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Perceptions of Marital Satisfaction among Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American Husbands and Wives

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PERCEPTIONS OF MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG COPTIC

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN EGYPTIAN-AMERICAN

HUSBANDS AND WIVES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Executive Counselor Education and Supervision program

Department of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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PERCEPTIONS OF MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG COPTIC ORTHODOX

CHRISTIAN EGYPTIAN-AMERICAN HUSBANDS AND WIVES

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ABSTRACT

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According to Christianity, marriage was founded by God the Creator as a sacred relationship between a man, a husband, and a woman, a wife. Marriage in the Coptic Orthodox Church is a sacrament. Coptic Orthodox Christians are allowed to marry one spouse. Coptic Orthodox Christian husbands and wives have the right to divorce only in the case of evidenced adultery or apostasy. This qualitative study is the first of its kind to consider marital satisfaction among Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans.

The study analyzed the relevant constructed meanings that emerged from all interviews and clustered them into five main themes in an attempt to reach an in-depth understanding of the lived marital experiences of Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives. These themes included their perception of what marital satisfaction is, the general factors that contributed to it, the effects of daily marital

experiences, how they managed these factors, and what they would change to improve their marital satisfaction.

The analysis of the collected data in this study provided a rich description of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans' lived marital experiences and an identification of factors that influence their level of marital satisfaction. The conclusions of the study indicate that there is a conflict between the Coptic Orthodox Church's view of marriage and that of the American society. Many Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives appear to question and reject their subordinate position in the family. They are beginning to seek more autonomy and equal power in marital relationships. Many Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands also appear to reject their identity and role as a husband, and are more open to the life style and values of the American society. An analysis of the data collected provided the basis for future research on this phenomenon as well as some implications for couples, Coptic Orthodox Church leaders, and marriage counselors working with this population.

DEDICATION

To my Lord Jesus Christ who is doing wonders with me every day. To my late mother, Fayza, the *love river* in my life. I feel your blessings as you smile upon me from Heaven. To my beloved wife, Manal. You are a very true compatible helper to me. Behind every successful man is a successful woman and you are that woman. To my two dear loving and understanding sons, Mark and Michael. I love you unconditionally. To H. H. Pope Shenouda III, the great teacher of many generations. To H. G. Bishop Paula, the open-minded and kind-hearted man. To all husbands and wives who believe in their marriage as a covenant and deal with their marital relationship as a sacramental relationship.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Marriage as a human institution is all around us and everywhere. It can be found in almost all cultures. Coontz (2005) states that marriage is universal and a central way of organizing personal and social life in almost all cultures. Marriage is "an important social institution satisfying popular health" (Zhang & Hayward, 2006, p. 639), "still very much in evidence among all U.S. groups" (Gibson-davis, Edin & McLanaha, 2005, p.1302), an enduring institution which shows little signs of disappearing (Nakonezny & Denton, 2008), and "a unique, legally binding contract" between two people (Cott, 2002, p. II). (Rauch, 2004) believes that marriage is "a pact with the community"(p.32) and a "life-altering boundary" (p. 35). (Cutrona, 2004), states that marriage represents a public statement regarding one's identity.

According to Aldous (1996), a good marriage provides individuals with a sense of meaning and identity in their lives. Nock (2001) describes marriage as a primarily social institution establishing certain norms or expectations for the relationship. The marital relationship provides a template of appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Thus, marriage provides a seal of legitimacy to the relationship in the eyes of society (Meezan & Rauch, 2005). It is a "cultural script" for the relationship (Popenoe, 1996, p. 247), and the primary structure for establishing a family relationship and rearing the next generation (Larson & Holman, 1994). Cotton (1999) states that marriage is a legal, formalized relationship that facilitates association in a network that could potentially provide social support and influences one's well-being. I believe that marriage is designed to be the most intimate and

lasting expressions of all human relationships. It is the fountain from which children and families spring forth into life.

It is clear from what the literature says about marriage that it is a social institution supported by different laws and policies in different cultures and countries, but always in the service of the common good that can result in a number of important personal and social benefits. These include the promotion of improved health and emotional well being both for spouses and for their children, the generation of children and the raising up of future citizens, and the overall flourishing of community life. Problematic and disrupted marriage tends to be destructive of the family relationships between husbands and wives as well as between them and their children. While having satisfactory marital and familial relationships can lead to stability and well-being of the family and the wider society, the unsatisfactory marital and familial relationships can affect both the family and the wider society negatively (Aldous, 1996; Meezan & Rauch, 2005; Nock ,2001).

For Egyptians, marriage always has been considered the sacred backbone of social life. It is considered the foundation of family life; it is the tool that strengthens family as a corporate unit. Egyptians consider marriage a transition to adulthood. Marriage in Egypt is one of the main sources for showing family solidarity and support (Atta-Alla, 2009; Rugh, 1984). The purpose of marriage differs from one family to another in contemporary Egypt. Therefore, Egyptians engage in different types of marriages: vested interest marriages, arranged marriages, and love marriages.

According to the faith of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Church, God willed to create all humans out of one, in order that they might be held in their society not only by

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likeness of kind, but also by bond of kindred. Therefore the first natural bond of human society is between man and wife. Coptic Orthodox Christians believe that marriage is as old as the human race; it is rooted in creation. Marriage is the first institution that God created and established before civil government, and even before the local church itself. The following biblical verses provide the basis for God's design in marriage which is rooted in creation prior to the fall of man.

> Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:26-27, NKJV).

> And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him" (Genesis 2:18, NKJV). Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (Genesis 2:24-25 NKJV).

Jesus himself confirmed God's design for marriage when the Pharisees asked Him about the lawfulness to divorce a wife for just any reason. Jesus answered and said to them,

> "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So then, they are no

longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery" (Matthew 19:3-9, NKJV).

It is clear from these biblical verses that Jesus' teaching on marriage includes:

(a) Marriage was instituted by God at the beginning (Matthew 19:3-4, NKJV),

(b) Marriage was designed for those created male and female (Matthew 19:4, NKJV),

(c) Marriage is for man and wife, who become 'one flesh (Matthew 19:5, NKJV),

(d) Marriage is a union that God joins, not the state (Matthew 19:6, NKJV), and

(e) Man may try to put asunder, but only God puts asunder (Matthew 19:7-9, NKJV).

Paul further explains Christian marriage as a great mystery:

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father

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and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is

a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let

each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see

that she respects her husband" (Ephesians 5:25-33, NKJV).

Paul repeats *Genesis 1:26* to the church at Ephesus and peeks into the theology

and mystery behind God's design for marriage. In marriage, we have a divine tension as

God has both spoken about it with both great clarity and also calls it a *great mystery*.

Marriage is a mysterious symbol of Christ's love for the church. All of our marriages, as

difficult as they can be at times, are still a symbol that God has placed in the earth to

reflect something of His love for His people and therefore something about the Gospel

itself.

The Mystery Paul speaks of in Ephesians is then revealed further in the book of

Revelation as the Church's Union with Christ for All Eternity. "Then one of the seven

angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked

with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife" (Revelation 21:9,

NKJV). God the Father is fashioning a Bride for His Son, the Groom, such that

somehow Christians, the universal church, are someday going to be joined to Christ for

all eternity.

Thus, the deep and profound meaning of Christian marriage is clear in the Bible.

God's design for marriage is weaved throughout the scripture from beginning to end. It is

rooted in Creation in the Old Testament, reaffirmed by Jesus in the Gospels, explained by

Apostle Paul in the New Testament, and revealed by John in Revelations. To conclude,

Christian marriage is central to the human experience and is the crown point of all human relationships. It celebrates the beauty and diversity of the two parts of the human race, *male and female*, coming together, and life springs forth from it and the next generation is born. In Christian marriage, husbands and wives reflect the nature of God in the fact that as men and women, they have equality in importance but difference in roles.

Many researchers and writers explain how marriage is a biblical concept and how it was the basic unit of society in all biblical cultures, including Jewish, Greek, and Roman (Cahill, 2003; Dishongh, 2009; Hauser, 2005; Rubio, 2003; Thomas, 2007; Gaillardetz, 2002). In Christianity, a married man is a husband and a married woman is a wife. The phrase, *husband and wife*, implies mutual rights of life in common, sexual relationship, and an enduring union. The purposes of marriage include security, companionship, procreation, child education and development, economic collaboration, and social stability. Thornton, Axinn, & Hill (1992) state, "Marriage, sexuality, and childbearing have been intricately interwoven with the ethics of Christian churches for centuries" (p. 629). Christian marriage is a unique journey in which husband and wife deepen their intimate relationship in continued companionship. In this marital journey, the husband and wife are to each other sacraments of forgiveness. They are called to support each other to reach their fullness of holiness in order to become more fully the Body of Christ. Johnson (2005) states that in marriage, men and women let go of life-long ways of thinking, behaving, prioritizing, relating, valuing, and being in order to survive. Through the gift of their bodies, they converse with each other, they serve each other, and they comfort and hold each other. Roberts (2006) states that in their marital sexual intimacy, Christian husbands and wives give their bodies to each other in the

physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of their being, in a special and most visible way. Roberts (2006) adds that they are in effect saying to each other, this is my body given for you. This is the cup of my blood, of my life, of my blessings poured out for you. Through their self-giving, the couple visibly manifests Christ's gift of himself to them.

Copts (Egyptian Christians) strongly believe that matrimony [marriage] is one of the seven sacraments instituted by Christ Our Lord. "The term *Copts* is equivalent to the word Egyptians. It is derived from the Greek *Aigyptos* meaning Egyptian , which, in turn, is derived from the ancient Egyptian *Hikaptah* , meaning the house of the spirit of *Ptah,* a most highly revered deity in Egyptian mythology" (Malaty, 1993, p. 8). When the Arabs arrived in Egypt in the seventh century, they called the Egyptians *Qipt*, thus the Arabic word Qipt came to mean both Egyptians and Christians. The modern use of the term *Coptic* describes Egyptian Christians, as well as the last stage of the ancient Egyptian language script. It also describes the distinctive art and architecture that developed as an early expression of the new faith. The Coptic Orthodox Church was founded by St. Mark the Evangelist of Alexandria around 43 A.D when he went to Egypt to preach Christianity. The Coptic Orthodox Church, which is also known as the Church of Alexandria, is one of the four oldest apostolic churches in the world. The other churches are the Church of Jerusalem, the Church of Rome, and the Church of Antioch. The Coptic Orthodox Church adheres to the Nicene Creed. St. Athanasius (296-373 A.D.), the twentieth Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church effectively defended the Doctrine of Christ's Divinity at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. His affirmation of the doctrine earned him the title, *Father of Orthodoxy* and St. Athanasius, *the Apostolic*. The

term *Orthodox* refers to the preservation of the *Original Faith* by the Copts who, throughout the ages, defended the Old Creed against the numerous attacks aimed at it (Malaty, 1993).

Since the establishment of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage has always been a sacramental bond that can never be broken unless one spouse is involved in adultery or apostasy. Pope Shenouda III, the 117th Pope of Alexandria and the Patriarch of All Africa on the Holy Apostolic See of Saint Mark the Evangelist of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria (1999) states that Coptic Orthodox Christians follow the Bible's teachings on marriage and divorce. The Bible states in four different places that divorce is permissible only in the case of adultery. The Coptic Orthodox Church Matrimony Sacrament means the unseen gift that the couple obtains as a result of their conscious participation in the holy sacrament. It is the invisible blessing that they receive in the midst of physical, visible manifestations. Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage means the union of a baptized Coptic Orthodox Christian man and a baptized Coptic Orthodox Christian woman. They acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and join in the worship, the sacraments, and the fellowship of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Church. Bishop Mettaous (2002) states that matrimony is a *holy sacrament*, officiated by a priest, of uniting a man to a woman. Through this holy sacrament, the man and woman become one. Bishop Mettaous (2002) adds that the three goals of Christian marriage are: (a) cooperation between man and woman, (b) procreation, and (c) protection against adultery and fornication. The joy and energy created in Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage can help accomplish God's kingdom

purposes. In the sacrament of marriage, the couple acknowledge that their conjugal life is a shadow of the church in heaven (Malaty, 1993).

The benefits of healthy marriages include but are not limited to a greater sense of spouses' well-being, lower rates of disease, and a longer life span. Married men and women experience improved holistic health (Waite, 2000). Marital quality is positively associated with both mental and physical health (Wickrama, Lorenz, & Conger, 1997; Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1987; Zhang & Hayward, 2006). The results of several studies on marriage support the hypothesis that marriage is associated with improved mental and physical health over time and demonstrate that people tend to be both healthier and happier when they are married (Gottman, 1994; Hawkins & Booth, 2005, Helms & Buehler, 2007; Kelly & Conley, 1987; Nock, 2005; Orbuch & Custer, 1995; White, 1994; Williams, Sassler, & Nicholson, 2008; Williams & Umberson, 2004). Waite and Gallagher (2000) state that married individuals have better mental and physical health than the unmarried. In many cases, married individuals report more social support, lower economic strain and are less likely to engage in risky health behavior than the unmarried (Umberson 1989; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Wienke and Hill (2009) state that the results of numerous studies on marriage show that married people, especially men, are better than unmarried people on several measures of well-being.

According to Neff and Karney (2007), marriage takes place within environments that may constrain or facilitate marital development. Kluwer and Johnson (2007) state that relationship quality continues to be the most widely studied topic in the area of close relationships. A person's satisfaction with his/her marriage tends to be a key factor in his/her overall happiness. A satisfactory marriage provides a wider social network of

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friends and kin to draw on in times of material hardship (Lerman, 2002) and a close

confidant that can protect individuals from the negative mental and physical health

consequences of emotional stress (Turner & Marino 1994). However, compared to

healthy marriages, unhealthy ones can be an enormous source of stress. While the study

of marital satisfaction has a long and well-documented history, it is clear from the

consistently high divorce rates around the world that still too little is known about ways

to achieve and maintain a sufficient level of marital satisfaction to assure marital success

(Arcus, 1992; Schvaneveldt & Young, 1992).

Various theories take somewhat different perspectives and explanation on

marriage and marital satisfaction. Boss (1993) points out that the interest and theoretical

approaches to the study of marriage and family in various period of time in history reflect

more or less the mainstream concern of the society. The Symbolic Interactionism and

Phenomenology approach the issues of marriage with a stronger stress on the subjective

interpretation of the couples in the marital relationship. The Social Exchange and Equity

Theories (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) are more positivistic in orientation stressing more on

external or societal forces that affect the marital relationship and try to identify objective

rules that govern the behavior of the spouses. These two theories assume that one is

satisfied if he or she evaluates the relationship as meeting or exceeding the set of internal

standards for a good relationship and does not perceive any other relationships that meet

those standards as well. For example, relationship satisfaction increases when the

perceived rewards such as warmth and self-disclosure increase and when the relationship

is perceived as fair (Kamo,1993). According to these two theories, gains can be very

tangible and physical (e.g., material resources: money, food, housing etc., sexual

gratification) or very intangible (social approval, sense of security, emotional support, self-esteem, social status) depending on the value system of individuals as well as the norms prescribed by society. Most people evaluate the rewards and costs of a given relationship in terms of what they feel is deserved and/or realistically obtained. Sabatelli (1986) states that relationship whose outcomes fall above the comparison level would be experienced as relatively satisfying and attractive.

Husbands and wives carry with them different expectation and needs in the marital relationship. They expect their needs to be fulfilled in marital relations. The nature of their expectations and the extent to which their expectations are fulfilled have direct implication on their marital satisfaction. Some of these expectations are individualistic in nature but some of them reflect the general value and expectation of the society or a particular demographic sector in which the couples are located. If spouses compare the rewards and costs of the current relationship with other alternative relationships or their internal standard of a *good* relationship, satisfaction is affected (Kurdek, 1992; Lenthall, 1977).

In light of the Social Exchange and Equity Theories, the meaning of exchange implies the exchange of different things (Klein & White, 1996; Nakonezny & Denton, 2008). For example, if a spouse offers something that the other spouse already has in abundance, the satisfaction of the receiving spouse will not increase very much. On the contrary, if the receiving spouse can obtain what the other spouse needs, he or she will probably experience a high level of satisfaction. Hence, in Social Exchange terms, complementality in a marital relationship is an important source of marital satisfaction. Therefore, two spouses of similar characteristics might not necessarily produce

satisfactory marital relationship because what one spouse does not have, the other spouse is unlikely to offer and vice versa. In a true Coptic Orthodox Christian marital relationship, spouses complement each other; the spouses can obtain something from each other that they did not possess. Hence, it is normal to see Coptic Orthodox Christian wives obtaining economic security and social status from their husbands and in return they keep and maintain comfortable family environment for themselves and their children. By this pattern of exchange, they derive satisfaction from the marriage.

I can argue that many Coptic Orthodox Christians get married because they love each other and they are not concerned so much about what they may get out of marriage. Rather, they are more concerned with what they can contribute to the marital relationship. From the Social Exchange perspective, committed spouses have developed a strong sense of trust towards each other. The couples will assume that their partner will not exploit or take advantage of them in any way (Sabatelli, (1986).

This trust can be based on previous satisfactory experiences or simply on assumption and beliefs. However, the trust or commitment will change, if a spouse consistently experiences what is contrary to his or her assumptions and beliefs. Commitment to a relationship might also be taken as a contrast to the exchange/equitable orientation. From the Social Exchange perspective, a spouse developing a commitment to a marital relationship means that he or she has developed a trust to the partner to the extent that he or she is willing to become dependent on the relationship. Under such consideration, committed Coptic Orthodox Christian spouses will try to stay away from other alternate relationships and solely depend on each other to fulfill their expectations and needs. Such spouses who managed to develop a sense of trust to each other and a

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commitment to their marital relationship become less calculatiing in their relationship. They become more concerned about the long term outcomes. They do not consider the issues of distributive justice and fulfillment of expectation as the paramount importance in their marital relationship. This results in positive experience and values that promote their marital satisfaction.

The perceptions of marital satisfaction vary across cultures (Adelmann, Chadwick, & Baerger, 1996; Shek, Lam, Tsoi, & Lam, 1993; White, 1983). Reviewing the pertinent literature on marriage shows that the most frequently studied aspect in research on marriage and family relationships is that of satisfaction and what helps people maintain happiness in their marriages (Heyman, Sayers, & Bellack, 1994; Larson et al., 1995; Spanier, 1976). A second concept that has received much attention in the literature relates to the processes by which individuals develop intimate relationships and, in particular, how love develops over time (Murstein, 1987; Sher, 1996; Sternberg, 1986).

The United States of America is an increasingly diverse and global society. Egyptians are among the more recent groups to have immigrated to the United States. Egyptians began to emigrate in significant numbers only during the latter part of the twentieth century. While the majority left for economic or educational reasons, many Copts, Jews, and conservative Muslims emigrated because they were concerned about the political developments in Egypt. The past five decades have witnessed unprecedented movements of large Egyptian populations to different countries including the United States (Fisher, 1985).

Each culture has its own beliefs, behaviors, and values that influence people's lives. People who move to live in a culture different from their culture of origin go, for a while, through a conflict between the host culture and the culture of origin Phinney (2003. Egyptian immigrants to the United States can be divided into three groups. The first group comprises Egyptian immigrants who react to the changes imposed on their lives and even try to reject these changes because they want to keep their original identities and do not want their identities to dissolve in the host culture. The second group comprises Egyptian immigrants who become American and also retain their original ethnic identity over time. Phinney (2003) calls them *bi-cultural identity* immigrants. The third group, which is the smallest one, comprises Egyptian immigrants who do not maintain their original cultural identity, become Americanized, and accept the American patterns of values, culture, and behavior in their daily interaction with the American culture. In other words, they interweave into the fabric of American life through the melting pot. Egyptian women, for example, living in their native country and culture, are strongly controlled by the male relatives in their lives. When these women immigrate to the United States, they are confronted by a variety of different values, norms, and beliefs. While it is difficult for many Egyptian males to be interwoven in the American culture, many Egyptian women go through changes in their values, behavior, and beliefs and try to make psychological and sociocultural adjustments. This may lead to misunderstanding and marital distress. According to Santisteban and Mitrani (2003) family bonds are threatened when family members show very different acculturation responses.

Knowledge of cross-cultural differences in relationships and relationship satisfaction is important information for counselors and counselor educators. The goal of

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the present study is to examine the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American

husbands and wives' perceptions of marital satisfaction and their lived marital

experiences after their immigration, acculturation and naturalization. Padilla (1980) states

that acculturation is the first step in assimilation theory where immigrants change their

cultural patterns to the cultural patterns of the host society. Thompson (1996) points out

that immigrants start with acculturation and end with complete assimilation. According to

Zane and Mak (2003), acculturation "reflects the extent to which individuals learn the

values, behaviors, lifestyles, and language of the host culture" (p. 39). The present study

is an attempt to uncover detailed descriptors of the lived marital experiences of the Coptic

Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives who became Egyptian-

Americans after emigrating from Egypt to the United States and staying for at least five

years, became naturalized citizens, and became part of the diverse American culture.

Statement of the Problem

Conflict between people in meaningful human relationships, such as marriage, is

inevitable (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995). Holley, Yabiku, and Benin (2006) state

that divorce has become a familiar experience in American society and at least half of all

first marriages end in divorce. Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American marriages,

like any other marriages, have their share of relational misunderstandings and mistakes,

clashes and cold shoulders, sharp words and shouting matches that result in pain and

make the marital relationship fragile. In many cases the marital relationship between a

Coptic Orthodox Christian husband and his wife becomes so fragile that the distressed

spouses cannot stand tolerating and forgiving each other. Consequently, they start to seek

separation or divorce. According to the Coptic Orthodox Christian Church's faith, which

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is biblically-based, a Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage cannot be broken by the single will of either spouse or by their combined wills [mutual consent], since it is one of the seven sacraments of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Both husband and wife have the right to file for divorce only in the case of evidenced adultery or apostasy. Therefore, the distressed spouses usually seek secular divorce outside the Coptic Orthodox Christian Church. The problems that result from the marital distress and/or secular divorce among Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans cause much pain for the church leaders who try to save marriages among the members of their congregation. Nydam's (2005) title, "The Messiness of Marriage and the Knottiness of Divorce," illuminates the difficult situations Christian leaders face when working with troublesome couples in today's society. The secularly divorced husbands or wives find it difficult to live in their church communities.

Four realities contributed to the reason for proposing the present study. First, the majority of research in the area of marital satisfaction has been done with newlywed couples, couples seeking therapy, and/or couples from a wide range of satisfaction levels and marital experiences (Collins & Coltrane, 1991; Larson & Holman, 1994). Second, although few studies of marital satisfaction have used people of color as sample populations, the existing literature indicates that minority group status may be an important variable to consider in investigations in this area (Robins, Stoltenberg, Robins, & Ross, 2002). Third, numerous studies on marital satisfaction have been conducted in Western cultures and societies (Birtchnell, 1993; Russell & Wells, 1991, 1992; Schumm, et al., 1986; Williams, 1995). However, little research has focused on the Middle Eastern societies including Egypt (Soad, 1990). Fourth, the increasing number of marital and

family problems which lead in many cases to either separation or secular divorce among Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American families places a heavy load on the shoulders of the separated and/or divorced spouses and their children who wish to remain active in their church and community, the Coptic Orthodox Christian Church leaders who try to save these marriages, and the community and friends who strive to take care of the divorced wives and their children both financially and socially. Therefore, it is essential to examine marital satisfaction among Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans and the factors that they believe influence it, since it is still an uninvestigated area in the marriage literature.

Significance of the Study

The present study is the first of its kind to consider marital satisfaction among Egyptian husbands and wives in general and Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans in particular. The findings of this study can provide a base-line understanding of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' perception of marital satisfaction, the factors which they believe positively and/or negatively influence it, and their desired changes that can enhance their marital satisfaction. Exploring the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' perceptions of their marital satisfaction is important for several reasons. I believe that the insights gained from this study may contribute to: (a) enhancing the level of marital satisfaction, (b) increasing the quality of marriages, and (c) decreasing the number of separation and divorce cases among Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans. I also believe that the findings of the present study may increase the knowledge base about Egyptian-Americans in the United States of America and make recommendations for the newly

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married couples, and the Coptic Orthodox Church leaders. The present study is an

addition to the minorities' marital satisfaction literature. I believe that the findings will

yield recommendations for establishing premarital training programs as well as marriage

enrichment programs in the Coptic Orthodox churches. I also believe that the findings

will yield recommendations and implications for marriage counselors/therapists.

Purpose of the Study

After conducting an extensive review of literature on marriage and marital

satisfaction, it appeared that, to date, no studies have been conducted to examine the

construct of marital satisfaction in Egypt. Moreover, neither quantitative nor qualitative

research has specifically explored the marital satisfaction of Egyptian-American spouses

in general and Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American spouses in particular.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-

American husbands and wives' perceptions of marital satisfaction and the factors that

influence it. More specifically, this study is an exploration into the lived marital

experience of the Coptic Orthodox Christian husbands and wives who emigrated to the

United States, became naturalized citizens after staying for at least five years and became

acculturated to the American culture. This study is an attempt to get at the meaning of

their lived marital experiences and understand the factors and practices that enhance or

lessen their marital satisfaction.

Research Questions

The following five research questions have been developed through a careful

review of the literature on marital satisfaction and my personal expertise as a deacon

serving as a marriage and family lay counselor in different Coptic Orthodox churches for more than seven years in Egypt and the States.

1. How do Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives perceive their marital satisfaction?

2. What are the factors which positively and negatively influence the marital satisfaction of Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives?

3. How do Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives maintain their marriage in light of their daily marital experiences that influence their marital satisfaction?

4. What changes in their marital relationships do Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' desire to enhance their marital satisfaction?

5. How can the Coptic Orthodox Church better prepare and support Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans in their marriage?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This qualitative study of how Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives perceive their marital satisfaction and the factors that positively and negatively influence it draws upon the central premise of the Social Exchange Theory (Nakonezny & Denton (2008) and the Coptic Orthodox Church beliefs and theology of marriage (Bishop Mettaous, 2002). The Social Exchange Theory (Nakonezny & Denton (2008) emphasizes that the exchange of social and material resources is a fundamental form of human interaction. This theory is based on rewards and costs of a relationship. It

explains how people feel about a relationship with one another based on their perceptions of: (a) the balance between what they put into the relationship and what they get out of it, (b) the kind of relationship they deserve, and (c) the chances of having a better relationship with someone else. It assesses the concept of transferring one type of goods or service in exchange for another within an interpersonal relationship (Klein & White, 1996; Roloff, 1981, 1987).

Equity Theory or the importance of a fair, balanced, and reciprocated exchange within an interpersonal relationship lays the foundation for the Social Exchange Theory. Adams (1965) states that equity is attained if the ratio of one's rewards to one's costs is equal to a partner's rewards to costs ratio. In essence, each party should be relatively equal in terms of the ratio of resources or goods received and given away, if the relationship is considered equitable. Hatfield, Traupmann, Sprecher, Utne, and Hay (1985) believe that Equity Theory provides insights toward understanding close, intimate relationships although it has often been applied and applauded for its explanatory power in casual relationships. However, some scholars dislike the application of Equity Theory in close relationships, since a premise of Equity Theory (and Exchange Theory in general) is that individuals are selfish, and self-motivated (Adams, 1965; Klein & White, 1996; Roloff, 1981; Peterson, 1986). Furthermore, opponents of Equity Theory argue that economic principles lack explanatory power in close relationships. In short, love is believed to transcend individual rewards and costs (Fromm, 1956; Rubin, 1973). Conversely, proponents of Equity Theory indicate that love often involves measures of give and take (Hatfield, et al., 1985; Hatfield, Utne, & Traupmann, 1979; Walster, Walster, &Berscheid, 1978). Individuals often reciprocate behaviors in order to sustain

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ties with close intimates (Peterson, 1986). Individuals in intimate relationships are deeply concerned with considerations of fairness, desiring to reciprocate love back to their relational partners. In addition, it is posited that the more equitable the relationship is, the more compatible the relational partners will be (Hatfield, et al., 1985).

According to Social Exchange Theory (Klein & White, 1996; Nakonezny & Denton , 2008; Roloff, 1981), married couples use the equation: Rewards – Costs = Profits to figure out whether their relationship is worth the time. Nakonezny and Denton (2008) state, "Marital partners yield goodness of outcomes based on rewards and costs" (p. 404). Husbands and wives act with each other in full recognition that each partner's acts will be noticed and in some way reciprocated by the other partner. They base their decision to develop or maintain their relationship from the amount of profits that they could receive. Meanwhile, they understand that in order to get the rewards, there will be costs that they will have to address. Husbands and wives exchange rewards and costs to quantify the values of outcomes in their marital relationships (Dew (2008). They strive to minimize costs and maximize rewards and then base the likeliness of developing a healthy relationship on the perceived possible outcomes. When these outcomes are perceived to be greater, they disclose more and develop a closer relationship with one another. Dew (2008) points out," Social Exchange theory asserts that the relationship satisfaction rises or falls as individuals compare the benefits and costs of the relationship with their expectations" (p. 60).

Bishop Mettaous (2002) states that the Coptic Orthodox Church believes in seven Holy Sacraments: (1) The Sacrament of Baptism, (2) The Sacrament of Confirmation also known as the Sacrament of Myron or the Holy Anointment, (3) The Sacrament of

The Eucharist, (4) The Sacrament of Repentance & Confession, (5) The Sacrament of The Anointing of The Sick, (6) The Sacrament of Matrimony, and (7) The Sacrament of Holy Orders [Priesthood]. These seven sacraments of the Coptic Orthodox Church are the channels by which God's children receive the graces and blessings of the Holy Spirit. Bishop Mettaous (2002) states that the Holy Spirit works in the church through the Sacraments, giving us His gifts, blessings and comfort, and teaches us and guides us to the way of truth.

According to the Coptic Orthodox Church's faith, matrimony [marriage] is a holy sacrament instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ who blessed the Sacrament of Matrimony by attending the wedding of Cana of Galilee, where, He manifested His glory and His disciples believed in Him (John 2: 1-11,NKJV). This sacrament is officiated by a priest to unite a man and a woman. Bishop Mettaous (2002) states that the Church Sacrament is an invisible grace Christian believers receive by practicing a visible rite, and a visible sign or substance performed by a priest. There are three conditions to accomplish the Sacrament: (a) An adequate substance for the Sacrament like water for Baptism, bread and wine for the Sacrament of Communion, oil for the Unction of the Sick, and so on, (b) An ordained priest by the laying on of the apostolic hand, and (c) Invocation of the Holy Spirit by the priest, by praying certain prayers for the dwelling of the Holy Spirit and sanctification of the Sacrament. Through the holy matrimony sacrament, the man and woman become one. The Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage is monogamous. Copts marry within the Coptic Orthodox faith; non-Coptic partners are required to convert. Divorce and remarriage are only permitted for the innocent party in cases of adultery (Matthew 5:32, NKJV) and for apostasy (1 Corinthians 7:15, NKJV).

The Coptic Orthodox Church strongly believes that marriage is created by God and reflects something in His nature. The Bible teaches that God exists in perfect harmony in the form of a relationship on a high level with three persons who eternally existing in love and communication within the Godhead. In the sacramental bond of Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage, we see this harmonizing of unity and diversity where the two great parts of humanity, man and woman, become one without losing their unique identities and roles as individual persons. According to the doctrine of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Christian marriage elevates the bodily union to become a spiritual union, through the Holy Spirit, just as the Holy Spirit works in the Baptismal water to make humans a new creation, and works through the Sacrament of Confirmation to ordain a person to become a temple of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit also works in the couple during the marital ceremony, through prayers and faith, to unite them in the Lord.

Through the commitments made by the bride and groom in fulfilling the commandments of marriage and the work of the Holy Spirit, the Church expects that the two partners become one in hope, one in desire, one in the way of life they follow, and one in their religious and spiritual practices. Nothing divides them, either in flesh or in Spirit. They are in every truth, two in one flesh; where there is but one flesh there is also but one spirit. They pray together, worship together, fast together, instruct one another, encourage one another, and strengthen one another. Side by side they face difficulties and persecution, and share their consolations. They have no secrets from one another, they never reject each other's company; they never bring sorrow to each other's hearts. Coptic Orthodox marriage implies that both bride and groom belong to each other, and are united in spiritual love and physical unity. The purpose of Coptic Orthodox Christian

marriage is to make men and women holy. It involves companionship, intimacy, sexual

relationship, children, and society. MacDonald (1979) states that the relationship between

a man and a woman in marriage is the prime relationship of all mankind superseded only

by that relationship which manor woman establishes with his or her God.

The Coptic Orthodox Church believes strongly in the principle of one wife, and

adopts its principle from the Holy Scripture, which always alludes to man having only

one wife. The teaching of the Coptic Orthodox Church which is based on the teaching of

Scripture concerning marriage includes four principles: (a) marriage is a holy and sacred

relationship between one man and one woman, designed to continue as long as they both

live, (b) marriage is the normal state for the average adult both from the social and the

hygienic standpoint, (c) children are a gift from God, and (d) the family (not the

individual) is the fundamental unit of society. Bishop Mettaous (2002) states that

Christian matrimony has three goals. The first goal of Christian marriage is cooperation

between man and woman. The Lord God said: "It is not good that man should be alone. I

will make him a helper comparable to him" (Genesis 2:18, NKJV). Comparable to him

means similar to him and equal to him, helping him and supporting him in all things. The

second goal of Christian marriage is procreation. Bearing children makes the couple

rejoice, and fills the house with joy and strengthens the marital relationship. David says

in Psalms 127 and 128:

> "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is His
>
> reward. Like arrows in the hand of warrior, so are the children of one's youth.
>
> Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them" (Psalm 127:3-5, NKJV), and,

"Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine, in the very heart of your house, behold

thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord" (Psalm 128:3-6, NKJV).

According to the Coptic Orthodox Church's faith, children are a heritage from the

Lord and the fruit of the womb is His reward, but if it happens that the Lord has not given

children to a married couple, they should not grieve, but be in complete surrender to Him.

Christianity does not make reproduction the main aim of marriage, but the second aim

after cooperation between the husband and wife. The Coptic Orthodox Church does not

permit divorce when one of the partners is barren, but rather advises them to continue

together, without destroying their happiness over a matter that is not necessary. The third

goal of Christian marriage is protection against adultery and fornication. St. Paul stated,

"It is good for a man not to touch a woman, not to marry. Nevertheless, because

of sexual immorality let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have

her own husband. ... For it is better to marry than to burn with passion"

(1 Corinthians 7, NKJV).

Marriage is the remedy for human weakness, for keeping oneself virtuous, and

preventing sexual immorality. Bishop Mettaous (2002) also states that there are three

main characteristics of the Coptic Orthodox marriage. These characteristics are unity,

continuity, and bearing fruits. First, the Coptic Orthodox Church believes and insists on

the law of monogamy, for in the beginning God created male and female; one Adam and

one Eve. Through Matrimony the two become one in Christ. Hence, they are no longer

two but one body. Second, the Coptic Orthodox Church believes that the purpose of

Matrimony is continuance, without divorce, except in the case of adultery or apostasy.

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This is because a strange person has entered and corrupted the holy unity of Matrimony, and profaned its holiness. However, if the person who sinned repented and the partner forgave, then the Church permits the continuation of the marriage. The second situation, in which divorce may occur, is due to the spiritual immorality or denial of faith and abandonment of Christianity by one of the partners. The matter of annulment of Matrimony is a matter authorized by the church, in the case where a partner had deceived or cheated the other in issues regarding sexual impotence. Third, the Coptic Orthodox Church believes through the Holy Spirit, that the Christian family bears many fruits such as Christian virtues in the life of its members. When the Lord grants blessed children, the family must bring them up in the fear of God and in the Church. The Coptic Orthodox Church teaches that married couples should deal with all people in true Christian love, living a life of service and self sacrificing. Hence, the many fruits that a Christian family bears are not only children, but love, virtues, and service.

According to the Coptic Orthodox Church's faith, the Matrimonial Rite is performed for virgin couples, however, if one of the partners is widowed, for example, then there is another prayer called *the prayer of forgiveness*. Bishop Mettaous (2002) states that the Coptic Orthodox Church Matrimonial Rite is divided into three parts: (a) betrothal, (b) ceremony of marriage, and (c) Holy matrimony. By the end of the Rite of the Matrimonial Prayer, the priest gives the commandments to the bride and the groom. He asks them to rise from their chairs and takes them to stand before the sanctuary door, facing east. He gives them the commandments before the sanctuary, as a witness that they are being wedded before the Lord, and so must keep what the Church advises them, by the priest, before the Holy altar of God. These commandments can be

summarized as follows: (a) You must know each other and submit yourselves to one another in love and purity; (b) My blessed son, may the grace of the Holy Spirit strengthen you to take unto yourself your wife, in purity of heart and sincerity. Do all that is good for her. Have compassion on her and always hasten to do that which will gladden her heart; (c) And you, blessed daughter, and happy bride, you must honor and respect him, do not disagree with him but increase your obedience to him over what was commanded many times. Receive him with joy and cheer. Do not frown in his face. Do not ignore any of his rights upon you and fear God in all your deeds with him (Bishop Mettaous, 2002).

The priest then prays the Prayer of Blessing on them: the bride and groom kneel before the altar, and place their joined right hands which are covered by the white veil, on the Holy Bible presented before them. Their heads are placed together as a symbol of union and marriage. The priest says, speaking in the singular form, says to them, *'Fill your heart with spiritual love,'* for they are now one heart, one body, and one mind. All those gathered then pray the Lord's Prayer, followed by the priest praying the absolution for the couple. He then says the final blessing, the Lord's Prayer, and the Dismissal (Bishop Mettaous, 2002).

By giving such commandments to the married couple, the Coptic Orthodox Church is confirming the importance of being aware of each other's rights so that the husband and wife may live together in harmony, stability and joy. They must give comfort and joy to each other. Submitting to each other is a very important commandment; the married couple must submit in terms of sharing and exchanging and being agreeable to each other's ideas and thoughts, not just clinging to what they want

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individually. There must be dialogue, advice and discussion between them, in order for them to come to a common, correct agreement, and so their lives together will be peaceful. The husband must never put down his wife's thoughts, or dominate her with his. It is also important that the husband must listen well to every word his wife says, warning him against selfishness and carelessness, which is the basis of trouble and strife. It is an invitation of love, sacrifice and giving in marital life. It is also important for the bride to humble herself for her husband and so live in peace. Problems can occur when the woman wants dominion over the family. As God is the head of the Church, He placed man to be head of the family, and the woman to be the heart of the family; the centre of motherhood, compassion, love and emotions. But once this heart does not exist, problems occur, and children suffer, becoming the victims. The placing of hands on the Holy Bible signifies an oath of promise to keep and abide by the Biblical commandments, and that their life will be according to the commandment, having the mind of Christ, to live following the Gospel of Christ.

There is great symbolism in the Coptic Orthodox wedding ceremony. The Bridegroom waits for the bride at the door of the church as a sign that Adam waited for Eve; also that as they enter the church as one so shall they be from that time onwards. The bride's maids holding candles symbolize the five wise virgins who had enough oil for their lamps and went into the wedding (Matthew 25:1NKJV). The procession towards the altar is a symbol that the couple are coming closer together in order to receive Christ as one as the wedding is now transformed into an eternal relationship. The priest has the wedding rings tied together by a red ribbon to signify that it is Christ's' blood that is the unity between the couple. The bride or bridegroom only put the ring on half way and the

priest pushes the rest to show that the wedding starts with the couple and is finalized with God after they have called upon Him. The robes placed on the bridegroom symbolizes that he is the priest of his household and is responsible to ensure that members read the bible, pray every day, confess at least twice a month, partake of the Eucharist weekly, and practice love, trust, respect and honesty in their lives.

Operational Definitions

The following operational definitions will be applied for the purposes of this study:

Marital satisfaction: the spouse's evaluation of his or her marital relationship as meeting or exceeding the set of his or her internal standards for a good relationship as it is defined by the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Copts: the Christian Egyptians who descend from the ancient Egyptians.

Coptic Orthodox Church: the church that holds the unbroken line of patriarchal succession to the See of Alexandria founded by Saint Mark, a disciple of Christ, when Egypt was Christianized during the first century A.D.

Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage: the union of a baptized Coptic Orthodox Christian man and a baptized Coptic Orthodox Christian woman who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and joins in the worship, the sacraments, and the fellowship of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

True Coptic Orthodox Christians: the Coptic Orthodox Christians who practice and live their Coptic Orthodox faith.

Summary

This chapter provides a framework for understanding the concerns related to the lack of literature on marital satisfaction of Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives. The chapter focuses on the significance of investigating the perceptions of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans of their spousal marital satisfaction. A brief overview of marital satisfaction that includes the lack of studies that focus on investigating minorities' marital satisfaction and the proposed need for such studies has been provided. The chapter presents the purpose of the study, describes the significance of the study, presents the research questions and the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study, and provides the operational definitions that are used in the study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marriage

Marriage is an important institution in almost all societies and all cultures. The desirability of marriage is reflected in surveys suggesting that 90% of Americans will choose to marry at some point in their lives (Brubaker & Kimberly 1993). Marriage is "an important social institution satisfying popular health"(Zhang & Hayward, 2006, p. 639), "still very much in evidence among all U.S. groups"(Gibson-davis, Edin, & McLanaha, 2005, p.1302), represents a public statement regarding one's identity (Cutrona,2004), enduring institution which shows little signs of disappearing (Nakonezny & Denton, 2008), a "life-altering boundary" (Rauch, 2004, p. 35) and "a unique, legally binding contract" (Cott, 2002, p. II) between two people but it is also 'a pact with the community' (Rauch, 2004, p.32). Marriage has been described as the most important and fundamental human relationship because it provides the primary structure for establishing a family relationship and rearing the next generation (Larson & Holman, 1994). According to Meezan and Rauch (2005), marriage provides a seal of legitimacy to the relationship in the eyes of society. Aldous (1996) reports that a good marriage provides individuals with a sense of meaning and identity in their lives.

A successful marriage can provide the spouses with emotional, social, and physical intimacy that makes the spousal relationship secure. Intimate emotional support, provided by a spouse, is characterized as a sense of being cared about, loved, esteemed, valued as a person, along with having a confidante. The positive effects of marriage have

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been documented in a significant body of research. (Hawkins & Booth, 2005; Helms & Buehler, 2007; Nock, 2005; Orbuch & Custer, 1995; White, 1994; Williams, Sassler, & Nicholson, 2008; Williams & Umberson, 2004). Married people report higher degrees of intimate emotional support and also tend to report lower levels of depression (Stack & Eshleman, 1998). Married people enjoy the benefits of social support, immediate intimate emotional support, and economic support (Waite, 2000), as well as having lower morbidity and mortality rates (Coombs, 1991; Ross, Mirowsky, & Goldsteen, 1990). Marriage is assumed to be economically beneficial because it most often results in higher household incomes and lower risk of impoverishment.

Although the constructions and perceptions of marital quality vary across cultures (Adelmann, Chadwick, & Baerger, 1996; Shek, Lam, Tsoi, & Lam, 1993; White, 1983), most research suggests that marital status and psychological well-being are closely associated (Neff & Karney, 2007). Research suggests that marriage contributes to an overall healthy well-being (Gove & Shin 1989; Hayward & Zhang, 2006; Lamb, Lee, & DeMarris, 2003; Ross, Mirowsky, & Goldsteen, 1990; Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2007). Research shows that psychological well-being is affected by marital adjustment and marital satisfaction (Gibson-Davids, Edin, & McLanahan, 2005). Research found that available intimate emotional support is very beneficial in preventing distress from turning into depression (Cutrona, 1996). Cotton, (1999) states that, through the increased social network provided through marriage, spouses may find psychological benefits. The presence of a supportive marital relationship is linked to reduced depression vulnerability in that marriage lessens one's susceptibility to experiencing distress (Davila, Bradbury, Cohan, & Tochluk,1997). Research also found that without the social ties that marriage

can provide, non-married people are more likely to possess lower psychological health (Gove, Hughes, & Style, 1983; Cotton, 1999).

Christian Marriage

Marriage was the basic unit of society in all biblical cultures, including Jewish, Greek, and Roman (Ferguson, 1993; Collins, 1992); thus, there is an emphasis throughout the Bible on marital relationships. Perkin (1987) states that the reasons to marry include: procreation, companionship, and promotion of family fortunes. Although marriage is not considered a sacrament inextricably connected to salvation, as advocated by Catholic and some Protestant theologians (Cahill, 2003; Lincoln, 1995; Knutson, 1999; Lawler, 1993; de Goytisolo, 1993; Kasper, 1980; Hauser, 2005; Rubio, 2003; Thomas, 2007; Gaillardetz, 2002), it is a biblical concept.

According to Christianity, marriage was founded by God the Creator. And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him" (Genesis 2:18, NKJV). Many researchers and writers explain how marriage is a biblical concept and how it was the basic unit of society in all biblical cultures, including Jewish, Greek, and Roman (Cahill, 2003; Dishongh, 2009; Hauser, 2005; Rubio, 2003; Thomas, 2007; Gaillardetz, 2002). God created marriage in the same way He created the world, man, and woman. The union between men and women is most intimate within marriage as it depicts the intimacy between God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit (Granberg & Root, 2001). In fact, the similarities between men and women in Christian marriage reflect the similarities between the trinity (Rosenau, 1994). Since God

created marriage and this relationship resembles divine attributes, these truths are an integral aspect of the theological construct of marriage.

In Christianity, a married man is a husband and a married woman is a wife. The phrase, *husband and wife*, implies mutual rights of life in common, sexual relationship, and an enduring union. Purposes of marriage include security, companionship, procreation, child education and development, economic collaboration, and social stability. Thornton, Axinn, and Hill (1992) state, "Marriage, sexuality, and childbearing have been intricately interwoven with the ethics of Christian churches for centuries" (p. 629). Christian marriage is a unique journey in which husband and wife deepen their intimate relationship in continued companionship. In this marital journey the husband and wife are to each other sacraments of forgiveness. They are called to support each other to reach their fullness of holiness in order to become more fully the Body of Christ. Johnson (2005) states that in marriage, men and women let go of life-long ways of thinking, behaving, prioritizing, relating, valuing, and being in order to survive. Through the gift of their bodies, they converse with each other, they serve each other, and they comfort and hold each other. In their marital sexual intimacy, Christian husbands and wives give their bodies to each other in the physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of their being, in a special and most visible way. They are in effect saying to each other, *this is my body given for you. This is the cup of my blood, of my life, of my blessings poured out for you*. Through all of this self-giving, the couple visibly manifests Christ's gift of himself to them. Christ communicates the gift of himself through their mutual self-giving (Roberts, 2006). This divine design and purpose of marriage is crystal clear in the first marriage mentioned in the Holy Scripture.

God designed marriage between man and woman to be divine.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:26-28, NKJV).

The Holy Scripture assures the divinity of Christian marriage.

"Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (I Corinthians 7:1-2, NKJV). And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning *made them male and female,* and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate"(Matthew 19:4-6, NKJV).

Christianity highly values marriage and family life (Denny, 1985). Christianity has a direct influence on marital quality by fostering a range of relationship-related values, norms and social supports, which in turn promote greater investments in the marriage, discourage behavior harmful to the marriage, and

encourage spouses to take a favorable view of their relationship (Christiano 2000; Wilcox 2005). According to Holly Scripture, husbands and wives are responsible to provide love, respect, and sexual intimacy to each other (Wheat & Perkins (1980). Christian spouses' beliefs and practice promote their psychological well-being, pro-social norms and social support (Amato & Booth 1997; Ellison 1994; Gottman 1998; Wilcox 2005; Wilcox & Nock 2006; Youm & Paik 2004). According to Christianity, God established marriage to be divine; therefore the divine commandments which relate to marriage are just as binding as those which relate to the plan of salvation or to worship. Consequently, God's laws forbid divorce unless adultery is involved.

"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Ephesians 5:31, NKJV). "Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you." (Genesis 3:16, NKJV). "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Ephesians 5:22-25, NKJV). "Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (I Corinthians 7:3-4, NKJV). "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4, NKJV).

Coptic Orthodox Marriage

Marriage in the Coptic Orthodox Church as well as in all the other traditional churches is a sacrament. It is the invisible blessing that they receive in the midst of physical, visible manifestations. The joy and energy created in Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage can help accomplish God's kingdom purposes. In the sacrament of marriage, the couple acknowledge that their conjugal life is a shadow of the church in heaven (Malaty, 1993). Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage in Egypt has always been a sacramental bond that can never be broken unless one spouse involves in adultery or apostasy. Pope Shenouda III (1999) states that Coptic Orthodox Christians follow the teachings of the Bible on marriage and divorce. The Bible states in four different places that divorce is permissible only in the case of adultery. Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage means the union of a baptized Coptic Orthodox Christian man and a baptized Coptic Orthodox Christian woman who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and join in the worship, the sacraments, and the fellowship of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

The purpose of Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage is to make men and women holy. It involves companionship, sexual relationship, children, and society. MacDonald (1979) states that the relationship between a man and a woman in marriage is the prime relationship of all mankind superseded only by that relationship which man/woman establishes with his/her God. True Coptic Orthodox Christians consider their marriage a God-given opportunity for men and women to be together in a special way. The *bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh* idea allows husbands and wives to communicate thoughts and feelings in a way not possible with animals (Balswick & Balswick, 1999). A Coptic

Orthodox Christian is allowed to marry one woman only according to the Holy Scripture. In summary from Genesis, Franks (2008) plainly concludes:

> There was the first man and first woman. They were created and brought together by God. He made one man and one woman. Each was made for the other. The first couple (male and female) formed the first "home." Their "marriage" was a God-approved mental, spiritual and physical union. The two truly became one flesh. (p. 2)

Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage in Egypt has always been sacramental bond that can never be broken. The blessing of the Coptic Orthodox Church, ministered to the bride and groom by the priest, during the wedding ceremony, conveys the grace to keep the vows given and received and to live chastely in the estate or status of matrimony.The gender relationship between a Coptic Orthodox Christian husband and his wife is on a spiritual level and is quite equal and without any discrimination in its evaluation. It is considered a small icon of the relationship between Christ and the church.

In the Coptic Orthodox family the husband is the head and the wife is the heart. "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (1Corinthians 11:3, NKJV). This is not an order of domination but rather a harmonious union. It means that within Christian marital equality there is also order. The husband is to serve God as head of his wife, as Christ is head of the Church and the wife is to be subject to her husband as the Church is, subject to Christ. There is nothing here to suggest that the wife is oppressed in marriage, anymore than one would call the Church oppressed in relationship to Christ. This perspective on the male

and female relationship within marriage is easily understood in light of the metaphor of Christ dying for the Church and the Church as the bride of Christ. Christ died for the church in love and the church submits to Christ, due to this same love.

> "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, (Ephesians 5:22-25, NKJV).

Christian husbands and wives have a sacrifice of love on both ends, and this is the Christian idea of how the marriage union should exist. The husband's actions, plans and desires are all for the benefit of his wife, for she is flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones, coming from him. Christian marriage is compared to the greatest love story ever told: Christ and the church (Wheat & Wheat, 2005). Unconditional love and submission characterize this relationship between Christ and the church. If the marital relationship is void of these God-given qualities, then there cannot be any comparison with the Lord's relationship to the church. However, as love and submission manifest themselves in areas such as joy, trust, commitment, unselfish nurturing, and companionship, the spiritual and emotional union seen in Christ and the church can also be evident in the marital relationship (Rosenau, 1994). Marriages are profound mysteries when the one flesh union incorporates physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions.

According to the Coptic Orthodox Christian faith, marriage and divorce are not treated as legal contract to be entered into and broken at will without any regards to moral

values involved in these acts. Both Coptic Orthodox husband and wife have the right for divorce in the case of evidenced adultery or apostasy. The New Testament teaches that inappropriate relationships are not acceptable to God. The Bible says: "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4, NKJV). Within the marital relationship, sexuality is an "honorable" expression of love and commitment between husbands and wives. However, by implication, inappropriate relationships are not honorable to God. These include: adultery, incest, homosexuality, rape, fornication, prostitution, and bestiality (Flatt, 1991).

Divorce

Although marriage has been associated with a number of positive benefits (e.g., health, income, child achievement), it appears that maintaining a marriage is a difficult task for many spouses in all societies and all cultures all over the world (Whiteman, McHale & Crouter, 2007; Baker,Sanchez, Nock, & Wright, 2009). Although marriage seems to be a highly desirable relationship, statistics indicate that marital satisfaction is not easily achieved (Amato, 2000; Hall, 2006). People are no longer concerned so much with completing each other as they are of meeting a need that they have. Many spouses report less positive feelings about their marriages (Hall, 2006). Halford, Kline, Markman and Stanley (2003) wonder about what enables some couples to sustain continuing high relationship satisfaction, while satisfaction erodes for others. Popenoe (1996) also explains that "No longer compromising a set of norms and social obligations that are enforced widely, marriage today is a voluntary relationship that individuals can make and break at will" (p.98).

The divorce rate in recent years has been estimated to be nearly between one half

and two thirds of all first marriages in the United States. Nearly half of all marriages end

in divorce (Hall, 2006). Research on divorce shows that divorce results in a plethora of

individual and social outcomes (Caldwell & Woolley, 2008, Fincham & Beech, 1999;

Pinsof, 2002). Social scientists, clinicians and researchers have paid a great deal of

attention to the topic of divorce over the last three decades. They agree that, socially and

psychologically, divorce is not a single event but a process of change that can extend over

long periods of time (Beck, 2007; Cherlin, 1992; Emery, 1988; Hetherington, 2003; Mo,

2007; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

Divorce Assumption

The findings of some studies show that divorced individuals have reported

increases in happiness, life satisfaction and self-esteem following the dissolution of their

marriages (Acock & Demo 1994; Kitson 1992; Riesmann 1990). These findings are

based on the assumption that removing oneself from an unsatisfying or debilitating

marriage is often considered a second chance at happiness (Ahrons 1994; Stacey 1996).

Challenging what is called the *divorce assumption*: that an unhappily married person

becomes happier by getting a divorce, Waite and Gallagher (2000) state that unhappily

married people who divorce are typically no happier on average than those who stay

married. Similarly, unhappily married people who divorce and remarry are on average no

happier than those who stay married.

Effects of Divorce

While a healthy marriage can promote spouses' personal health and well-being, a conflicted marriage can increase spouses' risk of physical and psychological dysfunction (Bookwala & Jacobs, 2004). Some divorced individuals view divorce as a crisis that starts with marital disharmony and, over the course of time, approaches a potential resolution. Divorce is a significant concern due to the detrimental effects it is proven to have on the psychological and physical health of spouses. Divorce as an evidence of spousal marital distress, and marital conflict has negative effects on the psychological and physiological functioning of the whole family. A great deal of research shows that divorced individuals show lower levels of well-being than married individuals including lower levels of happiness and self-esteem and greater psychological distress (Amato & Hohmann-Marriot, 2007; Aseltine & Kessler 1993; Beck, 2007; Comerford, 2006; Johnson & Wu 2002; Kitson 1992; Marks 1996; Marks & Lambert 1998; Simon & Marcussen 1999).

The environment of the family should be caring and nurturing, not stressful and violent. "The quality of the parents' relationship has a serious impact on children." (Renkl, 2001, p. 1). It is important for children to have happy parents because "children with happy parents have better social skills and are less depressed" (Renkl, 2001, p.1).

Divorce as probably the most widely studied and popularly discussed family stressor, has the potential for long-term deleterious effects on children and adolescents (Comerford, 2006). Dacey and Travers (2002) cited in Dykeman (2003) list many factors that influence the negative effects of divorce on children; these factors include: the age

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and sex of the child at the time of the divorce, the amount of conflict within the family

unit, and the degree of cooperation between the parents. There is a large body of

literature documenting the impact that divorce has as a stressor on children and

adolescents. Popenoe (1996) mentions that it is the children who suffer the most in

unhappy marriages when he states that with the increasing number of couples who

divorce and separate, children are being hurt in the process. For children, divorce

represents a traumatic transition from life with both parents to the condition of living with

only one (Guttmann, 1993). Divorce correlates with higher levels of childhood

"depression, withdrawal, poor social competence, health problems, poor academic

performance, and a variety of conduct-related difficulties" (Gottman, 1998, p. 170).

Children of divorce are more likely to divorce, themselves, though definitive evidence

has yet to be presented (Gottman, 1998; Guttmann, 1993; Teachman, 2002).

A variety of studies suggest that parental divorce increases the chances that

children will experience emotional problems such as depression and anxiety, and

increased substance use, have difficulty with school, engage in early sex, commit

delinquent acts, and exhibit higher rates of behavioral problems (Amato & Keith, 1991b;

Mo, 2007; Simon & Marcussen, 1999). Fagan and Rector's (2000) research showed that

children of divorce demonstrated an earlier loss of virginity, more cohabitation, higher

expectations of divorce, higher divorce rates later in life, and less desire to have children.

In their 10-year study, Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) cited many symptoms that

might be observed in the elementary school classroom in children of divorce such as

anxiety, depression, regression, asthma, allergies, tantrums, daydreaming,

overaggressive behavior, withdrawal from relationships, poor school performance,

frequent crying or absence of emotion, and, difficulty in communicating feelings. They found common themes to most children of divorce such as fear, anger, a sense of sadness or loss, feeling responsible for the well being of one or both parents, loneliness, feeling rejected, and conflicting loyalties.

Moreover, research on divorce indicates that the effects of parental divorce continue to be evident in adulthood. Amato (1994) reviewed several studies conducted on divorce and found that the results showed that adults who experienced parental divorce as children have lower psychological well-being, more behavioral problems, less education, lower job status, a lower standard of living, lower marital satisfaction, a heightened risk of divorce, a heightened risk of being a single parent, and poorer physical health than adults reared in a nuclear family. Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee's (2000) study showed that, as adults, many children of divorce were still dealing with inner conflict. Comparing adults with continuously married parents to adults with divorced parents, studies found that adults with divorced parents report less marital happiness, a greater number of marital problems, and more thoughts of divorce (Amato & Booth, 1997; Tallman, Gray, Kullberg, & Henderson, 1999; Webster, Orbuch, & House, 1995). In light of these findings, it is no surprise that, on average, adults who experienced the divorce of their parents are themselves more likely to divorce (Amato, 1999; Teachman, 2002).

Research on divorce also confirms the negative impact of divorce on the society (Diekmann & Schmidheiny, 2004). Fagan, Patterson, and Rector (2002) state that nearly three-fourths of the $200 billion spent annually in the United States on welfare is

distributed to homes headed by single parents, and eighty percent of children living

below the poverty line in the U.S. are the offspring of unmarried or divorced parents.

Divorce in the Coptic Orthodox Church

A Coptic Orthodox Christian male is allowed to marry only one woman according

to the Holy Scripture. A Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage cannot be broken by the

single will of either spouse or by their combined wills [mutual consent] because it is one

of the church's seven sacraments. Both Coptic Orthodox husband and Coptic Orthodox

wife have the right for divorce in case of evidenced adultery or apostasy only. In his

authoritative work, *The Law of Monogamy in Christianity* (1958), Pope Shenouda III

stresses that monogamy is the essence of Christian marriage, a canon law derived from

the Holy Bible and upheld within church law, whether received from the Apostles or

from ecumenical and regional synods.

According to the Coptic Orthodox Church doctrine, a marriage can be terminated

through *annulment* or *dissolution*. The term *divorce* is used in the Egyptian courts and

also in the Church when resulting from *adultery* (Thomas, 2006). According to the

Coptic Orthodox canons, a marriage could be *annulled* in cases of a major *fraud*

discovered early on that would hinder normal marital life and thus expose the innocent

spouse to the temptation of adultery. Examples of such cases would include: if the

husband were impotent, homosexual, or had a serious illness that his wife was not

previously aware of. Bishop Grigorios (2006) states that *Dissolution* of Coptic Orthodox

marriage is allowed in cases of *death* or *adultery*. Andrawos (2008) states that the

definition of adultery, as stated in the revised draft Article 115 of the suggested law for

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Egyptian Christians, was expanded to include any act that would confidently indicate

extramarital relations such as the wife running off with a stranger or spending the night(s)

away from home, letters sent to a third party indicating marital infidelity, the "suspicious"

presence of a stranger inside the family home; a husband inciting his wife to commit

adultery or debauchery, pregnancy that could not be attributed to the husband due to

absence or illness, and homosexuality.

Marital Satisfaction

Comparing married people with people who are not currently married, several

studies found that marriage is beneficial in terms of marital satisfaction, what marriage

provides, and levels of interaction with others (Kim & McKenry, 2002; Mastekaasa,

1994; Stack & Eshleman, 1998; Waite, 2000; Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2007;

Zhang & Hayward, 2006). Wienke and Hill (2009) state that the results of numerous

studies on marriage show that married people, especially men, are better than unmarried

people on several measures of well-being. Halford, Kline, Markman and Stanley (2003)

state that "in most Western countries 50% or more of couples who marry remain together

for the rest of their lives and the vast majority of these couples report being satisfied in

their relationship at least most of the time" (p. 15). Some studies suggest that marriage,

alone, is predictive of healthy psychological well-being (Acock & Demo, 1994; Kim &

McKenry, 2002). However, other studies suggest that the state of marriage alone does not

determine emotional health; rather the quality of the marriage determines emotional

health (Waite, 2000; Kim & McKenry, 2002). The results of numerous studies suggest

that people tend to be both healthier and happier when they are married (Gottman, 1994;

Orbuch & Custer, 1995; White, 1994). Summarizing the findings of various studies on

the benefits of stable and satisfying marriages, Wolcott and Hughes (1999) found that marital satisfaction is associated with improved physical health, mental health and material wealth for both men and women.

Literature on marriage and family relationships shows that marital satisfaction is the most frequently studied aspect in research on marriage and family relationships (Bookwala & Jacobs, 2004; Heyman, Sayers, & Bellack, 1994; Larson et al., 1995). People tend to expect that marriage will make them happy and fulfilled. Marital satisfaction which assesses the quality of spousal relationships is one of the most researched and documented effects of attachment style (Meyers & Landsberger, 2002).

The interaction processes between husbands and their wives strongly influence the level of their marital satisfaction. Marital interaction processes refer to interactions of the couple, not just to actions of the individual (Spanier, 1989). Mackey and O'Brien (1995) cited in Rosen-Grandon, Myers, and Hattie, (2004) identified five marital interaction processes that enhance marital satisfaction: (a) containment of conflict; (b) mutuality in decision making; (c) quality of communication; (d) sexual and psychological intimacy; and (e) relational values of trust, respect, empathetic understanding, and equity. Research also shows that other marital interaction processes that enhance marital satisfaction include: consensus, cohesion, and affectional expression (Spanier, 1976, as cited in Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004). While 'consensus' refers to agreement on matters of finances, recreation, religious matters, friendships, proper behavior, philosophy of life, ways of dealing with parents and in-laws, agreement on aims and goals, agreement on time spent together, decision making, division of household labor, leisure activities, and career decisions, 'cohesion' refers to the degree to which an individual feels connected to

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or separate from the marital relationship system (Spanier & Lewis, 1980, 1981). Craddock (1991) indicates that cohesion involves emotional bonding, or how close partners feel to each other, and can be measured on a scale that extends from enmeshment [high cohesion] to disengagement [low cohesion]. Affectional expression pertains to demonstrations of affection and sexual relations. Ade-Ridder (1990) found that continued sexual activity and sexual interest were important to maintaining a high quality marriage in later life.

Research regarding factors that influence marital satisfaction shows that potential factors impacting marital satisfaction include: gender (Brahnam, Marganavio, Hignite, & Barrier, 2005; Calasanti & Kiecolt, 2007; Glenn, 1990; Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1992; Kulik, 2004); length of marriage (Bookwala, Sobin, & Zdaniuk, 2005; Kulik, 2002; Russell Hatch & Bulcroft, 2004); Communication skills (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Weiss & Heyman, 1997); sexual satisfaction (Farley & Davis, 1980; Frank, Anderson, & Rubenstein, 1979; Health, 1978; Hurlbert, Apt, & Rabehl, 1993; Newcomb & Bentler, 1983; Przybyla & Byrne, 1981); the ability to give/receive positive support and the use of blame, anger and rejection in conflict resolution (Pasch & Bradbury, 1998); the use of the wife demand-husband withdraw conflict resolution pattern (Kurdek, 1995); self-disclosure and partner disclosure on a day-to-day basis and perceived responsiveness of spouse (Laurenceau, Feldman Barrett & Rovine, 2005); ones views of their partners specific traits (Neff & Karney, 2005); relationship personality and conflict resolution style (Schneewind & Gerhard , 2002); and the ability to forgive one's spouse in times of conflict (Fincham, Beach & Davila, 2004).

Young and Long (1998) identified a list of characteristics of healthy couples as follows: (1) a belief in relative rather than absolute truth, (2) an assumption that the partner has good motives, (3) a belief that differences will be resolved, (4) a belief in something larger, (5) the practice of healthy behavior, (6) responsibility, (7) alignment of goals, (8) encouragement, (9) open communication, (10) empathic listening, (11) willingness to analyze and discuss the relationship, (12) demonstration of acceptance, (13) support of positive goals of the marriage, and (14) joint conflict resolution, and commitment to the equality of the relationship.

Summarizing Larson and Holman's (1994) review of the literature on marital satisfaction from an ecological perspective, Rosen-Grandon, Myers, and Hattie (2004) listed three categories of factors: (a) background or contextual factors (i.e., family-of-origin variables, sociocultural factors, and current contexts), (b) individual traits and behaviors, and (c) couple interaction processes. Fenell (1993) cited in Rosen-Grandon, Myers, and Hattie (2004) identified the 10 most important characteristics of marital satisfaction, in order from most to least important, as (1) Lifetime commitment to marriage, (2) Loyalty to spouse, (3) Strong moral values, (4) Respect for spouse as a friend, (5) Commitment to sexual fidelity, (6) Desire to be a good parent, (7) Faith in God and spiritual commitment, (8) Desire to please and support spouse, (9) Good companion to spouse, and (10) Willingness to forgive and be forgiven. The results of a public opinion poll indicated that the most important components of marriage were faithfulness (93%), understanding (86%), a good sex life (75%), children (59%), common interests (52%), sharing household chores (43%), having enough money (41%), and sharing

similar backgrounds (25%) (Collins & Coltrane, 1991, as cited in Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004).

When spouses feel dissatisfied with their marital relationship, they start to have negative thinking and negative attitudes. Such negative thinking and negative attitudes are reflected in some negative behaviors such as criticism, blame, verbal and physical aggression, and verbal and physical abuse. These negative marital behaviors are believed to negatively influence spouses' personal well-being (Fincham & Bradbury, 1990; Laakso & Paunonen-Illmonen, 2002). Literature on marital quality and personal well-being indicates that individuals experiencing marital dissatisfaction tend to report higher levels of depressive symptoms than those who are satisfied (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007; Caldwell & Woolley, 2008; Culp & Beach, 1998, Umberson, Williams, Powers, Liu, & Needham, 2005; Williams & Dunne-Bryant, 2006). Longitudinal studies indicate that marital dissatisfaction predicts increases in depressive symptoms over time (Fincham, Beach, Harold, & Osborne, 1997; Kurdek, 1998; Proulx,Helms, & Buehler, 2007).

It is clear from the reviewed literature on marital satisfaction that the factors that positively or negatively influence spousal marital satisfaction vary in the type and effect. Most people start their marital experience in their early adulthood and remained in it in the rest of their life. The marital relationship, then, constitutes a very large proportion of most people's life experience. Marriage involves sharing, intimacy and responsibilities. Its importance to a person's life is beyond question. Numerous studies have demonstrated that satisfaction in marriage highly correlate with life satisfaction for both genders (Glenn & Weaver, 1981; Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen, & Wilson, 1983). We can expect that a lot of spouses' dissatisfaction in their life is related to their low level of

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marital satisfaction. Hence, if spouses can understand the factors that lead to their marital satisfaction, they can be better equipped to identify issues and areas that need intervention to improve their marital relationship.

Marital Satisfaction and Gender

Generally speaking, both husbands and wives benefit from marriage. Husbands benefit from their marriage because they often get their needs met through the nurturing and observant nature of women. Wives benefit from their marriage through the social assumptions of financial and emotional security and immediate social support. Studying the effects of culture and gender on heterosexual mate preferences in 33 countries, Buss et al. (1990) found that men and women around the world agree that love and mutual attraction are the most important factors in mate selection. Additional factors that received near-universal support were dependability, emotional stability, kindness, and understanding. Neff and Karney (2005) state that virtually all recently married couples admit to strong feelings of love and marital satisfaction.

While some studies show that married men and women experience improved holistic health (Waite, 2000), other studies find marriage to be emotionally disadvantageous for women and particularly beneficial to men (McGrath, Keita, Strickland, & Russo 1990; Simon, 2002). Many studies show that the benefits of marriage seem to be more significant for men than for women (Coombs, 1991; Wienke & Hill, 2009). Several studies show the positive effects of marriage on men, however findings vary in regards to women. When compared to their single counterparts, married women have more stress, less sense of mastery, and lower self-esteem. Married men, on

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the other hand, are healthier and happier and live longer than single men (Brown, Brody, & Stoneman, 2000; Dooley & Prause, 2002; Wienke & Hill, 2009). Research found that widowed and never married women, experience more psychological distress than separated and divorced women (Williams, 1988). Research also found that the divorced and never married women were substantially more depressed than married women (Acock & Demo, 1994).

Over the last five decades, researchers have witnessed several changes in gender relationship within marriage such as spouses' economic roles, work-family conflict, perceptions of fairness regarding the household division of labor, gender-role attitudes, and the balance of marital power. Both women and men have become less traditional in their gender-role attitudes, since the late 1960s (Thornton, 1989). Most husbands and wives shifted from traditional gender-role attitudes that stress the distinct nature of the husband-breadwinner and the wife-homemaker-mother roles to nontraditional roles that emphasize shared capacities for economic productivity and nurturance, as well as egalitarian power relations. Several studies suggest that this shift in attitudes (combined with greater sharing of work and family roles) should contribute to improvements in marital quality at the aggregate level (Coltrane 1996). Oppenheimer (1997) notes that marriage based on a sharing model is more flexible and therefore better equipped to respond to the loss or incapacitation of a partner than a marriage based on strict gender specialization. According to life course theory (Elder, 1994), these changes may have enhanced marital quality or may have contributed to the deterioration of marital quality.

The differences between husbands and wives' views of marital satisfaction as well as the factors influencing it have been examined in research. (Kurdek, 1995;

Laurenceau, Feldman Barrett & Rovine, 2005; Neff & Karney, 2005; Vangelisti & Huston, 1994). Studies suggest that gender is an important mediating or moderating variable of the marital relationship (Brahnam, Marganavio, Hignite, & Barrier, 2005; Calasanti & Kiecolt, 2007; Glenn, 1990; Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1992; Kulik, 2004). Marital satisfaction is associated positively with wives' life satisfaction (Freudiger, 1983) as well as with wives' and husbands' reports of global happiness (Glenn & Weaver, 1981) and self-esteem (Voss, Markiewicz, & Doyle, 1999).

Research shows that women generally report lower satisfaction than men in marriage. This is reported in several studies on the relationship between marital satisfaction and gender conducted in the West (Brahnam, Marganavio, Hignite, & Barrier, 2005; Calasanti & Kiecolt, 2007; Fowers, 1991). Similar findings have been reported in studies conducted in some non-Western countries such as China (Shek, 1995) and Zimbabwe (Abas & Broadhead, 1997). Examining the relationship among attitudes toward love, expectations about marriage, and marital satisfaction, Katz and Briger (1988) found that the more women perceived themselves as being entitled to be loved and treated as equals in marriage, the higher the level of their marital satisfaction. Some studies found that married women are able to experience lower levels of psychological distress because of the benefits of marriage (Brown et al., 2000; Green & Rodgers, 2001; McGrath, Keita, Strickland, & Russo, 1990). Other studies showed that married women possess higher levels of distress and that marriage can be a source of conflict (Cotton, 1999; Horwitz & White, 1991).

The reviewed research indicated that the factors which influence wives' marital satisfaction include: levels of intimacy, the ability to self-disclose with their spouses and

perceive their partners as responsive (Laurenceau, Feldman Barrett & Rovine, 2005);

husband's affectional expression and level of negativity (Huston & Chorost, 1994); and

the amount of time they had to spend doing things with friends/ relatives/ their spouse as

well as their communication styles (Vangelisti & Huston, 1994).

There is almost a consensus in the results of several studies on marriage quality

that marriage seems to confer greater health benefits on men than on women (Bernard,

1982; Brahnam, Marganavio, Hignite, & Barrier, 2005; Hu & Goldman, 1990; Joung,

Stronks, van de Mheen, & Mackenbach, 1995). Research shows that the factors which

influence husbands' marital satisfaction include: the presence of wife pursue/husband

distance conflict resolution style, their satisfaction with their sexual relationship, the

division of household tasks/ view of gender roles and the degree of input they perceive

they have in the relationship (Vangelisti & Huston, 1994). Research also supports the

idea that husbands' marital satisfaction is more frequently affected by how their wives

resolve conflict (Bookwala, Solin, & Zdaniuk, 2005; Kurdek, 1995).

Marital satisfaction and length of marriage

Marriage length, sometimes referred to as marital longevity, has been identifies in

literature as a potential influence on marital satisfaction. Research shows that the length

of marriage is positively associated with marital satisfaction (Bookwala, Sobin, &

Zdaniuk, 2005; Kulik, 2002; Russell Hatch & Bulcroft, 2004). Vangelisti and Huston

(1994) filtered the various factors that influence marital satisfaction for married couples

into eight major domains: communication, influence, sexual relationship, own leisure

(how one spends free time), division of household tasks, time together, external network,

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and finances. Research also shows that intimacy, amount of physical affection, love and relationship satisfaction which are related to level of sexual satisfaction are indicative characteristics of the quality of a relationship in long-term marriages (Lawrance and Byers, 1995; Oggins, Leber and Veroff, 1993). Rosen-Grandon, Myers, and Hattie's (2004) review of literature on marital satisfaction shows that marriage longevity can be divided into three stages: 1) initial stage lasting less than 3 years, 2) mid-length marriages lasting between 4 and 20 years, and 3) long-term marital relationships. Literature on marital satisfaction also shows that marital satisfaction tends to follow a U-path (Anderson, Russell, & Schumm, 1983; Belsky, Lang, & Rovine, 1985; Glenn, 1990; Lee, 1988; Weishaus & Field, 1988). VanLaningham , Johnson and Amato (2001) point out, "Most studies suggest a U-shaped association characterized by high marital happiness in the early years of marriage, a decline in marital happiness during the middle years, and a rise in marital happiness in later years" (p. 2).

Researchers have found that marital satisfactions tends to be high during the initial stages of the marriage and then declines for the approximately 10 to 20 years (Orbuch, House, Mero, & Webster, 1996). Virtually all recently married couples admit to strong feelings of love and marital satisfaction (Neff & Karney, 2005). Some researchers take the stance that marital dissatisfaction is to be expected as a marriage progresses, as disillusionment causes the initial feelings of optimism and happiness to fade (Cherlin, 1992, as cited in Neff & Karney, 2005). Patrick, Sells, Giordano, and Tollerud (2007) cited several studies that support the positive influence of long-term marriage on spousal marital satisfaction level. Lauer et al., (1990), as cited in Rosen-Grandon et al. (2004) state that couples that had been married for more than 45 years attributed their marital

satisfaction to the following components: (a) They were married to someone they liked, (b) they had a commitment to the person as well as to the marriage, (c) they had a sense of humor, and (d) they were able to reach consensus (i.e., agreement). Robinson and Blanton (1993) cited in Rosen-Grandon et al. (2004) studied couples who had been married an average of 40 years. They identified the key characteristics of happy marriages as (a) intimacy, (b) commitment, (c) communication, (d) congruence, and (e) shared religious orientation. The list of characteristics that are related to enhanced marital quality includes: love, reciprocity, communication, understanding, religious orientation, patience, commitment, intimacy, shared responsibility, personal identity, persistence, hopefulness, flexible boundaries, and congruence (Robinson and Blanton, 1993, as cited in Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004).

Vangelisti and Huston (1994) state that, husbands and wives report declines in the level of satisfaction in areas such as the quality of communication, the amount of influence/control they have in the relationship, their sexual relationship, and the amount of time they were able to spend together as time passed. Several studies show that while the introduction of children into the marriage decreases the closeness between spouses, children leaving homes allows spouses to grow closer (Belsky, Lang, & Rovine, 1985; Lee, 1988).

Summary

This study is an extension of the previous studies that focused on either the relationship between marital characteristics and marital satisfaction as reported in Kurdek (1995), using a different population among minorities in the United States. It is in line

with the previous studies that examined the perception of marital satisfaction as well as the factors that positively and/or negatively influence the level of spousal marital satisfaction reported in Glenn, 1990; Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1992; Russell Hatch & Bulcroft, 2004).

This chapter summarizes the literature pertinent to marriage, divorce and marital satisfaction. I reviewed the most related components of each of these three areas to benefit in setting the conceptual framework of the present study and in comparing its findings with those of other similar studies. Under marriage, I reviewed literature on marriage and psychological well-being, Christian marriage and Coptic orthodox marriage. In the divorce section, I reviewed the pertinent literature on divorce assumption, effects of divorce, and divorce in the Coptic Orthodox Church. In the marital satisfaction section, I reviewed the pertinent literature on: the factors that influence marital satisfaction, marital interaction processes that enhance marital satisfaction, marital satisfaction and gender, and marital satisfaction and marriage length.

CHAPTER 1II

METHODS

In this chapter, I describe the method and research design that was used to

examine the lived marital experience of Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American

husbands and wives. I also describe the conceptual framework which guided the study.

I discuss the research method and design, research instruments, and sampling procedures.

I address the ethical issues and protection of participants' rights. I also discuss the data

collection methods, data analysis, and the limitations of the study. The chapter concludes

with a short summary.

Conceptual Framework

The intent of this study was to examine Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-

American husbands and wives' perceptions of marital satisfaction and the factors that

influence it. More specifically, the study was an exploration into the marital lived

experience of the Coptic Orthodox Christian husbands and wives who immigrated to the

United States, got naturalized after staying for at least five years and became acculturated

to the American culture. It was an attempt to analyze the relevant themes that emerged

from the focus group discussions and the six key informant interviews with Coptic

Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives who participated in the

study, in an attempt to develop a rich description of their lived marital experiences.

Choosing a Qualitative Method

In order to obtain a comprehensive understanding and awareness of the

phenomenon of the lived marital experiences of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-

American husbands and wives, I used a qualitative design based on an ethnographic approach with phenomenological and symbolic interactionism perspectives. I used a qualitative research method in the present study in order to produce detailed data, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the topic. Qualitative research has been seen by many researchers as the preferable way to obtain in-depth knowledge and insight regarding human experience (Coyle, 1998; Lundervold & Belwood, 2000; Morgan, 1996). Creswell (1994) defines a qualitative study as the "inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complete, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting" (p.2). Krathwohl (1998) states, "Qualitative research methods are particularly useful in understanding how individuals understand their world, in showing how individuals' perceptions and intentions in situations determine their behavior, in exploring phenomena to find explanation, and in providing concrete and detailed illustrations of phenomena" (p. 225). I used Creswell's (1998) definition of qualitative research as the rationale for using the qualitative design for the present study. Creswell (1998) explains that a qualitative design is a process of understanding based on analysis of words, that it reports detailed views of informants, and that it is conducted in a natural setting. Berg (2007) states that a qualitative design is necessary, in order to achieve an in-depth understanding of a certain phenomenon in a social setting. Qualitative research studies are completed in natural settings, using data collected from these settings in an attempt to make sense of it. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000):

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible.

These practices transform the world. They turn the world into series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p. 3).

Therefore, I used the qualitative method design in this study to achieve its main goal which was examining Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' perceptions and perspectives of marital satisfaction. I invited the participants to explain and describe the essence of their day-to-day lived marital experiences including strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and how they interact with one another, in order to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon from multiple perspectives.

Ethnography

To fully understand the lived marital experiences of the participating husbands and wives, a qualitative inquiry of an ethnographic nature seemed most suitable for this study. Ethnography has been defined as the primary method of anthropology which is the earliest distinct tradition of qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002). It is observing, participating in and recording a people's way of life (Marvasti, 2004). Ethnographic research focuses on acquiring, describing and effectively presenting the participants' voices as the lens by which the reader can interpret and make meaning of the values, beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, that a specific group or case of individuals within an exclusive cultural setting contextualize their behaviors (Patton, 1990). Marvasti (2004)

emphasizes three dimensions of ethnography: (a) involvement with and participation in the topic being studied, (b) attention to the social context of data collection, and (c) sensitivity to how subjects are presented in the research text.

I selected the ethnographic approach because this study sought to find out about the Coptic Orthodox Christian husbands and wives' lived marital experiences including their perceptions of marital satisfaction, factors they feel contribute to or interfere with their satisfaction with their marriage, their desired changes to enhance their satisfaction with their marriage, and how the Coptic Orthodox Church can contribute in the enrichment of their marriage. The ethnographic approach used in the current study allowed Coptic Oorthodox Christian husbands and wives to describe their cultural behaviors and marital practices. Listening to the voices of the participating husbands and wives seemed to be an appropriate and important way to gain a better understanding of their marital culture and practices and provide a rich insight into their lived marital experiences.

Phenomenology

I used a qualitative, phenomenological perspective in the present study because it seemed better suited to provide a framework for yielding deeper understandings of the meaning attached to the lived marital experiences of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives. Phenomenology is both a philosophical theory and a research methodology. As a philosophical concept, phenomenology is the study of things that present themselves immediately to us as human beings. The goal of phenomenology as a research methodology is to put oneself in the place of another, and

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then to retell an experience to others in the culture so there can be a greater understanding. Phenomenology, as a research methodology, allows researchers to ask questions that are very specific to the nature of the experiences of a group or individual and to use cultural symbols to convey the experience with as little interference as possible. Leedy (1997) defines phenomenology as "a research method that attempts to understand participants' perspectives and views of social realities" (p. 161). By adopting this approach, the researcher must attempt to, "understand how individuals perceive the meaning of the world around them and seek to view it through their eyes, how people understand their world and their surroundings" (Krathwohl, 1998, p. 235). Phenomenological research attempts to describe, as vividly and thoughtfully as possible, the meanings or essences of lived human experiences. Patton (2002) states that phenomenological research is the study of essences; it is a search for what it means to be human. Kruger (1988) points out that phenomenological research attempts to describe people's everyday world, rather than providing explanations.

The idea of *the lived experience* is common in the language of phenomenology. van Manen (1997) suggests that the "essence" of a thing should not be mystified. Rather, he stated, an essence is a good description, one that "is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way" (p. 39). It is important to understand the interpretations of phenomena and to uncover the essence, or shared experiences of participants (Patton, 2002). van Manen (1990) outlines six assumptions, or methodological structures of phenomenologically-oriented research. These assumptions are: (a) research is interested in a particular phenomenon that sparks

the curiosity of the researcher, (b) the study of the phenomenon focuses not on how it is already conceptualized (or presumed to be), but on what the phenomenon reveals about itself, (c) reflection and analysis center on common or essential themes that emerge from the lived experience, (d) the phenomenon is described in written form (rather than through statistics), (e) the researcher must remain strongly engaged by the experience, (f) understanding the phenomenon occurs by considering both the details of the experience and the overall meaning suggested by the experience. I used the phenomenological perspective in the present study to examine the day-to-day lived marital experiences of the participating husbands and wives and to understand their perceptions and perspectives of marital satisfaction.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the use of symbols and shared interactions to make meanings and interpretations. According to Patton (2001) "people create shared meanings through their interactions and those meanings become a reality" (p.112). From a sociological perspective, symbolic interactionism focuses on the shared meanings that people create to give meaning to their experiences (Patton, 2003). The symbolic interactionism approach emphasizes "the importance of paying attention to how particular interactions give rise to symbolic understandings when one is engaged in exchanging symbols" (Patton, 2003, p. 113).

In this study, I used symbolic interactionism to highlight the common symbols or perceptions that emerged as important lived marital experiences of the Coptic Orthodox Christian husbands and wives living in Pennsylvania, as well as to make meaning of the

common interpretations of their marital experiences in light of their Coptic Orthodox Christian faith and their perspectives of Christian marriage. According to the Coptic Orthodox Christian faith, Christian marriage, as the Apostle Paul taught, symbolizes or replicates the relationship between Christ and the Church where Christ is the Bridegroom and the Church the Bride. In the eyes of the Coptic Orthodox Church, marriage is a holy sacrament, blessed and everlasting sacrament in the sight of God and His Church. When Jesus discussed marriage with the Pharisees he said:

> "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh" (Matthew 19 4-6, NKJV).

He was talking about a spiritual and physical union that encompasses love, creation and sacrifice. Coptic Orthodox Marriage is the sacramental union between a man and a woman that is used in the Bible as the image of God's faithful love for ancient Israel (Isaiah 54; Jeremiah 3; Ezekiel 16, NKJV) and Christ's sacrificial relationship to the Church (Ephesians 5, NKJV). The word sacrament here conveys the depths of the covenantal bond the bride and groom are about to enter into. For Coptic Orthodox Christians, the sacrament of marriage is the oath of loyalty unto death the bride and groom make to each other and, as a couple, their oath of loyalty unto death to our Lord Jesus Christ, *the King of kings and Lord of lords.* According to the faith of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Christian marriage is intended to be a sign of God's presence and love in this fallen and broken world. The Matrimony Sacrament in the Orthodox Church

sanctifies the union of a man and a woman who are brought into a communion of love for mutual companionship and fulfillment (Bishop Mettaous, 2002).

This blessed union is not expressed through vows, but through a shared and committed relationship with the Risen Christ. Therefore, the couple, the clergy, and the laity pray that this Christian marriage be sanctified and preserved by God in the image of Christ's perfect union to the Church. Unlike the wedding ceremonies in most non-Orthodox churches, marriage in the Coptic Orthodox Church is not a contract or a legal agreement with the exchange of vows or promises between two people. Rather, marriage is a sacrament where two independent people, man and woman, become one flesh, one united being. Marriage is the setting up, by two people, of a miniature church, a family church, wherein people may worship the true God and struggle to save their souls. It is also a family church that is in obedience to Christ's Church. Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage is not two checking accounts or two business interests being merged; it is not merely a contract signed by two partners. Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage is a way of life. It is a whole of habits, attitudes, ideas, and actions coming together. The Coptic Orthodox spouses, as followers of Christ, take their whole direction from Christ and His Church, and not from the standards of today's world.

Coptic Orthodox Christian husbands and wives take the love of Christ for the Church as a symbol and a model for their family life and make what can be called a *house church* or *a family church* for their family. Naturally, this is not something that can be achieved overnight but is something that must be strived for. Spouses struggle to overcome their pride and ego in order to submit to each other. In a sense, they martyr themselves for each other. In true Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage, authentic and

true love seeks to replicate the type of self-sacrifice Christ revealed to us when He became man and dwelt among us (and which is still expressed today in Christ's faithfulness to His Church). Self-sacrificial love conforms to the Great Commandment to love our neighbor more highly than ourselves in so doing we also love and honor God (Matthew 25:36-40, 1 John 4:19-21, NKJV).

True Coptic Orthodox Christian spouses consider their marriage as a three-fold journey. First, Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage is a journey of sorrows and joys. When the sorrows seem overwhelming, then they should remember that God is with them. He will take up their cross. It was He who placed the crowns of marriage on their heads. Second, Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage is a journey of love. It is the creation of a new human being, a new person, for, as the Gospel says, "the two will be as one flesh" (Matthew 19.5; Mark 10.7, NKJV). The true Coptic Orthodox Christian spouses strongly believe that God has united them, and made them one. From this union of two people, who agree to synchronize their footsteps and harmonize the beating of their hearts, a new human being emerges. Through such profound and spontaneous love, the one becomes a presence, a living reality, in the heart of the other. The true Coptic Orthodox Christian spouses who have become one flesh and one spirit cannot live a single day, even a few moments, without the companion of each other's life. They believe that they are part of each other's being; they complement one another.

The most fundamental component in the Coptic Orthodox marriage is love, and love is about uniting two into one. God abhors separation and divorce. He wants unbroken unity (Matthew 19.3-9; Mark 10.2-12, NKJV). During the Sacrament Rite, the priest takes the engagement rings off the bride and bridegroom's fingers of their right

hands, puts them on the fingers of their left hands to be closely connected to the heart. The Coptic Orthodox Christian couple exchange names on the marriage rings to show that, in life's changes, they will remain united. Each spouse wears a ring with the name of the other spouse written on it, which is placed on the finger from which a vein runs directly to the heart. That is, the name of the other is written on his own heart. The one, we could say, gives the blood of his heart to the other. He or she encloses the other within the core of his/her being.

Husbands and wives live to love each other, tolerate each other's faults, and do whatever makes them happy. A true Coptic Orthodox Christian spouse usually asks himself or herself about *what his or her partner wants, what interests him or her, and what gives him or her pleasure.* They are concerned about each other's worries, interests, job, friends, so that they can have everything in common. Husbands are called to love and care for their bride with selfless commitment. "Husbands love your wives," St. Paul wrote, "as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:21, NKJV). The husband gladly gives way to his wife. Because he loves her, he goes to bed last and gets up first in the morning. He regards her parents as his own, and loves them and is devoted to them. True Coptic Orthodox Christian husband should always remember that his wife has been entrusted to him by God. His wife is a soul which God has given to him, and one day he must return it. He loves his wife as Christ loves the Church (Ephesians 5.25, NKJV). He protects her, takes care of her, gives her security, particularly when she is distressed, or when she is ill. We know how sensitive a woman's soul can be, which is why the Apostle Peter urges husbands to honor their wives (1 Peter 3.7, NKJV).

Third, Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage is a journey to heaven, a call from God. It is, as the Holy Scripture says, a "great mystery" (Ephesians 5.32, NKJV). Marriage is a mystery (Sacrament), a mystical presence. Christ says, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am among them" (Matthew. 18.20, NKJV). And whenever two people are married in the name of Christ, they become the sign which contains and expresses Christ himself. This is also why crowns are placed on their heads during the wedding ceremony, because the bride and groom are an image of Christ and the Church.

According to the faith of the Coptic Orthodox Church, during the matrimony Sacrament, the Holy Spirit unites the couple and makes them one flesh with different roles. Any worldly organization or institution, whether it is a church, a parish, a monastery, a bank, a corporation, a school, must have a head, a leader. The same is true for a successful Christian marriage. According to the faith of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Church, the husband is the head of the family and the wife is its heart. The family is a spiritual and physical organization where the husband is the leader. He represents the principle of authority in the family. Just as the priest is the spiritual leader of the church, and responsible to God for the congregation, and thus the spiritual authority in the church, so too the husband is the priest in his family, responsible for setting the tone of family life. This does not mean that he is superior to his wife. In Christ's sight, all are equal; there is neither male nor female. In fact, marriage is a partnership of equals. Being the head does not give a husband any kind of dictatorial, tyrannical, arbitrary, or absolute authority over his wife and children. But, as with every position of importance, certain responsibilities go with this one, and they are very heavy,

very difficult, but also very challenging and potentially creative responsibilities. The Holy Scripture tells us that the husband must love his wife even as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:25, NKJV).

Love from the Coptic Orthodox Christian standpoint, means sacrifice, and self-denial. A husband must take as much care, concern, thoughtfulness, attention, regard and precautions for his wife as Christ takes for the Church. The husband's attentiveness might even have to extend to death itself. For just as Christ was put to death for His love of the Church, so too the Coptic Orthodox Christian husband must yield all things, even his life, if necessary for his wife. The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church. We know what kind of head Christ was. He washed the feet of His disciples. According to our Savior, to be head, to be first, means to serve and to be the first in giving love, in giving understanding, in giving patience, and in providing his family with protection. This is the kind of leader, or head, that the husband is called to be. And when he is this kind of leader, he is a real man, a true man, faithful to his divinely ordained nature. According to the faith of the Coptic Orthodox Church, the wife is the heart of the family. A wise wife encourages her husband to be this kind of man; she does not try to take on the position of authority herself. The wife expresses love for her husband through obedience. She is obedient to him exactly as the Church is to Christ (Ephesians 5.22-24, NKJV). It is her happiness to do the will of her husband. Attitude, obstinacy, and complaining are the axes which chop down the tree of conjugal happiness. The wife is the heart that loves. In her husband's moments of difficulty, she stands at his side. In his moments of joy, she tries to raise him up to even higher heights and ideals. In times of sorrow, she stands by him like a sublime and peaceful world offering him tranquility.

All these behavioral acts and interactions between Coptic orthodox husbands and their wives have a meaning for both of them. According to Patton (2001) "people create shared meanings through their interactions and those meanings become a reality" (p.112). According to the Coptic Orthodox Church's faith, the meaning attached to Christian marriage primarily is that of commitment, responsibility, loyalty, and sacrificing love.

The present qualitative study involved the way Coptic Orthodox Christian husbands and wives interact with one another, make, and share meanings from their interactions in light of their Coptic Orthodox faith and the Coptic Orthodox Church perspectives of marriage. Therefore, I used an ethnographic approach with phenomenological and symbolic interactionism perspectives to allow for a more systemic approach to making sense of the data that was collected since both methodologies rely heavily on understanding personal, human experience through traditionally qualitative methods.

Research Design

According to van Manen (1997), "the methodology is the theory behind the method, including the study of what method one should follow and why" (p. 27-28). Patton (2002) suggests that the philosophical tradition of an investigation should serve the central question under examination. To answer the research questions of the present study, I chose a qualitative approach. Qualitative research methods are most often interactive and relational. Qualitative research by its inherent nature is designed to propose, answer and support questions and conclusions regarding lived or social experiences (Merriam, 2002).

In this qualitative study, I used an ethnographic approach with phenomenological and symbolic interactionism perspectives. This ethnographic approach was uniquely suited to enable me to: understand the participating husbands and wives' perceptions of marital satisfaction, discover how they interact with their spouses, and make and share meanings from their interactions. This was accomplished by having them explain and describe the essence of their day-to-day lived marital experiences including strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and how they interact with one another to make, and share meanings from their interactions. To answer the research questions, I used three traditional qualitative methods of data-gathering, namely focus group interviews, key informant interviews, and researcher observations in collecting data.

Methods and Instrumentation

In conducting the present qualitative study, which used the ethnographic approach with phenomenological and symbolic interactionism perspectives, I used three traditional qualitative methods of data-gathering, namely focus group interviews, key informant interviews, and researcher observations.

Focus Group Interviews

Based on the nature of this qualitative study, I used semi-structured individual and focus-group interviews as the primary data collection instrument. With more attention being given to qualitative research, greater interest has been shown in focus groups. The practical and efficient nature of focus groups has led to a rapid increase in the popularity of the technique. Recently, there has been phenomenal growth in the use of focus groups in social science research (Morgan, 2002). This growth is likely due to the strengths of

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this method, which lends itself particularly well to social science research. The focus group method is being used more frequently in applied research (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990), and it has been expanded to the areas of public health, education, communications, media studies, feminist research, sociology, and psychology (Wilkinson, 2003). Focus groups can best be described as group interviews in which group interaction and discussion centers on a topic specified by the researcher (Morgan, 1988). The group interaction is expected to produce insights that would be difficult to obtain through individual interviews (Lengua et al., 1992; Morgan, 1988).

Although many qualitative research methodologies are time-intensive (Paisley & Reeves, 2001), focus groups provide a relatively time-efficient means of gathering rich data. From a qualitative research orientation, in order to more effectively understand and capture the perspectives and viewpoints of the participants, open-ended questions should be used during both individual and focus-group interviews (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1998). Focus groups are a qualitative research methodology that can be used to obtain information about the opinions, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and insights of a small group of people (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999). Such groups provide a means of obtaining participants' unique understandings of experiences.

In particular, focus groups are helpful in evaluation research or in understanding how people regard a specific experience or event (Krueger, 1994). Focus groups are a way of listening to and learning from people (Morgan, 1998a), a way of gathering data about the *meanings* of an issue to a particular group (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001). Focus groups are especially useful when a researcher needs more generalized, group data rather than an *individual account* (Morgan, 1997, 1998a). Focus

groups are increasingly viewed as a valid research method, especially when a researcher is interested in "filling in between the lines", thereby gaining a deeper understanding of issues (Edmunds, 1999). Focus groups involve gaining information through group discussion from a small number of people. Morgan (1996) defines focus groups as "a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher" (p. 130). In general, the focus group is a research method, it has a specific aim, and it engages participants in discussion. As with other types of qualitative research methods, the focus group can provide meaning, insight, and understanding to facts or events (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1998a; Patton, 2002). The goal of the focus group interviews is to have participants openly discuss and exchange ideas about topics relevant to the purpose of this study (Kvale, 1996).

My intent in this qualitative study was to engage the participants in a face-to-face dialogue concerning their lived marital experiences with a specific focus on their marital satisfaction. Seidman (1998) asserts "at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 3). Krueger (1994) describes a focus group as a "carefully planned activity designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive and non-threatening environment" (p. 6). As a function of their design, focus groups center on the interaction among participants. It is this interaction among group members that make focus group discussion "more than the sum of separate individual interviews" (Morgan, 1996, p. 139) and enhance openness and disclosure (Kitzinger, 1995; Wilkinson, 1998). Because the group dynamics are in the hands of the participants as opposed to the researcher, focus groups were a relatively egalitarian and empowering research method

that best suited the nature of Coptic Orthodox Christians who are by nature very sociable and collective who like to talk about their experiences when they feel comfortable and secure.

I used focus group discussions for this qualitative study because of their advantages in accessing participants' own language and concepts (Flores & Alonso, 1995; Bertrand, Brown & Ward, 1992). Because participants in focus groups primarily talk to one another rather than to the researcher; they tend to communicate in ways that more closely resemble their everyday conversation. As a result, I used focus group discussions because they were particularly sensitive to the faith and cultural values of Coptic Orthodox Christians Egyptian-Americans.

To conclude, one advantage of using focus group discussions in the present study was the interaction that enhanced discussions by stimulating or triggering participants' ideas and their format, generated feelings of involvement and buy-in among participants, and raised important issues and nuances that I did not foresee. This allowed me to probe participants for additional information or to clarify a participant's response. Therefore, I used open-ended questions which led to further discussions among participants as well as further in-depth exploration of their lived marital experiences. The collective responses of individuals gathered across the two focus group discussions yielded a set of themes and thus provided insight into the participants' perceptions and perspectives of their lived marital experiences. I used Berg's (2007, pp.158-159) eight ingredients in focus group as a framework to develop and implement the two focus group discussions into this study. These ingredients are: (1) A clearly defined objective and/or research problem, (2) The nature of the group, (3) Atmosphere, environment and rapport, (4) An aware listening

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facilitator, (5) A well-organized and prepared facilitator, (6) Structure and direction but restricted contribution to the discussion, (7) Research assistance, and (8) Systematic analysis.

Key Informant Interviews

In addition to the two focus group discussions, I conducted six individual interviews with key informants, three with husbands and three with wives. The six key informants were identified from the focus group discussions. The purpose of conducting the six individual interviews was to gain information that was not directly observable (Patton, 2003). The key informant interviews allowed me to build on the information presented in the two focus group discussions and to come in greater contact with the perceptions, reflections, and meaning associated with lived marital experience of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives. The key informants were encouraged to provide insights regarding meanings attached to some major marital behaviors which were described extensively during the focus group discussions, but were not fully addressed in terms of meanings attached to them.

I identified the key informants as those members of the focus group who were open to discuss their lived marital experiences in-depth. Patton (2001) highlights that "key informants are people who are knowledgeable about the inquiry setting, and articulate about their knowledge—people whose insights can prove particularly useful in helping the observer understand what is happening and why"(p. 321). The information obtained from the key informants was triangulated against the data that was gathered

through the two focus group discussions to enhance the trustworthiness of the study results.

Researcher Observation

In addition to the two focus group discussions and the six individual interviews, I used my focused and unfocused observations as a method for collecting data for the present study. Patton (2001) argues that "to understand fully the complexities of many situations, direct participant observation in and observation of the phenomenon of interest may be the best research method" (p. 21). I was "a facilitator and an observer at the same time…" (van Manen, 1990, p. 69) to make close observations of the focus group discussions. My focused and unfocused observations began several years ago as a Coptic Orthodox Church member back in Egypt and currently in the United States. Conducting marriage and family counseling sessions in different Coptic Orthodox Churches helped me to make close observations. My observations enabled me to "become increasingly familiar with the insider's world so as to refine and focus subsequent observation and data collection" (Jorgensen (1989, p. 82). My observations also enabled me to identify the participants suited for the individual interviews, to become an instrument used to collect data about the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives in my Coptic Orthodox Church, and finally to triangulate and refine the data during the analytic process.

The Researcher as an Instrument

Since I moderated the two focus group discussions, I was one of the research instruments. This required me to be reflexive during the study. Therefore, during the

focus group discussions and individual interviews, I maintained an internal dialogue to explore what is known and how it is known (Berg, 2007) and used field notes and a reflection journal. I also kept examining and reviewing my personal actions and reactions related to the study asking myself Glesne's (2006) four questions: What is the purpose of the study" What do I observe? What don't I observe? How do I know that I am right?

In describing myself as a research instrument and a participant observer throughout the study, there is some obligation on my part to provide a more extensive description of *who I am*, and of my experiential background, so that the reader may form a context in which to situate the comments and the conclusions of this study. I was born and raised Coptic Orthodox Christian. I received the Coptic Orthodox Church's faith from my mother. I grew up observing successful and unsuccessful Coptic Orthodox marriages and attending and observing wedding ceremonies as well as the rites of the Matrimony Sacrament.

I grew up in a Coptic Orthodox family where the sacrificing love was the daily bread of my family. I grew up observing my mother who was very submissive in love to my father. I watched my mother sacrificing her time, comfort, and happiness in serving my father who was chronically ill for several years until he passed away. My father passed away when I was twelve years old; therefore I grew up under the socialization and care of my very devoted, spiritual, giving, and lovingly sacrificing mother. I remember people calling my mother *the love river*. I recall my mother sitting with other ladies and giving them advice on how they should be obedient and loving to their husbands and family members. She used to say *since one cannot live with a dead heart, marriage cannot survive without a patient, obedient, and loving wife*. She also used to tell my

uncles (her married brothers), who sometimes used to come to her and complain about their wives, *"You are the captain of the ship who should sacrifice himself for the passengers."* My marriage experience and my marriage and family counseling expertise raised my interest in undertaking this study. Of particular interest to me was to find out about the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans' perceptions of marital satisfaction and their lived marital experiences as well as how they have been prepared for and supported in their marriage. The education that I acquired as well as my personal experiences as a Coptic Orthodox Christian husband and my expertise as a marriage and family lay counselor have also enhanced my personal virtues and attributes.

Throughout my graduate studies as a teacher educator and counselor educator, I learned that people become what they believe in, and nothing could come between them and their belief system, especially one that is acquired during their childhood. As a Coptic Orthodox Christian husband, I strongly believe in the Matrimony Sacrament. My own experience as a husband and my expertise as a marriage and family lay counselor in different Coptic Orthodox churches in Egypt and the United States helped me to note a number of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that seem to come with marriage. The significant amount of time I have spent with my counselees in the Coptic Orthodox churches has helped me to learn ways to connect with and enter into trusting relationships with husbands and wives. My interpersonal skills with the Coptic Orthodox Christian husbands and wives, along with my sensitivity to their daily lived marital experiences were advantageous during the focus group discussions and the key informant interviews. I am a trained marriage and family lay counselor; this training has helped me to realize that people may react very differently to a "similar situation," with possible

long-term effects on their psyches. As a trained marriage and family lay counselor, I learned that a caring individual can help people devastated by developmental situations find hope and look forward to life with a renewed purpose. The doctoral program that I undertook in counselor education and supervision at Duquesne University was of extra benefit in my life. This program has helped me to look first into my own life and situations before I can lend a helping hand to another person. Consequently, my own experience as a Coptic Orthodox Christian husband and counselor helped me to gain better and deeper understandings of their experiences.

My academic achievements, personal experiences, and counseling expertise, virtues, and attributes guided my focus for this study and served in illuminating the various dimensions of this study. In light of reviewing the pertinent literature on marriage and marital satisfaction, my personal experience, my counseling expertise, and my education, I generated the following five research questions: (a) How do Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives perceive their marital satisfaction? (b) What are the factors which positively and negatively influence the marital satisfaction of Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives? (c) How do Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives maintain their marriage in light of their daily marital experiences that influence their marital satisfaction? (d) What changes in their marital relationships do Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' desire to enhance their marital satisfaction? and (e) How can the Coptic Orthodox Church better prepare and support Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans in their marriage?

Sampling Procedures

   Purposeful Sampling

      The sampling method which I used to identify the participants of the present

qualitative study was reflective of the philosophical framework and purpose of the study.

Like the other methods used in this study, the sampling method was disciplined by the

research questions (van Manen, 1990). The present study was an attempt to uncover

detailed descriptors of the lived marital experiences of the Coptic Orthodox Christian

Egyptian-American husbands and wives who became Egyptian-Americans after

emigrating from Egypt to the United States of America and staying for at least five years,

became naturalized citizens, and became part of the diverse American culture. Al-Ma'seb

(2006) states that the time that immigrants take to acculturate with the host society is

fairly short. When immigrants spend a long period of time in the host culture, they are

more likely to accept the host culture's values, beliefs, food, and ideas. This may lead to

changes in their behavior. I chose the participants of the study intentionally to be

representative of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives.

      Consistent with the focus of the study, I used a non-probability sampling

procedure to identify participants for this study. Merriam (1998) indicates that non-

probability sampling is the method of choice for most qualitative research. The most

common form is purposeful sampling. Merriam (1998) states that purposeful sampling is

"based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain

insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 61).

Patton (1990) argues that "the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting

information-rich cases for study in depth" (p. 169). The purposive sampling which I used to recruit specific participants for the present study provided information-rich cases (Patton, 2002) specific to this qualitative study.

Selection of Participants

The participants in the present study were screened to determine whether they meet the following criteria: (a) they were Coptic Orthodox Egyptian-Americans, (b) married husbands or married wives, c) this was their first marriage, and (d) they were naturalized citizens. According to Patton (2002), sample size in qualitative research depends on the purpose of the research, what would be useful and credible, and the amount of time and resources that are available. "There are no rules for sample size" ((Patton, 2002, p.244). Leedy (1997) describes the method of data collection in a phenomenological approach as conducting interviews using a "purposeful sampling of 5-10 individuals" (p. 166). In general, an adequate sample is determined at the point of saturation or when no new information is forthcoming .This may require numerous focus groups among a large population and relatively few in a defined population. (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1998b).

McCracken (1988) states that for qualitative methods the researcher should select a small sample, preferably fewer than eight participants. To increase the utility of information obtained from the participants of the present study, I used a purposive sample of 20 Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives. The selected participants were from the volunteers who met the four selection criteria, in the Coptic Orthodox Church located in Norristown in Pennsylvania. These participants were eight

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Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian wives (focus group I) and six Coptic Orthodox

Christian Egyptian husbands (focus group II) who showed up in the focus group meetings

and participated in the focus group discussions. These participants became Egyptian-

Americans after emigrating from Egypt to the United States of America and staying for at

least five years, got naturalized and became part of the American culturally diverse

society. Then out of the two focus groups, I selected three wives and three husbands as

key informants for further in-depth individual interviews. I selected these specific six key

informants because "they were likely to be knowledgeable and informative" (Leedy,

1997, p.162).

Ethical Issues and Participant's Rights

In developing and conducting the present study, I used an ethical framework as

recommended in the qualitative research literature (Patton, 2002; Glense, 2006). This

ethical framework included but was not limited to participants' rights, protection of

privacy, confidentiality issues, and psychological well-being. Once the Duquesne

University Institutional Review Board granted me permission to conduct the study, I

sought permission from father Roufail Youssef, the priest of St. George Coptic Orthodox

Church in Norristown, PA. I explained to him the purpose and nature of the study as well

as the selection criteria of the participants for the study. I also asked father Roufail

Youssef to nominate potential participants for the study. After initial contacts were made,

I used referrals or snowballing to gain access to other informants who met the sample

screening criteria.

Once the participants were nominated, I invited them for an orientation meeting. During the orientation meeting, I thoroughly explained the demographic form (Appendix A), the semi-structured interview guide (Appendix B), and the consent to participate in the research project (Appendix C). I described the study, answered the volunteers' questions, addressed their concerns, and screened the volunteers who met the selection criteria. I divided the participants into two focus groups (one for wives and one for husbands) so as to avoid any bearings on possible consequences of participation or the honesty of the gathered responses. I scheduled the meetings for the two focus groups and asked the husbands and wives who agreed to participate in the study to bring the completed demographic form and the signed consent to participate in the research project form on the scheduled time of the focus group meeting.

By signing and returning the consent form, the participants verified that I have met the obligation to inform them of the nature of the study and their involvement in it, and that they understood and agreed with what has been communicated to them (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). The consent form presented participants with enough information on the study's purpose to enable them to make an informed decision about their participation. According to Berg (2007), the confidentiality of the participants should be protected. As for confidentiality in the present study, I informed the participating husbands and wives that although they would not be required to provide any information that would lead to identifying who they were, except their signatures on the consent forms and their voices on the audiotapes, I would keep their identity confidential. I also informed them that I would take reasonable steps to ensure that other participants in the focus group understand the importance of confidentiality. However, I clarified to

the participants that it would be difficult to ensure absolute confidentiality in a group

setting (Corey & Corey, 2006; Glense, 2006).

I also clarified to the participants that any report produced from this research

would only include summaries from many responses, and would never provide

information that would allow someone to identify an individual who participated. All

digital recordings, written materials, and consent forms would be stored in a secured file

in my home office and would be destroyed after five years. I also informed the

participants that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time they choose. As

for the benefits and potential risks of participating in this study, I informed the

participants that it would be possible to experience some negative emotions as a result of

participating in this study. I also informed them that counseling services would be made

available for them upon request. I informed the participants that the results of this study

might benefit them directly as well as the future Coptic Orthodox Christian husbands and

wives, Coptic Orthodox Church leaders, and marriage and family counselors. Finally, I

informed the participants that a summary of the findings of this study would be sent to

them at no cost upon request if they provided a self-addressed envelope for this purpose.

Data Collection

In collecting data for the present study, I obtained the approval by the Duquesne

University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects and the approval by the

priest of St. George Coptic Orthodox Church in Norristown, Pennsylvania, who provided

me with the information of an initial list of nominees. I selected the potential participants

from the nominated population with the help of the church priest and some deacons. I

held a research project orientation meeting a week before conducting the two focus group discussions and the six key informant interviews, where I thoroughly explained the demographic form, the interview guide, and the consent to participate in the research project. On the day of the focus group meetings, I collected the completed demographic forms and signed consents and reviewed the purpose of the study, addressed the participants' concerns, and answered their questions before starting the focus group discussions. I held the two focus group discussions followed by the six key informant interviews. I prepared the data, collected through observations, note taking, and audio taped focus group discussions and individual interviews, for data analysis.

Focus group and Individual Interview Protocol

According to Krueger (1998), it is more beneficial when teams conduct focus groups, one person can focus on facilitating the group while the other takes detailed notes and deals with mechanics like tape recorders and cameras. Most importantly, a second team member can also take care of special needs that may arise, for example, someone needing to leave early or becoming overwrought (Krueger, 1998). I was planning to lead the two focus group meetings with the help of a trained American graduate assistant as a co-moderator.

I held the general research project orientation meeting on a Sunday after the liturgy service for the participants who volunteered to participate in the research project and who met the screening criteria. I thoroughly explained the demographic form, the interview guide, and the consent to participate in English and Arabic to assure understanding and comfort. At the end of the orientation meeting, I asked if I could

conduct the focus group discussions and key informant interviews in English. Most of the

participants in the orientation meeting asked for the focus group discussions to be

conducted in Arabic where they can express themselves more clearly and to be able to

give details that might be difficult for many of them to express in English. We agreed to

conduct the group discussions in Arabic and the key informant interviews in English. In

light of this unexpected request, I canceled the participation of the co-moderator and I

assumed the tasks of facilitating and note taking.

On Saturday of the week that followed the orientation meeting I conducted the

first focus group discussion with the selected wives who showed up in the group meeting

after the Liturgy for Sunday School Children where the mothers were attending with their

children. On the next day I conducted the second focus group discussion with the selected

husbands who showed up in the focus group meeting after the weekly Sunday Liturgy

service.

The discussions of the two focus groups were conducted in a room at the St.

George Coptic Orthodox Church in Norristown, Pennsylvania. I arranged the chairs in the

room in a semi-circle to provide participants the opportunity to see and hear each other

clearly during the discussions. Based on their request in the orientation meeting, the two

discussions were conducted in Arabic. Before starting the two focus group discussions, I

followed the focus group protocol outline and began with introductions. I reviewed the

purpose of the study which was to investigate Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-

American husbands and wives' perceptions of marital satisfaction and to explore and

understand the factors and practices that enhance or lessen their marital satisfaction. I

also reviewed the consent to participate, their voluntary participation, and ability to withdraw at any time.

All participants in the two groups signed the consent and denied having any further questions or concerns. Before starting the group discussion in the two groups, I reminded the participants of the importance of confidentiality and informed them about the limits of confidentiality in a group setting. I also confirmed their rights to withdraw from the discussion when they feel uncomfortable and their rights to freedom to express how they feel during the discussion. In addition, I reminded the participants of the importance of following the eight ground rules of focus group (Appendix B). When it was clear that they understood the ground rules of the focus group discussion, I reminded them of their rights as they were mentioned in the consent form they signed. At the end of each interview, I answered participants' questions and addressed their concerns.

To make sure that the participants understand the process of the focus group discussion, I experimented with a question and had each participant practice taking turns answering it (Glense, 2006). Since the participants and I share the same Coptic Orthodox Christian faith, my general experimental question was to have the participants talk about the characteristics of the spiritual person. To prepare participants for the ending of the interview and seek final responses, I asked them a closing question about the questions I could have asked them but I did not, to allow them to share information and experiences that are not already discussed. At the end of the interview, I thanked each participant for their time and reminded them of the referrals for counseling follow-up upon request.

The interviewing protocol which I used for both the two focus group discussions and the six key informant interviews consisted of 10 open-ended questions based on the five research questions of interest. This semi-structured interview guide (Appendix B) gave me some flexibility to address topics that were not anticipated in advance of the interviews. Patton (2002) outlines three advantages to using an interview guide: (a) the interviewer considers in advance how to make the best use of the time spent with the interviewee; (b) the guide provides some consistency across interviews; and (c) the guide helps to keep the interview focused on the pertinent topics. Open-ended questions "yield direct quotations from the people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge" (Patton, 2001, p. 4) and allow the researcher to "understand the world from the participant's points of view without prior selection of the questionnaire categories" (Patton, 2001, p. 21), and "reveal what is on the interviewee's mind as opposed to what the interviewer suspects is on the interviewee's mind" (Krueger (1998, p. 60). According to Morgan (2001), less structured approaches in focus groups have fewer questions, a more flexible allocation of time within the interview and are preferred over more structured formats when the research goal is to gain understanding into participants' thinking. To accomplish the goal of understanding perceptions, the moderator in a less structured interview takes an active role throughout the interview, introducing related questions as needed to encourage participants to expand on issues and clarify meanings in the ensuing discussion (Albrecht, Johnson, & Walther, 1993; Holstein, & Gubrium, 1995).

Using open-ended questions in the focus group discussions and individual interviews in this study allowed me to exercise some flexibility in addressing issues that

were not anticipated before data collection and allowed the participants to choose the direction they wanted to respond from, provided them an opportunity to answer from a broader perspective, and gave them freedom to talk about their daily lived marital experiences. Therefore, I took an active role, as a moderator, throughout the interview, by introducing related questions or using more prompts as needed to encourage the participants to expand on issues and clarify meanings in the ensuing discussion (Albrecht, Johnson, & Walther, 1993; Holstein, & Gubrium, 1995) to accomplish the goal of fully understanding Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans' perceptions and lived marital experiences.

The participants in this study were able to answer most of the interview questions without formal prompts. In a few cases I had to ask more specific open-ended questions and use some prompts to supplement the main questions of the interview protocol and encourage the participants to elaborate and give more details about their lived marital experiences. Examples of such questions and prompts are: What do you mean by a fulfilling relationship? What does sacrificing love mean to you? Why is honesty an important aspect? What do you mean by little foxes? What do you mean by good friends? Why is respect so important to you? Why do you think physical intimacy essential to marital satisfaction? What do you mean by quality time together? I also used prompts such as: Tell me more about that. Explain please. Give me more details. Tell me what actually happens after the fight, etc.

The discussion lasted for ninety minutes for the first focus group which included eight Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives and sixty-five minutes for the second focus group which included six Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American

husbands. The key informant interviews lasted between twenty-five and forty minutes. All interviews were audio taped, as well as digitally recorded. Using the semi-circle setting for the focus group discussions and asking the participants to respond to all questions in the same turn made it easy for me to observe the process and take field notes about each participant which were helpful throughout the data analysis stage. In addition, of being an active listener throughout all of the interviews, I took field notes to supplement the interview transcripts (noting physical gestures or mannerisms), as well as documenting any early emerging themes that might lead to follow up on. Immediately following each interview I documented my reflections on the interview process (how the interview went, my rapport, or something that could be improved for next time), as well as the topics discussed in the interview (both pre-planned topics, and topics or themes that emerged from the participants). In addition, I reflected at that time about how the participant's lived marital experiences and opinions either matched or contradicted my own in order to minimize my bias.

Source of Questions

In developing the protocol questions, I adopted Patton's (2002) recommendation that the number of questions should be minimized to provide all participants the opportunity to speak. The same set of questions of the semi-structured interview was used for the two focus group discussions and the six key informant interviews. The questions were developed in light of an extensive review of the literature on marriage measures in general and marital satisfaction scales in particular. Specifically examined were *Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale* (KMSS; Schumm, et al.,1986), the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976), the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959), and

the Revised Marital Adjustment Test (RMAT; Kimmel & Van Der Veen, 1974). Using

Patton's (2002) interview guide approach, I asked the following questions:

1. What does marital satisfaction mean to you?

2. What are the factors that you feel contribute to your satisfaction with your
   marriage?

3. What are the factors that contribute to your dissatisfaction with your marriage? or
   What are the factors that interfere with your satisfaction with your marriage?

4. What are examples of daily experiences you have that influence your marital
   satisfaction?

5. What do you do to address issues/experiences that lessen your martial
   satisfaction?

6. What is it that has allowed you to maintain your marriage?

7. If there was anything you could change to improve your marital satisfaction, what
   would it be?

8. How have you been prepared for marriage by the Coptic Orthodox Church?

9. How have you been supported in your marriage by the Coptic Orthodox Church?

10. What recommendations do you make to the Coptic Orthodox Church leaders
    regarding marriage enrichment programs and marriage preparation programs?

11. What could I have asked you that I did not ask to gain a better understanding of
    the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans' lived marital experiences?

   During using these questions in the interviews, I attempted to bracket my

assumptions about the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans' lived marital

experiences. I kept in mind throughout the process of data collection, that bracketing

assumptions is a continual process. In some interviews, when I was confronted with some life stories that did not fit with the assumptions I made about marital satisfaction, I stayed open to the participant's experience and tried to understand such experiences.

Data Credibility and Trustworthiness

Although the quantitative-oriented terms reliability, validity, and generalizability are not considered applicable to qualitative research, this study addressed these constructs through multiple strategies to efficiently address issues of data credibility and trustworthiness. Qualitative researchers have identified equivalent practices to ensure scientific rigor in their work. Miles and Huberman (1994) state five evaluative criteria for qualitative research. These criteria are: (a) Objectivity/Confirmability - Relative neutrality, freedom from unacknowledged researcher bias, explicitness about inevitable bias, (b) Reliability/Dependability/Auditability- Is the process of the study consistent and reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods? (c) Internal Validity/Credibility/Authenticity - Truth value. Do the findings of the study make sense? Are they credible to the people studied, members of the research community, and others? (d) External Validity/Transferability/Fittingness - Do the conclusions of a study have any larger import? Are they transferable to other contexts? Do they fit with what we already know? How far can findings be generalized? And (e) Utilization/Application/Action Orientation - What does the study do for participants? What is the pragmatic value of the research? In order to be able to accurately analyze the collected data, I constantly checked, rechecked, and built a solid foundation for the duration of the process of interpretation by reflecting on these questions.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) used the concept of *trustworthiness* and defined it as being a result of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of data. Trustworthiness in qualitative research is evident in the study's rigor (Lincoln & Cuba, 2000). Although data retrieved from focus groups are evidenced-based (Lever, 2006), I took some measures to ensure the utility, validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the study findings. I used audio-taping, note taking, and observations to ensure accuracy in recording data. Since one source of data cannot adequately describe or provide comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon like perceptions of marital satisfaction, I used triangulation of the data collected and member-checking techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to enhance the credibility of the study. I established triangulation of data through the use of multiple sources. For example, I used the digital audiotapes, notes, observations, review of related literature on marriage and marital satisfaction, and members-check-ins. I also used multiple sources for collecting data from both focus group and key informants' interviews.

I triangulated each of the five main themes that were clustered out of the constructed meanings in the 10 categorical areas that matched the 10 research questions by confirming that data have been collected from different participants and through different methods (i.e., focus group/interview, member-checking, and note-taking). I used the field notes which I took along with the interviews to describe observations such as participants' body language, tone of voice, environmental distractions, contextual factors, changes in physical condition and comfort (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000). This technique is what Lincoln and Guba (1985) label as triangulation by different method or within-method triangulation. These notes were important additions during data analysis

because they provided validation for significant points made by the participants and facilitated appropriate emphasis on extracted themes during data analysis. This combination of field notes and interviews transcripts gave me a more comprehensive and truthful account of the participants' lived marital experiences than either method could alone (Maxwell, 2005).

To assess confirmability, I bracketed my assumptions, beliefs, and expectations in order to set them aside for the data analysis process as a strategy for getting "back to the things themselves" (Husserl, as cited in van Manen, 1982, p. 296), or as close to the actual phenomena as possible. I also reviewed relevant literature, reviewed my own professional and personal experiences with the phenomenon of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans' lived marital experiences, and kept an ongoing journal recording my reactions to the data as it was collected (Nelson & Poulin, 1997). To ensure and support the reliability of the study findings or how dependable or consistent they were, I maintained a systematic process and protocol (Patton, 2002) during data collection. I also compared the findings of the present study with related findings in the literature. I identified thematic consistency across and within data sources through systematic cross-checking of tentative interpretations and themes. Lastly, I provided a rich, thick description, through the use of participants' quotations, to make available to the reader a clear understanding of the research setting, participants, and their perspectives.

Patton (1990) states that in qualitative research, credibility comes from three aspects of the study. For a study to have credibility, it must be done with rigor, the researcher must be credible, and there must be an inclination on the part of the reviewer

to accept naturalist inquiry. Research credibility or internal validity was accomplished during the recursive data collection and analysis process. I exercised rigor in the collection of data using my experience in directing research. To ensure the research credibility or internal validity, I did my best to remain adaptable and responsive during data collection and analysis. I also bracketed my assumptions which were related not only to participants' responses but to the language they used. To protect the validity of the study results, I engaged myself in persistent observation, which required prolonged engagement in the material during data analysis methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Maxwell (2002) states that the researcher must be thoroughly acquainted with the data as well as the larger context within which the phenomenon under study is occurring in order to be able to maintain descriptive and interpretive validity. The perpetual review of related literature has helped me to ensure the relevance of the research questions. My experience as a Coptic Orthodox Christian husband for more than twenty five years, having a very stable and satisfactory marriage, as well as my expertise as a deacon and a marriage and family lay counselor in my Coptic Orthodox Church contributed to my ability to think theoretically by providing a basic understanding of what marriage and marital satisfaction mean to Coptic Orthodox Christians. With issues of trustworthiness and sensitivity in mind, actual data analysis became possible. To achieve the sensitivity of the study findings, I used the relevant literature and my personal experience to inform the analytic process. According to Maxwell (2002), these two sources provide evidence that allow threats to validity to be scrutinized effectively. To ensure that the findings are relevant to the participants, a summary of the proposed themes were provided to the

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participants, immediately after data analysis, for their review, commentary, and consensus.

Data Analysis

According to Gorgi (1985), the process of data collection is not an end in itself. In qualitative research, data analysis accompanies data collection (Glense, 2006) and is considered a fluid process (Levers, 2006). van Manen (1997) states, "Expressing the fundamental or overall meaning of a text is a judgment call" (p. 94). Data analysis of this study was *iterative and recursive* (Levers, 2002). Data analysis in this qualitative research began as soon as data were collected and continued until the collection process was completed. This recursive process allowed for the coding and categorization of data while it was being collected, so that the codes became more precise as more data was reviewed.

In analyzing the collected data and describing the units of meaning, I used Patton's (2002) reflexivity in analyzing the data collected for this study. I evaluated my own voice as well the voices of the participants. I started the analysis during the first focus group interviews and continued throughout and after the data collection ended. The audio tapes of the two focus group discussions were transcribed and translated into English. I double checked the translation to make sure that the English translation of the Arabic transcripts was accurate. In analyzing the collected data from the two focus groups and the six key informant interviews, I made constant comparisons, while exploring the data from all sources as it was collected. In analyzing the data collected, I adopted Creswell's (1998) data analysis strategies: (a) data management-Creating and

organizing data files, (b) reading and memoing-Reading through text and forming initial codes, (c) describing-Describing the lived marital experiences for the participants, (d) classifying-Grouping initial codes into meaning units, (e) interpreting, and (f) representing. The formal data analysis continued throughout the project.

I also used Giorgi' s (1985) four major steps for data analysis: (a) getting the sense of the whole, (b) discriminating meaning units, (c) entailing transformation of participants' everyday expressions into psychological language with emphasis on the phenomenon being investigated, and (d) synthesizing the transformed meaning units into a consistent description of the psychological structure of the event. Qualitative data interpretation and analysis involve making sense of what the participants have said, looking for patterns, putting together what is said in one place with what is said in another place, and integrating what different participants have said.

The first step in the analysis of the data collected in this study was getting the sense of the whole by carefully reading and rereading through the entire transcripts and field notes several times to gain an overall sense of the material; this is known as achieving immersion (Tesch, 1990). The second step was identifying common themes/ *units of meaning* (Kruger, 1979) and *lived experiences* (van Manen, 1990) and coding them as they emerged. Since data was coming in as the coding process proceeded, I developed an initial list of codes from the first focus group discussion and the accompanying field notes and revised this list as new data sources were collected. After the final key informant interview was conducted, and all accompanying materials were collected, I read through all the data a few more times to form overall impressions.

Themes are points of focus, simplifications, and ways of encapsulating the essence of the phenomenon under study (van Manen, 1997). Giorgi (1985) reminds that since one cannot analyze the whole content simultaneously, it has to be broken down into manageable units. I broke down the emerged constructed meanings into 10 main categories that matched the 10 questions in the guided-interview. Analysis of data collected continued until no new constructed meanings emerged from the data and until the emerged constructed meanings constituted an integrated description of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans' marital experiences. I considered the analysis complete when I reached Glasser and Strauss's theoretical *saturation* (as cited in Rubin & Rubin, 1995). That is when I was no longer able to identify more new constructed meanings and the constructed meanings were consistent across all interviews. At that point, I terminated data collection. I compared my overall impressions to the initial codes that were noted throughout the research process, and I formulated the preliminary findings. Then I compared these preliminary findings to the data with a final read through, with special attention paid to disconfirming evidence.

All disconfirming evidence was carefully considered, and all codes were evaluated in terms of validity across interviews, field notes, and reflection logs. After this evaluation process, I identified and grouped the emerged constructed meanings under 10 categories that matched the 10 areas of marriage addressed by the interview protocol as follows: (1) Perceptions of marital satisfaction, (2) factors which positively affect marital satisfaction, (3) factors which negatively affect marital satisfaction, (4) daily experiences which affect marital satisfaction, (5)Addressing issues which lessen marital satisfaction, (6) Maintaining marriage, (7) desired changes to enhance marital satisfaction, (8)

preparation for marriage, (9) available marriage support resources, and (10) Recommendation for church leaders.

In Giorgi's (1985) words, the transformation takes place basically through the process of reflection, and imaginative variation. The third step was using my earlier observations, my personal experiences, and the knowledge I have gained from the literature to reflect on the emerged units of meaning to entail the transformation of participant's everyday expressions into psychological language with emphasis on the marital satisfaction phenomenon. The fourth step was synthesizing and integrating the insights contained in the transformed meaning units into a consistent description of the lived marital experiences of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives. I used the cross analysis of the emerging constructed meanings and patterns in the focus groups and the key informant interviews along with observations and the field notes to cluster the five main themes that emerged from the data collected. These five main themes are: (a) Satisfying marriage, (b) Marital satisfaction factors, (c) Daily marital experiences, (d) Marriage maintenance factors, and (e) Desired changes. I also used the 10 categories of the emerged constructed meanings to generate "thick descriptions" of the data, and thereby, of the lived marital experiences of the participants (Denzin, 1989), generate hypotheses, and help increase the validity of the results (Patton, 2003). The analysis took on an inductive design characterized by the building and forming of categories of constructed meanings and clustering main themes out of the detailed constructed meanings emerged from the data collected. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, I consulted continuously with the literature about marriage and marital satisfaction throughout the process of analysis.

The findings of this study should be considered in light of several possible limitations. First, data was collected in one location (i.e., Norristown, Pennsylvania). The documentation of the participants' experiences and findings generated might shed light onto the experiences of Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans in comparable settings in other States but nevertheless those experiences are yet particularistic to that setting (Creswell, 2003).

Second, the results of this study were drawn from a comparatively small purposive sample of participants (twenty Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives) who were specially chosen. However, a small number of participants is acceptable for qualitative studies of the nature of the present study (Glense, 2006; Patton, 2002). Third, the sampling procedure, as it was designed, led the researcher to recruit only Coptic Orthodox Christian husbands and wives who met predetermined selection criteria. Therefore, participants did not fully reflect diverse characteristics of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American population, such as (a) variations in geographical-related factors, (b) personal factors, (c) extended family -related factors, (d) child-related factors, and (e) remarried spouses. This would make the generalizability of the findings of this study limited to the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans who also met the limitations of the participant selection criteria.

Fourth, the data in this study came from self-report instruments. Potential problems with self-report data include recall problems and the intentional misreporting of behaviors. The participants offered their own personal understandings, reflections,

perceptions, and meaning of the lived marital experiences. Therefore, the uniqueness of the participants in their particular setting limits the generalizability and transferability of findings from one setting to another (Merriam, 2002). Fifth, my biases and predispositions as a researcher-observer could have an effect on the data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the findings (Patton, 2002).

Summary

The main goal of this study was examining Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' perceptions and perspectives of marital satisfaction. To achieve this goal, I used a qualitative method design based upon an ethnographic approach with phenomenological and symbolic interactionism perspectives. To gather data for this study, I used three traditional qualitative methods of data-gathering, namely focus group interviews, key informant interviews, and researcher observations. I used the purposive sampling to recruit the participants for the present study and to provide information-rich cases (Patton, 2002) specific to this qualitative study. To enhance data credibility and trustworthiness, I used methodological triangulation of the focus group interviews, key informant interviews, observations, field notes and related literature.

In addition to describing the conceptual framework of the study and the methods and procedures used in this study, this chapter also described data collection, data analysis, and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the data analysis procedures and present the findings of

this study. I offered thick-description of the lived marital experiences of the Coptic

Orthodox Christian husbands and wives who immigrated to the United States and became

American citizens. The data are described in a case-by case narrative of the two focus

groups and the six individual interviews conducted in this study. I grouped the emerged

constructed meanings under the 10 preselected categories that matched the 10 questions

of the semi- structured guided interview. I finally clustered the 10 categories of the

constructed meanings emerged from the data collected into five main themes.

After obtaining the permission by the Duquesne University IRB, I held the

general research project orientation meeting on a Sunday after the liturgy service for the

participants who were nominated by the church priest, met the screening criteria, and

volunteered to participate in the research project. The number of the volunteers who

attended the orientation meeting was 23 (13 wives and 10 husbands). I divided the

participants into two groups, one group for wives and the other for husbands. I

thoroughly explained the demographic form, the interview guide, and the consent to

participate in English and Arabic to assure understanding and comfort. At the end of the

orientation meeting, I asked if I could conduct the focus group discussions and key

informant interviews in English. Most of the participants in the orientation meeting asked

for the focus group discussions to be conducted in Arabic where they can express

themselves more clearly and to be able to give details that might be difficult for many of

them to express in English. We agreed to conduct the group discussions in Arabic and the key informant interviews in English.

According to Krueger (1998), it is more beneficial when teams conduct focus groups; one person can focus on facilitating the group while the other takes detailed notes and deals with mechanics like tape recorders and cameras. Most importantly, a second team member can also take care of special needs that may arise, for example, someone needing to leave early or becoming overwrought (Krueger, 1998). I was planning to lead the two focus group meetings with the help of the trained co-moderator, an American graduate assistant. In light of this unexpected request, I canceled the task of the co-moderator. I took notes and made observations during all interviews.

On Saturday of the week that followed the orientation meeting, I conducted the wives' focus group discussion. It was after the Liturgy for Sunday School Children where the mothers were attending with their children. Only eight wives of the selected 13 wives, who attended the orientation meeting, showed up and participated in the focus group discussion. On the next day I conducted the husbands' focus group discussion after the weekly Sunday liturgy service. Only six husbands of the selected 10 husbands, who attended the orientation meeting, showed up and participated in the focus group discussion. In addition, I conducted six key informant interviews, three from the wives' focus group and three from the husbands' focus group. So, the total number of participants in this study was 20 Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives. To protect the participants' confidentiality, I assigned each participant in the two focus groups as well as the key informant interviews a number. The participants were

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identified by this number throughout the data analysis and the discussion of the findings of this study.

The discussions of the two focus groups were conducted in a room at the St. George Coptic Orthodox Church in Norristown, Pennsylvania. I arranged the chairs in the room in a semi-circle to provide participants the opportunity to see and hear each other clearly during the discussions. Based on their request in the orientation meeting, the two discussions were conducted in Arabic. Before starting the two focus group discussions, I followed the focus group protocol outline (Appendix B) and began with introductions. I reviewed the purpose of the study which was to investigate Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' perceptions of marital satisfaction and to explore and understand the factors and practices that enhance or lessen their marital satisfaction. I also reviewed the consent to participate, their voluntary participation, and ability to withdraw at any time. All participants in the two groups signed the consent and denied having any further questions or concerns. Before starting the group discussion in the two groups, I reminded the participants of the importance of following the eight ground rules:

1. Your participation is voluntary and based on your signed informed consent. Please participate to the fullest of your ability;

2. The co-moderator and I will pay particular attention to any signs of distress during the focus group session and a counselor will be available at and after the time of the focus group or interview for needed support;

3. It is important to respect each others' privacy and not repeat what you hear during the group discussions. Confidentiality is very important;

4. Please listen actively and respect others when they are talking. Be conscious of body language and nonverbal responses; they can be as disrespectful as words;

5. Please speak one at a time in a voice at least as loud as mine;

6. Please share your own story and experience. Say what's true for you, and have the courage of your convictions. Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing ("I" instead of "they," "we," and "you");

7. Don't let the group sway you, and don't sell out to group opinion or to a strong talker. It is OK, however, to change your mind during the course of the session because of something you hear or see; and

8. The goal is not to agree; it is about hearing and exploring divergent perspectives.

When it was clear that the participants understood the ground rules of the focus group discussion, I reminded them of their rights as they were mentioned in the consent form they signed. At the end of each interview, I answered participants' questions and addressed their concerns.

All interviews were guided by the 10 open-ended questions of the interview protocol (Appendix B). During the group discussions, I requested more elaboration and clarification from participants as it became necessary. All interviews were digitally recorded, which enabled me to identify with ease, each participant's responses and comments during data analysis. As mentioned earlier, the language that was used throughout the two focus group discussions was Arabic. It is the language with which the participants were most comfortable and which I also speak fluently. Using the semi-circle setting for the focus group discussions and asking the participants to respond to all

questions in the same turn made it easy for me to observe the process and take field notes about each participant which were helpful throughout the data analysis stage.

Focus group and Key Informant Interviews Data Analysis

I collected data through a series of semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B for interview protocol). The data sources for this study included interview transcripts, and detailed field notes and researcher reflections. The focus group interviews lasted for ninety minutes for the wives' focus group and sixty-five minutes for the husbands' focus group. The key informant interviews lasted between twenty-five and forty minutes. All interviews were audio taped, as well as digitally recorded. In addition to being an active listener throughout all of the interviews, I took field notes to supplement the interview transcripts, noting physical gestures or mannerisms, as well as documenting any early emerging constructed meanings that might lead to follow up on. Immediately following each interview, I documented my reflections on the interview process (how the interview went, my rapport, or something that could be improved for next time), as well as the topics discussed in the interview (both pre-planned topics, and topics or constructed meanings that emerged from the participants). In addition, I reflected at this time about how the participant's lived marital experiences and opinions either matched or contradicted my own in order to minimize my bias.

I used Patton's (2002) reflexivity in analyzing the data collected for this study. I evaluated my own voice as well the voices of the participants. I became aware of four presuppositions. First, I believed that the Coptic Orthodox Christian faith would guide participants in their perception of marital satisfaction. I assumed that they don't care so much about evaluating their marital satisfaction in light of meeting or exceeding their

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internal standards as it is confirmed by the Social Exchange and Equity Theories

(Nakonezny & Denton, 2008; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).This presumption was based on

my personal belief about Christian marriage as an everlasting agape relationship in which

spouses care more about what they can contribute to the marital relationship rather than

what they can get from it.

Second, I believed that money would be the top factor that influences the Coptic

Orthodox Christian-American husbands and wives' marital satisfaction. This

presupposition was based upon my observations and experience in the American society

as an individualistic and materialist society. It was also based on the findings of some

studies which confirmed that money is one of the main factors that influence marital

satisfaction (Fenell, 1993, cited in Rosen-Grandon, Myers, & Hattie, 2004)

Third, I believed that Coptic Orthodox Christian-American wives pay more

attention to the very tangible and physical gains of marriage such as money, food,

housing, and sexual gratification and pay less attention to the intangible gains such as

social approval, sense of security, emotional support, self-esteem, and social status. I

built this presupposition on the norms prescribed by the Egyptian culture and society.

My fourth presupposition was that Coptic Orthodox Christian-Americans lack

marital preparation and support. Again from my personal experience as a church member,

a husband, and a marriage and family lay counselor, I experienced such lack of

preparation and support. I have also seen a lot of people who sought support from the

church, but they could not get it either because of the lack of qualified people or because

of the excessive responsibilities of the church leaders towards their huge congregation.

I was aware of my preconceived notions of the Coptic Orthodox Christian-Americans' marital experiences starting from data collection and analysis that began during the first focus group discussion and continued throughout and after the data collection ended. I continuously examined and reviewed my actions and reactions and stayed focused on the purpose of the study. I kept in mind throughout the process of data collection, that bracketing assumptions is a continual process. In some interviews, when I was confronted with some life stories that did not fit with the assumptions I made about marital satisfaction, I stayed open to the participant's experience and tried to understand such experiences. I also bracketed my assumptions which were related not only to participants' responses but to the language they used. To protect the validity of the study results, I engaged myself in persistent observation, which required prolonged engagement in the material during data analysis methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I transcribed the audio tapes of the two focus group interviews and translated the transcripts into English. I double checked the translation to make sure that the English translation of the Arabic transcripts was accurate. I analyzed the collected data from the two focus groups and the six key informant interviews using the constant comparative method, where I explored the data from all sources as it was collected and continued formal data analysis throughout the project. In analyzing the data collected, I adopted Creswell's (1998) data analysis strategies: (a) data management-Creating and organizing data files, (b) reading and memoing-Reading through text and forming initial codes, (c) describing-Describing the lived marital experiences for the participants, (d) classifying-Grouping initial codes into meaning units, (e) interpreting, and (f) representing.

Since data was coming in as the coding process proceeded, I developed an initial list of codes from the first focus group interviews and their accompanying field notes and revised this list as new data sources were collected. After conducting the final key informant interview and collecting all accompanying materials, I read through all the data a few more times to form overall impressions. The data reached a saturation point when no new data points emerged and the themes were consistent across all interviews. At that point, I terminated data collection. I compared my overall impressions to the initial codes that were noted throughout the research process, and I formulated the preliminary findings. Then I compared these preliminary findings to the data with a final read through, with special attention paid to disconfirming evidence. I evaluated all codes in terms of validity across interviews, field notes, and reflection logs. After this evaluation process, I grouped the constructed units of meaning that emerged in the predetermined 10 categories related to the interview questions. This grouping helped me to establish a preliminary list of units or themes out of the emerged constructed meanings. Then, I compared my overall impressions to the initial codes that were noted throughout the research process, and I formulated the preliminary findings. After that, I compared these preliminary findings to the data with a final reading through the transcripts, my field notes, and my reflection logs. I considered the disconfirming evidence carefully; I excluded the constructed meanings that emerged once or twice throughout the two group discussions and the six individual interviews and used those which were repeated several times in the 10 categorized areas, and the five main themes clustered from them. I evaluated all codes in terms of validity across interviews through triangulation of the

focus group interviews, key informant interviews, observations, field notes and related literature.

Findings

The findings of this study include a report of the information from (a) a narrative analysis of the constructed meanings of the two focus groups, (b) a narrative analysis of the constructed meanings of the six individual interviews, and (c) a cross-case analysis of the two focus groups and six individual interviews, (d) a narrative analysis of the five main themes. Following each narrative, a table is used to summarize the identified constructed meanings and main themes. The findings are reported with particular respect to the anonymity of the participants.

The age of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives who participated in the first focus group ranged between thirty and forty-seven years. Their marriage length ranged between six and twelve years. Five wives were married in Egypt before immigrating to the States and three were single and got married to Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands. Five wives got married after a love story and three got married through family arrangements. Most of the wives in the first focus group attend church services and practice other spiritual activities together with their husbands. The level of education completed was college level for five wives, graduate level for one wife, and 10-12 years of education for the other two wives. One wife was employed and seven wives were unemployed. The income level was low for three wives, average for three, and high for two wives. Six wives live with husband, kids, and parents and two wives live with husband and kids only. The number of kids ranged between two and three. The characteristics of the wives' focus group are presented in Table1.

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Table 1

Focus Group 1 Participants' Demographic Data

Item	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7	W8
Age	40	38	30	32	36	31	47	36
Marriage length	10	12	11	8	10	6	12	11
Marital status before immigration	S	M	S	M	M	M	M	S
Type of marriage	LM	AM	LM	AM	LM	LM	AM	LM
Attend church services together	A	S	A	S	R	N	S	S
Practice other spiritual activities together	A	*S*	S	R	S	R	S	S
Level of Education Completed	G	H	C	C	C	C	H	C
Current employment status	E	Un	Un	Un	Un	Un	Un	Un
Income level	H	L	Av	Av	Av	L	L	H
Number of people living in the house	2 k	3 k	2 k	2 k	3 k	2 k	3 k	2 k
	2 p	2 p	2 p	2 p	2 p	2 p		

Note. W = Wife, S = single, M = married, LM = love marriage, AM = arranged marriage, A = Always, S = Sometimes, R = Rarely, N = never, G = Graduate, C = College, H = 10-12 years of Education, E = Employed, Un = Unemployed, H= High, L= Low, AV = Average, K = Kid, P = Parent, and In = In-law

The age of the Coptic Orthodox Egyptian-American husbands who participated in the second focus group ranged between thirty-six and sixty-six years. Their marriage length ranged between eight and thirty-eight years. Three husbands were married in Egypt before

immigrating to the States and three were single and got married after immigration. Four husbands got married after a love story and two got married through family arrangements. Three husbands in the second focus group attended church services and practiced other spiritual activities together with their wives and the other three rarely or never did. The level of education completed was college level for four husbands, one graduate, and one 10-12 years of education. The six husbands were employed. The income level was high for three husbands, average for two husbands, and low for one husband. Four husbands live with their wives and kids, one husband lives with his wife and parents, and one husband lives with his wife and in-laws. The number of kids ranged between one and three. The characteristics of the husbands' focus group are presented in Table 2.

I digitally recorded all interviews of the two focus groups and the six individual interviews. 1 also observed the group process and took field notes during and immediately after the group discussions. The participants were able to answer most of the interview questions without formal prompts. In a few cases I had to ask more specific open-ended questions and use some prompts to supplement the main questions of the interview protocol and encourage the participants to elaborate and give more details about their lived marital experiences. Examples of such questions are: What do mean by fulfilling relationship? What does sacrificing love mean to you? Why is honesty an important aspect? What do you mean by little foxes? What do you mean by good friends? Why does respect so important to you? Why do you think physical intimacy essential to marital satisfaction? What do you mean by quality time together? etc. I also used prompts such as: Tell me more about that. Explain please. Give me more details. Tell me what actually happens after the fight, etc

Table 2

Focus Group II Participants' Demographic Data

Item	H1	H2	H3	H4	H5	H6
Age	36	44	60	66	36	36
Marriage length	8	9	21	38	10	11
Marital status before immigration	M	S	S	M	M	S
Type of marriage	LM	AM	AM	LM	LM	LM
Attend church services together	R	R	N	A	A	A
Practice other spiritual activities together	N	R	N	A	S	S
Level of Education Completed	C	C	H	G	C	C
Current employment status	E	E	E	E	E	E
Income level	Av	Av	L	H	H	H
Number of people living in the house	2 k	3 k	2 k	1 k	3 k	2 k
			I In		2 p	

Note. W = Wife, S = single, M = married, LM = love marriage, AM = arranged

marriage, A = Always, S = Sometimes, R = Rarely, N = never, G = Graduate, C =

College, H = 10-12 years of Education, E = Employed, Un = Unemployed, H= High, L=

Low, AV = Average, K = Kid, P = Parent, and In = In-law

The emerged constructed meanings were organized under the 10 major categories,

preselected and used to structure the interview protocol. The emerged constructed

meanings were used to develop the main themes that emerged from the interviews. These

10 categories were (a) Perception of marital satisfaction, (b) Factors contributing to

marital satisfaction, (c) Factors contributing to marital dissatisfaction, (d) Daily marital

experiences, (e) Addressing negative marital experiences, (f) Maintaining marital

relationship, (g) Desired changes to improve marital satisfaction, (h) Preparation for marriage, (i) Marriage support, and (j) Recommendation for church leaders. These categories are now discussed in detail.

Wives' Focus Group Question-by-Question Narrative Analysis

Category I: Perception of Marital Satisfaction

When I asked the first question about how Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives perceive their marital satisfaction, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question. Wife # 1 responded, "Marital satisfaction means to feel each other's needs and feelings and try to satisfy each one's needs. It also means having a complete fulfilling relationship based on mutual respect, understanding, and unconditional love." Wife # 2 said, "To be happy doing anything together, something such as chores or paying bills are not fun to do but if we enjoy even that time together we will be in a satisfying marital relationship. Wife # 3 stated, "It is a marital relationship that has security, trust and respect. It is taking care of each other all the time." Wife # 4 added, "Marital satisfaction is a caring relationship where the husband loves unconditionally and the wife submits unconditionally."

Wife # 5 said, "For me marital satisfaction means a marriage that is built on the rock where love, care, and support for one another are unconditional; it is a way to Heaven." Taking turns, wife # 6 added, "It is a loving relationship that is enjoyable and fulfilling. Here husbands and wives understand each other and respect each other. Both have satisfied sexual relationship." Then, wife # 7 responded, "To me marital satisfaction is understanding each other , caring for each other , communicating well with each other,

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feeling jealous, having real intimacy, and being honest to each other." Finally, wife # 8 concluded, "Marital satisfaction means good relationship with God and between husband and wife based on love and respect. To have a friendly relationship where there is joy together. It is having good intimate and sexual relationship that is fulfilling."

Category II: Factors Contributing to Marital Satisfaction

When I asked the second question about the factors that positively affect Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives' marital satisfaction, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question. Wife # 1 responded, "My husband understanding of my personality, his encouragement of every field I try to go through, his ultimate closeness, and his giving personality." Wife # 2 said, "The factors I feel contribute to my marital satisfaction are love, honesty, openness, frequent communication regarding both positive and negative things, self-sacrifice, patience, and understanding**,** trust**,** and encouragement. I can also add having interest in each other**,** understanding the feelings of each other**,** having an enjoyable time in bed together**,** and showing affections to each other." Wife # 3 stated, "To me the factors are security and trust in my husband and his character, mutual respect, appreciation, feeling cared for, true friendship, and love."

Wife # 4 added, "My list of the factors that can positively affect my marital satisfaction includes trust, respect, understanding, honesty, and commitment." Wife # 5 commented, "To me it is safety, warmth, security, understanding, keeping boundaries, showing respect, and showing love." Taking turns, wife # 6 added, "It is care from my husband, love from my husband like what exactly God commands from him." Then, wife # 7 responded, "It is caring, loving, and understanding." Finally, wife # 8 concluded,

"The factors that enrich my marriage are commitment to marriage, respect for each other and each other's time and interests, having a strong spiritual relationship, and finally, being at the same level mentally, spiritually, and intellectually."

Category III: Factors Contributing to Marital Dissatisfaction

When I asked the third question about the factors that negatively affect Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives' marital satisfaction, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question. Wife # 1 responded, "I believe there are three main factors that destroy marriage. These are lack of care, worries, and little foxes." Wife # 2 said, "It is carelessness, not having patience, unfair demands from time to time, and lack of respect." Wife # 3 stated, "I can say discouragement, blame, shouting, and insult sometimes in front of kids." Wife # 4 added, "To me the negative factors are lack of recreational time together, unhappy physical relationship, and having different opinions most of the time."

Wife # 5 commented, "I see that anger, nervousness, and impatience can damage marriage." Taking turns, wife # 6 added, "I can add to that the lack of physical intimacy, neglect of feelings, and decrease of time we spend together." Then, wife # 7 responded, "To me my marriage suffers from lack of commitment to the marriage, lack of respect for each other's secrets, and very bad communication." Finally, wife # 8 concluded, "It's lack of communication sometimes, especially when my husband is tired or upset, decrease in intimacy, lack of trust in some situations, and the like."

Category IV: Daily Marital Experiences

When I asked the fourth question about examples of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives' daily experiences that influence their marital satisfaction, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question. Wife # 1 responded, "Praying together, watching Christian channels together, and having the three daily meals together." Wife # 2 said, "We have breakfast together with children and parents. He takes care of money and I take care of the house work. We rarely have lunch together since he comes home late in the evening. We have dinner together with very short conversation about the day. Sometimes we communicate about children's issues and parents' health issues." Wife # 3 reluctantly stated, "The routine life issues, having meals, taking care of children and parents, going to the church, going shopping, and discussing the daily problems." Wife # 4 added, "Same as she said except going shopping together. My husband hates shopping and always cares about buying the important things. Sometimes we watch a Christian movie together with children and parents during the weekend. We have a daily routine marital relationship. Everything is routine even the bed relationship."

Wife # 5 stated, "We have a sacred daily routine. We have breakfast at 6:30 in the morning. He goes to his private business at 7:00am and comes back by 10:00pm every night except Sunday. We rarely call each other during the day because he is always busy. If he calls it will be for 2 minutes asking for something to be ready before he comes home. I take care of all the house work, study for the kids, take care of my parents and do all the shopping. He is always nervous because of his business problems. We rarely talk

about our marriage or our life. I keep praying that God does something to our routine life."

Taking turns, wife # 6 added, "We have the meals together. We discuss the daily problems together. We do not have good physical intimacy. We never talk about feelings, as if we have only mind and body. We rarely spend time together, and if it happens it will be before the TV." Then, wife # 7 responded, "We live like two roommates who shares bed. He leaves and comes back when I am sleeping. He does not know anything about our children. He is only a bank to give us the money we need." Finally, wife # 8 concluded, "We have a peaceful routine life. We have the three meals together. We go out occasionally with the kids and have some fun as a family."

Category V: Addressing Negative Marital Experiences

When I asked the fifth question about how Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives deal with the issues and experiences that lessen their marital satisfaction, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question. Wife # 1 responded, "When we have a problem, we pray for it and we talk it over." Wife # 2 said, "During difficult times in our life, parents always interfere and help solve issues. We rarely fight because we rarely see each other or spend time together. I wish we see each other and we fight and get along again which will give meaning to our marriage." Wife # 3 stated, "With problems we always blame each other. We shout and relax. We agreed that when one is angry the other should keep quiet until the angry partner is done. This is a successful strategy which is working well with us. Parents sometimes help clarify things and resolve our conflicts. Sometimes we ask the advice from Abouna (the priest) in the church. Anyways, the love between us always helps us solve our problems and

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forgive." Wife # 4 added, "Problems come to us from outside. Sometimes they come from friends and other times from parents. When we have problems, we discuss them and share feelings. We fight from time to time but we usually forgive and forget."

Wife # 5 commented, "Since we have a sacred routine and we rarely see each other or talk we swallow our problems. I sometimes write my issues on a piece of paper or write a letter to my husband to tell him about my sufferings. I read the letter several times and then burn it. From time to time I take my personal worries to Abouna (the priest) in the church and he comforts me through prayers and the scriptures. My husband deals with the problems differently; he locks himself in the bedroom and does not talk to anyone. For him when I show him affection and give him a hug, he calms down and starts to talk. I do appreciate what he suffers from everyday in his private business. Life is very hard. We always ask God to help us out."

Taking turns, wife # 6 added, "We go through our problems routinely like any other thing in our life. We discuss the daily problems together and usually our good physical intimacy helps us overcome any daily problems." Then, wife # 7 responded, "Oh problems. We have a lot of problems in our life; we have the problem of communication and the problem of commitment, respect, and understanding. We never sit and discuss our problems." Finally, wife # 8 concluded, "Like any couple we have the daily problems. But we do not call them problems. We call them differences in opinion in how to handle stuff. We pray, sit, talk and express our feelings. Usually we resolve any conflict peacefully with a win-win solution. Thank God."

Category VI: Maintaining Marital Relationship

When I asked the sixth question about what make Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives maintain their marriage, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question. Wife # 1 responded, "Marriage to us is a lifelong relationship. We believe that we were married in heaven before earth; therefore we must stand each other. We must forgive and forget. We must make our marriage work." Wife # 2 said, "Our marriage is a Christian marriage where divorce is only for committing adultery. We are fine. All people have problems. How we solve our problems can make a difference. Having children also make a difference. We continue our marriage for the sake of children and hoping that one day everything will be fine." Wife # 3 stated, "There are many reasons for keeping our marriage. We are Christians and we do not have divorce. Our culture and traditions also force us to continue our marriage even with problems. The husband is the head and he is responsible for all the money we need. Also having a husband means having security and company." Wife # 4 added, "We believe that Christian marriage always has Christ in it and will finally work. It is our religion that tells us there is no divorce except if the husband or the wife commits adultery. Also wives should submit and respect their husbands and husband should love their wives and sacrifice for them." Wife # 5 commented, "We continue our marriage by our faith and religious beliefs, avoiding each other, forgetting our problems, and focusing on raising up our children, and keeping the company."

Wife # 6 added, "In Christianity there is no divorce. We never heard about a divorce in the family. The church always tells us that we do not allow divorce easily. Having children always helps forget and forgive. People look at the divorced or separated

woman as something bad. People talk about that a lot and judge and condemn." Then, wife # 7 responded, "My husband supports me financially. He protects me and my children. I have no other people here around me. I do not know what to do by myself. Many times I thought of separation like many women in the church." Finally, wife # 8 concluded, "To us marriage is not a contract or a business between a man and a woman. Marriage is a life. God chose my husband for me and chose me for my husband. We cannot and will never think of separation whatever the problems are. Marriage is a sacrament. It is blessed by God. The Holy Spirit is dwelling with us in our home. I do remember that our marital relationship is similar to the relationship between God and the church. Our spirituality always helps us be strong and overcome any problems."

Category VII: Desired Changes to Improve Marital Satisfaction

When I asked the seventh question about the changes that Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives could make to improve their marital satisfaction, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question Wife # 1 responded, "Just to be more patient and more romantic and to take care of himself. We need to work harder on making our marriage more successful."Wife # 2 said, "I would like not to be so emotional in my reactions so that I could think things through more thoroughly before I react. I would like him to understand that even though I have no doubt that he loves me, I like to hear it often as a reminder. We must use both our minds and our feelings." Wife # 3 stated, "I would like to see changes in our marriage such as better sex life, quality vs. quantity, I wish my attitude and physical responses become better. My husband understands that my service is a priority as his service and to allow accommodation to that end. We need to balance between our services at the church and

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our marriage and life needs. We need to understand that when marriage succeeds our service will succeed." Wife # 4 added, "To train ourselves to listen more than we talk; to increase our shared time together, and to increase our understanding and communication."

Wife # 5 commented, "The list of changes includes: to be less emotional, he becomes more active and more supportive, spend more time together, pay more attention to the way we talk and behave with one another, and show more respect to each other." Taking turns, wife # 6 added, "To continue respecting him. My husband stops smoking and come more often to the church than what he does now, and to give less time to his work and more time to God." Then, wife # 7 responded, "The change we need is to make an effort to prioritize family life vs. work, listening more than talking, be real and say sorry, and to respect my husband and show love to him." Finally, wife # 8 concluded, "Continue loving and respecting each other till we die, to spend more time together, and to have more open communication together."

Category VIII: Preparation for Marriage

When I asked the eighth question about how Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives have been prepared for marriage, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question. Wife #1 responded, "No preparation from outside, just our understanding during the engagement time." Wife # 2 said, "No preparation at all, just listening to friends."Wife # 3 stated, "Getting advice from TV shows and Christian readings and the guidelines of good marriage in the Bible." Wife # 4 added, "No preparation at all. I got married in two months through the family arrangements."Wife # 5 commented, "No formal preparations, just ideas from here and

there. I got some advice from friends and some guidance from the priest."Taking turns, wife # 6 added, "No preparation at all, only listening to friends." Then, wife # 7 responded, "I did not receive any preparation. I only got some ideas from my close friends and from my older sisters."Finally, wife # 8 concluded, "I got some concepts about Christian marriage by listening to sermons and by reading."

Category IX: Marriage Support

When I asked the ninth question about how Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives have been supported in their marriage by the Coptic Orthodox Church, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question. Wife # 1 responded, "No support, just confession and prayers." Wife # 2 said, "No actual support; sometimes brief guidance." Wife #3 stated, "The priest always says just pray and everything will be fine."Wife # 4 added, "Nothing." Wife # 5 commented, "No help or support. Sometimes the priest prays with us and gives some advice." Taking turns, wife # 6 added, "No support. No one listens to you." Then, wife # 7 responded, "No support. They help some people and some people not."Finally, wife # 8 concluded, "The church helps as much as they can. The problems are bigger than Abouna (the priest) to solve."

Category X: Recommendation for Church Leaders

When I asked the tenth question about the recommendations Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives would like to make to the Coptic Orthodox Church leaders regarding marriage enrichment programs and marriage preparation programs, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question. Wife # 1 responded, "My recommendations will be more support and more people to help." Wife # 2 said, "I can make three recommendations: more books, more sermons about marriage,

and not to allow marriage in a short time."Wife # 3 stated, "I can add providing CDs and

tapes on marriage and conflict resolution." Wife # 4 added, "Having counselors and

counseling offices at the Coptic churches."Wife # 5 commented, "To publish more

booklets on marriage and to have regular family meetings." Taking turns, wife # 6 added,

"More marriage and family meetings where they talk about success stories." Then, wife #

7 responded, "We need more people to help and solve the marriage problems and more

advice to parents before marrying their daughters especially in Upper Egypt." Finally,

wife # 8 concluded, "establishing weekly family meetings and offering marriage

counseling services."A summary of Wives' Focus Group categories is presented in Table

3 (See Appendix D).

Husbands' Focus Group Question-by-Question Narrative Analysis

Category I: Perception of Marital Satisfaction

I conducted the second focus group on the following day of conducting the first

focus group after the church service, using the same room and the same setting which I

used for the first focus group. The six participants were sitting in a small semi-circle where

they could see each other while responding to my questions. When I asked the first

question about the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands' perception of

marital satisfaction, they followed the ground rules and took turns in answering the first

question. Husband # 1 responded, "It means good communication, same faith in God,

seeking to serve each other without the other asking for it. It is love and same satisfaction

in physical intimacy." Husband # 2 said, "Marital satisfaction means love, understanding,

and respect. It is a relationship built on mutual love, trust and understanding." Taking turns,

husband # 3 stated, "It is to have a happy and settled relationship. It is the relationship

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where husband and wife understand themselves and each other." Husband#4 added, "To me marital satisfaction means submission, love, understanding, and honesty. It is a relationship in which the wife submits in love, understands her husband personality and needs, and enjoys her husband intellectually, emotionally, and physically." Then, husband # 5 commented, "Marital satisfaction is good communication, unconditional love, and forgiveness. Good communication means I listen when my wife talks because women like to talk more than men." Finally, husband#6 concluded, "To me marital satisfaction means having respectful relationship based on love and sacrifice."

Category II: Factors Contributing to Marital Satisfaction

When I asked the second question about the factors that positively affect Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands' marital satisfaction, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question, Husband # 1 responded, "My factors are respect, communication, care for each other and for children, and joyful sexual relationship." Husband # 2 said, "The good factors are love, understanding, respect, honesty, and interesting relationship in bed." Taking turns, husband # 3 stated, "It is respect, understanding, love, encouragement, and good sexual relationship." Husband # 4 added, "Well educated wife, smart wife, respectable wife, and attractive wife." Then, husband#5 commented, "Good communication, respect, submission, and Love." Finally, husband # 6 concluded, "The factors are respect, agape love, and communication."

Category III: Factors Contributing to Marital Dissatisfaction

When I asked the third question about the factors that negatively affect Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands' marital satisfaction, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question, Husband # 1 responded, "One

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and only one factor which is physical intimacy. She is not very interested while I am. But she still tries hard to respond. She always discourages me. She does not show any kind of respect although we got married after a love story. Her voice is always loud." Husband # 2 said, "What makes me mad in my marriage is lack of respect, talking too much, talking with other people about our marriage."Taking turns, husband # 3 stated, "It is worry, distrust, and being busy all the time with children and her work." Husband # 4 added, "Her excessive emotions, and sociability."Then, husband # 5 commented, "Disrespect, discouragement, and dishonesty, and anger." Finally, husband # 6 concluded, "The factors are not listening, not cooperating, and jealousy."

Category IV: Daily Marital Experiences

When I asked the fourth question about examples of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands' daily experiences that influence their marital satisfaction, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question, Husband # 1 responded, "Everyday we watch TV together. We have the three daily meals together. We share our daily problems and issues." Husband # 2 said, "We have breakfast and dinner as a family. I take care of finances and she takes care of the household. We talk about our daily needs and issues." Taking turns, husband # 3 stated, "We have meals, go to work, take care of children and parents, go to church, go shopping, discuss family issues, and visit friends sometimes." Husband # 4 added, "We do everything together in a loving way. We communicate, discuss, and have fun together. We share everything all the time." Then, husband # 5 commented, "Like most Egyptians we have our routine day that starts with breakfast and ends with dinner and a short chat before going to bed. We talk about our daily concerns and future plans." Finally, husband # 6 concluded, "We

have two meals together: breakfast and dinner during the week days and three meals during the week ends. We discuss the daily life issues together on a regular basis. We rarely talk about our feelings since we work like machines to bring money to pay the bills."

Category V: Addressing Negative Marital Experiences

When I asked the fifth question about how the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands deal with the issues and experiences that lessen their marital satisfaction, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question, Husband # 1 responded, "When we have a problem, we shout and yell until one of us gives up. Then later we talk as if nothing happened." Husband # 2 said, "Like other couples we fight from time to time, get upset and angry. When we calm down, we discus and pray. Sometimes we ask for help from others." Taking turns, husband # 3 stated, "We know that we are both nervous, so we agreed to use a strategy that one talks and one listens. Sometimes it works, other times it does not work and we yell and yell until we get tired. We seek advice from our close friends and from Abouna (the priest) at the church." Husband # 4 added, "In our life it looks like we do not have problems. We usually forget and forgive." Then, husband # 5 commented, "We do not have problems. We have repeated mistakes. We do not learn from our mistakes. We do not even try to solve our problems."Finally, husband # 6 concluded, "I agree that these are daily issues and experiences that all people have. We use different strategies in confronting our problems like praying, shouting, talking, silence, and sometimes shutting down.

Category VI: Maintaining Marital Relationship

When I asked the sixth question about what make the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands maintain their marriage, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question, Husband # 1 responded, "I strongly believe that marriage is forever. My partner and I are equally dependent upon one another." Husband#2 said, "There is no excuse for a divorce. I feel very loyal and committed to my wife. Taking turns, husband#3 stated, "Although divorce or separation is a reasonable way to end a bad marriage. I feel very dependent upon my wife. Husband # 4 added, "There are many reasons why people who are unhappy should remain married. It is children, suffering, reputation and other things."Then, husband # 5 commented, "It is important for people to stay married for the sake of their children. I am willing to sacrifice for my children."Finally, husband # 6 concluded, "I've put too much into this relationship to let it end. I would feel guilty if I were to get a divorce or even a separation. I am madly attracted and committed to my wife."

Category VII: Desired Changes to Improve Marital Satisfaction

When I asked the seventh question about the changes that the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands could make to improve their marital satisfaction, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question. Husband # 1 responded, "Changing our sexual relationship will be number one. I wish I could love my wife better or less selfishly. I wish I could treat her as nicely as she treats me. I wish she is more interested sexually." Husband # 2 said, "I need to be more patient, more emotional and less intellectual. I need to spend more time with my wife and children." Taking turns, husband # 3 stated, "I need to be more patient and show more love to my wife. She needs

to be less busy and give me more attention like children." Husband # 4 added, "My wife worries too much, too much preoccupied with the children who are close to be adults. To cooperate with me and give me more time which I deserve." Then, husband # 5 commented, "We both need to change our thoughts and feelings. We also need to learn from our mistakes." Finally, husband # 6 concluded, "I need to give my wife more time and care, not only during the weekends but every day. I also need to share more responsibilities in the household's chores."

Category VIII: Preparation for Marriage

When I asked the eighth question about how the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands have been prepared for marriage, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question. Husband # 1 responded, "I got ideas about what happens in marriage from observing my parents and listening to my friends' stories. I did not get any kind of preparation from the church." Husband # 2 said, "I only read books and listened to talks about Christian marriage." Taking turns, husband # 3 stated, "We got married traditionally without any preparation. This is why we have a lot of differences and problems." Husband # 4 added, "I was not prepared for marriage by the church, but through reading about marriage and observing different successful marriages in the family." Then, husband # 5 commented, "No preparation at all." Finally, husband # 6 concluded, "My little preparation was done through readings and little guidance from my father of confession in my church back in Egypt."

Category IX: Marriage Support

When I asked the ninth question about how the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands have been supported in their marriage by the Coptic

Orthodox Church, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question, Husband # 1 responded, "Nothing at all." Husband # 2 said, "Very little support from friends in the church." Taking turns, husband # 3 stated, "Just prayers." Husband # 4 added, "Sometimes prayers, other times no support at all." Then, husband # 5 commented, "You would be lucky if you get prayers for your marriage." Finally, husband # 6 concluded, "We used to have full support back in Egypt from the church, but here not as much as we expect."

Category X: Recommendation for Church Leaders

When I asked the tenth question about the recommendations the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands would like to make to the Coptic Orthodox Church leaders regarding marriage enrichment programs and marriage preparation programs, they went around the circle and each provided a response to the question. Husband # 1 responded, "More priests to serve the big number of people attending church services." Husband # 2 said, "The church leaders need to do more about helping the families living in the States because the culture is different." Taking turns, husband # 3 stated, "We need more books on marriage and more social talks rather than religious talks every day." Husband # 4 added, "just more orientation to newly married people and education for the people who are getting ready to marry.' Then, husband # 5 commented, "We need weekly meetings for married people and young parents." Finally, husband # 6 concluded, "I can recommend many things such as more books, more meetings about marital life and marital problems, more qualified people to guide and help."A summary of Husbands' Focus Group categories is presented in Table 4 (See Appendix D).

Key Informant Interviews Question-by-Question Narrative Analysis

Key Informant Interview # 1

When I asked key informant #1 about how the she perceives her marital

satisfaction, she responded, "Marital satisfaction means to have a strong relationship with

God. Having a true friendship with your husband and having fun together. It is a fulfilling

relationship. By fulfilling I mean trying to satisfy each one's needs. It is working together

for common goals. To do this requires constant communication and openness

commitment and understanding, willingness to keep working at it. It is also enjoying

communication, intimacy, shared responsibility, and support for one another in all aspects

of life. It is a relationship that is based on a sacrificing love, mutual respect, and trust;

they are all equally important. Sacrificing love means to always give without waiting to

take. You always forgive and support your spouse."

When I asked her about the factors that positively contribute to her marital

satisfaction, she added, "The factors I feel contribute to my marital satisfaction are open

communication, commitment, and trust. These are the three pillars of any successful

marriage. I also believe that honesty is an important aspect of a marriage. It is so

important because honesty leads to trust. Being honest to each other in all things and

having God word as the rule book to go by can make any marriage happy. To me it is

communication, mutual respect, love, trust, friendship, common goals, and commitment."

When I asked her about the factors that negatively affect her marital satisfaction,

she responded, "Three main factors that can destroy marriage. They are lack of care,

worries, and little foxes. When I talk about little foxes of marriage, I mean little things such

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as jealously, close-mindedness, high voice, wrong body languages, wrong tone of voice and the like."

When I asked her to give me examples of the daily experiences that influence her marital satisfaction, she said, "We usually pray together in the morning and before we go to bed. We often watch Christian TV channels together, and have the three daily meals together. We sometimes go out for a meal or to visit some friends from the church."

The fifth question was about how she deals with the issues and experiences that lessen her marital satisfaction. In responding to my question, key informant #1 responded, "We solve our issues through our mutual faith in Jesus Christ, unconditional love, a serious commitment to our marriage, other married friends to talk with, the willingness to seek help before it is too late if needed."

When I asked her about what makes her maintain her marriage, she told me, "It is our faith, children, commitment to marriage, our vows, and forgiveness. It is our willingness to go the second mile to support each other. It is understanding and patience."

When we came to the seventh question that asks about changes that she could make to improve her marital satisfaction, key informant #1 hesitated and then said, "My husband and I do not live together as a wife and a husband. He works in another state and comes home once a week. The most difficult part is when he's not here physically for me and the kids, but I've made lots of friends who help me out. Sometimes we feel that this is good for our marriage because when he is home we spend good times together. Other times we feel this should end because our children need a father and I need protection and intimacy.

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When I asked about how she has been prepared for marriage, she stated, "As I said before very little or no actual support, just few scattered ideas about marriage.

When I asked about how she has been supported in her marriage by the Coptic Orthodox Church, she laughed and said, "Same as I said in the discussion. Abouna (the priest) listens during confession and prays for us. Finally, when I asked if she would like to make some recommendations to the Coptic Orthodox Church leaders regarding marriage enrichment programs and marriage preparation programs, she concluded, "We need more people to help us in facing our daily problems in this world and to guide us in our marriage. We also want to have weekly meetings for married people in the church" A summary of the categorized constructed meanings emerged from Key Informant Interview # 1 is presented in Table 5 (See Appendix D).

Key Informant Interview # 2

When I asked key informant # 2 about how she perceives her marital satisfaction, she responded, "Our marriage is not as successful as I expected. To me a satisfying marriage is when the husband is committed to his wife and does not have relationship s with other women; when he supports his wife emotionally and physically. It is to have a husband who deserves respect."

When I asked her about the factors that positively contribute to her marital satisfaction, she added, "To me the most important aspect of a successful marriage is a loving and caring commitment, open communication, listening and being listened to; living in harmony through life's tribulations; and accepting each other no matter what. Just as the vows that we say on our wedding day is what it's all about. Believe me, it is

trust, respect, friendship, open and honest communication, and finally having fun

together that can give any marriage a meaning."

When I asked her about the factors that negatively affect her marital satisfaction,

she responded, "The negative factors are lack of respect, dishonesty, and lack of

commitment to marriage."

When I asked her to give me examples of the daily experiences that influence her

marital satisfaction, she said, "We argue a lot about money and time and who is doing

what. We do not cooperate at home. We do not reach any compromise in our fights. We

are always ready to fight and complain. We go to church sometimes together."

The fifth question was about how she deals with the issues and experiences that

lessen her marital satisfaction. In responding to my question, key informant # 2 responded,

"We never tried to solve our problems by ourselves. We blame each other and ask other

people to solve our problems and even raise our kids for us. My husband is lazy and stupid.

He does not know anything. He is like animals. He does not have feelings. He does not

listen to people in the church. I do not trust him and I do not respect him. Our children do

not respect us."

When I asked her about what makes her maintain her marriage, she told me, "As I

said before, it is the money I need because I do not work. I have three children and I do

not know what to do with them."

When we came to the seventh question that asks about changes that she could make

to improve her marital satisfaction, key informant #2 thought deeply and then said,

"Learning to communicate effectively and to respect my husband and to take care of each

other's mental, psychological, and physical needs. I need to see his commitment to our marriage, to have mutual understanding, open and effective communication, and complete trust."

When I asked about how she has been prepared for marriage, she stated, "The main source of marriage preparation was my two older sisters and my close friend. They told me good and bad things about marriage. I was young at that time and I only took the good things. My friend was even younger than me. She told me a lot about the physical relationship, but not the emotional relationship in marriage.

When I asked about how she has been supported in her marriage by the Coptic Orthodox Church, she laughed and said, "Abouna (the priest) and other people in the church help some people who are rich and have good education. They do not have time for people like us."

Finally, when I asked if she would like to make some recommendations to the Coptic Orthodox Church leaders regarding marriage enrichment programs and marriage preparation programs, she concluded, "We come from villages in upper Egypt. The church there does not have meetings for families. They do not talk about marriage or how to raise children. We need help here because we did not learn about this before. We need a lot of meetings about marriage problems." A summary of the categorized constructed meanings emerged from Key Informant Interview # 2 is presented in Table 6 (See Appendix D).

Key Informant Interview # 3

When I asked key informant # 3 about how she perceives her marital satisfaction, she responded, "Marital satisfaction means practicing a good relationship with God. This

relationship with the Lord gives us a sense of respect, thankfulness and commitment to our marriage. It makes our love, communication, physical intimacy, individual growth, and responsibility stronger. We are both committed Christians. We enjoy open communication, and true friendship. We trust each other. We are committed to each other and can reach compromise in our conflicts and care and share in good and bad times."

When I asked her about the factors that positively contribute to her marital satisfaction, she added, "There is a long list of factors that contribute to my marital satisfaction. This list includes love, mutual commitment and mutual respect, open communication, active participation, supportiveness, joint dreams and goals, being able to trust each other independently, making time for just the two of us, bringing out the best in each other naturally through cooperation, enhancing spiritual growth in each other, enhancing each other's joy, inner peace, energy, and kindness."

When I asked her about the factors that negatively affect her marital satisfaction, she responded, "To me the things that negatively affect marriage are having no solid foundation for marriage, anger, telling other people about the secrets of the family, lack of respect, bad communication and bad sexual relationship."

When I asked her to give me examples of the daily experiences that influence her marital satisfaction, she said, "Although we believe in the "3 COMs" of marriage - communication, companionship, and commitment. We do not practically practice them. Everyone has his or her own life at home. We are taking life very seriously. We share routines such as meals and short discussions and raising children. We pray together on Sundays during liturgy."

The fifth question was about how she deals with the issues and experiences that lessen her marital satisfaction. In responding to my question, key informant #3 responded, "We do not have problems; we have differences in personalities. Good communication and our long relationship always helps in dealing with our daily issues. We try not to go to bed angry. The ability to not just listen to what your spouse has to say but to really hear and feel it is helping. Very often, the reason a person gives for being upset may mask something more serious. If one doesn't really listen to his/her spouse, dissatisfactions could grow until they destroy the relationship. We try to catch and kill the little foxes of our marriage early."

When I asked her about what makes her maintain her marriage, she told me, "Marriage is a sacramental relationship. Having God in the center of our lives and our marriage always keeps us together and enables us to face our difficulties. Communication is extremely important. Learning how to disagree and argue about our differences without "tearing" each other down. Being supportive and lifting each other up. Being aware of each other's needs, desires, and dreams."

When we came to the seventh question that asks about changes that she could make to improve her marital satisfaction, key informant # 3 said, "We need to learn how to put each other's needs ahead of one's own needs. We need to practice more active faith. We need to put God in the center of everything. With his help anything can be worked out or accomplished. Another change we need to have is to find balance between fostering the individual growth of the two of us and allowing for more intimacy and emotional support."

When I asked about how she has been prepared for marriage, she stated, "I read many booklets about happy marriage and the differences between woman and man. I also listened to a few sermons on family and marriage."

When I asked about how she has been supported in her marriage by the Coptic Orthodox Church, she gave me a big smile then said, "Abouna (the priest) is doing his best in helping as much as he can. Usually people come to Abouna when it is too late and they failed to resolve their conflict. We pray for more qualified servants to help Abouna."

Finally, when I asked if she would like to make some recommendations to the Coptic Orthodox Church leaders regarding marriage enrichment programs and marriage preparation programs, she concluded, "I heard that some churches in Egypt now have weekly meetings for the married couples and even for those who are engaged. Why do not we have something similar here? Another idea if we can make it here is the family Eshbeen (best man/guide) who can get involved with the married couples who have problems and guide them in resolving their marital conflicts." A summary of the categorized constructed meanings emerged from Key Informant Interview # 3 is presented in Table 7 (See Appendix D).

Key Informant Interview # 4

When I asked key informant# 4 about how he perceives his marital satisfaction, he responded, "Marital satisfaction is a strong spiritual foundation that emphasizes commitment to marriage and family where the husband loves and the wife submits. It is to have a limited degree of self-centeredness on the part of both wife and husband. It is

mutual respect. You must respect your spouse and he/she must respect you in return to get past even the most basic difficulties."

When I asked him about the factors that positively contribute to his marital satisfaction, he added, "I can mention love, trust, respect, beauty, honesty, cooperation, constant communication, sense of humor, physical intimacy."

When I asked him about the factors that negatively affect his marital satisfaction, he responded, "My wife is very kind and loving. Sometimes I feel she has only heart. She is very generous and social to the extent of being naïve."

When I asked him to give me examples of the daily experiences that influence his marital satisfaction, he said, "We enjoy our open communication, honesty with self and each other. We share responsibilities of children and household as well as many good times."

The fifth question was about how he deals with the issues and experiences that lessen his marital satisfaction. In responding to my question, key informant # 4 responded, "We forget and forgive. In other words, we tolerate problems because we do not have time for them. We need to focus on our children and how to make them happy. Our strong relationship with God always helps us. God, too, is part of our marriage. God teaches us the importance of forgiveness and unconditional love every day! His rules for making a marriage work are very simple and easy to follow."

When I asked him about what makes him maintain his marriage, he told me, "God made marriage to last forever. It is a sacred relationship. If husbands and wives were to separate, the suffering of their children and extended families will last forever. My wife

and I each know we are not perfect, but our ultimate trust is in God who is perfect. God always forgives us, so we must forgive each other and continue commitment in love. To me, love is much more a commitment to put the other person first. A commitment can continue in spite of difficulties."

When we came to the seventh question that asks about changes that he could make to improve his marital satisfaction, key informant # 4 said, "We need to learn to stop worrying about the future of our children. We need to take care of each other and spend more quality time together whether inside or outside; time in which we focus on each other and have all kinds of intimacy."

When I asked about how he has been prepared for marriage, he stated, "Just through reading books and stories about married people and watching good and bad models of marriages around me in my village and my church."

When I asked about how he has been supported in his marriage by the Coptic Orthodox Church, he laughed and said, "Most churches have only one priest who is always busy with the liturgies and meetings. They do not have time to talk to everyone."

Finally, when I asked if he would like to make some recommendations to the Coptic Orthodox Church leaders regarding marriage enrichment programs and marriage preparation programs, he commented, "As I said before, we need more training and more meetings and people like you to teach and help." A summary of the categorized constructed meanings emerged from Key Informant Interview # 4 is presented in Table 8 (See Appendix D).

When I asked key informant # 5 about how he perceives his marital satisfaction, he responded, "It is the relationship that is built on love, mutual respect, trust, good sex, the ability to forgive, forget, and go on."

When I asked him about the factors that positively contribute to his marital satisfaction, he said, "We do need to communicate, show love and respect to each other. We need to apply what the bible says about marriage: love and submission."

When I asked him about the factors that negatively affect his marital satisfaction, he responded, "Our relationship is not intimate at all; my wife does not respect me. She is always angry; she insults me and calls me names. Sometimes she hits me or slaps me. She is very discouraging."

When I asked him to give me examples of the daily experiences that influence his marital satisfaction, he said, "Just eating and sleeping together. She takes care of children and house work and I take care of finance. We argue a lot and we discuss life problems and difficulties sometimes. We go to church as a family occasionally."

The fifth question was about how he deals with the issues and experiences that lessen his marital satisfaction. In responding to my question, key informant # 5 responded, "We never managed to talk about our problems without fighting and yelling, calling names, and sometimes hitting each other in front of the kids."

When I asked him about what makes him maintain his marriage, he told me, "In spite of what is going on in my life, I try to keep my marriage for the sake of my children. It does not matter that I do more for my wife than she does for me."

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When we came to the seventh question that asks about changes that he could make to improve his marital satisfaction, key informant # 5 said, "We need to learn how to respect each other and to communicate openly. We also need to talk about our feelings and what hurt them. I also need to accept my wife as she is and to forgive her. I also should prove to her that I am the head of the family."

When I asked about how he has been prepared for marriage, he said, "No one told me anything about how to choose my wife or even how to deal with daily marriage stuff."

When I asked about how he has been supported in his marriage by the Coptic Orthodox Church, he laughed and said, "Priests are tired and busy and sometimes do not want to get involved in the marriage problem of the church people."

Finally, when I asked if he would like to make some recommendations to the Coptic Orthodox Church leaders regarding marriage enrichment programs and marriage preparation programs, he concluded, "We need weekly meetings for families and couples. We need more people to solve problems before we go to court or before people leave each other and the whole family gets destroyed." A summary of the categorized constructed meanings emerged from Key Informant Interview # 5 is presented in Table 9 (See Appendix D).

Key Informant Interview # 6

When I asked key informant #1 about how he perceives his marital satisfaction, he responded, "1 believe it is mutual respect and space. In a good marriage, we should not dominate each other. It is saying '*I'm sorry*' when I make mistake and having it said

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to me when my wife is wrong. It is also keeping our friendship alive, sharing with each other all of our hopes and dreams."

When I asked him about the factors that positively contribute to his marital satisfaction, he said, "To me the good factor is true friendship. Each spouse must trust the other implicitly and absolutely and each must be a true and honest friend to the other. Genuine love; all else descends from this. When I have my love for my wife in mind, I do okay. When I allow myself to get distracted and busy, so that I no longer think of my love for my wife, then I become insensitive to her needs. Also strong marriage is based on good communication with each other about feelings and thoughts. Not letting things build up but talking about it immediately helps a lot."

When I asked him about the factors that negatively affect his marital satisfaction, he responded, "Although we love each other, we do not talk and when we talk she does not listen. Also she is very jealous and always looks at what other people have or do. She does not cooperate with me and wants to have her own account and her own independent life. I do not see her as a wife that can encourage me for better life."

When I asked him to give me examples of the daily experiences that influence his marital satisfaction, he said, "We have a deep and committed friendly relationship. We support each other by being there for each other. Our marriage is built on trust, caring and agape love at least from my part. We have the daily meals as a family. We pray together from time to time, go to church together, visit close friends from the church together, and watch Christian TV together, especially during weekends."

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The fifth question was about how he deals with the issues and experiences that lessen his marital satisfaction. In responding to my question, key informant # 6 responded, "We make mistakes and we learn from them. We use our Christian wisdom and simplicity in dealing with our daily experiences. We get experiences good and bad. We try to get rid of the bad and make the good stronger. We sometimes shout, we joke, we pray, we discuss, we cry, and we laugh. But in all cases we never go to be angry or upset."

When I asked him about what makes him maintain his marriage, he told me, "What helps us keep our marriage and make it better is our commitment to the Lord and each other. When we have problems, we always go back to our Christian faith, guidance in the Bible, and commitment and love for one another. Our friendship helps a lot. To us, friendship and trust are two of the most important aspects of marriage. No matter how good everything else is, a marriage is destined to fail if these two things are not met."

When we came to the seventh question that asks about changes that he could make to improve his marital satisfaction, key informant # 6 thought for a while and then said, "I need to show more care and love to my wife. She needs to be more patient with me. We need to spend more time together away from kids and friends."

When I asked about how he has been prepared for marriage, he stated, "I was somewhat prepared for my marriage through our love and long engagement period, readings about successful marriages, and guidance and advice from Abouna (the priest) at my church back in Egypt, who was a monk but at the same time caring a lot about marital life of his congregation."

When I asked about how he has been supported in his marriage by the Coptic Orthodox Church, he smiled and said, "The priest in my previous church in Egypt was young and very qualified to guide and help married people, when we moved to the States, things are different. The priest has no time for such issues. He works hard for the big congregation to provide the religious and spiritual services. Anyways, he tries to help as much as he can."

Finally, when I asked if he would like to make some recommendations to the Coptic Orthodox Church leaders regarding marriage enrichment programs and marriage preparation programs, he said, "My recommendations to the Coptic Orthodox Church leaders are to publish more books and write more articles on Christian marriage, to establish regular marriage and family meetings, and to train more qualified people who can help resolve the conflicts of the married couples, and prepare young people for successful marital life." A summary of the categorized constructed meanings emerged from Key Informant Interview # 6 is presented in Table 10 (See Appendix D).

Final Invitation

Question 11: What could I have asked you that I did not ask to gain a better understanding of the Coptic orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans' lived marital experiences?

This final question was asked in each focus group and key interview in an attempt to invite constructed meanings that the participants did not consider in response to any of the preselected stimulus questions. When I asked what else I could have asked to have a better understanding of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives' lived

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marital experiences, the participants answered, "you asked about everything." In the wives' focus group, one wife said, "Your questions were clever enough to get us to talk about our marriage and even feel more comfortable." The other participants agreed with her. When I repeated the question, one wife said, "No more questions."That was a signal to end the first focus group. In the husbands' focus group, I received similar answers. When I asked the last question about other questions I could have asked to have a better understanding of the Coptic orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands' lived marital experiences, one husband asked me this question, "What will you do when you are done with the study?" I responded, "I will make recommendations to the Coptic Church leaders. I will also design some marriage enrichment programs, and plan some premarital courses for the Coptic orthodox Churches." When I repeated the question, another husband said, "Nothing." That was a signal to end the second focus group. I followed the same procedure at the end of each key informant interview. I also provided each key informant with an opportunity to introduce constructed meanings that were not stimulated by the studies extant questions. When none of the key informants made suggestions for additional questions or added new data, I ended the interviews.

Cross-Case Analysis: Focus Groups and Key Informant Interviews

The cross-case analysis provides a synopsis of the multitude of constructed meanings that surfaced for all participants in this study, both in the two focus groups and in the six individual interviews. Similarities and differences in units of meaning that surfaced in the 10 categorical areas are summarized in Tables 11-20 (See Appendix D). A separate table for each category is provided for ease of review, and similarities and differences among constructed meanings in each categorical area are noted.

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The cross comparison of the participating husbands and wives' perception of

marital satisfaction shows that Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian husbands and wives

perceive marital satisfaction as a relationship based on respect, love, commitment,

intimacy, communication, honesty, trust, and understanding. Respect was emphasized by

the two focus groups and the six key informants. Love was emphasized by the two focus

groups and four key informants. Intimacy, friendship, commitment, and communication

came in the third rank. Forgiveness and understanding came in the fourth position as

bases for marital satisfaction (See Table 11, Appendix D).

The cross comparison of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American

husbands and wives' factors contributing to marital satisfaction shows that the

participating husbands and wives consider communication, love, trust, respect, honesty,

commitment and intimacy the main factors that can enhance marital satisfaction. By

counting the frequency of the emerged constructed meaning, it was clear that

communication and love received the highest frequency in the reported constructed

meanings. These two factors were followed in frequency by respect and trust, followed

by commitment and honesty, then intimacy (See Table 12, Appendix D).

The cross comparison of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American

husbands and wives' factors contributing to marital dissatisfaction. It shows that lack of

respect was the top factor that negatively influences Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-

American husbands and wives' marital satisfaction. Lack of communication, lack of

commitment, jealousy, emotional, verbal, and physical abuse, as well as discouragement

came in as the second most cited reason for marital dissatisfaction. Factors like

dishonesty, lack of care, lack of cooperation, lack of wisdom and sharing privacy with

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other people came in the third position among the factors that negatively influence Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' marital satisfaction (See Table 13, Appendix D).

The cross comparison of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' daily marital experiences shows that communicating about daily issues and having daily meals together were the top daily experiences of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives. They were followed by fighting and arguing. Going to church, sharing children's responsibilities, and sharing household chores came in the third position among the daily experiences of Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives. Going shopping, visiting friends, and watching Christian TV programs together came in the fourth position the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' daily marital experiences. Complaining about feelings came at the end of the list of the daily experiences of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives (See Table 14, Appendix D).

The cross comparison of how the participating husbands and wives address their negative marital experiences shows that discussion and communication were the main strategies they use to address their negative marital experiences. The second element that helps them address their negative marital experiences was their Christian faith and wisdom. Their commitment to marriage, prayers, unconditional love, and help from others came in the third position among the strategies the participants use to address their negative marital experiences. Forgiveness and tolerance, focusing on children, and

silence or shutting down were also strategies they use in addressing their negative marital experiences, but these strategies came at the end of the list (See Table 15, Appendix D).

The cross comparison of what makes the participating husbands and wives maintain their marriage shows that the participants' Christian faith and beliefs about marriage and having children were the top factors behind maintaining their marriages. It also shows that Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives maintain their marriages because of their commitment, communication, and understanding. The financial support from husbands to wives came in the third position among the factors that helped the participants maintain their marriages. Forgiveness and culture and traditions came at the end of the list (See Table 16, Appendix D).

The cross comparison of the desired changes the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives would like to make in order to improve their marital satisfaction shows that spending more quality time together came at the top of their list of desired changes to improve marital satisfaction. Showing more care and love, having more open communication, and practicing more forgiveness and patience came in the second position on the list of desired changes that can enhance their marital satisfaction. Better emotional, verbal and physical intimacy, accepting each other, and sharing more responsibilities in the household chores are also among the items that need to be worked on in order to improve the participants' marital satisfaction (See Table 17, Appendix D).

The cross comparison of how the participants have been prepared for marriage shows that the participants did a lot of readings to prepare themselves for marriage.

Receiving advice from family members and friends and listening to talks about Christian

marriage were the second source of their preparation for marriage. Watching good and

bad models of marriages, having long engagement periods, and receiving guidance and

advice from church priest came in the third position as a source for Coptic Orthodox

Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' marriage preparation. The table also

shows that many of the participating husbands and wives did not receive any kind of

marriage preparation (See Table 18, Appendix D).

The cross comparison of how the participants have been supported in their

marriages by the Coptic Orthodox church shows that the participating husbands and

wives received little support from the Coptic Orthodox church in the form of guidance,

advice, confession, and prayers (See Table 19, Appendix D).

The cross comparison of the recommendations the participating husbands and

wives would like to make to the Coptic Orthodox Church leaders shows that the

participants mainly recommended establishing weekly meetings for married and engaged

people, providing more qualified people to serve the big congregation, providing more

training, education, and orientation on marriage, providing counseling services in

churches, and providing more books and articles on marriage (See Table 20, Appendix

D).

Emerged Themes

The main themes that were developed from of the constructed meanings in the 10

categorical areas were: (a) Satisfying marriage, (b) Marital satisfaction factors, (c) Daily

marital experiences, (d) Marriage maintenance factors, and (e) Desired changes.

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Theme 1: Satisfying Marriage

Almost universally, the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives who participated in the study perceived marital satisfaction as a relationship based on respect, commitment, open communication, unconditional love, and submission. For example, wife #1 said, "Marital satisfaction means having a complete fulfilling relationship based on mutual respect, understanding, and unconditional love." Wife # 5 commented, "For me marital satisfaction means a marriage that is built on the rock where love, care, and support for one another are unconditional." Wife # 7 stated, "To me marital satisfaction is understanding each other , caring for each other , communicating well with each other, feeling jealous, having real intimacy, and being honest to each other." Husband # 1 said, "Marital satisfaction means good communication, same faith in God, seeking to serve each other without the other asking for it. It is love and same satisfaction in physical intimacy." Husband # 2 said, "Marital satisfaction means love, understanding, and respect. It is a relationship built on mutual love, trust and understanding." Husband # 4 added, "To me marital satisfaction means submission, love, understanding, and honesty."

The most significant sub-themes that described the satisfying marital relationship of the wives and husbands who participated in the study were: respect, submission, and physical intimacy. The participating wives reported that the unconditional love, open communication, and commitment were the significant sub-themes that describe their satisfying marital relationship. To the husbands who participated in the study, marital satisfaction was perceived as a relationship based on respect, honesty and submission.

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Theme 2: Marital Satisfaction Factors

The Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives who participated in the study reported that communication, commitment, respect, intimacy, active participation in house hold chores, spending time together, and submission are the factors which enhance marital satisfaction when they are present and practiced in the marital relationship. They reported that the absence of these factors leads to marital distress. The participating wives reported that communication, commitment, emotional intimacy, active participation in house hold chores, and spending quality time together enhance their marital satisfaction. The participating husbands reported that respect, physical intimacy, and submission as the three sub-themes influencing their marital satisfaction.

For example, wife # 2 said, "The factors I feel contribute to my marital satisfaction are love, honesty, openness, frequent communication regarding both positive and negative things, self-sacrifice, patience, and understanding, trust, and encouragement. I can also add having interest in each other, understanding the feelings of each other, having an enjoyable time in bed together, and showing affections to each other." Wife # 8 added, "The factors that enrich my marriage are commitment to marriage, respect for each other and each other's time and interests, having a strong spiritual relationship, and finally, being at the same level mentally, spiritually, and intellectually."Husband # 1 stated, "My factors are respect, communication, care for each other and for children, and joyful sexual relationship." Husband # 3 said, "It is respect, understanding, love, encouragement, and good sexual relationship."

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Theme 3: Daily Marital Experiences

The two focus groups and the six key informants of this study reported that their most common daily routine marital experiences were having daily meals, communicating about daily issues, sharing children's responsibilities, sharing household chores, praying together and going to church, complaining, fighting ,and arguing. Having daily meals together and communicating about daily issues were their two top daily experiences. For example, when I asked the participants about examples of the daily marital experiences that influence their marital satisfaction, Wife # 3 reluctantly stated, "The routine life issues, having meals, taking care of children and parents, going to the church, going shopping, and discussing the daily problems." Wife # 4 added, "Sometimes we watch a Christian movie together with children and parents during the weekend. We have a daily routine marital relationship. Everything is routine even the bed relationship." Husband # 1 responded, "Everyday we watch TV together. We have the three daily meals together. We share our daily problems and issues."

Talking about feelings was reported as the least practiced experience in the participants' life. Wife # 6 said, "We have the three meals together. We discuss the daily problems together. We do not have good physical intimacy. We never talk about feelings, as if we have only mind and body. We rarely spend time together, and if it happens it will be before the TV." Wife # 7 stated, "We live like two roommates who shares bed. He leaves and comes back when I am sleeping. He does not know anything about our children. He is only a bank to give us the money we need." Husband # 6 stated, "We have two meals together: breakfast and dinner during the week days and three meals during the week ends. We discuss the daily life issues together on a regular basis. We

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rarely talk about our feelings since we work like machines to bring money to pay the bills."

Different sub-themes emerged from the focus group discussions and the individual interviews in relation to how Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives address their negative daily experiences. The participants reported many sub-themes which reflect their Coptic Orthodox Christian faith and their cultural background. The most frequently reported sub-theme was resorting to their Christian faith and wisdom. Another theme was focusing on their children. A third sub-theme was their commitment to marriage. A fourth sub-theme was their forgiveness and tolerance. The fifth sub-theme was seeking help from parents, friends, and the church priests. For example, Wife # 2 said, "During difficult times in our life, parents always interfere and help solve issues. Wife # 3 stated, ".... Parents sometimes help clarify things and resolve our conflicts. Sometimes we ask the advice from Abouna (the priest) in the church. Wife # 4 added, "We fight from time to time but we usually forgive and forget." Wife # 5 said, "From time to time I take my personal worries to Abouna (the priest) in the church and he comforts me through prayers and the scriptures. Wife # 8 added, "We pray, sit, talk and express our feelings." Husband # 2 said, "Sometimes we ask for help from others." Husband # 3 added, "We seek advice from our close friends and from Abouna (the priest) at the church." Husband # 4 added, "In our life it looks like we do not have problems. We usually forget and forgive."

Theme 4: Marriage Maintenance Factors

Talking about how they manage to maintain their marriage, the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives who participated in the study reported that it is very essential for them to maintain their marriage even with daily problems. They reported many sub-themes that represent the strategies they use to keep their marital relationship. The sub-themes they reported were: focusing on their children, resorting to their Christian faith and beliefs about marriage, sticking to their marital commitment, using open communication, living by the rules of their Egyptian culture and traditions, forgiving each other, and considering the financial support they get from each other. Using their Christian faith and beliefs about marriage and having children were reported as the top factors behind maintaining their marriage. This was clear from the frequency of repeating these strategies by the participants. One wife said, "We continue our marriage for the sake of children." Another wife stated, "Our culture and traditions force us to continue our marriage even with problems. A third wife added, "It is our religion that tells us there is no divorce except if the husband or the wife commits adultery." A fourth wife said, "Marriage to us is a lifelong relationship." A fifth wife said, "My husband supports me financially. He protects me and my children." One of the husbands said, "It is important for people to stay married for the sake of their children. I am willing to sacrifice for my children." Another husband added, "It is the suffering of our children, our reputation and other things."

Theme 5 Desired Changes

The analysis of the data collected in the study indicated that Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives are keen about improving their marital relationships. They work hard on their desired changes to make their marriage better. The participants reported that the most desirable changes they want to make in their marital relationships, in order to enhance their marital satisfaction, were: having more open communication together**,** being more patient and forgiving with one another, practicing better emotional, verbal, and physical intimacy together, showing more understanding, more respect, more care and love for each other, spending more quality time together, and sharing more responsibilities in the household's chores. The sub-theme of spending more quality time together was repeated by all the wives and most of the husbands who participated in the study. It came at the top of the changes they desired to have in their marital relationship. For example, Wife # 5 commented, "to spend more time together, to pay more attention to the way we talk and behave with one another, and show more respect to each other." Wife # 8 concluded, "to spend more time together, and to have more open communication together." Husband # 2 said, "I need to spend more time with my wife and children." Husband # 6 stated, "I need to give my wife more time and care, not only during the weekends but every day. I also need to share more responsibilities in the household's chores." Key informant # 4 said, "We need to take care of each other and spend more quality time together whether inside or outside; time in which we focus on each other and have all kinds of intimacy." Key informant # 6 added, "We need to spend more time together away from kids and friends."

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Summary

A total of 20 Coptic Orthodox Egyptian-American husbands and wives participated in this study. The findings reported in this chapter emerged from two focus group interviews comprised of 14 participants and six in-depth interviews. The first focus group session included eight Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives while the second focus group included six Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands. Three husbands and three wives were selected from the two focus groups for the key informant interviews. I conducted the two focus group discussions in Arabic as the participants requested, while the individual interviews were conducted in English. I held the discussions of the two focus groups in a room at St. George Coptic Orthodox Church in Norristown, Pennsylvania. All interviews were guided by the 10 open-ended questions of the interview protocol which were developed in light of an intensive review of the pertinent literature. I digitally recorded all interviews which enabled me to identify, with ease, each participant's responses and comments during data analysis.

The constructed meanings that surfaced in all interviews were grouped in 10 main categories. The findings of this study indicated that the Coptic Orthodox Egyptian husbands and wives who participated in the study perceived marital satisfaction as a relationship based respect, love, commitment, intimacy, communication, and trust. They considered that the presence of some factors such as communication, love, trust, respect, commitment and intimacy can enhance their marital satisfaction, and the absence of such factors negatively influences their marital satisfaction.

The findings of this study also indicated that the participants manage to maintain their marriage, in light of their routine daily marital experiences, through their Christian faith and beliefs about marriage, caring about children, their commitment, communication, and understanding, as well as the financial support from husbands to wives.The findings of this study also revealed that the participants had some desired changes to improve their marital satisfaction such as spending more quality time together, showing more care and love, having more open communication, practicing more forgiveness and patience having better emotional, verbal and physical intimacy, accepting each other, and sharing more responsibilities in the household.

The findings of this study showed that, in light of their lack of premarital preparation and marriage support, the participants made a list of recommendations to the Coptic Church leaders to improve the church's support for married members. These recommendations included establishing weekly meetings for married and engaged people, providing more qualified people to serve, providing more training, education, and orientation on marriage, providing counseling services in churches, and providing more books and articles on marriage.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study is the first of its kind to consider marital satisfaction among Egyptian husbands and wives in general and Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans in particular. It is an addition to the minorities' marital satisfaction literature. In this chapter, I discuss the findings of the study and compare them with the existing literature. Recommendations for future research and for the practice of clinicians and Coptic Orthodox Church leaders are offered.

The purpose of this study was to investigate Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' perceptions of marital satisfaction and to explore and understand the factors and practices that enhance or lessen their marital satisfaction. The discussion of results is based on the findings from two focus group discussions (eight Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives and six Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands) and six in-depth interviews with key informants.

This qualitative in nature and largely exploratory study creates a rich, textured picture of the lived marital experiences of Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives. By reflecting on the canvas of experiences and the body of new information that emerged in this study, I use this chapter to open a discussion about the findings and generate hypotheses. According to Levers (2002), details of the data and nuances in experience that are able to be observed through qualitative methods open up opportunities for the researcher to "enhance understanding of phenomena, inform relevant questions, and generate new hypotheses" (p. 30).

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The discussion that follows is framed in light of the five research questions of the present study which were developed through a careful review of literature on marital satisfaction and my personal expertise as a deacon serving as a marriage and family lay counselor in different Coptic Orthodox churches for more than seven years in Egypt and the States. These five questions are:

1. How do Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives perceive their marital satisfaction?

2. What are the factors which positively and negatively influence marital satisfaction of Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives?

3. How do Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives maintain their marriage in light of their daily marital experiences that influence their marital satisfaction?

4. What changes in their marital relationships do Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' desire to enhance their marital satisfaction?

5. How can the Coptic Orthodox Church better prepare and support Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans in their marriage?

To answer these five questions, I used the collected and analyzed data that appeared consistent across all focus groups and individual interviews. The collected data also appeared to be exhaustive, thus increased the reliability of this study. I used the categorized constructed meanings that emerged from the focus group discussions and the key informant interviews to develop the five main themes of the present stud. These five

main themes are: (a) Satisfying marriage, (b) Marital satisfaction factors, (c) Daily marital experiences, (d) Marriage maintenance factors, and (e) Desired changes. I also used the data presented in the comparison tables 11-20 in Appendix D, as a basis for ranking the constructed meanings in light of their frequency.

Perception of Marital Satisfaction

To answer the first research question, "How do Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives perceive their marital satisfaction?", the emerged constructed meanings of the first main theme that reflected the participants' perceptions of marital satisfaction were compared.

The present study revealed that the differences in the perception of marital satisfaction given by the participating husbands and wives were not great. There were only few differences in the perceptions found in the present study. The findings of this study revealed that many of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' perceptions of marital relationship reflect the general values and expectations of their religious society or of a particular faith and demographic sector in which they are located and some of their perceptions of marital relationship are individualistic in nature that reflect their gender and personal belief.

Almost universally, both Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives who participated in this study perceived marital satisfaction as a relationship based on mutual communication, commitment, honesty, intimacy, love, respect, trust, faith, and understanding. These findings are consistent with the findings reported in the literature on spousal marital

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satisfaction. Spanier and Lewis' (1980) view of marital satisfaction as a multidimensional phenomenon and is represented on a continuum reflecting "numerous characteristics of marital interactions and marital functioning" (p. 826). These findings also confirm Collins & Coltrane's (1991) findings, as cited in Rosen-Grandon et al. (2004) that that the most important components of marriage were faithfulness (93%), understanding (86%), a good sex life (75%), children (59%), common interests (52%), sharing household chores (43%), having enough money (41%), and sharing similar backgrounds (25%).

These findings are also explicitly linked with Social Exchange Theory (Klein and White, 1996; Roloff, 1981, 1987); it can be understood as reflecting the expectations of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American spouses. The Social Exchange Theory (Hatfield, Traupmann, Sprecher, Utne, & Hay, 1985; Nakonezny & Denton, 2008) assumes that individuals are trying to maximize their gains in relationships through exchanging what one has with others. The findings also confirm what Homans (1961, p. 62) stated, "the open secret of human exchange is to give the other man behavior that is more valuable to him than it is costly to you and to get from him behavior that is more valuable to you than it is costly to him". Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives like most husbands and wives carry with them different expectations and needs in their marital relationship. They expect their needs to be fulfilled in their marital relationship. The nature of their expectations and the extent to which their expectations are fulfilled have direct implication to their marital satisfaction.

In addition to the similarities in the perceptions of Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives of their marital satisfaction, the findings revealed that the participating wives emphasized communication, love, care, friendship

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and emotional intimacy as bases for their marital satisfaction. For example, wife #1 said, "Marital satisfaction means having a complete fulfilling relationship based on mutual respect, understanding, and unconditional love." Wife # 5 commented, "For me marital satisfaction means a marriage that is built on the rock where love, care, and support for one another are unconditional." Wife # 7 stated, "To me marital satisfaction is understanding each other , caring for each other , communicating well with each other, feeling jealous, having real intimacy, and being honest to each other."

The participating husband emphasized respect, submission, and physical intimacy as bases for their marital satisfaction. For example, husband # 1 said, "Marital satisfaction means good communication, same faith in God, seeking to serve each other without the other asking for it. It is love and same satisfaction in physical intimacy." Husband # 2 said, "Marital satisfaction means love, understanding, and respect. It is a relationship built on mutual love, trust and understanding." Husband # 4 added, "To me marital satisfaction means submission, love, understanding, and honesty."

These differences reflect Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' individualistic expectations in light of their gender differences and personal beliefs. These findings are consistent with the findings of other studies about the perception of marital satisfaction which indicated that males emphasize pleasurable instrumental behavior, and women emphasize pleasurable affectional behavior (Huston & Vangelisti, 1985; Wills, Weiss and Patterson, 1974).

Based on the findings of this study in relation to the emerged constructed meanings reflecting Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' perceptions of marital satisfaction, I drew the following conclusions:

1. Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives have many similar and a few different expectations on marital relations.

2. Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives agree in their perception that marital satisfaction is a relationship based on mutual communication, honesty**,** intimacy**,** love, respect**,** trust, and understanding.

3. Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives have higher expectation for communication and affectional involvement. In other words, the degree of meeting expectations in spouse's affectional and communication involvement has stronger effect on the marital satisfaction of wives than husbands;

4. Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands have higher expectation for respect and physical intimacy to ensure marital satisfaction.

Factors Contributing Positively and Negatively to Marital Satisfaction

To answer the second research question, "What are the factors which positively and negatively influence marital satisfaction of Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives?", the emerged constructed meanings of the second main theme that reflected the positive and negative factors that influence the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' marital satisfaction were compared.

The findings of this study revealed that the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives who participated in the study strongly believe that love,

communication, commitment, understanding, respect, honesty, trust, emotional and physical intimacy, active participation in house hold chores, spending time together, patience, spirituality, good sexual relationship or physical intimacy, and submission were the main factors that positively influenced their marital satisfaction.

These findings confirm the findings of Fenell's (1993) study cited in Rosen-Grandon, Myers, & Hattie (2004) which identified the 10 most important characteristics of marital satisfaction, in order from most to least important, as (1) Lifetime commitment to marriage, (2) Loyalty to spouse, (3) Strong moral values, (4) Respect for spouse as a friend, (5) Commitment to sexual fidelity, (6) Desire to be a good parent, (7) Faith in God and spiritual commitment, (8) Desire to please and support spouse, (9) Good companion to spouse, and (10) Willingness to forgive and be forgiven. These findings are also consistent with the findings reported by Vangelisti and Huston (1994) who filtered the various factors that influence marital satisfaction for married couples into eight major domains: communication, influence, sexual relationship, own leisure (how one spends free time), division of household tasks, time together, external network, and finances.

The findings of this study also indicated that the most common factors contributing to the marital satisfaction of the Coptic orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives who participated in the study were love, communication, understanding, emotional intimacy, commitment , active participation in house hold chores, and spending time together. For example, wife # 2 said, "The factors I feel contribute to my marital satisfaction are love, frequent communication, understanding, and showing affections to each other." Wife # 8 added, "The factors that enrich my marriage are commitment to marriage, respect for each other and each other's time and interests,

having a strong spiritual relationship, and finally, being at the same level mentally, spiritually, and intellectually."

These findings reflect the participating wives' Coptic Orthodox Christian beliefs of marriage that describe the marital relationship as agape relationship based on sacrificing love. The Coptic Orthodox Church teaches that the husband must take as much care, concern, thoughtfulness, attention, regard and precautions for his wife as Christ takes for the Church. The husband's attentiveness might even have to extend to death itself. For just as Christ was put to death for His love of the Church, so too the Coptic Orthodox Christian husband must yield all things, even his life, if necessary for his wife. Bishop Mettaous (2002) states that by the end of the Coptic Orthodox Church Matrimonial Rite Prayer, the priest gives the commandments to the bride and the groom before the sanctuary, as a witness that they are being wedded before the Lord, and so must keep what the Church advises them. He commands the husband: to do all that is good for his wife, to have compassion on her, and to always hasten to do that which will gladden her heart.

These findings also confirm the findings reported by Laurenceau, Feldman Barrett and Rovine (2005) that the factors which influence wives' marital satisfaction include: levels of intimacy, the ability to self-disclose with their spouses and perceive their partners as responsive They are also consistent with the findings reported by Vangelisti and Huston (1994) that the amount of time husbands spend doing things with their spouse as well as their communication styles positively influence the marital relationship.

The findings of this study indicated that the most common factors contributing to the marital satisfaction of the Coptic orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands who participated in the study were respect, submission, and good sexual relationship or physical intimacy. For example, Husband # 1 stated, "My factors are respect, communication, and joyful sexual relationship." Husband # 3 said, "It is respect, understanding, love, encouragement, and good sexual relationship."

These findings reflect the participating husbands' Coptic Orthodox Christian beliefs of marriage. The Coptic Orthodox Church teaches that the wife is the heart of the family. A wise wife encourages her husband to be this kind of man; she does not try to take on the position of authority herself. The wife expresses love for her husband through obedience. She is obedient to him exactly as the Church is to Christ (Ephesians 5.22-24, NKJV). It is her happiness to do the will of her husband.

These findings also support the findings reported in by Vangelisti and Huston (1994) who indicated that the factors which influence husbands' marital satisfaction include: the presence of wife pursue/husband distance conflict resolution style, their satisfaction with their sexual relationship, the division of household tasks/ view of gender roles and the degree of input they perceive they have in the relationship.

For both participating husbands and wives the most common factors that negatively influence their marital satisfaction were lack of communication, lack of intimacy, lack of trust, anger, jealousy, and emotional, verbal, or physical abuse from one spouse to the other are the most common factors that negatively influence their marital satisfaction. Lack of communication was the most potential factor that negatively

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influences the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives'

marital satisfaction. For example wife # 8 said, "It is lack of communication, especially

when my husband is tired or upset, decrease in intimacy, lack of trust in some situations,

and the like." Husband # 6 stated, "The negative factors are not listening, not

cooperating, and jealousy."

These findings are consistent with the findings of Laakso and Paunonen-Illmonen

(2002) who reported that the spouses' negative behaviors such as criticism, blame, verbal

and physical aggression, and verbal and physical abuse which result from lack of open

communication, intimacy and lack of trust and respect would lead spouses to feel

dissatisfied with their marital relationship. These findings also support the findings

reported by Miller, Yorgason, Sandberg and White (2003) that the lack of

communication is one of the most common problems among couples. These results also

conform with the findings of Tolstedt and Stokes (1983) who examined three types of

intimacy (verbal, affective, and physical) in relation to marital satisfaction and found that

all three types of intimacy, but particularly verbal and affective intimacy, were highly

predictive: positively for marital satisfaction and negatively for thoughts of divorce.

The findings of this study revealed that the most influential factors that lead to

Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives' marital dissatisfactions were lack

of emotional and verbal intimacy and lack of time together. These findings are consistent

with the findings of other studies on wives' marital dissatisfaction. Darling, Davidson and

Cox (1991) reported that the closer the emotional relationship with one's partner, the

greater the chance that the relationship will be described as sexually satisfying. Lawrance

and Byers (1995) found that characteristics indicative of the quality of a relationship

(e.g., intimacy, amount of physical affection, love and relationship satisfaction) are related to level of sexual satisfaction. Hatch & Bulcroft (2004) reported that spouses tend to disagree more when they spend less time together, keep their opinions to themselves when conflict arises and hold less traditional attitudes toward gender and family roles.

The Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands who participated in this study believe that the lack of respect on the part of the wife was the most significant factor that negatively influenced husbands' marital satisfaction followed by the lack of sexual intimacy. A key informant husband said, "My wife does not respect me. She is always angry. She insults me and calls me names. Sometimes she hits me or slaps me. She is very discouraging." When I asked the participants about the factors that negatively influence husbands' marital satisfaction, one husband said, "One and only one factor which is physical intimacy. She is not very interested while I am. But she still tries hard to respond. She always discourages me. She does not show any kind of respect although we got married after a love story. Her voice is always loud."

This finding shows how important respect is for the Coptic Orthodox Christian husbands. It reflects their religious belief that the wife should expresses her love for her husband through obedience. She should be obedient to him exactly as the Church is to Christ (Ephesians 5.22-24, NKJV). This obedience is always translated into absolute respect and honor as the head of the family. Bishop Mettaous (2002) states that by the end of the Coptic Orthodox Church Matrimonial Rite Prayer, the priest gives the commandments to the bride and the groom before the sanctuary, as a witness that they are being wedded before the Lord, and so must keep what the Church advises them. He commands the wife: to honor and respect her husband, not to disagree with him, to

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receive him with joy and cheer, not to ignore any of his rights upon her, and to fear God in all her deeds with her husband.

The most second cited factor of marital dissatisfaction of the participating husbands was sexual satisfaction. This finding confirms the findings of other studies on the importance of sexual satisfaction in the marital relationship. Newcomb and Bentler (1983) reported that sexual satisfaction is positively associated with the closeness or quality of relationship. The importance of physical or rather sexual intimacy to the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands is consistent with Christensen & Miller's (2006) findings that sexual intimacy is a common marital problem. The label *sexual problems* can define a broad range of topics related to physical intimacy, such as frequency of sex, differing sexual desires, sexual quality, and sexual infidelity.

Two factors contribute to making marriage the only source for both Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives to practice their sexuality. The first and most controlling factor in this respect is their Coptic Orthodox Christian faith which is based on the scriptures. According to the Coptic Orthodox Church faith, sex outside marriage is forbidden. Even before getting married both Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian males and females should keep their chastity and virginity. Premarital virginity is a must for both males and females, based on the teaching of the bible. Marriage is the remedy for human weakness, for keeping oneself virtuous, and preventing sexual immorality, which God detests. One of the goals of Christian marriage is protection against adultery and fornication. St. Paul states,

"It is good for a man not to touch a woman, not to marry. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality let each man have his own wife, and let each woman has her own husband. ... For it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Corinthians 7, NKJV).

The second factor is the Egyptian culture. In the Egyptian culture and traditions, an unmarried woman who lives independently is a threat to the idea of chastity and virginity because it makes her vulnerable to sex outside of marriage, which makes her dishonorable. Kulwicki (2000) writes that premarital sex for girls in the Arab/Moslem societies is considered a sin that damages the family's honor. The maintenance of female chastity as a form of preservation of the family, especially male honor, has acquired high cultural value in Egypt.

Based on the findings of this study in relation to the emerged constructed meanings reflecting the positive and negative factors that influence the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' marital satisfaction, I drew the following conclusions:

1. Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives share in believing that love, communication, commitment, understanding, respect, emotional and physical intimacy, active participation in house hold chores, spending time together, spirituality, and submission are the main factors that positively influence marital satisfaction. They also share in believing that the absence of these factors leads to marital dissatisfaction.

2. Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives believe that love, communication, commitment, understanding, respect, verbal and emotional intimacy, active participation in house hold chores, and spending time together positively influence their level of marital satisfaction.

3. Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives pay more attention to emotional and verbal intimacy in building their marital satisfaction than physical intimacy.

4. Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands care more about their due respect from their wives because husbands are the heads and patriarch of the family according to the Coptic Orthodox Christian faith.

5. Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands pay much attention to physical intimacy than emotional and verbal intimacy since sex outside marriage is forbidden by their Coptic Orthodox Christian faith.

Maintaining marriage in light of daily marital experiences

To answer the third research question, "How do Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives maintain their marriage in light of their daily marital experiences that influence their marital satisfaction?", the emerged constructed meanings of the third main theme that reflected the daily lived marital experiences of Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives, how they address the negative daily marital experiences, and what makes them maintain their marriage were compared.

The findings of this study revealed that the most common daily marital experiences, the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives who

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participated in this study shared together, were having daily meals, communicating about daily issues, sharing children's responsibilities, sharing household chores, prayers, going to church, complaining about feelings, fighting and arguing, going shopping, visiting friends, and watching Christian TV programs.

Having daily meals together and communicating about daily issues were the first mostfrequently cited daily experiences of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives. These two daily marital experiences were followed by fighting and arguing. Going to church, sharing children's responsibilities, and sharing household chores came in the third position among the daily experiences of Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives. Going shopping, visiting friends, and watching Christian TV programs together came in the fourth position of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' daily marital experiences.

For example, when I asked the fourth question about examples of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives' daily experiences that influence their marital satisfaction, Wife # 3 reluctantly stated, "The routine life issues, having meals, taking care of children and parents, going to the church, going shopping, and discussing the daily problems." Wife # 4 added, "Sometimes we watch a Christian movie together with children and parents during the weekend. We have a daily routine marital relationship. Everything is routine even the bed relationship." Husband # 1 responded, "Everyday we watch TV together. We have the three daily meals together. We share our daily problems and issues."

Expressing feelings was the least frequently cited daily experience the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives share. For example, wife # 6 said, "We have the meals together. We discuss the daily problems together. We do not have good physical intimacy. We never talk about feelings, as if we have only mind and body. We rarely spend time together, and if it happens it will be before the TV." Wife # 7 stated, "We live like two roommates who shares bed. He leaves and comes back when I am sleeping. He does not know anything about our children. He is only a bank to give us the money we need." Husband # 6 stated, "We have two meals together: breakfast and dinner during the week days and three meals during the week ends. We discuss the daily life issues together on a regular basis. We rarely talk about our feelings since we work like machines to bring money to pay the bills."

The findings of this study also revealed that the most common strategies the participating husbands and used to address their negative daily marital experiences were: their Christian faith and wisdom, their commitment to marriage, their unconditional love to each other, discussion and communication, focusing on their children, forgiving and tolerating each other, receiving help from parents, friends, and the church priest, prayers, silence and shutting down. The findings indicated that the participating husbands and wives reported that when they have some negative daily marital experiences, they use discussion and communication as the main strategies to address such negative marital experiences.

The second element reported to be a helping factor in addressing their negative marital experiences was their Christian faith and wisdom. Their commitment to marriage, prayers, unconditional love, and help from others came in the third position among the

strategies they usually use to address their negative marital experiences. The participants

also reported that forgiveness and tolerance, focusing on children, and silence or shutting

down were also strategies they use in addressing their negative marital experiences, but

these strategies came at the end of the list. For example, Wife # 3 stated, "With problems

we always blame each other. We shout and relax. We agreed that when one is angry the

other should keep quiet until the angry partner is done. This is a successful strategy which

is working well with us. Parents sometimes help clarify things and resolve our conflicts.

Sometimes we ask the advice from Abouna (the priest) in the church. Wife # 6 said, "We

go through our problems routinely like any other thing in our life. We discuss the daily

problems together and usually our good physical intimacy helps us overcome any daily

problems." Husband # 2 said, "Like other couples we fight from time to time, get upset

and anger. When we calm down, we discus and pray. Sometimes we ask for help from

others." Husband # 6 stated, "We use different strategies in confronting our problems like

praying, shouting, talking, silence, and sometimes shutting down."

The findings of this study revealed that the participating husbands and wives used

certain strategies to maintain their marriage. The most common strategies reported by the

participants were: focusing on their children, resorting to their Christian faith and beliefs

about marriage, sticking to their marital commitment, using open communication,

confining themselves to the Egyptian culture and traditions, forgiving each other, and

considering the financial support they get from each other. Using their Christian faith and

beliefs about marriage and having children were the top factors behind maintaining

Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' marriage. One wife

said, "We continue our marriage for the sake of children and hoping that one day

everything will be fine." Another wife stated, "There are many reasons for keeping our marriage. We are Christians and we do not have divorce. Our culture and traditions also force us to continue our marriage even with problems. The husband is the head and he is responsible for all the money we need. Also having a husband means having security and company." A third wife added, "We believe that Christian marriage always has Christ in it and will finally work. It is our religion that tells us there is no divorce except if the husband or the wife commits adultery. Also wives should submit and respect their husbands and husband should love their wives and sacrifice for them." One of the husbands said, "It is important for people to stay married for the sake of their children. I am willing to sacrifice for my children."

Marriage commitment, communication, and understanding were the second most frequently cited factors that helped to maintain the participants' marriage. For example, one wife said, "Marriage to us is a lifelong relationship. We believe that we were married in heaven before earth; therefore we must stand each other. We must forgive and forget. We must make our marriage work."

Financial support from husbands to wives was the third most frequently cited among the factors that helped the participants maintain their marriages. For example, one wife stated, "My husband supports me financially. He protects me and my children. I have no other people here around me. I do not know what to do by myself. Forgiveness, culture, and traditions came at the end of the list. One wife stated, "People look at the divorced or separated woman as something bad. People talk about that a lot and judge and condemn." Another wife added, "Our culture and traditions also force us to continue

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our marriage even with problems. One of the husbands stated, "It is children, suffering, reputation and other things."

According to Spanier and Lewis (1980), marital stability refers to the status of a marriage as intact or non-intact (i.e., separated or divorce). Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans believe that a stable marriage is one which is terminated only by the natural death of one spouse. In light of their Coptic Orthodox Christian faith, they believe that their marriage can dissolve in case of committing adultery. The findings of the study concerning what makes Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americas keep their marriage are consistent with the findings of other studies that addressed the barriers to marital dissolution such as older age, longer marital duration, the belief that marriage is a life-time commitment, and presence of children (Heaton and Albrecht, 1991; Lauer & Lauer, 1986; Robinson & Blanton, 1982; Sabatelli and Cecil-Pigo, 1985). Moreover, it has been observed from a number of surveys and longitudinal studies on long-term marriages (Lauer & Lauer, 1986) that commitment to one's spouse and to marriage as an institution is one of the most important reported reasons for marital stability.

The findings of this study revealed how much the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives care about their children's sufferings as a result of divorce or separation. Popenoe (1996) states that with the increasing number of couples who divorce and separate, children are being hurt in the process. Gottman (1998, p. 170) states, "Divorce correlates with higher levels of childhood "depression, withdrawal, poor social competence, health problems, poor academic performance, and a variety of conduct-related difficulties." The findings of the present study also revealed how much the participating husbands and wives are true believers in the Coptic Orthodox

Church doctrine which consider marriage a sacrament that can be dissolved only by natural death of one spouse or by committing adultery. Bishop Grigorios (2006) state that the dissolution of the Coptic Orthodox Christian marriage is allowed in cases of death or adultery.

Based on the findings of this study in relation to the emerged constructed meanings reflecting the daily lived marital experiences of Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives, how they address the negative daily marital experiences, and what makes them maintain their marriage, I drew the following conclusions:

1. Based on their Coptic Orthodox Christian beliefs and cultural background, Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives have a daily routine of marital life experiences such as having daily meals, communicating about daily issues , sharing children's responsibilities, sharing household chores, prayers, going to church, complaining about feelings, fighting and arguing, going shopping, visiting friends, and watching Christian TV programs.

2. Based on their Coptic Orthodox Christian faith and cultural background, Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives address the negative marital experiences by using strategies such as using their Christian faith and wisdom, their commitment to marriage, their unconditional love to one another, discussion and communication, focusing on their children, forgiving and tolerating each other, receiving help from parents, friends, and the church priest, prayers, silence, and shutting down.

3. To maintain their marriage, Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives use strategies such as focusing on their children, resorting to their Christian faith and beliefs about marriage, sticking to their marital commitment, using open communication, confining themselves to the Egyptian culture and traditions, forgiving each other, and considering the financial support they get from each other.

4. Based on their Coptic Orthodox Christian faith and cultural background, Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives care about the cohesion of their family and their children more than their care about their marital satisfaction.

Desired Changes to Enhance Marital satisfaction

To answer the fourth research question, "What are the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' desired changes to enhance their marital satisfaction?", the emerged constructed meanings of the fourth main theme that reflected the desired changes the participating husbands and wives would like to have in their life to enhance their marital satisfaction were compared.

The findings of this study revealed that the most common changes the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives who participated in the study desired to make in their life in order to enhance their marital satisfaction were to have more open communication together, to be more patient and forgiving with one another, to practice better emotional, verbal, and physical intimacy together, to show more understanding, more respect, more care and love for each other, and to spend more quality time together, and to share more responsibilities in the household's chores. The

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desire to spend more quality time together was the most frequently cited change the

Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives, who participated in

the study, desired to have in order to improve their marital satisfaction. Showing more

care and love, having more open communication, and practicing more forgiveness and

patience were the second most frequently cited changes on the list of desired changes that

can enhance their marital satisfaction. Better emotional, verbal and physical intimacy,

accepting each other, and sharing more responsibilities in the household chores were also

among the items that need to be worked on in order to improve the Coptic Orthodox

Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' marital satisfaction. For example,

Wife # 4 stated, "We need to train ourselves to listen more than we talk; to increase our

shared time together and to increase our understanding and communication." Wife # 8

added, "To continue loving and respecting each other till we die, to spend more time

together, and to have more open communication together." Key informant # 4 said, "We

need to learn to stop worrying about the future of our children. We need to take care of

each other and spend more quality time together whether inside or outside; time in which

we focus on each other and have all kinds of intimacy."

The findings about the changes the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-

American husbands and wives who participated in the study desired to have in order to

enhance their marital satisfaction are consistent with the findings of many studies in the

literature on marital satisfaction and marital distress. Yelsma and Marrow (2003) studied

perceived difficulties with emotional expressiveness and marital satisfaction in 66

husbands and wives. The results indicated that both husbands' and wives' difficulties

with emotional expressiveness negatively influenced their own and their spouses' marital

satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the finding reported by Merves-Okin, Amidon, and Bernt (1991) that the lack of self-disclosure is related to marital dissatisfaction and a discontinuation of the relationship.

The participating husbands and wives desired to spend more quality time together. This finding supports the findings reported by Biller (2000) that dissatisfaction with time together was a strong predictor of global distress in the marriage for wives. It confirms Davey and Szinovacz's (2004) finding that the level of spouses' satisfaction with time together has been found to be more significant than the amount of time together. It also supports the finding reported by Biller (2000) that the distress relating to time together negatively affects marital satisfaction which led to the belief that it would also have an impact on sexual satisfaction.

The main changes which the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives who participated in the study desired to have in order to enhance their marital satisfaction were emotional support, better emotional and physical intimacy, commitment, and quality time together. For example, Wife#3 stated, "I would like to see changes in our marriage such as better sex life, quality vs. quantity, I wish my attitude and physical responses become better." Key informant #2 said, "Learning to communicate effectively and to respect my husband and to take care of each other's mental, psychological, and physical needs. I need to see his commitment to our marriage, to have mutual understanding, open and effective communication, and complete trust."

Affective communication, the expression of affection and understanding, has been shown to be an important factor for younger and older couples. Biller (2000) examined

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both short-term and long-term marriages and found that dissatisfaction with affective communication was a significant predictor of global distress in the marriage for wives, especially for wives in long-term marriages. The findings about the desired changes to improve marital satisfaction of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives who participated in the study confirm some of the findings reported by Bernard (1982) and Edwards and Demo (1991) that wives care about the amount of commitment of the spouse, affective involvement and time together; the amount of conflict over daily decision, over petty issues, on the use of leisure; criticism spouse expressed, on life style, and the amount of household tasks shared. These findings are also consistent with Tolstedt and Stokes' (1983) finding that intimacy is key variable contributing to longevity in marriages.

The changes the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands who participated in the study desired in order to enhance their marital satisfaction were showing more respect, showing more interest in the sexual relationship, increasing the amount and quality of emotions, and decreasing the level of their intellectuality. For example, husband # 2 said, "I need to be more patient, more emotional and less intellectual. I need to spend more time with my wife and children." Key informant # 6 said, "I need to show more care and love to my wife. She needs to be more patient with me. We need to spend more time together away from kids and friends."

These findings are consistent with the findings in the literature where the lowest satisfaction score was found on husbands' evaluation of their wives' amount of criticism expressed, the amount of arguing over petty issues, and conflict on the use of leisure time (Bernard, 1982; Edwards and Demo, 1991). Sexual satisfaction was found to be an

important factor in enhancing the marital relationship of both young and older marriages (AARP, 2004; Ade-Ridder, 1990; Hinchliff & Gott, 2004).

Based on the findings of this study in relation to the emerged constructed meanings reflecting the changes the participants desired to have in their life to enhance their marital satisfaction, I drew the following conclusions:

1. Based on their Coptic Orthodox Christian beliefs and cultural background, Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives would like to see an increase in many daily routine marital experiences such as having more open communication together; being more patient and forgiving with one another; practicing better emotional, verbal, and physical intimacy together, showing more understanding, more respect, more care and love for each other; spending more quality time together; and sharing more responsibilities in the household's chores.

2. Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives care about the cohesion of their family and their children more than their care about their marital satisfaction.

Recommendations for Marriage Preparation and Support

To answer the fifth research question, "How can the Coptic Orthodox Church better prepare and support Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans in their marriage?", the emerged constructed meanings of the fifth main theme that reflected how Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans were prepared and supported, and the recommendation they would like to make to the Coptic Orthodox Church leaders were compared.

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The findings of this study revealed that the participants were not formally prepared for marriage. They prepared themselves by doing a lot of readings on marriage, receiving advice from family members and friends, listening to talks about Christian marriage, watching good and bad models of marriages, having long engagement periods, and receiving guidance and advice from church priest.

The findings of this study revealed that the participating husband and wives were not formally or systematically supported in their marriage. They reported very few sources of marriage support such as advice from friends and family, confession in the church, little guidance and advice from the church priests, and prayers.

The findings of this study revealed that the participants made many recommendations to the Coptic Orthodox Church leaders. The most frequently cited recommendations the participants made were establishing weekly meetings for married and engaged people, followed by providing more qualified people to serve the big congregation, providing more training, education, and orientation on marriage, providing counseling services in churches, and providing more books and articles on marriage.

Through marriage preparation and marriage support programs the Coptic Orthodox Church can enable and support healthy Coptic Orthodox Christian marriages. The findings of the study in relation to the recommendations to the Coptic Orthodox Church concerning marriage preparation and support to the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American are consistent with many studies that focused on marriage preparation and support. Parrott and Parrott (2003) state that marriage preparation programs can save marriage before it starts. They argue that a framework of active

listening and basic communication skills can provide couples with a way to de-escalate

heated disagreements. Renick, Blumberg, and Markma (1992) state that marriage

enrichment programs can keep untroubled couples from becoming troubled by teaching

the skills of predicting happy, healthy relationships and ways in which to hinder those

behaviors that predict later marital distress

Based on the findings of this study in relation to the emerged constructed

meanings reflecting the recommendations to the Coptic Orthodox Church leaders

concerning marriage preparation and support, I drew the following conclusions:

1. The marriage preparation the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American
   husbands and wives receive is informal. It is represented in reading about
   marriage, seeking advice from family members and friends, listening to talks
   about Christian marriage, watching good and bad models of marriages, having
   long engagement periods, and seeking guidance and advice from the Coptic
   Orthodox Church priests.

2. The marriage support the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American
   husbands and wives receive is represented in the advice from friends and family,
   confession in the church, little guidance, advice, and prayers from the church
   priests.

3. To be prepared for healthy marriage and to sustain their marriage, Coptic
   Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives recommend that the
   Coptic Orthodox Church leaders should establish weekly meetings in all Coptic
   Orthodox Churches for married and engaged people. They should provide more
   qualified people to serve the big congregations in churches. They should provide

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more training, education, and orientation on marriage. They should provide

counseling services in churches. They should also provide more books and

articles on marriage.

Cultural Effects

The American society is one of the world's largest multiethnic societies

(Schuchman, 1997). Coptic Orthodox Christians are part of the immigrant population in

the USA. When people move to live in a culture different from their culture of origin,

which becomes their host culture, a conflict between the host culture and the culture of

origin arises. Coptic Orthodox Christian women living in Egypt are strongly controlled

by their male relatives in their lives. When these women immigrate to the United States

and become acculturated, they are confronted by a variety of different values, norms, and

beliefs. According to Abdulrahim (1993), these immigrant women may go through

changes in their values, behavior, and beliefs.

Trimble (2003) describes acculturation as change and adaptation. Acculturation is

"the process by which ethnic and racial minorities participate in the cultural traditions,

values, beliefs, assumptions, and practices of the dominant society" (Snowden & Hines,

1999, p. 36). When Coptic Orthodox Christians immigrate, they bring their general

values and beliefs such as spirituality, religiosity, family values, and gender roles to their

host society. Kulwicki (2000) states that in the collective societies such as Egypt, the

family is the foundation of society because it provides to its members security and a

strong and dependable social, economic, and emotional support. The individual is then

obligated to respect and conform to the norms of the family and to contribute both

emotionally and financially to the needs of his or her family, which often requires him/her to sacrifice his/her own needs to the needs of the family.

The findings of the present study indicated that in their new society, Coptic Orthodox Christian spouses start to live in a conflict between their religious and cultural values and beliefs and those of the American society which became their host society. They are beginning to experience some major differences between Egyptian culture and American culture, such as religious practices, values, belief systems, gender roles, relations, and control over decisions. For example, in the United States, women can freely have relationships with non-relative males such as friends, colleagues, and boyfriends. However, in the Egyptian culture, such relations are not acceptable. Women in Egypt are controlled by their religious and cultural values and beliefs. American women do not need permission from their male relatives to make their own decisions concerning their marriage, careers, and male-female relationships. This is not the case in the Egyptian culture, where men have the authority over women's decisions. In most Egyptian families, women's rights and responsibilities are decided by male family members who are at the same time responsible for protecting and supporting the women in the family. While women in the United States can live alone, date, smoke, and drink alcohol if they want to, Coptic Orthodox Christian women are not allowed to do so. The Egyptian society is a patriarchal culture and gender differences still remain strong. Men have the ultimate authority in the family and in the economic decisions. The father is the head of the family and is considered a powerful and charismatic figure (Al-Krenawi & Graham 2000).

The findings of the study also showed that on the one hand, when they become acculturated, a lot of Coptic Orthodox Christian spouses begin to reject their religious and cultural identity and accept that of the American society. Some husbands appear to reject their identity and role as a husband, and become more open to the life style and values of the American society. They spend more time outside home working and having fun neglecting their wives and children. Some unfaithful husbands get involved in sexual relationships outside their marriage. This leads to more marital distress and conflict. Consequently, the distressed wives start to seek more freedom and independence. Some wives move to separate homes of their own, live alone, and have control over their decisions.

On the other hand, after getting acculturated, some Coptic Orthodox Christian wives appear to question and reject their subordinate position in the family. They are beginning to seek more autonomy and equal power in marital relationships. They are beginning to seek more freedom, autonomy, and equality with their husbands, because they now live in a culture that allows women to have their own voice and rights. Such change may create marital problems between wives and husbands. When husbands resist such change that threatens their leadership, conflicts arise. The distressed spouses start to live separately, enjoy their individual life, and sacrifice their marriage and their children. According to Abudabbeh (1997), "A major source of conflict facing an immigrant family is the negotiation of changes in the wife's role" (p. 122). Many of those distressed spouses make use of the flexible American marriage law in seeking separation or divorce in the American courts.

Implication of the study

Hypotheses Generated from the Study

One of the major aims of conducting a qualitative study is to generate hypotheses for future research attention. The hypotheses that emerged directly from this study include the following: First, Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives experience a greater sense of marital satisfaction when their marital relationships are governed by their Christian faith and spirituality. Second, Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives experience satisfying and fulfilling marital relationships when they perceive their marriage as a sacrament. Third, the equality in division of household chores and decision making power is not correlated with the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' marital satisfaction. Fourth, the differences in life style and philosophy of life do not result in marital dissatisfaction among Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives. Fifth, while Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives have higher expectation for communication and affectional involvement, Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands have higher expectations for respect and sexual intimacy. Sixth, commitment to marriage is correlated with the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives' marital satisfaction. Seventh, respect is correlated with the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands' marital satisfaction. Eighth, Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans value their children more than they value their marital satisfaction. Ninth, Western life style has a significant influence on the thinking, feeling, and behavior of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives regarding their marital relationship. Tenth, the lack of premarital preparation and

marriage support is one of the most important causes of Coptic Orthodox Christian

Egyptian-American husbands and wives' marital distress.

Clinical Implications

This study shows how Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands

and wives perceive their marital satisfaction. Counselors' intervention including

therapeutic groups or individual counseling for dissatisfied Coptic Orthodox Christian

Egyptian-American couples may focus on encouraging the couple to think about how

realistic their relationship expectations are. They can be helped to understand that high or

unrealistic expectations can lead to marital dissatisfaction. This study suggests areas in

the marital relationship that may be fruitful areas of discussion in therapy. For example, it

may be useful to clinicians to facilitate communication about commitment, respect,

intimacy, headship and submission and exploring their symbolic meanings.

This study has pointed out the importance of affective communication for Coptic

Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives which suggests that emotionally focused

marital therapy (EFT) may be useful with Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American

couples. EFT (Johnson, 1996) is an approach to marital therapy that focuses on emotion

and attachment. The clinician works to help spouses change their emotional responses to

each other in a way that creates a more secure attachment in the relationship. Regarding

conflict over time together, it is expected that problem-solving approaches such as

behavioral marital therapy (BMT) may have value for Coptic Orthodox Christian

Egyptian-American couples. BMT (Jacobson & Margolin, 1979) is a treatment approach

for marital distress based on principles of reinforcement, social learning, and behavior

exchange. In applying these principles to marital dynamics, the focus is on changing unhealthy relationship patterns, balancing each spouse's needs, and improving skills in communication, conflict resolution, and problem solving.

The recognition that children can be the main source of marital stability for some minorities can be especially important to an ethnicity group that has high expectations for group harmony. The ability to provide communication training and the exploration of meanings related to gender roles can be meaningful tools for counselors to help Coptic Orthodox Christian couples. The ability to provide counseling services based on Christian faith and spirituality can also be a significant tool for counselors to help Coptic Orthodox Christian couples.

This study also suggests that clinicians should be aware of the impact of sexual intimacy on Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American couples and be prepared to assess and address sexuality with them since sex outside marriage is forbidden according to their Coptic Orthodox Christian faith. This study also outlines the importance of dealing with emotional and verbal intimacy as well as jealousy on the part of the Coptic Orthodox Egyptian-American wife and the importance of dealing with respect and sexual intimacy on the part of the Coptic Orthodox Egyptian-American husband. Clinicians may wish to be alert to these problems and specifically assess their presence when treating Coptic Orthodox Egyptian-American couples. In conclusion, results show that it is important that marital therapists must be aware of the impact of faith and culture on individuals and families and be aware of the specific needs and challenges that are more likely for Coptic Orthodox Egyptian-American couples.

Implication for Premarital Preparation and Marriage Support Services

From the study findings, most of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives who participated in the study were found to lack formal premarital preparation and marriage support. The findings revealed that Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives never receive formal premarital preparation. In their preparation for marriage they depended on their readings about marriage, advice from family members and friends, listening to talks about Christian marriage, watching good and bad models of marriages around them, having long engagement periods, and the little guidance and advice from the Coptic Orthodox Church priests during their confession.

The findings of the study also showed that Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' marriage support resources are very limited. The marriage support they received was in the form of advice from friends and family, confession in the church, little guidance, advice, and prayers from the church priests. In their recommendations to the Coptic Orthodox Church leaders the participants focused on the premarital preparation and marriage support programs as tools to prevent or lessen marital problems and increase the possibility of have a healthy and satisfied Christian marriage.

The Coptic Orthodox Church leaders should have a clear plan for premarital preparation and marriage support programs. Such programs should be provided for Coptic Orthodox people who are planning to get married to save their marriage even before it starts. They should also be offered to married people who did not receive

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premarital preparation to enrich their marital relationship. Stanley (2001) highlighted four positive effects of marriage preparation programs: encouraging relationship assessment, emphasizing the importance of marriage, informing couples of social supports, and decreasing probabilities of future distress. Delaying marriage in order to complete a premarital education program would increase the amount of time for a couple to get to know each other, decreasing their risk of unrealistic expectations going into marriage. The extended engagement period and premarital assessments would also increase the likelihood that high-risk couples would decide not to marry. Marriage preparation and enrichment programs would also raise the status of marriage. They would put couples in contact with social supports such as clergy or counselors to turn to in the event of future marital problems, and would make couples aware of the personal risk factors they might need to combat.

The Coptic Orthodox Church leaders need to develop Christian-based marriage preparation and enrichment programs to help Coptic Orthodox people saving their marriage (Parrott & Parrott, 2003). In keeping with its Orthodox Christian faith, the marriage preparation and enrichment programs should emphasize the strengthening of Christian marriage through the development and maturity of each marriage partner and the integration of faith and everyday living. The marriage preparation and enrichment programs should include skills training and assessments as well as mentoring by a stable couple during the first year of marriage. During these marriage preparation and enrichment programs, the couples' expectations towards their marital life should be rationally examined. Since high expectation level before marriage will increase the

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probability that the marital outcomes over time will become unsatisfactory, such programs will help them set up realistic expectations.

The skills training component of these marriage preparation and enrichment programs should include communication skills, conflict resolution, personality traits, and husband and wife roles in a Christian marriage. The training approach should be an insight-oriented approach (Durana, 1996) that emphasizes personal responsibility and self, not spouse, control. These marriage preparation and enrichment programs can be offered in many formats. They can be short and consist of four to six weekly small-group meetings of lecture and skills practice. They can also offered once a week as a weekend event for six months with lectures conducted in a large-group setting and couples being responsible for their own skills-practice (Renick, Blumberg, & Markma 1992).

The marriage preparation and enrichment programs topics can include the meaning of Christian marriage, marriage as a sacrament, the difference between marriage as a covenant and marriage as a contract, the symbols in the Coptic Orthodox marriage ceremony, communication skills, (describing and practicing good verbal and listening skills, and identifying and avoiding communication patterns that hinder relationships), relationship-enhancing skills such as conflict-resolution, communicating spiritual values in relationships (e.g., honor, respect, intimacy, and forgiveness), physical intimacy, how to maintain high levels of positive interaction and develop protective factors such as friendship, commitment, teamwork, fun, spiritual connection, and sensuality" while decreasing chances for negativity in the relationship (Renick, Blumberg, & Markma,1992; Markman, et al., 2001; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002).

Implication for Marriage Counseling Centers

Since counseling is new to Egyptians and most of the Egyptians are not used to visit marital therapists for cultural reasons, the alternate will be qualified lay Christian counselors who can serve in counseling offices or centers to be established in the Coptic Orthodox churches. These qualified lay Christian counselors can work as the support network for Coptic Orthodox Christian couples when the latter face marital difficulties. The suggested counseling offices or centers in the Coptic Orthodox churches can provide triple counseling service: waiting to clients to visit, reaching couples out based on the recommendation of the church priest(s), and providing a hotline to answer enquiries from Coptic Orthodox couples.

These counseling offices or centers can provide either behavior or insight-oriented marriage interventions (Kadis & McClendon, 1998). Behavioral marriage interventions emphasize changing interaction patterns to improve the quality of the marriage. Insight-oriented marriage interventions are based on psychoanalytical principles, and according to Kadis and McClendon (1998), their main goals are to "locate the important affect, then to trace the roots of the affect to the early experience, and finally to understand and explain the current conflict in the context of that early experience" (p. 19).

When using the insight-oriented marriage interventions, the Christian lay counselors in the counseling centers of the church can use the object-relations, family-of-origin, and experiential approaches because they address feelings or patterns of interaction that may have been carried into the marriage from past familial relationships.

They can also use the strengths perspective approach (Dinkmeyer, Evans, & Dedrick (1993).Viewing the couple as a self-contained system, the strengths perspective urges spouses to focus and build on relationship successes. In this intervention, the counselor helps couples to assess their own irrational, perfectionistic expectations of marriage as well as to see and gain confidence from the potential within their relationships. The theory is that by focusing on positive aspects of the relationship, the couple will recognize the worth of their marriage and will take ownership of its future (Dinkmeyer, 1993).

Limitations of the Study

While this study has been rewarding and rich in contributing to the understanding of the lived marital experiences of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives, it would be unwise to generalize its findings and conclusions to all Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian husbands and wives. The findings of this study should be considered in light of several possible limitations. First, data was collected in one location (i.e., Norristown, Pennsylvania). The documentation of the participants' experiences and findings generated might shed light onto the experiences of Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans in comparable settings in other States but nevertheless those experiences are yet particularistic to that setting (Creswell, 2003).

Second, the results of this study were drawn from a comparatively small purposive sample of participants (twenty Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives) who were specially chosen. However, a small number of participants is acceptable for qualitative studies of the nature of the present study (Glense,

2006; Patton, 2002). Third, the sampling procedure, as it was designed, led the researcher to recruit only Coptic Orthodox Christian husbands and wives who met predetermined selection criteria. Therefore, participants did not fully reflect diverse characteristics of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American population, such as (a) variations in geographical-related factors, (b) personal factors, (c) extended family -related factors, (d) child-related factors, and (e) remarried spouses. This would make the generalizability of the findings of this study limited to the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans who also met the limitations of the participant selection criteria.

Fourth, the data in this study came from self-report instruments. Potential problems with self-report data include recall problems and the intentional misreporting of behaviors. The participants offered their own personal understandings, reflections, perceptions, and meaning of the lived marital experiences. Therefore, the uniqueness of the participants in their particular setting limits the generalizability and transferability of findings from one setting to another (Merriam, 2002). Fifth, my biases and predispositions as a researcher-observer could have an effect on the data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the findings (Patton, 2002).

In spite of the fact that the interpretations, findings, and conclusions of this study are particularistic to this research setting and group of participants, I hope this study provides Coptic Orthodox Church leaders, clinicians, and researchers a better understanding of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans' marital satisfaction.

Implication for Future Research

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several recommendations for future research emerged. Future research should build on this study by using more generalizable Coptic Orthodox Christian samples. Data on Coptic Orthodox Christian couples who live in different States that represent the diverse socioeconomic structure, marriage length, and the size of the household would help build upon the current, limited knowledge base concerning marital satisfaction. Data on Coptic Orthodox Christian couples who live in different Governorates in Egypt that represent the diverse make-up, socioeconomic structure, and culture of Egypt would also help build upon the current, limited knowledge base concerning marital satisfaction among Coptic Orthodox Christians in Egypt. Researchers and clinicians could benefit from research that more deeply explores the problems encountered by Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American couples. Researchers and clinicians could also benefit from research that more deeply explores what causes Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives to report sexual problems as a common and significant marital problem, whether those difficulties are due to the frequency of sexual encounters, expectations about performance, infidelity, or other reasons. Future research on Coptic orthodox Christian Egyptian-American marriages would benefit from using quantitative measures that are more fully developed and sophisticated.

Future research should work to accurately describe the successful marriages of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans by investigating how many Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans learned to build and sustain healthy Christian marriages. Another future direction that should be explored is the quantitative and

qualitative measurement of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans' attitudes about marriage and divorce. It is worthwhile for future research to explore the relationship between the marital alternatives and Coptic Orthodox Christian marital stability; although a number of studies in the West reported that marital alternatives correlate positively with marital dissolution (South, 1995; South & Lloyd, 1995; Udry, 1981). Although the participants in this study shared a great deal about their conflict experiences, I believe that a mixed-method approach that utilizes established quantitative means for assessing conflict-resolution skills, in addition to rich descriptions of conflict with the marriage, needs to be carried out in order to address this specific area of research in the Coptic Orthodox Christian Marriage context.

Conclusion

Marriage is a very important social institution for human societies. Marital satisfaction is a subjective assessment of how pleasurable a spouse feels about his or her marital relationship. Marital satisfaction is related to what a spouse expects to obtain from a relationship. If spouses can obtain what they expect in the marital relationship, they attain a certain level of marital satisfaction. Furthermore, spouses do not feel satisfied if they perceive that what they give and take in the marital relationship is not balanced.

Dissatisfaction with marital relationship does not imply that a spouse will leave the relationship. In most societies, including Egypt, it is very costly to leave marital relationship. It is not only the legal responsibilities incurred by spouses (or one of the spouses) but also the pressure from society, community, relatives of the spouses, and the

Church. Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American spouses, who are dissatisfied with their marital relationships, can easily end their marital relationships and establish another one afterwards in the American courts for different reasons. It is very difficult, if not impossible for them to do so through the Coptic Orthodox Church unless the reasons conform to the two main reasons for divorce: adultery and apostasy.

According to Berry (2003), when an immigrant reaches the assimilation level of acculturation, he or she rejects his or her original culture's values and beliefs and accepts those of the host society's culture (Berry, 2003). The American society has different prescriptions on the respective roles of husbands and wives than the Egyptian society. The Egyptian society, as a traditional society, expects husbands to perform provider's role and wives to perform housekeeper's role, even if the wife is a working woman. In their new society, Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives become more conscious of their disadvantaged position. Many of them develop their career lives similar to that of men in society. The result is that more of them share the provider's role in family (they become co-providers) much more than men share the housekeeper's role. Because of the difference in role expectations, either the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives feel that their husbands are not doing housework enough, or the conflict and ambiguity of the dual roles' demands on Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives lower their level of satisfaction in marriage. Also, as a result of female consciousness, the issue of power and decision making in marital relationship surfaced. More and more Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American wives begin to reject the subordinate position in family. They expect more autonomy and equal power in marital relationship. This contradicts with many Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-

American husbands because they do not subscribe to this new attitude. This unfulfilled

expectation can result in un-resolvable conflict and lower their marital satisfaction.

The purpose of this study was to investigate Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-

American husbands and wives' perceptions of marital satisfaction and to explore and

understand the factors and practices that enhance or lessen their marital satisfaction.

This study provided the opportunity for the participants to share their lived marital

experiences. The analysis of the constructed meanings that emerged from the two focus

groups and the six key informant interviews provided a rich understanding of how the

Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' perceive their

marital satisfaction and the factors that positively and negatively influence their marital

relationship.

The results of this study which were consistent across the samples revealed that:

1. The participating husbands and wives perceive marital satisfaction as a

    relationship based on mutual communication, honesty**,** intimacy**,** love, respect**,**

    trust, and understanding.

2. The participating husbands and wives strongly believe that love, communication,

    commitment, understanding, respect, emotional and physical intimacy**,** active

    participation in house hold chores, spending time together, patience, spirituality,

    good sexual relationship or physical intimacy, and submission are the main

    factors that positively influence marital satisfaction.

3. The participating husbands and wives strongly believe that the most common

    factors that negatively influence marital satisfaction were lack of communication,

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lack of intimacy, lack of trust, anger, jealousy, and emotional, verbal, or physical abuse from one spouse to the other.

4. Based on their Coptic Orthodox Christian beliefs and cultural background, the participants enjoy many daily routine marital life experiences such as having daily meals, communicating about daily issues, sharing children's responsibilities, sharing household chores, prayers, going to church, complaining about feelings, fighting and arguing, going shopping, visiting friends, and watching Christian TV programs.

3. To maintain their marriage, the participating husbands and wives use simple strategies such as focusing on their children, resorting to their Christian faith and beliefs about marriage, sticking to their marital commitment, using open communication, confining themselves to the Egyptian culture and traditions, forgiving each other, and considering the financial support they get from each other.

4. The Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives who participated in the study received very little or no premarital preparation or marriage support from the Coptic orthodox Church, therefore they resort to informal resources such as reading about marriage, seeking advice from family members and friends, listening to talks about Christian marriage, watching good and bad models of marriages

In conclusion, the findings of this study have demonstrated some conflicting impacts of the Coptic Orthodox Christian faith and the American culture on the marital relationship of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives.

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APPENDIX A

Demographic Form

Demographic Form

Please complete all items on this questionnaire.

Date of Birth: _____   Age in years: _____

Gender: Wife _____   Husband _____

Date of Marriage: Year   Month   Day

                     _____   _____   _____

Marital status before immigration: Single   _____   Married_____

Type of Marriage: Arranged _____   Love _____

Attend church services together: Always ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___ Never ___

Practice other spiritual activities together: Always __ Sometimes __ Rarely __Never __

Level of education completed:

1-6 years _____   7-9 years   _____   10-12 years _____

 College   _____   Graduate school   _____

Current employment status: Employed _____   Not Employed   _____

Income Level: Low (less than $20,000) _____ Average ($20,000-50,000) _____
High (greater than $50,000) _____

Number of people living with you: Kids____ Parents ____ In-laws ____ Others____

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Semi-structured Interview Guide

I. Introduction

A. Introduction of Researcher
    The researcher is a Coptic Orthodox Christian university professor, a deacon, and a lay marriage and family counselor for more than seven years in Egypt and in some Coptic Orthodox Churches in Ambridge, San Antonio, Les Angeles, Cleveland, and Jersey City. The co-moderator is an American graduate assistant at Eastern University who has been trained to help facilitate the group discussions, make observation, and take notes.

B. Purpose of the Study
    The purpose of this study is to investigate Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-American husbands and wives' perceptions of marital satisfaction and the factors that influence it. More specifically, this is an exploration into the lived marital experiences of the Coptic Orthodox Christian husbands and wives who emigrated to the United States, got naturalized after staying for at least five years and became acculturated to the American culture to get at the meaning of their lived marital experiences and understand the factors and practices that enhance or lessen their marital satisfaction.

C. Focus Group Ground Rules
    Please follow these eight ground rules while participating in the focus group:

1. Your participation is voluntary and based on your signed informed consent. Please participate to the fullest of your ability;
2. The co-moderator and I will pay particular attention to any signs of distress during the focus group session and a counselor will be available at and after the time of the focus group or interview for needed support;
3. It is important to respect each others' privacy and not repeat what you hear during the group discussions. Confidentiality is very important;
4. Please listen actively and respect others when they are talking. Be conscious of body language and nonverbal responses; they can be as disrespectful as words;
5. Please speak one at a time in a voice at least as loud as mine;
6. Please share your own story and experience. Say what's true for you, and have the courage of your convictions. Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing ("I" instead of "they," "we," and "you");
7. Don't let the group sway you, and don't sell out to group opinion or to a strong talker. It is OK, however, to change your mind during the course of the session because of something you hear or see; and
8. The goal is not to agree; it is about hearing and exploring divergent perspectives.

D. Ethical Considerations:

1. The researcher in this study is bound by the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics and Pennsylvania State law. Although you will not be required to provide any information that will lead to identifying who you are, except your signature on this consent form and your voice on the audiotapes, I will keep your identity confidential. I will also take reasonable steps to ensure that other participants in the focus group understand the importance of confidentiality. However, there are no guarantees that other participants in the focus group will keep identity confidential. Any report produced from this research will only include summaries from many responses, and will never provide information that would allow someone to identify an individual who participated in the study. The exception to this confidentiality is that Pennsylvania State law mandates that a report be made to authorities in cases where a child is being abused or you are in imminent danger to yourself or other. All digital recordings, written materials, and consent forms will be stored in a secured file in my home office and will be destroyed after five years.

2. You are under no obligation to participate. You are a volunteer and you are free to decline to participate or stop participating at any time you wish. Should you choose to withdraw, you may request that the information that has already been collected be destroyed.

3. Risks to participating in this study are minimal, and may include negative emotions and/or feelings such as discomfort when talking about marital relationship. Counseling services are available upon request should you want them now or in the future.

4. Although you may not experience any immediate, personal benefits of the study, the research should help to provide information that will help other Coptic Orthodox Egyptian-American husbands and wives better understand the important issues related to a marital relationship. The results will also help our Coptic Orthodox Church leaders to design pre-marital programs and marriage enrichment programs.

5. You will have an opportunity to read, review, and discuss the informed consent before signing it.

II. Interview Questions*

1. What does marital satisfaction mean to you?
2. What are the factors that you feel contribute to your satisfaction with your marriage?
3. What are the factors that contribute to your dissatisfaction with your marriage? or What are the factors that interfere with your satisfaction with your marriage?
4. What are examples of daily experiences you have that influence your marital satisfaction?
5. What do you do to address issues/experiences that lessen your martial satisfaction?
6. What is it that has allowed you to maintain your marriage?
7. If there was anything you could change to improve your marital satisfaction, what would it be?
8. How have you been prepared for marriage by the Coptic Orthodox Church?
9. How have you been supported in your marriage by the Coptic Orthodox Church?
10. What recommendations do you make to the Coptic Orthodox Church leaders regarding marriage enrichment programs and marriage preparation programs?
11. What could I have asked you that I did not ask to gain a better understanding of the Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian-Americans' lived marital experiences?

III. Closure

A. Answering Participants' Questions
B. Addressing Participants' Concerns
C. Making Referrals upon request

* Probes were made when necessary.

Appendix C

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

<div align="center">

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 Forbes Avenue, PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

</div>

TITLE:	Perceptions of Marital Satisfaction among Coptic Orthodox Egyptian-Americans
INVESTIGATOR:	Monir Atta-Alla, Ph.D., Loeb School of Education, Eastern University, 1300 Eagle Road, St. Davids, PA 19087
ADVISOR:	Dr. William J. Casile
	Department of Counseling, Psychology and Special education, School of Education, Duquesne University
SOURCE OF SUPPORT:	This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ph.D. Degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at Duquesne University.
PURPOSE:	You are being asked to participate in a study that is intended to investigate the perceptions of marital satisfaction among Coptic Orthodox Egyptian-American husbands and wives living in the United States of America.
	If you agree to participate in this research project, you will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion and may be in a follow up individual interview. The interview will include 11 open-ended questions about your lived marital experience. You will also be asked to complete a demographic form which includes questions about age, education level, length of your marriage, whether you got married before or after immigration, type of marriage, employment status, income level, spirituality practice, frequency of attending church services, and household. Your participation in the entire study will take approximately 60-90 minutes.
RISKS AND BENEFITS:	If you agree to participate in this research project, you understand that it is possible to experience some negative emotions and/or feeling of discomfort. Counseling services will be available upon request should you want them now or in the future.
	Although you may not experience any immediate, personal benefits of the study, the research will provide information that will help other Coptic Orthodox Egyptian-American husbands and wives better understand the important issues related to a marital relationship. The results will also help the Coptic Orthodox Church leaders to design pre-marital programs as well as marriage enrichment programs.

<div align="center">

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COMPENSATION:	There is no compensation for participating in this research project; however there is also no cost to you for participating.
CONFIDENTIALITY:	Although you will not be required to provide any information that will lead to identifying who you are, except your signature on this consent form and your voice on the audiotapes, I will keep your identity confidential. I will also take reasonable steps to ensure that other participants in the focus group understand the importance of confidentiality. However, there are no guarantees that other participants in the focus group will keep identity confidential. Any report produced from this research will only include summaries from many responses, and will never provide information that would allow someone to identify an individual who participated. All digital recordings and written materials and consent forms will be stored in a secured file in my home office and will be destroyed after five years.
RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:	You are under no obligation to participate. You are a volunteer and you may decline to participate or stop participating at any time you wish. There are no consequences or penalties for not participating or stopping your participation. Should you choose to withdraw, you may request that the information that has already been collected be destroyed.
	If you are in any way dissatisfied with the process of the research study or believe you have been harmed or injured because of it, you can contact the researcher, Dr. Monir Atta-Alla (home- 610-275-2131; cell – 412-251-3701; email – monir.attaalla@gmail.com). You can also contact Dr. William J. Casile, the dissertation advisor for this study (office - 412-396-6112; email – casile@duq.edu). You can also contact Dr. Paul Richer, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board (office - 412-396-6326).
SUMMARY OF RESULTS:	You can receive a summary of the findings of this study at no cost upon request if you provide a self-addressed envelope for this purpose.
VOLUNTARY CONSENT:	I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is completely voluntary. I understand that my responses will remain confidential and my individual answers will be combined with the answers of other husbands and wives who participate; no one will know how I answered the interview questions. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation at any time, for any reason, without explanation, consequence or penalty. On these terms, I certify I am willing to participate in this research project.

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Investigator's Signature   Date

Appendix D

Tables

Table 3

Summary of Categorized Constructed Meanings from Focus group I-Wives

No.	Category	Constructed Meanings
1	Perception of marital satisfaction	A Relationship based on care
		A Relationship based on commitment
		A Relationship based on communication
		A relationship based on friendship
		A Relationship based on honesty
		A Relationship based on intimacy
		A relationship based on love
		A Relationship based on respect
		A Relationship based on security
		A Relationship based on sharing responsibilities
		A Relationship based on trust
		A Relationship based on understanding
1I	Factors contributing to marital satisfaction	Love
		Communication
		Understanding
		Emotional and physical intimacy
		Trust
		Respect
		Commitment
		Care
		Active participation in house hold chores
		Spending time together

		Honesty
		Patience
		Spirituality
1II	Factors contributing to marital dissatisfaction	Anger
		Lack of communication
		Discouragement
		Dishonesty
		Jealously
		Lack of care
		Lack of participation
		Lack of intellectuality
		Lack of commitment to marriage
		Lack of intimacy
		Lack of respect/disrespect
		Telling other people about problems
		Verbal abuse
1V	Daily marital experiences	Communicating about the daily issues
		Complaining
		Discussing
		Fighting
		Going shopping
		Going to the church
		Having meals
		Praying
		Sharing responsibilities
		Taking care of the household
		Visiting a friend

		Watching Christian TV channels
V	Addressing negative marital experiences	Active listening
		Blaming each other and shouting
		Christian faith
		Commitment to marriage
		Discussion
		Expressing feelings
		Forgiveness
		Good communication
		Help from parents, friends, and the church priest
		Prayers
		Silence
		Talking it over
		Unconditional love
V1	Maintaining marital relationship	Awareness of personal needs, desires, and dreams
		Children
		Commitment to marriage
		Communication
		Culture and traditions
		Fear of suffering after divorce or separation
		Financial support
		Forgiveness
		Marriage vows
		Normality of marital problems.
		Patience

		Perception of Christian marriage as a sacramental
		lifelong relationship
		Protection
		Spirituality
		The difficulty of getting divorce
		Understanding
		Willingness to go the second mile
V1I	Desired changes to improve marital satisfaction	Acceptance
		Balancing between individual growth and intimacy and emotional support.
		Better emotional and physical intimacy
		Forgiveness
		More open communication
		More patience
		More protection
		More shared time
		More spirituality
		More understanding
		Prioritizing family life vs. work
		Showing more care for each other
		Showing more respect
VIII	Preparation for marriage	Advice from friends
		Advice from older sisters
		Christian readings
		Christian TV shows
		Engagement period

		Guidance from the priest
		Listening to sermons about family
IX	Marriage support	Confession
		Priest's prayers
		advice from old deacons
X	Recommendation for church leaders	Establishing counseling offices in churches
		Establishing weekly marriage and family meetings
		Having Christian counselors in churches
		More advice for parents
		More books
		More sermons about marriage
		Providing CDs and tapes on marriage
		Rules for engagement length

Table 4

Summary of Categorized Constructed Meanings from Focus group 2-Husbands

No.	Category	Constructed Meanings
1	Perception of marital satisfaction	A Relationship based on communication
		A Relationship based on forgiveness
		A Relationship based on honesty
		A Relationship based on intimacy
		A Relationship based on love
		A Relationship based on respect
		A Relationship based on same faith in God
		A Relationship based on submission
		A Relationship based on trust
		A Relationship based on understanding
1I	Factors contributing to marital satisfaction	Communication
		Good sexual relationship or physical intimacy
		Honesty
		Love
		Respect
		Submission
		Trust
		Understanding

III	Factors contributing to marital dissatisfaction	Anger
		Discouragement
		Dishonesty
		Jealousy
		Lack of care
		Lack of cooperating
		Lack of communication
		Lack of commitment
		Lack of physical intimacy
		Lack of wisdom
		Lack of respect
		Emotional abuse
		Talking with other people about marital issues
		Verbal abuse
1V	Daily marital experiences	Communicating about daily issues
		Complaining
		Discussing family issues
		Praying together
		Going to the church
		Going shopping
		Having daily meals
		Sharing daily problems and issues
		Sharing household chores
		Sharing children's responsibilities
		Talking about daily needs and issues
		Visiting friends

		Watching TV
V	Addressing negative marital experiences	Active listening
		Christian faith and wisdom
		Discussion
		Focus on children
		Forgiveness and tolerance
		Joking and laughing
		Physical abuse
		Prayers
		Seeking advice from family, friends, and church
		Shutting down
		Talking the problem over
		Unconditional love
		Verbal abuse
V1	Maintaining marital relationship	Awareness of each other
		Children
		Christian faith
		Commitment
		Culture and traditions
		Difficulty of getting divorced
		Forgiveness
		Guilt
		Interdependence
		Love
		Reputation

V1I	Desired changes to improve marital satisfaction	Be more patient
		Decrease intellectuality
		Increase emotions
		Learning how to communicate openly
		Learning how to respect each other
		Sharing more responsibilities in the household's chores
		Showing more care
		Showing more interest in the sexual relationship
		Showing more love
		Spending more quality time together
VIII	Preparation for marriage	Listening to talks about Christian marriage
		Little guidance from the church priest
		Love and long engagement period
		Observing parents
		listening to friends' stories
		Reading books and stories about married people
		Readings about successful marriages
		Watching good and bad models of marriages around me
IX	Marriage support	Prayers
		Support from friends in the church
X	Recommendation for church leaders	Education for the people who are getting ready to marry
		More books on marriage
		More orientation to newly married people

		More priests to serve the big congregation
		More qualified people to work as Christian counselors
		More talks about marital life and marital problems
		Weekly meetings for married people
		Weekly meetings for young parents

Table 5

Summary of Categorized Constructed Meanings from Key Informant I

No.	Category	Constructed meanings
1	Perception of marital satisfaction	A friendly intimate, and committed relationship
1I	Factors contributing to marital satisfaction	Communication
		Commitment
		Trust
		Honesty
		Trust
		Mutual respect
		Love
		Trust
		Friendship
		Commitment
1II	Factors contributing to marital dissatisfaction	Lack of care
		Jealously
		Verbal abuse
		Lack of respect
1V	Daily marital experiences	Prayers
		Watching Christian TV channels together
		Having daily meals together
		Going out
		Visiting friends

V	Addressing negative marital experiences	Faith in Jesus Christ
		Unconditional love
		Commitment to the marriage
		Talking with married friends
V1	Maintaining marital relationship	Christian faith
		Children
		Commitment to marriage
		Forgiveness
		Willingness to go the second mile
		Understanding
		Patience
V1I	Desired changes to improve marital satisfaction	Spending more times together
		Balancing between marriage and job
		Increase emotional intimacy
		Increase psychological intimacy
		Increase physical intimacy
		Securing more protection
VIII	Preparation for marriage	No actual preparation
		Scattered ideas about marriage
IX	Marriage support	Confession
		Prayers
X	Recommendation for church leaders	More people to help
		Family meeting

Table 6

Summary of Categorized Constructed Meanings from Key Informant 2

No	Category	Constructed Meanings
1	Perception of marital satisfaction	A relationship based on commitment , respect and understanding
1I	Factors contributing to marital satisfaction	Loving Care Commitment Trust Respect Friendship Communication
1II	Factors contributing to marital dissatisfaction	Lack of respect Dishonesty Lack of commitment
1V	Daily marital experiences	Arguing about money Fighting Complaining Discussion sometimes Praying sometimes Go to church together sometimes
V	Addressing negative marital experiences	Blaming each Asking other people to solve our problems Abusing each other verbally Abusing each other verbally Abusing each other physically

V1	Maintaining marital relationship	Financial support
		Children
		Lack of social skills
V1I	Desired changes to improve marital satisfaction	Increase communication
		Increase care for each other's needs
		Be more commitment to the relationship
		Increase mutual understanding
		Increase mutual trust
VIII	Preparation for marriage	Advice from older sisters
		Advice from friends
IX	Marriage support	No support
X	Recommendation for church leaders	More orientation
		More meetings for married people

Table 7

Summary of Categorized Constructed Meanings from Key Informant 3

No	Category	Constructed Meanings
1	Perception of marital satisfaction	A committed sacramental relationship
1I	Factors contributing to marital satisfaction	Love Commitment Respect communication Active participation Trust Spending time together Cooperation spirituality intimacy
1II	Factors contributing to marital dissatisfaction	Telling other people family issues lack of respect Anger Lack of communication
1V	Daily marital experiences	Living as roommates Routine life such as meals , arguing, and discussion Sharing children's responsibilities
V	Addressing negative marital experiences	Good communication Long relationship Christian faith

		Active listening
		Conflict resolution skills
V1	Maintaining marital relationship	Belief that sacramental relationship
		Christian faith
		Communication
		Conflict resolution skills
		Awareness of each others' needs, desires, and dreams
V1I	Desired changes to improve marital satisfaction	Considering each other's needs
		Practicing more active faith
		Supporting each other's individual growth
		Increase intimacy
VIII	Preparation for marriage	Reading booklets about marriage
		Listening to a few sermons family
IX	Marriage support	Prayers
X	Recommendation for church leaders	Weekly meetings for the married people
		Weekly meetings for engaged people
		Establishing the family Eshbeen (best man/helper/guide)

Table 8

Summary of Categorized Constructed Meanings from Key Informant 4

No	Category	Constructed Meanings
1	Perception of marital satisfaction	A committed spiritual relationship
1I	Factors contributing to marital satisfaction	Love Trust Respect Honesty Cooperation Communication Physical intimacy
1II	Factors contributing to marital dissatisfaction	Excessive emotionality Excessive sociability
1V	Daily marital experiences	Enjoying open communication Sharing responsibilities of children and household Spending good times together
V	Addressing negative marital experiences	Forgiveness Tolerance Focusing on children Strong relationship with God Unconditional love every day
V1	Maintaining marital relationship	Belief that marriage is a sacred relationship Fear of children's suffering Fear of extended families suffering Forgiveness Commitment to love

V1I	Desired changes to improve marital satisfaction	Decrease worries about the future of our children. Increase care for each other Spending more quality time together
VIII	Preparation for marriage	Reading books and stories about married people Watching good and bad models of marriages
IX	Marriage support	No support
X	Recommendation for church leaders	More training More programs More qualified people More marriage meetings

Table 9

Summary of Categorized Constructed Meanings from Key Informant 5

No	Quality	Constructed Meanings
1	Perception of marital satisfaction	A relationship based on love and joy
1I	Factors contributing to marital satisfaction	Communication Love Respect Submission
1II	Factors contributing to marital dissatisfaction	Lack of respect Lack of intimate relationship Anger Discouragement Verbal abuse Physical abuse
1V	Daily marital experiences	Eating Discussion and arguing Takes care of children Taking care of house work Taking care of finance
V	Addressing negative marital experiences	Abusing each other emotionally Abusing each other verbally Abusing each other physically
V1	Maintaining marital relationship	Children Sacrifice
V1I	Desired changes to improve marital satisfaction	Respecting each other Communicating openly

		Expressing feelings
		Accepting each other
		Increase forgiveness
VIII	Preparation for marriage	No preparation
IX	Marriage support	Little support from the priest
X	Recommendation for church leaders	More people to solve problems
		More marriage and family meetings

Table 10

Summary of Categorized Constructed Meanings from Key Informant 6

N0	Category	Constructed Meanings
1	Perception of marital satisfaction	Relationship based on mutually respect
1I	Factors contributing to marital satisfaction	Friendship
		Trust
		Honesty
		Love
		Spending time together
		Communication
1II	Factors contributing to marital dissatisfaction	Lack of communication
		Jealousy
		Lack of cooperation
		Discouragement
1V	Daily marital experiences	Go to church together
		Supporting each other
V	Addressing negative marital experiences	Christian faith
		Wisdom
		Simplicity
		Prayers
		Visits close friends from the church
		Discussion
		Watch Christian TV together
V1	Maintaining marital relationship	Commitment to the Lord and each other
		Christian faith
		Guidance in the Bible

		Friendship
V1I	Desired changes to improve marital satisfaction	Show more care
		Show more love to my wife
		Show more patience
		Spending more time together
VIII	Preparation for marriage	Long engagement period
		Readings about successful marriages
		Guidance and advice from church priest
IX	Marriage support	Guidance and advice from the church priest
X	Recommendation for church leaders	Publishing more books
		Writing more articles on Christian marriage
		Establishing regular marriage and family meetings
		Training more qualified people
		Preparing young people for successful marital life

Table 11

Cross Comparison of Perception of Marital Satisfaction

Constructed Meaning	FG1	FG2	KI	KI2	KI3	KI4	KI5	KI6
1. A Relationship based on care	X							
2. A Relationship based on commitment	X	X	X		X	X		
3. A Relationship based on communication	X	X	X	X	X			
4. A Relationship based on forgiveness		X		X			X	X
5. A relationship based on friendship	X		X	X	X			X
6. A Relationship based on honesty	X	X		X				
7. A relationship based on interdependence								X
8. A Relationship based on intimacy	X	X	X		X		X	
9. A relationship based on love	X	X		X		X	X	X
10. A Relationship based on respect	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
11. A Relationship based on same faith in God		X						
12. A Relationship based on security	X							
13. A relationship based on shared responsibility	X		X					
14. A relationship based on spirituality						X		
15. A Relationship based on submission		X				X		
16. A Relationship based on trust	X	X					X	
17. A Relationship based on understanding	X	X	X	X				

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Table 12

Cross Comparison of Factors Contributing to Marital Satisfaction

Constructed Meaning	FG1	FG2	KI	KI2	KI3	KI4	KI5	KI6
1. Active participation in house hold chores	X				X			
2. Care	X			X				
3. Commitment	X		X	X	X			X
4. Communication	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5. Cooperation					X	X		
6. Emotional and physical intimacy	X	X			X	X		
7. Friendship			X	X				X
8. Honesty	X	X	X			X		X
9. Love	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
10. Patience	X							
11. Respect	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
12. Spending time together	X				X			X
13. Spirituality	X				X			
14. Submission		X					X	
15. Trust	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
16. Understanding	X	X						

Table 13

Cross Comparison of Factors contributing to marital dissatisfaction

Constructed Meaning	FG1	FG2	KI	KI2	KI3	KI4	KI5	KI6
1. Anger	X	X			X		X	
2. Discouragement	X	X			X			X
3. Dishonesty	X	X		X				
4. Emotional ,verbal, and physical abuse	X	X	X				X	
5. Jealously	X	X	X					X
6. Lack of care	X	X	X					
7. Lack of commitment	X	X	X	X				
8. Lack of communication	X	X			X			X
9. Lack of cooperating	X	X						X
10. Lack of intimacy	X	X					X	
11. Lack of respect	X	X	X	X	X		X	
12. Lack of wisdom	X	X				X		
13. Talking with other people about marital issues	X	X			X		X	

Table 14

Cross Comparison of Daily Marital Experiences

Constructed Meaning	FG1	FG2	KI	KI2	KI3	KI4	KI5	KI6
1. Communicating about daily issues	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
2. Complaining about feelings	X	X		X				
3. Fighting and arguing	X	X	X	X	X		X	
4. Going shopping	X	X	X					X
5. Going to church	X	X		X			X	X
6. Having daily meals	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
7. Prayers	X	X	X	X				X
8. Sharing household chores	X	X				X	X	X
9. Sharing children's responsibilities	X	X				X	X	X
10. Visiting friends	X	X	X					X
11. Watching Christian TV programs	X	X	X					X

Table 15

Cross Comparison of Addressing Negative Marital Experiences

Constructed Meaning	FG1	FG2	KI	KI2	KI3	KI4	KI5	KI6
1. Christian faith and wisdom	X	X	X		X	X		X
2. Commitment to marriage	X	X	X			X		X
3. Discussion and communication	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
4. Focusing on children	X	X		X		X		
5. Forgiveness and tolerance	X	X				X		X
6. Help from parents, friends, and the church priest	X	X	X	X		X		
7. Prayers	X	X	X			X		X
8. Silence or shutting down	X	X			X			X
9. Unconditional love	X	X	X			X		X

Table 16

Cross Comparison of Maintaining Marital Relationship

Constructed Meaning	FG1	FG2	KI	KI2	KI3	KI4	KI5	KI6
1. Children	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
2. Christian faith and beliefs about marriage	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
3. Commitment	X	X	X			X	X	X
4. Communication and understanding	X	X	X	X		X		X
5. Culture and traditions	X	X			X			
6. Financial support	X	X	X	X	X			
7. Forgiveness	X	X	X			X		

Table 17

Cross Comparison of Desired changes to Improve Marital Satisfaction

Constructed Meaning	FG1	FG2	KI	KI2	KI3	KI4	KI5	KI6
1. Acceptance	X	X				X	X	X
2. More open communication	X	X	X	X		X	X	
3. Better emotional, verbal, and physical intimacy	X	X	X		X		X	
4. More patience and forgiveness	X	X	X		X		X	X
5. Sharing more responsibilities in the household's chores	X	X	X			X		X
6. Showing more care and love	X	X		X	X	X		X
7. Spending more quality time together	X	X	X	X	X	X		X

Table 18

Cross Comparison of Preparation for marriage

Constructed Meaning	FG1	FG2	KI	KI2	KI3	KI4	KI5	KI6
1. Advice from friends and family members	X	X	X	X		X		
2. Guidance and advice from church priest	X	X		X				X
3. Listening to talks about Christian marriage	X	X	X			X		X
4. Long engagement period	X	X				X		X
5. No preparation	X	X			X		X	
6. Reading booklets, books, and stories about marriage	X	X	X	X		X		X
7. Watching good and bad models of marriages	X	X		X				X

\Table 19

Cross Comparison of Marriage Support

Constructed Meaning	FG1	FG2	KI	KI2	KI3	KI4	KI5	KI6
1. Advice from friends and family	X	X		X				
2. Confession	X	X	X					
3. Guidance and advice from the church	X	X		X			X	X
4. No support	X	X			X	X		
5. Prayers	X	X	X					

Table 20

Cross Comparison of Recommendations

Constructed Meaning	FG1	FG2	KI	KI2	KI3	KI4	KI5	KI6
1. More books and articles on marriage	X	X				X		X
2. More qualified people to serve the big congregation	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
3. More training, education, and orientation on marriage	X	X	X	X		X		X
4. Providing counseling services in churches	X	X			X		X	X
5. Weekly meetings for married and engaged people	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X