

**The Good Marriage Revisited**

**By**

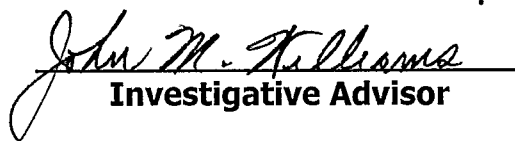
**Tamera L. Hill**

**A Research Paper**

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the  
Master of Science Degree  
With a Major in**

**Marriage and Family Therapy**

**Approved for Two Semester Credits**

  
**Investigative Advisor**

**The Graduate College  
The University of Wisconsin- Stout  
May 2001**

**The Graduate School  
University of Wisconsin-Stout  
Menomonie, WI 54751**

**ABSTRACT**

Hill	Tamera	L
(Writer)(Last Name)	(First)	(Initial)
The Good Marriage Revisited		
(Title)		
Marriage & Family Therapy	John Williams	May 2001
(Graduate Major)	(Research Advisor)	(Month/Year)
		95
		(No. of Pages)
American Psychological Association [APA]		
(Name of Style Manual Used in this Study)		

This research focused directly on the quality of marriage. The quality of marriage that was studied was the good marriage. Although qualitative studies of marriage are still considered a relatively new area of research, they are increasing rapidly.

The participants in this study were selected randomly and asked if they would like to participate. The researcher spent a short period of time explaining the research, the participants' responsibility, as well as what could be expected. (Couples were required to have been married fifteen years or more, have at least one child together, and consider their marriage good.) The researcher then had the participants complete an essay separately that spoke as to why they believed

they have a good marriage. This was asked of ten couples, of which, three were interviewed.

The selection of the three couples interviewed was based on the quality of their responses to the essay. The selection was made with the guidance of the research advisor, assuring the best fit for the research. The interview was conducted in a self-report style, in which the participants provided the direction in which the interview went. There were some questions to guide the interview but the majority of the direction was left to the participants. The interviews were approximately two hours with each couple. A summary of the results is presented and a discussion of the results follows.

The outcome of the interviews was compared and contrasted with the work already done in the area of quality within good marriages and contributions from the paper were highlighted. Conclusions addressed new questions raised and the value of further study on this topic.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank the many people that made this project a success. Without all of you I would still be trying to accomplish the goal of graduating on time.

The couples that participated in the research topic have my utmost regard. Not only did they invite me into their homes, but they opened up their lives to me in very personal ways. The stories were exciting, humbling, and encouraging all at the same time. I sincerely hope that each couple will utilize their audiotapes in the future by sharing them with children, grandchildren, or great grandchildren. You are truly inspirations for those who are married, intend to get married, or never marry. The information you have provided will live on as a legacy to other generations.

Thanks to my husband, Chad, who stood beside me, encouraged me to go further, and never once gave up on me. It is truly amazing how the strength of an extremely wise husband can inspire one to search inside themselves for the answers. The tenderness when I needed to be listened to and the prodding when I was getting a little behind task were all factors that helped in completing a project of this magnitude. Thank you for the transcription that you provided; many hours you sat and listened and typed and typed in amazement of how long we talked in the interviews. I know you will not be signing up for this again anytime soon but I deeply appreciate your persistence. Also, thank you for

coming to my aid one Thursday afternoon, not only did you surprise me, you lit up my day. Thank you Chad for being my number one supporter, my biggest prayer partner, and last but not least the dad in the house. I love you.

Thanks to the youngsters that live in the house. They are not your typical two-legged kind but the hairy four-legged variety. Timone as you licked my face when I sat and cried about the computer, which was not doing what I was asking it, and Riley for being the biggest goof and following the wall shadows around the house. The unconditional love and compassion of the two of you will never go unnoticed.

Thank you to my mother who has always given me the strength to do in life what I want to do. You have always considered me more of a student than I thought I ever was; thanks for acknowledging my gifts before I even knew them. Thanks to my dad who has always modeled a kind and giving heart. I always say that dad would give the shirt off his back to anyone in need. This is true and because of that kindness and generosity I know I have grown to be a tender heart myself.

Thanks to my brother, sister-in-law, and four nieces and nephews. It is a supreme joy to see my brother as a father. I pray that you encourage your girls and son to go out into life and do what they feel will bring them to joy and satisfaction. I pray for their education and whom they will meet in life. Truly, as a family, this is one that I can feel proud of. We have been through so many

fun, sad, and not so exciting times but through it all we hung together. Thanks to Rachelle [sister-in-law] for being a guide through many, many times in my life. You are much closer than a sister-in-law; if I could have picked a sister, I would have chosen you. I know that if ever I am in need all I would have to do is call either of you and you would come to my aid. I am truly blessed.

Thank you to my three best friends in the world. When I was praying for friends, God was listening. You have been there through the tears, the laughter, and the seriousness of deadlines; you have experienced all of this with me. How could I ever repay you for the times that you have consoled, cheered, and humorously prodded me on to completion? Thank you for being there for me and not getting too bored with all of the "marriage" talk. You are the gems in my pocket and I thank God for you every day. I love you all like the biological sister(s) I never had.

Last but certainly not least, thank you John for being the zookeeper. The visual of the giraffe and the meercat in continuous battle for my time is one I am not soon to forget. I am appreciative of all the time and effort you have spent with me as a student as well as with this research paper. Thank you for your kindness, your continual guidance, and gracious laughter. You will always have a special place in my heart. God bless.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	2
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>	4
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	7
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	
<b>Introduction</b>	10
Objective of This Study	12
Overview of This Study	12
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	
<b>Literature Review</b>	14
Communication	14
Work	16
Transition to Parenthood	19
Religion and Spirituality	23
Crisis in Marriage and Family	27
Four Types of Marriage	29
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	
<b>Methodology</b>	32
Qualitative Research Design	32
Ethnography as Qualitative Method	34
Data Analysis	35
Interview Design	37
Selection of Participants	39
Interview Procedures	39
Evolution of Methodology	41
Possible Bias	41
Sample Size	42

Participant Confidentiality_____	42
Personal Notes_____	43

## CHAPTER 4

<b>Case Reviews: Who are the Participants?</b> _____	45
Couple 1: Sam and Laurie_____	45
Couple 2: Bart and Connie_____	48
Couple 3: Roy and Carol_____	52
Contextual Observation Notes [all couples involved]_____	54

## Chapter 5

<b>Results</b> _____	58
Work_____	58
Long Hours_____	58
Communication_____	61
Non-defensive Listening_____	61
Active Listening_____	63
Self-Disclosure_____	63
Transition into Parenthood_____	65
Planned or Unplanned_____	66
Identifying and Embracing Change_____	67
Religiosity and Marital Satisfaction_____	68
Crisis in Marriage and Family_____	71

## CHAPTER 6

<b>Discussion</b> _____	74
Summary_____	74
Work_____	75
Communication_____	75
Transition into Parenthood_____	76
Religiosity and Spirituality_____	77



Crisis and Adversity_____	77
Four Types of Marriage_____	78
Limitations of this Research_____	80
Future Research_____	81
Conclusions_____	82
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> _____	84
<b>APPENDICES</b> _____	88
Appendix I	
Letter to Research Participants_____	88
Appendix II	
Participant Essay Form_____	89
Appendix III	
Interview Questions_____	90
Appendix IV	
Participant Consent Form_____	91
Appendix V	
Genogram Symbols_____	92
Sam & Laurie_____	93
Roy & Carol_____	94
Bart & Connie_____	95

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Centuries have brought about change in the quality of the marital relationship. With each generation we find more and more information about what marriage involves and requires. Marriage has been understood in very different terms at other times in our history primarily as an economic, social, or political alliance within which satisfaction and romantic love was not particularly important (Fowers, 1998). The importance of romantic love and satisfaction in marriage is very real today in the United States. With the changing times moving towards romantic love, there is a responsibility to learn about protecting and enhancing the love relationship. The focus of this study is to look at the experiences of couples who self-report that they have a good marriage and to look at the variables that predict this outcome.

In looking at the good marriage, as many scholars today are, there are confusions in the terminology of what constitutes good. Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton (1985), state that we seem to have lost our vocabulary for formulating a common understanding of good. Because we have undermined common standards for defining better and worse ways of living, each individual is left to define good for himself/herself. It is difficult, as the authors are suggesting, because good has connotations to each individual and their expectations of good in their marriages. Due to this importance there is an

attempt to formulate a blanket of variables that “most” couples agree is good and leads to marital success. These variables are listed in Chapter two of this paper.

Researchers have concluded through several studies that marital satisfaction far outweighs other aspects of life. Marital satisfaction is much more important to personal well-being than occupational success, religion, housing, or finances combined (Bellah et al., 1985; Fowers, 1998). Other innovative researchers on this topic, Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1996), have extended a tremendous effort to improve the quality of studies done on marriage. The studies thus far are typically not researched on the positive aspects of marriage as supported by Wallerstein. While researchers and clinicians have identified factors that contribute to the failure of marriages, relatively little time has been devoted to finding out what makes good marriages succeed (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). Therefore, this research became a large part of the effort to create qualitative research that focuses on the positive aspects of marriage as well as identifying what couples believe make marriages succeed.

Marriage is one institution in which people in America voluntarily enter. Nearly 90 percent of adults marry at least once in their lifetime (Schoen & Weinick, 1993). The marriage rates are high but the divorce rates are also staggering. Studies conclude that there are needs for quality research focused on how marriages succeed rather than their demise. Beirne & Beirne, (1997),

state that it is sometimes hard even to get people to talk about their good marriages, whatever the cause. It is a phenomenon that needs to be overcome if the engaged and newly married are to benefit from the community's collective wisdom. Many researchers are in agreement that this type of collective wisdom needs to be utilized in the future. Wallerstein, in her studies on couples concluded that there is a disproportionate concentration on pathology leaving a striking gap in our knowledge of the family (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996).

### **Objective of This Study**

The objective of this study is to describe the experiences of couples who self-report having a good marriage. The study will constitute a qualitative format with marital satisfaction research assisting in validating the findings.

### **Overview of This Study**

Chapter one is an introduction to the study that gives an overview of the importance of marriage in our society. The objective is stated clearly in this section as well. Chapter two is the literature review which focuses on the studies already done that are relevant to this topic. The studies will be compared and contrasted depending on the study and its content. Chapter three offers the reader the rationale behind choosing qualitative data, how the data is analyzed, and how it is formatted into the final project. This section will give the reader

the ability to replicate the study if or as desired. In Chapter four the summaries of the couples cases will be presented. Chapter five reports the results formulated in this study as well as reflection on the outcome of the interviews. Chapter six concludes with discussion about the research, implications for further studies, and therapeutic techniques. The Appendices include materials utilized in the research study such as interview questions, genograms of the couples, and the couples' self-report short essay about what makes their marriage good.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

This Literature review provides a chance to look at other sources that have been already written on the topic the author is exploring. In this review the following variables will be looked at more closely to decide if these are in fact variables of the good marriage. The variables are communication, work, transitioning into parenthood, religion and spirituality and crisis/adversity. These variables became the center point of this paper after spending time researching what was out there in terms of materials that support the good marriage. One source of material available to review is Wallerstein & Blakeslee's (1996) four types of good marriages. This will be covered in this section as well.

#### **Communication**

Research has focused a considerable amount of attention to the area of couples' communication or lack thereof. Popular and professional opinions converge that communication is the primary means of securing happiness (Bellah et al., 1985; Fowers, 1993). Fowers, in her study concluded that there are two main functions of marital communication. The first type of communication is focused on self-expression, mutual understanding, and emotional intimacy. The second type of communication is to effectively communicate about the difficulties that marriages will inevitably face. This study on marital success through verbal

communication lacked to talk about nonverbal communication, which Wallerstein uses as a basis of her research.

Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1996, concluded that research on couples communication is severely limited to communication meaning exchange of words. "It became clear early on that popular notions about marital communication failed to capture the subtlety of the daily interactions between men and women" (p. 335). The wisdom of knowing when was a good time to speak and when to listen, when silence speaks volumes and when silence is deadly, all of these communicative responses are essentially lost in popular research today according to Wallerstein. She continues further to show exactly what this type of communication looks like as couples grow together over time.

"It involves paying attention to changing moods, facial expressions, body language, and the many other cues that reveal inner states of mind. It means knowing each others' history and catching the echoes and behaviors that reverberate from the past. It includes knowing enough about the other so that at critical times one can take an imaginative leap inside the others' skin" (p. 335).

Wallerstein believes that nonverbal communication between couples adds a dimension that categorizes couples as the most intimate relationship possible.

## Work

Work is an area of legitimate concern in the research on marital quality. Research suggests in part that work is detrimental to the marriage and in part work is beneficial. (The benefit goes beyond the obvious paycheck).

Since the late 1980's the percentage of dual earner couples has nearly doubled in the United States. Of those in the workforce nearly 60 percent are women (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1989). This work force participation has significantly altered the family lifestyle. Despite the increased labor force participation of women, both husbands and wives have shown that they are more content with their marriages and report higher levels of life satisfaction (Bahr & Day, 1978; Lueptow, Guss & Hyden, 1989; Perry-Jenkins & Crouter, 1990). These authors agree that there is a move towards a more parallel way of thinking about families. Instead of the traditional wife as child and home caretaker and husband as the bread earner there is a move towards shared roles and responsibilities.

The parallel move in work and family is not supported by all researchers. Several suggest that work in the family puts a strain on marriage whether both or one person is working outside of the home. The heightened stress of job demands are detrimental to marital satisfaction (Kingston & Nock, 1987 p.192). The continual expectations by the work force to put in long hours and accomplish more, and the longing to be at home more with your family disrupts



■   \*   \*   ■

the family and marital union. An increase in hours spent in the employment realm and the decrease of family time is significantly related to higher levels of conflict (Kingston & Nock, 1987 p.191).

There is much more research stating that the move towards dual-earner relationships has restricted the marital and family relations. Wives who are not doing traditional household duties were less satisfied with their marriages and were subject to more physical and mental strain. Husbands of employed wives were less satisfied with their marriages and contemplated leaving the relationship more frequently. (Lueptow et al., 1989; Kessler & McRae, 1982). This research tends to explain the theory that personal preference is quite prevalent in the thinking about working outside of the home. Those who are working outside the home and wanting to be home, or those at home and desiring to be working will tend to show more negative patterns including verbalizing dissatisfaction in the marital relationship. There is also evidence that guilt inflicted on men, who are not able to allow their wife to stay at home, leads to depression in both sexes.

Research by Kingston & Nock (1987) suggests that length of hours affects the family but even more, the scheduling seems to be a problem. "Not only do hours in the work force have an impact on marital quality but the scheduling of those work hours is also important." (191). White & Keith (1990) have found that shift work is the hardest on the marital and family system. They state "shift

work has a negative affect on marital quality across a variety of dimensions.” (191). Along with the negative affect comes the increased likelihood of divorce.

Simon (1990) contributes by adding that shift work adds to the marital distress because of the rapidly changing schedule that leaves no chance for homeostasis. “The shift workers’ partner may experience resentment and frustration as a result of having to juggle multiple family responsibilities and his or her own job to accommodate the shift workers’ rotating afternoon, or night shift schedule.” (345). This seems to be in itself difficult for a family with children due to the fact that they may not see one or the other parent in a given day.

Research by Wallerstein and Blakeslee, (1996) conclude that work can and does in fact cause problems in a majority of couples. “I have learned many times over from the divorced couples I have worked with, the extraordinary threats that contemporary society poses to marriage. The stresses of the workplace and its fierce impact of the couple are writ large in the lives of these families.” (p.336). The fact that the workplace is incredibly demanding and family life at home can be demanding as well, often times leads an individual to divorce to be able to simplify life. However, after reading research from several of the authors, there is a desire to find out just how couples balance the work and family dyads.

## **Transition to Parenthood**

Transitioning into parenthood has been studied repeatedly to gauge the amount of strain on marriage. Research has been mixed however heavily siding with transitioning to parenthood as a precursor to decreases in marital satisfaction.

There is no disagreement that the birth of a child signifies a family life change. The dyad becomes a triad and with this distinction comes considerable novelty to both parents. The birth of a baby transforms the parents' inner psychological and emotional being and forever changes the marital dynamics (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996; Macdermid & Huston, 1990). This belief is shared in large part by several of the studies on transitioning the new baby into the home, but from there differing opinions occur.

Cox, in her research on the transition into parenthood focuses a great deal on reorganization. Transitioning into parenthood is a time when a marriage may be particularly vulnerable because the relationship has to be reorganized to meet new challenges daily (Cox, 1999). The reorganization includes many variables including childcare, schedule conflicts, and general day-to-day challenges. All of these significant life changes appear to happen at once and thus strain the relationship. Cox suggests that a couples' ability to find ways to deal with stress facilitates either less or more marital strain. Their ability to solve problems

together likely influence how well the couple makes the adjustments and compromises required in such a reorganization (1999).

Lastly, Cox concluded that parenthood actually might enhance some relationships, undermine some, and have little affect on others (Cox, 1999; Huston & Vangelisti, 1995). With this in the research, the conclusion seems to be that some disturbance is expected to occur, problem solving is required, and the possibility of significant strain remains individual to each couple.

Macdermid & Huston (1990) investigated the reality that children may not be the source for the diminished marital satisfaction. Declines in marital quality may be apparent soon after the marriage as the romantic glow of courtship fades (Macdermid & Huston, 1990). Since this may be part of the transitional difficulty, these researchers studied more closely the relationship between those parents with new children and those without.

The findings suggest what Macdermid & Huston had anticipated finding. Regardless of the widespread changes in their daily activities following the children's births, parents did not differ from non-parents in their general feelings of love or marital satisfaction, even more than one year after the transition to parenthood had occurred (1990). This study was a pioneering study since the researchers focused attention on comparing those who had children and those who did not. Findings supported the notion that marriage does decline even without the birth of children.

Most researchers have concluded that significant declines in marital quality become evident after the birth of the first child (Belsky & Pensky, 1988; Glenn & Mc Lanahan, 1982; Cox, 1999). Wallerstein and Blakeslee concurred in their findings that transitioning into parenthood remains a significant life change. However, they have found in utilizing qualitative research, through interviewing successful couples, that there are some variables that make the transition into parenthood smoother.

The first finding we defined as social support. Feeling physically and emotionally drained, she (the mother) needs support, praise, rest, and devoted care. In other words, she needs mothering – not necessarily from her real mother, but from the universe of mothers and sisters (Wallerstein, 1996, 75). This appeared to play a significant role in the research of good marriages. American women transitioning into parenthood face a momentous challenge. In many Third World countries, motherly and sisterly care for the new mother is part of the culture. But in our society of nuclear families, the mother seldom receives this kind of help (Wallerstein, 1996, 75). The marriages where support was granted to the new mother enhanced the couples' transition into parenthood.

The second finding reflected the needs of the husband/father. Through research Wallerstein and Blakeslee found that men connect on a different level. A man's experience is different.

He can attend Lamaze classes, rub his wife's back, hold her hand during birth, feel a surge of ecstasy as the head crowns, and rush to take photographs of his newborn child – but biologically he stands in the wings (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996, 75).

Their research suggests that becoming attached to the child, for the fathers, is underestimated in complexity by our society. The complexity occurs because of a strong sense of rejection. In the beginning when the couple finds out they are pregnant the physical changes occur in the mother, however the emotional and psychological changes are occurring in the father. Unconsciously he sees the baby not as an innocent newborn but as an archrival, and he reads his wife's anxious preoccupation with the new baby as pure rejection (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). This thinking, according to Wallerstein and Blakeslee, is pressure that couples can curtail given the desire to put the marriage first. She suggests that the woman needs to apportion her attention between husband and child, recognizing the importance of her role as wife and sexual partner (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). She continues by adding that the sexual desires and needs of the husband need to be addressed and not ignored so that he will not feel rejected and this in turn will help him feel more apt to connect as a support for his wife. The wisdom in this scenario seems to exhibit the rule of helping each other so that all parties get what they need.

Lastly, Wallerstein and Blakeslee believe that the couple needs to continually work at restoring their marriage. It is all too easy for the marital

S   a   n   d   M

relationship to take the backseat while childrearing takes center stage (1996). If either parent is too centrally focused on parenting the relationship will begin to be lopsided and rejection, anger, and resentment may set in. Wallerstein and Blakeslee have learned through interviewing couples for their book, *The Good Marriage*, that balance is the key. Obviously the needs of the parents are sacrificed to meet the needs of the children at certain times; however when one parent or the marriage itself needs attention the children's needs can be put on hold; this is what parenting and marriage are all about (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996, 79).

The good marriages that handled transitioning into parenthood believed that striking a balance was as crucial as never forgetting you entered in this together. In conclusion, both parents need to appreciate that restoring their life as a couple is vital to the child as well as to the marriage (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996, 79). The modeling that we provide to our children enhances their ability to grow and continue to carry their parents' marital style into their own. Parents have the responsibility to shape future generations by modeling respect, love, physical and emotional availability.

### **Religion and Spirituality**

Research in the area of religion and personal spirituality has been growing since the 1980's. However, research on the effects of religion and marital

relationships is rather new. Spirituality is gaining increased attention among Marriage and Family Therapists (Giblin, 1996). The following are two definitions used by researchers who have explored the religious dimension.

Anthony (1993), states that religious orientation refers to the way one relates religion to one's life and how one is motivated by one's religion (98). Giblin (1996), considered the spiritual dimension of the human as a unifying force which integrates all other dimensions, plays a vital role in well-being, and identifies what is meaningful and purposeful (47). Both of these definitions integrate the concept of using their religious/spiritual beliefs as guidelines for living life.

In a study by Booth & Johnson (1985), the authors reflected on findings that religious beliefs prompted no significant relationship to marriage. Although religiosity may decrease the probability of divorce, it neither enhances marital satisfaction nor decreases marital conflicts. This point was considered by researchers as the downfall to the religious marriages. Even if the relationship was not going well the couple may stay together to appease the religious beliefs they cleave to. "If divorce is discouraged and therefore not an option, individuals may report the marriage as happy even is it is not, in order to reduce dissonance between their feelings and their options" (Booth & Johnson, 1995, p. 663). The compromise of an unhappy marriage for faith seems to be a valid point, but even more compelling is how the relationship continues on. Booth and



Johnson (1995), report that those with deteriorating marriages may withdraw from religious activities in order to distance themselves from their spouse and avoid reminders that divorce is immoral and not encouraged.

Through research on religion several studies conclude that religion does in fact enhance the marriage. Hunt and King (1978), found that belief, effort, and participation in religion seemed to correlate with better marital adjustment and satisfaction (404). In support of this, Robinson and Blanton (1993), concluded that intimacy, communication, congruence, and religious faith were all essential elements in good marriages (49). With these studies in mind, we have support that indeed religion is tied into marital satisfaction for those who choose to believe.

Anthony (1995), suggests that the stronger the beliefs the greater the chance the individual will use religion as a guide to handling everyday life as well as stressful events that come along (97). His study focused on intrinsically oriented religiosity, indiscriminately anti-religiosity, and pro-religiosity. Intrinsically oriented people are those who continually strive to integrate their faith into all areas of their life on a daily basis. In the samples collected by Anthony the intrinsically oriented religious couples experienced the highest measure of relational satisfaction in their marriages.

The second group entitled the indiscriminately anti-religious received the second highest level of marital satisfaction. The persons in this group do not

practice any religious beliefs on a consistent basis and they appear to live according to how they experience life without the pressure of specific guidelines. Perhaps, these people are not hindered in their marital relationships by trying to maintain strict religious traditions and expectations (Anthony, 1995).

The last and third highest level was the pro-religious sector. These individuals desire a level of spirituality but are not willing to pay a high cost for it in terms of their lifestyle (Anthony, 1995). The couples appeared to support religiosity but were not honest with their motives.

The findings indicated that intrinsically oriented couples, and the anti-religious couples experienced the happiest marriages. Anthony concluded that both groups live lives based on a consistent belief system. Neither is hypocritical or concerned with their convictions. The weakest marriages, the pro-religious, appeared to struggle with hypocritical lifestyles and impure motives.

Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1996; Treas & Giesen, 2000; Beirne & Beirne, 1997; Giblin, 1996, all support the concept that religion can and does affect marital commitment, and social support systems for the family. Attending church services, taking part in church socials, and praying together may enhance couple interaction in a supportive environment (Treas & Giesen, 2000). This quote appears to suggest that community provided by a church family encourages the support system as well as provides a listening ear. The church is one of the biggest promoters of family cohesion in the communities that most

families live in. This institutional relationship appears to support all aspects of couple hood and enables people to share needs as well as praises.

In conclusion, divine interaction through prayer, mediation, and bible reading may help the individual and couple resolve problems and increase a sense of belonging and self-worth (Booth & Johnson, 1995).

### **Crisis in marriages and families**

Crisis in marriage can be seen through several lenses – car accidents, breast cancer, job loss, death, infidelity, loss of a home – there are many ways to explain crisis in a family. All of these losses indicate a significant amount of strain on the marriage and family. Every crisis has the potential to strengthen the marriage, weaken it, or bring it down altogether (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996).

Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1996), suggest that crisis can fall into two major categories. The first being crisis that is foreseeable so that dealing with this the family has prior knowledge. An example of this would be entering middle age. The second type of crisis is those that are unforeseeable and may occur at any time to any family member. Such an event would be an earthquake or the sudden death of a loved one. Both types of crisis are equally devastating if significant sadness or pain occurs.

❖   ❖   ❖   ❖

One area Wallerstein & Blakeslee have spent some time was on infidelity. Research on this topic suggests that in many ways this is not an unforeseeable crisis. The couples in the interview process conducted by Wallerstein and Blakeslee, suggest that the marriage was waning in several ways before the actual affair took place. Infidelity is not about the sex but about stressful events both in and outside of the marriage. (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). In her opinion, the couples had to battle with the outside forces that all marriages do but perhaps some do better than others. In the book, *The Good Marriage*, there is suggestion that those who face infidelity and are able to continue to stay married do so by mornning the loss of that part of their marriage but focusing on the future, and rebuilding the marriage.

Research by Smith (1994) indicated that American society disapproves of sexual infidelity. When the public was polled in 1992, an astonishing ninety percent of the respondents said it was "always" or "almost always" wrong to have a sexual affair outside of marriage. There are laws that support the popular opinion in nearly all of the states today. "Although they are rarely enforced, they would deny married persons who have extramarital sex the right to vote, serve alcohol, practice law, adopt children, or raise their own children (Constitutional barriers, 1992; Siegel, 1992, p. 48-49).

Research has found risk factors that increase the likelihood of extramarital activity. Positively correlated with affairs is heightened education, being African

American versus being white, and being male, all increase the risk for promiscuous attitudes and permissive sexual activity (Smith, 1992, Leigh et al., 1992; Dolcini et al., 1993; Choi et al., 1994; Smith 1991). There is further evidence that the male gender engages in more promiscuous sexual activity outside of marriage because society is more tolerant of male sexuality. This is considered by some to exhibit a double standard in society today.

Lastly, opportunity plays a large part in the experimentation of extramarital activity. Treas and Giesen (2000) describe social context as a detriment to some marriages. An example of this could potentially be the workplace. The work environment offers access to potential mates (perhaps with common education and interests), opportunity for travel or business trip getaways, and the income that supports the expenses. There are other social contexts in which people meet, but the workplace can be utilized to provide a cover or excuse to be away from the family.

### **Four Types of Marriage**

According to Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1996) there are four types of marriage. The types include the romantic, rescue, companionate, and traditional. The authors add "each type of marriage provides a different degree and kind of closeness between husband and wife." (p. 21). The core difference being the way that the husband and wife view their role. Sometimes the

relationship remains clearly constant throughout the marriage. "In others the core relationship may shift gradually or change radically at a critical developmental transition, such as the birth of the first child, midlife, or retirement." (p.21).

In the romantic marriage, the couples seem to continually focus on the time they met, the place they met, and even the feelings associated with this time in their lives. "the romantic marriage has at its core a lasting, passionately sexual relationship" (p. 22).

The rescue marriage is quite different from each of the other marriage types. This type of marriage is often coined the *walking wounded*. "The healing that takes place during the course of the marriage is the central theme" (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996, p.22). This marital union provides space in the marriage specifically for healing.

The third type of marriage is companionate. "The major factor in the companionate marriage is the attempt to balance the partners' serious emotional investment in the workplace with their emotional investment in the relationship and the children (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996, p.22). This marriage is most common amongst the younger generations because of the belief in equality of all labor and household tasks. The core of this relationship is friendship, and equality.

Lastly, the traditional marriage is the exact opposite of the companionate marriage. The core of this union is in the division of the labor and household chores. "The woman takes charge of the home and family while the man is the primary wage earner" (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996, p.22).

Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1996) conclude by adding that marriage is constantly changing and this too can change the type of marriage. "All marriages need to be renegotiated as they mature" (p.22). The renegotiation may take place when the children leave and the household chores are not as grueling as they once were. Another time may be in retirement. With retirement the typical nine-to-five wage earner is not leaving the house and therefore may partake in duties once held primarily by the other spouse. Each of these instances was supported in the text by Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1996).

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### **Qualitative Research Design**

Qualitative data focuses its emphasis on people's life experiences which place the majority of emphasis on events, processes, and structures of their lives (van Maanen, 1977). Qualitative research entitles the researcher to focus on words and stories to portray valuable data. This seemed to be the best research choice that would reflect favorably on the study conducted in this paper.

The choice became evident after the author spent time researching data types and found the best fit for this study.

"Words especially organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to a reader – another researcher, policymaker, a practitioner – than pages of summarized numbers (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 1).

Qualitative methodology was best suited for this research based on the four following factors (Walcott, 1992).

1. *Qualitative research is conducted through contact with a field or life situation.*

The field is marital studies, and the life situation consists of finding evidence for the variables that encourage marital satisfaction. One of the major features of qualitative research is the flexibility to focus on naturally occurring events in



natural settings so that focus it on “real life” instances (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

*2. Qualitative data has a richness and holism with strong potential for revealing complexity.* The researcher has the benefit of providing material that can show immersion into the life of the participant. In this research study, participants’ actual quotes will be used as results to paint “real life” images of the good marriage. Such data provides thick descriptions that are vivid, nested in real context, and have a ring of truth that has strong impact on the reader (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

*3. The researchers role is to gain an encompassing overview of the system under study.* The couples, in this study, are a system and by conducting interviews, my attempt is to gain insight into how the system functions. A main task thus being to illuminate the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day tasks (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

*4. Qualitative research contains inherent flexibility to assess how and why things happen as they do.* The words that are gathered can be assembled, sub-clustered, and broken into segments, to portray the material in the most

accurate form. The researcher then has the ability to reorganize data in order to be compared, contrasted, analyzed, and patterned to form the final report.

### **Ethnography as Qualitative Method**

Ethnography, commonly utilized in field research, stays focused on the naturalist views of studying people (Miles & Huberman, 1994). According to these researchers, the focus of ethnography is extended contact with a given community, concern for mundane, day-to-day events, as well as for unusual ones.

The type of qualitative research consists of getting into the participants' environment and observing information that is shared as well as observing what is not shared. One area that seems particularly important about ethnographic studies is the local groundedness. This is beneficial to this study for two reasons. First, the participants were local to the researcher contributing to environmental familiarity. Secondly, the data was collected in person as opposed to over the phone or through the mail.

Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach (2000), agree that face-to-face interviewing is needed in family life studies. They have concluded that more qualitative interviewing, case studies, or couples and families will add a component that has been missing. Miles & Huberman (1994), state that questionnaires and scales of marital satisfaction or dissatisfaction have yielded very little leaving

studies based on what people do with one another and how they act and react open for research.

Another positive correlate between ethnographies and this study is the way information is gathered and analyzed. Ethnographic methodology tends toward the descriptive aspect of gathering data. Focus is on the individuals' perspectives and their interpretations of their world, and relatively little time is spent on pre-constructing instruments to gauge outcomes. The time spent preparing consists mostly of interviewing and then using the audio or video outcomes as one's source of valuable data. This is a very accurate view of the study being presented. The descriptive nature allows for formulating material to be easily understandable by the reader and future researchers.

### **Data Analysis**

The following five concepts explain the procedure utilized to create the analysis of the data for this research project. (Wolcott, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

1. *Affixing codes to a set of field notes drawn from observations and interviews.*

The codes utilized in this research correlate directly with the variables examined in the literature section of Chapter 2. Typically, in each interview, couples' conversations lead to variables such as work, parenting, conflict and others. These variables were then written on field notes as the first letter equaling the

term attached to it. [Example: W on field notes equals work related suggestion in the interview].

2. *Noting reflections of other remarks in the margins of the transcriptions.* As the transcriptions took place, the marginalized noting consisted of writing in the coding used above as well as noticing long pauses, and nervous giggles. This helps the researcher identify the most utilized codes, but also contributes to the feel of the environment.

3. *Identifying similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, and common sequences.* The organization of the codes, and the notes in the margins provided a favorable way to be able to find similarities. The next part of this equation was to highlight the material on work in yellow, the material on parenting in blue, etc. creating the ability to find common themes quite effortlessly.

4. *Utilizing data reduction to sharpen, sort, focus, discard, and organize data.* The reduction of data consists as a large of the qualitative study. Most qualitative research typically will end with large quantities of data that has to be sorted and organized. In this study, it took a significant amount of time to decide which variables to consider and which to discard. The data reduction

leads to drawing conclusions which ends with finding supportive literature for the report.

5. *Confronting generalizations with formalized supportive evidence.* Once the materials are collected the search for formal studies to add validity becomes critical. Wolcott (1992) states that the meanings coming forth from the data have to be tested for plausibility, sturdiness, confirmability – that is their validity. Without the literature to accentuate the qualitative study, the information collected in the interviews is essentially life experience.

### **Interview Design**

The research design was adopted from the book, **The Good Marriage**, by Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1996. Her design was a qualitative study interviewing couples utilizing an open ended, semi-structured format. With this format the interviewer has the ability to investigate the story in further detail. Participants can correspond details of their life stories, including variance in perspectives, beliefs, values, and behaviors (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The researcher thus facilitates the interview allowing the participants to determine where they would like to direct their attention. In an interview setting with couples, as in this research, the perspectives typically vary giving stories added flavor.

The researchers position is to facilitate and make sure the discussion flows adding questions when needed. The interviewing is by self-report so the rapport building is essential. Participants, I believe, need to feel like they are comfortable to be able to converse about their life stories since not all of the details are always nice and neat. The collaborative effort of the qualitative interview ensures that both the facilitator and the participants can share openly and honestly.

The interview questions were based on Wallerstein and Blakeslee's questions as well as formulated by the researcher and the supervisor of the project. Questions consist of one page and are included in Appendix III. The questions were shared with friends, colleagues, and the supervisor of the project to ensure quality, clarity, and usefulness to this research.

A letter explaining the research was sent to fifteen perspective couples along with a brief essay page, and postcard. The postcard was to be sent back immediately. The back of the postcard listed yes, we would like to participate in the project, or no, we are not able to participate along with a date when the postcards needed to be received. The brief essay posed the research question. In a couple paragraphs please indicated why you believe you have a good marriage. The participants were instructed to fill out the sheets individually and send them in the postage paid envelope back to the researcher. (The essay is attached in Appendix II.

### **Selection of Participants**

The criteria for selecting three couples consisted of returning the postcard, filling out the essay and sending it to the researcher, and returning all materials by the dates provided.

Once all materials were received, the essays were read and compared to narrow the selection down to four couples. The first three to respond with all of the information intact became the prospective couples because they appeared to have a vested interest in the project. The selection was also narrowed down in the beginning by using the same requirements that Wallerstein and Blakeslee used in their research. Each couple had to be married at least nine years, share one child together, and independently as well as in the couple consider their marriage good. The couples completing the above materials and meeting the second set of requirements were then notified by phone and asked to set an interview time.

### **Interview Procedures**

The procedure of the interview was first and foremost set to last a minimal of two hours. This was indicated to the prospective participants in the letter explaining the project as well as on the postcard where they indicated they would or would not be able to participate.

As the interviewer began with each couple, the first part of the interview was to state the intent of the project as well as answer any questions the participants may have had. The consent forms were read and signed by the participants before the interview began. (Consent form matching the University's policy is attached in Appendix IV.

The couples were seated comfortably in their own home with the audio tape player nestled equal distance from each spouse. The couples were asked to start to tell their story about meeting each other and questions were then utilized to clarify information given, or gently guide the couple into discussion. The couples thus directed the interview with what they felt comfortable sharing. As noted earlier, the emphasis was on the peoples' lives, experiences, and their concept of how their data pertained to the world around them (Van Manen, 1977). The researcher became a part of the couples' experience, which in itself was enlightening.

Observational data was being collected at the time of the interview as well. As the couples were speaking and sharing, as the researcher, I was including mental notes about the environment. The environmental information would be considered closeness of participants, laughter, touch, considerate or perplexed glances as well as silent moments. Qualitative data ensured that the researcher could be both an active participant as well as a passive observer (Miles & Huberman, 1994).



## **Evolution of Methodology**

There was some change from the initial plan of study. The initial plan was to use types of marriage as my guide for the entire paper. However, upon researching **The Good Marriage**, variables began to come clear as to what it takes to have a good marriage thus I wanted to describe the types by interviewing couples without emphasizing the variables in the questions directly. Research has shown that this type of study, qualitative with interview format, has not focused on the phenomenon of good marriage. "Qualitative researchers, as opposed to quantitative, are in a more fluid, and a more pioneering position" (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Therefore, this became the best idea for this research.

## **Possible Bias**

Since qualitative interviewing has the ability to be subjective, the interviewer has to guard against skewing the data. Utilization of quality interview questions helped to diminish the possibility of bias entering the research. The intention is to build upon differences in experience with each couple. Not every couple experienced courtship in the same way, but the questions about engagement were asked to each couple. Therefore, selection of material provided a non-biased format because each couple was asked similar questions allowing for different, varied responses.

Secondly, the data gathering and analysis is readily reproducible. Qualitative analysis must be well documented as a process – mainly to assist in learning, making the study available to others (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The replication of this research study would be straightforward if utilizing materials in the methodology section as well as the appendices.

### **Sample Size**

The sample size for this research was small with three couples participating. However, according to Miles & Huberman 1984, if the researcher is not intending to formulate a new theory, the size is sufficient. This study utilized interviews, and comparative studies about materials already published on similar marital quality research.

### **Participant Confidentiality**

The participants were assured confidentiality from the start of the process. The contacts were made to the phone number appropriate for each couple, at their residence. The written essays and consent forms were kept in a file by the researcher. Audiotapes were transcribed with confidentiality ensured by an agreement with the transcriber. The transcriber was given fictitious names for each couple, keeping their stories secure. Participants were also given the audiotape once the project was completed. Couples were also offered a copy of

the final research if they wished. The names given in the results section, discussion, and on the genograms, were all fictitious. The completed research was conducted in accordance with the University of Wisconsin – Stout ethical guidelines.

### **Personal Notes**

As a researcher and a married woman, it was my desire to provide literature on the quality of good marriages. There are many articles that focus on the pathology of marriage and what leads to divorce, but very little about the good parts of marriage.

While growing up, I was not exposed to many marriages that I would indicate as good. As far as I am concerned, the couples in the marriages would probably not have self-reported them as good themselves. Therefore, it is one of my quests in life to find the components or variables that indicate the chance for a strengthened, good marriage.

The perspective from which I see marriage is the family systems model. This model in short, suggests that the individual is a part of a larger system from which they receive information on either how to live or how not to live. This systems approach would thus include a dimension of intergenerational existence. Therefore, the positive and negative characteristics flow from one generation into the next influencing thoughts and behaviors. How does this affect

marriage? My thoughts on this suggest that the marriages of subsequent generations will be affected by the generations previous to them. This concept explains in many ways how patterns develop and consistently show up in generations across the board. In closing, I believe in assisting new generations to concentrate their energy on the patterns that bring goodness to the marriage and work at releasing those patterns that cause heartbreak and further damage to subsequent generations. This is our responsibility as marriage partners and future parents of the next generations.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Case Reviews: Who are the participants?**

This chapter is a summary of the actual couples' reports about their life growing up and then as a couple. Hence, the title about whom these couples are. The information about their childhood provides an overview to the reader. Much of the data will correspond with the genogram in Appendix V. The names of all the participants in the stories have been changed to protect the participants' individuality. Chapter five and six will look more closely at the marital relationship and how the variables in Chapter two fit for the couples.

#### **Couple #1: Sam & Laurie**

Sam and Laurie have been married for almost seventeen years. Sam and Laurie are both in their early forties.

#### **Sam**

Sam grew up in rural Wisconsin. He has an older sister, and two younger brothers. Sam considers his upbringing to be very happy.

"I'd say pretty balanced for sure, a very committed family. I always thought a tight family compared to the friendships I had. The friends I had were kind of the only standard that I had to measure my family against. I remember the parents of some of my friends –

kind of sad some of the marriages that I saw around me. So, a very strong family."

Sam continued to say that he was always able to share in his family. "We were an intimate family, I mean we were definitely able to show expression, love and feelings." The only area Sam wishes he would have had more of was activity. "I wish we would have gone canoeing more and did vacations more and stuff like that, but I did not feel cheated." The family was a tight knit, bible believing, intimate family that loved being together and doing things for each other. Sam experienced a strong loving relationship between his parents. He witnessed a good marriage while growing up.

## **Laurie**

Laurie was raised in a family that was happy. She has an older brother as well as a younger brother. She recalls being closer to her father. Laurie remembered her family as quite active. "I remember playing a lot of games, like I said, going on a lot of vacations, and spending time together." The other area that united the family was her religious upbringing.

"There was also church every Sunday but not a lot of extra teaching at home; we attended a very active, biblical based church, which helped me grow a lot. I think my parents just delegated that [biblical teaching] to the church."

Her family life was quite normal although she didn't really understand that until her friends would let her know. "I never realized how normal a family we had until friends would come over and say things like 'your mom makes supper' or 'you eat every night together and I realized it was strange for them.'"

Laurie experienced a very committed marital relationship within her parents. Her only comment about their marriage was that intimacy was not shown in the home. "Feelings or physical forms of expression, of love, or that kind of thing, we did not really have that." How that affected her parents was explained as a lack of connecting on a deep soul partner relationship. "But, they enjoyed each other – very, very committed to each other."

### **Sam & Laurie**

Sam and Laurie met due to Sam's oldest sister's wedding. In college, Laurie and Clarice [Sam's older sister] were friends. Clarice wanted Laurie to play her flute for the wedding. Therefore, Laurie would come home from college with Clarice and stay at Clarice's parents' home. Over time and through opportunity, Sam and Laurie were able to meet and get to know one another. They soon started dating. In 1984, the couple was wed. Four years later a son, Adam, came along. Born three years later was a set of twin girls.

The couple sees their marriage as changing and evolving over time. Sam notes that he believes the couple gets closer with age. The couple agreed that

the strongest glue in their marriage was their desire to live their life based on Biblical instruction. Laurie states "if I am not doing well as a person and as – following the right way – following God, my marriage is not the best it can be and it shows, it shows!" The difference comes with the connectedness with God and the flow into the marriage. The other comment made that connects this couple is the commitment to the marriage. "Love is a choice you made at the altar, and it is a choice as far as healthy growth and commitment and a fulfilled marriage is not always a feeling, and it takes action." The action to strive for a good, fulfilled marriage with God as the core, keeps this couple grounded and able to handle what comes their way.

### **Couple #2, Bart and Connie:**

Bart and Connie have been married thirty-seven years. The couple was in their fifties at the time of the interview.

#### **Bart**

Bart grew up in a small rural town in Wisconsin. His life started out on a farm where he was one of eight children. Six of the children were boys and two were girls; Bart was the fifth child. His parents are no longer living.

Bart considered his childhood quite good with hard work as a big part of family life on the farm. "I came from a really large family, kind of like the



Waltons. We lived on a farm and all we really knew was work, we worked the farm from sunup to sundown.” As a young man Bart had several “adult” responsibilities placed on him.

“I would work odd jobs [as well as at the farm] to have spending money and I believe in saving it and I can remember times when it came for my parents to pay property taxes they would come to me for the money.”

He was responsible for finances even as a young man, but he mentioned that he is not at all resentful about this; he understood that his parents had no extra money.

Bart recalls that his family life was not filled with much communication about emotions. “I know we loved each other but nobody ever said that and I guess it was probably until we were married and living outside the home that I remember telling mom I loved her and she telling me back. I know she did and I know my dad did but there was not much verbal affection.”

## **Connie**

Connie grew up in a large metropolitan city, in an unhappy home. There appeared to be division, arguing and a general lack of affection. Her mother and father’s relationship, according to Connie, looked as though “she [mother] was not in love with my dad; it was so obvious.” Her mother was a debutant and an upper class woman, while her father was very poor. “He kind of used her, I

mean she was like a trophy and she was supposed to perform a certain way. My mother was a spit-fire woman and she was not about to.” Connie shared her home with two younger sisters. The sisters appear to have fared worse than Connie. Her amazement is that she came out quite well. She shares how she saw herself in the family as well as her sisters.

“I always considered myself a little blob that sat in front of the boob tube and didn’t do very much. Lisa was promiscuous, and Chantel was crazy. [Chantel experienced a nervous breakdown as age sixteen, and has continuously struggled with suicide attempts; the having recently attempted to commit suicide]. I was the only one who had any wholeness to her. It amazes me how you are covered and sheltered by the Lord.”

Connie’s childhood left much to be desired. She can recall wondering if she were really loved. “When Bart said that he knew his parents truly loved him even though they didn’t say it, I am not so sure in fact, to this day I do not know.” She responds now that she thinks her mother loved her but truly does not know about her father.

### **Bart & Connie**

Bart and Connie, the country boy and city girl married at the ages of twenty-one and nineteen. The courtship lasted from April until November of that year. “We didn’t even know each other – only on weekends, so you can probably figure out how many days we spent together.” Connie explains that



Bart was her first boyfriend and then her husband. All of this occurred quite quickly.

Four years after marriage, the first child, Katie came along. Five years beyond that they adopted a child named Krissy. The adoption was by choice, Connie was able to produce more children, but the couple opted to adopt. "I can remember when Katie was young and we would eat dinner together at night and light a candle. We were not Christians but we lit the candle for a baby out there." The candle was then blown out by a different member of the family each night.

Bart worked long hours and very hard to climb the corporate ladder. Since he had grown up being so poor, he worked hard to have a different life. Connie worked some before the babies came and some when the babies were older but it appeared that she was fortunate to stay home most of the time.

The family has fun together. They celebrated many holidays, and other family traditions together. The family has expanded with Krissy and Tony, having three children together. Bill and Katie were pregnant at the time of the interview.

In summary, Bart and Connie have shared trials and tribulations, but they have come out of them very strong. They have gone from a couple experiencing transitions to a couple rebuilding trust and building a large family themselves. They are a couple that has the right to share their experiences and their beliefs

in what makes their marriage good. They could be described as God loving and they are also connected with the dream of a log cabin and a tractor.

### **Couple # 3: Roy & Carol**

Roy and Carol have been married for fifty-seven years and have five children, several grand-children and even some great grandchildren.

#### **Roy**

Roy grew up in a home that was filled with many children; he shared everything he had with fourteen siblings. He spoke of working hard and spending little time having a great deal of fun. In those days it seemed as though work and making a living was number one at least on the minds of the young men. He had a loving family that did not want him to leave and be married. He explained that his mother was afraid that if one flew the coupe they all would eventually leave and this scared her.

#### **Carol**

Carol grew up in a rural Wisconsin home with a smaller family of origin. She spoke of her childhood being mostly nice but of fearing her father at times. It appeared as if her father had a nasty temper and when asked for items, such as money to buy the children new shoes, he would become irate and would be

physical with the children and their mother. One of Carol's comments was the fact that her mother was a cripple. When her mother was very young she jumped off a fence and onto a board with nails sticking out. The nails went through one end of the foot and out the other. Infection grew inside of the leg and she eventually lost a couple inches off of her hip. She continually wore a shoe with a higher sole to minimize the awkwardness of her walking. Carol believed her parents loved her and that they were mostly gracious to her and her siblings.

### **Roy & Carol**

Roy and Carol had a courtship that would last them four years. From the time they met at her uncle's store, until they married they maybe spent ten days together. The couple lived one hundred and fifty miles apart and in those days travel was not easy. Many people did not own a car.

After meeting the first time and attending a "free" movie, the couple did not meet again for several years. Roy heard that Carol was engaged to another man and therefore he did not intrude. Finally, one day as Carol was returning home from her job in the city she found her fiancé had been cheating. She went home and there was a card waiting for her from Roy. She read the card and it just wished her a happy birthday and wished her well. Since the

relationship was over with the other fellow, she decided to see Roy again. They met a couple more times and were married.

Their lives have been filled with children in many shapes and sizes. The couple together shares five biological children. Added to these are foster children, and foster college students. The home was never filled with a tremendous amount of silence! The couple to this day remains devoted, through the church they attend, to the needs of children.

During the retirement years they traveled together. The destination was wintering in Arizona. The couple would take a motor home to Arizona and visit with a child that lives there and one that would commute to see them from California.

Although the marriage had some tough times with depression, ill children, and a car accident that nearly took Carols' life the marriage is sharp and strong. Carol stated "they tied the knot tight." This knot has been tight for years.

### **Contextual Observation Notes**

In the interview process some of the information below was comprised from the field notes. In interest of the reader, the following information will paint a portrait of how these couples appeared in front of myself, as the researcher. My intent is to provide enough information that these couples become real to the reader and in doing so provide them with the additional data.

**Bart & Connie**

Their home sits nestled on a hill in a cul de sac. The house is a beautiful, large red wood home. As you enter, pictures of children and grandchildren are abundant as well as a spunky little dachshund. The day was snowy and very windy, but inside the fireplace was lit and welcoming. The couches sat in front of the fireplace and the atmosphere had a feeling of home.

During the conversation the couple frequently looked at one another and acknowledged each other's statements. Bart sat towards the edge of the couch and both seemed engaged in the conversation. The couple presented as a team readily sharing their experiences and appearing to enjoy looking back over the years. They have a way of exuding kindness and joy that makes those around them want to talk more and ask more questions.

**Sam & Laurie**

Driving up to Sam and Laurie's home on a windy sleeting evening, I noticed that they have a large residence. It is a home that appears to stretch on and on. They live in a cul de sac with a few homes surrounding theirs.

Entering the home, one instantly gets the feeling of family. Their children were home and the house seemed to be bustling with lights and voices. The newest remodeling project was taking place to the right of the entry. I was then escorted into a nice sitting room decorated in Victorian period. The room was

comfortable with beautiful French doors separating us from the rest of the home. This was the only home where children were still living at home and I started to appreciate the need for the privacy.

As the interview progressed Sam and Laurie would make eye contact, finish each other's thoughts, but most importantly they would share a similar view at times and a not so similar view at others. Nonetheless, I never had the impression that they weren't a team, but I did notice they were individual enough to have different opinions. The emphasis was on the fact that they are a couple, but that they carve out room for individuality as well.

### **Roy & Carol**

Roy and Carol live in an apartment near the southern edge of town. Upon entering the complex, I was buzzed in and Carol was standing in the hallway to greet me. In this woman's eyes was an expression of love and joy. Immediately I felt welcome. Once inside, Roy was sitting at the table and he stood to greet me. The smile on his face also said "welcome."

The apartment is a modestly decorated home with pictures of children, grandchildren and great grandchildren all around. The heart of this couple is their family.

Outside was a beautiful sunny day and you could see lots of activity happening from their sliding glass door. The flower planter was hung outside



with the restless signs of anticipation for spring. As the new life loomed outside the couple spoke of the new great grandchild that just had been born with excitement in their eyes.

As we talked, I encountered years of experience and wisdom. This couple had sustained a marriage for fifty-seven years. The thoughts ran through my mind about how they had done it; I came up with the notion that they did it the best they knew how and from that others can learn. This couple before me had loved, lost, and survived a couple of near tragedies, and depression; yet, through it all they credited the abundance of God's love and their love and commitment for one another. I was truly mesmerized by the plethora of information being shared with me about their life. I was honored to have talked with them.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Results**

The results are featured in this section. The literature covered in Chapter two will be observed in this section by combining the current literature and the participants' own words. This section is not designed to identify a new theory only to show results from the interviews and how they compare or contrast to current data.

### **Work**

#### ***Long Hours***

In each of the interviews work became an integral part of the marital and family relations. Voydanoff (1988) found that "an increase in hours spent in employment is related to higher levels of work/family conflict." (191). The stresses of work and family were supported in different ways by each couple.

Roy states "I was working the railroad at the time it was the Chicago Burlington Railroad, and I worked for thirty-six years; started in 1941 and retired in 1977. A couple of years I worked the Christmas rush as a helper with the mail."

Carol: "That wasn't good. We were living in the country and it was a cold winter, of course, Christmas time, and the pipes would freeze up and we just had an oil burner for heat. He was gone, so the church people – we had some good friends that would come out and thawed all the pipes and sort of looked out for us. We had four children at the time."

Roy: "I didn't get home too many times during that – usually about two weeks, and then I would be home for one night and gone again."

The strain on the marriage came from the male's desire to provide for the family and the female's need to care for the family. A study by Pleck (1977) explored this same topic. The findings are that a man's role as a provider for the family comes first, while being a husband and father is secondary. This is not due to the man wanting the outcome this way, but men in nuclear families have traditionally been the earners of the wages.

Sam: "I already had a job with a public accounting firm, and I was in general services. So, I had tax season, but I also had audits throughout the year and so I was busy all the time. And 70 - sometimes over 70 hours a week is not uncommon, especially in tax season."

Laurie: "Sam was working 60-70 hours a week when the girls were born [twin girls] so it was hard. He would call me and ask 'do you want me to come [home from work] and go back, or just finish out work and come home?"

Sam: "I didn't know that things were as bad or as stressed out for Laurie as they were. I knew that 70 hours a week was going to have to stop. I went back and talked to the partners at the firm I was working for and they understood – well I wouldn't say they were supportive because they kind of had me on a fast track to management."

Here again lies the separation of roles. The study by Pleck was supported by Voydanoff (1988) suggesting that the role of provider is sustained by society

and the need to have fathers as the earners in the family has passed through generations from their fathers and grandfathers. Blair (1993) states "it would appear that husbands remain somewhat entrenched in the traditional roles and behavioral expectations that were perhaps more indicative of their own fathers." (197).

In relation to the former studies is a study that looks at family time. Kingston and Nock (1987) have found that "time spent by couples, family time, is reduced by hours spent at work." (191). The article goes on to explain that the time spent at work takes precedence over family time. The couples all suggested this in the family but none as clear as Bart and Connie. Bart talked about wanting desperately to work his way up the corporate ladder and he explained what happened. Bart, "we had a vacation planned up North and I can remember them asking me on a Sunday to work the following week, and I said yes." The drive to be at the top and have what Bart never had seen his parents experience was stronger than the disappointment he would face when returning home.

In a study by Jorgensen (1979) it was concluded that wives' marital satisfaction was in direct relation to the husbands' income. This study was not at all supported in the research here. In fact, the couple that strove to get to the top learned a lesson about what is or is not really at the top.

Connie: "Our friends were always higher on the ladder than we were with bigger cars and bigger houses but I always knew that, I knew that what Bart and I had was the richest, riches that could be had."

Bart: "I can remember wanting a fancy car – we've got an old beater now that has 180,000 miles on it and that's ok with me."

Therefore, the research stating that money is the main need for a woman to be satisfied in the marriage was not supported here by any of the couples.

## **Communication**

Communication with each of the couples was definitely a requirement of good marriage. The information about communication is lofty, but there were three common threads that ran through for every couple. The three are non-defensive listening, active listening, and self-disclosing. Each of these dimensions will be looked at below.

### ***Non-Defensive Listening***

Gottman (1994a) emphasized that non-defensive listening is the first, if not the most important communication skill a couple can have. This type of listening involves really hearing the other person and trying to understand their view, before stating a rebuttal of your own. "This skill promotes mutual

understanding by reducing the partners' tendency to interrupt one another and the preoccupation with defending themselves and formulating retorts (Fowers, 1998, p. 520). The couple that stated an interest in processing was Sam and Laurie. They have outwardly said that they struggle with this concept, yet they have come up with a way to handle the difference.

Sam: "We don't handle things similarly. I am a talker and Laurie is not. She needs time, you know, just time to be by herself, time away, just when something comes up. I want to talk about it and she just wants to process. She just wants to be alone with it or not talk about it, just let it stew around back in there for a while. So yeah, that's been a challenge. The more major the issue the more challenging that is because 'what do you mean we can't talk about that now; now's the time to talk, so we definitely process things different."

Laurie: "It helps to communicate. Now, he will just say 'ok, I'm just going to talk right now, I'm just thinking out loud.' Because the problem was that when he would say something before, I would think, this is what we have to work with - this is the final decision."

This type of communication fits well with the work of Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1996). They have found that couples who communicate by listening to the other person before interjecting a retort or a belief of their own contributes to the wholeness of the marriage. This task is not easily mastered in the words of Sam above, "the more major the issue the more challenging it becomes to hear the other person fully."

### ***Active Listening***

In research by Gottman (1994a) the author suggests that utilizing messages that encourage the other person are essential. Eye contact, nodding, um hmm, all of these encourage people to talk more or to share deeper and further. In the couples interviewed several instances of this type of behavior were present. Although it is difficult to give instances because these are actions, one way to present this is to count the number of statements in the transcripts. The word, um hmm, was used sixty times in the interview sessions, total. One couple expressed encouragement by telling the spouse to tell a story. Connie stated "tell her that story about the taxes." This is a direct use of active listening and which encouraged the husband to share the story. The concept was also caught in the research for the book, **The Good Marriage**. There were several times in the book that the couples would prod the other to tell a story or share that with her, or some kind of statement suggesting that is a neat story and I want to hear you tell it. Gottman (1994a) suggests that the value in active listening is the validation; I do want to hear more, and this allows the speaker to feel heard.

### ***Self-Disclosure***

Several researchers agree that the level of self-disclosure within the marriage predicts marital outcome. Fowers (1998) concludes that open

conversation in marriages is a crucial ingredient in maintaining feelings and love for one's partner. "Ideally a spouse is someone who can hear and share one's joys and sorrows, triumphs and anxieties, hopes and desperations" (Fowers, 1998, p.521). This person is your friend, your best friend and sharing with them is essential. The couples in this interview all talked of times when they had to disclose to their spouse when in fact they were a little scared of the reaction. Connie had credit card debt that was eating her and she needed help, but to go to Bart was difficult.

Connie: "I came home and just broke down. I'd had it and I cried and I said 'you have got to do something about this because I can't live like this anymore, I just can't you've got to give me an allowance.' And I mean the man that didn't part with money, went out and got a \$4,000.00 loan to pay off my bills and he cut up my cards, of course, and he started giving me an allowance. It was the neatest thing to see him support me – I mean I had to go there and he had to come here."

The support that self-disclosure provides came with the risk. Fowers (1998) indicates that being able to self-disclose means being able to bear ones self and expose our inner self to someone. Responding to one another's' needs is thought to continually replenish a couples' bond. (Fowers, 1998, p.521).

In research by (Fowers, 1998; Gottman, 1994a) friendship was one of the areas that was typically found in conjunction with self-disclosure. The couples in the study had this to say about friendship. Bart: "Connie has always been my dearest friend and I can talk to her about anything. She is such an easy person



and positive person to talk to. I think that is one of the strongest glues that held us together.”

Connie: “ We like each other. I mean we love hanging out together. All weekend he got Friday off, Saturday and Sunday – oh, we just had a ball. It doesn’t matter if we are going to Wal-Mart to pick up something. It’s just fun that the two of us are hanging around doing stuff together.”

Carol and Roy experienced a similar view “the longer that we are together, the sweeter it’s been.” Gelman & Pedersen (1993) state that “happiest are those who are married to their ‘best friend,’ if you can say that chances are you have described not just your marriage as happy but your whole life as well (57).

### **Transition Into Parenthood**

Hobbs & Cole (1977) stated a concept that has been supported over time. “New parenthood was a stressful but essentially manageable, normative transition” (p. 412). When asking one of the couples what the transition to parenthood was like the response was very favorable. “Excitement, yeah, excitement and fulfillment of having a child of our own. That was a precious time and it really had no effect on us we just rejoiced in the fact that we were parents” (Roy & Carol). Connie mentioned that “I loved having kids, and I loved having a husband. But, I loved both of them and after the kids would go to bed we would have lots of fun.” This evidence seems to support the study by

Cowan & Cowan (1995). They found that when looking at other expected or unexpected transitions, becoming a parent is generally regarded as a affirmative change in the life of a couple. "A baby's arrival is unlikely to destroy very well-functioning marriages (Cowan & Cowan, 1995, p. 418).

Another angle in transitioning into parenthood is presented by Cowan & Cowan, (1995); Cox, (1999). The idea is that challenges faced by the couples during the transition can stimulate development of new coping skills. The adaptation of these skills was apparent in one of the couples. [This couple had one child at two years old and a pair of twins].

Laurie: "We didn't have a lot of time to communicate or sit and enjoy each other because it was child duty for a while. And we enjoyed it, it's not so bad, but again it was tiring and very consuming. But we really worked as a team, which is so amazing without talking much. It was like 'here's your baby, burp your baby, I'll feed this baby, and there's Adam, get him.' We were really tired, sleep deprived so when we could go to sleep we did."

Cox (1999), on a similar note, mentions how some couples are enhanced, some are torn apart, and in this interview the participants indicated enhancement from all parties involved.

### ***Planned or Unplanned***

Research in the studies of planned or unplanned pregnancies conclude that timing is extremely important (Cox, 1985; Huston & Vangelisti, 1995).

Cox (1999) suggests that timing is important as perceived by both parents. It appears that if one parent believes the timing was planned, and the other does not, marital difficulty can ensue; opening the marital relationship to issues of distrust. Two of the couples in the study spoke specifically about planning their children and the outcome of that. Connie and Bart remember “we waited four years, we knew we had to wait, we knew we weren’t grown up enough yet to have a child.” Sam and Laurie disagreed at first, but then in the long run have decided the waiting was good.

Laurie: “We were very glad that we waited four years to have children. That was the best thing for us. Because we really had time just to know each other as husband and wife and to work on our own issues.”

Sam: “We did not agree on that when we were first married. Cause I wanted to have my kids when I was young. Getting married at 24, I was four years behind already. You know, in my mind. But, I agree, I would never trade those four years. We planned for it [the birth of our children] and we financially planned for it.”

### ***Identifying & Embracing Change***

Several of the couples in this study have mentioned how they embraced the change by becoming a team, or rejoicing in the fact that you have a child together in this world. Research supports this notion. “Becoming a parent may represent one of the more pervasive normative life changes experienced by adults, resulting in striking alterations in self-definition and roles” (Cowan &

Cowan, 1985; Belsky & Pensky, 1988). Cowan & Cowan (1985) suggests that the child brings with it not only a new identity for the parents, but a reconfiguration of parents' investment in their other roles – son/daughter, partner, lover, worker and friend.

Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1996) have also found that the time in your life that a child enters is a time to be embraced. Becoming a first time parent only happens once in the couples' life. The child represents who they are as a family and invites for change that will alter the marriage forever; the dyad is now a triad for the rest of the couples' life until further members are added. Embracing the newness of family is in their study one of the most important times for all couples.

### **Religiosity and Marital Satisfaction**

Studies differ in their opinions of marital satisfaction as it relates to religion. The study by Booth & Johnson (1995), was completely contrasted by several other studies. Their notion was that religion neither enhances the marriage nor decreases marital conflict. Sam's view did not agree with this literature; he said, "commit your way to the Lord – I mean if you think you're going to pull this off [marriage] without the Lord, it's not going to happen." His wife mentioned another opinion similar to his, "If I'm not doing well as a person and as – following the right way – following God, my marriage is not the best it

can be and it shows, it shows!" Each couple in this study commented on similar findings in disparity with Booth & Johnson (1995). Another couple explains "in our dating time we started praying together, so that's really, that bonded us together. (Roy & Carol).

In a study by Anthony (1995) the author suggested that the stronger the belief the more the individual will utilize religion in handling everyday life and stressful situations. Sam and Laurie's view agrees with this in their relationship and they show how they use religion in their everyday life.

Sam: "If I think something should be a certain way and Laurie thinks it should be a certain way, we can always find that – the Biblical base. We can always come back to that. And we both believe in that strong enough that it brings us to a common ground. And again, it is easy over the years to see why people wouldn't be on common ground and that – just wedge after wedge and pretty soon you're driven apart."

Beirne & Beirne (1997) in their research mention one concept supported the interviews with the participating couples. "Some couples recognize that God has brought them together and they often marvel they have found their soul mate" (p.30). In this research study one of the couples addressed this by stating "I remember in college praying for my husband with a friend. I was praying I would know him as a friend first and I wanted to know his family. And I didn't realize it was an answer to prayer until I'm sure we had been dating many months." Both Connie and Bart believe they were put together on this earth as

soul mates as well. Bart: "We knew we were supposed to be, God meant us to be together." Connie states "I just – he is who God put on this earth for me. I know that with all my heart. We've been through trials and tribulations, but he's my like partner." Carol in her experience believes that the Lord intervened in her life and provided the man for her to marry as well.

Carol: "I was engaged to another man. I was working in the city and I had a chance to go home for my birthday and the bus went past his home. So, I thought, I'll surprise him, he'll be so glad. And so I got off the bus at his house and he was very upset, because he had another date. And so, I had him take me home and my mother said, oh Carol, you got a birthday card here. And after four or five years, he (Roy) sent me a birthday card and that was start of it. Because I knew it was sort of over with the other one. The Lord stopped that, I think the Lord intervened, you know, because we really thought a lot of each other but we never had a chance to date. [Roy and Carol were 150 miles apart during courtship].

Ellison (1991) in her study found similar materials supporting the importance of religion in marriage. Research by Ellison (1991) proposes that religion has features that affect the well-being of couples. Divine interaction through prayer, mediation, and Bible reading may help individuals resolve or interpret meaning in their lives as individuals and as couples. The techniques described and stated above, if applied by the couple, would then enhance the worth of their marital relationship.

## **Crisis In Marriage**

As Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1996) stated in their book, **The Good Marriage**, crisis can come in several different ways. Their research suggests that crisis can potentially break a marriage or even strengthen the marital bond. Several of the people in their research had undergone losing a child, or suffering from breast cancer, or even dealing with a marital affair. The notion that they dealt with was categorizing crisis into foreseeable and unforeseeable. The participants in this study have all faced foreseeable and unforeseeable crisis. A few are described but interestingly the first two are very similar. Laurie experienced some difficulty in the beginning due to her mother-in-law.

Laurie: "When your daughter is married, you're involved in every detail and I wanted to involve her but it just didn't turn out that way for her and expectations were different than what brought forth so –

Interviewer: Did it get reconciled?

Laurie: "It got worse over time for a couple of years. Very, very difficult.

Interviewer: "Did that hurt your marriage?

Laurie: "Marriage, yes. I believe by the fourth year Adam was born and it started to be reconciled."

In the same parameters another couple experienced a similar dissention with the mother-in-law. Carol explains "His folks were pretty much against one of them getting married so it wasn't easy for me. Our first year was a little hard for a

while because they thought I was taking him away from them. And when our first child was born, that healed it. Both of these women were not accepted by their mother in laws until the birth of a child.

Another area studied by researchers is the effect of extramarital affairs. In a study by Treas & Giesen (2000) the social context in which one works can lead to experiencing extramarital affairs. In the interviews for the paper one of the couples had experienced an affair. The authors of the article by Smith, (1991); & Leigh et al., (1993) suggest that there are some factors that indicate risk for sexual involvement outside of the home including being male, African American, and being educated. With the couple in this study at least two of the factors, being male and educated, were present. The actual affair happened at a vulnerable time in the life of the male, turning forty, however that was not addressed in this research. The participants describe this crisis by stating the following:

Bart: "I just had worked hard and struggled to get up the corporate ladder and for some reason felt like I was getting old and so I – I guess you'd call it a mid-life crisis.

Interviewer: So you left?

Connie: "Well, no. I asked him to. He had an affair.

Bart: "Not real proud of it."

Connie: "Honestly, I would say it took ten years for us to truly heal."



Research by Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1996), suggest that in order for a couple to heal from any significant crisis they need to grieve what was lost. The grieving process is as individual as the event itself but it must be grieved to truly heal.

In this study one other couple experienced an unforeseeable event when their child became sick. Carol stated, "When he [son Jeff] had sleeping sickness and was in a coma for a week the doctors told us he wasn't going to live." The church prayed for their son and he lived and is well to this day. The couple conclude with "But you know, they say things like this can either hurt a marriage or draw it closer and it drew us closer." This statement is in direct agreement with Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1996).

## **Chapter 6**

### **Discussion**

This chapter presents a summary of what this research set out to find. Suggestions are made for future research and ways to effectively help create good marriages. It also presents conclusions made by the researcher.

### **Summary**

This research tried to identify some variables effective in producing good marriages. The study consisted of three couples willing to testify to their good marriages. The couples' own words were utilized to capture the reality of how they live marital life. The words of the researcher were used to enhance the direct reports when needed. I have examined and discussed the couples' experiences as well as compared and contrasted their stories with the research data previously investigated.

Found in the study were comparisons in stories and data that supported or differed from most of the current research findings. In each interview the findings helped to decide if the variables utilized were conducive to positive marital life. The qualitative interview is best utilized in this type of research because the reliability comes directly from the voices of those being studied.

The variables that were selected, were found to be closely related to each participating couple. In breaking them down, I would like to visit each one and put some discussion in as the researcher.

## **Work**

The couples in the study traditionally fit the model of the male as the breadwinner and the female as the caretaker. Each mother was able to stay home while the babies were young and some beyond. Therefore, the husband had to earn money for the household. In light of this, the husbands in each home were good providers for their wives and children allowing for a lifestyle pleasing to the women. In respect, I would like to say there are families where the wife would love to be home and the husband either will not or can not supply the income. The women seemed to be fortunate although they had to struggle at times while the husband was gone. This held very true to the research.

## **Communication**

As an observer and an interviewer, this author found that as research points out, communication was key to the couple staying focused and committed. As a therapist, the author has noticed several couples struggling because they are not communicating. The styles of communication vary, but the essentials are still present. Being able to self-disclose, validate, and actively

listen to your spouse encourages communication even at times when discussing is difficult. Communication is a quality of good marriages that was seen in all of the couples. The good and the bad times were made better by the ability to effectively communicate.

### **Transition to Parenthood**

In this research, only one couple still had children living in the home. The others were grandparents and one couple great-grandparents. Therefore, it appeared that the couple with children in the home seemed to be in the midst of parenting, and still dealing with parent/child issues firsthand. The knowledge of having children is still there for the grandparents and great-grandparents, but the fact that they are removed from the day-to-day parenting may have allowed them to see the more exciting and fun side of parenting versus the “in the trenches” side.

Also, in response to the parenting piece, it appeared that attitude plays a role. Each couple in this study of good marriages enjoyed the idea/identity that came with being a parent. Perhaps research is accurate when it focuses somewhat on planned versus unplanned pregnancies. All of the pregnancies in this study were planned and that may have led to a change of attitude. Although the connection between attitude and ease of transition to parenthood has not been researched to date, this is an area for further study.

## **Religiosity and Spirituality**

In the research about religion either enhancing or not enhancing marriage, the majority of research implies that it does matter. This research on good marriages supported religion in the marriage as a key to handling life. My knowledge and what I had seen as a researcher leads me to conclude that religion, when shared by both husband and wife, will enhance the marriage. The couples presented here suggest that their common belief in the Bible as a way to live their lives strengthens their marriage. The common ground and related interests encourages growth and points itself in the direction of being for these couples a key element of the "good marriage."

## **Crisis and Adversity**

My eyes were widened on this variable, as I somehow believed the "good" marriages faced very little crisis or adversity. When I began speaking with the couples they had not only faced crisis but had survived and thrived. Infidelity, parental disengagement, depression, ill children, and car accidents were all factors that laid hard on the couples but in it all, they made the commitment to stand together and they made it. My thought is that crisis does in fact test a relationship and if they are successful they are strengthened. Strength, courage, and a will to make it, suggest once again how good marriages sustain through hard times.

### **Four Types of Marriage**

In the literature by these two authors, four types of marriages were discussed. The types are covered in greater detail in Chapter 2.

In each of the interviews I noticed a little mixing of the types. First, Sam and Laurie appeared to me to be mostly traditional. When the children were young Laurie was a full-time stay-at-home mother and Sam was the wage earner. Laurie managed the majority of the homemaking chores and the childcare. However, a bit of the companionate marriage is also readily seen. The couple was initially good friends before marrying, and they shared a great deal of equality. In the times that Sam was home, he was either feeding a baby or bathing a baby, which Laurie commented that Sam “always did all of the children’s baths.” Therefore I would initially call them traditional but the companionate marriage has some aspects intertwined.

In the marriage of Connie and Bart I would say they share a predominantly romantic marriage. The couple spoke often of their initial meeting and how they just “clicked.” They also talked about the rendezvous they still take back to the dinner where they met. This appeared to be quite a special time in their lives and both individuals spoke of being destined for each other. As a researcher, I noticed the gazing looks and the little touches of a hand or knee that was a reassuring gesture of the romanticism in the marriage. If any

other marital type was considered, they have some traditional pieces with the raising of the children and Bart being the primary wage earner.

Carol and Roy are a traditional marriage sprinkled with romanticism. The traditional piece of their marriage is the division of labor. Carol stayed home with the children while Roy worked. Carol mentioned about being the disciplinarian and not being fond of that job, but yet having to because she was with the children all day. This couple spoke of their lives in chapters. This is a crucial part of the traditional marriage. Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1996) add that "today women in this form of marriage define their lives in terms of chapters: the time before marriage and children, the chapter when children are young, and a later chapter that may include a return to work or a new undertaking" (p.22). Carol went on after children to being involved in the church and activities like prayer groups, leading bible studies, and cooking for the children at camp. This was a different time in the life of this couple.

The sprinkling of romanticism comes in the form of the union. This couple has been together for fifty-seven years and they still talk about their meeting and the Lord bringing them together. They speak of the time they met, separated, and met again only to marry soon their after. One suggestion that leads me to believe they are somewhat in the romantic marriage forms around their policy of never missing a day without saying "I love you" to the other person.

In each of the types above there appeared to be one that is the predominant marital type and one that could be a close second. In the relationships above there is a significant difference in those who no longer have children. The division of labor that once held them in the traditional category has now been removed and the relationship has changed some to take on a new typology. The new typology that is embraced still seems to run secondary to the initial type for each couple. It seems as if the couples that were traditional continue to hold closely these typologies but hearten others to form.

### **Limitations of this Research**

The largest limitation in this study is the lack of variation in socioeconomic status and multiculturalism. Each couple sustained a stable socioeconomic subset and their culture was predominantly white. Quite interestingly, other research studies, some of which were utilized in this research paper, tapped into this same socioeconomic and ethnic group. Therefore, the similarity in reporting helps to establish generalizations that were based on earlier research data.

This author found the study was limited by not having a sequence of questions. Some of the information did not flow, making it difficult to acknowledge where the participants were coming from at times. This made transcription challenging with the interviewer, who would break in to clarify the participants' statements. In future research, the use of preset open-ended



interview questions that each couple answers would make the interview easier to follow and guide.

Lastly, one area that limits this research is the use of theories pertaining to quality of “good marriages.” There is little research available that discusses quite frankly the essentials of a good marriage. Therefore, the information that was gathered is a mix of old research, previously compiled, and new samples (the three couples interviewed), combined to formulate what variables could possibly be involved in building a solid good marriage.

### **Future Research**

In future research I would like to see a larger sample to indeed identify variables across the board. These variables would also make for a quantitative study to get exact number data to ensure support.

Utilizing qualitative, ethnographic studying in an interview format, I would like to see more structured interviewing. Along with structure, the researcher compromises the ability to have items pop up that are of importance, that one would not have teased out by using an unscripted format. The trade seems to be heavier on the side of following participants versus having them able to freely roam when sharing.

## Conclusions

In studying the variables to the “good” marriage, viewed in this research, this author is intrigued and desirous of studying the subject further. My quest to find what entails a good marriage will continue on after academia has ended. When I meet new couples, I often ask, “what is good about your marriage?” Some cannot think of anything and others comment, “good question,” while others start naming what they believe is good. Very rarely are there no good things in the marriage to comment on. There is a large difference between, “I can not think of anything” and someone who rattles off several suggestions.

I am aware from researching this that many variables are included in a good marriage. Some are easy to name such as communication, but others are more elusive such as “inside jokes or couple talk.” It heightened the author’s awareness at looking at one’s own idiosyncrasies in marriage.

These variables are difficult to track or quantify; they just exist. In this study, I sought to show the humanity of each couple; to present data that could otherwise be missed by discarding field notes. This quest leads me to always look at my potential clients as humans, part of a larger system, a family system.

Lastly, as a researcher, I plan to never underestimate the power of one’s family of origin. However life has turned out for couples, there is still a hint of mom and dad or grandparents looming in the distance. My concerns demand that I continue to utilize a genogram approach with all couples and families. The

genogram tends to externalize an internal shame about something that has happened. I will continue to do what I call a renouncing genogram to ensure that baggage can be dropped at the door and that all of it does not follow one into the marriage. I remain engaged in the quest for the "good" marriage.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Anthony, Michael, J. (1993). The relationship between marital satisfaction and religious maturity. Religious Education, 88(1), 97-109.
- Bahr, S.J., & Day, R.D. (1978). Sex role attitudes, female employment, and Marital satisfaction. Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 9(1), 53-67.
- Beirne, S., & Beirne, K. (1997). Would you volunteer to help your marriage? U.S. Catholic, 62(2), 28-30.
- Bellah, R.N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W.M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S.M. (1985). *Habits of the heart*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Belsky, J., & Pensky, E. (1988). Marital change across the transition to parenthood. Marriage & Family Review, 12, 133-156.
- Blair, S.L. (1993). Employment, family, & perceptions of marital quality among husbands and wives. Journal of Family Issues, 14(2), 189-213.
- Booth, A., & Johnson, D. (1995). Belief and behavior: Does religion matter in today's marriage? Journal of Marriage & the Family, 57(3), 661-673.
- Booth, A., Johnson, D., White, L., & Edwards, J. (1988). Predicting divorce and permanent separation. Journal of Family Issues, 6, 331-346.
- Bradbury, T., Fincham, F.D., & Beach, S. (2000). Research on the nature and determinants of marital satisfaction: a decade in review. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62(4), 964-983.
- Choi, K.H. (1994). Extramarital sex and HIV risk behavior among American adults: Results from the National AIDS Behavioral Survey. American Journal of Public Health, 84, 2003-2007.
- Cowan, C.P., & Cowan, P.A. (1995). Interventions to ease the transition to parenthood. Family Relations, 44(4), 412-424.
- Cox, M.J. (1999). Marital perceptions and interactions across the transition to parenthood. Journal of Marriage & the Family, 61(3), 611-626.

- Dolcini, M.M., Catania, J.A., Coates, T.J., Stall, R., Hudes, E.S., Gagnon J.H., & Pollack, L.M. (1993). Demographic characteristics of heterosexuals with multiple partners: The National AIDS Behavior Surveys. Family Planning Perspectives, 25, 208-214.
- Ellison, C. (1991). Religious involvement & subjective well-being. Journal of Health & Social Behavior, 32, 80-99.
- Fowers, B.J. (1998). Psychology and the good marriage. American Behavioral Scientist, 41(4), 516-542.
- Fowers, B.J. (1993). Psychology as public philosophy: An illustration of the moral dimension of psychology with marital research. Journal of Theoretical & Philosophical Psychology, 13, 124-136.
- Gelman, D., & Pedersen, D. (1993). Counting your blessings. Newsweek, 121(21), 57-59.
- Glenn, N.D., & McLanahan, S. (1982). Children and marital happiness: A further specification of the relationship. Journal of Marriage & the Family, 44, 63-72.
- Giblin, P. (1996). Spirituality, marriage, and family. Family Journal, 4(1), 46-53.
- Gottman, J.M. (1994a). What predicts divorce: The relationship between marital process and marital outcomes. *Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.*
- Hobbs, D., & Cole, S. (1977). Transition to parenthood: A decade replication. Journal of Marriage & the Family, 38, 723-731.
- Hunt, R., & King, M. (1978). Religiosity and marriage. Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 17, 399-406.
- Huston, T.L., & Vangelisti, A.L. (1995). How parenthood affects marriage. In M.A. Fitzpatrick & A. Vangelisti (Eds.), **Explaining family interaction**. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Jorgensen, S.R. (1979). Socioeconomic rewards & perceived marital quality: A reexamination. Journal of Marriage & the Family, 41, 825-835.
- Kessler, R., & McRae, J. Jr. (1982). The effects of wives' employment on men & women. American Sociological Review, 47, 216-226.



- Kingston, P.W., & Nock, S.L. (1987). Time together among dual-earner couples. American Sociological Review, 52(2), 391-400.
- Leigh, B.C., Temple, M.T., & Trocki, K.E. (1993). The sexual behavior of U.S. adults: Results from a national survey. American Journal of Public Health, 83, 1400-1408.
- Lueptow, L.B., Guss, M.B., C.R., & Hyden, C. (1989). Sex role ideology, marital status, and happiness. Journal of Family Issues, 10(3), 383-400.
- Macdermid, S.M., Huston, T.L. (1990). Changes in marriage associated with the transition to parenthood: Individual differences as a function of sex role attitudes & changes in the division of household labor. Journal of Marriage & the Family, 52, 475-486.
- Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). **Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook**. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Perry-Jenkins, M., & Crouter, A.C. (1990). Men's provider-role attitudes: Implications for household work and marital satisfaction. Journal of Family Issues, 11(2), 136-156.
- Pleck, J.H. (1977). The work-family role system. Social Problems, 24, 417-428.
- Robinson, L., & Blanton, P. (1993). Marital strengths in enduring marriages. Family Relations, 42, 38-45.
- Schoen, R., & Weinick, R.M. (1993). The slowing metabolism of marriages: Figures from 1988 U.S. marital status life tables. Demography, 30, 737-746.
- Siegel, M.J. (1992). For better or worse: Adultery, crime and the Constitution. Journal of Family Law, 30, 45-95.
- Simon, B.L. (1990, June). Impact of shift work on individuals and families. The Journal of Contemporary Human Services, pp. 342-348.
- Smith, T.W. (1991). Adult sexual behavior in 1989: Numbers of partners, frequency of intercourse and risk of AIDS. Family Planning Perspectives, 23, 102-107.

- Smith, T.W. (1994). Attitudes toward sexual permissiveness: Trends, correlations, and behavior connections. In A.S. Rossi (Ed.), **Sexuality Across the Life Course**, (pp. 63-97). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Treas, J., & Giesen, D. (2000). Sexual infidelity among married and cohabitating Americans. Journal of Marriage & the Family, 62(1), 48-61.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. (1989). Statistical abstract of the United States: 1989 (109<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, D.C.: *U.S. Government Printing Office*.
- van Maanen, (1977). Resource in: **Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook**. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Voydanoff, P. (1988). Work role characteristics, family structure demands, and work/family conflict. Journal of Marriage & the Family, 50, 749-761.
- Wallerstein, J.S., & Blakeslee, S. (1996). **The Good Marriage: How and Why Love Lasts**. First Warner Books Printing Inc., New York, NY.
- White, L., & Keith, B. (1990). The effect of shift work on the quality & stability of marital relations. Journal of Marriage & the Family, 52, 453-462.
- Wolcott, (1992). Resource in: **Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook**. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

### **Appendix I**

(Participants' Name)

Hello, this is Tamera Hill, I am writing to see if I could get some help. I am going to be graduating this year with a degree in Marriage & Family Therapy. For me to graduate, I need to complete a thesis, and that's where I could use your help.

The topic of my thesis is a focus on good marriages. The reason I chose this topic is because I wanted to focus entirely on the positive nature of marriage. My thesis is based on a book entitled "The Good Marriage" by Judith S. Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee. The book discusses five types of good marriages and their background. I would like to look at how good marriages come to be and what characteristics are involved in good marriages across the board.

The following criteria must be met to participate in the study:

- 1) A legal marriage of at least 10 years duration.
- 2) You have together at least one child.
- 3) Both wife and husband regard their marriage as a good one.
- 4) The couple is willing to fill out a one-page questionnaire and will be interviewed together. Interviews would be minimally 2 hours in length, with you receiving the taped recording upon completion of the thesis.

Please return the enclosed postcard immediately indicating your involvement preference. If you would be willing to help me, please return the attached questionnaire in the enclosed envelope by April 11<sup>th</sup>. I can be reached with any questions or concerns at home at 786-4400.

Thank you so much for your consideration.

Tamera Hill



## **Appendix II**

**Instructions:** Please complete this essay question by writing independently from your spouse how you feel about the following question.

**Question:**

Utilizing this page, in one or two paragraphs, please explain why you believe you have a good marriage.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return both forms by April 11<sup>th</sup> in the enclosed envelope. I will be in touch to arrange a time to meet. Thank you!

### **Appendix III**

#### **Research Instrument**

##### **Possible Questions Used in the Interview:**

What's happy about your marriage?

What was it that drew you to your husband/wife?

What did you love about him/her?

Why do you believe you have been able to love each other for so many years?

What makes your marriage work while so many others fail or grow cold?

What could potentially break your marriage?

Have you noticed patterns in your intimacy as companions or lovers? If so, what do they look like?

Have you faced crises in your life? How do you handle crises?

How did you decide to have children? (Planned or unplanned).

Tell me about being parents together. Who does what in regards to parenting?

What was your childhood like? Were there patterns in your first family (e.g. birth order, parents' marriages) that helped or hindered you in your present marriage?

If you could let your spouse know one thing about you that he/she doesn't already know what would it be?

## **Appendix IV**

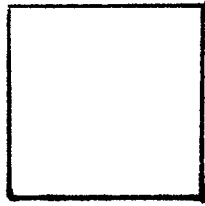
### **Participant Consent Form**

I understand that the purpose of this study is to investigate happy marriages. I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and I may discontinue my participation at anytime without any prejudice. I further understand that any information about me that is collected during this study will be held in the strictest confidence and will not be part of my permanent record. I understand that at the conclusion of the study all records which identify individual participants will be destroyed.

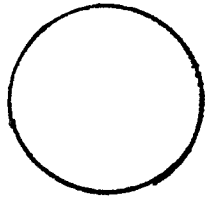
Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ date: \_\_\_\_\_

Note: Questions or concerns about participation in the research or subsequent complaints should be addressed first to the researcher or research advisor and second to Dr. Ted Knous, Chair, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 HH, UW- Stout, Menomonie, WI, 54751, phone (715) 232-1126.

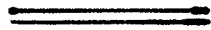
## GENOGRAM SYMBOLS



= MALE



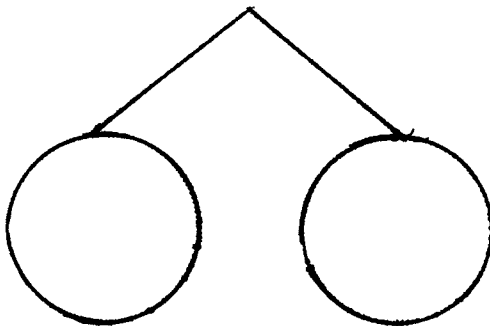
= FEMALE



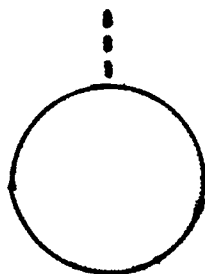
= CLOSE OR FUSED



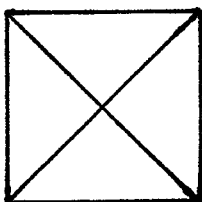
= CONFLICTUAL



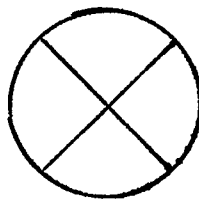
= TWINS



= ADOPTED



or



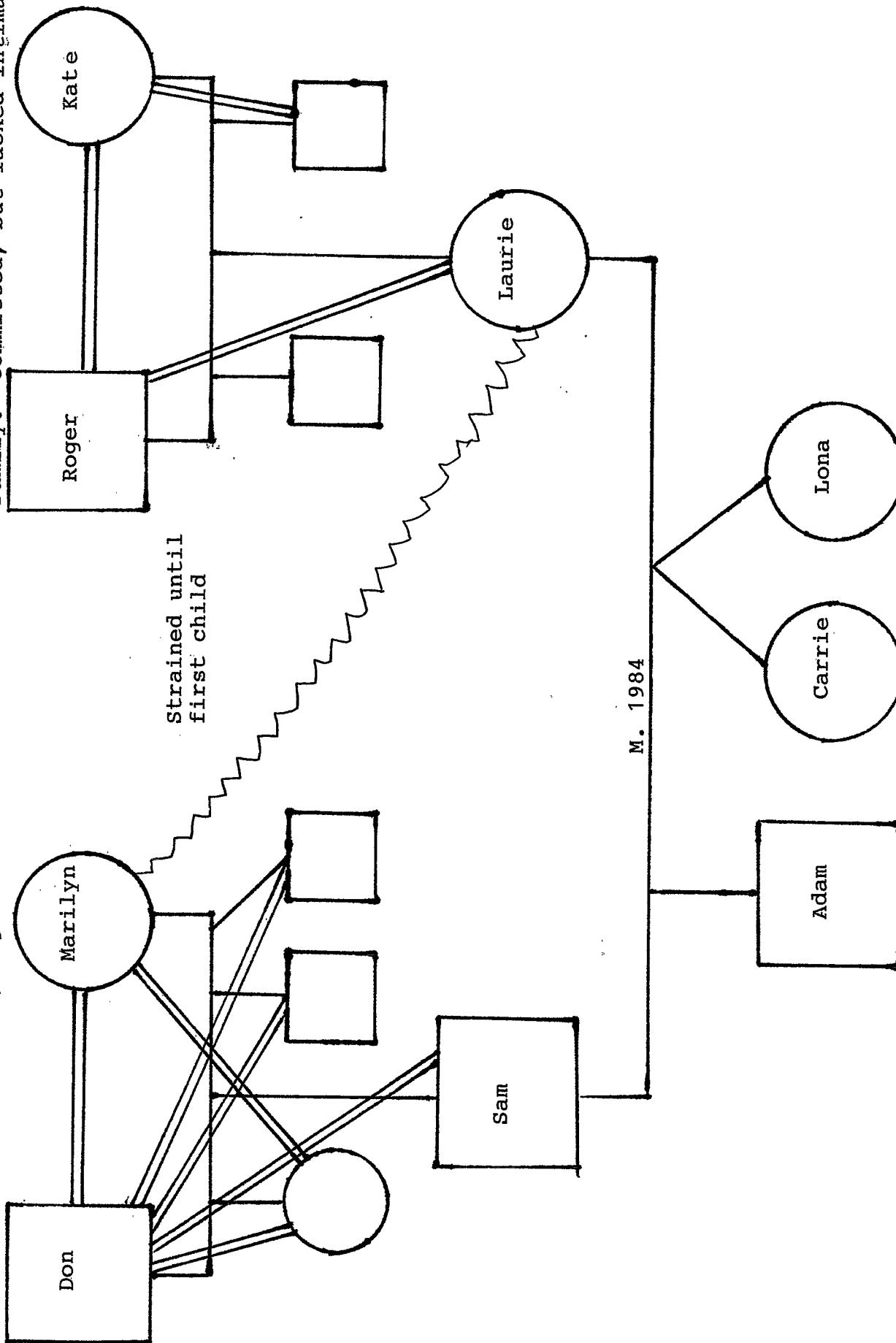
= NO LONGER LIVING

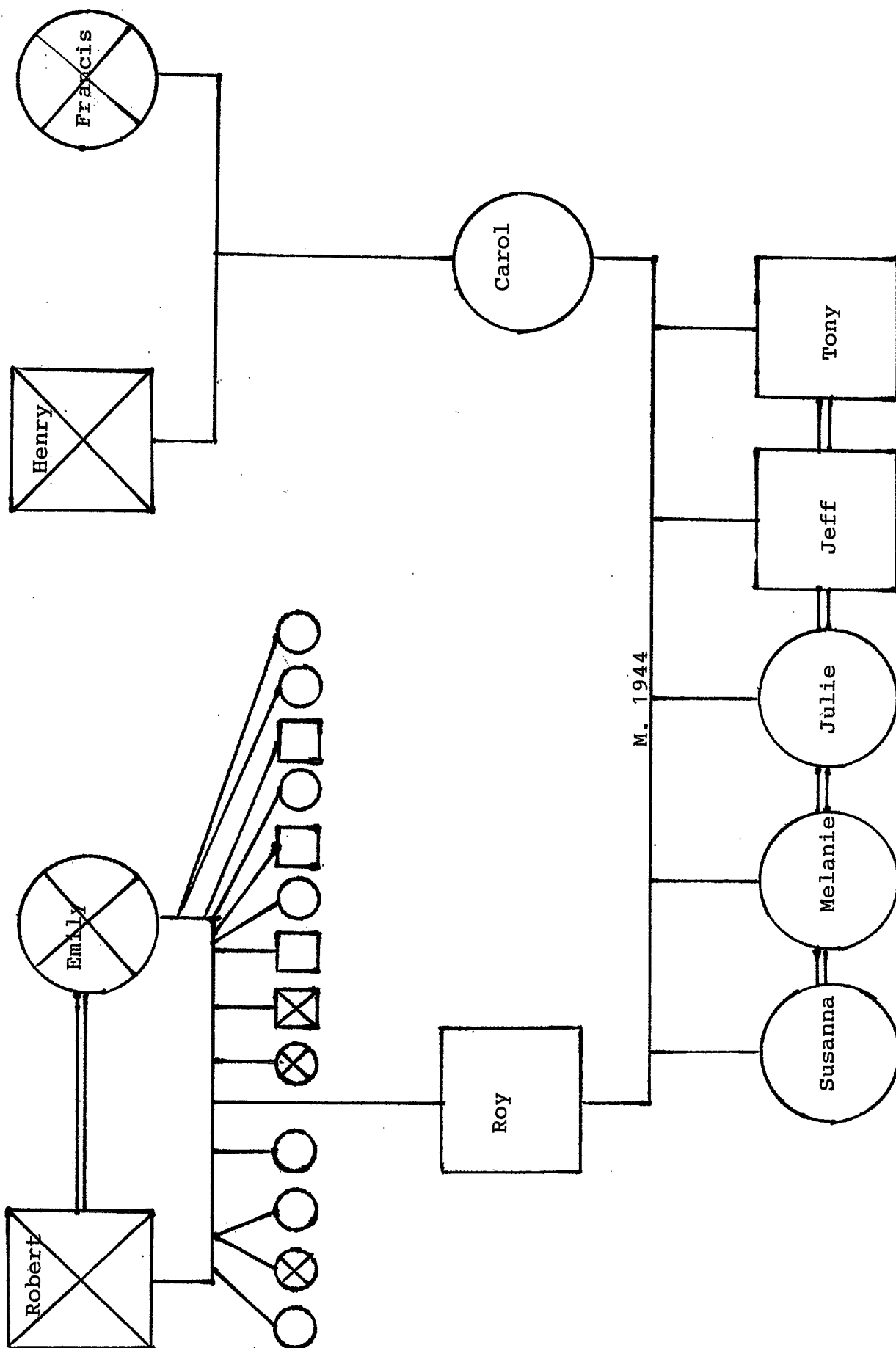
M. Date

= DATE OF MARRIAGE

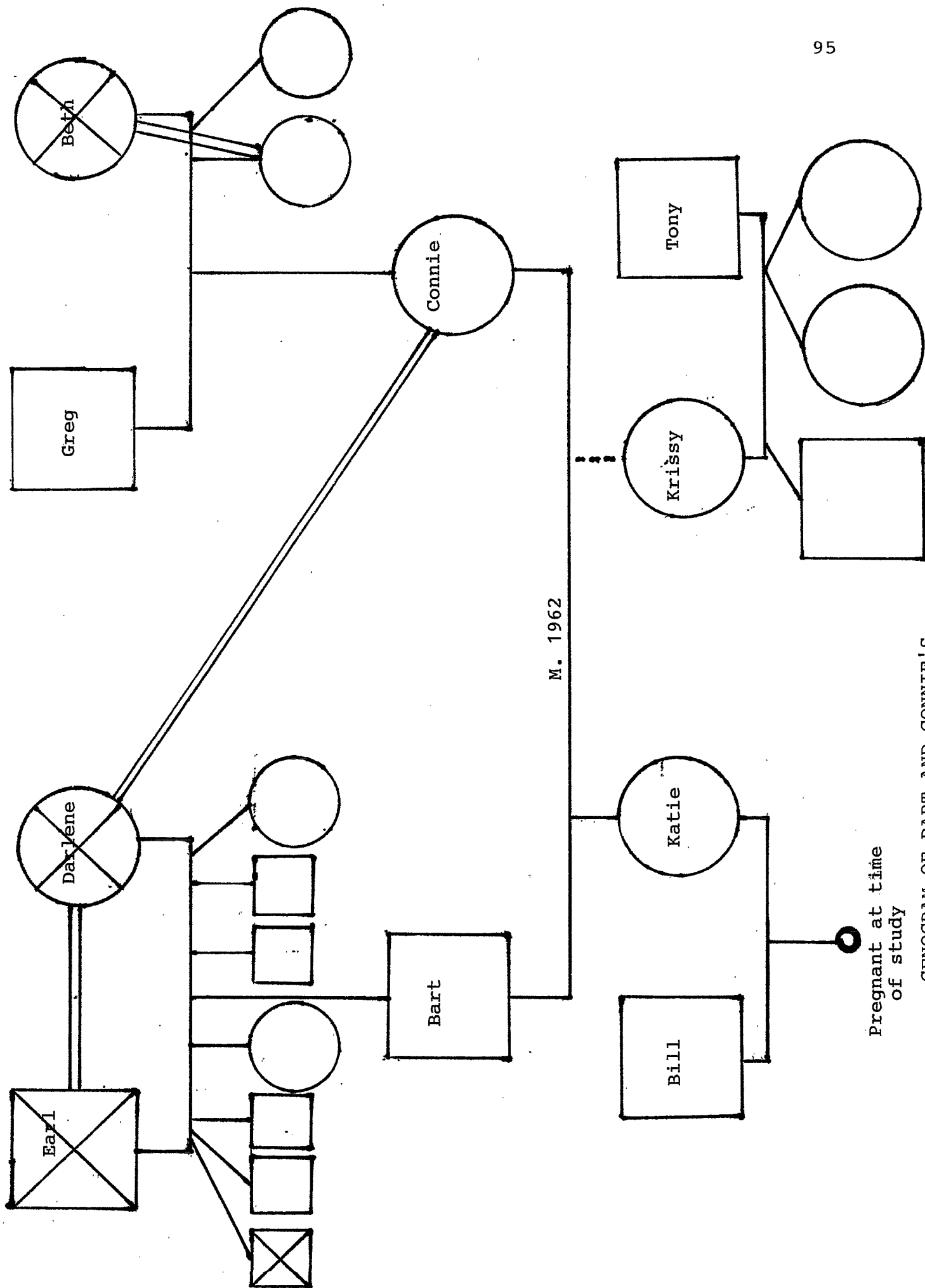
Family: Committed, tight

Family: Committed, but lacked intimacy





GENOGRAM OF ROY AND CAROL'S FAMILIES OF ORIGIN



Pregnant at time  
of study

GENOGRAM OF BART AND CONNIE'S  
FAMILIES OF ORIGIN