AFFECTIONATE EXPRESSION IN MARRIAGE:  
AN ETHNOCULTURAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC COMPARISON

BY

SHAREN M. WATERS

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2014

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Barry Ackerson, Chair
Professor Kory Floyd, Arizona State University
Professor Teresa Ostler
Assistant Professor Douglas Smith
ABSTRACT

In exploring the lived experience of married couples with affectionate communication, this qualitative, phenomenological study employed a triangulation of data collection methods, including a questionnaire, face-to-face interviews, and two specific observational activities; a game and musical exercise to identify the meaning couples made out of their experiences with affectionate expression. Eight diverse married couples were recruited through purposive, criterion and snowball sampling efforts. Couples had been married between a minimum of 2 years and 13 years, and ranged in age from 25 to 56. Participant groups included two African American couples, two Caucasian couples, two mixed race couples where husbands were African American and wives were Caucasian, and two mixed race couples where husbands were Caucasian and wives were African American. One couple in each racial category was targeted whose total household incomes were above and below $40,000 to allow for socioeconomic comparison. Couples defined affectionate expression and it was shown that spouses demonstrated multiple affectionate behaviors with the intention of making their mates feel good about themselves and their relationships, and also to derive some personal benefit associated with showing affection. Satisfaction was explored and it was shown that spouses appreciated affectionate acts that were perceived to be selfless and sincere as opposed to routine or reciprocal, and affectionate demonstrations that were in accord with their personal preferences. When spouses received adequate amounts of affection, they felt more loved, better about themselves, closer to their spouses, more energized in their relationships, and they perceived of their relationships as stronger. Insufficient amounts or inadequate types of affection made spouses feel unloved and question their mate’s sincerity, they perceived of their relationships as being “rocky,” their mates unhappy, and they felt a general sense of unease. Findings also indicated that satisfaction with affectionate expression inversely affected considerations of divorce. Ethnocultural and socioeconomic difference were examined and not identified in the study. Salient themes of the study included the importance of verbal assurances and of selflessness, sacrifice and sincerity, as behaviors thus perceived most engendered spousal satisfaction.
KEYWORDS: Affectionate, communication, couples, cultural, expression, intimacy, love, marriage, Maslow, satisfaction.
DEDICATION

I would be remiss if this chapter in my life and in my career were to close without an acknowledgement of appreciation to some very special individuals without whom this doctoral journey would not have been endeavored nor completed. I dedicate this study of affection to those I hold dearest. I share the most heartfelt appreciation with my parents, Jerrald and Christine Pierre, for your incredible generosity and boundless sacrifice. For always being there. For having given us a certain foundation in spirituality and morality, and for the lifelong gift of education. You’ve taught us so much. Inspired us. Challenged us. And helped us become the people we are today. Children seldom realize how sheltered, caressed, and cared for they are until they venture into the world and begin to stand on their own. Thank you for the steadfast support. Physically, emotionally, spiritually, financially. I have no idea how you managed to pay out-of-pocket for four children’s education, and always during the same time frame. But I now realize how uncommonly special it is to walk away from four years of college without a cent of debt. Because my parents took care of it. You took care of us so well in every way, and words could never express how grateful I am. I love you. To my new Dad, Marion Waters, for welcoming me into your family and into your heart the way you have. Since the day I met you, you have been a special source of love and support in my life. You told me early on that I am your daughter and that everything you have is also mine. Who you’ve been to me is more than I need. I couldn’t have imagined a better father-in-law. To my siblings, Carmel, Trinette, Jerrald, Jr., Sharleen and Kenny, thank you for so many wonderful years. The love. The care. The laughs. The fun. The support. The encouragement. The well-wishes. I have such deep love, gratitude and respect for each of you and I wish you light and peace as we continue life’s journey together. I’m so thankful that you’re mine. Finally, to my husband Gary. You are indeed the dearest friend of my heart. You’ve always been. It’s hard to thank you for what we’ve accomplished. Yet I do. Thank you for caring so deeply and for pampering me since the day I’ve known you. For not wanting me to be stressed years ago, and allowing me to just not work. For assuring me that should life ever feel too much, I can walk away and you will carry me. But for not letting me walk away from this, when I didn’t have it in me to go on. For never nudging, but always encouraging. For wholeheartedly supporting my dreams and daring to
dream and imagine along with me. For surpassing exceptional as my partner on this doctoral journey. For years of taking care of our home. Of taking care of me. For daily stops on your way home to bring me dinner. Thank you for the cleaning. The laundry. For being so handy around the house and repairing things I break, and building things I hope for. I appreciate all the work you do on my cars and all the cars throughout the years. Although I really don’t want yet another Honda, I so appreciate your thoughtfulness and I’ll never stop being awed by the surprises. For taking my car for washes and driving with me wee hours each morning for my pit stops for gas, when you simply never have to. When Cummins is in the opposite direction. Thank you. I can’t imagine never having a care in the world. Yet somehow I do. Because of you. We have never enjoyed a time since knowing one another that school wasn’t at the forefront of our lives, governing things we did or didn’t do, choices we made. Today begins a new day. As I imagine this fresh, new beginning, I anticipate so many moments with you. Joyful moments. Peaceful moments. Challenging moments. Moments filled with excitement and moments of silence. I imagine I’ll reflect back on today from time to time, a poignant landmark in our lives, and I’ll never forget your contributions to this work. Finding half the participants, driving me to interviews, assuring I had the software I needed, the paper, the ink. Supporting us and allowing me a 3-day work week to complete it. Coming home from work in the middle of the day to surprise and bring me lunch. Just because of my tears. You’ve so encouraged me. When I wanted to give up, you stood by me. You believed in me. You held me. You carried me. You hugged me on my breaks and massaged me through the migraines, and covered every window in the house to make it bearable. Gary, not just now, but always, you profoundly awe me. You are my life, and indeed my inspiration for this academic contribution on affection in marriage. You consistently cause me wonder how anyone could ever love so richly and completely. So unconditionally. Thank you for teaching me new and higher ways to love and deeper ways to give of myself. I share this study with others because of the life you’ve shared with me.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I share these acknowledgements, my emotions are heightened. With feelings of relief. Of happiness. Of disbelief. But more than anything, I'm moved to tears with appreciation.

I humbly, gratefully and sincerely thank you, Dr. Barry J. Ackerson, my dissertation chair and academic advisor, for your mentorship, during not only this dissertation process, but throughout my graduate school experience. Within a short period of time under your tutelage, in your class, it was evident that there was something very special and unique about you. The ways you relate to others and ways you impart knowledge. Your warm, gentle unassuming demeanor is well-complemented by your wealth of wisdom and your uncommon ability to share it so clearly and effectively. I have always been honored to learn from you.

Your mentorship on this doctoral journey has exceeded my every expectation. Your guidance, understanding, your patience, and your direction have been more than exceptional. I cannot imagine having had a better experience. I am not sure I can fully express the gratitude I have in my heart for all you have done for me. Your time. The energy. Your understanding and assistance with time restraints and requirements. Your kindness in forgiving my snafus. You are uncommonly a gentle man. And I am genuinely appreciative.

Your guidance has encouraged not only my growth as a researcher, but also as an independent thinker. I am not sure many graduate students are granted the opportunity to express themselves fully and feel heard and esteemed. I was. For everything you’ve done for me, Dr. Ackerson, I thank you. Thank you for the encouraging words. For believing in me. Thank you for instilling hope in me that I could, and for your assurance when the time was right, that I was ready. Thank you for the consistently immediate answers to every question. Early mornings. Evenings. Weekends. Although we were physically a distance away, you have simply always been there. I will never forget, nor stop appreciating the time and energy you have invested in me. You have my deepest gratitude.

I would also like to thank Dr. Kory Floyd of Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona. I began studying affectionate expression many years ago. It was a relatively new area of research, and one
scholar seemed to either author every article I read, or his work appeared in them. When I started my journey in the study of affection, I wrote him. I emailed someone I’d never met from a university across the nation, someone whose life’s work I studied and admired. Someone I considered a ‘guru’ in the field of affection studies. I wrote on a wing and a prayer, hoping he might agree to share a comment about my work or perhaps a few reflections with me if time would allow. Little did I expect you, Dr. Floyd. Little did I expect this. Yet here we are today. I am so moved by your thoughtfulness and generosity in sharing your time and expertise with me, but not only that. You’ve shared so much more. Encouragement along the way. The best of wishes and so much support. You’ve shared a part of who you are and I so genuinely and deeply appreciate you. I look forward to meeting you someday in person.

I also thank you, Dr. Teresa Ostler, for agreeing to be such an integral part of this dissertation experience. I appreciate so much the special insight you have brought to this qualitative inquiry. Thank you for your input, constructive comments, and the many kind offers of assistance you have shared with me. It seems on journeys such as this, that every smidgen of support becomes magnified in the heart. You may never realize how special your words of encouragement were to me. Nor how touched I was by your warm, gentle reminders that you were still there if I needed you. This continues to mean so much to me.

I have such gratitude as well for you, Dr. Douglas C. Smith. The kindness of others should never be forgotten. I will never forget needing someone to be a part of my committee with little time to spare, and finding no success. And then I wrote to you. I was amazed by the immediacy of your reply and the lighthearted way you accepted my petition for assistance. I learned a short time later that you were also working on being tenured at the time, which is often a monumental task. I would have never known, as your warm, pleasant demeanor reflected nothing but a generous willingness to help. You are inspiring. I was overwhelmed with emotion then, and I continue to be moved by your kindness. I thank you for your insights shared, and the wise and practical suggestions you’ve offered. I hope someday to be able to ‘pay it forward’ and do for someone what you’ve done for me.

I also especially thank the Dean, faculty, staff and students of the School of Social Work for all of
your varied contributions that prepared me for such an endeavor. I thank professors who have worked with me in the past. I thank Dr. Mary K. Eamon, for your encouragement and persistence in the midst of my discouragement. Not only were you astute and helpful, but incredibly efficient. I thank you Dr. Min Zhan, for your encouragement and assistance as our PhD Program Director. I won't soon forget the warm way you welcomed me back to campus and shared of your time with Gary and me. What may seem small things often mean so much. I would also be remiss if I didn't acknowledge someone who has assisted me in many ways throughout the years. Thank you much, Ms. Cheryl Street. How you manage to manage so much, and in the kind way you do, is inspiring. I appreciate all of your efforts on my behalf.

The study also would not have been completed without the support and assistance of my colleagues in Indiana. I especially thank my supervisor at Harbor Light Hospice, Dr. Amy G. Adams, RN, PhD for the generous way you've shared your time, energy and your expertise in examining the data and serving as a rater in the study. Without hesitation, you agreed to work with me. I don't take such kindness lightly. Also Amy, I cannot thank you enough for your many kindnesses and incredible understanding of my taking an approximate month off from work to complete this. In the hurriedness of moments, I didn't always think ahead to seek time off in advance. Yet, you understood. You always understood. Thank you for your thoughtfulness, your help, and for being who you are to so many of us. I simply could not have completed this without your warmhearted spirit and support. I appreciate you deeply and I could never forget all you have done for me.

I also wish to thank my friends and family at Harbor Light Hospice for caring for my patients when I was unable to, and for the many hugs, kind wishes and thoughts of encouragement. You all mean so much.

I would be remiss if I didn't thank our friends at Cummins, Incorporated. Having spent a lot of time there, I realize you are wonderful people to know. I was nonetheless, so touched by the immediate response and outpouring of help from so many of you when Gary simply emailed, "I need your help with a project for my wife." Because you cared, and because of your generosity of time and spirit, Cummins
employees comprised half of the couples in the study. Words escape me to adequately describe my appreciation. Thank you.

I must also thank a few other special people in our lives. You've been supportive, encouraging. You've been company. Welcome distractions. You've been friends. You've been family. You've understood when I was MIA. You've been wonderful. So thank you, Shankar and Rukmani, Anthony and Judy, Tyson and Rachel, Nathan and Kara, all of our friends at BCRCF, but especially Russ and Leslie, Dave and Donnie, Jim and Steve. Rachel, the scriptural texts and words of encouragement brought such light. Thank you.

Finally, with heartfelt appreciation and gratitude, I thank the husbands and wives who cared enough to allow a stranger in your homes, with whom you shared your time, energy, your private feelings and innermost pains. You shared stories, paradigms and perspectives so truthfully, bravely, and generously with me, and with many this research may assist. For your kindness and insight, I thank you. I wish for each of you peace, love and light. Many blessings.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................................................... xi

LIST OF FIGURES .......................................................................................................................................... xii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................................................... 8

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .................................................................................................. 38

CHAPTER 4: DEFINING AFFECTIONATE EXPRESSION: CONSTRUCTIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS .......... 91

CHAPTER 5: AFFECTION EXPRESSED: THE EXPERIENCE OF AFFECTION ........................................... 103

CHAPTER 6: SATISFACTION & DIVORCE: WITH ETHNOCULTURAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS ................................................................................................................................. 119

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION ............................................................................................................................. 153

REFERENCES .................................................................................................................................................. 174

APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE ........................................................................................ 185

APPENDIX B: EXPRESSIONS OF AFFECTION IN MARRIAGE QUESTIONNAIRE (EAMQ) ..................... 187

APPENDIX C: MUSICAL EXERCISE SURVEY ............................................................................................. 196

APPENDIX D: RESEARCH JOURNAL SUMMARY SAMPLE .......................................................................... 198

APPENDIX E: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL ........................................................................ 203
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Measurement of Household Income................................................................. 53
Table 2: Participants by Age............................................................................................ 55
Table 3: Participants by Occupation, Education and Income.......................................... 55
Table 4: Demographics Overview ................................................................................. 57
Table 5: Defining Affectionate Expression/Thematic Summary ....................................... 95
Table 6: Demonstrations of Affection & Satisfaction Frequencies.................................... 121
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Outline of Literature Review</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hypothesized Association Between Variables</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Diagram of Hill’s ABC-X Theory of Family Stress</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Human Needs</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Proposed Categories of Participants</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>My Home: A Research Setting</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Research Setting: Bessie’s View</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Musical Exercise Survey Example</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Remuneration</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Interrater Remuneration</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Defining Affectionate Expression/Coding Process</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>General Descriptions of Affectionate Expression - Emergent Themes</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Making Spouses Feel Good about Themselves</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ways Spouses Were Shown Affection</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Conceptual Model - Affectionate Expression in Marriage</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Perceptions of Satisfaction and Considerations of Divorce</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The Absence of Ethnocultural and Socioeconomic Difference</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Spousal Satisfaction with Affectionate Expression</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“You know the reason the Beatles made it so big? “I Wanna Hold Your Hand.” First single... brilliant. Perhaps the most... brilliant song ever written. Because they nailed it. That’s what everyone wants. Not 24/7... sex. Not a marriage that lasts a hundred years. Not a Porsche... or a million-dollar crib. No. They wanna hold your hand. Every single successful love song of the past fifty years can be traced back to ‘I Wanna Hold Your Hand.’ And every single successful love story has those unbearable and unbearably exciting moments of hand-holding” – David Levithan, Nick & Norah’s Infinite Playlist (2006).

Social scientists consider affection to be an essential human need, and it is included in multiple typologies of fundamental needs. Baumeister and Leary (1995) share the observation that people have a powerful, pervasive, and nearly universal need to be loved.

Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs corroborates these notions. This theory, explicating the fundamental needs of people, contends that after humans meet basic or physiological needs, they seek to satisfy higher growth needs; and higher needs only come into focus when all of the needs that are lower on the hierarchy are satisfied. One such need is for affection. In the absence of this element, Maslow suggests, individuals may become susceptible to loneliness, social anxiety, and clinical depression (Maslow, 1943). Further, he suggests that the need for love is essential before one can achieve a sense of self-worth.

When people are asked about what makes their lives meaningful, what contributes to their happiness, and what they value, they frequently identify close relationships (Perlman & Vangelisti, 2006). Also, when they are asked to rank their life goals, having a happy marriage is included as one of the top two on the majority of lists (Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Because marital relationships influence people’s quality of life uniquely, as no other relationship can (Whisman, Sheldon & Goering, 2000), and because marriage may have a positive or negative impact on people’s lives (e.g., being healthy or unhealthy), the quality of marriage is of interest to scholars. Researchers have historically explored differences between high and low quality marriages, mostly focusing on negative aspects of married life. In the past couple of decades, however, there has been a shift in the literature toward acknowledging positive aspects as well. One particular focus has been on what couples can do to sustain and enrich their relationships, and the use of relational maintenance.
strategies and behaviors is endorsed (Ogolsky, 2007; Stafford, 2003).

Relational maintenance strategies and behaviors are actions that couples use to maintain and enhance the quality of their bonds, thereby increasing the stability of their relationships (Dindia, 2000). Research indicates that maintenance behaviors help to promote relational resilience as they not only help to prevent relationships from deteriorating, but they also aid in restoring those that have experienced decline (Dindia & Baxter, 1987). It has further been shown that couples who do not engage in maintenance strategies are more likely to de-escalate or terminate their relationships (Guerrero, Eloy, & Wabnik, 1993).

The expression of affection is one type of relational maintenance behavior that is identified in the literature as being positively associated with marital quality (Schramm, Marshall, Harris, & Lee, 2005; Canary, Stafford, Hause, & Wallace, 1993; Dindia, 1989; Ogolsky, 2007; Stafford, 2003), and it has been heralded as the most influential marital interaction (Dainton, 1998). Satisfaction with received affection has been linked to perceptions of love and liking in marriage (Bulanda & Brown, 2007), and inversely associated with divorce (Doss, Simpson, & Christenson, 2004).

**Statement of the Problem**

Families are a cornerstone of society, as they play a central role in life; creating identities, economies, homes, and security for people. Families are also a crucial source of solidarity for kinship relationships and generations, offering purpose, love, and development to their members.

A strong family unit is the bedrock of a healthy society, and the government depends on the intact family for societal outcomes, such as diminished dependence on welfare programs, out-of-wedlock births, and increased high school education, et cetera (Potrykus & Fagan, 2013). Because healthy marriages provide benefits on an interpersonal, community, and societal level, marriage is a focus of public policy.

One disappointing long-term trend affecting American families is the elevated rate of marital disruption. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2005), roughly 40%-50% of marriages will end in divorce within the first 15 years.
Excessive rates of divorce have long been a major social and economic problem in this country. It is estimated that divorce costs the U.S. Government over $33 billion per year (Utah Commission on Marriage, 2005), and negative outcomes of marital dissolution are extensive. Such outcomes include declines in overall well-being for adults and children, social instability, the feminization of poverty, fatherlessness, diminished emotional support from parents, and the increased prevalence of mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, with associated pathologies (Amato, 2000; Schramm, 2003; Bierman, Fazio, & Milkie, 2006; Amato & Previti, 2003). Divorce rates have been likened to an epidemic (McDermott, Fowler, & Christakis, 2009) and given its destructive outcomes, there is a need for marital enhancement intervention for couples.

Notably, nine out of ten Americans believe that a happy marriage is one of the most important aspects of life (Carroll & Doherty, 2003), and seven out of ten Americans believe that marriage should be a lifelong commitment (Waite & Gallagher, 2000); thus supporting the notion that the majority of Americans are motivated to have healthy, sustained marriages. But such desire is not reflected in statistics of marital outcomes. The need for intervention for married couples is further illustrated by the results of a national survey that showed that the most frequently cited causes of acute emotional distress were relationship problems including divorce, separation, and other marital strains (Swindle et al., 2000).

The Federal government recognizes the benefits of healthy marriages and has appropriated millions of dollars for healthy marriage initiatives. Although proponents of marital intervention continue to lobby for more extensive marriage education programs, the effectiveness of these programs is debatable and future federal funding for them may be contested and uncertain (Gosier, 2012). As well, while various approaches to couple therapy demonstrate some degree of effectiveness in reducing relationship distress during treatment, a substantial percentage (e.g., approximately one-third) of couples fail to show significant improvement. Also, in only about 50% of therapeutic interventions do both married partners show significant improvement in martial satisfaction by the termination of treatment. Perhaps more disheartening, it is not uncommon for 30% to 60% of couples to demonstrate
significant deterioration when assessed two years or more after treatment (Snyder, Castellani, & Whisman, 2006).

Scholars of process research have evaluated couple-based treatment and have concluded that research on couple therapy should focus beyond the impact of the initial treatment to identify the individual, relationship, and treatment factors that contribute to deterioration or relapse, and identify effective measures to minimize these effects (Johnson, 2002).

This study similarly proposes further that research should be conducted to identify treatment factors that have been shown to be effective in mitigating marital distress, and that these specific components should be emphasized in treatment approaches. There is currently a small number of couple therapy approaches that are recognized by the American Psychological Association as being either well established (i.e., behavioral couple therapy, or TBCT), or efficacious (i.e., emotion focused therapy, or EFT). Some scholars have recommended that clinicians diversify their repertoire of treatment options (Shadish & Baldwin, 2003), but this study urges the need for a more extensive study of process research and the application of empirically-based outcomes to treatment strategies; and suggests the consideration of affectionate communication as one such strategy.

Also, given some less than impressive long-term outcomes that are associated with traditional marital therapy approaches, this study suggests the need for empirically-based efficacious components of couple therapy that focus on emotion (Snyder & Whisman, 2004), as emotion-based approaches have demonstrated more efficacious outcomes than behavioral- or cognitive-based treatment in effecting long-term change in couple therapy. In every comparison investigation of traditional behavioral treatment approaches and emotion-based approaches, emotional-based approaches demonstrate better outcomes.

This study recommends the investigation of affectionate expression as one such emotion-based strategy for multiple reasons. Not only has the expression of affection been shown to be positively associated with marital quality and inversely related to divorce (Schramm, Marshall, Harris, & Lee, 2005; Canary, Stafford, Hause, & Wallace, 1993; Dindia, 1989; Ogolsky, 2007; Stafford, 2003; Doss,
Simpson, & Christenson, 2004), but multiple studies have identified a lack of affection or a desire for increased affection as a reason that couples seek therapy (Doss, Thum, Sevier, Atkins, & Christensen, 2005; Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997). As well, research has shown that expressing one’s emotions with a loved one can facilitate the process of understanding, which may also lead to increased levels of communication and marital satisfaction (Gottman & Silver, 1999). This study therefore questions the lack of attention that has been focused on affectionate expression in marital research. In spite of its noted efficacy among couples in minimizing distress (Bell, Daly & Gonzalez, 1987) and the fact that affectionate expression has been lauded as the most influential marital interaction (Dainton, 1998), researchers have not yet begun to scratch the surface of its usefulness in therapy. In fact, this scholar has not located one study that recommends such exploration. This study, therefore posits the need for a more extensive study of affectionate expression as a potential catalyst to marital enhancement, and encourages the consideration of affectionate expression in discourse about and investigations of efficacious marital therapy.

Affectionate expression in marriage has been heralded as the most influential marital interaction (Dainton, 1998), and a plethora of research supports this claim. One rationale for studying the expression of affection is its benefits to relationships. The expression of affection has been positively associated with happiness, life satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction (Floyd, 2002; Floyd, 2006). Research has shown that couples who are more affectionate tend to be more happy and satisfied in their relationships (Gulledge, Gulledge, & Stahmann, 2003) and are more adaptive to chronic stressors (Floyd, Hesse, & Haynes (2007). Further, frequent affectionate behavior has been positively associated with martial satisfaction and negatively associated with the perceived likelihood of divorce (Dew and Wilcox, 2011).

Since evidence suggests that the expression of affection is positively related to marital quality and inversely associated with divorce, because multiple studies have identified a lack of affection or a desire for increased affection as a reason that couples seek therapy (Doss, Thum, Sevier, Atkins, & Christensen, 2005; Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997), and because scholars have expressed a need for
more effective and innovative interventions for couples, this study argues that the benefits that are associated with affectionate expression may be relevant and provocative enough that they should be included in forthcoming therapeutic investigation. Consistent with other scholarship, this study also urges the need for the consideration of affectionate expression in marriage among diverse ethnocultural and socioeconomic groups (Christensen et al., 2004), as virtually every recent review of couple therapy research has criticized the lack of findings that are relevant across ethnocultural groups.

Further, the field of social work has long endorsed the importance of research and practice with cultural competence. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW; 2013) suggests that while helping professionals “have a long way to go to gain cultural competence,” social workers are ahead of the curve in the development of standards that promote culturally competent services to diverse clientele. This study intends to further this goal and reflects on ethnocultural and socioeconomic difference. It is posited that as efforts are made to understand and support diverse groups of married couples, the investigation of affectionate expression and such difference may be a worthwhile endeavor.

**Significance of the Study**

By and large, there has been a limited focus on affectionate expression in marriage in the literature and it remains unclear how expressions of affection are pragmatically shared and perceived among married couples and the level of importance it holds for them. This study was conducted with the intention that insight might be generated to inform the consideration of affectionate expression as a component of therapeutic intervention. Specifically, it is an effort to establish groundwork on affectionate expression in marriage, exploring ways married couples understand affection, their satisfaction with it, and ways it affects the quality of their relationships. The second overarching question that this study posed is whether diverse groups (e.g., ethnocultural and/or socioeconomic) express affection in distinctive ways. As marital scholars investigate ways that relationships are maintained, such variation should be included in the exploration, and interventions be adaptive to diverse needs.
Organization of the Book

Chapter 1, the Introduction, contains the foundation for the study, including a statement of the issue and the significance of this endeavor. Chapter 2, the Literature Review, is an analytical synthesis and evaluation of scholarship related to affectionate expression in marriage which contextualizes the perceptions and experiences of married couples with it. Chapter 3 delineates the research questions, the hypotheses, and theoretical underpinnings that support the study. The Research Methodology chapter also provides a descriptive overview of the research design and process, and a discussion of its trustworthiness. Chapter 4, Defining Affectionate Expression: Constructions and Descriptions, explores the ways in which married individuals generally define affectionate expression, irrespective of their personal marital situation, and offers, from the voices of participants, a working definition of how affectionate expression is conceptualized in this study. Chapter 5, Affection Expressed: The Experience of Affection may be considered the heart of this investigation as it focuses on specific ways spouses show affection to their husbands or wives, and ways they receive and interpret it. The effect of affectionate expression on relationship quality is explored in Chapter 6, Satisfaction and Divorce: With Ethnocultural and Socioeconomic Considerations, as spousal satisfaction and the impact it has on marital dissolution is discussed. Additionally, each of the prior topics are examined through a cultural lens and reflected on as ethnocultural and socioeconomic difference is considered. Chapter 7 concludes the book by describing the perceptions and experiences of these married couples with affectionate expression, and integrating the study’s findings with existing literature in the field. The Discussion chapter reflects on the strengths and limitations of the research, as well as implications for policy and practice, and suggests directions for future inquiry.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This study suggests that given (1) the prevalence of marital dissolution in the United States, and disheartening predictions for the future; (2) the evidence that a lack of affection is a common issue among couples who seek treatment; (3) the increasing number of studies generally touting the benefits of affectionate expression in marriage; (4) calls in the field for diversified and innovative therapy approaches of marital intervention; (5) the efficacy of couple intervention that emphasizes the importance of emotion as an agent of change, and the potential applicability of affectionate expression in emotion-based approaches, there is a need for a deeper investigation of affectionate expression among married couples. The outcomes of such study may render the expression of affection worthy of consideration in discourse about or investigations of marital therapy. Affectionate expression may arguably serve as a component within another therapeutic approach or in the establishment of an innovative intervention. This study further posits that the exploration of ethnocultural and socioeconomic difference would be a worthwhile endeavor in such investigations.

The proposed study is intended to serve as a platform upon which subsequent investigations may be constructed. In order to accomplish this, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the ways that married couples perceive and experience affectionate expression, the level of importance that dyads attach to it, and specific ways that it correlates with marital quality. The purpose of this study is to expand our knowledge base about these concepts.

Hence, this literature review will support the conceptual framework and purpose of this study by including an operationalization of relevant terminology, a discussion of the benefits of affectionate expression in marriage, a review of extant literature on affectionate expression in marriage, a description of empirically-based therapies that are considered efficacious, the argument that emotion-based therapies are more effective at effecting change in distressed marriages, with empirical evidence to support it, and a concluding rationale for the supposition that affectionate expression in marriage...
should be further explored (See Figure 1). Additionally, in accord with the call in the field of social work for cultural understanding and practice with sensitivity, this proposal will encourage the investigation of affectionate expression among diverse ethnocultural and socioeconomic groups.

**FIGURE 1. Outline of Literature Review**

---

**Operationalization of Terminology**

One of the complexities of research is that scholars have used varying conceptions of terminology in the literature, which may result in definitions that are variable and ambiguous, providing significant limitations to scholarship. This study will attempt to avoid such risk by describing potentially ambiguous terminology.

**Relational Maintenance**

The use of the term maintenance *strategy* suggests that an individual is deliberately engaged in an action or behavior to achieve a desired end. Relational maintenance *behavior* is more widely studied in the literature and it typically refers to both strategic activity and routine interaction that occurs at a lower level of consciousness; actions that are not necessarily exercised as an intention to maintain a relationship. For example, a woman may clean her home as a general task of things that she wants to do, without intending to strengthen positive feelings among family members, but her action might also serve a maintenance function (Dainton & Stafford, 1993). Hereinafter in this paper, relational maintenance behavior will refer to both strategic and routine interaction.

A review of extant literature has identified several operationalizations of relational
maintenance, with the most basic being an effort to keep relationships in existence (Canary & Dainton, 2006; Dindia & Canary, 1993). They have also been conceptualized as actions or efforts to enhance relationships, and/or to keep them in a preferred state or condition (Reiter & Gee, 2008; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2008). For purposes of this study, relational maintenance strategies and behaviors are actions or efforts that enhance relationships and/or keep them in satisfactory condition.

Empirical research has yielded a minimal number of typologies of relational maintenance behaviors over time (Dindia, 1989; Guerrero, Eloy, & Wabnik, 1993); with the most frequently cited list having been established and validated by Stafford and Canary (1991). This particular typology continues to dominate maintenance research, and it characterizes relational maintenance as involving positivity (being cheerful and supportive), openness (discussing the nature of the relationship), social networks (involving friends and family), sharing of tasks (doing one's share of the responsibilities), and assurances (stressing one's love and commitment). In a subsequent effort to derive a more exhaustive taxonomy of maintenance behaviors, Canary and Stafford (1992) conducted additional research and identified behaviors that mirrored their 1991 typology, with a few being novel. This typology included more specific descriptions of behaviors (e.g., engaging in joint activities, engaging in humor, and the exchange of cards, letters, and telephone calls). Since that time, every list of relational maintenance behavior has practically mirrored the Stafford and Canary (1991) typology, and included the identification of a few additional behaviors (Stafford, Dainton, & Haas, 2000; Dainton, 2008).

Noteworthy, although the phraseology, "affectionate expression" was not specifically delineated in the aforementioned typologies of maintenance behaviors, descriptions of affectionate behavior are embedded within them. Hence, this paper presumes the inclusion of affectionate expression within conceptions of relational maintenance in the literature. For example, Dindia (1989) described relational maintenance behavior as being characterized by three types of strategies (e.g., romantic, pro-social, and antisocial), and he described romantic behaviors as being fun, spontaneous, and affectionate. Such associations between the term affectionate expression and these behaviors are empirically noted in the literature.
Affection & the Expression of It

The expression of affection is one type of relational maintenance behavior that is identified in the literature (Schramm, Marshall, Harris, & Lee, 2005; Canary, Stafford, Hause, & Wallace, 1993; Dindia, 1989). Affection has been defined as a tender feeling of fondness or liking (Oxford University Press, 2012), and an internal state of positive, often intimate regard for another (Floyd & Voloudakis, 1999). Affectionate expression is the communication of such feeling (Floyd et al., 2005).

Expressions of affection may be verbal or non-verbal, direct or indirect, and deliberate or inadvertent. An expression of affection may be anything that is said to or about someone; or done to, with, or for a person that might cause him or her to feel encouraged, loved, or validated. Verbal expressions might include saying “I love you”, sharing verbal support of a partner’s goals, complimenting a prepared meal, or expressing admiration about a loved one. Touch, which includes cuddling, hugging, kissing or holding hands is an example of a non-verbal expression of affection, as are acts of service, the sharing of one’s resources, e.g., tangible one such as finances, or intangible ones such as time or energy.

Twardosz, Schwartz, Fox, & Cunningham (1979) observed and identified four categories of affectionate behavior: (1) active affectionate physical contact such as kissing, hugging, and patting; (2) passive affectionate physical contact such as sitting on a lap; (3) affectionate words, involving verbal communications of love, friendship, or praise; and (4) smiling and laughing. Such categories were beneficial to the field, in that affectionate behavior was operationalized, but these scholars employed observational methods alone in the inquiry, hence the types of affection identified may be limited.

Further, emphasizing the difference between affection and affectionate communication, Floyd (2006) has noted that it is possible to feel affection and not express it, as well as to insincerely or dishonestly express feelings that do not exist, e.g., to engender favor or support, to initiate sexual interaction, or to be polite. Understanding the distinction between affection and affectionate communication may be a valuable component in couples’ intervention, as the demonstration or delineation of feelings by a partner may positively influence the perceptions and satisfaction of the
receiving partner. It appears that affection felt, but unexpressed may not be discerned as such, and that partners may not reap benefits from the undisclosed feelings.

Similarly, misconceptions may occur as indirect relational maintenance strategies are utilized. For example, I pondered the fact that my husband used to spend time assisting a recently widowed older neighbor with repairs and maintenance around her home. I attributed his behavior to the fact that he has a good heart and because he is the go-to guy for home maintenance for many of our friends, I assumed that he just wanted to help, and I was proud of him. Nearly a year later while traveling out of town, my husband initiated a conversation and asked, "Do you wonder why I was helping JoAnn so much?" His answer surprised me. He continued, "Because they say that what goes around comes around and I hope karma is right on this one. I hope that when I am gone, that it happens; that someone will be here to help you." My initial assessment about his behavior was not ascribed as affection for me, although his efforts were an indirect expression of it. With the communication of his rationale, both he and I were able to reap associated benefits of the expressed affection.

In summary, loving relationships contribute to human well-being, and the literature corroborates the widely held observation by Maslow and a number of other scholars, that the expression of affection is an essential human need; and that as a relational maintenance behavior, it may help to promote relational resilience. Although affectionate expression is only implicitly indicated in a few relational maintenance typologies, it stands to reason that since forms of affectionate expression mirror the ways that such maintenance behaviors are commonly understood, affectionate expression warrants inclusion in general discussions and investigations about relational maintenance behavior. Perhaps more importantly, this paper proposes the need for the exploration and construction, specifically, of a typology of affectionate expression.

**Benefits of Affectionate Expression**

One rationale for studying the expression of affection is its benefits to human relationships, as well its positive effects on the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of individuals.
**Psychosocial Benefits**

A robust amount of literature establishes that psychological benefits are associated with the expression and receipt of affection. For example, affectionate expression is positively related to happiness, life satisfaction, and healthy self-esteem (Floyd, 2002; Floyd, 2006). Studies have also shown that the expression of affection reduces psychological distress (Russek et al., 1998) and the susceptibility to psychosomatic illness (Komisaruk & Whipple, 1998); and it is inversely related to depression (Oliver, Raftery, Reeb, & Delaney, 1993), some damaging effects of stress (Floyd, 2002), and loneliness (Downs & Javidi, 1990). Affectionate expression has also been shown to enhance social functioning in interpersonal relationships. For example, it has been shown to be inversely related to alcohol abuse, and physical aggression in families (Shuntich, Loh, & Katz, 1998).

As it relates to romantic relationships, not only does affectionate expression serve a critical function in the initiation and maintenance of them (Floyd, Mikkelsen, Hesse, & Pauley, 2007), but studies have shown that it is positively related to relational satisfaction (Floyd, 2006). Findings of an empirical investigation by Gulledge, Gulledge, & Stahmann (2003), for example, indicated that couples who were more affectionate, were more happy and satisfied in their relationships than couples who were less affectionate.

Overall, psychosocial benefits of affectionate expression are well-documented and it is acclaimed for its ability to enhance, transform, and maintain close relationships.

**Physical and Physiological Benefits**

One exciting development in the study of affectionate expression is its focus on physiological benefits. The study of affectionate expression is a fairly recent endeavor, with the study of its physiological correlates being more novel. Often, concepts such as love and affection tend to be difficult to quantify outside of self-report, which makes the increasing amount of quantifiable medical research in this area refreshing. The study of physiological responses to affectionate stimuli diminishes reliance on participants' perception, record-keeping, and self-report, as each of these generate challenges to validity and limitations in research.
Although researchers have studied the ways that hormones affect human behavior since the 1950s, the physiological benefits that are associated with affectionate expression have not been widely recognized. This field of study is, however, growing and associated benefits are becoming more established in the literature, as social scientists have focused attention on biological connections to love in human beings.

During interpersonal interactions, an array of undetected biological events (e.g., hormonal responses) occur, and psychophysicologists study these responses to social interactions to better understand the effects of behavior on the body, and to gain insight on cognition, affect, and other internal states that individuals may be either unable or unwilling to articulate in research studies (Vanman et al., 1996).

For example, oxytocin, a hormone that is produced in the hypothalamus and acts as a neurotransmitter in the brain, binds to oxytocin receptors and influences behavior and physiology. It has become well-accepted among scholars that oxytocin is stimulated by affectionate expression, such as hand-holding, hugging, massaging, and cuddling (Holt-Lunstad, Birmingham, & Light, 2008). Further, researchers have explored the effects of oxytocin on psychological functioning and deemed it the “feel good” and “love” hormone (Barraza et al., 2011), postulating that the release of oxytocin may be correlated with the formation and maintenance of human relationships.

Grewen and colleagues conducted several studies on the effects of affectionate contact with partners on blood pressure and hormone levels. One study measured the relationship between warm social and physical contact among cohabitating couples and blood pressure reactivity to stress. Couples in the experimental group engaged in handholding, watching a romantic video, and hugging prior to being exposed to a stress-inducing situation (e.g., a public speaking task), while couples in the control group rested quietly for the same duration of time. Results indicated that couples who engaged in warm contact prior to the stressful event had lower blood pressure and heart rate increases than those who didn't (Grewen et al., 2003), thus offering support for the notion that expressions of affection generate physiological benefits.
Although close relationships have the ability to enhance well-being, they are also capable of causing harm (e.g., outcomes of dysfunctional relationships). Hence one focus of affectionate research has been on physiological responses to stress in relationships. It is noted that the expression of affection does not necessarily solve problems in relationships, but it enhances people’s ability to cope with stress, which in turn may reinforce their ability to deal with relational issues (Floyd, 2006).

Research has shown, and it is widely accepted that stressful relationships can increase the risk of cardiovascular problems, and a good amount of psychophysiological research on personal relationships includes measurements of heart rate and blood pressure (Loving, Heffner, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2006). Grounded by affection exchange theory, Floyd, Hesse, & Haynes (2007) conducted a study, surmising that individuals who are highly affectionate would be more adaptive to chronic stressors than those who are less affectionate. The findings indicated that expressed affection may, in fact, influence the physiological stress response, thereby suggesting the possibility that interventions that are designed to increase affectionate behavior may have stress-ameliorating physiological effects.

While various studies conducted at the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami corroborate the notion that the expression of affection – specifically touch, lowers the output of cortisol, thus minimizing stress (Field, 2004), Floyd, Mikkelsen, Hesse, & Pauley (2007) further note that it may not be necessary for couples to physically touch or to audibly verbalize affection to reap physiological benefits. In two separate investigations where the experimental groups were instructed to write affectionately about a loved one and the control groups wrote generally about their lives, it was shown that after 25 days that individuals in the experimental groups showed a significant reduction in cholesterol. Amongst other limitations in this study (e.g., homogeneity, with 78% of participants being Caucasian and each of them being college students), participants were instructed to write to a person who was significant in their lives, and writings were comprised for friends, relatives, and romantic partners. This serves as a weakness only as it relates to the study of affectionate expression in marriage, as researchers didn’t identify the percentages of participants that wrote to specific types of loved ones. Researchers examined the linguistic features of the experimental groups’ writing and found that
cholesterol reductions were greater in those who wrote directly to a loved one, as opposed to those who wrote in the third person about them. As well, it was noted that merely thinking about a loved one, without expressing the associated feelings, did not engender the same stress-reducing benefits. So, in spite of its limitations, the contribution of this research is significant in that it not only illustrated the benefits of affectionate expression on providers of it, but it also demonstrated the effect that a brief, affectionately expressed writing activity may have on human physiology (e.g., cholesterol), and the fact that affectionate thoughts alone (e.g., without expression) may not engender the same benefit.

The aforementioned studies contribute significantly to a growing understanding of how the expression of affection may enhance, not only self-reports of mental and emotional well-being, but also observable outcomes of physical health.

Notably, however, in spite of this growing body of provocative research supporting the merits of affectionate expression, this scholar has found no study to date that provides a comprehensive exploration of affectionate expression in marriage. This proposed study is intended to establish a foundation of understanding about the ways that marital dyads express and experience affection, using the voices of couples, with the expectation that this gap in research will subsequently be bridged.

**Affectionate Expression, Marital Quality and Divorce**

For many people, marriage begins as a source of satisfaction and fulfillment, but ends in frustration and despair. Scholars have long pondered how perceptions of marriage change to become less satisfying and stable over time.

This question may be grounded by social exchange theory, which is the most cited theoretical perspective in research on marriage. Proponents of social exchange theory consider stability and change to be a process of negotiated exchange, or a type of cost-benefit analysis between individuals that involves reciprocity, or the giving and taking, and denial of tangible and intangible resources, such as affection and respect. According to this theory, social behavior is the result of an exchange process, the purpose of which is to maximize benefits and minimize costs. Individuals are believed to add or subtract ‘points’ for the amount of effort he or she puts into a relationship versus how much his or her
significant other is contributing. When costs associated with the relationship outweigh rewards, it is suggested that people will likely abandon or terminate their relationships (Chibucos, Leite, & Weis, 2005).

As spouses make decisions about the quality of their bonds, affectionate expression within the marriage may serve as a reward or a cost. In a high quality marriage, for example, the tenor of the relationship may be perceived as a reward. In a low quality union, the nature of the relationship may weigh in as a cost, thereby rendering dissolution more attractive. As well, although a myriad of variables affect the decision to divorce, research has shown that expressing one's emotions with a loved one can, in fact, facilitate the process of understanding, which in turn can lead to increased levels of communication and marital satisfaction” (Gottman & Silver, 1999).

From an interpersonal to a societal level, a variety of factors have been shown to advance marital dissolution, and a few have been found to deter it. Marital quality, for example, not only gauges the dynamics of a marriage, but it is a significant predictor of overall happiness and well-being, and it is inversely associated with the risk of divorce (Durodoye, 1997). Marital research has identified numerous relational maintenance strategies that enhance marital quality; one of which is affectionate expression.

Affectionate expression is esteemed as a relational maintenance behavior that is positively associated with marital quality (Ogolsky, 2007; Stafford, 2003) and inversely associated with divorce (Doss, Simpson, & Christenson, 2004). Based on extant literature, this study asserts, a priori, the associations between relational maintenance behaviors (RMB), affectionate expression (AE), marital quality (MQ), and marital disruption (MD). Figure 2 (below) illustrates this premise that is inherent in this study.

An ample amount of support for this notion exists in the literature, with perhaps the earliest scholarship offered by Waller (1938), a pioneer in marital studies. Waller suggested that divorce is precipitated by the erosion of loving feelings and the waning of dyadic affection. Other scholars have noted that marital well-being is closely tied to spousal perceptions that their partners value them and
Associations Between Variables?

- ↑ RMB = ↑ MQ
- AE = RMB
- Hence, ↑ AE = ↑ MQ
- ↑ MQ = ↓ MD
- Hence, ↑ AE = ↓ MD

Hypothesized Associations Between Variables?

- ↑ RMB = ↑ MQ
- AE = RMB
- Hence, ↑ AE = ↑ MQ
- ↑ MQ = ↓ MD
- Hence, ↑ AE = ↓ MD

Figure 2. Hypothesized Associations Between Variables

demonstrate this verbally and physically (Oggins, Veroff, & Leber, 1993). Ayers (1983) further noted that relationships are maintained via actions that sustain the stability of dyadic satisfaction, and research shows that a spouse who receives the type of love that he or she desires has higher levels of marital satisfaction than a spouse who does not (Keithley, 2000).

Empirical scholarship on marriage supports this idea as well. For example, Dew and Wilcox (2011) conducted a study involving 3,146 married individuals to determine if spouses who engage in small acts of kindness and share frequent expressions of affection in their marriages, enjoy a better marital quality. These acts were further described as behaviors that go beyond common marital obligations and those that were designed to nurture the good of the marital relationship, or of one's spouse. Researchers measured the frequency of these behaviors, participants' perceptions regarding marital satisfaction, and their divorce likelihood. The study's findings confirmed their hypothesis that frequent affectionate behavior would be positively associated with marital satisfaction and negatively associated with the perceived likelihood of divorce. The researchers utilized a cross-sectional sample and cannot make claims about the directionality of effects (e.g., they cannot determine if marital quality precipitated affectionate behavior or vice-versa, or if the relationship was reciprocal). This study is nonetheless notable as an empirical study that explored the relationship between affectionate expression and marital quality, and identified a relationship with divorce.

Also, Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, and George (2001) conducted a 13-year longitudinal study, exploring dyadic change in relationships among 168 married couples, and subsequent long-term marital outcomes. Among other things, they measured the behavioral climate of the marriages, which included
a focus on dyadic expressions of affection. Their findings indicated that a year into marriage, these couples were considerably less affectionate, less approving, and less disclosing than they had been as newlyweds, and that the decline in affectionate expression was positively related to marital quality. The researchers posited that spouses who were moving toward divorce were more likely to demonstrate steep declines in affection over the first two years of marriage. Although this research, like most longitudinal studies, was affected by issues with attrition over the years, it furthered scholarly dialog about positive elements of marriage, with researchers noting that “partners in long-term happy marriages attribute the success of their marriage to enduring feelings of pleasure, comfort, emotional closeness, being cared for, and friendship;” much of which affectionate expression affords (Huston, Niehuis, & Smith, 2001, p.119).

Additionally, in an investigation about the types of problems that married couples were having, Schramm, Marshall, Harris, and Lee (2005) found that although couples perceived their self-identified problems as very serious, they reported higher levels of marital satisfaction when they were showing affection to and appreciation for one another. Unfortunately, researchers did not divulge particulars about the problem areas that participants identified, which arguably limits the study's usefulness in measuring the effect that affectionate expression has on specific problems. This study is nonetheless informative, as it demonstrates that affectionate expression may serve as a buffer between marital problems and marital satisfaction. In fact, Schramm and colleagues note that the expression of affection was among the strongest of predictors of marital satisfaction.

Indeed, correlations between affectionate expression, marital quality, and divorce have heretofore been demonstrated, but this study calls for a more extensive exploration of the meanings that couples ascribe to affectionate expression, and its perceived importance in their relationships.

**Diversity and Divergence?**

The second overarching question that this study poses is whether diverse groups (e.g., ethnocultural and socioeconomic) express and experience affection in distinctive ways. If so, this study posits that as marital scholars investigate ways that relationships are maintained, such variation should
be included in the exploration and interventions should be adaptive to diverse needs.

Dainton (2003) encourages researchers to espouse the notion that “relational maintenance is a function of, and is influenced by, varying contextual levels, and that these contextual levels are comprised of individuals, their relational system, plus larger networks and culture; each of which impacts maintenance processes” (Dainton, 2003 p. 300). Because marital interactions are products of interacting and dynamic factors, including interpersonal characteristics associated with individual partners, their history as a couple, and the broader social and cultural environment around them (Bryant et al., 2008), it seems plausible to acknowledge the possibility that diverse groups may interact with each other in distinctive ways, and demonstrate distinct interpersonal patterns.

Although cross-cultural research has shown that central aspects of self-concept vary across cultures, and racial groups may ascribe to divergent cultural norms (Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001), few studies have examined ethnocultural differences in the use of relational maintenance strategies such as affectionate expression. As well, there has been a narrow focus in the literature on the broader context surrounding marriage, despite calls for increased exploration of possible associations with social, cultural, and economic forces. Bryant et al., (2008) note that ethnicity and culture are powerful lenses through which individuals and couples construct notions of marriage and family, and that gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic factors should be further explored.

For example, in spite of similar conceptions about marriage and a desire for it among all ethnocultural groups, statistics show that fewer African Americans are married, compared with other racial and ethnic groups (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010). As well, marriage rates have fallen in a pronounced way among African Americans. Between 1970 and 2000, America witnessed the concurrent trend of diminishing marriage rates for all groups, but the largest and most dramatic decline was noted among African American women, as by 2000, more than 50% of low income black homes were headed by women (Western & Wildeman, 2009). Marriage rates among Caucasian couples dropped from 74% in 1960 to 56% in 2008. In 1960, 61% of African American adults were married, but by 2008, the percentage had dropped to 32% (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2011). Statistics show that not
only are fewer African Americans married, compared with other racial or ethnic groups (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010), but they report lower marital quality and think about divorce more than other groups (Bulanda & Brown, 2007; Faulkner, Davey, & Davey, 2005). Hence, marriages among African Americans are also more likely to experience disruption than marriages of other groups (McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000). Further, these racial differences persist even after controlling for level of education and financial resources (Bulanda & Brown, 2007; McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000). Notably, at every level of education, black women have the highest risks of marital disruption over the 15 years after they first marry (Fein, 2004).

Since the 1980’s, considerable attention has been paid to marriage rates among ethnic minorities in the literature, but in spite of poor marital outcomes among this group, the focus has been primarily on the sex ratio imbalance and the diminishing numbers of marriageable men, rather than factors that contribute to marital stability.

Edin (2000) explored the perceptions of a group of low-income women who lived in an urban area via ethnographic interviews and found that to these women, marriageability and marital preservation was perceptibly based on, among other things, their socioeconomic status and their spouse’s ability to care for the family. These women discussed dreams of living a better life, and concerns regarding the social status of lower-income, jobless men; including their lack of esteem and material resources, which limited their appeal as mates. Such views markedly align with premises inherent in social exchange theory, that when costs outweigh rewards, marital prospects and relationships may be abandoned.

Another scholar examined relational maintenance behavior with a focus on cultural and socioeconomic diversity, arguing the need for the study of African American marriages, “given that African American couples report experiencing a unique set of stressors” (Jones, 1998, p. 11).

**Marital Stressors of Disadvantaged Couples & Socioeconomic Explanations**

Reflecting on disparity among socioeconomic groups, one important supposition of this study is the notion that low income, disadvantaged couples who experience chronic stress may not share
comparable opportunities to express affection as more affluent couples. Hence, this lack of opportunity may correlate with diminished marital quality (↓ MQ) and increased marital disruption (↑ MD). If confirmed, such a claim may arguably offer a partial explanation for some disparities in marital quality and outcomes experienced by African American couples and/or couples in lower socioeconomic strata of society.

Research is replete with data about the adverse effects of chronic stress on overall well-being and on marriage (Brock & Lawrence, 2008). This study suggests that poor marital quality and high rates of divorce among some African Americans may be partially understood as a consequence of chronic stressful life circumstances. For example, research has shown that African Americans experience fewer socioeconomic opportunities, which in turn allows for increased exposure to multiple stressors (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005). Burton and Tucker (2009) assert that a major source of stress stems from limited income generation and the relegation to low-wage, intermittent employment, which often translates to transient living situations, unsafe, impoverished neighborhoods (McLoyd, Hill, & Dodge, 2005), structural constraints that may limit access to available resources (Bryant & Wickrama, 2005), higher death rates (Hayward et al., 2000), and gender role strain, as disparities in education and employment opportunities between African American men and women have led to a reliance on women as breadwinners (Wade, 1996).

The assumptions inherent in Hill’s (1949) Family Stress Theory (FST) undergird this discussion. FST involves an ABC-X model and it states that although stress disrupts equilibrium and creates an uncomfortable state for couples, this is normal and to be expected. Boss (2002) explicates that an event first occurs (A). The second step (B), involves the utilization of resources that couples use to reestablish equilibrium (i.e., behavior learned from a prior experience or coping skills learned from marital intervention). The next step (C), involves couples’ perceptions about the stressor and their ability to cope. The fourth phase of the process is (X), or the crisis. If couples are able to adapt during the period of reorganization, they will have successfully adjusted (See Figure 3 below). Applying FST to problems that couples face, it is suggested that stress results from an imbalance in demands, and when couples are
unable to balance demands, stressors pile up and it becomes increasingly difficult for dyads to adapt and return to equilibrium. Hence, marital conflict may emerge.

**Figure 3. Diagram of Hill's ABC-X Theory of Family Stress**

A key component of FST involves experiences of adversity; specifically financial strain (Conger et al., 2002). Financial strain is a particularly salient aspect of context for African American couples because they are disproportionately impoverished (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2009). Tucker's (2000) multi-city survey also found that economic problems are a prominent issue in African American divorce (p. 183) and research shows that economic factors have a direct influence on couple interactions and marital outcomes for African Americans (Cutrona et al., 2003).

Stress researchers have distinguished between chronic stressors (which persist over an extended period of time), and discrete events, such as job loss or divorce (Almeida et al., 2011). Eamon (2001) further points out that economic loss disrupts customary routines and thereby engenders stress. She further notes that chronic economic deprivation may overtax individuals and erode coping abilities.

This study conjoins these notions with those inherent in Family Stress Theory, and with Maslow’s (1943) explication of human needs to describe an idea that this study offers. That is, that in
the effort of adaptation, the expenditure of time and energy that is associated with meeting the demands of impoverished households may necessarily preclude these marital dyads from exhibiting or engaging in similar types and/or levels of affectionate expression as more affluent couples.

Maslow (1943) posits that in the hierarchy of human needs, basic needs must be met before needs of a higher order are addressed. Needs for love and affection are identified as being of a higher order than basic physical or safety needs (e.g., for air, food, shelter, warmth, sex, sleep, security, protection, order in life, and stability). Hence, Maslow contends that people who have no safe or stable place to live, food to eat, or income to rely on, may be unable to sufficiently focus on higher order needs, such as exhibiting affection to a significant other. This study acknowledges the possibility that disadvantaged couples may share similar circumstances. In other words, dealing with issues that are associated with impoverished lifestyles may leave little time, energy, or other resources available to devote to higher order needs such as expressing affection (e.g., cuddling at the end of a workday, especially if shiftwork is involved). (See Figure 4 below).

Research demonstrates commonalities among higher and lower class socioeconomic groups, as it relates to their rationales for divorce. Amato and Previti (2003) used national panel data that was collected over the course of 17 years to classify 208 individuals’ open-ended responses to a question of why their marriages ended in divorce and found, among other things, that specific reasons for divorce varied with social class. For example, individuals in lower socioeconomic groups noted the following reasons: physical or emotional abuse, neglect of home duties, gambling or criminal behaviors, financial or job problems, no sense of family, sexual problems due to health, financial problems, drinking, physical abuse, and husband’s economic non-support. Individuals in higher socioeconomic groups described the following reasons for divorce: too young at marriage, lack of communication, changes in interests or values, incompatible, commitment to work, partner self-centered, lack of love, excessive demands, personality, and value conflicts. Although these results are highly informative, the categories that responses have been divided into may arguably be broad. For instance, it would be helpful to know specifically what respondents intended by “lack of communication,” “lack of love,” “partner self-
centered,” or “personality.”

Notably, these results also appear to align themselves with Maslow’s (1943) perspective on human needs, in that individuals whose physical needs were met (i.e., higher socioeconomic

**Figure 4. A. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Human Needs**

![Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs](image)

respondents) reported having divorced because needs of a higher order were not being met. Rationales for divorce among lower socioeconomic classes involved the lack of need fulfillment in needs of a lower order (e.g., provision, security, stability, and order). Interestingly, not one disadvantaged respondent addressed a need of a higher order, such as a lack of love (or affection). Such findings are compatible
with prior research, as Goode (1956) found that higher socioeconomic status divorcees tended to report personality problems and conflict over values as reasons for divorce, whereas low status divorcees tended to report lack of economic support from their former husbands.

Such findings seem invaluable to the field of marital studies, as they provide the observation that as socioeconomic status increases, individuals are less likely to report instrumental reasons and more likely to report expressive and relationship-centered reasons for divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003). With such insight, interventions may be established that meet specific needs of diverse socioeconomic groups.

Family income and financial problems emerge in the literature as the most frequently mentioned impediment to lasting relationships by disadvantaged African American participants. Some women discussed the shame and frustration associated with having to turn to other family members and community resources because their partners are not able to support them economically, noting that they would rather “show men to the door” because “If I have to act as if I’m by myself, then I might as well be by myself.” Women also reported having little time to devote to tenuous relationships because they needed to focus on meeting basic needs (e.g., feeding and clothing their children). One respondent poignantly affirmed, “If we weren’t stressed with figuring out how to get food, we could focus on family as a unity concept” (Charles, Orthner, Jones, & Mancini, 2006).

This study therefore acknowledges the possibility that not only are disadvantaged couples negatively affected by economic constraints and stressors in and of themselves, but they may likely forfeit benefits that are associated with the expression of affection.

Incidentally, economic disadvantage appears to have less of an impact on Hispanic marriages. Although though Hispanic couples share similar economic circumstances with African Americans, they enjoy lower rates of marital dissolution. It is posited that cultural differences may influence marital outcomes among these groups, with Hispanic Americans heavily valuing marriage and family, while African Americans appear to value extended kinship relationships over spousal relationships (Bulanda & Brown, 2007).
Interestingly, although African Americans are disproportionately classified as being poor in comparison with Caucasians, research has shown that economic factors alone do not account for racial or ethnic differences in marital quality (Adelman, Chadwick, & Baerger, 1996; Broman, 1993). To date, researchers have not been able to definitively account for this distinction (Moller, 2002).

**Ethnocultural Explanations**

Reflecting further on disparities among ethnocultural groups, this study also acknowledges that ethnocultural groups may be socialized to conceptualize masculinity and femininity in distinctive ways (Hammond & Mattis, 2005), which may influence interpersonal communication and the expression of affection among diverse groups.

For example, Majors and Billson (1992) note that some symbolic manhood practices of African American males are engaged as coping mechanisms against oppression; denoting pride, strength, and control (e.g., “cool pose”). Cool pose is explicated as a ritualized expression of masculinity that involves behavior, speech, physical, and emotional posturing in an effort to demonstrate distance and superiority over outsiders, and it intends to deliver a clear message of strength and control (Majors & Billson, 1992). Gender role theorists attribute the adoption of such coping mechanisms to the inability of African American men to integrate standard traditional masculine roles into their lived realities, partly due to an inability to represent their families as providers. To compensate for feelings of inadequacy, it is believed that some African American males may have redefined masculinity as being tough and emotionally inaccessible. Major and Billson (1992) further note that such ideals are also indicative in the mannerisms, physical posture, speech, walking styles, forms of greeting, and styles of clothing of African Americans. They further note that such posturing also includes suppression of emotions, denial of vulnerability, and infidelity in relationships.

Majors and Billson (1992) further note that although these mechanisms serve a purpose for African American males, such traits and mannerisms are seldom understood or esteemed by others. Instead, they are conceptualized negatively and are often devalued by outsiders, including minority women. Hence, the person’s character may come into question, resulting in misrepresentations of who
they are, and negative consequences for them.

Such socialized stances are positioned opposite emotive qualities, such as being affectionate. Affectionate expression may often be undervalued among African American males, and it may be denigrated as “being feminine;” thereby rendering their interpersonal socialized stances as being distant and emotionally unavailable to others. For example, the question was asked in the “Cultures and Groups” Internet forum of Yahoo Answers: “Why are white men so much more affectionate than black men?”

The writer continued, “Why are black men so insensitive and uncaring? My (Caucasian) boss is always saying, “I don’t think you guys know how much I love my wife.” My white male co-workers often tell me I’m pretty, and they hug and make eye contact. A black man’s idea of a compliment is, “man, you got a nice ass!” Black men don’t hold hands and they don’t kiss on you. They don’t give non-sexual compliments at all. The guy I’m dating now is white. He touches my face a lot, and he likes to spoon half the night. When we text, he makes sure he always sends the last text. I love that…”

While such meaning-making (e.g., emotional distance) among African American men may prove beneficial in some facets of their lived experience, these traditions may arguably be unconstructive as it relates to satisfaction within their relationships.

Among other answers, one writer replied:

“I mean, just one example for me was the first time I ever wore my hair natural and picked it out so it was huge and went outside. I was so nervous! I thought people would stare at me and I was so self-conscious, but determined to show off my huge afro. So anyway, this Black guy I knew asked me if it was real, and I stood there trying to convince him that it was all my real hair, which was sad in my opinion. Then, I went to the beach and some white surfer guys asked me to take a picture for them, so I did and when I was done and handed them back their camera one guy goes ”You are beautiful!” and smiles, and his friend says ”Yeah, definitely,” and I think I blushed as much as a Black girl possibly can! It’s sad, but I’m just being honest…”

“I am Latina, and I can tell you that I find the majority of Hispanic and black men to be very disrespectful in the way they approach me. White men on the other hand are so polite. Black and Hispanic men will just grab you or say something sexual without any regard of how that makes a girl feel. White men will try to find a way to actually have a conversation and make you feel comfortable. I know it may sound harsh, but that is what I have learned in my 27 years of being a woman. I have never ever had a white man come up to me and say ”Damn baby I would love to hit that tonight.” Never. Ever. But I barely go a week without being called Mami or Chula by some random minority at the bus stop.”

- Yahoo Answers, October 30, 2012
Such viewpoints are not presented with the intention of comparing or touting tendencies of any racial group of being more or less affectionate than another, though the comments may appear be one-sided in this discussion, suggesting that Caucasian men are more affectionate than African American men. This is not representative of study’s viewpoint, as there are multiple paradigms and multiple ways of being in every racial group. Nor is the lack of representation of alternative opinions due to a lack of impartiality. Research was conducted of academic scholarship, as well as pop cultural sites in an effort to locate alternative viewpoints, suggesting that African American men are perhaps more affectionate than Caucasian or Hispanic men, but could not locate any.

The contents of this forum are included in this discussion merely to illustrate, with voices of society, that differences may exist in the ways that groups express and perceive affection, and that anyone, of any race or gender who demonstrates little affection may experience negative consequences. Such mentalities may also be harmful as they may preclude some African American men from deriving benefits that are associated with affectionate expression. Not only has it been shown that affectionate couples tend to be more happy and satisfied in their relationships, but highly affectionate couples are also more adaptive to stressors. Floyd (2006) notes that although the expression of affection does not necessarily solve problems in relationships, it does enhance people’s ability to cope with stress, which in turn may reinforce their ability to deal with relational issues. Being disproportionately affected by multiple stressors, interventions that promote affectionate expression in marriage may be particularly beneficial for disadvantaged couples.

Ultimately, the task of disentangling the effects of sociocultural factors from socioeconomic ones in the study of affectionate expression appears to be daunting, if at all possible. Few scholars have demonstrated an interest in exploring these issues, and among the few who have, none have been able to account for such phenomena. This study expresses the need for an increased understanding of affectionate expression among diverse groups, and the development of interventions that are tailored to meet the needs of diverse ethnocultural and socioeconomic groups.
In order to accomplish this, there is a need for a deeper understanding of what diverse married couples perceive affectionate expression to be, how such descriptions fit within their conceptions about gender, the level of importance that spouses attach to affectionate expression, and specific ways that it affects marital quality among these groups. This study posits that in order to effectively assist at-risk couples, researchers must attempt to establish innovative approaches that are ethnoculturally and socioeconomically diverse.

**Affectionate Expression & Couple Therapy**

Notwithstanding the prevalence of marital dissolution, relational distress is commonly experienced in marriage (Shadish & Baldwin, 2003; Snyder, Castellani, & Whisman, 2006). Currently, five types of couple therapy have been established as evidence-based treatments for marital distress.

(1) *Traditional behavioral couple therapy* (TBCT), which has long been considered the gold standard in the treatment of marital distress, is the most widely studied approach (Jacobson, Christensen, Prince, Cordova, & Eldridge, 2000). With a foundation in social exchange theory, TBCT focuses on the satisfaction level of couples with the assumption that their positive and negative interactions with each other translates to behavioral rewards and costs; and perceptions about which outweighs the other affect their assessment of the relationship and their willingness to sustain it. Hence, goals in TBCT are to increase the numbers of positive behaviors and minimize the negative ones, and to improve communication and problem-solving skills (Snyder, Wills, & Grady-Fletcher, 1991). TBCT emphasizes behavioral modification as the primary mechanism of change in treatment by encouraging behaviors that are pleasing to spouses, and by providing in-session discussions, homework assignments, and education regarding communication and problem-solving strategies (Jacobson & Christensen, 1998).

In contrast, proponents of (2) *cognitive behavioral couple therapy* (CBCT) believe that an individual’s thoughts impact how they behave, and their behavior, in turn, influences their emotions, and that people tend to engage faulty thinking which often lend to problematic issues in relationships (McMinn, 1991). Hence, CBCT addresses maladaptive thoughts and behaviors in the effort to effect
change in couples. It is assumed that the individual’s cognitions and behavioral responses are a result of maladaptive cognitive processes (e.g., a misinterpretation about the spouse’s behavior), and that automatic thoughts occur in response to specific situations. Hence, therapists focus on automatic thoughts, as they often reflect a person’s core beliefs about those situations or events (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; McMinn, 1991). Hence, relief from distress occurs with the reorganization of maladaptive automatic thoughts, assumptions, and relationship expectations (Baucom, Snyder, & Dixon, 2008), and therapists challenge these cognitions in order to effect change.

In the 1980s, scholars of couple therapy realized that in their efforts to study cognition and behavior, there was an oversight of emotion, which is a significant aspect of interpersonal relationships. Over recent decades, couple therapy has evolved from primarily cognitive and behavioral models to approaches that involve the explicit integration of emotion as an agent of change in clinical models (Johnson, 2004).

(3) Emotionally focused couple therapy (EFT; Greenberg & Johnson, 1988) was developed in response to the decades-long omission of attention to emotion in couple therapy (Johnson & Denton, 2002), and it is one of the emotion-based approaches that offers evidence-based support. EFT differs from the aforementioned modalities in that the focus for change is the emotional experience in the relationship, where therapists work with couples to minimize maladaptive interactions via the establishment of more secure attachment bonds (Johnson, 2008), and to restructure them in ways that enhance marital satisfaction. EFT therapists use emotion to elicit and change couples interaction, helping them to connect with their own feelings, and with each other; allowing for increased empathy, more understanding, and enhanced communicative interactions. The expression of such vulnerability is expected to lead to a shift from the use of hard emotion (e.g., anger and resentment) to soft emotion (e.g., vulnerability, fear, and disappointment), and to enhance compassion and acceptance in the dyad.

Similarly, (4) insight oriented marital therapy (IOMT; Snyder & Wills, 1989) involves the exploration of unconscious emotional processes that contribute to conflict in spousal dyads (Wills, Faitler, & Snyder, 1987). In order to facilitate dyadic interaction in a more mature and autonomous
manner, IOMT involves the use of probing and reflecting to access the unconscious feelings, beliefs, and expectations of couple dyads. Cognitive reconstruction is thereafter effected on a conscious level.

Finally, (5) integrative behavioral couple therapy (IBCT; Jacobson & Christensen, 1998) is an evidence-based couple therapy that also focuses on emotion. The primary focus in IBCT is on emotional acceptance, and behavioral change is a secondary objective. Acceptance involves abandoning the struggle to change one's spouse, and with increased understanding of common interactional patterns and the emotional experience of one’s spouse, differences (which once annoyed spouses) may no longer be perceived as overwhelming. As well, by focusing on the emotional context that occur within interactional patterns, IBCT seeks to facilitate the development of a new perspective on dyadic interactions and a deepener understanding of one's partner (Jacobson & Christensen, 1998). As a result of the increased understanding and the deeper emotional connection, behavioral change may occur more naturally, based on a genuine mutual desire for change, rather than via the complaint rule-following as is typically prescribed in TBCT (Jacobson & Christensen, 1998).

By and large within the literature, marital therapy has been shown to be efficacious, as multiple studies have shown that couple therapy is effective at reducing distress among married dyads (Baucom et al., 1998; Johnson & Lebow, 2000; Pinsof et al., 1996; Snyder et al., 2006) and at increasing overall relationship satisfaction (Snyder & Wills, 1989).

While some scholars deny outcome disparities among these evidence-based treatment approaches, this study emphasizes the fact that emotion-based treatment modalities (as opposed to behavioral or cognitive-based approaches) have been shown to provide slightly better outcomes in the short-term and results that are significantly more enhanced over longer periods of time.

For example, in the largest randomized clinical trial of couple therapy, Christensen et al., (2004) investigated the effectiveness of TBCT and IBCT among 134 chronically distressed couples and found an increase in relationship satisfaction among both groups, with 71% of IBCT-treated couples and 59% of TBCT-treated couples reporting improvements.

Additionally, Johnson and Greenberg (1985) compared efficacy outcomes of the most reputable
behavior-based model (TBCT) versus an emotion-focused model (EFT) among 45 couples and found that both models effected improvements in overall marital adjustment, compared with the control group, but consistent with similar comparative investigations of behavioral vs. emotion-based approaches, EFT-treated couples reported greater increases in marital adjustment and intimacy.

As well, despite repeated demonstrations of the efficacy of TBCT, significant limitations in this modality’s clinical significance and durability have been noted (Jacobson et al., 2000), and its overall benefit to couples remains uncertain. Although TBCT-treated couples typically demonstrate targeted change during treatment (Synder & Wills, 1989), numerous findings indicate that the changes are seldom sustained post-intervention. As a matter of fact, the changes appear negligible, if not non-existent two years post-treatment.

In contrast, IBCT demonstrates sustained desirable outcomes over time. For example, in a two year follow-up study of 130 of the 134 couples who were originally a part of the randomized clinical trial comparing TCBT and IBCT (Christensen et al., 2004), Christensen, Atkins, Yi, Baucom, and George (2006) found that 69% of IBCT-treated couples showed clinically significant improvement, compared with 60% of TBCT-treated couples. IBCT-treated couples demonstrated enhanced gains in a number of ways. Interestingly, the pattern of change revealed that satisfaction dropped immediately following the termination of treatment with both modalities, but it thereafter increased at varying rates, with IBCT-treated couples changing courses and gaining in satisfaction sooner than TCBT-treated couples (e.g., 14 weeks vs. 22 weeks). As well, IBCT-treated couples generally fared better, as there was evidence of greater stability during follow-up. Assessments were thereafter conducted every six months to a year, and five years post-treatment, the data revealed that 50% of IBCT-treated couples and 45% of TBCT-treated couples showed significant improvement or were considered recovered (Christensen, 2010). Such outcomes lend support to the importance of an emphasis on emotion in marital treatment.

As well, comparable to the positive outcomes of IBCT, the results of EFT for married couples have also shown promise. Both IBCT and EFT have demonstrated superior outcomes at the end of treatment (compared with BCT and TBCT), and more infrequent instances of deterioration over time. It
is further reported that following EFT, couples to continue to improve after the termination of treatment (Johnson et al., 1999).

These findings are particularly relevant to this proposed investigation of affectionate expression in marriage, as evidence-based outcomes in couple therapy illustrate the efficacy of emotion-based therapeutic approaches, and advantages that they may have over behavioral- or cognitive-based treatments in effecting change in marriage. The premises and goals of emotion-based approaches, such as IBCT and EFT align well with outcomes of affectionate expression as a relational maintenance behavior; eliciting dyadic emotion, encouraging vulnerability, attending to the needs of self and the other, and to the emotional context in interactional patterns in an effort to enhance communication, understanding, and acceptance. Hence, this study posits that it would not be a far stretch for researchers to investigate the benefits of affectionate expression in marriage, and to consider its inclusion as a component within an existing treatment modality as an innovative agent of change in couple therapy.

The literature is replete with evidence to support the call for the investigation of affectionate expression in marital therapy, as various studies have identified ‘a lack of affection’ as a reason that couples seek therapy. For example, Doss, Thum, Sevier, Atkins, and Christensen (2005) conducted a survey of 147 married couples entering marital therapy and found that their most frequently reported complaints included (1) communication, and (2) a lack of emotional affection. Additionally, when marital therapists were asked to identify the most pertinent issues they address in treatment, among other responses, “a lack of loving” was noted (Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997). As well, 250 members of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (AAMFT) identified five general problem areas for couples, one of which was “a lack of loving feelings” (Geiss & O’Leary, 2007).

Ultimately, there are only a few studies that have investigated reasons that couples enter therapy, yet the desire for affection has appeared on each list that this scholar has discovered. Remarkably, however, researchers continue to disregard its worth in the literature, and it continues to be excluded from consideration of, and discourse about intervention among married couples. This
proposed study argues the appropriateness of such consideration as emotion-based marital intervention continues to evolve.

Further supporting this argument, Gottman and Silver (1999) have noted that “research has shown that expressing one’s emotions with a loved one can, in fact, facilitate the process of understanding, which in turn can lead to increased levels of communication and marital satisfaction.”

On a practical level, perhaps, the use of affectionate expression as a component of EFT may be assistive in the development of more secure attachments. Attachment, as theorized by Bowlby, Ainsworth, Hazan, and Shaver (Bretherton, 1992; Sable, 1992) is generally based on an individual’s perception that another person is consistently available who shows concern for them. Secure attachment is established when an individual feels a sense of trust in the care that another provides for them. It does not appear to be a far stretch to hypothesize that the demonstration of affection may enhance these feelings, and attachment bonds. Having a spouse demonstrate care in affectionate ways may further accomplish objectives in EFT; the restructuring of underlying emotions in interactional patterns, allowing for a new, healing emotional experience among dyads (Greenberg, James, & Conry, 1988).

As well, affectionate expression may be applied as a component in IBCT. IBCT seeks to enhance understanding among couples via access to the emotional experience of partners, in an effort to increase acceptance among dyads. With this self- and other-awareness, IBCT ultimately seeks to establish an emotional intimacy among couples, which, proponents believe, may foster understanding and acceptance, as well as subsequent behavioral change. It seems reasonable to at least consider the idea that an emphasis on the way that couples show affection to one another may influence vulnerability, understanding, and acceptance among these dyads.

Finally, although the efficacy of couple therapy has been examined in the literature, scholars have expressed a need for more a more extensive investigation of the processes and mechanisms of change in couple therapy (Christensen, 2010; Doss, 2004; Johnson & Lebow, 2000; Snyder et al, 2006). Researchers and clinicians recognize the importance of understanding which specific elements of
treatment are effective as opposed to those that have minimal or no impact on couples in therapy. Process research involves an exploration beyond outcome questions of whether couples change, and further seeks to understand how and why change occurs (Christensen et al., 2005). This study argues that as the change process in marital therapy is investigated, that potential benefits of affectionate expression in marriage is worthy of inclusion in the exploration.

Summary

There are a limited number of couple therapeutic approaches that have been endorsed by the APA as efficacious, and a respectable amount of promise has been shown among treatment approaches that emphasize the role of emotion in practice. Noting the physical and psychosocial benefits that are associated with affectionate expression and the nation’s sobering need to curtail marital dissolution rates, the lack of consideration of affectionate expression in marriage literature, and the dearth of inquiry about its potential efficacy among married couples is surprising.

This study posits that, given the prevalence of marital dissolution in the United States, and disheartening predictions for the future; given the evidence that a lack of affection is a common issue among couples who seek treatment; given the increasing number of studies generally touting the benefits of affectionate expression in marriage; given calls in the field for diversified and innovative therapy approaches of marital intervention; and given the efficacy of couple intervention that emphasizes the importance of emotion as an agent of change, and the potential applicability of affectionate expression in emotion-based approaches, there is a need for a deeper investigation of affectionate expression among married couples. The outcomes of such studies may render the expression of affection worthy of consideration in discourse about or investigations of marital therapy. Affectionate expression may arguably serve as a component within another therapeutic approach or in the establishment of an innovative intervention. This study further posits that the exploration of ethnocultural and socioeconomic difference would be a worthwhile endeavor in such investigations.

This study is notably innovative in a variety of ways. In an effort to expand our knowledge base about affectionate expression and of specific ways that it may enhance marriage, this proposed study
will serve as a foundation upon which subsequent investigations may be constructed. There are no existing studies to date that recommend the inclusion of affectionate expression in couple therapy and provide cogent arguments to support such a claim, and there are no studies that explore these subjects qualitatively. This study also surpasses extant literature in the field as this investigation is also coupled with a deliberate focus on ethnocultural and socioeconomic comparisons.

Chapter 3, titled *Research Methodology*, will comprehensively describe the study's design, the data collection and analysis.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

“I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them.” – James P. Spradley

This study aims to understand how diverse groups of married couples experience affectionate expression, if they are satisfied with the types and amounts of affection that is expressed, and if affectionate expression affects their overall perceptions of marital satisfaction. It also seeks to understand whether diverse ethnocultural and sociocultural groups experience affection in distinctive ways.

Introduction: A Reflexive Exercise

Reflexivity refers to a researcher’s assessment of the influence that his or her own background, personal stories, interests, paradigms, and perceptions might have on the research process.

Because, as the researcher, I positioned myself in this qualitative inquiry, I had to examine myself as I examined participants. Hence, I considered my own background, interests, what I brought to the research, and what I hoped it would accomplish. Creswell (2013) states that researchers have a personal history that situates them as inquirers. They also have an orientation to research and a sense of personal ethics and political stances that inform their research. With these considerations, I begin by acknowledging the broad assumptions that brought me to this qualitative inquiry and the interpretive lens I used.

I have had an interest in the ways couples show affection to one another for decades. I grew up in a loving and affectionate middle class African American family, which included my mother and father, an older sister, a younger sister, and my youngest sibling, my brother. We received expressions of affection regularly, as we often shared expressions of affection verbally, physically, and via support. We weren't perfect. We had spats from time to time. And perhaps too often, dissension went unspoken. But I could never complain. I was loved and convinced that I was special. Because of the people around me.
We pretty much grew up in a large, predominantly African American church that was like family to us. Over the years, I often watched and wondered why couples didn’t touch. I don’t recall anyone holding hands with or hugging their spouses, or expressing tender feelings in general. I imagined one explanation for that might have been that individuals are different and some people don’t require those forms of expression. That would have been a valid argument, but the question still remained, why do I recall none? Expressions of affection would have stood out as memorable, as anomalies. People are different. Surely someone in such a large congregation was affectionate in nature.

This is the reason I chose to study affection. I wanted to know, not only how people express affection, but in exploring satisfaction, I hoped to learn more about how much affection men and women want; how much they feel they need. What makes individuals express themselves more or less than others? Are some people or groups more affectionate than others? If so, who are they? Why? How important is affectionate expression in marriage? How is it shown? How is it received? Does it influence people’s perceptions about the quality of their relationships?

My Assessment of the Research Process

As the data collection commenced, I was surprised by some emotions I felt. I generally tend to be warm, cheerful, and personable when interacting with others, including strangers. Because of the potentially sensitive nature of my study, however, I felt the need to remain personable, but I made a conscious effort to remain professional during the recruitment and interview process. I have visited with strangers in their homes and other private spaces throughout my career in social work, e.g., with parents and children in their homes as a case worker for Big Brothers, Big Sisters, with seniors and adult children as a social worker in long-term care facilities, with married couples as an interning therapist at the Center for the Homeless, and I currently meet with dying patients and their families in their homes and at care facilities as a hospice medical social worker. Throughout the years, I have been thanked and commended for my warmth and ability to make others feel comfortable. Importantly, I have entered each of those situations as an expert in my field, prepared to share my knowledge with clients, residents, patients and family members.
As I was in transit to the first interview, it began to occur to me that this engagement, this research process was different. I didn't have time to fully embrace my feelings or tease out the reason for my discomfort. I just knew that I was nervous. This had not happened to me before, and I was not expecting to feel such emotion, nor was I prepared to deal with it. Nonetheless, it was nearing 6:30 p.m. that Thursday night, and I am a stickler for being on-time, so I gathered my 'research bag', trudged forward, and rang the bell. I was able to overcome my feeling of anxiety prior to entering the home after thinking of myself in the context of a representative of the university. As I progressed through the other seven interviews, I experienced similar feelings, e.g., twinges of discomfort prior to my arrival, for many of them. Over time, I rationalized the sensation as being a result of my position as the researcher. I was no longer the expert that visited homes or facilities to share answers. I was there to learn. To take, not to give. This, I believe, made a difference.

I remained mindful of my position as an investigator who was there to discover throughout all of the eight interviews, and there was at least one moment during the majority of the interviews that caused me to consciously reflect on that. There were numerous significant moments during interviews. Some were enlightening, others inspiring. A few were uncomfortable. There were moments of tension between spouses, of sad discoveries, of dissatisfaction, of discomfort. These were times that proved most difficult for me, as I immediately began to mentally negotiate the multiple roles I held. Specifically, as a provider of marital therapy, I am trained to assist couples and I often had a desire to engage assistance, believing that with effective communication, the couple and I could maneuver through disconcerting moments and arrive in a more harmonious, understanding place. Because these instances proved to be momentary and no significant harm or injury was apparent, I maintained my role solely as an investigator.

In this phenomenological study of married couples, I occupied multiple roles as a social work therapist that has provided marital counseling, a social work PhD student and researcher, the wife of many participants’ co-worker, and an African American woman who is married to a Caucasian gentleman who happens to be particularly affectionate. As a marital therapist, it is my desire to discover
truths that may assist couples. As a social work scholar, I hope to discover findings that attest to the benefits of affectionate expression in marriage, as this would support a rationale for its consideration in marital therapy approaches. I admittedly, as researchers should, hope to discover some unique or distinctive idea that will add to the body of knowledge in the field of marital studies. I am also, however, fully open to the possibility that my presuppositions will not be supported, and I am aware that this outcome would also further academic knowledge. In this exploration, I was also the wife of many participants’ co-worker, a role which may have proven problematic had my spouse held close relationships with the participants. Due to the difficulty I experienced obtaining the targeted categories of participants, my husband sent a recruitment email that I had written to the diversity group at Cummins, Incorporated, where he is employed, which generated numerous replies and a significant number of participant couples. Because the respondents were not acquainted with my spouse, it minimized the risk of the study being compromised in this respect, but it did not fully eliminate the threat, as both I and they were aware that a connection, however removed, existed. To remedy this potential risk as much as I possibly could, I avoided any discussion of Cummins and remained professional and focused on the purposes and processes of the study. Also, being an African American woman who has experienced affectionate expression among diverse racial groups, I have presuppositions about the phenomenon under study, but I willingly suppress them and in exchange, enable the voices of participants to inform my curiosity about the ways that diverse groups express affection. Hence, in the tradition of the phenomenological approach to research, I kept these thoughts before me as I embarked upon this interpretive investigation.

Finally, because my life’s experience was so relevant and personally powerful, I understood that if allowed, it might undermine the study’s trustworthiness; as along with participants, I, too, would be making meaning through my personal lens. Hence, I have openly shared personal perspectives that I have never before disclosed, nor have I even pondered these thoughts as succinctly as I have in this reflexive discourse. In accord with traditions in phenomenological research, I have done so in an effort to minimize the likelihood that the views of participants will be misrepresented.
Summary

As I conceptualized and designed this study, and collected and analyzed data, I have repressed my personal story and quieted my experience because I did not want to know what I believe. I’m already aware of my own life’s story and consequent paradigm. My efforts to achieve discovery would be futile and this work pointless if I didn’t make a rigorous and resolute effort to seek to understand the experiences of participants and to remain true to their truths.

The Research Design

This chapter provides an overview of the research design and includes the research questions and hypotheses, and the conceptual frameworks that undergird the study, followed by a review of the study’s methods, including a description of sampling procedures, data collection and analysis processes, and steps taken to establish trustworthiness of the results.

Research Questions

In an effort to understand the perspectives and experiences of married individuals with affection, the following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1
How do married couples describe and interpret “affectionate expression”?

Research Question 2
How do married couples express affection? How frequent do they express affection?

Research Question 3
Are married couples satisfied with the amount of affection they are currently receiving? What would they change, if they could?

Research Question 4
Does the amount of affection they are receiving influence their perceptions about the quality of their relationships? Do they feel distressed about it? To what degree (e.g., have they considered marital disruption)?

Research Question 5
Do differences exist in the ways that diverse ethnocultural or socioeconomic groups perceive and express affection? Are diverse groups satisfied with the amount of affection they are currently receiving? Does the amount of affecting they are receiving influence their perceptions about the quality of their relationships? Do they feel distressed about it? To what degree?
Hypotheses

This research did not seek to prove or disprove causal relationships between affectionate expression and marriage. Instead, it is intended to provide a significant amount of data that will serve as groundwork for subsequent inquiry. Such a stance is consistent with underpinnings in phenomenological approaches to inquiry, as the intent of qualitative research is to explore complex sets of factors surrounding a phenomenon and to share the meanings or perspectives of participants, as opposed to making untimely predictions (Creswell, 2008). As the meaning and relevance of affectionate expression in the lives of participants were explored, general themes emerged concurrently with the analysis of the data.

Methodological Approach & Paradigm

Qualitative methods, grounded in a socioconstructivist framework, guided this exploratory study. Qualitative research seeks “answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10), and it offers a more sensitive reflection of the sociocultural context within which people live (Kvale, 1996). A qualitative approach to the proposed inquiry was appropriate, as my investigation was concerned with the meaning of affectionate expression among diverse groups of married couples, and their core lived experienced with affectionate expression.

The constructivist paradigm holds that people have preconceived ideas which affect their understandings of the world, and these understandings influence their choices (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). As well, their understandings about the world are characterized by their language, (e.g., things they say and how they talk about the world). There can therefore be no single, exclusive reality, but only individual perspectives. As this study sought access to the subjective knowledge and meaning-making of married individuals, I did not expect that my experiences or consequent paradigm about affectionate expression would be similar to participants’; neither did I assume that affectionate expression would be conceptualized consonantly.

Among the scant amount of research that explores affectionate communication in marriage, no study has been located that employs a qualitative approach. Such an omission may have deprived the
field of enlightening data. Broad categories of behavior (or typologies) are typically presented a priori in marital studies about affection, with a seemingly unspoken positivist assumption that both affectionate expression and specific affectionate behaviors possess singular universal meanings and that they are interpreted and understood similarly by everyone. A typology, or group of prescribed affectionate behaviors, would have been too ambiguous and potentially leading to have used in my study, as the lived experience of participants was pursued. For example, when Dainton, Stafford, and Canary (1994) examined how physical affection and maintenance strategies predict relational characteristics, their categories of measurement were limited to broad strategies that were delineated in the 1991 Stafford and Canary typology. Similarly, Bell, Daly, and Gonzalez (1987) developed a typology of affinity maintenance strategies and then utilized the Marital Relationship Inventory for couples to rate how frequently their spouses used each strategy and how important the affectionate behavior was to them. Notably, little relationship was found between marital satisfaction and the women's assessment of the affinity maintenance strategies. Marital satisfaction was, however, strongly related to perceptions about their spouses' use of affectionate expression. This observation is not only indicative of the importance of affectionate expression in marriage, but it also supports the argument that measurements of broad categories of behavior may not provide the most accurate reflection of dyadic lived experiences.

Creswell (2005) further recommends the applicability of qualitative research approaches for research problems where the variables are unknown and need to be explored. The use of qualitative inquiry in the phenomenological tradition allowed me to move beyond extant research approaches in the study of relational maintenance behavior and to explore the meanings and perspectives that diverse married couples ascribe to affectionate expression without constraints of predetermined categories of analysis, or broad typologies.

I therefore supposed that the perspectives and voices of married individuals would provide, devoid of objective definitions and beliefs about affectionate expression, an accurate reflection of their personal meanings, realities, and lived experiences with affection.
The epistemological assumptions of the socioconstructivist paradigm also supports this study's intent to include diverse groups in this exploration of affectionate expression in marriage, as constructivists emphasize the importance of the cultural, social, and historical settings that surround phenomena (Kvale, 1996).

As well, the use of multiple methods, which is a hallmark of qualitative inquiry, was essential in the effort to attain a robust understanding of this phenomenon. The reliance on a single data source, such as the questionnaire alone, would not have provided as hardy an understanding of their experiences with affectionate expression sans the in-depth interview and observation of the couples' interpersonal interaction.

Additionally, qualitative methods are most consonant with the way I intend to delineate the study's findings, as it is the most conducive approach to inquiry when investigators want to understand the context surrounding a phenomenon, and wish to convey discoveries in a flexible literary style that includes narratives, as opposed to more restrictive structures of writing.

Finally, the aim of this research was identical to objectives of phenomenological approaches to inquiry; to explore and to describe phenomena as it is experienced by people in their daily lives (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2008). In the interpretive phenomenological tradition, I espouse the belief that the known world has no meaning except for what is attributed to it by individuals and that I must emphasize what experience means for the one who experiences it (Merriam, 2009). Hence, I endeavored to gain an understanding of the lived realities and situation-specific meanings that have been constructed by married couples by relying on their views and my attempts to comprehend and delineate their truths.

Having recognized the impact that my own life experiences and paradigms might have on this research, I strove to suspended judgment of what was real and meaningful, and embraced the basic assumptions of phenomenology; that human behavior is understandable only in relationship to context, that language is a central medium through with meaning is constructed and conveyed, and that it is possible to convey and understand the central underlying meaning of a concept as experienced by others. To this end, I made a very conscious effort the duration of this investigation to remain true to the 'facts' that were
presented, and to accurately account for accounts that were shared. Hence, this study reflects a collaborative effort on my part to attempt to “make sense of the participants’ attempts to make sense of their own experiences” (Larkin, Watts, and Clifton, 2006).

Research Design

This section describes the research design, specifically describing the study's recruitment strategy, the criteria for participation, the recruitment process, and the data collection process.

Sampling Strategy

I employed multiple strategies in an attempt to secure the participation of eight diverse married couple groups in the study. I engaged purposive sampling methods, as my intention was to select groups that displayed variation on the phenomena under investigation (Mason, 2002). One goal of my study was to include voices of diverse groups in the exploration. Hence, criterion sampling was used to ensure that key constituencies were represented and all participants in the study experienced the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 1998). I also engaged snowball sampling methods in an effort to locate them.

Criteria for Participation

The criteria for participation was (1) that couples had been married two or more years; (2) that the husband and wife both agreed to participate in the study; (3) that the couple was willing and able to complete and submit a questionnaire at their leisure, and to subsequently meet with me for a face-to-face interview, (4) that the couple agreed to allow anonymous quotations of their responses in subsequent documentation, and (5) that the couple agreed to be audio-taped, as this would help me assure the accuracy of responses.

Recruitment

In an initial effort to identify the eight couples, I researched local radio stations on the Internet to find a popular station that appeared to have a large listenership of young and middle-aged African Americans. Having located Hot 96.3 as a station that claimed to be an exclusive provider of hip hop and rap music in Indianapolis’ black community, I emailed three of their show hosts. Also, I have been a long-time listener of David Smiley's morning show on Z995-WZPL, a popular local radio station that has
a primarily young to middle-aged adult Caucasian listening audience, and I emailed Dave as well. After having not received a reply after a week or two, I called the Smiley show. Dave picked up and after greeting him, I discussed seeking help with recruitment for a research study. My intention was to ask if he would allow me to discuss the study on-the-air. Dave (and KJ, one of his other co-hosts) both said they recalled getting the email. Dave said, "Oh, yea, yea, yea. You're the one who's studying couples." I confirmed I was studying how couples show affection to one another. Prior to describing the study, Dave and his co-hosts discussed how interesting the study sounded. One co-host said, "Dave, you can't be in it though, because you haven't been married two years." Dave asked me, "Is that right?" Before I answered, he said, "Why don't you tell us a little bit about it." I succinctly described the study, emphasizing that I was representing the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and that we wanted to learn more about ways married couples show affection to one another. I noted that we were looking for eight couples to complete a questionnaire, meet with me to discuss affection and to play a game, and that couples that completed the study would receive a gift card in the amount of $30.00 to any restaurant of their choice. Dave asked me to provide contact information, and I did. As Dave and I talked, I assumed we were off-the-air. We were for a portion of the conversation, but he quickly said, "Hang on a minute," and I heard our recorded conversation being played on-the-air. I was surprised, and appreciative. As I thanked Dave and was hanging up, the ring-tone on my cell phone that alerts me to new email rang multiple times. I opened my Yahoo mailbox to find three emails titled, "Your research study" or "The Smiley Show." My phone continued to buzz and within fifteen minutes, I had far more interested Caucasian prospective participants than I needed. I replied to each email with a comprehensive description of the study’s purpose and processes and I inquired again about their continued interest in participating, noting that we only needed two Caucasian couples, where one couple’s household income was less than $40,000, and the other’s was more than $40,000. I also noted that I would select participants on a first-come, first served basis, e.g., whoever met the participation criteria among those who emailed back first. By the end of the day, two Caucasian couples had agreed to be in the study. I had also engaged a snowball approach by closing the emails with a request that
these respondents invite their friends or loved ones to be a part of the study as well, and to contact me. I called Dave a few days later and thanked him for his assistance, and mailed research packets to participants.

I also attempted contacting several local churches with the intention of asking to post a recruitment notice on their bulletin boards, or to enter an announcement in their programs that are typically distributed weekly, but few phone lines were answered. I left multiple messages, but received no return calls. When I actually spoke directly with representatives at two of the churches, I also offered to visit to discuss the study in person, but my request was politely denied because I wasn't a member of their congregations.

The following week, I contacted a friend who was preparing to host a marriage retreat at her church and asked if I might try to recruit after the program. She was excited about the opportunity to present the study to married couples in her congregation and welcomed me to come. I arrived at Grace Apostolic Church when Brenda had advised me to; when the program was in its final hour. I set up a table top display that included a black table cloth, a table easel that held an elegant black poster describing the study, research packets, movie DVDs, a sign-up form, and pens, and joined the approximately 30 couples in the retreat, standing in the rear. At the close of the program, Brenda shared a brief introduction about me and invited me to come forward. I greeted the crowd and thanked them for the opportunity to sit in on the retreat and reiterated some of the inspiring comments that had been shared. My comments seemed well received by smiling faces. I then described the study and asked for volunteers to participate. No one raised their hands. I humorously addressed one couple and said, “Aw, I can tell you have something to share.” A group of couples chuckled, but no one volunteered. Brenda then whispered, “Tell them about the $30.00.” I had inadvertently forgotten to inform them about remuneration. After I did, multiple hands flew up. Brenda passed out my summary cards about the study and suggested that couples visit my table before leaving. I spoke with many men and women after the program and by the end of the day, 3 African American couples and 1 mixed race couple had signed up for the study. Each spouse received his or her research packet after signing up and providing contact
information for me.

About this time, I received the first set of complete packets from one of the ‘radio station’ participant couples in the mail. A few weeks had passed, so I contacted the other Caucasian couple, but received no reply. I tried multiple times, only calling once a week, so as not to harass the respondent, but still received no reply. I thereafter emailed another couple from my radio station list, and they agreed to participate, so I printed more packets and mailed them to them.

Around this time, I had conducted the first interview, and I expected to receive packets from the Grace Apostolic church members, but I didn’t. I left several messages and emails over the span of weeks, but received no replies. Finally, one day, an older gentleman answered the phone when I called and gave me his wife’s cell phone number. I contacted the prospective participant and she said that she was still excited about the study and asked if her granddaughter might also participate. The respondent was an African American woman who was married to a Caucasian man and her African American granddaughter was married to an African American man. The granddaughter’s participation would have secured the criteria for a household income of <$40,000. I excitedly mailed four packets to her home and waited a few weeks, but received no packets in the mail. When I called again, the respondent said that she and her granddaughter were getting together that evening to complete the questionnaire. After waiting a couple more weeks, I called again, but the respondent didn’t reply or return the call.

In the meanwhile, I had posted an advertisement on Craigslist and received an immediate reply from a young African American woman. We talked for approximately 50 minutes about the study and about marriage. She was “excited to help, so I mailed her a packet. Then received no reply.

I had been printing and mailing multiple packets to participants, but failing to receive the majority of them back. Neither of the 2nd or 3rd prospective participants from the radio station had returned their packets, and more than a month had passed. I had to ask myself if the length of the questionnaire was a hindrance, or if there was another reason. Assuming the length may have potentially been a problem, I have determined to very thoughtfully consider asking questions as succinctly as possible in future studies, so as not to hinder the research process.
I discussed my concerns about finding participants with my husband, Gary, and he was poised and happy to help. Gary works at Cummins, Inc., a fortune 500 company with corporate offices situated near our home in Columbus, Indiana. Per Gary's request, I emailed him a solicitation email, describing the purpose and procedures of the study, criteria, the need for participants, and remuneration; and he forwarded it to the diversity group at Cummins, with a note that read, "I need your help with a project for my wife." Gary and I received multiple emails that day and a few trickled to us subsequent days. Recruitment via Cummins yielded 50% of participants, with 3 out of the 4 mixed race couples, and one additional African America couple completing the study. Each of the couples associated with Cummins completed the study promptly and efficiently, which renewed my hope that the project could be completed. The only drawback about the participation of Cummins' employees was that each of their household incomes exceeded $100,000, which impeded the objective of meeting the socioeconomic criteria.

Months had passed since I'd conducted the first interview, and I'd seemingly exhausted every avenue of solicitation I knew of, and I was becoming discouraged. Not only had I gleaned all I could from Cummins, and I'd petitioned every friend and relative to recommend couples, but I also visited a former beautician and sought her assistance, offering free beauty treatments in the amount of $30.00, instead of restaurant gift cards to any couple who completed the study. This effort yielded no participants.

I continued to reach out to the woman at Grace Apostolic Church. I left approximately 3 messages for her over the course of 4-5 weeks, trying to sound excited about her interest in participating, though the chances of her completing the study were beginning to seem bleak. In the final message I left, I explained to her that her and her granddaughter's participation would have helped very much, as I just needed two remaining couples. I received no reply.

At this point, I had become desperate. I needed one last mixed race couple where the husband was Caucasian and the wife African American, and one African American couple.

Gary and I live in the country, in a rural community approximately 25 miles south of Indianapolis, which made locating African American couples who weren't family members or friends
challenging. There were plenty of mixed race couples in our community, but they seldom met some other important criteria of the study. Hence, I began to approach strangers in the community (e.g., Walmart, the bank, gas stations), and I kept a few research packets in my car, just in case I happened upon someone or a couple who might be willing. My husband was also on the look-out for me and he would signal when we came across couples who met the ethnocultural criteria. By this time, I had pretty much abandoned my resolve to find couples who would meet the socioeconomic criteria because finding a couple whose household income was <$40,000 was significantly challenging, and the multiplicity of variables (e.g., married 2 or more years with ethnocultural categories) rendered the socioeconomic criteria unreasonably difficult to attain. From my list of respondents from the radio station, I was able to eventually locate a Caucasian couple whose income was appropriate (e.g., ranging from $30,000-$40,000), as the husband worked part-time, and his wife was a ballet dancer. As well, one of the mixed race couples where the husband was an African American high school football coach and his wife was a mental health technician provided valuable data for affectionate expression among couples whose household income ranges from $16,000-$29,000. Every other household income in the study exceeded $100,000.

After a few more hits and misses in attempts to follow-up with strangers I’d met in the community, I located one of the final participants; Emily, a 50 year old African American woman I met in the outlet mall in Edinburgh, Indiana. She was shopping in one of the stores when I walked in. She smiled very friendly and struck up a conversation. I was constantly on heightened alert to find couples, and when I inquired about her interest, I assumed incorrectly that she would be my final African American couple to participate. She said, “If you need African American couples, I won’t work for you. My husband is Caucasian.” I smiled and excitedly exclaimed, “No, you’re exactly who I need!” She and her spouse completed the study promptly, and my co-worker referred the final African American couple who would as well.

**Targeted Participants**

Sixteen married individuals (or 8 married couples) participated in the study. Because I intended
to explore affectionate expression among a diverse ethnocultural and socioeconomic population of couples and I wanted to receive a thick saturation of data, the group of participants included two African American couples, two Caucasian couples, two mixed-race couples where the husband was African American and the wife was Caucasian, and two mixed-race couples where the husband was Caucasian and the wife was African American.

This study is the first in the literature to make such a distinction between combined race couples (e.g., emphasizing the specific race of males and females), and such consideration is warranted. It is commonly reported that interracial marriages are more likely to end in divorce than same-race marriages. For instance, one study noted that 41% of interracial couples divorced a decade following marriage, compared to only 31% of same-race couples (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002). Social scientists, however, have begun to recognize that that a simplistic, general view of this phenomenon may have oversimplified depictions of divorce among interracial couples. Utilizing data from Cycle VI of the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth, Bratter and King (2008) compared the likelihood of divorce among interracial couples with same race couples and found that some, not all interracial marriages are more vulnerable to divorce than intra-racial ones. For example, couple pairings involving African American men and Caucasian women were twice as likely to end in divorce as same-race Caucasian marriages, but marriages between Caucasian men and African American women were substantially (44%) less likely than same-race Caucasian couples to end in divorce. Such variation in outcomes among interracial groups echoes the call for the exploration of social phenomena through cultural lens; hence, such distinction was made in this study.

Although the participation of eight couples may seem limited, it is nonetheless appropriate. I initially considered targeting more couples (e.g., three African American couples, three Caucasian couples, and six couples who are a combination of African American and Caucasian); with one couple in each category representing more diverse socioeconomic groups (e.g., upper, middle, and lower class status), the literature revealed that such an endeavor may not have been practical. While the inclusion of twenty-four participants may have elicited more comparative insight, interpretive phenomenological
traditions recommend the use of only five or six participants as a reasonable sample size. Smith (1996) notes that five or six participants arguably provide enough cases to examine similarities and distinctions between participants, but not so many that an overwhelming amount of data is generated. Hence, the perceptions and viewpoints of sixteen individuals were explored.

Additionally, it was my intention that one couple within each ethnocultural group would report a higher socioeconomic status, and one couple within each ethnocultural group would report a lower socioeconomic status (see Figure 5 below).

**FIGURE 5. Proposed Categories of Participants**

The figures that were utilized to measure household income were loosely based on the academic class model published by Thompson and Hickey (2005) – see Table 5 below.

**TABLE 1. Measurement of Household Income**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASS</th>
<th>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</th>
<th>EDUCATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper class</td>
<td>(1%) $500,000 +</td>
<td>Ivy league education</td>
<td>Top level executives, celebrities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Middle class</td>
<td>$75,000 - $100,000+</td>
<td>Graduate degrees</td>
<td>Professionals &amp; managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower middle class</td>
<td>$35,000 - $75,000 $40,000</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>Semi-professionals, craftsmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>(32%) $16,000 - $30,000</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Clerical, pink and blue collar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower class</td>
<td>(14-20%) Less than $16,000</td>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>Occupy poorly paid positions or rely on government transfers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I made a distinction between higher and lower socioeconomic status, with lower socioeconomic status being characterized by household incomes totaling $39,999 or less; and higher socioeconomic status by household incomes that were $40,000 or more, as these ranges may reflect common characteristics associated with advantage or disadvantage.

One caveat should be made about the study's limited number of categories that were used to represent diversity, as only African American, Caucasian, and combined race African American and Caucasian couples were included in the study. Although the inclusion of more diverse ethnocultural groups would have been valuable in this exploration, the literature reveals that Asian and Hispanic marriages share similar outcomes as Caucasian marriages (e.g., they enjoy lower rates of marital dissolution), hence the inclusion of these additional groups did not seem as constructive a use of the investigative effort (Bulanda & Brown, 2007). Due to the nature and scope of this qualitative project (e.g., a focus on ethnocultural and socioeconomic factors) and the amount of data that is expected to be generated from the investigation of these few ethnocultural groups, it seems reasonable that the research design is limited to these groups.

Because of the specificity of targeted participant groups, recruitment efforts proved to be challenging and prolonged. Having anticipated potential obstacles in locating these diverse ethnocultural and socioeconomic groups, I included a caveat in my research plan, as approved by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), that should fewer than eight participant couples who meet the study’s criteria be identified, the data collection would be commenced with a subset of the targeted variables. Such was my experience, as locating couples whose household income was less than $40,000 and African American couples who were willing to complete the study was particularly challenging. After unsuccessful, labored and extensive efforts, I commenced the data set with a subset of my targeted population. Hence, while 100% of the couples comprised the targeted racial standard, only 50% (or 4 out of 8) met the socioeconomic criteria.
Participant Characteristics

Age and Number of Years Married. The age of participants in the study ranged from 25 to 56. Participants had a mean age of 38 years. Men ranged in age from 26 to 56, with a mean age of 39 years and women ranged in age from 25 to 50 years old, with a mean age of 37 years. Couples had been married an average of 7.5 years. The longest marriage in the study was 13 years (see Table 2 below).

### Table 2. Participants by Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total N by Age</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age 25-30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>▪ 50% (4) of the couples were one year apart in age, with the wife being younger in every case.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 30-40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>▪ One (1) of each of the remaining couples (N=4) were the same age, two years apart in age, four years apart in age and six years apart in age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 40-50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 50+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N by Gender</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Household Income

The group of participants consisted of two African American couples whose household incomes exceeded $100,000; one Caucasian couple whose household income was between $30,000-$40,000, and the other Caucasian couple's income exceeded $100,000. One of the mixed race couples, where the husband was African American and his wife was Caucasian, had a household income between 16,000 and $29,000. The other mixed race group where the husband was African American had a household income that exceeded $100,000. Finally, two mixed race couples where husbands were Caucasian and the wives were African American had household incomes exceeding $100,000 (see Table 3 below).

### Table 3. Participants by Occupation, Education & Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Husband (Occupation, Degree) &amp; Wife (Occupation, Degree)</th>
<th>HH Inc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Jude (Engineer, Bachelor’s) &amp; Olivia (Registered Nurse, Bachelor’s)</td>
<td>$&gt;100K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Juan (Fireman, Some College) &amp; Angelica (Social Worker, Master’s)</td>
<td>$&gt;100K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Pat (IT Sys Administrator, Some College) &amp; Karen (Sales Manager, Some College)</td>
<td>$&gt;100K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Gavin (PT Teacher/Law Student, Bachelor’s) &amp; Ebony (Ballet Dancer, Bachelor’s)</td>
<td>$&gt;30K</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AA: African American couple, C: Caucasian couple, M:AAh/Cw: Mixed race couple w/African American husband and Caucasian wife, M:Ch/AAw: Mixed race w/Caucasian husband and African American wife.
Table 3. Participants by Occupation, Education & Income (Con’d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Husband (Occupation, Degree) &amp; Wife (Occupation, Degree)</th>
<th>HH Inc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M:AAh/Cw</td>
<td>Arby (Football Coach, Some College) &amp; Bessie (Mental Health Tech, Some College)</td>
<td>&gt;$16K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M:AAh/Cw</td>
<td>Clark (Business Finance, Professional) &amp; Adele (Stay-at-Home Mom, Bachelor’s)</td>
<td>&gt;$100K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M:Ch/AAw</td>
<td>Tom (Mechanical Engineer, Bachelor’s) &amp; Julie (Business Planning, Master’s)</td>
<td>&gt;$100K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M:Ch/AAw</td>
<td>Clay (Maintenance Tech, Tech/Trade) &amp; Emily (Outreach Supervisor, Bachelor’s)</td>
<td>&gt;$100K</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AA: African American couple, C: Caucasian couple, M:AAh/Cw: Mixed race couple w/African American husband and Caucasian wife, M:Ch/AAw: Mixed race w/Caucasian husband and African American wife.

For an overview of participant characteristics, see Table 4, the Demographics Overview below, as it provides information on race, gender, years married, previous marriages, age, the number of children in the home, the highest level of education, occupation, income, and which spouse earned the higher income (Note: H = husband, W = wife, S = approximately the same).

Participant Profiles

It is said that we all have a story. Indeed, we share some things common to the human race, but we all have a unique thumbprint, with which we may identify ourselves and/or with which we may stamp the world. Through these unique life experiences, we come to understand the world. Or perhaps better stated, our worlds. Having analyzed participant meanings and arrived at my own interpretation of their truths, I now share profiles of participant couples, thereby thickening descriptions and enhancing interpretations.

Jude and Olivia

Jude and Olivia came to participate in the study when she sent me an email, immediately accepting the invitation to participate per an email she had received from her husband. Olivia’s message was very warm and enthusiastic. She said that she would have wanted to participate in the study even if there was no compensation. She thought it would be fun.

Jude and Olivia were both African American. They had been married 2 years and had no children. They had bachelor degrees and had both just begun master’s programs. Jude was an engineer
**Table 4: Demographics Overview**

Affectionate Expressions in Marriage Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ETHNICITY</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>YRS MARRD</th>
<th>PREVS MARRG</th>
<th>PART AGE</th>
<th>CHLDN HOME</th>
<th>DEGREE</th>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>HH INCOME</th>
<th>PERCEPTION OF FINANCIAL SITUATION</th>
<th>$$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAf(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Registered Nurse</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortable</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAf(2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Angelica</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortable</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cf(3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Some Coll</td>
<td>Sales Manager</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortable</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cf(4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ebony</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Ballet Dancer</td>
<td>$30-$40K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortable</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Cf/AAm(5)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bessie</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Some Coll</td>
<td>Mental Health Tech</td>
<td>$16-$29K</td>
<td>Suff/Diff b/c Exps</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Cf/AAm(6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adele</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Stay-at-Home Mom</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortable</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: AAf/Cm(7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>Business Planning</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortable</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: AAf/Cm(8)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>RN Supervisor</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Plenty Challenges</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAm(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jude</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortable</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAm(2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Some Coll</td>
<td>Fireman</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortable</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cm(3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Some Coll</td>
<td>IT Systems Admin</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortable</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cm(4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gavin</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>PT Teacher/Law Stu</td>
<td>$30-$40K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortable</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: AAm/Cf(5)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Arby</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Some Coll</td>
<td>Ftball Coach/Bus Own</td>
<td>$16-$29K</td>
<td>Suff/Diff b/c Exps</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: AAm/Cf(6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Clark</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Business Finance</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortable</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Cm/AAf(7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineer</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortable</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Cm/AAf(8)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Clay</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Tech/Trade</td>
<td>Maintenance Tech</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortable</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Marriage Demographics**

Average number of years married: 60 total years / 8 couples = 7.5 years

Individuals married previously:

Couples married 2 years: 3 (or 38%)  
Angelica & Julie (2 females)

Couples married 3-10 years: 1 (or 13%)  
Juan, Pat & Clay (3 males)

Couples married 11+ years: 4 (or 50%)

Longest marriage in study: 13 years (Clark & Adele)

**Age Demographics**

Average age of participants: 606 total years / 16 = 37.875 (or 38 years)

Females 25-30 yrs: 2  
Males 25-30 yrs: 2

Females 30-40 yrs: 3  
Males 30-40 yrs: 3

Females 40-50 yrs: 3  
Males 40-50 yrs: 2

Females 50+: 1 (56 yrs)  
Males 50+: 1 (56 yrs)
### Table 4. Demographics Overview (Con’d)

Affectionate Expressions in Marriage Study

**YRS MARRD:** Years Married / **PREVS MARRG:** Previous Marriages / **PART AGE:** Participant Age

**CHLDN HOME:** Children in the Home / **$:** Husband or Wife with Higher Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ETHNICITY</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>YRS MARRD</th>
<th>PREVS MARRG</th>
<th>PART AGE</th>
<th>CHLDN HOME</th>
<th>DEGREE</th>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>HH INCOME</th>
<th>PERCEPTION OF FINANCIAL SITUATION</th>
<th>$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAf (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Registered Nurse</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortble</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAf (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Angelica</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortble</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cf (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Some Coll</td>
<td>Sales Manager</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortble</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cf (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ebony</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Ballet Dancer</td>
<td>$30-$40K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortble</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Cf/AAm (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bessie</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Some Coll</td>
<td>Mental Health Tech</td>
<td>$16-$29K</td>
<td>Suff/Diff b/c Exps</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Cf/AAm (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adele</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Stay-at-Home Mom</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortble</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: AAf/Clm (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Business Planning</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortble</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: AAf/Clm (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>RN Supervisor</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Plenty Challenges</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAm (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jude</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortble</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAm (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Some Coll</td>
<td>Fireman</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortble</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cm (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Some Coll</td>
<td>IT Systems Admin</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortble</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cm (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gavin</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>PT Teacher/Law Stu</td>
<td>$30-$40K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortble</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: AAm/Cf (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Arby</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Some Coll</td>
<td>Football Coach/Bus Own</td>
<td>$16-$29K</td>
<td>Suff/Diff b/c Exps</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: AAm/Cf (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Clark</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Professnl</td>
<td>Business Finance</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortble</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Cm/AAf (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineer</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortble</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Cm/AAf (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Clay</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Tech/Trade</td>
<td>Maintenance Tech</td>
<td>$101-$300K</td>
<td>Suff/Comfortble</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children in the Household

- Number of households with 1-2 children: 4 (50%)
- Number of households with 3 or more: 2 (25%)
- Largest number of children in a household: 5

Education & Household Income

- Number of participants with Some College: 5: Karen, Bessie, Juan, Pat, and Arby
- Number of couples with Some College + HH Income of $16-$29K = 1: Arby & Bessie
- Number of couples with Some College + HH Income of $30-$40K = 0
- Number of couples with Some College + HH Income of $101-$300K = 2: Pat & Karen, Juan & Angelina
- Number of couples where husband brings in more income than wife: 6 (or 75%)
- Number of couples where wife brings in more income than husband: 1 (or 13%): Pat & Karen
- Number of couples where husband and wife brings in the same/similar income amount: 1 (or 13%): Gavin & Ebony
- Number of couples where wife has ↑ education than spouse: 3 Angelica, Julie and Emily
and Olivia, a registered nurse in mental health, and they were comfortable financially. The couple spent a lot of time with couples their age at church, playing sports, and they enjoyed many social get-togethers.

The interview took place in the couple’s home, which they had recently purchased, in a rural town in southern Indiana. They were as warm and personable in person as their emails had been. Olivia welcomed me in and took me on a tour of the home as Jude got settled in from work. Olivia was cheerful and smiled just about every moment of my stay in their home. I don’t recall her not smiling. If she wasn’t smiling at me, she was smiling, lovingly at Jude. She struck me as a romantic, and when we talked about it, she agreed. Jude was equally as doting. Together, they exuded love and affection. They shared funny comments and laughed often with each other, they shared loving words about the other, and they touched often. Jude and Olivia were the only couple in the study who were both satisfied with the types and amounts of affection expressed in their marriage.

**Juan and Angelica**

Juan and Angelica came to participate in the study with a referral from my co-worker. When I spoke with Angelica prior to the visit to her home, she was personable and told me that while Juan was completing the questionnaire, he had asked, “What if I answered all of the questions honestly?” She and I chuckled because she told him she hoped he would.

Juan and Angelica were both African American. They had been married 12 years and had 2 children living at home, and one away in college. Juan and Angelica had both grown up without fathers in their lives. Juan’s mother expressed affection using more “action than words.” Juan noted, “We were not huggers, kissers... it was the norm for my family not to be affectionate in that way, [e.g.,] kissing, hugging, saying I love you. However I never felt I was not loved.” Although Angelica was also satisfied with the affection shown in her family-of-origin, she shared that, ”More affection could have been expressed. My mother raised me as a single parent. She worked a lot, but also made sure we had extracurricular activities, so we didn’t spend that much time together.” Juan and Angelina have made a conscious resolve to be present and attentive in their children’s lives.

Juan and Angelica had both been married once before and had divorced. Juan had completed
some college and was a fireman, and Angelica had a master’s degree and was a social worker. Their household income exceeded $100,000 and they were comfortable financially.

Being a fireman, Juan spent days and nights at the firehouse; typically working 3 days there and returning home for 3 days. The family seemed to manage well with this schedule. Angelica didn’t note any concerns about it, as the time Juan was away allowed her to engage in activities she enjoyed. Angelica excelled in baking, interior decorating, and she was a creative organizer. The couple was active in their church and they enjoyed time socializing with friends. Angelica often hosted socials and get-togethers in their home (e.g., cookie exchange party, Pampered Chef party, etc.). Juan, on the other hand, preferred more of a focus on the two of them as a couple, and wanted Angelica to “prioritize what [was] more important” to her.

Juan, Angelica and I completed the interview in the husband’s sitting room, which contained decoratively arranged firefighter’s memorabilia, and pieces reflecting his hobbies. I was moved by a number of items in the room, (e.g., his fireman’s helmet, the coat, a figurine of an African American fireman assisting a child), and I thanked him for his service. I also complimented Angelica on her warm, colorful and calming decorating style. Juan and Angelica were as warm as their residence was, and made me feel at home. Juan sat on the sofa near the door and Angelica sat on the carpet in the center of the floor. Although Juan and Angelica did not draw near nor physically touch the duration of the interview, they shared moments of prolonged eye contact, and other moments smiling and joking with one another; mostly during the game. The mood was quiet and reflective and also lightened by laughter from time to time. There was a general sense of light unease between Juan and Angelica that persisted the duration of the interview. In private, Angelica told me that she and Juan had experienced a difficult time recently and that they were in the middle of “working it out, and that’s a good thing.” I only probed so far because it seemed to be a private pain. Angelica thought that participation in this study might be helpful to them as a couple. Neither spouse reported satisfaction with affection in their marriage.

**Pat and Karen**

Pat and Karen came to participate in the study as Karen was listening to Z995-WZPL as the
recruitment segment aired. She was excited about the opportunity and emailed me immediately. During the interview, Karen noted that she only listens to Z995 when songs she doesn’t like are played on her favorite station, hence she believed it was fate that she and Pat had “the opportunity to participate.”

Pat and Karen were both Caucasian. They had been married 6 years and had 2 young children together. Pat had been previously married, and had a son who lived with them part-time. This was Karen’s first marriage. They were both 37 years old. Both had completed some college and Pat was an IT systems administrator and Karen, a sales manager. Karen was the only wife in the study whose income exceeded her husband’s. Their household income was close to $300,000 and they were comfortable financially.

Karen traveled extensively for work and spent many nights away from home. While she was out-of-town, Pat cared for the children. When asked about what they would change in their marriage if they could, both said quality time together. Karen said, “More quality time spent with me, talking to me, not looking at a computer. Sitting down together to eat, and taking the time to work together when making dinner a few times a week.” Pat also said they would “consider their words more carefully.” In addition to their desire to spend more time together, they were the only couple in the study to also emphasize the importance of their own personal time. Pat enjoyed “me” time approximately once a week, and was satisfied with that. Because their children were young, they traveled separately. Karen went out with girlfriends and had recently gone on a trip with them to Florida. Pat took trips to their lake house alone. He was handy around the house and he typically went to perform maintenance on the home. He said, "It isn’t much; [we] just got a good deal on an old house."

The interview took place in the couple’s home, in a suburb of Indianapolis. Karen welcomed me inside with a cheerful smile and she was a gracious host. Having brought snacks, I was surprised to find that Karen had also prepared an array of treats, including sandwiches, chips, pretzels, dips, hummus and vegetables. I thanked her for her thoughtful generosity and marveled at the beauty of her home. It was a very large, upscale modern home, with a calming, relaxed ambiance, complete with lit candles in the
entry way and on the dining room table. Everything was in its place. Everything seemed perfect.

Pat and Karen both interacted quite a bit with their two-year old daughter during the interview. Although Karen asked her to go upstairs and watch a movie, the child spent the majority of the evening on her father's lap or sitting at the dining room table. Two year-olds demand attention and Pat and Karen attended to her distractions in different ways. Pat made a lot of eye contact with his daughter and spoke soothingly to her, often taking her in his arms and kissing her. She, in turn, responded lovingly to her father. She kissed him, played with him, and held onto his leg at one point. Although the diverted attention prolonged the interview, it was heartwarming to witness the tenderness between the two of them. Karen often looked at her daughter as the child talked and played. She picked her up once or twice and asked her to behave. At one point during the evening, seemingly exasperated, Karen scooped her daughter up and carried her up the stairs. Shortly thereafter, the daughter returned.

Pat and Karen both touched the daughter more often than they touched one another. They were both honest in their self-assessments and reports that things weren't perfect in their marriage. Their interaction with each other and their body language conveyed discord and unease; attesting to their reports. Both, however, shared very favorable comments as it related to satisfaction with their marriage. As the evening drew on and their relationship appeared more transparent, I witnessed unkind and unpleasant, disparaging comments from Pat to Karen. Comments which grew in intensity as the interview continued. Karen smiled less, but continued to smile and be a very warm and welcoming host.

**Gavin and Ebony**

Gavin and Ebony were the youngest couple in the study. The 26 and 25 year old were both Caucasian and had been married 2 years. They had one child; a three month old baby girl, and they were in a period of adjustment because of it. Both had bachelor's degrees. Gavin was a law student and a part-time teacher, and Ebony was a ballet dancer. They were comfortable with their household income ranging between $30,000 and $40,000. They led busy lives. They talked about recent events that had challenged their abilities to show each other affection. Ebony described, "It's been a lot since the baby
was born. Just in trying to get a routine going. We worked through it, but we had a big fight about responsibilities with [baby's name]. It's been a lot trying to figure out childcare and making sure everything's done every morning, and evening... things are more hectic. Just getting out of the house wears me out, and it seems like we have less time for everything... most nights, he's usually gone to study, and I go to bed after I've taken care of her."

During their interview, Gavin sat on the sofa and held the baby, who was awake, but was silent during the duration of the visit. Ebony sat on the loveseat alone. The couple did not share smiles, nor did they touch. Ebony was warm. She smiled with me. Especially as we talked about her unique career. She performed at a grand theatre in Carmel, Indiana, which was a posh little artistic city in the northern part of Indianapolis. Since I had attended a number of performances there, she and I discussed some shows we had commonly seen, and some she had performed in. Ebony beamed with emotion as she talked about performing and how much she enjoyed it. While Gavin was welcoming, he was not much of a talker. His responses were brief and to the point. During the interview, he was transferring knowledge. Perhaps this is all he had time for that evening. There was nothing unpleasant or difficult about his demeanor. This seemed to be his personality. He was polite. He just didn't talk much. Ebony affirmed her spouse, "I think he is on the higher end of the scale in terms of men showing affection to their wives. He knows when I need it and makes it a priority for our relationship." She added that she felt lucky to have "someone so special in [her] life." The minimal amount of physical touch or intimacy expressed between Gavin and Ebony was noteworthy in that they did not show emotion during the game either. Theirs was the shortest of all interviews, as responses were brief and there was little expounding on them. I saw a different side of Ebony, however, when we talked about her career. I wondered if she became more reserved at the end of this discussion out of habit. Gavin seemed to be reserved by nature. Perhaps this was what she was used to. I appreciated her and Gavin's time that evening. They were likely short on time. She had to take care of the baby. Gavin was likely preparing to leave to go study after I left. The couple was less talkative and less touchy, but seemed quite loving, as they esteemed one another often during my time there, and both reported satisfaction with the quality of their marriage.
Arby and Bessie

Arby and Bessie came to participate in the study as Bessie was referred by her co-worker Olivia, who had completed the study prior.

Arby was African American and Bessie was Caucasian. They had been married 12 years and had 5 children. They were 33 and 32 years old respectively. Both had completed some college and Arby was high school football coach in a small town and a small business owner; and Bessie was a mental health technician. Their household income, which ranged between $16,000 and $29,000 was sufficient, but they faced financial challenges because of expenses.

Bessie was dissatisfied with affection in her family-of-origin, as her mother was affectionate, but her father was not. “My Dad was not affectionate. [He] barely hugged us.” Bessie often discussed affection in her family-of-origin. “The amount was sparse... the amount was not sufficient because I could see how my sisters and I would crave affection growing up, especially from males.” Bessie used the phrase, “crave affection” twice during the interview, perhaps signifying a deep longing and a need that was unfulfilled. Arby also “blames” Bessie’s father for her lack of affectionate expression. “I blame her father because that’s where she developed ideas about who she is and how she should relate to others.” Arby found the affection he felt from his mother satisfying. He felt supported and loved by his grandmother and mother. His father was not involved in his life.

Per Bessie’s request, the interview took place in my home, which 4 out of the 7 family members attended. Arby, Bessie and their two youngest children (e.g., 2 and 4 years old). I welcomed the family in and offered bagels, fruit, muffins, and orange and apple juice for refreshments. A cartoon movie, Over the Hedge, was cued up and was played for the children to watch. Although the movie captured their attention but a short time, the children were well-behaved and distracted their parents very little. The youngest came and sat on his father’s lap from time to time. Both parents caressed and touched him, but...
Arby and Bessie were a kind couple. When they arrived at my home for the interview, I couldn't imagine they had five children. They seemed so young. They talked to some degree about the pace things moved in their home. Bessie said they stayed busy. I could imagine that. They had to move our interview back a half hour, as they were running late. I understood without question.

Arby was warm, humorous and jovial, and seemed to be comfortable with me, with the research experience, and with who he was. He spoke lovingly to his wife during our time together. He touched her hair. He had his arm around her at times. He looked at her. He smiled at her. They laughed together. Bessie was kind, though at first appearances, she might not have seemed genial. I could tell she was. I could tell that in spite of the fact that her head was held down at times and she wouldn’t make eye contact, she was as warmhearted as Arby was. Arby laughed with me often and I went out of my way to talk with Bessie during quiet moments; especially during the game, to make her feel at ease.

It was a cool, breezy fall day and the couple sat facing French doors that opened to my yard, which has miles of farmland behind it. Bessie often looked past me, outdoors as she spoke. Seldom making eye contact, she stared outdoors much of the time, especially while Arby spoke, and when there were moments of pause during the interview. Bessie also stared at her children a lot, as they watched the movie and had refreshments. During the game, the couple looked at one another, though Bessie did sparingly, and laughed often. They joked about their answers. After the musical exercise, Arby openly discussed Bessie’s insecurity noting, "she can’t even look me in the eyes." Bessie’s physical response while the song played corroborated Arby's claim, as she turned away from him and looked shyly away while he turned to her and moved closer.

Both spouses reported being dissatisfied with the affection in their marriage. Arby desired more communication and sincere expressions of affection, and Bessie simply craved more.
Tom and Julie

The couple came to be in the study as Julie responded to the recruitment email sent to the diversity group. Julie was happy to assist, but she had a very busy schedule and could only participate if it didn't involve a significant time commitment. I emailed her again, further describing the process, and she responded very quickly with an agreement to participate.

Tom and Julie had been married 11 years and had 2 young children in the home. Tom had a bachelor’s degree and was a mechanical engineer and Julie had a master’s degree and was in business planning. Their household income exceeded $100,000 and they were comfortable financially.

Julie discussed ways her current tendencies toward affectionate expression was similar to her experiences with affection in her family-of-origin, noting, “I didn't really see much affection in my family. I know that my family loved me. It’s just that we didn’t show it the same ways. We did encourage and praise each other and we gave compliments and a hug, but my parents never said I love you. But I knew they did. To me, we were loving. That was all I’d ever known... it was sufficient at the time but in hindsight, it could have been more. But I know I was loved.” Julie also commented on how affectionate Tom's parents were. "Tom's family is very affectionate. Even to this day. His parents are – how old are your parents, 85 or... even at 82 years old, they still show a lot of affection.” Julie further said, “I grew up without the external ways of showing affection and so the lack of it does not leave me uncertain.”

Throughout the questionnaire and interview, Tom and Julie shared notable comments and difficult feelings. They talked about their busy lifestyles. Julie traveled overseas regularly on business, and was planning to leave again the following week. Tom spent a lot of time caring for their children, the youngest of whom had cognitive impairment. Tom described their challenges as it related to his and his wife’s opportunities for affectionate expressions. “I go to work early, so [we are on] different schedules. We’re not in the same place at the same time. Julie started a new job that leaves her unhappy with work. I had a couple of medical false alarms that caused her much worry and me some worry. I sleep in [our daughter’s] room on school nights so that she will stay in bed – [it’s] not good.”

Julie had also been ill with cancer, and continued to experience residual issues that made life,
and expressing affection challenging. Tom also noted that “Julie has too many hot flashes. Not good.”

Although Julie was admittedly unaffectionate, some responses she shared and her demeanor seemed chilling at times. When she was asked about ways Tom showed her affection, she said that he “seeks a kiss in passing.” When asked how this made her feel, she replied, “It depends. If I’m focused on doing something it’s distracting. If I’m relaxed, I feel loved and thankful. I am not sure why it makes me feel this way. I am shown this kind of affection frequently. More than enough.” Julie’s comments were corroborated by Tom’s. He also noted, “[I] kiss her. [I hope this makes her feel] loved, happy. [She feels] slightly annoyed if done at a time that she thinks is unsuitable.” When Julie was asked how Tom shows her affection, she replied with “hugs.” When asked how this made her feel, she replied, “It depends. Sometimes it’s welcome and sometimes distracting. It’s welcome when I’m focused on him, distracting when I feel trapped.” Julie also showed affection to Tom by “Seek[ing] a kiss every now and then.” She hoped this would “assure him that I love him very much.” When asked if her kisses affected how Tom feels, Julie replied, “I think so.” Julie was then asked if she kissed Tom often. She replied, “No. Sparingly. [I’m] not sure why.” I was curious why. Julie appeared to have above-average intelligence and occupied a notable position in a Fortune 500 company. Julie was well-respected in the engineering field. When speaking with her, there was a sense of calm. Of stillness, as her spirit seemed zen. It would have been hard to imagine that she wasn’t a reflective individual.

There was no delicate way of inquiring about Julie’s comments, or the reasons for them. But before I asked, Julie shared. She seemed to feel the need to. Julie was a cancer survivor. She explained that some residual complications made life and the expression of affection challenging. Julie explained at the close of the interview, that her and Tom’s responses might “present as an anomaly,” because of her medical condition. Julie explained that her medical condition makes it very difficult for them. She is unable to regulate her body temperature and whenever she is around Tom, she “overheats to the degree that [they] can’t be close.” This may have made hugs and kisses “distracting” and Julie feel “trapped.”

A noteworthy moment occurred during the game when I asked the game question, “What is your and your spouse’s favorite way to be shown affection?” Tom answered first. He smiled, believing he had
had the right answer. His answer for himself was “physical intimacy,” or sex. Tom then tried to guess Julie’s response. “I’m sure you said cuddling.” Julie said she hadn’t. Julie didn’t smile. She looked at Tom without any particular emotion. “I said, ‘a gentle touch on the shoulder in passing.’” Julie had replied softly, but assuredly. Tom visually deflated. He sat motionless and seemingly glared, speechless. For moments. He looked shocked. And annoyed. Julie was now looking at the paper on her clipboard, preparing to discuss the next answer. This was a gentle family. A calm one. It seemed Tom’s eyes even blinked slower in that moment. The marital therapist in me craved intervention. I wanted to ask, “Julie, what are you feeling right now? As you look at Tom, what are you feeling?” As backward as it may seem, I would have asked her first. I would have posed the same question to Tom, and with the use of their language, broken their feelings down to their core understandings and needs. Perhaps this was also my role as the researcher. I simply didn’t feel it. The information gleaned would likely have been informative, but this felt like a moment between them. That didn’t really include me. I would be informed via observation alone. Besides, Tom’s face spoke wonders.

Pondering Tom’s reaction, I began to wonder if Julie’s apparent apathy about expressed affection or expressing affection was solely a consequence of her illness. Did the lack of affection shown in her family-of-origin in some ways affect her need for affection today? Was this simply her temperament? Her way of being? Perhaps it was a combination of each of these things.

Julie expressed her feelings. “I am not very happy about the fact that I don’t acknowledge my husband as often as he acknowledges me.” She acknowledged that the amount of affection expressed in their marriage was “sufficient for me, but not so much for my husband.” After spending time with Julie, I realized the challenges she faced. Although she may have seemed indifferent to the naked eye, given context, she wasn’t. She tenderly loved and cared. She faced a lot, though. Multiple surgeries and the life-dependent challenge of remaining cancer-free. The word ‘cancer’ typically arrests people, and stops life in its tracks. Julie had kept going. She may not have been able to function as most, to be as physically affectionate as most, but she cared. As I spent time in their home; a little over an hour, Julie talked about her struggles with cancer very often. I realized, in context, how important; how consuming
this circumstance must be. This was life. Julie was doing what most would do in quests to meet their human needs. She was striving for survival, a basic need. Needs of a higher order, like affection must have been difficult for her to focus on (Maslow, 1960). Incidentally, Julie was comfortable without typical demonstrations of affection because that was how she was raised. That’s what she was comfortable with. It didn’t mean she didn’t care. She wanted to meet her husband’s needs.

Tom and Julie were both very warm and their home was much like their demeanors, quiet and serene. During the interview and the game, the couple made eye contact often, and sometimes gazed at each other. They shared smiles throughout the game and laughs. Tom noted that he was going to “take [Julie] down!” (i.e., win the game). Both of them took their time sharing and discussing answers, often requesting additional time before I moved on to the next question. In spite of challenging moments, they appeared relaxed and to be enjoying the time, as evidenced by laughs, smiles and humorous comments.

Clark and Adele

Clark and Adele came to participate in the study as Clark accepted the email invitation that went to the corporate diversity group.

Clark was African American and Adele was Caucasian. They had been married 13 years and had 3 young children. They are 37 and 35 years old respectively. Clark had a professional degree and was employed in business finance and Adele had a bachelor’s degree and was a stay-at-home mom. The couple’s household income exceeded $100,000 and they were comfortable financially.

The couple discussed impediments to affectionate expression in their relationship. Adele had recently accepted a demanding job at their church, which Clark described as being “time-consuming.” He noted, “She is always busy and appears very distracted. Since everything she works with is confidential, it becomes awkward to communicate about her experiences. Because she is so busy and burdened, I feel more protective of her and want to let her know I love her.” Adele shared that she enjoyed Clark’s attention and his expressions of affection, but says that she doesn’t always want to stop what she’s doing to receive them.
The interview took place in Clark and Adele’s home in a rural town in Indiana on a Sunday beginning at 8:30 p.m., after the couple’s three young children had gone to bed. Clark answered the door and invited me inside and introductions were made. When I complimented them on their home and décor, they told me about renovations they had made and the fact that they had almost sold it and purchased another home, then changed their minds. This was to them a great source of stress.

Clark and Adele were welcoming and warm. Clark was laid-back and pleasant. Although Adele was quiet at the beginning of the interview, she became increasingly expressive as time passed. Adele was quite artsy and was proud of the scrapbooks and other crafts she had made throughout the years. Clark prided himself on being a good father and often took care of the children while Adele was working. The couple was expressly loving toward one another the duration of the evening. They often warmly smiled at each other, talked with one another, smiled, laughed, and they touched numerous times. I later learned that during the musical exercise, they had been “touching” under the table.

Although Adele was satisfied with expressed affection in their marriage, Clark was disappointed. He often expressed his displeasure with both the types and amount of affection he received, emphasizing feeling “less loved” because he didn’t receive affection in ways it most appealed to him (e.g., physical, touch). Adele admitted, “… we are not as intimate, but we have strong feelings for each other…” She also admitted, “… my spouse could use more affection in the ways he needs and wants not just the way I want to express affection. I can and should do better and give more energy into being affectionate with him.” She resolved to “… find better ways to make sure my husband knows I adore him and express my affection more often… take more time to physically be there for my spouse since I know physical touch is his #1 desired way of receiving affection and probably giving [it] too.”

**Clay and Emily**

The couple came to participate in the study as I happened by Emily while shopping in an outlet mall in Edinburgh, Indiana. Emily was warm, easy-going, humorous and engaging, and after talking for some time, I told her about the study and inquired about her interest in participating. Emily said, “If you need African American couples, I won’t work for you. My husband is Caucasian.” I smiled and excitedly
exclaimed, “No, you’re exactly who I need!” Clay eventually joined her in the store and she introduced us. Emily gave me her email address and I later emailed information about the study. She responded promptly, and said she and Clay would be happy to help.

Clay was Caucasian and Emily African American. They had been married 2 years and had no children. This was Clay’s second marriage, and Emily’s first. They were 56 and 50 years of age respectively. Clay had completed technical school and was a maintenance technician, and Emily had a bachelor’s degree and was registered nurse and outreach supervisor. Their household income exceeded $100,000, and although Clay believed they were comfortable financially, Emily felt they experienced financial challenges. Notably, Emily was the only participant who wasn’t in agreement with her spouse in assessing their financial situation. She was also the only spouse in the study who considered her husband “help[ing her] with finances” as a way he showed affection.

As we met for the interview, Emily was warm, open and engaging; just as she had been when I met her in the store. Clay had a calm spirit and became increasingly expressive as we talked; especially as we played the game. Notable moments occurred during the game. The couple joked with each other and laughed often. Clay joked about changing his favorite color from white to red in the middle of the game and Emily jovially accused him of cheating. They talked, laughed and nudged each other, often smiling and making eye contact the duration of the game.

The couple typically enjoyed a limited amount of quality time together, as Clay worked nights and Emily worked days. During the time they share together, they typically stick to routines more often than not, but both expressed an interest in engaging in activities they enjoy more (e.g., going out to dinner, taking day trips, and traveling).

Clay was less expressive of affection and he was satisfied with expressions he received. Emily was less satisfied with affection received, and more expressive. Clay admitted that Emily could “be quite needy at times, but [he didn’t] “fault her for it.” He added, “I think my spouse is normal for who she is. I mean, what is the standard? This won’t change... she needs what her heart tells her she requires and I try to meet her need.” The couple often talked about Emily’s desire for more affectionate expression.
Clay admitted, “Sometimes my affection is lacking and she lets me know about it. She will say I need to give more and we get it out in the open and talk; sometimes cry a bit too... I know I need to act out more of my inner feelings. Perhaps I am too reserved in this area and leave my spouse to assume I love her. She likes to be shown often, however.” Emily desired hugs, kisses, and smiles; things Clay seldom initiated, which prompted undesirable outcomes. Emily noted, “Sometimes I feel he doesn’t like me... I would like a little more affection, [such as] touching, smiles, kisses and hugs.” Clay has committed to “doing better,” and Emily was accepting of his way of being, in spite of her unmet needs. She was patient, she said, because they have been married just a short time and Clay was “still learning.” She was also trusting that things would get better and she resolved that “with God all things are possible to him who believes.”

Data Sources

The data sources for exploring the research questions included (1) the Demographic Questionnaire, (2) the Expressions of Affection in Marriage Questionnaire, (3) the Musical Exercise Survey (4) my research journal and field notes.

_The Demographic Questionnaire._ The Demographic Questionnaire (see Appendix A) petitioned demographic information such as age, ethnicity, the number of years couples were married, their household composition, their degrees, occupations, and total household income. The collection of demographic data enabled the comparison of subgroups to see how responses vary between diverse ethnocultural and socioeconomic groups.

_The Expressions of Affection in Marriage Questionnaire._ I designed the Expressions of Affection in Marriage Questionnaire (EAMQ) - (see Appendix B) to gain insight about participant perceptions about affection in marriage. Common to qualitative research practices, I did not primarily rely on questionnaires or instruments that were developed by other scholars. However, esteeming extant literature in the field, I extracted relevant useful data from similar questionnaires and incorporated appropriate information into the design of the EAMQ.

_The Musical Exercise Survey._ Musical Exercise Surveys were completed by participants during
the semi-structured interview. They were used to document participant reactions to the exercise (see Appendix C).

Research Journal & Field Notes. I began chronically my exploratory journey shortly after the data collection began, after the first interview. In it, I recorded my ideas and impressions about the research process, as well as thoughts and new discoveries. My field notes consisted of descriptions of participants and their homes, behaviors, temperaments, responses and comments they shared, as well as my thoughts about the research process, and my feelings, impressions, and surmisings about it. I jotted down what I observed (e.g., saw and heard) during interviews, and typed summaries of this combined information in the privacy of my home after interviews (see Appendix D, for a sample). I did not immediately realize the benefit these notes would bring. All I knew was that I wanted to engage this process of inquiry in as ‘textbook’ a way I could in accord with qualitative research. I realized during the analysis the gifts these tools equipped me with. Not only was I reminded of things I had forgotten, but I had stored up chunks of context that proved to be invaluable. In keeping the journal and recording field notes, I had not only given myself a gift, but I had also given this research a gift. One that guided my thoughts through the analysis and writing, providing context and stimulating additional reflection. I had also endowed this research with enhanced believability.

Data Settings & Collection

Data collection occurred in two stages. During the first stage, the Informed Consent Form, the Demographic Questionnaire (which should have taken approximately 5 minutes to complete), and the Expressions of Affection in Marriage Questionnaire (which should have taken approximately 25 minutes), were completed.

Stage 1: Completion of Documentation

Participants were instructed to complete the forms individually and privately. They were also informed that the information they reported would be kept confidential, and that I would be the only person who would have access to it. It was further emphasized that participant responses would not be
disclosed in any manner; neither verbally nor in writing, to their spouses. In addition, pseudonyms were used to protect participant identities from the risk of exposure.

After receiving the completed documentation, I reviewed participant responses to the EAMQ and recorded general themes, questions about inconsistencies or concepts that were ambiguous, and utilized these questions to inform topics that were explored during the semi-structured interview.

**Stage 2: The Semi-structured Interview**

During the second stage of the data collection process, participants engaged in semi-structured interviews where questions that were gleaned from the EAMQ were discussed, and some standard questions were posed to them (*see Semi-structured Interview Protocol in Appendix E*).

The setting for the second stage of research for most of the couples was their homes (7 out of 8), as data collection in natural settings are a common characteristic of qualitative research methods. Investigators generally collect data in sites where participants experience the issues or problems under study (Creswell, 2013), and research has shown that couples typically engage in more affectionate behavior in private, rather than public settings (Hopper et al., 1981; Stier & Hall, 1984). One of the mixed couples (AAh/Cw) preferred to meet at my home and brought two of their young children.

**The Interviews**

At the beginning of interviews, I briefly reviewed informed consent and re-established participants’ willingness to participate in the study. I then met with most spouses individually and discussed questions I had gleaned from questionnaires. I obtained clarification, asked additional probing questions, and performed member checks by confirming my own understandings of their responses. I also asked a short series of standard questions which were asked to all participants. Most responses were audio-recorded, though a few were recorded as field notes.

Although observation of these husbands and wives began the moment of my first contact with them (e.g., online), the bulk of observation began when I met them in person. I recorded field notes of observations, focusing on facial expressions, body language, eye activity (e.g., prolonged eye contact), personal space, and interpersonal gestures. Such observation continued beyond some interviews, as I
have had the pleasure of keeping in touch with some of the wives.

*The Know Your Partner Game*

After individual and joint discussions, couples played the *Know Your Partner Game*, where they were challenged to answer questions the way they thought their partner would respond. The spouse who guessed the most correct answers won the game and the opportunity to select from an array of DVD movie titles.

I had included the game in the study’s design because of my personal experience with games. I have created and hosted numerous games over the years and I have noted their ability to not only serve as icebreakers when people are unfamiliar with each other, but they also often foster unity, as teams attempt to work together. They tend to also disarm and allow people to relax, often to laugh, and let guards down. This was my purpose in including the game. The reason I chose to make this particular game was I’d hosted it at a few parties in the past, and people tended to enjoy it and we learn quite a bit about players and how they interact with one another. Players generally want so much to get answers right. Not so much to win sometimes, but because it feels good to know their partner or feel familiar with their preferences, desires, habits or favorite things. I believed the assessment of how well spouses are in tune with these things might provide some insight into the contexts of their lives. My main concern wasn’t necessarily whether they guessed their partner’s answer, however, but the actual answers and the subsequent discussions that would follow as we reviewed all responses verbally. The majority of couples engaged quite a bit of dialog after each question, whether they answered correctly or not.

Overall, the game proved to be an excellent component of the study because it provided an opportunity to witness couples in multiple mental, emotional, and cognitive states. For example, as questions were posed during the interview, a number of participants appeared apprehensive; perhaps wondering what would be asked of them next. Most participants were clearly more sober as we talked during the interview than they were while playing the game. The *Know Your Partner Game* seemed to be effective in disarming couples and allowing me to observe alternate ways they interacted and related to
one another. During the game, husbands and wives were more relaxed and playful. Numerous men told their wives they were “going down” or were “gonna get beat.” The tenor of the atmosphere changed as they smiled, laughed, and taunted one another. Men, who won the game 75% of the time (6 out of 8), often celebrated with masculine groans and posturing. I and many wives humorously hypothesized that men typically kept winning because the game was based on knowledge of the other, and men would know their partners better because women tended to disclose more. Being allowed to witness such variation in affect, mood, language, and behavior among the husbands and wives was valuable in this exploration.

**The Musical Exercise**

The musical exercise was also a valuable tool, as it allowed for extended observation and corroboration of self-reports. Hinman (2010) notes that the music therapy experience has been used to promote empathy in families, as music engages the emotional centers of the brain, the ones that are hard to access through cognitive processes such as talking and analyzing. As the interview continued, I asked couples to relax and try to be themselves as a song was played. I brought my pre-recorded ‘Research CD’ that contained 19 love songs to the first interview, and I had a printout available for couples to peruse, so that they could pick the song of their choice. Songs they could choose from included: *IOU* by Lee Greenwood, *Through the Years* by Kenny Rogers, *I Don’t Want to Miss a Thing* by Aerosmith, *Once Upon a Lifetime and Remember When* by Alabama, *Can You Feel the Love Tonight* by Elton John, and *Everything* by Michael Buble, among others. The couple that was first interviewed wasn’t familiar with any of the songs, and instead of my simply choosing a song for them, as I should have, I offered to play portions of each song so they could hear them and choose one. This process was time-consuming and one that likely affected the outcome of their responses to the exercise, as they had heard so many bits and pieces of songs by the time I played an entire one. I finally selected *Through the Years* by Kenny Rogers and later noted that although the song rendered warm feelings for the husband, his wife of 6 years said that she felt “silly” listening to it, because they haven’t been married long enough to experience difficulties.
I then began to ponder the idea that the music needed to resonate with couples if emotion or feeling would be elicited. Hence, during the following interview, I tweaked the process a bit. When I scheduled the interview via email, I asked the husband to share a song that might resonate with him and his wife. He selected, *Ain't No Sunshine When She's Gone* by Bill Withers, and I purchased an MP3 download, burned it to a CD and played it during their musical exercise. Although they reported enjoying the musical exercise, I still wasn’t satisfied with the process because I regretted using a brand new empty CD on which to record one song to play once, and this would be the case for 6 additional interviews if I didn't come up with a better plan! Hence, I selected the first song that appeared on my ‘Research CD’ and played it without inquiry to couples, as *IOU* by Lee Greenwood is a song that seems to neutrally elicit warmth. Reactions to the song in subsequent interviews were positive.

After the song was played, couples completed a brief, one-page survey, describing their experience during the exercise (see Appendix C). The Survey included three open-ended questions: (1) As the song played, I felt:, (2) I felt this way because:, and, (3) “Did you touch or show affection to your spouse during this exercise?” If respondents answered “yes,” they were asked, “What specifically did you do? Why? Name other ways that you show affection to your spouse.” If respondents answered “no,” they were asked, “Why do you think you did not demonstrate affection to your spouse?” Would you like to change anything about the way that you show affection to your spouse? If so, what would you change?

As I evaluated the musical exercise, I had mixed feelings. While it elicited emotion in couples, this didn’t necessitate them expressing it. Many couples ‘felt’, as music has a power to move us, but few physically responded or acted on those feelings. A commonly reported reason they hadn’t was because they were not alone. It mattered to most husbands and wives that I was in the room. In spite of my efforts to disarm them by putting my head down at times or appearing to look in another direction. I eventually asked myself, if I were redesigning the study, would I include the musical exercise again? The answer was actually yes. Because its aim was not to generate affectionate behavior. It was to inform me of how couples express affection, of when and in what situations they do. So, the exercise actually
served its purpose. I had hoped that responses to why people expressed or didn’t express affection to their spouses would be informative as it related to context surrounding the research questions, and it very often was. I was able to visually witness phenomena spouses shared verbally or didn’t share. For example, during one musical exercise, IOU by Lee Greenwood was played. It arguably would seem that regardless of one’s preference in music, that the lyrics would incite some reflection. When asked about his feelings after listening to the song, one husband completed the form (see Figure 8 below), noting that he was feeling “tenderness for Julie.” His wife, however, who was admittedly unaffectionate, shared a response that illustrated the degree to which she was unaffectionate. After hearing the song, when Julie was asked if she had showed affection for Tom, she said, “No. I was focusing and trying to listen.” When asked how she felt as the song was played, her response lacked all emotion. She responded,

"The same in many ways. Then I wondered if the tune would work with a Waltz. I tried to pick out the guitar."

The completion of the musical exercise concluded the data collection.

**Remuneration**

At the conclusion of the data collection, couples received an envelope that read, “The [their last name] Family.” A thank you card was inside the envelope, with a written message of appreciation from me. Within it was their gift card in the amount of $30.00 to the business establishment of their choice.
As the recruitment process drew on, I began to imagine new ways to attract participants. Because of my experience at Grace Apostolic Church, when no one volunteered until I mentioned the gift cards, I thought that this might be a viable area to change. Hence, I allowed participant couples to choose to have their $30.00 gift card be from any establishment, e.g., restaurants, stores, car washes, etc. Couples generally still chose restaurants, e.g., Bob Evans (n=2), Bonefish Grill (n=2), Outback Steakhouse (n=1), Red Lobster (n=1), Texas Roadhouse (n=1); and one couple, who reported the lowest household income, ranging from $16,000-$29,000, requested a Walmart gift card.

**The Addition of Referral Gifts**

Because recruitment was particularly challenging, to enhance efforts in attaining a snowball sample, I began offering a $15.00 gift card to anyone who referred a couple that completed the study. Two couples were attained as a result of referrals from others. One referrer chose to receive her gift card from AMC Movie Theatre. Because ticket prices were $9.00 each, I purchased an $18.00 card to spare her and her spouse any expense. As well, when another woman referred her brother and sister-in-law, the couple completed the study. As I left their home after the interview, with the referrer’s permission, I left a second envelope for her containing a $30.00 gift card for the timely and much-needed referral, as those ethnocultural and socioeconomic categories were so difficult to find. Her gift card was more than $15.00 because she was enthusiastic about completing the study herself and would have if she had met the criteria. As well, she was expecting her first baby the first week in November and I thought it would be a nice gift. I considered it ethically responsible to tangibly thank her, as she was willing to share so much, and she had given me something very valuable; one of the final couples.

**Closing the Interviews**

After couples received remuneration, I gathered game cards, musical survey responses, my computer and my field notes, and I prepared to leave.

Interviews typically lasted an hour, but ranged from 50 minutes to 2.5 hours. Such time frames are in accord with extant scholarship on observational data in the field. Heyman (2001), for example, investigated the question of how much observational time was necessary to witness enough behavior.
among marital dyads to make observations reliable, and found that 10 to 15 fifteen minutes was sufficient. However, in order to arrive at the truths that these husbands and wives were so gracious to share, I needed more time. To familiarize myself with and understand the context that surrounded them.

I had extended opportunities to observe couples after interviews as I was taken on tours around many of the homes, and we engaged in discussions in foyers and outside their front doors. I typically spent 20-45 minutes socializing with couples after our ‘prescribed work’ was done. Although I was still recording observations mentally, these were special times for me. Peaceful moments with kindred spirits. These married individuals had invited into their homes to conduct a study. They wanted me to stay because we enjoyed each other’s company. We enjoyed snacks together. I brought some snacks and participant couples surprised me and shared some as well. We talked about so much. Growing up, growing old, games we enjoy playing and the “right way to play checkers” versus my way, one couple’s journey into graduate school together, infertility and options of adoption, having family over to visit, home décor, HGTV, and challenges associated with illness.

When I thanked these men and women, I meant it sincerely. I was moved by their candor and bravery in sharing their personal truths about affectionate expression in such compelling ways, and I was touched that they were willing to do so with me. So commenced relationships that are now special to me, and incidentally provides additional context into their lived experiences. I sent Christmas cards to every couple, with a brief update about where I was in the analysis process and a note beside it: “Because of you. Thank you again so much.” One of the couples sent a wonderful Christmas family newsletter to me that discussed in depth the family’s journeys through illness. Another couple continues to look forward to the time I’ve completed my dissertation so we can get together and have a game night; so they can show me the “right way to play checkers.” Another wife who completed the study also recently became a hospice volunteer at my company.

**Data Analysis**

I employed interpretive phenomenological analysis in the effort to uncover the understandings
and experiences of affectionate expression among diverse married couples. The analysis was phenomenological in that I sought to represent the participants’ view of the world, and it is interpretive because it was also dependent upon my perceptions and interpretations (Willig, 2001).

Inherent in this tradition is the notion that different individuals may apply different meanings to the same phenomenon, and that the process of interpretation will include an interaction between the perceptions of the participants and the researcher. Hence, I have maintained a reflexive attitude about the process of this research, and I followed prescribed analytical steps in an attempt to remain true to the facts and how they reveal themselves (Husserl, 1960).

Hycner (1985) and Giorgi (1975) offer similar prescribed guidelines for phenomenological analysis. While I centered on Hycner’s guidelines as the data was analyzed, features of Giorgi’s model were also incorporated in my approach to analysis.

The data was derived from the EAMQ, the semi-structured interview, and my journal and field notes describing my observations. Consistent with Hycner’s guidelines, the data was transcribed as accurately as possible from these data sources, composed in a Microsoft Word documents, and imported into the NVivo software program.

**STEP 1. Identifying Units of General Meaning**

I attempted to transcribe the audio recordings immediately following interviews, but because they typically occurred late evenings, I transcribed them within 2-3 days following interviews. Within less than 24 hours, however, I transcribed my field notes and journal entries into reports that proved to be useful in providing context the duration of the analysis. This, I believed was paramount in my attempt to assure the integrity of the data.

Throughout the research process and as I commenced the analysis, I made a conscious effort at ‘epoche.’ At this stage of the analysis, I emphasized the importance of the words that were shared with me. Hence I read the transcripts multiple times. If I was to understand the phenomenon of affection from the voices of these men and women, I had to suspend my judgments and preconceived ideas and center on their words as units of general meaning. Hence, my analysis was approached with openness
to the phenomenon of affection as an entity of itself that these gracious men and women were going to give meaning to (Hycner, 1985). I identified nodes or units of general meaning or areas or those that were relevant to my research questions and classified them into the software program as nodes.

**STEP 2. Crystallization and Condensation**

The study employed constant comparative analysis. After every transcript had been coded, I referred back to the research questions to re-analyze the units of general meaning in conjunction with them, being sure to focus as much as possible on their literal words, and assuring that the units were of relevance. I ran frequency reports, noting nodes with high occurrence, as the frequency with which a unit is noted may indicate as much significance as the amount of emphasis a participant puts on a comment (Hycner, 1985). At this point, my goal was to further combine them into fewer general units, or conduct data reduction. During this process, I took a number of breaks, or allowed myself time away from the data. Often, it was to attend to some work or family responsibility; others, it was because the amount of codes derived from 16 viewpoints and multiple research questions were overwhelming. Hence, I took breaks, not only because it's prescribed in phenomenology, but because I knew I needed them.

**Challenges with NVivo and General Inexperience**

Being a novice to qualitative inquiry and in using NVivo's software, I ran into a few snafus. Although I’m typically computer savvy and beginning months before my analysis, I had thoroughly researched NVivo’s user manuals and watched over 10 hours of how-to videos, my actual use of the software led to quandaries and confusion, and portions of my analysis were unnecessarily extended and prolonged due to my lack of understanding and inexperience with conducting qualitative inquiry.

After having completed the coding process in NVivo, a procedure that took many weeks to complete, I attempted running reports beyond basic frequencies, and I couldn’t. I desperately retreated to the videos again, but found myself inundated with questions about what the software could do, what I expected it to do, and with instructions I didn’t understand. Because I was inexperienced in qualitative inquiry, I didn’t realize that my large stack of node reports situated me exactly where I needed to be.
Being a visual learner, I felt I had to restructure the data to make it make better sense to me. I, hence, spent the next month resorting to my typical way of understanding information; creating graphs, charts, and spreadsheets in Microsoft Word that helped me see the data clearly and allowed me to make sense of it. As writing commenced, however, NVivo proved to be a Godsend. While utilizing the program, I located quotes and bits of information that were difficult to locate in the copious stacks of reports I'd amassed.

I’ve learned a lot in this process of analysis; about affectionate expression, about qualitative research, and about myself. I now know my preferred approach for conducting qualitative inquiry, which will be invaluable to me in future studies. Meanwhile, I don’t lament these challenges because although this experience was highly time-consuming, it firmly established my familiarity with the data because I engaged the first two steps of analysis twice. Using tables and graphs I designed in Word, I recoded the data, approaching it with epoche’ once again, as though I had never seen it. I evaluated this second set of units against the research questions and manually calculated frequencies. I repeated the data reduction process by minimizing the numbers of codes and categories I had established. I knew that these husbands and wives were the experts in this study, so I sent summaries to them, noting this, and that I welcomed any suggestions for change or revision. I learned from responses that these men and women were just as curious as I was to know how others experience affection in their marriages. I received no recommendations for change, but words of appreciation. Yet I was the one who was thankful to them. Without their truth, this exploration would not have been possible. I was now ready to conceptualize themes.

**STEP 3. From Units to Themes**

I had spent a number of days conceptualizing and categorizing the units because I worked during the day and I found that stepping away from the data refreshed me. I did the same as I approached the emergence of themes. I knew that clarity was necessary as I attempted to determine the true meaning of these units applied to context. Sometimes I took half a day away as I ran errands, others were 1-2 day breaks. Time away was a must because of the number of research questions I had, and the
conceptual overlap in many of the units and questions that made lengthy continual attempts at analysis confusing. I actually found stepping away challenging because I had spent so much time with these words, stories and viewpoints that it was hard to separate myself from them; to not think about them. I was excited to be situated in this research process, closer to their truths, and I was curious about themes that would emerge. I thought about them from time to time during my breaks, then forced myself to refocus on other things. I also approached and re-approached the units and walked away again multiple times; mainly because of the number of questions involved.

Having studied qualitative research for some time now, I’ve heard it said that themes emerge from the data. In the past, I’d read that. I’d imagined it. I’ve now experienced it. With a freshness of mind, themes seemed to present themselves to my consciousness and I was amazed. It seemed that themes that emerged originated outside of me, and just came to me, and I was excited because I realized that this is exactly what I wanted. I sought the essence of affectionate expression for these couples and their words comprised it. I have been awed by this process of inquiry and I treasure this experience.

**STEP 4. From Themes to Descriptive Statements**

Themes that emerged were both condensed and conceptualized as descriptive statements that addressed how affection is expressed in marriage. As themes were delineated as narrative accounts, I was careful to remain true to the truths of participants, and to distinguish the difference between their words and my interpretations.

**The Multiplicity of Research Questions and Explication of the Findings**

One challenge I faced was to remain focused when analyzing and explicating very similar research questions with data from sixteen participants with multiple sources (e.g., questionnaires and interview transcripts) teeming with similar references. I wanted to keep the analysis pure, or free of conceptual overlap. For example, the question of how couples generally defined and described affectionate expression yielded a list of behaviors. This was a very similar list of behaviors as was delineated when couples were asked how they specifically give and receive affection. My strategy for remaining focused was to center specifically on one research question at a time and to determine the
appropriate and most effective method for arriving answers. While some responses were coded in vivo, other themes emerged from codes I constructed.

**Research Question 1**

Two corresponding questions on the Expressions of Affection in Marriage Questionnaire (EAMQ) informed this discussion: Q.12 *Defining Affectionate Expression.* How do you personally define affectionate expression? Q.13 *Describing Affectionate Expression.* If you were facilitating a seminar to a group of married couples about affectionate expression, and someone asked you to name specific ways that affection is typically shown among spouses, how would you respond?

To arrive at the definition, responses were coded in vivo. I typed, verbatim, every answer to Q.12, (i.e., every definition that was shared), where (n=16) and engaged line-by-line open coding. Units of general and relevant meaning were identified, then crystallized, as I eliminated redundancy. I continued to adhere to a constant comparative approach in the analysis, often checking to assure relevance to research questions. Categories were transformed into themes, and themes were conceptualized as descriptive statements. This process is illustrated in Chapter 4.

**Research Question 2**

In an effort to determine the ways spouses show each other affection, and the ways they receive it, transcripts from the EAMQ and interviews were coded using line-by-line open constructed codes, from which units of general and relevant meaning were identified, reduced, and themes were identified.

**Research Questions 3-5**

In an effort to determine spousal satisfaction and its effect on marital quality and considerations of divorce, line by line open, in vivo coding was employed.

**Trustworthiness: Strategies to Enhance Research Quality:**

*Without rigor, research is worthless, becomes fiction, and loses its utility* – Morse, et. al. (2002).

Rigor is the means by which integrity and competence is evaluated in research, and it is a way of demonstrating the legitimacy of the research process. The evaluation of the quality of this study was engaged with an emphasis on the achievement of trustworthiness, which according to Lincoln and Guba
(1985), is comprised of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

To this end, a variety of strategies and considerations were ingrained in the design and process of this study (e.g., credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability).

**Credibility**

Credibility, from an interpretivist’s perspective, refers to how well the research method investigates what it intends to (Mason, 2002) and the extent to which the researcher gained full access to, interpreted, and delineated the informant’s knowledge, and meaning (Remenyi, et. al., 1998). The central question in the evaluation of credibility is whether the research accurately identified and described the phenomenon under study, and such evaluation is contingent on the validity of the approaches used in the data analysis and the transparency of the researcher’s interpretations (Mason, 2002). Hence, attention to credibility is not a matter that is to be addressed at the conclusion of the study, but such consideration should begin with the conception of the project.

In the planning stages of this study, credibility was established via the provision of a thorough research plan and comprehensive descriptions of my proposed processes. Heretofore, I had richly articulated the decision-making process in the design-stage of the study (e.g., as it relates to the number of participants and ethnocultural categories).

This study was involved a triangulation of data methods, as data from questionnaires were compared with data obtained during interviews and observations, which offered a more holistic view of situation-specific meanings, providing context. The triangulation of data methods also helped me identify patterns of convergence between data sources, and to confirm and disconfirm participant self-reports. For example, on the EAMQ, a husband in the study reported satisfaction in almost every area of his marriage, and noted only one immensely minor matter of dissension. Observation, however, provided a contrasting reflection, as he shared numerous passive-aggressive comments about multiple ways his wife relates to him. Deviant cases, such as these, have also been emphasized, as they help to enhance our understanding of how couples experience affection. Guba (1981) notes that conflicts in the data do not necessarily obliterate credibility, but that credibility is enhanced when researchers
persuasively address inconsistencies and when the interpretations they provide adequately explain contradictions. It may be discovered that some event may have precipitated a chance from the couple’s typical interactional patterns, or that affectionate expression has a different meaning for the couple, or reveal beliefs regarding displays of affection in public spaces. Such inclusions may inevitably serve to enhance the quality (and believability) of the findings.

Central to the credibility of qualitative research is the ability of informants to recognize their experiences in the research findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Because I wanted to know for sure that couples would sense the essence of their truths, member checks were included in the analysis. Having received no recommendations for modification, I felt that credibility had been enhanced.

This study also included a triangulation of investigators. While some scholars argue the pointlessness of multiple interpretations, as the interpretivist intention is toward subjectivity and confidence in the human instrument, the stance of this research is in accord with the general consensus among some scholars of qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2008); that inter-rater reliability is a worthwhile endeavor, as such analysis mitigates itself against subjective bias in the data analysis process. Hence, I asked my supervisor at Harbor Light Hospice, Dr. Amy G. Adams, RN, PhD if she would assist in this endeavor. Amy, an experienced researcher, very willingly agreed to help. She and I independently coded the same random sample responses, which were a subset of cases (n=3). We deemed that we had achieved sufficient interrater agreement after one iteration and but we discussed discrepancies and modified codes and established the final dataset. We may have sought to attain a higher level of agreement on any other occasion, but it was impractical given work and academic time constraints.

---

**Figure 10. Interrater Remuneration**

[Image of a gift card for a massage]
At the conclusion of our work together, I was appreciative of Amy's contributions to this study as it was a significant time and energy commitment on her part, and I compensated her effort with an unexpected $75 coupon for a massage at the Massage Envy spa location of her choice. See Figure 10.

As well, in order to effectively illuminate the lived experiences or truths of these husbands and wives, it was my intention to describe the essence of the experiences with affectionate expression in a living, vibrant, detailed, and comprehensive manner.

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings may be applied to other contexts and settings, or with other groups (Krefting, 1991). Many scholars are dismissive concerning the role of generalizability in qualitative research, since qualitative settings tend to be unique and the purpose of such inquiry is to describe those unique experiences; not to generalize to others (Sandelowski, 1986). Other scholars, such as Lincoln and Guba (1985) accept the notion of applicability, conceptualized as transferability. They believe research meets this criterion when the findings fit into contexts that are external to the study. Hence, transferability or “fittingness” is determined by the degree of similarity (or the “goodness of fit”) between studies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) further posit that transferability is not the responsibility of the researcher, but of those who seek to transfer the findings to other situations; and they contend that as long as the researcher presents sufficient descriptive data to allow for comparison, he or she has addressed the problem of applicability. I also espouse the value of unique, interpretive inquiry in this study, and minimize the importance of generalizability; and this study provides a thick description of data, self-reflection and participant profiles so that others may be able to, as seamlessly as possible, evaluate the study's transferability.

**Dependability**

Reliability refers to the replicability of a study (Kvale, 1996). In other words, would the findings be fairly consistent if the study were repeated with the same or similar subjects in the same or a similar context? Would repetition alter the findings? Because of the diversity of context that is involved in most qualitative investigations, one would be hard pressed to be able to effectively replicate qualitative
studies. For example, in this current investigation, the core and periphery backgrounds and current experiences of each couple, each individual, is comprised of a variety of complex systems and subsystems of individual, dyadic, familial, community, and societal factors that combine in particular ways with temperamental and mental processes and paradigmatic structures to engender the truths of about their experiences. Hence, a true replication of such a study may not be possible to achieve.

Instead, Mason (2002) suggests that interpretivists conceive of dependability as a way of demonstrating that the researcher has not misunderstood, misread, or misrepresented either the data or the analysis of it. In order to minimize opportunities for misrepresentation, this study has been presented in a reflexive manner and I’ve provided a detailed account of my background and paradigm, conceptual frameworks that guided the study, the study’s methodology and my feelings about many aspects of it, the analytic choices and snafus I made, and the gems of self-discoveries I acquired along the way.

Summary

In summary, I believe the most effective overall strategies to enhance the quality of research is to assure a systematic and thoughtful research design that is transparent and reflexive; one that is delineated in a thorough and comprehensive manner, and one that will offer a plausible and coherent description of participant experiences with affection.

I also embrace the call to ethical standards, both as a part of the academic research community, and as a member of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), and I have adhered to these standards in this academic endeavor. Lincoln (1995, p. 287) notes that the “standards for quality in interpretive social science are also standards for ethics.” The social work code of ethics emphasizes three values that are relevant in the study of affectionate expression among diverse groups, and they are (1) that social workers are to work for social change or justice. This research was intended to serve as groundwork for subsequent inquiry about affectionate expression in marriage, and it also argues the need for the inclusion of affectionate expression in discussions and investigations on innovative therapy approaches. (2) The inherent worth of every individual has been retained in the forefront of my mind
from the design phase of the study until today, and it will continue to remain important to me, as I will reflect, likely for years, on the ways that my couples were treated and represented and hope they feel esteemed. (3) A researcher’s and social worker’s ethical responsibility to do no harm. I conducted this study in accord with professional standards and empathetically regarded the men and women who participated as I would wish to be regarded, should circumstances or roles have been different.

Throughout this process of inquiry, I have gathered sensitive personal data that revealed many details of life for participants. Wolcott (2010) argues that as researchers present their interpretations of these accounts, readers also have a right to know about them, what prompts their interest in the topic of study, as well as what might color their perspectives as they attempt to grasp the perspectives of others. I have comprehensively discussed my life’s experiences that led me to study affection in marriage, as well as my perspectives and paradigms.

As well, I took steps to avoid the risk of exposure or the exploitation of those who consented to work with me. Having conducted the interviews in participant homes, as opposed to an office, I avoided taking advantage of power issues. I respected their privacy by assigning fictitious names as data was analyzed and reported.

Finally, having reviewed the literature on affectionate expression in marriage, and reflected on the themes that have emerged from this exploration, I attest with confidence that this was an issue that was worthwhile to study. Therefore, I have presented the findings in a living, vibrant, detailed way, including narratives and graphics to convey ideas, and I have communicated in clear, unambiguous language, and have presented the findings in comparison with extant literature and concluding thoughts.

In the end, I wondered if I got it right. Did I capture the essence of the couples’ experiences with affectionate expression as it was presented to me? I also trusted that my adherence to the strategies that enhance research quality (e.g., thoughtful study design, member checking, triangulation, considerations of ethics, thick descriptions, and transparency) were sufficient.
CHAPTER 4
DEFINING AFFECTIONATE EXPRESSION:
CONSTRUCTIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS

Two questions informed this discussion. Husbands and wives were asked, “How do you personally define affectionate expression?” The second question posed to them was, “If you were facilitating a seminar to a group of married couples about affectionate expression, and someone asked you to name specific ways that affection is typically shown among spouses, how would you respond?”

The first question was intended to provide a collaborative definition in the language of participants. The second question solicited descriptions of specific behaviors that would provide context to the definition. It was my intention, in this exploration to remain true to the language and intent these social actors used, hence responses to these specific questions were coded in vivo. Participants often described affectionate behaviors using one to three words, therefore quotations are short.

The collaborative voices of husbands and wives in this study defined how affectionate expression would be operationalized, providing a conceptual framework of the way these men and women understand affectionate expression. There would be no reliance on a priori definitions. As participants shared their own personal definitions of affectionate expression, one idea that resonated as a common theme was that expressing affection is an act, or something that must be done, demonstrated or displayed:

Pat: The act of showing...

Tom: Gestures that...

Clark: Any actions or words that...

Bessie: Taking the steps necessary to ...

Jude’s (AAm.28) definition seemed to ground the others:

Jude: Acting on a choice to...

Jude shared an observation that before any action occurs, there must often be a choice to take it. I

---

1 Referencing the participant’s racial group, gender and age (RACIALGROUPgender.age)
wondered if Jude had contributed this nugget of truth intentionally, or if it had inadvertently entered our discourse. Jude was a thoughtful young man. He seemed to have a depth of self- and other-awareness well beyond his 28 years. I wanted to understand the meaning he attached to this statement. After meeting Jude and noting his poise and ability to express his thoughts in insightful ways, it became obvious that the definition he offered was no random surmising. Jude had given it thought:

_Sharen:_ To define affectionate expression, you wrote, “acting on a choice.”

_Jude:_ Uh-huh.

_Sharen:_ Why?

_Jude:_ Why did I write it?

_Sharen:_ How did you come to think it? What does that mean to you?

_Jude:_ It means that I can or can choose not to do anything. That’s with everything. So, like for me, I’m not really a very sensitive or affectionate person. So, it’s a choice for me. Sometimes I don’t even think about what to do to be affectionate. I’m pretty much clueless to that stuff. But Olivia is very affection [smile]; maybe more than the typical person. So, I’m trying to kinda make sure I’m doing things she wants or needs. But I’m not nearly where I need to be ‘cause sometimes when it dawns on me to do something, I have to decide to actually do it.

_Sharen:_ Have you consciously made a decision not to show her affection?

_Jude:_ No. Uh-uh. But then again, what’s conscious? Like, if I’m watching TV, which is my downfall, I might think of something, like going in the kitchen to hug her or something, but this real good commercial’s on or something and a show comes back on, but I didn’t get up; I didn’t intentionally choose not to, but I did, right?

_Sharen:_ I see.

_Jude:_ I’m not [pause] I just don’t think about it a lot, that’s all. But she deserves it so I’m getting’ better.

Juan (AAm.44) had also given thought to his contribution. Juan was hardly as comfortable when we met, as Jude had been. But he was friendly. He smiled. He answered questions when I asked. He didn’t always add reflection. But I didn’t expect him to. Having reviewed his questionnaire prior to the interview, I knew that he was a man of few words. Especially with strangers, and especially when talking about affection. Juan’s wife, Angelica (AAf.43) noted many times that Juan preferred action over
words, when it came to showing affection. Juan’s responses also suggested he was a thinker, as they didn’t depict common ideas. His contribution to the definition was holistic in nature:

   **Juan:** *Verbal, physical, and emotional ways of...*

The definition of affectionate expression was a true collaboration of participant voices, being formulated one step at a time (*see Figure 11 below*).

Also inherent in the definitions shared by participants was the noteworthy idea that people show or demonstrate affection for different reasons. Or, that they intend them for different purposes. Responses reflected notions that we share them: (1) to *show* another how we feel, and (2) to *make another feel* a certain way. Responses in *Table 5* were categorized by participant identified purposes.

Participants surmised that people express affection to show how they feel. They used the following language:

   **Arby:** *Showing someone you love them...*

   **Adele:** *An act... that expresses...*

   **Ebony:** *A feeling that one shows to another.*

   **Pat:** *The act of showing...*

Participants also surmised that people express affection to make someone feel a certain way. They used the following language:

   **Bessie:** *... to make someone feel...*

   **Jude:** *... to make another feel...*

   **Gavin:** *... that makes them feel...*

Husbands and wives also identified qualities and feelings that givers and recipients of affection are intended to show or sense:

   **Gavin:** *... feel loved.*

   **Bessie:** *... feel wanted, special, needed*

Hence, each of the phrases that depict showing might be completed by a feeling that is intended to be shown. For example, “The act of showing” might be completed with multiple feelings (e.g., love,
## Definitions of Affectionate Expression

*To explore how respondents define affectionate expression, engaged line-by-line open, in vivo coding.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Quality time spent without unwanted distractions, physical touch, closeness to each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The act of showing love, kindness, or thoughtfulness toward another person or thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Showing someone you love them, care for them, and [they] can be secure with you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Taking the steps necessary to make someone feel wanted, special needed. Ex: holding hands, kissing, holding one another, saying I love you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>An act verbally, physically, emotionally that express love from one person to another or express admiration &amp; respect, fondness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Any actions or words that let someone know you care about or love them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Displays of romantic affection toward one’s significant other such as holding hands, hugging or kissing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Acting on a choice to make another feel special, loved or wanted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>A gentle, subtle outreach that lets another person know you feel love and care for them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Gestures that show that you care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>A feeling that one shows to another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Anything that makes them feel loved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Warm and playful interaction such as smiles, winks, touching, kisses, hugs, verbal affirmation, selfless acts of love, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Considering the other person before yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The act of demonstrating a fondness, liking, or love for someone else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Verbal, physical, and emotional ways of supporting each other’s wants, needs, and desires</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 5. Defining Affectionate Expression | Thematic Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANTS WORDS</th>
<th>PROPERTIES (derived from coding)</th>
<th>OPEN CODE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical touch</td>
<td>▪ Physical touching involved</td>
<td>Various ways to express affection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding hands… holding one another</td>
<td>▪ Verbal manifestations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An act verbally, physically, emotionally</td>
<td>▪ Sharing of emotion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any actions or words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugging or kissing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal affirmation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal, physical and emotional ways</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anything that makes them feel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Involves gestures or acts</td>
<td>Involves acts or gestures that informs another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Involves words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Involves manifestations that informs another (e.g., displays)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Involves purposive outreach to another</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The act of showing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing someone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking the steps necessary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An act</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any actions or words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displays</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting on a choice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A gentle subtle outreach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gestures that show</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The act of demonstrating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Expressive acts</td>
<td>Doing something to show how you feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Displays</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Indicative acts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Demonstrative acts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>To show:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Love (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Care (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Fondness (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Liking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Admiration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Respect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Kindness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Thoughtfulness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The act of showing love</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing someone you love them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An act… that expresses love</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displays of romantic affection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That lets another know you feel love</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That show you care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling that one shows to another</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating a fondness or liking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting each other’s wants, needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>To make another feel:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Loved (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Wanted (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Special (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cared for (e.g. wants, desires and needs met)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Needed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Safe / Trusting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
admiration, kindness). As well, affection may be expressed with the purpose of making someone feel loved, wanted special, etc.

Couples essentially identified, not only actions and behaviors they felt were indicative of affectionate expression (e.g., holding hands) but also motivations behind them. This would become a significant element of the study, as research questions were further explored.

**A Significant Discovery**

With exploration came discovery. As meaning emerged from the voices of these husbands and wives, revelations presented themselves. The fact that couples identified intentions for affectionate behavior, or motivations behind them, made it obvious that in order to arrive at the depth of understanding of affectionate expression in marriage I had hoped to, research questions would have to not only focus on behaviors, but motivations behind them. In exploring questions such as, *how do you define affectionate expression? Or, how do you demonstrate it, or interpret and receive it from your spouse,* lists of behaviors (or taxonomies) would be informative, but they arguably might not be as illuminating as the deeper analysis that questions of *why* might provide. Or, for what purpose?

The importance of identifying reasons people show affection became clear. As behaviors were explored it became evident that 5 different husbands would do a broad variety of affectionate things to generate the same one, identical feeling in their wives. For example, in order to make their wives feel special, husbands engaged numerous different behaviors (e.g., kissing, hugging, listening, calling, encouraging, sacrificing, etc.). Their actions differed significantly. Similarly, this “special” feeling might be engendered in 5 wives in 20 different ways. Such subjective lists of behaviors may be too exhaustive to be of real value in understanding the lived experiences of people with affection. Examining lists of behavior alone would provide a certain surface level data that might surround this phenomenon, but wouldn’t delve into it or provide useful understandings the way explorations of motivation would. For example, the fact that Billy Joe kisses his wife to demonstrate affection is interesting. The fact that Billy Joe kissed his wife because he wanted her to feel desirable is more useful information. It is my estimation that purpose lends context, particularly in this investigation. Such was the discovery that
modified the approach to analysis of subsequent research questions. Therefore, although it was not included among the original research questions, the reasons spouses show affection, or motivations behind their behaviors, will be explored and presented as context in the study when applicable.

**A Collaborative Definition**

Affectionate expression was thereby defined with the voices of husbands and wives, through my interpretive lens as “actions (e.g., outreach, gestures) that may be expressed physically, verbally or emotionally, that: (1) demonstrate (e.g., show, express, display) feelings of fondness, liking, love, care or admiration; or (2) that support another’s needs or desires by making them feel special, wanted, needed, secure or good about themselves. Such is the conceptual understanding that undergirds the study.

**Describing Affectionate Expression**

Participants shared conceptual examples, providing context to the collaborative definition. Multiple examples of affectionate behavior were shared and compartmentalized into the following four categories: (1) **Physical Touch & Intimacy**, (2) **Caring Communications**, (3) **Fulfillment & Camaraderie**, and (4) **Helping & Support** (see Figure 12 below).

**Physical Touch & Intimacy.** As husbands and wives described types of affectionate behavior, the majority shared multiple examples that included physical affection. Three of the most common responses involved hugging, kissing and having sex, or “making love” as some participants phrased it. These responses were almost exclusively shared using one to three words, leaving little need for interpretation (e.g., “kissing,” “holding hands,” etc.). Ebony (Cf.25) described affectionate behavior using the following general, self-explanatory terms:

*Ebony:* Kiss, show thanks, help with housework or children, hug, cuddle\(^2\), make dinner, plan date night.

Behaviors from Ebony’s descriptions that were categorized as physical touch and intimacy were “kiss,” “hug” and “cuddle.” As well, Angelica (AAf.43) shared the following descriptions of affectionate behavior:

---

\(^2\) Per some participants, a hug referred more to an embrace, while cuddling was perceived as a longer hug,
**Figure 12. General Descriptions of Affectionate Expression - Emergent Themes**

**Physical Touch & Intimacy**  
\( n = 57 \)
- Hugging/Cuddling: 15
- Kissing: 14
- Sex/"Making love": 10
- Holding hands: 8
- Caress: 7
- Massaging: 2
- Playing w/Hair: 1

**Caring Communications**  
\( n = 29 \)
- Thoughtful, loving words: 8
- Love cards/letters/texts: 5
- Talking: 5
- Expressing appreciation: 4
- Words of affirmation: 3
- Listening: 2
- Compliments: 2

**Fulfillment & Camaraderie**  
\( n = 29 \)
- Quality time: 12
  - going on dates: 3
  - doing things together: 7
  - going on vacation: 1
  - taking walks: 1
- Enjoying each other’s company: 7
  - smiles and laughter: 4
  - playfulness: 3
- Gifts: 5
  - Gifts: 4
  - Sending flowers: 1
- Being mindful and attentive: 5
  - doing things spouse likes: 1
  - doing things w/out being asked: 1
  - noticing how they are feeling: 1
  - thinking about the other person: 1
  - opening doors for wife: 1

**Helping & Support**  
\( n = 14 \)
- Acts of Service: 8
  - doing chores: 4
  - cooking: 3
  - help w/children: 1
- Doing things for each other: 2
- Enhance physical & emotional well-being: 4
  - Encouraging/Coaching: 2
  - Comforting: 1
  - Protecting: 1

Angelica:  *Sex, hugs, kisses, quality time, cuddling, listening to them about their day with sincere interest, doing a hobby together, doing things for them that they could do for themselves, send love letters/cards.*

Behaviors from Angelica’s descriptions that were categorized as physical touch and intimacy were “sex,” “hugs,” “kisses” and “cuddling.” Other participants shared multiple understandings of affectionate behavior. For example, Adele (Cf.35) shared the following general examples of affectionate behavior:

---

3 Caress is defined by participants as touching someone in a loving, gentle way.
**Adele:** Holding hands, kissing, saying “I love you,” expressing appreciation, going out on dates, going on vacation, back rubs, doing chores for each other, noticing how they are feeling, gifts, opening doors for your wife, intimacy, asking about how they are, talking to each other/sharing, writing love notes/texts, thinking about the other person, playing their favorite music, allowing them to choose TV show or movie, expressing love about each other when others are around, speaking highly of each other, asking permission to “go out” with friends or do activities away from your spouse.

Behaviors from Adele’s descriptions that were categorized as physical touch and intimacy were “holding hands,” “kissing,” “back rubs” and “intimacy.”

**Caring Communication.** References about caring communication fundamentally involved talking and listening. Affectionate verbal communication was conceptualized by participants in a variety of ways:

1. In light of the quality of expressed words:
   - **Arby:** Kind words.

2. It was conceptualized in terms of types of expressed words:
   - **Bessie, Clark, and Juan:** Compliments.
   - **Ebony and Gavin:** Those that express appreciation.
   - **Arby and Karen:** Affirming words.

I asked Karen (Cf/37) to describe the types of affirming words she referred to. She explained:

   - **Karen:** Just compliments. You know, about being a good mom or dad. Or showing how much you appreciate someone. And to like, encourage people.

3. Affectionate communication was also described using specific words:
   - **Bessie and Gavin:** Saying “I love you.”

4. It was described as modes of communication:
   - **Adele:** Writing love notes/texts.
   - **Angelica:** Send love letters/cards.
   - **Clark:** Love letters.
   - **Clay:** Love notes. Love letters. Emails.
   - **Karen:** Sending love texts.
(5) Finally, to whom affectionate expressions are communicated was discussed. Adele (Cf.35) observed that affectionate expression need not be addressed directly to one’s spouse, but that kind or loving words shared with others about one's spouse also constitutes affectionate expression.

Adele: Expressing love about each other when others are around.

Adele: Speaking highly of each other.

**Fulfillment & Camaraderie.** Participants also described expressions of affection as characteristics of things people do with and for each other that bring pleasure, enjoyment, good feelings, and may serve to meet esteem needs. Camaraderie stems from the French root word, comrade, which describes someone who shares in one's activities, occupation and interests (Etymology Dictionary, 2014). It signifies closeness, familiarity, intimately belonging together and being friendly with one another. Aron, Paris, and Aron (1995) describe this as expanding oneself by incorporating aspects of the other's self in one's own; where the greater the self-expansion and overlap of the partner, the greater the amount of commitment and satisfaction that's felt in the relationship. In this study, camaraderie is also closely tied to the concept of fulfillment, which Maslow (1960) theorized to be akin to joy and happiness, and in some ways to exceed it. It incorporates Dindia’s (1989) romantic behaviors of being fun and spontaneous. The Fulfillment & Camaraderie category included twenty-nine references with 41% centered on spousal time spent together, or togetherness. Jude (AAm.28) shared ideas of ways couples may enjoy quality time:

Jude: Plan a picnic, find a sport or activity you can do together, talk...

Other examples included:

Adele: Going out on dates. Going on vacation.

Clay: Plan a date night.


Juan (AAm.44) described togetherness, not as quality time, but “sacrificing time.”
Another facet of affectionate communication involved camaraderie between lovers, as respondents deemed the sharing of smiles and laughter, and being playful also as means of communicating affection.

**Clay:** Smiles, playful winks/gestures.

**Emily:** Playing, smiles.

**Julie:** A smile.

**Olivia:** Laughing.

Finally, one wife in the study shared a number of responses that were situated in one sub-category titled, ‘being mindful and attentive.’ While one response reflected the fact that she considered chivalrous behavior affectionate, (e.g., “opening doors for your wife), the others centered around consideration of the other and empathy. Adele listed the following:

**Adele:** Noticing how they are feeling. Asking about how they are. Thinking about the other person.

Thus, ‘being mindful and attentive’ behaviors were thoughtful and reflected the fact that one’s spouse was intentionally thinking of them.

**Helping & Support.** Participants constructed helping and support behaviors in terms of ways we help those we love, and two sub-categories emerged. Demonstrations of affection in this category was conceptualized as (1) acts of service, or things done to help loved ones physically, and (2) demonstrations of support, or things done to enhance a loved one's mental or emotional well-being. Physical support was characterized as “cleaning” and “doing chores” by Adele, Ebony, and Emily. Supportive behaviors were described in the following ways:

**Bessie:** Comforting.

**Juan:** Encouraging. Protecting.

**Karen:** Rooting/coaching them on.

Hence, a list of behaviors, or a typology of affectionate expression for this study was established.
Descriptions of Affectionate Behavior

The ways affectionate expression was described well-complemented the established definition. Participants had shared multiple examples that corresponded with it.

Affection had been defined as “actions that may be expressed physically [Physical Touch & Intimacy], verbally [Caring Communications] or emotionally [Fulfillment & Camaraderie and Helping & Support] (1) that demonstrate feelings of fondness [Olivia: hugging], liking or love [Gavin: saying “I love you”], kindness [Juan: sending flowers], thoughtfulness [Jude: plan[ning] a picnic], admiration [Emily: respect], or that you care [Bessie: comforting them]; or (2) that support another's needs or desires by making them feel special [Tom: holding hands], wanted [Angelica: sex], needed [Clay: [sending] love notes, love letters and emails], or assured that they can be secure with you [Juan: protecting].”

The definition felt complete, because participants had shared so much.

Chapter 5, titled Ways Couples Demonstrated and Received Affection, will explore the ways these husbands and wives experienced affection and feelings behind it.
CHAPTER 5

AFFECTION EXPRESSED:
THE EXPERIENCE OF AFFECTION

Husbands and wives in the study expressed affection in a variety of different ways, and they engaged multiple types of actions and behaviors to communicate it. This chapter explored not only the behaviors they engaged, but motivations behind them. What did they hope to show their spouses, or make them feel? What do spouses feel as recipients of a variety of affectionate behaviors? Are there commonalities in the experiences of these couples?

As understandings of these lived experiences with affection were sought, two categories were explored: (1) Ways husbands and wives showed affection to one another, and (2) Ways husbands and wives received affection from one another.

When examining the ways husbands and wives showed affection to one another, three phenomena were observed. When affection was expressed, (1) recipient spouses felt good about themselves; (2) recipient spouses felt good about their relationships; and (3) the expression of affection often benefited the giver in specific ways.

When examining ways spouses received affection from one another, the importance of selflessness, sacrifice and sincerity were identified.

Ways & Reasons Spouses Demonstrated Affection

Husbands and wives engaged in numerous types of actions and behaviors they considered to be affectionate for different reasons. In spite of each participants’ specific reason for showing affection, at its very core was the idea that they showed affection because they wanted their spouse to feel good. There was an abundance of commonalities and overlap as it related to motivations behind, or intended outcomes of affectionate acts. In other words, husbands and wives engaged in identical behaviors with the intention of experiencing both similar and different expected outcomes. For example, motivations for kissing were described as follows:

4 The spouse who is being shown affection.
5 The spouse who is showing or demonstrating affectionate behavior
Juan: [I] kiss her in the morning to let her know I’m thinking of her. [I hope this makes her feel] secure!

Arby: [I] kiss her on the forehead. [I hope this makes her feel] special, turned on, wanted.

Jude: Hugs & kisses. [I hope this makes her feel] she is home, I will always love her.

Ebony: [I give him a] hug and kiss when he comes home. [I hope this makes him feel] that I've missed him and [I am] happy to see him.

As well, in an effort to make their spouses feel a certain way (e.g., “loved”), participants engaged in multiple behaviors to arrive at that one single intended outcome:

Pat: [I] buy her gifts. [I hope this makes her feel] important, loved.

Bessie: [I] tell him I love him. [I hope this makes him feel] wanted, loved, needed.

Julie: [I] ruffle his hair. [I hope this makes him feel] that I care & love him.

Commonalities attested to the idea that these husbands and wives shared this phenomenon called marriage, and that in many respects there were shared understandings and experiences. Texting, for example, elicited good feelings because the recipient was being thought of by givers:

Adele: [Clark sends] texts or emails. [This makes me feel] that I’m an important part of his day, because he’s taking time to communicate with me.

Olivia: [Jude calls] or [texts] me just to say hi. [This makes me feel] very loved and special.

Pat: [Karen] sends loving text messages out of the blue. [This] makes me feel loved. That she thought of me.

To Feel Good About Themselves

Husbands and wives wanted their spouses to feel good about themselves and often engaged behaviors they thought would elicit this feeling. Figure 13 below categorically illustrates the specific feelings they aimed for.

When describing actions they engaged to elicit these feelings, participants identified behaviors that mirrored those within the categories of general examples they had previously described, e.g., Physical Touch & Intimacy, Caring Communications, Fulfillment & Camaraderie and Helping & Support.
Spouses showed affection in a variety of ways. They demonstrated it physically:

**Julie:** [I] pinch him. [I hope this makes him feel] that I still find him attractive.

**Emily:** I kiss him all the time. [I hope this makes him feel] loved and wanted.

**Karen:** Sex. [I hope this makes him feel] loved and manly.

**Karen:** Yeah.

Couples also expressed affectionate feelings verbally:

**Adele:** [By] texting him that I love him or thanking him for something he’s done. [I hope this] shows him that I appreciate him and the things he does to make me happy.

**Bessie:** [I] tell him he looks nice. [I hope this makes him feel] good, wanted, attractive.

**Emily:** I tell him that I love him and that I’m in love with him. [I hope this makes him feel] loved and warm on the inside.

**Jude:** She says that the best place she likes to be is in my arms.

As well, couples communicated affection by attempting to enhance their spouse’s sense of fulfillment.

**Karen:** Not nagging him to get off the computer. [I hope this makes him feel] that he has quality time alone.

**Clay:** Take her out for nice dinner at a restaurant. [I hope this makes her feel] happy.

**Adele:** Every now & then I get him a small gift. [I hope this] allows him to know I was thinking about him and wanted to get him something to make him smile.
Couples also described showing affection in helpful and supportive ways:

**Clay:** [I] do unexpected things for her to make her day less stressful or burdensome. [I hope this makes her feel] happy.

**Karen:** Helping out with the kids. [I hope this makes him feel] that all the weight isn’t on his shoulders.

**Olivia:** [I go] to his games to show support (soccer & basketball). [I hope this makes him feel] encouraged & supported.

Olivia (AAf.27) described her motivation for attending Jude’s (AAm.28) games:

**Sharen:** What sports do you play?

**Olivia:** Soccer and other things. We love sports. Right now, my husband is playing in a league and I can’t play.

**Sharen:** Why can’t you play?

**Olivia:** Because it’s a men’s league. I love playing and want to play, but I can’t [sigh then smile].

**Sharen:** You wrote on your questionnaire that you attend Jude’s games.

**Olivia:** Yeah, when I can. If I’m not working or tired after work.

**Sharen:** Why do you go?

**Olivia:** Because [smile], I want him to look up and see me from time to time, and know I’m in his corner. Even if I’m not looking at him at the moment. He can look at me and know I care about him enough to want to be there.

**Sharen:** How does he feel about you being there?

**Olivia:** I think he loves it. It doesn’t seem to matter to him what I’m doing; like, if I’m talking or playing. I think he’s just happy I’m there. Like, we don’t have to be doing the same thing, but he enjoys my being there. But I wish I could play [laugh].

Husbands and wives were pleased when they knew demonstrations of affection made their spouses feel good about themselves.

**To Feel Good About Their Relationships**

Participants also wanted to make their husbands or wives feel good about their relationships and engaged in a variety of behaviors to elicit this feeling. Although the behaviors they engaged differed, their motivations were common. They wanted to generate in their spouses a sense of continuity and
commitment, a feeling of being secure, and of closeness. As well, these husbands and wives also wanted to feel capable, successful or 'good at marriage' themselves.

With hugs, Jude (AAm.28) wanted to instill in his wife the idea that “she was home, and [he] would always love her.” Jude had hoped to foster a sense of stability, of security. During the interview, he described it as Olivia being able to "let down her hair and stay a while."

Spouses also engaged in affectionate acts that were characterized as fulfillment and camaraderie behaviors, with an intention of enhancing their relationships. They considered activities they enjoyed together expressions of affection. Juan and Angelica (AAm.44, AAf.43) traveled to enhance their sense of closeness. Juan described his thoughts about traveling with Angelica:

Juan: “Doing things we have in common. We always talk about growing together. What better way than to experience traveling together?”

Couples also considered efforts to make their marriages better demonstrations of affection:

Ebony: [I] work on my temper or trouble spots in our relationship. [I hope this makes him feel] that I’m continuously working on keeping our marriage strong.

Among these couples, effort mattered. A pattern was soon identified, that even if husbands or wives made mistakes, had faults, or were not fully successful in some endeavor (e.g., showing affection regularly), their spouses were forgiving, and accepting if they were attempting to "do better" or "be better." For example, Pat (Cm.37) expressed dissatisfaction about certain aspects of Karen's (Cf.37) personality, but noted overall that "[It was] just good to know that she is making a positive effort in [their] relationship."

The language of husbands and wives revealed a common and often implicit desire to be 'good at marriage.' Couples in the study wanted to have successful marriages. Gavin (Cm.26) noted:

Gavin: She tells me I am a good husband/father. [This makes me feel] like I am doing a good job. [It makes me feel this way] because being a good husband/father is my job.

Bessie (Cf.32) and Adele (Cf.35) shared similar sentiments:

Bessie: [By] being a good mother. [I hope this makes him feel good, loved].

Adele: Hugs & kisses [make me feel] very loved & supported... it fulfills me and shows me that I have a wonderful husband & marriage.
Showing Affection Benefits the Giver

When participants demonstrated affection, they often received some benefit from it. This was an unexpected, yet noteworthy theme that emerged from the language shared by participants. It seemed to elude their consciousness. No one, for example, reported hugging their husband with the intention of getting hugged back. Intentions were typically to show some feeling or elicit some emotion.

It is doubtful that participants consciously engaged affectionate behavior to receive some benefit in return. However, although such an intention may not have guided their behavior (or caused them to demonstrate affection), givers were often aware of, and looked forward to some personal benefit. The benefits, incidentally, were often contextual in nature. For example, Karen (Cf.37) described a challenge she and Pat (Cm.37) faced:

Karen: My husband, on occasion, drinks too much. He has had a haunting drinking problem. He's tried to stop, does good, then drinks again. When he over consumes, I can’t show him affection. I have to force myself to. When he does, there is a snapping point where he becomes mean and hateful to me. I end the night by going to bed, and wake the next morning with him being loving and affectionate. I’m so angry from the night before that I completely ignore him and show him no affection in return, and I tend to completely avoid and ignore him.

Not only had Karen verbally shared her pain, as it related to Pat’s drinking and becoming mean, I had witnessed it in part. I say in part because Pat appeared to be fully sober during my time in their home. He was pleasant with me, calm-natured and polite. He was also warm with the children. But as moments passed during the 2.5 hour interview, Pat made multiple comments about his wife “strong-arming” him into things. He reiterated that word multiple times that evening. At first, I laughed along with him while defending Karen. It was initially hard to identify the subtle insults as such. They so closely mimicked humor that I assumed Pat just had a unique sense of one. Besides, he said nothing outright nasty. Just hurtful. And he smiled while he said them. Earlier in the evening, he had made comments about Karen having a "controlling" personality, but as time passed, the comments grew darker, and they increased. By the end of the evening, almost every comment was insulting to Karen, accompanied by a grin or nervous laughter to follow. Karen was a good sport. She took it in stride, but I sensed her discomfort, and my own. At one point, I considered transitioning into my role as a therapist.
and attempting to intervene, but I somehow felt it wasn’t my place, not at this time. Not in this research setting. I was there to learn about how couples show affection and the fact that I was not witnessing it, but was witnessing worse than the opposite, may not have called for intervention. Besides, Karen kept smiling. She kept playing the game with enthusiasm. She laughed and attempted to defend herself from time to time.

Karen had previously described the affection she expresses to Pat:

Karen: [I give] him words of affirmation. [I hope this makes him feel] happy, intelligent, and needed. It puts him in a positive mood and makes him feel important.

Karen also shared:

Karen: [I help] out with the kids. [I hope this makes him feel] that all the weight isn’t on his shoulders. Yes [this seems to affect him, as] he doesn’t get frustrated as quickly and short-tempered.

Karen may or may not have consciously shared words of affirmation or assisted Pat with their children to minimize negative responses from Pat. She did, however, realize on some level the benefit she received.

Incidentally, Karen’s interactions with her spouse seemed to closely reflect the CRAFT approach, which is a common method of intervention that relies on non-confrontational methods to encourage loved ones to more healthy drug-free living. Similar to Karen’s motivation to maintain Pat’s ‘good mood,’ some goals of the CRAFT approach are not only to minimize the abuse of substances for their loved one (or identified patient), but also to simultaneously improve the lives of the concerned significant other (CSO). By also focusing efforts on the CSO, the CRAFT intervention fosters increased independence by the CSO, thereby reducing their anxiety and depression, as well as their anger if their loved one is unsuccessful with treatment (Smith, Milford & Meyers, 2004).

Similarly, Pat noted during our interview that projects Karen wanted completed weren’t the “easiest to do.” Karen had complained that Pat procrastinated. When Pat was asked how he showed affection to Karen, he replied:

When asked how he hoped this made Karen feel, Pat replied, “Glad [and] grateful.” It is possible that Pat may have answered, “grateful” even if he didn’t feel pressured to complete projects. There was notably though, a similar trend among participants. They wanted their spouses to appreciate them, to acknowledge them, to perceive of them as good. For example, Bessie (Cf.32) described one way she showed affection to Arby (AAm.33) as “[by] being a good mother.” She added, “It seems to make him proud of me.” Similarly, Emily noted:

Emily: I cook and serve him. [I hope this makes him feel] like a king. I hope he feels grateful to have me as his wife.

Summary. Hence couples showed affection in multiple ways with multiple motivations to elicit multiple outcomes. These outcomes ultimately included (1) making spouses feel good about themselves, (2) making them feel good about their relationships, and (3) experiencing some personal benefit from expressing affection.

Ways Affection Was Received

As spouses discussed specific ways they were shown affection, they identified behaviors involving Physical Touch & Intimacy, Caring Communication, Fulfillment & Camaraderie, and Helping & Support behaviors. See Figure 14 below:

**Figure 14. Ways Spouses Were Shown Affection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Touch &amp; Intimacy</th>
<th>Helping &amp; Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kisses (12)</td>
<td>Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugs (9)</td>
<td>Help w/Housework (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch (7)</td>
<td>Help w/Children (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cook for me (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Get Coffee for me (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring Communication</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tells “I love you” (6)</td>
<td>Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texts/Calls (4)</td>
<td>Help w/Finances (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliments (3)</td>
<td>Takes me out when too tired to cook (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfillment &amp; Camaraderie</td>
<td>Sacrifice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifts (4)</td>
<td>Goes to church (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives me “me” time (1)</td>
<td>Sacrifices for me (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comforts me (1)</td>
<td>Does things I like (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One particularly noteworthy finding in the study was that although recipient spouses had preferences about the forms of affection that was shown them, they typically appreciated most types of expressed affection, as listed in Figure 14. Few were disheartened by hugs, massages, loving text messages, compliments, gifts, help around the house, or having things done for them. There was something that mattered to couples more than the type of action or behavior that was shown recipients; the spirit with which the behaviors were shown. The study's conceptual model illustrates this idea.

**The Study’s Conceptual Model**

The conceptual model presents an overview of the main themes of the study. As husbands and wives reflected on ways they were shown affection, three significant themes emerged; that of selflessness, sacrifice, and sincerity.

The study’s conceptual model illustrates participant motivations for expressed affection, which included making their spouses feel good about themselves, making them feel good about their relationships, and experiencing personal benefits themselves. Such ideas are at the heart of the model, along with sincerity, selflessness, and sacrifice (See Figure 15 below). The model illustrates that spouses engaged in affectionate behaviors to make their mates feel loved, thought of, attractive, esteemed, important, valuable, fun to be around, special, capable and relieved, et cetera. As couples focused on their relationships, givers wanted, along with their spouses, to feel a sense of stability, of hope for their future, of continuity and commitment. They wanted to feel security and closeness. They also wanted to be ‘good at being married.’ Also, perhaps not as consciously, spouses often anticipated some personal benefit from their affectionate behavior. They wanted their spouses to be grateful to them, to be proud of them, which, incidentally, did not appear to be in any way sinister or selfish. Participants didn’t seem particularly cognizant of the desire. Visualizing it there in the midst of participant language, was epiphanic to me, though hardly surprising. These are, after all, fundamental human needs, according to Maslow (Maslow, 1943). If people want to feel esteemed by anyone, why shouldn’t it be by the potentially most important person in the world to them?
The model illustrates the notion that couples conceptually made a distinction between types of affection that was shown them, identifying a difference between routine, “meaningless” behaviors and intentional demonstrations of affection, which they considered more sincere and preferable. Husbands and wives wanted to feel loved by their spouses. They wanted to know they were thought of, and they were not an afterthought. They wanted to receive affection without having to ask for it. Spouses wanted their mates to initiate affectionate behavior because they perceived such behavior to be willful instead of coerced, and intentional instead of reciprocal. By focusing on ‘initiation,’ participants determined if affectionate expressions were routine or sincere. Behaviors that were assessed as routine were symbolically discarded as unwanted or unappreciated. Affection, however, shown intentionally or sincerely contributed to and advanced their principal goals of making their mates feel good about themselves and their relationships.

Couples also made a distinction between affection shown in ways they would like versus ways their spouses seemed most comfortable expressing it. Couples often referenced their preferred ‘love language,’ and specific ways they wanted to receive affection. *Loving my Way versus Loving Their Way* describes demonstrations of affection which weren’t as pleasurable (if at all) to the recipient, as it may have been comfortable for the giver to provide versus the provision of affection that was fulfilling to the recipient. The model reflects the idea that when givers of affection showed love in ways that they wanted or were accustomed, which did not satisfy any of their spouses ‘feel good’ needs, it was often considered (consciously and sub-consciously) selfish and meaningless and it was symbolically discarded as unwanted or unappreciated. When affectionate expression was provided in ways that were appealing to recipients, it had a better chance of addressing their central desires of making their mates feel good about themselves and/or their relationships.

Finally, impediments were temporal or temperamental obstacles or challenges couples faced in having opportunities to express affection to one another. Accepting impediments versus challenging them refers to the effort couples made to assure that affection was expressed in their relationships, which involved creative, alternative approaches in the face of challenges. Challenging impediments is
TO FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES

They wanted to make spouses feel loved, special, important, capable, cared for, enjoyable to be around, thought of, comfortable, secure relieved, fulfilled, attractive, esteemed.

TO FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

They wanted to feel or make spouses feel a sense of intimacy, stability, continuity, closeness, security, that they were capable and successful as spouses, that they were ‘good at marriage.’

TO BENEFIT THEMSELVES

They wanted spouses to be "proud" of them, "grateful" to them. They wanted to be esteemed by them.

Couples in the study showed affection in a variety of ways (via Physical Touch & Intimacy, Caring Communication, Fulfillment & Camaraderie, and Helping & Support to feel make their spouses feel good about themselves, their relationships, and for personal gains.

Benefits from showing affection enhanced feelings about themselves and their relationships.

Highlights:
- Participants defined affectionate expression in part as acting on a choice to demonstrate it
- Participants made a distinction between routine expressions of affection and intentional, sincere ones, and appreciated spousal initiation of affectionate behavior
- Some participants were aware of their preferred affectionate styles and desired it
- Participants appreciated sacrifice

Figures:
- Figure 15: Conceptual Model - Affectionate Expression in Marriage

“Acting on a Choice”

ROUTINE
Meaningless
Having to request affectionate behavior

INTENTIONAL
Sincere
Spousal initiation of affectionate behavior

Sacrifice?

‘Going Beyond’

LOVING MY WAY
Demonstrating affection in ways that are familiar and comfortable

LOVING THEIR WAY
Understanding and providing preferred affectionate expression

ACCEPTING IMPEDIMENTS
Accepting impediments as more important than spousal needs

CHALLENGING IMPEDIMENTS
Questioning impediments and explore new or alternative ways

Yes

No

UNWANTED
UNAPPRECIATED
AFFECTIONATE
BEHAVIOR

ACCEPTING
IMPEDIMENTS

CHALLENGING
IMPEDIMENTS
reflective of the effort to demonstrate affection in the face of life's every day challenges. When couples challenged, rather than accepted such impediments, the expressed affection seemed to enhance their feelings about themselves and their relationships.

**Selflessness, Sacrifice and Sincerity**

References to selflessness were made adjacent to those about sacrifice, sharing the same idea; that participants felt good about being thought of by their spouses, and they felt good when their spouses knew they were thinking of them, and being thoughtful. Sacrifice was perceived by participants as "going beyond" or doing more than the expected. Adele (Cf.35) discussed a variety of housekeeping things she does for her husband Clark (AAm.37), such as making his favorite meal, cleaning his closet, and washing his car. Adele acknowledged that she wanted Clark to feel loved and to know that she was thinking of him, and "going out of [her] way to show him." Adele stressed the word "show," but I focus on the phrase, "going out of my way" because it explicitly reflects the perception of numerous participants, as they described their experiences with affectionate expression. They felt gratified by the idea that someone cared about them enough to “go out of their way” to do things for them. When describing the housework Adele does, Clark said, for example:

Clark: *(It) makes me feel special, that someone would commit that much effort to me. *(It) makes me realize how much she sacrifices.*

Participants discussed receiving gifts from their spouses. Angelica (AAf.43) appreciated this type of affection she received from Juan (AAm.44), but not because of the actual gift. She appreciated it because he was thinking of her and had selflessly given it to her. Angelica said:

Angelica: *Buying me things. *(This makes me feel) appreciative. *(It makes me feel this way because) he didn’t have to do it and [he] could have spent the money on something else.*

Clay also shared similar sentiments about Emily:

Clay: *(Emily) often brings home an unexpected gift for me. *(This makes me feel) wonderful. *(It makes me feel this way because) once again, *(it) shows she is thinking about me [and she] wants to make me happy.*

Clay contributed the word, "unexpected" to participant dialog. He said it multiple times. Other participants said it in a number of different ways. By unexpected, they meant something out of the
ordinary, beyond the typical happenings of the day or habitual actions we take. There was something special about the unexpected to these participants. It involved thought in the moment, of the other. Participants wanted to know that they were thought of. Specifically. Perhaps this was the reason participants appreciated receiving texts messages as they did. They were being thought of. Olivia (AAf/27) discussed receiving text messages from Jude (AAm/28) and described her feelings:

Olivia: Knowing he thinks about me at random times throughout the day makes me feel special and loved.

Participants also pondered reasons they appreciated certain expressions of affection. Reflecting on Olivia packing lunch for him, Jude shared:

Jude: When she packs lunch... for me to take to work, I feel like I am well taken care of, that she is thinking about me. She cares for me. I think it’s the element of her being nurturing in that way, making sure I have something to eat.

Couples appreciated being thought of. Intentionally, not haphazardly.

Pat (Cm/37) reflected on what was to him a routine, sometimes meaningless behavior he engaged in with Karen (Cf/37). During the interview, Karen said several times, with the broad beautiful smile she had, that she and Pat kiss every night before bed. I knew she was proud. She had noted it several times as well on her questionnaire. I asked Karen to describe what this meant to her:

Karen: That's easy. Quality time. That’s my number one love language... Pat and I kiss every night before we go to bed. We've been doing that a long time now.

Having already been apprised of Pat's feelings about it, I wanted to dig deeper.

Karen: That seems to mean a lot to you.

Karen: It does. I absolutely love it.

Karen: What does it mean to you? That you kiss him?

Karen: (smiling now) It's a wonderful feeling... we didn’t do this when we were first married. It's something that just kind of stuck after we had counseling and I love it. I think it makes us feel closer and (pause) we can actually feel how much we love each other and want each other.

Pat didn't feel the same:
**Pat:** Kissing is important to her. She must have a kiss before going to bed every night. [This makes me feel] good, but sometimes I feel forced. I feel forced or that she has made it so important that it takes some of the feelings out of the action, but I comply because it is important to her.

Pat had made several comments that indicated he felt pushed to do things against his will. “Strong-armed, coerced, forced.” He also said that he “complied.” In other words, he sometimes kissed Karen because she wanted him to, not necessarily because he wanted to. Pat had therefore expressed insincere affection7 to his wife.

When asked about ways Bessie showed him affection, Arby had written:

**Arby:** She says she loves me from time to time. [This makes me feel] eh. Because it’s mostly when we are leaving or hanging up the phone. [This occurs] daily. Nope! [It’s not enough for me].

On the questionnaire, participants had been asked to share 5 ways their spouse showed them affection. Arby had listed one. During the interview, I asked him about it. He exclaimed, with charisma and a smile:

**Arby:** That’s all she does!

**Sharen:** And this particular way is insufficient for you? You wrote, “Eh.”

**Arby:** We say it [I love you] all the time but it’s kind of meaningless because it’s rushed and hurried. Kind of like a habit more than a feeling.

Men and women appreciated sincerity in various aspects of their relationships. For example, Adele’s (Cf.35) “#1 love language” was communication, and she valued the time she and Clark (AAm.37) spent talking. Verbal communication was not Clark’s preferred way of receiving affection. His was physical and instrumental. Physical demonstrations. Helping and support. He preferred “action vs. words.” Clark, nonetheless, managed to meet Adele’s needs for communication, though perhaps not as often as she would have liked. Adele described her feelings when she and Clark talked:

**Adele:** [He] sincerely asks and wants to know how I am, or asks if something is wrong. [This is] my favorite way to be shown affection from him, communicating with him. I feel

---

7 To insincerely or dishonestly express feelings that do not exist, e.g., to engender favor or support, to initiate sexual interaction, or to be polite (Floyd, 2006).
validated, and loved, and close to him, [and] that he really cares. [This occurs] pretty much every day but not as “deep” every day. At least once a week. I would like more.

Sincerity mattered. Demonstrations of affection that appeared routine often went unwanted and unappreciated.

Spouses also wanted to know that their husband or wife showed affection for the right reason, (e.g., because they felt love, fondness or tenderness any given moment). Hence, they did not want to ask for it. If they “have to ask,” Angelica (AAf.43) observed during her interview, “who did the affection come from anyway?” Angelica had shared a noteworthy point that was revelatory as it related to this study. Various participants reflected on it as well. They wanted to know that their spouses weren’t just complying. They wanted to know that the expressions of affection they were receiving were sincere and intentional. One way they might know, they felt, was by considering who initiated the behavior.

Initiation was important to these couples. As Jude (AAm.28) described affectionate behaviors, he included, “doing things without being asked.” Jude and Olivia (AAf.27) discussed an affectionate behavior he had come to enjoy; having Olivia “write on his back at night in bed.” Jude listed it as a way Olivia showed him affection and described it this way:

**Jude:** [Olivia] writes on my back at night or generally. [This makes me feel] wonderful, loved, relaxed, sleepy. I am not exactly sure [why it makes me feel this way], but.

During Olivia’s interview, she and I had discussed this:

**Olivia:** I’ll write on his back...

**Sharen:** With a… with your finger?

**Olivia:** No, with a pencil.

**Sharen:** Oh.

Olivia went on to explain how much Jude enjoyed it. She said, “He loves it so much he asks for it some nights.” Jude, however, had noted on his questionnaire:

**Jude:** I can’t boil it down to a number of times a week or month, but typically if I ask, I receive. Yes [it is enough for me], but sometimes I want her to offer.

Olivia was impressed that Jude asked for the expressed affection, while Jude was hoping she would
offer or initiate it.

Finally, husbands and wives also appreciated sacrifice. Juan and Angelica (AAm.44/AAf.43) often pondered various aspects of their lives together and seemed to be in tune with their feelings. Juan shared a thoughtful idea as it related to selflessness and sacrifice. When asked to describe ways Angelica showed him affection, Juan noted:

_**Juan**: She does things I like, but she doesn’t care for, e.g., watching programs, sports (basketball). She cooks something she doesn’t eat. [This] feels good! [It makes me feel this way] because it lets me know that she will make sacrifices to meet my desires and goals.

Juan reflected on Angelica “going beyond” the norm of what was expected.

As long as husbands and wives were loved their own way, they had little regard about the specific type of affection behavior shown them. Perhaps more than anything, participants appreciated intentional behavior and sacrificial demonstrations of affection. They wanted to know that they were important to their spouses; so much so, they would “go beyond” for them, or go the extra mile to meet their needs.

In *Chapter 6*, participant satisfaction with specific types of affection will be explored, along with their perceptions about marital quality and divorce.
CHAPTER 6
SATISFACTION & DIVORCE
WITH ETHNOCULTURAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

Sometimes I feel very satisfied, but other times I feel underappreciated and wish he would express affection in ways that I need or want it most - Adele

Adele's (Cf.35) comment illustrates the experience of these husbands and wives with expressed affection and their satisfaction with it. Satisfaction was seldom estimated in absolute ways. As couples shared stories, it was apparent, often without explicit discussion that expressed affection was often satisfying, but was sometimes deemed unwanted. These couples experienced good and bad moments with affection. Moments when affection was both intentional and routine. Times when it was shared in ways they preferred, and others in ways that felt more comfortable to their mates. There were smiles and tears. Some triumph, some challenge. Such is the way satisfaction was measured in the study. Not necessarily by asking if couples were generally satisfied with marriage, though this topic was also a focus in this exploration. The aim, however, was to understand if spouses were satisfied with specific types of affection that was shown to them, as well as amounts of it. Hence, couples were asked to discuss particular ways they were shown affection and to describe their perceptions of them.

The operational definition of affectionate expression was presented in Chapter 4, and examples of specific behaviors were identified and categorized into four types: Physical Touch & Intimacy, Caring Communication, Fulfillment & Camaraderie, and Helping & Support. This chapter continues this discourse by reflecting on participant feelings of satisfaction with demonstrated affectionate behavior. The latter part of this chapter investigates whether the types or amounts of expressed affection influenced participant perceptions about the quality of their relationships and considerations of divorce.

Satisfaction with Received Affection

Exceptional. Generous. Brave. Describing the men and women in this study, such words seem inadequate. These husbands and wives gave of themselves fully. They shared, not only positive aspects of their relationship, but also marital challenges. I reflected on a question Juan (AAm.44) asked his wife, Angelica (AAf.43) when completing his questionnaire: “What if I answered all of the questions
honestly?” Although humorous, ultimately, Juan’s question made sense. A less sensible question would have been why they would allow a total stranger in their home and be willing to share their intimate truths so honestly. Yet they did. They discussed qualities and behaviors that made them proud of their marriages, and they shared disappointments.

Because space won’t allow a comprehensive discussion of each type of affectionate behavior, noteworthy ideas and commonalities will be shared. For a comprehensive overview of spousal satisfaction with specific behaviors, see Table 6 below.

**Satisfaction with Physical Touch & Intimate Behaviors**

Whether husbands and wives were thinking hypothetically about general affectionate acts or discussing behaviors they personally engaged in, couples most frequently identified behaviors that involved touch and intimacy. Of the 37 references to physical affection spouses noted receiving, 54% (20) found the behaviors to be both pleasurable\(^8\) and satisfying\(^9\).

In the category of **Physical Touch & Intimacy**, spouses referenced kissing most commonly, and 50% of husbands and wives (6 out of 12) found kisses from their spouses to be both pleasurable and satisfying. Olivia (AAf.27) discussed her feelings:

**Olivia:** *I love kissing and when he kisses me, I feel like he loves me. [He does this] just about every day. Yes [this is enough for me] but I’d love more kisses... just because.*

As well, 33% of spouses (4 out of 12) found receiving kissing enjoyable, but didn’t feel their spouse kissed them enough, and 17% (2 out of 12) found kissing non-pleasurable at times.

Pat (Cm.37) and Julie (AAf.46) did not enjoy kissing their spouses at times, for different reasons. Pat “complied” with kissing Karen (Cf.37) because she “required” it every night, and Pat sometimes felt “forced” to do so. Julie suffered with residual physical symptoms of cancer which caused her body to overheat whenever Tom (Cm.50) was near her; making kissing uncomfortable at times. With Julie being an exception, participants found most forms of physical affection pleasurable. Their preferences were subjective and varied. Touch behaviors, for example, yielded mixed assessments from the 8 (or 50%) of

---

\(^8\) Participants found the type of behavior to be enjoyable (pleasurable).

\(^9\) Participants found the amount of behavior to be sufficient (satisfying).
### TABLE 6. Demonstrations of Affection & Satisfaction Frequencies

#### Frequency Tables: Ways My Spouse Shows Me Affection

**Physical Touch & Intimacy**

**Physical Expressions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PCI</th>
<th>PLSG</th>
<th>SFG</th>
<th>≠ PLSG</th>
<th>≠ SFG</th>
<th>~ PLSG</th>
<th>~ SFG</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kisses me</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1/1*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugs me</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touches me</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2*2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pats my Behind</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plays w/my Hair</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubs my Leg w/ Foot in Bed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smacks my Butt</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0*1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touches my Face</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touches me Sexually “Groping”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0*1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touches my Waist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex/“Makes love to me”</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives me massages</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2/1*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Caring Communications**

**Verbal Expressions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CC</th>
<th>PLSG</th>
<th>SFG</th>
<th>≠ PLSG</th>
<th>≠ SFG</th>
<th>~ PLSG</th>
<th>~ SFG</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Says “I love you” to me</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texts/Emails/Calls me</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives me Compliments</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listens/Sincerely Asks How I Am</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanks me/Expresses Appreciation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Legend

- PLSG = I find this type of affection pleasurable
- ≠PLSG = I don’t find this type of affection pleasurable
- ~PLSG = I find this type of affection pleasurable sometimes
- SFG = I find this type of affection satisfying (e.g., spouse provides enough)
- ≠SFG = my spouse does not provide this type of affection enough
- *SFG = my spouse provides this type of affection more than enough (unwanted)

Gender: males ↑ action > words
Gender: 2 females, 1 male respondent
Gender: female respondents only
Gender: male respondent
**Table 6. Demonstrations of Affection & Satisfaction Frequencies (Con’d)**

### Frequency Tables: Ways My Spouse Shows Me Affection

#### Helping & Support

*Acts of Service and Support*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H&amp;S</th>
<th>N=</th>
<th>PLSG SFG</th>
<th>PLSG ≠SFG</th>
<th>≠ PLSG SFG</th>
<th>≠ PLSG ≠SFG</th>
<th>~ PLSG SFG</th>
<th>~ PLSG ≠SFG</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helps w/Housework</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Almost 100% satisfaction w/H&amp;S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps w/Children</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100% satisfaction w/help w/children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brings me Coffee</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooks for Me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packs my Lunch</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps when I’m Coming In</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Finances: Provides relief &amp; discomfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps w/Finances</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes me Out w/Tired to Cook</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Spouse perceived as EE&amp;F, not H&amp;S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Fulfillment & Camaraderie

*Quality of Life*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EE&amp;F</th>
<th>N=</th>
<th>PLSG SFG</th>
<th>PLSG ≠SFG</th>
<th>≠ PLSG SFG</th>
<th>≠ PLSG ≠SFG</th>
<th>~ PLSG SFG</th>
<th>~ PLSG ≠SFG</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gifts</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100% satisfaction w/gifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attends Church w/Me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comforts me When I’m Stressed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives me “Me” Time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Spouse perceived ≠ SF, “1x/wk enough”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrifices by Doing Things I Like</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Time/Togetherness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Legend**

- **PLSG** = I find this type of affection pleasurable
- **#PLSG** = I don’t find this type of affection pleasurable
- **~PLSG** = I find this type of affection pleasurable sometimes
- **SFG** = I find this type of affection satisfying (e.g., spouse provides enough)
- **#SFG** = my spouse does not provide this type of affection enough
- **~SFG** = I find this type of affection satisfying (e.g., spouse provides more than enough (unwanted))
participants who considered it a way they were shown affection. The specific types of touch they described included touching the waist, the face, playing with a spouse's hair, patting or ‘smacking’ a mate’s rear end, and groping. While 75% of these 8 (6) considered touch enjoyable, 4 participants were satisfied with the amount of touching they received and 2 desired more. Notably, Angelica (AAf.43) let Juan (AAd.44) know that she found groping displeasing. Arby (AAm.33) was not aware that Bessie (Cf.32) did not enjoy him “smack[ing her] butt.” Both wives considered these forms of touch unwanted.

Sex was explicitly noted by 38% (6 out of 16) of participants as a way their spouses demonstrated affection to them; though others commented about their satisfaction with sex at other times during the study. Of these six spouses, 100% (6) found sex pleasurable and 67% (4) felt they engaged in it enough. Notably, three out of the four participants who found it satisfying (or felt they engaged in sex enough) were wives. Few husbands 13% (2) listed sex as a way they were shown affection. The two who did, both found it enjoyable, and both were unsatisfied with the amount they received. Gavin (Cm.26), the young new father in the study, said that he and Ebony (Cf.25) had sex once or twice a week. Clark (AAd.37) noted that he and Adele (Cf.35) engaged in such intimacy “weekly?”

Finally, 15% of husbands and wives (2 out of 16) considered being massaged a way they received affection, and 100% of respondents (2 out of 2) both enjoyed it and found it satisfying.

**Satisfaction with Caring Communication**

*Caring Communication* was the second most common form of affectionate expression participants identified. Spouses shared 16 references about expressions of affection they received in the caring communication category. Of these, 63% (9) found verbal affection pleasurable and satisfying. “Saying I love you” was the most commonly referenced communicative behavior, with 50% (3 of 6) finding those words both pleasurable and satisfying. Perceptions about the phrase varied among participants. Bessie (Cf.32) found it pleasurable, but didn’t think Arby (AAm.33) said it enough. While she admitted that Arby said it often, she wanted to hear it more:
**Bessie:** He tells me he loves me. [This makes me feel] on top of the world because very few people have said this and meant it. [He does this] almost daily. No [it is not often enough for me].

When asked how much would have been enough, she said, “I don’t know exactly. I never get tired of hearing it. When asked how she shows Arby affection, she replied:

**Bessie:** Tell him I love him. [I hope this makes him feel] wanted, loved, needed. [Does this affect how he feels?] Not really. [It seems to be] just expected. No [I don’t do this as often as he would like because it] seems as if we get in a hurry.

Bessie’s comment illustrated multiple desires spouses had. Couples hoped, not only to please their mates, but also to be assured that they were. They wanted to know that they were good partners and that they were recognized as such. Givers were often disappointed when their efforts to make their spouses feel a certain way about themselves, their relationships, or a certain way about givers themselves were not successful. Consequently, givers often discontinued affectionate behavior, or didn’t provide certain forms very often. Bessie’s comment also revealed a difference between the standard she held for herself and the amount of affection she wished for from her husband. Arby told Bessie almost every day that he loved her, and this was not enough for her. However, when asked about the amount of affection she showed him, she discussed temporal challenges that inhibited her efforts (e.g., “it seems as if we get in a hurry”).

Arby disagreed.

**Arby:** [That’s] an excuse. Showing affection can take as little as saying, 'You look beautiful today.'

I also talked with Arby about affection in his marriage. He was vocal about his feelings and attributed Bessie’s inability to express affection to her “insecurity.” After the musical exercise, Arby said lightheartedly, “She can’t even look me in the eyes.” Bessie’s physical response while the song played corroborated Arby’s claim. As he turned to her, she turned from him. She looked shyly away as he moved closer. I talked with Bessie about her feelings. She was, indeed, reserved, though obviously caring and tender. She seemed full of emotion kept bottled up. She was, nonetheless, honest with me. She seldom looked me in the eye, but she talked with me.

**Sharen:** When you think of affection, what do you feel?
Bessie: (deep breath, pause). It’s something I want.

Shareen: You said you craved it.

Bessie: Uhm.

Shareen: What does that mean to you?

Bessie: Just that [pause] I’ve never had it and [did not complete the sentence, so I moved on]

Shareen: Is it something you share with Arby?

Bessie: Sometimes.

Shareen: Why sometimes?

Bessie: Because - for a lot of reasons, really. Just everyday things get in the way. With five children and him coaching, it’s just crazy busy all the time.

Shareen: You also mentioned on your questionnaire that you don’t feel good at it, and you fear rejection.

Bessie: Yeah, I do.

Shareen: Have you ever felt rejection from Arby?

Bessie: Not really rejection, but he’s said that I get too emotional, so I try not to.

Shareen: What does he mean by emotional?

Bessie: I’ll cry (chuckle) at the drop of a hat [turning red, seemed full of emotion]

Shareen: Is this something you’re comfortable with? Holding it in?

Bessie: It’s - it’s what I do.

Arby and Bessie both expressed a deep lack of satisfaction with expressed affection in their marriage. Bessie craved affection and Arby was frustrated by the lack of it. He was also frustrated by the lack of communication, demonstrated emotion, and of sex. When asked if there were any kinds of affection he and Bessie shared that was satisfying, Arby replied:

Arby: I'm not [satisfied]. There is none! She does not know how to [express affection]. She cannot look me in the eyes when I hug or give her a kiss!

A lack of affectionate expression caused Arby to question Bessie’s love. He wondered if Bessie loved him:

Arby: ... because of what we have (kids!) or is she in love with me?
The couple’s comments and ways of relating to one another suggested they seldom communicated their feelings without reservation. For example, one way that Arby showed Bessie affection was by “smack[ing] her on the butt.” He said that he’d done this for a long time, occasionally. When asked how Bessie responded to this type of affection, Arby replied:

**Arby:** *Ha, I don’t know. Turned on? [I’m] not sure [if this affects how she feels]*.

When Bessie was asked how Arby showed her affection, she also listed this as one of the ways:

**Bessie:** *[He] smacks my butt.*

Bessie’s assessment of the behavior revealed, not just a casual, ‘I can take-it-or-leave-it’ perspective, but it affected her emotionally. She said:

**Bessie:** *[I am] not sure [how this makes me feel]. Kind of embarrassed. I don’t know… like he should figure something else out to do.*

When asked if they had talked about it, she said they hadn’t. She wasn’t initially sure why, but reasoned that maybe she didn’t say anything because Arby seemed to enjoy doing it.

Arby and Bessie’s uncertainty about what each other wanted or needed in lieu of affection was not uncommon. As couples received affection, it was clear they wanted to be shown affection in ways that appealed to them or brought them pleasure. But as Arby and Bessie’s experience illustrates, spouses weren’t always aware of what would.

Some knew. It was interesting to note the number of couples (3 out of 8) who were aware of their and their spouse’s preferences or ‘love languages.’ Couples who were aware included Clark and Adele (AAm.37/Cf.35), Pat and Karen (Cm.37/Cf.37), and Juan and Angelica (AAm.44/AAf.43). This suggests that nearly half of the couples in the study had either sought assistance or enhancement in their relationships, whether through personal inquiry (e.g., self-improvement efforts) or couples counseling. Reflecting on their ages, I wondered if it was just by chance the younger and older couples hadn’t discussed ‘love languages.’ Nonetheless, each couple in the study was serious about their relationship. They wanted to make them work. Some had obviously taken steps to do so, but although they knew each other’s love languages, they didn’t always speak them. In the short time I spent with couples, I came to know their preferences. Their desires resounded in their responses. Through their
language. Did their partners know as well? Some couples knew what they wanted (i.e., affectionate expression) and were aware of how they wanted it (i.e., their specific love languages), but weren’t always assured of receiving it from their spouses. There were also couples like Arby and Bessie, who didn’t seem to know, or maybe just wouldn’t say.

Ultimately, each couple experienced some uncertainty. This begged the question: how could spousal needs be met if husbands and wives weren’t sure of what they were? Knowing each other’s love language seemed to provide a good foundation in understanding spousal wishes, but it brought no assurances. It did not guarantee that needs would be addressed or wishes provided. It also didn’t guarantee an absolute knowledge about their spouse’s satisfaction with every type of affectionate behavior. There was a need for verbal assurances.

*The Need for Verbal Assurances*

It’s been said that knowing is half the battle. It seems the proper order of things is to first know what to do, then “act on a choice” to do it. On a whole, couples weren’t fully aware of their mate’s desires. As comments indicate below, the majority of spouses had a general idea about some things that pleased their mates:

*Angelica:* [I] tell him I love him. [I hope this makes him feel] that I need him; that I appreciate him. That he is special to me. [Does this seem to affect how he feels]? Not really. He will respond in kind. I believe he appreciates that words, but he told me a long time ago that action means more to him than the words.

*Bessie:* [I] tell him he looks nice. [I hope this makes him feel] good, wanted attractive. Yes, [this affects how he feels]. It puts a smile on his face.

However, among all couple types, ages, cultural and socioeconomic groups, there were lapses in knowledge, where couples simply didn’t know if their mates liked or enjoyed certain behaviors. Such lapses in knowledge often led to stagnation, as frustrated spouses stopped trying to meet their partner’s needs. For example, when rendering acts of service for Clark (AAm.37), such as “making his favorite meal, clean[ing] out his closet, [or] washing his car,” Adele (Cf.35) hoped he would feel loved. When asked if this affected Clark, she replied:

*Adele:* Yes and no. I know he appreciates it but sometimes I see no difference when I do.
Adele wanted to make Clark happy and she had hoped he would recognize her efforts as acts of love, and that he would feel loved by her. Without appreciation or affirmation from Clark, however, she wasn’t sure that her efforts were wanted or worthwhile. She also hadn’t been expressly acknowledged as having done something good or as being a good spouse and she was disappointed. When asked if she provided these types of supportive behaviors often enough to satisfy Clark, she said:

_Adele:_ I’m unsure. I try to do random acts of service all the time and I don’t know if he wants more or less.

In addition to stagnation, lapses in knowledge caused emotional discomfort. Emily (AAf.50) expressed her love for her husband often and she demonstrated above average amounts of affection to him. However, when she gave Clay (Cm.56) compliments, his reaction (or perhaps non-reaction) left her uncertain. Emily described:

_Emma:_ I tell him how fine he is. He’s a good-looking man. I hope this inflates his ego and makes him feel sexy. [Does this seem to affect him]? I don’t think so. At least he doesn’t act like it. He just says “Thank you, Baby” or “You’re good-looking, too.”

When Emily was asked if she gives compliments to Clay as often as he would like, she replied:

_Emma:_ I really don’t think it matters to him some days. But I think he likes it.

Without assurance of her spouse’s wishes or desires, Emily may cease to provide affection Clay might possibly enjoy. Similarly, without spousal assurance, Clay might continue to be subjected to a behavior he may not find pleasurable.

Juan and Angelica (AAm.44/AAf.43) shared a misconception that may have been assuaged with verbal assurance. One of the ways Angelica enjoyed experiencing Juan’s affection was being kissed by him in the mornings. This meant a lot to her. She noted:

_Angelica:_ [He] kisses me before he leaves for work. [This makes me feel] loved, appreciated… that his love is the last think he wants to leave with me. I appreciate the little things. The act of him pouring out himself.”

As much as this meant to Angelica, Juan had no idea. Although he assumed she liked it, he didn’t know:

_Juan:_ I kiss her in the morning to let her know I’m thinking of her. [I hope this makes her feel secure!] [Does this seem to affect how she feels]? I’m not completely sure. She’s the same either way. Hard to measure.

I asked Juan to further explain what he meant.
*Shareen:* She’s the same either way.

*Juan:* (nods yes).

*Shareen:* What do you mean?

*Juan:* I mean [pause] just like it is. She doesn’t really react to things. You’d expect a smile or her to get excited, or something. But [pause] she doesn’t.

Juan wanted to please his wife, but he wasn’t sure of how to do so. His lack of understanding about what Angelica enjoyed engendered misconceptions and he considered her assessment of his expressed behavior as unwanted or unappreciated.

Likewise, Clark (AAm.37) illustrated a benefit of sharing verbal assurance. When asked how he shows Adele affection, he explained:

*Clark:* I tell her. She knows what I am feeling through my words... she would prefer that I am more vocal with my words.

Clark was asked how Adele shows him affection and he replied similarly:

*Clark:* [She] lets me know verbally that she loves me. [This] makes me feel special because it is a direct expression of her feelings, [which] give[s] me a clearer understanding of what she feels for me.

Sometimes, however, knowing was uncomfortable for couples. Juan and Angelica (AAm.44/AAf.43), for example, were among the group of couples who had taken steps to enhance their marriage. They had spent time pondering their relationship and they had an idea what of what the other didn’t like:

*Angelica:* I asked that he not grope, but share a gentle touch or just a hug that doesn’t have to lead to anything else.

*Juan:* I like to touch my wife sexually (groping). It’s my way of affection, she can do without. A hug and a kiss is enough for her.

As difficult as it may have been to know that expressed affection wasn’t received positively, spouses appreciated knowing and seemed to consider verbal assurances a gift. Not only did such knowledge benefit recipients of the expressed affection, as their true desires were often better attended to, but it also benefited givers of affection, engendering confidence in husbands and wives that their efforts to make their mates feel a certain way were worthwhile. Couples then felt more successful as
mates, and they felt more capable of being ‘good at marriage.’

Verbal assurance also came in the form of compliments. Husbands and wives valued compliments. It made them feel good about themselves and their relationships. Similarly, when they didn't receive compliments, an inverse effect was felt. Bessie (Cf.32), for example, enjoyed receiving compliments about her appearance from Arby (AAm.33), but she didn’t feel she received them often enough, and it sometimes angered her.

Olivia (AAf.27) also shared:

**Olivia:** Sometimes, if [Jude] doesn’t kiss me or tell me I’m beautiful, I feel a little bad. I know I’m still beautiful and he still feels the same, but I want him to say and do those things.

Olivia illustrated a desire for verbal assurance.

As well, Gavin and Ebony (Cm.26/Cf.25) felt gratified by compliments. Gavin found compliments that he was a good spouse and parent both pleasurable and satisfying. His wife Ebony was similarly gratified by compliments about her appearance. Ebony had shared numerous comments about her physical appearance and its importance to her:

**Ebony:** My husband is physically attracted to me and makes me feel loved and wanted.

**Ebony:** Tells me I’m beautiful or sexy. [This makes me feel] great! It keeps me confident with my physical appearance.

**Ebony:** Hugging, kissing, touching. [This makes me feel] excited that he is attracted to me every time he sees me.

Gavin and Ebony were a young couple who didn’t show much emotion. They didn’t touch during the interview. Questions posed to them during the game were answered briefly; almost systematically. Responses were shared without humor and without a discussion of thoughts among themselves. Gavin and Ebony answered a question and simply waited to share the next one. This was uncommon as participants enjoyed discussing their answers aloud the most. Couples typically humorously debated answers, and laughed considerably. Gavin and Ebony were different. They were not as engaging as other couples. This wasn’t good or bad. It appeared to be their way of relating to one other; their way of loving one another. Notably, where no physical sign of affection was observed, verbal sentiment told
their truth. They complimented each other. They shared compliments about the other with me. They appreciated each other. Compliments meant a lot to them.

Compliments were meaningful to couples. Among the 19% of participants (3 out of 16) who identified compliments as a type of affectionate expression they received, each of them (100%) found them pleasurable. The sharing of compliments was one of the few forms of affection that was always assessed as pleasurable, and never appraised as being “sometimes enjoyed” or unappreciated (see Table 6).

Like other couples, Gavin and Ebony exhibited a lapse in knowledge about each other’s desires that led to a misconception; one that verbal assurance might have prevented. Ebony wasn’t the only one concerned with her appearance. Gavin was concerned about his and shared a notable perspective when asked how Ebony showed him affection:

**Gavin:** Physical (kissing hugs). [This makes me feel] attractive. She wouldn’t want to get physical with me if I wasn’t.

Ebony admitted that since the baby had been born, a “lack of [sexual] intercourse” had become an issue for her and Gavin. They made love once a week, which was satisfying for her. She knew it wasn’t satisfying for Gavin and she suspected:

**Ebony:** I think he thinks I’m not as attracted to him as I used to be.

She assured me she was. Gavin may have appreciated this gift of verbal assurance.

**Satisfaction with Helping & Support**

Spouses identified fourteen affectionate behaviors that fit within the helping and supportive category, and 93% (13) of these types of behaviors were considered pleasurable and satisfying. These were instrumental tasks. Things spouses did to help the other or benefit the family or home. Some couples, like Pat and Karen (Cm.37/Cf.37), put forth intentional effort to manage their households efficiently. Pat and Karen reported having a viable family organizational system in place, in spite of Karen’s frequent business travels. They not only managed an orderly system for childcare, but routinely allowed each other personal time to attend to his or her physical, mental and emotional needs and well-being. Karen noted:
Karen: We work together really well. We have some hiccups at times, but for the most part, we do pretty well. He takes care of the kids while I'm working and then I watch the kids for him. We have a 2 and a 4 year old and it's a lot to manage. So I'm really blessed to have Pat be willing to do so much.

Sharen: How often are you out of town on business?

Karen: Every week. Sometimes I'll have more than one trip a week.

Sharen: Is your schedule fixed? So you can plan who will take care of the children with Pat?

Karen: [shakes head no]. No, I'm like all over the place [grins]. So we have to be really organized. We discuss who's in charge of the children and we try to keep it balanced. Like I try to make sure Pat has everything he needs before I leave. I just - I know he could do it but it really is a lot, so I still try to help.

Pat appreciated Karen's efforts and his personal time away from the family:

Pat: She travels for work and when she's gone I have the kids and our kids are young. So it is nice to step away and take care of things I need to or do something for myself or family.

While visiting the homes of husbands and wives, I witnessed their efforts to work together and to help one another. For example, when I arrived at Tom and Julie's home that Sunday afternoon, Tom was in the driveway. He had pulled into the driveway moments before I did. When I got out of my car, I was surprised he knew my name. I had only talked with Julie to arrange the interview. Tom welcomed me, “Hi Sharen. Come on in.” I noticed Tom was carrying a plastic grocery bag. He had been shopping. He introduced me to Julie, then put the groceries away and joined us. Tom was helping take care of his family.

They Wanted to Help

Such were the feelings of participant couples. They wanted to help their spouses. They wanted to support them. Some put forth more effort than others. Olivia (AAf.27) enjoyed cooking for Jude (AAm.28) and considered it her way of showing him affection because as she said, “he love[d] to eat.”

When asked about ways she shows Jude affection, Olivia noted:

Olivia: Going to his [soccer and basketball] games to show support. [I hope this makes him feel] encouraged & supported.

Olivia further discussed her intentions in attending Jude's games:
Sharen: What sports do you play?

Olivia: Soccer and other things. We love sports. Right now, my husband is playing in a league and I can’t play.

Sharen: Why can’t you play?

Olivia: Because it’s a men’s league. I love playing and want to play, but I can’t [sigh and smile].

Sharen: I read that you attend Jude’s games.

Olivia: Yeah [smiling broadly] when I can. If I’m not working or tired after work.

Sharen: Why do you go?

Olivia: Because I want him to look up and see me from time to time, and know I’m in his corner. Even if I’m not looking at him at the moment, he can look at me and know I care about him enough to want to be there.

Sharen: How does he feel about you being there?

Olivia: Oh, he loves it. And it doesn’t seem to matter to him what I’m doing. Like, if I’m watching the game, talking or playing. I think he’s just happy I’m there. But I wish I could play [chuckle].

Jude also discussed ways he helps his wife:

Jude: [I] do the dishes, clean around the house [and] do laundry. I do not hope it shows her anything. I haven’t really done or do these things to create any particular feeling in my wife… it does [seem to affect her]. She is genuinely appreciative and happy.

Jude’s assessment was a critical departure from every other response, debating the idea that there must have been some conscious motivation behind expressions of affection. There, indeed, may not have been. Jude further said:

Jude: I just do them randomly, not particularly with the intent to be affectionate.

If Jude had in fact cleaned the house without intending to make Olivia feel a certain way or to show her how he felt, it may not have been affectionate behavior, because Jude would not have been acting on a choice to make her feel any particular way, nor intending to show anything. Notably, Jude’s help with the housework might still have been received by Olivia as an expression of affection; in spite of his intention. Jude had observed, however, that his help with cleaning made Olivia “happy and... genuinely
appreciative.” Does this identify an underlying, unconscious idea that he was helping her? Likely. Does it indicate that he was acting affectionately toward his wife? Perhaps not.

Emily (AA/50) also discussed ways she enjoyed helping Clay (Cm.56), her husband of 2 years.

When discussing ways she helped her husband, Emily described Clay as “spoiled rotten,” and said that he gets, “probably too much affection.”

Emily: I cook and serve him. [I hope this makes him feel like a king… he rarely cooks or makes his plate. I know he expects it [me to]. When it’s time to eat he just sits and waits for me to serve him.

Emily noted another way she cared for Clay:

Emily: I wash and fold and put away his clothes… he’s tired from work. He works very, very hard. Me helping him in this way is a relief for him… he always has clean clothes and doesn’t have to lift a finger to get them.

Emily’s ultimately said:

Emily: I think he is satisfied. I try to put his needs and wants before my own. He knows he can depend on me for love and support.

Couples generally wanted to help and to support their spouses, and did so in various ways. They helped care for children, they helped with housework, they supported their husbands and wives in hobbies, interests and activities that were important to them. They cooked food they didn’t necessarily like themselves to go the extra mile for their spouses. Incidentally, there was overlap in the categorization of the four categories. As it pertains to helping and supporting their loved ones, spouses also did so by listening. By talking. By sharing hugs, by spending time together, by giving foot and back rubs, et cetera (e.g., physical, verbal, and fulfillment and camaraderie forms of affection).

Satisfaction with Fulfillment & Camaraderie

Nine references were made describing affectionate behavior shown within the Fulfillment & Camaraderie category, with 78% of participants (7 out of 9) finding them both pleasurable and satisfying. Gifts were most commonly noted as ways spouses were shown affection, and 100% of participants (4 out of 4) found them both pleasurable and satisfying. Other behaviors in this category included spending quality time together, spousal attendance of church services, being comforted when stressed, and being sacrificed for. These behaviors were also perceived as pleasurable and satisfying;
though Karen (Cf.37) wanted Pat (Cm.37) to attend church with her more frequently, and she also
desired a tad more quality time with him (e.g., rather than 2-3 times per week, she preferred 3-4 times weekly).

When considering fulfillment and contentment, Olivia and Jude quickly came to mind. I asked
them about their love story:

**Sharen:** How long have you known each other?

**Olivia:** We met for the first time in 2004.

**Jude:** Two-thousand... yeah. It was four.

**Sharen:** You have such great chemistry. Why do you think that is?

**Olivia:** (chuckles). Oh, thank you! [Jude smiling, they look at each other as she talks] We have a really funny kinda meeting story.

**Sharen:** Ah.

**Jude:** [chuckles] It's unique.

**Olivia:** We met in college in Texas. He was with a friend and I was, and we ended up sitting together. One of our friends introduced us, but we didn't exactly hit it off that night. But I liked him, so I invited him to a meeting on campus that next Thursday, and he came! We saw each other at the meeting every week and we’d talk, but we didn’t think we’d actually end up together. We just thought we were going to be friends. But we just kinda fell in love from that. So, he never really asked me out and we never went on a first date. We just happened really.

**Sharen:** That’s a unique love story.

**Olivia:** [Smiling] It was. It was perfect because we became friends first. We were just a good fit.

**Sharen:** What makes you a good fit?

**Jude:** We’re just ourselves. We can talk about anything. We do a lot together.

**Sharen:** [To Jude]: What’s your favorite way to show Olivia affection?

**Jude:** I don’t think I have a favorite way. I just do what feels natural at the time. But most of the time, I honestly don’t think about it. I’m really not a very sensitive person that way. But she deserves my efforts, so I try to get better.

**Sharen:** Are you both satisfied with affection in your marriage?

**Jude:** I couldn’t ask for anything more, really.
Olivia: See? I just love my husband and my life with him.

Jude had said he wasn't particularly affectionate. Since my observations differed, I asked him why he felt that way:

Jude: I'm really not a very sensitive person that way. It's not that I don't love her. I do, I just - it's not like me to naturally be that way. But I try because she gives of herself so much for me. So I have to. I'm not the best at it, but I try to make her happy. But half the time I don't even think about it. That's why I say I'm not. I know I should do stuff like get up and hug her and stuff like that, but it doesn't always dawn on me to do them. And I gotta say, the TV doesn't help. I need to be more like her.

Discussions with Jude and Olivia were enlightening. Not just because of their words, but also their mannerisms. The way they talked with each other and esteemed one another; the way they blushed. They exuded love and affection. They had epitomized the spirit of the word, camaraderie. Their strong sense of togetherness and belonging. The way they shared in each other's lives, activities and interests. They had also entered graduate school together, determined they would encourage one another. Perhaps most importantly, they seemed to deeply enjoy one another. Incidentally, it wasn’t surprising that neither of them referred to sex as ‘sex.’ They called it “making love.”

Jude: Making love. [I hope this makes her feel] connected, intimate, loved, wanted. She can be herself with and around me. We usually lay in bed and hold each other and caress each other till we sleep.

The warmth, cheerfulness and comfort in one another's presence that Jude and Olivia conveyed were inspiring. This young couple shared what many couples in the study wanted, or as Bessie phrased it, what they “craved.” Intimacy. Camaraderie. Fulfillment.

Summary. Husbands and wives engaged in a variety of behaviors to show their spouses how they felt about them, and to make their spouses feel good about themselves, good about their relationships, and good about having them as partners. As husbands and wives received affection, they appreciated a variety of actions and behaviors, especially those characterized as selfless, sacrificial and sincere.

Affectionate Expression, Marital Quality & Considerations of Divorce

Spouses in the study were loved. No one said they weren’t loved, and no one said they didn’t love their spouse. Spouses just didn’t always feel loved. Inherent in the language these husbands and
wives shared was the need, not to know or possess knowledge that they were loved, but to sense it. They wanted to feel loved. But what if they didn't? Did it affect their perceptions of marital quality?

To examine whether adequate or insufficient levels of affectionate expression affected spousal perceptions of marital quality, husbands and wives were asked to describe ways affectionate expression in their marriages influenced their (1) feelings about themselves, (2) feelings about their spouses, and (3) feelings about their relationships.

**Affectionate Expression Affected Feelings about Themselves**

The amount of expressed affection affected the way husbands and wives felt about themselves. Couples shared thoughts about how both satisfactory and insufficient amounts of affection affected their self-perceptions.

**Feelings about Themselves: Positive Outcomes.** Spouses described how satisfactory amounts of affectionate expression affected them. Juan (AAm.44) rather uniquely focused on physical and psychological benefits he experienced when he was shown adequate amounts of affection:

*Juan:* I feel less stressed about life. It makes me think about taking better care of my health and well-being.

As spouses described how adequate amounts of affectionate expression affected them, they most commonly acknowledged feeling better about themselves. Pat (Cm.37) shared that when he's shown adequate amounts of affection it "makes [him] feel loved." Clay (Cm.56) also shared:

*Clay:* [An adequate amount of affection] makes me feel wanted and desired and relevant to her happiness and life.

Ebony (Cf.25), the ballet dancer, also wanted to feel desirable:

*Ebony:* I am very aware of my physical appearance and it's important to me. When [Gavin, Cm.26] assures me that I am beautiful and sexy, it helps my self-confidence.

Affectionate expression enhanced self-confidence in both young women and older men. Tom (Cm.50) noted, "The more affection... she shows me, the better I feel about myself."

**Feelings about Themselves: Undesirable Outcomes.** As spouses discussed outcomes of receiving inadequate types or insufficient amounts of affectionate expression, they described feeling
unloved, unliked and unwanted. Bessie (Cf.32) noted:

**Bessie:** It often makes me question how much he loves me or if I’m good enough. [I] feel unwanted.

Clark (AAm.37) similarly described his desire to be shown affection in ways that most appealed to him; illustrating the conceptual theme of Loving my Way versus Loving their Way:

**Clark:** Sometimes I don’t feel as loved because I don’t receive affection in the way I would prefer.

Angelica (AAf.43) reflected on affection that Juan (AAm.44) commonly expressed to her, and she shared a similar sentiment:

**Angelica:** He shows by doing things (e.g., lawn care, house repair) though he knows I would much rather spend time with him. [This makes me feel] appreciative, but he would do some of those things regardless of whether he was married or not. [It makes me feel this way] because that is not the way I need to be loved. That’s the way he wants to love me (or show affection).

Angelica expressed an additional pain that resulted from Juan's inexpression of affection, or her perception of it. When asked if she was satisfied with the amount of affection that was expressed in her marriage, she replied:

**Angelica:** No. I don’t feel as though my husband finds me beautiful. He is not happy with my current weight (neither am I) and he rarely (if at all) gives me compliments and he rarely tells me he loves me on his own; instead, he will say it as a response.

With Angelica's vulnerability, came insight. Her poignant and painful acknowledgement characterized feelings shared by many of the study's participants. Her comment illustrated the importance of verbal assurance, of compliments, of initiation and the importance of acting on a choice to show one's love. Bessie's and Clark's comments and Angelica's perceptions of how Juan felt about her well-illustrated some undesirable outcomes that may result from insufficient amounts or inadequate types of expressed affection.

**Affectionate Expression Affected Feelings about Their Spouses**

The amount of expressed affection affected the way husbands and wives felt about each other.

**Feelings about Their Spouses: Positive Outcomes.** As couples reflected on how affectionate behaviors made them feel about their mates, many felt more loved. Notably, 56% (5 out of 9) of spouses
felt more loved themselves, which enhanced their feelings about their mates. Tom (Cm.56) shared:

**Tom:** *The more affection I get, the more loved I feel. The more loved I feel, the better I feel about her.*

Similarly, not only did Olivia (AAf.27) attest to feeling loved when Jude (AAm.28) showed her ample amounts of affection, but she also described the phenomenon of reciprocity; where spouses would demonstrate some kind of affection in return as a result of having received affection from their mates.

**Olivia:** *When he gives me attention and shows affection, I feel more loved and return the favor.*

Karen (Cf.37) shared a similar sentiment and reflected on a way affectionate expression enhanced her emotional health:

**Karen:** *When the affection is there, I feel more loved and therefore I tend to love more back. My mood is better and so my emotions toward him are much more positive.*

Similarly, Gavin (Cm.26) also referenced enhancement to his emotional well-being. He noted that adequate amounts of affection made him more confident about Ebony's (Cf.25) love. He said, “When she is affectionate, I know she really loves me.”

Adele (Cf.35) inversely considered what her relationship would be like if Clark (AAm.37) were not as affectionate as he is:

**Adele:** *If he was withdrawn or not affectionate, I probably wouldn't feel so happy or loved in our relationship.*

Participants also noted that when they were shown adequate types and amounts of affection, they were energized in their relationships and tended to feel more loved, to feel better about their spouses, and they attempted to complement the energy shown them.

Clay (Cm.56) admittedly struggled with expressing affection, as affectionate behavior did not fall within his natural tendency to engage. He noted that Emily’s (AAf.50) tendency to show a lot of affection typically influenced his. “I find myself reciprocating in a positive way to meet her energy.”

Notably, as Juan (AAm.44) illustrated, adequate types and amounts of expressed affection often benefited the giver and recipient reciprocally.
Juan: It makes me want to be with her more often. Do special things together.

Adequate amounts of affection between spouses engendered multiple interpersonal benefits, including positive reciprocal effects, as well as enhancements to individuals' well-being.

Feelings about Their Spouses: Undesirable Outcomes. As spouses described how inadequate types or insufficient amounts of affectionate behavior affected their feelings about their mates, a notable phenomenon was observed. Spouses began to question. They questioned the love of their husbands and wives. “Does he love me?” “Why is she in this relationship?” Unanswered or unresolved questions transformed into doubts, perplexities, ponderings. Each participant who perceived of an inadequate amount of affection in their marriage had questions. Questions which, without fail, led to injured feelings, anger and/or resignation of efforts to meet spousal needs.

Juan (AAm.44) had, in some ways, resigned certain efforts in his desire to meet Angelica's (AAf.43) needs, but he also seemed to be searching for answers; for solutions. He wanted to know what pleased her. Juan expressed the need for verbal reassurance, noting:

Juan: Communication would help... knowing if my wife is satisfied with the affection.

Inadequate affection caused emotional pain, as Emily (AAf.50) described, “Sometimes I feel like he doesn't like me. But on the other hand, he wants me to have everything I want. I want more hugs, kisses, and smiles.”

Affectionate Expression Affected Feelings about Their Relationships

The amount of expressed affection also affected the way husbands and wives felt about their relationships.

Feelings about Their Relationships: Positive Outcomes. As spouses described how satisfactory amounts of affectionate expression affected their relationships, they perceived them and their spouses as being closer, stronger, and more intimate. As it related to closeness, Ebony (Cf.25) and Olivia (AAf.27) used identical terminology to describe how they felt when they received adequate types and amounts of affectionate expression:

Ebony & Olivia: I feel closer to him when we are affectionate.
Karen (C/37) shared a notable response as well:

**Karen:** When there's affection, our relationship is strong. We click, we laugh and things are great. When we argue, it's short, no grudges, and we figure it out and move on.

Pat (Cm.37) and Karen had shared concerns about how they ineffectively communicated with one another at times. Pat said that if he could have changed anything about their marriage, he would have wanted them to “choose their words more wisely.” It is noteworthy that in Karen’s comment above, she did not say that adequate amounts of expressed affection minimized their number of arguments or disagreements. She instead observed that when she and Pat argued in the midst of being affectionate, they fared better, as their arguments were shorter and they tended to find resolution more quickly and without holding grudges. Hence, the provision of satisfactory amounts of affection served to enhance spousal feelings about their relationships and these couples had an enhanced sense that they were ‘good at marriage.’ Adele (C/35) shared a similar sentiment:

**Adele:** When we are affectionate, I feel our relationship is strong.

Pat also described ways adequate types and amounts of affectionate expression affected his perceptions about his relationship with Karen. “[It makes me feel] that we have a common goal to love each other and raise a loving family.”

**Feelings about Their Relationships: Undesirable Outcomes.** Spouses experienced less desirable outcomes when inadequate types or insufficient amounts of affection were expressed. Adele (C/35) observed:

**Adele:** When we are not affectionate, we seem withdrawn. When we are withdrawn, I feel our relationship is rocky or we are not happy with each other.

Her husband Clark’s construction of satisfaction included an association between affectionate expression and marital quality. He observed:

**Clark:** Sometimes I feel that... affection shown in the way I feel affection should be shown is a reflection of the quality of the relationship.

As Clark presumed an association between the quality of expressed affection and marital quality, his comment also emphasized the importance of husbands and wives receiving affection Their Way.
Considerations of Divorce

The amount of affection shown in these marriages brought joy to some couples and pain to others. Husbands and wives were asked if and how the amount of affection they were receiving influenced their considerations of divorce.

As ideas about marital dissolution are shared, a graphic overview is provided in Figure 16 as a visual reminder of couples ‘at-a-glance.’ They are grouped according to their self-reported levels of satisfaction with affection in their marriages; coupled with observations by this researcher.

As considerations of divorce were explored, 63% (10 of 16) of spouses had considered divorce as a result of their disappointment with expressed affection in their marriages. Fewer participants, 38% (6 of 16) said they had not.

There were a few noteworthy commonalities among participants who had not considered divorce. The first was the number of years they had been married. With the exception of Tom and Julie...
(Cm.50/AAf.46), each couple had been married 2 years. Neither Jude nor Olivia (AAm.28/AAf.27) had considered divorce. Jude’s response was simply, “I haven’t thought about divorce.” Olivia noted:

Olivia: [I have] never thought about divorce and I don’t want to think about or imagine life without him. Everything about him (even his flaws) and yes, his affection towards me makes me not want to be without him in life.

Olivia didn’t want to consider life without Jude and specifically noted that this was due, in part, to the affection he showed her.

Notably, 2 (out of 16) participants; both male, reported not having thought about divorce, but they had considered what life would be like without their wives. Pat, for example, shared:

Pat: I haven’t really thought about divorce, but I have thought from time to time what it would be like without my wife and it is usually when we are not being affectionate towards each other. At least a couple times a year I think about it, usually when we go through some type of disconnect.

When asked what this meant, Pat explained that he is committed to making his marriage work and he had not considered divorce, but he had considered what his “life would’ve been like if [he were] still single.” Gavin (Cm.26) shared a similar idea:

Gavin: I never think about divorce but I think about how my life would be different without my wife at least once a week.

Another perhaps unsurprising commonality was that, with the exception of Tom (Cm.50), spouses who had not thought of divorce were satisfied with affectionate expression in their marriages. Interestingly, Tom was clearly dissatisfied and vocal about the lack of affection in his marriage to Julie (AAf.46). However, when he was asked about considerations of divorce, he denied them:

Tom: I couldn’t get by without Julie. She completes me and does the things I can’t do. Life without her would be even busier. It’s already too busy. And even harder.

Julie was admittedly unaffectionate and was satisfied with the lack of affection expressed in their marriage. She too, dismissed the idea of divorce with the explanation:

Julie: Given this is the second time for me, I made sure I would stay in before I went in. The thought does not cross my mind.

Similarly, Clay (Cm.56) was not disappointed with the affection in his marriage to Emily (AAf.50), but Emily was. Clay dismissed the notion of divorce and said he had "no such thought,
affection or not.” Emily’s response differed. She had frequently considered divorce:

**Emily:** *The first year of marriage, almost daily... affection played some role.*

Responses from the nine remaining participants attested to the importance of affectionate expression in their marriages. Some responses were emphatic, typically when spouses were highly dissatisfied; others were hopeful. For example, Juan (AAm.44) provided no explanation when asked whether he had considered divorce and if those considerations were influenced by affection in his marriage, he noted:

**Juan:** *Several times! Yes!*

Karen (Cf.37) provided some insightful context as she shared her thoughts about divorce and how affectionate expression affected such feelings:

**Karen:** *We [Pat - Cm.37] separated for 3 months after 1 year of marriage. The amount of affection is HUGE when it comes to thoughts on divorce. The only time I even think about life without him is when I don’t feel loved emotionally and physically ALL [due] to affection.*

Arby (AAm.33), who was also highly dissatisfied with affection in his marriage shared:

**Arby:** *Sometimes I wonder. Of course the lack of affection, sex and communication plays a role.*

Clark and Adele (AAm.37/Cf.35) both acknowledged having considered divorce at times, but “not very often.” Their feelings were similar. Clark shared:

**Clark:** *Not very often, but how I respond to the amount of affection that I am shown does affect the frequency of those thoughts.*

Adele (Cf.35) similarly noted:

**Adele:** *Not very often, but when I do, it’s when I am very upset with my husband and in the moment we are expressing very little amounts of affection. If we do fight and make up, I feel like affection increases immediately following, coming to a resolution of conflict or discord.*

Some participants shared reasons they dismissed notions about divorce. Bessie (Cf.32) noted:

**Bessie:** *[I think about divorce] on occasion, but in the end I always want my marriage to work.*

Angelica (AAf.43) shared a similar reply when asked if she had considered divorce. She attributed her dismissal of such a notion to her commitment to her marriage and to spirituality:
Angelica: [I have thought of divorce] probably three times. The lack of affection played some part, but my commitment to my marriage and God outweighed the thought of divorce.

Spousal Resolves & Moving Forward

In spite of disappointments about and challenges with affectionate expression in their marriages, couples, including highly dissatisfied husbands and wives, still wanted their marriages to work, whether for instrumental, spiritual or esteem reasons.

For example, Juan and Angelica (AAm.44/AAf.43) were both dissatisfied with the amount of affectionate expression in their marriage. Juan felt that “attention to [his] needs [were] lacking.” He wanted Angelica to focus less on social events and more on their relationship. Juan felt Angelica “could use some help in prioritizing what’s more important in [their] marriage.” He also wanted her to communicate her feelings or perceptions about the affection he showed her.

Angelica was also dissatisfied with the affection in their marriage. She believed their relationship “could be more fulfilling.” Angelica wanted to feel loved and desired by Juan. She wanted him to consider her beautiful. She wished they “had more intimacy and romance (from both parties) so that [they would be] intentional about expressing [their] love” to one another. She wished affection would be “second nature” for her and Juan. She would “make sure that every day [was like] Valentine’s Day, instead of one.” She also hoped that she and Juan would “be honest (completely) with one another.”

Despite their needs and desires as it related to affectionate expression, life for this couple was full of other concerns. When I met the couple in their home, Angelica introduced me to her children, who were warm, polite and personable, and obviously accustomed to being in the company of adults. The children were respectful and quiet. The couple’s teenage son came into the room we interviewed in once. He said, “Excuse me,” and quietly told his mother about something that had gone awry in their preparations to cook dinner. Being parents, the couple had to have more on their minds than just the interview. Angelica had told me just after I arrived that they were going to cook and have dinner, then go to prayer meeting at church following the interview. After the couple learned about the problem (e.g., the chicken fell on the floor), they looked a little puzzled about what to do about dinner, but this
revelation in no apparent way impacted the interview. They didn’t comment or leave the room. They continued talking with me as though nothing had happened. This moment brought to mind the space that affectionate expression must also have occupied in the lived experience of Juan and Angelica. It was contextual. They noted during the interview, that they emphasized being present and supportive in the lives of their children, and that their personal and dyadic needs often took second place to the needs of their family. They had much to manage. Affectionate expression wasn’t everything.

In spite of disappointment and frustration, Angelica resolved:

Angelica: I love him just the same. I wish he would demonstrate affection by sincere cuddling, telling me that he loves me, compliments... but I understand that he is not that person and it is not natural for him to express himself that way.

Angelica resolved to make their marriage work and said, "I know that he gives me what he can and he is willing to give me what I need.”

Indeed, in spite of the challenges, disappointment and frustration, husbands and wives often challenged themselves to “do better” and “be better” as givers and they were forgiving and accommodating as recipients of affection. They wanted their marriages to work.

Ethnocultural and Socioeconomic Considerations

Ethnocultural and socioeconomic difference was examined with a specific focus on whether diverse couples defined, understood or experienced affectionate expression differently, and if any nuances existed in their perceptions of satisfaction and its influence on their considerations of divorce.

Different Understandings?

Husbands and wives shared common understandings of what affectionate expression was, with no identifiable difference in regards to ethnocultural or socioeconomic considerations. In fact, there essentially were more similarities than notable differences. For example, Adele (Cf35) defined affectionate expression similarly to Juan (AAm.44), who was nearly a decade her senior, and a different gender and race. They defined it as:

Adele: An act, verbally, physically, [or] emotionally that expresses love from one person to another or expresses admiration and respect, fondness.
Juan: Verbal, physical and emotional ways of supporting each other’s wants, needs and desires.

Socioeconomic difference was also not identified. For example, Bessie (Cf.32), a mental health technician and mother of 5, whose household income totaled between $16,000 and $29,000, shared comparable understandings of affection expression with Jude (AAm.28), an engineer whose household income exceeded $100,000. Bessie construed affectionate expression as:

**Bessie:** Taking the steps necessary to make someone feel wanted, special, needed.

Jude defined it as:

**Jude:** Acting on a choice to make another feel special, loved or wanted.

No apparent difference was identified among these groups in their understandings of what affectionate expression was.

**Different Ways of Showing or Receiving Affection?**

Ethnocultural and socioeconomic difference was explored in regards to ways spouses demonstrated and received affection; and difference was not identified. As couples expressed affection to their spouses, they engaged multiple actions and behaviors they considered to be affectionate, and no patterns or ethnocultural or socioeconomic trends were recognized. Participants engaged these behaviors generally with some motivation to make their spouses feel good about themselves or their relationships, and/or to make their spouses feel good about the giving spouse. Such behaviors differed. Motivations were different. Whether children lived in their household mattered. Work or school schedules affected affectionate expression. Characteristics of families-of-origin, and current temperaments mattered. But ethnocultural or socioeconomic difference did not. Difference was not represented in either the givers’ motivations or the ways affection was received.

No matter the ethnocultural or socioeconomic group identity, affection was generally received with appreciation when it was perceived to be sincere and intentional, as opposed to being routine and meaningless; when it involved a behavior that appealed to the recipient as a way they wanted to be loved, as opposed to being a way their spouse felt comfortable showing love. Spouses were especially
appreciative of selflessness and sacrifice in giving. Such considerations presented no ethnocultural or socioeconomic patterns. Figure 17 provides illustration:

**Figure 17. The Absence of Ethnocultural and Socioeconomic Difference**

Figure 17 illustrates the absence of patterns as it relates to ethnocultural groups and socioeconomic group identity. While patterns are not evident to support the existence of difference among this group, the following observations suggest that there were none. Figure 17 indicates that four wives expressed affection to their husbands by kissing (e.g., Adele (Cf.35), Ebony (Cf.25), Emily (AAf.50) and Julie (AAf.46). Not only are these women in different places as it related to their satisfaction with affection in their marriages, but 50% of them are African American and the other half Caucasian, and their household incomes vary.

**Where Difference Was Found**

Although ethnocultural and socioeconomic trends were not identified, noteworthy patterns by gender were. The first was that while women tended to prefer affection expressed via caring communication or quality time, men desired expressed affection in the form of physical touch or helping
behaviors. Notably, Clark (AAm.37), Juan (AAm.44) and Tom (Cm.50) voiced feelings of discontent about the forms of affection that was shown them, and each of them explicitly said they preferred “action to words,” meaning affection shown in physical or instrumental ways, rather than with verbal communication. While Clark, Juan and Tom expressly stated this, a number of other men alluded to it. The idea that affectionate communication may be assessed and appreciated differently by men and women is not novel to this study, but a minimal amount of data exists in the literature supporting such a notion. According to Prager (1995), few contextual variables have been found to be more likely to affect intimate behavior than gender (p. 186). It is widely held in the literature, and supposed by this study that such difference may be engendered via socialization. Gendered behaviors were cataloged by Maccoby (1990) and Noller (1993), identifying male ideals as focusing on breadwinning; including autonomy, self-confidence, instrumentality, and a tendency to avoid audibly expressing affectionate feelings. Female ideals involve nurturing and emotional and verbal expressivity of emotion. Hence, as noted in this current study, men tend to experience affection in instrumental ways and women via verbal communication.

There was also a second pattern noted by gender, which was an unexpected phenomenon.

Clark (AAm.37) and Tom (Cm.50) were different. They were racially different and there was a 13 year age difference between them. These men were also similar. Both had 3 children, both were in mixed racial marriages, and both were disappointed with affectionate expression in their marriages.

Clark desired and seemingly pled for more hugging, kissing, and love-making with Adele (Cf.35) and voiced the need consistently during the research process. Adele, on the other hand, admitted that she and Clark were less intimate since becoming parents, but she was satisfied with the affection in their marriage.

Tom’s situation was similar, as he had hoped for more sex, more kissing and more hugging with Julie (AAf.46); but his situation seemed bleak, or more dire. Tom considered the opportunities he and Julie had to engage in affectionate behavior “sad.” He described their life circumstances:

Tom: There’s been much less love-making since [Julie’s] surgeries. Somewhat less love-making after our youngest child was born. Julie’s medical problems or
medication makes her less inclined to want to make love. Julie has too many hot flashes. Not good.

Julie concurred. “We barely have time to talk, and due to medical problems, intimacy is rare. While this may work for me, I know it is troubling for my spouse and it makes me sad that I am unable.”

Patterns existed. Not necessarily patterns of similar life circumstances, but the fact that no matter the ethnocultural or socioeconomic group, husbands were pleading for affectionate expression and wives, for a variety of reasons, often denied them. Some rationales were due to medical reasons, some because life was busy, and others were the result of ineffective interpersonal communicative abilities. On a whole, husbands in the study were dissatisfied with the amount of expressed affection in their marriages (see Figure 18 below). In fact, 75% of men (6 out of 8) expressed feelings of disappointment or frustration.

**Figure 18. Spousal Satisfaction with Affectionate Expression**

Based on researcher’s assessment, not participant self-assessments.

Finally, husbands and wives were asked if they or their spouses held a perception that affectionate behavior was “feminine” or uncharacteristic of what a man does. Out of 12 responses, 33%
of husbands (4) said they either held that belief or it in some way influenced them. Five participants, or 42% had either “never heard anything like that” or they didn’t feel it was true. Three participants, or 25% weren’t sure, but said they “knew people who were that way,” or they “could see that being the case.

Participants who disagreed included Arby (AAm.33), Angelica (AAf.43), Emily (AAf.50), Juan (AAm.44) and Tom (Cm.50). Angelica noted, “That was not expressed in my family. I don’t hold that belief.” Her husband Juan simply said, “That is not true.” Tom replied much the same, “I don’t think this is true.” Spouses who weren’t sure, but suspected it could be true included: Ebony (Cf.25), Julie (AAf.46) and Olivia (AAf.27). Ebony noted, “I don’t think it is at all, but I can see how it can be perceived that way by men.” Olivia said the same, “I don’t think so, but I can see how some men might.” Olivia also noted that she and Jude were more affectionately expressive than their friends. She wasn’t sure why. Julie shared, “I have known men who feel this way, or appear to.”

Participants who identified or agreed with the statement were all males and they were half African American and half Caucasian: Clark (AAm.37), Clay (Cm.56), Gavin (Cm.26) and Jude (AAm.28). Clark agreed, “True. The way my spouse wants me to express affection is different from how men where I am from express it.” Jude also noted, “I agree in some ways. I don’t know if it’s considered feminine, but we are certainly more affectionate than couples in our community.”

Notably, Clay and his spouse had a difference of opinion on the matter. Emily had noted:

**Emily:**  This has never been an issue [with Clay]. I think past hurts and fear stops the experience of affection for my husband. He’s not concerned about... having... feminine behavior. He knows who he is.

Clay, on the other hand said, “[This is] somewhat true. I think it is subtle, but I see this effect in myself sometimes. Perhaps [it’s] an American handicap. I doubt European mean suffer this.”

Clay’s thought seemed to characterize all considerations of ethnocultural and socioeconomic difference in the experience of these couples with affectionate expression. Difference may exist beyond these particular ethnocultural or socioeconomic groups, or perhaps in other countries, or perhaps with a
different set of couples in identical ethnocultural and socioeconomic groups; but it was not noted among these husbands and wives.

As these men and women experienced affection, they defined it in similar ways, they understood it in similar ways. They lived it both uniquely and similarly, as well. They were gratified and disappointed by common impediments and situations that impeded opportunities for engaging affection. Whether they appeared at the top of the pyramid in Figure 15 (e.g., they were exceptionally satisfied with affectionate expression in their marriage), or the lower parts of it, these couples shared something in common; they all hoped to improve. They were all on a journey and no couple considered themselves to have arrived. In spite of disappointments, they were forgiving. In the face of unmet needs, they hoped. In spite of their frustrations, they moved forward.
CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore, understand, and describe the lived experience of affection for eight diverse couples by focusing on their situation-specific meanings and shared constructions, which would include ideas and perspectives about ways they show and receive affectionate behavior. Participants described moments and behaviors that brought them and their spouses joy and disappointment, sadness and satisfaction.

Affectionate Expression Defined

This study first explored the meaning of affectionate expression to couples and their constructions of it. One of the complexities of research is that scholars often use varying conceptions of terminology in the literature, which may be variable or ambiguous, and may be understood in unintended ways. In the operationalization of affectionate expression in the past, researchers have observed and coded the frequency of behavior among couples. This approach has yielded limited typologies comprised of mostly non-verbal affectionate behavior (Acker, Acker, and Pearson, 1973; Acker & Marton, 1984). Another arguably less beneficial approach has been to simply omit a discussion of the proposed meaning of terminology altogether. This current study went beyond extant studies sought to avoid such risk by not only delineating the collaborative understanding of affectionate expression, but by also providing examples of intended meanings to comprehensively describe it.

Affectionate expression was defined as “actions that may be expressed physically, verbally or emotionally, that: (1) demonstrate feelings of fondness, liking, love, care or admiration; or (2) that support another’s needs or desires by making them feel special, wanted, needed, secure or good about themselves. This definition is in line with extant definitions of affectionate expression in the literature. Affection has been defined in the literature as a tender feeling of fondness or liking (Oxford University Press, 2012), and an internal state of positive, often intimate regard for another (Floyd & Voloudakis, 1999), and affectionate expression is the communication of such feeling (Floyd et al., 2005). The men and women of this study defined affectionate expression similarly, and went beyond extant research by
incorporating considerations of motivation with it.

Inherent in the study's collaborative definition was the noteworthy idea that spouses demonstrate affection with different motivations, or they intend affectionate actions for different purposes. It may arguably be the case that affection is not always shown with a consciously intended purpose. This study is not the first to introduce the idea that there are purposes or motivations behind affectionate expression, nor is it the first to question whether specific intent or motivation guides it. A focus on expectations in the expression of affection was introduced via Affectionate Exchange Theory, which considers the main motivation behind affectionate communication to be, in part, long-term viability, or survival (Floyd, 2001). This study's definition, and the meaning made by participants that incorporates a focus on motivation behind affection is in line with existing scholarship. For example, Gulledge, Gulledge, & Stahmann (2003, p. 234) defined physical affection as "any touch intended to arouse feelings of love in the giver or the recipient," suggesting intention or motivation. Affectionate expression is also described as a type of relational maintenance behavior used to keep relationships in existence (Canary & Dainton, 2006; Dindia & Canary, 1993); which also suggests intent. Further, a distinction is made in the literature between relational maintenance strategies and routine maintenance behavior, where strategies suggest that an individual is deliberately engaged in an action or behavior to achieve a desired end (Dainton & Stafford, 1993). Routine maintenance behavior is less intentional and it occurs at a lower level of consciousness. Relational maintenance behavior in the literature typically refers to both strategic activity and routine interactions between partners. This current study holds that couples may have communicated affection without a conscious intention to elicit specific outcomes, though such thought typically occurred at some lower level of consciousness. This current study innovatively went beyond previous studies, however, because participant motivation behind affectionate behavior was expressly inquired of. In other words, couples were asked to expound on their motivation for expressing affection. Hence, questions need not arise regarding the intent of these husbands and wives, since they specified themselves what their intentions were. Notably, in this study, when there was no conscious intent toward affectionate behavior, a participant stated this. One
husband cleaned his and his wife's home, claiming no particular motivation toward affection. He acknowledged, however, that he knew his wife would appreciate his efforts based on her reactions to this behavior in the past.

The collaborative definition of affectionate expression was illuminating because participants shed light on the importance of exploring reasons spouses showed affection (e.g., "to make her feel secure"), which extended the study's initial research focus to include analyses of motivation for affectionate behavior as a key focus. Such was one benefit of this qualitative inquiry.

Among the scant amount of research that explores affectionate communication in marriage, no study has been located that employs a qualitative approach. Such an omission may have deprived the field of enlightening data. Broad categories of behavior (or typologies) are typically presented a priori in marital studies about affection, with a seemingly unspoken positivist assumption that both affectionate expression and specific affectionate behaviors possess singular universal meanings and that they are interpreted and understood similarly by everyone. A typology, or group of prescribed affectionate behaviors, would have been too ambiguous and potentially leading to have utilized in this current study, as the lived experience of participants was pursued. For example, when Dainton, Stafford, and Canary (1994) examined how physical affection and maintenance strategies predict relational characteristics, their categories of measurement were limited to broad strategies that were delineated in the 1991 Stafford and Canary typology. Similarly, Bell, Daly, and Gonzalez (1987) developed a typology of affinity maintenance strategies and then utilized the Marital Relationship Inventory for couples to rate how frequently their spouses used each strategy and how important the affectionate behavior was to them. Notably, little relationship was found between marital satisfaction and the women's assessment of the affinity maintenance strategies. Marital satisfaction was, however, strongly related to perceptions about their spouses' use of affectionate expression. This observation is not only indicative of the importance of affectionate expression in marriage, but it also supports the argument that measurements of broad categories of behavior may not provide the most accurate reflection of dyadic lived experiences.
A variety of themes were identified in participant definitions. The first essential idea was that expressing affection is an act, or something that must be done, demonstrated or displayed, and that individuals choose to show affection. This idea is synonymous with discourse in extant literature, where a distinction is made between the feeling of affection and the expression of affection (Mikkelson & Floyd, 2009). It is recognized in the literature that affection is often felt, but not expressed, as well as expressed when it is not felt. Such difference was exhibited in this study as participants commonly described having feelings of affection toward their spouses, but not expressing it. Wives typically fell into this category and they were unable to describe the reason they did not express felt affection, because they were not consciously aware of the reasons why. One husband also admitted to communicating insincere affection (Floyd, 2006), or demonstrating affection without necessarily feeling it (e.g., Pat kissing Karen because she wanted him to every night, as opposed to wanting to himself). Such ideas would seemingly be beneficial for scholars to further explore.

**Descriptions of Affectionate Expressions**

Unlike prior studies, participants in this current study also shared descriptive examples of affectionate behavior, which were compartmentalized into four categories: *Physical Touch & Intimacy, Caring Communication, Fulfillment & Camaraderie, and Helping & Support.* When participants conceived of affectionate behavior, they most commonly identified behaviors that involved physical touch and intimacy. Three of the most common forms of behaviors within the Physical Touch & Intimacy category were hugging, kissing and having sex. Others included holding hands, caressing, massaging, and playing with their spouse’s hair. References about Caring Communication fundamentally involved talking and listening, and other forms of verbal communication, e.g., love letters, texting, cards, the expression of appreciation, words of affirmation, and sharing of compliments. The Helping & Support category included acts of service and supportive behaviors, such as doing things to help the other, doing things to enhance one’s spouse’s well-being, encouraging, coaching, comforting and protecting. Fulfillment & Camaraderie referred to behaviors that fostered togetherness or enjoyment, including quality time, enjoying one another’s company (e.g., smiles, laughter and playfulness), and the giving of gifts. ‘Being
mindful and attentive’ was a subcategory in this group, which was comprised of examples such as chivalrous behaviors, doing things without being asked, and noticing how the other person is feeling, etc. The ways affectionate expression was described well-complemented the definition established by participants.

The four categories that were conceptualized in this current study were comparable to categories identified in the one other study in the field that had previously provided a typology of affectionate behaviors. In a study by Twardosz, Schwartz, Fox, and Cunningham (1979) categories of affectionate behaviors were identified. Although their four categories were similar to those found in this current study, their methods included observation solely, and their categories were limited to behaviors immediately observable (e.g., physical and some verbal communications of affection). By declining the option to commence this study with predetermined categories of what constituted affectionate behavior in either the relational maintenance literature or in the Twardosz, et al. (1979) study; and operationalizing our own definition, this study identified additional categories of affectionate behavior (e.g., Helping & Support and Fulfillment & Camaraderie categories); thereby offering a more holistic understanding of affectionate expression among couples.

Ways Couples Experienced Affection

The lived experiences of couples with affectionate behavior were examined in two ways: (1) Ways & Reasons Spouses Showed Affection, and (2) Ways Spouses Received Affection.

Ways Spouses Demonstrated Affection

As husbands and wives described specific ways they demonstrated affection to their spouses, they identified behaviors involving Physical Touch & Intimacy most commonly, with 75% of participants (12 out of 16) identifying kissing as a way they show their spouse affection; 68% (11 out of 16) referred to hugging; and 42% (5 out of 16) cited sex as a way they show affection. As well, 13% of participants (2 out of 16) described giving massages (e.g., foot rubs, back rubs) as a way they showed affection. These results are consonant with the handful of extant studies that have investigated non-sexual physical affection among couples (Bell, Daly & Gonzales, 1987; Gulledge, Gulledge & Stahmann, 2003;
and Burleson, Trevathan & Todd, 2007). Results from these studies yielded identical types of physical affection as described by the husbands and wives of this study (e.g., kissing, hugging, cuddling, holding hands, caressing, and massaging/back rubs).

Among Caring Communication behaviors, 50% of spouses (8 out of 16) described showing affection by saying “I love you;” 25% (4 out of 16) mentioned giving compliments; 19% (3 out of 16) discussed sending text messages or calling; 13% (2 out 16) noted listening; 6% (1 out of 16) showed it by expressing appreciation and 6% (1 out of 16) expressed it with words of affirmation.

Throughout the study, the Helping & Support and Fulfillment and Camaraderie categories were referenced the least. Behaviors that were noted in the Helping and Support category included helping with housework, with a quarter of participants (4 out of 16) discussing it, and 19% of participants (3 out of 16) showing affection by helping with their children. Three participants (or 19%) indicated that they demonstrated affection by cooking for their spouses, and 13% (2 out of 16) generally noted that they “do... things my spouse can't do.” Additionally, one spouse (or 6% of participants) noted that she showed affection by supportively attending her husband’s games and involving herself in his interests.

Finally, spouses discussed eight ways they demonstrated affection that fostered Fulfillment & Camaraderie. Nineteen percent of participants (3 out of 16) identified giving gifts as a way they showed affection, and one participant each (or 6%) listed the following as ways they showed affection: allowing their spouses personal time alone, taking their spouses on trips, taking their mates out to dinner, doing unexpected things to brighten her day, and working on her own temper.

Motivation Behind Affectionate Behavior

As motivation behind behavior was explored, three phenomena were observed. When affection was expressed: (1) recipient spouses felt good about themselves; (2) recipient spouses felt good about their relationships; and (3) the expression of affection often benefited the giver of affection in specific ways.

Making their Spouses Feel Good. Husbands and wives wanted their spouses to feel good about themselves, which included feeling loved, cared for, thought of, important, appreciated, attractive and
enjoyable to be around, et cetera. To achieve such ends, givers engaged various types of affectionate behavior (e.g., Physical Touch & Intimacy behaviors, such as kissing, hugging, sex, massage; modes of Caring Communication such as text messaging, compliments, words of affirmation; behaviors that fostered Fulfillment & Camaraderie, like gifts, smiles, travels or going out to eat; and Helping & Support behaviors such as chores, encouragement, comforting, and protecting).

**Feeling Good about Their Relationships.** Husbands and wives also wanted their mates to feel good about their relationships. They wanted to generate for their spouses, and often themselves as well, a sense of security, commitment, of closeness, and the feeling that they were capable, successful and ‘good at marriage.’ Couples typically engaged hugging, compliments, personal efforts to improve in some way, acts of service and gifts to attain this.

**Showing Affection Benefited the Giver.** When participants demonstrated affection, they also often realized some personal benefit from it. Although spousal intentions were typically to show love or care, or to elicit some feeling in their mates (e.g., make them feel special), husbands and wives were generally knowledgeable about outcomes of showing specific types of affection. Although the opportunity to receive something in return may not have guided their actions (or caused them to show affection), givers were often aware of, and anticipated some personal benefit. Spousal givers of affection often acknowledged such intentions (e.g., “so that my spouse will be grateful to me;” “it makes him proud of me”).

This was an unexpected, yet noteworthy theme that emerged from the language shared by participants. It is doubtful that participants consciously engaged affectionate behavior to receive some benefit in return. Incidentally, the anticipation of such benefits did not appear to be in any way sinister or selfish. Participants didn’t seem particularly cognizant of the desire. Instead, such benefits seemed to elude their consciousness as their intentions were typically to show some feeling or elicit some emotion. Although the discovery of such a finding was epiphanic to me, it was hardly surprising. Such need for esteem is, after all, a fundamental human need, according to Maslow (Maslow, 1943). If people want to
feel esteemed by anyone, why shouldn't it be by the person who might potentially be the most important in the world to them?

**Ways Spouses Received Affection & Satisfaction**

Spousal satisfaction with specific types of affectionate expression was examined in accord with the four types of affection identified in the study.

**Physical Touch & Intimacy.** As husbands and wives described specific ways they were shown affection by their spouses, they identified behaviors involving *Physical Touch & Intimacy* most commonly with kissing, hugging, touch and sex being most commonly referenced. The majority of spouses found these behaviors pleasurable, though not always satisfying, as mates often desired more. As well, most forms of touch were enjoyed by recipient spouses, but being “smacked on the butt” or “groped” were not. Additionally, sex was expressly noted by 38% of participants (6 out of 16) as a way their spouses demonstrated affection, with 100% finding it pleasurable. Notably, 67% (4) of participants (mostly wives) found the amount of sex they were having satisfying, and the two men who listed it as a way they were shown affection desired more. Such findings were in accord with previous studies that determined a high degree of correlation between particular types of physical affection and satisfaction (Bell, et al., 1987, Gulledge, Gulledge, and Stahmann, 2003).

**Caring Communication.** Affection that was communicated verbally was typically found to be pleasurable, unless the behavior was considered routine and meaningless, as opposed to intentional and sincere. The expression, “I love you,” for example, was considered pleasurable for 4 out of 6 respondents. The context provided by this qualitative analysis is a major asset of this study that sets it apart from extant studies in the field, as speculation for responses is minimal. One husband did not appreciate the words “I love you” because his spouse typically said it in a rushed manner as they got off the telephone or when they were exiting one another’s presence, and he evaluated it as meaningless. The second husband often told his spouse that he appreciated “action versus words,” and he preferred to be *shown* love, rather than told of it. Couples generally appreciated text messages or telephone calls,
as the irregularity of it made spouses feel that they were being thought of in the moment, and this was important to them. They also appreciated compliments, though many desired increased amounts.

**The Need for Verbal Assurances.** As couples assessed the affectionate behavior they demonstrated to their spouses, they commonly had questions about what their partners liked. They were not always aware of the types of affectionate behavior their spouses enjoyed or found satisfying. Such lapses in knowledge commonly led to misunderstandings and stagnation, where frustrated spouses minimized their efforts to meet their partner’s needs. This, in turn, led to apathetic feelings, hurt feelings and questions of whether their spouses really loved them. The need for verbal assurance was therefore emphasized. This finding was consistent with results of previous studies which underscore the importance of spousal assurances (Bell et al., 1987; Stafford & Canary, 1991). Marston et al.’s (1987) conclusion that one of the ways individuals showed love to their partners was by “actually telling them,” was identical to a comment made by one of the husbands in this study, who noted, “She knows what I am feeling through my words... she lets me know verbally that she loves me. [This] makes me feel special because it is a direct expression of her feelings, [which] give[s] me a clearer understanding of what she feels for me.”

**Helping & Support.** Couples commonly referenced helping with housework or projects around the house as ways they were shown affection. While the majority of spouses found such assistance both pleasurable and satisfying, one wife did not find it pleasurable because she preferred her spouse to spend more time verbally communicating with her, and she reasoned that he would have done those things around the home “whether he was married or not.” Hence she did not consider his helpful behaviors a meaningful expression of affection. Spouses also received affectionate expression via acts of service, such as cooking and packing lunches, bringing a cup of coffee, assistance when arriving home from work, help with financial matters, and taking a spouse out to eat when she was too tired to cook. The fact that recipients of such behavior found them both pleasurable and satisfying is a finding that is in line with extant studies, as empirical evidence supports the notion that individuals show love by doing things for their partners, and spouses interpret it favorably (Bell et al., 1987; Marston et al., 1987).
Fulfillment & Camaraderie. Behaviors in this category included gifts, spending quality time together, spousal attendance of church services, being comforted when stressed, being given personal alone time, and being sacrificed for. Although fewer references were made describing affection shown via Fulfillment & Camaraderie behaviors, these behaviors were invariably perceived as pleasurable and satisfying.

Summary. Although couples focused more on physical and verbal behaviors when they considered affectionate expression in their marriages, behaviors that characterized the Helping & Support and Fulfillment and Camaraderie categories, though fewer in the number of references, were assessed as a whole, in a more positive way. This was likely due to the fact that physical and verbal behaviors were often assessed as polar opposites by gendered groups, where husbands favored physical expressions and wives often preferred verbal demonstrations, and they typically noted disfavor with the other form of expression.

Satisfaction with Affectionate Expression.

When couples were asked to reflect on specific ways they were shown affection and to assess their satisfaction with them, they noted both positive and undesirable outcomes. To explore the ways high and low levels of affectionate expression affected spousal perceptions of marital quality, spouses were asked to describe ways adequate and insufficient amounts affected feelings about themselves, feelings about their spouses, and feelings about their relationships.

Affectionate Expression & Feelings about Themselves. The amount of expressed affection affected the way husbands and wives felt about themselves. Positive Outcomes. As spouses described how adequate amounts of affectionate expression affected them, they most commonly acknowledged feeling better about themselves and feeling “more loved.” One husband poignantly noted that expressed affection not only minimized his negative perceptions about stressful things in his life, but it also enhanced his desire to take better care of himself. Affectionate expression engendered in him thoughts about longevity in life and in his marriage, and about optimizing his health accordingly. The remainder of responses referenced enhancement to esteem needs (e.g., it made one husband feel wanted, desirable
and important, and a young wife and mother felt more attractive and self-confident.  **Undesirable Outcomes.** When discussing the ways inadequate types or insufficient amounts of affectionate expression impacted them, participants described feeling unloved. One husband shared a desire to be 'loved his way' or to receive affection in the way he preferred (e.g., physical), as opposed to the way his wife preferred showing it (verbal). He didn’t “feel as loved” because she didn’t make the effort to meet his needs.

**Affectionate Expression & Feelings about Their Spouses.** Participants also described how satisfactory or insufficient amounts of affectionate expression impacted their feelings about their spouses. **Positive Outcomes.** In addition to feeling more loved, affectionate expression also engendered reciprocity among couples, where spouses demonstrated some expression of affection as a result of having been shown affectionate behavior by their mates. As well, when participants were shown adequate amounts of affection, they reported feeling “better about their spouses” and they felt energized, which fostered effort on their parts to match the energy shown them. As well, adequate amounts of affection among these husbands and wives fostered desires for more quality time. One husband noted that the more affection he’s shown, the more he wants to be with his spouse and do “more special things together.” **Undesirable Outcomes.** When inadequate types or insufficient amounts of affection were communicated, unsatisfied spouses tended to question their mate’s love and sincerity. Left unresolved, such questions often led to distress or injured feelings, anger and/or a resignation of efforts to attempt to please their mates.

**Affectionate Expression & Feelings about Their Relationships.** The amount of expressed affection affected the way husbands and wives felt about their relationships. **Positive Outcomes.** With satisfactory amounts of affectionate expression in their marriages, husbands and wives felt closer to their spouses, they felt more intimate and they felt their relationships were stronger. **Undesirable Outcomes.** With deficits in affectionate expression, spouses experienced generally unpleasant feelings and perceived their relationships as being rocky, and their mates as being “unhappy.” There was a general sense of discomfort and unease.
**Summary.** As the importance of affectionate expression on marital satisfaction was evaluated, the voices of these husbands and wives seemed to echo participants’ of prior studies, as extant literature reveals that relational maintenance behaviors are very strong predictors of satisfaction. Indeed, one husband who felt unsatisfied and “less loved” because he wasn’t being shown affection the way he wished to receive it, observed, “the level of affection shown in the way I feel affection should be shown is a reflection of the quality of the relationship.”

Such findings are in line with extant research in the field, touting both psychosocial and physiological benefits of the expression of affection, e.g., it is positively related to happiness, life and relationship satisfaction, and a healthy self-esteem. It is also inversely related to depression and loneliness, and it reduces psychological distress, the susceptibility to psychosomatic illness; as well, it mitigates against harmful effects of stress. Although this qualitative inquiry with such a limited sample size (e.g., sixteen) asserts no claim to generalizability, such findings are also consonantly represented in empirically-based quantitative studies that are more applicable to larger populations (Floyd, 2002, Floyd, 2006, Floyd, Mikkelson, Hesse & Pauley, 2007, Russek, et al., 1998, Komisaruk & Whipple, 1998, Oliver, Raftery, Reeb & Delaney, 1993). It was in fact noteworthy that with such a limited sample size, many desirable outcomes of affectionate expression that are established in the literature were acknowledged by participants in this current study.

**Perceptions about Affectionate Expression and Divorce**

Participants were asked directly if and how the amount of affection they were receiving influenced their consideration of divorce. Notably, 63% (10 out 16) spouses said they had, in fact considered divorce as a result of their disappointment with affection in their marriages, and 38% (6 out of 16) said they had not. I was struck by the large percentage of participants who had considered marital dissolution as a result of their lack of satisfaction and sought to identify extant research that would either corroborate this finding, or that might reflect lower percentages, but could not locate any study that measured the consideration of divorce by perceptions of satisfaction with affection in marriage.
There were a few interesting trends among spouses who had not considered divorce; the first being the number of years married. With the exception of one couple, each of these husbands and wives had been married 2 years. Also, with the exception of that same couple, each spouse who had not considered divorce was satisfied with the experience of affection in their marriage.

**Ethnocultural or Socioeconomic Difference?**

Ethnocultural and socioeconomic difference was explored, with a specific focus on whether diverse couples construed, experienced or valued affectionate expression differently. Ethnocultural and socioeconomic difference was considered in an effort to understand patterns of marriage and divorce rates among African American men and women, as they experience significantly higher risks of remaining single and divorcing than other groups (Fein, 2004). Reflecting on disparity among socioeconomic groups, a supposition of this study was that low income, disadvantaged couples who experience chronic stress may not share comparable opportunities to express affection as more affluent couples (Conger, et al., 2002). Hence, such lack of opportunity might correlate with diminished marital quality and increased marital disruption. This study conjoined these notions with those inherent in Family Stress Theory, and with Maslow's (1943) explication of human needs to offer the idea that the expenditure of time and energy that is associated with meeting the demands of impoverished households may necessarily preclude these marital dyads from exhibiting or engaging in similar types or amounts of affectionate expression as more affluent couples. Because of the study's limited sample, or the investigator's inability to locate couples in diverse socioeconomic groups, this study remains incapable of informing such notions. The opportunity for socioeconomic comparison had been foregone as every African American couple in the study's household income exceeded $100,000.

One significant finding of the study was that ethnocultural and socioeconomic difference was invariably not identified. *Figure 17* illustrates the absence of patterns as it relates to ethnocultural group identity. These diverse groups of husbands and wives shared common conceptions of what affectionate expression was, they demonstrated and received affection in identical ways, and their assessments of satisfaction indicated no conceivable difference with regard to ethnocultural or
socioeconomic considerations. There were no identifiable difference between African American, Caucasian or combined race couples as it related to any of the research questions.

**Where Difference Was Found: Gender**

Although ethnocultural trends were not identified, noteworthy patterns by gender were. The first was that while women tended to prefer affection expressed via caring communication or quality time, men desired expressed affection in the form of physical touch or helping behaviors. Notably, three husbands expressly voiced feelings of discontent about the forms of affection that was shown them, and others alluded to the notion that they preferred “action to words,” meaning affection shown in physical or instrumental ways, rather than with verbal communication.

The idea that affectionate communication may be assessed and appreciated differently by men and women is not novel to this study, but a minimal amount of data exists in the literature, supporting such a notion. According to Prager (1995), few contextual variables have been found to be more likely to affect intimate behavior than gender (p. 186). It is widely held in the literature, and supposed by this study that such difference may be engendered via socialization. Gendered behaviors were catalogued by Macoby (1990) and Noller (1993), identifying male ideals as focusing on breadwinning, which include autonomy, self-confidence, instrumentality, and a tendency to avoid audibly expressing affectionate feelings; and female ideals as involving nurturance and emotional and verbal expressivity of emotion. Hence, as noted in this current study, men tend to experience affection in instrumental ways and women via verbal communication.

There was also a second pattern noted by gender, which was an unexpected phenomenon. It was that no matter the ethnocultural or socioeconomic group, husbands were dissatisfied with the types and amounts of affection expressed in their marriages, and they longed for more affection and for types of affection that were more pleasurable to them. Wives however, for a variety of reasons, were denying such pleas for affection. Some rationales from these women included medical challenges, busy lifestyles (typically with work and children), and challenges sharing feelings interpersonally.
This finding is supported by some relatively new research in the field that suggest that frequent cuddling and kissing is an important predictor of happiness for men, and not women. In this study by Heiman and colleagues (2011), it was found that relationship satisfaction for middle-aged and older men tended to depend on health, physical intimacy and sexual activity. It also corroborated gendered findings in this current study as it showed that not only do men enjoy cuddling more than women do, but they “crave” even more physical affection the longer they are in a relationship.

As it related to satisfaction, forms of affectionate expression mattered. Gender mattered. The length of marriages may have mattered. Work or school schedules seemed to matter. Spousal temperaments and preferences mattered. But ethnocultural or socioeconomic difference did not. Difference did not present in either the givers’ motivations or the ways affectionate expressions were received.

**What Really Mattered**

As husbands and wives discussed the things that moved them, satisfied them or brought them comfort, they also reflected on things that didn’t. Few focused on specific behaviors, though spouses clearly described their preferences. Participants seemed to resolve however, that the particular type of affection shown, no matter their assessment of it, or their appreciation of it, was not the most important thing as it related to their own satisfaction. One wife noted, “The longer we are married I feel like it’s less important to focus on the how he expresses affection and makes me appreciate and focus on the fact that he is still affectionate with me.”

The things that mattered to couples, as they experienced affectionate expression in their marriages, were conceptually organized to form a comprehensive overview of the study’s findings, and are presented in the study’s conceptual model.

**The Study’s Conceptual Model: Selflessness, Sacrifice and Sincerity**

What was most important to couples? Not lavish demonstrations of affection or pointedly specific behaviors. Instead, spouses often assessed and appreciated affectionate expression if it was characterized as selfless, sacrificial, and sincere.
References to selflessness were made adjacent to those about sacrifice, sharing the same idea; participants wanted to know that their spouses deeply cared for them and were willing to “go beyond” doing routine things for them. While couples appreciated most demonstrations of affection, they especially treasured those that involved selflessness and sacrifice. Gulledge, Gulledge, and Stahamm (2003) shared similar findings, noting that massages (specifically back rubs) had a higher correlation with relationship satisfaction than caressing did. They offered the explanation that certain types of affection were likely deemed more “selfless” than others, and that back rubs may have been perceived as a more selfless act because it typically involves more time and perhaps more of an exertion of energy than caressing. Hence, they hypothesized, couples may have valued it more.

The conceptual model describes participant motivation for expressed affection as a choice to show affection that would: (1) make their spouses feel good about themselves (e.g., feel loved, thought of, attractive, esteemed, relieved, et cetera); (2) make their spouses feel good about their relationships, engendering a sense of stability, of hope for their future, of continuity, commitment, security and closeness; and (3) perhaps subconsciously, provide some personal benefit to the spouse demonstrating the affection.

As husbands and wives assessed behaviors, they made a distinction between the types of affection that was shown them, identifying a difference between routine, “meaningless” behaviors and intentional demonstrations of affection, which they considered more sincere and preferable. Initiation was of interest to couples, as they perceived initiated behavior to be willful instead of coerced, and intentional instead of reciprocal. By focusing on ‘initiation,’ participants determined if affectionate expressions were routine or sincere. Behaviors that were assessed as routine were symbolically discarded as unwanted or unappreciated. Affection, however, shown intentionally or sincerely contributed to and advanced the giver’s principal goals of making their mates feel good about themselves and their relationships. Sincerity in the demonstration of affection has been explored in the literature and it has been found that people do not always interpret affectionate expressions as being sincere, but they recognize that ulterior motives may influence behavior (Butterfield & Trotta, 1994).
This study's central themes aren't novel, but are in accord with results found by Marston et al. (1987), where the demonstration of routine physical affection did not predict feelings of love and satisfaction, though similar other affectionate behaviors did (e.g., touch).

Often referencing their individual 'love languages,' couples also made a distinction between ways affection was shown. When givers of affection showed love in comfortable ways or ways they were accustomed to, which did not satisfy any of the recipients 'feel good' needs, it was often consciously and sub-consciously considered selfish and meaningless, and it was symbolically discarded as unwanted or unappreciated. When affectionate expression was provided in ways that were appealing to recipients, it had a better chance of addressing their central desires of making their mates feel good about themselves and/or their relationships.

Finally, impediments were obstacles - temporal or temperamental, or challenges couples faced in having opportunities to express affection to one another. Accepting impediments versus challenging them referred to the effort couples made to assure that affection was expressed in their relationships, which involved creative, alternative approaches in the face of challenges. When these couples challenged, rather than accepted such impediments, the expressed affection seemed to enhance their feelings about themselves and their relationships.

The final theme of the study that emerged was that of 'simple things.' When asked to define or discuss expressions of affection in their marriages, these couples didn't imagine grand expressions. They thought of simple things that brought warm feelings. They wanted to be certain they were still loved. They wanted to be reminded of that love with compliments. They wanted to feel important to their spouses and they wanted the affection they showed to be worthwhile. They appreciated sacrifice. They thought of selflessness. Of going to bed together at the same time. They thought of hugs, of kisses, of holding hands. They thought of smiles. They thought of simple things.

Conclusion

This qualitative, phenomenological study furthers understanding of the experiences of these married couples with affectionate expression; the ways they define it, the ways they demonstrate and
receive it, outcomes they experience, as well as perceptions of satisfaction with it, and how it affects their considerations of divorce. In this study, couples appreciated most types of affection that was shown them, but especially appreciated affectionate acts that were demonstrated selflessly, sacrificially and sincerely. The provision of these types of affection typically served to meet their main goals of making their spouses feel better about themselves, better about their relationships, and it was beneficial in some ways to givers as well. The study also concluded that ethnocultural and socioeconomic difference was not identified.

**Implications for Policy & Practice.**

Families are a cornerstone of society and play a central role in creating identities, economies, homes and security for people. A strong family unit is the bedrock of a healthy society and the government depends on the intact family for societal outcomes, (e.g., diminished poverty or dependence on welfare programs). Because healthy marriages provide benefits on an interpersonal, community and societal level, marriage is a focus of public policy. One disappointing and economically costly long-term trend affecting American families are excessive divorce rates. The Federal government recognizes the benefits of healthy marriages and has appropriated millions of dollars for such initiatives, but the effectiveness of these programs and other forms of marital therapy is contested and uncertain, as couples who avail themselves of therapeutic intervention often fail to show significant improvement over time. Given some less than impressive long-term outcomes of traditional marital therapy approaches and calls in the field for innovation based on empirical evidence, this study proposes that further research be conducted to identify treatment factors that are shown to be effective in mitigating marital distress and that these specific components be emphasized in treatment approaches. Because emotion-based approaches have demonstrated more efficacious outcomes than behavioral- or cognitive-based treatments in effecting long-term change in couple therapy, and because the expression of affection, which has been considered the most influential marital interaction, has been shown to be positively associated with marital quality and inversely related to divorce, this study recommends a deeper investigation of affectionate expression as one such emotion-based strategy. This study was
conducted to establish groundwork on affectionate expression in marriage and to inform the consideration of it as a component of therapeutic intervention.

Further, the field of social work has long endorsed the importance of research and practice with cultural competence. This study has furthered this goal with the examination of ethnocultural and socioeconomic difference in affectionate expression. The knowledge that difference was not found may also be assistive as interventions for diverse couples are established.

**Strengths and Limitations**

Multiple strengths characterize this study, including the nature of the design. Having employed a qualitative and phenomenological approach to inquiry afforded this study context and depth of understanding that answered questions that similar extant studies could only speculate about. As well, this study employed a triangulation of methods in collecting data (e.g., questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, and two specific observational exercises. The interview afforded an opportunity to clarify survey responses, and to probe for additional data, and the game and musical exercise allowed for extended observation, which provided for, not only the corroboration of self-reported data, but also increased familiarization with nuances in the personalities and temperaments of spouses. Perhaps most importantly, it also afforded an opportunity to witness couples in varied mental, emotional and cognitive states, as most participants were clearly more sober when talking during the interview, than when playing the game. The game uniquely disarmed couples, allowing observation of alternate ways they interacted and related to one another (e.g., smiles, laughs and taunts), as well as variations in affect, mood and language patterns. One significant limitation of the study, however was that, due to temporal constraints, interviews averaged 1.25 hours and more time could not be spent in the presence of couples.

One complexity of research is that as terminology is used, its intended meaning often remains undefined and left to the interpretation of readers, producing vague and ambiguous understandings. This study, on the other hand, operationalized affectionate expression using the collaborative voices, constructions, and understandings of husbands and wives in the study and the resultant definition was
An additional strength of the study is its comprehensive exploration of affectionate expression. No other study has outlined its process for arriving at its conceptual definition, ways couples show affection, their thoughts about satisfaction and perceptions about divorce. As well, no other study has attempted to explore ethnocultural and socioeconomic difference with affectionate expression.

The examination of ethnoculturally and socioeconomically diverse groups of couples is also a strength of the study, as difference was explored, thereby advancing cultural competence and understanding. This study is also innovative, being the only one that makes a distinction between types of mixed race couples (e.g., with African American husbands and Caucasian wives and Caucasian husbands and African American wives). Though scholars have noted distinctions in divorce patterns among these groups, this is the only study that has investigated them (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Bratter and King, 2008). A significant limitation of this study, however, is its inability to effectively explore economic difference due to the inability to locate targeted categories of diversity. While the study did include each of the targeted ethnocultural groups, socioeconomic diversity was not achieved.

The study nonetheless provides an abundance of perspectives supporting the importance of affectionate expression in marriage for these eight couples. Reflecting on the positive outcomes these couples experienced when they received satisfactory amounts of affectionate expression versus the discomfort, negative self-impressions and frustration they experienced with insufficient amounts; coupled with their pleas and "cravings" for affectionate expression, and their considerations of divorce with inadequate types or amounts, groundwork has been established informing the importance of affectionate expression in marriage, and for its consideration as a component of therapeutic intervention.

**Future Directions for Study**

In order to further enhance understandings of affectionate expression in marriage and the ways it impacts marital quality, additional research should be conducted quantitatively, with a more representative sample, investigating specific outcomes of adequate and insufficient types and amounts
of expressed affection among married couples. Marital satisfaction among these couples was found to be based in part on these couples’ perceptions of satisfaction with affectionate expression. The findings indicate that not only was affectionate expression important to the emotional health and well-being of participants, but it was also a critical factor in their considerations of divorce. Couples provided, not only self-report data about their perceptions of affectionate expression and its importance to them interpersonally and in their relationships, but they identified specific outcomes that result from adequate and insufficient types and amounts of affectionate expression they experienced. The clinical implications from such findings suggest that marital therapists, social workers, psychologists and other mental health providers that work with couples and families would benefit from access to this knowledge. As well, the results indicate that a broader exploration is warranted.

Future studies may also benefit from a deeper exploration of ‘love languages’ or preferred affection styles among married couples, investigating and identifying empirically-based clinical methods that would effectively assist couples in, not only knowing each other’s “#1 love language,” but also in meeting each other’s needs. Such scholarship should be used to promote education that could be accessed, not only through marital counseling or other healthy marriage programs, but also by communities at-large (e.g., via the Internet).

Additionally, future studies on marriage may benefit from the use of games, music or other creative exercises or activities that elicit alternate moods, affects or ways of relating between spouses during interviews or observation, as such variation was valuable in this exploration.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Your First & Last Name: ________________________________________________________ Date:______________________

Your Spouse’s Name: _______________________________________________________

Home Address: __________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

Home/Cellular Number: _______________________________________________________

Email Address: __________________________________________________________________

Best Way to Contact You:  □ Home Phone  □ Cell Phone  □ Email

Best Times for Brief Contact:  □ Weekends / 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 Noon
                                □ Weekends / 12:00 Noon – 3:00 p.m.
                                □ Weekdays / Before 10:00 a.m.
                                □ Weekdays / 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 Noon
                                □ Weekdays / 12:00 Noon – 3:00 p.m.
                                □ Weekdays / 3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
                                □ Weekdays / After 6:00 p.m.
                                □ Please don’t call. Just email.

Has your Spouse agreed to Participate in this Study?
□ Yes  □ No

Month/Year of Your Wedding: ____________________________________________

Length of Your Relationship (years): ______________________________________

Did you Live Together before Marriage?
□ Yes  □ No

Number of Children in Your Home: ____________

Number of Previous Marriages: ____________

II. Race & Gender

Your Gender:  □ Male  □ Female

Your Age:  I am currently _______ years of age.

Your Racial Background:  □ African American or Black
                                □ Caucasian or White
                                □ Mixed Race: ______________________

Your Spouse’s Racial Background:  □ African American or Black
                                □ Caucasian or White
                                □ Mixed Race: ______________________
### III. Employment & Wages

#### What is Your Highest Level of Educational Attainment?

What do you do for a living?

---

Do you have a fixed or variable work schedule?

(e.g., fixed = 8:00 – 5:00 M-F
variable = 11:00 p.m. – 7:00 a.m. some days)

- [ ] Fixed
- [ ] Variable

#### What is Your Spouse's Highest Level of Educational Attainment?

What does your spouse do for a living?

---

Does he or she have a fixed or variable work schedule?

(e.g., fixed = 8:00 – 5:00 M-F
variable = 11:00 p.m. – 7:00 a.m. some days)

- [ ] Fixed
- [ ] Variable

#### What is Your Total Household Income?

Which of the following statements best characterizes your family's income?

- [ ] My spouse and I earn approximately the same salary.
- [ ] My spouse earns more than I do.
- [ ] My spouse earns less than I do.
- [ ] My spouse is currently unemployed

#### How Would You Best Describe Your Household Finances?

- [ ] We don’t make enough to support our meager standard of living.
- [ ] We make enough to support our meager standard of living.
- [ ] We make a sufficient amount of money, but because of expenses, we have difficulty making ends meet.
- [ ] We make a sufficient amount of money and we are comfortable financially.
- [ ] We make plenty of money, but are sometimes challenged with financial concerns.
- [ ] We make plenty of money and have few financial cares.
APPENDIX B

EXPRESSIONS OF AFFECTION IN MARRIAGE QUESTIONNAIRE (EAMQ)

Instructions: Please answer each question in-depth, avoiding using only “yes” and “no” responses. A thorough thorough description of your thoughts and feelings will be most helpful. Feel free to add extra pages if necessary.

Part I. Reflections of Affection in My Marriage
Using thoughtful reflection, please answer the following questions as thoroughly as you are able to.

1. How was affection expressed in your family of origin (e.g., among your parents, siblings, or other family members)? If possible, please provide 3 examples of the ways that affection was expressed.

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. How do you feel about the amount of affection that was expressed in your family as you grew up? Do you feel that it was a sufficient amount of affection? Why or why not?

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. Describe eight (5) specific ways that your spouse shows you affection, completing the following. *If you cannot describe 5 ways, please describe as many as you can.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Way My Spouse Shows Me Affection</th>
<th>How This Makes Me Feel</th>
<th>Why Does it Make Me Feel This Way?</th>
<th>How Frequently Am I Shown Affection This Way? Is This Enough For Me?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Way My Spouse Shows Me Affection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>How This Makes Me Feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why Does it Make Me Feel This Way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How Frequently Am I Shown Affection This Way? Is This Enough For Me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>How This Makes Me Feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why Does it Make Me Feel This Way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How Frequently Am I Shown Affection This Way? Is This Enough For Me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>How This Makes Me Feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why Does it Make Me Feel This Way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How Frequently Am I Shown Affection This Way? Is This Enough For Me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Way My Spouse Shows Me Affection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>How This Makes Me Feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why Does it Make Me Feel This Way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How Frequently Am I Shown Affection This Way? Is This Enough For Me?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Do you feel satisfied with the amount of affection you receive from your spouse? Why or why not?
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________

5. Does the amount of affection that your spouse shows to you in any way affect the way that you feel about her or him? Why do you feel this way?
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________

6. Does the amount of affection that your spouse shows to you in any way affect the way that you feel about yourself? Why do you feel this way?
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________

7. Does the amount of affection that your spouse shows to you in any way affect the way that you feel about your relationship with her or him? Why do you feel this way?
________________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________________


8. Describe five (5) specific ways that you show affection to your spouse, completing the following.

*If you cannot describe 5 ways, please describe as many as you can.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Way</th>
<th>I Show My Spouse Affection</th>
<th>How I Hope This Makes My Spouse Feel</th>
<th>Does This Seem To Affect How Your Spouse Feels? <em>Explain how.</em></th>
<th>Do You Show This Type of Affection as Frequently as Your Spouse Would Like? <em>Why or Why Not?</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Way I Show My Spouse Affection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How I Hope This Makes My Spouse Feel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does This Seem To Affect How Your Spouse Feels? <em>Explain how.</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do You Show This Type of Affection as Frequently as Your Spouse Would Like? <em>Why or Why Not?</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th>Way I Show My Spouse Affection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How I Hope This Makes My Spouse Feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does This Seem To Affect How Your Spouse Feels? <em>Explain how.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do You Show This Type of Affection as Frequently as Your Spouse Would Like? <em>Why or Why Not?</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Have you and your spouse ever talked about the amount of affection you show to one another? If so, what, specifically, did you (or do you) talk about?

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________  
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________

10. Typically, we don’t feel 100% one way in marriage all the time, but our feelings change and fluctuate. We may feel good about some things, and not others. Keeping this in mind, please answer the following questions:

10a. In what ways are you satisfied with the affection in your marriage?

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________  
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________

191
10b. In what ways are you dissatisfied with the affection in your marriage?

______________________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________

10c. How has affectionate expression in your marriage changed throughout the years?

______________________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________

10d. How often have you thought about divorce or considered what life would be like without your spouse? Did the amount of affection you’re shown in your marriage affect these thoughts in any way?

______________________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________

11. Describe 3 ways that you would change the expression of affection in your marriage, if you could.

1. ____________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________

2. ____________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________

3. ____________________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________________

Part II. General Ideas about Affectionate Expression
This section does not focus on your relationship with your spouse, but instead asks about your general ideas about what affectionate expressions are.

12. How do you personally define affectionate expression?

Affectionate expression is: ____________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________
13. If you were facilitating a seminar to a group of married couples about affectionate expression, and someone asked you to name specific ways that affection is typically shown among spouses, how would you respond?

_____________________________________________        ___________________________________________
_____________________________________________        ___________________________________________
_____________________________________________        ___________________________________________
_____________________________________________        ___________________________________________
_____________________________________________        ___________________________________________

Part III. Managing Life & Time for Affection
This section the questionnaire focuses on reasons that couples may not have time or energy to express affection to their spouse. Please share your opinions and/or personal experiences or stories about the following sentences.

14. Life gets busy and this leaves little time to show affection to my spouse.

As I consider this statement, I feel: _____________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________________

15. My spouse is satisfied with the amount of affection I express.

As I consider this statement, I feel: _____________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________________
16. I often **feel** affection for my spouse, but somehow fail to **show** it.

As I consider this statement, I feel: _____________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________

17. I (or my spouse) have been taught that expressing affection is a feminine behavior and is uncharacteristic of what a man is.

As I consider this statement, I feel: _____________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________

18. I show affection to my spouse, but he or she does not always realize that it is affection. It seems that we may interpret affection differently.

As I consider this statement, I feel: _____________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________

194
19. My spouse seems overly needy for affection.

As I consider this statement, I feel: ________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

20. My overall opinion of affection in my marriage is: ________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

21. Name some important life events and routine experiences (good and bad) that you and your spouse have experienced in the past 6 months:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

21a. Considering the life events or activities that you checked, name 3 of them (if applicable) that have posed the greatest challenge to your ability to express affection to your spouse, or your spouse’s ability to show affection to you. Please explain why.

1. __________________________________________________________________________
2. __________________________________________________________________________
3. __________________________________________________________________________

22. Is there anything more about affection in marriage that you would like to share?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your participation in this study. Please insert this questionnaire, along with the Informed Consent Form, the Demographic Questionnaire, and your Restaurant Choice Form into the self-addressed, stamped envelope and mail it to the researcher. Sharen will be in touch with you shortly. Thank you.
APPENDIX C
MUSICAL EXERCISE SURVEY

1. Please complete this sentence: As the song played, I felt ____________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

2. I felt this way because: _________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

3. Did you touch or show affection to your spouse during the exercise? □ Yes □ No

   If you answered “Yes,” please answer questions in 3a.
   If you answered “No,” please answer questions in 3b.

   3A. What specifically did you do? ______________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

   Why? _______________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

   Name other ways that you show affection to your spouse: _________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3B. Why do you think you did not demonstrate affection to your spouse?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Would you like to change anything about the way you show affection to your spouse? If so, what would you change?

- [ ] Yes  
- [ ] No

Name other ways that you show affection to your spouse *(if applicable)*: 

-   
-   
-   

Karen contacted me via the Smiley Morning Show, as I spoke on the air with the host, Dave Smiley. She sent me an email, noting her interest in participating. I explained the study and she said that she and her spouse, Pat, were excited about participating.

We scheduled the interview shortly after I received the paperwork back in the mail.

When I arrived for the visit, Karen welcomed me inside with a smile.

Karen is a short, slim, Caucasian woman who has shoulder-length red hair and a pretty smile. She is in sales and travels frequently for her job. She often travels overnights, and her spouse takes care of the couple's young children.

Her two-story home was very large, in a nice suburb of Indianapolis. Her home's decor was contemporary, yet warm with beautiful colors and inspirational quotes sprinkled very tastefully here and there on the walls (e.g., wall art). The ambiance in the home appeared to be in preparation for my visit. Candles were lit, and although I had brought a cookie cake in appreciation, and some sandwich pinwheels, Karen had also prepared snacks (vegetable chips with hummus).

I asked where she wanted me to set up. For the visit, I brought my computer (to play the song), a blue research folder that had paperwork in it (e.g., a copy of the wording I used during the introduction to the study, where I reiterated, in a summarized fashion, aspects of informed consent, the game's instructions and questions, the participant game cards, and the interview observation form). I'd also brought approximately 20 movie DVDs from which the winning spouse chose one, and my audio recorder. I sat up on the dining room table.

When I entered the home, my perceptions were that Karen is much like I am. She was excited to participate in a study about marriage and to assist. She enjoys entertaining and wanted the ambiance to be perfect and enjoyable for me as a guest in her home. She wanted to impress me, as I did her and her husband. This may have influenced responses, as it sometimes felt that she was "on guard" and ready to give the appropriate responses (e.g., especially when I met with her separately to conduct member-checking). For the first time, she didn't smile, but looked uncomfortable and serious. I attempted helping her to relax by explaining why I wanted to speak with them privately and that I just wanted to verify some things to be sure I understood her responses well.

Karen appeared to be relaxed the remainder of the evening. She was very talkative and smiled often.

The couple has two young children, who were upstairs when I arrived. The youngest child came downstairs early during the interview and was disruptive. She climbed on her parent's lap, touched things on the table, talked, requested things, moved around, and disobeyed her parent's requests often. The interview was put on hold often, as the child was addressed by either parent. As the song was played, both spouses engaged with the child often (e.g., sometimes to ask her not to do something, and other times they hugged, kissed her, or just stared at her). Karen asked the daughter to go back upstairs and watch the movie a number of times, but she disobeyed. Karen became agitated at one point and began taking her, then resorted to threatening her. I talked with her from time to time, but wanted to continue to focus on the study, as time was fleeting.
During the game, I observed that Karen looked at Pat often, and she smiled and talked with him often, but she didn’t touch him much. Her responses appeared to be heartfelt and warm, and she joked with Pat about some responses that she and he gave.

Her responses appeared to reveal that she values time with friends. She travels overnight, and appears to enjoy being away from home. She admits to being a type-A type personality, and wants everything to be in its place. She told me of the very limited amount of affection she received in her family-of-origin and reported that she is thankful for her immediate family and the ways they show affection to and for each other. While I could sense the affection that her spouse exhibited toward the children, I couldn’t detect much exhibited affection by Karen. It seemed to be something she wanted to exhibit, but it didn’t appear to be her natural way of being. It did appear that she loves her spouse, but she did not exhibit it via touch or expression, except for smiling at him during the game. The smile, however, appeared to be in response to having a researcher as an audience. While her spouse was attentive and loving with the children (e.g., hugs and kisses), Karen appeared to tell them what to do (e.g., stop touching and go upstairs) often, but I don’t recall any displays of affection between her and the children either. The only time she touched her daughter was to move her hand from touching something and when she picked her up to bring her upstairs.

Karen does appear to have a very loving and generous heart, however. This may be a reason they participated in the study in the first place. During the member-checking session, Karen noted that she seldom listens to the radio station that my advertising discussion aired on. She enjoys Christian music radio stations and typically listens to one of them, but whenever they play gospel music, she tends to switch stations to Z99.5 for a while, and this is when she heard me discussing the study, on the Smiley Morning Show. She considered it a "blessing" to be in the study and to meet me, and considered her timing in hearing the advertisement "meant to be." She was happy to help with the study.

Karen talked about wanting to adopt a child because it is the right thing to do, since so many children need homes. She was really heartfelt about it, and talked in depth about wanting to do good for someone. She said that she wanted to begin the process of adoption, but that Pat wasn’t sure he wanted to, so she wouldn’t. She then mentioned wanting to work with the elderly. Because she was so passionate about helping in some way, but wasn’t sure of how to, I told Karen that I am a hospice social worker and talked with her about hospice volunteering. She was ecstatic about the idea and believed it may be her calling. This is why she believed our meeting was "meant to be." Karen appears to have a big, tender, caring heart.

A representative from my hospice organization has since contacted Karen and she is now a hospice volunteer.

During the musical exercise, Karen read the form that I had given her and looked at her daughter a number of times (as the song played), then back down at the paper. As soon as I turned the CD off, she began writing.

She thereafter took me on a tour of their large home and showed me the renovations that her spouse had made throughout the home. She had moved into the home as a single individual. After the couple was married, Pat moved in. I learned from the questionnaire that the couple had separated in or after their first year of marriage, but Karen was hopeful about their relationship again after they had some counseling and learned more about each other’s love languages. She wrote this in the interview where it asks if there was anything additional to add.

During the interview, I learned from Pat, that Karen has a tendency to strong-arm him into doing things; that she may be forceful about getting things done. He joked about how she told him that he needed to complete his questionnaire and that he ended up finishing and mailing his before she did. She laughed and said, "Well, yeah. I wanted him to get it done because you had chose us, out of all these other couples to be in the study, and I told him he’d better do it!" Pat laughed, telling me how he actually completed and sent his first.

The interview lasted far longer than expected. Mainly because we enjoyed each other’s company and began discussing Pat’s handiwork around the house (as they had told me of his home renovation projects), as well as Karen’s skill in decorating (as Pat had teased her about decorating for every holiday and loving to do it, e.g., Valentine’s day, St. Patrick’s Day, etc.). Karen asked if I would join them upstairs to see their work up there. I
followed and noted the beauty of the home. The couple spends much of their time upstairs and very little downstairs, as they have a large loft where they spend most of their evenings as a family. The children were in the loft area, watching TV. Various toys and things were in this area. Karen took me into her bedroom and showed me her tremendously large walk-in closet, and the fact that her clothes were organized by color. She showed me the his and hers bathroom in their bedroom, which was also large, and mentioned the square footage in the home.

I’d noted on the application that Karen makes the most money and their household income is between $101,000 and $300,000. Neither of them completed college, but had completed "some college." Karen is in sales and Pat is in information technology. Karen has two children, both of whom are with Pat, and this is her first marriage. Pat had been married prior to this marriage and has one child from the previous marriage. The 13-year old male child does not live with them full-time, but visits. Karen noted some challenges with her step-son, but says that overall, they do okay.

As it relates to the culture of the family, they noted, during the pre-game member checking sessions, that they vacation alone at times. This may be to avoid issues with traveling with young children. They own a lake house (e.g., a small home they purchased on a small lake in Indiana) that they visit often. Karen and Pat reported visiting the lake house alone, likely for some alone time. Karen travels alone with her girlfriends (e.g., to Florida and to spend time with them), though Pat didn’t report doing so. He goes to the lake house to work on it. Pat has noted that he wishes that they would go to the lake house without their friends and without the children more. It appears that he would like to spend more time alone with his wife there.

Hence, this couple may experience issues that emerge when there is: (1) a blended family, (2) second marriage, (3) young children, (4) wife making more than her husband, (5) wife traveling for business frequently, including overnight stays away, (6) husband feeling that he is doing the bulk of the work with the children, and feeling less satisfied with the amount of time he spends with his wife, (7) husband has a new job, (8) the couple travels separately, and (9) the wife travels and spends time with friends.

---

**confidential Memo**

*Recorded 2013 September 5*

Pat’s wife, Karen, contacted me via the Smiley Morning Show. I had not interacted at all with Pat until the interview.

When I arrived for the visit, Karen welcomed me inside with a smile. Pat was in the kitchen area. He was equally as warm and smiled.

Pat is a medium height Caucasian man who has dark hair and smiles often. He is employed in information technology and has just begun a new job recently. Since his spouse travels frequently, he spends a lot of time taking care of the couple’s young children.

Their two-story home was very large, in a nice suburb of Indianapolis. The home’s decor was contemporary, yet warm with beautiful colors and inspirational quotes sprinkled very tastefully here and there on the walls (e.g., wall art). The ambiance in the home appeared to be in preparation for my visit. Candles were lit, and although I had brought a cookie cake in appreciation, and some sandwich pinwheels, Karen had also prepared snacks (vegetable chips with hummus).

I asked where they wanted me to set up. For all visits, I brought my computer (to play the song), a blue research folder that had my paperwork in it (e.g., a copy of the wording I’d use during the introduction to the study, where I reiterate, in a summarized fashion, aspects of informed consent, the game’s instructions and questions, the participant game cards, and the interview observation form). I’d also bring approximately 20 movie DVDs from which the winning spouse would choose one, and my audio recorder. I sat up on the dining room table.
As I met with Pat, I sensed a warm, an ease in talking with me. He was calm and kindly engaging. He came into the living room to talk with me privately, and told me about growing up in an affectionate family-of-origin, and of how affectionate he is with his children. His daughter came over during the member-checking meeting and he engaged warmly with her. Touching, holding her on his lap, tickling her, and talking warmly with her throughout the visit. He mentioned how special he feels when she wraps herself around his leg and clings to him. He says that he wants his children to feel as special as he did growing up. He was affectionate with one daughter who came downstairs the entirety of the evening.

The couple has two young children, who were upstairs when I arrived. The youngest child came downstairs early during the interview and was disruptive. She climbed on her parent's lap, touched things on the table, talked, requested things, moved around, and disobeyed her parent's requests often. The interview was put on hold often, as the child was addressed by either parent.

Whenever Pat engaged with the child, he did so with a smile on his face, and apparent tenderness. He continually spoke positively to her and appeared to be amused by her.

The child sat on Pat's lap as the song was played and both spouses engaged with the child often (e.g., sometimes to ask her not to do something, and other times they hugged, kissed her, or just stared at her). This appeared to distract the couple from the musical exercise, as they did not once touch each other.

During the game, it became apparent that Pat was dissatisfied with the amount of affection his wife showed him, and perhaps with the marriage in general. It was impossible to determine which it was at that point. Pat appeared to be disappointed when one question asked who each spouse's best friend is. Karen answered first and said that she couldn't decide between her friends which one was best. When she asked Pat who he'd chosen as her best friend, he said, "I feel stupid, I said me." She said, "Aww," as I did as well. Karen had listed one of Pat's friends as his best friend and he said quickly, "Again, I said you were." She looked as though she felt that she'd written the wrong answer and apologized to him and noted that she wasn't thinking.

Pat appeared disappointed. Throughout the remainder of the evening, Pat's disappointment with their relationship continued to be evidenced. For instance, he nearly constantly began teasing Karen, making fun of her decorating for everything, her "type A personality," her tendency to strong-arm everyone. He would smile while he would make funny little wise-cracks. On their own, they may not have revealed disappointment, but there were so many that it was hard not to notice that he may be dissatisfied with the relationship. Karen laughed with me, but after a while, it became apparent that although Pat's comments were delineated as jokes, they appeared to characterize his true feelings (in spite of the answers he provided on the questionnaire).

For example: on the questionnaire, he noted that he sometimes feels "forced" to kiss Karen every night, but wrote that he does it because he loves her and it makes her feel good. I initially believed that he wanted to be more spontaneous in expressing love to his wife, but because he is a loving husband, he was happy to do whatever it took to make her happy, including kissing her every night. Throughout the evening, however, his wise cracks included kissing Karen every night. He says what he says calmly (e.g., as sort of a dry humor), but he made it apparent that Karen forces him to do things, including kissing him. At one point in the evening, Karen intended to share something positive about their relationship, and said, "And we kiss every night before bed." She was proud of this. Pat followed up by reiterating, "EVERY night," which gave the impression that he is burdened by the activity.

The dichotomies between what Pat wrote in the questionnaire (mostly noting that he is satisfied with affection in their marriage) vs. his comments that appeared to reveal a lack of true satisfaction, raised some questions for me. I am not sure if Pat does what he does to make Karen happy or to keep her from being angry. I am not sure how much Pat communicates his feelings to her (which appear to be that they spend
more time alone as a couple - without children and without friends, and that she would exhibit more affectionate behavior).

Karen reportedly values time with friends. She travels overnight, and appears to enjoy being away from home. She is a type-A type personality, and wants everything to be in its place. She told me of the very limited amount of affection she received in her family-of-origin and reported that she is thankful for her immediate family and the ways they show affection to and for each other. Pat also mentioned the difference in the amount of affection he and Karen received in their families-of-origin. He noted how warm and loving his family-of-origin were, and how he tries to show this affection to his children and wife.

Pat has a strong interest in technology and loves gadgets. He enjoys talking with others about technology and spoke with me at length about cell phones (e.g., Samsung vs. IPhone, and IPads). He enjoys computers and spending time on his. He considers it a good thing when Karen allows him time to himself to engage in things he enjoys. He expressed that he wasn’t taught to be handy around the home, but that he tried hard to learn these skills to make the changes Karen wanted, to make her happy. He admitted that it doesn’t come easy for him, and he hopes that she appreciates the efforts he makes.

During the interview, I learned from Pat, that Karen has a tendency to strong-arm him into doing things; that she may be forceful about getting things done. He joked about how she told him that he needed to complete his questionnaire and that he ended up finishing and mailing his before she did. She laughed and said, "Well, yeah. I wanted him to get it done because you had chose us, out of all these other couples to be in the study, and I told him he’d better do it!" Pat laughed, telling me how he actually completed and sent his first.

The interview lasted far longer than expected. Mainly because, in an effort to esteem the couple, I discussed Pat’s handiwork around the house (as they had told me of his home renovation projects), as well as Karen’s skill in decorating (as Pat had teased her about decorating for every holiday and loving to do it, e.g., Valentine’s day, St. Patrick’s Day, etc.).

I’d noted on the application that Karen makes the most money and their household income is between $101,000 and $300,000. Neither of them completed college, but had completed "some college." Karen is in sales and Pat is in information technology. Karen has two children, both of whom are with Pat, and this is her first marriage. Pat had been married prior to this marriage and has one child from the previous marriage. The 13-year old male child does not live with them full-time, but visits. Pat didn’t mention his son from the previous marriage, nor his previous marriage, nor make any comparisons.

As it relates to the culture of the family, they noted, during the pre-game member checking sessions, that they vacation alone at times. This may be to avoid issues with traveling with young children. They own a lake house (e.g., a small home they purchased on a small lake in Indiana) that they visit often. Karen and Pat reported visiting the lake house alone, likely for some alone time. Karen travels alone with her girlfriends (e.g., to Florida and to spend time with them), though Pat didn’t report doing so. He goes to the lake house to work on it. Pat has noted that he wishes that they would go to the lake house without their friends and without the children more. It appears that he would like to spend more time alone with his wife there.

Hence, this couple may experience issues that emerge when there is: (1) a blended family, (2) second marriage, (3) young children, (4) wife making more than her husband, (5) wife traveling for business frequently, including overnight stays away, (6) husband feeling that he is doing the bulk of the work with the children, and feeling less satisfied with the amount of time he spends with his wife, (7) husband has a new job, (8) the couple travels separately, and (9) the wife travels and spends time with friends.
APPENDIX E

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The number of standard questions were minimal as the majority of questions that were posed to participant referenced questionnaire responses. The following are standard questions that were asked:

1. How did you feel after completing the questionnaire?
2. What have you learned about yourself or your spouse after completing it?
3. It is said that life's a journey. What would you say you've learned from one another along the way?