PORTRAITS OF MARRIAGE

FROM FRANKL'S EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

by

CHRISTINA RADZIEJEWSKI

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

GRADUATE COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAM

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

………………………………………………..

Marvin MacDonald, Ph.D., Thesis Supervisor & Thesis Coordinator

………………………………………………..

William Strom, Ph.D., Second Reader

………………………………………………..

Stefan E. Schulenberg, Ph.D., External Examiner

………………………………………………..

TRINITY WESTERN UNIVERSITY

September 23, 2011

ABSTRACT

This project took a phenomenological approach to comparative case studies to explore

the fulfilment of individual purpose in life in the context of marriage. Viktor Frankl's

views on human nature and intimate relationships provided a useful conceptual

framework. Key research strategies included 3-hour semistructured interviews,

observations of couple interactions, and other supporting materials from couples, which

included photographs, videos, websites, and blogs. These data collection strategies

facilitated accessibility to rich data uniquely appropriate for this research. A purposive

sampling strategy was used to recruit three happily married couples. A number of unique

themes emerged that have not been addressed in the literature. It was concluded that a

system of familiar and unique processes can interact in a dynamic marital environment

where couples have a shared understanding of marriage. A distinct noetic dimension of

couple relationships thrives in such an environment. In this system, the marital

environment operates in circular dynamism, leading couples to experience a sense of

contentment. The system feeds back unto itself, leading the individual to redefine his or

her purpose and meaning in life, encouraging couples to reach for higher potentials, and

to celebrate through self-transcendent giving to the world. The implications of this

research suggest that within a stable marital environment: (a) couples nurture individual

goals and purpose; (b) couples encourage individual growth, freedom, and responsibility;

(c) spouses protect each other against external stressors; (d) couples foster realization of

the common purpose; and (e) couples self-transcend toward meaning potentials beyond

their marriage.

Key words: Marriage; phenomenology; purpose in life; logotherapy; noetic dimension

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, my sincere thanks to the participants of this research, who not only made this research possible, but made it a rewarding and meaningful experience for me. Thank you for your generosity, insights, and grace. You have truly made this project the highlight of my Masters program.

Special thanks go to Dr. Marvin McDonald, my thesis supervisor, whose wisdom and guidance have been invaluable throughout the entire process. Mac, your gift of time, expertise, and enthusiasm, has been such an encouragement to me, and I cannot thank you enough. Many thanks also to Dr. Bill Strom, who provided a unique perspective and valuable insights, and was an integral member of the thesis team.

I would also like to give thanks to my parents, who have been married 44 years, and are my constant role models. I am also grateful to God, whose continued presence in my life has brought countless blessings and grace.

Last and certainly not least, my heartfelt thanks to my dear husband Ian, who provides meaning and purpose in my life every day. Thank you, Ian, for your patience, encouragement, and unconditional love. This is for us, HB.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The quest for meaning is centuries old. Philosophers as renowned as Aristotle have been quoted both heralding and lamenting the mysteries and wonders of life. The searches for happiness, for everlasting love, and for the true self are similar pursuits that have baffled the most perceptive of people.

Indeed, modern existential psychology has benefited from a number of contributions from great philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Tillich (Feldman & Snyder, 2005), to name a few. Today's existential theories are very much integrated with humanistic thinking. Contemporary existential–humanistic theories are based on the work of such esteemed individuals as Allport, Frankl, Sartre, Maslow, Bugental, and Yalom (Feldman & Snyder, 2005; Schnell & Becker, 2006).

In 1959, Frankl famously wrote that the search for meaning is "the primary motivational force in man" (p.121). According to Frankl, individuals are being genuine and authentic unto themselves when they desire for meaning in their lives. Individuals who seek meaning in their lives are taking responsibility for themselves, one of the tenets of Frankl's logotherapy, by setting goals to help themselves (Feldman & Snyder, 2005). Much of contemporary meaning therapy is inspired by, and derived from, logotherapy (Wong, 2010).

Meaning is but one single, though powerful, concept within the realm of existentialism. Meaning is a profoundly intrinsic essence of each human being and hence there is a legitimate and acknowledged place for existential meaning therapy in clinical use. Wong (2010), and researchers Schulenberg, Hutzell, Nassif, and Rogina (2008), have called for the adoption and integration of meaning into psychotherapy, regardless of

the clinician's orientation and theoretical framework. Yalom (2002) wrote that he did not

consider existentialism to be a specific branch of psychotherapy; however, it is his

conviction that all dynamic therapists should be aware of and be sensitive to existential

issues.

Meaning is the value an individual attributes to the people or events in their lives

(Stillman et al., 2009). Meaning is unique to the individual, and it is contextual,

depending on the situation in which individuals find themselves (Frankl, 1959). Meaning

may also be viewed as a way of coping with life, a way of making sense of existence by

assigning purpose and direction (Feldman & Snyder, 2005; Schnell & Becker, 2005;

Stillman et al., 2009).

Hence meaning is subjective; there is no one definition of meaning that is right.

According to Schnell and Becker (2005), people who are high in meaningfulness attribute

the source of meaning to principle-driven facts of life, such as morality, reason, and

tradition. Such individuals are also likely to be more involved with their families,

friends, and community.

People are especially motivated to find meaning when they are confronted with

negative life events, such as a death in the family or an illness (Jim, Richardson, Golden-

Kreutz, & Andersen, 2006; King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, 2006). Yanez et al. (2009)

found in two longitudinal studies that cancer patients who have gained meaning or peace

in their lives show higher levels of adjustment. A number of studies cited by King et al.

(2006) supported the premise that finding meaning in negative life events is a potent

coping mechanism in dealing with these events.

Meaning has the effect of increasing a person's positive feelings; the converse was also found to be true, in that positive affect also enhances a person's experience of meaning in life (King et al., 2006). Sirgy and Wu (2009) suggested that balance in life is important for happiness, maintaining that the complexity of life calls for multiple domains to satisfy the multiple needs of the human person. Seligman (2002) proposed that happiness can be achieved when individuals can satisfy their experiences for a pleasant, engaged, and meaningful life. In expounding on the latter, the author wrote that achieving a meaningful life means experiencing a connection to a bigger purpose.

What then is purpose? Baumeister stated that a sense of purpose is driven by the perception that current activities are related to future outcomes (as cited in Stillman et al., 2009). In their study on social exclusion, Stillman et al. (2009) found that individuals who are socially connected are more likely than those who are not socially connected to seek purpose fulfillment and to see life as being meaningful.

Many scholarly works and literature have attested to the positive effects of marriage on personal well-being and self-esteem (Hawkins & Booth, 2005; Proulx, Helms & Buehler, 2007; Stutzer & Frey, 2006). Married people experience love, friendship, companionship, and emotional, psychological, and financial support (Myers, 2000). Marriage provides the context in which individuals could find their purpose in life.

Marriage is also one of the most complex of human relationships. According to Kierkegaard, love fills us with much happiness but paradoxically, it also fills us with much uncertainty and anxiety for love does not provide any guarantees for happiness (Correia, 2008).

Marriage is also a commitment that involves responsibility, requires work, and may be stressful. Although marriage has the power to provide much happiness, it also has the ability to provide the impetus to ruin lives. A chronically dysfunctional marriage can lead to depression and anxiety (Proulx et al., 2007; Stutzer & Frey, 2006), which, in turn, may lead to spousal abuse, violence, and suicide (Canetto, 2002). In their 12-month study on marriages, Whisman, Uebelacker, and Bruce (2006) found that unhappy marriages were closely linked to a 3.7-fold increase in risk for the development of alcohol abuse.

Although meaning is a personal experience, in the context of marriage, couples must redefine and reenact meaning in their lives in a way that is respectful of and responsive to the most beloved person in their lives. As such, upon marriage, meaning as the individual knows it ceases to exist, and is transformed into a more complex form. The individual is required to reconstruct his or her purpose in life. The unique manner individuals approach their personal goals and dreams in the context of their marriage is the focus of this research.

A weakness in the current body of literature is that there is limited research on marriage from an existential perspective. It is also true that most existing research is quantitative in nature. With the current distressing rate of divorce, it is hoped that a phenomenological case study approach that seeks to understand the lived experience of purpose fulfilment in marriages, will further aid marriage therapists and facilitators of marriage enhancement programs in their quest for fulfilling and satisfying unions.

This study used the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 2001) as a screening tool to determine couples' satisfaction with their marriage. To explore the

nature, development, and attainment of purpose in marital relationships, couples were

engaged in qualitative in-depth interviews, deploying a phenomenological case study

approach. Specifically, this study asked couples the question "How has your purpose

been fulfilled in the context of your marriage," inviting couples to narrate the stories of

their lives. Data were also gathered through observations of participants in their homes,

as well as through photographs, videos, and other meaningful sources of data. By

gathering data from multiple sources of evidence, I hoped to gain rich descriptions of the

fulfilment of individual purpose in the marital domain.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to briefly explore the theory of meaning according to Viktor Frankl and to understand the concept of purpose. Key influences on purpose and of marital quality are discussed. Findings that have correlated purpose in life with marital quality are then presented and finally, the current research idea is explained.

Viktor Frankl and Logotherapy

Viktor Frankl was one of the most significant contributors to the field of psychology, to the existential movement in particular, and was the creator of logotherapy (Frankl, 1959). *Logos* denotes meaning in Greek. Frankl described logotherapy as a *will to meaning* (man's search for meaning) as distinguished from Freud's *will to pleasure* (the pleasure principle) and Adler's *will to power* (the attainment of superiority). The goal of logotherapy is to help clients find meaning in their lives (Frankl, 1959). In addition, Frankl emphasised that all human life has purpose (the *meaning of life* tenet), and that human beings have the freedom to make, and to take responsibility for, their choices (the *freedom of will* tenet).

Frankl (1959) believed that values play an integral role in the way that individuals define meaning. He believed that meaning in life will save individuals from suffering *noogenic neurosis*, which evolves from existential frustration. Noogenic neurosis leads to an existential vacuum filled with emptiness and meaninglessness (Frankl, 1959).

Viktor Frankl (1959) presented his enduring legacy to the world in his renowned book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. In it, he spoke of the intimate and complex relationships between people in love:

Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost

core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the very

essence of another human being unless he loves him. By his love he is

enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person; and

even more, he sees that which is potential in him, which is not yet

actualized but yet ought to be actualized. Furthermore, by his love, the

loving person enables the beloved person to actualize these potentialities.

By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become,

he makes these potentialities come true. (Frankl, 1959, p. 134)

While interred in Nazi concentration camps in the 1940's and as a witness

to the horrors of war, Frankl (1959) sustained himself by his will to see his wife

again. Frankl realised that his deep desire to see his beloved gave his life

meaning and a purpose. Those interred with him who did not see a vision of the

future and who did not have the same will to live, did not survive (Frankl, 1959).

Frankl (1959) began to believe, during the most dehumanizing and desolate of

conditions, that love is the ultimate goal that human beings can aspire to have. Frankl

said "a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief

moment, in the contemplation of his beloved" (p. 59). Frankl created meaning out of his

suffering and, as a result, he survived imprisonment.

Meaning

Frankl (1959) was of the view that to be human is to be responsible for one's own

existence. It is by developing our individual consciences and by making our own choices

in life that we will be able to find meaning and purpose in our lives. The pursuit of

meaning is essential to all human beings, as meaning is positively associated with overall mental, spiritual, and psychological health (Melton & Schulenberg, 2008).

As it is the focus of this study to examine how couples integrate their purpose in life in the context of their marriage, this review will only be concerned with those aspects of life that supports the attainment of goals and dreams, through which individual purpose is revealed (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). Specifically, this literature review is focused on the concept of purpose, the influence of personality and of self-esteem, as well as the role of work and of relationships in shaping purpose. A latter section will discuss marriage and the factors that may affect couples in their quest for both individual and couple dream fulfilment.

Purpose. Frankl (1959) believed that all human beings have a purpose and that all human beings are motivated to search for meaning in their lives. Purpose is a driving force that is intimately associated with identity and personality and is revealed through the pursuit and attainment of goals (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). Purpose provides a direction for life and it inspires and motivates the accomplishment of goals. When goals are clearly stated and strategies are designed to meet them, individuals are able to achieve meaning in their lives (Griffith & Graham, 2004).

Purpose provides the impetus for living and serves as the force that propels individuals to overcome life's obstacles (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). Baumeister (1991) described a sense of purpose as perceiving a clear and desired future outcome based on current activities. When individuals have achieved this sense of purpose, they are one step closer to a meaningful life.

In his objective list theory, Nussbaum (1992) proposed that happiness consists of the attainment of worthwhile life pursuits such as career, friendship, good health, material comforts, education, love, knowledge, and good conscience. Such worthwhile pursuits give individuals purpose.

Purpose requires individuals to engage with life in a manner that is focused and directional (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). The attainment of purpose through the pursuit of goals is rewarding and satisfying, in turn shaping the individual's self-image and feeding his or her confidence, overall mental health, and quality of life (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). According to McKnight and Kashdan (2009), meaning and purpose have a bidirectional relationship in that meaning drives the development of purpose, and purpose drives meaning when purpose has been further developed.

Goals must be differentiated from purpose. Purpose is the overarching theme that shapes our life's paths. Goals, on the other hand, are specific, and have an endpoint when outcomes are achieved (Elliot, 2006). Purpose does not have an endpoint, nor does it necessarily have specific outcomes (Wilson & Murrell, 2004). Goals serve the bigger purpose and hence, goals are derived from purpose (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). Although purpose drives goals, not all goals will indicate a purpose. However, goals will reflect individuals' core values, and these core values are intimately tied to purpose (Griffith & Graham, 2004).

Individuals are naturally attracted and respond automatically to stimuli that are consistent with their purpose (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). People who are strong in

their conceptualization of purpose and are dedicated to their purpose will tend to exhibit

behaviours that are consistent with their purpose (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009).

The influence of personality. In their study on the correlations between

personality and meaningfulness, Schnell and Becker (2006) found that 16% of variance

in meaningfulness can be explained by personality factors. They reported that the Big 5

factors Extraversion, Conscientiousness, and Agreeableness contribute positively to the

prediction of meaningfulness. Extraversion is closely linked to the constructs of

happiness, subjective well-being, and optimism (Schnell & Becker, 2006). Individuals

who are high in Extraversion are attracted to fun and challenges, are creative, and are

aware and attuned to their own needs. It is a personality trait that has been linked to

positive affect in individuals (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998).

DeNeve and Cooper (1998) stated that people who are high on Conscientiousness

tend to set higher goals for themselves and have reported being high on life satisfaction.

Conscientious and agreeable individuals tend to experience life as being meaningful

(Schnell & Becker, 2005).

Personal characteristics such as self-confidence, spontaneity, and broad-

mindedness are also essential for the experience of meaningfulness (Schnell & Becker,

2006). These characteristics are indicative of individuals who are capable of

conceptualizing abstract phenomena, which is foundational for the creation of purpose

(McKnight & Kashdan, 2009).

Schnell and Becker (2006) reported that individuals high on Agreeableness,

Extraversion, and Conscientiousness are also high on self-transcendence, a strong

predictor for meaningfulness. People who are high on self-transcendence tend to place

importance and focus on others, by looking beyond their own needs (Schnell & Becker, 2006).

   The power of self-esteem. Self-esteem is a factor that will determine whether individuals have the confidence and psychological health to achieve their life's purpose, affecting functioning and performance in many areas of life (Schimel, Arndt, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2001). Closely associated with self-image and self-worth, self-esteem may be viewed as an evaluation of the self in terms of success and achievements in life (Butler & Gasson, 2006). Morgan and Farsides (2009) found that self-esteem is a strong predictor for an accomplished and a valued life, both of which contribute to a meaningful life.

   According to Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, and Schimel (2004), when self-esteem comes under threat, people are generally defensive and motivated to protect themselves so as to continue maintaining high self-esteem. Pyszczynski et al. concluded that self-esteem is a natural self-regulating aspect of the human condition, and a coping mechanism with which to manage existential angst. Such angst, which Frankl (1959) described as a *tension*, exists due to the difference "between what one has already achieved and what one still ought to accomplish" (p. 127).

   The function of work. One domain that speaks to an engaged and a meaningful life is that of work (Sirgy & Wu, 2009). Work provides for the economic necessities of life, allowing individuals to feel connected to the external world and to feel competent and capable of providing for themselves and their dependants. In doing so, work provides a sense of purpose, meaning, and fulfillment unlike any other sphere within the

vast domain of life. Work also provides individuals with an identity, a social network, and a purpose (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Sirgy & Wu, 2009).

Yet too much work can be in stark opposition to a meaningful life, if it was not part of the balance in life, as inferred by Sirgy and Wu (2009). The idea is not to eliminate work altogether. Rather, the pursuit of meaningful work may close the gap between necessary work and meaningful life (Michaelson, 2008). Dedicating valuable time and effort to pursuits that are of value may be considered meaningful work in that it allows individuals the opportunity to serve their community, insofar as their abilities would allow them. Work becomes meaningful based on the reasons individuals attribute to their work, and meaningful work has the effect of raising one's self-esteem (Michaelson, 2008).

Dik, Duffy, and Eldridge (2009) referred to the terms *calling* and *vocation* as being popular alternatives to refer to work that is meaningful. According to them, a calling expresses motivation from an external source such as God, or a social need; a vocation is meaning derived internally from oneself. Dik et al. (2009) concluded that when individuals are able to connect meaningful aspects of their work to life, to uphold prosocial values at work, and to attribute satisfaction at work to overall life satisfaction, these individuals are able to increase meaning in their lives.

Feldman and Snyder (2005) believed that life meaning arises when people are effective in managing and controlling their lives to achieve their desired goals. These researchers found that this perception is directed by hope-filled goals and has been shown to correlate negatively with anxiety and depression. It is important to recognize that meaningful work is an integral part of the individual's life; however, it is merely one

aspect of the complex individual (Sirgy & Wu, 2009). Nevertheless, success in the work

domain aids personal satisfaction, which in turn increases the meaning of life.

The role of relationships. Friendship, love, and the ability to connect with others

are common themes in the work of Allport, Maslow, and Erikson (as cited in Ryff &

Singer, 2008). Throughout life, individuals are involved in multiple concurrent

relationships. The dynamics of relationships can be rewarding and a source of happiness,

instilling a sense of belonging and building a healthy self-esteem. Relationships can also

be complex, conflict-laden, and a source of psychological and emotional distress.

Schnell and Becker (2005) found that romantic attachments provide emotional and

mental support and the desire for harmony reduces conflict with the external world, hence

protecting the sense of self.

Individuals have an innate need to belong to social groups and to find meaning in

their relationships with others (Stillman et al., 2009). The capacity to build relationships

with others is a sign of maturity and a central aspect of a meaningful life (Ryff & Singer,

2008). A healthy connection with others in the external world can lead to a healthy sense

of self and an increase in self-esteem, which, in turn, leads to a balanced and meaningful

life (Sirgy & Wu, 2009).

On the other hand, social exclusion, as demonstrated by Stillman et al. (2009),

leads to dissatisfaction with life and a loss of meaning. Individuals who perceived

themselves as belonging to and accepted by a social group, even if the association was

temporary, have demonstrated high levels of meaning in life. The interaction between

sense of belonging and meaning of life underscores the importance of social relationships

(Stillman et al., 2009).

In intimate relationships such as marriage, research has shown that spousal support for personal goals can predict for later marital satisfaction. Brunstein, Dangelmayer, and Schultheiss (1996) found that for individuals who received higher levels of spousal support for their personal goals, those who rate themselves high in marital satisfaction were in turn more likely to report giving a lot of support to their spouse's goals. These researchers also suggested that giving of support for marital goals can predict for marital satisfaction in the other spouse, however, with the proviso that the former was aware of the latter's most important goals.

The research literature also shows that in times of stress, both husbands and wives can stabilize their marital relationships by their individual efforts to provide adequate support to their spouses (Brock & Lawrence, 2008). When matching emotional support was provided to the emotional reaction of a stressor, individuals perceived their spouses as sensitive to their needs. These individuals are more likely to be satisfied when they received adequate support from their spouses (Cutrona, Shaffer, Wesner, & Gardner, 2007). Research has also demonstrated that external sources of support cannot compensate for a lack of spousal support (Brock & Lawrence, 2008; Coyne & DeLongis, 1986; Cutrona et al., 2007).

To conclude this section, a meaningful life is achieved not only when one is content with life as it is, but when one extends the self and reaches for a higher and bigger purpose (Frankl, 1959). A meaningful life is one that goes beyond an individual's own needs and wants. Personality and self-esteem are two important aspects of the individual that have important implications for how couples work through their individual goals and dreams, without losing their joint sense of purpose. Relationships

and work are two areas of an individual's life that influence and support his or her sense

of self and have important consequences for the way that the individual negotiates and

makes allowances to accommodate his or her spouse in the accomplishment of dreams.

The abovementioned factors are closely intertwined and interdependent constructs

that impact upon each other in a complex manner that is unique and different for all

human beings. These are the key aspects of couples' lives that will help to focus this

study, in the quest to understand how couples support, influence, and accomplish their

purpose in life.

A Developmental Perspective

The stage theory of life span development states that human life consists of stages

that are marked by certain milestones through which individuals must live and pass in a

prescribed order (Adams, 2006). Over the course of life, individuals will occupy multiple

roles within the family structure, at work, and in the social context. Within each of these

roles, individuals are expected to behave in ways that meet societal expectations of their

roles (Adams, 2006; MacMillan & Copher, 2005). As individuals grow and mature,

these roles will change organically. As young adults, they will leave school for higher

learning institutions and will find jobs. Eventually these individuals fall in love, get

married, buy a house, and become parents (MacMillan & Copher, 2005).

According to MacMillan and Copher (2005), each of these steps necessitates a

transition to a different social role with its own expected demands. The successful

transition to a different role will determine the individual's life trajectory. Further,

MacMillan and Copher posits that the individual's life course is a result of the "dynamic,

interconnected unfolding of trajectories and transitions over time" (p. 860).

The life courses of married couples are intimately intertwined. The decisions that couples make about their lives together will have implications that are far-reaching throughout their married lives (MacMillan & Copher, 2005). For example, when couples decide to start a family, they are confronted with one of the biggest and most rewarding challenges they would face together. Having a child is a major life trajectory that brings with it lifelong responsibilities. Wives may decide to leave the labour force to become full-time mothers in the early years of their children's lives. In such cases, husbands may tend to focus on their careers to increase earnings to support their families (MacMillan & Copher, 2005).

The relationship between marriage and parenthood, and work values, is bidirectional. Johnson (2005) concluded from her study with 709 cases, completed over a 14-year period, that the intrinsic work rewards that individuals place a high value on (such as personal satisfaction) become less important when individuals are involved in meaningful relationships such as marriage.

The interdependency of the roles of husband and wife is a key characteristic of family functioning (MacMillan & Copher, 2005). According to Kluwer, Heesink, and Van de Vliert (2002), mothers perform more childcare duties than do fathers, as well as carry the bulk of responsibility for house chores. Fathers who are the sole providers in the family carry the burden of earning enough money to feed their families (Walzer, 1998).

Both husband and wife have separate roles and responsibilities which would change throughout their marriage, but both individuals are dependent on each other for the daily functioning of their family. Parenthood signals a significant change in the lives

of couples. Many research studies have concluded that this important time correlates

with a decrease in relationship satisfaction for parents (Mitnick, Heyman, & Slep, 2009).

Marriage

A search of the PsycInfo database of peer-reviewed articles written in the past 30

years for the term *marriage* found 6,133 articles. In a similar search for the phrase

purpose in life, 598 articles were found. When both terms were searched together, there

were 13 articles, of which 5 can be said to relate to the subject of the current study. None

were written from a phenomenological case study perspective.

Marriage is a complex, interpersonal, and intimate experience that includes a

commitment made with another human being, based on love, common values, beliefs,

and interests, and involving many other social, interpersonal, socio-cognitive,

philosophical, and psychological factors. The following sections review the literature on

aspects of married life that will likely surface during the course of inquiry of this study.

Similarities in spousal life satisfaction. In a study to determine whether spouses

are similar in life satisfaction, Schimmack and Lucas (2006) found in a longitudinal study

that, over a course of 20 years, changes in spousal life satisfaction are highly similar.

These researchers found strong evidence for assortative mating for life satisfaction.

Assortative mating refers to the selection of mates according to traits that both have in

common (Schimmack & Lucas, 2006). The researchers concluded that individuals are

likely to marry others who share similar levels of life satisfaction.

Further, Powdthavee (2009) found strong evidence that the well-being of one

partner has a "spillover effect" on the other partner. He also concluded that as couples'

life satisfaction increases, the likelihood of marriage dissolution the following year decreases.

Personality differences in couples. Similarity in personality between partners can predict for marital stability and quality, and is a contributing factor for subjective well-being (Arrindell & Luteijn, 2000). Personality traits were found to be stable in couples with enduring marriages (Donnellan, Conger, & Bryant, 2004). Botwin, Buss, and Shackelford (1997) demonstrated that husband reports of conscientiousness were associated with wife reports of marital satisfaction.

In a longitudinal study spanning 17 years, Stutzer and Frey (2004) asked the question "Does marriage make people happy, or do happy people get married?" They found evidence that singles who eventually marry reported higher life satisfaction than those who stayed single.

Stutzer and Frey (2004) also reported that married couples demonstrated higher satisfaction with life when compared to those living as singles. Stutzer and Frey equated this to the effect of individuals having 2.5 times more household income. They also reported that the life satisfaction of couples who stay married is more stable over time than is the life satisfaction of couples who eventually divorce.

In addition, people who divorce were less happy before and during marriage, when compared to married couples with higher life satisfaction (Stutzer & Frey, 2004). This conclusion was supported by the 15-year longitudinal study carried out by Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, and Diener (2003) on adaptation by couples to the effects of marital transitions. Lucas et al. concluded that preexisting personality differences between

individuals predict for later marital satisfaction. In addition to personality, individuals'

attitudes and reactions to marriage also depend on their life circumstances.

Interestingly, Dehle and Landers (2005) found little evidence that individuals

purposely find life partners whose personalities are similar to their own. Unfortunately,

differences in personality types are a source of conflict and subjective unwellness in

couples (Arrindell & Luteijn, 2000).

Personal well-being. Marriage can confer many benefits and as many stressors

on the well-being of men and women (Proulx et al., 2007; Williams, 2003). In a

metaanalysis involving 66 cross-sectional and 27 longitudinal studies, Proulx et al.

(2007) reported that marital quality was associated positively and significantly with

personal wellbeing. The researchers' conceptualisation of wellbeing includes self-

esteem, physical health, global happiness, and life satisfaction.

The relationship between marital quality and personal well-being changes at

different time points in marriages (Proulx et al., 2007). The arrival of children and the

stressors of finances and career can cause strains on marital relationships and can

negatively influence personal well-being.

Proulx et al. (2007) went on to suggest that individuals whose sense of self is

closely tied to marital quality have more to gain when their marriages do well; by the

same token, they have more to lose when their marriages fail. Chronically unhappy

married people risk suffering low self-esteem, experience psychological distress, as well

as endure various health issues (Hawkins & Booth, 2005).

Shared values and traits. Individuals are generally attracted to and form

compatible relationships with those who are similar to themselves in terms of their

beliefs, values, and views on life. In a cross-sectional study that involved 248 couples to

examine the role of couple similarity in spouses' marital satisfaction, Gaunt (2006) found

that greater similarity between partners was associated with higher levels of marital

satisfaction and lower levels of negative affect. Gaunt also found that the more spouses

are similar in their religious beliefs, the more that the husband would experience positive

emotions, and the more that the wife was satisfied with their marriage. In addition, the

greater similarity spouses share on values and traits, the less likely that both husband and

wife would experience negative emotions in their marriage.

Roest, Dubas, Gerbis, and Engels (2006) found in their study of 685 Dutch

couples in established marriages over a 5-year period that spouses remain similar in their

understanding of and appreciation for traditional family values. The transmission of

values by wives to their husbands was facilitated by shared social positions on education

and religion, and by higher marital satisfaction (Roest et al., 2006).

According to the self-expansion theory, described as "including other in the self"

(Aron, Steele, Kashdan, & Perez, 2006, p. 388), individuals assimilate traits of intimate

partners (such as a spouse) into their conceptualization of self. Based on this theory,

individuals see valuable traits in their romantic partners that they do not yet possess. As

a result of their close relationship, these individuals are influenced by their partners and

over time, they become more like each other, thus increasing positive affect and fuelling

greater intimacy and relationship satisfaction.

The effects of sacrifice. The ideal of true love is often portrayed in popular

media as being unconditional and selfless. Individuals who are selfless are those who

willingly make sacrifices for others. Sacrifice may be viewed by some couples as a sign

of their commitment to each other, by others as a gift that they willingly give to their

spouses, and by some, as an act that requires a settling of accounts at a later time (Beels

& Newmark, 2006).

Stanley theorized that couples are more willing to sacrifice for their spouse if they

view their marriage as a lifetime commitment (as cited in Stanley, Whitton, Sadberry,

Clements, & Markman, 2006). For these couples, the act of sacrifice is fulfilling and

satisfying as they forego self-interest to benefit the relationship. Focus shifted from the

self to the couple (Stanley et al., 2006).

Sacrifice has the effect of increasing trust between individuals in a relationship,

which in turn increases their commitment to each other (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, &

Agnes, 1999). Stanley et al. (2006) demonstrated that a healthy attitude towards sacrifice

can enhance couples' sense of security and safety about their relationship, leading to

more trust, relationship growth, and marital success.

In their study on the approach-avoidance motives of sacrifice-making, Impett,

Gable, and Peplau (2005) concluded that approach-motivated sacrifice, which focuses on

obtaining positive outcomes, increases positive emotions and relationship quality, greater

satisfaction with life, and lesser relationship conflict. They also concluded that

individuals who desire an intimate relationship may view acts of sacrifice as being

inherently rewarding to the self and, therefore, act accordingly.

Measuring Marital Quality

A number of scales and inventories have been developed to measure marital

quality. Some popular scales are the Marital Satisfaction Inventory – Revised

(Herrington et al., 2008), the Waring Intimacy Questionnaire (Waring, 1984), and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 2001). The DAS is discussed below.

The dyadic adjustment scale. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 2001) is a 32-item self-rating instrument that measures the quality of adjustment to marriage or a similar dyadic relationship. According to Spanier (2001), the DAS has been the subject of over 1,000 research studies, and it is one of the most popular instruments used by marital therapists today. The DAS includes 4 subscales: (a) Dyadic Consensus, (b) Dyadic Satisfaction, (c) Affectional Expression, and (d) Dyadic Cohesion (Spanier, 2001).

The Dyadic Consensus subscale measures the agreeability between partners on important matters such as religion, money, friends, and time spent together. The Dyadic Satisfaction subscale measures the tension level between the couple and whether the partners are committed to continuing with their relationship. The Affectional Expression subscale measures the couple's satisfaction with the level of affection in their relationship. The Dyadic Cohesion subscale measures areas of interest and activities shared by the couple. All the DAS subscales may be used separately. The DAS is available in a 7-item version.

The Experience of Purpose in the Marital Dyad

The relationship between purpose and marriage is an important one. There are two distinct characteristics of the current literature on marital quality and meaning: (a) these constructs have been largely considered separately, and (b) there is a strong emphasis on the use of quantitative methods to examine the relationship between them. I found a limited number of articles that considered meaning and marital quality jointly.

There are, however, some articles that correlated different constructs of meaning with marital quality.

There were no articles on the concept of *purpose* in marriage. There are however, a number of books and publications on the topic of meaning-centered couples therapy and on logotherapy as a therapeutic frame for work with marriages in distress. Coche and Coche (as cited in Sells, Giordano, & King, 2002), in their work with couples in a group setting, stressed the close relationship between marital intimacy and personal meaning. Schulenberg, Schnetzer, Winters, and Hutzell (2010) emphasised the significance of meaning in intimate relationships and provided a rationale for therapists to include logotherapy as a part of their therapeutic work with clients, in particular, with couples. Lantz (1999, 2000, 2004) has written extensively on the topic of logotherapy and the application of this therapeutic approach with a number of different populations, including with couples.

The current research is a cross-sectional study of couples at different development stages of marriage; hence, our conclusions were drawn from a single snapshot taken of couples' lives at a specific time in their marriage. During the course of this inquiry, couples were asked to look retrospectively at the earlier stages of their marriage, when their concept of purpose of life may have been different. It is likely that some primary themes elicited during the analysis process reflected the effects of the passage of time. Couples were asked to clarify or to expand on their thoughts on those aspects that required elaboration, so as to maximise relevance and to minimise ambiguities.

I perceived that an in-depth study of the experience of meaning in a marital dyad as viewed from an existential-humanistic lens may be useful to study because the

phenomenological case study approach may provide a new understanding that clarifies the connections and distinctions between important constructs of meaning and purpose in the marital domain. It is hoped that by engaging in a case study of the lived experiences of married couples, a deeper understanding would develop that was educational and beneficial for couples, marriage therapists, as well as for facilitators of marital enrichment programs.

In asking the question, "How have you fulfilled your purpose in life in the context of your marriage," I proposed that in-depth interviews with couples may reveal the extent to which spouses consciously and purposefully help their partners attain their life goals, without hindering their own growth. It may reveal how couples support each other in realizing the magnitude of their freedoms, without losing their selves. Additionally, it may also help us understand how couples confront their fears as an individual and as a couple.

I would further suggest that understanding the complexities of marital relationships with an existential-humanistic lens is a value that would further our collective understanding of the most intimate of human relationships. In so doing, researchers, clinicians, and marital education proponents alike may be further aided in their quests to help individuals understand and confront their humanity and their mortality in a way that is loving, harmonious, and life-giving for their spouses, for themselves, as well as for their marriages.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The current research is a cross-sectional exploratory investigation adopting a phenomenological framework within the case study research approach. My primary objective was to uncover insights that will further aid our collective understanding of how purpose manifests itself in the lives of happily married couples.

There are few qualitative studies that examined the relationship between purpose and marriage. Quantitative approaches are useful in that they are used to measure causal relationships between variables. However, quantitative studies are not able to portray the lived experience of couples in a real life context. The thick descriptions of qualitative studies, provided by rich accounts of time, place, culture, and context, provided details that could explain the complexity of the phenomena (Mertens, 2010). The arguments for case study research are briefly presented here.

Phenomenological Case Study Research

There appears to be an ongoing debate as to whether case studies should be considered a method of inquiry, or if it is a research design in the empiricist sense. Mertens (2010) argued that due to the number of methods of data collection deployed in this approach, she would consider case studies as one of many qualitative research strategies available to researchers. Stake (2005) described cases, which may be the study of people or programs, as being both unique and common, and he described the case study as being a desire to "hear their stories" (p. 1). Stake viewed case studies from a holistic approach to understand the fullness and wholeness of the individual. Yin (1994) proposed that the case study may be quantitative, qualitative, or both.

Flyvbjerg (2004) was of the opinion that in order to know something in-depth, the case study approach is necessary. However, there are a number of misconceptions about the case study approach that has dissuaded researchers from employing it. Flyvbjerg presented his argument against five common misconceptions of the case study approach:

- Misconception 1: General, theoretical, and context-independent knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical, and context-dependent knowledge. Flyvbjerg (2004) argued that the close proximity to reality and the object of study that case study researchers find themselves, is a great opportunity for feedback that is not available with other forms of research. Hans Eysenck (as cited in Flyvbjerg, 2004, pg. 422) said that "sometimes we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases – not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something!" Flyvbjerg concluded that the complexity of the human condition calls for studies that produce concrete and context-dependent knowledge rather than studies used to simply offer broad, predictive theories.

- Misconception 2: A single case cannot contribute to scientific development because it is not generalizable. Flyvbjerg (2004) reiterated that the method chosen for any research depends on the problem under investigation. Moreover, Flyvbjerg argued that "a purely descriptive, phenomenological case study without any attempt to generalize can certainly be of value in this process (of gaining knowledge), and has often helped cut a path towards scientific innovation" (p. 424). Flyvbjerg is of the opinion that it is possible to generalize on a single case if the case study was complementary to other methods. He further added that the case study is an excellent example of an alternative method of inquiry that has often been underestimated.

- Misconception 3: The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses, and other methods are more suitable for hypotheses-testing and theory-building. Flyvbjerg (2004) believed that case studies could be useful for activities other than hypotheses generation. He argued that this could be accomplished by the strategic selection of cases for generalizability, which is directly related to hypothesis-testing. Flyvbjerg identified three types of cases that could affect the generalizability of the study. He described extreme cases as providing richer information than a typical or average case. In contrast, critical cases are strategically chosen for their perceived value to the problem. Flyvbjerg described critical cases as being those that are "likely to either clearly confirm or irrefutably falsify propositions and hypotheses" (p. 426). He added a third choice, that of the paradigmatic case, which he described as cases that represent the general mores of the population under study. Hence, researchers' strategic choice of cases has a direct impact on the generalizability of the study, affected by what they hope to find, allowing them to test their hypotheses, and build on their theories.

- Misconception 4: The case study tends to be biased towards verification of the researcher's own preconceived ideas. Flyvbjerg (2004) believed that the opposite is true, that case studies tend towards falsification, and not the verification of preconceived ideas. In his opinion, case studies are no more affected by researchers' own biases than other methods of research. Additionally, researchers are often more affected by and learn through their proximity to cases than they do through a study involving large groups and statistical evaluations.

- Misconception 5: Single case studies cannot be summarised and generalized into propositions and theories. Flyvbjerg (2004) argued that good case studies must "be

read as narratives in their entirety" (p. 432). He asserted that summarizing case studies

can be problematic, not because of the method itself, but because when summarizing,

one loses the meaning of the phenomenon as told by the participants in the study.

Nehamas (as cited in Flyvbjerg) believed that successful narratives do not allow the

question to be raised, as the answer is found within the narrative. It is the unique

dialectical dance between reductive focus and reflexive self-awareness described by

Finlay (2008), which allows researchers to experience fresh and unexpected moments

of phenomena with their participants. This experience of "being moved by the other"

(Finlay, 2008, p. 3) is partially enabled by researchers' strategic choice of participants

as discussed earlier.

Rationale for Use of Case Study Methodology

The case study approach is the preferred approach in seeking responses as to how

and why certain socially and naturally-occurring phenomena takes place (Yin, 1994).

The broad research question that provides the basis for this case study design is, "How is

individual purpose fulfilled in the context of marriage?"

By adopting this research method, it was my hope to uncover rich insights that

may be therapeutic and beneficial to couples, marriage therapists, and other professionals

in the field, as well as to marriage enrichment program facilitators and educators. Such

insights were gathered from couples by adopting a phenomenological framework, in

search of couples' lived experience in a real-life context. Meaning was assigned to

patterns and themes that emerged, in a detailed and contextualized manner that would be

meaningful to readers.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, both meaning and marital quality are multifaceted concepts, with many constructs and elements that are, in turn, interesting and complex. Multiple variables of interest were considered in this research, making the case study approach an appropriate choice (Yin, 1994). These variables were not preselected; however, it was expected that they would be revealed and explored during the course of inquiry.

Phenomenology

The phenomenological case study research was deemed to be most appropriate for investigating the lived experience of participants (Giorgi, 1997; Laverty, 2003; Osborne, 1994). Neither the grounded theory approach nor the participatory action research method met the criterion of lived experience. Focus groups were not appropriate as they relied on the dynamic interchange between participants in a group format. The phenomenological approach, which delved into the deeper, experiential, and subjective world of couples, was the preferred and most appropriate choice for the particular focus of this study.

The exploratory nature of the present study was a key characteristic of phenomenological case study research that was expected to yield opportunities for learning (Flyvbjerg, 2004; Stake, 2005; Yin, 1994). Within the phenomenological tradition, there are two different schools of thought. Researchers who adopted the phenomenological approach based on Husserl's descriptive phenomenology, acknowledges rich accounts of the phenomena told by the subject and accepts their stories as narrated (Giorgi, 1997; Laverty, 2003). In contrast, the interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology tradition, based largely on Heidegger's work, involves the

subjective interpretations, biases, and experiences of the researcher (Giorgi, 1997;

Laverty, 2003).

In this study, I have chosen to combine both methods, a practice that many

contemporary researchers have undertaken (Osborne, 1994). I have engaged in

bracketing (Appendix A), and I have interpreted participants' descriptions in search of

meaning based on my own perspective and my knowledge of the subject during the

process.

Characteristics of Cases

A case in the present study refers to a legally-married couple. Three cases were

considered in this study. Couples were chosen based on the duration of their marriages.

To maximise contextual differences, it was deemed desirable that one couple would have

been married between 1 to 5 years at the time of the study, one couple married between

10 and 15 years, and a third couple married for more than 25 years. The intention of

studying couples at different developmental stages in their marriage was to identify

themes that may or may not emerge during those stages. Important themes could emerge

that contrasted from one developmental stage to another; other themes could remain

consistent across all developmental stages. It was expected that the inherent diversity,

which could arise as a result of the differences in the number of years married, would

serve to enhance the richness and uniqueness of each experience and further expand the

depth of this study.

Couples who are heterosexual, legally married under Canadian law, and fit into

one of the developmental stages identified above were recruited for this research. It was

envisaged that these criteria serve to reflect common forms of the majority of Canadian

marriages (StatCan, 2006). It was also desirous to have couples who are happily married

for this study. Other than these criteria, no other preexisting conditions were considered

so as to maximise contextual variation and to allow patterns and themes to freely emerge

in later analysis of the data collected.

Case Selection and Recruitment

A purposive sampling approach was strategically adopted for this study, and a

snowball sampling technique was utilised to recruit couples, starting with couples from

my own social circle. It was envisaged that these couples know of other couples who

meet the research criteria, and could act as "key informants" (Mertens, 2010, p. 322).

Couples were offered a $75 dining voucher as an incentive for participation and a copy of

the study if they were interested in the final conclusions.

All interested couples received an email (Appendix B) that explained the

objectives of the study and invited their participation. Couples who responded by return

email were followed up with phone calls. Couples were then asked to complete a

Consent Form (Appendix C). Thereafter, couples were emailed the 7-item Dyadic

Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 2001, Appendix D). Couples were requested to

complete the DAS separately and to return the completed form by email. The first three

couples to qualify were chosen for this study.

Data Collection

Data were collected over 3 months, during which interviews were conducted in

participants' homes, observations were noted, and video recordings were made. Couples

were encouraged to share photographs and other items that related to the stories they

were telling. When interview protocols were transcribed, a copy with additional

questions was sent to couples for their clarification and response. Draft themes and

subthemes were also sent to couples for their verification.

Preparation. A chart of the research process is shown in Figure 1. This chart

provided structure and acted as a checklist to aid in the preparation for interviews with

couples. Two weeks prior to our first interview, couples were given a brief form that

captured basic demographic information (Appendix E). The three couples in this study

had been married for 5 years, 15 years, and 40 years at the time of their interviews.
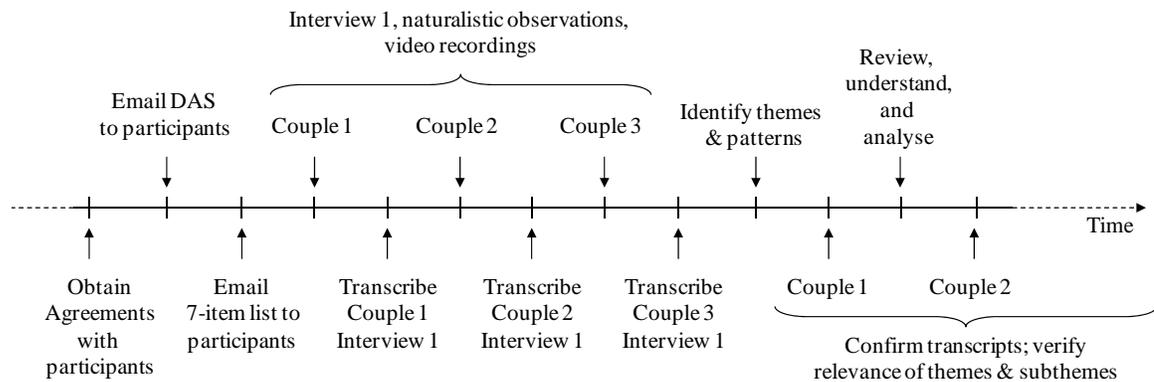
Figure 1. Research process

7-item list. One week prior to their interviews, couples were asked to think

individually about 5 to 7 items that provided them with a sense of purpose (Appendix F).

Couples were not given a particular definition of purpose, so as to encourage their own

personal interpretation of the concept of meaning or purpose. It was intended that items

on their lists would become launching points for in-depth discussions.

Interviews. At the start of all interviews, couples were engaged in relaxed

conversation. Couples were encouraged to ask questions about the process and to express

their feelings or any anxiety they might have about the interview. Couples were briefly

introduced to the research method and were reassured that confidentiality was a highly

valued element of the success of the process.

The initial interviews took approximately 3 hours and were held in participants'

homes. Semistructured interviews were conducted; these interviews were based on

predetermined questions (Appendix G) that allowed couples to talk freely about areas that

matter to them. After the first interview, subsequent questions were conveyed via email

and by telephone. Questions were open-ended, so as to elicit rich and detailed

descriptions told in the couples' own words and style. Couples were encouraged to be

open, honest, and spontaneous. Care was taken to offer the couples sufficient time to tell

their stories and to ensure that they were not unduly influenced by my interpretations of

their responses.

Naturalistic observations. Observing cases in their natural environment is a

method of data collection consistent with qualitative research. Observations were made

of the couples in their home as they interacted with each other. These, and other

impressions made, were recorded. It was perceived that this multivariate, complementary

approach of data gathering was consistent with the intent of the study and would be

helpful in eliciting and exploring the richness and the depth of marital relationships in

their conceptualization of purpose.

Photographs and other sources of data. Although these were not a necessary

feature of the case study methodology, in this research couples were encouraged to show

photographs, videos, mementoes, or treasured family items if they felt that these items

could help them in telling their stories. The option was left to participants to determine

and to share only what they felt were key to their stories.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted firstly by transcribing conversations held with couples based on the initial interview. Transcription was undertaken immediately after each interview and prior to the next communication with that couple (Figure 1).
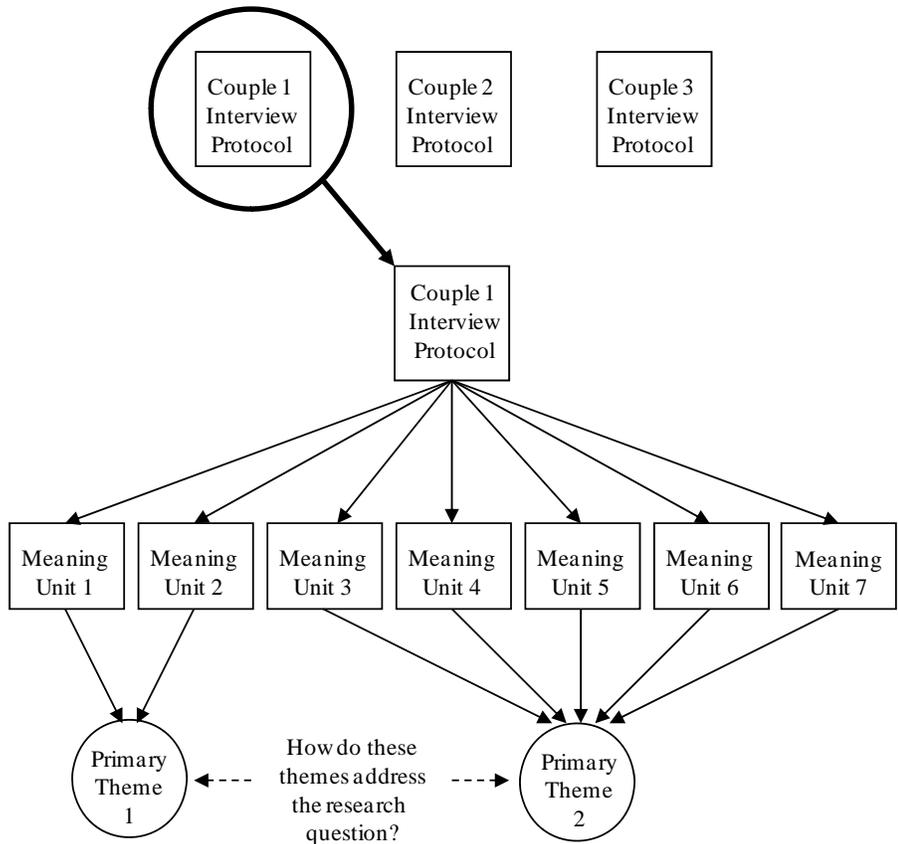
Figure 2. Analysis Procedure

After the transcripts were completed, protocols were read and reread so as to understand their importance to couples and their relevance to the research. When protocols were understood, meaning units were identified (Figure 2). A meaning unit was described by Halling (2008) as "a concept analogous to a complete thought" (p. 163).

After all meaning units had been identified, initial themes were proposed for each protocol (Figure 2). The themes for all protocols were then combined, and a process of sorting and delineation took place. During the process, care was exercised to allow what was unique to each case to remain a differential aspect of their case. According to Stake (2005), it is important not to lose what is unique about each case as we focus on finding similarities.

Rigour and quality. Flyvbjerg (2004) stated that case studies were often perceived as being less rigorous than quantitative methods. However, Campbell and Stanley (1966) argued that the case study has a different rigour, which allows researchers to focus on particular events and situations as they arise during the course of inquiry.

Sufficient time was spent with participants to ensure that observations made were consistent so that conclusions can be confidently made. To ensure that themes and subthemes were correctly identified, for the purposes of internal reliability, the thesis supervisor randomly read selected portions of the transcripts to reach consensus on the exact definition and identification of themes. A volunteer graduate student at Trinity Western University was also asked to randomly choose a transcript to identify themes, and these themes were then compared to those identified by myself and my thesis supervisor.

To ensure validity, participants were provided with opportunities to clarify and to provide feedback to draft interpretations and results. Participants were asked if any aspect of their experience was misunderstood during either the transcribing, or the analysis process.

These procedures, made to elicit rich data from participants, facilitated the research inquiry of exploring purpose in life among married couples. They were particularly illuminating in demonstrating how couples discovered their purpose in life, their selfless giving to each other and to their community, and their resilience and their faith in the midst of crises and suffering.

Bracketing. A posture of bracketing was adopted in the present study. Finlay (2008) described bracketing as a "dialectical dance" (p. 3) between reining in preunderstandings and exploiting them to gain further insights. Finlay described the aim of phenomenological research as being able "to see through fresh eyes, to understand through embracing new modes of being" (p. 29). In the present study, an attitude of reflexive openness was adopted while at the same time, care was exercised to not allow personal preconceptions and notions to cloud the research process.

The narratives of participants were key in the story of their marriages. To achieve this as much as possible, I undertook an honest examination of my beliefs, ideas, attitudes, and biases about my purpose in marriage (see Appendix A), with the goal of setting aside these beliefs during the course of research. The act of bracketing further ensured a certain level of validity for the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Participants

The participants in this study came from different backgrounds and cultures. All three couples who took part had very unique views of marriage; however, there were similarities in what couples perceived as their purpose in life. The following is a brief portrait of each couple, using the pseudonyms that they had chosen.

Mara and John. Mara and John met on a website for marriage-minded Catholics in 2005, and they had been happily married for 5 years. Mara was a 45-year old full-time mother and homemaker. She came from the city of Manila, in the Philippines, where she worked as a chemical engineer. John was 47 years old, and he worked as an installation technician. John was born in Canada, was previously married, and had been divorced for a number of years prior to meeting Mara. Mara and John enjoyed spending time with their 4-year old daughter Donna. Both Mara and John were devoted to their faith and to their church community.

Pam and Gord. Pam and Gord had been married for 14 years. Both were 39 years old and were born in Canada. Pam and Gord discovered that they were pregnant after 3 months of dating. When Jonathan was born, he was three months premature and was given a diagnosis of cerebral palsy. Weighing only 2 pounds at birth, Jonathan endured a number of surgeries in his early life. Although given a prognosis of severe disability, Jonathan had far exceeded the expectations of his medical team. At the time of the study, Jonathan was a 15-year old teenager who loved to listen to music and to play with his 12-year old sister Ally. Pam worked as an Infant Development Consultant, and Gord worked as a draftsperson part-time and taught at a local university.

Jane and Joe. Jane and Joe had been married for 40 years. Jane was 62 years old and was a retired school teacher. Her husband Joe was 61 years old and he was a retired government employee. Jane was born and raised in Canada, whereas Joe was from England. This couple met while Jane was working in Britain. The couple lived the first five years of their married lives in the suburbs of London, England, after which they immigrated to Canada in 1974. Jane and Joe had three children, ranging in age from 29 to 39 years, and they had four grandchildren who were between 11 and 15 years of age. Both Jane and Joe were faithful Catholics who actively participated in various organizations within their church. This couple also enjoyed spending time with their family and friends and took pleasure in helping their community.

All participants lived in the Lower Mainland and the Fraser Valley of British Columbia. All couples reported being satisfied with their marriage; they all achieved a mean score of 26.3 on the 7-item version of the DAS. The maximum score on the DAS is 36.

Themes and Subthemes

From an analysis of the data, 12 themes and 38 subthemes emerged. These themes and subthemes represent how the participants experienced their purpose in life while in a marital dyad, and these results are displayed in Table 1. These themes are not presented in any particular order. Quotations from participants are used to provide specific examples of how these themes and subthemes emerged.

The selection of themes and subthemes were primarily based on my perceived importance of the theme to the participant. Some themes were created from explicit statements made by the participants, and other themes were derived from nuances and

Table 1

Themes and subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
1. Personal definition of purpose	1. Led by faith
	2. Evident prior to marriage
2. Profound change in perspective	3. An awakening
	4. Being on the right seat on the right bus
	5. A shift of perspective and expectation of life
3. Values-driven premarital relationship	6. Knowing own purpose
	7. Evidence in words and actions
4. Noetic dimension	8. Faith-centered purpose
	9. Fulfilling a vocation
	10. Marriage has a higher purpose
	11. Purpose created by crises
5. Common purpose	12. Spouses are united in purpose
	13. Sharing the same vision
6. Shared understanding of marriage	14. A permanent bond
	15. Marriage is a fusion, not a competition
	16. Shared values and beliefs
	17. Personality differences
7. Interdependence between spouses	18. An individual and a joint effort
	19. Growing individually and together
	20. Challenging each other
	21. There's no formula
	22. Trust
8. Individual responsibility	23. Individual Goals
	24. Individual growth supports common goal
	25. Compromise
	26. Adaptability and flexibility
9. Proactive mutuality	27. Attributed growth to spouse
	28. Supporting spouse's desire for personal accomplishments
	29. Spouse's willingness to trade traditional marital roles
	30. Freedom to be self
	31. Encouragement from spouse
	32. Two is better than one
10. Marriage before individual goals	33. Personal goals do not conflict with couple goals
	34. Communication is key
11. Sense of contentment	35. Satisfaction with life
	36. Personal achievements
	37. Self-transcendence

12. Positive attitude towards change   38.   Nothing will ever stay exactly the same

subtle inflections (from nonverbal cues such as nods, smiles, and tonal emphases).

Themes have also been derived from repetition(s) of a point as well as from the detailed

descriptions and explanations involved in telling their unique stories.

The following is a discussion of each of these themes and subthemes. Each

discussion is focused on the theme's relevance to the research question, while seeking to

maintain the authenticity and the uniqueness of participants' experiences.

Theme 1: A Personal Definition of Purpose

All participants provided their own personal and unique definition of purpose

independently of their spouse. For some participants, their purpose in life came to them

at an earlier stage of life, prior to meeting their spouse. For others, their purpose was

closely tied to their faith.

Some definitions broadly encapsulated participants' experiences; for example,

Pam described purpose as "the driving forces in my day-to-day experiences. My work

gives me a lot of purpose, but I cannot compare it with my children and my husband.

There are times when things take on greater priority in my life and other things get to

have a break." Pam's husband, Gord, described purpose as "an element of duty and

responsibility to myself," going on to say that "it is situational, depending on what is

calling for your attention at the time."

For other participants, their definition of purpose was closely tied to their

relationship with a significant other, be it their spouses or God. Joe described it as "what

makes me tick within this relationship, what makes it meaningful for me. To me, our

marriage and our life, that's my main purpose. It keeps me going." For Mara, it is about

"why I exist. What I am here for. God created me for a purpose. How can I serve God?"

According to John, it was about playing an active role in his life and in his maturation as

a person. It was also about what he can contribute to life and to others, which gave his

definition of purpose a self-transcendent quality.

Some participants spent more time thinking about their purpose, while for others,

the definition of purpose came quickly and easily. For these individuals, they had a clear

understanding of purpose as this had emerged in their lives at an earlier stage. For those

who struggled with a definition, listing the areas of their lives which provided purpose

helped them to come up with a clear definition.

Led by faith. Participants who were brought up in faith shared throughout our

interviews that their purpose was closely tied to their faith. According to Mara, "I

believe that God created me for a purpose. And that I am special and I am unique. I

don't think I can separate myself from being a creature of God." Mara added that "being

a member of a community, or being associated with a community is also being attached

to being a Catholic, because it's not just the spiritual life that you live or you grow with.

You also grow in life being in the community, helping people, serving people."

Joe, who was born and raised as a Catholic, shared that "I don't really know why

church was always important to me, but it was a part of who I was inside." Jane and Joe

also shared that their faith community was important to them. Jane revealed that "when

we immigrated to Canada, we were fortunate that the church community that we went to

was very active and established, and people were very friendly and welcoming. It was a

nice place to go. We felt like part of a community."

Evident prior to marriage. For Mara, it was very clear to her what her purpose in life was as she had first discovered her purpose as a teenager growing up in the Philippines. According to Mara, "there was this call for me to own my faith, and get to know more about it." When Joe and Mara met their respective spouses, their faith was already very much a part of who they were, and it influenced their behaviours and their thoughts about life.

When Pam and Gord first met, Pam was pursuing her university education. As Pam put it, her education was "on pause" when they had their first child. It was evident to both Pam and Gord that education was a personal goal that was important to them, and there was no question that both would continue with their education when their children were older.

Theme 2: A Profound Change in Perspective

Many participants were able to describe the experience of discovering their purpose in life. For most participants, the experience was a profound, life-changing event that shaped their lives in different ways. The experience of discovering their purpose evolved over time for some participants, and this is linked to the maturing of the individual. For these participants, their sense of purpose also led to a greater sense of control over their lives.

For two individuals, the term "awakening" was used to describe their experience, and one person described it as a "surprise." For these participants, the experience was a joyful one. For others, it was a profound change in how they view their world. For them, purpose came unexpectedly and overwhelmingly.

An awakening. Both Jane and Mara described their experiences as an "awakening." Mara revealed, "I was really very excited. I wanted to know more. I would ask my Spiritual Director or Counsellor, how would I know what God wants me to be?"

Jane said, "I think we were at the right place at the right time, because it all made sense to us," referring to the Marriage Encounter program run by the Catholic Church. Joe said of his experience, "we felt our call forcefully. And it kinda formed us. We were early in our marriage, five years of marriage. Suddenly, the purpose of why we were together suddenly took on a different meaning. And it was a surprise!" Joe added, "there was a higher purpose, not just being together, having children, and making a good life. Our higher purpose is to let people know that there is something special about the marital relationship."

Jane revealed, "it was something that I wanted, but I didn't know how to achieve it or how to go about it. Then I realized that this is where I want to be. And there's a comfort there. It was comfortable."

Being on the right seat on the right bus. Jane's feeling of comfort was echoed by John, who described his experience as "being on the right seat on the right bus." John said, "I don't have to worry about where it's going so much. I just have to remain faithful to that design and that purpose." John also stated, "I definitely feel more alive, because all parts of my life are so healthy."

John's experience was a profound one because, for him, "it is the transition from being a passive participant to being very aware. Wow, this is actually what's happening! I am able to direct this more than I thought! And I am also able to let it go too. I don't

actually have to dictate as much direction, really the same thing in Mara's belief, rooted

in faith, that God already has a plan for me anyway, I just need to cooperate, I don't

actually have to drive my life so much."

A shift in perspective and expectation of life. For Pam and Gord, their crisis–

having a premature baby at an early stage in their relationship–gave them purpose. Pam

revealed, "I didn't imagine that this was going to be a part of the context of my

experiences. I thought I was going to fall in love, I was going to get my education. We

were planning on travelling together, we had a lot of different ideas. So I guess it was a

shifting of perspective and expectation of life. That's the only way I can describe it."

Pam's experience was so profound that it also shaped her career. She shared, "my

experience of supporting Jonathan's growth and development, and my experience with

the Infant Development Program, directly influenced the career that I am in now. I was

originally thinking of becoming an art therapist."

John's shift in perspective was evident in his career after marriage. Family

provided a new purpose for him. John shared, "the realization of the reality of our family

and actually of being a person who has two dependants, basically shifted my view.

Because when I was interviewing for this job, I wasn't asking for this kind of salary, or

that kind of commission, or whatever, for any other reason than this is what my family

needs. It really took the edge off negotiating, because it was just based on reality."

Theme 3: Values-driven Premarital Relationship

Most participants recalled that they were able to get a sense of their spouse's

purpose prior to marriage. This occurred in conversation, through correspondences, or

from observing their behaviours. In order for participants to discern if their beloved has a

sense of purpose, participants needed to have known what their own purpose was. Not all participants knew their purpose; however, they knew that they felt a sense of comfort and fit with their partner. Most participants stated that if their spouse had not had a purpose, they would not have been attracted to them, even though some participants were not specifically thinking about purpose at that point in their lives.

Knowing own purpose. For John who had been married before, getting it right the second time was very important to him. John stated, "I wanted a conservative, moral, and values-based approach to marriage. I reasoned that I would get more out of marriage this way. And Mara could clearly identify between a wife and a husband, a mother and a father, which meant a lot to me."

John also added that "Mara's openness, and freedom, to having children or not having children, was very essential for me. And her purpose was to serve God. I could put all that together, because this now satisfies very much what I knew was what I needed in my marriage, in order for it to be my last marriage."

Evidence in words and actions. Participants who became aware of their spouse's purpose prior to marriage not only heard it in their words, but they were also able to witness it in their actions. To John and Mara, it was evident that marriage was their purpose as they had met on a website specifically designed for Catholics desiring marriage. John recalled of his experience of Mara in their early months of courtship, "there were no red flags. Her image showed humility, and her description of herself was not vain. I got a sense that she was a highly moral person. I gathered that her intentions were genuine, and her purpose was marriage, and that also her purpose was to serve God."

John added, "Mara's view of the family unit is that the husband is the provider and protector of the family, and the wife is the center and nurturer of love in the home. This view is something I really valued and it made me very comfortable with her. And it made me think that she clearly knows, or understands, and thinks about what her purpose is." Hence, although John and Mara did not discuss the topic of purpose, it was evident to both that the other knew what his or her purpose was.

Jane recalled, "I got a sense of Joe's purpose when he took me to our first confirmation, or communion, I can't remember, at the church, just to show me what it was like. I wasn't Catholic yet. And we went to church a few times together. So I got the sense that church was very important to him." By exposing Jane to important rituals and traditions that were customary with his faith, Joe intimated that his church was an integral part of who he was.

Pam and Gord believed that their sense of purpose was influenced by how they felt in their partner's presence. Pam recollected, "I distinctly remember a moment in the beginning of our relationship when I go, this is the one! He was talking about his family and I was really impressed!" Gord recalled, "I remember thinking that she felt like family, that she could already be a part of my family."

Pam stated, "I had every faith that Gord had direction, he had purpose, and he had meaning. He had plans for himself and for us. I don't think I would have chosen to marry him, if I didn't see us go anywhere. It was the way he conducted himself. There were behaviours that indicated that he's going to take care of this, he would do that."

Theme 4: A Noetic Dimension

A noetic dimension was a distinct theme in all interviews, whether this was borne out of faith, out of organized religion, or from crisis. In the cases in which faith was strongly associated with purpose in life, the participants' belief in God shaped their attitudes about life and influenced their behaviours towards others. Their religion steered them to a faith community in which they actively participated and contributed. Marriage was described by some participants as "fulfilling a vocation." For these individuals, there was no higher purpose than marriage.

For two couples, their faith led them to believe that marriage itself has a higher purpose in that through their morally-based words and actions, they could influence how other couples live their own lives. These couples felt that they were called to serve their community by living exemplary marriages and by giving witness to others of their faith-based marriage. For one couple, spirituality in their lives was manifested in the form of a crisis which brought their joint purpose in life into focus.

Faith-centered purpose. John's faith and purpose in life were intimately intertwined. John shared, "my conversion back to my faith was I believe the catalyst towards everything else that I've received." John added, "with utter conviction I needed more than church attendance, I needed community. And Mara was already living the life I wanted."

Faith had a profound impact on John's life. John experienced changes in himself as a direct result of his faith-centered marriage. He expressed, "I can easily compare my life to-date to my life prior and I can see the differences not only in my life, but in myself. And just in the overall order of my life today versus what was a big disorder in my life before. It is also part of cooperating with, what I believe, are God's intentions for

me. Which are not necessarily anything great or spectacular, it's very simple and normal."

Having the same religious affiliation was an important factor for Mara. She shared, "we wanted to be part of the community, and serving others. You also grow in life being in the community, helping people, serving people." Faith has the effect of helping individuals grow and of facilitating an increase in their service to their community. This, in turn, helps individuals to grow deeper in their faith, which results in more service, thereby enabling a cyclical effect that is beneficial for all involved.

Jane and Joe also found that faith gave them purpose. Jane shared, "in the beginning when we first immigrated to Canada, the Church gave Joe some sort of comfort and center, when everything else was a little bit chaotic." Joe found in the church a familiar place where he felt a sense of belonging. Joe recalled, "the church was an anchor. There was somewhere I could go where it felt familiar. And I needed something familiar. I needed an anchor, because I was lost. I was lost, but I had Jane."

Fulfilling a vocation. For the Catholic participants in this study, the idea of marriage was summed up by John, who said, "we believe that marriage was instituted by God, not by man. And God knows what we need. God makes perfect things. And marriage itself is great." In the Christian faith, the idea of fulfilling a vocation may be likened to answering a call from God. John stated, "marriage is by far the most default vocation that anybody alive can have, which is to be a family, to be son or daughter, husband or wife, mother or father."

Jane explained, "when you think of our life, marriage is the purpose. It's like, I'm a teacher, I have a vocation as a teacher. And I'm part of a marriage, and marriage is a

vocation as well. The two are exclusive of one another. One isn't more important than the other, you can have both."

Marriage has a higher purpose. All participants stated that marriage was a source of meaning in their lives. However, marriage itself could serve a higher purpose. Couples whose marriages were stable and happy could influence and inspire other couples in the community by their exemplary behaviours towards each other. For two couples, Jane and Joe, and Mara and John, it was their faith that instilled this belief. Jane explained, "there is a higher purpose, not just being together, having children, and making a good life. Your relationship, and how you live your life as a couple, affects other people in the community, and other people around you. It has a ripple effect."

By making a conscious decision to love one another, couples could make a difference in the lives of others. Jane added, "the choices that you make have to reflect how you live together as a couple. There's the hope that we can influence others by how we live together with one another."

Additionally, these faith-centered marriages have one other purpose. Mara shared, "I think because we are religious people, our common goal is to reach heaven as a married couple. And so, how do we reach that ultimate goal, we have to look at the means that we have here on earth to lead us there."

To reach heaven, John and Mara believed that their purpose in life was to serve while on earth. John expressed, "I believe that we both feel that we are here to serve. First and foremost, we are here to serve God, but also to serve each other, our community, and our daughter. And we have experienced already, how we benefit and gain or acquire more by giving, as opposed to actually being goal oriented, to the point

where that is all that we are going for. I think it's just a different mindset. We see

serving as a privilege." Although their intent may be to reach heaven, the benefits of

their service to their community were more far-reaching. Through their behaviours, John

and Mara could also influence others to live similar lives of service.

      Purpose created by crisis. Crises are not uncommon among married couples

and can threaten the stability of the marriage, as well as the well-being of the individuals

involved. When participants were dealing with a crisis, they discovered that they became

more united as a couple, emerging stronger at the end. Participants also revealed that in

crisis, they placed their spouse first and that there was complete acceptance of each other.

      Shortly after Jane and Joe immigrated to Canada, they experienced a period of

time that Joe described as one of the most "rocky" times that they had experienced up to

that point in their marriage. Jane explained, "I remember it was a very, very confusing

time for the both of us. In the sense that Joe came to a totally different country, I sort of

came back a totally different person, because I left a university student, and I came back

as a mother with two children." Jane and Joe worked through this difficult time together,

and they realized that there was a purpose for their struggles. Joe stated, "after a period

of years, we realized that we've worked through all these things, and we came out

stronger at the end of that." According to Jane, "I think we understood one another a lot

more. We grew up a lot."

      When Pam and Gord's son Jonathan was born with cerebral palsy, this young

couple was thrown into a crisis that shattered their assumptions about how their lives

together was going to evolve. In 2009, Pam and Gord's house burned badly,

precipitating yet another crisis in their lives. The fire was followed by a flooding and the

discovery of asbestos in their roof. Pam recalled, "we got pretty close. We became

accepting, and the process was to get the house back on track. And we were so on the

same page there. Honestly, I don't think we had one argument over the house or

anything like that."

Although a series of crises would have torn other couples apart, Pam and Gord

united against their "common enemy." Pam shared, "we had a lot of anger and

frustration towards the process, towards the insurance company, and towards the workers,

but there wasn't anything between us." The stressful process of getting their house

rebuilt was a difficult one, leading Gord to start smoking again. Pam recalled, "that was

a hard time. It pretty much shook us to the core." In the end, Pam and Gord's unity and

resilience triumphed over the external forces that threatened to overcome them.

Theme 5: A Common Purpose

A recurring theme in all the interviews was that couples were united by a shared

purpose. Whether this shared purpose was borne out of crisis or whether it was

discovered over time, all participants conveyed that their shared purpose brought them

closer together. Couples shared the same vision or idealized picture of their marriage,

and they were united in purpose, which guides them towards their vision.

Spouses are united in purpose. The experience of caring for their disabled child

united Pam and Gord. Pam explained, "that experience really created or shaped our

foundation. And it is so true that in a crisis, Gord and I automatically go to this place of

partnership and support, and there is no anger, no nothing. It becomes about complete

acceptance, I always feel." Pam and Gord were united in purpose, and their experience

of crisis changed their lives profoundly. Pam shared, "by the time we became married,

we were already married in every sense of the word." Gord added that it was their acceptance of each other that helped them get through the crises that they had to face as a married couple.

A common purpose can be an important factor that joins two individuals in ways that transcends their marriage. John and Mara's common purpose was their marriage; however, what binds them together is something much more complex. John said, "deeper than that, we knew what we needed in our marriage, which was common to both of us. And this was our faith and community."

Faith and community were two items that attracted this couple to each other and that provided the basis upon which their marriage was built. According to John, "the dynamics of my marriage and my married life wouldn't really be what it is if it weren't for the first foundation, which is our faith life." John added, "we both value spirituality and community, and if you take that out of our marriage, we would probably have a very rocky time."

For all participants, marriage was the focus and the priority of life, upon which all other activities were based and influenced. Jane and Joe, who were both devout Catholics, spent much of their time in the service of their church. Joe expressed, "we belong to our church, and we belong to it fully. But we belong to each other first. I love it, that we are part of something bigger. And that we serve a bigger community. This community here [pointed to Jane and himself] has to be strong for the rest to make sense. The sense of church comes from here. If you don't have it here, you don't have it there."

When marriage was a priority, the participants revealed a desire to cherish and to keep safe that which was precious to them. Joe also said, "I don't know if I'd say that we

rescued each other, but we found each other. And I think there's something very unique

about that. And I think that any couple, if they truly focused on what they found in the

other person, all these other stuff doesn't mean squat!"

Sharing the same vision. Couples who shared the same vision for their marriage

often found that they were in agreement about how to proceed when they were

confronted with a major decision. When Jane spoke of a job position that John had the

opportunity to pursue, she explained, "this job involves a lot of travel, and he would

never be at home. I didn't say I don't want you to do it. But we talked about it, and it's

not really what we want. It's not what we want our life to look like."

When couples could agree about their vision for their marriage, their experience

of marriage could be protected from uncertainties and conflict. Pam and Gord's desire to

complete higher education was a vision for them in the early years of their marriage.

This meant that both parents had to work out their parenting and domestic responsibilities

while one parent was pursuing full-time studies. Gord recalled, "honestly, we kept

saying, we can't believe this is working and we are not dirt poor! There were things

financially, but in the end, we made it work."

Participants discussed with their partners the kind of marriage that they desired

prior to getting married. For some, there were clearly defined roles. For others, the

desired type of marriage was stated in broad terms based on their understanding of

marriage from observing the role models in their lives. Before getting married, Jane and

Joe discussed the type of marriage that they wanted. Jane recalled, "there were a number

of things that we agreed upon, the goals in our life, the way we wanted to live our life, the

kind of people we hope to be. We talked about being respectful to one another, talking to

one another, and not talking to one another in a demeaning manner. We also talked about

persevering, and being enthusiastic about having children, and having a family life. And

not so much about where we were going to live, but how we were going to find a place to

live."

An ideal marriage provides a standard that couples can strive to achieve; however,

it was also recognized that couples can, and do, fail from time to time. It was suggested

that having a standard to strive for could curb how far couples stray from their ideal.

When Joe was given an opportunity to pursue a higher position at work, he turned it

down because he valued his marriage more. Joe explained, "I remember I was asked to

go to a meeting in a bar. Obviously, getting to that stage, I had spent those nights going

to the bars, having those meetings, things like that. And I was quite enjoying it! But it

really wasn't us. It was separating us. So I didn't go to that meeting, and gradually I

pulled back from that kind of lifestyle."

Joe recalled, "I don't remember taking a long time to discuss this with Jane. I

just felt that I did not want to go down that road. I can remember thinking if I enter

into this lifestyle, I would be saying goodbye to the couple stuff and the relationship

we had. Our life together as a couple was important." Recognizing that he did not

want to sacrifice his marriage for his career, Joe was able to redirect his focus to

what was important to him. Joe added, "when you go off your ideal, and you realize,

that's not really what we are about. And you pull yourself back." Joe refocused his

priorities on his marriage and his wife.

Theme 6: Shared Understanding of Marriage

A number of subthemes emerged from participants that revealed that couples were united in their understanding of marriage. For all participants, it was clearly evident to them that marriage requires both individuals to participate fully, whether that participation is from preagreed marital roles or if it was in response to new things that came up. Couples had a clear sense of who they were as a couple and of their place in their marriage. These couples thrived because they shared similar values and beliefs, and they were able to create a shared vision of the marriage together. Couples did not compete with each other; rather, they had the attitude that supporting and encouraging each other would benefit their marriage. These factors combined to aid the fulfilment of purpose through the attainment of personal goals.

A permanent bond. Whether or not couples were deeply religious, all participants viewed their marriage as a permanent bond not to be broken by crisis or event. Mara expressed, "marriage is a covenant. When you get into a covenant, you put your whole self into it. And it's binding and permanent."

A permanent bond meant a lifetime with the same person, which could pose some challenges throughout the marriage. Jane recalled, "I do remember having the conscious thought that if you were going to be married to somebody for a lifetime, there were going to be times during that lifetime when you weren't going to be too happy! I mean, if this is going to be a lifetime, there's going to be good and bad, ups and downs." A mature and sensible attitude could serve as a calming factor for couples who viewed marriage as a permanent bond.

Jane and Joe were united by their shared attitude of never giving up on each other. Joe revealed that in their early years in Canada, "I felt that this is so foreign, so alien to

me, this whole country. And I had to grow up so quickly. I had to suddenly change my whole mindset. It took maybe a year, 18 months, to make my way through until where I was ok. We had enough residual strength that we were able to work through that time and come out the other end. But there was never any moment when we would leave each other, or break up. We won't give up. We've never given up on each other." Jane added, "it's about attitude. It's that attitude of 'I'm not going to give up.' So, if we're both not going anywhere, well, I guess we'll just have to stay and figure this out!"

Marriage is a fusion, not a competition. In marriage, couples were united in their willingness to face challenges together. Their goal was not to outdo their spouse. Mara stated, "in a marriage, individuals grow together individually, but they grow together in the relationship too. When the spouse could not do better individually, that's when they do better together in accomplishing a goal. That's what a marriage is."

Jane's view was that the attitudes that individuals brought to their marriage was also important. She said, "it's how you frame it, and the attitude that you bring to it. I guess if you bring a competitive attitude to it, or an entitlement type of attitude, like I'm entitled, is different from, you helped me achieve my goals, now I will help you achieve yours."

Joe agreed, adding, "you don't count the things that you do for your spouse. You don't say, well, I did this for you, now you do this for me. I think that if you're going to keep score, then you're going to lose for sure. You just do what you have to do. If you count, somehow you've got the wrong idea about what this is all about." Score-keeping was perceived as an action that could be detrimental to couples and that contradicts the idea of unity.

These happily married couples valued their spouses, acknowledged that they were different individuals, and appreciated that they would always be different. Jane and Joe spoke of their early years in Canada as a period when they "grew up a lot" and during which they understood each other a lot more. Joe said, "to me, it's a relationship that we have with each other. The good, the bad, and the ugly, that's what we got here. But it is a relationship between two people, and there's a dynamic to that, but it has always been about us."

Jane added, "it's not necessarily putting the other person first, but sort of see it through their eyes." Joe reiterated the point by saying, "I would ask myself, is this truly cherishing the other person? Is this truly treating her right?" By asking himself these questions, Joe treated Jane with dignity and respect, and he demonstrated that he valued her.

Core values and beliefs. Participants shared many core values and beliefs with their spouse; however, all agreed that they were still individuals with different ways of approaching things. When couples got married, they brought their individuality and their different personalities to the marriage. Many of these core values were learned from their family of origin; others were learned from church. Couples may have learned about each other's core values early in their relationship; however, for most couples, it was in marriage and by experiencing life together with their spouses that they learned what their values were. Pam revealed, "it was the experience of caring for Jonathan that Gord and I earn very quickly what our core values and beliefs were, because of how we responded to this. We didn't have to wait 2 or 3 years!"

Pam and Gord referred to "roommate issues" as peripheral issues that are distinct from core issues. Gord explained, "roommate issues have nothing to do with our core beliefs, core values, or purpose. There is a distinction between an argument about who is washing the dishes, and an argument about whether your kid should go to church or not. Or whether you would go back to school." Thinking about issues as either roommate or core helped Pam to separate what she is angry about, or frustrated with, and this helped the couple to de-escalate the situation quickly.

Gord explained, "marriage is a two-level thing. There's the love relationship, and then there's the other part, where you have to physically live with this person. And I think that's a really easy thing for people to stumble over, cleaning the house or whatever, and thinking that their marriage isn't going well because they are always arguing. You are just arguing with your roommate, you are not arguing with your wife. It's different. Or rather, it can be thought of as different." He added, "our core values, the ones that are important, are the same. Some of the peripheral stuff are different, but that doesn't matter."

Personality differences. In marriage, couples learn about each other's personalities, and they learn to adapt to and to appreciate their spouse's perspectives and way of doing things. Jane had this to say about her experience of reaching for goals, "what I've learned is that I don't have to figure it all out before I get started. I can just go for it, and see how it works out. If it's not working out, I can stop, change direction, or just keep going. Joe is more of a risk taker than I am, so I have learned to be more open to possibilities." Although Jane and Joe had different personalities, they appreciated each

other's way of doing things, and they have adopted the traits that they valued in their

spouse.

Pam and Gord shared many similar beliefs and values about what they wanted and

about how they would like their children to be raised. According to Pam, "sometimes we

do that differently, but our core belief is the same. And we talk about that often, in

conversation. A lot of our beliefs and values are similar, but how we go about it may be

different." Although participants were on the same page on important issues, from time to

time, the manner in which they went about doing things differed from their spouse. These

couples were able to differentiate between the things that were important to them and those

things for which that they could "let go."

Theme 7: Interdependence Between Spouses

Participants believed that they were interdependent on each other in marriage and in

the fulfilment of their purpose. Their marriages thrived when both spouses participated

fully by taking responsibility for their respective roles. One spouse's growth affected the

other as it helped them to grow as well, and spouses could lean on the other for guidance

and support when needed. The marriage benefitted when both individuals took part in

activities that supported their growth as individuals and as a couple. One spouse could not

make the marriage work unless the other spouse also participated. All couples revealed

that there was no formula or manual to which they could refer. What has helped them

through their challenges was managing those challenges together, relying on each other for

support.

Marriage is an individual and a joint effort. The success of a marriage requires

both spouses to work on the marital relationship. The goal of Mara and John as husband

and wife was to ensure that they play their individual roles well. For this couple, they have

clearly identified their roles in their marriage based on a faith-driven definition of the roles

of husband and wife. John said, "the definition of the husband being the protector and

provider, and the wife being the center of love in the home, are very different, very

identifiable roles in the home. They are complementary to each other. They are also vital

to the prosperity of each, the husband and the wife."

John explained further by saying, "it's an intricate relationship between being a

married individual, and a married couple. I am the protector and the provider, because I

assume those roles, and because she regards me as such. There is nothing that we can

essentially do on our own. So it's not only an individual effort. I just can't be the

trusting person unless I am trusted. And it's so intricate. It's almost hard to say which

comes first."

John added, "if a guy is to take this leader and protector thing too far, he's going

to overlook all that his wife can contribute. And these roles are no good unless the other

one supports them. And I participate in my role by being a loving person."

Communication between spouses about what was expected of them in their

marital role was required so that spouses could carry out their roles. John added, "you

need to know what you need the other one to do, in order to make your role successful."

Growing individually and together. Individuals contributed to their marriage

by working on themselves, and working with their spouse. Mara's view of marriage was

that "in marriage, the couple should grow as one and move towards the same goals. But

you have to be responsible for your own growth, so that you can be a good spouse. It's

not about being dependent. The term that I would say is interdependence."

An interdependence between spouses ensured that spouses could rely on each other when required. John explained, "we have each other to carry us when one of us is, I wouldn't say fallen behind, but somewhere else. At the same time, there might also be a time when you might depend on your spouse to guide you. Your strength will help the other person, and a weakness will call you for support." In helping each other to play their marital roles, John and Mara were achieving their purpose in life.

John stated, "there has never been an expectation set by me or by her, that 'you shall become an excellent chef or cook,' or whatever. There just wasn't that pressure of 'you have to do this' because it's part of your job description." John's and Mara's acceptance of each other allowed both individuals to step up to nontraditional tasks when required.

Challenging each other. The idea of challenging themselves to be better spouses was present in the marriage of John and Mara, a couple who had defined their marital roles early in their relationship. In challenging themselves, they strived to provide a better quality of life not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of their spouse and of their family. According to John, "we do challenge each other, but not with strings attached. I think that if I don't pressure her, it's a compliment to how she doesn't pressure me, for example, for things that she wants that's beyond our means, or anything like that."

The idea of challenge was accompanied by a desire and a willingness to overcome the challenge. As Mara explained, "it's that passion inside you that drives you to do something. My goal was to be a better cook, and the benefit is to my family." John

added, "it's a patient kind of appreciation, if one develops or the other develops a new skill or something, that's great, we enjoy it together."

There's no formula. Marriage comes with a myriad of unexpected challenges that could test a couple's bond and commitment to each other. A common thread with most participants was that as a couple, they would tackle all challenges that came their way together. Even though these couples shared a vision of their marriage, there was no roadmap to take them there. Joe described the earlier years of their marriage, saying, "I didn't have a clue! I don't think I understood exactly what was happening." He went on to say, "there's no manual. There is no formula for doing this right. Even when we talked about rules for arguing, and rules for decision-making, they are good processes. Every couple and every situation will be different." The couple found ways to manage such challenges that worked for them. Joe revealed, "when new things come up, Jane would ask, how do you think this is going to impact us? Where do I fit into this? Where does that leave me? And I have to think about that, because it's important."

When their plans did not go as desired, couples were comforted in the knowledge that they had each other for support. Pam received comfort from Gord when a couple of jobs which she got close to fell through. She explained, "there's the message of, well, if it doesn't happen, we would still be okay, we'll work it out. It was those kind of statements."

Trust. Trust is a key foundation in marriage. When couples trusted each other, their marriage grew and they were able to venture out from the firm and secured center of their marriage to achieve their goals. John shared, "I trust Mara to bring up an idea, and she trusts me to be logical and rational about it, for it to be a good decision. When Mara

wants something, I don't have to consider it too strongly, because I absolutely trust her. So there's no real anxiety about it."

Joe revealed that when he and Jane first got married, all that they had were each other for support. According to Joe, "in some respects, people think too much about what could go wrong in their relationship and try to train themselves, or think about, what they must do, how they must talk, and how they must do this and that. And if you just trusted yourselves and did what you knew was right. When we got married, the only thing we knew was that we loved each other."

Not only did couples trust each other for a stable and healthy relationship, they also trusted in their relationship. Joe expressed, "trust that with the love and support of one person who has your back at all times, so much is possible, and that life is an adventure! I can honestly say that I am astounded by the journey! I could not have imagined where I would be forty years ago. It's been fun, most of the time!"

Theme 8: Individual Responsibility

Whereas couples were interdependent on each other as discussed earlier, individuals were personally responsible for achieving their individual goals. However, this did not distract them from their marriage, which was their main purpose in life. There was a general view among participants that individual growth was important not just for the individual, but that it benefitted the marriage as well. Mara stressed, "in a marriage, you couldn't give something which you don't have, so you have to be responsible for growing individually. You have to be responsible for your own growth, so that you can be a good spouse."

Individual goals. As reflected by the participants in this study, married individuals appreciate that their spouses have personal dreams and career goals that are important for their own sense of accomplishment and well-being. When individual goals are important to one spouse, it becomes important to the marriage. According to Pam, "going back to school fulfilled my education, but it also fulfilled a social need, me being connected with other women. I talked shop a lot, and I got to meet other women who had kids. Gord recognized that I needed more, and he was fine with it."

Pam became an Infant Development Consultant when she completed her studies. Pam shared, "my job gives me a sense of connection to other people who are in the process of coming to terms or learning that their child may have special needs. I am a natural supporter, and this job helps me support other people's journey and discovery of their life with their children. The other component to this job is that it's helped to shape my personal identity." Pam's career aspirations gave her a sense of fulfilment, but its influence was far more compelling in that it had become integrated with who she was.

Whereas Pam derived much satisfaction from her career, Gord desired to be "a cog in the wheel of society." Gord explained that this goal gave him a sense of purpose. He questioned, "if you're not contributing to the collective in some meaningful way, why are you here?" As a couple, Pam and Gord were fully supportive of each other's goals to be useful members of society, which enabled them to enjoy a sense of fulfilment from their chosen careers. At the same time, both individuals have obtained an individual sense of accomplishment in how their careers have helped their marital roles. Pam explained, "as Gord's wife, this [career] helps me feel that I contribute as an equal partner in the success of our family life."

Joe discussed the importance of achieving his individual goals while married. Joe

stated, "we were doing worldly things, and doing them relatively well. But the hinge pin to

all that was that when we came home to our house, this was the solid part of it. All this

other stuff was important to us as individuals, and the achievement of this goal and that

goal, all that were important. We achieved all these things, but we didn't lose sight of us.

The world was important, and we didn't remove ourselves from the world." Joe

highlighted individual responsibility in pursuing individual careers and in being connected

to the world. He explained that for Jane and himself, their focus on each other did not

waver while they were accomplishing their individual careers.

Individual growth supports common goal. The spouses within this study were

not worried about straying too far off on their own path, because, as Mara puts it, "if

you've got the same goal, and you're looking into the same things, even your individual

growth is geared towards your common goal. My goal was to be a good housewife. The

benefit goes towards our growth as a couple, but I take the responsibility for improving

myself."

For Pam, the attainment of her personal goal, the completion of her degree when

her children were older, was also a means of helping her family. Pam stated, "my

education was mine. But it supported the family, and it enabled things to happen for our

family." She added, "it also lets me know that we have security as a family because I am

employed. It provides income and stability to the home."

Compromise. After 40 years together, Jane and Joe have learned a lot about their

spouse. According to Jane, "there aren't really areas we compromise on. I think we

know what things are important to each other. And you don't go there, and we learn that

over a period of years. There are certain things that we just won't do. And we don't

come to each other with outrageous ideas!"

For Mara, moving to Canada and starting a family meant that she had to give up

her career in the Philippines and her capacity to earn money. Mara explained the

adjustment that she had to make in giving up her independence, saying, "if you've got

some kind of part that you put into a mould, you've got to do some trimming so that it fits

into the mould. I could see the rewards now, of giving up my career. It's connected to

how I view family life, the man is the protector and provider, and even without having

my own money, I am being provided, and I am being protected." For Mara, giving up

her career in the Philippines was viewed as a compromise and not a sacrifice, because she

valued her marriage more than her career.

Adaptability. Participants found that being adaptable with their needs and goals

were important for their family. According to Pam, "we accommodate each other's

schedules. The time that Gord spends doing the things that he likes, does not interfere

with our responsibilities and the stuff that we do together for our home and our life."

Gord added, "family can also work around whatever too. You have to be flexible with

whatever is going on at the time."

Adapting to their family's needs goes beyond general interests and hobbies.

Participants' careers were also shaped by their children's needs. Jane was a parent who

adapted her career when her children were young. According to Joe, "she didn't struggle

with it because the family came first. We had talked about it. Every career she had, she

worked around us. She worked it around the kids, and our home."

By being flexible, parents found that they could achieve their career goals while attending to the needs of their family which came first. Jane added, "I wanted to be involved in my children's education, so when it came time for them to go to preschool, I chose a Parent Participation Preschool because they had a requirement that I help in the classroom at least once a month. I found out that even though I trained as an intermediate grade teacher, I really had a calling for this work. So I took training to teach preschool and eventually kindergarten, and this became my life's work."

Theme 9: Proactive Mutuality

All the participants of this study were active supporters in their spouse's pursuit of individual purpose. All participants expressed a respect for their spouse's desire to pursue their own goals, whether this was a career goal or a life goal. Spouses were willingly supporting their partners and this support allowed individuals the freedom to be true to themselves and to strive to reach their potential. Spouses were encouraging of and showed their appreciation for each other. Participants spoke about working together as one, guiding and supporting each other, and stepping in for their spouse, as being a natural thing to do.

Attributed growth to spouse. For some individuals in this study, their growth was directly attributed to their spouse. This was the case for John. He expressed, "the support that I get from Mara being my wife, the fearlessness and abandon that Mara would go into this life with, has helped me to experience that in my own life, in becoming a parent, being trusted as an individual, as husband and father, and being regarded as a leader. My growth in the past 5 years is due to Mara."

Joe attributed the path that his career had taken to his wife. He explained, "once you get on the train, then it becomes self-fulfilling. But someone has to help you get on the train. And Jane helped put me on the train." He also added, "the strength that I get comes from the main purpose that I have, which is my marriage and my life with Jane."

Supporting spouse's desire for personal accomplishments. It was important for couples to acknowledge and to respect their spouse's desire for personal accomplishments. Jane supported her husband Joe in achieving his goals by "not minimizing what he wanted to achieve. Or belittling what his goals are, or diminishing their importance to him. Recognising that, if you say you're going to do this, if you verbalized it, then it's important to you."

Spouses not only supported each other, but spouses also instilled confidence and provided guidance. Joe said this of his wife, "she has always been there for me. I can doubt myself and my abilities at times, and I need encouragement. She has always been supportive and I cannot remember her ever saying 'that's not possible,' or, 'no, you cannot do that.' She has even supported me when I made false starts or needed to back away from some endeavour. She would challenge me and force me to look at why it happened the way it did."

Spouses valued the sense of satisfaction and accomplishment that their partners would get from achieving their personal goals. Pam knew what getting a degree meant to her husband Gord. Pam stated, "Gord talked about his education, and his degree, that it was something that he felt he needed to do for himself. No one can ever take away your education. Someone could take your job away but they can't ever take away your education."

Spouse's willingness to trade traditional marital roles. Spouses' willingness to step in for their partners was a key factor in these individuals' freedom and capacity to achieve their personal goals. All participants demonstrated a selfless attitude in performing the tasks traditionally undertaken by their spouse. Jane gave the example of the time when she was going to night school to upgrade her skills. She said, "Joe had to pick up the slack and keep everybody organized, make sure the children were fed, check their homework, and the usual evening activities. But he didn't balk at doing it. It wasn't like an obstacle."

Pam revealed that when she was working while Gord was a student, Gord assumed the role of primary caregiver, which enabled her to immerse herself in her work and learn it. Gord stated, "as long as she was happy, I was happy. And it all worked out. It was really no skin off my nose. There was no reason, even if I look for a reason, there was no reason why it would bother me. It was the right thing to do."

Freedom to be self. In marriage, couples who have the freedom to be themselves are acknowledged, accepted, and appreciated by their spouse for who they are. As John puts it, "we allowed ourselves to grow into our roles. We didn't have it so rigid, that it has to be like this, or it has to be like that. There's a general willingness to be ourselves and accept each other in our marriage." Mara added, "when he appreciates me in my role, it encourages me to keep doing it, to keep growing in it."

Both Jane and Joe concurred that their spouse has always been accepting of them. Joe stated, "Jane knows my strengths and my weaknesses, and she has never said, 'that is not a good idea.' I have the freedom to do things, and I know that I am supported. I have

never felt any tension from Jane pulling me back. Never! I don't remember her ever telling me that I shouldn't do something."

Encouragement from spouse. For some couples, the encouragement that they received from their spouse provided the impetus to explore their individuality further, and to more fully realize their potential. Joe received encouragement from Jane for his ideas, something that was not a norm for him when he was growing up. Joe explained, "you see, a lot of our conversations would begin with 'well, here's an idea,' and Jane would support me and she would support that idea. This was a unique experience for me. With Jane, anything that I did or said, we would talk about it, and I was encouraged to explore it. I discovered that I had goals. Because I would say these things, and Jane would go, yes, that's a good idea, why don't we explore that?"

John encouraged Mara to explore in similar ways. John stated, "there's no doubt that as our daughter gets older, Mara's role will continue to change. Starting next year, Donna will be going to all-day kindergarten, and Mara has absolutely my full support, and she has the freedom to choose what she wants to do. I think she could enjoy the experience of going for something that she really wanted to do. And she could enjoy that without any pressure to support her family, or anything like that."

Two is better than one. Couples found that they are able to achieve more when they were accomplishing goals with the support of their spouses. Mara expressed, "in the sacrament of marriage, the both of you walking together is more effective than each one of you walking individually."

Similar to Mara's view, Joe drew strength from his relationship with Jane and he noted that this support helped him to provide service to his church and community with a

certain level of comfort. Joe explained, "there is so much wrapped up, for me, around our relationship. But if you were to take that out, all the other stuff like church, community, those are still important, they still give me meaning. But everything hinges off our relationship."

Theme 10: Marriage Before Individual Goals

With all participants, it was evident that when it came to their marriage, they were willing to let their individual goals "take a back seat," as described by one individual. This did not mean that they would discard their personal goals, but that they were able to prioritise their own personal needs in favour of the immediate needs of their marriage and their family. Couples communicated their needs to each other and they strived to find a balance that fits their situation.

Personal goals do not conflict with couple goals. John and Mara's view of marital roles was closely tied to their individual goals. Mara expressed, "I think that having a good understanding of our specific roles in the relationship is one way of ensuring that my personal goal will not conflict with his personal goal, and at the same time, we veer towards our common goal."

John added, "the marriage can and is more important than the goals of the individual in the marriage. And so from time to time, one of us may find ourselves having to put our goals aside. I think we would think, maybe, temporarily, because we don't know what the future would hold. But if there was a struggle that was having a negative effect on the marriage, we each have to be aware that we need to consider making a sacrifice." He added, "we acknowledge that if you are going to make a sacrifice, you do it with your whole self, and not do it half way."

Mara expressed, "if there was a thing that I'm passionate about which would not be good for our marriage, I might as well drop it, no matter how much I like it. I experience the benefits of marriage by practising this way of thinking. The bottom line is, what really matters to me? Is it the marriage, or is it that I get what I want?"

On the other hand, individuals would have different interests from their spouses that they would like to pursue. Pam revealed, "I think it's good to have things that are together, but I also think that it's healthy to have things that are separate. To bring different experiences and conversations to the marriage. And Gord, well, he can't be my everything. He gives me other things, other people gives me other things. My family and my parents give me different things."

Communication is key. For all couples, communication with their spouses was an important ingredient when considering their personal goals and in the overall success of their marriage. Jane stated, "if something new came along, we would talk about it to see if it fits. We would talk about how much time this is going to take, is it going to take time away from what we do together. It's about finding that balance of things that we do that are important to us, but we still have the time to do the things that we want to do together. So, it is like a constant dance of trying to figure these things out, because stuff happens all the time."

Communication with spouses provided them the opportunity to respond to the needs of their partners. When Pam started her career after the conclusion of her studies, she communicated her anxiety to Gord. Pam stated, "Gord had to listen! And he was supportive. He would say, go get those shoes then, or those pants, you know, to feel good about the interview."

Theme 11: A Sense of Contentment with Life

Among all participants, there was a sense of contentment with life. As John described it, "I enjoy my life today as it is. There is nothing I want tomorrow that I want more than what I have today." All couples expressed their satisfaction with life, and for some, their gratitude to God for what they have been given.

Satisfaction with life. John and Mara viewed their marriage as a gift from God. John stated, "for myself, I asked for this to be different than it was before. I knew that I didn't want to be alone. And being given what I've been given, I have to acknowledge and thank Him that this is what I have asked for. At this point, there is nothing that I'm lacking. I basically just live for this. I don't know what else there is." Mara added, "as an individual, we are better off for the marriage we've had, for the time that we've had."

The choices that Pam and Gord made in pursuing their careers meant that they were not in a better position financially. However, Pam shared, "We have a good life. We love our life!"

Personal achievements. When Pam completed her education, she experienced a sense of completion as she had to put her career on hold when she had Jonathan. Pam said, "the completion of the education, I took full ownership of that. It was a completion too of something that was on pause. It was something that was important to me before I had Jonathan. So, yes! I got that done. It was a good thing." Her husband Gord had a similar experience, having fulfilled his dream of having a degree after their children came along. Gord stated, "I love that having a degree fulfils a sense of purpose."

Like Pam, Jane worked her career around her family's needs. Jane revealed, "I've always wanted to be a teacher since I was 5 years old. And I've always wanted to have

my own classroom. That was one of my major goals. But I didn't have my own classroom until I was 40, so that was a big goal for me." Joe added, "it was something that Jane wanted to do from the very beginning of our marriage. She never lost sight of that, all our married life."

John's career accomplishment was a big factor in his sense of contentment with life. John stated, "everything is so satisfying to me. I work with my hands, and I enjoy that, so my sense of accomplishment is huge. And everything is so right. The whole scenario for me is right. And I'm satisfied with what I have."

Self-transcendence. A theme that has surfaced in this study is self-transcendence. Participants spoke about the desire to give of themselves in altruistic ways, giving in ways that exceeded what they were already accomplishing by serving their faith and local community. John stated, "a goal that I would love to do, is actual hands-on volunteer work, or mission work in particular in the Philippines, building houses there." Along a similar vein, Joe is a volunteer who works with the homeless and is a member of many volunteer organisations in his church. Gord spoke about his desire to be "a cog in the wheel of society" to make a meaningful contribution to the world. These individuals' desires to extend themselves for the benefit of others are related to their satisfaction with their marriages, which has led to their sense of contentment with life. Their self-transcendence honours the success of their marriage.

Theme 12: A Positive Attitude Towards Change

Participants have a healthy awareness that change was continuous and inevitable, which was accompanied by a preparedness to face new challenges together. The key to the couples' healthy attitude towards change was the knowledge that they have each other for

support and that they could continue to deal with challenges together. Couples

acknowledged that future challenges could be different from the challenges they have

experienced at an earlier stage in their marriage.

"Nothing will ever stay exactly the same." John and Mara described their lives

together as "walking with each other." John said, "people change, they grow. And we

may grow a lot, we may grow a little, we may grow in spurts, or not at all for a while.

There's no need to get excited because nothing will ever stay exactly the same." Mara

added, "so along the way, you grow, you pick up things, you choose the right places to

educate yourself, to form yourself."

John's attitude towards the changes that has occurred in his life was shaped by

hope and faith. In describing his perspective towards having children and finding a

career that will provide for his family, John stated, "all you need to do is be open, and to

saying yes to the life."

In retirement, Jane and Joe had to confront new challenges; these challenges were

different from those they had faced earlier in their lives. Joe shared, "some of our goals

have now changed, because we realized that we have to keep ourselves going as

individuals to achieve stuff. But it still does not distract from this one [pointing to

himself and Jane]." For all of these couples, the priority has been, and will continue to

be, each other.

Integrative Summary

The above themes and subthemes were identified as the key patterns that emerged

in this study. An illustrative comparison of themes among participants is presented in

Appendix H. The following is a brief discussion of the similarities and the differences

between themes. A short discussion on the connections among themes follows.

Similarities. All participants had a personal definition for purpose and could

share a moment or a period of time during which they became aware of their purpose.

Most participants were able to get a sense of the spouse's purpose prior to marriage.

Those who did not talk about purpose before marrying shared that they felt "there was

something about" their spouse that led them to believe that they have purpose. All

participants shared similar values and beliefs with their spouses.

For two couples, Jane and Joe, and Mara and John, their Catholic faith played a

strong role in their married lives. These couples explicitly stated that marriage was their

purpose.

All couples revealed during our interviews that there was an interdependence

between the spouses, wherein individuals were willing to trade traditional marital roles so

that their spouse could pursue their individual goals. In all cases, spouses were active

supporters of their partners' desire to achieve their personal goals.

Participants also shared the belief that it is the responsibility of the individual to

pursue their own goals; however, all shared the belief that marriage is their priority.

Adaptability was also shared among all couples as being an important ingredient for a

stable and happy union.

Most couples expressed that they enjoyed their life as it was. Some participants

shared their awareness and appreciation for change.

Differences. One major difference amongst the couples was that Pam and Gord

were not active members of a religious community when compared to the other two

couples. Their definition of purpose differed from those who were involved in their faith; specifically, it differed in terms of how they perceived marriage and purpose.

Although the other two couples–Jane and Joe, and Mara and John–have a strong affiliation to their faith, their perceptions of the relationship between faith and marriage were different. This difference is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Connections among themes. Both theme 6 (a shared understanding of marriage) and theme 4 (a noetic dimension) appear to be the foundation upon which all the other themes were realized.

Theme 7 (interdependence between spouses) and theme 9 (proactive mutuality) are also connected, as interdependence suggests that spouses take mutual responsibility for their roles. Both these themes are also connected to theme 8 (individual responsibility). Couples are united by their common purpose; hence, theme 7 and theme 9 are also connected to theme 5 (a common purpose).

All themes appeared to interact in a system-like manner within a dynamic environment that encourages individual growth and responsibility. This system is explored further in the next chapter.

Developmental differences. It is important to note that no major findings were found in relation to the developmental differences of couples in terms of purpose, based on the number of years that couples were married. However, a number of subtle differences merited review and a discussion on this follows. The lack of major findings may be due to inherent cultural differences between couples, and this is also discussed.

Pam and Gord compared with Mara and John. These two couples differed on a number of cultural factors and they are similar on a number of important dimensions.

Pam and Gord had been married for 10 years longer than Mara and John. Mara and John may be portrayed as being in an earlier stage of marriage whereby their rate of growth could be described as being greater than Pam and Gord's. However, the differences between them are subtle and this may be attributed to the maturity and the self-awareness of Mara and John. This couple was in their mid-forties. Additionally, John had been married previously and Mara married for the first time in her late 30's. Age and, by extension, maturity, could account for the self-reflectivity and the familiarity of Mara and John on the topic of purpose in life.

Additionally, Mara and John also differed from Pam and Gord in that the former couple were avidly involved in their church and their faith shaped their perception of life, their marriage, and their marital roles. Pam and Gord were not active participants of a particular faith tradition. Mara and John had an interracial marriage wherein language differences could have a bearing on daily communication. Moreover, family support had not been easily available for this couple, as Mara left her family of origin in the Philippines. Mara and John met on the Internet, where they had gone specifically in search for a partner in marriage. In contrast, the early relationship of Pam and Gord was accelerated by an unexpected pregnancy.

Both couples shared a strong awareness of their purpose in life, although the sources of meaning for both couples differed. Mara and John derived their meaning and their purpose in life from their faith; Pam and Gord found their meaning and their purpose from the birth of their severely disabled child. Notwithstanding the sources of meaning and purpose, both couples were committed to their marriage, their spouse, and their children. Both couples strived to provide a better life for their families. Careers

were very important to Pam and Gord in terms of their own personal satisfaction, their

identity, and their sense of accomplishment. Purpose for Mara and John was intimately

tied to their faith and community.

Individuals in both couples supported their spouses in the attainment of personal

goals. They demonstrated a willingness to take on additional domestic tasks to assist

their spouse. Both couples agreed that doing so would benefit not just their spouse, but

also their family. Furthermore, both couples agreed that individual growth was important

for the overall growth of the couple. Mara and John revealed that they challenged

themselves, with the aim of growth and benefit of their family, to be better spouses. For

Pam and Gord, the importance of retaining individuality and personal interests were

stronger themes.

To conclude this comparison between this couple, it seemed that although there

was a significant difference in the number of years that these couples were married, there

still appeared to be more similarities than differences in terms of how these couples

perceived their purpose in life. These similarities could have been moderated by the age

and maturity of Mara and John.

Mara and John compared with Jane and Joe. Jane and Joe were married for

35 years longer than Mara and John. There were a number of cultural similarities

between these two couples. Both couples were similar in terms of their strong devotion

to their faith and their community, and they have stated that these areas provided purpose

in their lives, albeit in different ways. They were passionately involved in various

organizations and had given generously of their time and energy for the benefit of their

faith and community.

Both couples perceived of their marriage as a vocation and that there was no higher purpose than marriage. Additionally, both couples believed that marriage itself has a higher purpose, a belief that was strongly tied to their faith. Both couples believed that they were called to live exemplary married lives such that their examples could provide a testament to other couples.

These couples were also similar in that one spouse from each couple did not grow up in Canada, and immigration was a factor early in their relationship or marriage. As a result of immigration, both couples have experienced a cultural dimension in their marriage that could be described as both interesting and challenging. For both couples, their church and their faith provided an anchor that helped them to integrate into life in Canada.

These couples differed in a number of ways. For Mara and John, their marital roles provided a "compass" in how they achieved their personal goals, which were intimately tied to their common goal. Their marital roles were defined by a traditional and faith-based view of the roles of husbands and wives. In contrast, this was not a strong theme for Jane and Joe. Although both couples viewed their marriage as a sacred and permanent bond, a stronger theme that emerged from Jane and Joe was that they would "never give up on each other."

To summarise the differences and similarities between these two couples, both couples share a common element in that both couples were strong in their faith, which was a rich source of meaning and purpose. Although Jane and Joe were older in age and had been married for a much longer period of time, the differences between these two couples were not revealed in the present study. The faith foundation of both couples

provided a firm understanding of their purpose in life. Moreover, faith shaped and

influenced many areas of their marriage. It also impacted how they perceived their place

in their families, their communities, and the world. To conclude, the interaction between

the faith and the maturity of Mara and John may have narrowed the developmental

differences between these two couples.

Pam and Gord compared with Jane and Joe. Jane and Joe had been married

for 25 years longer than Pam and Gord, and Jane and Joe were on average 21 years older

than Pam and Gord. Although both couples shared the similarity of having been married

in their early twenties, Jane and Joe were married in the early 1970's, whereas Pam and

Gord were married in the late 1990's. Faith played a prominent role in the lives of Jane

and Joe; for Pam and Gord, religion did not play a key role in their marriage even though

they were brought up in faith-based families. Jane and Joe's conceptualization of

purpose did not fully appear in their lives until they had migrated to Canada, and had

been married for five years. Pam and Gord's purpose came in the form of their severely

disabled child before they were married, when both individuals were still in their early

twenties. Although both couples had a strong sense of purpose in their lives in the early

years of their marriage, purpose appeared to them in quite different but important ways.

Faith and community were strong themes in the lives of Jane and Joe, and higher

education and career pursuits were more significant in the narratives of Pam and Gord.

Both couples demonstrated that individual purpose was important to them, and both

couples appreciated the significance of the attainment of individual purpose for their

spouses. Both couples had willingly taken on the domestic roles of their spouse, to allow

their spouse the opportunity to pursue their goals. Individuals of both couples shared the same vision for their marriage with their spouses.

To conclude this comparison, these two couples differed in that faith played a strong role in many aspects in the lives of Jane and Joe, whereas it did not for Pam and Gord. The definition of purpose in life was strongly influenced by faith for Jane and Joe; faith did not influence Pam and Gord's definition of purpose in life.

To close this section, it would appear that from a developmental perspective, there were no salient differences in the manner in which purpose in life was fulfilled in the lives of the couples in this study. There were unique differences in the ways in which purpose was defined, and this may be due to the different life circumstances in which couples found themselves and due to the presence of faith in the lives of two couples. All couples, regardless of how long they had been married, respected the individual goals of their spouses and supported their spouse's pursuit of personal achievements. These points are further discussed in the next section.

Themes appeared in the research that helped to organize the interesting features of couples' stories into a framework that could be used in fruitful ways. The broader significance of this system of themes are discussed in the next chapter where we explore hidden qualities that may allow us to understand marriage and purpose in a different light, to apply our learning in practical ways, and to extend the research on marriage and purpose in life.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This research explored the lived experiences of married couples and sought to understand important ways in which individuals within the marital dyad fulfilled their purpose in life. A case study phenomenological approach was deemed the most appropriate method for this study. This methodology has not been used very often in illuminating the complexity of the marital relationship.

The couples in this study participated with insight, and demonstrated clear awareness of purpose in life and how it related to their marriage. Three couples were interviewed and were asked to share their experiences of how their individual purpose was fulfilled in the context of their marriage. At the time of the study, one couple had been married for 5 years, one couple for 15 years, and the third couple had been married for 40 years. Interviewing couples allowed the emergence of common themes regarding the fulfillment of purpose in life while married. At the same time, each couple was different, and their unique stories have been highlighted in the results. Analyses of the data revealed 12 themes and 38 subthemes.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the results of the study in light of existing research. Themes are discussed in accord with current theories and knowledge as presented in the literature review of Chapter 2. This is followed by a review and discussion of unique themes that have emerged. Based on previous literature and the results of the analysis presented here, a dynamic system is outlined to describe the process of purpose in life in the context of marriage. The section after that is an examination of the limitations of this study, as well as the potential areas for further

research. The final section concludes the discussion with implications of these findings

for counsellors and for marriage education facilitators.

Themes Familiar to Current Literature

This section explores how current research findings are related to existing research

and theories. We will first discuss themes that are confirmed and validated by current

literature. This is followed by an exploration and a discussion of themes that have not yet

been revealed in previous research.

Purpose in life is a topic that has generated much interest in the literature. Purpose

in life has been defined as "a central, self-organizing life aim" (McKnight & Kashdan,

2009, p. 242), as "striving from incompletion to completion" (Adler, as cited in Griffith &

Graham, 2004, p. 28), and as "man's attitude towards his existence" (Frankl, 1959, p. 88).

In this study, the definition of purpose in life was intentionally left to participants to define

in their own words, based on their unique experiences in life. All participants were able to

come up with a personal definition of what purpose in life meant to them.

In reviewing the themes that emerged from this research, it was found that 6 of the

12 themes are covered in the literature. These included theme 1 (a personal definition of

purpose), theme 4 (a noetic dimension), theme 7 (interdependence between spouses), theme

9 (proactive mutuality), theme 10 (marriage before individual goals), and subtheme 16

(shared values and beliefs).

Theme 1: a personal definition of purpose. It was discovered that all

participants had their own personal and unique definition of purpose, validating the work

of various researchers in the logotherapy literature (Schulenberg et al., 2010). For some

participants, this definition of purpose came to them early in their lives; for others, it was

in experiencing life and marriage that they found the basis for their purpose in life.

Participants with a rich spiritual life created definitions that were strongly influenced by

their faith; for example, one participant defined her purpose as "what God created me

for." One participant remarked that there was "an element of duty" in his purpose; by

this, he was referring to his responsibilities as a son, husband, and father.

It should be recognized that participants' definitions of purpose reflected a

maturity and wisdom that were benefits from having engaged in life fully. It was my

observation that participants arrived at their definitions because they experienced a sense

of contentment with life derived from a healthy and dynamic system of values, beliefs,

attitudes, cognitions, and spirituality.

Theme 4: a noetic dimension. Faith and community were the most frequently-

occurring items described by participants as providing meaning, second only to the

marital relationship itself. A significant amount of literature had investigated the

importance of the relationship between marriage and faith. Mahoney, Pargament,

Tarakeshwar, and Swank (2008) conducted a metaanalytic review of 94 studies through

which they investigated the links between religion, marriage, and parenting. Variables

used by these researchers to measure religiosity included, for example, denominational

affiliation, frequency of church attendance, and personal religiousness. They concluded,

among other things, that a positive relationship existed between religiosity and marital

satisfaction, and that religious homogeneity among couples resulted in a higher rate of

marital satisfaction. Regarding the former, the findings of this study validated the work

of Mahoney et al. (2001). For the latter finding, there was religious homogeneity among

two couples; however, it was not investigated whether this was responsible for a higher

rate of marital satisfaction than the non-homogeneous couple.

Couples in this study showed two distinctive ways that the relationship between

marriage, faith, and community (all of which were identified as sources of purpose) could

be viewed.
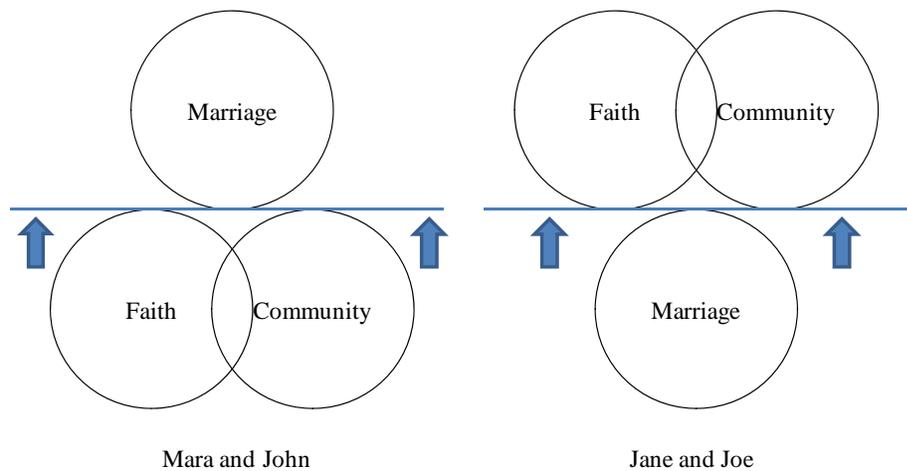
Figure 3. Two ways of viewing the association between marriage, faith, and community.

For Mara and John, faith and community provided the foundation upon which

their marriage was built (Figure 3). For this couple, an intricate association existed

between marriage and the presence of faith and community. For Jane and Joe, faith and

community were also very important to their relationship, however, it was their strong

Catholic marriage that provided the impetus to belong to and to serve their church and

community. Both couples found a role for faith and community that fitted comfortably

with their marriage. Moreover, they did so in a manner that enriched their marital

relationship and in a way from which they derived much purpose.

The faith of these couples called them and their marriage to a higher purpose.

They believed that they also had a responsibility to the community, in addition to the

vows that they had made to each other. The spiritual dimension of their marriage has a

significant influence in how these couples viewed their lives, their behaviours, and their

choices. They considered it their responsibility to provide an example to other couples

on the institution and the sacrament of marriage. In short, spirituality provided a different

dimension to their perception of purpose.

The spirituality of couples who profess devotion to an organized religion may be

differentiated from the spiritual life of those who do not. Frankl (1959) distinguished this

difference by coining the term *noological* (p. 123), sometimes referred to as the "defiant

human spirit" (p. 171), to describe spirituality without the religious implication (Wong,

1998). Wong (1998), however, defined the noological, or noetic, dimension as an

overlap of aspects of the spiritual and the psychological dimensions. Wong sought to

define all human endeavours that seek to do good, to find meaning, and to be morally

guided, without taking into account adherence to a religious tradition. Self-transcendence

is a key element of the noetic dimension. The same is true for resilience in the face of

suffering and for the will to meaning (Wong, 1998). In light of the work of Frankl and

Wong, we could surmise that all couples in this study demonstrated a noetic quality in

their marriages. This was evidenced by their shared purpose and meaning in life, by their

willingness to give of themselves to each other and to others, and by their strength and

persistence in managing the trials and challenges that they have encountered together.

Pam and Gord may be described as having a noetic dimension to their marriage.

Their path to spirituality differed from the other couples, yet their destinations shared

many similarities. This couple has demonstrated a firm understanding of their purpose in

life, self-transcendence in their quest to be contributing members of society, and a strong will and resilience in the face of crisis.

A crisis has an immediate and convincing way of either separating or uniting a couple. Couples can either crack under the pressure of a crisis, or they can unite to form a stronger bond to do battle with the crisis as a team. The couples in this study were able to find the strength to unite and deal with their crises. The crises that Pam and Gord experienced had the effect of bringing them closer together and reminding them of the value and gift of each other. It would seem that their crises had the same effect that faith had on the other participants, in that both crises and faith drew couples closer together as a result of couples' joint involvement. Their crises brought a noetic dimension to their marriage in a similar way that faith brought spirituality to the lives of the other couples.

For couples who have experienced many crises in their lives, perhaps the lack of a crisis would make their lives seem without a purpose towards which they could focus their attention and energy. It could be argued that crisis has a role to play in marriages, but perhaps only for couples who are in strong and stable marriages that are capable of withstanding the test of a crisis. In the present study, the crises presented included an untimely pregnancy followed by the birth of a child with severe disabilities, an existential crisis precipitated by migration to a different country, and the loss of a child. In all cases, couples were able to rise above their crisis by leaning on and supporting each other, and in some cases, by using their faith as a firm foundation.

Crises usually present with negative effects; however, with adequate and appropriate support, most crises could be overcome. Over the long term, crises can have positive effects that were likely not visible at the time of the crisis. As stated by one

couple, they dealt with their crisis by persevering and not giving up on each other, and they found that they came out stronger at the end. Perhaps couples whose unwavering commitment to each other is a source of strength in their relationship, are better equipped than others to overcome and defeat their crises.

Frankl (1959) suffered his own crisis when he was torn away from his family, and interred in concentration camps. Frankl found meaning even when he found himself in a situation of great suffering:

> We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed. For what then matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one's predicament into a human achievement. When we are no longer able to change a situation–just think of an incurable disease such as inoperable cancer–we are challenged to change ourselves. (p. 137)

Frankl (1959) viewed his suffering as a source of meaning, and he believed that life without suffering and meaning cannot be complete. Perhaps in their suffering or hardship, especially suffering that is lifelong, such as in the case of a child who suffers an untreatable disability, participants reevaluated their own life in terms of its meaning and purpose, which is intimately connected to that of their spouse.

It was also Frankl's (1959) view that with meaning, suffering can be endured with dignity. John and Mara grieved the loss of their child who died six days before she was due, and who had been diagnosed earlier with Edwards' Syndrome, a genetic disorder that causes severe abnormalities. John and Mara, who have a firm foundation in their faith,

gave meaning to their suffering by accepting and embracing it as God's will. Mara wrote

that she was reminded of Jesus' words, "my yoke is easy and my burden is light" in

Matthew 11:30 (New International Version) to describe their journey during her pregnancy.

John revealed, "losing this child also cemented the fact that there is a great deal we

have no control over and taught us acceptance to a Higher Will. As an individual, I have

learned to try and embrace these trials, and consider that I must be very special to have

been chosen to carry it." John and Mara's attitude towards their suffering was influenced

by their faith, from which they derived much meaning. When their baby died, John and

Mara described it as being a peaceful event. John described the experience as enriching

and as a blessing.

The noetic dimension was observed in all three couples in that purpose, self-

transcendence, and resiliency in the face of suffering were present in their lives. In two

couples, the noetic dimension in their lives has a strong religious presence, but this was

absent in the lives of Pam and Gord. It should be noted that although religion was not

present in their married lives, both these individuals were brought up in conservative

religious environments. Hence, reference to Wong's (1998) proposal that the noetic

dimension occupies the overlapping area between the spiritual and the psychological

dimensions was appropriate for this study.

Theme 7: interdependence between spouses. MacMillan and Copher (2005)

concluded from their research that spouses depended on each other for the overall success

and functioning of their marriage and family life. Throughout the course of their

marriage, couples experience changes in their life trajectories and, as a result, they must

learn to lean on each other for support. It was found that participants in the present study

relied on each other during role changes, and major life transitions, such as when children were born, or when one spouse leaves the workforce to pursue full-time studies. The research conducted by MacMillan and Copher was confirmed in this study.

When individuals put their personal goals on hold, they may experience a *noological neurosis*, or existential frustration, borne out of the realization of the difference between "what one is and what one should become" (Frankl, 1959, p. 127). However, it would appear that any tension the couples in this study may have experienced was overcome by their love and by the meaning-filled act of self-transcendent giving. Logotherapy literature (e.g., Schulenberg et al., 2010) regarded such self-transcendent assistance by a spouse in reaching for meaning potentials as a source of meaning; as such, the work of these researchers was validated.

The couples in the present study have admitted that they did not know what to do when faced with marital challenges in the early days of their marriage. These couples agreed that there was no formula because the situations and circumstances in which couples found themselves were different each time. How successfully couples dealt with these challenges were largely due to how well they communicated their fears and anxieties with their spouses, while asking for support and understanding. An individual in this study said of the early days of their marriage, "we were clueless! All we knew was that we loved each other."

It would appear that if individuals continued to focus on their marriage and their spouse as entities to be valued and cherished, they would face no obstacles from their spouses in achieving their own individual goals. This theme is closely associated with theme 9 (proactive mutuality), which describes the expression of love in concrete form.

Theme 9: proactive mutuality. In 1959, Viktor Frankl wrote, "by his love, the loving person enables the beloved person to actualize their potentialities. By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become, he makes these potentialities come true" (p. 134). The lived experiences of the couples of this study, specifically, the love that they have for their spouses, which was put in concrete form through the actions of support that they provided on a day-to-day basis, reflected Frankl's words. For example, one participant honoured his wife by acknowledging the encouragement and openness that she had demonstrated towards his ideas and by noting the strength and motivation he drew from that to serve his church and community. Another participant actively encouraged her husband to explore new ideas, and by doing so, fostered creativity and prioritized individual freedom, which, in turn, allowed him the opportunity to reach his noetic potential. A couple revealed their self-driven passion and motivation to be better partners for their spouses. They did this by recognizing and appreciating the important role that their spouse played in their lives. In turn, this recognition and appreciation led them to a community-focused way of life, as opposed to their previous self-focused motivation of being.

Schnell and Becker (2005) found that romantic attachments provided emotional and mental support, which was evident in the marriages of the couples in this study. Spouses encouraged their partners in times of stress and anxiety; for example, when one wife reentered the work force after a period of study, she received much encouragement and emotional support from her husband.

In addition to emotional and mental support, spouses were also willingly extending their self by carrying out nontraditional gendered domestic roles so that their

spouses could pursue their own goals. These husbands and wives carried out these

additional roles without complaint, and they explained that it was the natural thing for

them to do within the context of their marriage. The mutual respect, companionship, and

connection that these individuals experienced provided the basis for a successful and

stable marriage. This in turn encouraged even greater self-transcendence in the form of

service to their community. Their selfless act of giving is further evidence of the noetic

dimension proposed by Frankl (1959).

The findings of this research also affirmed the work of Brunstein et al. (1996).

These researchers concluded from their study that individuals who received higher levels

of spousal support for their personal goals were more likely to report giving a lot of

support to their spouse, if they rated themselves high in marital satisfaction than if they

rated themselves low in this scale. In all couples of this study, husbands and wives were

both recipients and givers of support at different times in their married lives, therein

validating the above study.

There was also an observation that couples were grateful and appreciative of their

spouse. Feelings of appreciation could increase positive affect in spouses, helping both

to connect emotionally at a deeper level. It could also increase the couples' levels of

commitment and their desires to support or to make sacrifices for their spouse. This

validated the study of Lange et al. (1997) who found that willingness to sacrifice was

associated with strong commitment and high satisfaction. Spouses who showed

appreciation could also increase the self-esteem and confidence of their partners, fuelling

even greater satisfaction and contentment with their marriage.

It could be asserted that couples found it personally meaningful and fulfilling to provide support to their spouses in achieving their goals and dreams. The basis for this may be the deep sense of love, commitment, and respect that individuals felt for their spouse, strengthened by their sense of responsibility, and reinforced by the love and respect that they have received in return. The success of their spouse has become their own success; what was fulfilling and meaningful for one has become fulfilling and meaningful for the other. Their unity has made them one in spirit and purpose. The altruistic quality of spousal support, the derivation of meaning from their selfless giving, and the act of relinquishing their dreams, even temporarily, are evidence of the noetic dimension proposed by Frankl (1959).

Theme 10: marriage before individual goals. Another theme to surface from this study is that marriage comes before individual goals. In the present study, couples have found ways in which their individual goals could be achieved without compromising the needs of their marriage. In most cases, careers were either adapted or put on hold while the needs of the family were met. This altruistic quality was a key feature of the couples in this study and is evidence of the noetic dimension. The findings validated the work of Stanley et al. (2006) who concluded that in committed relationships, individuals shift their focus from themselves to their partner.

Individual goals are important to the well-being, self-esteem, and self-image of the individual, providing much satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment when achieved (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). However, in marriage, individual goals have to be redirected and refocused in a way that considers, in tandem, the needs of the marriage. This is not to suggest that the marriage will always

come first or that the spouse will always come first. At any time, the other needs of the

individual may require more attention, and other priorities "get to have a break," as one

spouse revealed. In cases where people are not called to make a choice between their

marriage and their individual goals, then both marriage and individual goals can coexist

harmoniously. It is when individuals have to choose that conflict could arise between

spouses.

Couples found that communicating their needs to one another and making

decisions together were key factors in ensuring that goals were achieved without conflict.

When individuals needed the support of their spouse or when they wanted to offer

support, communicating their desire was important for the health of the marriage. In this

study, when couples communicated their desire for more support, their spouses provided

that support without hesitation. Perhaps when spouses show vulnerability in admitting

that they need support, their partners respond quickly to that vulnerability by protecting

and caring for their spouses in a way that they would like to be cared for and protected

themselves. It is likely that over time, couples learn how to ask for and to provide

support in ways that are adequate, affirming, and nurturing for their spouse.

The findings of this research also validated the work of Impett et al. (2005) on the

approach-avoidance model of sacrifice making. These researchers found that couples

who focused on the approach-motivated sacrifice obtained positive outcomes and were

more likely to increase positive emotions and relationship quality, to experience greater

satisfaction with life, and to deal with lesser relationship conflict. The couples in this

study willingly made sacrifices that brought positive outcomes for the benefit of their

family, complementing the results reported by Impett et al. These authors also suggested

that there were costs and benefits to making sacrifices. In the present study, one couple

spoke of the financial costs of the sacrifices they made; however, the decision to make

those sacrifices were made as a couple, and they had since enjoyed the rewards that their

sacrifices have brought. These costly sacrifices brought benefits to their marriage.

Another couple spoke of the financial strain of having just one breadwinner in the family;

however, the couple believed that the benefits of having a full-time mother for their four-

year old daughter far exceeded the loss of additional income. Yet another couple

discussed the impact that a certain job would have on their lives and their marriage. The

job came with a potential cost to their marriage and this was a risk the husband did not

wished to take. These examples fit well with the patterns described by Impett et al.

The selfless acts of giving to their spouses gave couples meaning, even in the

surrender of their own dreams. Such a surrender was perceived not as a loss, but as a

gift. John described sacrifice as "the best source of freedom. When I make a sacrifice

for my family, I become myself even more and feel the greatest satisfaction for being

me." The self-transcendent, altruistic quality of putting their marriage before their own

goals is a key element of the noetic dimension.

Subtheme 16: shared core values and beliefs. Research literature has shown

that individuals were attracted to others who were similar to themselves, and that these

individuals chose to marry spouses who shared their values and attitudes about marital

roles (e.g., Gaunt, 2006; Schimmack & Lucas, 2006). In addition, the literature also

revealed that these initial assortment practices led to marital satisfaction later in life

(Gaunt, 2006).

Research has also shown that values were intimately tied to purpose (Griffith & Graham, 2004). Values become evident in the type of goals that individuals pursue, and goals, in turn, are a manifestation of the broader individual purpose. When asked to provide the areas of their lives that give them meaning and purpose, participants discovered that their lists were very similar to their spouses', thereby affirming existing research. We could extend the results of existing research to say that couples who share important core values are more likely to share a similar purpose in life.

It should be noted that couples in this study have also shown some dissimilarities on their lists. These items were indicative of individual differences; for example, differences existed in their pursuit of interests and hobbies that do not involve their spouses (such as learning to play a musical instrument, vegetable growing, and biking). These differences were likely a function of the individuals' personalities and were not reflective of differences in values.

It is my hypothesis that shared core values and beliefs among couples, which they may or may not have discovered prior to marriage, provided the foundation for the noetic dimension and a purposeful marriage. Hence, this theme is closely aligned with theme 3 (values-driven premarital relationship) and theme 4 (a noetic dimension of marriage).

Other Findings

A number of themes emerged from the interviews with participants that merit discussion. These themes were combined and labelled theme 6 (a shared understanding of marriage). Another theme that fits into this category is theme 2 (a profound change in perspective).

Theme 6: a shared understanding of marriage. Whether couples have been married for 5 years or for 40 years, all couples in this study demonstrated a shared understanding of their marriage and of their roles and responsibilities within the marriage. For many, their understanding of marriage was made evident through the role models in their lives, which were most notably their parents. Some couples were inspired by the marriages of others who have become their mentors. For others, their idea of marriage was influenced by their Christian faith.

For all couples in this study, an important theme that emerged was the partnership characteristic of marriage. The label "marriage is a fusion, not a competition", as described by one participant, was appropriate in describing this subtheme. Couples had "each other's back," as described by another participant, as they pursued the difficult terrain that marriages often posed. Couples did not keep score of the number of times in which they may have done something for their spouse; keeping score was unnecessary since they do these tasks or chores willingly. One participant described life as an adventure that would only be meaningful if experienced with someone special. When couples could view their lives together as something to be treasured, it would seem that any obstacles or challenges that come their way would appear so much more manageable than it would seem if they had to navigate through life alone.

A belief that emerged from one couple was the idea of "never giving up." When couples are committed to each other and when they could appreciate each other with all their flaws and their imperfections, the idea of being married to one person for an entire lifetime was a proposition to be welcomed and not to be discarded when the going gets tough. Such a value-driven concept gave couples a purpose.

Couples in this study have also demonstrated, both implicitly and explicitly, how much they valued the gift of their spouse. Some have done this by their words of appreciation. Others have done so more implicitly through words of encouragement. In encouraging their spouses, these individuals have shown respect for their spouse's individuality and their right to be themselves. When couples show their appreciation for their spouses, it would be likely that these couples would perceive of an entire lifetime together as a journey that is secure and enjoyable. This would lead to a sense of satisfaction and contentment with life, inspiring some individuals to give of themselves to their community.

However, such purpose would not be present if there were important parts of the individual's life that were in disarray. Marriage is of course one of the most important parts of a married person's life. As demonstrated by some couples in this study, the satisfaction of couples with their marriages was closely associated with their contributions to the community. As also demonstrated, one couple's involvement in their community was a key factor in their satisfaction with their marriage. The link between marriage and purpose is an important one, but perhaps one that cannot clearly be demonstrated without also considering the moderating influence of children, physical and mental health, or socio-economic status.

Theme 2: profound change in perspective. When couples were confronted with life-changing events that challenged their assumptions about their lives and identity, they experienced a cognitive shift that led them to redefine what their purpose in life was. This shift changed the way they viewed and lived their lives. If couples assigned meaning to or derived meaning from their experiences, they were rewarded with a sense of control and

certainty about their lives. This finding validated the work of Feldman and Snyder (2005), Schnell and Becker (2005), and Stillman et al. (2009).

For some participants, such life-changing events occurred early on in their lives prior to their marriage, and it was observed that these individuals carried a sense of maturity, awareness, and insight that strengthened and bolstered their marriage. For others, it was in marriage that they experienced challenging events, which had the effect of drawing the couples closer together and uniting them. For these couples, it may be the noetic dimension of their marriage that sustained and held them through difficult times, and it could be this special quality that differentiates them from couples whose marriages do not survive stressful events.

Themes familiar to the literature were discussed above. However, the methodology employed gave rise to a number of additional themes that has broadened our understanding of purpose in marriage. These unique themes did not appear to reflect a theory or conclusion derived by previous research. All themes, both familiar and unique, are connected in an overall pattern of dynamic processes as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4 captured important dimensions of couples' experiences and demonstrated their relationships with one another. The square boxes in the figure identify themes emerging in this analysis that are also familiar in current literature. Other themes display processes that clearly emerged in the present analysis but were not as clearly highlighted in existing research. The enriching features of the system described here have been more readily identified in part through the application of the unique and enlightening methodological strategies of this study (e.g., complementary materials such

s photographs, online videos, and blogs). The results displayed a systemic pattern of

processes that operated in a dynamic marital environment.
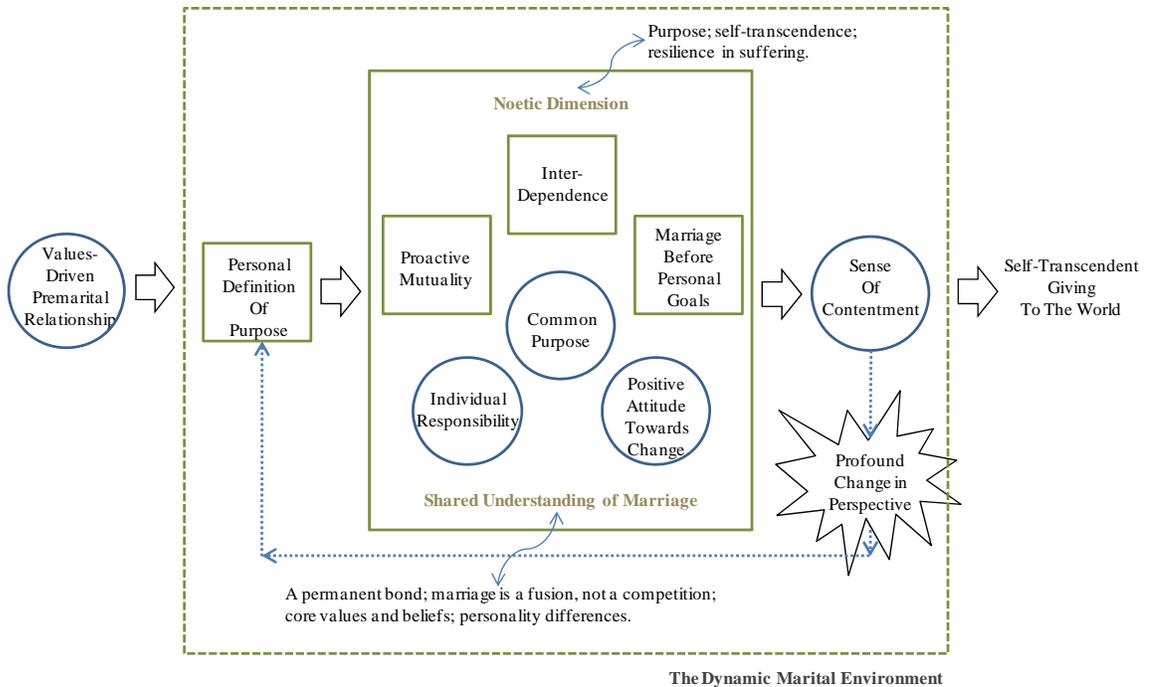
Figure 4. A circular dynamism: the system of processes that emerged from this study,

showing how familiar and less-familiar processes could interact and connect.

        The diagram highlights a noetic dimension that permeated the lives of couples.

This noetic dimension seems to emerge directly from processes that reflect and nurture a

shared understanding of marriage. The marital environment encourages individual

freedom, responsibility, and growth; it promotes mutual and selfless giving; it serves as a

protection against external stressors; and it fosters the realization of couples' common

purpose. These processes can lead to a sense of contentment with life, which, in turn, can

be fed back into the system, encouraging all elements of the system to a higher level of

being. A sense of contentment and satisfaction with life could also lead individuals to

redefine their purpose in life. Individuals who are content with marriage and life are

motivated to celebrate that life by self-transcendent giving to the world. A premarital

relationship that was value-driven and purposeful underlies the success of marriages.

In marriages operating in the manner described above, couples do not live life

passively; rather, they are constantly changing and growing. Hence, the system, as

illustrated in Figure 4, may be viewed as a circular system of change. At each change

juncture, be it a career decision or a crisis, we ask ourselves how we are to respond,

potentially leading to a profound change in perspective. Frankl (1959) stated:

> Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather he must
>
> recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life;
>
> and he can only answer to life by *answering for* his own life; to life he can
>
> respond by being responsible. (p. 131)

The system of a responsible marital dyad is vibrant, healthy, and promotes

circularity, constantly embracing change and growth, and reaching for higher potentials.

In doing so, both individuals can achieve deeper levels of the noetic dimension.

The following is a discussion of the methodology that was used that led to the

unique themes of this research. This is followed by discussions of these unique themes

and how they relate to the research question. Thereafter, a discussion of implications for

counselling and potential areas for future research follows, and finally, we address the

limitations of this study.

Unique Aspects of the Research

Methodology. The case study phenomenological methodology of exploring

purpose in life with married couples has not been undertaken in the past. The current

method included semistructured interviews with couples that were recorded on video and

included observations of the couples in their homes. Participants shared pictures, items,

websites, videos, and blogs to help tell their unique stories. Participants were invited to

provide feedback on the process (Appendix I), as well as to provide integrity checks to

ensure that the analysis offered had accurately reflected their experiences. Participants

did not have any feedback for the transcript or the randomly selected draft themes and

subthemes.

Participants' feedback on the research process was validating and encouraging.

John and Mara described the interview process as "a discovery" and as affirmation that

they had "a great marriage." The act of verbalizing their thoughts about their marriage in

a semistructured, semiformal manner "made it more real."

Pam and Gord reported a similar experience. Upon reflection, this couple

reported that the interview process validated what they were already practising and doing

but had never discussed with each other. They also reported that the experience was an

interesting one, and it reaffirmed that they were "a good team."

Jane and Joe revealed that the interview helped them to clarify what they wanted

to do in their retirement. With age and life experiences, there was a greater

consciousness of life, its meaning, and its purpose. This couple also revealed their

awareness of the finiteness of life. To continue living rich and meaningful lives, they

have engaged in conversations about their future to eliminate uncertainty and boredom.

These data gathering techniques were especially suited for the topic of meaning

and purpose. The interview process drew me into their world, in as much as participants

felt comfortable in allowing. Each subsequent technique that followed permitted

participants' stories to be understood further, deepening and enriching the process for me.

Photographs. Couples shared some family pictures that helped to tell the stories of their lives. Pictures of family events, birthdays, and vacations were shared. Jane and Joe shared a picture of the house in London where they used to live in the early years of their marriage and the park where they used to take walks. These photographs helped to paint a picture of their lives before they had children, a time when they lived in a different culture. As a young newly married couple then, Jane and Joe had many hopes for the future, including starting a family, building their careers, and living meaningful lives.

Pam and Gord shared pictures of their family home after it was ravaged by fire. The fire created a crisis as the family did not have their own home to live in for a period of time. The fire, the ensuing flood, and the discovery of asbestos created a prolonged crisis that brought Pam and Gord even closer together, reinforcing their acceptance and trust in each other.

Mara and John shared pictures that helped to tell the story of a couple who met on the Internet and whose faith in God was evident from the moment they first met through to the present day. Mara and John believed that their meeting, their marriage, and their married lives were divinely guided. Their daughter, Donna, was a testament of their love and commitment to each other and to God. They showed me the website where they had blogged and posted pictures of their courtship, engagement, wedding day, the birth of their daughter, and the death of another. In sharing this with me, they helped me to understand their personal experiences in a more intimate way.

Other data sources. Some couples shared other items with me that helped to highlight parts of their stories. Pam showed me a remnant of their old house that had

survived the fire and that became a banister in their newly renovated home. This fixture

served as a constant reminder of the crisis that their family experienced and survived

together. Joe played a few chords on his banjo, proudly displaying skills that he had

developed since his retirement. Learning a new instrument was an example of Joe's

desire to pursue new interests, in order to keep himself active and focused. John and

Mara led me to the website where they met six years ago, a place where many memories

were created, and that continued to be preserved as a success story for other individuals

around the world looking for love and marriage. I was also led to online videos of

important events in their family life, such as their daughter's birthdays, her dance

demonstration, and so on.

Pictures and other complementary data were important in allowing me to

understand the depth of participants' joy such as wedding pictures, or their suffering, for

example, pictures of the aftermath of a house fire. It also allowed me the opportunity to

observe participants' emotional and physiological reactions when recalling a memorable

event. These sources of data from different media gave life to participants' narratives

and brought me closer to understanding the breadth and depth of emotions that they have

experienced as a result of their encounters with life as a couple. The data gathering

techniques employed facilitated accessibility to deeper levels of the noetic dimension.

Unique Themes

A number of unique themes emerged due to the application of in-depth interviews

to understand and explore the lived experiences of couples in fulfilling their purpose in life.

The case study phenomenological approach is particularly useful when one is interested to

know how and why certain phenomena occurred. In this study, I was specifically

interested in understanding how individuals go about fulfilling their individual purpose in

life in the context of their marriage. It was my objective to understand and learn from the

unique experiences of couples in this study. Their stories were the primary focus of this

endeavour.

The unique themes that emerged from this study included the following: theme 3

(values-driven premarital relationship); theme 5 (a common purpose); theme 8 (individual

responsibility); theme 11 (a sense of contentment); and theme 12 (a positive attitude

towards change). These unique themes demonstrated the predominance of the noetic

dimension in the lives of couples.

Theme 3: values-driven premarital relationship. The current research revealed

that couples had a sense of their spouse's purpose prior to getting married. In two cases,

this was not accomplished by talking about the topic. It was found that the concept of a

purpose in life was not a topic for conversation among couples who were in love and

were courting for the purpose of marriage. For these couples, the purpose of their partner

was made evident to them through their behaviours and actions. One spouse was brought

to her partner's church to witness a number of important rituals on more than one

occasion. From this, she gauged that church was an important part of his life. The rituals

and traditions that individuals participated in were indicative of their values, which were

intimately associated with their purpose in life.

Another couple met on a website specifically designed for Catholics desiring to get

married. Part of their correspondences and conversations had been about what was

important to them, and for both, faith and community were very important aspects of their

lives that gave them a sense of purpose. When this couple met in person, they were

presented to members of their partner's faith community, as a part of the introduction to their partner's life. This couple discovered their common purpose early in their relationship, both in words and action.

For all couples, the sense of purpose in their partner was an attractive quality, even though most couples admitted that they could not specifically identify what it was that made their spouse attractive to them. It would appear that although purpose was not specifically mentioned in conversation, individuals could sense if their partners had some direction or ambition. This suggested to them that their partner had a purposeful attitude towards life or had determination to strive for a better future. Ambition showed confidence, a healthy self-image, and a resolve to be a useful member of society. These were qualities that participants desired in their life partners.

In order for individuals to recognize that their beloved has a purpose, it could be assumed that they knew what their own purpose was. For some participants, their purpose was clear to them when they met their spouse. Some participants in this study began their exploration for purpose in their teens, and they were, as one participant described it, "awakened" when their purpose was revealed to them. For others, the discovery of purpose came about after marriage and children.

It could be asserted that a value-driven premarital relationship provided the foundation for a purpose-filled marriage, which in turn was the center from where individuals could explore their potential and fulfil their purpose in life. A value-driven premarital relationship could be described as a source of the noetic dimension of marriage.

Theme 5: a common purpose. For some couples, a common purpose connected them from the beginning of the relationship. For others, a common purpose united them in marriage. In these cases, the couple's common purpose provided the "glue" that kept them together in times of joy, as well as in times of stress. A shared purpose could be a unifying factor, even when couples were not conscious of them.

Marriage was described as "the default vocation" by one husband, who expressed that there could be no higher purpose than fulfilling the call to all men to be a husband and a father, and to all women to be a wife and a mother. It was his purpose to be married and to carry out all the roles, functions, and responsibilities of a married man.

For these individuals, marriage provided the anchor upon which all their other worldly activities and pursuits were based. The relational and psychological aspects of the deep connection that they share with their spouse influenced the way they were being in the world and gave them the confidence and security to explore and fulfil their potential.

One couple stated that their common purpose was for both individuals to reach heaven and that to achieve this goal, they would use the means that were available to them on earth. On a daily basis, they were actively and consciously involved in their marriage, their faith, and their community. These were areas in which these individuals exercised their freedom to make choices about how they live their lives and how they use the tools available to them to ultimately reach heaven.

When couples shared a common purpose, they were united in that purpose. Unity in happy marriages provided individuals with a safe and secure base to explore their personal goals. This unity, which helped them to focus on their marriage, may have developed from their understanding of their spouse's purpose, which they had learned from

each other in the early stages of their relationship. Hence, it could be surmised that this

theme is intimately linked to theme 3 (values-driven premarital relationship). Unity could

also be the result of having a common understanding of their marriage; therefore, this

theme is also closely related to theme 6 (a shared understanding of marriage). At the same

time, couples are interdependent on each other in carrying out their individual roles and

responsibilities; hence theme 7 (interdependence between spouses), theme 8 (individual

responsibility), and theme 9 (proactive mutuality) are also closely associated with this

theme.

Theme 8: individual responsibility. Another theme to emerge is that of

individual responsibility for the fulfilment of individual goals. One of the central tenets

of logotherapy was that of personal responsibility in accounting for one's life (Frankl,

1959). In this study, I have evolved this principle to individual responsibility within the

context of marriage.

Whereas it is the individual's responsibility to fulfil their own purpose in life, it is

also their responsibility to ensure that the fulfilment of their purpose does not eclipse the

needs of their marriage. Couples in this study were able to do this by ensuring that their

individual goals were closely aligned with their common goals. For example, when an

individual invested in full-time studies, the whole family benefitted as it allowed her to

get a better job, and it allowed her to provide for the family in ways that she previously

could not. At the same time, this individual was able to fulfil her goal of achieving a

higher education and was rewarded in the social status and the recognition that came with

it. Individuals whose personal goals were aligned with the common goals that they

shared with their spouses were able to harmoniously achieve their personal goals without

compromising on the needs of the couple. In these cases, conflict would not arise between the couple as a result of individuals pursuing their own goals.

When personal goals are different from common goals, individuals have to ensure that their common goals are not neglected in the pursuit of personal goals. Individuals could achieve this by being adaptable and flexible to the needs of their spouses. This theme is closely linked to theme 9 (proactive mutuality) in that spouses have to be actively involved in their partner's personal goals, as well as their marriage-related goals. Being actively involved could mean rescheduling one's time to meet the needs of the spouse or it could mean offering to look after the children when the spouse has to complete a school assignment.

Couples may challenge each other to achieve their personal goals. In the present study, one couple's common goal was to be a good spouse, and both individuals jointly challenge each other to be better in their marital roles. This couple's desire to be better spouses was an innate desire that came from within, and was not a challenge that was posed by their spouse. In this case, the couple derived great pleasure in rising up to their own challenge, and as a couple, they could both enjoy the rewards of overcoming their challenges. This theme could be said to be closely related with theme 7 (interdependence between spouses). However, it has to be recognized that the primary responsibility for fulfilling individual goals within a marriage rests with the individual.

Theme 11: a sense of contentment. In interviewing the couples in this study, it became evident that all couples were experiencing a certain sense of contentment with their lives. Couples in this study have achieved their personal goals or have found that

their personal goals were closely aligned with their common goals, which they were living daily.

Perhaps couples who experience a noetic dimension in their marriage are more likely to report being content with life, and, as a result of a stable and happy marriage, they are also more likely to pursue and fulfil their personal goals. It could also be hypothesized that couples who attach meaning to their daily struggles, joy, or suffering are better adjusted and happy in their marriages. This extends the work of Frankl (1959) who posited that individuals who give meaning to their suffering could suffer with dignity. In the same manner, couples who assign meaning to their daily routines and challenges are able to derive greater satisfaction in the context of their marriage and family life. Meaning could serve as a buffer in protecting the human spirit from harm; for example, this could occur when one is faced with a crisis that threatens to destabilize one's existence. Our strength, resilience, and attitudes towards suffering are important ingredients in the search for symbolism and connections in our everyday lives.

A sense of contentment may be a natural consequence of the dynamic interchange between the noetic dimension and a couple's shared understanding of marriage. Therefore, theme 11 (a sense of contentment) may be described as an outcome of a dynamic environment infused with theme 4 (a noetic dimension) and theme 6 (shared understanding of marriage), as illustrated in Figure 4.

Theme 12: a positive attitude towards change. Change is inevitable, and it brings with it challenges, uncertainty, and a certain level of anxiety. Different individuals will deal with change differently. Frankl (1959) wrote that "everything can be taken from man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any

given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way" (p. 86). Frankl was referring to the decisions that he and a few of his fellow prisoners made; specifically, he was referring to the decision not to succumb in spirit to the terrible circumstances in which they were caught.

In the present study, couples accepted that change would happen and that they would manage it together in ways that they had established together or in new ways. There was a general acceptance that challenges would look different in the future, however, what couples would bring to it is the same, that is, the desire to get through the challenges together. For Jane and Joe, their future would look quite different from their work life, and they have accepted that new goals would have to be constructed in order for them to live the next phase of their lives as productive and useful members of society. For John and Mara, the growth of their four-year old daughter meant that more time would become available for Mara to pursue a vocation that interests her.

In all cases, the thread through all the changes that couples faced together was their constant love for each other and their commitment to their marriage. When love and devotion are present in a marriage, it would seem that couples are better prepared for both psychological and emotional changes. As succinctly put by one participant, "two is better than one." It may be hypothesized that the healthy attitude of the couples of this study towards change has been partially responsible for their marital satisfaction and their sense of contentment with life.

Also present in all couples was the noetic dimension and the couples' shared understanding of marriage, which together serves as a protective holding environment for individuals experiencing the stressors of life that change sometimes brings. The dynamic

marital environment thrived due to the presence of these distinct features in their lives.

At the same time, a positive attitude towards change strengthens couples' shared

understanding of marriage and enhances the noetic quality of their lives together.

As discussed, the processes identified in the system illustrated in Figure 4 are

connected by a number of overlapping themes. It could also be concluded that each of

these processes share dual functionalities in that they are both validated by and contribute

to the system.

This research has revealed how purpose influences and affects the lives of happily

married couples. It is evident that purpose has great benefits for marriage, including

connecting and uniting spouses in times of stress and providing a direction for their

family towards which they could journey together. For the participants in this study, their

unwavering commitment to each other provided the cornerstone upon which their

marriage was built. For many of them, marriage was their purpose and their whole being

was geared towards this single purpose. For them, there was no higher purpose than

marriage. For some, marriage itself presented a higher purpose, and that was to influence

other couples by the choices and behaviours demonstrated in their own marriages. There

was a profound sense of appreciation between spouses, which was borne of a deep

understanding and acceptance for who they were as individuals, which in turn led to a

sense of contentment that was evident among all couples. These results have helped to

reveal the role of purpose in marriage and to outline how spouses experienced the

fulfilment of their purpose in life in the context of their marriage.

This study illuminated the interactional nature of established processes identified

by previous studies and those highlighted more clearly by the present study and the

analysis therein. The system as demonstrated by Figure 4 provided a framework through which we could conceptualize the dynamics of these intricate processes in the lives of the couples in this study.

Implications for Counselling

It is hoped that reviewing the results of this study will enhance counsellors' understanding of the role of purpose in the lives of individuals who are happily married. The themes presented could help counsellors to identify areas where purpose and the marital relationship coexist to have important impact on the lives of happily married couples, which may be important to explore in counselling couples who are in distress. Some of these areas could include: spouses' attitudes towards their partner's goals in terms of their marriage and their own goals, spouses' willingness to switch marital roles when required, an understanding and appreciation for the difference between peripheral and core issues, and an increased awareness of how to provide and receive help and support from their spouses. Counsellors who are not married or who do not have a spouse who has purpose may gain invaluable insights from this study.

The findings of this research could also have important implications for marriage education facilitators in highlighting the importance of individual purpose in the context of marriage. With the current alarming rate of divorce (StatCan, 2006), marriage enrichment programs are becoming more popular. Originally undertaken solely by clergy for marriage preparation, today's programs are run by marriage therapists as well as lay people in cooperation with their pastors, with the objective of helping couples maintain healthy and committed relationships (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Halford, Markman, & Stanley, 2008).

Couples attending church-based marriage enrichment programs may discover that viewing their marriage as a purpose is a way of understanding marriage that they have not considered previously. Couples attending such programs, whether church-based or not, may discover that their individual purpose is an important part of their identity that does not have to be discarded when they get married. Couples may find that working as a team, they are able to achieve much more together than they could individually.

Limitations and Future Research

As with most studies, there were a number of limitations in this study. These are briefly discussed below, followed by a discussion of the opportunities for future research.

Limitations. Firstly, all couples were self-selected. Two couples were facilitators of a marriage preparation program in the Catholic Church in which I was also involved. These participants may be more self-aware and self-reflective of the topic than would participants who were not of any religious persuasion or who were not involved in a marriage preparation program. These couples may be more comfortable in volunteering their time to a fellow program facilitator, and they may also be more altruistic than others. A related limitation may be that as facilitators of a marriage preparation program, these couples may be compelled to portray the more positive aspects of their marriages, leaving out the less desirable parts. All the above could be potential causes for bias in the research findings.

A further limitation was that couples were asked to recall events that may have occurred many years ago. As such, the findings were impacted by the accuracy of the memory of participants. Another limitation in the study may have been a lack of time in exploring related areas that were important to the couples.

A final limitation is my own bias in the interpretation of themes during the interview process. Although bracketing was conducted prior to the research, my interpretations, which were based on my own experiences with marriage and my familiarity with the research topic, were a key component during the interviews. As a result, some bias would have occurred during the process.

An attempt was made to explore if there were important differences between couples in terms of the number of years that couples were married. Comparisons were made across cases; however, no strong patterns could be identified. Hence, it may be concluded that developmental differences were not a salient feature of the results. Limitations in this regard may be the small size of the study as well as a lack of time.

Future research. Each of the themes identified may be studied in greater depth by applying the case study methodology, which has yielded some surprising insights in this study that have not been previously explored in existing research. Some topics may already be well-researched using quantitative methods; however, qualitative methods to understand marriage or purpose in life from the lived experiences of participants may be a worthwhile pursuit to benefit counsellors and marriage enrichment facilitators.

Quantitative studies to investigate whether engaged couples connect as a result of similar purposes in life would be useful in understanding when and how purpose in life is made evident in the lives of young people. This study could also reveal whether premarital couples are aware of their betrothed's purpose in life and the extent to which people consider the idea of purpose in life individually and as a couple.

This study discovered that couples from faith-based marriages referred to their marriage as their purpose in life. Although the relationship between religion and

marriage are well-researched (Gaunt, 2006; Mahoney et al., 2003), both quantitative and

qualitative research could further help the marriage enrichment community to understand

how marriage as a purpose affects dual-faith couples or couples whereby one individual

does not subscribe to an organized religion.

It was discovered that couples were connected and united by purpose and

sometimes it was a crisis that gave them this purpose. It would be beneficial for

counsellors to understand in greater depth how some crises have the effect of pulling

some couples closer together and in other cases, it has the effect of pushing some couples

apart. The information gleaned from such a qualitative study could be very valuable in

counselling couples who have been through a crisis, such as in case of the death of a child

or in the event of an infidelity.

A quantitative study to understand the concept of compromise may be beneficial.

Marriage counsellors as well as marriage program facilitators may find it useful to know

the process by which couples arrived at a compromise and its effects on marital

satisfaction and individual well-being. It would be useful to know what important factors

were involved, couples' level of commitment, stressors present (e.g., children, mortgage,

careers, etc.), and whether they had a religious affiliation.

It was discovered that the happily married couples of this study had a healthy

attitude towards change. It may be of interest to researchers to investigate in greater

depth the relationship between attitude towards change and marital satisfaction, and the

factors that could affect this relationship. Qualitative research to find out the magnitude

of the role that spouses play in building their partner's self-esteem may also be useful.

Findings from such a study could have implications for marriage enrichment programs.

Lastly, it may also be useful to increase quantitative research on the presence of

meaning and purpose among married couples of different ages. I attempted to discover if

there were important differences between couples based on the duration of their

marriages. There were no salient features found. The results of a quantitative study of

this nature may be useful in customizing and tailoring workshops and programs for

couples of different generations.

Conclusion

This research project focused on the fulfilment of individual purpose in the

context of marriage. It is evident that purpose can play a fundamental role in marriages,

for individuals as well as for their marriage. The couples in this study placed a great deal

of importance on their marriages, and partners showed us how they played significant

roles in encouraging and supporting their spouses in the fulfilment of their own purpose

in life. Couples shared similar values, beliefs, and a general understanding of their

marriage and their place in it. For two couples, their faith and their community have

brought them closer together as a couple. For the other couple, other sources of meaning

brought a noetic quality to their marriage.

In most cases, individuals admitted that they did not enter into a marriage

knowing fully what their role was, nor what was expected of them. However, in all

cases, couples were fully committed to their marriage and willingly invested of

themselves in meaningful ways that were appreciated by their spouses. Couples may be

described as selfless in their behaviours towards their spouses, and for some participants,

their growth as individuals were directly attributed to the presence of their spouses in

their lives. For the participants in this study, their purpose in life was intimately related

to their marriage. Couples also revealed a high level of marital satisfaction and contentment with their lives.

Figure 4 describes a dynamic system of processes that thrives due to the shared understanding of marriage between spouses and the presence of a noetic dimension. These processes can lead to a sense of contentment with life, which is then fed back into the system, encouraging the individual to engage in higher levels of being and greater self-transcendence, leading to deeper levels of the noetic dimension.

Several important implications may be drawn from this system of processes within the dynamic marital environment: (a) couples nurture individual goals and purpose; (b) couples encourage individual growth, freedom, and responsibility; (c) spouses protect each other against external stressors; (d) couples foster realization of the common purpose; and (e) in partnership, couples self-transcend toward meaning potentials beyond their marriage.

To conclude, Frankl's (1959) existential perspective provided a useful framework for the study of purpose in life among married couples. His noetic dimension was clearly demonstrated in the lives of the married couples in this study. Couples found meaning in the fulfilment of their spouse's purpose, they willingly and unhesitatingly gave of themselves, and they demonstrated a clear commitment to face challenges together. These processes cultivated individuals who can pursue the fulfilment of their own purpose in life while supporting the goals of their spouse and upholding their common purpose.

REFERENCES

Adams, M. (2006). Towards an existential phenomenological model of life span human

    development. *Existential Analysis, 17*, 261–280. Retrieved from

    http://www.existentialanalysis.co.uk

Aron, A., Steele, J. L., Kashdan, T. B., & Perez, M. (2006). When similar do not attract:

    Tests of a prediction from the self-expansion model. *Personal Relationships, 13*,

    387-396. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.2006.00125.x

Arrindell, W. A., & Luteijn, F. (1999). Similarity between intimate partners for

    personality traits as related to individual levels of satisfaction with life.

    Personality & Individual Differences, 28, 629-637. doi:10.1016/S0191-

    8869(99)00125-7

Baumeister, R. F. (1991). *Meanings of life.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Beels, C. C., & Newmark, M. (2006). Sacrifice: A clinical view. *Family Processes, 45*,

    305–309. doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.2006.00172.x

Botwin, M. D., Buss, D. M., & Shackelford, T. K. (1997). Personality and mate

    differences: Five factors in mate selection and marital satisfaction. *Journal of

    Personality, 65*, 107–136. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6494.1997.tb00531.x

Brock, R. L., & Lawrence, E. (2008). A longitudinal investigation of stress spillover in

    marriage: Does spousal support adequacy buffer the effecs? *Journal of Family

    Psychology, 22*(1), 11-20. doi:10.1037/0893-3200.22.1.11

Brunstein, J. C., Dangelmayer, G., & Schultheiss, O. C. (1996). Personal goals and social

    support in close relationships: Effects on relationship mood and marital

satisfaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 71*, 1006-1019.

doi:10.1037/0022-3514.71.5.1006

Butler, R. J., & Gasson, S. L. (2006). Development of the self-image profile for adults

(SIP-AD). *European Journal of Psychological Assessment, 22*, 52–58.

doi:10.1027/1015-5759.22.1.52

Campbell, D. T., & Stanley, J. C. (1966). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs*

for research. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.

Canetto, S. S. (2002). Love and achievement motives in women's and men's suicide

notes. *The Journal of Psychology, 136*, 573–576.

doi:10.1080/00223980209605552

Carroll, J. S., & Doherty, W. J. (2003). Evaluating the effectiveness of premarital

prevention programs: A meta-analytic review of outcome research. *Family*

Relations, 52, 105–118. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2003.00105.x

Correia, E. (2008). Love is a hell of a job! Some considerations about love and its

importance to psychotherapy. *Existential Analysis, 19*, 267–279. Retrieved from

http://www.biomedsearch.com/article/Love-hell-job-Some-

considerations/191214758.html

Coyne, J. C., & DeLongis, A. (1986). Going beyond social support: The role of social

relationships in adaptation. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 54,*

454-460. doi:10.1037/0022-006X.54.4.454

Cutrona, C. E., Shaffer, P. A., Wesner, K. A., & Gardner, K. A. (2007). Optimally

matching support and perceived spousal sensitivity. *Journal of Family*

Psychology, 21, 754-758. doi:10.1037/0893-3200.21.4.754

Dehle, C., & Landers, J. E. (2005). You can't always get what you want, but can you get

    what you need? Personality traits and social support in marriage. *Journal of*

    Social and Clinical Psychology, 24, 1051–1076. doi:10.1521/jscp.2005.24.7.1051

DeNeve, K. M., & Cooper, H. (1998). The happy personality: A meta-analysis of 137

    personality traits and subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin, 124*, 197–

    229. doi:0033-2909/98/$3.00

Dik, B. J., Duffy, R. D., & Eldridge, B. M. (2009). Calling and vocation in career

    counselling: Recommendations for promoting meaningful work. *Professional*

    Psychology: Research and Practice, 40, 625–632. doi:10.1037/a0015547

Donnellan, M. B., Conger, R. D., & Bryant, C. M. (2004). The big five and enduring

    marriages. *Journal of Research in Personality, 38,* 481–504.

    doi:10.1016/j.jrp.2004.01.001

Elliot, A. J. (2006). The hierarchical model of approach-avoidance motivation.

    Motivation and Emotion, 30, 111-116. doi:10.1007/s11031-006-9028-7

Fegg, M. J., Kramer, M., Bausewein, C., & Borasio, G. D. (2007). Meaning in life in the

    Federal Republic of Germany: Results of a representative survey with the

    schedule for meaning in life evaluation (SMiLE). *Health and Quality of Life*

    Outcomes, 5(59), 1–8. doi:10.1186/1477-7525-5-59

Fegg, M. J., Kramer, M., L'hoste, S., & Borasio, G. D. (2008). The schedule for meaning

    in life evaluation (SMiLE): Validation of a new instrument for meaning-in-life

    research. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management, 35*, 356–364.

    doi:10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2007.05.007

Feldman, D. B., & Snyder, C. R. (2005). Hope and the meaningful life: Theoretical and

    empirical associations between goal-directed thinking and life meaning. *Journal*

    of Social & Clinical Psychology, 24, 401–421. doi:10.1521/jscp.24.3.401.65616

Finlay, L. (2008). A dance between the reduction and reflexivity: Explicating the

    "phenomenological psychological attitude." *Journal of Phenomenological*

    Psychology, 39, 1–32. doi:10.1163/156916208X311601

Flyvbjerg, B. (2004). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. In C. Seale, G.

    Gobo, J. F. Gubrium, & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp.

    420–434). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Frankl, V. E. (1959). *Man's search for meaning.* New York, NY: Pocket Books.

Gaunt, R. (2006). Couple similarity and marital satisfaction: Are similar spouses happier?

    Journal of Personality, 74, 1401–1420. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6494.2006.00414.x

Giorgi, A. (1997). The theory, practice, and evaluation of the phenomenological method

    as a qualitative research procedure. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 28*,

    235-261. doi**:**10.1163/156916297X00103

Griffith, B. A., & Graham, C. C. (2004). Meeting needs and making meaning: The

    pursuit of goals. *Journal of Individual Psychology, 60*, 25–41. Retrieved from

    http://www.utexas.edu/utpress/journals/jaip.html#601

Halford, W. K., Markman, H. J., & Stanley, S. (2008). Strengthening couples'

    relationships with education: Social policy and public health perspectives. *Journal*

    of Family Psychology, 22, 497–505. doi:10.1037/a0012789

Halling, S. (2008). *Intimacy, transcendence, and psychology: Closeness and openness in*

    everyday life. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hawkins, D. N., & Booth, A. (2005). Unhappily ever after: Effects of long-term, low-quality marriages on well-being. *Social Forces, 84*, 446–465. doi:10.1353/sof.2005.0103

Herrington, R. L., Mitchell, A. E., Castellani, A. M., Joseph, J. I., Snyder, D. K., & Gleaves, D. H. (2008). Assessing disharmony and disaffection in intimate relationships: Revision of the marital satisfaction inventory factor scales. *Psychological Assessment, 20*, 341–350. doi:10.1037/a0013759

Impett, E. A., Gable, S. L., & Peplau, L. A. (2005). Giving up and giving in: The costs and benefits of daily sacrifice in intimate relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 89*, 327–344. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.89.3.327

Jim, H. S., Richardson, S. A., Golden-Kreutz, D. M., & Andersen, B. L. (2006). Strategies used in coping with a cancer diagnosis predict meaning in life for survivors. *Health Psychology, 25*, 753–761. doi:10.1037/0278-6133.25.6.753

Johnson, M. K. (2005). Family roles and work values: Processes of selection and change. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 67*, 352–369. doi:10.1111/j.0022-2445.2005.00121.x

Kluwer, E. S., Heesink, J. A. M., & Van de Vliert, E. (2002). The division of labour across the transition to parenthood: A justice perspective. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 64*, 930–943. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2002.00930.x

King, L. A., Hicks, J. A., Krull, J. L., & Del Gaiso, A. K. (2006). Positive affect and the experience of meaning in life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 90*, 179–196. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.90.1.179

Lange, P. A. M., Rusbult, C. E., Drigotas, S. M., Arriaga, X. B., Witcher, B. S., & Cox,

    C. L. (1997). Willingness to sacrifice in close relationships. *Journal of*

    Personality and Social Psychology, 72, 1373-1395. doi:10.1037/0022-

    3514.72.6.1373

Lantz, J. (1999). Marcel's testimony in existential psychotherapy with couples and

    families. *Contemporary Family Therapy, 21*, 469-483.

    doi:10.1023/A:1021623104656

Lantz, J. (2000). Phenomenological reflection and time in Viktor Frankl's existential

    psychotherapy. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 31*, 220-231.

    doi:10.1163/15691620051090988

Lantz, J. (2004). World view concepts in existential family therapy. *Contemporary*

    Family Therapy, 26, 165-178. doi:10.1023/B:COFT.0000031241.68493.de

Laverty, S. M. (2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology: A comparison

    of historical and methodological considerations. *International Journal of*

    Qualitative Methods, 2(3), 1-29. Retrieved from

    http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/2_3final/pdf/laverty.pdf

Lucas, R. E., Clark, A. E., Georgellis, Y., & Diener, E. (2003). Reexamining adaptation

    and the set point model of happiness: Reactions to changes in marital status.

    Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84, 527–539. doi:10.1037/0022-

    3514.84.3.527

MacMillan, R., & Copher, R. (2005). Families in the life course: Interdependency of

    roles, role configurations, and pathways. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 67*,

    858–879. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2005.00180.x

Mahoney, A., Pargament, K., Tarakeshwar, N., & Swank, A. (2008). Religion in the

    home in the 1980s and 1990s: A meta-analytic review and conceptual analysis of

    links between religion, marriage, and parenting. *Psychology of Religion and*

    Spirituality, S(1), 63-101. doi:10.1037/1941-1022.S.1.63

McKnight, P. E., & Kashdan, T. B. (2009). Purpose in life as a system that creates and

    sustains health and well-being: An integrative, testable theory. *Review of General*

    Psychology, 13, 242–251. doi:10.1037/a0017152

Melton, A. M. A., & Schulenberg, S. E. (2008). On the measurement of meaning:

    Logotherapy's empirical contributions to humanistic psychology. *The Humanistic*

    Psychologist, 36, 31–44. doi:10.1080/08873260701828870

Mertens, D. M. (2010). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology.* Thousand

    Oaks, CA: Sage.

Michaelson, C. (2008). Work and the most terrible life. *Journal of Business Ethics, 77*,

    335–345. doi:10.1007/s10551-007-9353-0

Mitnick, D. M., Heyman, R. E., & Slep, A. M. S. (2009). Changes in relationship

    satisfaction across the transition to parenthood: A meta-analysis. *Journal of*

    Family Psychology, 23, 848–852. doi:10.1037/a0017004

Morgan, J., & Farsides, T. (2009). Psychometric evaluation of the meaningful life

    measure. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 10*, 351–366. doi:10.1007/s10902-008-

    9093-6

Myers, D. G. (2000). The funds, friends, and faith of happy people. *American*

    Psychologist, 55, 56–67. doi:10.1037/0003-077X.55.1.56

Nussbaum, M. (1992). Human functioning and social justice: In defense of Aristotelian

    essentialism. *Political theory, 20*, 202–246. doi:10.1177/0090591792020002002

Osborne, J. W. (1994). Some similarities and differences among phenomenological and

    other methods of psychological qualitative research. *Canadian Psychology, 35*,

    167-189. doi:10.1037/0708-5591.35.2.167

Powdthavee, N. (2009). I can't smile without you: Spousal correlation in life satisfaction.

    Journal of Economic Psychology, 30, 675–689. doi:10.1016/j.joep.2009.06.005

Proulx, C. M., Helms, H. M., & Buehler, C. (2007). Marital quality and personal well-

    being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 69*, 576–593.

    doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2007.00393.x

Pyszczynski, T., Greenberg, J., Solomon, S., Arndt, J., & Schimel, J. (2004). Why do

    people need self-esteem? A theoretical and empirical review. *Psychological

    Bulletin, 130*, 435–468. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.130.3.435

Roest, A. M. C., Dubas, J. S., Gerris, J. R. M., & Engels, R. C. M. E. (2006).

    Disentangling value similarities and transmissions in established marriages: A

    cross-lagged longitudinal study. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 68*, 1132-1146.

    doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2006.00319.x

Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. H. (2008). Know thyself and become what you are: A

    eudaimonic approach to psychological well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies,

    9*, 13–39. doi:10.1007/s10902-006-9019-0

Schimel, J., Arndt, J., Pyszczynski, T., & Greenberg, J. (2001). Being accepted for who

    we are: Evidence that social validation of the intrinsic self reduces general

defensiveness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 80*, 35–52.

doi:10.1037/0022-3514.80.1.35

Schimmack, U., & Lucas, R. (2006). *Marriage matters: Spousal similarity in life satisfaction* (Discussion Paper 623). Retrieved from

http://www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw_01.c.44710.de/dp623.pdf

Schnell, T., & Becker, P. (2006). Personality and meaning in life. *Personality and Individual Differences, 41*, 117–129. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2005.11.030

Schulenberg, S. E., Hutzell, R. R., Nassif, C., & Rogina, J. M. (2008). Logotherapy for clinical practice. *Psychotherapy Theory, Research, Practice, Training, 45*, 447–463. doi:10.1037/a001433

Schulenberg, S. E., Schnetzer, L. W., Winters, M. R., & Hutzell, R. R. (2010). Meaning-centered couples therapy: Logotherapy and intimate relationships. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy, 40*, 95–102. doi:10.1007/s10879-009-9134-4

Seligman, M. (2002). *Authentic Happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Sells, J. N., Giordano, F. G., & King, L. (2002). A pilot study in marital group therapy: Process and outcome. *The Family Journal, 10*, 156–166.

doi:10.1177.1066480702102005

Sirgy, M. J., & Wu, J. (2009). The pleasant life, the engaged life, and the meaningful life: What about the balanced life? *Journal of Happiness Studies, 10,* 183–196.

doi:10.1007/s10902-007-9074-1

Spanier, G. B. (2001). *Dyadic adjustment scale: User's manual*. Toronto, ON: MHS.

Stake, R. E. (2005). *The art of case study research.* New York, NY: Sage.

Stanley, S. M., Whitton, S. W., Sadberry, S. L., Clements, M. L., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Sacrifice as a predictor of marital outcomes. *Marital Process, 45*, 289–303. doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.2006.00171.x

Statistics Canada (2010). *Population by marital status and sex*. Retrieved from http://www40.statcan.gc.ca/l01/cst01/famil01-eng.htm

Stillman, T. F., Baumeister, R. F., Lambert, N. M., Crescioni, A. W., DeWall, C. N., & Fincham, F. D. (2009). Alone and without purpose: Life loses meaning following social exclusion. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 45*, 686–694. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2009.03.007

Stutzer, A., & Frey, B. S. (2006). Does marriage make people happy, or do happy people get married? *The Journal of Socio-Economics, 35,* 326–347. doi:10.1016/j.socec.2005.11.043

Walzer, S. (1998). *Thinking about the baby: Gender and transitions into parenthood.* Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Waring, E. M. (1984). The measurement of marital intimacy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 10*, 185–192. doi:10.1111/j.1752-0606.1984.tb00009.x

Whisman, M. A., Uebelacker, L. A., & Bruce, M. L. (2006). Longitudinal association between marital discord and alcohol use disorders. *Journal of Family Psychology, 20*, 164–167. doi:10.1637/0893-3200.20.1.164

Wieselquist, J., Rusbult, C. E., Foster, C. A., & Agnes, C. R. (1999). Commitment, pro-relationship behaviour, and trust in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77*, 942-966. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.77.5.942

Williams, K. (2003). Has the future of marriage arrived? A contemporary examination of

    gender, marriage, and psychological well-being. *Journal of Health and Social*

    Behavior, 44, 470–487. doi:10.2307/1519794

Wilson, K., & Murrell, A. (2004). Mindfulness and acceptance: Expanding the cognitive-

    behavioral tradition. In S. C. Hayes, V. M. Follette, & M. Linehan (Eds.). *Values*

    work in acceptance and commitment therapy: Setting a course for behavioural

    treatment (pp. 120–151). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Wong, P. T. P. (1998). Spirituality, meaning, and successful aging. In P. T. P. Wong, &

    P. S. Fry (Eds.), *The human quest for meaning* (pp. 359-394). Mahwah, NJ:

    Erlbaum.

Wong, P. T. P. (2010). Meaning therapy: An integrative and positive existential

    psychotherapy. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy, 40,* 85–93.

    doi:10.1007/s10879-009-9132-6

Yalom, I. (2002). *The gift of therapy.* New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Yanez, B., Edmondson, D., Stanton, A. L., Park, C. L., Kwan, L., Ganz, P. A., & Blank,

    T. O. (2009). Facets of spirituality as predictors of adjustment to cancer: Relative

    contributions of having faith and finding meaning. *Journal of Consulting and*

    Clinical Psychology, 77, 730–741. doi:10.1037/a0015820

Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

APPENDIX A

Bracketing

As a graduate student in the MA Counselling Psychology program at Trinity Western University, my purpose is to help others achieve healing and peace in their lives. This is a personal goal that I have been considering and nurturing for 12 years. I had been in different careers before, but it is only now, with the wonderful love and support of my husband, that I am finally able to accomplish my purpose in life.

As mentioned, my concept of what my purpose in life was started 12 years ago. This was a purpose that has its seed in my childhood. When I was young, I had taken part in activities in, and outside of, school, whereby the outcome would be beneficial to others. This trait I believe was a gift that I received from my parents. Both my mother and father are very giving individuals, and through their words and action, have taught me that sometimes it is better to give, than it is to receive.

I grew up in a middle-class family where money was tight at times, especially in the early years of my parents' marriage. However, my parents did not ever discourage me, or my siblings, from pursuing our dreams. Whatever education, ambitions, or careers we wanted to pursue, they have always been supportive and encouraging, morally, spiritually, and financially. When I left for Scotland in 1996 to pursue an MBA, their support was immediately encouraging and uplifting.

When I decided that I did not fit into the corporate world years later, I undertook a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology. At the time, I did not think that it would lead me to a vocation in counselling, but I knew that I wanted to help others heal from their pain. I had a vision, but that vision was not concrete.

When I met my husband in 2004, we held long and deep conversations about what we would like to do with our lives. That long, intimate conversation has continued to this day, as we believe that we are constantly evolving and changing. To ensure that we are always on the same page and headed in the same direction, it was important for us to maintain our intimate dialogue regularly.

When Ian and I got married in 2007, we were fully aware of the devastating divorce rates in North America, and we were adamant that we will not be a part of that statistic. Our marriage was consecrated in the Catholic church, and we believe that our marriage is forever - until death do us part.

To stay connected, Ian and I have engaged in many activities together as a couple, always ensuring that we maintain similar interests. Some of our activities are of an altruistic nature, others are for fun and enjoyment. Through work, our church, and the people that we have met, we have learned and grew a lot in the six years that we have been a couple. And as we learn and grow, we always made sure that our spouse was aware of what learning and growth has occurred for the other.

Ian and I share many values, not least of which is the belief that education is important and life-giving. We also believe, through our volunteer work with the Catholic Engaged Encounter marriage preparation program, that giving of ourselves is itself a life-giving act that is very beneficial to our marriage. Ian and I also believe that our involvement in church activities raises awareness of the beauty of community building and support.

I was able to pursue my dream of becoming a counsellor only after Ian and I have spent years of dialoguing with each other about our joint purpose in life. That joint

purpose is to achieve a meaningful life together. With Ian's constant understanding and love, I was finally able to better understand myself, and to define what my purpose in life is. The realization of my own purpose fulfils our joint purpose.

While I am pursuing my dream, Ian too is pursuing his, although we are doing this in very different ways. We support each other in all that we do, and as a result, we can freely *be* the best spouse that we can be for each other.

I recognize that my journey here is accomplished only after a number of detours and wrong turns. These detours and wrong turns facilitated much growth, and complementing that with my parents' love, their life examples, my own life experiences, and my husband's constant devotion and love, have together brought me where I am today.

I also recognize that the journey and process will be different for other couples, just as their purpose and concept of meaning will be different from mine. In conducting this research, I endeavour to remain open to hearing new stories about how purpose is fulfilled in marriage. Whatever people's journeys and paths may look like, it is *their* story, and that is ultimately what I am interested in.

APPENDIX B

Email invitation for participation

Hi there,

As you know, I am currently in the second year of the Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology program at Trinity Western University. I am in the process of recruiting participants for my qualitative research study, and I would appreciate if you would either respond to this call for participation, or pass on the request to couples in your social network who meet the research criteria.

What is my research about? Well, I am interested to explore how couples experience their individual purpose in life in the context of their marriage. Interviews with couples will be centered on the question, "How do you experience purpose in life while married?"

Couples will agree to an initial interview lasting up to 3 hours, to my presence in their home to observe them, and to video recordings being taken of our interviews and observations. Couples can expect to spend around 4 - 5 hours in total, which may include a 1-hour follow-up interview, taking phone calls, and responding to email communications for clarification and confirmation of findings, over a period of 3 - 4 months.

All participants can be assured that confidentiality is a highly valued element of this project. At no time will participants' real identities be included in transcripts or the final report, as pseudonyms will be used to identify participants. All video recordings and transcripts will be kept in a secured filing cabinet in the offices of the Counselling Psychology Department of Trinity Western University.

Specifically for this research study, I am looking for couples who meet the following requirements:
- Couples who are happily married;
- Couples who are legally married;
- Couples who are heterosexual;
- Couples who have been married for 1-5 years, 10–15 years, OR more than 25 years.

As a small token of my appreciation, participating couples who complete the study as outlined above will receive a $75 gift certificate. Couples may opt out of the study at any time without consequence.

I would really appreciate your help in recruiting eligible participants for my study. If interested couples have questions, they can contact me directly at christina.radziejewski@mytwu.ca or at 604-771-1386.

Thank you very much - I appreciate your help!

Christina Radziejewski
Graduate Student, M. A. Counselling Psychology Program
Trinity Western University

APPENDIX C

Agreement to participate

CONSENT FORM

Date:
Research Project Title: Portraits of Marriage from an Existential Perspective
Researcher: Christina Radziejewski, 604-771-1386
Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Marvin McDonald, 604-513-2121 ext. 3223

Goals of Research

The goal of this research is to understand how purpose in life is fulfilled in the context of happy marriages at different developmental stages. A phenomenological case study approach is adopted in order to understand the *lived* experience of happily married couples.

Selection Process

You, along with other interested couples, will participate confidentially and separately in an initial selection process that will be conducted via email. If you meet the research criteria and qualify for the study, you may be chosen to proceed to the next stage of the study. You will receive a phone call informing you if you have been selected for the study.

If however you have not been selected for the study, no further information will be required from you and this concludes your participation. All information that you have provided will be destroyed at this time.

Research Process

If selected, we will then set up a convenient time for you to participate in a personal interview with me lasting up to 3 hours. This interview is an opportunity for you to share your personal stories about the experience of purpose during your married life. Specifically, the interview will be centered on the question, "How have you experienced your purpose in life while married?"

Video recordings will be made of all interviews. A copy of the transcript will be sent to you for verification, and a follow-up meeting lasting up to 60 minutes will be set at that time. Any further follow-up's thereafter may be conducted via phone or email. During follow-up meetings, phone calls or emails, you will be asked to confirm if the researcher's interpretations are accurate.

Privacy & Confidentiality

Participants will be asked to come up with a pseudonym, as such, their identity in the transcripts and in the final thesis document is not known. Computers containing transcripts and video recordings will be kept secured with password protection.

All video recordings, transcripts, and notes taken during the process, will be kept in a password-protected folder. When thesis requirements have been met, all video recordings will be permanently deleted. Transcripts will be saved in a password-protected document and stored in a locked filing cabinet in the offices of the Counselling Psychology Department of Trinity Western University.

Risks and Benefits

Risks associated with this research are minimal and will depend on the couple. A benefit to participation is an illumination or rediscovery of who you are in the context of your marriage. In participating, you will help counsellors understand the role of purpose in happy marriages. You may also be helping marriage educators to review their programs from a meaning base.

As a small token of my appreciation, participants who complete the project as explained above will receive a $75 gift certificate. Participants may withdraw from the project at any time without consequence. Should this happen, all recordings, transcripts and notes collected to date will be immediately disposed of.

Should you have questions about ethical issues involved in such a study, please contact Ms. Sue Funk in the Office of Research, Trinity Western University at 604-513-2142 or sue.funk@twu.ca.

Agreement

We, _____ and _____ have read and understood the above description of the project and we hereby willingly give our consent to participate.

Signatures: _____
               _____
Date: _____
Address: _____
               _____
               _____
Phone: _____
Email: _____

APPENDIX D

Screening Process

Dyadic Adjustment Scale

Directions: Most people have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

Always disagree	Almost always disagree	Frequently disagree	Occasionally Disagree	Almost always agree	Always agree
0	1	2	3	4	5

1. Philosophy of life.
2. Aims, goals, and things believed important.
3. Amount of time spent together.

Directions: How often would you say the following events occur between you and your mate?

Never	Less than once a month	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Once a day	More often
0	1	2	3	4	5

4. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas.
5. Calmly discuss something together.
6. Work together on a project.

7. Directions: The numbers on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, "happy", represents the degree of happiness of most relationships. Please circle the number which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

Extremely unhappy	Fairly unhappy	A little unhappy	Happy	Very happy	Extremely happy	Perfect
0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Please state what you hope to contribute to this study:

_____
_____
_____
_____

Please state what you hope to get out of this study:

_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX E

Brief demographic information

First Names: Wife: _____ Husband: _____

Last Name: _____

Address: _____

               _____

Telephone: _____ (primary) _____(other)

Email: _____

Age: Wife: _____ years   Husband: _____ years

Ethnicity: (please tick ✓)
               European ___
               Asian ___
               East Indian ___
               African ___
               First Nations ___
               Other, please specify _____

Number of years married: _____ years

Number of children: _____ Grandchildren: _____

Are you affiliated with a church or denomination?   Yes ☐   No ☐

If you ticked yes, please specify _____

Wife …   Are you currently … Employed part-time ☐   Employed full-time ☐
                                    Unemployed   ☐   Semi-retired   ☐
                                    Retired   ☐

Husband …   Are you currently … Employed part-time ☐   Employed full-time ☐
                                    Unemployed   ☐   Semi-retired   ☐
                                    Retired   ☐

Our preferred pseudonyms are: Wife: _____

                                    Husband: _____

APPENDIX F

Areas which provide meaning to my life

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

Responses from participants were used as launching points for in-depth conversations about purpose and meaning. Please refer to the Methods chapter.

APPENDIX G

Interview Protocol

- What was the experience like for you to think about your purpose in life?

- What does purpose mean to you?

- When did you first become aware of your purpose?

    o What was the experience like for you?

- When you first met your spouse, did you get a sense of their purpose?

- In your choice of partner, was choosing someone who has a sense of their purpose in life, a factor in your decision making?

- Were common areas shared prior to marriage?

- Was having a common purpose a factor in your decision to marry?

- Has marriage changed the purpose of your life? How?

- How do you ensure that your goals or dreams are preserved without compromising your spouse's or those that you share as a couple?

- What were some of your goals and what was the experience like for you in reaching for your goals while being a spouse and parent?

- Does having common or shared goals help you in realizing your own individual goals?

- What were some important factors that have led you to achieving your own goals?

APPENDIX H

Illustrative Comparison Of Themes Between Participants

Themes	Subthemes	Couples					
		1		2		3	
		H	W	H	W	H	W
1. A personal definition of purpose	1. Led by faith	✓	✓			✓	✓
	2. Evident prior to marriage	✓	✓			✓	
2. A profound change in perspective	3. An awakening	✓	✓			✓	✓
	4. Being on the right seat on the right bus	✓				✓	
	5. A shift of perspective and expectation of life				✓		
3. Values-driven premarital relationship	6. Knowing own purpose	✓	✓				
	7. Evidence in words and actions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. A noetic dimension	8. Faith-centered purpose	✓	✓			✓	✓
	9. Fulfilling a vocation	✓	✓			✓	✓
	10. Marriage has a higher purpose	✓	✓			✓	✓
	11. Purpose created by crises			✓	✓	✓	✓
5. A common purpose	12. Spouses are united in purpose	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	13. Sharing the same vision			✓	✓	✓	✓
6. Shared understanding of marriage	14. A permanent bond	✓	✓			✓	✓
	15. Marriage is a fusion, not a competition		✓			✓	✓
	16. Shared values and beliefs	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	17. Personality differences	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7. Interdependence between spouses	18. An individual and a joint effort	✓	✓				
	19. Growing individually and together	✓	✓				
	20. Challenging each other	✓	✓				
	21. There's no formula	✓	✓			✓	✓
	22. Trust	✓	✓				
8. Individual responsibility	23. Individual Goals	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	24. Individual growth supports common goal	✓	✓	✓			
	25. Compromise	✓	✓			✓	✓
	26. Adaptability and flexibility	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Theme	Subtheme						
9. Proactive mutuality	27. Attributed growth to spouse	✓	✓			✓	✓
	28. Supporting spouse's desire for personal accomplishments	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
	29. Spouse's willingness to trade traditional marital roles	✓		✓		✓	
	30. Freedom to be self	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	31. Encouragement from spouse	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	32. Two is better than one	✓	✓			✓	✓
10. Marriage Before Individual Goals	33. Personal goals do not conflict with couple goals	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	34. Communication is key	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11. A Sense of Contentment	35. Satisfaction with life	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	36. Personal achievements	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
	37. Self-transcendence	✓		✓			
12. A Positive Attitude towards Change	38. Nothing will ever stay exactly the same	✓				✓	

The above table is an illustrative comparison of themes between participants. Ticks indicate that the corresponding theme was explicitly stated by the participant. The absence of a tick does not imply that a participant did not agree with the theme. This table was an integral part of the analysis process, as it helped in the identification, formulation, and organization of themes and subthemes.

APPENDIX I

Email to Participants

Dear Couple,

I want to thank you both for all that you have done so far for my research. Your insights and wisdom has been invaluable to me in conducting this research.

To conclude, there is just one last thing that needs to be done for a qualitative research of this kind, and that is to have participants check the accuracy of my interpretations.

In the attached document, I have included a table of the themes and subthemes that have emerged from my interviews with you and with the other couples in this study. I have also included one of the themes, its thematic description and subthemes, which includes what you have said that supported this theme.

In reviewing this brief document, please ask yourselves:

(i) Do the themes and subthemes fit with some of your understanding of purpose in marriage?
(ii) Is the description of Theme X adequate, in that it captures what you wanted to convey?

You are invited to comment on any aspect of the document, and I would be happy to send you other thematic descriptions, if you wish to view them.

As you know, as participants in this research, you are entitled to a $75 gift certificate. I will be mailing this gift certificate to you in the next couple of weeks.

Thank you again! I look forward to receiving your feedback/comments soon.

Regards,
Chris Radziejewski