

ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE

STORIES OF COMMITMENT:
HOW WE CAME TO BE MARRIED

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of St. Stephen's College in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AND SPIRITUALITY

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Fall 2017
Edmonton, Alberta

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Abstract

How do couples know and decide to be married? This question is posed to three couples who made such a decision. The research reviews the development of romantic relationships and commitment, psychological theories and frameworks for couple counselling, and secular and theological understandings of marriage. Narrative inquiry was used to capture the stories and develop themes. Five themes emerged from the research: *catalysts* which advanced the development of a particular relationship; *acceptance* of the other without the need to have the other change; the development of *relationship priority* over the individual's; the presence of *fear and trust* in moving closer to the commitment of marriage; and a sense of *destiny*. Knowledge of these factors can assist couples and their significant confidants in helping couples discern how they know and decide about marriage.

Keywords: marriage, engagement, commitment.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to acknowledge the gift of my wife Janice, who over many years sacrificed much so that I might pursue this degree and thesis, and has provided support, motivation, and encouragement at critical moments so that I might complete this journey. She has continued to say, “I love you” throughout our marriage even when the loving wasn’t easy.

I offer my thanks and appreciation for my supervisor, Dr. Mona-Lee Feehan, who stuck with me through multiple shifts and changes, cheered me on in the rough spots, helped me be clear, and persevered with her knowledge, faith and confidence that this was indeed worthy of my life effort.

I thank the three couples who let me into their lives and moments of intimacy and knowing in the context of their relational development, for preparing to tell their story, and keeping me centered on the story they told.

I give thanks for communities of supportive people:

The MPS Calgary breakfast group – their encouragement and example;

My brother-in-law Doug and Edge Enterprises – for space to write;

My children and their spouses – whose marriages inspired me as I wrote;

My “Response community” – for insightful feedback and direction;

For ALL my extended family and friends; congregations I have served; counselling agencies, staff and other students – your support and encouragement has been much appreciated.

“I am only one, but I am one. I can't do everything, but I can do something. The something I ought to do, I can do. And by the grace of God, I will” (Jeanie Ashley Bates Greenough, 1902).

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Whether to wed and whom to wed are among the most consequential decisions that individuals make during their lifetimes.” (Surra & Hughes, 1997, p.5)

The Beginning

I was once asked by a young person who was in love and struggling with what that meant, “How do I know if she is the one I should marry?” My initial response was surprising to me, “You just know.” I recalled in this conversation that the marriage rite in the Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada (1985) asks the couple, “If either of you knows a reason why you may not lawfully marry, you must declare it now” (p. 529). I was fascinated to discover that this question is asked in the singular negative – “knowing *a* reason you may *not* marry”. There is no coincident query to list the plural positives – the knowing of why you *should* marry. After 30 years as an Anglican priest I pondered the young person’s question in the context of the marriage service for the first time.

Personal Interest

As one who has been married for a third of a century, I and my spouse have our own stories of how we came to be married. I can recall the first moment that I saw my spouse. I can visualize where she was standing, what she looked like, what she was wearing. I remember a sense of “knowing” prior to our “first date” saying to myself, “If I go over to see her, we are going to get married.” It was as if my mind and person *knew* the outcome prior to the possibility of knowing *her* through the development of an intimate friendship. This remains somewhat mystical for me but I can see these factors in my own experience:

- a sense of call (from God);
- a sense of fate (many circumstances came together to make the possibility of my meeting my spouse);
- some of these “fates” took place before my conception (that my father was injured in the Second World War by a piece of shrapnel, which, by an inch missed going through his heart);
- some of the decision is emotionally based;
- some of the decision is cognitively based;
- feelings of fear were present as I contemplated a life changing event and relationship (the decision to marry will irreversibly change my future).

I have been preparing couples for marriage for over 30 years within the context of the Anglican Church of Canada. I have prepared couples individually using a process called Prepare/Enrich (1998, 2009) and have seen this program change and develop over the decades. This tool to help couples prepare for marriage has grown both as research brought more information to the table and as the culture changed. Being conscious of my own story and the apparent number of miracles that happened to occasion my meeting with my spouse, I am always curious about how couples meet, their commitment to each other, and their concept of marriage, but have not entertained the depth of this puzzle of knowing.

For the last fifteen years I have offered marriage preparation in group settings. Increasingly as couples share in both individual and group settings, I noted shifts in the culture of the “first meeting” as many couples meet online or through an online dating service. Though this is a different process, the outcome is the same – a decision to marry

which has brought them to marriage preparation. This has been a fulfilling ministry and has led me to a greater interest in counselling and couple counselling.

In the midst of course work for the Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality degree, I discovered the work of John Gottman. In 2010, I took Level 1 training in Gottman Couples Therapy. A few years later The Gottman Institute developed *The Gottman Seven Principles Program* for couples based on his book *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (Gottman & Silver, 1999). In 2013, I was in the second group of people trained as educators for this program. In 2014 my wife and I attended a Gottman workshop for couples, *The Art and Science of Love*. Later that year I renewed Level 1 and took Level 2 training in Gottman Couples Therapy. I have intentionally used Dr. Gottman's assessment and material in couple counselling.

From my brief experience of using the Gottman assessment tool, I have experienced a variety of responses to the question, "What led you to decide that this was the person you wanted to be with?" (Gottman & Schwartz-Gottman, 2009, p. 3-13). To date I would have difficulty categorizing and creating a formulary of this decision process – each couple's experience and story is unique. Couples are also unique in the way they tell their story: the images and metaphors which are brought to the surface, the cultural influences, and the influence of personal history and trauma. The puzzle has many pieces to fit together but the Gottman research indicates that this story and how it is remembered and retold is critical to marital satisfaction and endurance (Gottman & Silver, 1999).

General Statement of the Area to be Studied

Gottman began studying marriages from his base at the University of Washington (Seattle) in 1972. After decades of research, he published *The Seven Principles for*

Making Marriage Work (Gottman & Silver, 1999) and developed his own theory and process for couples' counselling. The Gottman process for counselling begins with an assessment of a couple's relationship through written assessment instruments and four interviews prior to engaging in recommended interventions. Following is one of the questions in the Oral History section of this assessment process:

Tell me about how the two of you decided to get married or commit to each other. Of all the people in the world, what led you to decide that this was the person you wanted to be with? Was it an easy decision? Was it a difficult decision? Were you ever in love? Tell me about this time.

(Gottman & Schwartz-Gottman, 2009, p. 3-13).

The Gottman question invites the telling of the story of the couple's relationship and in particular the story of their committing to one another. Soliciting the story assists clinicians in the observation of, not only the content of the story, but how the story is told. The coming to a decision, to the place of knowing, is in some sense the "plot" of the early stage of a couple's story which then leads to a future wedding and marriage.

The Gottman oral history question, the young man's question, "How do I know if she is the one I should marry?" and the mystery of my own story have compelled me to this research. As a person, as a counsellor of couples, as one who offers marriage preparation, and as an Anglican priest, I am interested in spiritual phenomena related to call, covenant, commitment, and life meaning. I believe these are part of the experience of couples within the context of the decision to marry and are revealed in how they talk about this decision. This thesis mines the depth of the stories of three couples who decide to marry: how they *know* that "this is the person for me," how they formulate that

knowing, how that knowing develops into a commitment that is eventually made in a public exchange of (sacred) vows.

From the young man's question and the Gottman assessment question comes the research question for this thesis: **How do couples know and decide to be married?** What do they identify as factors and processes in that decision? How do they tell about "knowing" to get married? What does "being married" mean to them? This thesis examines the puzzle of "knowing" contained in the stories of three couples' decision to marry. I invite you into the lives of three married couples. Their journeys are unique and each couple told their story from the perspective of the present time in their respective marriages: entering the first year, after twelve years, and after nineteen years. The focus is on telling about the beginning of their relationships: how they met, how their relationship developed, how they came to the decision to be married? Through their stories we see this life and family altering decision which couples make with the intent to live together for the rest of their lives.

Brief Literature Review

In preparing the literature review I was fortunate to find the *Handbook of Relationship Initiation* (Sprecher, Wenzel, & Harvey, eds., 2008) which contained articles which address the very beginnings of relationships. Articles range from "first sight" and what motivates a first encounter, to factors involved in taking a relationship "to the next level." Within this volume were works which were not just descriptive of relationships, but examined what factors are involved in movements to closer and closer relationships (Guerrero and Mongeau, 2008; Derlega, Winstead, & Greene, 2008). Similarly, Perlman

and Duck's volume, *Intimate Relationships: Development, Dynamics and Deterioration* (1987) provided several articles on relationship development.

“Sociologist Murray Davis (1973) ... was the first to provide a systematic breakdown of the steps ... six core tasks ... involved in starting a relationship” (Bredow, Cate, & Huston, 2008, p.4). Davis' book, *Intimate Relations* (1973), notes that we enter into relationships as strangers with conceptualizations of role relationships and become acquaintances. His work is furthered by Simpson and Gangestad (1991) who examine motives in mating.

Various authors have developed theoretical models of relationship development:

- Robert F. Winch developed *The Theory of Complementary Needs* suggesting that individuals (unconsciously) choose a mate on the basis of how their psychological needs compliment and are gratified by another (Winch, Ktsanes, and Ktsanes, 1954);
- Murstein's *SVR (Stimulus – Values – Roles) Model* (1970) is one of several which suggest a linear developmental which takes couples from the original meeting and attraction (stimulus) through a focus on values (attitudes, temperaments, interests) to the determination of whether the other is a good “fit” (acceptable and compatible roles);
- Guerrero and Mongeau (2008) give descriptions of Knapp's five-point *Stage Theory* and Altman and Taylor's four levels of *Social Penetration Theory*;

- Huston and Burgess (1979) present *Social Exchange Theory* based on the sense that individuals assess the costs and benefits of being in relationship with another person;
- Rusbult's (1980) *Investment Model* has a similar "economic" taste in which he identifies couples making "emotional" investments in the relationship which may, at some point, be grounds for commitment;
- *Interdependence Theory* (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) describes relationship development in a less economic way giving a different basis for looking at commitment in relationships and the movement from a focus on individuals to a focus on the relationship.

These theoretical premises are often noted as foundational as other researchers test the empirical value of these theories. As might be expected, researchers further develop from these theoretical foundations inventories which assist clinicians in assessing the various aspects of a couple's relationship, for example:

- *The Love Scale* (Lasswell & Lasswell, 1976);
- *The Relationship Closeness Inventory (RCI)* (Berscheid, Snyder, and Omoto, 1989);
- *PAIR (Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships) Inventory* (Schaefer and Olson, 1981);
- *The Inclusion of Other in Self Scale* (Aron, Aron, and Smollan, 1992);
- *The Triangular Love Scale* (Sternberg, 1997);
- *The Relationship Attachment Model (RAM)* (Van Epp Cutlip, 2013);

In the late 1950's, John Bowlby and later Mary Ainsworth developed *Attachment Theory* which has had significant impact on relationship research. Hazan and Shaver (1987) were among the first researchers to relate attachment theory to romantic relationships. Since then a number of theoretical approaches to couple counselling have emerged which have some foundation in attachment theory including *Emotionally Focused Therapy for Couples* (Greenberg & Johnson, 1988) and *Gottman Method Couples Therapy* (Gottman & Schwartz-Gottman, 2009).

More recent research has begun to examine the significant elements in relationships which mark shifts towards or away from relationships developing into lasting commitments. These more recent developments show the impact of a spirituality in the process of discerning a mate. Derlega, Winstead & Greene (2008) examine the importance of self-disclosure (revealing information, thoughts and feelings) and responsiveness to self-disclosure in the beginning of a relationship and the movement of a friendship to a close relationship. Guerrero & Mongeau (2008) identify "turning points" which mark transition from friendship to romantic relations. Gonzaga, Keltner, Londahl, & Smith (2001) note that "as interdependence, commitment, and trust grow between partners, they become more likely to ignore romantic alternatives, sacrifice for the relationship, and display increasing amounts of prorelationship behavior" (p. 248). Surra & Hughes (1997) identify different types of commitment (global and marital) and different levels of commitment.

These spiritual markers and the development of commitment lead to examination of the history and conception of *marriage*. Theological concepts of covenant (Buck, 2012), sanctification (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003),

vocation (Veith, 2011) and sacrament (Lawler, 1993) are significant within the constructs of marriage. The way a couple constructs an understanding and attitude toward the concept of marriage affects their commitment to each other (Larson & Homan, 1994) and those who express the transcendent nature of the bond through marriage end up with a higher commitment in comparison with common-law unions (Clark & Crompton, 2006).

Coontz (2005) and Cherlin (2009) examine the shifts and changes in the understandings of the meaning of marriage through history and culture. Specifically, they note the shift from traditional understandings of the marital relationship as a foundation for society and necessity for bringing up children to the modern notion of marrying for love. Cultural emphasis in the United States on individuality and personal development have shifted the reasons why couples marry and their conception of marriage. Increasingly in western societies cohabitation and having children precede marriage if marriage is considered at all. These are very recent historical developments – not long-ago sex before marriage and having a child out of wedlock were taboos.

Chosen Methodology

From my experience in marriage preparation and couples' therapy, Narrative Inquiry was the most appropriate methodology for this research. Story telling is a significant part of a couple's relationship and early history. Wedding receptions are full of tales of the individual lives of the two being married and the budding story of their life together. It appears that these are significant in their telling – both for the couple and those who are close to them. "Narrative inquiry is stories lived and told" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Theology is developed from "sacred story" and the story of a couples' marriage takes on a sacred element (in many churches weddings are referred to

as *Holy Marriage* or *Holy Matrimony*). It appears to be a place where story needs to be honoured for the story's sake. The couple's story of their relationship is reminiscent of the narrative style of the scriptures where the relationship of God to people is told.

I also considered a phenomenological approach to this study. Phenomenology has a connection with existentialism as it addresses the meaning of existence from an individual perspective (O'Donoghue & Punch, 2003, p. 52). "A phenomenological study is a study that attempts to understand people's perceptions, perspectives and understandings of a particular situation" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p.141). Though this approach could have been taken with this study, it would have leaned more towards analysis and understanding rather than the richness of the "sacred story" which I hoped to hear.

The Gottman assessment process clearly expresses interest in the story that a couple tells about their decision to marry. Their experience is contained *in the story* they tell. Narrative Inquiry as a "method assumes that people construct their realities through narrating their stories" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 153). Clandinin & Huber (2010) suggest that narrative inquiry, rather than posing a research question, poses a puzzle to be explored. The emphasis in narrative inquiry is to hear the story and to seek from it understanding rather than approaching the story with predetermined understandings that one seeks to have the stories confirm. Polkinghorne (1995) distinguishes two different approaches to analysis in narrative inquiry: *analysis of narrative* and *narrative analysis*. Analysis of narrative looks for categories, commonalities, or themes amongst a number of stories; narrative analysis is more concerned with putting the puzzle together in a coherent story which gathers the various aspects of culture, temporality, setting, choices,

actions, and continuity to generate a story. “The result of a narrative analysis is an explanation that is retrospective, having linked past events together to account for how a final outcome might have come about” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 16). This process of narrative analysis is the approach I take with the individual stories, while also employing analysis of narrative to a collection of stories to identify themes.

The process of Narrative Inquiry encourages the researcher to “get into” the story being told rather than “bracketing” ones’ self from the participants as in a phenomenological approach. Narrative Inquiry encourages a variety of field texts which interweave in the creation of the narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I believe it is imperative to encourage couples to use what is important to them in the telling of their story. The way a couple tells their story will say something about their story. It is similarly important, as a narrative inquirer, to be available and open to hearing the couple’s story as fully as I can. As much as possible, I entered into their story in order to retell it with accuracy and sensitivity.

As researcher in this process I needed to be aware of my own self in relation to the stories being told and the research project. I named above my personal interest and my background as an Anglican priest and counsellor. I was also aware that I am a mature white male, married and a parent of married children, and a Christian. These factors all influence both my interest in the subject and affect my view of the data provided by the couples. Certain aspects of my training, particularly active listening, were of benefit to the research. This pastoral and counsellor training emphasizes the ability to listen to subjects with the intent of clearly understanding what is being said through reflective statements. The employment of a response community in the process of the research also

assisted in identifying any biases in my writing of the stories of the three couples. The response community also gave opportunity for personal reflection on how my beliefs, experience, and attitudes may have affected my writing and analysis.

Process

This study used narrative inquiry as an intentional way to hear not only the story of how a couple came to decide about being married, but how they also told this story. It is through the telling of the story and the potential use of metaphor in the story telling that nuances of spirituality may become evident.

I recruited three couples to tell their stories for the purpose of this thesis. I advertised for participants, set up an initial interview with each couple to clarify questions regarding the process and intent of the research, and to clarify expectations in order for them to be fully informed prior to signing their consent to involvement in the process. I interviewed each couple asking them to tell their story in their own way with the focus being on how they came to and made their decision to marry. This interview was videotaped and transcribed. From this I wrote a draft narrative of their story, shared this with the couple and with a response community for feedback, and made revisions in the story which were again shared with the couple. This process was engaged so that I was telling the couples' story to their satisfaction. In one case, significant revisions were made in the first draft to accomplish this retelling to be truly faithful to the couples' story.

These three stories then became the raw data (Chapter 4) for the narrative analysis and analysis of narrative (Chapter 5). I started by examining the individual couples' stories to listen for what each couple identified as significant in their process of telling. I then began "to explore how participants' stories overlap and interlock and examine the

ways in which such accounts relate to the overarching issue under study” (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007, p. 466). From this process comes the analysis which will link to theory and other bodies of knowledge (Hardy, Gregory, & Ramjeet, 2009).

Ethical Considerations

Potential participants became aware of the purpose and nature of the research through a written description which was made available to them. I further explained the topic and purpose of this research to potential participants in an interview and described what to expect in the process of the research. Participants were invited to ask questions and consider whether they had enough information and were free (without coercion) to sign the informed consent.

The opportunity to opt-out was noted as part of the informed consent and was explored prior to the signing of consent and at each subsequent meeting prior to continuing with the process and at the conclusion of the meeting. At these points, couples restated verbally their consent to continue in the process. Participants were made aware that if they experienced some harm to themselves or their relationship in the process, referrals for counselling would be made available (none of the participants expressed concern in this regard).

Participants were interviewed and videotaped in the comfort and privacy of their own homes and chose pseudonyms for themselves which were used in the transcription and the retelling of the story to provide anonymity. References to family members within the stories were noted by relationship with no names used. Video tapes were encrypted and password protected for transport to the professional and experienced transcriber and kept in a double locked secure location afterwards with the transcripts. Transcribers and

members of the response community signed agreements to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Validity

Validity of the data was obtained through a circular and consultative process whereby the participants confirmed the authenticity and completeness of the story written regarding them. Further, the stories were shared with a response community, composed of one person familiar with Narrative Inquiry and the other familiar with couple counselling. Comments from the response community raised issues for clarification which were brought to the couple and incorporated in a second draft of the story. Couples gave feedback to both the first and second drafts of the story with confirmation that the end product was faithful to their story. As the thesis was written the input of my thesis supervisor and continued reviews from the response community provided “outside eyes” to help focus the process and development of the thesis.

Where does this fit?

The “Handbook of Relationship Initiation” (Sprecher, Wenzel, & Harvey, 2008) contains 27 research papers which all focus on the beginnings of a relationship: distinguishing what happens at the beginning of a relationship to classify it *as a relationship*, what causes it to move forward or not, and what happens to make some relationships romantic and others to be classified as just friendships. Relationship progression can involve a *tipping point* – a point at which a relationship moves in one direction or another. Researchers in this volume examine these shifts in relationship from various perspectives: attraction (Graziano & Bruce, 2008), environment (Arriaga, et al, 2008), self-disclosure (Derlega, Winstead, & Greene, 2008), emotion (Metts & Mikucki,

2008), and beliefs (Knee & Bush, 2008) to name a few. These all suggest influencing factors in the process of deciding about relationships. These studies also all point to further studies of the factors and influences which affect the movement forward (or not) of relationships through time. The sheer volume of perspectives by which we might look at beginnings and later commitments is staggering. As with kindling a camp fire, many factors are involved to initiate a flame and many more factors move a flame to a fire. Once the fire is kindled, there are more factors involved in its stabilization, continuance and containment.

This paper examines and adds a factor which may be less tangible and more difficult to describe (hence the importance of a narrative approach). As Sprecher, Wenzel and Harvey (2008) question at the beginning of their book regarding relationship initiation, “Is it one of those terms that everyone just *knows*, and a definition is not necessary?” (p. x, italics mine). Beyond the definitions and science of the factors involved, how *do* people *know*? Is it definable? Is, “You just know”, the right answer to the question posed in my opening paragraph? What is this quality of knowing that dramatically changes the future of lives and relationships and tips couples into something called *marriage*?

Conclusion

I will proceed with a more extensive Literature Review (Chapter 2) and a detailed description of the Methodology (Chapter 3) which was used to form the “Data: The Couples’ Stories” (Chapter 4). Chapter 5 will present a Narrative Analysis of the three stories leading to a final chapter (6) which presents conclusions and implications from

this study. It is my hope that the puzzle pieces, when put together, will present the picture of **how couples know and decide to be married.**

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review focuses on research and theory related to close relationships and how those in these relationships commit to the institution of marriage. Though there is some universal idea of marriage, the theory and research noted here is from the Western world where romantic love and a couple decision are commonly involved. First, I review literature about how relationships develop. This begins with *first encounters* and moves to matters which define relationships as close, friendly, and romantic. Secondly, I review commitment as a sustaining factor in marriages and thirdly theoretical models of couple counselling which address relational issues. Particular focus has been paid to how theoretical models treat the importance of the factors which influence a couple's decision to be married. Finally, I will examine constructs of marriage itself and how it is viewed both from secular and theological perspectives.

Relationship Development

All couples who decide to marry, have a first encounter with each other and some form of relationship development. There are different models which suggest stages of couple development (e.g. *The SVR (Stimulus-Value-Role) Theory*, (Murstein, 1970); *Stages in Relationship Development*, (Braiker & Kelley, 1979); *Levinger's ABCDE Model*, (Perlman & Fehr, 1987); *Knapp's Stage Theory*, (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008); *The Soul Mates Model*, (De La Lama, De La Lama, & Wittgenstein, 2012)). There are also perspectives on cultural changes (specifically in North America) which identify different relationship motives which have changed over time. What follows are some broad elements (rather than stages, though there is a beginning) of relationships which are likely part of a couple's journey to marital commitment. Relationships generally do not

follow one particular trajectory, though all relationships have a history and story that tell of the development of their particular relationship.

In general, it must be remembered that individuals coming into a couple relationship come into that relationship with their own personalities, histories of experience, and familial and cultural influences. The myriad of personal influences that have developed in each individual by the time of their first meeting has already created specific expectations and meanings about being in relationship with another and particularly a relationship that involves intimacy and marriage. Additionally, the experience of each person, from previous relationships, also affects the way their relationship will develop with a new individual. D'Augelli and D'Augelli (1979) note research which suggests that prior intimate sexual experience with another predicts quicker progression to sexual intimacy in a new relationship (especially when both partners have prior experience). It is a given, that when a couple first meet, they are already a composite development of experience and meaning in relationships which will affect the trajectory of their relationship.

The beginning.

“Sociologist Murray Davis (1973) ... was the first to provide a systematic breakdown of the steps ... six core tasks ... involved in starting a relationship” (Bredow, Cate, and Huston, 2008, p.4). These tasks are all described as from the initiator of the relationship: (a) determining an encounter is worthwhile, (b) determining availability of the other, (c) an *opener* that gets the others attention, (d) finding a topic of common interest, (e) presenting one's self as attractive to the other, and (f) scheduling a second encounter (which can be initiated by the other) (Bredow, Cate, & Huston, 2008, p. 4).

Commonly this is referred to as the development of *first impressions*. Gottman and Schwartz-Gottman (2014), from decades of research into what makes marriages work, suggest that how a couple remembers this first encounter is significant to marital success. In the Gottman Method Couples Therapy assessment which they developed, the couple is asked to tell the story of this first meeting. Couples who tell this story with positive memories and regard are more likely to have successful marriages (Gottman & Schwartz-Gottman, 2014). The quality and success of the start of a relationship is significant to a couple's decision to marry or not to marry.

Social exchange theory notes this initial interaction as an “operation of “marketplace” considerations in evaluations of the potential partners” (Huston & Burgess, 1979, p. 14). The suggestion is that there is some premeditation on the part of one who gives an overture to another determining whether the interaction is likely to be rewarding or not. This constructivist and economic theory would seem to be the foundation of dating and mating services which similarly seek to make it so that couples “know in advance which people actors will find attractive, and which people the actors believe will find them attractive” (Huston & Burgess, 1979, p. 14). This social exchange is also referenced in terms of reciprocal exchange of complimentary needs and resources (emotional) (Carson, 1979).

In a social event “there are a number of relationship alternatives open to the potential initiator” who “may pay attention to any one of the competing social stimuli” (Berscheid & Graziano, 1979, p. 37). This description notes that initiation may come in the context of *social noise* and requires the *particular* investment of attention by one individual upon another. Though the factors which guide this attention may be physical

in nature, they may also be characterized by “novelty” (disconformity, incongruence, unfamiliarity), what s/he considers “important”, and social stereotypes (Berscheid & Graziano, 1979, pp. 38, 49).

As noted later in this chapter (Mating), the motives of the two individuals around that initial contact and engagement in a second encounter are also significant. Simpson and Gangestad (1991) conclude, in a study on social sexuality, that those who desire long-term relationships choose persons with attributes of “relationship stability and commitment (e.g., the partner’s faithfulness, personal compatibility, capacity for affection)” (p. 880) whereas persons in short-term relationships seek “personal attractiveness, personal charisma” (p. 880). One’s motivation for initiating a relationship, or responding to an overture, are significant to the long-term nature of the relationship assumed in marriage.

Friendship.

Beyond this first (and second) encounter, married couples develop a friendship important for marital satisfaction. Commonly friendship can refer to a continuum of relationship from those who are acquaintances to those who are “close” friends. Fehr (2008) notes the following qualities as minimums for a relationship to be called friendship: “voluntariness, reciprocal liking, and equality” (p. 30). From these minimums, friendships develop on a continuum involving other factors such as mutual support and assistance and levels of self-disclosure.

Gottman and Schwartz-Gottman (2014) note friendship as the foundation and next two levels of their “Sound Relationship House” (Appendix A). Fehr (2008) notes three

characteristics commonly desired in friendships: physical attractiveness, social skills, and responsiveness. Beyond these qualities in the individuals,

friendships are more likely to form when liking is reciprocal, when self-disclosure is mutual, and when the two individuals are similar to one another ... friendships are more likely to “get off the ground” if the two people share a humorous experience (Fehr, 2008, p. 40).

Self-disclosure.

Derlega, Winstead, and Greene (2008) examine the importance of self-disclosure (revealing information, thoughts and feelings) and responsiveness to self-disclosure in the beginning of a relationship and its movement from a friendship to a close relationship.

Derlega, et al. note a host of factors which influence a person’s willingness to self-disclose: (a) privacy regulation, (b) truthfulness (authentic self), (c) informativeness, (d) effectiveness of the disclosure, (e) cultural norms and expectations, (f) access to a social network, (g) personality, (h) individual characteristics, and (i) gender differences (pp. 154-164). They also note that different theoretical frameworks suggest a variety of ways in which self-disclosure develops in a relationship. Derlega, et al. refer to Altman and Taylor’s *social penetration theory* which suggested an increase over time of the amount and intensity of self-disclosure (p. 164-165). They also refer to Berg and Clark who identified a *clicking* model which suggested that partners make an early decision about whether “the other person fits (or may fit) the prototype for a friend or intimate dating partner” (Derlega, et al., 2008, p. 156). This clicking can intensify self-disclosure at early stages of a relationship rather than the *over-time* perspective of Altman and Taylor. Derlega, et al. note that Altman later described a dialectical and privacy perspective

which suggested an *ebb and flow* to self-disclosure based on the oppositional tendency to be open or closed: “There will also be changes in frequency, amplitude, relative duration, and regularity of occurrence . . . based on the partners’ needs, situational requirements, and the nature of each relationship” (p. 197). The use of the internet has also affected self-disclosure and in some circumstances, has *jump started* relationships (Derlega, et al., 2008, p. 166). Whichever the model or theory, self-disclosure is significant in the movement of friendships to closer relationships and “most importantly, the disclosure recipient’s and the discloser’s reactions to self-disclosure input, including expressions of concern, understanding, and acceptance” (Derlega, et al., 2008, p. 168).

Conflict.

The development of a closer relationship is also dependent on how the couple deal with conflict. Braiker and Kelley (1979) define two kinds of conflict which likely need to be overcome successfully for the relationship to move to further closeness. How a couple deals with “conflict of interest and decisional conflict [plays] a central role in the development and continuation of the higher levels of interdependence” (p. 142).

Romance.

The movement from friendship to a romantic relationship denotes a clear change in the quality and intensity of the relationship. Berscheid, Snyder, and Omoto (1989) in a testing of the *Relationship Closeness Inventory* (RCI) with college students, note that in each of three categories of relationship, (1) frequency of impact on each other, (2) the diversity of activities, and (3) the strength of the impact, romantic relationships were found to be closer than friends or family in all categories (p. 798).

Guerrero and Mongeau (2008) review several theories related to the transition from friendship to a romantic or passion based relationship. They examine theories in reference to three different trajectories that relationships might become romantic: (a) a traditional path that moves from acquaintance through to romance, (b) a trajectory that begins as a platonic friendship which already exists to romance, and (c) *Friends with Benefits* – friends who partner sexually with the promise of not getting emotionally involved (and then do) (pp. 176-178).

Guerrero and Mongeau (2008) note two theories that fit well with the traditional path noted above. In the development of *social penetration theory*, Taylor (1968), describes the relationship development involving:

reciprocal behaviors that occurs between individuals in the development of interpersonal relationships ... behaviors include exchange of *information* ... expressions of positive and negative *affect*, and mutual *activities* ... *breadth of penetration*, or the amount of interaction ..., and *depth of penetration* or the degree of intimacy (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008, p. 79).

Guerrero and Mongeau (2008) also reference a *stage theory* developed by Mark Knapp. Knapp defined five stages which couples advance through in a traditional trajectory: (a) initiating, (b) experimenting, (c) intensifying, (d) integrating, and (e) bonding (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008, pp. 176-177). The intensifying stage involves an emotional connection that moves partners “to the next level.” “Romantic couples often say, “I love you,” during this stage” (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008, p. 177).

Davis (1973) notes that couples “who want to increase the intensity level of their relationship will eventually reach the point at which they must shift the dominant activities from those acceptable in public to those only possible in private” (p. 42). Integrating is when couples are known as *couples*. Davis (1973) notes that this can be seen observably as intimate couples sit or stand side-by-side, “Shoulder to shoulder they are united ... coordinating their response to whatever is external to their relationship” (p. 65). Huston and Burgess (1979) note that in this stage the couple’s “public” character is assessed as “persons involved with either partner or with the couple react to the relationship either by supporting it (and therefore rewarding the partners for maintaining the relationship) or by attempting to thwart it” (p. 19).

The variety of social networks which a couple interacts with are diverse. Each individual brings to the relationship their own set of network influences and characteristics that can positively or negatively influence the couples’ trajectory or cause issues of conflict which need to be managed or resolved. Ridley and Avery (1979) identify several *network influences* (biological: sex, age, genetic makeup; physical: place of residence, climate; and social: kinship, education, occupation, physical mobility, and social mobility) and *network characteristics* (structural: size, degree, density, and intensity; and interactional: diversity, content, directional flow, frequency and duration) (pp. 228-232).

Aron, Aron, and Smollan (1992) developed another model measuring interpersonal closeness to further the RCI of Berscheid, Snyder, and Omoto (1989). They used “Venn-like diagrams ... to tap people’s *sense* of being interconnected with another ... which ... posits that in a close relationship the individual acts as if some or all aspects

of the partner are partially the individual's own" (Aron, et. Al., 1992, pp. 597-598) (see appendix B). This *Inclusion of Other in Self Scale* appears to be a good measure of both feeling and behaving close and reflects well the sense of communion or interpersonal closeness which characterizes romantic relationships. The progression of the Venn diagrams in this model would fit well also as a description of traditional relationship development trajectory.

Guerrero and Mongeau (2008) argue that stage theories are insufficient to describe romantic relationship development where "physical-sexual attraction are viewed as preceding, or at least accompanying" (p. 177) the friendship development. They also note other factors which affect the romantic relationship development: each individual's relationship history, the mitigation of uncertainty in the relationship, the influence of the social network on the relationship, and each individual's expectations about what a romantic relationship looks like (pp. 178-185). Trajectories that involve a platonic friendship to begin with are considered intimate but do not involve romance. These intimate friendships "might exist long (e.g., many months or even years) before passion-based intimacy" (p. 178). Relationships that already involve sexual intimacy (Friends with Benefits) but do not involve mutual love and exclusivity present another departure from the first two trajectories. Increased intimacy is already expressed in these relationships and may not define a movement to romance. The movement to a "romantic" relationship in these cases may not seem particularly romantic or passionate, but be defined by "communicating mutual love and negotiating exclusivity" (p. 178).

Other research has suggested *turning points* which mark transitions from friendship to romantic relations (Guerrero and Mongeau, 2008). These turning points are

identified by couples as *moments in time* (which may be cumulative) which define these transitions. Examples include, first date, first kiss, first sex, disclosure of romantic feelings, saying “I love you,” moving in together, getting married, physical separation, reunion, and feelings of jealousy (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008, pp. 180-181).

The research of Aron, Dutton, Aron, and Iverson (1989) almost suggests that romantic relationships may in a sense by-pass friendship altogether. Over three studies, they consistently identified that couples *falling-in-love* were focused on the desirable characteristics (the other’s appearance and desirable personal characteristics) and reciprocal liking of the other (both in general and from self-disclosure). *Falling-in-friendship*, held these two qualities as well, but noticeably “was preceded moderately often, and generally more frequently than was falling in love, by perceived similarity and propinquity” (p. 251). Their research was based on findings of studies on general-attraction and mate-selection which identified eleven potential variables: (a) similarity, (b) propinquity, (c) desirable characteristics, (d) reciprocal liking, (e) social influences, (f) filling needs, (g) arousal/unusualness, (h) specific cues, (i) readiness for entering a relationship, (j) isolation from others, and (k) mystery (pp. 245-246). Interestingly, in two of their three studies, arousal/unusualness, was associated more with falling-in-friendship than falling-in-love (p. 249).

Guerrero and Mongeau (2008) describe two other theoretical approaches which suggest other influences in the movement from friendship to romantic relations.

Expectancy violation theory references that each person has expectations about what a friendship is and what a romantic relationship is. These are different for each person and can change within the context of the relationship. Romantic relationships have to be

successful in navigating these expectations and their change (p. 183-186). *Uncertainty reduction theory* suggests that relationships have and develop uncertainties related to self, partner and relationship.

Knobloch and Solomon (1999) identified four types of relational uncertainty ... about what constitutes acceptable versus unacceptable behavior ... whether one's feelings are reciprocated ... about the nature or state of the relationship ... about commitment and the direction the relationship will take in the future (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008, p. 182).

Information and disclosure in these areas can either reduce or increase uncertainty.

Relationships which reduce these uncertainties “might mark a transition to a more stable and less turbulent relationship stage” (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008, p. 183). This becomes complicated when relationships are developed *long-distance*. Stafford and Reske (1990) note in their study of long-distance relationships the “normal progression of the dissipation of idealization is not taking place” (p. 278). As a result of limits in communication inherent in long-distance relationships, “individuals have not had the interaction necessary to reduce their uncertainty regarding their partner ... couples may have little idea of how idealized and inaccurate their images are” (Stafford & Reske, 1990, p. 278).

Moss and Schwebel (1993) tried to come to an acceptable definition of intimacy that would help describe differences between romantic intimates and other relationships. They noted 61 different definitions of intimacy in research (to that date). Their concluding “definition specifies five components of intimacy: a) Commitment; b) Affective Intimacy; c) Cognitive Intimacy; d) Physical Intimacy; and e) Mutuality” (p.

33). They suggest that only romantic relationships can be defined by high (and positive) levels in all five of these components whereas friends would identify with lower levels of mutuality, commitment and physical intimacy.

Similarly, Van Epp Cutlip (2013) references the *Relationship Attachment Model (RAM)* as another tool which helps differentiate aspects of relationship and their intensity. The RAM identifies “five dynamic bonds ... know, trust, rely, commit, and touch” with “ranges of strength – higher levels of the dynamic bonds indicate higher degrees of development or strength of that specific bond” (p. 71, 73). Like Moss and Schwebel’s (1993) component levels of romantic intimacy, the RAM can be shown as a bar graph to assist couples in identifying their present levels in each of the five bonds and can be used to grade the impact of specific events on the couple relationship (e.g. effects of military deployment or a new baby) or be a monitor of other relationship distress (Van Epp Cutlip, 2013, p. 78-79).

Schaefer and Olson (1981) developed the *PAIR (Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships) Inventory* as a clinical scale to measure intimacy and to help couples identify where they’re perceptions and expectations were in their relationship. They began from “the seven types of intimacy originally described by Olson (1975) ... (1) *emotional* ... (2) *social* ... (3) *intellectual* ... (4) *sexual* ... (5) *recreational* ... (6) *spiritual* ... (7) *aesthetic*” (p. 50). In the development of the PAIR Inventory they dropped the spiritual and aesthetic qualities “because they were conceptually and empirically unclear” (p. 51). The PAIR Inventory is one of many tools which can be used to assist couples (at any stage) to help them “focus on specific areas of the relationship” (p. 59).

The transition from friendship to romance or from some other relationship description to romance can happen in a variety of ways and is influenced by many factors. In the end, Guerrero and Mongeau (2008) conclude that “a romantic relationship ... is a relationship labeled as such by partners ... the partners’ mutual definition for their particular entanglement” (p. 175). Yet there is some definition of this state which at least in western cultures is present when couples come to a state of commitment to each other which includes statements of exclusivity and mutual love common in the commitment ceremonies in western cultures.

Love.

“Seminal work on the theory and measurement of love” (Sternberg, 1997, p. 334) was initiated by Zick Rubin. Rubin (1970) laments the lack of attention love has received in social psychology because “the association between love and marriage gives it a unique status as a link between the individual and the structure of society” (p. 265). In his effort to change this, he defined love as “an attitude held by a person toward a particular other person, involving predispositions to think, feel, and behave in certain ways toward that other person” (Rubin, 1970, p. 265). Rubin developed a questionnaire to discern between *loving* and *liking* in both romantic and platonic relationships. The loving component was correlated with questions that addressed, (a) affiliative and dependent need, (b) predisposition to help, and (c) exclusiveness and absorption (Rubin, 1970, p. 267-268). He also devised a *gazing* behavioural test to measure exclusiveness and absorption. The questionnaire revealed “that respondents’ estimates of the likelihood that they would marry their partners were more highly related to their love than to their liking for their partners” (Rubin, 1970, p. 272). From these results, he differentiated

between those who were strongly in love and those who were weaker on the love scale. Tracking individual gazing was not a factor that differentiated strong from weak, but that simultaneous, mutual gazing was significantly higher for strong couples (Rubin, 1970, p. 271).

Lasswell and Lasswell (1976) were not concerned about quantifying love but were concerned that couples who presented for therapy had different definitions of love. Their work used the six styles of loving identified by Lee (1974): (a) *Storge* (*life-long friends*), (b) *Agapic* (*totally "thou" centered*), (c) *Mania* (*possessiveness and intense dependency*), (d) *Pragma* (*logical – sensible*), (e) *Ludus* (*self-centered game player*), (f) *Eros* (*romantic*) (Lasswell & Lasswell, 1976, pp. 215-219). They developed a questionnaire, *The Love Scale*, which would assist couples to identify the love they typified and used this as information to create conversations between couples and acceptance of each other's different style/type without judgement. They noted that "persons have varying degrees of each quality" (Lasswell & Lasswell, 1976, p. 219). Lee (1977) is careful in describing the styles noting,

a typology is about an empirically manifested social style, pre-existing the lover in question. It is about a style of relationship, not about a personality or identity. It is about a particular relationship, not necessarily all of the intimate adult affiliations in which this person engages (p. 174).

Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) further tested this theory of typology in two studies with some changes in the questionnaire developed by Lasswell and Lasswell. They concluded that indeed the six types were evident and could be delineated and also noted correlated differences of personality and characteristics within the populations

studied. Eros and Mania were higher in emotion than the other four; self-esteem was highest among Eros and lowest among Mania; Eros was strong in commitment; Ludic was manipulative; Storge was evolutionary; Pragma would relate to “computer mating”; Agape related to “strength” of love (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986, p. 400-401). They confirmed other and related studies on sexual differences: “males are more permissive and instrumental in their sexual attitudes ... consistent with males being more ludic in their love styles ... females have been more conservative in sexual attitudes ... more pragmatic ... more storgic than males” (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986, p. 401). Cultural influences might suggest that different styles or traits may not change yet Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) wonder if “possibly some dimensions are more changeable by experience” (p. 401) than others and so note that studies to that date have not followed couples over time to see if these styles change or are static.

Sternberg (1997) described a *triangular love scale* which incorporates the many aspects described above, not from a developmental point of view, but as an assessment tool referencing different components of love. He describes three components, (a) intimacy, (b) passion, and (c) decision/commitment. Intimacy is described as the cognitive, emotional and experiential parts of a relationship including mutuality and esteem; passion references the romantic and sexual components; and decision/commitment “refers, in the short-term, to the decision that one loves a certain other, and in the long-term, to one’s commitment to maintain that love” (p. 315). He describes eight kinds of love based on combinations of the evidence of one, two, or all three components. Interestingly, in one study, the lover relationship constituted the highest scores in all three components which would reference “consummate, or complete

love” (p. 316, 320, 327). In a study using the Triangular Theory of Love, Acker and Davis (1992) with 204 participants, were able to distinguish the three components of love, and relate them to relationship satisfaction (65% of participants were married and mean relationship length was 9.5 years). They conclude,

commitment was the strongest, most consistent predictor of relationship satisfaction for the full sample, displaying a significant association for every measure employed ... consistently significant for all measures for both sexes ... for relationships of differing lengths, commitment not only remained the most consistent predictor of satisfaction, but also became a stronger predictor as relationship length increased ... commitment may be the most fundamentally important construct in adult romantic relationships (Acker & David, 1992, p. 45).

Commitment

This study is about the decision to marry. This decision is encapsulated in the Anglican Marriage rite when couples are asked to make a decision using their wills: “*N* will you give yourself to *N* to be her husband: to love her, comfort her, honour and protect her; and forsaking all others, to be faithful to her so long as you both shall live?” (Anglican Church of Canada, 1985, p. 543) (Note. This quotation is the form addressed to the bridegroom. The same question is asked of the bride with appropriate gender reference changes). A couple who have decided to be married have indicated that their relationship is of a quality and nature that they are prepared to make this life-long exclusive commitment to each other. This commitment is central to the concept of marriage and figures prominently in successful marriages. “*Commitment* represents the

degree to which an individual experiences long-term orientation toward a relationship, including intent to persist through both “good and lean times,” feelings of psychological attachments, and implicit recognition that one “needs” a relationship” (Van Lange, Rusbult, Arriaga, Witcher, Drigotas, & Cox, 1997, p. 1374). In a subjective study, Surra and Hughes (1997) define marital commitment as “the partners’ estimates of the likelihood that they will marry their partners ... “the chance of marriage”” (p. 5).

Davis (1973) notes that intimates create *communion, contrariety, and commitment*. Communion is the establishing of what is common and what makes them “a couple”. Contrariety is the discovery and consciousness of what makes one distinct from the other. Some might say “she completes me” as an expression of seeing oneself more clearly and distinct within the context of the communion. Davis notes that these two states are “unstable” though desired and so “intimates lock themselves together through their *Commitment*” (p. 170). He notes that this can be expressed in different ways, through “going steady”, “living together” and by “marriage” (pp. 193-194). Ogolsky and Surra (2014) distinguished these three different types of commitment in dating couples, “commitment to a recreational dating relationship, commitment to marrying, and commitment to a long-term cohabitation” (p. 621).

Some studies reference what is called *global commitment* as a way to reference relationships which are termed committed but have not formalized this through marriage (Surra & Hughes, 1997; Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999). Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston (1999) suggest that what is termed as global commitment is contained in one of three aspects of Johnson’s (1991) formulation called *personal commitment*. Their suggestion is that global commitment formulations do not consider or involve *moral* or

structural commitments (the other two aspects of Johnson's (1991) formulation).

Likewise, Surra and Hughes (1997) distinguish marital commitment from global commitment: "moral, social, legal, and other structural constraints are likely to be much more influential in marital than in global commitment ... partners who are committing to wed are apt to be more concerned about the likely survival of the relationship" (p. 6).

Cherlin (2009) identifies this same distinction noting that cohabitation requires a *private* commitment versus the *public* commitment of marriage resulting in what he calls *enforceable trust*. This difference in global vs. marital commitment may be related to a study which shows that cohabitating couples are less dedicated, have less interpersonal commitment, and are less satisfied than married couples (Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004).

Interdependence.

A theoretical view of commitment, *interdependence theory* is referenced in many articles. This theory was presented in *Interpersonal Relations: A Theory of Interdependence* (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). As noted earlier in the section on romance, Kelley & Thibaut (1978) identify a step process that evolves commitment. Their four steps note considerable intention: (a) a decision to further the relationship based on the determination that the relationship will be rewarding, low cost, and dependable – and communicating a dependence on the relationship, an overlap of interests, and intention to act in consideration of the other and the common interests, (b) the intention to induce a reciprocal response from the other, (c) communicating or implying a commitment to further and enlarge the relationship, and (d) if successful the partner's uncertainty is reduced to the extent that they reciprocate (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978, pp.232-234). Van

Lange, et al., (1997) note that in this process the exclusivity of the relationship is also enhanced:

Commitment is argued to develop as a consequence of increasing dependence as a result of an (a) increase in *satisfaction level* (i.e., the relationship gratifies important needs, such as the needs for intimacy or security) and (b) decline in *quality of alternatives* (i.e., specific alternative partners, field of eligible, or noninvolvement are relatively unattractive) (p. 1374-1375).

Satisfaction.

Risch, Riley and Lawler (2003) researched problematic issues for couples in the first five years of marriage, noting that other research suggests that 20% of first marriages end in divorce in the first five years (p. 253). In their study of 793 couples, 73.8%, in these early years of marriage note that commitment to marriage was not a problematic issue. Of the 42 issues raised in the survey which might be problematic, only 4 other issues were seen to be less problematic than commitment to marriage (gambling, sexual fidelity, trusting your spouse, and use of physical force) (p. 257).

In a 2001 General Social Survey in Canada, it was found that 23% of marriages ended in dissolution within the first 11 years (Clark & Crompton, 2006). Part of this study was a query about the importance of marriage to personal happiness. Clark & Crompton (2006) conclude from the data, “Married couples generally have “greater commitment and higher relationship quality” than partners in common-law unions, which suggests something about the transcendent nature of the marriage bond itself” (p. 29).

This conclusion points to both the complexity of commitment (transcendent) and its importance for the durability of a marriage.

Attitude.

Larson and Holman (1994) reviewed “over 50 years of research on premarital predictors of marital quality and stability” (p. 233). In their concluding remarks, they recommend a number of topics that should be covered in pre-marital counselling in three broad areas: (a) assessing each partner’s personality traits and behaviours, (b) assessing the tendency to choose a mate similar to one’s self, and (c) background and contextual factors (Larson & Holman, 1994, p. 235). In the first area, they note a need to assess each partner’s “conventionality.” DeMaris & MacDonald (1993) suggest that one’s attitudes towards the institution of marriage and marriage roles affect one’s commitment. Background and contextual factors, particularly the stability of one’s parent’s marriage and one’s experience of parental divorce may affect one’s attitude to marital conflict, commitment and divorce (Larson & Holman, 1994).

We.

In their research and summary of research into the beginnings of relationships, Custer, Holmberg, Blair, & Orbuch (2008) use narrative inquiry to discover the significant aspects of early relationship development. One of their observations seemed to confirm other studies in noting that couples who develop a “we” orientation in their storytelling (as opposed to a “you” and “I”) were more satisfied in their relationship than those who did not (p. 458). This is indicative of a move toward a focus *on* the relationship rather than on the individuals *in* the relationship. Their summary of research addresses consistency over time. They note that “high levels of collaboration” in

storytelling continued over time and “relational affects increased” while other aspects of the narrative changed, leading them to conclude: “once couples have shared an experience and worked through the meaning of it together, it becomes “theirs”” (p. 460). This may indicate that the “we” decision endures over time in the face of changes in marital satisfaction and that the beginning of “we” statements notes commitment to the relationship.

Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult and Langston (1998) furthered this “we” perception in their study which addresses cognitive change in relation to commitment:

For romantic involvements, cognitive interdependence appears to increase hand-in-hand with increases in commitment level. The more romantically committed individuals become, the greater is the tendency to think about the relationship in a pluralistic, other-inclusive manner, as reflected in the spontaneous use of plural pronouns to describe oneself and one’s relationship... In addition, the more romantically committed individuals become, the more they come to regard themselves as blended with the partner, as revealed in perceived overlap in mental representations of self and partner... Furthermore, romantically committed individuals tend to regard their relationships as relatively central to who they are and what their lives are about, as an essential component of that which is important and meaningful in life ... the effects of commitment and cognitive interdependence are reciprocal (p. 951).

Just using the word “we” does not automatically indicate marital satisfaction. Use of the word “we” can signal an unhealthy relationship. Burr (1990) notes that this

“occurs when individuals are using a “we-orientation” to manipulate others against their will” (p. 272). “When simple I-statements are combined with We-statements it adds tentativeness and subjectivity and minimizes the likelihood that family members will use We-statements in disabling, exploitive or unhealthy ways” (p. 273). Though the use of “we” can indicate a positive movement in relationship development (Agnew, et al., 1998 and Custer, et al., 2008), Burr’s (1990) research suggests that a balanced use of “I” and “we” may also be indicative of a healthy relationship and encourages an examination of the use of the word “we” to make sure it is indicative of commitment and not manipulation.

Investment.

Rusbult (1980) proposed an *investment model* to discern commitment and relationship satisfaction. Her theory and research concluded that the degree of commitment to a relationship is a function of the costs and rewards of the relationship over time – it is akin to an economic paradigm. “The investment model is based on several principles of interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), and assumes that individuals are in general motivated to maximize rewards while minimizing costs” (Rusbult, 1980, p 173). “Commitment increases with the passage of time in part because the resources “put into” a relationship increase the costs of withdrawing from it” (Rusbult, 1980, p. 174). The investments are both economic (investments of money, sharing a home) and of person (trust, emotion, time, self-disclosure). When the loss of these investments (through dissolution of the relationship) are greater than possible alternatives, commitment to the relationship increases. Rusbult (1980) was also able to distinguish commitment from relationship satisfaction, noting that the relationship may

not be satisfying, yet commitment may remain strong because the costs of alternatives are too great. Le and Agnew (2003) in a meta-analysis of research to that date note that “satisfaction level was found to be significantly more predictive of commitment ... however ... alternatives and investments ... predicts commitment above and beyond satisfaction” (p. 50). They conclude, “satisfaction with, alternatives to, and investments in a relationship each correlated significantly with commitment to that relationship” (Le & Agnew, 2003, p. 37)

Goodfriend and Agnew (2008) studied different types and timings of investment in relationships. They distinguished between material and immaterial investments and whether those investments were considered past or part of the relationship already or planned for the future of the relationship. They concluded that “planned investments of any type and intangible past investments were the strongest predictors of commitment level” (p. 1648). In relation to time they found “that higher commitment to a particular relationship is associated with a greater number of plans regarding future possibilities with that relationship partner” (p. 1650).

Gratitude and appreciation.

Another investment strategy that has been researched, is the area of gratitude and appreciation. Joel, Gordon, Impett, MacDonald and Keltner (2013) note that when an individual recalled investment in the relationship that the partner has made it “elicited feelings of trust as well as feelings of gratitude, both of which, in turn, increased people’s own commitment to their relationship” (p. 1337). They noted this result was also effective over time. Persons who recorded feelings of gratitude for their partner’s investment in the relationship, lead to increases in commitment to the relationship three

and nine months later (p. 1340-1341). Similarly, Gordon, Impett, Kogan, Oveis, and Keltner (2012) note that “feeling appreciated by one’s partner appears to promote one’s own appreciative feelings, which, in turn, promote responsiveness to a romantic partner’s needs” (p. 266). Gordon, et al., (2012) note, as did Joel, et al., (2013) that the effect of appreciation “was associated with greater commitment” and that “people were 3.58 times more likely to still be in their relationships 9 months later” (Gordon, et al., 2012, p. 267).

Dedication and constraint.

Stanley and Markman (1992) proposed another measure, the *Commitment Inventory* describing commitment as a combination of, *personal dedication* and *constraint commitment*. Personal dedication refers to the desire for an individual to maintain or improve the quality of his or her relationship for the joint benefit of the participants ... constraint commitment refers to forces that constrain individuals to maintain relationships regardless of their personal dedication to them. (p. 595-596).

Stanley and Markman (1992) clearly focus dedication on the priority for the relationship and its continuance over time. They also relate dedication to the subject’s prevalent view of themselves as a team (couple) rather than individuals and the presence of self-sacrifice for the other’s benefit. They noted that ‘constraint’ is often viewed in a negative fashion, but in their study, couples in satisfying relationships saw constraints as positive and stabilizing.

In another study considering commitment and the dynamics of dedication and constraint, Stanley, Rhoades, and Whitton (2010) note that commitment precedes self-sacrifice: “The tendency of individuals to sacrifice, or forgo immediate self-interest for

the good of the partner or relationship, is strongly dependent on the presence of commitment” (p. 246). They see sacrifice “as a strong behavioral signal of commitment and security between partners” (p. 246). They would concur with Davis’ (1973) inference that romantic attachments are *insecure* when they describe the *anxiety* that can develop in the couple relationship regarding the potential loss of the emotional bond (romantic attachment) that has developed in a relationship. They note “the fundamental role of commitment is to secure the romantic attachment between partners, thereby reducing this type of anxiety ... commitment throughout history has been to secure romantic attachment ... intention is central in understanding commitment” (p. 248-249). They identify that this type of commitment is related to dedication (internal motivations) and not constraint (external reasons to remain committed to a relationship). They express concern that couples who cohabit prior to marriage can be thought of as “sliding through transitions ... a process that cannot provide as much support for sustained commitment as the case in which one intentionally makes a decision to become committed as part of the transition process” (p. 254). Constraint oriented commitment may begin to develop in these relationships which traps partners in a relationship negatively even if they later make a marital commitment (based on constraint rather than dedication).

Self-sacrifice.

Whitton, Stanley, and Markman (2007) further delineated the perceptions of self-sacrifice in relation to commitment. They found that “in highly committed relationships, acts of sacrifice are often not perceived as very negative for self-interest” (p. 84). This confirmed Stanley and Markman’s (1992) understanding that self-sacrifice is positively

related to marital satisfaction and commitment. However, they note that the “perception” of the self-sacrifice is important and that “expected” self-sacrifice in romantic relationships, may be correlated with depression in women. These findings note the importance of commitment in relationship, “a gender difference has important ramifications for unmarried cohabitation, which is characterized by lower levels of interpersonal commitment than marriage” (Whitton, et al., 2007, pp. 84-85).

In a longitudinal study of young marriages, Stanley, Whitton, Sadberry, Clements and Markman (2006) confirmed “that attitudes about sacrifice predict marital success and the maintenance of relationship adjustment in the early years of marriage” (p. 297). They concluded that acts of “sacrifice may exert a beneficial effect on relationship quality” (p. 299) and “may be highly salient symbols of devotion between partners, leading to greater levels of trust” (p. 291). They furthered the connection between negative perception of sacrifice and depression to affect both men and women, but still “in men, a long-term commitment is related to greater willingness to sacrifice” (p. 300).

Van Lange et.al. (1997) studied the *willingness* to sacrifice as it relates to commitment. Their study supports much of what has been noted in other studies mentioned above “commitment appears to operate as an emergent property of dependence, reflecting more than the sum of the conditions out of which it arises: In promotion of prorelationship motivation, commitment accounted for substantial, unique variance above and beyond its components” (p. 1390).

Motivation and trust.

These theoretical studies are based on *interdependence theory* (as noted above) which suggest “a relationship persists when the outcomes from that relationship are

beneficial and satisfying to the individuals involved. As individuals begin to influence the degree to which their partners' outcomes are achieved, and vice versa, a condition of mutual dependence develops" (Le & Agnew, 2003, p. 38). This is described in several articles as a *transformation of motivation* which happens in relationships where the betterment of the relationship takes priority over self-interest (hence the presence of positive perception of self-sacrifice). Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, and Agnew (1999) suggest it is important to identify the basis of stable transformational tendencies to understand these pro-relationship decisions and habits (p. 943). They suggest this is based in trust:

the expectation that a given partner can be relied on to behave in a benevolent manner and be responsive to one's needs ... Trust is said to include three components (Holmes & Rempel, 1989): (a) predictability, or belief that the partner's behavior is consistent; (b) dependability, or belief that the partner can be counted on to be honest, reliable, and benevolent; and (c) faith, or conviction that the partner is intrinsically motivated to be responsive and caring. (Wieselquist, et al., 1999, p. 944).

They suggest that there is a cyclical pattern where one's dependence increases one's commitment which motivates one's pro-relationship behavior which is perceived by the partner and increases the partner's trust and dependence, and enhances the partner's commitment and pro-relationship behavior which is then perceived by the one and cycle's back (Wieselquist, et al., 1999, p. 945). Their findings in research conclude that "strong trust produces enhanced dependence, which in turn strengthens commitment" and "that

perceived partner accommodation and sacrifice are associated with enhanced trust” (Wieselquist, et al., 1999, pp. 960-961).

Change in commitment.

Surra, Arizzi, & Asmussen (1988) attempted to discern changes in commitment in couples' overtime. From couple reports on changes in their commitment, they were able to identify some general directions that either increased or decreased commitment in the relationship. They identified four general influences on commitment: (a) intrapersonal-normative (predispositions or preconceptions about dating and marriage, and standards for a relationship); (b) dyadic reasons (expressions of interdependence, self-disclosure, agreements, conflicts); (c) social network reasons (family, friends, comparisons with others); and (d) circumstantial reasons (events, forces over which the partner have little control) (p. 51-52). Generally, dyadic reasons were given for upturns in commitment, some more quickly than others. “Predispositions and standards are associated with moderate declines” in commitment (1988, p. 56). Social network reasons can cause dramatic shifts in commitment positively or negatively, “relations with significant others provide information about the relationship and create dilemmas that need to be resolved” (p. 58). “Circumstantial reasons are connected to sharp declines” in commitment. (p. 57). Though Surra, Arizzi, and Asmussen (1988) draw some general conclusions, their study of 264 couples through their first year of marriage identified 37 themes and evidence of cultural differences creating a web of influences affecting increases and decreases in commitment over time.

Psychological Theories and Frameworks for Couple Counselling

In this section, I will briefly introduce the various theoretical approaches to couple counselling. I will use the general summary of approaches that are referenced in the *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy (Fourth Edition)* (2008a). I will depart from Gurman's (2008a) text to address a current therapy which parallels Object Relations Therapy and to address Attachment Theory which is foundational to Emotion Focused theory and Gottman Couples Method. I will conclude with Gurman's (2008b) comments on Integrative Approaches. In approaching the different models, I will focus on modalities which particularly give attention to the beginnings of relationships and the decision made by the couple to become a couple or to be married.

Behavioural approaches.

Cognitive-Behavioral (CBCT) and Integrative Behavioral (IBCT) Couple Therapy approaches are particularly centered on the couples here and now conflicts and issues which they present for therapy (Gurman, 2008a, pp. 29-103). The approaches are similar in that therapeutic interventions focus on practicing new behaviors in the relationship and changing cognitions which contribute to dysfunctions in the relationship. "The CBCT therapist is to help couples become more active observers and evaluators of their own automatic thoughts, and their longstanding assumptions and standards (form of relatively stable cognitive schemas or knowledge structures) regarding their relationship" (Baucom, Epstein, LaTaillade, & Kirby, 2008, p. 33). "IBCT focuses as much or more on the recipient of behavior as on the agent of behavior" (Dimidian, Martell, & Christensen, 2008, p. 76) through acceptance, empathy and tolerance. Rather than a focus solely on changing the behavior of one, there is a similar focus on changing the cognitions and

responding behavior of the other. Though behavioural approaches both enquire about the beginnings of relationships and commitment within their assessments, there is little emphasis on these within the therapeutic approach but are referenced as “context” for information and historical understanding of current issues (if applicable). Their importance for this study may be awareness of how couples accept their differences and how they address conflict and whether cognitive and behavioural changes are present in their decision to marry.

Systemic approaches.

Gurman (2008a) groups, *Brief Strategic Couple Therapy* and *Structural Couple Therapy* together as systemic approaches (pp. 297-349). Shoham, Rohrbaugh, and Cleary (2008) note that Brief Strategic Couple Therapy focuses on a current problem or issue to be resolved in the relationship with emphasis on the “the extent to which interaction patterns based on attempted solutions keep a complaint going or make it worse” (p. 301). Structural Couple Therapy was developed from family systems models that understands the couple as a subsystem with a boundary that surrounds it and assesses the permeability of that boundary and the differentiation of the couple within that boundary (Simon, 2008, pp, 323-333). Both of these approaches deal with here and now issues and address the current functioning of the couple with little reference to the importance of history or indeed romantic involvement. These approaches identify that couples come to a relationship from different family systems which influence their conflict resolution styles, behavior, expectations, etc. There is also a cultural sensitivity referenced particularly in the concept of arranged marriages where romance may not be a prime motivator for couples who marry. How couples engage in conflict, and the

influences of family systems will be important aspects of reference in the stories of couples' decision to marry.

Object relations couple therapy.

Object relations couple therapy is a psychodynamic approach influenced by both systemic and behavioural approaches. "Object relations theory holds that the motivating factor in growth and development of the human infant is the need to be in a relationship with a mothering person" (Scharff & Scharff, 2008, p. 168). As applied to couples and marriages, object relations theory suggests that part of a romantic relationship is complimentary matching on an unconscious level. "In the healthy marriage, this unconscious complementarity allows for derepression of the repressed parts of one's object relations, so one can re-find lost parts of the self in relation to the spouse" (Scharff & Scharff, 2008, p. 169). One might understand this theoretical understanding in the statement by someone who says of their partner, "S/he completes me."

Harville Hendrix and Helen Hunt in the 1980's developed *Imago Relationship Therapy* with parallels to object relations theory and attachment theory. He notes that couples shift from a romantic love to a power struggle - instead of fulfilling each other's childhood unmet needs, there is now a demand to "magically meet all of my needs and love me like my parents never did" (Williams, 2012, How does romantic love go wrong? ¶ 2).

Hendrix notes that in his practice he observed often that partners unconsciously related to each other in parallel terms to their childhood families: "there was a close correlation between parents and partners, and with few exceptions *the traits that matched up most closely were the negative traits!*" (Hendrix, 2008, p. 46). Couples unconsciously

seek out a mate who “images” (hence the Latin name of this therapy) those they closely related to in childhood. Couples take their respective styles of attachment (imago) into their marital relationship. Imago therapy begins from this premise: that each partner has chosen to marry the imago of their childhood close relationships. In time, the wounds which they experienced in childhood begin to present themselves in the couple relationship. Imago therapy makes conscious the unconscious imago and couples “begin to heal the ruptured connection they had experienced decades ago with their caregivers” (Hendrix, 2008, p. 105).

Transgenerational couple therapy.

Transgenerational (TG) theory is prevalent in most therapeutic practices and references that “professionals routinely assess and refer to family-of-origin issues when treating partners, if only to create a genogram” (Roberto-Forman, 2008, p. 196). Transgenerational approaches are grouped together by reference to family-systems. Bowen’s Natural Systems Theory and Whitakers, Symbolic-Experiential Theory are examples of TG models which “were created to provide a relational view of lifetime vulnerability and to explain why emotional breakdown occurs in one family member rather than others” (Roberto-Forman, 2008, p. 199). Transgenerational theories invite therapists to understand their original family system: roles people took, tolerance of individual differences, leadership, emotional connectivity or disengagement, etc. Family systems analysis “has tremendous implications for therapists working with issues of partner selection” (Roberto-Forman, 2008, p. 198).

Social constructionist approaches.

Narrative Couple Therapy is one of the approaches Gurman (2008a) references under this heading. Freedman and Combs (2008) note narrative therapy's approach:

Instead of trying to solve problems, we began to focus collaboratively on enriching the narratives of people's lives. ... we work to help people find new meaning in their lives by experiencing, telling, and retelling stories of as-yet-unstoried aspects of their lives (p. 229).

Freedman and Combs (2008) highlight the importance of story and metaphor in the context of a couple's life. This is often evident at wedding receptions where photo presentations and toasts celebrate the story of each of the two lives, and the story of their connecting and relationship development.

Solution-Focused Couple Therapy is a pragmatic, out-come oriented therapy that looks for what works for a couple.

The solution-focused approach is client centered and transcultural, in that it truly respects the "local knowledge" (individual, familial, social) of those who seek therapy; "cultural diversity" is honored in that the emphasis is genuinely on learning *from* clients, not just *about* them.

(Hoyt, 2008, p. 261).

Solution-focused therapy "emphasizes the use of language in the social construction of reality" (Hoyt, 2008, p. 259). This therapeutic approach identifies the individuality of every relationship rather than looking for norms (as does the narrative approach).

Attachment theory.

Attachment theory was pioneered by John Bowlby, a child psychiatrist, and was specifically associated with research about infant attachment to and separation from parents. From his observational research of the behaviours of infants with their mothers, he noted an “unmistakable attachment behavior ... (among them sucking, clinging, and following...)” (Bretherton, 1992, p. 762). Mary Ainsworth joined Bowlby in 1958 and through further study “delineated three styles or types of attachment, often called secure, anxious/ambivalent, and avoidant” (Hazan & Shaver, 1987, p. 511).

Striking individual differences were observed in how sensitively, appropriately, and promptly mothers responded to their infants’ signals. For some mother-infant pairs, feeding was an occasion for smooth cooperation. Other mothers had difficulties in adjusting their pacing and behavior to the baby’s cues. In response, their babies tended to struggle, choke, and spit up, hardly the sensuous oral experience Freud had had in mind. (Bretherton, 1992, p. 765).

Bowlby’s and Ainsworth’s work on attachment theory has now become common in our day. Soon to be parents receive pre-natal classes where the need for children to be held (skin to skin) is recognized as crucial in the early moments and days of a child’s life: “Attachment is the close emotional bond that forms between you and your baby. This makes her feel safe and loved. You build secure attachment ...” (Alberta Health Services, 2014, p. 113). It is interesting that in this text (part of Alberta’s pre-natal classes for parents) there is a reference to “secure attachment” as common language with little reference to its origin.

Attachment theory has expanded in its application from Bowlby and Ainsworth's original focus on the infant/mother relationship. Using attachment theory, researchers have examined how adults attach to children and other adults (Ainsworth, 1989; Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and in romantic and/or marital relationships (Creasey & Jarvis, 2008; Crowell, Treboux, & Waters, 2002; Hazan, & Diamond, 2000; Johnson, 2003; Parker & Scannell, 1998; Schmitt, 2008; Van Epp Cutlip, 2013).

Hazan & Shaver (1987) were among the first researchers to relate attachment theory to romantic relationships:

Just as the feelings an infant presumably experiences in the relationship with his or her mother are thought to reflect the quality of attachment to her, we expected that different types of respondents – secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent – would experience their most important love relationships differently (p. 513).

The results of their studies noted a correlation with attachment theory: “Secure respondents characterized their love experiences as friendly, happy, and trusting, whereas avoidant subjects reported fear of closeness, and anxious/ambivalent subjects described relationships marked by jealousy, emotional highs and lows, and desire for reciprocation” (p. 518). Hazan & Shaver (1987) further noted that the style of attachment one experiences in childhood is consistent with the adult style and that the different styles of attachment have different expectations of love relationships: “people with different attachment orientations entertain different beliefs about the course of romantic love, the availability and trust-worthiness of love partners, and their own love-worthiness” (p. 521). This conclusion also supported Bowlby's theory that attachment styles were not

simply a matter of stimulus and response but are also stimulated by intrapsychic processes (Bretherton, 1992).

Attachment theory plays an important role in a number of couple therapy modalities. Graziano and Bruce (2008) note that “research and theory on relationships changed focus dramatically in the period from 1985 to 2007 ... attachment theory ... changed the relationship landscape” (p. 286). Many counsellors may use assessment instruments in the beginning stages of couple therapy which clearly reference attachment theory. George, Kaplan, & Main (1985) developed the *Adult Attachment Interview Protocol (AAI)* which although focused on one’s relationship to one’s parents assesses one’s attachment style to inform couple counselling. Subsequently, Crowell & Owens (1998) designed a similar instrument, *The Current Relationship Interview (CRI)* to “investigate the nature of attachment relationships in adult partnerships” (p. 3). One can see the influence of attachment theory in other assessment instruments for couple therapy. Part of the Gottman assessment references the experience of the partners in their family of origin. Attachment theory is at least implicit in statements like, “My family home was a place of instability and insecurity,” “My parents didn’t protect me from danger very well,” “The kids were ignored by my parents” (Gottman & Schwartz-Gottman, 2014, p. 4-30-31).

Emotionally focused therapy for couples.

Emotionally focused therapy for couples (EFTC) is another theoretical base from which couples counselling is offered. Therapists emphasize dealing with the here and now relationship of the couple and processing emotions. Therapists are particularly attuned to emotional aspects of communication and beliefs as well as the cognitive and

behavioural aspects. In particular therapists look for underlying emotions of sadness or being scared which may be covered up by an expression of anger. EFTC invites partners to engage their feelings, not simply to talk about their feelings in the counselling sessions. Dysfunctional cognitions and “the nature of the self in relation to the other, are most accessible in couples therapy when the emotions themselves are aroused” (Greenberg & Johnson, 1988, p. 23).

Greenberg & Johnson (1988) note that “the need for attachment is of primal importance” and “interdependence is the goal of healthy attachment” (p. 18). As Crawley & Grant (2005) have noted, EFTC can be helped by attachment theory especially in the assessment phase of therapy. Knowing the attachment styles of the couple and how they interface can assist therapists to address family of origin attachment issues.

EFTC invites integration of the emotional (present and past) in the narrative of a couple’s story. Couples who are “able to reflect on their experience and create integrated coherent narratives about their attachment relationships” are more secure (Johnson, 2003, p. 109). Therapy for couples might address any emotional incoherence between a couple’s current telling of their story and their recollection of the emotional component of their decision to marry. EFTC is clearly a therapeutic model of counselling addressing marital relationships which are in some manner not functioning. From this perspective, the decision to marry is likely made in the context of reciprocal emotional safety.

Partners need to be able to reveal their essential selves to each other and be accepted as they are. They need to be able to say what they feel most deeply and what they think most profoundly without fear of rejection or fear of hurting the other” (Greenberg & Johnson, 1988, p. 20).

Gottman method couples therapy.

Gottman's therapeutic model comes from decades of research involving what he called "The Love Lab". This was a studio apartment where couples would spend a weekend being monitored by a variety of methods including urine analysis, heart rate monitors, and a blood sample at the end of their stay. Most importantly co-researchers observed the couple through a one-way mirror and video cameras taped their daytime activity (Penner, 2012, p. 78-79). Significantly, Gottman followed some of the same couples throughout three decades of their marriage. As a result of his research he began to distinguish what he called the *masters* and the *disasters* in marriage and published *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (1999). Gottman's therapeutic model involves an assessment of the areas he defined as significant for good functioning marriages which he calls *The Sound Relationship House* (Appendix A). What follows is a brief explanation of the seven levels of the house.

The foundation of the Sound Relationship House is *Love Maps*: "Love maps refer to how well someone knows their partner, how detailed the map in their mind is of the other person's life" (Penner, 2012, p. 91). These are primarily cognitive in nature: the partner's favorite colour, the name of their best friend, how they take their coffee, etc. These are often matters that couples learn early on in their relationship which draw them closer emotionally.

The second level is *Fondness and Admiration*. These are the attributes of the other which one admires or are fond of. These may be physical or character attributes which the other finds attractive, interesting, and engaging and which draw one to be closer to them. Couples often express this when they recall the early stages of their

relationship and how they were attracted to each other. Therapeutically, Gottman invites couples to focus on these fond and admirable qualities, rather than the negative attributes which they are focused on when they often come to therapy.

The third level is named *Turn Towards Instead of Away*. Here Gottman uses an image of an *Emotional Bank Account* (Gottman & Silver, 1999, p. 83). He suggests that each time a partner acknowledges, does something for, supports, expresses love, etc. s/he is making a deposit in their emotional bank account. On the contrary, when one ignores, is apathetic towards, or rejects their partner, there is a withdrawal from the emotional bank account. Couples choose, sometimes in very mundane and common conversations or encounters, to either turn towards their partner or turn away. Gottman also describes these moments as times when one of the partners makes a *bid* for the attention of the other. How the other responds to those bids constitutes whether that is a turning towards or turning away (a positive response which acknowledges the bid can be as simple as an “uh huh” or nod of the head). Gottman’s research notes, “The difference between turning toward each other during dinner 86 percent of the time, like satisfied newlyweds did, or 33 percent of the time, like distressed newlyweds, cumulatively is significant” (Penner, 2012, p. 103).

These bottom three levels constitute the friendship of the couple relationship. The culmination of these give rise to the fourth level called *The Positive Perspective*. A positive perspective is developed through having good and current love maps, expressing fondness and admiration, and turning towards bids for attention. In the positive perspective, the partner is always seen as an ally even when there are disagreements. The positive perspective is also characterized by the absence or minimal presence of criticism,

defensiveness, contempt and emotional disengagement. When these latter are present and when the bottom three levels are not positive, Gottman would identify the relationship as problematic having developed a *Negative Perspective*.

Gottman notes that if a positive perspective exists the couple will likely be able to *Manage Conflict* (Level 5). Couples whom he was able to follow over time would argue about the same subject over and over again. He was able to conclude that 69% of couple conflicts were *perpetual* - meaning these would not get resolved. Gottman suggests that couples need to *manage* conflict rather than necessarily *resolve* conflicts. Happy couples are able to dialogue about perpetual problems, solve solvable problems and to know the difference. Couples who manage conflict well are open to each other's influence and able to self-soothe when they are physiologically elevated to the level of fight or flight.

The top two levels of the house are *Make Life Dreams Come True* and *Shared Meaning*. These are areas where couples share common goals, support the individual goals of the other, and create rituals which express shared values and meaning in life.

Gottman's assessment process helps identify which levels of the house are positively contributing to the relationship or not as a way of communicating a therapeutic plan for the couple. Gottman's therapeutic theory and processes for intervention have their roots in both attachment theory and emotion focused therapy. His therapeutic model would infer that couples who come to a decision to marry are relationally successful in all or many of the areas of the Sound Relationship House.

Integrative approaches.

Snyder and Mitchell (2008) note that "in only 50% of treated couples do both partners show significant improvement in relationship satisfaction, and that 30-60% of

treated couples show significant deterioration 2 years or longer after termination” (p. 353). They suggest that therapists take a pluralistic approach noting “that no single theoretical, epistemological or methodological approach is preeminent and there is no single, correct integrative system toward which the field of psychotherapy is evolving” (Snyder & Mitchell, 2008, p. 355). They propose a *Sequential Model for Organizing Couple Interventions* with the goal of addressing “developmental origins of interpersonal themes, and their manifestation in a couple’s relationship” (a process they call affective reconstruction) (Snyder & Mitchell, 2008, pp. 356-358).

Gurman (2008b) concludes the *Models of Couples Therapy* by addressing *Integrative Couple Therapy: A Depth-Behavioral Approach* (ICT). He notes that the trend in couple therapy is to an eclectic approach where therapists use the many approaches and models discussed to date. “ICT attempts to integrate the interpersonal with the intrapersonal, and to integrate people, as well as theories and techniques” (p. 385). As the integrative approach to therapy suggests, all models have something to say about the development and character of couple relationships. We might expect all of these theories to be present in some form as we look at a couple’s decision to marry.

What is Marriage?

Mating.

One of our contexts for marriage is that it is an expression of what happens in the animal world related to survival and procreation – animals mate. Schmitt (2008) notes that we can conclude from studies of mate choice, our prolonged childhoods, and neurochemistry of attachment, that “humans are designed to choose romantic partners who possess qualities advantageous to a monogamous mating system” (p. 55). In the

human context males and females exhibit different strategies for short-term and long-term mating. Schmitt identifies *key mate choice adaptations* for both men and women. Men seeking short-term mates “prefer larger number of partners, prefer easy sexual access, and minimize commitment”; men seeking long-term mates “prefer cues to youth and fertility, prefer sexual fidelity, and prefer good parenting skills” (p. 62). Women seeking short-term mates “prefer immediate resources, and prefer genetic quality (intelligence, masculinity, and symmetry)”; women seeking long-term mates “prefer attributes that indicate ability and willingness to invest in self and offspring” (p. 62). In the context of our cultural norms expressed in vows which culminate “until death do us part” (Anglican Church of Canada, 1959, p, 566), marriage references strategies for long-term relationships.

History.

Marriage is an ancient institution, referenced in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, and practiced in civilizations in various forms (including polygamy). Generally, in the western cultures, monogamy has been the predominant practice. In North America, the reformation influences were significant, as many from Europe immigrated to this continent to practice freedom from colonial religious influences: “the Puritans settled in America so they could practice their religion, a dissenting version of Protestantism at odds with the prevailing Anglican faith of the Church of England” (Cherlin, 2009, p. 41). Luther rejected the sense that celibacy was the best spiritual state, “for him, marriage was the most spiritually edifying form of personal life” (Cherlin, 2009, p. 42).

Beyond its connection with church and religion, “marriage was, in fact, the foundation of civil society” (Cherlin, 2009, p. 42). There was a pragmatism to marriage in that in the developing country one needed a team to work and settle the land. There was no “idea of a “housewife” who produced little of value” (Cherlin, 2009, p. 44) even though the husband was considered the family’s head. When the economy changed to a *wage labour* one the religious influence maintained the husband as *head of the family* as the *bread winner* while the concept of housewife began to emerge. The evolving economy put in question the pragmatic notions of marriage and “by the middle of the twentieth century, most people took the connection between romantic love and marriage for granted” (Cherlin, 2009, p. 63). The image of marriage and the family, as a basic social construct, even in this new era, was maintained through the 1950’s by the prominent influence of the church: 59% of Americans were affiliated with a church in 1950 (Cherlin, 2009, p. 75). Over the latter half of the twentieth century the face of marriage in society changed as laws regarding divorce changed, couples began to cohabitate without being married, single parent families became common, and homosexual unions tested the traditional understanding of marriage as solely between man and woman.

In the current century, marriage still seems to be important, but its concept has changed:

Most twenty-somethings see marriage as centered on intimacy and love rather than on practical matters such as finances and children... “when you marry you want your spouse to be your soul mate” ... it is more important “to have a husband who can communicate about his deepest

feelings than to have a husband who makes a good living” ... “While marriage is losing much of its broad public and institutional character, it is gaining popularity as a SuperRelationship, an intensely private spiritualized union, combining sexual fidelity, romantic love, emotional intimacy, and togetherness.” (Cherlin, 2009, pp. 139-140).

In the current era, Cherlin (2009) still describes a value for marriage and identifies distinctions between marriage and cohabitation. He describes marriage as the “capstone” of adult development – something sought after or a prize which is achieved much like “manhood” or “womanhood” in a culture that values self-development. He notes that marriage has the quality of an “enforceable trust” because it is a public commitment different from the private commitment made in cohabitation. With this “enforceable trust” couples are more likely to make long-term investments in a house and raising children.

Theological contexts.

Covenant.

One of the scriptural words which is related to the understanding of marriage is the word covenant. Covenant, more so than the word contract, has a “theological dimension ... a solemn agreement ... effecting a relationship that is binding and inviolable.” (Buck, 2012, p. 450-451). Contracts are familiar in our society and are used in business and can, by mutual consent, be broken. For many, marriage is a contract. However, in the Hebrew Scriptures, the word covenant is used in contracts made by God with people, with the presumption that covenants are unbreakable. Covenant references the relationship “as personal, rather than as juridical” (Lawler, 1993, p. 19). Though the

theology of this word may not be understood by all, there is a sense of permanence regarding marriage at weddings in churches expressed by words: “till death do us part.” In reference to the earlier section on commitment, “To covenant is to consent and to commit oneself radically and solemnly” (Lawler, 1993, p. 20). Marriage, and the decision to be married, in this context, reference something greater than a decision between two people – a knowing or a calling which may be considered holy.

Sanctification.

Sanctification of a relationship is something that the church understands occurs within the marriage rite through God. From a Roman Catholic perspective, “God converts a heterosexual relationship via the sacrament of Holy Matrimony into a divine, eternal union that cannot be dissolved by human action” (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank & Murray-Swank, 2003, p. 221). Mahoney et al. (2003) also give a psychospiritual definition of sanctification as “a psychological process through which aspects of life are perceived by people as having spiritual character and significance” (p. 221). Davis (1973) notes this in his description of intimate lovers when he says, “every word and gesture compose ... a holy book, ... read over and over again ... to diagnose ... the precise gradation of his state of grace” (p. 72). The knowing decision of a couple who are to marry is a recognition of this latter psychospiritual definition which may lead them to participate in a church rite which declares the theological understanding of sanctification.

Vocation.

Closely related to sanctification is the subject of vocation. Though the Christian Scriptures reference vocation as God’s call to a life of faith in Christ, it later became

associated with monastic life (Middle Ages) and everyday tasks and labour (Reformation) (Richardson, 1969). Is there a vocation to marriage? Is marriage seen as a call from God? Gene Veith (2011) sees the doctrine of vocation as one of three major teachings of the Reformation. Veith notes that Luther, understanding marriage to be a creation of God, understands the roles of husband and wife (among others) as vocations. In defining Christian marriage, Morris (1960) implies the vocation of each partner, “each dedicated to his understanding of God’s purpose for him and to helping the spouse and their children to achieve the measure of the fullness of the stature of Christ” (p. 4). The Lambeth Conference, 1958, proclaims “marriage is a vocation to holiness, through which men and women may share in the love and creative purpose of God” (Morris, 1960, p. 186).

Sacrament.

In the classical Christian understanding, a sacrament is “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” To each sacrament there is a visible tangible sign of something divine we cannot see. Bread and wine are the outward sign at the Eucharist, water at baptism, the vows, rings and couple at marriage. The implication of the “inward and spiritual grace” is that this is a grace of God, that God is in some way made present, or is represented, in the outward sign. In particular, in marriage, the grace or invisible reality intended to be seen in the marriage of two people is “on one level ... the intimate communion of life and love between a man and a woman ... on another ... the intimate communion of life and love and grace between God and God’s people and between Christ and Christ’s people, the Church” (Lawler, 1993, p. 14). One can see the intention in this sacramental understanding, that just as a couple vow to love each other “till death do us

part” so the Christian church understands that God’s love for God’s people will never end, nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39). In that a couple vow and do live together in “holy marriage” they proclaim to the world God’s unbounded love for God’s people.

In the first creation story in Genesis, there is reference which gives rise to the sacramental understanding, “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). There is an inference here that the couple are “an outward and visible sign” of what God is like. In the second creation story, there is a commentary which suggests that marriage, is the recreating of a union that has been separated, “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). The union of two reflects a greater reality – one plus one is greater than two.

In the sacramental understanding of marriage in several Christian denominations there are overtones of eschatology. Mark’s gospel (12:25) has Jesus address this connection in a seemingly negative association: “When they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage”. Yet there is an understanding that in the sacrament (in this case marriage) there is a foretaste of the life to come: “Alexander Schmemmann explains that in the Orthodox Church, marriage is not a promise “until death do us part,” but rather “until death unites us completely”” (McCarty, 2009, p. 50). Many, who have lost a spouse through death, express an understanding that they will be reunited with their loved one when they themselves die. This seems contrary to Jesus’ teaching (in Mark’s gospel) and yet strongly suggests a sense of “holiness” within some marriages in which they understand that the quality of their relationship is eternal and beyond time.

Couples may express this eternal feeling about their relationship in the story of deciding to marry.

Indication of the Location of the Project in the Body of Research to Date

The above references and studies identify the significance of the development of romantic commitment, the variety of influence in a couple's development, and the importance of the couple's story of commitment for marital quality. Categorical analysis of these factors seems to lack reference to how couples *actually* decide to marry. Indeed, Murstein (1970) clearly distinguishes between those who "choose as opposed to "settling" for a partner" (p. 474). A sense of *knowing* in the midst of deciding about marriage is either undefined or not particularized. Significantly, as noted earlier, Schaefer & Olson (1981) omitted assessing spirituality in a relationship because it was "conceptually and empirically unclear" (p. 51). Similarly, Carlson, Kirkpatrick, Hecker, and Killmer (2002) note that while family therapists acknowledge the importance and need to include spirituality in their therapy process, "there is still a large gap between the number of articles related to spirituality compared to the importance that marriage and family therapists ... place on spirituality" (p. 170). Is there a spiritual knowing that is significant in a couple's decision to marry?

Narrative inquiry has done more to help understand the initial stages of marriage and what remains consistent in these stories over time (Custer, Holmberg, Blair, and Orbuch, 2008). "Relationship themes in couple narratives reflect important factors in understanding couples' lives (Chadiha, Veroff, & Leber, 1998, p. 116). Orbuch, Veroff, and Holmberg (1993) conclude in their study "to see what meaning couples were making out of the courtship that eventually led to their marriage" that "the narrative or accounts

approach ... is perhaps the only way we can enrich our understanding of marital experience” (p. 824).

Aron, Fisher, Strong, Acevedo, Riela and Tsapelas (2008) note that in the understanding of *falling in love* there is still a sense of mystery. They suggest future study that use “straightforward methods that directly tap subjective life ... will undoubtedly continue to make the greatest contributions” (Aron, Fisher, Strong, Acevedo, Riela & Tsapelas, 2008, p. 330). Hardy, Gregory, and Ramjeet (2009) note: “Through attending to an individual’s story, healthcare practitioners can identify themes and issues that affect that person’s quality of life, and thereby identify meaningful, person-oriented interventions.” (p. 10).

Couples who enter into marriage preparation programs have already decided to get married and are often cohabitating. Understanding how couples decide to get married, how they “know” about their relationship, how they come to a *we* orientation may contribute to better processes for marital preparation. For clergy, marriage therapists, and pre-marital counsellors, acquaintance with the narratives, the stories of decisions to marry, may inform their practice and their pastoral, therapeutic or psycho-educational connection with the couples they serve.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reviewed research and theory regarding the development of relationships and theoretical models of couple counselling. I have also reviewed constructs of what marriage is from secular and theological perspectives. Within the context of this research, I now turn to explain the methodology to be used in this present research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Choice

One of my initial methodological inclinations for this study was to use a phenomenological approach. Part of the phenomenological approach is centered in describing and discovering the essence of a matter: “The phenomenological method, according to Merleau-Ponty, embraces four key qualities that are said to be 'celebrated themes' characteristic of phenomenology . . . description, reduction, essences and intentionality” (Ehrich, 2003, p. 45). The description of the subject “with no reference to explanation or reflection – describing the experience as it is lived” (Ehrich, 2003, p. 47) had particular appeal. However, phenomenological approach also emphasizes a reflective consciousness of the lived experience and a search for an essence which is common. “The goal of a phenomenological study is to discover emerging themes from the narrative text during analysis. These themes depict the essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon” (Struthers & Peden-McAlpine, 2005, p. 1265). My experience with couples has found more individuality and uniqueness in the process of mating than an essential common experience. The descriptive point of the phenomenological methodology which I sought was more clearly honoured and intended through narrative inquiry without the seeking of a common essence with other stories.

Having identified narrative inquiry as a choice which fits with my personal experience, Clandinin and Huber (2010) suggest considering practical and social justification. Narrative inquiry fits for what was described in the introduction as the “puzzle” of knowing. Narrative inquiry is appropriate for understanding “shifting or changing practice” (p. 438). Although people have been deciding to get married for

centuries, the present context in which those decisions are being made have changed. In particular the practice of co-habitation before marriage (or instead of marriage) is significantly more common and problematic for marriages than in the past. Social justification is also noted in consideration of the potential of this inquiry to influence marriage preparation programs (required by some churches and states).

Narrative inquiry expands the first quality of phenomenology into a whole by itself. Narrative's intention is to hear not only the story but to hear how the story is told: in the context of this topic, how a couple comes to decide about being married and how they tell this story. I anticipated that through the telling of the story, and the potential use of metaphor in the story telling, that nuances of spirituality would become evident. As researcher, I have an appreciation of "sacred story" which in this context is the couple's story of their own movement to engagement – their story will need to be honoured for story sake. "The researcher's story should not only be useful; it should also be faithful to the actual historical happenings" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 20).

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative research is "the study of how human beings experience the world, and narrative researchers collect these stories and write narrative of experience" (Moen, 2006, p. 2). The focus of narrative inquiry is the story, "most narrative inquiries begin with asking participants to tell their stories" (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 437). Within the context of the story being told, narrative inquiry can focus on the plot, "happenings are drawn together and integrated ... as parts of an unfolding movement that culminates in an outcome ... the plot" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5). This movement to an outcome or plot is

the focus of this thesis on how a couple tells their story that culminates in a decision to be married.

A prime source for understanding Narrative Inquiry is the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000). They thoroughly explore the challenges of narrative inquiry within the qualitative methods of research. Central to this exposition is the focus on the story being told by the participants and the presence of the researcher. The researcher is intentionally in a close relationship with the participants, allowing himself or herself to be *in* the story of the subjects so that in the compilation of the story later, he or she can demonstrate an intimate understanding of that story. The process requires reflexivity by the researcher on what is being told and personal engagement with the subjects and the story. The establishment of the relationship between researcher and participants is understood to involve significant time. This method anticipates that the reflective writing of the researcher is shared with and confirmed by the participants.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe that the inquirer is attentive to three dimensions in the process of inquiry: *interaction*, *continuity*, and *situation*. Their discussions and formulation of these three perspectives in narrative inquiry are highly influenced by the work of John Dewey, “the preeminent thinker in education” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). In his field, Dewey focused on the nature of *experience* within the understanding of the education of children.

“For Dewey, experience is both personal and social” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). This allows us to understand that an experience is the experience of an individual, but that the experience takes place in a social context. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) use the term *interaction* to reference the social and personal aspects.

They further think of the personal aspects as *inward*, “such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions” (p. 50). The social aspects can be considered as *outward* looking toward the “existential conditions” and “environment” (p. 50). There is a tension within the telling of stories as people reference their experience of *outward* events and at the same time reference their “inner experiences, feelings, doubts, uncertainties, reactions, remembered stories, and so on” (p. 86).

Continuity is the temporal reference – past, present, future – the story’s fluidity and change through time – “the notion that experiences grow out of other experiences and experiences lead to further experiences” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). This temporal reference is broad, “not only concerned with life as it is experienced in the here and now but also with life as it is experienced on a continuum” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19). This aspect of continuity brings a tension to narrative inquiry in that as stories are retold by the researcher, there is a context that these recorded stories are not finished or complete – they are a moment in time which is still unfolding with future references to the past in another present time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 166).

Situation is those aspects of space and context in which the story takes place and in which the story is told. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) originally understood this perspective as part of the other two aspects, but developed it “as a third term, which attends to the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes” (p. 61). This perspective acknowledges that the inquiry and the telling of a story itself is an influence and part of the story being told. It also acknowledges the presence of those who are present in the situation of the telling at that particular time and location. Within this context, narrative inquiry is open to a variety of field texts which

interweave in the creation of the narrative. These could include “journal writing; field notes; letters; conversation; research interviews; family stories; documents; photographs, memory boxes and other personal-family-social artifacts” (p. 93). These all become part of the situation in which a story is told.

These three dimensions are focal in the narrative inquiry process. These three perspectives combined create “a metaphorical *three-dimensional narrative inquiry space*, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and the social along a second dimension, and place along a third” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Maintaining this three-dimensional picture will create the narrative desired within this research project.

Steps Used in Researching the Question

To hear the stories of couples’ journeys to knowing and deciding to get married I outline here the process I used to reach that goal. First, I recruited volunteer couples using a description of the study and sharing this with agencies which couples frequent. From responses, I had an initial interview with the couple to describe further the study and the commitment they would make to be involved as participants and sought their informed consent. I then set up with them an interview to hear and record their story. From this recorded story, transcriptions were made and I drafted my telling of the story. This writing was shared with the couple for feedback and accuracy and with a response group for feedback and suggestions. I met with the couple a third time to review the written draft and to raise questions from the response group after which I made corrections to the first draft. This second draft was shared again with the couple to make sure that the story I was telling was their story. These written stories formed the data

section for this thesis from which narrative analysis was then used to examine the three stories.

Recruitment of participants.

Appendix C contains a brief description of the project which I used as an advertisement and posting to recruit participants to be involved in the study. I made this posting available to faith and community organizations which particularly target couples: The Calgary Couples Meetup Group, Calgary 20-30 Something Couples, North Calgary Married Couples 35+, Fifty Something South Calgary Couples, Baby Boomers Couples, Calgary Parents, Foothills Alliance Church, First Assembly Church, Catholic Diocese of Calgary, Anglican Diocese of Calgary, and the Calgary Presbytery of the United Church of Canada. These groups were contacted through email and through online messaging services and asked to post or relate this to their constituents. Through this process I received one response from a couple who found the notice on a bulletin board.

A second couple was recruited through conversation with the couple in a church where the posting was on the bulletin board. The couple had been known to me when I was in a training program with one of the partners over a decade earlier. They took particular interest in the study through this conversation and asked if they could be interviewed. Since I had no current relationship with the couple, and the acquaintance with the individual in the previous decade was within the context of a training program only, I determined that there was no conflict or relationship that would deter from their prospect as co-researchers (see paragraph later in this section regarding ethical issues).

I made two further searches for co-researchers. About six months after the first circulation I circulated a second notice through a University of Calgary bulletin service,

through a Kijiji advertisement, and through contact with persons I could identify on the web who offered marriage preparation programs. About two months later, I contacted clergy and colleagues with whom I had current or past relationships to ask their assistance in finding another couple. Through their assistance I was guided to other potential contacts that might be helpful in recruiting other co-researchers. Through this process, I received one immediate expression of interest which became the third couple to be interviewed. After setting up that interview I had two further expressions of interest. After the third couple was interviewed, I expressed my thanks to these two further couples for their offers and noted that the number of couples required for the research was complete. I also contacted agencies, contacts, and colleagues who had been asked to post notices to offer thanks and to have them take down notices they had posted.

In the context of these searches, I made changes in the notices that were posted in response to suggestions from persons who had agreed to post the bulletins. In the second posting I changed the title of the notice to the plural “couples” and used “research study” rather than “thesis research”. I changed the wording on the third posting of one of the identifiers from “Have made a decision to be married” to “Have made or did make a decision to be married.” This was in response to confusion about whether the couple being sought was just engaged, recently married, or been married for a longer period of time.

Initial contact, interview, and consent.

The three couples involved contacted me independently. I briefly explained the purpose of the research and answered initial questions. Each couple expressed interest in being part of the study. I arranged to set up an appointment to meet with them face to

face for an initial interview to explain the study further and to seek their informed consent.

At this personal interview, I used Appendix D as a guide to describe to the couples what would be involved in the process and the time commitment that I expected would be involved. I confirmed with them that they understood the process and invited any questions they might have. Each couple was encouraged to use whatever medium and process they desired to tell the story surrounding their decision to marry. “Field texts can include transcripts of conversations, field notes, family stories, memory box artifacts, photographs and other texts that are composed by narrative inquirers and participants to represent aspects of lived experience” (Clandinin and Huber, 2010, p. 439). I emphasized that it was their story and their telling of it that was important for the research and that my written story would be checked with them for accuracy. Couples were also informed regarding the use of a response group who would also be reading my composed story and that they and the transcriber would also sign confidentiality agreements (Appendix E).

Once this explanation and understanding was reached, I inquired whether they would be willing to engage in the process and be part of the study. In each case there was agreement and I then reviewed with them the “Letter of Informed Consent” (Appendix F). Couples were informed of their right to exit the study at any time in the process without reprisal and that should they do so, any and all materials gathered through tapes or field notes would be destroyed at that point. Participants were also informed of the processes in place to maintain confidentiality. In two cases, the letter of consent was signed at the conclusion of the interview, in the other the Letter of Informed Consent was left with them and signed prior to engaging in the data gathering interview.

Data gathering interview.

A data gathering interview was scheduled with each couple following the initial review of the process and signing of consent. Each couple chose to be interviewed in their home though other options were available if desired. As with any qualitative inquiry, anonymity of the participants was important for this research project. Each participant chose a pseudonym that was used in place of their name in the transcription and writing of the stories (and thesis). These data gathering interviews were video recorded using a computer and the videos were protected by a password and encrypted on a memory stick for use by the transcriber.

At the beginning of the interview, I reconnected with the couple, reiterated briefly the process and consent which we had signed and invited any questions they had about the process or relationship and confirmed their willingness to continue to participate. I invited each couple to tell me the story of their relationship beginning from the first time that they met, reminding them that my interest was in how they decided to be married.

As researcher, I wanted to remain curious and observant of the couple, the story being told, meanings, and the dimensions of interaction, continuity and situation. I decided to take minimal notes knowing that I could review the video conversation later. I had prepared sample questions (Appendix G) for this interview, but these were not explicitly used when couples told their story inclusive of their process to engagement and marriage and shared memories and meanings in that context. I had prepared the questions from suggestions quoted in Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk (2007) who adapted four principles identified by Hollway & Jefferson (2000). These principles were to “use open-ended questions ... elicit stories ... avoid ‘why’ questions ... (and), ... follow up

using respondents' ordering and phrasing" (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007, p. 462). I used reflective listening to track the couple's story, asked for clarification, expressed curiosity about words or events, and if one of the couple was the primary teller of the story, I would ask how that was for the other. As suggested, I avoided "why" questions seeking more of the story and understanding the meanings in the memories. In each case the recorded interview was approximately one hour in length (58 minutes to 67 minutes).

One couple prepared in advance written descriptions of how they chose to be married and gave them to me for inclusion in the study. In response to this offer I discerned that these articles (with identifiers removed) might become part of the thesis Appendices. I prepared a consent form for this possibility (Appendix H) and the couple involved agreed to the use of these materials (if desired) as part of the thesis. These and other notes, transcripts, memory sticks and forms were kept in a locked filing cabinet in a secure office.

Drafting narrative and conferring with participants.

Following the initial interview, I encrypted the video on a memory stick and sent it for transcription having previously arranged for the transcriber to sign a Confidentiality Agreement (Appendix E). I reviewed the tapes and transcriptions and began to compose draft texts of the story retold. I quoted the couple's words often to remain faithful to the wording which they used in the telling of their story. When stories referenced persons, who were close to the couple, the relationship was referenced (rather than the name of the person) or a pseudonym used where this was helpful to the narrative. As Clandinin and Huber (2010) suggest, "blurring identities and places" was employed in the writing to be

attentive to the ethical issue on anonymity (p. 440). Place names were either not used, were less specific, or changed in the re-telling of the story.

I employed a “response community” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) to review this draft. I asked two colleagues to review a description of what was intended in this role (Appendix I) and upon their agreement asked them to sign a Confidentiality Agreement (Appendix E). One of these colleagues was familiar with narrative inquiry and the other involved in couple counselling. These people reviewed my written draft and responded with questions and comments. I found this process very helpful in bringing attention to aspects missing from the narrative which was of interest to these two readers and also in giving perspective to future directions for the thesis.

One of the tasks in narrative inquiry is the reflexive, back and forth nature of the research as process. After creating my initial draft of the story, they told in the interview, I made an appointment with each couple to seek their input, revisions, clarifications and insights on this first draft. At this interview, I reviewed process and confidentiality and opened space for questions or concerns. I specifically asked for their continued consent to be involved in the process noting that at any time, should they have any concerns, they could withdraw from the study. “Kavanaugh and Ayres (1998) adopted a method of ‘process consent’ ... Process consent means returning to consent at different key stages of the research, rather than obtaining one point of consent, typically at the start of a project” (Hardy, Gregory, and Ramjeet, 2009, p. 11). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that there is a continual “negotiation” of relationships in the context of narrative inquiry (page 73). This involves the ongoing conversation between researcher and participants about what is being done and how the relationships are going. The ongoing negotiating of

composition of research texts with participants is one way in which the ethical obligation to the “participants’ lived and told stories” is respected (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 440).

Through this follow up interview I was also able to bring the response communities’ questions to the couple for reflection and clarification. Two pieces from the response community’s feedback to the first couple interviewed referenced the couple’s demographics and queried a question that did not come up in the first interview: “Did they have times of doubt/uncertainty and how did they address this?” Also of interest to the response community were timelines of the events and decision points in the relationship. These I brought to the first couple (on their review) and was intentional about including it in the first interviews of the other two couples.

From the response community’s input and the review and feedback from the couple, I revised the text of the stories. This process of reflection and conferring with participants, was repeated after revisions were made from the first feedback. I sought to confirm concurrence regarding the narrative described achieving a “co-construction, with the informant invited to engage in all stages of the research process” (Hardy, Gregory, and Ramjeet, 2009, p. 11).

In two of the three stories, minor revisions were made to the first draft which were presented and met with the concurrence of the couple. The third couple noted a need for substantial revisions of the first draft text in order to be faithful to the story they desired to tell. The original tapes were reviewed in the context of their suggested revisions and a second draft presented. This required another interview with the couple, renewing process consent, and reviewing the second draft and making further revisions which were

again checked with the couple. Once each couple had agreed to the text that would tell their story, it became part of the thesis data section.

Writing.

As noted before, this thesis takes the side of narrative analysis as described by Polkinghorne (1995). The intent of this writing requires “engagement from within, not analysis from outside, the story and narrative ... enticing people to think and feel *with* the story being told as opposed to thinking *about* it” (Smith & Sparkes, 2006, p. 185). In this respect, I first told the individual couple’s stories provided separately. Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007) note that this beginning allows a focus to be on the participants in context and facilitates reflexivity and identify researcher bias. “From here, it is possible to begin to explore how participants’ stories overlap and interlock and examine the ways in which such accounts relate to the overarching issue under study” (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007, p. 466). In the process of writing and respecting the narrative, “theoretical links ... to a wider body of knowledge” can be made without generalizing the results (Hardy, Gregory, & Ramjeet, 2009, pp. 15-16). It was expected that the quantity of field texts would be far greater than that referenced in the writing therefore part of the writing would be given to the process by which particular stories are highlighted over others (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 439).

Discussion of Ethical Issues and Management of these Issues

Ethical research requires that participants are neither coerced nor held captive in the research and that care is taken to do no harm to them in the process of the research. Accordingly, I was concerned that participants freely participate in and give consent to being part of the study. Since their story would become public, safeguards needed to

protect them from harm by the possibility of being identified by others. Stories are powerful in shaping our lives, thus I also needed to provide care for the couple should injury come to their relationship through the retelling of their story. Part of the Letter of Informed Consent (Appendix F) referenced that referrals for appropriate counselling would be offered if either member of the couple experienced a concern in this regard.

Freedom to participate in the study without pressure was a first ethical concern. Potential participants were first made aware of the purpose and nature of the research through an advertisement and written description (Appendix C). Participants freely contacted the researcher in response to this description and an interview was used to further explain the topic, purpose and process of the research. (I, as researcher, did not initiate calls to prospective participants). This was of concern in relation to the couple who was interviewed where I had had a previous acquaintance with one of the participants. I consulted with the response community and my supervisor and expressed this concern to the couple to manage any potential ethical conflicts.

At the conclusion of the first interview, potential participants were invited to consider whether they had enough information to sign the informed consent (Appendix F). Part of the consent identifies that the participants are free to be involved in the study without coercion or threat and that they have the freedom to opt-out of the process at any time without reprisal. Process consent, as identified earlier, was used at each meeting with the participants to ensure their continued consent to the study, address any concerns, and confirm the opportunity to opt-out if desired.

Anonymity and confidentiality were addressed in the consent form. Participants chose pseudonyms for themselves which were used by the transcriber and researcher in

all written forms of the research. Persons referenced within their stories were referenced by relationship or given pseudonyms. Video data was secured and encrypted on password protected data sticks and they, field data provided, and notes were kept in locked storage. Data sticks were sent to (and returned by) professional transcribers via registered mail. Members of the response community and the transcriber completed confidentiality agreements (Appendix E). Field data which was provided by one couple for inclusion in the thesis had identifying images and notes removed and the couple signed consent (Appendix H) for the use of this material as it had been edited.

Part of the consent agreement was identification that I would provide referrals for individual and/or couple counselling if desired should participants experience any harm to themselves in the process. Although this was offered, participants did not request this during the process. However, all couples noted value to their relationship in telling the story in the study process.

Validations

Validity processes were built into the design of the thesis. These included reflexive, back and forth conversations with the participants as the narrative was drafted. This ensured that the narrative written was consistent with the narrative told by the participants. Additionally, I used a response community to reflect with me on the writing to ensure that it was both faithful to the narratives told and the scholarly nature of the research. The response community was made up of one person who was familiar with the narrative inquiry process and the other was one who was a therapist with experience and current engagement in couple counselling. At various points in the process I was in

conversation with my thesis supervisor as another check to the accuracy of my process and faithfulness to the narrative nature of the thesis.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the process and method which was used from the beginning recruitment of participants through the telling of their stories and the analysis of these stories. I have also noted the ethical issues addressed and the validation built into the process. I will now turn to the data collected from the three couples involved in this study.

Chapter 4: Data

What follows in the next pages is the retelling of the stories of each of the three couples interviewed for this thesis. As noted in the preceding chapter, these interviews were video recorded and transcribed. In each case, the participants chose pseudonyms to be used in place of their names within these transcriptions and these names became the titles for each story.

In retelling the stories, I have endeavoured to quote words from the interview to be faithful to the wording and conceptualizing of the couples. Within each story, the quotes identify which of the couple is speaking. There are times in the telling of the story, that while one of the couple is speaking, the other will nod, say “yes”, or sign some other affirmation of the comment of the other. These affirmations of their story are noted by referencing, “they said” and then quoting from one of the couple. These affirmations, or contexts of “we” are important to note when not part of the written transcription because they show parts of the stories that are owned by both parties – one speaks the story, the other assents to what is being said. At other times, it is clear that the participants have differing stories, or differing perspective on a part or interpretation of these stories, I have endeavoured to be careful to indicate these differences by reference to only one of the couple.

I invite you into these three stories of couples’ movements to decision to be married, to the narrative of the story of their commitment. I will address analysis of these stories independently in Chapter 5.

Cass and Bev

Cass and Bev are a middle-aged couple (45-55 years of age). Cass had been in one long term relationship (ten years) which ended about two years before they met. Bev was previously married (thirteen years) and separated about a year prior to when they met. They have been married for twelve years. They married three years after they first met. Both are employed and live together in an urban city condo. I found them calm and engaged during the interview and they had taken care and time to prepare for the interview making lists of why they wanted to get married and why they wanted to marry each other (Appendices J through M). Cass noted himself to be more emotional and Bev noted herself to be the planner.

Cass and Bev met at a pub near Bev's house. She was there with a girlfriend and he was there celebrating a friend's birthday. Bev remembered that Cass "kept on coming over to talk to me" and that at the end of the night, he asked for her phone number and asked if he could phone her. Cass remembered Bev being a "person of interest" immediately noting her frame, shape and smile. He wondered if this was what was called "love at first sight" as he noted "she was like the sweetest candy in a box of chocolates in my eyes", "all the things that were appealing to me", and "she was perfect". He hoped that she did not mind him coming to talk with her all night and hoped he would get her phone number. Cass phoned the next morning – he pursued her right away. That next day, they met for coffee, which turned into lunch, which turned into dinner.

Bev noted that "we were mostly just friends in the beginning and then things just seemed to develop." Cass noted that they talked for a couple of weeks and "all of a sudden, it was like we had a beginning and from there we just went forward." Early

conversations were about things they liked and disliked. Bev noted that Cass was not honest with her about types of music he liked, but she did not tell him that. During this early friendship, they did not call each other “boyfriend or girlfriend”, they did not know where the relationship was going to end up. Because they had come from previous relationships, they did not want to make mistakes for the future so they were not in a hurry, though, as Cass noted, “it struck me that we were committed to each other early on.”

Cass and Bev had certain things in common. They came from small families and had both lost their fathers early in life. In their families of origin, they each had one sibling. They both had come from previous relationships. This led to talk about philosophic foundations for their relationship: telling the truth to each other always – “honesty had to be paramount” and “to not take life for granted.”

An early concern in their friendship, for Bev, was an age difference of nine years between them. Cass was less worried about this because at the time his mother was dating someone ten years older than herself. Cass noted that they were both strong willed people and defining limits was challenging. This, Bev noted, was part of the development of trust between them.

“Once we decided to date,” Cass noted, “it was an exclusive thing for each of us ... we were committed to each other in that sense.” This change to “dating” was marked by Bev making a “drawer in her bureau” for Cass and buying him a toothbrush to use at her place. Cass was overwhelmed and scared at the moment, but understood that Bev was taking “the first steps in making sure I understood that there was a future for us.” The scare for Cass was related to being hurt in the last relationship and not wanting “to make

the same mistake over again.” He noted Bev was very good at “quelling my fears” and helped him get past his nerves. Despite these “nerves”, Cass noted, “I always wanted a future ... I was hoping it was with Bev.”

Commitment for Cass was exemplified by his parents’ relationship, “they would have spent 100 years together ... great friends ... an awesome example.” He learned that commitment was serious – “you either are or you are not.” “Once I decided this ... it was easy to go forward.” A decision point for Cass was when Bev said (re his going for a beer after work), “You could either phone me, and have me join you for beers or you should just come home.” Cass took this to heart; she was paying attention, wanted him to consider her, and to “get on the path”.

For Bev, commitment “seemed to come naturally”. “He was starting to come over on the weekends and it just seemed, like, logical to me that he should have a drawer and a toothbrush ... we talked about that and I feel like, after that, we understood that we were more serious than just being friends at that point.” These expressions of commitment led to them starting to live together about eight months after meeting.

Bev and Cass did not remember talking much about marriage but noted events which were in that direction as being significant. Cass noted that although he did not want to hurry or make a mistake, that “I did realize that it was important to me that we were going to be together and I wanted her to be mine in all aspects.” Bev noted that while they were dating, she was not divorced, “and one day he suggested that I get a lawyer and he would pay for my divorce. So, I knew ... he saw a future with me.” The focus of talking about marriage was more about talking “about our lives together.”

They did note, however, having a conversation about being “loyal” to each other, and what that meant. This related in Bev’s mind to the marriage vows “in sickness and in health, for richer for poorer”, about having no other relationships, and Cass standing up for her. They both noted this relationship being different from their previous long-term relationships. Cass noted that from the beginning, “I chose to be a better version of myself. I promised myself to be a better man.” Bev noted that Cass was a totally different person from her first partner and they had spent the time to really get to know each other first.

Cass had a positive parental model about marriage (noted earlier). Bev’s parental model was not as positive. She noted her parents being “devoted” to each other rather than “loyal” to each other; “they stayed together but they used to lie to each other and they did things behind each other’s back.” Bev noted this left her “untrusting” and her conversations with Cass were about her need to be able to trust him. She noted that this was helped because trust was important to him too. Cass noted trust as “paramount” and the “basis of our great love story.”

Cass and Bev were engaged about sixteen months into living together. Cass had been working on buying a ring, and just before Christmas paid the last payment. They remembered that at the moment, they weren’t looking “special for each other.” Bev had just had surgery and was recovering in bed “with her hair all over the place”. “I knew as soon as he came home that he had it.” Cass noted his excitement, “I couldn’t wrap it ... I kept my tongue bit for about four hours and then I just finally gave it to her.” Bev noted, “We were having popcorn and he says ‘here, would you like some popcorn’ and he put it

in the popcorn and I knew when he handed me the popcorn that the ring was going to be in it. I could just tell.”

Bev presented reasons, developed together, of why they decided to get married (Appendix L):

- We didn't want to lose each other.
- It seemed like the next step in our commitment to each other.
- It was important to have a legal contract that binds us together.
- It was what we grew up eventually wanting someday, based on what we saw and learned as children growing up.
- The concept of “Mr. and Mrs.” was appealing.
- And, for me (Bev), carrying his last name was important.

Separately, Bev and Cass had prepared lists of why they wanted to be married to each other. Bev noted her list to be in order of importance (Appendix K):

- The first reason I wanted to marry him is because we loved each other.
- Number two – he was my best friend.
- Number three – I couldn't imagine the rest of my life without him.
- Marriage seemed like the next step in our commitment to each other.
- Five – he is the most genuine person I've ever met.
- Six – he is a good person with high morals and values.
- Seven – we were sexually compatible.
- Eight – we get along very well and want the same things.
- Nine – he takes good care of me.
- Ten – he makes me laugh.

Cass noted that his list was in no particular order, just points that came out (Appendix J was Cass's written list which covers the same points listed below but he presented the points in the interview with story rather than reading the list, therefore some wording is different):

- My first point was I needed to be physically attracted to the person I would marry.
- I would also have to be emotionally invested in this person.
- I would need to feel that I could trust and be trusted.
- My dreams would have to be their dreams.
- I want my partner to need my support but also be an independent person.
- I, personally, have known since I was a young teenager that I didn't want to have children of my own. My partner would have to understand that point and not make it an issue.
- I'm a horribly selfish individual and I also needed somebody who was strong enough, personality-wise, to control my selfishness. Call me out on the spot.
- I am always very interested in my personal life and my professional life to become a better person, gain more knowledge ... I wanted someone who is committed to those goals as well.
- I knew for a fact that I didn't want an alcoholic in my life.
- And a ... phenomenal ... cook.

In the interview, Cass and Bev shared how the issue of children could have been a "deal breaker" from different perspectives. Cass definitely did not want to have children of his own. Bev already had children and expressed that she needed to know that if one

of her adult children died, leaving a grandchild for her to care for, that this would be OK. These were firm stances for each and were approached with tolerance, respect and agreement. Bev noted there were no surprises in their marriage and noted their maturity which would be different from a younger couple making the decision. “I find, sometimes, when people are dating they want to change the other person ... we really knew that we liked each other the way we were.” Cass and Bev used words like respect, tolerance, honesty and trust as significant in their marriage and that they took the time to develop the friendship central to their marriage. Bev and Cass wrote their own wedding vows which were expressive of these values (Appendix M).

When asked to share a metaphor or image for their marriage, they referenced a Cheerios TV Commercial where “two Cheerios in a bowl of milk ... they find a way to come together.”

Cass and Bev reflected with the researcher on the experience of telling their story. Cass noted it gave “a chance to ... just think about us ... that is always great.” Bev noted, “it is not something we do every day ... it was really nice to be able to talk about these things again.” Cass summarized their own marriage with a recommendation for others, “most things, I think, can be worked out but if you’re not friends ... if you’re not *best* friends ... it is impossible to believe that there is a sustainable future.”

Fred and Jade

Fred and Jade are between 25 and 35 years of age and have been married less than two months. They work in different careers in the city and Fred also helps out on a farm. Both were looking for a long-term relationship prior to meeting. They told me their story seated on their living room couch, relaxed, touching each other, talking to each other as

well as to me, with their cat sometimes on their laps and sometimes on the couch beside them. As they shared their story, they would often chime in with the other's comments, finishing each other's statements or correcting them, or adding their point of view. There was much laughter as they told their story.

They met using an online dating service. They recalled that Fred's profile was pretty "matter-of-fact" – Fred was clear about what he was after. Jade noted, "I really like that. I don't like beating around the bush." Jade reflected, "I think our relationship actually moved pretty fast because we both put our cards on the table". They chatted through emails asking general things about each other.

After a couple of days, they agreed to meet face to face for coffee, but almost did not. There were three coffee shops in the same area and they ended up at different ones. Via the photos online, "we had a rough idea of who to see", said Jade. The key was an old classic car that Fred had recently restored. Jade said about this first encounter, "He got out of the car. He was limping ... he had his cane and he had a British hat on ... And I was thinking what does this guy think he is doing? He thinks he is all that ... I don't know ... this is going to be terrible. He is going to be a horrible person." Fred had been in a vehicle accident that landed him in hospital for a number of months and following which he had to learn to walk again. Once he had explained this, Jade "felt so guilty" it precipitated a "second date" they explained with laughter.

That second date was the next day, "that was ... according to the dating rules ... a big no-no", noted Jade. Jade remembered telling her mom "I'm going out with this guy. Call me every half hour to make sure that I'm still alive." They drove to a special fishing spot by the river and "sat by the river and ... just talked and watched the water go by and

relaxed” (they said, Fred completing the sentence Jade began). Jade remembered Fred talking about “wanting to find someone to share his life with” and that she talked about her “career and ... life is just starting and wanting to be able to share all that adventure.” This second conversational date was not long (an hour or two) and they concluded by stopping for a beer on the way back.

Fred noted, that “by the fourth date we pretty much ... were verifying each other”. As Jade noted, “For girls, we always have to be wary that this guy may not be on the up-and-up.” They continued dating as a couple, the two of them doing their “own thing” rather than going “out with a lot of people”. Jade noted that during this stage, when talking with her parents, “I couldn’t really have a conversation without mentioning him.”

Being “truthful from the start” was an important common intention for both Jade and Fred, they were both looking for a long-term relationship, and “living a lie for how many months” was not an option, Jade said. Fred noted, “We laid out our minimal expectations ... right off the bat.” “We were both up front ... being together and confirming” what had been shared online and through emails. “When all those things were confirmed ... it was like a flip moment for each of us ... I can stop being so interrogative ... she was honest to me and she was truthful all the way up and I was the same to her.”

Fred noted that when he was young he did his partying, but it was “time to settle down and move on.” He reflected that it was like he was “stuck in that loop” and “there wasn’t really anywhere to progress in life.” He said, “I had a bunch of 1 year or ¾ year relationships but I was focused on my work.” Because “I was only home a week out of

every month and half of that week I was sleeping and recovering from working 14-hour days ... there wasn't really much time for me to mend and keep those relationships, so they always fell apart."

Jade noted "I had gone out on a couple of dates with some other guys before" but that she really did not date until "halfway through my last year at university because I was very focused and I really wanted to concentrate on my career." Realizing she had not "really met anybody" that she was interested in, led to the online dating.

Jade noted that "the big test for him ... was if he could manage my family". It was about three months into the relationship when Fred met "three different clans" of Jade's family. Though Jade said there were 25 people there, Fred noted that "it felt like more ... like 40". Jade remembered that "he was good-natured ... he made me comfortable" knowing they were important to her. Fred noted he "just went in ... this is who I am".

For Fred, the big test was when Jade moved into his apartment, "this is when you go to the next step ... can we live together?" About nine months into their relationship they "started the transitory period of moving stuff slowly," Jade said. The move in was purposed around spending more time together. Prior to this, "We would see each other for an hour or two and then we would spend more time driving ... home and back than actually ... relaxing." There were "little issues like you would expect to have," Fred said, about Jade moving in, but it was "little stuff."

Arguments for Fred and Jade were more about "big things ... crafting, renovating, and painting," said Jade, "and it wasn't really an argument." "It was figuring out how we were going to do it," Fred completed. They exemplified this by talking about a Christmas

craft they did for Fred's parents and backyard renovations, "We made it through the backyard renovations" noted Fred. "If he can live with that, then he can do anything," Jade concluded.

The early conversations and honesty were noted as key, we were "compatible ... able to socialize ... to have honest conversations," then "live together and cohabitate," Fred noted. This was summed up again by Fred when he noted that Jade "loves me and likes me for who I am."

A turning point to knowing this was a relationship which was getting more significant was when Jade was stressed out in her first job (about four to six months into their relationship). She remembered crying and that Fred "just sat with me ... and cuddled both me and the cat at the same time and he said, 'it's okay'." Finding that comfort was a big thing for Jade. Jade noted a moment of trust on another occasion when "I fell asleep during one of our dates ... and he didn't even bother waking me up. He said, 'you looked like you needed the sleep' ... and you were fine with that."

Fred noted, that for himself it was a year (to the date) into the relationship when Jade "came out to the farm with me and sat in the combine to keep me company for 14 – 18 hours". They were out till 3 AM when the combine broke and "working by flashlight trying to fix it up in the engine bay and she is grabbing us tools and stuff, and she looks at me and ... says 'Oh, happy anniversary' ... referencing our first dating anniversary." It was his co-worker who, surprised that this is what they would do on an anniversary "to spend time together" said to Fred, "you better marry her," to which Fred responded, "yeah, actually."

Jade noted that she knew she was ready for marriage “when I started having conversations” like, “say we were to stay together ... would you be okay with our kids coming to church with me?” They would sit watching a TV program, and “one of us would have something pop into our head and we’d just say it ... talk about it, and move on,” Fred noted. Fred’s philosophy was, “Let’s get this sorted out now. If we are going to have issues, let’s not waste each other’s time.” So, proposing marriage wasn’t “going to be a surprise to either of us as we had been talking about it for so long,” Fred said.

In the midst of talking about marriage, Fred said, “we’ve been talking about this for quite a while ... should I ask your Dad?” A formal proposal and engagement were not as significant to them as the occasion of Fred’s asking her Dad for his blessing. They knew prior to this event that they would get married, even if the answer was no. It was significant for Fred, because he did not have a significant relationship with her Dad, and remembered “sweating bullets” at the dinner with her parents when he asked for their blessing. Jade believes her Mom knew this was coming and had been prepping her Dad with conversations like “what if they got married ... what if they have kids” in advance of this event. As Fred noted, she was “planting the seed.”

Jade noted that she knew she was going to marry Fred “when I couldn’t imagine my life without him.” She noted that she normally has five and ten-year plans for her life. After being with Fred, “it’s kind of, like, okay, I *do* want to change my plans. They’re no longer set in stone ...my plans will be better if I change them ... he has made them better.” For Fred, it was an occasion when Jade was sick after giving blood, “I was an hour and a half away from the city and I got a call and they said they were calling the ambulance ... I just dropped all my stuff.” “They thought I was having a stroke,” Jade

noted. Fred said, “that night I kind of thought about it ... I couldn’t imagine if something had happened to her ... it made me realize how much she meant to me.”

Important for Fred in this knowing was also the approval of his aunt and uncle who were almost like his parents; they helped him “out when times were tough and took care of me”. Other girlfriends he had taken to meet them received a “no ... don’t waste your time” response. When he brought Jade, they nodded their heads affirmatively and gave him a thumbs up, and he thought “maybe I was right finally.” Jade and Fred both expressed the need to have family support, even though their families are completely different, “the more support you have, the easier things are” noted Fred.

Another compatibility that was important to both Fred and Jade was ambition. Fred described this as “always having that drive to move forward and better ourselves and ... our lives.” Jade described this by saying, “I didn’t want to be taken for granted.” For both, their careers were important, “We both knew we had our own jobs and careers to worry about,” Fred noted, “and both of us were really supportive of the other ... you don’t find that often” Jade completed. They saw each other as having different gifts and personalities which both helped them in their life together. Jade, a planner, cares about the details. Fred sees the big picture and is more spontaneous and concerned that Jade not get too stressed about the details. Fred noted, “We sit down and plan it all out and if both parties are comfortable with moving forward, we just go do it.”

Jade noted that observing how Fred treated his twenty-year-old cat was also significant. She could tell by his awareness, touching and contact with the cat that “he knows how to care for a little being that can’t really take care of itself.” She also noted

that the cat's acceptance of her was also important, "because that's pretty much his daughter."

The "are you sure" question was one that *other* people raised in the process of planning the wedding. The wedding planning was stressful, but both Jade and Fred noted that they never questioned getting married to each other.

For Jade, getting married meant, "I wanted to share your life. I wanted it to be official ... I would show the world that we were in it together." Comparing their life as a couple with others, Jade noted that for her, marriage is "telling God that this is my partner ... I'm going to ask for forgiveness of this guy ... I'm going to cry and I'm going to laugh with him ... I'm not perfect but ... I feel a little bit closer to perfection when I'm with him."

Fred noted that "the way we were living and cohabitating" was "my definition of married before we were officially signing the paper." "We had already bought the house together, we were living together for a couple of years ... we were already married by debt, so why don't we just make it official?"

Towards the end of our conversation, Jade noted that there was a concern that "this is way too simple ... isn't it supposed to be harder? Isn't it supposed to be more difficult? Aren't we supposed to have more fights?" Fred noted, "It was pretty straight forward ... everything just fell into place ... it was just the right thing to do ... The main thing is the communication, from the beginning, has been there ... we were both looking long-term and we were both willing to have these conversations and also both willing to shake hands and go our separate ways at the same time, unless all the boxes were checked off. I think that made it way easier!"

Darian and Alicia

Darian and Alicia are between 45 and 50 years of age and have been married almost 20 years. Darian grew up in a “tiny little 100-year-old farm house ... heated by a wood stove.” Alicia grew up in an upper-class family in an urban centre. They described themselves as from two different cultures and religions (both Christian denominations, but very different in practice). For each of them, meeting the other’s family, and going to the other’s family home was culturally shocking. They told me their story sitting relaxed and close together on a couch in their home.

Alicia told the story of their first meeting which happened when she was moving to a new city to go to university and was looking for a place to rent. She and her father were introduced to Darian by a student giving them a tour and Darian noted that he had accommodations available at his house. Alicia did not consider this as an option at all, in part because of Darian’s appearance (beard and torn pants) though he was friendly. After this meeting she thought, “there is no way I would go and live with Darian – no way!” Her father concurred. As she told this, Darian noted, “And at that moment, God said, ‘Aha!’” resulting in much laughter. Alicia went on to note that after a brief time at the university she returned home. There she spent about a year recovering from grief (the loss of her grandmother who had raised her) and depression.

Alicia was preparing to return to university the next year and reconnected with Darian as she again was looking for accommodation. She noted that they had a long conversation on the phone and then “in my heart it just came to me that I had to go back to befriend him.” She moved back to university (Darian had found her accommodation) and they then started to become really good friends. Though Alicia was not interested in

Darian romantically, she found him “this really soft place to land and he was safe”. This friendship continued to develop for about six months.

From this good friendship came the conversation wondering if “we were becoming more than just friends.” Alicia abruptly rejected, this idea, and though she “didn’t want to hurt him,” she had grown up “to learn that love is abusive ... and as a woman you cannot be loved properly ... and ... there is just nobody who would ever marry you.” For Darian, this rejection connected with frequent previous experiences “where I become close to somebody and then it would be ... ‘no’.” So, for a month, there was a silence in their relationship. Even though they still sat next to each other in class, there was no communication. Alicia, perceived this as anger, and remembered, “He wouldn’t acknowledge me or anything.” Darian noted, he didn’t feel angry, but it was a “time to regroup and figure things out without getting all tangled up in complicated friendships that aren’t friendships.”

Alicia went away to visit some friends and upon her return talked to her sister saying, “I have this really good friend ... it’s really hurting me that he doesn’t talk to me more.” She wondered, “Why am I feeling so hurt that he was out of my life ... when I don’t have any attraction?” Her sister noted to her, not even knowing him, “He just sounds like he has been there for you.” Then Alicia heard a voice in her head, like the one which encouraged her to return to university to befriend him, saying, “Phone Darian and tell him!” She did not understand what she was to tell him, but she decided to phone him and see what happened. They remembered the phone call being late at night, and Darian and Alicia remembered the conversation going something like this:

Alicia: “I’ve changed my mind.”

Darian: “About what? ... Okay ... do you want me to come over and shake your hand?”

Alicia: “No ... just stay ... I don’t want to see you ... just stay where you are.”

Alicia remembered feeling overwhelmed, confused and scared. She knew, “if I make this phone call ... this is forever ... this was the real deal.” She knew she could not hurt him, “he was so genuine and so good” but “I wasn’t used to that ... from ... all the fellows in my life ... I just couldn’t accept that.” She also remembered her roommate saying, “Darian is salt of the earth.” I said to God, “This doesn’t match ... this is not my choice.” “It was, like, chosen for me and for all the right reasons.” The phone call came out of the blue for Darian. He had thought “that door was closed ... it kind of threw me, because in my mind ... I was moving on.”

They agreed to meet the next day at the university. Alicia remembered meeting friends before the meeting with Darian and that she “couldn’t stop smiling, and they were like, ‘What is the matter with you?’” It was a brief and awkward meeting while Darian was with others painting a mural, so they did not talk much there, but he suggested meeting her later. Alicia recalled that he came to her place that evening and that they talked, but there was not much significance to the meeting except that she “stressed the whole night thinking I made this terrible mistake again ... because I don’t feel anything ... when I’m next to him.” She recalled that the next day, Darian expressed concern for her, worried that she “wasn’t eating or something and he came and he left some chocolate for me on my desk.” The next day, Alicia was sick and went to visit Darian who:

prepared some nice meal and then he called his Mom and got some homemade remedy for my sore throat and then he was reading me all his poetry ... I didn't even know he was a poet ... so he started reading me all of his poetry and, then, at some point, I just started crying ... tears were just coming and it was just from hearing his poetry and I can remember saying to you 'I just love who you are ... your heart and your mind ... it was total connection from that time ... he was just so kind and so loving and I think I was crying, too, because I had never experienced anything like that ever.

This was a story that only Alicia recalled and it had significant impact for her, she reflected, "then I really did know, at that point, that he was it. Like, it was frightening. It was, like, he was it!"

From this point Darian and Alicia were a "couple" and Darian noted, "I had the sense that this was not somebody that you just casually date." They were together for about three months, then separated for three months while Alicia was overseas to do research for her thesis. When she returned, the next six months were difficult as they lived sometimes in different cities at some distance from each other and Darian went through a time of struggle and unemployment and ended up staying with friends for a period of time.

About three years after they first met, two years after they became friends, and about one and a half years after identifying as a couple came a proposal. This happened after Alicia had been away for three weeks at her sister's wedding (during which time she received several proposals for marriage from people of her own faith and culture with pressure from her family). Darian, during that time

alone, “knew that I didn’t want to be apart from her.” Upon her return, Darian had prepared a dish from Alicia’s cultural cookbook, “the most difficult recipe” which spurred Alicia to think “this guy really, really does love me”. After the meal, Darian proposed to Alicia. He notes “I can’t say that I was 100% sure that I wanted to marry her. I was just 100% sure I didn’t want to lose you.” Alicia, in turn said, “I didn’t know that I wanted to say yes, but I didn’t want to hurt him ... I prayed ... ‘God, you know, I’m just going to say yes and I know it is going to work out.’ They noted that this was a time of struggle for both of them, Darian noting, “It was a rough time ... it wasn’t happy times for me but it worked.”

Alicia told her parents who noted “we haven’t met him ... and Darian will ask permission of your Dad.” This opportunity came the following Christmas when they went to Alicia’s parents’ home. Alicia and Darian told stories together, with much smiling and laughing, of how Darian did not “make a very good first impression.” In the end, Darian said to her father, “You know, I want to marry your daughter” at which moment people came into the room and the conversation ended. “I never got an answer,” noted Darian. “So, I suppose, if he had been opposed to it he would have come and told me at some point.” Darian remembered at their wedding, “making the speech and I told this story and I turned to him and said, ‘So ... is it okay?’” The next summer, one year after Darian’s proposal, they had a formal engagement in the cultural and religious customs of Alicia’s family. Over the next year Alicia continued to get proposals from gentlemen connected with her family. Even after their engagement there was pressure for Alicia to marry into her own culture and religion. Theirs was the first inter-cultural marriage in her family (but not the last).

Darian noted that his family was always supportive. Alicia's experience of Darian's family home was so different from her own. It was "simple ... just their love for each other and the land ... I wanted a piece of that simple kind of living." It was a stark difference from the importance in her family on "the airs ... what you wear ... what you drive ... what job you have ... where you live." Alicia remembered her mother-in-law saying, "Come pick peas" and I thought "Pick peas? Stick my hand in the dirt? Are you kidding me? And I was hooked. Now we garden!" She also knew that "he would make an amazing father – that was really important to me too" and his family's background would "allow me to be simple and not live in this fake material world. That really spoke to me."

Alicia and Darian were married a year later in the custom of Alicia's family. "It was ... a big production ... huge preparation and planning ... it was like a show," Alicia noted. They wrote their own vows and took them seriously. With "this big production right behind me" and not wanting to let her father down, it felt like "I wasn't there." She believed Darian's vows, and she prayed "make it okay ... this is what we want ... just make it work."

As Alicia and Darian reflected on their story, they noted that the timing of their second meeting, when they began to become good friends was significant. Darian noted, we "both found ourselves in a similar place at the same time. I hadn't made the best decisions when I was younger and I wasn't living the best life ... I had come to this point ... where I thought I have got to change it around. I have got to do something different." Between their first and second meetings Darian noted, "I stopped drinking, I stopped smoking, I moved out of that house

... I got my own place and was in a place where I needed my life to be.” Darian also noted, “I wasn’t really religious at the time ... just sort of finding my way back to a place of faith ... but still there was this spiritual connection ... I had faith in God that this was the right thing.” Alicia noted she “was ready to try positive love ... and not believe it was going to hurt me ... he said he loved me ... through his actions. I knew he would just always be there for me. I had no doubt.”

For each of them, the other represented a new and different life to the one that they had lived before. Darian said to Alicia, “You almost represented, for me, the life ... that different life that could be there ... I saw in you the same thing I was looking for ... I knew you would anchor me and keep me from whatever demons there were.” For Alicia, Darian represented a different love and acceptance than she had grown up knowing, Darian was like:

I’m just ... here ... whatever you say to me is okay. You told me this horrific story ... and I don’t hate you and I’m not going to reject you.

Nobody ever touched each other in my house. Nobody ever said anything nice. Nobody ever did anything nice for anybody.

Alicia and Darian also both noted that the struggles they went through in developing their relationship prepared them for their later life together. “There were a lot of clashes ... growing up so differently and the culture and the religion ... at some point we didn’t think we were going to make it. All the pieces shouldn’t fit together.” Darian described working through their difficult and uncertain times as “stubbornness – the refusal to walk away.” Alicia noted, “it was like this thing is bigger than us and we can’t leave it. Whatever is holding us, is holding us ... we just never let it break.” Though

they are two “very different people” Alicia noted, “it’s like we have ... the same soul.” Darian said, “There was a lot of just faith ... I had faith in God that this was the right thing. Underneath all our differences, there is this really strong, powerful core. ... It’s like magnets.” Alicia chimed in, “It’s like a glass ... a really fine piece of glass that we try to drop on the ground and it won’t break. There is something in the middle ... it is God.” This is something they freely and honestly talked to each other about. Alicia noted, “I can speak to him about God and he knows what I am saying.” Darian also noted, “Even though, on paper, we are two different religions ... traditions ... we both just understand each other.”

They described this core as a present reality, enduring in their relationship now, but they both described it as being there from the beginning. Darian described this “core” being there “right at the beginning ... even before we were together as a couple.” Alicia noted, that even when she said “no” to Darian the first time, that core was already there. Darian noted that “there has been conflict ... “it will swirl around ... like a dust devil” but “it does just kind of go ... that is not what remains.” What remains is this core “because it can’t be broken.” Alicia said, “The center of our relationship is always God because that is who put us together.”

Conclusion

These three stories form the data which will be discussed and analyzed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Narrative Analysis

As noted earlier, narrative analysis contemplates the experience and movement of a story to its conclusion. In each of the three stories told in the previous chapter, the conclusion is the same: the couple marry. In the analysis of their stories I first treated each story separately to understand the significant factors in each story which contributed to the knowing and decision to be married. For each story, I described the personal context of each person prior to meeting, the inward and outward experiences of their meeting and relational development, the interaction with familial systems, and significant expressions each couple used to describe the development of their relationship to the point of marriage. These descriptions provided evidence of the continuity of each couple's experience. Each analysis concluded with reference to the situation of telling the story – what themes and expressions were evidenced as a whole.

From the analysis of these individual experiences, I then identified how the stories overlapped or interlocked – where there were similar or common elements. Themes developed from the three stories referencing in some way the question, “How do couples know/decide to be married?” Having identified these themes from the narratives, I then turned to research and theoretical and theological connections with the themes presented.

Individual Couple Analysis

The following is a narrative analysis of the three individual stories which have been told. In each story, I have considered the themes of narrative analysis identified in Clandinin and Connelly (2000): Interaction (social and personal contexts, the inward (feelings, hopes, morals) and the outward (existential issues and environment)); continuity (fluidity of time and continuity of experience); and situation (the telling of the

story). These are addressed under the following titles which relate to the development and progression of the relationships: (1) the personal context (of each individual prior to their meeting); (2) the experience of meeting (for the first and/or the second time); (3) the experience of the relationship's development; (4) the connections made with family or significant others of each of the couple; (5) the consideration of marriage; and (6) qualities evident in the telling of the story.

Cass and Bev.

Personal context.

Cass and Bev both identified significant common context in their lives to the point of their meeting. Both had come from previous relationships which had terminated. Both of their fathers had died when they were children. They both came from small families. In the context of this life experience, they both were wary of beginning a new intimate relationship “not wanting to make a mistake”. They identified a desire to not be “hurried” in the development of their relationship. Both identified, from their recent relationship experience, that trust and honesty were qualities that would be important in a future relationship. Trust and honesty were common qualitative desires though motivated by two different experiences: for Cass, this was what he saw in his parent's marital relationship whereas Bev saw this as absent in her parent's marital relationship.

Cass and Bev also noted significant disparity in both present circumstances, hopes, and desires. Among these was the existence of children in Bev's life and her desire to care for them and for their children (should that be) and Cass's desire not to have children. This difference in what their lives were about was significant enough to be called a “deal breaker”. Another difference was their age (nine years). This was noted

as a difference of concern for Bev but not for Cass based on his experience with his mother dating someone ten years older than herself. Significant for Cass was that he was “trying to be a better man” referencing his dissatisfaction with who he was in the previous relationship and indicating a movement and desire for positive change.

Experience of meeting.

Their first encounter with each other was in a pub. Cass noted a physical attraction to Bev, identifying characteristics that made her a “person of interest”. Cass also displayed a persistence in pursuing Bev; making repeated forays to engage Bev in conversation and a subsequent date. Cass is clearly the initiator of these first encounters.

Experience of relationship development.

Cass and Bev described the beginning of their relationship as a friendship. During this stage, they shared likes and dislikes and avoided naming the relationship as one between a boyfriend and girlfriend. This stage was also identified with testing boundaries and limits and a time of developing trust.

This changed when they identified that they were dating. The movement from friendship to dating was led by Bev and involved her identifying space in her home which signified her commitment to taking a more intimate step in their relationship. This stage of their relationship was described with words which included exclusivity and commitment. For Cass, the movement to this stage elicited fear related to previous relationship breakdown and with reference to a black and white sense of commitment; you are either committed or you are not, there was no middle ground. The movement to this stage also referenced, for Bev, a future for the relationship.

Familial connection.

Cass and Bev did not reference outside connections with family as part of the telling of their story.

Considering marriage.

Engagement, as a marker toward marriage, was something considered and talked about in advance. The time of engagement was affected by the financial ability for Cass to buy a ring. The actual moment of engagement was referenced with excitement on the part of Cass – once he had the ring, he could not wait “for the perfect moment” and that came in the form of sharing a bowl of popcorn. Bev referenced a sense of knowing about the presence of the ring in the popcorn.

The consideration of marriage came after living together for some time. Marriage referenced “seeing their lives together” in a future context. This also referenced a loyalty to each other characterized by exclusivity and “standing up” for each other. They both referenced their previous relationship as “different” from this one which was considered positive motivation for the consideration of marriage. Marriage was seen as, (1) the next stage in their commitment to each other, (2) something that would make their future together legally binding, (3) made sense in terms of their expectations of life growing up, and (4) referenced titles of marriage (Mr., Mrs., and a change of name). There was also a sense of “not wanting to lose each other”. This referenced a fear that motivated the expression of a commitment in marriage.

In separate lists of reasons for their marriage there was little in common; both lists expressing their differences in personality. Considering what might be different language and expressions for similar themes I concluded the following: attraction (physical,

sexual, personal characteristics); evidence of trust and trustworthiness; a future orientation (lives together, dreams); existence of a supportive friendship; and love and acceptance.

Telling the story.

Reflecting on their journey and referencing differences that were overcome to make their marriage work, Bev and Cass referenced the following as important: respect, tolerance, taking the time to develop a friendship, and no desire to change each other. Their image of their relationship as “two cheerios in a bowl of milk which come together” referenced other expressions in the telling of their story noting a gradual coming together, acknowledging that the progressions seemed like the next step on a journey together which took its own course.

Fred and Jade.

Personal context.

Fred and Jade noted that their eventual relationship began by independently (before they met) desiring a long-term relationship. They noted that their relationship developed quickly, that a lot of things had been “laid out on the table” through on-line interaction before their first meeting.

For both Jade and Fred, there was a prior shift in focus in life prior to the relationship beginning. For both there were two similar factors: (1) dissatisfaction with previous relationships (or lack of them) and (2) a time of shifting in their careers. Jade noted this as necessitating the revision of her five and ten-year plans for her life to include Fred. Yet, for both, consideration and support for each other’s careers was also important – they noted a common drive for personal and career betterment.

Experience of meeting.

Significant for Jade and Fred was that their first meeting was on-line – they met each other electronically through pictures, profiles, and email exchanges. They noted their web presentations were “matter of fact” about themselves with the intention of weeding out persons who were not interested in themselves nor looking for long term relationships.

Their first face to face meeting was arranged on-line to take place at a coffee shop. Jade noted a sense of personal risk involved in their first meeting and in the date that followed since an on-line presence can be quite false to a person’s reality. Fred noted that first meetings were characterized by checking out the reality of the on-line portrayals and by conversations about what was important to them (careers, relationship expectations, family).

Experience of relationship development.

“Comfort” and “relaxedness” with each other was a desire that characterized the development of the relationship as they made personal changes to spend more time together. They noted a value for truthfulness which was important to express in the early part of the relationship which was a testing of the veracity of each other and the potential relationship. These factors were summed up by the couple as confirming their “compatibility” and love for each other which was a love for the other “as they were”. The ongoing development of “comfort” was a factor in “turning points”. These were related to times of personal stress in which the other held, comforted, and accepted the one under stress. For Jade, it was literally being held by Fred in a time of exhaustion and work stress; for Fred, it was Jade spending a day with him on the combine.

Familial connection.

Connectivity with family and their support were important. The occasions of Fred meeting Jade's family and asking her father's permission to marry were significant. Introducing Jade to Fred's aunt and uncle and receiving their "thumbs up" was important for Fred. Jade also noted the need for continuity into the future by referencing involvement of their children in her church.

Considering marriage.

Both Jade and Fred told of experiences of knowing about their commitment to the relationship through events or conceptualizations. Jade, in the context of the consideration of change in her life plans, noted "she couldn't imagine her life without Fred". The imagination of a life with Fred also made her life plans better. For Fred, this commitment was noted by his response to her being sick – an apparent immediate response without thought, which upon reflection referenced an innate desire not to lose Jade. For Jade, marriage was a proclamation of their being in it together. For Fred, marriage was already being expressed in the relationship – marriage was formalizing what already existed. Fred expressed a general sense of destiny when he noted "that everything fell into place".

Telling the story.

Both in their telling of the story and in their description of their first date, there was a sense of relaxation – comfort being themselves with each other. Significant in the context of the story telling was the ongoing presence of their cat which was referenced as Fred's child. The cat's comfort and the couples' response to its movements and petting it, was symbolic of the relaxed way in which they talked about their relationship and their

relaxed acceptance of the development of that relationship – there was movement and flow without anxiousness.

Darian and Alicia.

Personal context.

Darian and Alicia came from very different cultures and religious expressions. Darian grew up on a rural farm and Alicia in an upper-class family in an urban centre. In telling their story, both referenced a shift or change in their personal lives. Darian described this as purposeful change from one way of living to another involving changes in where he was living, personal habits, and religious involvement. Alicia was coming out of a time of grief and depression and a personal background in which she understood love to be abusive and where living involved putting on airs and a show.

Experience of meeting.

Darian and Alicia first met in the context of Alicia's pursuit of higher education at a university level. Their meeting was in the context of one having a basic need (shelter) and the other having a resource to meet that need. However, this first meeting appears to have little to do with the eventual development of the relationship in terms of attraction or a developing of a close relationship. On the contrary, Alicia noted a rejecting reaction at this first meeting.

Experience of relationship development.

Alicia and Darian developed a close relationship as friends over several months. The suggestion that this friendship might become romantic was rejected by Alicia and the couple experienced a time of separation. This apparent termination brought back to each of them historical negative experiences of love (on the part of Alicia) and close

relationships (on the part of Darian). Alicia experienced the separation as hurtful and Darian as a time to regroup.

The returning to relating was marked by a major shift in thinking for Alicia. She “changed her mind” which led to feeling overwhelmed, confused and scared. This in part was related to acknowledging a sharp difference between the love she experienced from Darian and the love she had experienced as a child. Darian experienced shock by Alicia’s change of mind. The relationship developed on a new level as Darian expressed caring love (expressions of concern, active caring for Alicia when ill, and sharing of his poetry) which again showed a very different love than what Alicia had experienced prior.

Familial connection.

Darian and Alicia described meeting each other’s families as shocking to the other. Darian invested significant energy into trying to be accepted into Alicia’s family. Her family expected him to ask her father to marry her and required a ceremonial engagement and wedding in their religion and culture. Their marriage was inter-racial, a first in Alicia’s family.

Alicia experienced Darian’s family as simple and down to earth. This was a significant contrast to her own and she felt an attraction to this simple life and genuine relating which she had not experienced in her own family. Darian described his family as always supportive of their relationship.

Considering marriage.

Alicia was aware of a commitment to Darian when she had the change of mind during their separation. She noted, “this was forever ... this was the real deal.” This came again after Darian’s expression of caring when she was ill when she noted, “I really

did know, at that point, that he was it.” A year and a half later, Darian noted, in the context of Alicia’s absence for a couple of weeks, that he “knew he didn’t want to be apart from her” and “he didn’t want to lose her.”

Reflectively they talked about a “core” (descriptive of their relationship together) as from God and being present from the beginning of their relationship. It was present even in the times of Alicia saying no. They understood this core, present from the beginning, as unbreakable.

Telling the story.

Darian and Alicia were relaxed and animated by the opportunity to tell their story. They engaged each other and addressed each other in the context of the telling. There was significant reference to their connection with God in the telling. Alicia referenced God’s “choosing” of Darian as her partner. They referenced their relationship as “bigger” than them especially considering their differences which would presume them not to be a good match. They referenced many difficult times prior to marriage and since marriage which could have broken their relationship. They expressed a belief that the presence of God in their relationship had prevented their relationship from being broken.

Interconnecting Themes from the Narratives

The following are themes which I saw as evident in all three stories: (1) catalysts, (2) acceptance, (3) relationship priority, (4) fear and trust, and (5) destiny. Obviously, these are not all the themes that could have been identified from the stories, but these seemed to be particularly salient in the context of the decision to marry. Some of these themes do not use words present in the stories themselves, but are descriptive of elements

that have been gathered from the three stories. In each theme, I present examples from the stories to support the theme identified.

Catalysts: I will be better with him/her than without.

In each of the three stories there were influencing factors that precipitated the relationship. These catalysts appeared to anticipate the relationship and were housed in the previous experiences of each of the parties. Catalysts were present for each person prior to their first meeting and gave context for the relationship getting off the ground from that first meeting.

In the case of Bev and Cass a common catalyst was their previous relational terminations. I note this in this way to give reference not only to the romantic relationships which had previously failed for them, but also the loss of the relationships with their fathers when they were young. This common loss was a common depth experience which created a bond for them. Cass noted that his previous relationship breakdown had precipitated for him the desire to be a “better man”. He was already on a journey in which he desired personal change. Bev noted that Cass was very different from her previous partner and that her parent’s marriage was not one characterized by truthfulness that left her untrusting of others. These experiences were catalysts for her to be looking for a trusting relationship.

In Fred and Jade’s experience, they were both looking for a long-term relationship. For Fred (and to a lesser degree Jade) this was precipitated by previous unsatisfying relationships. For Jade, this was in relationship to her finishing her university degree and looking at a new stage in life. Both were in transition – looking for a long term rather than a short-term relationship in the context of personal transitions.

Darian noted that he was making significant life changes both in his outward habits of living and in an inward spiritual quest. He referenced that Alicia represented for him “that different life that could be there ... the same thing I was looking for.” Alicia’s catalysts were her negative experiences and representations of love from her childhood and her recent life experience that led her into a period of depression. Though she did not reference that she was *looking for* or *on a quest for* a different kind of love, the love that was presented to her was a stark contrast to her experience. To emphasize this contrast, she referenced other suitors whom she did not pursue likely because they represented to her the same life she was coming from rather than something different. She was looking for love to present itself in a way different from her experience and a love that could accept her amid recent traumatic life events.

Acceptance: Love expressed as acceptance of the other.

In each of the stories there are expressions of love or the couple identify love in a particular way. Love can have varied definitions. Here I gathered the narratives in which love is identified as acceptance of the other. This acceptance was expressed by one and was experienced by the other.

Bev and Cass’s expression of this seems the clearest when they reflected on the experience of telling their story: “I find, sometimes, when people are dating they want to change the other person ... we really knew that we liked each other the way we were.” This sounds like a simple statement and yet it profoundly notes a *knowing* that has been communicated between them of profound acceptance of the other as they are.

Fred and Jade’s expression of this love developed quickly for them in their early experience of being totally honest and upfront with each other – no beating around the

bush. The conclusion of which was expressed by Fred, “Jade loves me and likes me for who I am.” Jade’s experience of being held and falling asleep in Fred’s arms was deeply expressive of her sense of being accepted as she was (in high stress and exhaustion at that time).

Alicia’s acceptance of Darian was also communicated non-verbally when she cried in the context of saying to him, ‘I just love who you are’ noting she had never experienced anything like that ever before. Alicia also noticed this acceptance in the context of visiting Darian’s parents, that their lifestyle would “allow her to be simple and not live in this fake material world.” She experienced an acceptance with a coincident relaxation of her need to be someone else she was not or to “put on airs”. She also noted this acceptance from Darian, hearing in his actions “I’m just ... here ... whatever you say to me is okay.”

Relationship priority.

The stories all show evidence of actions which mark the priority of the relationship in the lives of the individuals. Often these marked a turning point in the relationship towards a greater commitment.

Bev’s providing a drawer in her bureau was a significant symbolic gesture. She cleaned out some of her things to make room for his. She provided a space for him in her life by giving up some of her space for him. She demonstrated that the relationship was taking up space in her life and that she desired it to take up more space. Cass’s offer that he would pay for Bev’s divorce clearly marked his intention to marry her and to free her from a legal impediment to that taking place. His offer to pay for this was also an offer

of financial investment in the relationship moving forward in the direction of increased commitment.

Jade offered herself to spend a day on the combine with Fred – a significant investment. Not only was this an investment in the relationship, but it was an investment of herself in something that was important to Fred – not something she would likely have done for any other person or relationship. Fred noted this in the interview by noting that Jade had spent 17 hours in the cab with him and later learned to drive the machine, in comparison to a relative who after 30 minutes was done. Jade moving into Fred's apartment had a two-fold agenda for Fred; first he saw this as taking the relationship to another level, "could we live together" and secondly, it was a solution to the desire to spend more time together rather than travelling between each other's homes. The desire to be more together as a couple meant working out what "together" looked like.

Darian's priority for the relationship was expressed in numerous caring activities which communicated to Alicia a love she had not experienced before and had her recognize the value that he placed in being in relationship with her. This began with caring gestures for her wellbeing (chocolates, meal making, researching remedies for her cold) and later in attempts to be valued by her family – many of which could have been considered failures in that the good intentions ended in a lot of "clean-up" work from messes created. Alicia seemed to be given divine direction to make the relationship a priority – hearing voices to "phone him and tell him" when she appeared to have no attraction to him. For both Darian and Alicia, there was a constant navigation through cultural differences which threatened to push them apart rather than support them coming

together. The priority for their relationship appeared to be not so much their own but as a response to a higher being.

Fear and trust: Taking risks that express hope for the relationship.

The element of trust in the relationships of these three couples is palpable. This developed throughout the relationship and in the very beginnings of the relationship. This trust was often expressed by the ability to share one's self totally with the other with coincident risks, fears and uncertainties. As trust grew so did a hope for a continuing future in the relationship. The fear of losing the other appeared as a turning point where personal actions indicated both personally to each individual and to the couple collectively that some threshold of commitment had been accomplished.

Fred and Jade made a leap of trust when they moved from an on-line relationship to meeting in person and then to a first date. There was clearly on the part Jade a coincident aspect of risk in the context of an on-line picture of Fred which may or may not have been true. This, by some accounts, was clear risk taking on her part and indeed for some people ends up in disaster rather than marriage. There was enough trust in the portrayal of each other on-line that they were willing to risk themselves in meeting the other.

Jade noted two stories which she classed as turning points for her. She recalled being held by Fred during a stressful time in her career. She could cry, be held and be soothed by Fred. A second memory referenced her being able to fall asleep on a date – she referenced this as a moment of trusting herself with him. Fred's language was not of trust, but he continually risked himself and the relationship in the context of an "all or nothing" philosophy. He referenced "laying it all on the table" and if things were not

acceptable “they would shake hands and go their opposite ways.” In some ways, this was his method of dealing with any uncertainty about the relationship – he tested the uncertainties head on and quickly.

Bev and Cass noted their trust of each other in the context of their fears related to previous broken relationships. There was a hesitancy to trust oneself to the other, as Cass noted “I didn’t want to make a mistake.” They also referenced taking time to become friends, not wanting to hurry the relationship – with reference to the fear of making a mistake in this relationship development which may have led to dissolution.

Trust was expressed symbolically and in action. Bev noted her trust of Cass with the symbolic gesture of providing a drawer and a toothbrush in her home for him. For Cass, this elicited fear - worried about making a mistake in the relationship. Coincident with this fear of moving the relationship to another level was the recognition of and joining with Bev in a hope for the future of the relationship. Throughout the development of their relationship there was evidence of this back and forth movement between trust and fear and between risking self amid uncertainty.

Darian and Alicia’s story contains much reference to faith. Indeed, in many of Alicia’s comments, her trust was not so much in Darian or in the relationship but in the guidance of God to be in this relationship. Alicia’s personal story incorporates much fear and mistrust of men, relationships and human love. She moved back and forth in relationship development between this fear (based in her past experience) and her trust in what she understood as God’s prompting to be in this particular relationship.

Darian’s risk to move the relationship beyond a friendship brought a response which brought much uncertainty – indeed it appeared that the relationship at that point

was over. When invited to re-engage in the relationship there was confusion on his part and likely much uncertainty about risking again for this relationship to move further.

This uncertainty was highlighted by his sharing that when he proposed to Alicia, he wasn't 100% sure he wanted to marry her, but he was 100% sure he did not want to lose her. This expression referenced the tension between uncertainty and hope. Darian clearly proposed to Alicia in the context of a fear of losing her – marriage appears to have been a way to address this fear and trumped uncertainty with a commitment which he was not 100% behind.

Marriage appeared to be the response for couples who fear losing the relationship with the other. Bev and Cass noted as their first item in a list of reasons they wanted to marry, “we didn't want to lose each other.” Darian referenced this same fear in relation to his decision to propose marriage to Alicia. Alicia's fears were evident in her uncertainty of self at the wedding praying that God will “make it OK ... make it work.”. Fred's moment of fear came in the context of Jade's illness when he realized “he couldn't imagine if something had happened to her ... it made him realize how much she meant to him.” Jade's moment came during her life planning “when I couldn't imagine my life without him.” Each of these were moments that appear to move the relationship from a romantic one to a commitment toward marriage in which the motivation was not identified as love but the fear of losing the other and thereby losing the relationship. In each of these stories, the couples chose to trust the relationship rather than succumb to the fear.

Destiny: A sense of mystery, spirituality, or an “other” involved in the relationship.

In each of the three stories there was a sense of destiny in the relationship that culminates in marriage. I used the word destiny to describe a certainty (fate) of the relationship which was guided by something outside of the couple’s control. In one couple, this was described clearly as “God”. Alicia references that the choosing of Darian as her partner was not so much hers as it was God’s. Both Darian and Alicia described this as being present at the beginning of the relationship. There was the sense that, at the moment of their first meeting, their destiny to be married was present. Significantly for them, this destiny was not based in logical reasoning – their relationship and marriage seemed to fly in the face of reasonableness.

Jade and Fred’s story seemed less connected to this destiny being described in God terms, and less of a force. Yet, Fred references “that everything fell into place.” This might be considered coincidence or a natural occurrence, but nevertheless was described as something not “chosen” by them, but as something that “happened” to them.

Bev and Cass’s experience of destiny was expressed in a “knowing” and an image. Bev noted at the engagement, even though discussion of marriage had been significant to the point of knowing, that she had a sense of “knowing” about the engagement ring in the popcorn, “I could just tell.” This knowing was likely a logical expectation in the context of their relationship, yet the expression suggested a knowing about a reality without concrete evidence of its reality. More telling was their description of their marriage and relationship development as two cheerios in a bowl of milk which find a way to come together.

This concept of destiny referenced a mysterious outside-of-their-control aspect in the process of coming together in marriage. There was a sense in which the decision to marry was not solely their own decision, but there was a higher power, a fate, a destiny that was present in the context of the two people coming to a state of marriage.

Theoretical and Theological Connections with the Narrative Themes

I now turn to discern connections with these themes to research, theory and theology. Some of these connections are referenced to subjects in the literature review while others created connections beyond those sources. As in the description of the themes, I approached these themes roughly in the order in which they appear in thread lines of the stories themselves.

Catalysts.

The first theme was relative to what was happening in the two individuals prior to or at the time of meeting. There appeared in the stories of the couples some “set up” or some “pre-condition” in their personal lives which created an opening for the relationship that ended in marriage. Each of the partners identified some crisis or personal change happening in their lives that created a personal need or a personal stance from which they were looking for or were open to a relationship which would fulfill that need or answer the life stance that they had taken. For the men in the stories this was expressed as “to be a better version of myself ... a better man” (Cass); being “stuck in that loop ... there wasn’t really anywhere to progress in life” (Fred); “I wasn’t living the best life ... I had come to this point ... where I thought I have go to change it around. I have got to do something different” (Darian). For the women, Bev noted being left “untrusting” from the example of her parent’s marriage; Jade was coming to the end of a life focus on study

and career development; for Alicia, it was her unhealthy experience of what “love” looked like and her depression.

What I described above was a *pre-condition* to the beginning of the relationship – something in place prior to the first meeting of the couple. It described the *soil* into which the *seed* (the first meeting) of a relationship was planted. I named these “catalysts” because it appeared as an influence outside the relationship itself but which advanced or promoted the development of the relationship. “Catalysis is the increase in the rate of a chemical reaction due to the participation of an additional substance called a catalyst. With a catalyst, reactions occur faster and require less activation energy.” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catalysis>). Whereas many models of relationship development begin with the first meeting and place attraction and initial impressions as key to the initiation of the relationship (Braiker & Kelley, 1979; De La Lama, De La Lama, & Wittgenstein, 2012; Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008), this catalyst is pre-existent to these impressions and attractions in the life stories of the two individuals.

As an example of this difference, this *catalyst* description differs from the “stimulus” described by the SVR model of relationship development (Murstein, 1970). His description of stimulus is related to the qualities and attractions which are evident in the first meetings of a couple. These stimuli are “qualities of the other” (p. 466) whereas the description I have noted here have to do with a self focus. Contrary to Murstein’s (1976) devaluation of Freud’s theory, catalysts seem consistent with the view that “Human interaction occurs ... because relationships with other humans are usually the only way in which painful tensions can be reduced to manageable levels” (p. 21). However, these couples describe their need (painful tension) not as biological, instinctual

or irrational as is suggested by Freud. Murstein (1976) himself identifies a *critical incident* as one of the factors which may spur people to a marriage commitment and identifies transitions in life as examples of these. “The critical incident in this case usually serves as a catalyst to hasten the eventuality of marriage” (Murstein, 1976, p. 70).

Catalysts were factors in the stories of these couples and led to deeper stages in the development of their relationships. As part of their story, these catalysts also factored in the individuals as they moved to a sense of commitment to each other. The catalysts formed the basis for statements in the data like: “I couldn’t imagine the rest of my life without him;” “he has made *my plans* better;” “I saw in you the same thing I was looking for;” “I feel a little bit closer to perfection when I’m with him.”

A pre-existing need is significant in the scriptural stories of faith. So often, God’s action is seen as a response to a situation or human need. This may be seen in the Exodus (as a response to the slavery in Egypt) and the healing stories of Jesus (which answer a particular need in the life of the individuals who are healed). In general, these catalysts are part of the human story and are the pre-existing context for which a story is told. Genesis, chapters 1-11, are often referred to as “pre-history” and are the stories that pre-exist, help explain, or give reason for the saving acts of God which follow.

Catalysts are also significant in the stories of covenant where God covenants with a human being. God’s displeasure with human behaviour led to a special relationship with Noah and a covenant signed in a rainbow (Genesis 6:9). God made a covenant with Abraham and Sarah about their future lineage even though they were beyond the age of having children (Genesis 15:17). God later honoured this covenant through a special relationship with Moses to deliver the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt (Exodus).

In the context of the last supper before his death, Jesus identified a “new covenant” (Luke 22). These covenants were made in the context of particular aspects of life in a particular time and come as answers to particular events. Similarly, marriage in these stories, as a covenant, began in a certain context ripe for the possibility of that covenant.

These catalysts appeared to be significant in the three couples’ stories told in relation to their decision to get married. Their knowing about getting married relates to the circumstances and the development of their lives to the point at which they meet their mate. The mate may not be the fairy tale “only one in the world for me” as much as “the person that came into my life in a particular circumstance”.

Acceptance.

Presumably in our society, couples marry because they love each other. Because love has many different connotations, I use the word *acceptance* here instead of love to particularly denote the presence of a love for the other which is experienced by the receiver of the love as acceptance of themselves by the other. This might, in other terms be noted as unconditional love. From the narratives, we see love as acceptance when the lover portrays or says: “I’m just ... here ... whatever you say to me is okay ... I’m not going to reject you;” and “I just love who you are.” We can also see this from the one on the receiving end of the love who notes: “I knew he would just always be there for me;” “she loves me and likes me for who I am;” and “we really knew that we liked each other the way we were.”

Although not clearly referenced in the stories, the expression of love as acceptance presumed that self-disclosure had taken place. This may be assumed in the statement, “whatever you say to me is okay ... I’m not going to reject you.” Derlega,

Winstead, and Greene (2008) note self-disclosure and the response to self-disclosure as significant in the development of relationships. The story of Fred and Jade clearly depicts what Derlega, et al, 2008, note as a “jump start” effect in their relationship because of their online relationship initiation. They note in their story that their relationship developed very quickly because of the self-disclosure already begun on line. Cass and Bev are good examples of “clicking” (Berg & Clark, 1986) when Cass notes “it struck me that we were committed to each other early on.”

Theologically, the experience of accepting love might be considered *grace*: “favour freely shown ... It is the redemptive activity of divine love ... God’s love is free in that it is unmerited. God is not moved to love us by our virtues, nor does he withhold his love from us because of our vices.” (Richardson, 1969, p. 147-148). This quality was clearly exemplified in Alicia’s proclamation, “whatever you say to me is okay ... I don’t hate you and I’m not going to reject you.” This identifies that the acceptance that is felt in the relationships in which people marry has a redemptive quality reflective of what is said in 1 John 4:19 “We love because God first loved us.” This accepting love “transforms us and our world ... and makes us what we are – human: we do not have to become something else” (Laishley, 1983, pp. 87-88).

Relationship priority.

In the experience of each couple there were occasions which can be identified as *turning points* (Guerrero and Mongeau, 2008): a moment or series of moments defining a transition in the relationship. In Guerrero and Mongeau’s (2008) research, this signified the movement from acquaintances to friends or from friends to romantic partners. In the stories of these couples, the turning points reflected moments in which a partner

discovered the depth of their commitment to the other. As Van Lange, Rusbult, Arriaga, Witcher, Drigotas, and Cox (1997) note this expressed in some the shift toward an understanding of a long-term future for the relationship or that the relationship would succeed or the person desired it to succeed in bad times. Considering the earlier theme of catalysts, the turning points also referenced the sense that the individual “needed” the relationship that had developed.

Turning points were also clearly times when there was expressed a priority for the relationship over individual need. As Rusbult (1980) expressed in her *investment model*, these turning points reflect a time of increased personal investment in the relationship. Stanley, Whitton, Sadberry, Clements and Markman (2006) reference these moments as one’s of self-sacrifice which become powerful symbols of commitment and devotion.

Below are examples from the data of these turning points, moments of self-sacrifice or investment signifying that the relationship had become a priority in the life of the individual and the desire that it continue:

- Bev’s providing a drawer in her bureau for Cass: “after that, we understood that we were more serious than just being friends.”
- Cass’s response to Bev’s challenge re getting her to join him for a beer after work.
- Cass’s offer to pay for Bev’s divorce.
- Fred cuddling Jade in a time of stress.
- Jade spending a day in the combine with Fred.
- Jade changing her five and ten-year plans for her life to include Fred.

- Fred’s response to Jade’s sickness after giving blood which “made me realize how much she meant to me.”
- Alicia’s change of mind about Darian.
- Darian’s experience of being apart from Alicia for three weeks.
- Darian’s attempts to make an impression on Alicia’s family.
- Darian’s mother’s invitation to Alicia to pick peas.

These instances were moments in time when the relationship appeared to take priority, where a shift happened in one person by which they moved away from their own centre on self to a position that expressed that the relationship had priority in life.

From both the perspectives of attachment theory and the investment model, these turning points may be suggestive of a moment in time where one recognizes that the attachment to or the investment in the relationship has reached a level where the benefits of staying in the relationship outweigh the costs of leaving it. Hence the relationship and maintaining the relationship becomes a priority even from a perspective of personal need and survival – e.g. one’s person and one’s survival are tied together with the relationship and its survival (I cannot imagine my life without him/her). These conclusions appear to be “discovered” in the moment rather than apprehended by a cognitive process and subsequent cognitive decision.

Theologically, these turning points are very evident in scripture as moments when persons answer a call from God which invites them on a path where their own self interest is noted as a lesser priority to expressing a trust or faith in what they understand to be God’s call. Among biblical stories:

- Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22).

- Jeremiah's purchasing a plot of land (Jeremiah 32).
- Jesus' numerous invitations to others to "follow me".
- Peter's vision regarding eating unclean animals and his subsequent visit to the home of Cornelius a Roman gentile (Acts 10).
- Ananias going to visit the murderous Paul to minister God's healing grace (Acts 9).

These are but a few examples where persons are invited to move out of themselves with often an uncomfortable, out of character, or irrational action which expresses that their own self is not the priority for themselves, but their relationship and obedience to God or their understanding of their faith.

Fear and trust.

In each of the three stories, the participants reference fears which are present during the development of the relationship. Fear appeared in some cases to be a motivating factor regarding commitment to marriage, "I didn't want to lose her" or "I couldn't imagine my life without her". This element was like the presence of a threat which encouraged the participant to choose to either run from or trust more in the other and the relationship. In some circumstances, marriage was seen as a security or a safe place in the face of that fear (e.g. as in a game of tag where you can not be tagged if you are in a safe zone). The fear was related to the position of relationship priority in the sense that the fear was about the loss of the relationship and or the loss of self.

In the face of this fear in the stories, there was a coincident choice of trust in the other person or in the relationship. Taking a trusting step was often related to the theme noted above (relationship priority) and marked a turning point toward the relationship in

trust of the other person, trust in the relationship to progress, trust as expressed as faith in God, or trust in marriage to allay the fear. In each case, the movement to trust was an expression of commitment to the other, to the relationship and eventually to marriage.

Prevalent in the story of Cass and Bev was the fear of making a mistake in the relationship. This was generated by their past experiences of relationship failure. This fear appeared to express itself at times when the relationship was taking a turn or required more commitment or trust exemplified by the choice to move in together. Both Cass and Bev noted the importance of taking the time to develop their friendship in the face of these fears.

In the story of Jade and Fred there was little fear expressed, but there was a sense of a testing of the relationship. As in the previous story, living together was a test of the relationship – a next step in discerning whether they would move forward to marriage. Fred noted “sweating bullets” in the context of asking Jade’s father regarding their marriage.

Alicia expressed fear of the relationship itself and fear of commitment: “If I make this phone call ... this is forever.” Her fear was also expressed in her prayers – turning to God for help when the relationship and commitment to it seemed opposite of reasonable decision making.

In the face of these fears there was the presence of risk taking by the couples – sometimes as a joint effort, but sometimes more by the person experiencing the fear. Cass noted that Bev was good at quelling his fears indicating acknowledgement of their reality and a willingness to move forward together in the face of the fear. For Alicia, there was a battle she fought with prayer to move forward in a direction where “feeling”

was supposed to take a lead, but was not there. Darian seemingly was “just there” for Alicia in acts of love and kindness which simply appeared to, at some point, outweigh the fears and misgivings that Alicia voiced.

In research, this appears more as “uncertainty” rather than fear. The stories of these couples clearly reference uncertainties (hurdles, fears) which are either overcome or reduced in the process of forming deeper commitments to the relationship. Murstein (1976) reflects that this “overcoming” is similar to the passion expressed in Shakespeare’s, *Romeo and Juliet*, where passionate love “thrives on frustration and depravation and becomes, seemingly, an act of rebellion against the repressive establishment” (p. 11). Uncertainty Reduction Theory references the need for couples to reduce their uncertainty about each other and the relationship in order to move forward down the continuum of relationship development. Knobloch and Miller (2008) reference this uncertainty as ambiguity and reference cognitive processes by which couples work to reduce this ambiguity. We clearly saw this in the process of Fred and Jade as they worked out a time of “testing” the reality of their online profiles and whether those were consistent with the person they had met. However, my reference point here is more the existence of fear as a motivating factor about relationship development and commitment.

Fear is a very present aspect in scripture when there are “God” moments for human beings. In most appearances of angels to humans there is often an immediate response of fear by the human which is recognized and addressed by the angel who says, “Fear not.” These were moments of encounter with the sacred and might suggest that the fears that arise in couples amid developing relationships which lead to marriage are parallel to encounters with the divine. The very presence of fear can suggest the presence

of the divine or sacred and rather than being a negative to the relationship could signify the “destiny” aspect referred to next. Fear, then, can be a reference to the developing spiritual and sacred nature of the relationship.

Destiny.

“Destiny or fate is a predetermined course of events. It may be conceived as a predetermined future, whether in general or of an individual”

(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Destiny>). There was a quality within the decisions to marry of the three couples in which they expressed that the decision to marry was made not only by them but seemed to have been a course already set, came naturally, or was orchestrated by an external power. It reflected a spiritual and mystical element by which couples identified that there was something more to their relationship, to the fact that they met and were moving to a commitment to be married, which was beyond them – beyond their control, their reason, their decision. Their decision to marry appeared to be a response to a call, the next step in a journey or process that was already set in motion and seemed determined and only required their consent. From the data, I note the following in this regard:

- One of Bev’s reasons for deciding to get married: “It seemed like the next step in our commitment to each other.”
- Bev and Cass’s image of two Cheerios floating in a bowl and coming together.
- Fred noting “everything just fell into place ... it was just the right thing to do.”

- Numerous statements in the story of Alicia and Darren attributed to God's guidance.
- Alicia noting "this thing is bigger than us ... whatever is holding us, is holding us ... underneath all our differences, there is this really strong, powerful core ... it won't break."
- Darian noting that this core being there "right at the beginning ... even before we were together as a couple."
- Alicia's conclusion, "The center of our relationship is always God because that is who put us together."

This sense of destiny, or "God" having a hand in the decision to marry was one of the conclusions of a study by Antonsen (2003) of five Christian couples. She identified a theme "spiritual leading in choosing a spouse" and a sub-theme "God purposefully put them together as husband and wife" (pp. 51-52). "All participants (even those who had a "nominal faith" while dating) believed that God specifically brought themselves and their spouses together" (p. 52). Significantly, the participants were unable to explain "why" God brought them together but believed this was the case nevertheless indicating little cognitive understanding of this external force which was involved in their mate selection.

The research of Catherine Surra (et al) references the influence of "beliefs" in relation to the development of commitment. She notes within the context of this subject of destiny that "partners had beliefs that the time or circumstance was right for marriage" (Surra, Arizzi, and Asmussen, 1988, p. 49). In one research project, she identified a "circumstantial" category to explain "forces or institutional actions over

which the partners have little control” which included references to “act of God” (p. 52).

This sense of destiny has a distinctive spiritual quality in that it is one which is hard to talk about in concrete terms and references often something intangible in operation outside of the couple. Scripture itself is written as a record of the activity of God in the lives of people and contains stories where people feel guided by a spiritual being to do or accomplish acts beyond their control. Scripture also is often written as a narrative of a journey of people with God – the account of a presence which guides and often appears to determine an outcome which could not be there except by understanding or attributing the outcome to the hand of God. Among these we see what might be called miraculous events:

- Sarah’s pregnancy in her 90’s (Genesis 17).
- The journeys of Noah and Moses as leaders of salvific action for people (Genesis 6-9; Exodus).
- Israel’s victories over enemies understood to be by the hand of God (Judges 2 and 3 give examples of this understanding).
- The witness and martyrdom of persons of faith in the face of death (Stephen in Acts 7 as an example).
- The apparent randomness of the grace of God in the lives of people (cf. Jesus healing on the Sabbath, Mark 3).

This section has demonstrated the theological and theoretical connections with the narrative themes developed from the three stories. These connections both supported the

evidence of the presence of these themes and expanded the understanding of these themes.

Collective Story Line

Having heard the stories of these three couples and considered the themes present, I conclude this chapter by collecting these themes in a story line which might be representative of the three stories as one.

Prior to meeting, the two individuals (who later become a couple and marry) have not only two different histories and families from which they come, but are also, at the time of meeting, experiencing some shift in their lives. This may be some trauma, some life transition, or some personal growth which collectively act as catalysts in the context of meeting their future partner. The combining of these catalysts in the context of their two lives creates a possibility for these two persons to engage in the development of a relationship which might lead to marriage.

As the relationship develops they discover that they mutually feel accepted by the other for who they are. They further discover that by continuing self-disclosure the other continues to accept them as they are, often to their surprise – “this other person accepts me no matter what I have done or say which might cause them to reject me.” They experience this acceptance as a love that many call unconditional and that some relate as grace.

Without conscious decision making, they discover themselves acting in ways which clearly indicate that they want the relationship to continue and that express its importance in their lives. They find themselves making sacrifices not

just for the other person but for the relationship itself. Sometimes, to their surprise, these sacrifices are of long held positions or life plans which now are being altered by the presence of this significant relationship. They discover through these actions how much the relationship means to them and begin to see these expressions and discoveries as indications of their commitment to the other and to the relationship itself.

Amid these discoveries, they recognize that fear is present – a fear that they might lose the relationship or the other person. This fear requires a decision to either trust in a future for the relationship or to succumb to the fear and leave the relationship. The decision to trust often motivates more of these actions of self-sacrifice and acts as an agent in wanting to protect the relationship from harm. One way in which this protection might be made is by declaring a public commitment to a long-term relationship with the other through marriage.

In the midst of making this monumental commitment of their life to another, the couple begin to reflect on the journey and wonder how they have come to this point. They wonder and give note to these processes, the stages, and the stories of their lives together. As much as they would like to claim control of the process, they recognize that there seems to be something in play which seems to have destined them to this state of relationship commitment. Sometimes this is expressed as something that just makes sense considering what has happened or as the next stage in the relationship. Others express this as a force or the hand of God which has been at work to make this happen. Some see this as having started and been happening from even before they met. Some begin to see this commitment as bigger than just the two of them and begin to reference symbols or plan symbols which express what cannot be put into words. With the words

and symbols they can find, of their own or in the context of culture or religion, they marry – till death do them part.

Conclusion

The analysis of the three couples' stories presented in this research has given rise to five themes: (1) the presence of *catalysts* prior to relationship beginnings; (2) the presence and challenge of *fear and trust*; (3) turning points where there is a clear expression of *relationship priority*; (4) the experience of *acceptance* (also referenced as unconditional love or grace); and (5) a sense of *destiny* or some influence greater than just the couple involved. I have supported the existence of these themes by references to the data from the couple's narratives, other research, and theological and scriptural writings. I now turn to conclusions referencing the question posed in this thesis, "How do couples know and decide to be married?"

Chapter 6: Conclusions: Findings

This thesis set out to explore the question: How do couples know and decide to be married? It was understood from the beginning that the answer to this question would likely elicit pieces of a puzzle. Using a narrative methodology, I invited three couples to share the story of how they came to the decision to be married. Each told their story which I recorded and wrote back to them for their concurrence that I had understood and captured their particular story. From this data, I looked for salient features and commonalities which formulated five themes that appeared significant to the process of knowing and deciding to be married: (1) catalysts (to their relationship), (2) acceptance (unconditional love or grace), (3) relationship priority (a mutual movement to prioritizing the relationship), (4) fear and trust (the presence of fear and the choice to trust), and (5) destiny (an external force or call to be together, to be married). These five aspects of their stories were then related to research and theology and summarized in a storyline about the movement these couples experienced to knowing and deciding to be married. This chapter presents a summary of the findings and the place of these findings in the context of research, and practical implications.

Summary of Findings

As noted above and in the previous chapter the findings from the stories of three couples consisted of five aspects of those stories which they related in the process of answering the question “How did you know and decide to be married?” These five elements were part of the stories that they told and are outlined below.

The couples described what was happening in their individual lives prior to or at the time of meeting. These stories were not only the context, but a “set up” or “pre-

condition” in their personal lives which created an opening for the relationship which for them lead to marriage. The catalysts were identified as a personal trauma, a time of personal change, or a cumulative dissatisfaction with previous relationships. This described the soil, prepared and fertilized, into which the relationship was seeded. These catalysts were factors in the development of their relationship and moved them towards commitment. They were expressed in statements like: “I couldn’t imagine the rest of my life without him;” “he has made *my plans* better;” “I saw in you the same thing I was looking for;” “I feel a little bit closer to perfection when I’m with him.”

The presence of love as acceptance or unconditional love and the perception that one is unconditionally accepted by the other figures strongly in the stories of these three couples. This quality of love is a grace of accepting the other without the need to change them. Significant in the stories is not so much the proclamation by one that they love the other in this way, so much that the other perceives and experiences this love and acceptance from the other.

Each of the three couples tell stories significant of knowing that the relationship takes priority in their lives. Often these are identified as turning points and can be identified as times of self-sacrifice in the sense that the relationship takes priority over the individual. These are times when commitment to the relationship is experienced. They appeared simply as spending time with the other, or in the context of a crisis, or a time when accommodating the relationship signed a change in personal direction. These moments were significant of “call” or “vocation” and often “happened” rather than being planned or cognitively thought out.

Fear and coincident trust is present in the context of the knowing and the decision to move towards marriage. Often this is noted as a fear of losing the other and acts as a motivation for commitment expressed in the public vows of marriage. This fear relates to the risk taking involved in various stages of relationship development as a couple chooses to trust and take the relationship “to the next level.” This fear may be related to the type of fear of the divine expressed in the appearances of angels following which humans often trust the message delivered. As marital relationships develop, there is a coincidental fear and trust parallel to encountering the divine.

There is a sense of destiny in the stories of these three couples whereby is expressed the sense that the relationship takes a course of its own, is guided by God, or that it comes naturally. This sense is removed from a cognitive decision or knowing about marriage and is more a spiritual element or knowing that marriage is “the next step” or is to happen – almost as if the marriage is “destined” to happen. Reflectively, this destiny is seen by some couples as a force that is present from the beginning of the relationship – bringing this list back to the sense of the catalysts as part of the “set up” for the marriage that was destined to happen.

Research Context

This research parallels other research on the development of romantic relationships and their movement to committed monogamous relationships. It relates to research on marriages and their formation. It offers a narrative study in the context of other research methods which have been used in these areas.

Consistencies with other research.

This research is consistent with research about the development of romantic relationships and parallels many facets already identified as significant in the development of relationships. It reflects well research by Murray Davis (1973) and others who chronicle the beginnings of relationships and first meetings including the presence of intention (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). The significance of self-disclosure (Derlega, Winstead, & Greene, 2008) is evident in these stories of the development of friendship and the movement to romantic relationships. Larson and Holman's (1994) reference to background and contextual factors in relationships as a matter for premarital counselling is very significant in the context of what I name as catalysts to the relationship.

As the relationships which were the subject of this study progressed through the romantic phase, there was significant correlation with the work of Guerrero and Mongeau (2008) as couples negotiated further intimacy, negotiated their familial and social networks, and moved to exclusivity. The couples in this study clearly noted "turning points" in their relationship as a reference to the changes toward intimate exclusivity and commitment. These couples also reflected the works of Schaefer and Olson (1981), Moss and Schwebel (1993), Sternberg (1997), and Van Epp Cutlip (2013) regarding components or types of intimacy and love which are characteristic of committed romantic relationships.

Distinguishing factors of commitment and the commitment associated with marriage are also evident in this research. Davis' (1973) definitions of communion, contrariety and commitment were evident as were Surra and Hughes (1997) distinction

between global and marital commitment. Similarly, Kelley and Thibaut's (1978) description of interdependence as part of the commitment process was very evident as couples communicated in various ways to give evidence of a commitment and to further the relationship. Rusbult's (1980) investment model of commitment appears to be well referenced as couples invest themselves in furthering their relationships. Whitton, Stanley, and Markman's (2007) work on self-sacrifice in relation to commitment was very significant in the analysis of these narratives. This same sense of sacrifice is referenced in Le & Agnew's (2003) work on motivation and interdependence.

Unique elements.

The first unique element to this study has been the use of narrative analysis as an approach to the subject. Through the narrative analysis many of the elements of other research have been shown to be relevant and useful. The narrative approach also, while looking at its parts, views the relationship being analyzed as a whole and as a growing organism in which many factors combine and influence each other.

The naming of the prior life and experience of the couple as "catalysts" rather than simply context for the beginning of the relationship is significant. This suggests a heightened influence of the situation of the couple as opposed to or in addition to the existence of family values and life experience.

Much reference is made in research to romantic love, whereas this research emphasizes the presence of accepting love as significant to the relational development. It is interesting that the couples interviewed all referenced this type of love more so than the romantic love which one would expect to be foundational to relationships in which marriage is involved.

Although research references the need for couples to deal with conflict and reduce uncertainty in their relationships, there is less emphasis on the element of fear which is likely significant in these areas. This research raises the element of fear as a significant motivational force within the context of understanding one's trust and commitment to the other and to the relationship and therefore as a significant element in the decision to marry.

The recognition of a sense of destiny or of a spiritual power at work in the context of a couple's movement toward commitment and marriage is another factor that is unique to this study. Difficult to describe and quantify, this aspect of a couple's decision and process of knowing about marrying the other is not surprisingly best found as researchers focus on the narrative of the couple's experience.

Limitations.

This study was a narrative study of three couples and their experience and story of movement to a decision to marry. As such, this study has limitations to generalizing about the subject in other situations as the stories of other couples may indeed present very differently.

The results of this study are also limited to understanding the story of why these three couples came to a decision to marry. Although two of the couples have been married for more than ten years, this research is a study of how they came to be married and does not suggest that the reasons they note can be interpreted as significant for marital happiness, success or longevity.

This study was limited to married couples and did not address persons in committed relationships who are not married. Additionally, none of the couples involved

in this research were gay. It cannot be discerned from this study if similar or different results might be obtained by research with these populations.

Recommendations for further research.

Further research in this area may focus on the stories of couples who have been married for significant lengths of time. Gottman's research suggests that how couples remember and tell the stories of their early relationship are significant for both successful couple counselling and living happily within marriage. Conducting similar interviews with those in long-term marriages may reveal similar or contrary information regarding the conclusions of this study. Such interviews would also create potential relevance of factors to look for in the stories of couples about to be married which might suggest the potential for long-term commitment.

This research did not involve a married gay couple. A similar study involving persons within gay marriages would be significant to assess whether similar or different findings might be discovered.

Further research of the influence of spiritual factors would also augment this present research. Three theological constructs are referenced in this research which may focus such research. First, the concept of "unconditional love" as evidenced by grace and acceptance of one's partner (as opposed to the need to change one's partner). Second, the sense of "epiphany" related to the turning points or "aha" moments when a relationship takes as significant turn to commitment and the experience of fear or awe. Thirdly, the element of "sacrifice" evident in these stories and making sacrifices for the relationship. Each of these theologically elements were evidenced in the stories of these couples and reference the significance of spiritual factors related to the decision to be married which

would benefit from further research. Additionally, these factors may be focuses of research studies of marriage preparation programs and couples counselling modalities.

Summary

This research has presented the stories of three couples as they pondered the question, “How did you know and decided to be married?” Their candid telling of their stories confirmed what much research has evidenced in the development of relationships leading to monogamous commitments (in marriage). Their stories identified nuances consistent with existing research and significant factors not otherwise explored in research. Five elements were discovered as significant in the storied process of their decisions to marry:

- Catalysts. The co-researchers described situations and elements in their personal lives at the time of encountering their mate which acted as catalysts for the forming and development of their relationship.
- Acceptance. Co-researchers identified an experience of love as acceptance by their mate. I connected this acceptance with the theological concept of grace as unconditional love often attributed to the way God’s love is expressed.
- Relationship priority. Consistent with research, these couples identified elements of self-sacrifice and turning points, which identified the relationship as a priority in their lives.
- Fear and trust. Co-researchers identified fear as a motivating factor in their trust of the relationship and a decision to marry.

- Destiny. Co-researchers referenced a sense of destiny in relation to their movement to marriage. This was part of the “knowing” and appeared as an influence from outside of the control of the couple.

These findings are noted as both consistent with present research and as adding a nuance to that research. These findings may be significant for couples who are asking the question about how they know if they should marry another, for those with whom they confide, for persons responsible for marriage preparation, and for couple counsellors.

This research adds to the body of research about committed relationships and their development. It adds narrative – couples telling their story which support much of the research to date. It also adds to that research through the suggestion of elements within these stories not significantly referenced within that research and elements which are identified as spiritually significant. The conclusions of this study may be helpful to couples in the process of discernment about marriage providing questions to formulate their story and understanding of their decision both from their history, their experience of their love, and the influence of spiritual factors beyond their control.

What do you say when someone asks, “How do I know if I should marry him/her?” I noted at the beginning of this thesis my original response, “You just know”. I now have a fuller response which parallels some of my own experience. From this research, I now can respond with questions which might invite reflection by the asker:

- What was happening in your individual lives that is significant to your coming together?
- Do you accept your partner the way they are and experience acceptance by them of the way you are?

- Have you experienced turning points signifying the relationship takes priority over your self?
- Do you experience fear and a subsequent movement to trust your partner and the relationship?
- Do you experience a force/God/call beyond the two of you that is moving you in this direction?
- Tell me your story.

Hearing the asker's own storied responses to these questions might shed a brighter light on a difficult question rather than "you just know". Chances are s/he does *know*, they just haven't had a chance to tell a guided story of their knowing.

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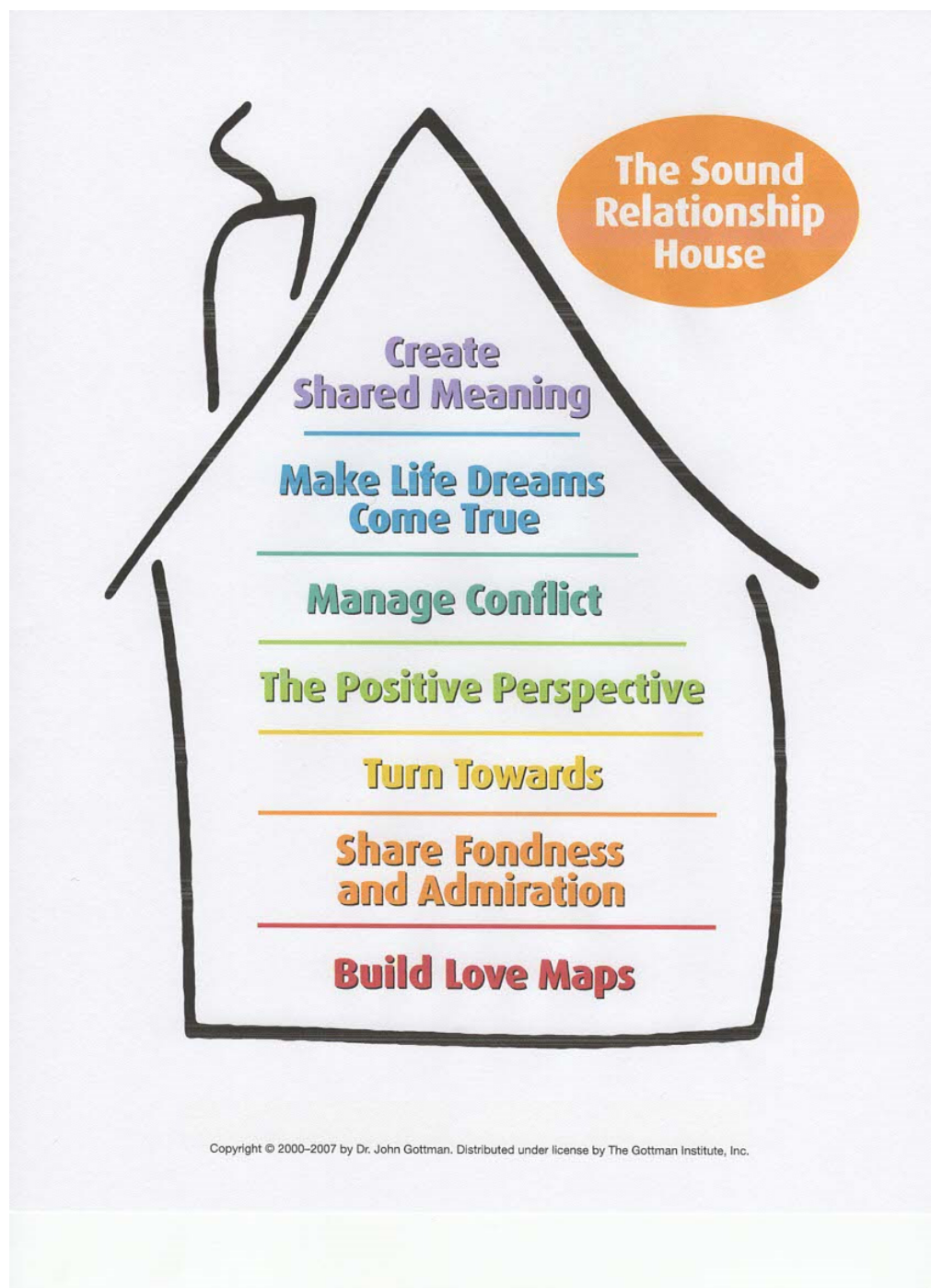
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Appendix A

The Sound Relationship House

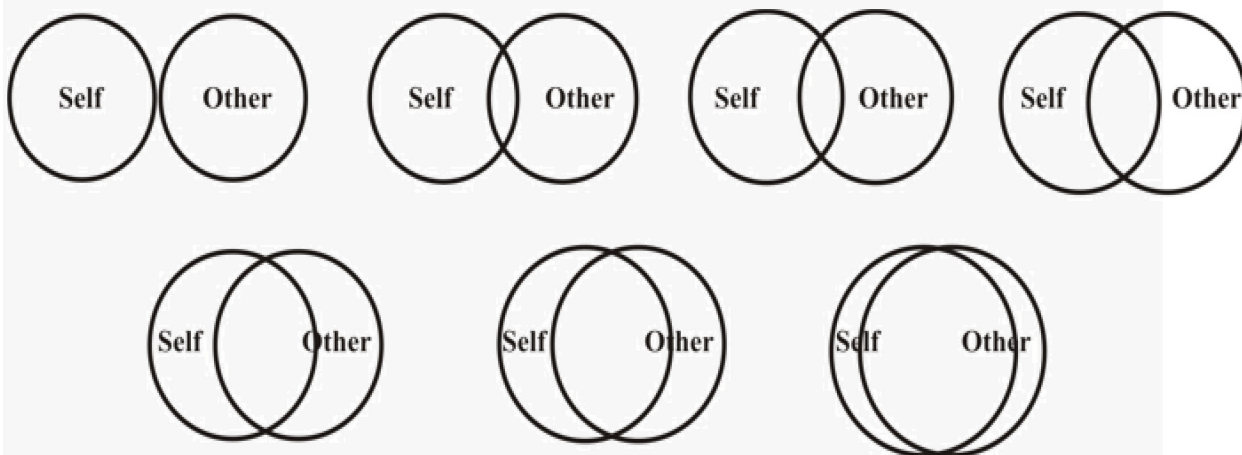


Appendix B

The Inclusion of Other in Self Scale

The Inclusion of Other in the Self scale (IOS)

Instructions: Please circle the picture that best describes your current relationship with your romantic partner.



Aron, A., Aron E. N., & Smollan, D. (1992). Inclusion of other in the self scale and the structure of interpersonal closeness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63, 596-612.

Appendix C

Research Notice

Couple Needed for Thesis Research

Brian Way, a student in the Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality degree program through St. Stephen's College, Edmonton, is doing a narrative research study of a couple's decision to be married. He is looking for a couple who would be willing to share the story of their relationship and in particular that of their decision to get engaged and to be married.

He is seeking a couple who:

Have made or did make a decision to be married.

Did not make this decision in the context of a pregnancy.

Are willing to share about their relationship and tell their story (in their own way) as a couple in a recorded interview.

Are willing to review the author's writing to ensure accuracy.

If you would like to be involved in this research or would like more information, please contact Brian Way @ [xxx-xxx-xxxx] or [xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx@xxxxx.xxx].

Appendix D

Process Description for Couples

A narrative inquiry research study by Brian Way, a student in the Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality degree program through St. Stephen's College, Edmonton.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the stories of couples' decision to marry. How is it that they come to know and decide to make the commitment to be married?

Process:

1. An initial interview with each couple to clarify questions regarding the process and intent of the research.
2. A subsequent personal interview with potential couples to further clarify expectations and questions and to sign consent.
3. An interview in which the couple tell their story of how they came to decide to get married. Each couple is encouraged to select where and when they would like the interview to take place. They will also be encouraged to use whatever medium and process they desire to tell the story surrounding their decision to marry (family stories, artifacts, photographs, etc.). This interview will be video recorded using a portable device. During the interview, I will take notes and record observations and ask for clarifications. If couples have particular notes or items of importance related to their story which they wish to share they may make copies for my notes.
4. The writing of a draft narrative of their story. Using pseudonyms.
5. Sharing the draft with the couple for accuracy.
6. Revising the draft and sharing the second draft with a response community.
7. Sharing the second draft with the couple and revising if necessary to complete a narrative of the story with concurrence of the couple in consultation with a response community.
8. Narrative analysis of three stories and writing of the thesis for submission.

Appendix E
Confidentiality Agreement

I understand that as:

transcriber

member of a response community

thesis advisor

for the study being conducted by Brian Way, a student in the Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality degree program through St. Stephen's College, Edmonton under the supervision of Dr. Mona-Lee Feehan, confidential information will be made known to me.

I agree to keep all information collected during this study confidential and will not reveal by speaking, communicating or transmitting this information in written, electronic (disks, tapes, transcripts, email) or in any other way to anyone outside the research team.

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

(Please Print)

Witness Name: _____ Witness Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix F

Letter of Informed Consent

I, _____, agree to participate in the research proposal of Brian D. Way [xxx-xxx-xxxx; xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx@xxxxx.xxx] who is seeking a Masters of Psychotherapy and Spirituality through St. Stephen's College, Edmonton. The purpose of the study is to tell the story of a couple's decision to marry.

I recognize that I am free to participate in this research project of my own accord and have not been coerced or pressured.

I understand that the method involved requires an interview of one to two hours in length and that this interview will be videotaped. Additionally, there may be up to two follow-up interviews to clarify content from the first interview. I understand that the video tape will be transcribed and give my permission for this transcription knowing that the transcriber will also agree to maintain confidentiality. I understand that my name and the names of any mentioned by me will be assigned pseudonyms and will not be revealed in any transcription of data or its interpretation. I understand that the video tape, transcript, notes, and any other items which I provide to the researcher will be kept secure and will be destroyed in the month following the researcher's graduation (anticipated November 2016).

I understand that the use of data collected through my participation is for the sole purpose of the writing of this thesis and that the thesis will be published and available through St. Stephen's College and the National Library of Canada and therefore may be referenced in other research. I understand that the thesis will be publicly presented at St. Stephen's College, Edmonton, upon completion of the thesis process.

I understand that at any time in this process I and/or my partner have the right to withdraw consent and participation in the study. I understand that should I and/or my partner withdraw, the video tape, transcription and any other data collected will be destroyed at that time and not included in the study and I will be released from the study process without reprisal to myself. I understand that, if for any reason, I or my partner experience a concern, referral(s) to appropriate counselling will be made.

I understand that two other people will be involved to reflect and make critical comment on the researcher's developing written text to ensure faithfulness to the narrative told. These two people will also sign agreements of confidentiality.

I understand that Brian Way's supervisor, Dr. Mona-Lee Feehan [xxx-xxx-xxxx; xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.xx] will have access to this material and will hold this information in confidence.

I have reviewed this form and consent to being a participant in this study as described above,

Participant's Name	Signature	Date
Brian D. Way Researcher	Signature	Date

Appendix G

Data Gathering Interview Guide

The data gathering interview (and subsequent interviews) will begin with renewing the previous agreements in relation to consent, confirming their willingness to continue, and addressing any concerns which they may have about the process and relationship. As researcher, it will be my task to remain curious and observant of the couple, the story being told, meanings, and the dimensions of interaction, continuity and situation. I have created sample questions for this interview from suggestions quoted in Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk (2007):

1. Tell the story of how you came to decide to get engaged and to get married.
2. Tell me about particular memories that are significant and meaningful to you about that time and about deciding.
3. You said Tell me more about that.

Appendix H

Informed Consent for the use of Materials Provided

We give our permission for Brian Way, a student in the Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality degree program through St. Stephen's College, Edmonton under the supervision of Dr. Mona-Lee Feehan, to use and copy the following documents provided to him, in relation to our participation in his thesis study:

- Why we decided to get married.
- Why we wanted to marry each other
- Why we wanted to marry each other: Why I wanted to marry Cass
- Our wedding vows (text only, no date or picture)

We understand that, if used, these documents will become part of his thesis and that the thesis will be published and available through St. Stephen's College and the National Library of Canada and therefore may be referenced in other research. We understand that at any time, prior to the submission of the thesis (anticipated December 1, 2015) I and/or my partner have the right to withdraw consent for the use of these articles. I understand that should I and/or my partner withdraw our consent, these documents will not be copied as part of the thesis, and will be kept secure and will be destroyed in the month following the researcher's graduation (anticipated November 2016) as previously agreed.

We freely give our consent to the use of this material. We recognize that we can withdraw our consent any time prior to the completion of the thesis (estimated Dec. 1, 2015).

Participant's Name

Signature

Date

Participant's Name

Signature

Date

Brian D. Way

Researcher

Signature

Date

Appendix I

Role of Response Community

As you know, as a student in the Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality degree program through St. Stephen's College, Edmonton, I am doing a narrative research study of a couple's decision to be married.

I have asked you and one other person to participate with me in developing my thesis by being what Clandinin & Connelly (2000) reference as a "response community": an ongoing place where a narrative researcher can give accounts of his/her developing work over time (p. 73).

What follows is a copy of the first two pages of my thesis proposal which I hope will give you context for what I am researching:

Tentative Title of the Thesis: How did we choose to be married? Stories of Commitment.

A General Statement of the Problem Area

I was once asked by a young person, in love and struggling with what that meant: "How do I know if she is the one I should marry?" My initial response was surprising to me: "You just know". I recalled in this conversation that the marriage rite in the Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada (1985) asks the couple, "If either of you knows a reason why you may not lawfully marry, you must declare it now" (p. 529). I was fascinated to begin to discover that this question is asked in the singular negative – "knowing *a* reason you may *not* marry". There is no coincident query to list the plural positives – the knowing of why you should marry.

John Gottman began studying marriages from his base at the University of Washington (Seattle) in 1972. After decades of research, he published *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (1999) and developed his own theory and process for couples' counselling. The Gottman process begins with an assessment of a couple's relationship through written assessment instruments and four interviews prior to engaging in recommended interventions. Following is one of the questions in the Oral History section of this assessment process:

Tell me about how the two of you decided to get married or commit to each other. Of all the people in the world, what led you to decide that this was the person you wanted to be with? Was it an easy decision? Was it a difficult decision? Were you ever in love? Tell me about this time. (Gottman and Schwartz Gottman, 2009, p. 3-13).

The question is like the one noted earlier: "How do I know if she is the one I should marry?" The Gottman question invites telling the narrative of the couple's relationship. Soliciting the story assists clinicians in the observation, not only of the content of the story, but how the story is told.

The coming to a decision, to the place of knowing, is in some sense the "plot" of the early stage of a couple's story which then leads to a future wedding and marriage. The problem of knowing is a philosophical one, but one which may be critical to understanding one of the most important decisions people make which relationally changes the trajectory and content of the rest of their lives.

The Research Question

The Gottman assessment process clearly expresses interest in the story that a couple tells about their decision to marry. Their experience is contained in the story they tell. This led me to consider that Narrative Inquiry would be the appropriate methodology for this research: this “method assumes that people construct their realities through narrating their stories” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 153). Clandinin & Huber (2010) suggest that narrative inquiry, rather than posing a research question, poses a puzzle to be explored. This research will explore the stories of couples’ decision to marry.

As a member of the response community for my thesis project, I would ask you to read the three stories which I have created from the interviews with my co-researchers, and to note to me the following:

- What is interesting to you in this story?
- What possibilities for this thesis do you see?
- As you read this story, what do you wonder about?
- What changes would improve the telling of this story?

The process I envision is that when I have composed a text of a couple’s story, I will email it to you in a protected file. It would be helpful to me if you could write your comments and email them back to me (in a protected file or email), but I am open to however you would like to give me feedback. If, beyond these questions, you have other comments for me in any regard, I would most welcome them.

Let me know if you have any questions about this role I am asking you to fulfil.

If you are willing, please sign the attached confidentiality agreement and return it to me to confirm your agreement to be part of my research team by fulfilling this role (scanned copy sent electronically is sufficient).

The texts that I provide to you have already had the names of the co-researchers changed.

Thank-you for engaging in this reflective process with me,

Brian Way

[xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx@xxxxx.xxx]

Appendix J

Why We Decided to Get Married

Why We Decided To Get Married

Didn't want to lose each other

Next step in our commitment to each other

It was important to have a legal contract the binds us

It was what we grew up eventually wanting some day based on what we saw and learned as children growing up.

Concept of Mr and Mrs was appealing

Carrying Cass's last name was important to me (Beth)

Appendix K

Why We Wanted to Marry Each Other – Bev

Why We Wanted To Marry Each Other

(These were done separately – we did not talk about the reasons or look at each others reasons till after we had each completed our reasons).

They are completed in order of importance.

Why I Wanted To Marry Cass

1. We loved each other
2. He is my best friend
3. I can't imagine the rest of my life without him
4. Marriage seems like the next step in our commitment to each other
5. He is the most genuine person I've ever met
6. He is a good person with high morals and values
7. We are sexually compatible
8. We get along very well and want the same things
9. He takes good care of me
10. He makes me laugh

Appendix L

Why We Wanted to Marry Each Other – Cass

Why We Wanted To Marry Each Other

(These were done separately – we did not talk about the reasons or look at each others reasons till after we had each completed our reasons).

They are completed in order of importance.

I have always been a selfish individual. This is something I have always known. After lying to myself and a life partner for 10 years I knew my next long term relationship would have to be different in many ways.

The first thing that would need to be true.

1-I would have to be physically attracted to my mate.

2-I would also have to be emotionally invested; I would have to need them as much as I was needed. If I could not love this person I should sever myself from a relationship and search for someone I could.

3-I would need to feel I could trust and be trusted. Commitment to one person is not a life sentence but journey for two people to make together.

4-My dreams would need to be the dreams that we shared. My hopes, goals, and desires would need to be ours.

5-I want my partner to need my support but also be someone who could act independently.

6-Because I do not want to have a child/ children my partner would need to understand this and never require this to change.

7-Because I am a selfish person by nature, I need someone who will challenge my selfishness and help me to make decisions that appropriate for both of us. I am a live in the moment kind of a person, my life mate would need to help me focus on the future. Bring me back from a point of great outstanding debit then create a net of savings and safety.

8-I am a person who is always working to gain more knowledge, a life mate would need to be someone who aspired to better themselves.

9-I also knew from my past I did not want to choose another alcoholic, but still find a person who enjoyed a few drinks from time to time.

10-I grew up in a family that I was surrounded by great cooks and I knew my life mate would need to be great cook and baker.

Appendix M

Our Wedding Vows

I take you to have and to hold from this day forward, in whatever circumstances or experiences life may hold for us. I pledge my love to you and vow that our bond will always be too strong to break. You have taught me that love can be completing and how to love completely. You have shown me that I can trust and believe in you without doubt. I will faithfully stand beside you in times of sickness and sadness and together we will face the best and worst of times. Together moving forward, our two hearts will beat as one. I am a better person with you and together we can accomplish anything. Now and forever, every day will start with a kiss and each night I will renew my pledge of love to you. You are like the first rays of sun at dawn. Your love, like light, pierces the darkness and brings brightness to the shadows. You are my best friend and the greatest love of my life. Will you be my partner, my lover, my best friend today and every tomorrow?