [ ] I don't feel like we're in crisis mode anymore, in our marriage. [ ] I think it's like okay we've been through a lot, we've been able to get back to the core of what we learned. When all is said and done if we just go back to that fear cycle and that fear dance and the concepts we learned, we'll be okay.

Having to live and work apart for those months naturally would add stress on a marriage, but in light of their own personal histories, the challenges they had had in their marriage prior to the intensive, and the lack of trust that would be understandable for Anne in light of Mitchell’s emotional affairs, this particular work stress targeted all of those insecurities for her and tested all that she had learned at NIM. She emphatically expressed,

Yeah because here's the deal, three years ago, or two years ago even, to be apart that much, how do you think I would have felt? No way would I have trusted him, but what I have come to is even if something were to happen, even if he were to go, continue and find that person again, and they went off and lived happily ever after, that does not determine my happiness. It could hurt me, but it doesn't determine my happiness and my well—being. I no longer put that responsibility on Mitchell.
Confirming some of the earlier themes about taking personal responsibility, this experience revealed that although being apart expressively tested what they had learned at the intensive and made those months following more difficult in maintaining their gains, when each partner takes personal responsibility for their own happiness and well-being, real relational change is possible.

Julie and David have had challenges with being apart as well; for them, however, this was not a seasonal thing but a life-style. With David’s job regularly requiring travel that took him away for days at a time multiple times in a month, being apart was a stressor that remained something that needed to be worked through. They shared,

David: We don't go on dates. [ ] We don't do a lot of the just fun time. We have fun together, but we're usually with the kids or, you know, we don't really have the one on one time that I think we need to have, or we should have. So that's now the next thing that we need to really work on.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is, how do you make sense of that?

Julie: It's not worse since the intensive. It's the same as it's always been. It, for us, it just really is a schedule [thing …] David's always had a travel job.

Because there was so much less time with David home, this couple found it challenging to divvy up his home time to meet all of the family needs. They recognized alone time would be important for them, but at the time of the interview, they had not yet figured out how to make it work within their limited time constraints. When asked how they made sense of it, they admitted it was not a new stressor, but rather one they simply had not been able to figure out. In another part of the interview they referenced that their parents
did not make time for each other either, so this tied into the theme of having no model noted above.

Interestingly, Julie’s going back to work since the intensive had the opposite effect; it helped her take better care of herself and therefore not put as much demand on David. This is part of the work subtheme but provides a contrast to the idea that work is always an added stressor. In her case, work became something that assisted her in her self-care and helped her to maintain her personal gains coming out of the intensive. She admitted,

It's been funny that it was nice to go back to work. [ ] It’s just so, it's nice to have people see you, and talk to you, and say thank you [chuckles] because when you're at home all day with kids, you know, a lot of times people don't say thank you, or oh that, you did a great job with that, or anything like that, so that was, that was nice. It wasn't, I didn't think it would be. It made me realize I was missing that part 'cause I didn't realize that prior to doing it.

Because Julie had been so disconnected with her own needs, she did not realize her need for affirmation and acknowledgments from others. She seemed surprised that it was so nice to go back to work, and yet at the time of the interview she was able to recognize the significance of that decision as something that contributed to the success of their being able to maintain gains. From a relational perspective her taking on this role and getting these needs met through work, released some of the pressure she had been putting on David to meet all of interpersonal needs. It also helped her with some of the loneliness she expressed related to his being away so much.
**Personalized life stressors.** In addition to having no model and the stresses related to work situations, each couple mentioned other outside pressures that made maintaining gains difficult for them. These, however, were more personal to each couple and included family illness, shifting friendships, in-law issues, relocating residences cross-country, distance from family supports, renovations, and the like. A list of quotes related to these issues and the other themes related to the Maintained group can be found in appendix G.

**Themes of Group 2: Difficulties Group**

Similar to the last section detailing the analysis of the Maintained group, this section details and explicates the findings of the Difficulties group in answer to the two key research questions. In response to the discussions with the participants of this group, three themes and four subthemes were found in answer of the first question, what, if any, gains have been sustained and how, and three themes and nine subthemes were found in answer of the second question, what, if anything, has made it difficult to maintain gains. For the Difficulties group, the themes answering the first question have been grouped under the heading Gains and Positives, while the themes answering the second question have been grouped under the heading Overwhelming Difficulties. See Table 4.3 for a summary.
Table 4.3 Summary of Themes for the Difficulties Group

Group 2 – Difficulties Group  Q: What, if any, gains have been sustained and how?  
A: Theme Set: Gains and Positives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th># Participants Supporting Theme</th>
<th># Couples Supporting Theme</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intensive Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Things that happened at the intensive that they said were helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Package</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>The intensive itself was of high quality for multiple reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful Tools</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NIM tools were helpful even if not being used in the marriages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Responsibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on personal changes needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owning Contributions to the Problem</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The recognition that they personally contributed to the marital issues, regardless of what the other also did</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible for Change</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Taking care of personal well-being and happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Importance of personal faith</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group 2 – Difficulties Group  Q: What, if anything, has made it difficult to maintain gains?  
A: Theme Set: Overwhelming Difficulties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th># Participants Supporting Theme</th>
<th># Couples Supporting Theme</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intensive Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Things at the intensive that made change difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not the Root</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Did not get to the root of the issues, held back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Prevents Focus</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Group worked as a restraint to real vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive Not Enough</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>It is hard to do it on their own coming out of the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gains and Positives Theme One: Intensive Factors

Similar to the Maintained group, the first theme in the Difficulties group was Intensive Factors. In this theme participants described things about the intensive and what they gained from the intensive that they believed were positive and helpful factors in their journeys. Two subthemes were found to bring clarity to this theme. These included Quality Package and Helpful Tools. See Figure 4.6 for graphic depiction.

Quality package. Similar to the participants of the Maintained group, three of the four participants in this group commented on the quality of the NIM package. They noted that the therapists who ran their groups and the environment NIM created in general were helpful and of high quality, even though they were not able to maintain the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change Takes Too Much Time</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Enough Change</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unresolved</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discouraged by Time</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Committed to Persevere</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Therapy Not Helpful</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Model</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
gains they achieved there. Michelle said, “I like their methods, I think they have a good program, I think they have some of the best therapists”. In this she acknowledged in fairly strong language that they were some of the best therapists. At first glance this may appear to simply be a nice sentiment, but when one takes into consideration that Michelle had a counseling history of over 40 sessions (as noted in her pre-intensive survey) with at least five counselors, this comment takes on more weight. In light of the pool of experience she drew from, it was significant that she valued NIM therapists as “some of the best”.

Mackenzie and Aaron also noted how their therapists were impactful for them and their continued journeys. Even though it was difficult at times, the way the therapists created a mix of safety and confrontation was what they needed. Mackenzie shared,
I don't know, I just felt like I really, there was some connection there, just, I was really able to receive things from [the therapist], and [ ] certainly, there were points that he sort of got in my grill about some things, I mean in a loving way, but you know, “no that's your issue”. But I felt [ ] that he still really heard me though, and so for me that was just, it was, it was just huge, it was just huge after years of just feeling not heard, not seen, like Aaron said, “well I got over it, why can't you”. I mean just like, I'm still back in the ashes and nobody's coming back for me. So, yeah, I think for me that was, that was huge at that time.

In this excerpt Mackenzie shared how powerful that experience was for her. She began with talking about how she felt connected, and that in turn allowed her to receive things from her therapist that she had not considered before. She used the metaphor of “got up in my grill”. This denotes the idea of going beyond the surface, really getting into things and calling her out on some things she may not have been willing to admit or accept initially. And yet, even when he did this she shared how it felt loving and as though he truly heard her. There is a skill and art to being able to hold that balance that only comes with quality therapists.

Further, Mackenzie also pointed out the real significance of feeling heard and understood. Earlier in the interview she talked about two other therapists that they had tried who did not really get the significance of her pain relating to Aaron’s pornography years earlier. In contrast, the NIM therapists took the time to go back and find her “in the ashes”. This word picture depicts the remains of a fire that reduced everything to ashes. Mackenzie had been burned in that fire and remained stuck in the rubble of that
devastation and, in her perception, no one had cared enough to return to the site and find her until NIM.

Her point was, regardless of the other dynamics currently in their relationship, quality therapists would hear and understand when there was something else going on, and the NIM therapists did this. In doing so, they created enough safety for Mackenzie to open up and be able to hear things that may also be happening on her side. The way she repeated “that was huge” for her indicated how powerful and vital this actually was for her to be able to begin her own journey out of the ashes towards healing. This was not simply a nice feature of the program, safety was imperative for her.

Similarly, Aaron also shared about how the therapists helping them to see each other freshly enabled him to receive from them. He said,

I guess I felt, I felt the same way toward Mackenzie as well, that maybe she was hearing some things too that I, you know, either don't know how to express or, you know, it's odd, I felt like it was… yeah, I definitely agree with what she said, I mean if [our therapist] spoke things to me, I mean, I know that totally made, you know, that are hard but made sense, but I think it's the same for both of us.

In this passage Aaron seems to have had two trains of thought colliding. Mackenzie had just shared how she felt like Aaron had been able to hear things differently for the first time and this was his response to the question, “Did it feel like that to you Aaron, that you were maybe hearing Mackenzie and her experience freshly, for the first time?” Before answering that question he shared how it was similar for him as well, feeling like he, too, was heard for the first time about things he had a hard time expressing. In this he
did not blame her for not being able to hear him, but rather revealed the skill of the therapists being able to help him articulate things he had difficulty expressing previously. Then, it seemed he was about to elaborate more, but caught himself and redirected back to the question at hand. When hearing the therapists share things, he was able to hear things freshly from Mackenzie; he confirmed it was the same for both of them. As a result of the skill the therapists brought to the sessions, both Aaron and Mackenzie were able to hear one another freshly and understand one another better for the first time.

In addition to the quality of the therapists at NIM, these two couples also mentioned the environment and how all of the other details of the intensive also contributed to the quality experience. Mackenzie detailed how these things contributed to her experience.

I think the other thing [ ] that's so beautiful about there is that they've done such a good job of creating an environment not only that's safe, but that is comfortable. It's beautiful. I mean, 'cause when you're going through that kind of emotional upheaval and pain, and all of that, I mean to be able to emerge out of that room at the end of the day […] and go to] the bedroom that we had. [ ] It was just like this peaceful, it was, I don't know it was just beautiful and so I just, I think that it was a really important part of the experience of just going okay, yeah, I know you've been through the ringer today, and now you can just rest in this beautiful place, and they, you know, they take care of all of your needs.
Here Mackenzie expressed repeatedly how “beautiful” the setting was and how that impacted her time there. In the middle she seemed to stumble over finding another way to describe it and there was some hesitancy in her speech. Likely this had to do with her remembering back and taking a moment to see it again in her memory. In addition, she provided some interpretation to why this beauty and peace was so impactful in her experience. She used the metaphor of being put “through the ringer”, being washed, scrubbed, and rung out. That experience was stretching, painful, and exhausting. But, after all of the upheaval of the counseling sessions, she expressed how they took care of everything and allowed clients to simply rest in a beautiful and peaceful setting. This seemed to be an important part of the experience for her.

Similarly, Michelle noted, “in general they make you feel comfortable, they create a great environment so to come in and let your guards down”. Not only was the environment helpful in creating soothing restoration after a draining session, Michelle pointed to the fact that it also helped to relax clients going into sessions so they could let their guards down and fully engage. Thus, these three participants found the NIM experience was a quality package in all aspects, from the environment they created to the therapists who led the sessions. If anything could assist in couples being able to maintain gains, the environment and therapists fostering the change initially would be part of that assistance. Like the Maintained group, this theme was evidenced throughout in the comments of the Difficulties group as well.
Helpful tools. In addition to the quality package overall, each participant in different ways mentioned the tools they learned at NIM were helpful, even if they were not practicing them in the ways they had hoped at the end of the intensive. The tools, when used, were still expected to make significant differences in the relationships in which they were engaged.

Mackenzie and Aaron, the only couple still together in this group, spoke highly of the tools and the fact that they still have them ready for the time when they would be able to use them in their marriage. Mackenzie put it this way:

We definitely have got some good tools and they are there; they're not going anywhere, but we are just not, we are just not capable right now, I think, of working on the marriage, to the degree that we need to until we again get through some of this individual junk.

In this passage, Mackenzie acknowledged that they had learned good tools, and at some point she hoped to be able to use them with Aaron, but at the time of the interview, she recognized they were not able to do so due to their own individual “junk”. By making this distinction she separated out what was learned and given by NIM from what they individually brought to the situation. The tools, once they could work through the particular issues in their individual lives, would once again become useful.

In her reflective summary she clarified her perspective on how her own junk impacted her ability to work on her marriage. “Until I work through more of my own personal “junk,” which continues to be the lens in which I view so many things, it’s going to be very difficult to effectively work on my marriage.” Here she recognized that her
“junk”, the unresolved issues in her own life and her lack of ability at that time to really actualize her self-care, were the very things that impeded her vision from seeing things in a way that would allow her to effectively use the tools. Unlike the passage in the interview, where she used “we”, recognizing both she and Aaron had personal issues to work out, in this excerpt Mackenzie fully owned that her way of looking at things needed to change. She used the image of a lens she was looking through; if one imagines looking through colored sun glasses and how that color tints everything that is perceived, this is picture she was using for how she looked at her marriage and her husband. Her lens of unsettled pain and hurt tinted her perspective to the point that she was unable to see things the way she knew would be needed to use the valuable tools she had received. It was not the tools, but her own perspective that needed to change.

Similar to Mackenzie, Michelle also noted the tools and teachings of NIM would have been helpful, but explained the problem resided with the couple attending the intensive. At different times she owned responsibility for her and her husband not using the tools. She stated, “They [NIM] try to give you tools to work with what you have, and like I said, that's only as good as the two people that show up.” Later she explained, “Had we used the work talk, [and had] we used the heart talk, I think we could have gotten there... but we never used those styles of communication. Had we done that I think we would have gotten somewhere”. In these excerpts Michelle took full responsibility for things not working in her marriage and separated that from her evaluation of the helpfulness of the tools. She believed had they used them, things would
have been different. Unfortunately, they would only be helpful when practiced and used on a regular basis, and that simply did not happen in her marriage.

Jim also spoke of the positive tools he had gained at NIM, even though they were not enough to save his marriage.

I think figuring out [ ] what that, you know, the fear cycle kind of thing was, what created the fear cycle, and then how that worked out, I think [ ] sort of walking through that a little bit, sort of brought some reality into it a little bit, you know, it kind of helped you see what it really was, and, you know, kind of separate yourself from the emotion of it.

Being able to see how their fear cycle worked provided new insight and empowerment for Jim and his wife. It became more real to him as he understood and saw what had been happening mapped out before him. Even so, the shift from “I” language to “you” language seems to indicate a slight disconnect for Jim in this. While he understood the concepts and the tools theoretically, and they were helpful in making things better to some extent, in his speech, they were not integrated to the point of really owning this learning as something powerful in his life or marriage.

At the same time, in an earlier segment he provided some clarification on how learning about this fear cycle and getting separation from the emotion impacted his interactions with his wife.

I think the best thing about it was that we figured out [ ] how not to get into the World War III fights where things really get vicious and to try to stop the fights before they start escalating, you know. I think, since the intensive we haven't
really had any fights that are too bad, you know, I mean they're fights but they're not… ones that are really intent to destroy the other person.

While this was not enough to save his marriage, Jim noted that the lessons he learned about their fear dance helped them to stop fighting to the highly destructive level that had been their pattern. He used the metaphor of “World War III where things really get vicious”. The portrayal of vicious war-like combat where both sides are intent on destroying their opponents was how Jim had experienced many of his arguments with his wife before the intensive. Seeing this mapped out on paper gave him insight and perspective. Even though they were not able to stop the conflicts altogether, being able to refrain from this intensity of battle had a significant impact on Jim coming out of the intensive. He said, “the best thing about it was…”; this was a needed shift for him, regardless of it being able to save his marriage or not.

**Gains and Positives Theme Two: Personal Responsibility**

Another theme emerged that focused on the participants taking personal responsibility for things in their lives and marriages. While the participants in this group did not seem to internalize these responsibilities to the extent that the Maintained group had, there remained a solid recognition of the need for personal responsibility in different ways. Included in this theme were two subthemes, Owning Contributions to the Problem and taking Responsibility for Change. See Figure 4.7 for graphic depiction.
Owning contributions to the problem. Being able to take personal responsibility for one’s part in a struggling marriage is an important aspect of being able to bring about change. For all of the couples in this group, while it was not necessarily enough to allow them to maintain gains or save their marriages, their own personal contributions were noted as something they recognized, at least to a certain extent. This would be the beginning to being able to make changes in the future. Michelle in particularly was able to articulate how both she and her husband both contributed to the break-down of their marriage. She admitted,

I would say things to emasculate him. He would say things that were degrading to me. He, like, he would always attack my family, you know, he would go there, really, really vulnerable places, so, places that are really hard to heal, and I would emasculate him, you know so, we were equal offenders.
She was not blaming him entirely. Although in her mind he clearly played a significant part in the problem, she was also able to see how she also contributed to the problem. The fact that she detailed some of the things he did and put emphasis through intonation on how hurtful that was, seemed to indicate that while she was not blaming him for everything, she did see his behaviors as perhaps a justification for her own. At the same time, she also acknowledged emasculating him was equally damaging. Interestingly, while the repetition of her confession may emphasize this acknowledgement, her tone was flat, indicating being matter of fact rather than remorse. She may have become so disheartened and numb to her feelings that it was difficult for her to recognize her own contributions to the problems in her marriage.

In another passage she also recognized how her words likely defeated him as well and took responsibility for the reality of how he felt. “I think he got defeated, and felt just like, you know, he would never measure up no matter what he did, and I think he may be right, yeah, I mean, that just, unfortunately that's the truth.” Even if her husband had tried and made great efforts, at the point of the interview, Michelle had come to the point of agreeing that likely nothing he did would be enough. Because of her high expectations, the responsibility of things not working out was equally upon her shoulders.

Aaron also shared his perspective on why things were not getting better in his marriage. Like Mackenzie, noted above, he recognized that it was his own unresolved pain and history that prevented him from being able to work on his marriage. He shared,

Aaron: I think there's a lot of, there's baggage and hurt and unresolved... things and shame and... um... you know, I just... yeah, I mean that, that would be... a lot
of it I guess for me, you gotta just, I don't know I mean... I think sometimes I have a hard enough time loving myself let along loving somebody else and...

Interviewer: So the heart issue for you isn't so much about Mackenzie as it is about you, and you have a hard time?

Aaron: and that's why I said, it's like, you know I guess in one way, yeah, I could rid both of us and we could move on, find somebody else, do something else with somebody, but I know for a fact, it wouldn't be any different for me, I'd be the same person I am. It has nothing to do with her. It really doesn't. She didn't do anything to me, so, it's not, I mean yeah, this hurts and there's history, and there's things that have happened, and things have been said and what not, but my heart and how I feel about myself, and that it's not her. It's not her doing. That's mine so, and that's what I have to deal with, so I think you know, for me, you know, a lot of this stuff right now, it just goes back to just so much of the baggage and history.

In this extended excerpt it is clear that Aaron was not blaming his wife for the poor state of their marriage. He took full responsibility for the things he had done and not done. He also explained how he made sense of why that was. He recognized, even if they were to separate, he would bring the same issues and hurts into another relationship. He identified the core issues within himself and his inability thus far to be able to love himself, let alone anyone else. However, the dejected tone of this excerpt indicated a lack of balance in recognizing there likely were also things his wife had done as well. Here he not only took full responsibility for his own contributions to the problem, he also
seemed to accept full responsibility for all the problems in the marriage; though that was not necessarily accurate. When Aaron stated, “It has nothing to do with her. It really doesn’t. She didn’t do anything to me”, he took on more responsibility than could actually be the case.

Further, as he spoke of this pain, his speech became hesitant with many starts and stops. This served to emphasize how painful and difficult it was for Aaron to talk about and admit the state he was in with himself. Sounding defeated, he admitted he had a hard time loving himself and that was what made it so difficult to love his wife in the ways she longed for. It was not that she was not worthy of this love, but rather he was unaware of his own worthiness to be able to offer such love. Similar to Mackenzie, this was the lens he was looking through, and until that heart issue, as they called it, could be resolved within himself, it would remain difficult for him to work on his marriage and loving his wife.

While Jim was not as clear in owning his contributions as the others, his repeated use of “we” language as he spoke of their damaging fights, indicated some responsibility for his participation. His description of how the arguments played out, indicated that Jim owned his contribution by his use of sharp words, like knives, and pushing his wife’s buttons. While the use of “we” also placed responsibility on his wife, he did not deny his damaging behavior as well.

**Responsible for change.** As with the group of couples in the Maintained group, each of these participants in the Difficulties group noted taking personal responsibility for
their own self-care as something that they had learned from their NIM experiences. While this did not necessarily translate into change in the marriage, each recognized they needed to change how they were getting their own needs met from trying to have their spouses meet them, to taking that responsibility upon themselves. For Aaron this meant recognizing the self-care aspect of what he had learned and trying to put those things into practice personally. He shared,

Some of the things I learned there, even though I’m not always consistently doing those things, I know the tools, and so even just the other day when I was starting, you know, I was like, you know, I kind of went into my little bit of self-care stuff, trying to figure out what’s going on, asking myself questions, just kind of going through the process.

Though he had not been using the tools often with his wife and here he noted he was not consistent with using them himself, this excerpt revealed that Aaron was still making efforts to process things using the intrapsychic skills he had learned at the intensive. Taking responsibility for change in Aaron’s marriage meant little-by-little practicing the tools he learned about interacting with himself and his pain in order to heal some of the hurts from the past and separate his wife from those triggers. The hesitancy in how he described his efforts could relate to his acknowledgement that he was not yet doing this as much as he would have liked at that point. Even so, he was able to articulate parts of the process and what he had learned to do for self-care. The hesitancy could also be a representation of the underlying self-criticism that came out throughout the interview as
well, thus, in this case revealing that he has a hard time giving himself credit for the efforts he is making, regardless of how small.

Mackenzie admitted, while she embraced the concept of taking responsibility for her self-care, she struggled putting into practice.

God definitely, I feel like that’s when He began to begin to help me to see “yeah, we, we got work with you sister that, [audibly breaths out] that we gotta do here and this is not all him” and not, not that I consciously thought that it was him but I was very, very… I was so wounded and for the longest time really felt like I can’t move forward until he does whatever, you know, and, and it was at NIM that, especially [one therapist], you know, really spoke to this to say “really, you’re going to give him that much control and that much power of you, really? No, that, that’s not, that’s not healthy, that’s not what that should look like, you have to be responsible for you, you are, and again, your own self-care and what you have to do regardless of what he does, and confronting me even when we were [there] in November, you know, he just said, um, really, you're gonna trust this guy like, just, like in the sense of to put all your eggs in that basket?

This idea of self-care being her responsibility was new to her and remained a challenge even at the point of the interview. However, hearing it repeatedly from her therapist it took on significance that resonated for her deeply. This was evidenced by her interpreting the message as not only coming from her therapist but also from God. She audibly breathed out at that point, perhaps feeling the magnitude of what this would and had meant to her.
By the time of the interview she had been focusing on her own self-care specifically for a number of months and still did not feel like she had really grasped it. Her therapist had pointed out, both at the intensive and later when they returned to NIM for a conjoint intensive, that she was giving Aaron too much power. While she could recognize this theoretically, the struggle to take back that power remained very real for her.

This battle between realization and struggle to actualize this learning may be evidenced in the changing tense of her discourse as well. Recalling the time at the intensive she shifted from the present tense of realization in the moment back to past tense in describing what prevented her from seeing things this way before. That shift may indicate a loosening of the old wounds as she had begun to take power back. However, the shift back to present tense in “I can’t move forward” may reveal that this was still a very real struggle for her at the time of the interview. This present tense continued as she spoke of giving control to her husband, and in recalling the counsel of one of her therapists at NIM. Again, this could be indicative that this was real and meaningful to her at that time as well. Nonetheless, having taken a number of months to actively focus on this, she revealed how significant and powerful that teaching was for her and how she remained committed to bringing it to fruition in her life.

Michelle also shared how this was the most impactful part of her intensive experience, and while it did not lead her to reconciliation in her marriage, it had given her new strength and motivation to take ownership of her self-care and do what she needed to do to actualize it. She shared,
It made me realize that I [ ] had to take ownership and I had to be proactive about taking care of myself in, in creating a safe place, and a safe place for me meant a place where I could go and find refuge, so that I could try to re-energize to try to save our marriage, I realized I couldn’t save it in a house with him because it was depleting me to the point where I, I couldn’t fight for it.

With the regular arguing still going on after the intensive Michelle felt she could not take care of herself and still live with her husband. Although she did not have a lot of hope going in, coming out she was not ready to end it without every effort, however, in recognizing her need for self-care, she realized emotional safety for her was not simply a state of mind, but a matter of getting physical space from her husband to reenergize.

Later in the interview she claimed, “The most helpful part for me, I don’t know as a couple, but for me I think it was [the therapist] telling me to create a safe place for me”.

As evidenced in the larger passage, creating a safe place was initially with the intent of being able to find a way back to her marriage. However, after things did not seem to get any better with her husband, that safe place became a new way of living without him. In the interview she did not seem to hold any bitterness towards her husband; instead her demeanor seemed to indicate more a resolution to the fact that they were not compatible. As a result, self-care had turned into a commitment for her to be true to herself and to become happy again for her children. “You want to do it for the kids but kids, the kids need a happy mom, a mom who can you know be joyful so I just had to choose the lesser of two evils.”
As Jim faced being alone again, he also turned to the teaching about taking personal responsibility for his self-care as a resource to get him through. He admitted, I was maybe relying too much on her to be happy um, and I think, you know the stuff about self-care, just, well, you know, maybe this thing’s going to fall apart, you know, you need to rely on God, alone, to, to sustain you, and you know, maybe you don’t get anything from her.

For him self-care meant releasing his wife from making him happy and fulfilling his needs. This was an important realization for him as he transitioned to being alone and having to find other things that made him happy. Turning to God as a resource seemed to be a good idea, but as with an earlier excerpt from Jim, his language shifted from “I” language in owning that he had put too much responsibility for his happiness on his wife, to almost talking to himself about needing to rely on God alone to sustain him. The way he shifted to “you” language at that point may indicate again that this was still a work in process for him and not something he has been able to fully integrate at the point of the interview. This was further evidenced in his continued thought that it was difficult to make this shift to relying on God when He is not physically present with him.

In addition, unlike the other participants who seemed to see self-care as something intrinsic to them, Jim seemed to indicate more extrinsic motivation based on his marriage “falling apart” and his wife no longer meeting his needs. Therefore, while he was certainly moving in the direction of taking responsibility for his own self-care, his reasons seemed to relate to her not being available to do this for him anymore, compared
with Mackenzie’s growing realization that it would never be her husband’s responsibility to do this for her.

Being responsible for change, even if it only focused on the self-care side of things was a clear theme that was mentioned by everyone in this group. The reasons for taking personal responsibility for self-care were different, and some seemed to only be embracing it out of necessity because their spouses were not, but the reference to NIM’s teaching and how this became something they referred back to indicated the significance of that teaching for each of these participants.

**Gains and Positives Theme Three: Faith**

Faith was also noted by all of the participants in this group in overt and subtle ways. See Figure 4.8 for graphic depiction. Their faith was apparent and seemingly an important aspect and resource to each of them, although some of them also struggled with it during their time of marital struggles. In the above passage Jim noted his faith and knowing he needed to rely on God alone to sustain him now that things were not working out with his wife. However, immediately after stating this reliance on his faith, he confessed the reality of how that was also a very real challenge for him at the time.

I think um, you know, that’s where I’ve tried to kind of keep… my relationship with God but… it’s hard to ‘cause you, you know, you’re human and… you want, you want someone, you know, that’s there, wants to sit on the couch, watch a movie, you know, snuggle.
Knowing that personal responsibility for one’s self-care and one’s faith was important, Jim was honest in sharing his struggle with both things. On some levels he seemed to still want his wife to meet those needs because she was there, human, someone he could be with. Because of his faith he knew that relying on God instead of her would be the answer, but in reality making this real in his life continued to be very difficult.

Similarly, Mackenzie noted how her faith had been a real resource and yet was still a struggle when it came to full surrender. She shared,

It’s been a life-long thing for me too, that I’ve been running and just you know afraid so much of my life and so, that’s been huge for me just being truthful with myself to be able to accept that and to recognize, yeah, I really was expecting um, you know, Aaron to be things that really only Jesus can be.

Later she admitted,

[Jesus] can come in really powerful ways, and I think for, I, you know, like a lot of us, that’s obviously the difficult part is that surrender part, that’s the scary part
um, especially for me, I am just thinking of my journey of just, I have done this
dance all my life where I give it to Him, I take it back, I give it to Him, I take it
back, like just my fear that does that.

In the first passage she confessed wanting Aaron to provide for her needs the way only
Jesus could. Even recognizing that fact she said was huge for her. And yet, similar to
Jim, recognizing what needed to happen and doing it were different things. In the second
excerpt she confessed she was not fully surrendered yet because her own fears held her
back. It appeared that although she wanted God to be her self-care, she was not fully able
to let Him be that if Aaron did not bring some reconciliation as well. Once again,
knowing that surrendering to their faith would help them was important to these
participants, even if they had not yet been able to make that happen.

While Aaron did not speak directly about his faith, he agreed with Mackenzie’s
description of his journey with God in this season. She described Aaron’s faith journey
this way,

He also talked about the fact that, [ ] that Jesus is kind of showing him some
things about the way he hides and some shame issues and so I, I guess, to me,
those are some pretty significant things.

Mackenzie referenced conversations she has had with her husband in which he talked
about how he felt God was revealing things to him about himself. Earlier in the interview
Aaron had said, “Jesus [has] gotta come in and do some things to us”. These comments
indicated that faith was an important part of Aaron’s healing journey as well. He was not
simply relying on what he could do, but was trusting that God was active in his life and could make a difference in changing his marriage as well.

In his reflective summary he confessed, “I am broken, tired, hopeless and very, very lonely. It sucks right now, but I have a faint pulse that maybe God can bring this dead marriage back to life”. While it remained very difficult for Aaron to put into practice the things he had learned at NIM, these excerpts revealed that he still had his faith and was trusting that as long as he continued to foster that, there would still be a faint hope for things to be different in his marriage one day. Pulse is evidence of life, and as long as there is even the slightest pulse, life is still present. For Aaron, this slight pulse referred to the life of his marriage; he believed it was not dead and neither was his hope for change, though it may have been only faint and barely hanging on. At the time of the interview he could not see how it would be restored, but his faith in God was the one thing he clung to keep his hope alive.

Although Michelle did not speak overtly about how her faith related to this journey during the interview, she indicated in her pre-intensive survey that faith was very important to her, and she alluded to it in her interview in a few places. In describing what went wrong in her marriage she confessed, “I think just the dynamics of the marriage not being in line with ah, what we both believed Biblically, just took a toll on each of us and it started to really kill his spirit”. Later she noted,

I thought in separation I would be able to um, get to a place where I could, you know, be spiritually grounded again, and just get some peace if I could you know,
fight for, fight for my marriage from a place of abundance versus a place of just complete, you know depletion.

These passages referenced her faith indirectly, but revealed that it was an important part of how she viewed her life and her self-care. Being spiritually grounded, she hoped, would allow her to return to her marriage from a place of abundance to fight for her marriage. She recognized how she had been approaching things had only led to complete depletion and sought God to renew her abundance.

Therefore, while faith did not necessarily come out overtly in reference to assisting in restoring their marriages, each participant in different ways expressed a reliance, or at least a desire for reliance on God to help them through. He was seen as an available resource to them, as long as they were able to surrender to Him and find a way to allow Him to sustain them. This was not easy for these participants though, and they spoke of how they were taking responsibility to work on this area in their lives.

**Overwhelming Difficulties Theme One: Intensive Factors**

While all couples in this group admitted there were some good take-aways from NIM and at least two of the three couples represented spoke highly of the program and the willingness to return, overwhelming difficulties had made it challenging or even impossible to reconcile their marriages at the time of the interview. The next three themes focus on what emerged from the interviews regarding factors that made maintaining gains so challenging for this group.
Unlike the Maintained group who had very little negative to say about the intensive itself, this group found a few things that they said may have been part of the reason they had not been able to effectively put what they learned at NIM into practice. This first theme, Intensive Factors is broken out into two subthemes, Not the Root and Group Prevents Focus. See Figure 4.9 for graphic depiction. These two subthemes capture some of the explanations given by the participants in this group.

**Not the root.** The two individual interviewees clearly noted that one of the big issues making things difficult for them to actualize the changes they began at NIM related to not being able to fully get to the root of their issues at the intensive. In addition, although the other couple in this group was able to share the main relational issues they were struggling with, they too were not able to achieve any significant healing or resolution while they were at the intensive, perhaps due to not really getting to the root of personal issues. Thus, not getting to the root seemed to be an important factor in not being able to actualize the perceived gains that were achieved at NIM.

In discussing what it was like to share deeply with the group, Jim indicated that it was not easy, and in a lot of ways they did not fully do it. He admitted,

[We shared] some but maybe not everything, um, I mean I think, [ ] the issue of, um, affection in our relationship… um, you know, we never dealt with that, you know, while we were there… um, I mean that was something that was important to me but, it wasn't really something you can talk about in a group.

This topic of lack of affection was one that came up other times in the interview as
something that was a core re-occurring issue for Jim in his failing marriage, and yet, when at the intensive, it was not something either of them felt comfortable sharing with the group. Jim’s hesitant speech in this section may further reveal how uncomfortable he was in talking about this topic in detail. On the other hand, the discomfort in the interview may have also come from admitting that while this was an important topic for him, he did not pursue talking about it enough at the intensive. Though it may have been noted, without getting to the root of the key issues couples were struggling with, it would be difficult to really bring about sustaining change once they arrived home.

Further, at another point in the interview Jim noted that they did not talk about other things that were main issues for their relationship. Instead, when asked what they had discussed, he said,
In this excerpt Jim elaborated on what they discussed and how it was predominantly
general or preliminary stuff from his perspective. The intensive did not bring them to the
core of what they were dealing with. Learning about the fear cycle was helpful he had
said, but when it came down to being enough to sustain gains, keeping at the surface of
their issues did not allow for significant enough shifts in the issues that he found to be
most germane in his marriage. Without these changes, the other changes were not
sustainable either.

Michelle also noted that although she and her husband enjoyed their time at NIM
and she tried to be as transparent as she could, she did not believe they really got to the
root of the issues as they related to her husband’s sharing. She reflected,

I don't really think the intensive got to the root of our problem, um, I think we
were kind of superficial and not, I think I was transparent, I don't think that he, I
think he was as transparent, like I said in my summary, as much as he knows how
to be.

Michelle used the word picture of “root of the problem”. This phase represents the deep
underlying parts or cause of an issue; what would be most germane to understand what is
on the surface. By contrast, she claimed they stayed superficial, on the surface. Later,
she said “as long as we were dealing with surface things we were fine”. This seemed to
be a theme in her marriage, particularly on her husband’s side from her perspective. In fact, this very issue was one of the big problems Michelle experienced in her relationship. She wanted to go deeper and felt there were times when it was required, but he wouldn’t or couldn’t.

In the excerpt above she seemed to shift in her direction of thought a couple of times on this. First she said we were superficial but then clarified, it was mainly her husband who was not being transparent. Then, almost as though not wanting to speak negatively of him, she clarified further that he may have thought he was, but she did not believe he was actually as transparent as would have needed to be.

For the third couple in this group, the intensive seemed to be the first place they were able to get to the root issues in their relationship and actually feel heard. It is possible this was one of the factors holding this couple together, while the other two couples were separated and either contemplating or proceeding with divorce. Even so, Aaron openly admitted that personally he had not yet gotten to the root of his issues that held him back from really working on the marriage. He confessed,

I've always been just kind of running from one thing to the next to try and, you know, satisfy and fill me up and whatever, you know. It's, and that's the thing I just worry about myself, and just even about, you know, whether it's pornography or something else, I mean pornography is not the issue, that's a symptom of something else so um, so even though you stop, it's like, you know, that doesn't automatically make you intimate, you know, just because you stop doing pornography and, you know, now I'm just an intimate guy and can share and, and

190
be emotional and all that other stuff, I mean, it just, I don’t know, so I hide a lot, you know, that’s what I do, what I've done.

At the intensive Aaron’s past pornography use was addressed as it related to Mackenzie’s pain and feeling left back in time. However, this excerpt revealed that Aaron’s root issues related to the pornography were not addressed. He was aware that it in itself was not this issue; it was only a symptom. The real issue for him had not been addressed, and as a result he continued to hide. Pornography was one means of running, hiding, avoiding, or medicating. There were other things as well but what he was hiding from and the hole he was trying to fill with these things remained untouched. For him to be able to use the tools he gained at NIM, the root of this issue needed to be dealt with.

**Group prevents focus.** Group dynamics have been noted by most of the couples as an initial barrier or challenge they faced going to the NIM intensive. The couples in the Maintained group, and even the couple still together in this group, were able to overcome this discomfort. Interestingly, though, each of the couples in this group noted the group dynamics as both positive and negative in their healing process, and the negatives seemed to outweigh the positives for the Difficulties group. Jim began with a slightly positive affirmation of the group dynamics, but quickly noted for his marriage it may have been better to have gone to a conjoint intensive instead.

I think, some of the, you know, some of the group interaction… I mean, I think it's good to… see that other couples are in trouble but, you know, I think in hindsight, we would have been better off maybe not going in group.
Although Jim recognized the group dynamic could be normalizing, he confessed it may not have been the best choice in their case. This related to not feeling comfortable with discussing some of their core issues in a group setting. After being asked what the most difficult part of the intensive was for him, he went on to explain, “Maybe being open in front of other people, I think that was a little bit uneasy, you know, here we’re strangers and, you know, you're kind of supposed to bear everything in front of other people”. This uneasiness never did subside for Jim, and as a result, he did not end up sharing the things that were most important for him at the intensive.

Michelle also believed the group format may have impeded her husband from being transparent and vulnerable. She noted, had they attended a conjoint intensive instead of group, the therapist may have been able to call him out on things that the group therapists could not have noticed in the group setting. She said,

My husband was only as transparent as he knows how to be. I honestly, think we would have benefited more from the one on one intensive. I don’t think the therapists had enough [time] to study him one on one and call him on his bluff. Similar to her comments in the earlier theme, Michelle did not believe her husband was being as transparent as he needed to be. In a later passage she described this way:

He's a people pleaser and he's very um, I wouldn't say ostentatious but very um, you know, he knows how to play the role for lack of a better word, I mean you know, yeah, he seemed to be all in at the intensive.

In light of this people pleasing tendency that she saw in him, she concluded that conjoint therapy would have been more effective; she argued, a conjoint therapist’s attention
would not be divided, thus allowing him or her to call her husband’s “bluff” and actually reach real transparency. Further, if her husband had tendencies to behave in a way he thought others were expecting and wanting him to behave, as Michelle suggested, group could have very easily posed a large barrier to true authenticity and vulnerability for him.

Even the couple that were able to get to the root of their issues noted that group made it harder to really focus on their specific issues. While it was not about avoiding being authentic or vulnerable for them, Mackenzie and Aaron knew even at the end of the intensive that they would be returning for more. Mackenzie shared,

I felt like as good and productive as the intensive was, I remember when we left there, I remember saying to Aaron, [ ] I really feel like we're going to need to come back here.

In a later passage she explained her reasoning behind knowing they needed to return as recognizing the group dynamics prevented them from really applying the skills and tools personally to their own situation. She said the reason was,

to be able to, again, kind of hone some of the tools again that we learned, to say, okay what would that look like in your specific situation, 'cause we didn't get to do as much of that understandably, in the, the 4 day with 5 other couples.

Here this theme came out again. The group intensive format was good and helpful in many ways, but it also had the weakness of not being able to get as focused on each individual couples’ issues as the participants in the Difficulties group would have liked.
**Intensive not enough.** Like the couples in the Maintained group, couples in the Difficulties group also all expressed in different ways that the intensive simply was not enough to equip them to be able to maintain the gains they achieved at their intensives. For Mackenzie and Aaron this simply meant they would seek out more help from NIM and return for another session. Initially this took the form of paying for additional coaching sessions but after approximately six of these, they knew it was time to return for a conjoint intensive. Mackenzie explained what it was like for her to leave knowing the intensive was not enough.

I mean we definitely peeled back a little bit of layers but there was a whole lot of stuff, you know still under there that obviously, that was very much ours and that we were still gonna have to still deal with and the thought of trying to do that on our own, for me was just still very scary and overwhelming, and so I just, you know I knew, you know, in my head, I, I didn't know when, but I just knew. I mean Aaron had initially said I think 6 months and I remember saying, no, no I don't want to wait that long.

Having not been able to make as much progress as they needed, the prospect of having to do the rest on their own scared Mackenzie. She recognized leaving that there was much more to do, and though layers had been peeled back, there were still many more to go. This image is that of an onion with many layers wrapped around one another. The process had begun but they were not yet at a point of being able to continue the process on their own. Her use of the word “still” as it related to very scary and overwhelming could further indicate that though they had been working on things on
their own since their conjoint intensive, that process remained difficult and possibly scary and overwhelming at times even a year later. However, for this couple, they had found something they believed in, and they were continuing to trust the counsel they had received at NIM, even if it had not been enough.

While Michelle did not express the same reasons, she noted that she asked for a referral because she, too, knew they were not finished when the intensive was over. She said,

I think that [our therapist] probably saw that and should have recommended that we do some more, or do some individual therapy and couples therapy. Now, I did get a referral from [our other therapist…] She did give me a referral to a therapist here and we did go and see that therapist, and I told you that therapist told me, you know, if you stay in this marriage you are going to have to give up all of your hopes and dreams.

Recognizing they needed more work and that her husband probably was not being as transparent as he needed to be, Michelle would have preferred a more proactive approach from the NIM therapists recommending more therapy for them. Nonetheless, she took the initiative and asked for a referral to a therapist in her area. Unfortunately, the therapist they saw was not able to continue the work that was begun at NIM and instead let Michelle know she had to give up on the things that were so important to her. These may have been hopes and dreams that her husband could be someone that he was not. For Michelle to stay in the marriage, this request was too much for her.
Similarly, Jim quite strongly expressed that the intensive was not enough; not that it was a negative experience, but that it simply did not do enough or provide enough follow-up care to allow the intensive to be effective in his marriage after they left.

It's not been enough, and you know, it, it might have been a good start, I think if there was something afterwards, you know, to build on, it's probably… a good thing where, if you're kind of at rock bottom and you need to sort of get things straightened out to where you can start fixing things, um, but you know, it's just not enough to, to go and then say okay, everything's fine, you know. So, it's kind of the ER room but then you have to go home and you know, if you really don't have any follow up care afterwards, yeah, it's just really hard, so, especially if things were bad, you know, it's just, things aren't going to change, habits aren't going to change, people need reminders and correction and you know, whatever, going down the road.

In this passage he noted it could have been a good start if there had been something more afterwards, but as it was, it wasn't enough for them. Had there been more specific follow-up care where they continued to work through things then this may have been helpful. However, the two follow-up calls that he believed did not allow them to get into anything new or in depth, were not helpful or enough to keep any momentum they had achieved at the intensive.

Jim used the metaphor of an emergency room in describing the intensive. This was where surgeries happen, but if patients did not take care and continue with physiotherapy after a surgery, they could re-injure themselves and find themselves in the
same position or worse than they were before the surgery. In Jim’s case, this was what it felt like had happened. It was a beginning but without proper follow-up care and continued support, the intensive was not enough to be helpful in the long term. This was emphasized with his repeated list of things that “aren’t going to change”. The present tense of these phrases further highlighted how he interpreted the lack of impact the intensive really had. It simply was not enough, and things were not going to change.

**Overwhelming Difficulties Theme Two: Change Takes Too Much Time**

In addition to the Intensive Factors that made it difficult for couples in the Difficulties group to maintain gains, the fact that Change Takes Too Much Time in their estimation also contributed significantly to not being able to actualize their early gains. Unlike the Maintained group who also experienced the reality that change takes time, the participants of the Difficulties group found the amount of time it took to bring about their desired changes was disheartening, and for some, was simply too much for them to endure. This theme is broken down into four subthemes that capture this feeling of Change Takes Too Much Time. These include Not Enough Change, Unresolved, Discouraged by Time, and Not Committed to Persevere. See Figure 4.10 for a graphic depiction.

**Not enough change.** A big part of this feeling that change takes too much time came down to participants being discouraged by how little change was actually happening. For the couple still together, the discouragement was from both of their lack
of change, whereas for the two separated couples, it was more the lack of effort being made by the other partners that made things difficult. Jim expressed it this way:

I guess over time I just got discouraged 'cause nothing was ever enough, you know, and there just, there wasn't any compromise, it was just, you know, the bar is up here and until you reach it and you stay there for six months, I'm not buying into it, you know, I'm not going to trust you.

This passage identified both Jim’s impatience with the lack of change, but also his wife’s requirement that she see his change enduring over long periods of time before she would be willing to put her own efforts in. In this case, both were looking for the other to show evidence that they were willing to make changes that lasted, regardless of their own
efforts. When the other did not meet these expectations, it was difficult for Jim to continue in his efforts and for his wife to be willing to contribute her efforts. Further, Jim’s wife’s expectations seemed to him to be too high and difficult for him to meet and sustain without any encouragement from her. He used the image of a high-jump bar that he had to constantly reach. Until he was able to consistently meet these high expectations she said she would not trust him. For him, that expectation was simply too much. He became discouraged and stopped trying. Unfortunately, that would have only added to the lack of trust his wife already experienced.

At the same time, Jim felt that it was unfair that he should have to do all of the changing while she sat back and waited.

It just would never occur to her that God might change her heart or her attitude… to make it work, “no I'm who I am and I'm not going to change and if you're not going to change to become who I want then, what's the point.”

Whether she had actually said these things or this was simply how Jim experienced his wife’s reactions, his interpretation was clear to him; she was not willing to make any changes. From Jim’s perspective, that was not going to work. There were things she needed to do also, and as long as she refused, there was little hope for their marriage going forward.

Michelle had a similar experience with her husband in that he too did not show her any evidence of the personal change she needed to see in order to have hope for her marriage. She lamented, “It takes two, I would say let's sit down and have a heart talk or let's look at the book, um, ‘I don't have time tonight, can we do that tomorrow night’, you
know, it's always, it's always tomorrow.” Michelle felt alone in her efforts and although she would initiate and try to practice the things she had learned at NIM, he always seemed to want to put it off. The repetition of “it’s always” served to punctuate her exasperation with her husband’s proclivity to procrastinate. Though he would go and seem to make efforts in counseling, once the responsibility was his to execute, Michelle simply did not see any effort on his part; in fact, she experienced resistance.

While Mackenzie and Aaron’s story was different and they were not experiencing the overt resistance of the other to change, they were both frustrated and disillusioned with the lack of change in spite of the efforts they were making. Aaron shared his frustration with the lack of change by saying they had wasted the opportunity they had been given by going to NIM. “I wouldn't say it was wasted but we didn't really, we haven't really taken full advantage of what we, of what happened down there, that's for sure, I haven't.” He later clarified saying,

I guess what I am saying is that we wasted the opportunity right now, so I'm not saying that what we did was a waste of time, I'm just saying right now where we're at, what we're doing it feels to me like, at least I have, I feel like I have wasted the opportunity [ ] I mean 'cause I [ ] feel like NIM was one of the best things I've ever done quite frankly, it was very, very powerful. It was, and I just, I would just recommend it, and we have to other couples, you know, our journey isn't ah, you know, our journey isn't a kind of a reflection on them it's a reflection on me, reflection on Mackenzie, a reflection on us.
The frustrating thing for Aaron was that they had this great opportunity to really allow what they had learned at NIM to bring about profound change and yet, for whatever reasons, they were not doing that. In these passages he focused on them as a couple initially but when it came to not taking advantage of the opportunity he admitted, he knew he had not. The experience was not a waste; it was the fact that he had not allowed that opportunity to make a significant difference that felt like a waste. In the end, he brought it back to Mackenzie and the marriage again. It was not only Aaron who had not capitalized on this opportunity, “it is a reflection on [Aaron], a reflection on Mackenzie, a reflection on [both of them]”.

Mackenzie also took ownership for her own unfinished personal changes that seemed to be keeping them stuck relationally. She confessed,

I know that there are just, that there is this lens of stuff that I still look through and I just, I can't seem to get around that, and that's my deal, it's my area where I need healing, where I need Jesus to come into that and so I just, I feel like NIM was kind of the beginning of all of that and, [ ] I think that's the biggest thing and reason that this just hasn't gotten back on the track is because [ ] I just think there's still some pretty big pieces, you know, of healing that, [ ] that have to happen or we, we are just, clearly, still very stuck in some of these same patterns of behaviors and that, and based on our woundedness.

Like Aaron, Mackenzie owned that there were things that were still holding her back from being able to change. Her lens and the way she still looked at things created problems for her being able to move forward. Not enough change had happened for her
in this area. She said she couldn’t seem to get around it. NIM was the beginning, but not enough had changed to allow her to get things back on track. This metaphor of a derailed train was a common one for this couple. When this happens a train cannot keep moving, it needs to be put back on the track to function again. Mackenzie saw her inability to change the way she looked at things as a big part of why their marriage train was not able to get back on the track. In the end, she also changed her language from “I” to “we”, recognizing that there had not been enough change in Aaron as well. They both had a lot more to do and that made it difficult.

Unresolved. Another evidence of Change Takes Too Much Time is the way each couple talked about things not being resolved or never being able to be resolved. Though the expression was different for each person, the experience of things being unresolved was clear in each case. For Mackenzie and Aaron who were still working on their marriage, the fact that things were still so unresolved remained painful, but neither of them seemed able to change it. In discussing the lack of reconciliation she felt in her marriage, Mackenzie expressed the pain that remained fresh in her experience.

It's not my responsibility to keep coming to his yard to say you need to fix this, you need to fix this, I mean, it's his responsibility and vice versa if I do something and so, like for me, I, part of my wounding is just feeling like that again, that is part of the reconciliation piece that I just feel like has never happened, since all of the, everything came out about the pornography, all of that, like the rebuilding
that needs to happen as a result of that damage that was done, just really to a greater degree, just has not happened.

Although Mackenzie could recognize her own responsibility in some areas, this one remained painful due to the fact that she was not experiencing Aaron making efforts to reconcile after the hurt he inflicted on her. She seemed to still be struggling to heal her pain as long as Aaron was not trying to reconcile this historic wound. She said it is not her responsibility to *keep* coming into his yard like she had been doing in the past. The repetition of her phrase “you need to fix this” emphasized the repeated nature of her previous efforts and her frustration with him for not taking this responsibility on himself. Again, this reiterated her inability to take personal responsibility for her healing in this area.

There was also a sense of helplessness to this excerpt. Although Mackenzie admitted, “it is not my responsibility”, the fact that Aaron had not taken the responsibility on himself continued to pain her and keep her stuck, because there was nothing she could do to bring about this reconciliation. Because she still believed this needed to happen for her to be able to move forward, some of her power remained in Aaron’s hands and not in her own. Wounding is a strong word that Mackenzie repeatedly used throughout the interview to describe her state. When she used it in the above passage, it was in the present tense. Thus, she experienced current and ongoing wounding as a result of this reconciliation piece having never happened. Consequently, until it did happen, it was possible that her wounding from this lack of reconciliation would continue. At the time
of the interview, Mackenzie had not yet been able to take that piece back, in order to prevent further wounding related to this unresolved aspect of their relationship.

At the same time, Aaron also recognized he was not doing what he needed to do to reconcile with Mackenzie. He admitted, “I don’t think I’ve done a great job of really kind of rebuilding, you know, rebuilding bridges across, kind of like I’m, I’m over it so she should be over it, which is stupid, I know.” He used the image of a chasm needing a bridge to be rebuilt to span the distance, and yet he recognized he was ambivalent to do that rebuilding. On some levels he simply wanted the separation to resolve itself by having Mackenzie “over it”. He recognized that did not make sense but the language he used could provide a clue into the reason why he had not been able to bring about this reconciliation. He said, “it is stupid”. This is a strong word in comparison to something like foolish or ineffective perhaps, which he could have chosen. His choice of this word revealed the negativity he held towards himself. In fact, this negativity was confirmed later when he spoke about having “a hard enough time loving myself let along loving somebody else”. He went on to say,

Buttons get pushed on certain things or [I] even get a look or a sigh, or you know, whatever it is, it just kind of comes flying back to she doesn't care, I'm useless, I'm worthless, I'm the most, I'm the biggest problem in this marriage, if it wasn't for me everything would be so much better and, you know, blah, blah, blah, the whole, the whole thing that I've done for, for many years, even before I was married.
Instead of being able to rebuild bridges with Mackenzie, Aaron was stuck in his own unresolved feelings of unworthiness, which led him to inactivity. Though he may have wanted to bring about change, even the slightest reaction from Mackenzie would send him spiraling into self-deprecation that sucked all motivation from him and left him in despair. It was not that Mackenzie was not worth his efforts, as she interpreted, it was that he did not know that he was worthy to make the efforts.

In Jim’s relationship he also recognized there were so many things that were not resolved for his wife, and yet he longed to move forward while she still seemed to need resolution in things that he felt were not resolvable. He expressed,

I can let go of things, and I can look past things, and I guess I can kind of make the best of things and compromise or whatever, and, you know, I guess when I would try to do that she'd just be like “well, how can you act that way, how, how can you just forget [ ] about, you know, x or y?” I'm like, I don't know, you gotta start somewhere. I mean you gotta let go of stuff, you know, you can't just keep resenting the other person. If you don't change something then nothing's going to change.

Similar to Aaron, Jim wanted to move forward without needing to fully resolve the issues and hurts that had piled up over the years. This may represent a gender difference between men and women that is commonly evidenced by more men distancing in intimate conflictual situations while more women tend to pursue (Ward, Bergner, & Kahn, 2003). More research could be helpful in understanding the gender differences related to the need for thorough conflict resolution in order to let things go. However, the
men in this group would rather be able to let things go without having to really sort through them and process them, while their wives needed to take time with them and find resolution. Nevertheless, in Jim’s relationship that did not happen. He was frustrated with this needing to keep going back to things and that came out in his perspective that “you can’t keep resenting the other person”. This could also relate to his wife’s insistence that he continue to change for long periods of time while she did not have to change until she could trust his efforts. He likely experienced this as her not being willing to accept his changes and thus holding on to the resentments of the past. Overall, the result was the same, their key issues did not get resolved.

Michelle, too, had come to the conclusion that things simply would not be resolved in her relationship. In an effort to make sense if this, she suggested the differences came down to the very things that made up who they were.

I think we just got to the point where we really didn't like each other, we didn't like who, you know, we didn't like the things about each other that, that would never change, you know, there are parts of you that you can change and there are some things that, you know, God made you who you are, and I think we had gotten to the place where we just didn't like those parts of each other.

Interestingly, Michelle did not express the frustration that the other couples seemed to experience. Instead, her description seemed more like a resolution to or acceptance of the interpretation she had of what was really going on. The things that were unresolved she saw as personality differences that simply could not be resolved without having to change who they were. When asked what these parts were, she said she is a type ‘A’ personality
and he is a procrastinator. Because these things could not be changed in her mind, the issues they had between them remained unresolvable.

Discouraged by time. As a result of things not being resolved and changes not happening fast enough for these couples, each experienced significant discouragement and two of the couples had given up. Mackenzie and Aaron were still holding on but they expressed their discouragement repeatedly. The next passage illustrated this point and how they both were in agreement about this.

Mackenzie: It's hard because I think once you have been empowered, you know, we have new tools, [ ] and then to still be in a place a year later where we just are still struggling, and again, not that there hasn't been some baby steps here and there, but just the fact we haven't been able to consistently get things going again, I, I think that, that's what's hard. It's kind of like ignorance is bliss, you know, when you don't know what you don't know, but then once you do, [ ] I think that's partly what makes it harder now is because we, we'd had a taste, you know of what could be.

Aaron: Yeah, we kind of see what's possible.

Mackenzie: Right.

Aaron: I guess, and it sucks to not be there, it sucks to not even be close to that.

Clearly having experienced the possibility of change in their marriage at NIM, and yet not being able to achieve it after a full year was very challenging for this couple. They contrasted what could be based on what they had experienced at NIM with the
reality of their relationship at the time of the interview. Because they had experienced it there, they believed it was possible in their relationship, but not being able to realize the changes at home remained very disheartening to both Mackenzie and Aaron.

The metaphor of tasting provided a vivid picture of a new kind of experiential knowing that only comes through actually saporously taking something in. Once that had happened, one could never go back to not knowing, even if it became a vague memory, the essence remained. At the intensive they had experienced change and hope, and that experience made it even more discouraging because they knew what it felt like to have things different between them. That experience made the following year without it harder and more depressing for them.

However, it would appear that this taste had also created a hope that kept them working at their relationship, whereas the other two couples had given up with the length of time change was taking. Jim described it this way:

I think, you know, we lost the ability to stop the fights before they started and… I think maybe there was this idea that after this everything should be fine and since it's not, well then it didn't work.

As noted in their introduction, when things did not get better after a few months of trying, his wife gave up and filed for divorce.

I think over time… that ability to identify a fight and not want to fight just kind of wore off and so it's “okay, let's fight” um, and then I think it was in August or September, I forget what the exact date [the intensive] was but then, you know by, by January she filed for divorce so um, it kind of just… deteriorated again I guess.
Though Jim was not as ready to give up, sustainable changes took too long for his wife and when that happened, she gave up. Their ability to stop fights and apply what they had learned wore off, like paint that slowly fades. It was not enough, and change simply took too long for her to keep holding on. This was discouraging for Jim as well, as noted in an earlier subtheme. Trying to reach the bar she set without seeing anything from her side became too much for him also.

Michelle had a similar experience in her marriage. When her husband wasn’t showing any signs of effort outside of the intensive itself, she became discouraged and gave up waiting. “When I realized there was not any reciprocity I just, I kind of, I just caved in at this, at that point, I just stopped trying.” Soon after the intensive she realized her husband was not going to try to use the tools. Although she did continue to make a few efforts by seeking more counseling, when that also seemed to make no difference, she gave up too, unwilling to do it on her own. Later, when discussing his reaction to her separating, she said,

He just kind of caved in and quit. He was really sad and depressed about it and, you know, if I said let's make it work he would have, he would have, but I still would have had to be the catalyst for that and I just, I don't, I don't, I don't know how to do that anymore.

This passage stressed her exasperation with being the one to carry the relationship and be the one to make things work. Her husband would follow along, but he would not take any initiative or make any efforts to really work on his side of things. While Michelle admitted she could have kept at it, she described her demoralization in her statement “I
don’t know how to do that anymore”. The fact that she repeated the “I don’t” part of this statement three times, further stressed the weariness she was feeling at that time. She simply did not have it in her to keep at it if he was not going to reciprocate.

**Not committed to persevere.** Similar to the last subtheme, there was a sense in the interviews with Michelle and Jim that there was less commitment to really push through and make these tools work than with Mackenzie and Aaron. Although all three couples had not maintained their gains, perhaps the reason Mackenzie and Aaron were still together while the other two couples were not is connected to this subtheme. In the interview with Michelle, she recognized this lack of commitment and stated it clearly.

If you’re not willing to take those tools and implement them, then you have wasted your money and your time and in a sense I think that’s what we've done.

We did, because we didn’t use any of those tools.

Later she said “I think we were willing while we were there. I don’t think we were willing to come home and do the hard work that was required”. In these two passages she expressed the lack of commitment to do the hard work that would have been required to actualize the changes she and her husband had begun at the intensive. This lowered commitment was also evidenced in her pre-intensive survey where she indicated her commitment level was “weakening” even before they attended the intensive.

Jim’s interview also illustrated a lack of commitment to really persevere and work at the tools. His pre-intensive survey indicated a neutral commitment from him. These
next two passages also illustrate a lowered motivation for him and his wife. When describing what he believed was significant he said:

Jim: I think in some ways um, you know it. [ ] I at least tried something, that's pretty um, significant.

Interviewer: How so?

Jim: Well, I mean, I think just kind of putting your life on hold and going and doing something like that, at least demonstrates that you’ve tried to make things better to try to make things work.

Similar to Michelle, this could indicate that he was willing to sacrifice putting money and time going to the intensive, but when it came to continuing the efforts at home, the commitment seemed to wane fairly quickly post intensive. The frustration with things taking too long and both of them not being able to persevere with the tools when they perceived the other as not changing enough after a few months may also indicate this reduced commitment to push through that was needed to make it work.

In addition, what he imagined his wife felt was also indicative of the lack of commitment that may have been evident in this couple. “I think she was cautiously optimistic that maybe it would work, um, I don't know, and then when it wasn't a quick fix she's like aah forget it, I don't know, I mean I'm just guessing.” Here he was speaking for his wife and he was aware he could be wrong in his estimation. Nonetheless, this indicated how he experienced her as hoping the intensive itself would help, but not being willing to put in the prolonged efforts after they got home.
By contrast, even though Mackenzie and Aaron were still very clearly struggling, they seemed to maintain a commitment to the things they learned at NIM as well as a hope that one day they would be able to put them to use in their marriage. They shared, Mackenzie: We know clearly, the principles that we learned are principles that apply to any relationship, it's not just marriage obviously, so, so I think what Aaron is saying that we both found is that, yeah, even though we're maybe not in a position or a place that we're actively working on our marriage right now, we're still using and applying those principles even in our personal journeys or [] with our children. [] I think for me, the fact that we are using them at all in whatever context is still good, because it's still engraining in us and again I'm, hopeful when we get to a place that we are better able to actively work on our marriage, you know, again we've had some practice with it still, so it's not like we're taking on the rusty vault and what was that concept or what was that, I mean we have them I think under our belt so it just, it, I think that is good. []

Aaron: Yeah I think that's true, what she said, I would agree with that, I mean it's still frustrating that, you know, we are not using them together but yeah, at least it's, like she said, not in a rusty vault at least.

The way Mackenzie and Aaron talked about the tools and their plans to one day be able to use them in their marriage, revealed that the commitment remained for them, even with the challenges they faced with not being able to actualize these changes at that point. Instead, they were committed to practicing the tools in other relationships that were not as triggering as the marriage relationship. This allowed them to remain fresh
and ready for when they had worked through the personal issues that prevented them
from really working on the marriage at that time. Mackenzie used the word “engrained”
to describe the effect of this practicing. Instead of putting the tools aside until they could
use them together, using them with others allowed the tools to become part of them and
their thinking, like grains in a log. The other analogy she used was a rusty vault. This
picture contrasted the readiness of having something engraved with the picture of having
something locked behind a vault that has been corroded closed, rendering its contents
inaccessible. The commitment was thus revealed first in their commitment to continue
practicing the tools, and second in the hope and intent that one day they would be able to
use those tools together.

**Overwhelming Difficulties Theme Three: Outside Factors**

In addition to the intensive factors related to being at the intensive, other Outside
Factors emerged related to why gains achieved at NIM may have been so difficult to
maintain. Outside factors related to things that were outside of the couples’ control or
that were not directly related to the couples’ efforts. They included Other Therapy Not
Helpful and No Model. See Figure 4.11 for graphic depiction.

**Other therapy not helpful.** Because the intensive was not enough, each of the
couples sought additional help post-intensive. All had also sought help prior to the
intensive that had not been effective in bringing change to their marriages. As noted
above, Michelle was told by one therapist she had to give up her hopes and dreams. In a
continued effort to find a workable solution she sought other counsel as well. “I once again sought out another marriage therapist. After much analysis he labeled us a devitalized couple. Shortly thereafter, I moved forward with the divorce proceedings.”

Because NIM had not been enough, and the local therapists she sought out after NIM could not provide anything in addition to what NIM provided that would be helpful in reaching her husband, Michelle saw no other alternative to ending the marriage.

Jim also sought out local counsel, but he too was told there was nothing he could do to change his spouse. He shared,

I think even when I continued to go to counseling, you know, I had this conversation with the counselor, it's like well, she’s just going to keep telling me, well you can keep doing what you are doing, you're doing the right things, you know, just do what you're doing, I'm like well, hello!? There's only so much, you
know, I just felt like, what else can I do, it's just it takes two people, it has to be kind of a willingness um, in the other person to try to do something so, you know, I tend not to be the most patient person in the whole world.

From a relational perspective the counselor seemed to be telling him he was doing everything he needed to be doing to make things better. Unfortunately, he was not seeing any change in his wife so this counsel was not received as helpful to him. He admitted he was not the most patient person, and this became a real problem for him. He didn’t want to be the only one working on things; that frustration was evidenced by his exasperation, “hello!? There is only so much…” He felt strongly it had to be both of them making efforts, and the additional counsel they received did not bring that change. In addition to the frustration that was evidenced in this passage, there was also a shift to a more defeated stance, “what else can I do”. He believed he had done all he could have, but without her equal efforts, no counsel was going to be of help to them.

Mackenzie and Aaron did not try local counselors because the two they had tried before the intensive ended up being such a negative experience for Mackenzie that she struggled with trusting any new therapists who may not recognize the core issues the way the therapists at NIM did. So, although their outside counseling efforts were pre-intensive, they also strongly believed other therapy would not be helpful for them.

**No model.** Another outside factor that made maintaining gains more difficult that was not related to the intensive was having no model to look back on from childhood. Three participants from two of the three couples in the Difficulties group referenced this
in different ways. For instance, Mackenzie was able to recognize that her parents did not model how to have a healthy relationship.

I think that I definitely came in with a lot of unrealistic expectations certainly, um, did not grow up in a home with great role models. I mean my parents were both Christians and that, but they struggled in their marriage, I did not ever see um you know really good conflict resolution. As I'm beginning to work through my junk, realizing, you know, we didn't really ever talk much about feelings. We didn't um, so you know, I recognize that I brought all that crap in with me.

This passage revealed how Mackenzie was recognizing that as she tried to work through her “junk”, she did not have a healthy model to look back to as a point of reference. Her parents had their own issues and they had not taught her how to relate to her emotions or talk about them. This would mean that she would be learning how to do this for herself in her own marriage, even as they dealt with the other issues that impacted them.

Although Aaron did not speak directly about his family of origin, he did note that the issues he still struggled with were rooted in a lifetime struggle. “It's been an ongoing battle for... almost 50 years, [ ] I'll be 50 this year, so yeah, it's been an on-going battle”. Based on attachment theory and psychosocial developmental theory (Pittman, Keiley, Kerpelman, & Vaughn, 2011), because his issues with intimacy had been going on his whole life, one could assume that his parents did not model healthy intimacy for him or provide him with a secure base to allow for healthy intimacy growing up. Intimacy and
being open and vulnerable was scary for him, likely because he had never witnessed it or experienced it in healthy ways in his family of origin.

Jim also referenced that family of origin issues contributed to things being more challenging in his marriage.

I grew up with an alcoholic father so yelling to me was danger and um, you know, I'd kind of go into panic mode when she'd yell and, for her yelling was normal, you know, that's how we'd communicate, um, it's no big deal, we yell and it doesn't mean anything in her family.

Later he described her family further.

Her dad was always bashing her mom, and her mom thought very little of her dad, um, it's gotten a lot better recently, but for I think a long, long time they just didn't like each other and you know, he would always openly make comments, soon as the kids are gone I'm leaving you kind of stuff.

With these models for relationships in their history, it would be difficult to try to create something new and more adaptive going forward. In addition to the hurts they created within their years together, the models they looked back on were not ones that represented parents being able to adaptively work through issues and resolve them. Initially Jim feared the anger and yelling but over time, recognizing this way of interacting was what he had been used to, he engaged in kind. His wife’s family also did not model partners working on their own sides of things or working together to resolve things, so she also seemed to fall back into what she had always known.
Although this was not enough on its own to prevent gains from being maintained, as seen in the Maintained group, when other factors are also at work, not having a healthy model only added to the challenges these couples faced coming out of the intensive. See Appendix H for a list of excerpts referenced and quoted in this section.

**Group 1 and 2 Comparisons and Contrasts**

When comparing the two groups at large, it can be seen that the overarching themes that emerged from both groups were the same. Both included Intensive Factors, Personal Responsibility, and Faith in answer to question one as seen in Figures 4.1 to 4.3 for the Maintained group and Figures 4.7 to 4.9 in the Difficulties group. Similarly, both included Intensive Factors, Change Takes Time / Change Takes Too Much Time, and Outside Factors in answer to question two as seen in Figures 4.4 to 4.6 in the Maintained group and Figures 4.10 to 4.12 in the Difficulties group. See Figures 4.13 and 4.14 for graphic depictions of the overarching similarities. However, when the illustrations including subthemes were compared side-by-side, the similarities and differences became even more striking. See Figures 4.15 to 4.20 for a graphic depiction of these comparisons. Specifically, it can be seen that the themes of the maintained group were much more developed in answer to the first question looking at what was helpful in maintaining gains than those themes in answer to the second question. Conversely, for the Difficulties group, the themes that emerged in response to the second question, asking
Figure 4.13: Comparing Themes in Response to Question 1 - What, if any, gains have been sustained and how?

- Theme 1: Intensive Factors
- Theme 2: Personal Responsibility
- Theme 3: Faith
Figure 4.14: Comparing Themes in Response to Question 2 - What, if anything, has made it difficult to maintain gains?

Theme 1: Intensive Factors

Theme 2: Change Takes Too Much Time

Theme 3: Outside Factors
Figure 4.15: Comparing Themes in Response to Question 1 - What, if any, gains have been sustained and how?

Theme 1: Intensive Factors
Figure 4.16: Comparing Themes in Response to Question 1 - What, if any, gains have been sustained and how?

Theme 2: Personal Responsibility
Figure 4.17: Comparing Themes in Response to Question 1 - What, if any, gains have been sustained and how?

Theme 3: Faith

- Maintained Group
  - Experienced at NIM
  - Personalized at Home

- Difficulties Group
  - Theme 3: Faith
Figure 4.18: Comparing Themes in Response to Question 2 - What, if anything, has made it difficult to maintain gains?

Theme 1: Intensive Factors
Figure 4.19: Comparing Themes in Response to Question 2 - What, if anything, has made it difficult to maintain gains?

Theme 2: Change Takes Time / Change Takes Too Much Time

Maintained Group

- Need Patience
- Theme 2: Change Takes Time
  - Still Struggling/Working At It

Difficulties Group

- Not Enough Change
- Unresolved
- Discouraged by Time
- Not Committed to Persevere

Theme 2: Change Takes Too Much Time
Figure 4.20: Comparing Themes in Response to Question 2 - What, if anything, has made it difficult to maintain gains?

Theme 3: Outside Factors

Maintained Group

- No Model
- Personalized Life Stressors
- Work

Difficulties Group

- Other Therapy Not Helpful
- No Model

Theme 3: Outside Factors
about what made it difficult for participants to maintain gains were much more developed than the themes in response to the first question.

Overall, seven general similarities and five general differences came out of these interviews. The similarities included Quality Package in both groups, Practicing Tools in the Maintained group and Helpful Tools in the Difficulties group, Owning Personal Contributions to the Problem in both groups, Responsible for Change in both groups, Faith in both groups, Intensive Not Enough in both groups, and Still Struggling – Working At It in the Maintained group and Not Enough Change in the Difficulties group. Differences between the themes included Group Dynamics in the Maintained group versus Group Prevents Focus in the Difficulties group, Purging – Getting it All Out in the Maintained group versus Not the Root in the Difficulties group, Owning Personal Contributions to the Problem in the Maintained group versus Not Enough Change in the Difficulties group, and Need Patience in the Maintained group versus Discouraged by Time and Not Committed to Persevere in the Difficulties group. Finally, there were seven subthemes that were represented in one or the other group. These included Individual Healing First, Faith Experienced at NIM, Faith Personalized at Home, Work, and Personalized Life Stressors in the Maintained group and Unresolved and Other Therapy Not Helpful in the Difficulties group. Each of these similarities and differences are discussed in detail below. See Table 4.4 for a graphic representation of these similarities and differences.

Before moving to the detailed discussion of the particular similarities and differences, a brief discussion is needed to explain these similarities and differences in
Table 4.4: Theme Similarities and Differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1 - Maintained Gains</th>
<th>Group 2 – Difficulty Maintaining Gains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong>: What and how maintain gains</td>
<td><strong>A</strong>: What and how maintain gains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining Gains</td>
<td>Gains and Positives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive Factors</td>
<td>Intensive Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Package</td>
<td>Quality Package</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Dynamics</td>
<td>Helpful Tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purging / Getting it out</td>
<td>Personal Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Individual Healing First</td>
<td>Owning Contributions to the Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Responsibility</td>
<td>Responsible for Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own the Personal Contributions to the Problem</td>
<td>Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible for Change</td>
<td>Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing Tools</td>
<td>Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Faith Experienced at NIM</td>
<td>*Faith Experienced at NIM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Faith Personalized at Home</td>
<td>*Faith Personalized at Home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Group 1 - Maintained Gains**

- Maintaining Gains
- Gains and Positives
- Intensive Factors
- Quality Package
- Group Dynamics
- Purging / Getting it out
- *Individual Healing First
- Personal Responsibility
- Own the Personal Contributions to the Problem
- Responsible for Change
- Practicing Tools
- Faith
- *Faith Experienced at NIM
- *Faith Personalized at Home

**Group 2 – Difficulty Maintaining Gains**

- Maintaining Gains
- Gains and Positives
- Intensive Factors
- Quality Package
- Group Dynamics
- Purging / Getting it out
- *Individual Healing First
- Personal Responsibility
- Own the Personal Contributions to the Problem
- Responsible for Change
- Practicing Tools
- Faith
- *Faith Experienced at NIM
- *Faith Personalized at Home

**Similarities**

- Intensive Not Enough
- Change Takes Time
- Need Patience
- Outside Factors
- No Model
- Work
- *Personalized Life Stressors

**Differences**

- Not the Root
- Group Prevents Focus
- Intensive Not Enough
- Change Takes Too Much Time
- Not Enough Change
- *Unresolved
- Discouraged by Time
- Not Committed to Persevere
- Outside Factors
- *Other Therapy Not Helpful
- No Model

* Unique to One Group
general. First, when the themes were explored closely in the final step of analysis, clear differences became evident within the subthemes. Even when the subtheme names were the same in both groups, often the way they were experienced and the meaning that the participants derived from the themes were different. As this became apparent, two overarching comparative themes began to emerge. After they were developed, they were explored in light of all of the previous themes and the original data, and it was found that these two overarching things in fact pointed to clear differences that differentiated the groups possibly from the beginning. This section will briefly describe the two comparative themes and then detail the general theme similarities and differences that emerged from this study. Attention will be given to how these theme comparisons relate to the overarching comparative themes throughout.

The first overarching comparative theme pointed to the difference between the intrinsic and extrinsic perspectives of the two groups (See Figure 4.21 for graphic depiction). The Maintained group was able to internalize the changes that had begun at NIM and were more able to focus on their own change and growth regardless of the other partner. By contrast, the Difficulties group, though able to identify many of the same themes, seemed to approach their change more in relation to what their partners were or were not doing. This difference was also apparent in relationship to how they described the impact and importance of their faith.

The second overarching comparative theme identified the difference between the participants of the Maintained group who seemed to have at least one partner feeling regenerated in relation to their marriages, compared to the participants of the Difficulties
group, who all seemed to be disheartened when it came to their marriages (See Figure 4.22 for graphic depiction). For the Maintained group this regeneration created the impetus couples needed to withstand the time enduring change took to transpire, even though there remained more to accomplish in every couple. By contrast, the disheartened experience of the Difficulties group made it difficult to keep persevering, to the point that two of the three couples could no longer sustain it. As will be evidenced below, these two comparative themes were interspersed throughout both the similar themes and the contrasting themes.

**Group Similarities: Quality Package**

To begin the similarities comparison, almost all of the participants, regardless of which group they were in, discussed the quality of the NIM package in different ways. Things that were pointed out included the facilities of both locations, the therapists, the
hosts, the general environment of safety, feeling accepted and valued, and feeling the welcoming presence of the Holy Spirit. Though they also talked about how hard the intensive had been, the way everything was conducted and the care that was taken in all aspects of the intensive, right down to the food, made it possible to do the work that was needed there, for those who were willing.

At the same time, Michelle noted that while this idyllic setting made it easy to do the hard work while they were there, real life back at home made it much more difficult to continue the good work that had begun there. She expressed it this way:

It’s easy to do the hard work and, and feel like you are making change in a beautiful environment when you don’t have to deal with the real stresses of real life, but the real test is when you come home and real life is turned back on, and there’s laundry and there’s bills and there’s babies and there’s work.
This excerpt seemed to point to the underlying differences for the participants of the Difficulties group. Most couples agreed the time spent at NIM was powerful and impactful, and even though it was admittedly hard work, while couples were immersed in an idyllic setting that catered to all of their other needs, change was possible and hope was available. However, as Michelle pointed out, the difference came when they returned home to all of the other demands of life. That was the “real test” she said.

Thus, this example became the first clear illustration of the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic change. Perhaps for the Maintained group the changes they were able to experience at NIM were enduring because they were able to internalize the hope and gains they achieved at NIM to the point that even when they were faced with all of the challenges of real life when they returned home, the changes and perspective shifts remained. Conversely, for the Difficulties group, participants were able to experience what seemed like significant change while at the intensive, but because these changes were dependent on being free from the other stressors of life, they were not as easy to maintain once couples returned home.

Similarly, the changes for the Maintained group may have been more regenerating for at least one of the partners in each couple, thus allowing them to persevere when the stresses of everyday life returned. Julie remembered fondly, “there's something magical about having that time carved out there, 'cause once you get home, you've got to be real intentional with your time”. The sense was not as much that coming home was overwhelming; as it was something they had to be intentional about. It can be noted that this was not the case for all of the participants of the Maintained group. Sadie, for
instance, did not return regenerated and admitted to taking almost a year to be able to make her significant shifts. What enabled that couple to persevere may have been the significant regeneration of Bill upon his return. By contrast, the above excerpt from Michelle revealed some of the disheartening she experienced in the months following the intensive. Though she wanted the change to be sustainable and continued to make efforts for a while, she lost hope when she did not see changes in her spouse. The changes she experienced at NIM had not become intrinsic enough to sustain her alone if her husband did not change.

**Group Similarities: Practicing Tools / Helpful Tools**

Another similar theme between the two groups was the recognition of how helpful the tools were that they received at the intensive. For the Difficulties group the recognition was more of an observation and a desire to use them, or an acknowledgment that they would be good if and when employed. Unfortunately, most were not in a position of being able to employ them with their spouses; though Mackenzie and Aaron had noted they were effective when used with others. For the Maintained group, this theme came out more in the recognition that the tools needed to be used and practiced, both with their spouses and with others. Anne summarized this perspective succinctly when she said, “When all is said and done if we just go back to that fear cycle and that fear dance and the concepts we learned, we'll be okay”. On the other hand, Aaron expressed his recognition and regret of not using the tools this way.
I mean it's frustrating and it's hard, yeah, I mean 'cause I really do feel like it's, the things that we were taught and challenged with I mean those are true things whether or not we live it out or, I mean it's still true the stuff that we learned, it was still true.

While it may be true that going back to the fear dance and the tools learned would bring change within a marriage, the couples in the Difficulties group brought to light that there could be other factors that got in the way of being able to do that, even when they were in full agreement that the tools would be effective. The difference could relate to the idea that without practice, the tools could not become intrinsically part of each individual and thus, would be more difficult to activate in the marriage. In addition, the idea that while the tools work best in conjunction with the other person, even when one person activated real personal change it made a difference in the experience of the marriage, as seen in the Maintained group but not in the Difficulties group. Further, as illustrated by Aaron, not being able to put into practice the tools they learned, based on their own unresolved side of the dance, was both frustrating and disheartening.

**Group Similarities: Owning Personal Contributions to the Problem**

Shifting to Personal Responsibility, Owning Personal Contributions to the Problem is also a subtheme that was found in both groups. However, though these themes shared the same name, there were some distinct differences as well. In both groups individual partners clearly took responsibility for their contributions to the problems in their relationships. Even so, the differences between the groups seemed to
be that the couples in the Maintained group typically had at least one partner focused intentionally on what they had done and needed to do regardless of the other partner, whereas the couples in the Difficulties group also focused on what their partner’s contributions were and whether or not they were working on their side of the solution. Again, this seemed to point to the difference between intrinsic responsibility that recognized and owned behaviors regardless of the behaviors in their spouses, and extrinsic responsibility that was willing to acknowledge personal responsibility only as long as the responsibility of the other spouse was also acknowledged and recognized.

The two exceptions were Sadie in the Maintained group, who recognized she still struggled with resentment but admitted to be working on that, and Aaron in the Difficulties who seemed so consumed with his own crippling shame that he was not focused on the things his wife may have done to contribute to the problems they were having. Aaron’s situation lends support to the second comparative theme of being disheartened. His lack of focus on his wife’s side of the problems did not come out of his taking responsibility for his own contributions from a place of assurance. Instead, it came from a self-deprecating position that seemed to over-emphasize his contributions and ignore even healthy awareness of his wife’s contributions. He bemoaned,

I have always felt like the screw up in our marriage. Like if it wasn't for me things would be great and Mackenzie would be happy. This has been something I struggle with all the time as I spiral down in self-pity and feelings of worthlessness. I'm also a selfish bastard and can't seem to break its hold on me.
In contrast to Aaron’s perception revealed above, there was also a sense of blame that was present in the rest of the Difficulties group, but was generally absent in the Maintained group. An example of this came from Michelle who did not seem resentful of her husband, but rather completely disheartened by him. “He doesn't have ill intentions, he just doesn't really know what to do, you know, and I don't want to live the rest of my life teaching him how to be a man”. The blame came out in her admitting she wanted him to be different and the derogatory description towards her husband she used to express herself in this excerpt. In another place she acknowledged one of her big contributions was emasculating him, and this statement revealed this kind of thinking remained. Even so, from her description, her emotional stance was one of complete disillusionment rather than something more energized like resentment or anger. Because he wouldn’t or couldn’t change in the ways she wanted, she simply could not continue.

**Group Similarities: Responsible for Change**

Another similar subtheme of Personal Responsibility was the idea of taking responsibility for change as it related to self-care. For the Maintained group the focus on self-care helped the spouses find healing and strength in themselves that in turn allowed them to work on the marriage. For Anne this piece was likely the strongest take-away for her and she shared how she emphatically teaches this to other women.

Even if this person disappoints me, it doesn't have to determine my happiness.

That's a big part of it for women. And that's probably my strongest message is do
not make your husband responsible for your happiness. He will let you down 
every time and you'll put too much pressure on him.

Similarly, Mitchell’s biggest take-away was recognizing he had value and for 
him, that became something he was responsible to protect and acknowledge for himself 
so that he could continue to make decisions based on that intrinsic value.

I keep going back to the value thing, for me it's the value, and I need to rest in the, 
the fact that I'm... have value and that I don't need to let anything waiver my sense 
of knowing I'm valued, and continue to make value decisions.

This had become his full responsibility, regardless whether his wife could see the changes 
or not. At times this meant confronting her when she would doubt. “She would say 
something and I'd say I'm not that person anymore, and she'd say I don't know that, and 
I'd say but I do.” This certainty he carried illustrated the integration of his learning and 
changes. It was not simply theory that made sense; it had become a part of him. Further, 
this intrinsic knowledge served to regenerate him and give him energy to continue 
persevering in this challenging journey.

Aaron and Mackenzie saw how that would work at the intensive and were striving 
to reach that intrinsic understanding as they continued to make efforts at doing the self-
care they hoped would help them. However, at the time of the interview, this personal 
focus was not yet actualized for them. They both remained bound by the changes Aaron 
struggled to make, even though Mackenzie knew theoretically that putting her power in 
his hands would not bring the healing she needed. As long as this remained a theory and 
not an intrinsic part of her, she struggled.
Unfortunately for the other two participants in the Differences group, though they also believed the self-care part of taking responsibility for change was significant, it did not lead to this same empowerment to fight for their marriages. In fact, for Michelle, this idea of self-care admittedly had the opposite effect. While she said she found it to be the most helpful learning, she also admitted, “Unfortunately, I think that concept has kind of led to my divorce”. Jim also revealed his disheartened and extrinsic motivation for his self-care.

I was maybe relying too much on her to be happy um, and I think, you know, the stuff about self-care, just well, maybe this thing’s going to fall apart, you know, you need to rely on God, alone, to, to sustain you and you know, maybe you don’t get anything from her.

As revealed here, Jim’s self-care was more due to the fact that his wife was not going to care for him, than his taking ownership of his self-care as something that would be needed regardless of his wife’s affections. The disheartening is also evidenced in his statement, “maybe you don’t get anything from her”. Doing self-care is required because his wife would not be giving it to him as he longed for.

**Group Similarities: Faith**

Faith was also a common theme throughout both groups. However, in the Maintained group it was described as an important part of what motivated and helped couples maintain their gains, whereas the couples in the Difficulties group spoke of it as something on the side or as something they continued to struggle with. It did not seem to
have the same regenerating quality to it for the Difficulties group that it had for the Maintained group. For instance, couples in the Maintained group strongly valued their intrinsic faith, and the spiritual aspect of the intensive was described as an instrumental part of the experience for them. For them faith was a strong resource, a motivator, and a source of hope in their marriages. Although Bill and Sadie did not go in with their faith holding this significance, the intensive changed that for them. Bill made this connection most strongly when he spoke of how his gaining real faith was the most significant factor in his own changes, and how his faith commitment then became the motivator for Sadie to see that his overall changes were real. This recognition further allowed her to start softening her own heart and to begin to work on her side of reconciliation. Bill summarized this in saying, “I think our faith has been the only thing that has allowed us to turn back from the path we were on and start working to rebuild our relationship”.

In the Difficulties group faith was also discussed and seemed important to each of the participants, but it did not come forward as something prominent relating to helping them maintain their gains relationally. While it might have been a motivator out of duty, like Aaron alluded to when he said “[Mackenzie] has stayed with me more for the children than anything and because we are believers and don't believe in divorce”, it did not seem to be an internal motivator for most of these participants. However, throughout the interview Mackenzie and Aaron were the couple who spoke of their faith and the desire to have Jesus come in and make changes in each of their lives and their marriage. Although their faith journey remained one of struggling to surrender, their desire for God
in their lives may have been the one hope that kept this couple together, compared to the other two couples who were no longer together.

Conversely, when Michelle and Jim spoke of their faith, the focus was more tangential or related to personal journeys of interest instead of how their faith motivated and enabled them to focus on their marriages. Because of how minimally this was discussed in the interviews, it would appear that faith for these two couples was more extrinsically motivated than intrinsically. Alternatively, it could be that because they were so disheartened by their marriages, even though they had indicated that faith was extremely important to them in their pre-intensive surveys, the faith they had, regardless of how strong, was simply not enough to help them hold on to hope for their marriages.

**Group Similarities: Intensive Not Enough**

Shifting to similarities concerning what made it more difficult to maintain gains, all couples except for one in the Maintained group indicated that the intensive itself was not enough to completely bring about the changes couples needed. They said it was a good start but four days was simply not enough to work through everything. Couples in both groups wanted more follow-up care and many noted it would have been helpful to have local counselors who follow the NIM program that they could have continued with for reminders and accountability. Mackenzie and Aaron in the Difficulties group did not want to have to build trust with another counselor so they went back for a conjoint intensive with one of their counselors from the NIM group experience. Michelle asked for a local referral but it was not helpful.
For Anne and Mitchell who did not express that the intensive was not enough, they stated they would like to go back and even be a part of the alumni group who could support other couples coming out of intensives. Anne shared,

It's a life long journey, that's for sure. We would like to go back and go to one of their weekend alumni excursions and we're hoping, I know they have a whole system, 'cause [they] just told me, where they have alumni in different parts of the country that are contacts for people that come out of the intensive, so we would like to be used in any way we can, in that way.

The fact that NIM has set up this alumni network may indicate that the intensive not being enough on its own is a common factor for couples coming out of the intensives. At the same time, Anne and Mitchell were the only couple who referenced this so it may not be well-known to all couples coming out of intensives.

Even so, the main difference between the groups related to this theme was that the couples in the Maintained group were able to make it work even without the additional counseling that they would have desired, whereas the Difficulties group had not yet been able to, even with extra counseling from either NIM or local counselors they sought out after returning home. This may point to the fact that at least one of the partners in all of the Maintained group couples felt regenerated by the intensive and was willing to persevere in making efforts to continue with what they learned, regardless of the lack of perceived support. As David said, even though it wasn’t always “by the book”, they had been intentionally working through things and continuing to make efforts since the intensive. This could also be said of Mackenzie and Aaron, but in their case the
experience was more disheartened compared with the motivating experience of feeling regenerated.

**Group Similarities: Still Struggling – Working At It / Not Enough Change**

In addition to the intensive not being enough when they left, both groups also spoke of how change continued to take time, and in some cases they were still struggling to make desired changes. For the Difficulties group, once again this was described more from a disheartened stance of there not being enough change, whereas the Maintained group spoke more from a stance of hope and motivation to keep at it, even though some things were still very difficult.

Further, for the Maintained group the struggles they were still working on did not seem to be getting in the way of their progress or ability to work on their marriages or use the tools they learned within their marriages. The changes they were making had become a part of them and using the tools was an outpouring of that. Mitchell put this internalization of wanting to keep progressing regardless of continued struggles this way.

I think it's, it's probably subconsciously we are realizing, I don't want to go there, I don't want to go back to where I was, without really even saying it to each other, and then we catch ourselves and just, you know move, move forward instead of regressing.

Conversely, for the Difficulties group, this lack of significant change was one of the main factors they said held them all back or led to their separations. Instead of being able to recognize they were in process and continue to apply the things they learned at
NIM to move them forward, when their own issues seemed too large or there was lack of significant effort on their partner’s part, they were not able to continue applying what they learned personally in their marriages. The lessons they learned and how effective they believed they could be remained extrinsic and theoretical. This was seen in both how the lack of personal change impacted them, and how the lack of their spouses change impacted them.

In the first case, though there may have been similar levels personal distress in the couples of both groups, their ability to actualize significant personal change was different. In the Maintained group at least one partner was able to bring about and maintain progressive change until the other was able to come alongside. This was certainly the case with Sadie and Bill. Because of the betrayal and wounding she had experienced from Bill, Sadie had a hard time being able to open up again and make efforts in the marriage. She admitted, “It took me a year, it took our anniversary, well it, it took a year. It took a year from finding out about, you know, whatever, to the next year and I literally spent that year... hiding.” That was a long time for Bill to wait for any significant shifts from his wife, but he had experienced intrinsic change and he was regenerated to make his marriage work, however long it took.

By contrast, neither Mackenzie nor Aaron had been able to make significant personal shifts so they continued to struggle and feel disheartened by how long change was taking. In his reflective summary Aaron expressed his discouragement vividly.
I'm not really sure where we are going to go right now with our marriage. I don't feel like we can start over because so much hurt has happened between the two of us. Maybe we can, but it sure doesn't seem like it right now.

Perhaps if even one of these spouses had been able to execute change, the struggle would not seem as daunting and demoralizing.

The other difference could be that when couples in the Maintained group talked about change taking time, there was not a stipulation that the other partner must change also or first, however, this stipulation was certainly present in the Difficulties group to one extent or another. Jim’s wife’s not changing and waiting to see if his change was lasting was too much for him. Similarly, Michelle was not willing to make efforts on her side this time if her husband was not also clearly making efforts on his side. “When I realized it was not any reciprocity I just, I kind of, I just caved in at this, at that point, I just stopped trying.” Change for these two couples seemed to be extrinsically motivated and when not enough changed occurred in their spouses, the disheartened partners gave up too.

**Group Differences: Group Dynamics / Group Prevents Focus**

In addition to themes that seemed quite similar in their focus and direction, there were also themes that were similar in focus but tended to be experienced in contrasting ways. The first of these was how the couples experienced the group dynamics at the intensive. While most mentioned that the normalizing aspect of group was helpful on
Jim and Michelle of the Difficulties group found that being in the group may have been a key factor in preventing them or their spouses from really getting to the root. Jim spoke of it being uneasy to really share in front of the others, while Michelle talked about her husband’s people pleasing and how with the whole group dynamics it may have made it harder for the therapists to really see this and call him on it. Even Mackenzie and Aaron noted they went back to get more focused therapy relating to their own issues.

Conversely, while the Maintained group also talked about the group dynamics being challenging at first, many of them noted how watching the others share and receive counsel from the therapists helped them to gain perspective they may not have gained had they gone to a conjoint intensive instead. Further, Mitchell also talked about how the affirmations from the other men in the group were key in the healing of his personal pain and shame. This could not have occurred to the same extent in a conjoint session. He emotionally shared,

That was one of my things, my, ah [ ] my wants was value and I didn't have any and I wanted it... but I never expected it. [ ] I had it but I didn't believe I had it, you know, it was, it was um made clear to me... and I um (sniff), and it was made clear to me by the other people in the room... (nods) the men especially (wipes a tear).

The emotion of this passage revealed how powerful and significant this was for him. He was deeply touched by the affirmations of the other men who not only saw his total brokenness laid out for them, but they affirmed his value even in the midst of his vulnerability and exposure. This change impacted how he saw himself and intrinsically
changed him going forward. Had it not been for the other men in the group affirming him in this way, he may not have had the same level of transforming change.

**Group Differences: Purging – Getting it All Out / Not the Root**

The theme Purging – Getting It All Out in the Maintained group seemed to be in direct contrast to what happened for the couples in the Difficulties group, as suggested by their theme of Not the Root. Although it was grueling and the couples in the Maintained group talked about being completely broken down and exposed at the intensive, they all spoke about how they truly got to the root of their issues and purged out all of the “infection” while they were there. This was uncomfortable, but they noted they did not believe the intensive would make a difference for those who do not do this. Interestingly, for the Difficulties group, this seemed to be what happened. When considering the two couples who had separated, both Jim and Michelle admitted that either they or their spouse was really not transparent with the real issues or the roots of the problems.

Mackenzie and Aaron, who did seem to share the root of their relational issues, had not been able to fully get to the root of their own personal issues, which they believed held them back from being able to really work on the marriage. In her reflective summary Mackenzie admitted,

> What I have come to recognize, especially in the last few months, is that honestly, I know that I personally have a lot of "junk" that I am still bringing to the table that make it difficult, if not impossible, for me to receive certain things from Aaron or be able to give to him in ways I should.
Because the deep personal issues had not been fully addressed at the intensive, significant change was impeded in relationship to her marriage. The theories and lessons gleaned from NIM remained at the surface because her own personal “junk” prevented them from being integrated into her perceptions and thinking. Unlike Mitchell, noted above, who was able to receive that transforming change by being completely vulnerable at the intensive, the wounds and pain Mackenzie continued to struggle with had not fully been addressed or resolved at the intensive. As a result, disheartening and discouragement had set in.

**Group Differences: Owning Personal Contributions to the Problem / Not Enough Change**

Another difference comes in the area of owning Contributions to the Problem versus Not Enough Change. While both of these themes also have similarities or corresponding themes in the other group, as noted earlier, the key difference that is important to note is one of focus. Both groups in different ways acknowledged and owned personal contributions to their problems, however, in the Maintained group the participants made this their main focus in bringing about personal and marital change, whereas the Difficulties group still struggled with being discouraged by lack of progress, often their partners’. This was particularly true for the two couples who separated because they simply did not see a willingness from their partners to change; it could also
be seen in Mackenzie’s struggle with Aaron’s lack of personal changes and thus not being able to work towards reconciliation.

I think that's been a huge piece for me um, to feel like, and then even when he says things like I, I don't feel like I'm ready to fight for you yet, or what, you know, things like that that just further intensify this feeling I've had for so long that I, I, will, will you ever want to fight for me? Will you ever... you know, what is that?! I, I mean I, so, I just and I, I've just grown so weary and feeling like I just, I don't know, I just can't take a whole lot more of that, so that's for me anyway I'd say those are those are probably a couple of the biggest things [that have made it difficult].

The disheartening Mackenzie experienced was palpable in this passage, along with the fact that some of her focus still remained on Aaron changing and wanting to fight for her. While in other places she admitted to her commitment to focus on her own contributions to the problems, passages like this one revealed that her focus remained divided. Power over her healing and change was extrinsically powered to some extent by Aaron’s ability to bring about his own healing.

Sadie, on the other hand, also admitted to still really struggling, but she was able to make the shift to taking ownership of her side and focus on how she contributed to the problems regardless of how Bill reacted.

I'm gonna take down all my walls and be raw with you, I'm tired of hiding my feelings, I'm tired of being afraid of my feelings I'm just, you know, your gonna have to suck it up and listen to me cry and moan and if I'm unhappy, I'm gonna
tell you I'm unhappy, and if I'm happy, you, you're gonna know I'm happy. I'm gonna quit being a robot.

After a year of hiding, this was a big step for her. It also pointed to the fact that Bill had not made his changes reliant upon his wife’s change. A year later he continued to work on himself and was ready when Sadie was able to join him with her own efforts.

**Group Differences: Need Patience / Discouraged by Time & Not Committed to Persevere**

The last clear contrast between the group themes related to how the two groups dealt with the fact that change fundamentally did take time. For the Maintained group the focus was more positive, and participants were gentle with themselves and their partners. As noted in the last point, a perfect example of this was Bill and Sadie who admitted it took Sadie a year to soften and be able to begin to draw closer to Bill. One thing that did not come up in the interview was up until that one—year point if they experienced the same discouragement that the Difficulties group experienced. Upon e-mail clarification with Bill, he admitted that the waiting was in fact very discouraging for him.

The patience part was MOST DEFINITELY discouraging [emphasis his]. I was cursed with a distinct lack of patience to start with and when we came home, I wanted to immediately ‘start fresh’ and move forward. I tend to push and push and push until something breaks [ ] and to be forced to sit still and wait for the appropriate time was incredibly difficult. What I believe in hind sight is that this was another example of the Lord’s power and love for his people. He knew that
exactly how long it would take to make me to slow down, study his word, and learn perspective.

In this passage Bill was able to clarify that he certainly experienced discouragement. Capitalizing “most definitely” provided emphasis for how true this was for him. He also confessed he was not particularly patient at first. This was similar to Jim’s experience of admitting he was not the most patient person. The difference was demonstrated in how each participant responded to his impatience. Jim and others in the Difficulties group seemed to shut down and give in to the disheartening rather than push through and continue with their own changes, regardless of the other person. Bill, illustrated here that by continuing to turn to God and wrestle through this without giving up, he experienced what he believed to be God’s power and love for him in giving him what he needed to really draw closer to his Lord. While Jim knew cognitively that God would be his support, he did not seem to be intrinsically experiencing that regeneration at the time of the interview.

In Sadie’s clarification e-mail, she admitted she still was skeptical of Bill at times and her patience had actually gotten worse through all the stresses in their life over the past few years. However, the overall tone of her e-mail was also one of hope, and in the end she confirmed this hope that continued to push her forward.

The amount of stress that we've been under the past few years has been unbelievable and it has taken its toll on Bill and myself. It seems as though a couple of seasons of our life are ending in the near future (my degree program and
when his dad passes away). My hope is that we will be able to take a new approach to our individual life as well as our family life.

Although impatience and discouragement had been there for Sadie and the struggle continued, the tone of her responses indicated a resistance to disheartening and a determination to make things better. Thus, the experience of the two groups was not entirely different; what set them apart was the focus and determination to not give up.

Even in looking at the one couple in the Difficulties group who had not given up, the temptation and weariness was unmistakable. Mackenzie put it this way:

A lot of the behavior patterns and that that we struggle with and have struggled with, I just feel like we have been kind of just right back in that and um, I don't know, for me personally, I just have felt more and more like I just, I just can't keep doing this, I just can't.

In this excerpt she repeated “more and more” and “I just can’t” indicating how difficult holding on had truly become for her. They were still working on things but the disheartening and weariness of how long change was taking continued to make it difficult to keep going. Their determination was waning, though they still hoped for something to bring about the shift they needed to re-energize them.

Therefore, it would appear commitment and determination to make the relationship work was a major factor in marriages staying together, and patience with the process of change was key in coming to the place of actually experiencing real change in a struggling marriage, no matter how long it took. However, as Mackenzie seemed to be asking, how long does one persevere when change does not seem to be forthcoming as
she hoped? The answer to this question may tie back into the other strong theme of the Maintained group, particularly focusing on intrinsic self-change where one has actual control, instead of focusing on the other partner or even the marriage at first.

**Group Differences: Unmatched Subthemes**

Other differences included subthemes that were represented in one group but not the other group, either because they were not represented at all or because they were not represented strongly enough or frequently enough in the other group to constitute a theme formation. These included, Individual Healing First; both subthemes of Faith, Experienced at NIM and Experienced at Home; Work; and Personalized Life Stressors in the Maintained group and Unresolved and Other Therapy Not Helpful in the Difficulties group.

Within the Maintained group the subtheme Individual Healing First under Intensive Factors was not represented in the Difficulties group enough to constitute it becoming a theme for that group. Only Mackenzie and Aaron focused on the idea of really needing personal healing before they could work on their marital issues. Although they had not been able to actualize these personal changes to the degree they recognized they needed to, and this had not yet become their predominant focus like the couples in the Maintained group, they understood coming out of the intensive that this clearly was an important focus in their recovery. The other two participants in the Difficulties group did not focus on this as something they learned would be critical in making their marriages work, though they both did take away the idea of self-care and its importance.
personally. The difference was self-care for them stopped with them, instead of being something that would enable them to refocus on the marriage and be different within it.

In addition, the subthemes to Faith were not evidenced in the Difficulties group the way they were in the Maintained group. It is likely that this nuance emerged because the couples in the Maintained group found the faith aspect of the intensive to be a key feature for them that not only impacted them at the retreat but also was evidenced in their lives before and after the intensive. Through the way they described their faith and how it permeated everything in their experience, it was clear that faith was or had become an intrinsic force guiding their lives. Conversely, while faith was also a noted factor for the Difficulties group, it was referenced more in relation to their own personal journeys than how faith related to the intensive or their marriage experiences. This absence of focus in the two individual participants may indicate a more extrinsic faith experience, rendering faith more peripheral in their lived experiences. For Mackenzie and Aaron, faith seemed to be in a state of transition from extrinsic to intrinsic. They seemed to desire more of God’s impact in their lives but were having a hard time giving up control to allow that to take hold practically.

In looking at the things that made maintaining gains difficult for both groups, two subthemes for both groups were not represented in the other group. For the Maintained group, both fell within the Outside Factors theme. The first was Work and the second was Personalized Life Stressors. While some of these things were evidenced in the Difficulties group, there was not enough attention given to them to constitute the development of a theme. For instance, Jim talked about significant work stressors that
impacted his marriage, but none of the others focused on this stressor. For the other couples in the Difficulties group, the main focus of the interview resided in what was going on in their marriages or with their spouses and how difficult that had been for them.

Similarly, for the Difficulties group two other subthemes were discussed that were not found with any real consistency in the Maintained group. These subthemes included Unresolved from the Change Takes Too Much Time theme and Other Therapy Not Helpful from the Outside Factors theme. The Unresolved subtheme related to the intensive not being enough for the Difficulties group to effectively resolve the key issues that contributed to their marital issues; some unresolved issues were due to partners giving up, and others were due to it simply being a long road that had yet to foster any real substantial healing. This subtheme exemplified the disheartened experience the couples within the Difficulties group faced. While the Maintained group noted patience was needed, and there were still things they were all working on, the sense was that things did not remain substantially unresolved any more for them. Further, they seemed more regenerated and ready to continue to persevere, unlike the Difficulties group who remained disheartened and generally demoralized.

In addition, while the couples in the Maintained group had all been to couples therapy prior to the intensive, Other Therapy Not Helpful, referred to post-intensive therapy, which was not indicated by the Maintained group at all. This also may point to the regenerated state of most of the participants in the Maintained group coming out of the intensive. While it was still difficult and change certainly was going to take time,
they were able to tap into an intrinsic energy and motivation that carried them through and prompted them to continue applying the things they learned, even when they faced discouragement. The Difficulties group seemed to lack this intrinsic motivation and though they sought external help again post intensive, the determination to keep pushing through was simply not there for most of them. For Mackenzie and Aaron, the determination to push through had remained to the point of the interview, but as Mackenzie had noted, she was not sure how much longer she could keep going. Aaron also noted an extrinsic motivation he perceived was holding them together when he said “I don’t believe she really loves me anymore (she has told me so) and has stayed with me more for the children than anything and because we are believers and don’t believe in divorce”. In this interpretation he had clearly pointed to an external motivation for them, rather than a deep intrinsic motivation coming from within. See Appendix I for referenced and quoted excerpts in this section.

Chapter Summary

This chapter sought to unfold and explicate the findings of this IPA study in a way that presented the cases of each group in a detailed, idiographic way that also clearly represented the experiences and interpretations of the participants as well as the interpretations of the researcher. The chapter began with introducing the participants through group-wide demographic information followed by brief descriptions of the couples’ marriages. This was followed by the presentation of the themes that had
emerged from both groups in answer to the two main research questions: 1) What, if any, gains have been sustained and how? and 2) What, if anything, has made it difficult to maintain gains? Finally, the two groups were compared and contrasted and the resulting overarching comparative themes of Intrinsic versus Extrinsic Change and Motivation, and Regenerated versus Disheartened Experiences were detailed.

Through this detailed analysis, it became apparent, for the Maintained group, the main factors that enabled them to maintain gains in spite of challenges that made it difficult were that they had experienced intrinsic change that fostered a regenerated and energized perseverance in them. Conversely, while the Difficulties group had similar intensive experiences, they returned home with more extrinsic knowledge and motivation for change that left them disheartened and demoralized in the face of overwhelming difficulties post-intensive. It is possible that this deeply disheartened state began before the couple entered, as may be indicated by couples in this group indicating they were more dissatisfied with their marriages in general before entering NIM. More research would be needed to determine if this hypothesis exists with larger sample sizes. The next and final chapter provides a discussion of conclusions and recommendations resulting from this study.
This study explored how two groups of couples who had gone through National Institute of Marriage (NIM) four-day intensives made sense of the impact or lack of impact their intensives had on their marriages one year post treatment. The two groups represented couples who initially found the intensive helpful and were able to maintain gains (Maintained group), and couples who initially found the intensive helpful but were not able to maintain gains (Difficulties group). Because little research had been done in the area of making sense of post-treatment maintenance, this study utilized an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) model to inductively examine how clients made sense of their experiences within a framework allowing for in depth interpretative analysis of the explanations provided. Data was collected through reflective summaries provided by the participants, followed by semi-structured interviews that were videotaped and then thoroughly transcribed and analyzed. The previous chapter detailed the findings of this analysis by explicating the six themes that emerged from each group. Then the similarities and differences between the groups were explored and the overarching comparative themes that emerged from that comparison were presented.

This chapter discusses the significance of these findings related to the research questions (1) How do couples who have gone through four-day marriage intensive therapy perceive and make sense of the impact or lack of impact this treatment has had on their marriages?; and (2) What, if any, marital gains do participants believe have been
sustained and how?; (a) What, if anything, do participants believe helped achieve and maintain any gains?; and (b) What, if anything, do participants believe has made it difficult to achieve and maintain gains? This is achieved through grounding these findings in the larger context of the literature, including expanding on how these findings also resonate with common factors research that explores non-model-specific variables that impact therapeutic outcomes. Implications for NIM and clients are also explored followed by a discussion of limitations and recommendations for future research.

Significance: Engaging the Literature

The findings of this study relate back to the findings of previous literature in different ways. This can be seen first in the literature supportive of the benefits of group therapy formats and the challenges of intensive formats that were reiterated by the participants of this study. At the same time, the findings of this study expand upon that literature by connecting client outcomes with common factors. In this study the common factors understood to impact treatment outcomes were also attributed to treatment maintenance or lack of maintenance by the participants. This section briefly considers the general connection these findings have to group and intensive literature, and then focuses on connecting the key findings to current common factors literature.

Connections to Group and Intensive Literature

Research relating to group marital formats suggested that there are a number of benefits for couples working within a group context. These included normalizing couple
distress through similar shared stories; allowing couples to come out of feeling isolated and alone in their struggles; feeling supported, understood, not judged, and challenged by others in the group; vicarious learning as couples watch other couples work through their unique issues; and reduced defensiveness through watching and relating to others (Ferguson, 2010; Garfield, 2012; Harkness, 2012; Hoffman & Rosman, 2004; Kirby, & Baucom, 2007a; Marcuse, 1974; Mouritsen & Rastogi, 2013; Yalom, & Leszcz, 2005).

Most of the participants of the current study mentioned these benefits in different ways as well. Julie said, “listening to them talk, I learned as much as when it was my own turn to talk” and Bill and Sadie said they did not feel as isolated because they could relate to everyone else in the room. Bill joked, “We’re all screw-ups in there”. At least for the Maintained group, the benefits that have been suggested by other researchers were reiterated through the experiences of the couples at NIM.

When talking about the benefits of intensive group formats, Marcuse (1974) suggested that intensive groups are helpful in deepening emotional feeling and expression but to create lasting change, continued group therapy would be recommended for a number of weeks following the initial intensive. The members of the current study also noted that it was a good start but more would have been helpful or necessary. Jim said this directly, “it might have been a good start. I think if, there was something afterwards”. While Julie said in support of the intensive format, “there's something magical about having that time carved out there”, David noted “it’s a shame that there's no counselors in our area that follow their program”. The intensive had the power to get couples’ attention and help them to focus, but without follow-up or relapse prevention.
therapy, it was difficult to maintain the gains begun at the intensive. Michelle expressed this when she said, “it’s easy to do the hard work and, and feel like you are making change in a beautiful environment when you don’t have to deal with the real stresses of real life”. The problems arose when they went home and life stressors crowded out what they had learned. Gottman (2003) found similar maintenance results with his study that revealed only couples in the Both plus Therapy group were able to maintain gains at one year follow-up. These were couples who had attended both intensive modules as well as relapse prevention therapy.

**Common Factors Connected to Maintenance As Well As Outcome**

Adding follow-up or relapse prevention therapy may be an important factor in helping couples to maintain gains after treatment, but there seem to be other factors also at play in maintenance or lack of maintenance that can be evidenced by common factors research. Lebow and colleagues (2012) suggested that the research indicates relational change occurs through couples experiencing each other differently within a counseling context. This occurred for most, if not all, of the couples in the current study and yet, as evidenced by Mackenzie’s comments, sometimes having that experience makes it more difficult when couples are not able to recreate it or maintain it once they go home. “I think that's partly what makes it harder now is because we, we'd had a taste, you know, of what could be.” However, in their case, this may also be what was providing the hope to keep going, unlike the other two couples in the Difficulties group. Shadish and Baldwin (2003) published a meta-analysis of marriage and family interventions and noted that not
enough research had been done looking at moderators that impact treatment effects. Since then, a number of studies have looked at common factors that seem to be at play and, in fact, may have significantly more impact on change than model-specific factors (Davis, Lebow, & Sprenkle, 2012; Ward, Linville, & Rosen, 2007). This section discusses some of these factors in the literature that also emerged in this study.

The first common factor that emerged in this study was found in the Intensive Factors: Quality Package subthemes. Participants in this study acknowledged a number of factors relating to Quality Package including the environmental aspects of the intensive and how these assisted in creating safety and comfort for them to relax and engage in the process. In reference to the facilities Anne said, “Everything they did was extremely purposeful on making sure that when you walked in you knew that you were loved and embraced and there was no judgment.” While this was not commonly mentioned in the literature, one study specifically focused on IMIT at NIM, stated that focus on environment and hospitality was intentional in creating the safety that participants experienced (Burbee et al., 2011). That being said, the majority of current research focused on the interpersonal and therapist factors also found within this theme. According to the research, these can be teased apart into a number of factors relating to the therapeutic relationship, which are understood to be significant in fostering change (Blow et al., 2009; Lebow et al., 2012).

Davis and Piercy (2007b) suggested that these therapist factors included patience, caring while remaining firm and boundaried, cultural and religious sensitivity, building rapport, trust, and respect, and clients’ perception of therapist competency. It was made
clear that these factors were instrumental for the participants of this study by their affirmations of many of these things. For instance, Mackenzie noted, “There was some connection there, just, I was really able to receive things from [our therapist], and [ ] certainly, there were points that he sort of got in my grill about some things, I mean in a loving way”. She went on to say, “he still really heard me, though, and so for me that was just, it was, it was just huge”. This corroborated findings in one study suggesting when asked what clients believed helped them feel better about their therapeutic problem(s), most responded with either feeling heard and understood or therapy techniques (Ward et al., 2007). Similarly, in another study, Tilden, Hoffart, Sexton, Finset, and Gude (2011) found that the key therapist factor that had the most impact and influence on clients in a 12-week residential couples’ therapy program was therapist empathy and ability to create safety for their clients. The comments from the participants of the current study were in line with these findings, as Julie said, “They really do give you time to work through stuff”.

In addition to therapist factors, the fit of the model has also been noted as an important common factor (Davis et al., 2012; Davis & Piercy, 2007b). This relates to how well the therapy model fits the couples and their worldview. A corresponding common factor is how much clients adopt therapist conceptualizations (Davis & Piercy, 2007a). Both Faith and the subthemes related to the tools provided corroborated the research on these factors. Revealing the fit of the faith component of the model, Bill commented, “There was focus on...faith and ah, grace you know, that, that forgiveness was available which, to me, I was desperate for at the time”. Anne expressed her belief in the model by saying you have to “work the program” and recommending that others
“practice the check-ins every day, make it a priority, um, pray together every day, do your devotion together every day, and you’ll have a great chance of this sticking with you”.

Conversely, while Jim bought into the model as it related to his fear cycle and understanding more about what had been happening with his wife, he may not have fully internalized the strong focus on personal responsibility expressed in the IMIT model, thus impacting his ability to continue working on his side once things began to deteriorate again. “I guess over time I just got discouraged ’cause nothing was ever enough.”

Another area that Jim and his wife struggled with was being able to be fully open and honest within the group context. Participants in the Maintained group stressed this as an important part of being able to bring about lasting change, as seen when Mitchell said, “you better go in there open and honest, [ ] or it won’t work”. This supports the common factors research that suggested being willing to be open and risk being vulnerable is an important factor in positive outcomes (Davis et al., 2012). Burbree and his associates (2011) also noted that a key assumption of the NIM program is to create emotional safety so that couples can be vulnerable and find resolution.

A follow-up study looking at gains maintained after couples EFT also indicated that only the couples who were able to resolve underlying attachment injuries during treatment were able to maintain their gains (Halchuk et al., 2010). Those who left feeling better but who had not been open and vulnerable enough to get to the root of their issues were significantly less able to maintain their gains. This was also observed in the couples of the Difficulties group in this study. The subtheme Not the Root pointed to this idea.
that couples where at least one partner was not able to really resolve their underlying personal issues were not been able to maintain their gains. Mackenzie recognized this when she admitted, “Until I work through more of my own personal “junk,” which continues to be the lens in which I view so many things, it’s going to be very difficult to effectively work on my marriage”.

Taking personal responsibility was another strong theme that emerged in this study and also corroborated the common factors research that has found the significance of clients being able to take personal responsibility for their own sides of their issues. In fact, taking responsibility can be seen as both a theory-specific common factor as a result of many models emphasizing this (D'Aniello, 2013; Davis & Piercy, 2007a; Halchuk et al., 2010; Vogt, 2001), and a client common factor as a result of clients recognizing the need for giving up blame, seeing how they contribute to their problems, and taking responsibility for change and engaging in therapy (Bird, Butler, & Fife, 2007; Davis et al., 2012; Davis & Piercy, 2007b). In this study the theme Personal Responsibility included subthemes of Owning Personal Contributions to the Problem and Responsible for Change. Bill summarized this idea when he said, “When I focused on making it not about what she did or didn't do, it opened up the way for us to heal and not constantly be so antagonistic”. As an example of taking responsibility for her triggers and applying the tools she had learned, Julie said, “when I do feel the, like I'm upset about something, I stop to think is this really, you know, is this really something, or is this just me being afraid about something else?”
At the same time, couples in the Difficulties group may not have taken as much responsibility for their own sides of issues and their own happiness and well-being. This lack of depth in their internalization of personal responsibility may have resulted in a type of defensive individualism that prevented them from continuing in their own efforts until their spouses matched these efforts. Unfortunately, this further resulted in greater disillusionment and disheartening when their partners did not step up. Mackenzie’s pain-stricken cry illustrated the struggle she continued to have. “Will you ever want to fight for me, will you ever... [ ] I've just grown so weary and feeling like I just, I don't know, I just can't take a whole lot more of that.” Her happiness remained tied to Aaron’s change, which kept her bound to her discouragement and pain. As the common factors research indicated, holding on to personal responsibility, regardless of one’s partner may be an important factor in bringing about change but also in assisting couples in maintaining the gains they felt during treatment.

In contrast to the disheartening and disillusionment evidenced by Mackenzie and the others in the Difficulties group, hope and expectancy were recognized as a common factor in couples who were able to succeed in therapy (Blow et al., 2009; Davis et al., 2012; Ward et al., 2007). Included in this factor are beliefs that change is possible, beliefs that clients themselves can make wise choices to bring about these changes, and beliefs in one another and/or a higher power (Davis et al., 2012). As an example of this hope and expectancy found in the Maintained group, Mitchell’s declaration to Anne when she doubted his change was evidence of his acceptance of the value he felt God had given him and his belief in his ability to continue to maintain the changes he experienced.
“I'd say I'm not that person anymore, and she'd say I don't know that, and I'd say but I do.”

Interestingly, Ward and associates (2007) found that clients who received more treatment or treatment for a longer period of time perceived therapy to be more helpful and perceived themselves to have had more positive change. This could connect to the fact that almost all participants in this study mentioned that they would have liked more counseling post-intensive. Simply put, Sadie said, “I would love to see [my NIM therapist] more” in order to help her continue to heal and build on the gains she began at NIM.

Similar to hope and expectancy was locus of control. This tied to the belief that one can bring about changes and impact relationships on his or her own. Internal locus of control refers to a belief that one has power to impact the outcomes in his or her own life, while external locus of control refers to the belief that one is not in control of outcomes and is instead at the mercy of others and circumstances to bring about change (Bugaighis, Schumm, Bollman, & Jurich, 1983; Camp & Ganong, 1997). Two separate studies exploring husband and wife locus of control in relation to marital satisfaction found that internal locus of control was positively correlated with marital satisfaction (Bugaighis et al.; Camp & Ganong). These findings related to the current study through the overarching comparative themes of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation and change. Participants, like Mitchell who believed he had power over his changes noted above, were intrinsically motivated to continue to bring about those changes regardless of their spouses’ appraisals. Conversely, though Michelle showed internal locus of control in
relation to her taking care of her own self-care, she did not see her power to bring about happiness and positive change in her marriage if her husband did not also equally participate. She said, “When I realized there was not any reciprocity I just, I kind of, I just caved in at this, at that point, I just stopped trying.”

Bill, on the other hand, was committed to making things work and continued to make his own efforts, though it took Sadie a year to start making positive efforts towards the marriage. He said although this was very discouraging at times, “[God] knew exactly how long it would take to make me to slow down, study his word, and learn perspective”. His focus remained on the changes he was making, and his belief that his efforts could make a difference in his relationship. Blow and colleagues (2009) noted commitment to working things out is another common factor leading to positive change. Clearly, in Bill and Sadie’s marriage, it was also a factor in maintaining and building on gains in the year following therapy.

Another common factor that was found in the literature and could be at play in this study was the level of distress. Many studies have found that more distressed couples tend to either leave treatment early or have lower outcomes upon completion than couples with less distress (Davis et al., 2012; Snyder et al., 2006; Wood et al., 2005). Davis and associates (2012) suggested this could relate to lowered commitment levels and less willingness to take personal responsibility. More research would be needed on these factors to substantiate this claim, but similar outcomes were demonstrated by the couples of the groups in this study. Pre-intensive demographic surveys indicated that while there was little difference in levels of hope going into the intensive, the couples in
the Difficulties group averaged greater levels of distress with their marriages and their partners than the Maintained group. This could also be evidenced in the fact that more couples in the Difficulties group were no longer sharing a bedroom, while two out of three of the couples in the Gains group were still sharing a bedroom before the intensive. There were also more couples with the same levels of perceived interest in counseling in the Gains group than the Difficulties group. While none of these are conclusive in such a small sample, these differences could be illustrative of the effect of heightened distress going into treatment.

Further, looking at predictors of divorce, Gottman (2001) found that couples who were in distressed marriages tended to be more negative towards their partners than couples who were less distressed. This could be seen in how Michelle spoke about her conflicts with her husband. She said, “He would always attack my family, you know, he would go there, really, really vulnerable places, so, places that are really hard to heal, and I would emasculate him, you know, so we were equal offenders”. Gottman and Silver (1994) and Holman and Jarvis (2003) also found that couples who were more distressed and typically less emotionally regulated would use more of what Gottman called the four horsemen of the apocalypse, criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. This was evidenced in the excerpt above and in the subtle contempt expressed in Jim’s frustration and sarcasm when he said “It just would never occur to her that God might change her heart or her attitude, you know, to make it work”.

Finally, another predictor of divorce that seemed to be at work in the Difficulties group was the level of discouragement. Feinauer and Patterson (1992) found that high
levels of discouragement, as evidenced by hopelessness, feeling depressed and defeated about the marriage, not knowing what else they can do, and recognition and regret of unrealistic expectations, were predictors of later divorce. While this may not be a causal relationship, if partners continued to feel this way, motivation for change would likely decrease as well as perceived locus of control. Couples in the Difficulties group in this study expressed these feelings, as evidenced by the overarching comparative theme of disheartened versus regenerated. At the time of the interview, two couples were moving towards divorce and the third expressed feelings of deep discouragement. However, perhaps what kept Mackenzie and Aaron together was the hope that change was still possible and the continued efforts they were making to slowly work on their own issues.

As Mackenzie said,

The fact that we are using [the tools] at all in whatever context is still good, because it’s still engraining in us and again, I’m, hopeful when we get to a place that we are better able to actively work on our marriage, you know, again we’ve had some practice with it still.

Based on the connections that have been made between the themes that emerged out of this study and the common factors that have been studied relating to these themes, there are some practical implications that can be drawn for both NIM and couples who are considering marriage therapy in conjoint, group, or intensive group formats. The next two sections explore these possible implications.
Implications for NIM

Not only is there significance in this study due to how it relates to previous research; there also emerged some interesting potential implications for NIM and others who offer intensive marriage therapies. First, this study corroborated that intensive group couples therapy and the NIM model is effective in bringing about change in similar ways to other therapy models. This was particularly true in its emphasis on personal responsibility and focus on interactional cycles (Davis & Piercy, 2007a; Halchuk et al., 2010). At the same time, because most of the couples in both groups commented on having wanted more after the intensive, different options could be provided to meet different needs.

First, in addition to surveying levels of distress in the pre-intensive survey, Gottman’s indicators could also be explored or queried. This may help NIM facilitators to more effectively make recommendations for treatment modality and aftercare post intensive. Further research comparing severely distressed couples and less distressed couples in group versus conjoint programs may bring additional clarity. Out of the current research, it could be recommended that couples who are not severely distressed be offered an added day or half-day conjoint session to help them better understand how the theories and tools provided in group specifically apply to them, and to provide relapse prevention training so they feel better equipped to return home.

For couples who are more severely distressed, conjoint treatment instead of group work could be advantageous. Another option for severely distressed couples might be to have additional conjoint work either tacked onto the end of the intensive or as an
additional recommendation for highly distressed couples. In addition, NIM may want to consider building a strong national referral network of therapists who are not only familiar with IMIT, but who are willing to collaborate with NIM therapists to develop appropriate aftercare treatment plans specific to couples post intensive if indicated. This could provide more continuity and higher success rates for recovering severely distressed couples going forward.

In addition, while NIM does offer follow-up coaching calls post-treatment, only one couple in the Difficulties group found these to be helpful. One way these could become more helpful might be to have the coach sit in on and contribute to the final session at the intensive so that couples become familiar with the person who will be providing their follow-up care. This idea came from Bill’s comment “when you spill your guts to somebody in person, it's a connection that you can't duplicate from reading a file and talking on the telephone”.

Another option came from Anne and Mitchell’s reference to an alumni network that is available to encourage others coming out of intensives. They were the only couple who referenced this, but others could find it helpful if this program were developed and recommended more intentionally. In fact, support groups led by successful alumni could be set up to continue support for struggling couples post intensive. Another option could be to create a “sponsor” program similar to addictions treatments where successful couples agree to partner with struggling couples for the first year to help them stay on track with the tools they have learned at NIM. These ideas would have to be tested for effectiveness but they all point to the need for something else in addition to the intensive
week that provides couples with supplementary support to assist them in focusing on
personal responsibility, internal locus of control, hope, and practicing the tools they
gained at the intensive.

Further, more attention could be given to couples who indicate greater levels of
distress going into the intensive, as seen in the common factors research indicating more
attrition and less success rates. While this may not have been the case immediately after
the intensive, this disheartened state may be a key factor in couples not being able to
maintain gains going forward. One interesting dynamic in the Maintains group
demographics was that though in two couples’ distress levels were fairly high on some
aspects of their marriage, they also indicated some satisfaction with other aspects of their
marriage or their spouses. This was in sharp contrast to the Difficulties group who
indicated consistent levels of heightened distress across all aspects of their marriage.
This may be an area NIM could investigate further in order to better meet the needs of
this population.

Implications for Clients

In addition to implications this study has for NIM, there are also some
implications that can be suggested for couples who are either planning to go to a marriage
intensive, have been to a marriage intensive, or are engaged in other forms of marital
therapy. First, this study supports the common factors research pointing to taking
personal responsibility for both the problem and making changes to resolve marital
issues. Because of this, couples should be encouraged to search their motives and
willingness to look at their own sides of things and enter intensives being prepared to focus significant attention there. In addition, it is recommended that they find a program that fits with their worldview, to enable them greater buy-in, increased hope and expectancy for change, and increased willingness to engage in the process. The implications of this study indicate that coming out of treatment, continuing this personal focus regardless of spousal involvement or appraisal, prolonged patience, hope that change in both partners is possible, and sustained change in even one partner may allow for greater marital gains maintained over time.

**Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

As with any research, this study had limitations that must be recognized and taken into consideration when evaluating the findings of this study. However, these limitations do not have to be considered negative, but rather can point to further research that can build on the findings discussed here. This section explores some of these limitations and points to recommendations for future research emerging from this study.

To begin with, it must be noted that the qualitative nature of this design prohibits findings from being statistically verifiable. This was not a problem because the intent was to gain rich understanding of the lived experiences and meaning making of a small number of couples who had gone through intensive therapy. Going forward, these findings can then be operationalized and researched quantitatively to see if these common factors are in fact at play in the maintenance experience of large numbers of couples.
In addition, while it was noted that couples in the Difficulties group shared the experience of being disheartened, and this may be related to higher distress levels, this study was not designed to validate or verify those potential correlations. Future research is needed to explore these correlations and the possible means of addressing them recommended in the previous section.

Another limitation of this study related to the unequal group sizes. While initially the intent was to have two groups with all partners represented, only one couple from the Difficulties group consisted of both partners being willing to participate. Not having the two other partners may have biased the perspective on what happened in each of their post-intensive experiences because only one side of the couple perspective was provided. Having the perspective of the other partners would have conveyed a fuller picture of the interactions that occurred and would have allowed for a more balanced interpretation of what happened in these two marriages and the meaning they gave to their lack of gains maintenance. However, the researcher was aware of this imbalance and attempted to analyze the data while imagining what the silent spouses may have experienced based on what was shared. Even so, assumptions about the silent spouses’ experiences were not included in this project because they could not be verified and were not directly found in the data provided. Future research could hold to more rigid requirements, insisting on including only couples with both partners’ participation.

Future studies could also be structured with separate interviews for all participants, possibly allowing for more openness and honesty within the interviews. Having couples interview together was a possible limitation; however, this was intended
to allow for the additional inter-relational data to be observed by the interviewer as couples shared their joint experiences together. How couples interacted, completed each other’s thoughts, or ignored each other and proceeded with their own sharing provided additional soft data that would not have been possible in separate interviews. Even so, future research could consider meeting with couples individually or individually and together to obtain different advantages in the data.

In addition, future research could include exploring the experience of more couples in each group separately to verify the findings obtained in this mixed study. This could also allow for different designs with separate interviews and more rigid exclusion criteria. Coming out of the connection between the findings of this study and those coming out of common factor research, studies could be designed to test the perceived correlations between common factors and outcome maintenance over time. In addition, future studies could look at the addition of relapse training to couples therapy in general and to NIM intensive therapy specifically. Further, more research could be done exploring if there is any significance or correlation between couples where one spouse is less distressed than the other spouse and couples where both spouses seem to be equally distressed. Finally, more research is needed in general to better understand severely distressed couples and what can be done to assist them in reengaging and creating the possibility for restoration in their marriages, as well as equipping them in maintaining any gains they were able to achieve through marital therapy.
Relocating the Researcher in Light of the Findings

Throughout the process of this research I noticed my approach to marital therapy continuing to evolve more in the direction of the findings of this study. When couples would come in continuing to blame one another, I felt more confident to challenge them on the absolute need to focus on their own sides of the dance and take personal responsibility for their own well-being, happiness, and side of the relational issues. The theories used at NIM have been incorporated further into my work, and this research has given me greater confidence in using this treatment modality as well as a renewed interest in finding or creating more accurate assessment instruments to be used specifically for assessing couples. With this information, I hope to be better equipped to treat and meet the unique needs of my clients entering therapy.

Chapter Summary

This chapter sought to provide the significance of the findings from this study as they related to the research questions about how participants made sense of the impact or lack of impact their marriage intensive therapy had on their marriage in the first year post treatment. This was achieved through grounding these findings back into current research related to group couples therapy and intensive therapy, and through connecting these findings to common factors research that has been corroborated by this research. Common factors that seemed to be supported by the current study included therapeutic relationship factors; fit of the therapy model; being open, honest, and vulnerable; taking personal responsibility; commitment; hope and expectancy; locus of control; levels of
distress; and predictors of divorce. After making these connections, implications were provided for NIM and clients, and then limitations and recommendations for future research were discussed. Finally, the researcher shared how this study has impacted her and her counseling practice.

**Final Summary**

This study began with a desire to understand how couples made sense of the impact or lack of impact their marriage intensive had on their marriages one year post intensive treatment. The journey began with providing the rationale for this study through explaining its purpose, significance, and parameters, followed by locating the researcher in the study by explaining her reasoning for why this focus appealed to her. Chapter two expanded on this by providing a literature review that pointed to the necessity of this research within the existing research pool. Research exploration included studies relating to effective conjoint marriage counseling treatments, group marital therapy formats, marital education formats, marriage intensive formats, and finally Integrative Marriage Intensive Therapy as provided at National Institute of Marriage (NIM).

Once the case had been made for this study, chapter three detailed the IPA research design, explaining all aspects of what was going to take place. IPA itself was explicated including detailed explanations of the three key facets of the design: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. The methods used to determine the participant selection were then provided followed by a thorough explanation of the data
collection and analysis procedures. This was followed by a description of the trustworthiness techniques and ethical considerations that were engaged during the entire study.

Once the design was approved by the Institutional Review Board, active research began with executing the methods laid out in chapter three. Participants were contacted and screened through a NIM gatekeeper, and consenting participants provided reflective summaries and then shared their experiences and interpretations through a videotaped semi-structured interview with the researcher. Participants were selected to make up two groups, the first representing couples who had experienced gains at the intensive and were able to maintain those gains (Maintained group), and the second representing couples who initially experienced gains but were unable to maintain them by one year post intensive (Difficulties group). Interviews were then transcribed and rigorously analyzed first individually, then within the context of each group, and finally in comparison to one another, seeking similarities and differences between the groups.

Chapter four detailed the six themes that emerged from this analysis for each group and then provided the analysis of the similarities and differences and the two overarching comparative themes that emerged from that comparison. In answer to the first research question, what and how gains were maintained, themes in both groups included Intensive Factors, Personal Responsibility, and Faith. In answer to the second question, what made it difficult to maintain gains, themes in both groups included Intensive Factors, Change Takes Time/Change Takes Too Much Time, and Outside Factors. While the main theme headings were the same in both groups, how these themes
were experienced was quite different, as seen in the subthemes and the overarching comparative themes. These overarching themes that emerged when comparing the two groups were Regenerated versus Disheartened, and Intrinsic versus Extrinsic Change and Motivation.

Chapter five brought the study full circle with returning the findings of this study back to the extant literature and drawing further connections with the emergent themes and common factors research. Many of the subthemes within this study pointed to and supported earlier findings about common factors leading to positive or negative treatment outcomes. These connections revealed that the same common factors that contribute to treatment outcomes may also be at work in the maintenance of gains achieved during treatment, even at one year post treatment. Finally, implications for NIM and clients were discussed, and limitations and recommendations for future research were then provided. In conclusion, it is the hope of this researcher that these findings will be expanded upon to further understand the factors involved in outcome maintenance, along with the development of new innovative ways to equip clients based on these findings.
REFERENCES


282


283


285


286


290


Appendix A: One-Page Research Summary

TITLE:

The significance of marriage intensives: A multi-perspective interpretative phenomenological analysis of couples’ post intensive experience

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this study is to understand and compare how couples make sense of their marriage experience one year after intensive therapy for couples who found it significant and were able to maintain gains, and for couples who initially found it helpful but were unable to maintain gains.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

How do couples who have gone through marriage intensive therapy perceive and make sense of the impact or lack of impact this treatment has had on their marriage?

a) What, if any, gains have been sustained and how?

b) What, if anything, has made it difficult to maintain gains?

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR COUPLE INTERVIEWS:

1. What was your marriage like before the intensive?

2. Tell me about your intensive experience at NIM.

3. What has your marriage been like since the intensive?

4. How has the intensive changed the way you think about yourself, your spouse, and/or your marriage? Why or why not?

5. Describe how the marriage intensive affects they way you see your marriage/yourself in the future.

CASE SELECTION:

(1) Couples have completed IMIT at NIM at least 1 year prior to this study; (2) Initially experienced positive gains immediately after intensive; (3) Increased marital satisfaction maintained (4 couples); (4) Increased marital satisfaction not maintained (4 couples); (5) Both partners participate; (6) Articulate and willing to share openly

293
Appendix B: Possible Questions for Couple Interviews

Project Title: The significance of marriage intensives: A multi-perspective interpretative phenomenological analysis of couples’ post intensive experience

1. What was your marriage like before the intensive?

*Possible prompts:*

- Resources/Strengths?
- Challenges?
- What led to your decision to attend the marriage intensive at NIM?

2. Tell me about your intensive experience at NIM.

*Possible prompts:*

- While you were at the intensive, what was:
  - Most helpful?
  - Least helpful?
  - Most challenging?
  - Most rewarding?
  - Most disappointing?

3. As you reflect on it now, describe the significance of the marriage intensive experience since you attended.

*Possible prompts:*

294
• Why do you believe it was important for you to attend the intensive?
• What meaning does your intensive experience have to you?
• How has the intensive changed the way you think about yourself, your spouse, and/or your marriage?

4. Tell me about your marriage since the intensive.

*Possible prompts:*

• What has been different?
• What is going well?
• What is not going well?
• If we talked with those who know you, how would they say you and/or your marriage have changed since the intensive?
• What do you think your spouse would say?

A. If separated/divorced:

• What led to the decision?

5. What, if any, marital gains do you believe have been sustained and how?

*Possible prompts:*

• What, if anything, do you (individually) believe helped achieve and maintain any gains?
• What, if anything, do you (individually) believe has made it difficult to achieve and maintain gains?
• Was there anything specifically that NIM did or did not do?

• What did you (individually and both) do to maintain or not maintain possible gains?

6. Is there anything else you would like for me to know about the significance of your marriage intensive experience at or since NIM?
July 9, 2013

Tara Lalonde

Dear Tara,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1974
Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

The Significance of Marriage Intensives: A Multi-Perspective Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Couples’ Post Intensive Experience

Tara Lalonde
Liberty University
Center for Counseling and Family Studies

You are invited to be in a research study about the significance of having gone through a National Institute of Marriage (NIM) couples’ intensive. This study seeks to compare couples who were able to maintain gains and those who have not been able to maintain gains for whatever reason. You were selected as a possible participant because of your participation in NIM’s couples intensive a year ago and your initial assessment that it had been impactful for your marriage at that time. I ask that you read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Tara Lalonde
Liberty University’s Center for Counseling and Family Studies

Background Information:

The purpose of the study is to understand and further the research knowledge base on how couples make sense of what happens for them in the first year after marriage intensives.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will be asking you to do the following things:

- Sign and scan/e-mail or fax this consent form back to me after asking any questions you may have.
- Agree to have NIM transfer all previously collected demographic information to the researcher. [Initial here]
- Write and e-mail me a brief summary of your marriage experience since the intensive, including how you have made sense of the impact or lack of impact the intensive has had on you or your marriage.
- Participate in a 60 to 120 minute video-conference interview as a couple (if possible) which will be audio and video recorded and transcribed by the researcher. You will be required to obtain access to a video recording device and Internet access to Skype in order to participate in the real-time video-conference interview(s).
- Be available for follow-up questions if needed for the purposes of clarifying data, gaining further insights, and commenting on interpretations. These will either be over the phone
or via video-conference where possible and should take no longer than 30 minutes. Again, all correspondences will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

- Read and provide feedback on final interpretations and documentation via e-mail.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

While the risks of participating in this study are not more than would be encountered in everyday life, there are some risks you should be aware of before agreeing to be in this study. Risks may include feeling uncomfortable, anxious, or having self-doubt due to having to share your story and personal details with a stranger. Some people may feel a sense of shame or exposure. There may also be an emotional cost to openly and reflectively sharing your time, emotional resources, and priceless experience. For instance, some couples may have negative feelings stirred and brought back to the surface through sharing their stories.

Steps to minimize these risks include signing this consent form after being able to ask as many questions as you require to feel comfortable participating in this study, taking time to really think through your preparatory summary, making you as comfortable as possible during the interview by really trying to understand your story and your experience the way you see it, understanding confidentiality listed below, being able to debrief with me or a NIM counselor, and your ability to revoke your participation in the study at any time.

The possible benefits of you participating in this study include possible renewed hope, increased awareness and focus on your marriage, increased insight, greater self-awareness, and possible shifting in priorities. In addition, your sharing may help other couples going through similar experiences, may help NIM and other intensive programs make changes to make treatment more effective, and may help the research community identify new areas that require attention.

**Compensation:**

Other than the possible benefits to you listed above, there will be no direct or monetary compensation for participation in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In the dissertation report or any subsequent journal publications or presentations, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant.

All transcribed and video-taped data or notes will be coded in such a way to remove your name and all other personally identifying information, and the code sheet will be stored separately in a locked and protected area in the researcher’s office. All interview and research records will be stored on a secure, encrypted laptop that remains in the constant possession of the researcher, as well as being backed up on a portable USB that will be stored in a locked and protected cabinet in the researcher’s office. All video tapes will be deleted immediately upon completion of this study. All other transcribed data, notes, and identifying information (stored separately) will be destroyed within three years of completion of the study. Until that time, data will be stored in the office of the researcher in coded format and inaccessible to outsiders.
Limits of confidentiality

In a qualitative study complete confidentiality is not possible because excerpts and descriptions from participants’ interviews become an integral part of data reporting. However, anonymity will be upheld by allowing participants to choose pseudonyms and review all information being included.

Further, in accordance with the US Department of Health and Human Services (see https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/manda.cfm) if the participant states or suggests that he or she (or his or her spouse) is abusing a child (or vulnerable adult), or a child (or vulnerable adult) is in danger of abuse, the researcher is required to report this information to the appropriate social service and/or legal authorities.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, with NIM, or with Tara Lalonde. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time without negative repercussions. Should you decide to withdraw, you can contact Tara Lalonde by phone and then in writing via e-mail to let her know of your desire to withdraw from the study. At that time, your transcribed data and video recordings will be removed from the study and stored separately until they can be deleted three years after the completion of the study.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Tara Lalonde. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at telalonde@liberty.edu or 905-239-2295, Fax 905-492-3386. You are also free to contact my Liberty University advisor, Dr. David Jenkins at 434-592-4045 or djenkins@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ I understand and agree to be audio and video-recorded during the interview and possibly during follow-up correspondences.

(Approval indicated in check box is required in order to participate in this study)
Signature: ___________________________ Date: ________________

Signature of Investigator: ______________________ Date: ________________

**IRB Code Numbers:** 1629.070913

**IRB Expiration Date:** July 9, 2014
Appendix E: National Institute of Marriage Research Consent Form

Research Consent:

National Institute of Marriage (NIM) is dedicated to improving the health of marriages. We are committed to ensuring that the services we provide are of the highest quality in meeting the needs of the individuals and marriages that come through our doors. As a result, we are conducting ongoing research to help inform us about the effectiveness of our programs and services.

As a client, I hereby authorize NIM to use information from my intake assessment and treatment records for research purposes. I understand that I will likely be notified via mail, e-mail, or phone on several occasions (typically at several month or yearly intervals) after the Intensive. I further understand that my participation is strictly voluntary and that I can refuse to participate in or withdraw from the study at any time. I also realize that my refusal to participate will not keep me from receiving treatment and services through NIM.

I understand that NIM will strive to handle all the information I provide them with strict confidentiality and will seek to protect my anonymity. I understand that there are risks to confidentiality inherent to each of the modes of communication listed above. I also understand that NIM may from time to time contract with outside persons or organizations in order to best facilitate the collection, storage and analysis of research data while at all times taking reasonable steps to protect my anonymity, confidentiality and privacy. Finally, I understand that I can contact NIM should I have questions or concerns related to participation in their research.

____________________________________         _______________________
Client Signature              Date

_____________________________________
Printed Name
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Key words</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sadie and Bill</td>
<td>SB 2-30</td>
<td>we'd become professional at hurting each other</td>
<td>Bill (p. 93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SB 1-94</td>
<td>even though we were living in the same town, ah seven miles basically from his office, he was not here, I mean he was gone</td>
<td>Sadie (p. 93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SB 1-95</td>
<td>long hours and then when I was here it was so much, so awful I wasn't checked in, I mean I was totally checked out when I was here</td>
<td>Bill (p. 93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SB 2-41</td>
<td>I harbored a lot of resentment about that, even still, I try not to… but yeah, that's a... that was a pretty awful thing for me... to go through alone</td>
<td>Sadie (p. 93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SB 2-215</td>
<td>to hear people praying for me personally, I didn't, I was uncomfortable um, I didn't feel like I deserved... um, their prayers, um I didn't go to dinner that night</td>
<td>Sadie (p. 93 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SB 2-123</td>
<td>I think for me... going to NIM was like the last... straw for me, if I didn't, if I couldn't have come out of that with something, I don't know what would have happened. (Crosstalk Bill: then it was over) I think it would have been over. I think at that point I was willing to share the kids, where I'd never been able, I would have never done that before.</td>
<td>Sadie (p. 94 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td></td>
<td>I don't think I realized until the intensive that we were doing this to each other if not consciously than certainly deliberately. That to me was a pretty humongous revelation</td>
<td>Bill (p. 94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td></td>
<td>Since that time I have been intent on not being that way. I can't say I have always been successful, but after seven years, change doesn't always come easily</td>
<td>Bill (p. 94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-229</td>
<td>“I stayed in bed, that was what I did for months even after the retreat, because I still was very depressed and uncertain, I guess, …not of the marriage but just (crosstalk Bill: everything) life in general</td>
<td>Sadie (p. 94)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-285</td>
<td>I think I truly began to change and um, I...had it on my heart for probably a few months but ah, our anniversary, the night before our anniversary [ ] I wrote Bill a card, I have no idea why, but I basically said, you know I'm gonna take down all my walls and be raw with you, I'm tired of hiding my feelings, I'm tired of being afraid of my feelings I'm just, you know your gonna have to suck it up and listen to me cry and moan and if I'm unhappy I'm gonna tell you I'm unhappy and if I'm happy, you...you're gonna know I'm happy.. I'm gonna quit being a robot</td>
<td>Sadie (p. 94 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-288</td>
<td>after that we really spent time working together, and again I don't know what happened but one morning I just couldn't wait for him to leave for work. I wanted him out the door. As soon as he got out the door, I got on the computer and I wrote a e-mail to his parents, basically saying you know, I'm sorry, let's move forward, everything's in the past</td>
<td>Sadie (p. 94 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne and Mitchell</td>
<td>we've been in ministry since the day after our.. wedding, we, literally</td>
<td>Anne (p. 95 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 44</td>
<td>I've shared my story many, many times, and I speak at women's retreats, it's all based on my traumatic life story and um, God uses it and I'm very thankful for that but I live this story, it's not just a story, it's me</td>
<td>Anne (p. 95 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 109</td>
<td>prior to that, my first 32 years of my life was a lie (crosstalk T: wow, fair enough) so, so that's.. that was kinda like, I think I described it as, I lived up to about this point [uses hand to indicate a point] and then I fell off and then all of this was just a lie so I don't even know who I am... at this point</td>
<td>Mitchell (p. 95 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 153</td>
<td>as the years went by it got heavier and heavier and just weighed more</td>
<td>Mitchell (p. 95)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 205</td>
<td>having been in ministry, um, and in high profile ministry, and we, we just never had the time to tend to the wounds … and then this one issue kept piling up on it and other issues</td>
<td>Anne (p. 95)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 21</td>
<td>I had told him 10 years ago that if you ever are connected with her again that I'm done, so my immediate response when I realized what was happening was I'm done, that's it</td>
<td>Anne (p. 95)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 31</td>
<td>We were getting ready to move out of the house we were living in</td>
<td>Anne (p. 95)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 307</td>
<td>that was tough but I don't know if it helped because it feels different now, I don't feel like we're in crisis mode anymore in our marriage</td>
<td>Anne (p. 96)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie and David</td>
<td>JD 170</td>
<td>we'd had a lot of deaths in our family and we'd lost a lot of our family and friends and that was very, very hard on us both as a couple and then also on us each individually, personally</td>
<td>David (p. 96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JD 10</td>
<td>Instead of like coming at it early on it would just... we'd sort of let things pile up then when we'd have the discussion there was never a, this is what I'm upset about, it would be more of a laundry list type thing.</td>
<td>Julie (p. 97)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|  | JD 166 | I went back to work so that also helped you know having to be with other people, you know it's…we've had a little bit of a shift, just not just with NIM class but with taking this financial class and with me working. | Julie (p. 97) 
reference only |
|  | JD 252 | we both knew we need to do a better job of taking care of our marriage, we just didn't really know how, and that's the, that last part which we, we need to figure that part out | Julie (p. 97) |
| Mackenzie and Aaron | MA 15 | It's just been a hard thing and I don't think it's fine if you really kinda rebuilding, you know, rebuilding bridges across. Kinda like I'm, I'm over it so she should be over it | Aaron (p. 98) |
|  | MA 154 | [It was] the whole thing of just feeling just | Mackenzie (p. |
| MA 141 | NIM was one of the best things [we’ve] ever done quite frankly, it was very, very powerful | Aaron (p. 98) |
| MA 100 | after our first, and then we got additional ones, we paid for additional um coaching 'cause I just, I personally didn't feel like we were good at just three and I think after maybe our fifth, I think we may have done maybe 5 or 6 total and it was pretty much after that that we started talking about we need to go back | Mackenzie (p. 98 reference only) |
| MA 325 | I see, you know, the, the things that I'm doing that are contributing to not being able to move ahead, because… again, a lot of it because of just my woundedness and just not really knowing what to, to do, or things that I try to do and then it just seems like it doesn't work, and then I, you know, I kind of run for cover again. | Mackenzie (p. 99) |
| MA 200 | Until [personal change] happens I don't know if we are going to be, you know, I don't think we're gonna be that good together, so, and that's part of the, I guess and that's the thing like with the stuff I learned at NIM, it's like I agree the stuff that they're teaching and I believe it, um, but, I'm not there, that's for sure, I'm not there. | Aaron (p. 99) |

**Jim**

<p>| Jm 9 | We were kind of opposites in many ways | Jim (p. 99) |
| Jm 190 | As things got worse and worse, um, you know, all of our, a lot of our friends just didn't want to be around us anymore, you know, I mean it's like ‘aah… we don't want to be around you, you know, you guys are just miserable and toxic and fight’ and so I think you know, we, we kinda just lost a lot of those friendships. | Jim (p. 99) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Page/Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jm 111</td>
<td>um, and so, I don't know, I mean that's where I think things you know are really tough right now is um, you know it seems like what she wants is somewhere else, doing something and you know what I want is just kinda that quality time with her no matter where it is.</td>
<td>Jim (p. 100 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JM 25</td>
<td>One of the things I think we identified… I like touch, affection, that kind of stuff, and that was just never demonstrated in her family and you know she has no need for that whatsoever.</td>
<td>Jim (p. 100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 45</td>
<td>with her, I think it was cultural.</td>
<td>Jim (p. 100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 152</td>
<td>One of the things I think we identified… I like touch, affection, that kind of stuff, and that was just never demonstrated in her family and you know she has no need for that whatsoever.</td>
<td>Jim (p. 100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 186</td>
<td>On the weekends it's you know usually a fight, so, but you know you've gotta live somewhere on the weekends, you can't just stay at work.</td>
<td>Jim (p. 101)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>So the respect I was, should have been able to give my husband to help him become everything that God had called him to be as far as being head of the household, I was never able to give him um, and I guess, that, that, I mean, I, I saw my, my family owns a business and um, my financial stability has pretty much always been there for me, so I really felt like I was a means to an end.</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 101)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 11-12</td>
<td>there were a lot of arguments, a lot of arguments, the arguments became, they, we couldn't control the arguments, they were spilling out in front of the children.</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 101)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 34</td>
<td>It started to um, impact my oldest son, when his daddy would raise his voice he would stand between us and like push us apart, he never saw any physical altercations but just that horrible, that verbal, that tension in the verbal conversation was enough for him to know something wasn't right and that's when I made the decision that it's just time.</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 102)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to separate.</td>
<td>Mi 166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think we were willing while we were there, I don't think we were willing to come home and do the hard work that was required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix G: Maintained Group References and Quotes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Key words</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intensive Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Package</td>
<td>JD 105-107</td>
<td>I mean I think the whole formula of the intensive is good from top to [bottom], you know, from beginning to end in that it's all the little things. It’s the [hosts], you know, it's the people that are there you just, you feel like when you get there that you're being loved. [ ] It's just a very welcoming environment. You feel the Holy Spirit, you feel that this is, you know, that this is good. [ ]</td>
<td>David (p. 106)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JD 113-116</td>
<td>That's one good part of that formula and the other thing is certainly the facility is outstanding, um, so it's just a very nice place. And then when you get into the, you know, the sessions... again they were effective in that, um, you know, they've got their framework, but I think it's different with every time because there's different couples; there's a different dynamic to the room. [ ] It was very much a, hey, if we go off on this tangent, let's go and see where this takes us and you know if they needed to bring it back a little bit, they would [ ] so that was, you know, that was good</td>
<td>David (p. 106)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AM 82</td>
<td>she’s got the best story. [ ] She walked in and immediately felt safe</td>
<td>Mitchell (p. 107)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AM 89</td>
<td>Oh, okay, yeah he's right, it, I mean immediately when you walk into their facility, everything is purposeful, every piece of furniture, everything on the wall. [ ] But everything they did was extremely purposeful on making sure that when you walked in you knew that you were loved and embraced and there was no judgment.</td>
<td>Anne (p. 107)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AM 94</td>
<td>It was safe and then the people inside made it even safer, you know</td>
<td>Mitchell (p. 107)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AM 118</td>
<td>there was no judgment</td>
<td>Mitchell (p. 107)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SB 2-225</td>
<td>I wanted to bring… [the hosts home] with us</td>
<td>Sadie (p. 107)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Quote</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-449</td>
<td>because, you know, I had never had anybody...take care of me like that</td>
<td>Sadie (p. 108)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-250</td>
<td>qualified psychologists and mental health counselors [ ] who are knowledgeable enough to point people in the right direction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Dynamics</td>
<td>yeah, they were [ ] top notch folks</td>
<td>Bill (p. 108)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 186</td>
<td>We wanted to do a private one because we thought well we've got some really horrible things and ah, we decided, how on earth are we going to go there and share in a group of people we don't know, and the [ ] intake counselor on the phone, she said I promise you, you will not regret doing the group intensive, and I said okay, I'm going to take your word for it and ah, I wouldn't have changed that for anything in the world</td>
<td>Anne (p. 108)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 115-116</td>
<td>I was able to see [the other husbands] through the eyes of Christ as a Christian sister, so what I was able to do was look at Mitchell through the eyes of Christ as a Christian sister, and not as a cheating husband ...and that really helped me see him differently, because the other wives were looking at him with mercy and compassion, I was looking at their husbands with mercy and compassion, I'm like oh come on forgive him, you know</td>
<td>Anne (p. 109)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD 99</td>
<td>I was originally concerned how that was going to work out</td>
<td>Julie (p. 109)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD 101-102</td>
<td>It was really good because, [ ] when you first got there it's like these people are nothing like us but then at the end you realize how similar, even though your problems are different problems, it's the same innate problem is that you're having trouble communicating and how are you dealing with it. We haven't kept up with the people, we originally thought we would, but I still, listening to them talk, I learned as much as when it was my own turn to talk</td>
<td>Julie (p. 109)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-444-447</td>
<td><strong>Bill:</strong> The ability to kind of, purge some of our stuff with other people that were carrying around a lot of the, not the same stuff but similar stuff, so we could kind of all get it out there and… <strong>Sadie:</strong> You didn't feel so isolated <strong>Bill:</strong> Yeah, and nobody could judge anybody else because we all could, you know, <strong>Sadie:</strong> We'd all screwed up <strong>Bill:</strong> We're all screw-ups in there so <strong>Sadie:</strong> Honestly that is [] very important, [] It made me feel at least, you know, okay... I can relate to what she's saying, I can relate to what she's saying, I could relate to everyone's story and when you sit in a counseling session with just the counselor, and you and the husband, it is all about blame</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting It All Out</td>
<td>AM 361-363</td>
<td><strong>Mitchell:</strong> you better go in there open and honest. <strong>Anne:</strong> completely honest <strong>Mitchell:</strong> or it won’t work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 367</td>
<td>had he revealed that two weeks prior in the intensive and dealt with it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-459-460</td>
<td><strong>Bill:</strong> I'd say if you're considering it, you have to go... at least with some level of openness, ah, because, I think if you're completely closed off then... it, you're wasting your time. It won't work. [ ] At least with our group everybody there was in pretty bad shape. <strong>Sadie:</strong> and unfortunately one couple, you know, was not open. One of the parties was not open. <strong>Bill:</strong> and you can tell. <strong>Sadie:</strong> and they did divorce, and you can tell, um ah, you could tell with them, you know, […] the minds had already been made up, you could tell.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill and Sadie (p. 110)</td>
<td>Annie and Mitchell (p. 111)</td>
<td>Annie and Mitchell (p. 111)</td>
<td>Bill and Sadie (p. 112)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>Quote</td>
<td>Page References</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-189-191</td>
<td>It was like cleaning out an infection, you know, just have to get all that stuff out that had been bottled up, that we had bottled up, that everybody else in the room had bottled up. So, I mean, I think that was very important though. I think that was a really good thing for us, I know it was for us, just to get it, just like purge all of that, get it, get it out here in front of us lay it on the table and yeah it's nasty and it's ugly and we did that (crosstalk Sadie: but hey they’ve done it too and…) Yeah, we're not the only ones who have ever done bad things and lived.</td>
<td>Bill and Sadie (p. 112)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 126-127</td>
<td>I just felt like [ ] there was noth'n left… for me to… be. There was noth'n left for me to pick up the pieces and move on, I was, I was broken, I had done all of the hurt and I didn't want to hurt, I didn't want to hurt anybody anymore and so, the more [ ] the week went on, you know, every day is a root canal. How many root canals can you get before you're tired of them, you know? And, for every tooth that was…pulled out of me, four [were] pulled out of her, and I was just...I was just tired of it, I was, I said I, I don't deserve this person, I don't want to hurt her any more so it's just better if I go.</td>
<td>Mitchell (p. 113)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD 10, 14</td>
<td>Instead of like coming at it early on it would just, we'd sort of let things pile up then when we’d have the discussion there was never a, this is what I'm upset about, it would be more of a laundry list type thing. It wasn't healed or fixed it was just [put] away 'til the next time we had time to look at it and then there would be other stuff we'd add to it, so that sort of I think is where we used to be</td>
<td>Julie (p. 114)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Healing First</td>
<td>I think the coolest part about the whole thing was, I'm not as good at this as Mitchell is, but Mitchell in my opinion found true humility and ah, his humility, that was just like released, um, to me, just shed the shame off of him, 'cause he was living in shame his whole life.</td>
<td>Anne re: Mitchell (p. 116)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 279</td>
<td>destroyed... crushed, and, you know, [to] be swept out in a dust pan and that's the end of Mitchell</td>
<td>Mitchell (p. 116)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 280</td>
<td>I think... by me doing that, [it] allowed me to... not only… um, be broken but yet rebuilt at the same time, um, what was the most significant part was that... they took time to know me, you know, and that there was an actual person... that mattered</td>
<td>Mitchell (p. 116)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-210-218</td>
<td>Sadie: So [the counselors] spent an afternoon just basically break'n me down, um to all the things I had buried, I guess, um, I, you know, ugly things that had happened. um, things that I didn't understand, um... mmm... I don't know reasons that I guess I'd lost faith, I don't understand grace and mercy, I still, it was not preached um, in the church that I grew up in. [ ] But man that night was hard for me. Everybody in the room was crying, everybody in the room was crying, and to hear people praying for me personally, I didn't, I was uncomfortable um, I didn't feel like I deserved, um, their prayers, um I didn't go to dinner that night, I just had to go, I had to go sleep because I, I just... couldn't take anymore. Interviewer: Pretty exhausting night Sadie: Yeah, it was exhausting, and so that was probably the... biggest thing for me, was when they broke me down to show me... why I shut myself off from people. [ ] So that was probably the biggest thing for me, was breaking it down so I understood where my... personal issues were</td>
<td>Sadie (p. 117)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD 242-249</td>
<td>They really do give you time to work through stuff and then it's, some of it you, you don't know, I mean I think having the time to focus on yourself you realize things that you might not have realized. [ ] It made me realize that I need to take better care of myself, um, and it made me [ ] realize that I'm not the only person that has hurt, that David has hurt too.</td>
<td>Julie (p. 119)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Summary</td>
<td>Julie told me after the intensive that until the intensive she didn't know that I had a heart. Julie also didn't tend to her heart at all.</td>
<td>David Re: Julie (p. 119)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD 174</td>
<td>and so I had a lot of resentment to Julie because of... I was trying to make her happy with things over here, and then I mean it was just all this crazy stuff</td>
<td>David (p. 119 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| AM 109-113 | I've shared my story many, many times, and I speak at women's retreats, it's all based on my traumatic life story and um, God uses it, and I'm very thankful for that. But I live this story, it's not just a story, it's *me*, and for the first time in my life I was able to realize, I was able to be in touch with the fact that this is *me* this happened to. [ ] It wasn't just a story, it was me and I was able to, be in touch with that and what it did was it helped me to... understand my own responsibility of handling my past, it wasn't Mitchell's responsibility, it never was and it never will be.
Anne (p. 120) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Responsibility</td>
<td><strong>Owning Personal Contributions to the Problem</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| SB 2-104, 118 | I was absolutely in the wrong. I was just... I was just, it was just wrong... I, I mean I think, I feel like I guess anything I could say would sound like an excuse and I don't want to make excuses for what I did 'cause it was wrong, and I shouldn't have done it. [ ] I don't know, this sounds even horrible saying it too, but it was a totally selfish act on my part, you know it wasn't about, it wasn't about having a relationship with someone else, it was about me wanting to satisfy myself, selfish. You know what I mean, I mean like scratch my own itch so to speak, feel, feel good about myself…
Bill (p. 121) |
| SB 2-279 | One last thing that has been influential to me is to use ‘I’ and ‘me’ rather than ‘you’. I was always directing the blame back at Sadie for everything. When I focused on making it not about what she did or didn't do, it opened up the way for us to heal and not constantly be so antagonistic.
Bill (p. 122) |
| SB 2-279 | I began to soften slowly, um, I move at snails’ pace, I don’t like change and I’d spent many years being… a witch but you know… to put it nicely, a witch.
Sadie (p. 122) |
<p>| AM 316 | I didn't fully understand [that my choices impact positively or negatively] prior to [the intensive], because every decision that was made around my life never took me into consideration, so why should I take other people into consideration when I make decisions. That's the way I lived, because that's the way I knew. And so, coming out of that, it gave me a sense of value and, and saying to myself, I don't need to act like that, nor do I want to act like that. I'm better than that. I have this wonderful person next to me, and I need to value that, because now I value me, and I understand that value means something | Mitchell (p. 123) |
| AM 297 | I have judged him off and on but I don't think it's to the degree that I used to um, and I see that it frees him more | Anne (p. 124) |
| JD 147-149 | The whole concept of the whole fear cycle was definitely pretty interesting of the, you know, she says this, here's how I respond, like, you know, I go to my office, you know, hide out, that was good for us to see that on paper and to talk through that. [ ] And then again now, we don't have that nearly to that extreme of what it used to be, You know, it's still there because that's how I'm engrained, but now I catch myself and I go wait a minute is this really what I want to do, this is just gonna set up the next thing, so here's, here's, you know, what do I want, okay here's what I want, alright let me go turn this around and not do this | David (p. 124) |
| JD 211 | [I] felt like Oh God, I've gotta take care of her even though she won't be happy with me, because I won't take care of her properly but my God I've gotta at least try so that when she tells me how sucky I am I can at least say I tried | David (p. 125) |
| Julie Summary | My big take away was I was so tired and angry, but I never stopped to take care of myself. I expected David to do that. | Julie (p. 125) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Responsible for Change</strong></th>
<th><strong>JD 160</strong></th>
<th>No one's intentionally sitting around trying to be mean to me, which is what I used to think [said chuckling], it's just how life is and if I can take care of myself then I'm better</th>
<th>Julie (p. 125)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>JD 16</strong></td>
<td>I don't make taking care of me his responsibility so that I'm not mad at him as easily as I would have been prior</td>
<td>Julie (p. 126)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AM 107-108</strong></td>
<td>I think the most helpful were the main points of we are all responsible. After we are out of our parents' care, and for me, I did not have that, I didn't have parents care as a child so that was kind of irrelevant for me, but the point they make is once you're out of your parents' care, you are responsible for your own value, you are responsible for your own vulnerability, and you are responsible for your own happiness.</td>
<td>Anne (p. 126)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AM - 354</strong></td>
<td>That's a big part of it for women and that's probably my strongest message is do not make your husband responsible for your happiness he will let you down every time and you'll put too much pressure on him</td>
<td>Anne (p. 127) reference only</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AM 316</strong></td>
<td>And so, coming out of that, it gave me a sense of value and, and saying to myself, I don't need to act like that, nor do I want to act like that. I'm better than that. I have this wonderful person next to me, and I need to value that, because now I value me, and I understand that value means something</td>
<td>Mitchell (p. 127 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SB 2-200</strong></td>
<td>There was so much focus on faith and ah, grace, you know, that that forgiveness was available, which to me I was desperate for at the time</td>
<td>Bill (p. 128)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-251-255</td>
<td>Bill: for me, ah, coming back I knew I had been pretty much a complete screw-up with everything, terrible husband, I had been a terrible dad, really just not a very good person generally speaking, ah, [ ] and I guess another thing that [I] realized, ah, was that, just because I had been that way didn't mean I had to continue being that way, [ ] you know, and that, that was, it was my choice to act awful, it also my choice to not act awful Interviewer: Was that new for you, coming out of the intensive, I don't have to keep doing this? Bill: Yeah. Yeah, I think so, I mean I thought that, you know, that I, my course had kinda been set for me, and that, kinda come hell or high water, that was the way I was, but I didn't have to be.</td>
<td>Bill (p. 128)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Summary</td>
<td>Since that time I have [been] intent on not being that way. I can't say I have always been successful, but after seven years, change doesn't always come easily.</td>
<td>Bill (p. 128)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD 345-346</td>
<td>I intentionally come out of my office and come and find Julie and engage with her whether it's just for you know a second or more but at least I do intentionally say okay I need to emerge from my cave and go and find my people and make sure that they know that I'm, I'm still around</td>
<td>David (p. 129)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Tools</td>
<td>The number one thing I would say is practice the check-ins every day, make it a priority, um, pray together every day, do your devotion together every day, and you'll have a great chance of this sticking with you and, and take your fear cycle portrait that they draw with you with their colored sharpies and put it...we had it on our bedroom wall and ah, just keep this a part of your life.</td>
<td>Anne (p. 130)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 432</td>
<td>okay so that's what this is you have to work the program</td>
<td>Anne (p. 130)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 437</td>
<td>It's kind of like your pen and pencil you know they are always there and you know what they are for, you know. When we were a kid we didn't know what a pen was for (chuckles) until we were taught, and now it's a part of our life, you know</td>
<td>Mitchell (p. 130)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 234</td>
<td>I think it's, it's probably subconsciously we are realizing, I don't want to go there, I don't want to go back to where I was, without really even saying it to each other, and then we catch ourselves and just, you know move...move forward instead of regressing</td>
<td>Mitchell (p. 131 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD 346-347</td>
<td>I think for me one of the things I've been really trying to do is really just trying to take better care of myself by getting enough sleep and then also not... not getting hurt, before I'd get...as soon as I'd feel like David may have done something that hurt me I stop and I think why am I, you know, I do the whole why do I feel that he, you know, is that a real thing, would he really hurt me</td>
<td>Julie (p. 131)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD 349-350</td>
<td>so I..I feel like when I do feel the... like I'm upset about something, I stop to think is this really you know, is this really something or is this just me being afraid about something else is the him or is this really my thing that I've now put on him and then I tell him about it and so I can find out, which I think that a big that's been a big helper for me, 'cause most of the times it's nothing but at least knew and it's, then it's gone it's not like we're holding on to it for a later date</td>
<td>Julie (p. 131)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD 259</td>
<td>I think everything's a process, and I think we've been working through those things somewhat organically, um, I mean we have done it, it just hasn't been by the book, and this that and the other, but I think this [interview] might be good too to help us to re-track [ ] you know, okay let's, let's figure out a plan, you know, let's pick up where we left off</td>
<td>David (p. 132)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD 272</td>
<td>I think it's because we are better with ourselves, so therefore you can, you are, you're just, you don't have to think about it, it's just coming natural to take care of each other better</td>
<td>David (p. 132)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-219</td>
<td>Heart talk or the cycle that they take you through, I refer back to that a lot, um especially if we start to get off track...I will say, you know... Bill practices heart talk a lot, he does that better than I do. He will sit and reflect and say I hear what you are saying and then I am more um, inclined to say okay you're forgetting my stressors, you're forgetting the things that trigger my emotional responses</td>
<td>Sadie (p. 133)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-212-213</td>
<td>I still to this day have a hard time with grace and mercy, um, but I did buy the [ ] little bracelets like we bought our daughters, I bought the [ones] that said grace and mercy [for me] and it is, [ ] rarely a day that I, um, go without them...as reminders. And I laugh and it's like, you know, which one am I going to put on [ ] closer to my heart today, and it would be the one I needed</td>
<td>Sadie (p. 133)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Faith**

**Faith Experienced at NIM**

**Bill Summary**

Sadie grew up with a very strong spiritual background and me, not so much, but we have both felt a very strong pull all our lives. Our counselors encouraged all of us to embrace a relationship with God, ask Him for help and accept that He [is] capable of healing all the damage that had been done. After the intensive, Sadie and I have both recommitted ourselves to the Lord and that has been the single biggest change in both our lives. We are finally on the same page working to the same end and are both in the faith. [ ] I think our faith has been the only thing that has allowed us to turn back from the path we were on and start working to rebuild our relationship.  

**Bill (p. 135)**
<p>| SB 2-200-202 | Bill: There was focus on...faith and ah, grace you know, that, that forgiveness was available which to me I was desperate for at the time. Sadie: and I had given up on it Bill: And Sadie had given up on it, and [ ] I went and ah, talked to [our counselors] just for a, briefly for a few minutes so, and they kind of assigned me for my homework to, to learn about that 'cause I had not ever, you know, I'd never, and didn't grow up in church | Bill (p. 135) |
| JD 105-110 | You feel the Holy Spirit, you feel that this is, you know, that this is good. There's, the people here aren't trying to control things, they're letting go and letting [ ] God work this plan through the facility and through them and through this and through that so… And I'm big on that, in that, you know I'm big on getting a feeling of whether this is going to be good or it's going to be bad and whether there's good stuff happening in this place with these people [ ] So I got that good feeling and the good vibe out of everybody there. | David (p. 136) |
| AM 287-290 | I remember when we left the room, the actual [counseling] room, not even the whole house, um, you know we, everybody hugged and it was time to go to [ ] our last dinner together... and... everybody walked out and I remember me, I couldn't leave the room. It was the safest place I'd ever been in my life and I never ever had felt safe, ever, 'cause I had been so abused and left alone throughout my entire life and hurt and vulnerable and so I said I'm going to fluff the pillows, you know. [ ] I just wanted to be the last one to look at that room and say thank you God, you know. And it, for me, gave me a little glimpse of heaven and what it's going to mean to be in the presence of true authenticity, no holds bar, nothing... no surprises to God and no surprises to Jesus and we're all gonna know each other and | Anne (p. 137) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Extracted Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faith Personalized at Home</td>
<td>love each other the way we are and that's what I said when we both felt like for the first time we ever experienced what the church is truly supposed to be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-276-278</td>
<td>Sadie: After [Bill’s] baptism and you know we kind of got back on the same page Interviewer: That's what started to soften your heart, the baptism?  Sadie: Probably, seeing his efforts to, um, learn more, I, I, oh, believe me there were many Sundays where I sat there and went, he's not going to keep this up, you know this is just for show, he's just doing this to keep me... but then it was just, you could just really, it, as I listened to him speak more, speak out more and listened to the knowledge that he had gained, I was like, okay, this is for real.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-275</td>
<td>I'm very proud of him for that, because... it's unexpected and it makes me, you know it makes me want to be a better person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-357</td>
<td>so the...a...there's several women at the church that...that...have kinda... (crosstalk S: mothered me) mothered Sadie in a good way and I, I think they've, you know kind of taught her and helped kind of bring her up and bring her back to where she wants to be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 44</td>
<td>we've been in ministry since the day after our.. wedding, we, literally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 56</td>
<td>Anne: We were both very committed to doing everything possible to stop the generational sin of, my mother was married technically eight times, his mother was married, his adopted mother, four, three or four times Mitchell: Yeah Anne: So, there was a lot of motivation, spiritually</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

322
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Work In Process</strong></th>
<th><strong>Intensive Factors</strong></th>
<th><strong>Intensive Not Enough</strong></th>
<th><strong>Change Takes Time</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JD 23-24</td>
<td>It's my job to take care of myself. The thing they did was the one thing, they broke up the Bible verse love the Lord your God with all your heart, your mind, your soul, there was one more [ ] but [they] broke it down into the different ways how, if you’re not taking care of these four areas, then you’re not, you can't love God properly, you can't love yourself, you can't love [your] partner and so it was like, there you go, that, you know that was the big, for me the big take away.</td>
<td>Julie (p. 140)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Julie</strong> (p. 140)</td>
<td>JD - 122 the end part was some of it (crosstalk D: a little rushed) was a little rushed and that I feel like that's the part where that part would have been a part that helped us</td>
<td>Julie (p. 141)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Julie</strong> (p. 141)</td>
<td>JD 136-138 That's where it's a shame that there's no counselors in our area that follow their program. So that's where it kinda falls on us</td>
<td>David (p. 141)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>David</strong> (p. 141)</td>
<td>SB 2-391-392 Sadie: [My counselor] has helped me to understand that, you know, there is forgiveness, and there is grace, and there is change, and I would love to see her more but, you know, it's expensive and Bill: It's a long ways away Sadie: it's a long ways away, and it was hard to get [ ] to you know, to maneuver the children. We don't have those type of resources, um in the rural area. [ ] I do have a mentor here but [ ] she's a clinical therapist, she's not religiously based. Bill: Yeah. Sadie: And I think we need a religiously based [counselor].</td>
<td>Sadie &amp; Bill (p. 142)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sadie &amp; Bill</strong> (p. 142)</td>
<td>SB 2-177 I saw [the NIM counselor] after the intensive for a few months</td>
<td>Sadie (p. 142 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need Patience</td>
<td>SB 2-464-467</td>
<td>Bill: I think, coming out of it, [ ] I think the word would be patience. I think you have to [ ] have some patience to allow things to kind of percolate and stew, and… work on ya some, you know, [ ] it took us seven years to get as bad as we were, you know it, it was gonna take more than four days to get good again. Sadie: but, look at what, you know, in a year. Bill: yeah, and I'm not saying [ ] it's gonna take seven years, ooh I hope not [laughs] but I, you know, I don't think, yeah I kind of had hopes, you know, I kind of got real jazzed while I was there and I came home and I was like, [claps] let's go baby we're good but, no… Sadie: It wasn't like that for me. No, I had to… Bill: Well it took you a year. Sadie: It took me a year, it took our anniversary, well it, it took a year. It took a year from finding out about, you know, whatever, to the next year and I literally spent that year… hiding Bill: healing. Sadie: He says healing and I say hiding because I didn’t, I, I, was not, I did not want to leave the house.</td>
<td>Bill &amp; Sadie (p. 143)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD 374</td>
<td>It takes a while for some of this stuff to really seep in and to realize you know what was happening there.</td>
<td>Julie (p.140)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-285</td>
<td>I'm gonna take down all my walls and be raw with you. I'm tired of hiding my feelings, I'm tired of being afraid of my feelings I'm just, you know, your gonna have to suck it up and listen to me cry and moan and if I'm unhappy, I'm gonna tell you I'm unhappy, and if I'm happy, you, you're gonna know I'm happy. I'm gonna quit being a robot.</td>
<td>Sadie (p. 145)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-207</td>
<td>I think we've still got a long way to go, I mean 'cause there's still all this stuff, you know, I mean it still hurt her so you can't, you can't heal from the wound overnight.</td>
<td>Bill (p. 146)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 260</td>
<td>Our marriage is constantly in process of even getting, I mean [ ] every day it's a learning process. I, every day we go through moments of, I do, I shouldn't say</td>
<td>Anne (p. 146)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Still Struggling/Working</strong></td>
<td><strong>AM 298-299</strong></td>
<td><strong>I still struggle with um, feeling, like some of my buttons still feel like they are being pushed, like not being loved or um, a couple of others, but then some of the buttons aren't pushed at all anymore. So, it's a slow process, but I, I imagine 10 years from now, if I look at that chart, I think I can go, okay this button when pushed isn't as severe, 'cause they, what they told us is buttons will always be pushed but I don't feel it as much because I learned how to respond correctly.</strong></td>
<td>Anne (p. 147)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SB 2-40</strong></td>
<td><strong>I harbored a lot of resentment about that, even still, I try not to, but yeah, that's a... that was a pretty awful thing for me to go through alone so...</strong></td>
<td>Sadie (p. 148)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SB 2-432</strong></td>
<td><strong>I'm still working on it, it's a daily thing for me, I, I still don't understand the concepts of it, you know it's still very hard 'cause I, I grew up with a preacher that was hell-fire and damnation, you know, it was, God is not loving, God is a scornful.. God, you know, [ ] if you don't follow exactly to the ‘T’ everything that's [ ] said, you know, you have no chance</strong></td>
<td>Sadie (p. 148)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JD 243-244</strong></td>
<td><strong>Julie: There were things that I learned about David that I didn't know, you know, [ ] and I mean I still think there's stuff you're working through David: Oh totally. I'm still, I mean that's the thing, [ ] it's not like you leave there and you're fixed, I mean it's all...it's a process. Yeah sure, 'course there's stuff I'm still working on I'm sure there's stuff you’re still working on. Julie: yeah.</strong></td>
<td>Julie &amp; David (p. 149)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| <strong>Outside Factors</strong>         |                                                                                                                     |                                                             |
| No Model | AM 263-265 | Anne: Marriage is completely a mystery to me, I, we've been married for 29 years and if I get it on the day I die it will be a miracle, I, I just, I don't um, know if we really… Mitchell: Can I try? Anne: Oh yes. Mitchell: The reason that it's hard for me too is 'cause we didn't have a model of a marriage, Anne: ever. Mitchell: Neither one of us, so we don't have anything to base it upon, are we getting it or are we not, 'cause we don't know… Anne: Is this what it is? What it's supposed to be? We just don't know. | Anne &amp; Mitchell (p. 150) |
| JD 96 | but that's you know that's one of those things where neither of us came from parents that had this great relationship to model | Julie (p. 151 reference only) |
| JD 311 | Julie, you know nailed it, you know we didn't have, we don't have the example, we didn't grow up with the example | Julie &amp; David (p. 151 reference only) |
| SB 2-256 | My family is strange and to have, just very hard people, you know they're just hard, [ ] they're not warm, they're not, I mean for them it's all about work; work, work, work, work, work, you know, your work ethic is what defines you | Bill (p. 151) |
| SB 2-358 | Sadie: My mother is now very um, shoo, she used to be a lot like Bill's mom Bill: hard. Sadie: hard, harsh, um, temperamental, Bill: bitter. Sadie: bitter and ah, she has changed since her dad died, which has been very difficult for me to see that 180 in her. So she'll say things now that I'm like, who are you because this is not, I don't even know what to do with you, you know. | Sadie (p. 152) |
| Work | SB 2-443 | I'll be pulled to wanna stay at work for long hours and things like that so yeah, I mean we still have a ways to go yet | Bill (p. 153) |
| AM 307-308 | I mean he was there from February to June and I was going back and forth, so I would be here [in New York] for three weeks and then go back there for a week, then be here for three weeks and that was tough, but I don't feel like we're in crisis mode anymore, in our marriage. I think it's like okay we've been through a lot, we've been able to get back to the core of what we learned. When all is said and done if we just go back to that fear cycle and that fear dance and the concepts we learned, we'll be okay. | Anne (p. 153) |
| AM 312-313 | Yeah because here's the deal, three years ago or two years ago even to be apart that much, how do you think I would have felt? No way would I have trusted him, but what I have come to is even if something were to happen, even if he were to go, continue and find that person again, and they went off and lived happily ever after, that does not determine my happiness. It could hurt me, but it doesn't determine my happiness and my well-being. I no longer put that responsibility on Mitchell. | Anne (p. 154) |
| JD 275-278 | David: We don't go on dates, we don't do a lot of the just fun time, we have fun together, but we're usually with the kids or, you know, we don't really have the one on one time that I think we need to have, or we should have. So I that's now the next thing that we need to really work on. Interviewer: Why do you think that is, how do you make sense of that? Julie: It's not worse since the intensive, it's the same as it's always been, it, for us, it just really is a schedule [thing …] David's always had a travel job. | Julie &amp; David (p. 154) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JD 183-185</td>
<td>It's been funny that it was nice to go back to work. It's just so, it's nice to have people see you, and talk to you, and say thank you [chuckles] because when you're at home all day with kids, you know, a lot of times people don't say thank you or oh that, you did a great job with that, or anything like that so that was, that was nice. It wasn't, I didn't think it would be. It made me realize I was missing that part 'cause I didn't realize that prior to doing it.</td>
<td>Julie (p. 155)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalized Life Stressors SB 341</td>
<td>I think there's a lot of those kinda...I don't know, technical (crosstalk S: yeah) issues I guess that we gotta, we still (crosstalk T: still working on; S: yeah) feeling our way through</td>
<td>Bill: Different expectations in parenting (p. 156 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-309</td>
<td>what is going to happen after his dad passes away</td>
<td>Sadie: Family health issues (p. 156 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-454</td>
<td>if his mom moves here we may ah, yeah...um...but... ah...sorry that... absolutely frightened me when I thought that again</td>
<td>Sadie: negative in-laws (p. 156 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadie clarification e-mail</td>
<td>It seems as though a couple of seasons of our life are ending in the near future (my degree program and when his dad passes away). My hope is that we will be able to take a new approach to our individual life as well as our family life.</td>
<td>Sadie: life transitions (p. 156 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 323</td>
<td>we've had a lot of changes and I th..again, his is the value, mine is I'm responsible for my own happiness and not my circumstances, I mean it's very difficult to be 2882 miles away from your 3 precious grand-babies</td>
<td>Anne: being thousands of miles from her grandchildren (p. 156 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD - 173</td>
<td>it was just the hardest year of my life of dealing with the house and, and, and all of the...it was just a complete nightmare</td>
<td>David: house renovations (p. 156 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD - 304</td>
<td>I don't want to spend the money 'cause I'm cheap (crosstalk T: so that's part of it) spend some money on a baby sitter and going out, that to me is just a ridiculous</td>
<td>David: money priorities (p. 156 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>waste of money</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JD - 327</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think also in the past, in the past year we've also met some friends and we've done some things like with couples without kids, and that happ... that was fine, and that was something where that was new</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie: shifting friendships (p. 156 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix H: Difficulties Group References and Quotes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Key words</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intensive Factors</td>
<td>Mi 206</td>
<td>I like their methods, I think they have a good program, I think they have some of the best therapists</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 157)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 14</td>
<td></td>
<td>we made several attempts, he was always willing to go to counseling</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 157 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 180-181</td>
<td></td>
<td>we moved out in February in hopes that we could still work on the marriage in my mind, and then when I realized he just wasn't making any effort, and we went to two therapists, I set it up for us to go to one therapist, and th...wha...ah... one therapist you know that ah, who basically told us, told me I had to give up my hopes and dreams he helped us, he helped us work on a separation plan and then I went to my own individual therapist who referred me to this, another couples therapist who um, who, who did, you know he's a psychotherapist and he runs all these different tests and he said you know we're a devitalized couple and the chances of us being successful was, you know like 1%</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 157 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 79-80</td>
<td></td>
<td>I don't know, I just felt like I really, there was some connection there, just, I was really able to receive things from him, and [...] certainly, there were points that he sort of got in my grill about some things, I mean in a loving way, but you know, “no that's your issue”. But I felt [...] that he still really heard me, though, and so for me that was just, it was, it was just huge, it was just huge after years of just feeling not heard, not seen, like Aaron said, “well I got over it, why can't you”, I mean just like, I'm still back in the ashes and nobody's coming back for me. So, yeah, I think for me that was, that was huge at that time.</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 159)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 72</td>
<td>I mean to me, this is what to me a professional would do to say, okay this is kind of a big thing um, and if we are going to continue then you need to talk to her about it so we can get everything out in the open, and it didn't happen with either one of them</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 160 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 158</td>
<td>I guess I felt I felt the same way toward Mackenzie as well, that maybe she was hearing some things too that I, you know, either don't know how to express or, you know, it's odd, I felt like it was… yeah, I definitely agree with what she said, I mean if [our therapist] spoke things to me, I mean, I know that totally made, you know that are hard but made sense but I think it's the same for both of us</td>
<td>Aaron (p. 161)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 116-120</td>
<td>I think the other thing [ ] that's so beautiful about there is that they've done such a good job of creating an environment not only that's safe, but that is comfortable. It's beautiful. I mean, 'cause when you're going through that kind of emotional upheaval and pain, and all of that, I mean to be able to emerge out of that room at the end of the day […] and go to] the bedroom that we had. [ ] It was just like this peaceful, it was, I don't know it was just beautiful and so I just, I think that it was a really important part of the experience of just going okay, yeah, I know you've been through the ringer today, and now you can just rest in this beautiful place, and they, you know, they take care of all of your needs</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 162)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 146</td>
<td>in general they make you feel comfortable, they create a great environment so to come in and let your guards down</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 163)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful Tools</td>
<td>MA 324</td>
<td>We definitely have got some good tools and [ ] they are there, they're not going anywhere, but we are just not, we are just not capable right now, I think, of working on the marriage, [ ] to the degree that we need to until we again get through some of this individual junk.</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 163)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackenzie Summary</td>
<td></td>
<td>Until I work through more of my own personal “junk,” which continues to be the lens in which I view so many things, it’s going to be very difficult to effectively work on my marriage.</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 164)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 55</td>
<td></td>
<td>They [NIM] try to give you tools to work with what you have, and like I said, that's only as good as the two people that show up</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 165)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 133</td>
<td></td>
<td>Had we used the work talk, [and had] we used the heart talk, I think we could have gotten there... but we never used those styles of communication. Had we done that I think we would have gotten somewhere</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 165)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 246</td>
<td></td>
<td>I think, you know, figuring out [ ] what that, you know, the fear cycle kind of thing was, what created the fear cycle, and then how that worked out, I think [ ] sort of walking through that a little bit, sort of brought some reality into it a little bit, you know, it kind of helped you see what it really was, and, you know, kind of separate yourself from the emotion of it</td>
<td>Jim (p. 165)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 67-68</td>
<td></td>
<td>I think the best thing about it was that, you know, we figured out [ ] how not to get into the World War III fights where things really get vicious and, you know, to try to stop the fights before they start escalating, you know. I think, since the intensive we haven't really had any fights that are too bad, you know, I mean they're fights but they're not, um, ones that are really intent to destroy the other person.</td>
<td>Jim (p. 166)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Responsibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

332
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Owning Personal Contributions to the Problem</strong></th>
<th><strong>Mi 93</strong></th>
<th>I would say things to emasculate him. He would say things that were degrading to me. He, like, he would always attack my family, you know, he would go there, really, really vulnerable places, so, places that are really hard to heal, and I would emasculate him, you know so, we were equal offenders.</th>
<th>Michelle (p. 167)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mi 115</strong></td>
<td>I think he got defeated, and felt just like, you know, he would never measure up no matter what he did, and I think he may be right, yeah, I mean, that just, unfortunately that's the truth.</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 168)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MA 270-272</strong></td>
<td>Aaron: I think there's a lot of, there's baggage and hurt and unresolved... things and shame and... um... you know, I just... yeah, I mean that, that would be... a lot of it I guess for me, you gotta just, I don't know I mean... I think sometimes I have a hard enough time loving myself let along loving somebody else and... Interviewer: So the heart issue for you isn't so much about Mackenzie as it is about you and you have a hard time Aaron: and that's why I said, it's like, you know I guess in one way yeah I could rid both of us and we could move on, find somebody else, do something else with somebody, but I know for a fact, it wouldn't be any different for me, I'd be the same person I am, it has nothing to do with her, it really doesn't, she didn't do anything to me, so, it's not, I mean yeah this hurts and there's history and there's things that have happened and things have been said and what not, but my heart and how I feel about myself and that it's not her, it's not her doing, that's mine so, and that's what I have to deal with so I think you know for me, you know a lot of this stuff right now it just goes back to just so much of the baggage and history</td>
<td>Aaron (p. 169)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jm 33</strong></td>
<td>eventually I think, we just got to a point too where everything always escalated and it was just, very sharp knives, very sharp</td>
<td>Jim (p. 170 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA - 180</td>
<td>I guess for me, I, I think that it has in some respects for sure changed me, and I think that it actually, when I think about it, I think that it was kind of a marker for me in that it really began a journey for me of beginning to just really look more at my own self, and my own junk, as much as I still struggle with trust issues and the lack of reconciliation, with Aaron</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 170 additional example, not referenced)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible for Change</td>
<td>Some of the things I learned there even though I’m not always consistently doing those things, I know the tools, and so even just the other day when I was starting you know I was like, you know I kind of went into my little bit of self-care stuff, trying to figure out what’s going on, asking myself questions, just kind of going through the process</td>
<td>Aaron (p. 171)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 189-191</td>
<td>God definitely, I feel like that’s when He began to begin to help me to see “yeah, we, we got work with you sister that, [audibly breaths out] that we gotta do here and this is not all him” and not, not that I consciously thought that it was him but I was very, very… I was so wounded and for the longest time really felt like I can’t move forward until he does whatever, you know, and, and it was at NIM that, especially [one therapist], you know, really spoke to this to say “really, you’re going to give him that much control and that much power of you, really? No, that, that’s not, that’s not healthy, that’s not what that should look like, you have to be responsible for you, you are, and again, your own self-care and what you have to do regardless of what he does and confronting me even when we were in November you know, he just said, um, really, you're gonna trust this guy like, just, like in the sense of to put all your eggs in</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 172)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA - 186</td>
<td>I've been in process the last 3 months of doing some pretty intensive work on myself in terms of I've been doing prayer appointments and, and really trying to to, you know ask Jesus to come in truth and to show me, you know what, where, I'm stuck and what lies you know that I've been believing and how that has affected the trajectory of my life</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 173 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 60-61</td>
<td>it made me realize that I [ ] had to take ownership and I had to be proactive about taking care of myself in, in creating a safe place, and a safe place for me meant a place where I could go and find refuge, so that I could try to re-energize to try to save our marriage, I realized I couldn’t save it in a house with him because it was depleting me to the point where I, I couldn’t fight for it</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 174)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 72</td>
<td>the most helpful part for me, I don’t know as a couple, but for me I think it was [the therapist] telling me to create a safe place for me</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 174)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 175</td>
<td>You want to do it for the kids but kids, the kids need a happy mom, a mom who can you know be joyful so I just had to choose the lesser of two evils</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 175)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 143</td>
<td>I was maybe relying too much on her to be happy um, and I think, you know the stuff about self-care, you know just well, you know, um, maybe this thing’s going to fall apart, you know, you need to rely on God, you know, alone, to, to sustain you and you know maybe you don’t get anything from her</td>
<td>Jim (p. 175)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Faith
<p>| Faith Jm 144 | I think um, you know that’s where I’ve tried to kind of keep, you know my relationship with God but, you know, it’s hard to ‘cause you, you know, you’re human and you know you want, you want someone you know that’s there, wants to sit on the couch, watch a movie, you know, snuggle | Jim (p. 176) |
| MA 332 | It’s been a life-long thing for me too, that I’ve been running and just you know afraid so much of my life and so, that’s been huge for me just being truthful with myself to be able to accept that and to recognize, yeah, I really was expecting um, you know Aaron to be things that really only Jesus can be | Mackenzie (p. 177) |
| MA 350 | [Jesus] can come in really powerful ways, and I think for, I, you know, like a lot of us, that’s obviously the difficult part is that surrender part, that’s the scary part um, especially for me, I am just thinking of my journey of just, I have done this dance all my life where I give it to Him, I take it back, I give it to Him, I take it back, like just my fear that does that | Mackenzie (p. 177) |
| MA 213 | He also talked about the fact that, [ ] that Jesus is kind of showing him some things about the way he hides and some shame issues and so I, I guess, to me, those are some pretty significant things | Mackenzie re: Aaron (p. 178) |
| MA 199 | Jesus [has] gotta come in and do some things to us | Aaron (p. 178) |
| Aaron summary | I am broken, tired, hopeless and very, very lonely. It sucks right now, but I have a faint pulse that maybe God can bring this dead marriage back to life | Aaron (p. 178) |
| Mi 24 | I think just the dynamics of the marriage not being in line with ah, what we both believed Biblically, just took a toll on each of us and it started to really kill his spirit | Michelle (p. 179) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intensive Factors</th>
<th>Not the Root</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mi 62</strong></td>
<td><strong>Jm 91</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I thought in separation I would be able to um, get to a place where I could, you know, be spiritually grounded again, and just get some peace if I could you know fight for, fight for my marriage from a place of abundance versus a place of just complete, you know depletion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[We shared] some but maybe not everything, um, I mean I think, you know, [ ] the issue of um affection in our relationship, um, you know we never dealt with that, you know, while we were there, um, you know, I mean that was something that was important to me but, it wasn't really something you can talk about in a group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jm 101</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mi 16-17</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think kind of the general stuff about, you know, fighting and how to avoid the fights and how not to make the fights worse, some of those things, um, I guess, you know, trying to understand [ ] what motivates her, what motivates me, that kind of thing, but, um, you know, I think it was just kind of preliminary stuff.</td>
<td>I don't really think the intensive got to the root of our problem, um I think we were kind of superficial and not, I think I was transparent, I don't think that he, I think he was as transparent, like I said in my summary, as much as he knows how to be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mi 21</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 277-278</td>
<td>I've always been just kind of running from one thing to the next to try and, you know, satisfy and fill me up and whatever, you know. It's, and that's the thing I just worry about myself, and just even about, you know, whether it's pornography or something else, I mean pornography is not the issue, that's a symptom of something else so um, so even though you stop, it's like, you know, that doesn't automatically make you intimate, you know, just because you stop doing pornography and, you know, now I'm just an intimate guy and can share and, and be emotional and all that other stuff, I mean, it just, I don't know, so I hide a lot, you know, that's what I do, what I've done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Prevents Focus</td>
<td>Jm 73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 88</td>
<td>Maybe being open in front of other people, you know I think that was a little bit uneasy, you know here we're strangers and you know you're kind of supposed to bear everything in front of other people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Summary</td>
<td>My husband was only as transparent as he knows how to be. I honestly, think we would have benefited more from the one on one intensive. I don’t think the therapists had enough [time] to study him one on one and call him on his bluff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 139</td>
<td>He's a people pleaser and he's very um, I wouldn't say ostentatious but very um, you know, he knows how to play the role for lack of a better word, I mean you know, yeah, he seemed to be all in at the intensive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 297</td>
<td>I felt like as good and productive as the intensive was, I remember when we left there, I remember saying to Aaron, part of my s... concern about leaving was to say, I really feel like we're going to need to come back here, like I was wanting him to acknowledge and commit to we will commit to come back here, like, 'cause I knew when we left to be able to, again, kind of hone some of the tools again that we learned, to say, okay what would that look like in your specific situation, 'cause we didn't get to do as much of that understandably, in the, the 4 day with 5 other couples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 319</td>
<td>We paid for additional coaching 'cause I just, I personally didn't feel like we were good at just three and I think after maybe our fifth, I think we may have done maybe 5 or 6 total, and it was pretty much after that that we started talking about we need to go back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 100</td>
<td>I mean we definitely peeled back a little bit of layers but there was a whole lot of stuff, you know still under there that obviously, that was very much ours and that we were still gonna have to still deal with and the thought of trying to do that on our own, for me was just still very scary and overwhelming and so I just, you know I knew, you know, in my head, I, I didn't know when, but I just knew. I mean Aaron had initially said I think 6 months and I remember saying, no, no I don't want to wait that long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 298-299</td>
<td>Yeah, I'd say, it was really good um, I'm glad we did it, again, it was really difficult, but um, yeah, I mean I, the times we've spent down there have all been worthwhile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 149</td>
<td>I think that [our therapist] probably saw that and should have recommended that we do some more, or do some individual therapy and couples therapy. Now, I did get a referral from [our other therapist…] She did give me a referral to a therapist here and we did go and see that therapist, and I told you that therapist told me, you know, if you stay in this marriage you are going to have to give up all of your hopes and dreams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 130-132</td>
<td>It's not been enough, and you know, it, it might have been a good start, you know, I think if [ ] there was something afterwards, you know to build on, [ ] it's probably, you know, a good thing where, [ ] if you're kind of at rock bottom and you need to sort of get things straightened out to where you can start fixing things, um, but you know, it's just not enough to, to go and then say okay, everything's fine you know. So um, it's kind of the ER room but then you have to go home and you know, if you really don't have any follow up care afterwards you know, yeah, it's just really hard, so you know, especially if things were bad, you know, it's just, things aren't going to change, habits aren't going to change, people need reminders and correction and you know, whatever, going down the road.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 138</td>
<td>[The person over the phone was like] “I can only really talk about this, and we've only got a limited amount of time” so like, whatever, you know, it just, um, yeah, I'm like, you know I'm just kind of like, yeah whatever, this isn't going to help, you know, we're not going to make it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Change Takes Too Much Time
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Enough Change</td>
<td>Jm 210</td>
<td>I guess over time I just got discouraged 'cause nothing was ever enough, you know, and there just, there wasn't any compromise, you know it was just, you know the bar is up here and until you reach it and you stay there for six months, I'm not buying into it, you know, I'm not going to trust you</td>
<td>Jim (p. 191)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jm 267</td>
<td>It just would never occur to her that God might change her heart or her attitude, you know, to make it work, “no I'm who I am and I'm not going to change and if you're not going to change to become who I want then, what's the point”</td>
<td>Jim (p. 192)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mi 135</td>
<td>It takes two, I would say let's sit down and have a heart talk or let's look at the book, um, 'I don't have time tonight, can we do that tomorrow night', you know, it's always it's always tomorrow</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 192)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MA 129</td>
<td>I wouldn't say it was wasted but we didn't really, we haven't really taken full advantage of what we, of what happened down there, that's for sure, I haven't.</td>
<td>Aaron (p. 193)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MA 137-141</td>
<td>I guess what I am saying is that we wasted the opportunity right now, so I'm not saying that what we did was a waste of time, I'm just saying right now where we're at, what we're doing it feels to me like, at least I have I feel like I have wasted the opportunity [ ] I mean 'cause I [ ] feel like NIM was one of the best things I've ever done quite frankly, it was very, very powerful. It was, and I just, I would just recommend it and we have to other couples, you know, our journey isn't ah, you know, our journey isn't a kind of a reflection on them it's a reflection on me, reflection on Mackenzie, a reflection on us</td>
<td>Aaron (p. 193)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 184-185</td>
<td>I know that there are just, that there is this lens of stuff that I still look through and I just, I can't seem to get around that, and that's my deal, it's my area where I need healing, where I need Jesus to come into that and so I just, I feel like NIM was kind of the beginning of all of that and, [...] I think that's the biggest thing and reason that this just hasn't gotten back on the track is because [...] I just think there's still some pretty big pieces you know of healing that, [...] that have to happen or we, we are just, clearly, still very stuck in some of these same patterns of behaviors and that and based on our woundedness</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 194)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unresolved</td>
<td>MA 256</td>
<td>It's not my responsibility to keep coming to his yard to say you need to fix this, you need to fix this, I mean, it's his responsibility and vice versa if I do something and so, like for me, I, part of my wounding is just feeling like that again, that is part of the reconciliation piece that I just feel like has never happened, since all of the, everything came out about the pornography, all of that, like the rebuilding that needs to happen as a result of that damage that was done, just really to a greater degree, just has not happened.</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 195)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 15</td>
<td>I don't think I've done a great job of really kind of rebuilding, you know, rebuilding bridges across, kind of like I'm, I'm over it so she should be over it, which is stupid, I know</td>
<td>Aaron (p. 196)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 270</td>
<td>I think there's a lot of, there's baggage and hurt and unresolved... things and shame and... um... you know, I just... yeah, I mean that, that would be... a lot of it I guess for me, you gotta just, I don't know I mean... I think sometimes I have a hard enough time loving myself let along loving somebody else</td>
<td>Aaron (p. 196)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 274</td>
<td>Buttons get pushed on certain things or [I] even get a look or a sigh, or you know whatever it is, it just kind of comes flying back to she doesn't care, I'm useless, I'm worthless, I'm the most, I'm the biggest problem in this marriage, if it wasn't for me everything would be so much better and, you know, blah, blah, blah, the whole, the whole thing that I've done for, for many years, even before I was married</td>
<td>Aaron (p. 197)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 262</td>
<td>I don't know that's just kind of re-wounding to me all over again to like everything that I've you know been through with this and, and to feel like 10 years later, I'm still not it, for whatever reason (tears there) so yeah for me I would say that's real hard</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 197 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 208</td>
<td>I can let go of things and I can look past things and I guess I can kind of make the best of things and compromise or whatever, and, you know, I guess when I would try to do that she'd just be like “well, how can you act that way, you know how, how can you just forget [ ] about, you know, x or y”, I'm like, I don't know you gotta start somewhere, I mean you gotta let go of stuff, you know you can't just keep resenting the other person, you know, if you don't change something then nothing's going to change</td>
<td>Jim (p. 197)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 108-109</td>
<td>I think we just got to the point where we really didn't like each other, we didn't like who, you know, we didn't like the things about each other that, that would never change, you know, there are parts of you that you can change and there are some things that, you know, God made you who you are, and I think we had gotten to the place where we just didn't like those parts of each other</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 198)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 111-112</td>
<td>I'm very A-type and I, I am very um, my, my best friend tells me that most people's best is my average, or you know my average is most people's best so in that</td>
<td>Michelle reference (p. 199)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discouraged by Time</td>
<td>MA 225-227</td>
<td>Mackenzie: It's hard because I think once you have been empowered, you know, we have new tools, [ ] and then to still be in a place a year later where we just are still struggling, and again, not that there hasn't been some baby steps here and there, but just the fact we haven't been able to consistently get things going again, I, I think that, that's what's hard. It's kind of like ignorance is bliss, you know, when you don't know what you don't know, but then once you do, [ ] I think that's partly what makes it harder now is because we, we'd had a taste, you know of what could be  Aaron: yeah, we kind of see what's possible Mackenzie: right Aaron: I guess, and it sucks to not be there, it sucks to not even be close to that</td>
<td>Mackenzie and Aaron (p. 199)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 167</td>
<td>I think you know we lost the ability to stop the fights before they started and you know I think maybe there was this idea that after this everything should be fine and since it's not well then it didn't work</td>
<td>Jim (p. 200)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 152</td>
<td>I think over time, you know, that ability to identify a fight and not want to fight just kind of wore off and so it's “okay, let's fight” um, and then I think it was in August or September, I forget what the exact date [the intensive] was but then, you know by, by January she filed for divorce so um, you know it kind of just... deteriorated again I guess</td>
<td>Jim reference (p. 201)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 81</td>
<td>when I realized there was not any reciprocity I just, I kind of, I just caved in at this, at that point, I just stopped trying</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 201)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 173</td>
<td>He just kind of caved in and quit. He was really sad and depressed about it and, you know, if I said let's make it work he would have, he would have but I still would have had to be the catalyst for that and I just, I don't, I don't, I don't know how to do that anymore</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 201)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Committed to Persevere</td>
<td>Mi 56</td>
<td>If you're not willing to take those tools and implement them, then you have wasted your money and your time and in a sense I think that's what we've done. We did, because we didn't use any of those tools.</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 202)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 166</td>
<td>I think we were willing while we were there. I don't think we were willing to come home and do the hard work that was required.</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 202)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 129</td>
<td>Jim: I think in some ways um, you know it, [ ] I at least tried something, that's pretty um, significant Interviewer: How so? Jim: Well, I mean I think just kind of putting your life on hold and going and doing something like that, at least you know demonstrates that you've tried to make things better to try to make things work</td>
<td>Jim (p. 203)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 263</td>
<td>I think she was cautiously optimistic that maybe it would work, um, I don't know, and then when it wasn't a quick fix she's like aah forget it, I don't know, I mean I'm just guessing</td>
<td>Jim (p. 203)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 234</td>
<td>We know clearly, the principles that we learned are principles that apply to any relationship, it's not just marriage obviously, so, so I think what Aaron is saying that we both found is that yeah even though we're maybe not in a position or a place that we're actively working on our marriage right now, we're still using and applying those principles even in our personal journeys or [ ] with our children</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 204)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 239-241</td>
<td>Mackenzie: I think for me, the fact that we are using them at all in whatever context is still good, because it's still engraining in us and again um, hopeful when we get to a place that we are better able to actively work on our marriage, you know again we've had some practice with it still, so it's not like we're taking on the rusty vault and what was that concept or what was that, I mean we have them I think under our belt so it just, it, I think that is good [ ] Aaron: yeah I think that's true, what she said, I would agree with that, I mean it's still frustrating that, you know, we are not using them together but yeah, at least it’s, like she said not in a rusty vault at least</td>
<td>Mackenzie and Aaron (p. 204)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Therapy Not Helpful</td>
<td>Mi 150 and I told you that therapist told me you know if you stay in this marriage you are going to have to give up all of your hopes and dreams</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 206 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Summary</td>
<td>I once again sought out another marriage therapist. After much analysis he labeled us a devitalized couple. Shortly thereafter, I moved forward with the divorce proceedings.</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 206)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 216-217</td>
<td>I think even when I continued to go to counseling you know I had this conversation with the counselor, it's like well, you know she’s just going to keep telling me well you can keep doing what you are doing, you're doing the right things, you know, just do what you're doing, I'm like well, hello!? you know there's only so much, you know I just felt like, you know, what else can I do you know it's just it takes two people, it has to be kind of a willingness um, you know in the other person to try to do something so, you know, I tend not to be the most patient person in the whole world</td>
<td>Jim (p. 206)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 73</td>
<td>they continued to take our money and to counsel us and yet here we had, and that wasn't our only issue but I'm just saying that was, I mean I felt like I was putting everything out that I had, all my junk, and he wasn't and so I just felt like they continued to take our money and yet neither one of them, and so I felt very burned by that, I just, I just felt like yeah, what was that about…</td>
<td>Mackenzie reference (p. 207)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Model</td>
<td>MA 18-19</td>
<td>I think that I definitely came in with a lot of unrealistic expectations certainly, um, did not grow up in a home with great role models, I mean my parents were both Christians and that but they struggled in their marriage, I did not ever see um you know really good conflict resolution as I'm beginning to work through my junk, realizing you know we didn't really ever talk much about feelings we didn't um, so you know I recognize that I brought all that crap in with me</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 207)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MA 229</td>
<td>It's been an ongoing battle for... almost 50 years, [ ] I'll be 50 this year, so yeah, it's been an on-going battle</td>
<td>Aaron (p. 208)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 10</td>
<td>I grew up with an alcoholic father so yelling to me was danger and um, you know I'd kind of go into panic mode when she'd yell and you know for her yelling was normal, you know, that's how we'd communicate, you know um, it's no big deal, we yell and it doesn't mean anything in her family</td>
<td>Jim (p. 208)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 23</td>
<td>her dad was always bashing her mom, and her mom thought very little of her dad, um, it's gotten a lot better recently but you know for I think a long, long time they just didn't like each other and you know he would always openly make comments you know soon as the kids are gone I'm leaving you kind of stuff</td>
<td>Jim (p. 209)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix I: Comparing the Groups References and Quotes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Key words</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Similarities</td>
<td>JD 177-178</td>
<td>just having the chance again to go there, and I think just kinda feel like okay, you know, getting some love, you know just, you know, and that's part of I think too that whole, you know, just going there and having somebody care for us</td>
<td>David (p. 212 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mi 168</td>
<td>it’s easy to do the hard work and, and feel like you are making change in a beautiful environment when you don’t have to deal with the real stresses of real life, but the real test is when you come home and real life is turned back on, and there’s laundry and there’s bills and there’s babies and there’s work</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 212)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JD 338</td>
<td>there’s something magical about having that time carved out there, 'cause once you get home, it you've got to be real intentional with your time</td>
<td>Julie (p. 213)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SB 2-466-467</td>
<td>Yeah I kind of had hopes, you know, I kind of got real jazzed while I was there and I came home and I was like, [claps] let's go baby we're good but, no… Sadie: It wasn't like that for me. No, I had to… Bill: Well it took you a year Sadie: It took me a year, it took our anniversary, well it, it took a year.</td>
<td>Bill &amp; Sadie (p. 214 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing Tools / Helpful Tools</td>
<td>MA 234</td>
<td>the other thing is that we know clearly, the principles that we learned are principles that apply to any relationship, it's not just marriage obviously, so, so I think what Aaron is saying that we both found is that yeah even though we're maybe not in a position or a place that we're actively working on our marriage right now, we're still using and applying those principles even in our personal journeys or in other rela...or with our children</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 214 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AM 308</td>
<td>When all is said and done if we just go back to that fear cycle and that fear dance</td>
<td>Anne (p. 214)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MA 145</strong></td>
<td>I mean it's frustrating and it's hard yeah, I mean 'cause I really do feel like it's, the things that we were taught and challenged with I mean those are true things whether or not we live it out or, I mean it's still true the stuff that we learned, it was still true</td>
<td>Aaron (p. 215)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Owning Personal Contributions to the Problem</strong></td>
<td>One last thing that has been influential to me is to use ‘I’ and ‘me’ rather than ‘you’. I was always directing the blame back at Sadie for everything. When I focused on making it not about what she did or didn't do, it opened up the way for us to heal and not constantly be so antagonistic.</td>
<td>Bill (p. 216 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MA 325</strong></td>
<td>I see you know the, the things that I'm doing that are contributing to not being able to move ahead, beca...again, a lot of it because of just my woundedness and just not really knowing what to, to do or things that I try to do and then it just seems like it doesn't work, and then I you know I kind of run for cover again</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 216 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jm 265</strong></td>
<td>for some reason she just felt like, you know, she was owed that, you know like well, you know you have to do all this and then I'll think about it, I don't know, I'm not quite sure why somebody would ever think that but you know, that's not what compromise looks like, ever, look at what's going on in Washington DC, you know if you don't give, there's going to be no agreement so. (shrugs)</td>
<td>Jim (p. 216 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SB 2-40</strong></td>
<td>I harbored a lot of resentment about that, even still, I try not to, but yeah, that's a... that was a pretty awful thing for me to go through alone so…</td>
<td>Sadie (p. 216 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aaron Summary</strong></td>
<td>I have always felt like the screw up in our marriage. Like it it wasn't for me things would be great and Mackenzie would be happy. This has been something I struggle with all the time as I spiral down in self-pity and feelings of worthlessness. I'm also a selfish bastard and can't seem to break its hold on me.</td>
<td>Aaron (p. 216)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 65</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>he doesn't have ill intentions, he just doesn't really know what to do, you know and I don't want to live the rest of my life teaching him how to be a man</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 217)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 93</td>
<td>217 reference only</td>
<td>I would say things to emasculate him, he would say things that were degrading to me, he like, he would always attack my family, you know, he would go there, really, really vulnerable places, so, places that are really hard to heal, and I would emasculate him, you know so, we were equal offenders</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 217)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible for Change</td>
<td>AM 354</td>
<td>Even if this person disappoints me, it doesn't have to determine my happiness. That's a big part of it for women. And that's probably my strongest message is do not make your husband responsible for your happiness. He will let you down every time and you'll put too much pressure on him.</td>
<td>Anne (p. 217)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 322</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>I keep going back to the value thing, for me it's the value and I need to rest in the...the fact that I'm...have value and that I don't need to let anything waiver my sense of knowing I'm valued and continue to make value decisions</td>
<td>Mitchell (p. 218)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 327</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>it would come out to...to... she would say something and I'd say I'm not that person anymore and she'd say I don't know that and I'd say but I do</td>
<td>Mitchell (p. 218)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 180</td>
<td>218 reference only</td>
<td>I guess for me, I, I think that it has in some respects for sure changed me, and I think that it actually, when I think about it, I think that it was kind of a marker for me in that it really began a journey for me of beginning to just really look more at my own self, and my own junk, as much as I still struggle with trust issues and the lack of reconciliation, with Aaron</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 218)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 74</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>Unfortunately, I think that concept has kind of lead to my divorce</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 219)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 143</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>I was maybe relying too much on her to be happy um, and I think, you know the stuff about self-care, you know just well, you</td>
<td>Jim (p. 219)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>I think our faith has been the only thing that has allowed us to turn back from the path we were on and start working to rebuild our relationship.</td>
<td>Bill (p. 220)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>has stayed with me more for the children than anything and because we are believers and don't believe in divorce</td>
<td>Aaron (p. 220)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>I grew up in the church, um, you know even during college I was involved in campus crusade and um, so, you know I've, you...I...maybe gone through some rough spots you know during college or you know whatever but um you know, I've almost always gone to church</td>
<td>Jim (p. 219 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive Not Enough</td>
<td>it's not been enough, and you know, it, it might have been a good start, you know I think if you know there was something afterwards</td>
<td>Jim (p. 221 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackenzie</td>
<td>just the whole counseling thing, I was mistrustful because the two counseling experiences we had prior to going to the intensive</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 221 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>I think that [our therapist] probably saw that and should have recommended that we do some more, or do some individual therapy and couples therapy. Now, I did get a referral from [our other therapist…] She did give me a referral to a therapist here and we did go and see that therapist, and I told you that therapist told me, you know, if you stay in this marriage you are going to have to give up all of your hopes and dreams.</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 221 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>it's a life long journey, that's for sure. [ ] We would like to go back and go to one of their weekend alumni excursions and we're hoping, I know they have a whole system, 'cause Brett just told me, where they have alumni in different parts of the country that</td>
<td>Anne (p. 222)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
are contacts for people that come out of the intensive, so we would like to be used in any way we can, in that way

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Still Struggling – Working At It / Not Enough Change</th>
<th>AM 234</th>
<th>I think it's, it's probably subconsciously we are realizing, I don't want to go there, I don't want to go back to where I was, without really even saying it to each other, and then we catch our selves and just, you know move...move forward instead of regressing</th>
<th>Mitchell (p. 223)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-467</td>
<td>It took me a year, it took our anniversary, well it, it took a year. It took a year from finding out about, you know, whatever, to the next year and I literally spent that year... hiding</td>
<td>Sadie (p. 224)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron Summary</td>
<td>I'm not really sure where we are going to go right now with our marriage. I don't feel like we can start over because so much hurt has happened between the two of us. Maybe we can, but it sure doesn't seem like it right now.</td>
<td>Aaron (p. 225)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 123</td>
<td>I think she kind of expects that I do all the changing and then eventually she'll kind of come around and maybe um, maybe she'll be affectionate or whatever, but it just, it just doesn't ever happen</td>
<td>Jim (p. 225 reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 81</td>
<td>so when it was, when I realized it was not any reciprocity I just, I kind of, I just caved in at this, at that point, I just stopped trying</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 225)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Differences</td>
<td>Jm 88</td>
<td>Maybe being open in front of other people, you know I think that was a little bit uneasy, you know here we're strangers and you know you're kind of supposed to bear everything in front of other people</td>
<td>Jim (p. 226 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Dynamics / Group Prevents Focus</td>
<td>Mi 139</td>
<td>He's a people pleaser and he's very um, I wouldn't say ostentatious but very um, you know, he knows how to play the role for</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 226 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ref</td>
<td>Quote</td>
<td>Source (p. reference only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 319</td>
<td>lack of a better word, I mean you know, yeah, he seemed to be all in at the intensive.</td>
<td>Mackenzie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD 102</td>
<td>and to be able to, again, kind of hone some of the tools again that we learned, to say, okay what would that look like in your specific situation, ’cause we didn't get to do as much of that understandably, in the, the 4 day with 5 other couples.</td>
<td>Julie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 284</td>
<td>listening to them talk, I learned as much as when it was my own turn to talk</td>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-189-191</td>
<td>That was one of my things, my, ah [ ] my wants was value and I didn't have any and I wanted it... but I never expected it. [ ] I had it but I didn't believe I had it, you know, it was, it was um made clear to me... and I um (sniff), and it was made clear to me by the other people in the room... (nods) the men especially (wipes a tear).</td>
<td>Bill and Sadie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jm 101</td>
<td>It was like cleaning out an infection, you know, just have to get all that stuff out that had been bottled up, that we had bottled up, that everybody else in the room had bottled up. So, I mean, I think that was very important though. I think that was a really good thing for us, I know it was for us, just to get it, just like purge all of that, get it, get it out here in front of us lay it on the table and yeah it's nasty and it's ugly and we did that (crosstalk Sadie: but hey they've done it too and…) Yeah, we're not the only ones who have ever done bad things and lived.</td>
<td>Jim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 16-17</td>
<td>I don't really think the intensive got to the root of our problem, um I think we were kind of superficial and not, I think I was transparent, I don't think that he, I think he was as transparent, like I said in my</td>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackenzie Summary</td>
<td>What I have come to recognize, especially in the last few months, is that honestly, I know that I personally have a lot of &quot;junk&quot; that I am still bringing to the table that make it difficult, if not impossible, for me to receive certain things from Aaron or be able to give to him in ways I should.</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 227)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 258-259</td>
<td>I think that's been a huge piece for me um, to feel like, and then even when he says things like I, I don't feel like I'm ready to fight for you yet, or what, you know things like that just further intensify this feeling I've had for so long that I, I will, will you ever want to fight for me, will you ever... you know, what is that?! I, I mean I, so, I just and I, I've just grown so weary and feeling like I just, I don't know, I just can't take a whole lot more of that so that's for me anyway I'd say those are those are probably a couple of the biggest things [that has made it difficult]</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 228)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-285</td>
<td>I'm gonna take down all my walls and be raw with you, I'm tired of hiding my feelings, I'm tired of being afraid of my feelings I'm just, you know, your gonna have to suck it up and listen to me cry and moan and if I'm unhappy, I'm gonna tell you I'm unhappy, and if I'm happy, you, you're gonna know I'm happy. I'm gonna quit being a robot.</td>
<td>Sadie (p. 229)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill clarifying e-mail</td>
<td>The patience part was MOST DEFFINITELY discouraging [emphasis his]. I was cursed with a distinct lack of patience to start with and when we came home, I wanted to immediately ‘start fresh’ and move forward. I tend to push and push and push until something breaks […] and to be forced to sit still and wait for the appropriate time was incredibly difficult. What I believe in hind sight is that this was another example of the Lord’s power and love for his people. He knew that exactly how long it would take to make me to slow</td>
<td>Bill (p. 230)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
down, study his word, and learn perspective.

<p>| Jm 217 | What else can I do you know it's just it takes two people, it has to be kind of a willingness um, you know in the other person to try to do something so, you know, I tend not to be the most patient person in the whole world | Jim (p. 231 reference only) |
| Sadie clarifying e-mail | I was so skeptical of every decision or statement that Bill made that it was discouraging for me to not have anyone to talk to. I truly felt disconnected from everyone. At times I still feel skeptical. My entire personality has changed from this experience and the person I am today is very different than before. I've never been a truly patient person but now it seems as though I have no patience at all. Where before of I Bill wanted to discuss something I might avoid it, now I am more of a &quot;fine lets just get it out of the way&quot;. | Sadie (p. 231, reference only) |
| Sadie clarifying e-mail | The amount of stress that we've been under the past few years has been unbelievable and it has taken its toll on Bill and myself. It seems as though a couple of seasons of our life are ending in the near future (my degree program and when his dad passes away). My hope is that we will be able to take a new approach to our individual life as well as our family life. | Sadie (p. 231) |
| MA 253 | A lot of the behavior patterns and that that we struggle with and have struggled with, I just feel like we have been kind of just right back in that and um, I don't know, for me personally, I just have felt more and more like I just, I just can't keep doing this, I just can't. | Mackenzie (p. 232) |
| Unmatched Subthemes | We definitely have got some good tools and we, they are there, they're not going anywhere, but we are just not, we are just not capable right now, I think, of working on the marriage, as, to the degree that we need to until we again get through some of this individual junk | Mackenzie (p. 233 reference only) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Author (p. 234 reference only)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-200</td>
<td>There was focus on...faith and ah, grace you know, that, that forgiveness was available which to me I was desperate for at the time.</td>
<td>Bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 290</td>
<td>we both felt like for the first time we ever experienced what the church is truly supposed to be.</td>
<td>Anne (p. 234 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-278</td>
<td>Probably, seeing his efforts to, um, learn more, I, I, oh, believe me there were many Sundays where I sat there and went, he's not going to keep this up, you know this is just for show, he's just doing this to keep me... but then it was just, you could just really, it, as I listened to him speak more, speak out more and listened to the knowledge that he had gained, I was like, okay, this is for real.</td>
<td>Sadie (p. 234 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD 23-24</td>
<td>It's my job to take care of myself. The thing they did was the one thing, they broke up the Bible verse love the Lord your God with all your heart, your mind, your soul, there was one more [ ] but [they] broke it down into the different ways how, if you’re not taking care of these four areas, then you’re not, you can't love God properly, you can't love yourself, you can't love [your] partner and so it was like, there you go, that, you know that was the big, for me the big take away</td>
<td>Julie (p. 234 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 350</td>
<td>[Jesus] can come in really powerful ways, and I think for, I, you know, like a lot of us, that’s obviously the difficult part is that surrender part, that’s the scary part um, especially for me, I am just thinking of my journey of just, I have done this dance all my life where I give it to Him, I take it back, I give it to Him, I take it back, like just my fear that does that</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 234 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD 301</td>
<td>it's hard too 'cause I don't want, I don't want to go out w/ David on the weekend if he's only going to be home for 3 or 4 days, I don't want to take him away from the kids</td>
<td>Julie (p. 234 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB 2-443</td>
<td>I'll be pulled to wanna stay at work for</td>
<td>Bill (p. 234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim 17-18</td>
<td>I started a business and that failed [ ] so financial pressures you know just made everything worse, you know she was always, you know why can't you provide, you know, you're a loser, everyone else seems to be living well, and going on vacations and we're not, and you know you're a jerk kind of thing</td>
<td>Jim (p. 234 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi 173</td>
<td>he just kind of caved in an quit, he, he was really sad and depressed about it and you know if I said let's make it work he would have, he would have but I still would have had to be the catalyst for that and I just, I don't, I don't, I don't know how to do that anymore</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 235 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 200</td>
<td>I guess and that's the thing like with the stuff I learned at NIM, it's like I agree the stuff that they're teaching and I believe it, um, but, I'm not there, that's for sure, I'm not there,</td>
<td>Aaron (p. 235 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 37</td>
<td>I felt like we, we started to make better progress last August and in November when we went it just, I don't know, I, I, just feel like we just never got it, got it together</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 235 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Summary</td>
<td>I once again sought out another marriage therapist. After much analysis he labeled us a devitalized couple. Shortly thereafter, I moved forward with the divorce proceedings.</td>
<td>Michelle (p. 236 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 247</td>
<td>about ah, 2 months ago, Tara, I kind of, I again came to a place of just going, I, I just feel like can't keep doing this, and again, 'cause it's especially hard now, that we've been to NIM and we're still in just this very difficult place</td>
<td>Mackenzie (p. 236 reference only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron Summary</td>
<td>I don't believe she really loves me anymore (she has told me so) and has stayed with me more for the children than anything and because we are believers and don't believe in divorce</td>
<td>Aaron (p. 236)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>