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COUPLES IN GREAT MARRIAGES WITH A TRADITIONAL STRUCTURE AND
EGALITARIAN RELATIONSHIP

by

Pamela Kandior Morrill

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Family, Consumer, and Human Development

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2006

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ABSTRACT

Couples in Great Marriages with a Traditional Structure and Egalitarian Relationship

by

Pamela Kandior Morrill, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2006

Major Professor: Dr. Linda Skogrand

Department: Family, Consumer, and Human Development

This study researched the possibility of an egalitarian relationship coexisting with a traditional role-structured marriage. Qualitative methods were used to gather data from a national sample using a 31-page questionnaire. Out of the larger Great Marriage Research Study of 130 respondents (65 couples), 14 couples fit the criteria for this study in that they had a traditional structure to their marriage and both felt their was a balance of power between them. Their stories were analyzed to discover what their marriages were like and how they talked about and operationalized an egalitarian relationship. Findings from this research indicated that it is possible to have an egalitarian marriage relationship paired with a traditional role-structure. The findings can contribute to marriage education for couples who choose to live with a traditional structure, but want an egalitarian relationship.

(142 pages)

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Pamela Morrill

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

What promotes marital happiness and stability is a topic of current research for many social scientists. With 96% of the United States' population at age 65 reporting they have been married at some point in their lifetime and a continuing 50% divorce rate, it is appropriate that researchers look for ways to help couples have happier marriages (Teachmen, Tedrow, & Crowder, 2000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Information gathered from research on what promotes marital happiness is a prime source for developing educational materials and marriage education programs. The goals of these programs and educational materials are to teach couples the relationship skills necessary to have successful marriages.

There is a substantial difference between marital stability and marital happiness. Researchers have defined marital stability as the strong commitment couples have to the marriage (Knoester & Booth, 2000). These couples have a desire to stay together even if one or both is not particularly happy with the relationship (Ebling & Levenson, 2003). In contrast, couples who have a high degree of marital happiness are, in fact, happy with the relationship. It is possible to have marital stability and yet not have marital happiness. Knoester and Booth indicated that people in these kinds of marriages stay together for a variety of reasons called "barriers" to divorce. Some of these barriers are religious beliefs, shared children, extended family expectations, and financial reasons. These researchers concluded that, with changing social norms, barriers are no longer as effective as they once were. Indeed, a more salient reason to marry and to stay married is that the couple is happy (Glenn, 1991; Knoester & Booth). It is, therefore, important to

look at characteristics and traits of happy and satisfied couples to understand what promotes happiness in marriage.

Marriage researchers have found that attitudes about role expectations for men and women have a great deal of influence on a couple's marital happiness (Margolin, Fernandez, Talovic, & Onorato, 1983; McHale & Crouter, 1992). The feminist movement in the middle of the 20th century helped to redefine gender roles and provided flexible ways for couples to interact and fill family roles (White & Klein, 2002). Egalitarianism established a new way of looking at gender roles within a marriage (Schwartz, 1994). Couples in these types of marriages have an equal distribution of power in decision-making and both partners fulfill aspects of each potential role within the marriage (Schwartz; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1995). Each spouse contributes money and shares childcare and household duties (Gilbert, 1993; Haas, 1980). In addition, each carries equal weight in making decisions (Schwartz; Wallerstein & Blakeslee). This type of marriage is described by some researchers as a companionship and a "best friend" relationship (Pollock, Die, & Marriott, 1990; Schwartz; Wallerstein & Blakeslee). An egalitarian marriage relationship is different in many ways from a traditional marriage relationship (Wallerstein & Blakeslee).

Traditional ideology supports the idea that male/female relationships are hierarchal with the male as the dominant partner "making all the important decisions and calling all the shots" (Brehm, Miller, Perlman, & Campbell, 2002, p. 308). In a traditional marriage relationship, a husband is expected to be the sole provider and the wife is responsible for childcare and domestic work (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1995). This type

of marriage generally establishes a hierarchical order in the marriage (Booth & Amato, 1994; Schwartz, 1994; White & Klein, 2002).

Research suggests that egalitarian and traditional approaches to the marriage relationship are at opposite ends of a continuum and they are mutually exclusive categories (Beere, King, Beere, & King, 1984; Gray-Little, 1982). In other words, individuals are either traditional or egalitarian, but they cannot be both (Margolin et al., 1983). Researchers report that marital happiness is highest in egalitarian oriented relationships (Amato, Johnson, Booth & Rogers, 2003; Gray-Little; McHale & Crouter, 1992; Schwartz, 1994). Couples who chose, or felt bound to choose, a traditional approach to marriage did not score themselves as highly on marital happiness measures (Schwartz). In addition, many couples who value traditional beliefs experience great distress when the wife, for financial reasons or self-fulfillment, is involved in paid labor (McHale & Crouter). Being involved in paid labor may require that wives come home to work the "second shift" (Hochschild, 1989). The research, therefore says, that this can lead to a great deal of stress for people in traditional households when a wife feels she must do both jobs: bring in a paycheck and be responsible for all the household duties and childcare as well (Hochschild; Greenstein, 1996).

In her 1994 study of egalitarian marriages, Schwartz contends that couples who are enjoying the happy rewards of an egalitarian marriage are those who do not adhere to traditional gender roles. This seems to suggest that a happy and egalitarian marriage is out of reach for couples who choose to fill traditional gender roles for reasons such as religion, culture, family expectations or simply personal preference. Is this really the case?

There is research to indicate that it is not just shared roles (i.e., dual-earner couples) that determines an egalitarian relationship (McHale & Crouter, 1992). In other words, just having the egalitarian role-structure is not a guarantee that a couple will reap the emotional rewards of an egalitarian relationship (Hochschild, 1989; Schwartz, 1994). In fact, attitude toward the family roles (i.e., gender-role ideology—for example sharing power in the relationship), is a critical piece that influences marital equality and, in turn, influences higher marital satisfaction (Brennan, Barnett & Garesis, 2001; McHale & Crouter). From the research we can conclude that an individual's gender-role ideology or attitude is what makes the difference. This suggests that it may be possible to have an attitude of equality in a marriage relationship regardless of the structure of the marriage.

For purposes of this study, attitudes and beliefs are defined as the "inward" feelings and constructs that an individual has about what are appropriate roles for men and women, and will be referred to as "role-attitude" (Araji, 1977; McHale & Crouter, 1992). Structure and behaviors are defined as the "outward" observable roles that men and women perform, and will be referred to as "role-structure." For example, someone may have a traditional role-attitude that women are better suited for domestic work and childcare, but have an egalitarian role-structure where each partner provides income and equally shares in domestic work and childcare (Araji; McHale & Crouter).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore whether couples who fill traditional gender-roles in their marriage can also be egalitarian (equal partners) and, if so, what their marriage looked like. How did they talk about and operationalize becoming

egalitarian? It is for this purpose that volunteer couples in happy, highly successful, self-identified great marriages were studied: first, to determine if there were any that fit this description and, if so, to learn from them about how to accomplish this type of a marriage relationship.

Qualitative research methodology was used to collect data from a national sample of volunteer couples who self-identified as having great marriages. Couples were recruited nationwide and were asked to contact either principal investigator, Dr. Linda Skogrand or Dr. John DeFrain, if they felt they had a great marriage and wanted to participate in the Great Marriage Research Study (GMRS). Information was gathered for this project through a lengthy open-ended questionnaire. The researcher on this particular study read through all the collected data and pulled out a subsample of couples who fit the criterion of (a) having a traditionally-structured marriage with (b) characteristics of an egalitarian relationship as informed by the literature. This research was exploratory and was not intended to be representative nor generalizable to any population.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research will utilize the principles of equity theory. Both exchange and equity theories look at rewards, costs, and profits to individuals involved in a relationship (an exchange). Although there are many similarities between the two theories, and equity theory is regarded as a variant of exchange theory, they are different (White & Klein, 2002). Exchange theory is more individually based in that a person seeks to minimize *their* costs and maximize *their* rewards. Individuals feel benefited and happy with high rewards and low costs (White and Klein). Equity theory is

based more on the interaction of the two parties. When *both* parties feel their benefits are fair in relation to the benefits of the other party, then the exchange is equitable. When the exchange is inequitable (either in their favor or not), they feel distress and seek to restore equity or fairness to the situation (Adam, 1965; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978) It is not just about benefiting personally, it is caring about whether the partner in the exchange, benefits fairly as well. Equity theory posits that individuals will seek their own happiness by insuring the happiness of their partner. It is believed that this theoretical framework will serve to explain and help interpret the findings from this research.

Summary Statement

In summary, this study researched the possibility of an egalitarian relationship coexisting with a traditional role-structured marriage, to learn about this particular type of marriage. Egalitarian characteristics were identified as informed by the literature. This resulted in a subsample of 28 spouses (14 couples) from the larger collected sample of 130 respondents (65 couples). Marriage stories from the subsample of 28 spouses were analyzed to discover what their marriages were like and how they talked about and operationalized an egalitarian relationship. Implications for these findings could contribute to marriage education for couples who choose to live with a traditional structure but want an egalitarian relationship. This research will also add to the knowledge base about egalitarian attitudes and traditional gender-role marriages.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There is a great deal of literature written about what promotes marital happiness and stability (Booth & Amato, 1994; Rogers, 2004). One type of marriage relationship that seems to be consistently linked to marital happiness is the trend toward more egalitarian marriages as opposed to traditional marriages (Krueger, 1985; Thorton & Young-Demarco, 2001). Therefore, a literature review of what promotes happiness in marriage is provided. This will be followed by a literature review of egalitarian marriages. Specifically, this review explores attitudes and/or beliefs as well as structure and/or behaviors that characterize egalitarian marriages as compared to traditional marriages. Attention will be given to egalitarian marriages to explore the distinction between the attitudes and beliefs as well as the structure and behaviors of these couples. This investigation addresses the possibility that couples in traditional structured marriages may benefit from an egalitarian attitude.

Marriage in the United States

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2004), by the age of 65, 96% of men and women have been married at some point in their life. While most people marry in their lifetime, staying married is a different issue, with approximately 50% of marriages ending in divorce (Teachmen et al., 2000). This high marriage rate, coupled with the 50% divorce rate, suggests a motivation for researchers to look for characteristics and traits of happy and satisfied couples (Gottman, 1994; Halford, Markman, Stanley, & Kline, 2003). Many researchers try to identify characteristics and traits of happy couples—and to teach

couples' skills—in an effort to help married couples discover ways to increase marital happiness (Gottman, 1999). A further purpose of turning research findings into marriage education is to decrease the divorce rate for couples who might benefit from learning skills needed to have a happy and successful relationship (Stanley, Markman, & Blumberg, 2000). Researchers contend that these skills can be learned, and in a recent review of marital programs which teach relationship skills, they indicated that learning positive relationship skills led to an improvement in relationship satisfaction (Halford et al.). Research that identifies positive relationship traits, therefore, would add to the body of knowledge available to help married couples have happier marriages, which in turn could decrease the rate of divorce.

Marital Happiness

As previously stated, there is a difference between marital stability and marital happiness. Marital stability refers to a couple's ability to stay together versus divorce. Marital stability is further defined as a strong commitment couples have to the marriage (Glenn, 1991; Knoester & Booth, 2000), even when one or both of the partners is/are not happy with the relationship (Ebling & Levenson, 2003). In contrast, couples who have a high degree of marital happiness are, in fact, happy with the relationship. It is possible to have a stable, but unhappy, marriage. Some researchers indicate that spouses in these marriages stay together for a variety of reasons called barriers. Barriers might consist of religious beliefs, shared children, extended family expectations, and financial issues (Knoester & Booth). A combination of both marital happiness and marital stability seems to make the strongest marriages; when happiness wanes, commitment can hold the couple

together until happier times come again (Knoester & Booth). The key word here is *can* as Knoester and Booth conclude that barriers have become less influential in holding marriages together because of changing social values, and the ability of women to work and provide for themselves and their children. Divorce does not have the social stigma it did the first half of the previous century. Thus, marital stability may be more influenced by marital happiness than perceived barriers (Knoester & Booth).

Marital happiness can have an influence on marital stability because a feeling of love for ones' partner is obviously a motivation to remain married (Glenn, 1991). Glenn contends that, even though contemporary couples include traditional vows in their weddings such as "till death do us part," they are not necessarily able to keep that vow. He suggests that it may be more realistic to say "as long as we both shall love" or "as long as no one better comes along" (Glenn, p. 265). Looking at a half century of mate preferences, researchers found an increase in the importance of marrying for love for both sexes (Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, & Larsen, 2001). Few people in the U.S. would consider marrying someone they did not love (Simpson, Campbell, & Berscheid, 1986). Unfortunately, for many, this positive marital beginning does not always lead to long-term marriage (Vanlaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). While identified barriers to divorce no longer appear to have as much influence on stability (Knoester & Booth, 2000; Previti & Amato, 2003), others suggest that feelings of love and satisfaction with the relationship have a great deal to do with marital happiness and, in turn, have an influence on marital stability (Rogers, 2004; Sanchez & Gager, 2000; Schoen, Astone, Rothert, Standish, & Kim, 2002). This research, therefore, will focus on what promotes

marital happiness for couples, since happiness rather than barriers to divorce may have more influence on a couple's success.

In continuing research for variables that correlate with increased marital happiness for couples, a few interesting trends have emerged. In a study by Amato et al. (2003) on marital quality between 1980 and 2000, trends were identified that correlated with increases in marital happiness for couples. This study involved two large national probability samples, with the first one collected in 1980 and the second one collected in 2000. The wording was identical in the surveys of both waves to compare for changes or similarities in behaviors, beliefs, and feelings toward marriage over the 20-year span. Identified trends included a significant shift toward more egalitarian marital relations. In both surveys, wives indicated they were less happy in marriage than their husbands, but the gap in reported happiness grew smaller during the 20 years. The researchers attributed this to a shift toward more egalitarian marriage relations. Upon first reading of these findings, a positive trend seems indicated, but a close look at how they assessed gender ideology shows that they assess for an egalitarian *role-structure* and reported it simply as an egalitarian marriage. This could, however, only be reporting the rise in dual-earner couples. Sample questions included, "A woman's most important task in life should be taking care of her children" and "Even though a wife works outside the home, the husband should be the main breadwinner and the wife should have responsibility for the home and children" (Amato et al., p. 7). These types of questions are used in a great deal of the literature to assess gender ideology beliefs—when they really appear to be identifying a preference for gender role-structure (Amato et al.; Frisco & Williams, 2003; Greenstein, 1996; Thorton & Young-DeMarco, 2001; Voydanoff & Donnelly, 1999).

This implies, in effect, that if you answer yes to these questions you are considered traditional and all of your responses will be reported as someone who is traditional with all that that implies (i.e., a hierarchal marriage arrangement with the husband in a position of dominance).

Several researchers have pointed out that increases in the husband's share of housework correlated with increased marital happiness for wives (Amato et al., 2003; Coltrane, 2000; Frisco & Williams, 2003; Gottman, 1994). Coltrane said it more forcefully when he suggested that husbands' helping with a greater portion of housework could be the most important variable in predicting a wife's feelings of fairness and equality in the marriage. Coltrane reviewed over 200 scholarly articles and books published on the subject of household labor between 1989 and 1999 to report this finding. This concurs with Amato et al. whose research spanning 20 years indicates that a move toward greater role-sharing and gender equality brings increased happiness to couples.

Some researchers have found that attitudes toward role expectations for men and women have a great deal of influence on a couple's marital happiness (Pina & Bengtson, 1993). In her book *Peer Marriage*, Schwartz (1994) described an egalitarian marriage as companionate with a best-friend relationship. Couples who were able to transcend the stereotypical male and female roles by sharing all roles equally reported deeper satisfaction and love (Schwartz). According to her research, most egalitarian couples were dual-earners and Schwartz concluded that a one-provider egalitarian couple was a rare occurrence. According to her, egalitarian marriages were more likely to occur when both partners were involved in paid labor. However, it should be noted that Schwartz's qualitative study used a snowball sampling technique. The researcher interviewed dual-

earner egalitarian couples and then asked if they knew anyone who had a marriage that was similar to their marriage, to recommend for the study. It is likely that many of these working couples would most likely know other working couples who had egalitarian role-structured marriages. The conclusion that a one-provider egalitarian couple was rare comes from research with a biased sampling procedure. However, the study does explore the characteristics of happy egalitarian couples and gives an in-depth look at what those types of marriages are like.

Couples who identified themselves as being egalitarian, but did not behave in a way that was consistent with an egalitarian approach, tended to be less satisfied with their marriage (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; McHale & Crouter, 1992; Schwartz, 1994). This was particularly the case for egalitarian role-attitude wives who were willing to share traditional roles, such as the provider role, but found their partner was not as willing to share homemaking and childcare roles (Greenstein, 1996; McHale & Crouter; Rabin & Shapira-Berman, 1997; White & Klein, 2002). It appears important to look at this trend toward egalitarian marriages to determine what role-attitudes and role-structures are actually present to facilitate this happy and more satisfying type of relationship. What exactly is an egalitarian marriage and how does it differ from a traditional marriage?

Egalitarian and Traditional Marriages

Demographics

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005) reported finding in 2004 that 61% of married couples with children under the age of 18 years were dual-earner couples, which is part of an egalitarian role-structure. This represented 15,257,000 married couples.

Over 31% of families headed by married couples with children under the age of 18 had a family structure where only the father was employed, suggesting a more traditional role-structure. This latter group, although smaller than the former group, represented 7,867,000 couples in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of married couples with children under 18 where only the father is employed is growing, while the number of dual-earner married couples with children under 18 is declining. The 2004 reported numbers for father-only-provider was 3.6% higher than in 2000. Clearly, dual-earner couples are more prevalent than father-only-provider couples, but the statistics suggest the possibility of more families returning to a traditional role-structured marriage (Bureau of Labor Statistics). This presents another reason to study this type of a marriage structure.

Definitions of Egalitarian and Traditional Marriages

According to the literature, an egalitarian marriage is one in which both partners share power in decision-making and family roles are divided, such as childcare, housework and paid labor. This means that roles are not divided based on gender (Beere et al., 1984; Gilbert, 1993; Hass, 1980; Schwartz, 1994). Other researchers add that friendship and personal happiness are considered important aspects of an egalitarian marriage (Pollock et al., 1990; Schwartz; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1995). Some researchers seemingly base their egalitarian definitions on role-structure only (Gilbert; Haas). Other researchers explain the importance of the role-attitude of each spouse. An egalitarian role-attitude must be congruent with the egalitarian role-structure of the marriage to promote greater marital happiness (Greenstein, 1996; MacDermid, Huston, & McHale, 1990; McHale & Crouter, 1992; Perry-Jenkins & Crouter, 1990; Roehling &

Bultman, 2002; Schwartz). A common thread through many of these egalitarian definitions is the importance of the attitude of each spouse toward family roles. Perhaps it is more important than the role-structure of the marriage and presents the possibility that role-attitude can exist independent of role-structure.

Schwartz (1994) adds, from her in-depth qualitative study of egalitarian couples, that these couples based their marriage on a mix of equality and equity, meaning that they both filled some of the family roles and what they did felt fair. She goes on to add that it is not just a 50/50 proposition these egalitarian couples were going for, but their combined efforts were in the "service of an intimate and deeply collaborative marriage . . . in order to produce profound intimacy and mutual respect" (Schwartz, p. 2). In other words, because spouses felt sufficiently rewarded and happy with the marriage relationship, they did not seem to keep track of "who did what." Rather, it was more important that they collaborated to fill the needs of the family. These couples "believed" that each partner had equal status and importance in the relationship and there was no hidden hierarchal order (Schwartz). This description of the benefits or rewards of an egalitarian relationship appear to be independent from the egalitarian role-structure that Schwartz says is necessary, to have an egalitarian relationship.

In contrast, a traditional marriage is one in which spouses fill roles based on gender. A traditional marriage relationship falls within a functionalist framework which suggests that a family functions best when the husband takes on the role of provider and the wife takes on the role of homemaker and caretaker of the children (Brennan et al., 2001). Complementarity and gender-role specialization are considered key components of a traditional marriage, with economic resources often providing the basis for marital

power (Amato et al., 2003; Brehm et al., 2002; Pina & Bengtson, 1993; Schwartz, 1994). In a traditional marriage, the husband typically has more power and makes the important decisions (Brehm et al.; Schwartz; Thatcher, 1998; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1995). In addition, according to Wallerstein and Blakeslee a key component of a traditional marriage is the father's main role in the family and his main emphasis in life is providing adequately for his family. A great deal of his connection to his children is through his wife. The traditional men in Wallerstein and Blakeslee's qualitative study admitted they paid a price of reduced family time, by not being as close to their children as they would have liked to be. The traditional role-structure, then, is where husbands and wives fill distinctly separate family roles based on the sex of the spouse. This structure generally encourages a hierarchal relationship (Brehm et al; Schwartz). Before the 1960s, most people accepted traditional gender-roles in a marriage without question (Pyke & Coltrane, 1996).

Development of Egalitarian Marriages

A consistent trend since the rise of feminism in the 20th century has been the call for equality between the sexes (White & Klein, 2002). Marriage researchers have found that a shift toward shared family roles and equality in family life has a positive influence on couples' marital happiness (Amato et al., 2003; McHale & Crouter, 1992; Pina & Bengtson, 1993; Schwartz, 1994). Much of the "call for equality" in the private lives of couples has to do with each contributing equally to all aspects of family life (Gilbert, 1993; Hass, 1980; Sanchez & Gager, 2000; Schwartz). The feminist movement has facilitated redefining gender roles and giving couples flexible ways to interact (Rabin & Shapira-Berman, 1997). For instance, the traditional family structure with the husband in

the provider role and the wife in the role of homemaker began to change as women left home for the workplace (McHale & Crouter). Husbands typically did not help very much with childcare or housework in the traditional family structure (Gottman, 1999; Hochschild, 1989; Pyke & Coltrane, 1996; Ward, 1993). With wives' entry into the paid labor force, husbands were expected to increase their involvement in chores that were traditionally considered a woman's domain. This led to greater distress in many marriages when a working wife, helping with the provider role, expected her husband to now share the domestic work and childcare roles (Hochschild; Pina & Bengtson; Sanchez & Gager; Shelton & Daphne, 1996). Some researchers blame this social restructuring for the large increase in divorces in the 1960s and 1970s (Schwartz; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001) as couples struggled to accommodate these changes in traditional roles (Rabin & Shapira-Berman).

Sixty-one percent of married couples with children are currently in dual-earner families, indicating that the structural part of an egalitarian marriage is prevalent in our society (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). It needs to be understood that an egalitarian role-attitude—and the characteristics that attitude produces—are not necessarily present in all egalitarian role-structure marriages (Greenstein, 1996; McHale & Crouter, 1992). This means that all dual-earner couples are not necessarily egalitarian.

After a half-century of developing greater equality for women in our society, there has been a progression to the point where most couples who marry today espouse an egalitarian ideology (Pollock et al., 1990). In other words, it is culturally accepted for couples to marry planning to share family roles equally as opposed to opting for gender-role specialization. In fact, it would appear politically incorrect to comment, with today's

marriage views, that a woman should stay home and tend children and domestic duties, and the husband should be the sole provider (Pollock et al.). While talk of gender equality became more prevalent after the 1970s, actually achieving marital equality has been much more difficult (Brehm et al., 2002; Schwartz, 1994). Thus, after reviewing how egalitarian marriages developed in our society and became more accepted and aspired to, it appears that gender equality, in family life, may still be more talk than practice (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Booth & Amato, 1994; Milkie & Peltola, 1999; Schwartz).

Characteristics of Egalitarian Marriages

Role-sharing. There are some distinct differences between egalitarian and traditional marriages in terms of who fills what roles in the family. Much of the literature says an egalitarian marriage relationship typically shares family roles and decision-making equally (Gilbert, 1993; Hass, 1980; Schwartz, 1994; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1995). In contrast, a traditional marriage relationship generally divides family roles by sex. Hass questioned egalitarian couples, who shared the provider, domestic, handyman, kinship, childcare, and decision-making roles, about their motivation for doing so. She found that most couples ended up with such an arrangement for practical reasons rather than due to any ideological commitment to feminism. She also found that spouses in egalitarian marriages sometimes did not share roles equally, but the criterion for who did perform a family role was not based on sex. Instead, it was based on who was available and who was able and willing to fill a particular family role (Hass).

Gilbert (1993) in her book, *Two Careers, One Family*, outlines two assumptions that must be present for a couple to be viewed as egalitarian. Partners must both contribute economically to the family and the partners' relationship must be characterized

by role-sharing and mutuality that is free from stereotyped gender-roles. It also includes having an equal partnership in all aspects of the relationship with no hierarchal arrangements (Gilbert).

Marriage can be looked at from two different perspectives, an “outsider’s” or “insider’s” approach. An “outsider’s” approach is someone who observes a marriage from the outside looking in to the marriage. They can only see what is visible—the structure. An “insider’s” approach studies couples up close to understand the dynamics of their relationship and then report what is found—the attitudes and feelings. Both Gilbert and Hass seem to have taken an “outsider’s” approach in defining an egalitarian marriage. They define, in their opinion, what must be structurally present for a couple to be egalitarian. In contrast, other researchers (Schwartz, 1994; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1995) described an egalitarian marriage from an “insider’s” point of view and found relational characteristics evidenced in an egalitarian relationship.

Schwartz’s (1994) exploratory study allowed her to uncover attitudes and characteristics present in an egalitarian relationship and her contribution was in helping others understand the inside dynamics of egalitarian relationships. However, the researcher purposefully recruited couples who did not perform traditional gender roles, and therefore cannot report—as was reported—that traditional role-structured marriages are not likely to be egalitarian, because they were not included in the study. Schwartz does admit to having three couples in the study where the husband only filled the provider role, but does not give the criteria for allowing them to participate. Despite those limitations, Schwartz contributes a great deal to our understanding of relational aspects present in egalitarian marriages. After in-depth interviews with each of the married

couples in her study, four trends emerged: (a) egalitarian couples in her study shared approximately a sixty-forty split in household duties and childcare; (b) they believed, and acted accordingly, that each person had equal influence over important and disputed decisions; (c) both spouses felt they had equal control over the family budget and discretionary funds; and (d) each partner's work was given equal weight in the couple's life plans (Schwartz). These happy couples, who transcended talking about equality into "doing" equality, were likely to describe their relationship as "unique." An overarching theme to her findings was the ability of these couples to build an intimate and deeply satisfying best friend relationship which she states is the "hallmark" of an egalitarian relationship (Schwartz).

Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1995) also did an in-depth qualitative study of happy marriages with similar methodological procedures as this current research project. The researchers recruited couples who self-identified being happily married. Couples were not paid for participating and most indicated they were happy to share with others how they had created their happy marriage. Couples participating were married (or remarried) with at least one child. Fifty couples from a wide area surrounding the University of California at Berkeley were interviewed and categorized into one of five different marriage types. The two types relevant to this study were the categories of a traditional marriage and a companionate (egalitarian) marriage. Their findings supported findings by Schwartz that egalitarian couples had found a new "uncharted" way of relating to each other in a marriage relationship and "at the core of a companionate marriage is friendship and trust and the belief that both partners have equal responsibility in all domains of the marriage" (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, p. 155). Her findings indicate that those who share

roles—specifically the provider role—and are happily married have found themselves to be equal partners and best friends. She equates dual-earners as egalitarian or, her word for it, “companionate.” What was most interesting in Wallerstein and Blakeslee’s study was their portrayal of happy traditional marriages. They described happy traditional marriages as those where spouses filled separate roles in the marriage (provider husband/homemaker wife), with the husband as the dominant partner and his provider role being central to his life. They also reported the characteristics of this type of marriage and how couples had found a way to be happy with a husband-dominant relationship. Interestingly, when Wallerstein interviewed a younger traditional couple (she categorized traditional based solely on structure) it was called the “new” way of doing a traditional marriage and reported the following, “power was negotiated in different ways . . . [A married couple] like the partners in companionate marriage, shared equally in the power and decision-making. They were equals and soul mates” (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, p. 236). Their findings support the idea that traditional role-structured marriages can have an egalitarian role-attitude that encourages a best friend relationship and treatment of each other as equal partners—despite filling separate roles.

Power in marriage. Power, control, and decision-making are areas that have been studied extensively by researchers since they have such an influence on feelings of equality in a relationship (Brehm et al., 2002; Gottman, 1999; Komter, 1989; Madden, 1987; Rosenbluth, Steil, & Whitcomb, 1998; Tichenor, 1999). In a traditional marriage, the provider typically has more decision-making power (Blumberg & Coleman, 1989; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1995). Another researcher, however, asserts that it is not income or job status that determines power, but gender (Tichenor). Methodological

differences and differing conceptualizations of power could account for the different results. In a study of dual-earner couples in which the wife had a higher job status and/or earned more than her husband, she did not, in general, gain greater power in the marriage (Tichenor). This conclusion was also drawn by other researchers who asserted that a husband's attitude toward gender roles determined how he viewed his wife's greater income (Brennan et al., 2001). Similarly, other researchers concluded that a wife's egalitarian attitude is not enough to make a relationship equal in terms of decision-making; it also requires a husband's egalitarian attitude to positively influence shared power and decision-making (Greenstein, 1996; Rabin & Shapira-Berman, 1997).

An imbalance in power can occur in a marriage relationship when one spouse makes unilateral decisions and has more influence than the partner in decisions pertaining to family life. In her oft-cited study on the hidden power in marriage, Komter (1989) concludes that attitudes about gender, influence how power is enacted in the marital dyad. According to Komter, manifest, latent, and invisible powers are three types of hidden power in the marriage relationship. Manifest power is defined as outwardly visible attempts to control change or conflicts. Latent power is described as a more invisible attempt to control change or conflicts. For example, the spouse with less power refrains from bringing up issues or asking for change for fear of a negative reaction (Komter). Invisible power is defined as ingrained gender-role beliefs where the husband is assumed to have more power (Komter). The power is invisible because couples are not always aware they hold these power beliefs. All three kinds of power are based on the assumption that one of the spouses has more power than the other, an idea not congruent with a marriage based on equality (Komter).

Power and control by either spouse are characteristics that Gottman (1999) also identified as harmful to a marriage. After observing over a hundred couples discussing a disagreement, he identified a recurring trend where one spouse tried to control one's partner and this control generally came from the husband (Gottman). This facet to a relationship had such an impact on marital happiness that Gottman identified it as one of his "seven principles" needed for a successful and happy relationship. He stated this desire to try to control one's partner as the opposite of letting your partner influence you (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Gottman & Notarius, 2000). "When a man is not willing to share power with his partner, there is an 81 percent chance that his marriage will self-destruct" (Gottman, p. 100). He concludes that allowing your partner to influence you is really about honoring and respecting your partner. Simply stated, men (or women) who accept influence or share power with their wife (or husband), find themselves happily married (Gottman; Gottman et al.; Gottman & Nortarius).

Equity and equality. People in general may speak about equity and equality as if they are the same, but they are not. As researchers look at what characteristics correlate with higher scores on a marital satisfaction scale, equity may have more to do with higher scores than equality (Sanchez & Gager, 2000). In order to clarify the concepts of equity and equality, the following explanation from an educational model was used (Plihal, Ernst, & Rehm, 1986) and may be helpful when teaching marriage education as a way to clarify the difference between these two concepts. The concept of equality refers to being the same or identical (Plihal et al.). When this concept of sameness is applied to the education of a student, some assumptions are made. It is assumed that all students are the same and all come with the same abilities (Plihal et al.). If they all receive the same

instruction, they should all achieve the same desired outcomes. In contrast, equity means justice and fairness. In regard to the students in this educational model, some of the students may, in fact, be different. They may learn in different ways and at different rates. To teach them all in the same identical way would not be fair. It would be equitable to treat them unequally. Some may require more help to understand concepts and some may grasp concepts quickly. In the case where you have unequal learning abilities, "equal treatment would be inequitable" (Plihal et al., p. 6). This explanation clarifies that the *same* is not necessarily equitable or fair. This concept applies to this study in that researchers are saying the only way to be equal in a marriage is if you fill the same roles in a marriage (Gilbert, 1993; Hass, 1980; Schwartz, 1994). While performing the same roles can help couples feel that they are equal partners, it cannot be a forgone conclusion that filling separate roles will keep them from being equal partners.

In a marriage relationship, researchers have discovered that the objective view of equality, sharing identical tasks, does not necessarily mean the couple will feel they are equal in their relationship (Schwartz, 1994; Tichenor, 1999). If you can share roles equally and still not feel like equal partners, perhaps the converse is true that you can fill different roles and feel like equal partners. There may be something more important than sharing roles equally. Madden (1987) found that couples rated themselves higher on a marital happiness scale when they had perceived task control. In other words, they did not feel forced to do a particular task. This meant that it did not matter who actually performed a household task as long as each spouse felt that he/she had control over whether or not they performed a particular task. So not feeling *forced* to perform some

task produced feelings of being equal. Feeling equal did not always mean doing everything 50/50.

Larson, Hammond, and Harper (1998) described equity in a marriage as perceived balance. Even though one partner may feel that he/she is contributing more to the relationship than his or her partner, he or she may perceive the relationship as equitable as long as each feels they are getting a fair benefit from the marriage (Larson et al.). Larson et al. goes on to say that couples in an inequitable relationship will have negative feelings and a loss of intimacy "because the basic feeling of fairness, or perception that one's spouse will treat one fairly, is missing" (p. 491). Equity or fairness requires a continual effort from both partners to respect each other and work together to find solutions (Karpel, 1994).

Equity and equality have different meanings. Does one or the other have more influence on marital happiness? To answer this question a group of self-described, dual-career egalitarians were asked if they felt things would be unfair in a marriage if one of the partners did most of the household and child care tasks (Rosenbluth et al., 1998). Both male and female respondents (64%) said "no, such a marriage is not necessarily unequal, that the level of equality is determined by each spouse's career demands, overall contributions to the marriage, and personal choices" (Rosenbluth et al., p. 233). Fair reciprocity was by far the most important measurement of equality in this sample. The researchers conclude that a spouse's "need for emotional sustenance within the family may be better served by flexibility than by the careful division of domestic responsibilities" (Rosenbluth et al., p. 242). Reciprocity or a mutual exchange of privileges was more important to this sample than equality with its assumption of 50/50

sharing. It seems that, while equality and equity are different and both can add to the quality of a marriage, equity—the feeling of fairness—is more critical to marital happiness than equality. In the case of a traditional role-structured marriage where spouses do not share the “same” roles equally, equity or the feeling that they are being treated fairly would be a critical part of their ability to be egalitarian.

The Assessment of Traditionalism and Egalitarianism

Research indicates that an individual's attitude and beliefs about what are appropriate roles for each gender can affect marital happiness (Amato et al., 2003; McHale & Crouter, 1992). It is important to understand how these constructs are measured since researchers rely on them to assess gender ideology (Acock & Edwards, 1982; Beere, 1990; Beere et al., 1984; Brennan et al., 2001; Pyke & Coltrane, 1996; Rogers, 2004). Assessing the attitudes of men and woman, particularly in regard to gender ideology, has been a practice for some time (Shaw, 1997) in helping researchers to categorize people.

Specific wording of the gender ideology measures have changed over the years but the underlying constructs have a common theme. This underlying construct is either people believe that family positions, activities, and roles are gender-specific, or they believe that family positions, activities, and roles can be filled by either sex and should not be determined by the sex of the individual (Beere et al., 1984). An individual's composite score on a “gender attitude” measure, will place them at either end or somewhere in between on a continuum with traditionalism and egalitarianism on opposite ends. According to these scale constructs, a traditionalist is someone who is likely to

believe that men should do paid work and have more power in decision-making and women should stay home and care for the household and children. According to Wallerstein and Blakeslee's description of "new" traditional marriages, this was not always true. However, power and domination, with a wife being subservient to her husband, were commonly reported to be part of a traditional marriage (Booth & Amato, 1994; Schwartz, 1994). In contrast, an egalitarian is someone who believes that women should have the same opportunities for work and career as men, and household tasks and childcare should be divided evenly between men and women in a family (Blair & Johnson, 1992; Pyke & Coltrane, 1996; Rabin & Shapira-Berman, 1997; Shaw, 1997; Thorton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). Once again, this measure is looking more at the structure of a relationship to determine if it is egalitarian or not.

Most of the measures used (Amato et al., 2003; Frisco & Williams, 2003; Greenstein, 1996; Thorton & Young-DeMarco, 2001; Voydanoff & Donnelly, 1999) seemingly make it clear that the two measured constructs of traditionalism and egalitarianism are mutually exclusive categories. The measures do not provide a possible category for the individual or couple to combine the following two attitudes: (a) that men and women are equal partners with equity and fairness essential to a relationship with no hidden hierarchal order, and (b) that it is preferable for a wife to engage exclusively in homemaking and childcare with the husband as sole provider. According to the gender ideology measures, there is no possibility for the egalitarian role-attitude (a above) to exist with the described traditional role-structure (b above). It appears possible that the current ways of measuring gender ideology for research purposes is outdated. Perhaps it

is possible that there are more dimensions to traditionalism and egalitarianism than a simple linear model would suggest.

There are, in fact, some studies that separately assessed role-attitude and role-structure indicating the possibility of a two-dimensional model (Araji, 1977; Lye & Biblarz, 1993; McHale & Crouter, 1992; Perry-Jenkins & Crouter, 1990; Roehling & Bultman, 2002). Although these studies labeled their categories as beliefs and behaviors, the following categories are used for consistency in this study. These studies separated traditional ideology and egalitarian ideology into the following four categories: (1) traditional role-attitude, (2) traditional role-structure, (3) egalitarian role-attitude, and (4) egalitarian role-structure. Dividing traditionalism and egalitarianism into four separate groups opens the possibility of looking at different combinations existing within the individual and between marital partners. For example, one spouse may have both a traditional role-attitude and an egalitarian role-structure and this may cause conflict within that spouse. A combination between spouses might be where the wife has an egalitarian attitude and her husband has a traditional attitude. The possibility exists for many different combinations and it would be helpful to know, for marriage education, which combinations correlate with higher marital happiness.

Incongruence Between Gender Role-Attitudes and Gender Role-Structure

Studies separating gender role-attitude from gender-role-structure have reported some interesting findings. McHale and Crouter (1992) separated role-attitude from actual role-structure and tested for marital satisfaction when incongruencies exist within the individual and between spouses. The researchers hypothesized that wives who hold an

egalitarian attitude, yet fill traditional roles, are at risk for marital distress, as are husbands who hold traditional attitudes but fill egalitarian roles. McHale and Crouter's findings supported their hypotheses. Marital distress, moreover, is likely to occur when spouses differ in their ideological beliefs such as when the husband holds a traditional attitude and the wife an egalitarian attitude. The findings suggest that individuals who do not actually live what they believe and value may experience greater unhappiness in their marriage. Support for this idea also comes from other authors who find that couples with similar gender role attitudes and gender role behaviors report greater marital satisfaction (Roehling & Bultman, 2002). Researchers looking at the influence of a wife's higher earnings on the marital satisfaction of her husband found the moderating variable to be the husband's attitude about the provider role. The husband's role-attitude actually influenced his marital satisfaction, not whether his wife earned more income than he earned (Brennan et al., 2001).

Separating traditional and egalitarian ideology into four separate categories opens the following possibilities: What if both spouses have an egalitarian role-attitude combined with a traditional role-structure? Are there couples with high marital happiness who have succeeded with this combination? What do their marriages look like? The purpose of this research project is to locate and study the characteristics and beliefs of happy and satisfied married couples in self-described "great marriages" from around the United States. Since Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1995) and Schwartz (1994) indicated that there are some traditional role-structured couples who are egalitarian, we expected to find some in our nationally recruited sample. The purpose was to collect a group of this

particular type of marriage and study them to understand the characteristics inherent in their egalitarian relationship.

Summary

Marriage is still a popular institution in the United States with 96% of individuals reporting at the age of 65 that they have been married at some point in their life (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). This high lifetime marriage rate coupled with the continuing 50% divorce rate suggests a reason to study happy and satisfied couples to find out how they succeed at having great marriages (Gottman, 1994; Halford et al., 2003). This information will be used in an educational effort to help others succeed at marriage.

Researchers are finding that marital happiness has a great deal of influence on marital stability. A trend in marriage research correlates higher marital satisfaction with those in egalitarian marriages (Amato et al., 2003; Gottman, 1999; Larson et al., 1998; Madden, 1987; Sanchez & Gager, 2000). The literature explains that an egalitarian marriage is different from a traditional marriage in the areas such as sharing family roles, power, and decision-making in the relationship, and in feelings of equity and equality between spouses (Gilbert, 1993; Hass, 1980; Schwartz, 1994; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1995). In assessing individuals' gender-role ideology, most gender ideology measures place egalitarianism and traditionalism on opposite ends of a continuum in mutually exclusive categories, as illustrated:

Traditional-----Egalitarian

According to most of the literature, individuals can fall at either end, or somewhere in between on this continuum, but the couples with the most happiness are toward the

egalitarian end of the continuum (Amato et al.; Gottman; Larson et al.; Madden; Sanchez & Gager). Most researchers have the assumption that the egalitarian end has the prerequisite that women must be involved in paid labor. According to Gilbert, this condition is necessary for equality to exist in a marriage. Hass and Schwartz seem to support this view as well. There are, however, some studies that support separating role-attitude and role-structure (Lye & Biblarz, 1993; McHale & Crouter, 1992; Perry-Jenkins & Crouter, 1990; Roehling & Bultman, 2002). These studies have indicated that incongruence within the individual and between couples concerning role-attitude and role-structure causes higher marital distress. Therefore, could couples who self-identify having a highly successful, happy, great marriage *both* share an egalitarian role-attitude with a traditional role-structure? The basis of this research is that the underlying constructs of many of the gender ideology measures may be flawed when correlating happiness with egalitarian marriages that are only identified through their role-structure. Therefore, with identified traits and characteristics of egalitarian marriages, this research looks at happy and satisfied couples in great marriages who have a traditional role-structure to see if these egalitarian traits are present.

The findings from this study will lead to a clearer understanding of the following theme-related questions: "Can an egalitarian relationship coexist with a traditional role-structured marriage? If so, what characteristics are present to indicate it is egalitarian? Particular attention will be paid to how these couples talk about issues of power and decision-making and how they deal with money issues.

Thus, the research questions investigated in this study:

1. How do couples in self-identified great marriages, with a traditional structure and egalitarian attitude, talk about their marriage?
2. How do couples in self-identified great marriages, with a traditional structure and egalitarian attitude, talk about shared power, money issues, and decision-making?
3. How do couples in self-identified great marriages, with a traditional structure, operationalize an egalitarian relationship?

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Introduction

This study used qualitative methods to examine the experiences of couples in highly successful marriages, where both husband and wife self-identified as having a "great marriage." Participants who volunteered were told that the researchers wanted to learn about their marital successes and use this information to benefit other couples through education.

In addition to research that suggests couples in egalitarian marriages assess themselves higher on measures of marital happiness, a few qualitative studies identified egalitarian relationships existing with a traditional-role-structured marriage (Schwartz, 1994; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1995). Knowing that some marriages with this combination existed, the goal of this study was to collect several of these types of marriages and study them as a group. It was hoped that many of the couples volunteering for this study would have an egalitarian marriage and that some of them would have a traditional role-structure marriage as well. This proved to be the case.

The data used for this research study consisted of a subsample of couples from the Great Marriage Research Study (GMRS). It included those who indicated living a traditional structured lifestyle with the husband as sole provider and wife as primary caretaker of the children and home. In addition, it only included those who indicated they shared power and decision-making in their relationship and considered themselves equal partners with no hierarchal arrangement.

Design

This qualitative study utilized a strength-based framework with the objective of studying couples who have highly successful, strong, satisfying, and happy marriage relationships. The family strengths perspective focuses on studying the strengths or positive qualities of successful families, rather than focusing on why some families fail (Olsen & DeFrain, 2006). The idea is that successful families, or couples, could serve as models for others who want to succeed. Therefore, we consider these couples to be the experts on having great marriages and this research study is a way to learn from them. Since we did not have a great deal of information about marriages with an egalitarian relationships and a traditional role-structure, using a qualitative research approach to learn about them was appropriate. This type of research is exploratory by design and facilitated learning about this type of marriage. Using a qualitative approach allowed couples the freedom to describe their great marriages and in turn allowed the researchers to look for common themes expressed by these couples.

While this study drew participants from across the United States, the sample is not intended to be representative in nature, using randomly selected couples, or to be generalized to all married couples. Instead, the goal is to study couples from around the country who are self-selected because they felt they had highly successful, great marriages and were willing to tell their story. The resulting information from this research will contribute to the literature about what characteristics are evident in strong and happy marriages and ultimately contribute to effective marriage education.

Procedures

Two principal investigators, Dr. Linda Skogrand from Utah State University and Dr. John DeFrain from the University of Nebraska initiated the GMRS to study couples in happy marriages. Couples were recruited for the GMRS using a recruitment procedure previously used for other strength-based family research projects (Stinnett, Sanders, & DeFrain, 1981). Lists of newspapers in all 50 states were obtained from the *Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media* (Fischer, 1998). Efforts were made to send letters to small and large newspapers targeting rural and urban communities throughout the United States (Appendix A). Two hundred fourteen newspapers were contacted in 23 different states. The letter invited editors, who were willing, to publish information in their newspapers' family life sections about the GMRS. A sample press release (Appendix B) was included with the letter, which invited couples to volunteer for the study. No cash remunerations were offered. When printed in a newspaper, the request for volunteers explained that researchers were seeking to recruit couples nationwide who were willing to tell their stories of how they created strong, satisfying, happy, "great marriages." Contact information was included for further information about the research.

In addition to the main recruitment method explained above, a family strengths website at the University of Nebraska advertised the research. This website is located at <http://unlforfamilies.unl.edu>. The website provides resources to strengthen the family and provides reports on other research also gathered from a strength-based perspective. The website invited couples who felt they had a great marriage to answer the questionnaire online. In addition, flyers were distributed through personal contacts, word of mouth, and e-mails to people who could "get the word out" to potential volunteers. In response to

these recruitment efforts, requests to participate were received from over 150 couples located in 19 different states. Couples requesting to participate were sent a two-page consent letter (Appendix C) which further explained the purpose of the study and how the findings would be used. Along with the consent letter, couples received a copy of the questionnaire (Appendix D) with a postage-paid, self-addressed envelope to return the completed questionnaire. The study was designed to maintain the anonymity of participants who returned questionnaires. Without return addresses and in many cases without postmarks as well, we could not determine where many of the participants lived. Sixty-five completed questionnaires were received.

The Institutional Review Board at Utah State University and at the University of Nebraska has approved this research project. Approval for this specific project to look at egalitarian/traditional role-structured couples—using a subsample of the GMRS—was also obtained from the Institutional Review Board at Utah State University (Appendix E).

Sample

The couples included in this study were taken from the larger pool of couples who volunteered to participate in the GMRS. There were no age limits or number of years that respondents had to be married to qualify for inclusion in the larger study. Out of the 65 completed questionnaires, 16 couples had a traditional role-structured marriage. This was indicated in the demographic section when the husband and wife marked that all of the family income (at least the majority of it) came from the husband, with the wife identified as homemaker. Of those 16 happy couples, 14 couples indicated they felt they were equal partners and there were no hierarchal arrangement in their marriage. The other

two couples, although happy and satisfied with their marriage, indicated that the husband was the head of the house and had right of final say, and this did not fit the criteria for inclusion in this study.

The 28 participants in the subsample ranged in age from 25 to 81 years of age with the mean age of 58 years. Years of marriage ranged from 3 to 54 years with mean years married at 32 years. Educational levels attained, ranged from high school graduate to Ph.D., with "some college" as the modal class and a master's degree the next most common educational level, indicating a highly educated sample. The number of times participants were married ranged from one to three times, with the modal class being married only once. Although religious affiliation was not requested on the questionnaire, most couples identified having some religious affiliation representing several different religious denominations. Two couples indicated a personal spirituality without being affiliated with any religious organization. All couples were raising, or had raised, one or more children, and participants were all European American.

Instrument

The data collection instrument was a 31-page, 123-item questionnaire (Appendix D) divided into three sections. Section one collects demographic information, section two is the qualitative part of the questionnaire and is the longest of the three sections, while the third section is a quantitative marital strengths inventory. Only data collected from section one and two were used for this research project.

The first section consisted of eleven questions requesting demographic information. Among other questions, the participants were asked to identify if they were

a dual-earner couple, a husband-provider couple, or a wife-provider couple. In addition, participants were asked about family size and current ages of any children. This information was used to identify couples with at least one child and to determine if the majority of their life was spent with a husband-provider/wife-homemaker structure.

Section two of the questionnaire had 46 open-ended questions to give couples an opportunity to tell their marriage story. An example of one question with several parts is: "What were the qualities that attracted you to your mate? Are these qualities still important to you today, or has your thinking changed on all this?" There are several parts to most questions in order to stimulate participants' thinking about an issue. This open-ended question section provided an in-depth understanding of the perspectives and beliefs held by the participants.

This second section was particularly important to this research project in that it included questions to identify how couples divided power in their marriage, how they managed conflict, and who made the decisions for the family. For example, question 37 asks, "How is power divided up in your marriage? Question 28 asks them to describe communication patterns in their marriage. It goes on to ask, "When you have a conflict over some issue, how is it usually resolved? Please give some examples. Question 38 asks couples to talk about money, typically an area where many couples engage in power struggles when deciding how it will be spent. This question asks, "Disagreements over money are perhaps the most common type of disagreements couples have. How do you manage money? How do you deal with debt? Who is in charge? What conflicts do you have over money, if any, and how do you resolve them? A couples' response to these types of questions helped to identify if they operated as equal partners or if they had a

more traditional hierarchal arrangement to their marriage. Couples who indicated they worked together as equal partners with equal influence over decisions were included in the study.

All questions on the instrument had a separate place for the husband and wife to respond separately, allowing couple data to be collected. The questions included in the questionnaire were informed by marriage literature, but open-ended enough to allow participants to tell their marriage story in their own way and not be bound by existing research.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using a procedure described by Bogdan and Biklen (1982, 2003). After identifying the couple data, which fit the criteria for this study, each couple was assigned a number (1-14) and referred to in the data as husband 1 or wife 7, etc. Quotes in the findings will also use such references.

Analysis began by becoming immersed in reading through the qualitative section of the questionnaire several times in undisturbed blocks of time (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; 2003). This was to get a general idea of what the research subjects were saying. Next, the author identified words, phases, and examples in the data that addressed the research questions (Bogdan & Biklen). For example, data concerning how they talked about their marriage relationship, how they talked about power and influence, and how they handled money, were some of the identified pieces of the data that addressed the research questions (i.e., categories). Specific focus was given to words like consensus, compromise, united, sharing, togetherness, and partnership as well as how couples used

those expressions. In addition, stories from the couples were used to further explain and clarify how they operationalized the identified concepts in answer to the research questions. This part of the process helped to articulate the coding categories that corresponded to the research questions. The three major coding categories addressed the three research questions.

Determining which data accurately addressed each of the three research questions was the next step in the process. One of the principle investigators and another graduate student who is familiar with qualitative data analysis joined the analysis process. Each of the three researchers looked at a select sample of the data and became immersed in reading and rereading it. The three researchers independently coded data, which they felt, addressed the research question. The coding categories were then shared among the researchers and differences were identified. Where there were differences, they went back to the data to help clarify and come to a consensus about how the data answered the research questions.

The author clarified and defined the coding categories by going back to the literature that talked about egalitarian relationships. This helped to further identify relevant concepts that were discussed by the couples and code them into the correct categories. For example, phrases from the literature that mentioned subtle concepts such as: talk about anything, intense companionship, profound intimacy, mutual respect, commitment to the marriage, selflessness, respect for each other, acceptance of each other, etc., helped to further clarify the coding categories which, as previously stated, were based on the research questions. The principle investigator and the author of this

study then independently coded a small sample to see if the categories accurately addressed the research questions. It was determined that they did.

Not all of the data from each 31-page questionnaire were used. For example, items asking about couples' family members and where they lived, had no relevance to this research project. The data used for this study represented 45 single-spaced pages.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The current chapter presents findings from the qualitative analysis of 14 couples who were identified as having a traditionally structured marriage with characteristics of an egalitarian relationship. A rich narrative from 28 different voices takes us inside warm and loving marriage relationships where both spouses self-identified as having a great marriage. Not all couples reported how much time it required for them to complete the questionnaire, but those who did indicated that it took them six hours each to complete the questions. After reading through the qualitative data, it became evident that a great deal of time and effort was required for each couple to tell us about their great marriage. This gave us an intimate and in-depth look at how each husband and wife felt about his or her marriage.

The purpose of this research project was to identify the characteristics of egalitarian marriages and investigate if these characteristics could be found in marriages with a traditional structure. The research questions were ordered to present the findings from (a) more overarching ideas about their marriage to (b) how they specifically talked about key defining areas (i.e., shared power, money issues, and decision-making) and included (c) examples of how they actually operationalized equality in their marriages. The answers to these three research questions and an unanticipated finding will be reported using the participants' own words.

Research Question One: How Do Couples Talk About
Their Marriage?

As the data were analyzed for this research question, three themes became evident. First, couples felt that their marriage relationships were particularly rare or special and different from other marriages they observed. Second, all of the couples in the study indicated that their spouse was their best friend, someone with whom they could confide about any and all issues in their life. Many indicated their spouse was their soul mate. Spouses had a great deal in common with their partner and shared fun experiences which facilitated this friendship. Third, couples expressed an attitude that the "marriage wants" were more important than "personal wants." In other words, the marriage relationship took precedence over individual needs and desires. Each partner getting what they wanted was not as important as making sure the spouse was happy. In this way, spouses' felt they *were* getting what they wanted, an intimate and collaborative relationship with a partner. They not only wanted to be happy themselves, but they were invested in the idea that they wanted their partner to be happy as well. One husband said it well, "If she's happy, I'm happy" (Husband 13).

Described Their Marriage as Special or Rare

Most felt that their marriage relationship was particularly special, and even rare, as they described with enthusiasm why they felt they had a great marriage. Most shared the sentiments of one wife who said, "I am proud of our marriage" (Wife 5). Couples felt they had achieved something out of the ordinary, as expressed by this husband:

Perfect marriage, the best and happiest of any of the several hundred marriages we have observed. Although our personalities are "night and day" different, our

compatibility is amazing Our mutual ESP amazes and delights us and our love is total, mutual, and complete. (Husband 3)

Many couples were not shy in explaining just how great their marriage was. Although the following three spouses did not see each other's answers, it appears they were trying to outdo each other as they described their marriages with "our marriage is indeed great," "better than great," and "greatest!"

Our marriage is indeed great, special, rare, especially close and the very best thing that ever happened to me! We have been married 36 years, our first and only marriage, and I believe that it has been the ideal way for me to go through life. (Husband 14)

Our marriage is better than great. It is rare, in many respects Being human, we each have shortcomings (or at least I do), but I would be hard-pressed to think of any for my wife. She is such a dear that displeasing her or disappointing her in any way is something that I could hardly bear to do. (Husband 13)

Maybe "greatest!" I often wish other couples could be as happy as we are. After 55 years it feels like it gets better and better. (Wife 8)

Feelings of love and happiness with their marriage was expressed by all couples and articulated with the following sentiment, "I guess it just feels like we're always in the middle of our own love story" (Wife 9).

The participants in this study seemed not only happy with the achievement of a great marriage, but some spouses also seemed proud and realized that it was a great accomplishment. One husband's pride in his 36-year marriage might be construed as arrogance when asked if he had ever considered divorce, "Divorce is for others who have made poor choices in partners, careers, lifestyles, etc. I have never considered it!" (Husband 14) In answering this same question—if they had ever considered divorce—one wife answered, "No. I feel sorry for couples who have this problem. Why am I so

fortunate in my marriage?" (Wife 13) Clearly, the couples in this study felt that their accomplishment of a great marriage was very special.

Best Friends and Companions

All of the couples indicated that their spouse was their best friend, someone who they could confide in about anything. Several identified their spouse as their soul mate and someone with whom they had a great deal in common. Most said they would rather spend time with their spouse than anyone else and that their spouse was the person with whom they shared fun experiences. Several couples expressed outside interests, but felt that being with their partner was so satisfying that many expressed how difficult it was going to be if, or when, one of them had to live without the other someday (through death). A best friend relationship requires spouses to feel that their partner is always there for them, there is total trust between them, and that they can bring up any issue and feel free to discuss it. The spouses in this sample had a great deal to say about friendship and liking their partner, someone whom they could confide in and tell everything to:

My husband is my best friend. I can share all my thoughts, feeling, fears, joys, dreams, etc. with him and know that he will respect them. (Wife 1)

We can talk about anything and everything [and] we respect each other's opinions. (Wife 2)

We talk about things constantly, sharing feelings, ideas, and thoughts. We withhold nothing . . . (Husband 3)

Soul mate. Some indicated that their spouse was their soul mate. One husband elaborated on this theme by expressing the following, "[My wife] is my other half—my true love—and I would do whatever possible to please her. She has a blank check to my

heart—and the account has no limit” (Husband 9). His wife simply stated, “He is my soul mate.” Others expressed similar sentiments:

We *like* each other and like to be around each other . . . I feel as if I’ve known and loved him forever; he really is my soul mate. (Wife 5)

I think my husband is my soul mate. We enjoy spending time together and apart and I do not begrudge him his time alone. (Wife 4)

In addition to loving each other, all of the spouses talked about how much they liked each other and enjoyed each other’s company. This made it easy to spend time with their partner and do things together.

We like each other and truly enjoy each other’s company . . . Everything we do together is enjoyable for me because she is sharing it with me. (Husband 5)

Our best times are when we can do something together—even when that is each sitting in our own recliner and reading. (Wife 7)

[I] really like who he is. Enjoy the sound of his voice, looking at him, hugging him. Want to hear what he’s thinking; listen to what he’s dreamed about last night. He’s interesting. [I] trust him unconditionally. About everything. (Wife 9)

[We] do like to spend time together—anything together can be enjoyable. (Husband 9)

Sameness. Having a great deal in common and sharing the same values, beliefs, opinions, and liking the same activities facilitated the friendship for these couples. Most individuals felt they had a lot in common with their spouses and this enhanced their relationship and made it enjoyable to spend time together. Spouses talked about being similar in many ways:

We like to do the same things and enjoy each other’s company . . . This may be hard to believe but over the years, we have agreed on most life issues. (Wife 2)

We are both night owls and like staying up late together. We’re on the same political wavelength. We like to cuddle every day. (Wife 9)

We have [a] huge commonality of shared values and beliefs—may account also for the smoothness of [our] marriage. The *accord* prevents potential *discord*. (Husband 9)

Having the same goals in life was also an important part of “sameness” for many of the spouses in this study as expressed by these two husbands:

[We have the] same goals—we want the same things out of life. We usually agree on the same things—especially in family matters. (Husband 10)

We have a lot of fun together; a sense of humor helps our marriage. Above all though, our marriage is great because we have common goals. (Husband 12)

When asked to give advice to individuals who are planning to get married, the idea of looking for someone who is similar to you was expressed by a few spouses:

Never “settle.” We all deserve a great relationship with love, respect, humor, and camaraderie. Work on yourself first and then you will attract a “like” person to compliment you. (Wife 3)

Pick your partner with great care! Look for “same-ness” (Wife 9)

Apparently, the couples in this study did find someone who was similar or the *same* in many areas. This has, no doubt, contributed to the smoothness with which they all seem to have in their friendship and marriages.

Shared fun experiences. Having a deep and caring friendship shines through as one of the most pervasive themes throughout all the data. Intertwined through difficult times they all have faced in life, individuals gave examples of how they enjoyed their spouses’ company through a variety of fun experiences, some of which became the highlights of their life together:

One evening we had a lovely dinner, danced in our kitchen, made love, and laid awake and talked and cuddled and laughed until, believe it or not, it was time to get up. What a lovely time to remember when things begin to get us down. We love each other now as then. (Wife 5)

Just spending time together provided fun experiences and kept these couples from leading parallel lives. As one wife stated, "Everything is more fun if we can do it together" (Wife 8). Others had this to say:

Our life probably seems boring to many, but it is fun for us Over the years some of our very best times have been when we were finishing a basement or landscaping a yard or building a barn. Some people may think it strange but our favorite recreation is working together. If my husband is doing a project, which is too strenuous for me, then I will sit in the shop, or wherever, and talk to him while he works. We also like to read together. We have novels that we buy for the express purpose of reading together. I'll read a chapter and then my husband will read the next one to me. (Wife 1)

It's fun to work as a team and give parties, even the clean up when we put on country music and start doing the dishes. Or all the times we've hosted groups of Tibetan monks. I don't know, it just doesn't make sense to speak of high points [in marriage] when just going grocery shopping is a treat. (Wife 9)

In telling their marriage story, several of the spouses in this study repeated that they just "loved to be together!" This included any and all activities from taking walks, watching a sunset, reading together, traveling together, or enjoying a good conversation as expressed by the following couple:

Even after 36 plus years, we always enjoy talking. One thing that we have noted is that we can travel across the country together and never turn on the radio. We are comfortable with silence but most of the time we talk. One of the things that we enjoy doing together is travel. We love the planning of a journey, driving and seeing the beautiful country that we live in. Everyday activities are enjoyable too. We cook together, garden, exercise—including square dancing—[and] enjoy music and art. (Wife 14)

Indeed, these couples seemed content in just spending time with each other and did not require spending much time apart.

The following quote from a husband explained how a best friend relationship is essential in a successful marriage, but it takes effort to make that happen:

To have a successful marriage she has to be his best friend and confidant, and he has to be the same for her. Our second son was divorced years ago. He said it was our fault because we made successful marriage look so easy. He hadn't realized as he grew up that we were working on our marriage every day to make it more satisfying and stronger. (Husband 5)

This final quote from another husband sums up the importance of a best friend

relationship and the importance of liking one's partner:

Marriages struggle because the partners aren't first best friends. You surely have to LIKE someone if you want to spend time with them, especially a lifetime Part of a truly great marriage is realizing that your partner isn't perfect (nor are you), but that you love them nonetheless and that you can always count on one another for security, happiness, and to share confidences that only you know and maintain. True best friends in every respect! (Husband 14)

The spouses in this sample made it clear that their partner was their best friend, confidant, and trusted companion. The spouses in this sample went to great lengths to explain they not only "loved" their partner, they also "liked" their partner.

*The Spouse and Marriage Relationship Takes
Precedence over Individual Desires*

As the data were analyzed, another two-part theme became quite evident. Spouses indicated being willing to give up personal wants/desires for (a) each other and (b) for the good of the marriage relationship. As many couples became united in their goals, they felt the marriage relationship was a priority for both of them. It was not their paid jobs or their children or their homes, but their relationship with their spouse that was placed above all else.

Couples cared for their marriage by overriding selfish desires and caring more about their spouse and his/her desires than one's own. One wife articulated this when she said, "His happiness is as important to me, as mine is to him" (Wife 5). Another husband added, "You will live healthier, longer, and happier lives if you love your mate with all

your heart and do not let your needs ever overpower your mate's needs" (Husband 1).

These relationships were built on admiration, mutual respect, and a deep caring and desire for the happiness of their partner. Some expressed this as a willingness to put the needs of their partner above their own:

Each partner needs to be truly interested in the other—their happiness, their health, their mental outlook, their physical needs, [and] their financial security . . . place[ing] one's partner above all others and seek[ing] to accomplish together what would not be possible for one alone. (Husband 14)

I do everything I can to serve my husband and put his needs first. He does everything he can to serve me and put my needs first. (Wife 1)

Our marriage is great because we think of the needs of each other, often putting our partner's needs before our own. We try to think of things they enjoy doing, foods they like eating, and places they like to go. As much as possible we try to fill the others' wants and needs. (Wife 7)

The second part to this theme is placing the good of the *marriage* above personal wants and desires. It was as if they were both in the service of something that was greater "than either of them" and they both wanted to support it:

We both know that if there is something [either of us] want that would cause contention in our marriage, it just isn't worth it. (Wife 1)

Commitment means you're in it for the long haul and willing to work through your troubles because you care more about your marriage and your spouse than anything else. (Wife 10)

The following husband saw the need to do both, place the marriage and the spouse above his own wants and desires:

The promise is to be always there, willing to do whatever is needed to help the partnership and to provide continuous support for, and encouragement to, your mate You are not the most important, they are. (Husband 14)

Many couples talked about commitment to the marriage as a way to nurture their marriage relationship as the following couple explained:

Our commitment has been so steadfast and secure. We are a unit. If ever there are times when one is vulnerable, the other always comes to their aid—never stepping on the one that is down—no recriminations! (Wife 3)

This commitment took on an “us against the world” attitude. Rather than blaming each other, they became a unit to solve problems, which they viewed as coming from the outside.

Our level of commitment to each other has been total and unconditional. We do not take [our marriage] for granted and do not let things develop that could weaken it We deal with all problems . . . by treating them as *our* problems and work together as a strong unit to solve them It’s kind of an “us against the world” attitude we have always maintained. (Husband 3)

Whereas the marriage relationship took precedence over individual needs and desires, couples indicated that they did not keep track of “who did what” in their marriages. One wife stated this firmly when she said, “. . . we *don’t* keep score” (Wife 4). This carried over into how they handled responsibilities or jobs in the marriage. They did not worry about one person doing more work than the other does. They did what was necessary for the benefit of the marriage:

We help each other—[It’s] NOT 50/50 We enjoy working together to accomplish a harmonious atmosphere within our home. (Wife 3)

[A good marriage is] a willingness to give up personal wants for the good of the couple. (Wife 1)

Understanding what needs to be done, with each partner being willing to contribute whatever it takes to accomplish that, was the attitude of several spouses, as the following husband expressed:

Part of a sound marriage should be knowing what has to be done and helping to see that it gets accomplished, regardless of who does it. (Husband 14)

One younger wife, still in the midst of child rearing, indicated how she and her husband worked at having different roles in the marriage, yet in the end, doing whatever needed to be done:

With us, it's fairly simple. [My husband] and I constantly give to each other and look out for each other's interests . . . [we] take care of each other. We are both in charge of different parts of our life. I take care of home and he takes care of work and finances. Some if it overlaps and we help each other with whatever needs to be done. (Wife 10)

Since the marriage relationship and the happiness of their partner took precedence over their own wishes and desires, it became clear that one spouse could not be happy unless he/she knew the partner was happy. These couples were willing to sacrifice for their partner, as indicated by one husband:

Willing[ness] to make sacrifices to achieve the other' goals—to make do with what you have, to insure the other is whole. I would do whatever I thought was necessary to make life easy or bearable if she needed it to be so. (Husband 4)

Interestingly, the preceding comment was made by a husband who indicated he really had not wanted to take part in this research project. Not because he did not have a great marriage, but because it was a lengthy project. However, his wife really wanted to do it and so he obliged her—certainly an example of what he just stated. This attitude was indicative of all the spouses in this study, which is that their marriage relationship and putting the needs and desires of their spouse first, was more important than their individual needs and desires.

These traditional role-structured and egalitarian relationship marriages, in our sample, talked about their marriage as special or rare, that they were best friends, and that the marriage took precedence over personal desires. These characteristics appeared to be an important part of their great marriages.

Research Question Two: How Do Couples Talk about Shared Power,
Money Issues, and Decision-Making?

The couples in this study talked about their marriage relationship as being equal partners. They were adamant about shared power and they felt and behaved as co-presidents—not as a president and a vice president—when describing their feelings about financial resources and decision-making. These three particular areas are fundamental in a marriage signifying either power and domination, or sharing and equality. This research question addresses how spouses talk about these key areas of shared power, money issues and decision-making, while the final research question will address how they operationalize some of these areas.

Shared Power

The couples in the study said they felt they were equal partners when they answered the question “how is power divided in your marriage?” This section on shared power is reported with comments from both the husband and wife, since the issue of having equal power in a relationship is one of the defining differences between an egalitarian relationship and the hierarchal nature of a traditional relationship, and *both* partners need to feel power is shared. Husbands and wives stated they were not dominated by the other and felt that power was equal between them, as one couple indicated:

It is pretty equal. We try to let each other have their own way as much as possible, and we fully trust each other to make decisions. Neither one of us would go do something that would hurt the other one or would hurt the marriage. We have learned not to be domineering over the other one. (Wife 1)

We are very equal in all we do. My wife is probably much more passionate about things that go wrong around us, but we make most major decisions together. (Husband 1)

Some couples indicated that there is a real give-and-take approach to how they dealt with each other in their marriage and it seems that power or someone having the “final say” was not a part of their marriage relationship. In fact, this is so much the case that one spouse having more power in the relationship was a “foreign concept” to some of the couples when asked how they dealt with power in their marriage:

I don't know how to respond. I think [he] spoils me. He supports me in everything I do whether it's selling on eBay, keeping the bunnies from eating my marigolds, volunteering at the library, or whatever. He empowers me. (Wife 9)

We preempt power issues. [My wife] is supportive of me in whatever I pursue; I support her in whatever she wishes to do. She always is responsive to my perspective; I try to be always responsive to hers (Husband 9)

In addition to being a “foreign concept”, one couple said power had no place in a great marriage. In fact, an imbalance of power would cause problems:

We never think of power in relation to our marriage We make decisions together and rely on each other. No one is dominant. (Wife 14)

If there is “power” in a marriage, there will likely be problems. Isn't marriage a union rather than a dominant/subservient relationship? One partner may certainly be better at something than the other and vice versa, but in a sound marriage, I think that those qualities should compliment one another, not dominate. (Husband 14)

Another couple explained how they viewed power in their marriage. They indicated that it is a “non-issue.” Although this couple teased each other about having power in the relationship, it was not a hot button:

He thinks I run things (smiley face). I am very bossy, but power is pretty even. Seriously, we work together and always feel more powerful as a team. (Wife 3)

It is not divided up nor has it ever been an issue . . . We work things out together, not through arm-wrestling or control games, although we tease each other about "control." (Husband 3)

The spouses in this study indicated that power and domination were not part of their marriage relationships. The expressed feelings from the couples in this study described an egalitarian relationship between the husband and wife, which was summed up by the following:

There isn't and never was a power struggle—we supported each other all the way. If [we had power struggles] we would not be where we are today—happy! (Wife 11)

Money Issues

How couples deal with money, particularly when only one brings resources to the marriage through paid labor, says a great deal about being equal partners. Financial resources can be a source of power in relationships and those who bring more resources to the marriage, or the majority of the resources, can have more say or power in the relationship. We wondered if there was a common way that couples with a traditional structure worked together on financial issues. The findings tell us there was *not* a common way that all couples used in handling money. Couples decided to have either the wife or the husband be in charge of handling the finances, or both worked together in managing their finances. A prominent theme for these couples was either they agreed to live within their means and were out of debt, or getting out of debt was a shared goal. Most expressed feelings of pride in being able to handle their finances so well together. One wife commented, "The growth [in our marriage] came as a result of the two of us working toward a common goal [which was] to save enough money so that now we are debt free (Wife 11). In addition, spouses *agreed* and felt *comfortable* with how they

chose to handle their finances. Two couples described how things work when the husband handled the finances:

Money is one problem we don't seem to have. We don't have disagreements over money. My husband now takes care of all the finances. (Wife 13)

I have taken the lead on working out what we can do financially, always mindful of what my wife prefers We encourage each other to buy what we want Our love for each other no doubt influences our spending habits, and we eventually rein in by mutual agreement. (Husband 13)

* * *

[My husband] manages the money. I have a charge card and if I need any [money] to go out to lunch, he gives me some. I don't think I spend too much. Figure he would let me know if I need to cut back. (Wife 9)

[My wife] is welcome to whatever she desires—and is so considerate that there is no dispute or worry. We have no debt. We buy only with money we have. [My wife] can spend on whatever she wishes. (Husband 9)

Other couples described how things worked when the wife handled all the finances:

We deal quite well with the money. We don't have much debt . . . I do the money, but I share with [him] where we are. (Wife 12)

We are both very frugal, we talk about our bills and where the money needs to go. My wife really [handles] the checkbook and the bills. (Husband 12)

* * *

First of all, we are very fortunate to agree on how money should be used. We both feel strongly that we need to spend less than we make and that our necessities need to be taken care of before wants. Neither one of us likes debt and so we were both willing to sacrifice wants to get our mortgage paid off. I have always enjoyed working with money and with numbers. I enjoy budgeting, balancing the checkbook, and basically managing money. Because of this my husband just turns it all over to me. I love it and he trusts me. (Wife 1)

My wife loves to manage our money. Even though I am the only one who has had a moneymaking career since we got married, I am more than happy to have her take care of all the finances. I work every day with multi-million dollar budgets and am excited about how she has our future finances all worked out. We hope to retire early and have some special time together . . . We learned many years ago

that financial problems destroy marriages. We are completely out of debt and believe that we are under a whole lot less stress because of it. (Husband 1)

Two of the preceding couples who spoke of being out of debt were older and being out of debt was probably possible because they had been married longer. The following is from a younger couple who has agreed how they will deal with money so that it does not cause conflict. Again, the theme of both wanting to be out of debt is articulated:

I pay bills and do the managing, but we do not ever conflict over it. It's either there or not [money]. (Wife 4)

I make it, she spends it. We discuss debt and have agreed to get out from under it. (Husband 4)

Money and the handling of it in such a way that both spouses have equal access to it, and shared goals on how it should be spent, are common themes from the couples in this study. Here is still another way that money was handled when both managed the finances together:

We manage money now by being open about our financial status. We use one checkbook and both can spend money knowing the other will not spend large amounts without discussing it. (Wife 2)

This final comment from a husband seemed to be a common theme of how the couples in this study viewed the family income:

What money we have is held jointly. It's ours, not his and hers. If a large purchase becomes necessary we discuss it and decide together what to spend and what not to spend. (Husband 5)

Making Decisions

In a hierarchal arrangement within marriage, a more common component of a traditional marriage, one partner takes the lead in making final decisions that affect the

family. In an egalitarian marriage, couples have worked out a way to make decisions together. The data collected from these couples show how they work together to make joint, not unilateral, decisions. Making decisions and solving conflict seem to go hand in hand. How they solve conflict is a form of making decisions when coming to an agreement about a problem. Couples either had always known, or had learned, to handle conflict and disagreements in a calm and respectful manner:

I [used to] fight and yell and argue. That's the way I was raised. Used to make me angrier when he wouldn't argue. Finally, [I] got it through my head [that] his way of talking was better. Now we don't have conflicts—nothing left to fight about. (Wife 5)

We discuss everything from feelings to finances. We try to emphasize the positive side of things rather than the negative and if we disagree, we discuss it until it's resolved. (Husband 5)

The following couple explained their strategy in handling conflicts or coming to a decision about something, by discussing the situation and allowing each to air their side of the issue while the other spouse respectfully listened:

When we have a conflict we usually wait until the kids are in bed, we sit on the couch, face each other, turn off the TV, and discuss the situation. We try to allow the person to express their concern before jumping in or telling our side. (Wife 6)

[We handle conflict] by listening to each other. One listens and doesn't speak while the other talks. (Husband 6)

Most of the couples made it clear that they made decisions and handled disagreements by calmly discussing issues and seeking to compromise:

When we disagree, we try to talk it out as calmly as possible. We often have to compromise to come up with a solution that is agreeable to both of us. (Wife 7)

If I feel strongly about something, I feel free to say so, and he listens. We both give our reasons and make the decision we both can agree on. Can't recall ever having a fight—just disagreements. (Wife 8)

We talk openly and calmly about things . . . We are respectful [and] appreciative in our day-to-day conversations and, thus, we don't argue a lot. (Husband 12)

We rarely argue and when we do, we handle it quite calmly and resolve it quickly. (Wife 12)

The preceding comments show the importance that couples placed on talking out their problems calmly. The theme of talking about conflicts or discussing a decision that affected their marriage, or the family, and coming to a "united decision" was prevalent throughout the couples' stories. Interestingly, most of the couples indicated they had found a peaceful and mutually agreeable way to talk about issues and solve problems as this couple comments:

[We solve problems by] talking, laughing, smiling, thumbs up . . . We work out compromises [and] over time, we wonder what the problem was. (Wife 5)

These couples with a traditional role-structure and egalitarian relationship tended to feel that power in the relationship was shared. Couples, therefore, had equal influence over decisions and money in their marital relationships. This power balance appeared to be an important part of their great marriages.

Research Question Three: How Do Couples Operationalize an Egalitarian Relationship?

Many couples may say they are equal partners, but it is necessary to back up that statement with daily actions and behaviors that reveal an egalitarian attitude. How couples talk about money issues, particularly when only one brings resources to the marriage through paid labor, and how they talk about making decisions and solving conflicts, says a great deal about power issues in the marriage. The preceding research

question addressed the participants' general attitudes in these areas. This research question reports how they operationalized equality through specific examples from their shared history. Specific examples were gleaned from their marriage stories which represented common problem areas in accomplishing an equal partnership. While each of these 14 couples did not address all problem areas, they did share examples of operationalizing equality in the following areas: (a) household responsibilities, (b) childcare, (c) making decisions, and (d) stressful situations. These findings gave us a glimpse into how these couples operationalized an egalitarian relationship.

Household Responsibilities

How can traditionally-structured couples, who actually divide the family roles, view themselves as equal partners? A theme that materialized with these couples was that they did not view any particular family role as more important than the other. They had a great deal of appreciation for the contributions of each partner in keeping the family going and helping each other without regard to "who does what." The provider role of the husband did not seem to take center stage in these marriages; their marital relationship and family responsibilities at home took precedence as this husband remarked, "My wife and family are my primary focus in life, have always been, and will continue to be the most important thing to me. I cherish our marriage!" (Husband 14) Some started out with a traditional attitude that changed over the years, while others started out with the attitude of working together as partners to do whatever it takes to have a successful marriage and family. The following couple started out with a traditional attitude but changed to something that worked better for them:

At first we were traditional, except I always worked outside the home. We didn't have any kids. Then we moved to "if I'm working at a job, when we get home, we both work at home." That lasted until we began to adopt kids, then I stayed home. [However] he got up with the babies at night, changed diapers, etc., [and] when he was hurt, I would go back to work until he could work again. (Wife 5)

Our [marriage] started out traditional but we matured; the line between "his and her" jobs blurred to where it became "our" jobs. We are full partners in everything we do and in the plans we make. (Husband 5)

The preceding couple learned to fill in wherever there was a need. Other couples gave examples of how they worked together as a team and did not look at what they did as her job or his job. The following couple explained it as blurring the line on traditional roles:

[My husband] blurs the line on traditional. I usually cook dinner, but he cooks our breakfast eggs . . . I do household cleaning, but he sometimes helps. I do the laundry, but he could if I would let him. (Wife 9)

We are at times traditional, but are comfortable being switch hitters. We usually split the clean-up after dinner. Split the dishwashing. I have certain areas I usually always clean. (Husband 9)

Another husband explained how they shared family responsibilities:

We have always tried to help one another. Whether it was balancing the checkbook, cleaning the house, taking the children out, packing for a trip, and even more recently (for me) helping with the cooking and baking. We've tried to be helpful to each other. As a part of this shared responsibility, we seem to have fallen into certain routines that although unspoken or unwritten, just seem to work for us—she always does the laundry and I always take care of maintaining the cars and minor house repairs. And we both enjoy planning trips, financial goals, [and] food for meals. When those plans come to fruition, it is more rewarding that we have both contributed. (Husband 14)

Many of the spouses in this study did traditional gender tasks. However, most indicated it was not because they *had* to, it was because they wanted to, and it just worked out that the things they liked to do fell along gender lines:

There are no set rules. I cook the meals but only because I want to. We can eat out anytime I ask. He helps with the housework without a complaint. I keep the books and pay the bills because I enjoy doing it. He helps with the laundry and I help in the yard. (Wife 2)

[Our marriage] is probably traditional, but we dislike the concept of division of duties. We help each other as needed but don't "keep track" of whether one is doing more or less. She tends to spend more time in the kitchen and in preparing meals, and I tend to do the maintenance, the repairs and the heavy lifting. We do not assign roles; we really do what we want and what we enjoy, with the emphasis on taking care of each other. (Husband 3)

I would say our marriage is a transitional marriage. My wife and I try to help each [other] in every way we can. I get the feeling at this time ours has become more of a traditional [role-structured] type of marriage, not because that is what I would like it to be, but she has found it to be more comfortable for her at this present time. (Husband 7)

Couples also indicated they were not immune to stepping into each other's shoes when they needed to and they did so willingly "with the emphasis on taking care of each other." This attitude also included doing for the family what needed to be done, as explained by the following couple who grew from their experience:

[My husband] was injured at work and was off for about 6 months . . . We had a role reversal that was pretty tough on a man who was used to being the breadwinner. He just grinned and bore it. We both did what we had to do at the time and we gained a lot of understanding of the roles we normally had. He's a really good cook now and often does the cooking. I know I can take care of the family [financially] if I had to. (Wife 5)

I was injured and unable to work so my wife went back to work to help support the family. At the same time she went to college, which she had always wanted to do but had been unable to before this time. I took over the cooking and housework and child raising. (Husband 5)

This final comment on household responsibilities sums up what most of the couples alluded to in their stories. The feeling was that they were there to help each other out. If jobs fell along traditional gender lines, then so be it—but they did not feel *compelled* to do so. What ever they did was in the service of maintaining and taking care

of the marriage and the family, and was done willingly by whoever was available, as this husband explains:

We assumed roles based upon who had the most time (or made better use of it) or was most inclined, for whatever reason, to take it on. (Husband 13)

Childcare

All of the couples in this study said raising children was a rewarding and a desired experience. Most had stressful experiences as parents but worked as a united force in front of the children. If there was a disagreement about how things should be handled, it was done in private, and they came to a consensus or compromise on how a situation was to be handled. One wife explained, "On the few occasions when we disagreed [about child rearing], we talked it over and worked out a solution that we could both agree to use" (Wife 14). Many fathers were involved in the care of their children as much as was possible. One father explains how this began with the pregnancy:

My wife and I attended childbirth classes together, knew about and understood the birthing process, and then were able to be side by side in the delivery room as each of our children came to life. No other experience matches this one! (Husband 14)

My husband was in the delivery room and coached me through the birth of each child. Our daughter was born after a short period of labor. Although she was tiny, he looked for an early opportunity to hold her and took a very active role in her care. When our second child was born, the doctor gave him to my husband to carry to the hospital nursery, which was on a separate floor. My husband's presence at both births was a great psychological help and comfort to me, a real bonding experience for both of us My husband shared the care of the children from the beginning so I think we both understood the time and energy that we both expended in their care. (Wife 14)

However involved the fathers tried to be within a traditional structure, a wife generally had the greater role in childcare as this father wistfully reports:

My wife, being the homemaker and knowing her own mind about raising children, set the parameters. I had complete confidence in her as a mother and great admiration for how she managed. Looking back, I would say I was involved importantly, but somewhat peripherally. Our grown daughters are very close to us both. (Husband 13)

Many of the couples gave examples of difficult parenting situations and how they handled it together as a couple, which served to strengthen their marriage:

[Our son] shot himself. I found him. The guilt we felt. We didn't think we had done enough to help him At night we would lay in bed holding each other, cried and talked and prayed. We comforted each other, we each had our own feelings to deal with, but we helped each other through it. We still mourn for him, but we talk about it and comfort each other. (Wife 5)

Another couple talked about the difficult time they had in raising a daughter. They helped each other through the crisis:

We just stood by each other. When we were so worried about our daughter and couldn't sleep, sometimes we would get up in the middle of the night and walk down the country mile—and hold each other and cry and pray. (Wife 8)

Many of the couples talked about the pains and trials of raising children, with many children continuing to have problems after their parents had gone into retirement. Interestingly, none of the child raising problems caused their marriage to fall apart. They continued to hold their marriage as a high priority, despite parenting problems. Parenting was viewed as a shared activity, despite the fact that, with a traditional structure, the wife was involved in more childcare than was the husband.

Making Decisions

Although making decisions was addressed under research question two, it was only addressed in how they talked about making decisions. This section will give a few examples of how couples operationalized making egalitarian decisions. The following

husband explained the time it required them to discuss a decision before moving ahead with a plan:

[When we made] our decision to build our current home, I was really excited and had a vision of where I wanted to live. My wife was content to stay where we were [currently living]. She did keep an open mind and after we had discussed it for two years, she agreed to build. She now likes being here as much, or more, than I do. (Husband 6)

This couple did not move forward with a decision until both agreed on what was to be done.

Another wife articulated how they made a decision together on what to do for a family car with the resulting compromise that pleased them both:

I wanted a better car; he wanted to keep his old brown one. We checked our expenses on the old one for gas mileage, etc. and he [decided] to keep the old one for emergencies. We also bought a much newer one for every day use. (Wife 5)

The following couple had a tragic event happen in their life when they discovered that one of their children had been sexually molested. They talked and decided together how to handle the crisis:

We supported each other and didn't allow it [the crisis] to destroy our relationship. We planned what we would do together and we chose to move to another community. (Wife 1)

These examples highlight some of the ways couples operationalized an egalitarian relationship in decision-making. They did so by allowing each spouse to have an equal influence and say in decisions concerning their marriage and family. Another way many of the couples operationalized equality was to decide beforehand who would make decisions over different areas of their life. They were happy and comfortable with the way that worked for them, as articulated by the following husband:

We agree on most things. Where we disagree on a course of action—say, one of us gives in gracefully, depending on who feels most strongly about it. In matters

about the home, I leave that pretty much to my wife. For example, she wanted to replace carpet and vinyl floors with wood. I would have been content to keep it as is and use the money for something else. But if she's happy, I'm happy. (Husband 13)

These examples illustrate that these couples did more than talk about equality; they lived it in their day-to-day lives.

Stressful Situations

Life is full of stressful situations for all couples and these traditionally-structured, happy couples in great marriages, were no exception. Being each other's best friend, caring about the happiness of each other, and being there for each other through thick and thin, characterizes their relationship. Problems were not trivialized or dismissed. Spouses cared deeply about their partners' happiness as the following illustrates:

Last year I started doing some volunteer teaching. I have been a "stay at home mom" for 28 years and so have been out of the work force for a long time. After the first day I came home almost paralyzed from fear. My husband in his kind, gentle way sat down with me and went over the next day's lesson plan step by step with me. He calmed me down and gave me a great deal of encouragement. He is truly my best friend. (Wife 1)

A high point for me was when I had my son and I got really sick. My husband stayed with me, and through it all I never doubted his love. (Wife 4)

My wife had a hysterectomy at age 22. She thought as she was going through the change of life that I was going to leave her for a woman who would give me children, and thought it would be less painful to drive me away. It took me over a year to convince her that I loved her and not her childbearing abilities. (Husband 5)

I admire the strength of my wife as she cared for me when I was near death and stood by meeting my every need. She did not give up on me, but instead nursed me back to complete health. She underwent many complaints and frustrations when I was in the hospital recovering. She took care of all the finances and other family affairs by herself with only a small amount of encouragement from our family members. She is definitely an angel in disguise. (Husband 7)

All of the couples shared stressful and/or painful experiences that life had handed to them, but they did not tear at the fabric of their marriage because of their total trust, admiration, support, genuine appreciation and love for their best friend and partner. One wife wrote, "We always deal the same way with all crises—together—[we] take care of each other!" (Wife 3)

A final theme in handling stressful situations indicates that these couples do not allow themselves to fall into placing blame when one spouse makes a mistake. One husband admonished, "Remember always to blame the situation and not each other." Quietly supporting each other, without blame, kept the marriage a safe place for growth as the following illustrates:

Against my wife's better judgment, I once bought silver on the margin at \$12 an ounce. Each time the price dropped, we had to fork over more money, and eventually lost most of the investment. We really couldn't afford that. My wife, while disappointed, never second-guessed my decision and accepted the financial setback without ever hinting that the foray was a dumb move. (Husband 13)

Evidently, like most people, these happily married, traditionally role-structured couples had their share of sorrow, disappointment and pain as they journeyed through life together.

With these examples it appears that the couples in our sample, with traditional role-structure and egalitarian relationship marriages, operationalized their belief about an egalitarian relationship by how they handled household responsibilities, childcare, making decisions and in stressful situations. This way of operationalizing their beliefs appeared to be an important part of their great marriages.

Unanticipated Finding

It seems logical that happy couples in great marriages most likely had great roles models in their families of origin, where they learned how to have a successful marriage. It was, therefore, an interesting finding that most of the couples in this research project came from unhappy homes and some came from traditional role-attitude homes with power imbalances. Most indicated they did not want to have the same marriage relationship as their parents. Nineteen out of 28 spouses said their great marriage was different from their parents' marriage. Only two out of 14 couples said both spouses in the marriage came from happy families. However, as one of those couples indicated—when asked if their marriage was like their parents' marriage, "Our parents certainly followed more traditional roles, but we have modified them to suit our circumstances and preferences in life" (Husband 14), thus indicating that the couple had intentionally chosen to do things differently than their parents.

Most of the spouses were much more adamant that their marriages were quite different from their parents, as this wife firmly explains, "Our marriage is nothing like my parent's [marriage], thank goodness" (Wife 13). Another wife indicated her parents' marriage was "happy" and they were "committed" to each other but said the following:

My dad was more authoritarian than my husband. Growing up I thought my mother should have more say in what happened. Even though I loved my dad very, very much, I wished he would have included my mother more in decisions. I think because of that I have pretty much demanded that I be an equal partner I believe my husband has always treated me as his equal or better. (Wife 1)

The preceding wife intentionally created a different marriage than the one her parents had created because she wanted to be an equal partner with her husband—unlike her mother's marriage.

Many of the spouses stated that their family of procreation was nothing like their family of origin—indicating their happy home and great marriage were not like the family in which they were raised. Some spouses indicated their homes of origin were “just not happy places” and their different comments grew progressively worse as these examples show:

My father was (and can be still) a difficult man to be around . . . It is a joy to be with a man who is calm and kind and smart and funny. (Wife 9)

My family was not particularly close (emotionally) and did not show a lot of outward affection. I am trying to improve that relationship in the family I am creating today. (Wife 6)

There was a great deal of tension between my parents—virtually most of the time—or at least frequently . . . My parents argued a lot in front of us (Husband 9)

Grew up in a family where my dad was not involved with us . . . He was always yelling at something. It doesn't compare at all with the family we are creating today. My husband helps with everything. We believe a marriage is a team, an equal team.
(Wife 12)

The family I grew up in [was] to me an unhappy family, quarreling and drinking.
(Wife 13)

I grew up in an abusive, dysfunctional, nutty family. We barely have contact since I moved out . . . I've always wanted a fun, happy home. I have that now. (Wife 4)

There appeared to be unhappiness in the majority of the homes in which these spouses were raised, and their comments indicate that the marriages and home life they created were very different from their families of origin. This suggests the idea that people can, in fact, rise above the situation in which they were raised. From this study of 28 spouses, it appears that individuals are not predetermined to failure by childhood experiences, but can take charge of their own fate regardless of their background. We do

not know how typical this finding is, but it gives support to the idea that some people can learn how to have great marriages and treat each other as equal partners despite the modeling they experienced as children.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This study researched the possibility of an egalitarian relationship coexisting with a traditional role-structured marriage. Other qualitative researchers (Schwartz, 1994; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1995) indicated that this type of marriage—although possibly rare—did exist and a small subsample of these couples in the Great Marriage Research Project (GMRP) were identified. The GMRP was conducted from a strength-based perspective, which meant looking for couples where both spouses felt they had built a happy, great marriage. We looked to them as the experts on how to achieve this happy state of matrimony. Participants who responded were very happy to share with the researchers how they built a marriage of which they were proud. Several thanked the principle investigators for allowing them to take part in this reflective research project.

With such scant research written about this specific type of marriage, the overarching research question was, "Can an egalitarian role-attitude exist within a traditional role-structured marriage?" The second overarching research question was, "If so, what characteristics are present to indicate it is egalitarian?" In answer to the first question, the findings from this study indicate that it is, in fact, possible to have an egalitarian relationship existing with a traditional role-structured marriage. Couples with a traditional role-structured marriage can have a relationship where they treat each other as equal partners, with no hierarchal power arrangement. In answer to the second question, the couples indicated they had characteristics of an egalitarian marriage, and

these characteristics will be discussed. These findings supported and expanded the existing knowledge in the literature. This chapter begins with a discussion of the important findings from this study, followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework. Limitations and suggestions for future research and implications for marriage education will also be discussed, followed by the conclusion.

Important Findings

There were three compelling findings that differ from what is generally understood in the literature. The first and most important finding is that, according to these couples, it does not appear to be the role-structure of the marriage that is critical to an egalitarian relationship; it is the attitude of both partners that determines whether or not it is egalitarian. Second, an intimate and deeply satisfying, best friendship—characteristic of egalitarian marriages—can be part of a traditional role-structured marriage. The third compelling finding is that power in a traditional role-structured marriage can be shared in the same manner as reported for egalitarian marriages. Finally, the couples in this study provided evidence of a more precise way to look at role-structure and role-attitude for egalitarian and traditional marriages, which will be presented with a conceptual model.

Role Structure Not Critical to Egalitarian Relationship

Existing literature typically refers to an egalitarian relationship as one that is determined by the role-structure of the marriage, where both spouses share all family roles, particularly the provider role (Gilbert, 1993; Hass, 1980; Schwartz, 1994;

Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1995). This is further evidenced by the ideology measures used to determine if a person is egalitarian or not, in that the measures typically ask about role-structure beliefs. If someone believes it is better for children that the mother stays home and cares for them instead of involvement in paid labor, he/she is labeled traditional and all that goes with it. This typically includes a power imbalance with the husband as dominant in the relationship and the *attitude* that some family roles are women's work and some family roles are men's work. In contrast, these 28 spouses who lived with a traditional role-structure made it clear they viewed each other and treated each other as equal partners. Even though they divided the provider/homemaker roles along gender lines, their attitude and behaviors showed that they viewed all roles as a joint responsibility. A few of the spouses mentioned that they "blurred" the line on traditional, when asked if they divided family roles along traditional lines. Spouses indicated that they worked together to see that things were done, and whoever was available at the time did the job. A distinguishing element was these spouses "helped each other out" in *whatever* needed to be done. It is a subtle difference, but it makes an important difference in a marriage relationship when both partners do what needs to be done without the attitude "I don't do that—it is not my job."

While most studies of egalitarian marriages concentrate on the structure of the marriage, regarding who does what (i.e., how much housework, childcare, etc. does he/she do), there are a limited number of qualitative studies that look in depth at the characteristics, or dynamics of what the marriage relationship is like. Schwartz (1994) and Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1995) are the primary researchers who addressed this issue in the 1990s when they examined happy marriages from a strength-based

perspective, identifying the characteristics and traits they contained. Their worthy contributions in describing the *non-role-structure* characteristics of happy, egalitarian relationships made it possible to conduct the current research. Their findings allowed the author to compare identified egalitarian characteristics to the characteristics of the traditional role-structured couples in this study. The literature regarding gendered power in marriage suggests that many marriages, including some egalitarian role-structured and traditional role-structured marriages, are hierarchal in nature with the husband as the dominant partner (Brehm et al., 2002; Gray-Little, 1982; Komter, 1989; Tichenor, 1999). The contribution of findings from this research is that an egalitarian role-attitude, which encourages an equal partnership, is possible in a traditional marriage.

A part of this discussion includes the related finding that it is not a forgone conclusion that men will be dominant in a traditional role-structured marriage. It cannot be disputed that it does happen and perhaps quite often. Without a representative sample and a clear way to assess gender ideology, it cannot be determined how prevalent a traditional role-attitude is. What is suggested is that it appears to be incorrect to assume if someone prefers a traditional role-structure for their marriage relationship, it also means that he/she favors or wants a dominate/subservient relationship. The findings from this research indicate that there are those who have managed to have the traditional role-structure without the traditional role-attitude. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005), more couples are returning to a traditional role-structured marriage. It would be hard to believe that all women, and even all men, are also returning to a traditional role-attitude. Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1995) briefly discussed this same phenomenon when they talked about the "new" traditional marriage of younger couples where spouses were

“equals.” They suggested that a return to the traditional role-structure would come with new rules.

Intimate Best Friendship

One of the defining “hallmarks” and “the core” of an egalitarian relationship is a deeply intimate, soul-mate-kind-of-a-best-friendship, between the spouses (Schwartz, 1994; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1995). All 28 spouses in this study talked about their partner being their best friend and some used the word “soul mate” to express the depth of their feelings toward their spouse. The spouses in the sample told how they just “loved to be together” and this included any and all activities from grocery shopping to working together to giving parties at their home. In addition, all participants made it a point to express how much they “liked” their partner and had the same goals, interests, and values as their spouse. This made it easier for them to get along so well and facilitated enjoyment of each other’s company.

Research participants expressed that another part of their friendship was the total trust they had in each other, which held them together through stressful times in their married lives. These stressful times did not pull them apart and some indicated they grew stronger as a couple because they had faced stressful situations together. It became evident while reading their marriage stories that being each other’s best friend was one of the most pervasive themes throughout the data. An overarching message from the spouses in this study is if you do not have a great friendship, you do not have a great marriage.

The happily married, egalitarian couples in Schwartz’s (1994) study and also Wallerstein and Blakeslee’s (1995) study indicated that they felt their marriage was

unique or different. The couples in this sample also made it clear that they felt they had built a relationship that was rare, special, and even "greater" than other marriages. It seems that the unique, special, and deep friendship that is characteristic of egalitarian relationships is evident in these traditional role-structured marriages.

*Traditional Role-Structured Marriages
Can Have Shared Power*

The third compelling finding revolves around an issue that distinguishes an egalitarian relationship from a traditional relationship: it is the issue of power in a marriage. There was a consensus from the spouses in this study that they worked as equal partners and neither was dominate over the other person. Who had power in a marriage and how it was manifested in the marriage has been a source of much discussion and research among family scholars (Brehm et al., 2002; Gray-Little, 1982; Komter, 1989; Tichenor, 1999; White & Klein, 2002). A common way of measuring power concerns who makes the decisions in the marriage, or who has right of final say. Some researchers have contended that the spouse who brings the monetary resources to the marriage has the greater power (Brehm et al.). Still others contend that it is not money but gender that confers power and in most cases it is the husband who is dominant (Komter; Tichenor). These three areas will be addressed.

Sharing decision-making. Spouses in this study indicated that they made joint, not unilateral decisions. They would discuss their problems/issues and would reach a decision through consensus. Some spouses indicated that they had decided one spouse would have more decision-making power in selected areas of their life. This was operationalized, for example, by one couple who decided the wife would make decisions

regarding home projects. Another husband wanted to build a new house but discussed it and waited patiently for two years until his wife decided that was what she wanted as well. The spouses in this study had influence with each other and took into consideration how their partner felt about issues. This is an important component of a happy marriage according to Gottman et al. (1998). An overall theme expressed by these couples was they respected each other's opinions, and when they had a disagreement, they found ways to work out their problems calmly so both were happy with the outcome.

Money power. How financial resources are handled, particularly when only the husband is in paid employment, provides information about power in the marriage. If the husband exerted more influence over what money could be spent on—because he made it—it would indicate he had more power (Brehm et al., 2002). The couples in this study, however, indicated the money in the marriage belonged to both of them and they had equal access to it. A goal for most of these couples was they either were out of debt or had a shared goal of getting completely out of debt. In addition, couples indicated they had three ways of handling finances for the marriage: either the wife managed the money, the husband managed the money, or they managed it together. In all cases, both spouses said money was not an issue for them and each had a say over how money would be spent.

Shared power. Power is manifest in a marriage in subtle ways. Komter (1989) contributed to the literature when she conceptualized this hidden power in marriage. The ability to bring up any issue of disagreement and/or talk freely about decisions affecting the marriage and the family would indicate an egalitarian relationship. Marriages where the wife feared upsetting her husband if she brought up certain issues indicated a power

imbalance, typical of a traditional marriage (Komter). In Wallerstein and Blakeslee's (1995) study of happy traditional marriages, wives also indicated that "not bringing up issues that would upset him" was part of the traditional relationship. The couples in this study overwhelmingly stated they could talk to each other about anything and everything. Participants also indicated they did not dominate each other, that spouses were free to say and do what they wanted, and that it was safe to disagree with each other. According to the comments from the couples in this study, it was evident that hidden power had no place in their great marriages.

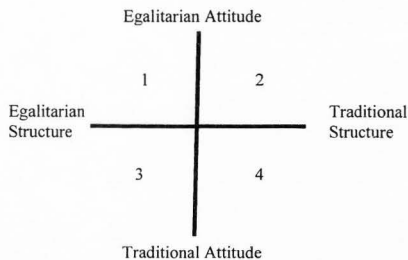
Role-Structure/Role-Attitude Model

The findings in this study led us to believe that traditional and egalitarian relationships can be separated into four categories: a traditional role-attitude, a traditional role-structure, an egalitarian role-attitude, and an egalitarian role-structure. These four categories make several combinations possible, with one combination being an egalitarian attitude with a traditional structure. These findings support previous research which suggested that attitudes and behaviors (structures) can be recognized as existing independently of each other—within and between spouses (Araji, 1977; Greenstein, 1996; McHale & Crouter, 1992).

This model can be used to assist individuals in understanding where they fit in regard to their personal attitude and structure. This assessed information about their marriage can also be used to help couples in marriage education and therapy settings. Unhappy couples who find themselves in a variety of different combinations could be helped to work for congruency between their personal attitude and structure and/or

understanding of incongruence in their marriage relationships. Figure 1 illustrates these four combinations.

Looking at marital relationships in this manner allows for a more precise understanding of the spousal relationship. In addition, it can provide a more accurate way to assess gender ideology and help couples identify where they fit in regard to the four



- Combination 1: An egalitarian structure where spouses share each potential role in the family, paired with an egalitarian attitude where a spouse feels that they are equal partners and they operate as such.
- Combination 2: An egalitarian attitude where a spouse feels that they are equal partners and they operate as such, paired with a traditional structure where each spouse fills family roles based on gender.
- Combination 3: An egalitarian structure where spouses share each potential role in the family, paired with a traditional attitude where a spouse feels that a hierarchal arrangement is best with the husband in charge of directing the family and having right of final say.
- Combination 4: A traditional structure where each spouse fills family roles based on gender, paired with a traditional attitude where a spouse feels that a hierarchal arrangement is best with the husband in charge of directing the family and having the right of final say.

Figure 1. Role-structure/role attitude model.

quadrants of this model. It also identifies the possibility of several combinations within each individual and between spouses.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theory used to explain the research findings on traditional role-structured couples was equity theory. One of the propositions of equity theory according to Walster et al. (1978) is: "When individuals find themselves participating in inequitable relationships, they become distressed. The more inequitable the relationship, the more distress individuals feel" (p. 17). Additionally, according to this theory, it does not matter if they are the "victims" or the "beneficiaries" of the inequity, they will feel distress (Walster et al.).

This proposition explains why the couples in the study moved beyond filling traditional roles when they said they just did whatever was needed to help each other. They transcended the stereotypical norms of their own traditional role-structured situation and did whatever it took to make sure their partners were happy.

Spouses' attitudes of being in the service of a happy and great relationship rendered them acutely aware of the needs and desires of their partner and, regardless of the traditional roles they were filling, they wanted their partner to be happy. One husband indicated he would "do anything necessary to make life easy and bearable if she needed it to be so" (Husband 4). As explained previously, equity theory is different from exchange theory in that it is not just about benefiting personally, it is caring about whether your partner in the exchange benefits fairly as well. That appears to be the case for these

couples who stated that their happiness depended on their partner's happiness, as explained by a husband who said, "If she's happy, I'm happy."

Limitations and Implications for Further Research

The sample size of 14 couples was a limitation of this study. Although participants came from several different states, they were homogeneous in that they were all European American, fairly well educated, and according to income, they were middle class. Our sample is typical of those who volunteer for research projects and this volunteer sample was not representative of the population at large. The small sample size of 28 spouses along with the volunteer status of the participants, made this sample a very select group of people.

There was also a self-selection bias inherent within a study involving volunteers. Couples who volunteered for this study had to be willing to complete a lengthy questionnaire of 31 pages. Some couples who originally requested to take part in the research project might have decided not to participate, once they realized the amount of time required to fill out the questionnaire. Because of the great amount of writing required, our sample was relatively highly educated and does not represent a cross section of the population. Would our findings be different if we had participants with lower educational levels? We do not know. We were aware of a few couples who did not complete the questionnaire because of the length and their stories were left untold.

Another limitation was the length of time the couples were married in this sample, with the mean years married being 32 years. However, according to DeFrain, Cook, and Gonzalez-Kruger (2005), it takes many years to build a strong and happy marriage. It is

only after many survived trials and hardships that a couple will realize how precious and wonderful they are to each other. This could be a reason why a research project studying great marriages attracted couples who had been married for a long time.

Although some of the couples made a copy of the 31-page questionnaire so they could fill it out separately, most of the couples filled out the questionnaire together and saw each other's answers. This may also be viewed as a limitation of the study. This way of gathering data, however, resulted in a complete "marriage story" on one questionnaire, which was positive. For example, having couple data helped us to better understand the power issues from the perspective of both husband and wife as described in the findings.

Implications for future research might be to further explore the difference between role-structure and role-attitude by developing an assessment tool representing the conceptual model. With such an assessment measure, it would be possible to do future research using quantitative methods. The assessment tool could also be used as a standard to assess couple relationships and place them in appropriate categories. It would then be possible to identify different combinations to study. For example, a traditional role-structured couple that includes a traditional role-attitude wife and an egalitarian role-attitude husband might be identified. The assessment tool would make it possible to examine many different combinations (a) within each individual and (b) between spouses to determine which combinations promote increased marital happiness.

Another implication for future research, regarding the unanticipated finding that most of these happily married individuals came from less-than-happy-families-of-origin, supports previous research that studied individuals with traumatic childhoods. According to research by Skogrand, Woodbury, DeFrain, DeFrain, & Jones (2005), many

individuals transcended a traumatic childhood and went on to have happy and healthy marriage relationships. Further research needs to be conducted to determine how individuals break out of negative marital scripting and move into healthy couple relationships.

Implications for Marriage Education

There are implications for these findings for marriage education. First, it might be helpful for couples to understand where they are currently located on the model and determine where they want to be. Marriage education could provide opportunities for couples to work for personal congruency and/or greater understanding of their marriage relationship. The possibility also exists for this assessment tool to be helpful for therapists as they work with couples in providing marriage education. In addition, just understanding the characteristics of happy, great marriages, could be instructive in an educational setting to help couples work toward a great marriage of their own.

The unanticipated finding, that the majority of these individuals came from less than happy families of origin and they did not want a marriage like their parents, also has implications for a marriage education setting. Although families of origin do have an influence on the next generation, it is not necessarily deterministic. Individuals can be encouraged by the finding that coming from a less-than-ideal-family-of-origin does not necessarily keep them from going on to have a highly successful marriage of their own. There were also some participants who had been unhappily married before, but went on to have highly successful, great marriages the second time around. This should be encouraging information for divorced individuals seeking to remarry.

Concluding Remarks

Despite the limitations of this study, it was a worthwhile project to take an in-depth look at the great marriages created by these couples. The contribution of this research is that we now know it is possible for couples to have the characteristics of an egalitarian marriage with a traditional role-structure. Couples with this marriage combination were a previously unidentified segment of the population. When we talk about marital happiness correlating with egalitarian relationships we cannot leave out this segment of the population. It is felt that these findings could redefine how we assess gender-role ideology by using the concepts identified in the role-structure/role-attitude model. It is also hoped that the educational benefits of these findings will help couples in creating their own great marriages.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Letter to Newspapers

Newspaper Name
Address

Dear Family Life Editor:

We are beginning a new research project at Utah State University and the University of Nebraska about *Great Marriages*, and would appreciate your help by publishing the enclosed news story. The press release can be published at any time that is convenient for you.

The purpose of this study is to better understand how couples develop highly-successful marriages. A diverse sample of several hundred couples is being sought with the help of the media around the U.S. We are looking for couples who perceive they have a strong, satisfying, happy, high-quality relationship with each other. We will send them a questionnaire in order to gain an in-depth understanding of highly-successful marriages. The findings will be used for Cooperative Extension program development in our respective states and nationally, and educational efforts to improve the quality of marriages.

The questionnaire has both open-ended questions and closed-ended questions. We encourage couples to keep the original questionnaire as an important document, a self study of their marital relationship to date and encourage them to make a copy and send it to us.

We would be happy to send you a copy of the instrument, if you would like to see it. You can also call either of us to get more information for a more complete story about our marriage research to publish in your newspaper.

We have more than 30 years of experience in the family field and together have authored 17 books and a multitude of articles about marriage and family life.

Sincerely,

Linda Skogrand, PhD
Assistant Professor, Extension Family Life Specialist
Specialist
Utah State University
Phone: (435) 797-8183
E-mail: Lindas@ext.usu.edu

John DeFrain, PhD
Professor, Extension Family Life
University of Nebraska
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Appendix B. Press Release

FOR RELEASE ANYTIME

Great Marriages Needed for Research Project

Logan, Utah and Lincoln, Nebraska – Couples who believe they have a *Great Marriage* are needed for a new research project at Utah State University and University of Nebraska, Lincoln. This research is being conducted by Dr. Linda Skogrand at Utah State University and Dr. John DeFrain at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Dr. Linda Skogrand, Extension Family Life Specialist said, “We need the help of several hundred couples nation-wide to tell us how they have created a strong, satisfying, happy, high-quality relationship.” Dr. DeFrain added, “The folks who have great marriages are the experts. We need to learn from them how they did it.”

The research will be used for Cooperative Extension program development and educational efforts to improve the quality of marriages in our respective states, nationally and internationally.

Volunteer couples are encouraged to contact Dr. Linda Skogrand, via e-mail at Lindas@ext.usu.edu, by phone at (435) 797-8183 or by mail at the following address to receive a questionnaire:

Dr. Linda Skogrand
Utah State University
2705 Old Main
Logan, Utah 84322-2705

Volunteers will be sent a questionnaire to complete together and return postage-paid. Couples will be able to view the questionnaire before they decide to participate anonymously in the study or not.

The questionnaire consists of 46 open-ended questions about various aspects of a strong marriage, plus an inventory of couple strengths. The questionnaire takes anywhere from an hour to three hours to fill complete. The questionnaires will be analyzed seeing what the researchers can learn from each couple, and what can be learned from all the couples as a group. Couples are encouraged to keep the original copy of the questionnaire as an important document, a self-study of their healthy marital relationship to date, and something to be passed down to their children.

Over the past 30 years Dr. Skogrand and Dr. DeFrain have co-authored 17 books and a multitude of professional articles on family issues. They have both have a strong desire to enhance marriage and family life.

Appendix C. Consent Letter

Dear Participants,

The purpose of this study is to better understand how couples develop highly-successful marriages, and the qualities of those marriages. A diverse sample of volunteer couples, who perceive they have a strong, satisfying, happy, high-quality relationship, are being invited to participate in this study to gain an in-depth understanding of highly-successful marriages. The findings will be used for Cooperative Extension program development and educational efforts to improve the quality of marriages locally, nationally, and internationally

The questionnaire mainly consists of 46 open-ended questions, plus an inventory of couple strengths. I ask that you complete the questionnaire as a couple; there is a place for the husband and the wife to respond after each question. The questionnaire will take from an hour to three hours to complete. The completed questionnaire will be a *story* of each great marriage. You can choose not to answer specific questions and at any time you can choose not to participate in the study. If you choose to complete the questionnaire, you can then mail it in the enclosed post-paid envelope. The information you provide will be anonymous.

The stories will then be analyzed by the researchers. There will be an analysis of all the couples' stories as a group, seeing what general principles or themes can be ascertained from the group of couples.

In many previous studies using this type of approach, I have found that participants often gain a good deal of satisfaction in passing on to others what they have learned about life. In this particular study, your marital successes will be used as examples for others to learn from.

Risks involved are minimal, because you are volunteering for the study and can withdraw at any time. You are encouraged to contact me to ask any questions about the research you might have at the phone number listed below, and I will answer them honestly. I encourage you to keep the original copy of the story as a valuable document describing an important part of the life of your family. I do not ask for your names and identifying details which could identify you will never be used in any written or presented accounts of the research.

The results of the study will be published in journal articles, presented at scholarly meetings, and used in developing educational programs for couples and families. I have worked for many years with state and national professional organizations helping to strengthen couples and families, and the results of this study will be very influential in the creation of marriage and family programming.

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject that have not been answered by the investigators, feel free to contact True Rubal, Utah State University Institutional Review Board, at (435) 797-1821.

Please send a copy of the questionnaire to me in the enclosed, post-paid envelope. By returning the questionnaire, you are indicating your consent to participate in our study.

Thank you for your kindness and your contribution to a better understanding of the creation of strong marriages in our country.

Sincerely,

Linda Skogrand, PhD
Assistant Professor and Extension Family Life Specialist
Principal Investigator
Department of Family, Consumer and Human Development
College of Education and Human Sciences
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Appendix D. Questionnaire

GREAT MARRIAGES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Questionnaire

Principal Investigator:

Linda Skogrand, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor and Extension Family

Life Specialist

Department of Family, Consumer and
Human Development

Utah State University

Phone: 435 797-8183

E-mail: lindas@ext.usu.edu

General Information

1. Your ages:

___ *her* age

___ *his* age

2. This is *her*:

___ first marriage

___ second marriage

___ third marriage

This is *his*:

___ first marriage

___ second marriage

___ third marriage

3. The number of years you have been in this marriage.

___ years

4. In your own words, please describe the ethnic/cultural group to which you belong:

_____.

5. Highest level of education you have achieved (please describe):

_____ *her* education.

_____ *his* education.

6. Are you in paid employment?

___ *husband*, yes

___ *husband*, no

___ *wife*, yes

___ *wife*, no

7. How many hours per week do you work for pay?

___ hours of *husband*

___ hours of *wife*

8. What do you call your job?

_____ *husband*

_____ *wife*

9. What kind of work do you do on your job?

_____ *husband*
_____ *wife*

10. Approximate yearly gross household income:

11. What percentage of your yearly gross household income does each partner contribute?

_____ % *wife's* contribution

_____ % *husband's* contribution

11. Age of children (if you are parents):

___ years

___ years

___ years

___ years

___ years

___ years

GREAT MARRIAGES, PART II

Open-Ended Questions

Three key points for couples to consider while filling out this part of the questionnaire:

- *This questionnaire looks really long. But, on careful examination, you will see that I'm simply leaving you a lot of space to express your thoughts. Depending on how much time you wish to devote to the process, I am confident you can fill out the questionnaire in an hour's time up to three hours. Since this can be an important document for you as a couple to keep, I believe the time you invest will be well spent.*
- *Answer questions without worrying about spelling, punctuation, grammar, or correct word usage. Just write freely. Tell me the story of your marriage in your own unique way. Also, add extra pages or write on the back of the pages if you need more space.*
- *So that you don't influence each other's responses to the questions, I suggest that each of you to complete the questionnaire before you look at what the other person has written. After you're finished writing, I encourage you to enjoy discussing your individual perceptions about your marriage with each other.*

1. You have volunteered for a study of great marriages. Tell us about your great marriage. What's it like, and why is it so good? Is *great* marriage the best term for you? Can you think of a better one?

Her response:

His response:

2. Why did you get married?

Her response:

His response:

3. Please describe what you consider to be your *family* and the environment in which all of you live. For example, who are the members of your family, and how old are they? (Be sure to include yourself.) What does each family member do? Please describe the places in which your family members live, and how all of you fit into the larger community.

Her response:

His response:

4. Please describe the family you grew up in. How would you compare it to the family you are creating today?

Her response:

His response:

5. Beside the family you grew up in, are there other families you lived in before creating the relationship you are now in? (i.e., has either partner been divorced, widowed, and so forth?)

Her response:

His response:

6. How did you meet? Please tell the story. Was it love at first sight? Were you friends first, then lovers? Details, please.

Her response:

His response:

7. What were the qualities that attracted you to your mate? Are these qualities still important to you today, or has your thinking changed on all this?

Her response:

His response:

8. What was it, while you were dating, that led you to believe you would have a good marriage?

Her response:

His response:

9. How did the age at which you got married affect your marital relationship?

Her response:

His response:

10. Did you live on your own before marriage, or did you go from your parents' home straight to marriage with your spouse? Please discuss.

Her response:

His response:

11. Did you live together before marriage? If so, was this useful to do or not?

Her response:

His response:

12. It has been said that, "You don't marry an individual. You marry a whole family." Could you describe the ups and downs of blending two different extended families into one marriage. How do you get along today?

Her response:

His response:

13. What are the strengths of your marriage? Please list and write about each strength.

Her response:

His response:

14. What are the areas of potential growth in your marriage? In other words, what are some things that you would like to see change? Please discuss each.

Her response:

His response:

15. How did you learn about what it takes to have a strong marriage?

Her response:

His response:

16. How did you prepare for getting married (marriage education classes, books, talking with clergy, etc.)? How was it useful or not?

Her response:

His response:

17. What preparation do you wish you had?

Her response:

His response:

18. Do you know other couples that have strong marriages? If so, what makes them strong?

Her response:

His response:

19. Do you know couples that are having difficulties? If so, what causes these difficulties?

Her response:

His response:

20. How many months or years did it take before you two had created a great marriage?
Please describe the process.

Her response: ____ Months or ____ Years

His response: ____ Months or ____ Years

21. Were there high points in your marriage? Please tell a story. And low points? Please tell a story.

Her response:

His response:

22. What are the challenges you face in your marriage today? Please describe each.

Her response:

His response:

23. Please tell a story that best illustrates the strengths of your marriage.

Her response:

His response:

24. Please tell a story that best illustrates the area or areas of potential growth of your marriage.

Her response:

His response:

25. Please describe the challenges you have faced together. How did you deal with these challenges?

Her response:

His response:

26. Please define the word *commitment*, and describe the level of commitment you have for each other. Could you explain this for us in a way we could understand in our heart?

Her response:

His response:

27. Could you describe your thinking on the importance of expressing appreciation and affection in a marital relationship?

Her response:

His response:

28. Could you describe communication patterns in your marriage? Do you do a good job communicating with each other? Are you generally positive with each other? When you have a conflict over some issue, how is it usually resolved? Please give some examples.

Her response:

His response:

29. Do you like to spend time together? What do you do together that is enjoyable? How would you describe the balance you have between togetherness and separateness? How much apart time do you each need, besides the time you spend at work?

Her response:

His response:

30. Please describe the very best time in your marriage. A special time in which you were the happiest and most connected to each other; the most engaged as a couple and in love.

Her response:

His response:

31. Do you share religious, spiritual, ethical, or social values and beliefs which are important to your marriage? Please describe these values and beliefs. What is important about them that contributes to the strength of your marriage? Are there areas in which you have different perspectives on these issues?

Her response:

His response:

32. How do you manage stress and crisis in your marriage? Could you please describe some of the stressors you face, and how you deal with them. Have you had a major crisis or crises in your marriage in the past few years? How did you deal with them?

Her response:

His response:

33. How do you manage conflict or fight?

Her response:

His response:

34. To whom would you go if you had a problem in your marriage?

Her response:

His response:

35. Have you ever thought of divorcing and/or come close to divorcing? What was going on at that time, and how did you patch things up? Looking back, how do you feel about this experience now?

Her response:

His response:

36. Would you describe your marriage as a traditional marriage or a more contemporary marriage? (To explain further, does the man perform traditionally male roles in the marriage, and the woman performs traditionally female roles? Or, do you assign roles on a different basis?) Please explain. And, would you say your marriage is like your parents' marriage in this regard, or different?

Her response:

His response:

37. How is power divided up in your marriage?

Her response

His response

38. Talk about money. Disagreements over money are perhaps the most common type of disagreements couples have. How do you manage money? How do you deal with debt? Who is in charge? What conflicts do you have over money, if any, and how do you resolve them?

Her response:

His response:

39. [For those couples with children] How old were you when your children were born? How long were you married? Were they planned pregnancies? How did the arrival of your first child affect your marital relationship?

Her response:

His response:

40. [For those couples with children] Couples sometimes disagree over approaches to parenting. Are your approaches to parenting generally in agreement? What is your philosophy of parenthood, and how is it similar to or different from that of your spouse?

Her response:

His response:

41. [For those couples with children] Children bring joy to a marriage, and also can put a strain on the marriage. What do you think? How have the children brought you closer together? And, in what ways have they added stress to your marriage?

Her response:

His response:

42. Tell us about the part sex plays in a great marriage.

Her response:

His response:

43. Are there any ethnic or cultural issues or differences that affect your marriage relationship? Please discuss these if applicable.

Her response:

His response:

44. If you were to draw a graph of your marital happiness over the years, what would it look like?

Her response:

His response:

45. What will the future bring for you as a couple and for your family?

Her response:

His response:

46. What would be most useful in helping couples prepare for and continue to have good marriages? Your advice please.

Her response:

His response:

*GREAT MARRIAGES, PART III**Marital Strengths Inventory*

On the next pages, rate each quality in your marriage on a five-point scale:

5 = very high

4 = high

3 = undecided

2 = low

1 = very low

Or, note that a particular quality does not apply to your marriage :

NA = not applicable

APPRECIATION AND AFFECTION

(5 = very high; 4 = high; 3 = undecided; 2 = low; 1 = very low; NA = not applicable)

Husband Wife

- | | | |
|-----|-----|---|
| ___ | ___ | caring for each other |
| ___ | ___ | respect for each other |
| ___ | ___ | respect for individuality |
| ___ | ___ | physical and emotional affection |
| ___ | ___ | tolerance |
| ___ | ___ | playfulness |
| ___ | ___ | humor |
| ___ | ___ | put-downs and sarcasm are rare |
| ___ | ___ | we are both committed to helping enhance each other's self-esteem |
| ___ | ___ | a feeling of security |
| ___ | ___ | safety |
| ___ | ___ | we genuinely like each other, and we like being with each other |
| --- | --- | <i>Over-all rating of <u>appreciation and affection</u> in our marriage</i> |

COMMITMENT

(5 = very high; 4 = high; 3 = undecided; 2 = low; 1 = very low; NA = not applicable)

Husband Wife

___ ___

trust

___ ___

honesty

___ ___

dependability

___ ___

fidelity or faithfulness

___ ___

we are one

___ ___

we are family

___ ___

sacrifice

___ ___

sharing

___ ___

Over-all rating of commitment in our marriage

POSITIVE COMMUNICATION

(5 = very high; 4 = high; 3 = undecided; 2 = low; 1 = very low; NA = not applicable)

Husband Wife

- | | | |
|-----|-----|--|
| ___ | ___ | open, straightforward communication |
| ___ | ___ | discussion rather than lectures |
| ___ | ___ | positive, not negative communication |
| ___ | ___ | cooperative, not competitive |
| ___ | ___ | non-blaming |
| ___ | ___ | a few squabbles occur, but generally are consensus building, rather than a winner and a loser |
| ___ | ___ | compromise |
| ___ | ___ | agreeing to disagree on occasion |
| ___ | ___ | acceptance of the notion that differences can be a strength in our marriage and that we do not have to be exactly the same |
| ___ | ___ | <i>Over-all rating of <u>positive communication</u> in our marriage</i> |

ENJOYABLE TIME TOGETHER

(5 = very high; 4 = high; 3 = undecided; 2 = low; 1 = very low; NA = not applicable)

Husband Wife

- | | | |
|-----|-----|---|
| ___ | ___ | good things take time, and we take time to be with each other |
| ___ | ___ | we share quality time, and in great quantity we enjoy each other's company |
| ___ | ___ | serendipitous (unplanned, spontaneous) good times |
| ___ | ___ | simple, inexpensive good times |
| ___ | ___ | <i>Over-all rating of the <u>time we share together</u> in our marriage</i> |

SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

(5 = very high; 4 = high; 3 = undecided; 2 = low; 1 = very low; NA = not applicable)

Husband Wife

- | | | |
|-----|-----|--|
| ___ | ___ | happiness |
| ___ | ___ | optimism |
| ___ | ___ | hope |
| ___ | ___ | a sense of peace |
| ___ | ___ | mental health |
| ___ | ___ | a functional religion or set of shared ethical values which guide us through life's challenges |
| ___ | ___ | oneness with God |
| ___ | ___ | oneness with Nature |
| ___ | ___ | supportive extended family members |
| ___ | ___ | involvement in the community, and support from the community |
| ___ | ___ | the world is our home and we feel comfortable in it |
| ___ | ___ | <i>Over-all rating of <u>spiritual well-being</u> in our marriage</i> |

THE ABILITY TO MANAGE STRESS AND CRISIS EFFECTIVELY

(5 = very high; 4 = high; 3 = undecided; 2 = low; 1 = very low; NA = not applicable)

Husband Wife

- | | | |
|-----|-----|--|
| ___ | ___ | share feelings |
| ___ | ___ | understand each other |
| ___ | ___ | help each other |
| ___ | ___ | forgiveness |
| ___ | ___ | "don't worry, be happy" |
| ___ | ___ | growing through crises together |
| ___ | ___ | patience |
| ___ | ___ | resilience (the ability to "hang in there") |
| ___ | ___ | <i>Over-all rating of <u>our ability to cope with stress and crisis.</u></i> |

OVER-ALL RATINGS OF THE MARITAL RELATIONSHIP

(5= very high; 4 = high; 3 = undecided; 2 = low; 1 = very low)

Husband Wife

- ___ ___ The degree of *closeness* in my relationship with my spouse.
- ___ ___ The degree of *satisfaction* in my relationship with my spouse.
- ___ ___ The degree of *happiness* in my relationship with my spouse.
- ___ ___ The degree of *strength* in my relationship with my spouse.

OVER-ALL RATINGS OF PARENT/CHILD RELATIONSHIPS (IF APPLICABLE)

(5= very high; 4 = high; 3 = undecided; 2 = low; 1 = very low)

Note: Relationships may be different between parents and individual children.
If you would like to make separate ratings for each child, please do so.

Husband Wife

- ___ ___ The degree of *closeness* in my relationship with my child or children.
- ___ ___ The degree of *satisfaction* in my relationship with my child or children.
- ___ ___ The degree of *happiness* in my relationship with my child or children.
- ___ ___ The degree of *strength* in my relationship with my child or children.

Appendix E. IRB Approval

Utah State UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD OFFICE
9530 Old Main Hill, Suite 214a
Logan, UT 84322-9530
Telephone: (435) 797-1821
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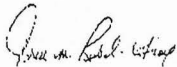
USU Assurance: FWA#00003308
Protocol # 1218

SPO #:
AES #: UTA00

1/30/2006

MEMORANDUM

TO: Linda Skogrand UMC: 2705
Pamela Morrill

FROM: True M. Rubal-Fox, IRB Administrator 

SUBJECT: Continuation Approval of your Protocol:
Power & Gender Roles In Great Marriages

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file. Any change affecting participants must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. The Institutional Review Board originally approved your protocol on 3/9/2005. As required for yearly continuation review, you have received another year's approval through 2/1/2007. All approved protocols are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Injuries or any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the IRB Office (797-1821).

Prior to involving participants, properly executed informed consent must be obtained from each participant or from an authorized representative, and documentation of informed consent must be kept on file for at least three years after the project ends. Each participant must be furnished with a copy of the informed consent document for their personal records.

Please note that the data cannot be used for another study or an extension of the current study without IRB approval either through modification (addendum) or a new application.