

THE ENGAGEMENT AND IMPACT OF RELATIONAL MAINTENANCE  
BEHAVIORS IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN DUAL-CAREER COUPLES

by

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The Engagement and Impact of Relational Maintenance Behaviors in African-  
American Dual-Career Couples

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ABSTRACT

Using individual and couple interviews, this qualitative work examined relational maintenance behaviors of 13 African-American dual-career couples. Findings reveal that study participants employed a variety of routine and strategic behaviors which they identified as relevant to maintaining marital satisfaction and stability. Couples distinguished between strategies in their daily interactions and those implemented for the long-term sustainment of their marriages. Couples also engaged a series of repair behaviors designed to restore the marital relationship once a transgression occurred. A new category of maintenance was discovered as useful for these African-American couples -- seek a spiritual connection. Each finding is discussed in regard to how it advances understanding of relational maintenance behaviors.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

Marriage is a broad, encompassing, highly prized relationship that serves as the primary bond in most adults' lives (Lye & Biblarz, 1993). Because of the value Americans attach to marriage and heightened concern about the current high divorce rate, how couples maintain the quality of their marital interactions is of growing research interest (Gottman, 1994; Sternberg & Hojjat, 1997). Relational success depends on meeting partner's expectations for the daily routines of married life, as well as making repair attempts when unpleasant actions such as violations of trust or withdrawal of intimacy occur (Rolloff & Cloven, 1994). The day-to-day routine of family life -- having dinner together, giving a hug, listening to problems -- helps sustain the marital relationship over time, but serious injustices require more targeted and specific actions (Rolloff & Cloven, 1994). The process by which a couple monitors the quality of their relationship and implements behaviors designed to maintain the relationship's existence, its status, its desired level, and its repair is referred to as relational maintenance (Canary & Stafford, 1994; Dindia & Canary, 1993; Rolloff & Cloven, 1994).

Researcher's interested in relational maintenance have studied a variety of couple types but have not yet investigated the maintenance behaviors of African-American marital partners. Historically, married African-American women have been employed in greater numbers than their White counterparts (Taylor, 1994). Recent census bureau reports document that increasing numbers of African-Americans are gaining higher degrees, entering professional occupations, and marrying individuals of similar description (O'Hare, Pollard, Mann, & Kent, 1991). In spite of evidence attesting to the

difficulty that African-American dual-career couples experience in scheduling time to attend to relationship issues (Dickson, 1993; Thomas, 1990), no literature on relational maintenance for them could be located. There is a need to acknowledge that middle-class African-American couples are on the rise and more information is needed concerning how they maintain satisfying marital relationships.

Career couples typically work well in excess of the 9 to 5 parameters of most jobs, and one way of easing the strain is to become more interdependent -- a marital style that allows feelings of dependence and independence to be freely shared and acted upon when the need arises (Guelzow, Bird, & Koball, 1995; Weingarten, 1978). Relational maintenance behaviors, in effect, help couples sustain their desired relational definition as interdependent partners. Maintenance actions and activities provide evidence of affection, trust, commitment, and support -- factors that have been linked to relational satisfaction and marital stability (Canary & Stafford, 1992, 1993). African-Americans, because of a past history of racial intolerance, learn from childhood the benefits of supporting one another through interdependent actions (Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993). Interdependence implies that people through their interactions, develop a shared sense that their lives are intertwined; that they can depend on one another in a variety of ways (Kelly & Thibault, 1978; Rusbult & Arriaga, 1997).

A number of researchers have examined the actions that individuals employ to maintain personal relationships (Ayres, 1983; Baxter & Dindia, 1990; Bell, Daly, & Gonzales, 1987; Canary & Stafford, 1994; Dindia & Baxter, 1987; Newton & Bergoon, 1990). From these and other studies, evidence has accumulated that: 1) relationships require maintenance efforts to remain satisfactory and stable over time; 2) individuals

maintain relationships through routine interactions -- behaviors that are less mindful and more habitual, without specific goals in mind; 3) individuals employ strategic interactions to maintain relationships -- behaviors targeted to desired relational goals; 4) relational maintenance includes restorative behaviors; and 5) maintenance behaviors communicate commitment and support to the partner. Given that a limitation of this previous work is the focus on White individuals, this study extended the maintenance research to include African-American couples and asked the following research questions:

1. How do couples explain the stability of their relationship -- what actions are linked to its long term continuation?
2. What routine behaviors do partners employ on a day-to-day basis to maintain relational satisfaction ?
3. What strategic behaviors do partners engage in response to relational transgressions?

## Chapter Two

### Review of the Literature

#### Theoretical Framework

Much of the research on relational maintenance suffers from the lack of a clear theoretical framework (Burleson and Samter, 1994; Stafford, 1994). Researchers have most often used variations of exchange theory to explain maintenance behaviors. Exchange theories rest on the assumption that relational partners interact on the basis of costs and rewards, with rewarding interactions linked to relational satisfaction and stability (Berscheid & Lopes, 1997).

The theoretical framework that undergirds this research project is interdependence theory, a variation of exchange theory which is unique in its view that relational partners come to depend on each other and decide to commit based on their evaluation of satisfaction from both an individual and self-interested perspective (Thibault & Kelly 1959; Kelly & Thibault, 1978; Kelly, 1979). Partners who stay together are said to persist because the satisfaction gained from their current interdependent coupling was superior to any they would experience elsewhere (Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994).

Interdependence, then, refers to the extent to which two people influence each other's relational outcomes (Kelley, 1979). As partners interact, they clarify expectations, make plans, state requests, and otherwise become intimately involved in each other's lives. Interdependence emerges as the couple shares life experiences within an intimate

relationship (Weingarten, 1978). More recently, interdependence has been defined as “the manner in which -- as well as the degree to which -- interacting individuals act upon or influence one another’s experiences in reference to the fact that the preferences, motives, and behavior of the individual are relevant to those of the interaction partner.” (Rusbult & Arriaga, 1997, p. 221). Primary to this theory is the idea that interaction is the foundation of all interpersonal relationships.

Rusbult and colleagues (1983, 1991, 1993, & 1994) have clarified and extended interdependence theory in their work on relational commitment. They have organized their findings and labeled the results as the “investment model”: a theory of the process by which individuals become committed to their relationships as well as the circumstances under which feelings erode and relationships end” (Rusbult et al., 1994, p. 119). The investment model proposes that commitment is the key factor to understanding relational stability.

Commitment is envisioned as a sense of being able to depend on a partner. It includes the expectation of remaining in the relationship long term. Commitment emerges out of an individuals’ investment in and satisfaction with their relationship with a particular partner. Commitment is also influenced by the feeling that the relationship established with the partner cannot easily be replaced.

Committed partners, Rusbult and colleagues conclude, make efforts to maintain the positive feelings they have relative to each other and their relationship, and consequently ensure its stability across time. Relational maintenance is accomplished by various means, including 1) deciding to remain in the relationship, 2) being accommodative in conflictual situations, 3) devaluing potential alternative partners, 4)

being willing to self-sacrifice for the good of the partner and the relationship, and 5) labeling the relationship as superior, compared to others (Rusbult, & Buunk, 1993; Rusbult, Yovetich, & Verette, 1994). Other relational maintenance behaviors described by Rusbult and her research partners include building cooperative daily routines, adopting relational rules that encourage supportiveness and reciprocity, and remaining positive in situations in which the partner behaves badly.

The present investigation further examined the engagement and impact of relational maintenance strategies and extended the research to include African-Americans. The goal of this study was to contribute to an understanding and appreciation of the maintenance behaviors used by African-American married couples.

## Background

### Defining Relational Maintenance

Several authors have provided definitions of relational maintenance. For example, in their chapter on relational maintenance, Roloff and Cloven (1994) focus on how dyads manage to keep relationships ongoing in the face of relational transgressions. In his work on marital stability and satisfaction, Gottman (1994) conceptualizes maintenance as individuals not divorcing. Similarly, Rusbult, Drigotas et al. (1994) view maintenance as resulting from satisfaction that leads to a long-term desire to sustain a relationship. Perhaps one of the most objective and comprehensive definitions of maintenance is provided by Dindia and Canary (1993) as “(1) to keep a relationship in existence, (2) to keep a relationship in a specified state or condition, (3) to keep a relationship in satisfactory condition, and (4) to keep a relationship in repair” (p. 164). This conceptualization served as the focus of this project.

## Overview of Past Research

The first typology of relational maintenance was offered by Ayres (1983). The focus of his research was on keeping the relationship in its current state. In this context, the goal of maintenance was to prevent escalation or de-escalation of the relationship. In Ayres' investigation males and females (i.e., friend, marital, sibling) were given a scenario and requested to choose from 38 strategies, those that would sustain a hypothetical relationship.

Through factor analysis, the 38 initially identified strategies were reduced to three factors or types of maintenance behavior. Avoidance strategies, the first factor, were comprised of activities a partner uses to disregard actions employed to create change in the relationship's direction. Balance strategies, the second factor, describe a partner's actions to maintain the current levels of behavioral and emotional interaction. The final factor, directness strategies, includes partners clearly informing one another that the relationship should remain at its present level. The use of avoidance, balance and directness strategies were found to be effective in aiding a partner's desire to control the direction of the relationship.

In a second study, Bell, Daly, and Gonzales, (1987) investigated affinity-maintenance strategies in marital relationships. They requested participants to write out descriptions of what they said and did in their marriage to sustain liking and unity. Responses were content analyzed and produced a 27-strategy typology.

In another study, Dindia and Baxter (1987) used deductive and inductive methods to examine the marital maintenance and repair techniques of 50 couples. Study results

provided a typology comprised of 49 techniques that clustered into 11 superordinate types. Couples indicated that prosocial, ceremonial, togetherness and communication techniques were the most frequently employed. A follow-up study was conducted by Baxter and Dindia (1990) to evaluate the validity of their previously constructed typology. Forty-five married couples sorted the previously identified 49 strategies into three types of responses. Three fundamental dimensions were found to underpin the sorted strategies. These included ambivalence-based versus satiation-based conditional use, constructive /destructive communication styles, and proactivity/passivity.

Ambivalence-based conditional strategies are characterized by the perception that they are constructive or destructive to the relationship, while the satiation-based conditional strategies are positive approaches whose effectiveness is determined by its sporadic use (i.e., gifts, flowers). The distinguishing quality of these strategies is their conditional use. The second group, constructive/destructive communication strategies, are defined by their perceived impact on the relationship, which may include actions that are negative and harmful or constructive and positive. The last dimension highlights whether strategies are proactive or passive. The proactive approaches are typified by actions that are perceived as supportive, friendly or future based; whereas passive strategies are characterized by a tendency to avoid or ignore problems. These findings were similar to their previous work, in that they revealed no distinctions between preventive and remedial maintenance activities, and the preventative strategies were more readily reported than the remedial.

Following a thorough perusal of the above studies as well as related literature, Stafford and Canary (1991) concluded that numerous limitations existed in past research on relational maintenance. A primary shortcoming noted was the lack of precise definitions of the concepts presented. Therefore, in an attempt to bring a greater level of preciseness and accuracy to the study of maintenance these researchers carried out an investigation whereby married and dating dyads filled out an open-ended questionnaire describing behaviors which they engaged to maintain satisfactory relationships. These responses were combined with previously identified responses from past research and factor analyzed. A pool of 80 behaviors were reduced to five relational maintenance strategies: network (interacting with friends and affiliations held in common); positivity (maintaining a state of being that is cheerful and positive); assurance (demonstrating love and faithfulness and emphasizing commitment); openness (practicing self-disclosure); and sharing tasks (participating in household chores). Results indicated different usage of these strategies among married, engaged, and seriously dating individuals. That is, seriously dating, married, and engaged individuals perceived greater use of sharing tasks and assurances than did those having dated a short time. Seriously dating and engaged individuals sensed increased partner positivity and openness than did dating individuals or married couples.

In a later study, Dainton and Stafford (1993) sought to replicate previous work as well as add insight into the description of routine maintenance behaviors, in particular. They focused on the differences between routine and strategic behaviors couples employed to maintain their relationships. The sample consisted of married and dating

couples. Couples responded to a questionnaire requesting them to identify behaviors that they used to maintain their marriages. These findings replicated those reported by Dindia and Baxter (1987) and Stafford and Canary (1991) in that proactive actions were found to maintain the marriage. Prosocial behaviors consisted of expressing genuine interest and cooperation; giving gifts (i.e., candy, cards) and self-disclosure. These results also suggested that sharing tasks was more characteristic of routine than strategic maintenance behaviors.

### Routine and Strategic Behaviors

Findings from past research provide evidence that maintenance behaviors reflect both routine and strategic actions. That is, some identified behaviors possessed a habitual quality (routine), while others were more directed and accompanied with an intentional purpose (strategic). As Dainton and Stafford (1993) explain, routine behaviors that occur within established relationships are actions that are carried out regularly, seem mundane and trivial, and are often performed without notice (i.e., simple greetings when returning home). Routine behaviors may even occur at a unconscious level (Dindia & Baxter, 1993).

Strategic behaviors on the other hand, are defined as intentional actions engaged to sustain the relationship (Duck, 1988). Strategic actions are intentional acts designed to obtain a specific desired end (Dindia, 1991). These behaviors are characterized by their intentional nature (Canary & Stafford, 1993). Such behaviors serve a specific function and are different from routine behaviors in that they are not marked by habit (i.e., performed unknowingly or unconsciously). Newman and Bergoon (1990) point out that strategic behaviors are perceived as approaches used with the intent of achieving desired

goals. When negative situations arise, it is interesting to note the strategic behaviors spouses engage to maintain their relationship.

Relational maintenance may be enacted proactively or reactively (Rolloff & Cloven, 1994). When individuals expect that their actions might be upsetting to their partner, proactive attempts tend to lessen the potential damage and thus delay or avoid a conflict. Secondly, once a conflict does occur, the transgressing partner begins to engage in “relational repair” and their actions focus on damage control. In these instances, Rolloff and Cloven (1994) have noted that the purpose of relational maintenance is strategic -- is focused on preserving the relationship. They provide five responses that serve an instrumental purpose in understanding the responses of retribution, prevention, reformulation, minimization and relational justification.

#### Inclusion of African-American Couples

No research exists which specifically examines the role of relational maintenance within middle-class African-American marriages. Given that dual-career African-American couples report experiencing a set of unique problems, including racial discrimination on the job, spouses’ perceptions that African-American women get promoted more easily at work, personal concerns about living more prosperously than close relatives and friends, difficulty instilling Black values and cultural appreciation in their children while living within a White environment; and feelings of social isolation (Thomas, 1990), the risk of marital difficulty may be greater than those not experiencing such obstacles. African-American dual-career couples also expressed experiencing stressors similar to those of their White counterparts, for example, marital equity issues

were a primary concern (John, Shelton, & Luschen, 1995). How some African-American dual-career couples are able to maintain satisfying and stable marriages even as they live in such potentially stressful circumstances is a question this research was designed to address.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

#### Overview of the Research Design

This qualitative research project follows a series of quantitative studies that have been quite helpful in increasing our understanding of relational maintenance and repair. Canary and Stafford (1994) have called for more contextual knowledge to enhance our understanding of how couples employ such behaviors. As such, qualitative methods are shown to be most effective when the purpose of research is exploratory (Gilgun, 1992). The purpose of this project is to allow, through qualitative investigation, these couples to increase our understanding of maintenance and repair behaviors by revealing the context and process of their actions.

#### Site and Participants

The present investigation examined the engagement and impact of relational maintenance strategies within 13 African-American dual-career couples. More specifically, the sample was comprised of 26 African-Americans, all of whom identified themselves as having a professional career. Occupations included three university professors, three attorneys, two executives, one engineer, three teachers, two nurses, two sales managers; one paralegal; one plant foreman, one architect, two computer analysts, one banker; and four university administrators. The sample was a purposive one, to provide a group of information-rich informants to express their feelings and perceptions about their marital interactions (Judd, Smith, & Kidder, 1991). A snowball technique was used to identify the sample, where participants may be a friend of a friend. All participants met the following criteria: a) both spouses employed full time in professional

positions; and b) all couples committed to complete all three proposed taped interviews. Ages ranged from 27-65 years. The educational background of the sample ranged from four years of college to completion of a doctoral degree. Couples had been married from 3 to 33 years. Of the 26 respondents, one individual had been married previously. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to assure confidentiality (see Table 1).

Data for this investigation were obtained from participants in a small college community and several metropolitan communities in a mid-Atlantic state. These two divergent locations were selected in an attempt to sample couples from both university and non-university community settings. While the scheduling of all interviews proved to be challenging for couples with such demanding schedules, the mid-Atlantic state meetings presented additional challenges due to the distance factor. Interviews took approximately 3 to 4.5 hours and were tape recorded. All identifying information was removed during transcription and replaced with pseudonyms.

#### Data Collection Procedures

Thirty-nine interviews were carried out with 13 couples. Twenty-six of the interviews were conducted with individual spouses and thirteen interviews with them as couples. A total of 26 individuals were interviewed. Each interview was preceded by the explanation and reading of a consent form that had been approved by the University. A brief discussion of the research purpose, confidentiality, and contributions of the project were elucidated. Each couple agreed they understood and signed the consent form. Additionally, a brief form that requested demographic data was completed at this time.

Table 1. Demographics

| <b>Pseudonym</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Yrs Married</b> | <b>No of Children</b> | <b>Education</b> | <b>Profession</b>         |
|------------------|------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| Kenneth          | 44         | 17                 | 4                     | B.S.             | Architect                 |
| Carolyn          | 39         |                    |                       | M.A.             | Teacher                   |
| Charles          | 46         | 20                 | 2                     | Ph.D.            | Associate Professor       |
| Sarah            | 47         |                    |                       | M.A.             | University Administrator  |
| Rob              | 37         | 14                 | 2                     | B.S.             | Foreman                   |
| Pat              | 35         |                    |                       | B.S.             | Registered Nurse          |
| Silas            | 43         | 19                 | 2                     | B.S.             | Minister/Computer Analyst |
| Jennifer         | 41         |                    |                       | B.S.             | Registered Nurse          |
| Sam              | 36         | 7                  | 1                     | B.S.             | Sales Manager             |
| Brenda           | 37         |                    |                       | B.S.             | Paralegal                 |
| Bob              | 34         | 8                  | -                     | B.S.             | Corporate V.P.            |
| Mary             | 32         |                    |                       | J.D.             | Attorney                  |
| Phil             | 32         | 7                  | 2                     | B.S.             | Engineer                  |
| Kathy            | 31         |                    |                       | M.A.             | Teacher                   |
| Terry            | 39         | 7                  | 2                     | B.S.             | Insurance Co. Manager     |
| Barbara          | 39         |                    |                       | Ph.D.            | University Administrator  |
| Richard          | 36         | 5                  | 2                     | B.S.             | Corporate V. P.           |
| Diane            | 37         |                    |                       | J.D.             | Attorney                  |
| Jim              | 65         | 33                 | 3                     | Ph.D.            | Professor                 |
| Jan              | 64         |                    |                       | M.A.             | Teacher                   |
| Frank            | 37         | 4                  | -                     | Ph.D.            | Assistant Professor       |
| Susan            | 35         |                    |                       | Ph.D.            | University Administrator  |
| Bill             | 30         | 3                  | 2                     | B.S.             | Computer Analyst          |
| Ronnie           | 27         |                    |                       | B.S.             | University Administrator  |
| Steve            | 35         | 8                  | -                     | B.S.             | Banker                    |
| Carrie           | 34         |                    |                       | J.D.             | Attorney                  |

Appendix A contains the demographic form.

All interviews were held in the participants' homes except for one couple. The wife was interviewed in her office, and the other interviews were conducted at my home, as this appeared to work best for them. All interviews were scheduled to meet the needs and ensure the comfort of the respondents. The use of individual and joint interviews allowed the opportunity for couples to converse freely and confidentially and the joint interview provided me the opportunity to observe the spouses' interactions. The use of joint interviews provided opportunity for each spouse to voice their perceptions. All but two interviews were conducted with individuals first, followed by the couple.

The semi-structured interviews were comprised of questions which were supplemented with probes which served as a means to access depth of meaning and accuracy of intent. Each interview was preceded by a brief period of light conversation to help the respondent and myself relax and become comfortable with each other. This time was used to discuss family-type questions like number and age of children, years married, their professions, and so forth. This type of questioning often attuned the couples to begin thinking about their families and their careers. The questions that directed the interview can be found in Appendix B.

Field notes were written at the conclusion of each visit to a home. These notes were used to record any observations regarding the interview, the interviewee, and myself. Additionally, these notes reflected concerns I had about the interview process. Comments here included concern about inadequate probing, excessive probing, order of questions when very young children were in the room, and possible solutions to such situations for future interviews. These notes also housed my questions about the process

and served as an important tool to evaluate the data. Much effort was put forth to record these notes as soon as possible after the interview, usually within 15 minutes of leaving the home. This detailed description of the interview also served to record unusual impressions, unique turn of phrases, nonverbal actions, and insightful pieces of information gained prior to or following the interviews. These notes proved invaluable in keeping these couples' stories alive during the analysis of the data.

### Data Analysis Process

Data analysis began with several readings of each interview. The first reading was used as an opportunity to familiarize myself with the data. There was no notetaking or comments made during this reading. During the second reading, comments and brief notes of meaningful terms and key phrases were recorded. During subsequent readings, a systematic investigation of the data continued. Such analysis included a combination of procedures established by Patton (1990).

An analytic induction process was used to guide the analysis of the data. The inductive analysis process allowed me to draw patterns, themes, and categories from the data. This process enabled me to let the themes and patterns emerge from the data, rather than theoretical or empirical findings directing the analysis (Patton, 1990). Data were inductively developed into a series of typologies in two ways: 1) through descriptions that emerged from the data; and 2) through analyst-induced descriptions of categories to represent hidden patterns described by the respondents (Patton, 1990).

The interpretation of data began with a cross-case analysis to identify primary words or recurring phrases within each question. These were highlighted during the second readings of the interview transcript. The key words that emerged were retained

because they reflected some essence of their response and because they came from the respondents. From these terms and phrases, the second step included analyst-constructed typologies. This step allowed me to determine any patterns and categories not revealed by key words or phrases alone. As the analyst, this proved to be a means by which I was able to determine patterns within the data, not readily evident by the respondents' comments. To prevent my imposing a biased perspective on the respondent's responses, a continual dialogue concerning the analysis process was shared with my advisor. A serious caution of qualitative research is the continual reflexive examination by the researcher to prevent subjective interpretation.

While there are a variety of methods to determine patterns and categorical systems, Guba (1978) spelled out an empirically-derived system which was employed at this point in the analysis. Two principles, convergence and divergence, are important for the evaluator in adequately analyzing qualitative data. Each factor and its relevance to this investigation is discussed below.

Convergence addresses the question of which concepts are connected. To determine which concepts belong together, Guba (1978) provides the following guidelines to classify related concepts. The analysis was continued by the evaluator looking for recurring regularities within the typologies. These recurring regularities are referred to as patterns. These patterns are then sorted into categories. In devising my categories, two criteria were used to ensure their meaningfulness, "internal homogeneity" and "external heterogeneity." Internal homogeneity assures that data placed within a category reflects appropriate interconnectedness. External heterogeneity, on the other hand, guarantees that the differences among categories are independent and distinct.

Therefore, data were inductively developed into a series of categories in the following two ways: 1) through patterns that emerged from the data as they were spelled out by the respondents themselves; and 2) through analyst-induced descriptions of categories to represent hidden patterns described by the respondents.

The following steps spelled out by Guba (1978) were used to test the categories for completeness:

1) The category system should have integratability. That is, it should reflect a consistency among included concepts. Additionally, the category should be inclusive enough to accurately describe each concept. For example, the actions that made up the category of spiritual issues appeared to be consistent in its meaning and intent (i.e., praying, Bible-reading, worshipping).

2) The category system should include as much of the data provided. To ensure the “reasonable” inclusion of participants’ responses, there was a continual referring back to the specific question asked.

3) Another requirement spelled out by Guba (1978) is that the category should be easily replicated by an independent judge or colleague. In continued consultation with my advisor it was determined that the categories made conceptual as well as logical sense in their intent and purpose in light of questions asked. This check and balance also served as a means of reliability as will be discussed in more detail below.

4) The categories should make sense to the respondents who provided the information.

### Reliability

It is of vital importance that a qualitative researcher maintain the context of participant's responses and the inclusion of relevant observations (Kirk & Miller, 1986). As such, this project was analyzed through my evaluation of the data, the review and use of field notes, the reflexive conversations with my advisor, and to accomplish Step 4, the participant's contributions. The process to accomplish step four is spelled out below. I requested the participants' evaluation of my interpretation of their typed responses as depicted by the Results section. A packet of materials was sent to 11 couples (five in Northern Virginia and six in Southwestern Virginia) to evaluate my interpretation of their responses. Two couples had relocated and could not be contacted. A cover letter thanking them for their participation and requesting their evaluation of their responses was enclosed. Each of three research questions with an attached brief questionnaire was provided. Instructions requested participants to read the information reflecting their responses. Pseudonyms were identified for each participant. Following the reading of each question, participants were asked to indicate their opinion as to whether or not I had accurately conveyed their statements. A copy of the cover letter is in the appendix (see Appendix D). Ten of the eleven couples returned their questionnaire indicating that I had accurately interpreted their responses. This means of obtaining reliability was consistent

with the recommendations put forth by other investigators (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1983; Thompson, 1992). The results that follow reflect the assigned pseudonyms.

## Chapter Four

### Results

This qualitative study was based on in-depth interviews with 26 African-American spouses, ranging in age from 27 to 65 years. This project was designed to investigate dual-career African-American couples use and management of strategies to maintain their marriages, and thereby contribute to the relational maintenance literature. The purpose of the investigation was to examine the engagement and impact of relational maintenance behaviors for couples facing the challenges of sustaining two careers. More specifically, these results reflect how these couples explain the stability of their marriages, what routine behaviors do spouse's employ to sustain their marital satisfaction, and what strategic behaviors do spouses engage to restore the marriage following a transgression.

These results are a summation of the impressions of couples' efforts to sustain their marriages. The participants' responses are the genuine reflections of these thirteen couples. I believe they were honest in their appraisal of their actions and would often follow-up their answers with any necessary qualifiers they thought best explained their actions. Upon reflection of their responses, they often voiced regret for not displaying behaviors which they knew were effective in maintaining the satisfactory marital quality. That is, they knew what to do to maintain the positive atmosphere within the marriage, and they did engage these actions; they were not always satisfied with the consistency of their displaying the actions. Results will be presented by providing the answers to each research question, and are presented in turn.

### Research Question One: Marital Satisfaction

This initial question was designed to examine those actions found to contribute to marital satisfaction. The responses reflected participants' impressions of those behaviors that prove vital in ensuring marital longevity. These couples described behaviors that suggested a strong commitment to their spouse, family, and their marriage. While careers played a dominant role in these individuals' lives, the importance of family was clearly evident.

Couple responses produced eight categories which were thought vital in ensuring a quality relationship: Develop Strong Communication Skills, Be Adaptable and Adjust, Be Understanding, Establish Relational Rules, Manage Conflict Constructively, Set Limits on Careers, Seek Spiritual Connection, and Maintain Quality Friendships. Figure 1 displays the eight categories resulting from the analysis. Many of the named strategies were presently operative in couples' daily interactions. Others had not been fully developed, nor carried out in a consistent manner; however, couples felt it was important to aspire to achieve them at some point. Because of their impact on relational success, couples expressed opinions which were often accompanied by personal anecdotes that explained how participants came to value various concepts believed to be beneficial in ensuring marital satisfaction and success. As I listened to these couples respond to various aspects of this question, it was clear that they were deeply invested in their marriages. Their descriptions of what contributed to a successful marriage and what they

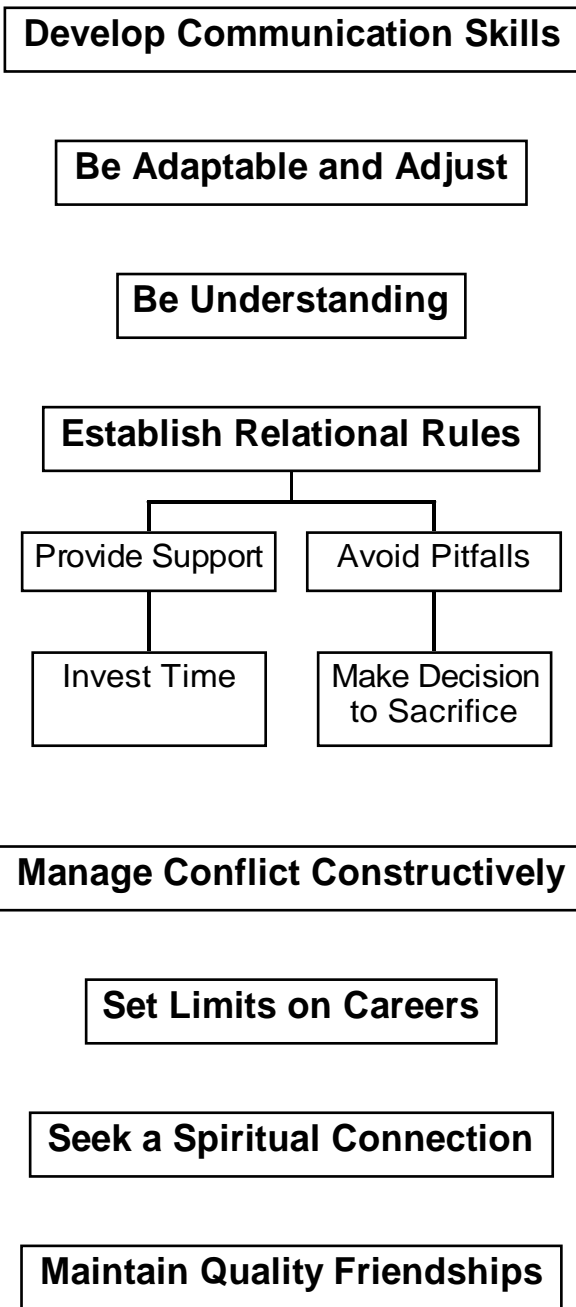


Figure 1. Marital Stability

had learned in their years together was often precisely articulated, and accompanied by agreement from their spouse.

A brief description of each category and the accompanying themes will be presented. Because these answers were provided during the couple interview, the results will not be divided into husbands' and wives' responses, but reflect their combined impressions.

### Develop Communication Skills

Communication was a commonly expressed response by these respondents. Eight of the respondents stated the importance of communication, first and foremost as a means of ensuring satisfaction, as expressed by Kenneth.

Kenneth. So when you're in love with somebody, you talk. And the least little thing, you know, you can talk about "How's your Momma doing?", you know, "Where did you get those socks from?" It doesn't make any difference. You just talk to that person.

The importance of talking things out was highly valued. Instances where such modes of communication proved to be beneficial are reflected in the following themes, Pursue Direct/Honest Communication and Discuss Problem Areas. A brief description of each theme follows.

Pursue Direct/Honest Communication. The ability to communicate was perceived as a key element in maintaining a working marriage. Interestingly, many individuals remarked that effective communication skills had to be learned and perfected over time, as Sarah married 20 years and Carolyn and Kenneth married 17 years pointed out.

Sarah. I think one of the main points or keys to making our marriage work is communicating with one another -- because we didn't do that initially -- so we've had to work in that area as well.

Carolyn. Like when we first got married, I kept a lot of things to myself. But I talk more now, not always in the nicest mood, but I say it. He's not always trying to read my mind.

Kenneth. Oh yeah, because Carolyn and I are just two different types of people, period. ... that's getting to the place where as we communicate, we're starting to know each other a little more. Sometimes it's still hard to figure out.

A younger couple's reflections on the importance of communication was articulated by Ronnie and Bill, married three years. While their communicative ability is still developing they are acutely aware of its importance in building their relationship.

Ronnie. ...ever since Bill and I started dating, up until now we've always tried to at least be open with each other. We are very verbal, we communicate, we may not always hear each other but we communicate, so we ... keep the conversation going.... We've kind of talked ourselves into finding out more about each other.

Bill. I would definitely agree with that.

A third couple responded this way.

Bob. I think communication, being able to talk to each other even though they may not be good things all the time, just be able to communicate and talk to her.

Mary. I would say that is number one.

Discuss Problem Areas. Couples also stated that an atmosphere in the home should be created that encourages the discussion of problem areas. A willingness to listen and discuss each other's problems, was viewed as beneficial, as Jan indicates.

Jan. Listen to the problems that the other has - discuss them...feel free to share these problems.

Given the demanding careers these couples assumed, and the considerable job stress they faced, communicating about stressful issues, particularly those that related to job demands was important. Bob expressed his perspective regarding the benefit of communicating his stress level in this area.

Bob. I would say discussing time constraints, and by that I mean understanding what situation each person is in, what their career requires, and be able to say, "Okay, I understand you'll be doing this for 'X' amount of hours". ... being able to communicate what types of stresses and pressures you're under at the job.

Three respondents voiced a unique strategy when discussing general problem areas, namely the use of humor. For example, Jennifer and Silas agreed that humor was an important element in their mode of communication, particularly when discussing potentially problematic issues.

Jennifer. We laugh about a lot of things that might become very, very serious. We just laugh about it, and if you make it fun, it's a whole lot easier to deal with.

Silas agreed that humor was an important element in dealing with difficult situations.

Silas. Yeah, I guess that's one element I forgot. That was one thing my dad, he made us laugh a lot really.

In sum, the development of communication skills was found to be of major benefit in the overall interaction pattern of these couples. The expression of one's feelings, concerns, and expectations displayed genuine interest in understanding spouses.

### Be Adaptable and Adjust

The second of the eight categories for relational success reflected couples' deep understanding of the fluid nature of their married lives. They expressed the importance of understanding and appreciating the fact that each of them came into the marriage with different backgrounds, family traditions and values. The importance of making allowances for such differences and working through them within the context of their daily interactions, was best exemplified in the comment by Brenda.

Brenda. Maybe this is obvious, just finding out how to live together. You come from two different households. You are raised in two different environments a lot of times, and one of the things that we often talk about is how difficult it is to bring two lives, two different histories, two different ideas -- how to do things. You have to figure out how to live together, and really, I think, spend time working through what works and what doesn't. And I think some couples are not successful, are couples who don't continuously try to find things that work and don't work.

In this same vein, the willingness to compromise one's own way of doing things and adopt a spouse's strategy was expressed by Jennifer.

Jennifer. I was always really serious when we first met. As we have assimilated, -- association brings on assimilation, we have assimilated, ... I think we two have become one. It's just about that simple because, you know, he has certain traits that I didn't have,

and I had certain traits that he didn't. And we just kind of assimilated those traits. We're still very, very different in a lot of ways.

### Be Understanding

The ability to understand one's self as well as one's spouse was said to be essential. This idea of understanding pervaded many facets of the marriage. Brenda, for example, expressed a general sentiment concerning the importance of understanding what one's spouse is experiencing, and the difficulty in acquiring this ability.

Brenda. I think there are times that I feel Sam does not always understand. I think for the most part, yes, but I think that there are more subtleties, nuances of things - problems that, I think, I experience that he just doesn't quite understand how hard it is for me. And I think it is hard to make a person understand without it causing more problems. I think I understand him. I think I spend a lot of time trying to figure out what works, what doesn't work, how he's feeling. I think a lot about our marriage. I think a lot about our careers. I think a lot about how we're doing. And sometimes I feel that Sam doesn't always spend as much time paying close attention to how I'm faring, how things are going.

Within this category, another form of understanding thought to be vital for marital success was having realistic expectations of day-to-day interactions. Steve and Carrie expressed their thinking this way.

Carrie. Understanding what you're going through. You might not appreciate it at the time, but understand that everything isn't going to be perfect. When you walk into a room you're not going to always hear violins, and having the patience to go through that and realizing that if you do that, things will get better.

Steve agreed with Carrie.

Steve. The main thing is understanding - and don't have all these high expectations that everything is going to be grand. Some people think that some marriages are perfect.

Understanding of one's self, of who you are, was also seen as important. The ability of the couple to acknowledge personal differences and inadequacies seemed related to an individual partner's confidence level, based, in part on his/her previous accomplishments. For instance, Susan reflected on the positive impact of her previous accomplishments (obtained prior to marriage) on her ability to acknowledge her differences and shortcomings to her spouse.

Susan. ...Frank and I got married late, you know, I was 30 and Frank was 32. I had already been working for eight years, and Frank had been out working, so coming into the relationship was more of an understanding of who you are, and that you are able to do some things individually.... knowing that I had purchased a home while I was single, and that I had a job, and I was able to live by myself. When Frank would make certain statements, they didn't bother me, but I think they probably would have bothered me if I had not done those things on my own.

In short, an understanding and appreciation of one's accomplishments were seen as crucial in one's ability to accept feedback and criticism from one's spouse

A third type of understanding dealt with appreciation for the spouse's career demands on a day-to-day basis. Diane's comments provided insight into the need to appreciate her spouse's work environment.

Diane. You take for granted that you know what your partner does and you don't. You have no idea what their life is like once they step foot in their office environment. I think couples who are, have dual-careers, should each take the time to really go on the other person's job from time to time just to see what it is like - so that when that person comes in the door at night, you're not assuming that they did nothing during that day. You're not assuming that their job is easier than yours, or vice versa.

The last factor discussed within this theme was the importance of understanding the other's feelings and knowing what makes each other happy.

Brenda. Consider the other person's feelings - know what's going to make that person happy; I know time that I spend with him - that makes him happy. So I do my best to be understanding about that.

It appeared that the level of understanding of self, spouse, marriage and career demands enabled these couples to formulate, initiate, and carry out success strategies within their marriage. The willingness to adapt to the needs of others was a major contributor to marital success.

### Establish Relational Rules

Within this fourth category the couples discussed the issues they felt were most important to marital success. Their answers were reflective of time-honored strategies, as well as techniques they were aspiring to attain. The list of behaviors described here reflect a combination of actions that serve to create an atmosphere for success. These actions serve as guides to their long term marital goals that may occur at any time in the marriage. Four guidelines, Provide Support; Invest Time; Avoid Pitfalls; and Make Decision to Sacrifice were revealed which couples felt contributed to marital success.

Provide Support. A strong concept, discussed throughout the individual and couple interviews, was the importance of supporting each other. The value of support was depicted by Susan and Frank, married four years, as follows.

Susan. ...that person being there... What Frank brings to the relationship - what he brings to me is knowing that everyday I get a chance to see my best friend, somebody that will support me and to be there, and for me to be there for him.

Frank, Susan's husband, also stated that he thought support was important to their marriage.

Frank. ...again trying to support each other in critical times.

Invest Time. Within this theme, many of the comments reflected the need to spend time together as a couple. Because of their busy careers, couples may neglect their relationship. The couples cautioned against this common problem.

Mary. Plan down time. So you make a plan about what you're going to do together, and also be considerate of what the other person wants to do, which includes a beeper, if that's what you have to do, you know, that's part of trying to make it work.

Given the busy schedules and demanding careers, it was apparent these couples had to make spending time together a priority, and that such times be planned. Frank, a university associate professor, and Rob, a foreman within a corporation, stated their feelings below.

Frank. Spend quality time, enough quality time together each week.

Rob. Just taking some time out to spend time with each other, whether it is small or big, just a little bit of time to do something -- even if it's just to go to get some ice cream together -- letting each other know how much you love them, from time to time.

Avoid Pitfalls. This theme consisted of comments denoting potential problem areas that may arise in day-to-day interactions and must be avoided to facilitate marital success. This included general comments such as agree on money expenditures, maintain respect for each other and avoid criticism. Regarding the latter pitfall, criticism, Jim, the oldest participant stated.

Jim. Reduce the amount of criticism - don't criticize. That's not helpful.

Other comments included the importance of not taking each other for granted and respecting each other's feelings. One additional problem area to be avoided was not keeping each other informed of daily schedules. Given their busy work and family lives, it was important to know each other's schedules, as well as unanticipated modifications to it. Sarah stated her thoughts on this important issue.

Sarah. Touching bases with each other, keeping each other informed of our schedules -- that's been one of the keys.

Susan and Frank state the need to agree on money matters..

Susan. I would add money, that's one thing we don't argue about. This is my bill or his bill.

Frank. That was a major source of arguing with both our parents.

Frank went on to say that his educational pursuits were encouraged by his mother who assured him he would not have to fight over money with his wife.

Bill's following statement implies the need to set realistic goals of what can be accomplished.

Bill. You can't really do it all at the same time. That's the one thing I guess you find out, when you have two jobs, two parents, two kids, you just can't do it all. It's impossible [to do] at the same time.

Make Decision to Sacrifice. The comments expressed within this theme reflected sacrificial choices made to ensure the stability of the marriage. The overriding concept here was commitment to one's spouse, family and the marriage. Phil nicely conveyed his level of commitment through his willingness to persist even during challenging times.

Phil. I'd say commitment to one another, through thick and thin, and not getting into this concept of falling in and out of love. Once you're committed to that person, regardless of some of the things that go on, if you're committed to them, you'll stick by their side. I think that's key.

Couples talked of a willingness to sacrifice career advancement for each other, the children, and the marriage.

Diane. Both must realize some things must go by the wayside, you have to sit down and decide as a couple what's important. I've sacrificed things that are important to me. I don't think you can have everything. You can't pull it off, something goes by the

wayside. -- in sacrifice, I think you have to be honest with yourself and -- and you have to sit down and as a couple determine what they are. I mean because things that I have sacrificed are - are very important to me, and I wish I hadn't and - vice versa. You can't have everything. I don't believe you can have it all and pull it all off. Something is going to - to go by the wayside.

Richard, her husband responded.

Richard. You just determine what it is - what it is that you are willing to sacrifice. Whether you're - whether you're willing not to be the superstar at work, that you know you can be or whether you are going to sacrifice in your home life because something has got to give.

When questioned further on this idea, Richard explained his thoughts more fully.

Richard. Okay, what are we willing to do to get that, and who's going to do what part of it and if there has to be a sacrifice, I guess with the right commitment in place you can get just about all of it done. -- if you agree on what you are going to get done and what you're not going to get done towards getting what you both want, then there's less room [to discuss] what was sacrificed and what was not - what was worth it, what was not, who was going to do this, who wasn't. That type of thing.

In conclusion, the establishment of relational rules required spouses to enact a number of behaviors including providing support, investing time, avoiding pitfalls, and being willing to sacrifice. These varied themes required thought and consideration from each spouse.

### Set Limits on Careers

These 13 couples voiced the necessity of placing boundaries on their career goals and aspirations. As evidenced in the preceding paragraph, many spouses were compelled to make difficult decisions concerning their commitment to their careers and family. It was recognized fairly early on, that demands from both job and family could not always be simultaneously met. Therefore, parameters had to be set in place. Time had to be allotted to deal with family and career matters. It appears the family assumed priority over the career, even though careers were highly valued. For these couples, family was most important.

At issue for some couples was the concern about “bringing the office into the home”. Brenda and Sam related their frustration with this issue.

Sam. What I was going to say is, that we have to set limits to their careers, their jobs -- the time they allow it to -- take up in their lives. So that they make sure that they don't spend too much time for their job or career.

Brenda responds as follows.

Brenda. The 90's and the days we're in - our jobs are accessible to us by lap tops, by phone, by beepers, but that is increasingly difficult for couples to keep the job at bay, and keep the home time. Sam often gets calls from his manager at dinner time or from colleagues, co-workers, or people that work for him. And those are calls he has to take.

From these statements it is obvious that they felt limits needed to be set on the career to prevent infringement on home life. A corresponding opinion was put forth by Frank, an aspiring tenured professor.

Frank. Don't let the career overwhelm you where you're not willing or think you can't put in a certain amount of time, every week. I mean your marriage has to be the priority over the career.

Within this topic of setting limits on careers, the discussion of who's career would take precedence was also voiced. Given that both spouses have invested much time, education and money into the preparation for a rewarding career, it becomes a point of serious discussion when an individual's goals hinder the progress of the other's, or affects the family negatively. Diane, a mother with two children under the age of four, expressed her experience with this dilemma as follows.

Diane. I don't think you can do it at the same time. I don't think both the husband and wife can seize the opportunity, even though it may arrive at the exact same time. I think you'll have total chaos in your household, so I think you have to cooperate to determine who gets the chance to do this, when, and for how long. And then the other person can take advantage of it another time do that later on.

Similarly, a husband echoed this comment.

Terry. You've got to recognize that there is going to be some conflicts between careers, and maybe you might get to the point where one will have to take a second seat.

A last point reflected, was the importance of setting emotional limits and acquiring the ability to shift gears when leaving the workplace and returning home. Diane states the following.

Diane. I think when you have dual career households, you have two people who are obviously very successful and very competitive - maybe - outside of their home life, and then when you put that, into a home environment, I think you have to cooperate with

one another. Because, I know that we have had that experience. It may be detrimental in another [marriage].

In summary, given the enormity of family, household, and career demands the couples' ability to set limits was vital. While their careers were of real import and required extended amounts of energy, time and dedication, these couples worked hard to keep the family the priority. Give and take was a common strategy employed to keep the family first.

### Manage Conflict Constructively

While these couples were able to describe adaptive strategies that led to marital success, they recognized that there would be times of conflict. This category, managing conflict, is noteworthy in that a strong emphasis was placed on the need to control the inevitable disagreements that arise in marriages. An initial step in this process was conceptualized by one couple as "getting things out on the table". Their comments follow.

Barbara. Uh, we fight a lot. I think that, I mean, we fight a lot, I guess that means, that that things are not held back. What do you think, Terry?

Her spouse Terry responded.

Terry. I wouldn't use that word "fight", but we definitely squabble a lot.

A related agreed-upon strategy was "setting boundaries for arguments." Brenda expressed the importance of setting boundaries for arguments and to control potentially hostile situations. Her comments follow.

Brenda. One of the observations that I believe that couples, that I think are not successful relates to disregard for each other's personal, or just the way that they argue,

the way they go about having disagreements. I think that when you permit and allow for shouting and arguing, and I don't mean that. A lot of people's personalities. I'm talking more about the fact that we don't seem to set parameters for what is reasonable when you see a problem. In my mind, and I think Sam agrees, that it is not reasonable to not speak for several days, to shout and scream at each other and create a very hostile environment, particularly when you have children, so that there is a lack of decency, respect for each other.

To deal with conflictual situations, several couples identified actions which they had found to be successful. The operative words here were compromise and pray. These concepts exemplified the manner in which these couples approached conflict. For Pat, compromise was the method of choice for managing difficult circumstances.

Pat. Being able to compromise. -- You know, one may have a different opinion on something, or one may not agree, like for example, disciplining children. One may have a difference of opinion as far as what they would do, and just being able to sit down and talk and come to a compromise.

Similarly, Mary felt that compromise was also an effective method. That is, Mary and Bob have agreed to not eat dinner together because of Bob's extended work hours. While this had served as a real source of contention for sometime, they agreed to eat separately during the week, but to go out during the week-end. Mary explained the current situation below.

Mary. Bob and I often don't eat dinner together. -- And so we know that. -- But even though we can't eat dinner together, we still spend time together every night. We just agree, and that's not a problem, not an issue. We don't fight about it, you know, we're

not going to be able to eat dinner together. We just come up with a plan, you know, something that's going to work, that we can both accept.

A second strategy offered as a means to manage conflict was the use of prayer, as stated by Ronnie.

Ronnie. We pray about our circumstances and the situations, and come to some agreement about things.

Several of the spouses expressed the importance of having respect for each other's values, considering their spouses' feelings, as well as having the option to agree to disagree.

Richard. We both have basic family values that dictate a certain amount of cooperation and stability.

Diane, his wife, concurs.

Diane. We ultimately have the same goals. We ultimately want the same thing.

In sum, in light of the continued demands of home and career, marital strain was a common expected occurrence. Managing the inevitable conflicts serves to increase the likelihood of marital success. Setting boundaries for arguments, and controlling potentially hostile situations were strategies found effective in dealing with problem areas.

### Seek a Spiritual Connection

Twelve of the twenty-six respondents expressed some aspect of spiritual guidance when attempting to describe factors that contributed to marital success. These references alluded to prayer, reading the Bible, attending church, and church related seminars. There

was a sentiment for the importance of God in their lives. Rob provided a general comment which reflected this thinking.

Rob. Again, having Jesus as head of the house, the marriage.

Silas and Jennifer voiced their sentiments.

Jennifer. ...I love God. I love God first, and him [Silas], you know, I love him second. He's second.

Silas. [Knowing] God loves you puts everything else in perspective. I mean really, in other words, I think - God first, family second.

Another respondent, Bill, voiced the value of relying on God during difficult times.

Bill. ...Our spiritual beliefs that have helped us and held us together through a lot of tough times. -- Our belief in God, our belief in Jesus, belief in His grace, and the Holy Spirit working in our lives.

Similarly, Rob, stated how his reliance on God helps him to specifically maintain marital stability.

Rob. ...We base our marriage on the Bible. What the Bible states is how it should be run, difficult principles and applications. Because, before we had the Lord in our lives, we did a lot of things that were wrong, that we didn't realize were wrong, and since we have received Jesus in our lives, we're a lot closer together. We're more knitted together as we should be.

Looking to the church for training and direction in applying Biblical principles in the marriage was a strategy which was frequently employed. Phil described the benefits he received from seminars offered in the local church.

Phil. I guess what's helped us, to me, what's helped us the most is getting trained in what's required of us, I guess, as husband and wife, and the type of commitments we need to make in the marriage relationship. We were fortunate to get some of that training early on to avoid some of the - but we, - avoid them all, but it made things a lot easier. -- Even before we were married we did seminars, I guess, or sessions in teaching and training about marriage and what's required of the husband and wife. Things along those lines.

To conclude, spiritual guidance served as a defining feature in many of these couples' lives. The active engagement of prayer, Bible-reading, and attending church afforded these couples direction, strength and stability. Collectively, they reported that these activities contributed significantly to their level of marital success.

#### Maintain Quality Friendships

Use of friendships was also highlighted as a major source of support for marital success. Friendships provided opportunities for pleasurable interactions, as well as resources for gaining solutions to day-to-day dilemmas. Individuals with similar values, backgrounds, careers, and family goals were often sought out as friends. Rob explained the benefit he sees in his relationship with his friends.

Rob. And that also entails having a set of quality friends. Somebody you can go to and talk to that won't go tell everybody else, and you know that you're going to get good advice from those people.

His wife concurred.

Pat. Not only that , those same friends, they value family relationships as well as you do.

Many times these friendships revolved around relationships established through the church.

Ronnie. We fellowship with Believers in other churches and we know that things we go through, we've got other people that we can have as resources that can help us out, talk to us, and let us know that we are not the only ones going through things. So, it's just been a nice network with our church. And then we have a good family that supports us.

Kathy stated similar thoughts concerning the value of close friends who may serve as models in particular situations.

Kathy. To make sure that you are surrounded by others, happy and stable couples. Couples that have been married a really long time, couples that have been married a medium - where you can get really good, positive encouragement so that when you do have problems, you know, you have some shared experiences and so forth.

It was also interesting to note that many couples felt the need to have their spouse as their "friend". Barbara expressed this thought in the following manner.

Barbara. I think we were friends long before anything else.

It is clear that quality friendships were shown to be an extremely valuable resource for gaining insight and assistance in dealing with issues which may threaten the success of the marriage.

In sum, marital success was the result of the engagement of several specific strategies (i.e., developing communication skills, adapting, establishing rules, setting limits, managing conflict, seeking spiritual connections and maintaining friendships). This comprehensive list of effortful behaviors suggests that marriage was highly valued

by these couples. Their willingness to attend to and uphold positive marital relationships reflects genuine regard for each other, their families, and ultimately their marital success.

### Research Question Two: Routine Behaviors

The second research question was designed to explore those behaviors spouses employed on a day-to-day basis to maintain the marriage in a positive state. These behaviors are marked by their routinized nature, which often can be overlooked. However, they were nonetheless essential to the overall well-being and positive nature of their daily marital interactions.

Couples were asked to describe actions they engaged to maintain warm, positive interactions within their marriage. It appeared that the primary hindrance to carrying out actions was time constraints due to combining a heavy work schedule with familial responsibilities. Descriptions of the responses within the domain of positive behaviors provided five categories: Share Recreational Activities; Give Gifts; Show Verbal/Physical Affection; Make Special Efforts; and Establish Supportive Daily Routines. See Figure 2 for the depiction of these categories and accompanying themes. In general, the responses are presented by wives and husbands together, however within some categories and themes they are separated.

#### Share Recreational Activities

Recreational activities were reported most frequently as a strategy for maintaining marital satisfaction. More specifically, the most common source of recreation was going out to eat (i.e., breakfast, lunch, dinner, ice cream). Within sharing recreational activities, two themes emerged, Going Out and Relaxing at Home. Each will be separated below.

Going Out. Husbands and wives were desirous of activities that allowed time for them to be alone, away from their children. For example, planning low budget getaways and weekend trips were ventures that men thought were important. Taking time for each other by doing a variety of things such as going for rides in the country were highly valued. Twelve of the thirteen couples reported going out to eat as a positive behavior that favorably affected their relationships. Such behaviors seemed to occur more frequently as a planned activity rather than a spontaneous one. It appeared eating a meal

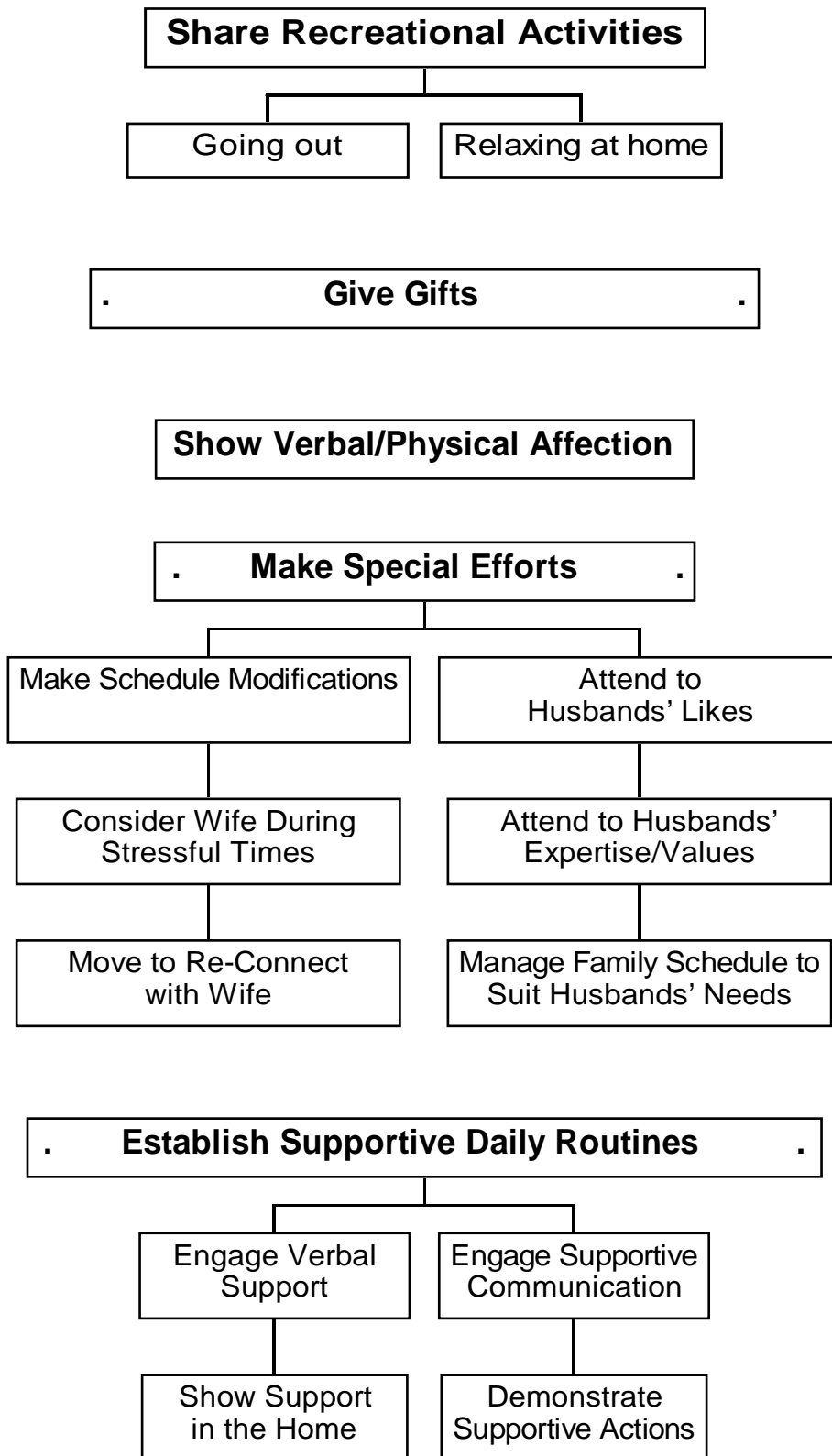


Figure 4.6. Routine Behaviors

together outside the home and away from the children could be a source of maintaining positive interactions. This time together was viewed as very important by Kenneth.

Kenneth. I like to take her out...have a good time together, in spite of finances - because we can't afford not to.

The value of going out was also echoed by the following respondents.

Kathy. [We] spent time together without the kids – we'd go to the drive-in or take a drive in the country.

Steve. ...on the week-ends it's just the two of us ... so we spend a lot of time, so we're out at the movies and things of that nature ... in the spring and summer we take a lot of little trips down to the beach and things like that. Silas. But just every now and again, when we can get away just for a few days ... just before she took her boards, we just went to the Parkway for a few days. That's a place for us. We used to say -- this little escapism -- we go to the Parkway. ... That's our getaway.

While the women agreed time alone was important, they more often mentioned the need to spend time together as a family. One participant, Sarah, described the importance of including the children.

Sarah. ... and sometimes the boys will go with us [walks] ... a family outing during the week two or three times ... depending on the weather.

Additionally, Sarah stated that family time was important as it related to meals.

Sarah. Well, we try to interact with the boys more in the evening also. ... At least on Fridays, we try to have dinner together, and sometimes during the week. It just depends on when his [Charles'] classes are in the evening because that is not always possible. ... We try to have a couple of meals together -- during the week. Then that

allows us to share about what went on during the day ... not only with us, but with the children.

One participant stated that he and his wife relax by watching their child enjoy himself which he felt contributed to the positive nature of their marriage.

Sam. Doing something together with our son, -- that helps us to relax. We take him out of the house and we go to fun places that he likes, and relax ... a very good ... family kind of. It just feels more relaxed -- we like to see him enjoy himself, and we share his joy. So that helps.

While the underlying purpose of sharing recreational activities is to provide time for relaxation, it is also an opportunity to share mutually enjoyable activities. It appears these efforts do much to maintain couples' marital satisfaction.

Relaxing at Home. The second theme within Sharing Recreational Activities was Relaxing at Home. Again husbands and wives responded with similar answers which may reflect their agreement on activities which they enjoy. It appeared that quiet activities, such as watching a video, listening to music, and talking were most enjoyable. However, one wife expressed the time and effort required to make quiet time at home enjoyable.

Brenda. I try to ... create a home atmosphere that is comfortable and relaxing and enjoyable for us so that we can, for example, I may stop and get the movie, pop the pop corn.

Further, Brenda's husband stated he made an effort to make time at home more relaxing and enjoyable for his wife.

Sam. If I help out, if I cook dinner ... it makes for a relaxed evening because she'll have more time to do other things, and she won't have to worry about cooking a meal. If I

pick up the baby early and I feed him, then that helps. She'll be able to, she doesn't have to worry about him eating anymore.

Additionally, quiet time in the evening was a common way to not only unwind, but also proved to be a means to connect with their spouse, as depicted in the following comment by Frank.

Frank. In the evening -- we can have some activity together like just discussing current events, discussing what happened during the day -- some funny event or something like that ... on occasion we will listen to music together or watch a movie together at home, something like that.

In sum, it appears that the home is a setting for family relaxation. To relax as a family in the comfort of one's home provides a true benefit to the overall maintenance of the marriage. Watching videos, listening to music, and talking to each other were among those behaviors which afforded these couples positive interactions. The relaxation away from home was more a function of desiring time alone, away from the children. Concerted effort was required to ensure that such recreational activities occurred.

### Give Gifts

A second category found under positive behaviors which couples engaged to maintain their marital relationship was gift-giving. Several spouses expressed that buying gifts was a means of positively maintaining their marriage. It was reported that often these gifts were of minimal monetary value, but were intended to reflect genuine concern and care for their spouse. Most of these items included candy bars, cards, flowers, costume jewelry, and at times, clothing. The following comments by Carrie demonstrates the value of small gifts.

Carrie. But if I go to the store and I see something that I know he'd like, I'll pick it up – even if it's like a favorite soda, like I did last night. Just kind of a little treat and ...that always helps. It doesn't have to be anything big.

Many times such gifts were highly valued by wives, because it reflected thought and the realization that the husbands' knew what their wives liked. Frank's comments revealed this, as recounted below.

Frank. I buy her a card because that's her favorite thing --- or some chocolates or flowers or something like that.

For Rob, there have been times that he has personalized his gift-giving in that he puts forth the effort to make the gift himself. He stated.

Rob. Because at times I've made her cards and so forth, made her jewelry.

One respondent reported the motivation for gift giving was to directly inform her spouse of something she desired.

Mary. I give him a card just to say, "I love you" or I'll bring him a balloon, which are corny things that I like, corny things that I want to be done for me. I really do things for him that I would like done for me.

The actual timing of the gift-giving played an important role as well. It appeared that the gifts showed the spouse that they were thought about, and were given for some particular reason. Because Susan's husband traveled often, she would often acknowledge his return with the purchase of his favorite foods, as well as "forbidden" goodies.

Susan. He travels a lot, when he returned I would always have him something special – sandwiches – or his favorite juice – I know he likes Paydays – so I buy them for him and hide them in, uh, cabinet, but knowing full well he knows they are there.

Gift-giving was somewhat different for husbands and wives. The husbands' gifts usually included items such as candy, cards, flowers, or clothing. The wives' gifts included similar items (i.e., cards, candy); however they also included things that required more thought and effort. Such gifts consisted of making a special meal, celebrating a special event, or creating a little surprise.

Carrie. Steve is a big kid – he really is, so that things that I know that he really likes – you know – like last week was his birthday – so I decorated the apartment and little things like that. Or for no reason I'll give him a card and toys – he loves toys.

Kathy. We have a long-standing uh – doing things like picking up a candy bar on the way home. It sounds goofy, but.

In sum, in light of the old saying, “little things mean a lot” gift-giving was found to be of tremendous benefit in contributing to feelings about the marriage.

#### Show Verbal/Physical Affection

For both husbands and wives, the expression of affection was highly valued. Affection was displayed in a variety of ways. These expressions consisted of actions as well as verbalizations. Actions included touches as a means of greeting and parting: hugs, pats on the shoulder, kisses, and messages. For some, these actions had become expected when greeting or departing.

Mary. We never leave each other without kissing. Whenever we speak on the telephone, we always say, “I love you” before we hang up. We can't hang up without saying, “I love you”.

Mary's husband, Bob, stated he knows showing affection is important as well.

Bob. We kiss every morning ... normally I'm getting up and going to work – she's laying in bed still – I kiss her good morning.

Another husband mentioned kissing his wife in the morning.

Phil. I guess something real small, uh, over the years is that we kiss before we leave.

Silas and Jennifer have made showing affection a general part of their married life, as well.

Silas. Well, hugs and kisses .... Just .... expressions of affection. She [Jennifer] just tells me, "Silas, I need a hug."

Jennifer. ....We're real touchy .... Our kids would say we're always pawing each other, but we wrestle, we play, we talk, .... We'll pat each other or rub each other or rub shoulders. I guess you'd say we touch a lot, we talk a lot.

Many of these actions are so much a part of their daily routines that they have become an integral part of their lives. Several of the couples adopted a "night-time routine" where they were able to provide affection in the midst of their busy lifestyles. Carrie described a routine that Steve does that she highly valued.

Carrie. He does this thing that I just love. I usually go to bed before he does, and he'll come in and he'll tuck me in or whatever. And I've got this teddy bear that I've had since I've left college, and he knows if I'm really upset about something, he'll go and get "Randy" and Randy comes to bed with me. If I'm happy Randy stays in the closet, if I'm upset he gets Randy, yeah, I love that.

Given that many couples did not always go to bed at the same time, such routines were helpful in maintaining a sense of closeness.

## Make Special Efforts

Make Special Efforts included behaviors that reflected planned actions designed to meet specific needs. The responses are delineated by gender, given that different themes were suggested by husbands' and wives' answers. Husbands' responses were divided into three themes: Make Schedule Modifications; Consider Wife During Stressful Times; and Move to Re-connect with Wife; while wives' themes consisted of Attend to Husband's Likes; Attend to Husband's Expertise/Values; and Manage Family Schedule to Suit Husband's Needs. A brief description of each theme follows.

Make Modifications to Schedule. It appeared that these husbands understood that their contribution to maintaining their marriage required that they spend time in the home and with their wives. For example, they would make modifications so that they could be home longer in the morning or return earlier, when necessary. Additionally, the mornings were used as times for discussions about their day and what would take place. For example, Phil stated the following.

Phil. Usually, I have a short conversation in the morning after the alarm goes off. This helps set the tone of the day – how well things are going to go; how you feel.

Because of the different careers and job schedules, it appeared that these couples found that keeping each other apprised of their itinerary contributed to the positive atmosphere in the marriage.

Charles. .... I recognize that notifying my wife of my itinerary – whether it consisted of previous day or weekly or monthly itineraries, or if this changed, helps – my failure to do this hurts just as much as it [helps] when I do it.

Charles' wife, Sarah, stated that another way of maintaining a positive atmosphere in their marriage was by his coming home at times that best suited the family needs. Another husband stated that his sales job offered him the flexibility to leave and return home at convenient times for his wife. This flexibility also afforded them time alone to discuss family and personal issues.

Sam. .... Because we're under some time constraints with how much time we have, to take her all the way to work, I used to drop her off at the train, but it gives us about an hour of time that we spend together in the car. And it gives us a few more minutes alone.... time spent alone to talk about things other than cooking, cleaning, --- house things.

Consider Wife During Stressful Times. The second theme, Consider Wife During Stressful Times, described behaviors husbands engaged during particularly stressful periods for their wives. Here husbands took special care and concern to be sensitive to their wives' needs during times of extreme stress. For example, responses included helping with dinner, doing things the way she likes, initiating activities without the wife's request, and talking more. Jim's comment nicely depicted several of the male respondent's actions.

Jim. If she is busy, I might take over some of her chores ... when I know she is under stress -- to get what she wants done -- to help her out.

Similarly, Sam reported that he takes the initiative to help relieve Brenda's stress resulting from trying to "get out of the house on time". He clearly delineated the actions he engaged which will afford Brenda relatively stress-free mornings. See the following comment.

Sam. taking care of Cameron in the morning, and then ... dressing him, getting him something to eat. If I do those things, she has more time for preparing for work -- doing her hair, and making sure that everything that she needs to do for herself, ... she has the time to do it. ... she's able to have more time to do -- and prepare herself, so she's not as stressed while we are going to work, not feeling like ... she's in a hurry.

For another respondent, a stress reliever for his wife was for him to request direction and follow it exactly. Interestingly, Kenneth found that this strategy to be beneficial to not only his wife, but to him as well.

Kenneth. Most of the time I'm given instructions ... Carolyn is a person who thinks that you read her mind. But I don't do it with her very well. So I just let her instruct me and I do it ... I love it . She loves it too.

The benefit of assisting one's wife under extreme levels of stress was reflected by a comment by Frank.

Frank. I always try to be accommodating to her ... particularly when she's under stress and that's something that she always ... says that she's appreciative of. It also -- I think draws us together because she feels that I'm there to support her in her time of need, so I always try to make a point of when I feel she's in that state to work to be as accommodating as I can.

Move To Re-connect with Wife. It appeared that these men were aware that some “down time” on a personal level was needed to properly maintain the positive status of their relationship. These down time activities included several of the following actions: sharing a glass of wine, sitting outside, and talking more. Such interactions proved to be

times of re-connecting. Bob's ability to use such relaxed times as opportunities to express warmth and regard is evidenced in the following comment.

Bob. We go and grab maybe a glass of wine ... One thing that I enjoy is her telling me I look nice, or me telling her how nice she looks -- or any personal involvement. These things are helpful to, uh relationship because they reinforce the caring for each other.

In sum, it appears that husbands supported their wives during stressful times. That is, when it was evident that their wives were under stress, they sought and engaged thoughtful actions to assist them.

The females' responses to the category of Making Special Efforts included the following three themes: Attend to Husband's Likes; Attend to Husband's Expertise/Values; and Manage Family Schedule to Suit Husband's Needs. A brief description of these female themes follows.

Attend to Husband's Likes. These wives' responses reflected a deep understanding of what their husbands liked and their willingness to attend to them. It appeared that these behaviors served the purpose of maintaining their marital relationship in a positive fashion. Nine of the thirteen women stated that their husbands usually responded positively, following their attentive efforts.

Cooking meals was a frequently reported means of attending to husbands' likes. For example, Pat cooked breakfast, a meal she normally did not prepare.

Pat. I cook breakfast - every so often - well he likes it. He has a big smile on his face, and thanks me when I have breakfast ready for him in the morning.

For Brenda, a paralegal, cooking a meal rather than ordering take-out was done to please Sam, her salesman husband. This required a great deal of effort on her part as she had to shop for his favorite foods and then prepare the meal. For Ronnie, preparing her husband's favorite meal was a daily activity but done to keep the marriage positive as well.

Ronnie. Making him his favorite meal, that's a "food thing" I do.

Mary, an attorney in her early thirties, who knew her husband valued receiving "little cards" stated:

Mary. He'll say, "Oh, that's really nice", or "That was so sweet". Oh, recently, I gave him a little card, and I put it in his briefcase. And he leaves before me in the morning, so what he did was wrote a note on the envelope and put it back in my briefcase. So he had already opened it before he left for work. So he -- that was nice -- he surprised me.

Susan, a university administrator, stated considerate actions promoted a sense of well being within their relationship and served to provide tangible evidence of their thinking about each other. Additionally, the following comments: "I feel loved"; "it makes for fun in our relationship"; "it's nurturing to our relationship and our being conscious of the other person" illustrate the positive impact the behaviors contribute to the marital relationship.

Other actions mentioned by these respondents involved more personal behaviors carried out on a daily basis, especially those designed to please their spouse. One strategy here included physical appearance. Wearing her hair in a way that she knows pleases her husband is a strategy Carolyn uses to maintain positive interactions.

Carolyn. Anytime I wear bangs in my hair. We laugh, but he likes the bangs for some reason. So if I wear my hair pulled back like this, he doesn't like it. If I wear it down, he likes it. So sometimes I'm actually doing it to be nice to my husband. Sometimes I'm doing it just to be nice to myself.

Attend to Husband's Expertise/Values. These wives also kept their relationship positive by attending to their husbands' expertise or values. To accomplish this they would engage behaviors which reinforced their husbands' values concerning particular issues. For example, Carolyn knew that her husband, Kenneth, liked the children's TV watching monitored.

Carolyn. Sometimes I turn the TV off. That makes him feel happier. Unfortunately, ever since I've been saved, I still have this TV habit that a lot of ways is a stress reliever for me, ... I just like watching the half-hour comedies. It's like they say you don't have to think. I just kind of laugh and go on. Of course, now I'm more, with my kids getting older, I do think a little bit more when I watch them because they're not really suitable. So I'll turn the TV off for him because I know a lot of those shows he doesn't really like to look at -- doesn't like for me to look at them because he knows the kids will come around me ... so it's more for the children that he doesn't like those TV shows on.

Her primary purpose was to accommodate her husband's value.

Two other approaches expressed was to foster behaviors in the children in areas that the husband deemed important. For example, teaching children to greet the father in a pleasant way upon his return from work and ensuring homework was completed were highly valued. Another strategy engaged by wives was requesting the husbands' help in

situations that required his expertise. For example, Sarah whose husband was a computer buff, often sought out his expertise in this area.

Sarah. I turn to him for advice about situations at work, people things and also problems with my computer.

Manage Family Schedule to Suit Husband's Needs. Here the wives revealed how hard they work to organize the family's day to suit their husband's needs. One common example for couples with children was re-arranging dinner time.

Jan. We hold dinner over until Jim comes home from work. Even when the boys were home, they would not eat until Jim came home.

In sum, the combination of wives and husbands seeking to be accommodating and understanding of each other was seen as vital to maintaining satisfaction within the marriage. The willingness to adapt to the changing needs of the other served as evidence of their continued commitment.

#### Establish Supportive Daily Routines

The last category found within positive actions designed to maintain marriage quality was Establish Supportive Daily Routines. These dual-career couples experienced extremely busy days that required a measure of planning and organization to ensure a high level of efficiency in both the home and the workplace. Their comments presented a variety of positive actions. The men's responses reflected two themes consisting of Engage Verbal Support and Show Support in the Home. These forms of support are very subtle and often overlooked, even though they provide a beneficial role in the overall quality of marital interaction.

Engage Verbal Support. Husbands relied on a variety of verbal strategies to move through the daily routines in a positive fashion. These strategies provided support in that they reflected genuine interest toward wives. The mornings were times of greeting or departing, saying "Good morning", "Have a good day", as well as a time of checking on each other's day.

Some men also used mornings to coordinate their schedules, as well as resolve immediate issues.

Kenneth. Carolyn and I, we usually spend time in the morning talking and discussing things, and if there's any things, or bits of business that I need to conduct during the day or she does, we discuss those. Or should we have a meeting or the kids have some problems, we might discuss those. We pray about them, and just take care of little bits of stuff, things like that.

A common form of support was the expression of interest in their wives' day. This strategy was typically engaged at the end of the workday. It appeared that the primary goal was to make themselves available to hear their wives' concerns.

Charles. I carry on a conversation, ask about her day, and avoid the details of my own situations to discuss. Also, just, listening.

It is interesting to note that Charles made a conscientious decision to be selective in what he shared about his own day.

Additionally, evenings provided an opportunity for husbands to verbally express support to not only their wives, but also to their children.

Phil. Mealtime is a big thing, sitting down eating together, talking with the kids about what happened in their day; as well as sitting down and talking about each other's day.

Opportunities to verbalize support were presented throughout the day, however, it should be noted that some times were better than others. Whether or not verbal support was expressed in the morning was dependent upon the husbands' unique communication patterns. For three husbands, mornings were not good times for them to express verbal support. This was conveyed by Silas, a Baptist minister and a computer technician.

Silas. There's really not too much we do before work. ... I'm not much of a morning person. So if we spoke, sometimes maybe it was "Ugh" one of those or something like that. Like you sort of roll out of bed -- But maybe we'll have a little conversation, very little conversation in the morning like that and sort of get up and go to work.

Show Support in the Home. The second theme, Supportive Action, reflected the daily routines and actions husbands engaged to show support to their wives and families. Household responsibilities were a common focus here. These men recognized the need to contribute to the running of the household. All husbands took an active role in caring for the children and the maintenance of the home.

With regard to the running of the household, all but one husband stated he took an active role in carrying out household duties.

Charles. Going again to the grocery store, rounding up all the cups in the house in the morning when I get up, starting the dishwasher before I leave, emptying the dishwasher when I see that its full. -- I might get a notion to vacuum, or I might get a

notion to clean the windows. The past two days, I've gotten up early to cook breakfast for everybody...

Caring for the children was a common activity for these husbands. Following are descriptions of their care.

Kenneth. ...Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, I'll probably be giving kids baths.

Rob. Sometimes during the day, if I didn't have time to fix the kids lunch in the morning, or we didn't have anything, I wake up and go to take the kids lunch.

Upkeep of the family automobiles was another form of supportive action displayed by husbands.

Kenneth. Well, you know, if there's maintenance work that needs to be done, like car maintenance work, I'll call the people and talk to them. If there's insurance business that I need to discuss, so I kind of get some instructions from the person who does that scheduling, and I perform the part that I need to do.

The need for leniency was particularly beneficial during times of increased demands. One couple, for example, found that the relaxing of standards, for home maintenance was perceived as a form of support.

Rob. If she doesn't feel like cooking, there's this thing that we have between us that she doesn't have to cook, and I don't require anything from her that I don't feel like doing. And if the dishes reached the ceiling, if she didn't feel like washing, I didn't feel like washing; we let it sit until somebody gets it.

Another husband stated his support for his wife at busy times was something that he learned early on in life.

Jim. Well, I think probably that it's uh - well it goes back to probably a religious background. You know, if you do things for other people you help yourself too. And so - it's something, growing up, my family has always done, to help other people do things, get done. My father used to do things, so you watch, you learn. Well, you don't think you're learning, but it's something that becomes a part of you.

It appeared these couples had established routines that suited their individual familial needs. For some of the men taking time to pray in the morning was important to them, even though it was a difficult task to accomplish. For most of the couples the morning kiss good bye was a general routine, which occurred even if their spouse was still asleep. It appeared that these expressions of warmth were common ways of maintaining the day-to-day quality of the marriage. Steve stated.

Steve. On the mornings that she's off, so before I leave in the morning, I'll kiss her good-bye but she may not know it -- she knows it sometimes and she does that to me in the mornings. You don't think about it, you just do it. As I'm putting my tie on and going out the bedroom, that's it.

For the women's responses within the category of Establish Supportive Daily Routines, two themes were established, Engage Supportive Communication and Demonstrate Supportive Actions. A brief description of the actions described in these wives' themes follow.

Engage Supportive Communication. This type of communication included general greetings and parting comments people often make such as, "good morning", "good night", "thank you", etc.

The following comments were given as a means employed to express support.

Diane. ...generally, I'll say "I'll see you later" or "have a nice day". I'll try hard to call him during the day at work.

Further, these conversations include checking each other's schedules and discuss the day's activities and itineraries.

Kathy. We will talk in the evenings, ... usually it starts about whatever that person did during the day or whatever they're doing at the present time. We keep strict bedtimes for the children ... so it's just us in the evenings, so we can talk or do whatever we wish and that gives us some space.

Another strategy for demonstrating verbal support was the use of a soft tone of voice and the leaving of warm messages. The purpose for this type of conversation was to create a positive atmosphere and to sustain a smooth-flowing quality through their interactions. Sarah, employed in a university administrative position, stated that she and her husband showed support by using encouraging words.

Sarah. We try to be supportive of one another by speaking encouraging words. We try to set aside time at work, since both of us work at the same place, for lunch. So we can get in some time together to communicate.

Another respondent, Carolyn, said she was "really not as talkative as her husband" and that she was generally a quiet person, so for her to engage in extended conversations demonstrated a high level of support toward her husband.

Another strategy was to use communication as a means to ensure the spouse that they were valued and important. Ronnie, an administrative assistant, stated that their strategy to remain close and positive within their marriage was based on open communication.

Ronnie. I know that Bill and I began our relationship with very open communication. We really did talk a lot.

Even though they had been married only three years, the least of any of the respondents, she felt that their communication style contributed significantly to their marital stability.

It was interesting to note that for two of the couples minimal levels of verbal communication reflected a great degree of closeness. For Jim and Jan, the couple married the longest, (33 years), long silences were quite comfortable and were indicative of the security they had developed over their many years of marriage. Jan stated her feelings this way.

Jan. We are not a real openly talkative couple ... I think with our many years of marriage ... I might have gotten a little more talkative than he because I think sometimes one of us has to talk. There are certain situations when we don't have talk ... when we are not at the television -- we don't have to talk to each other. We can just sit in the same room. You don't have to be verbal to enjoy each other's company and to express affection. He likes to do crossword puzzles in the paper -- that's fine, and I do my handwork. We're in the same room -- I'm not conversing with him, and he's not conversing with me, but we're enjoying each other's company. So, you don't have to, -- it's just the closeness of each other.

Demonstrate Supportive Actions. Women assumed the majority of family and household responsibilities as a form of support and care for their husbands and families. They mentioned preparation of meals, and maintenance and decorating of the home.

Carolyn. If I straighten up the bedroom, keep junk from off the floor, don't put all my piles of [sorting clothes] around.

Brenda. I try to decorate my home and create a warm atmosphere that is comfortable and relaxing and enjoyable for us so that we can enjoy.

Jan. If I know he's not going to be up and getting dressed before the trash gets picked up, [and the] garbage needs to be put out, I'll put it out.

Every mother stated that her caring for the children was highly valued by their husbands and considered it a supportive action. For example, Brenda offered a synopsis.

Brenda. Right now, I've been leaving the house before Sam does, so that means he gets the baby ready for daycare. In doing so, I make sure that the baby has ample clean clothes so that Sam does not have the stress in the morning of figuring out what to put on the baby. On the days that the baby has to bring extra things to daycare, I make sure that those things are available quickly for him -- I pack the bag, leave it at the front door, write out the check for daycare and put it in the car so that all he has to do is drop it off. I spend a lot of time planning and doing small things that make the mornings easier.

In summary, in an effort to maintain their marriages through positive behaviors, these couples employed five generalized types of routine behaviors (Share Recreational Activities, Give Gifts, Show Verbal/Physical Affection, Make Special Efforts, and Establish Supportive Daily Routines). These African-American couples engaged behaviors that demonstrated support within their interactions. Study participants felt it was important to be supportive at difficult times, even though it proved challenging. Their behaviors reflected a genuine appreciation and concern for each other's desires and needs. These couples mentioned having a strong commitment to their marriages and

persevered even in the face of day-to-day pressures, as they sought to meet the mutually-agreed upon goal of having a successful marriage.

### Research Question Three: Strategies within the Repair Process

This final research question addressed the reparative actions spouses employed when they had committed a transgression. The responses were comprised of a series of actions specifically designed to restore the satisfactory quality of the marriage in a timely fashion. In analyzing their responses, a process was revealed which spouses determined to be effective in repairing their relationships. Evaluation of couple data determined that a six-step process was initiated and carried out. The steps consisted of the following: Create Distance; Consider Other Perspectives; Accept Responsibility for Own Actions; Take Corrective Action; Talk Heart to Heart; and Attempt Resolution/Restoration. See Figure 3 for the listing of these steps. Although all participants did not engage all of these steps, nor were they necessarily carried out in this sequence, this repair process demonstrates the combined description of all actions described. A brief description of each step will be provided to show how this process was engaged to restore the relationship. Exemplar responses which contributed to the repair process steps will be provided.

#### Create Distance

When a transgression occurred, several of the respondents expressed the need to pull back emotionally, as well as physically. In general, their comments conveyed that distancing was a necessary requirement for progress to be made. It should be noted that the frequent reporting of this step throughout the repair process reflected its importance. Allowing distance was a strategy that could be employed at various points throughout the repair process, but it is consistently used at the beginning of the repair process.

Husbands stated they knew it was better to “stay out of their wives’ way” and allow some time to pass before approaching them. This time appeared to be used as a “cool down” period for these husbands and wives. They realized they had made a

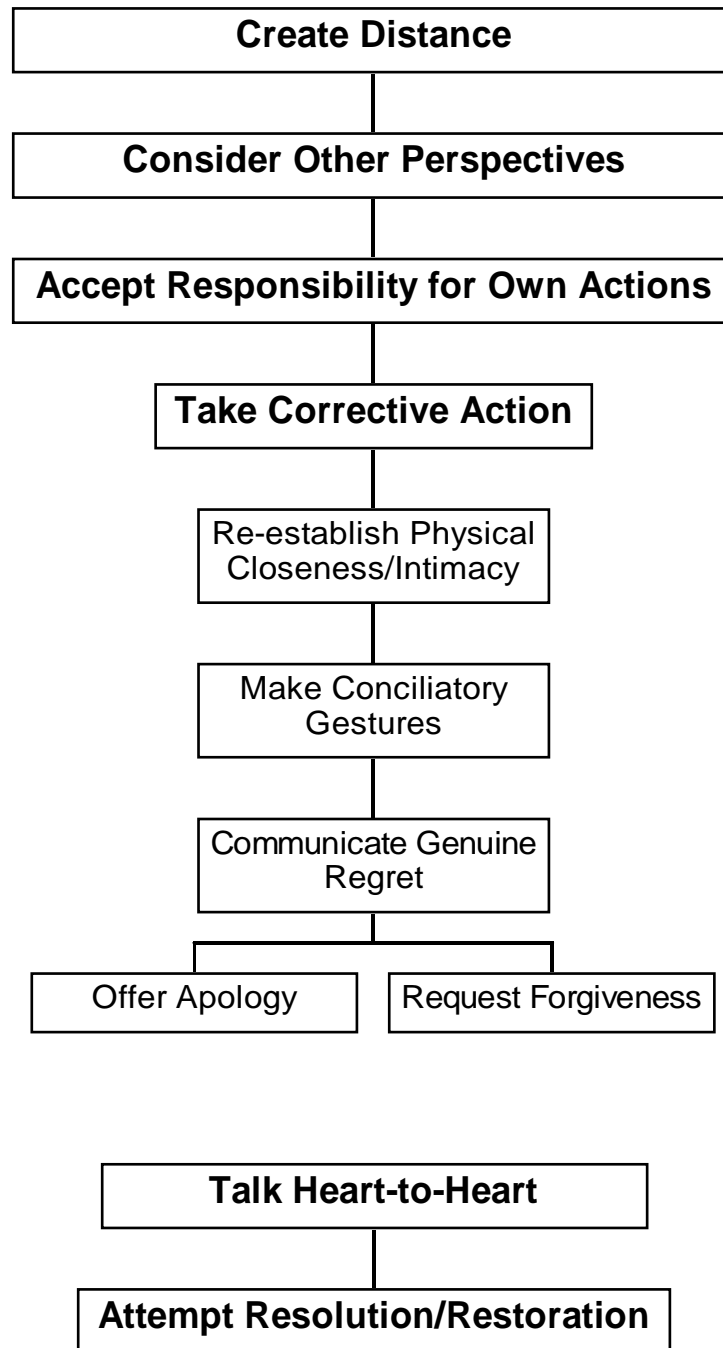


Figure 3. Strategies within the Repair Process

mistake and recognized that something needed to be done. It appeared that they knew that whatever the corrective action was, time was needed before it could be implemented. This “cool down” period helped to enhance the wives’ reception of their husbands’ corrective actions. This was well stated by the following respondent who pointed out that distance was a necessary step to correct a relational mistake.

Kenneth. Of course, there's always the cooling down period first.

He further explained that he has a good idea as to when to approach his wife, and if it was a real serious situation, he stated he would give it a little more time before approaching her.

Kenneth. Usually I have a pretty good feel for how long it takes for, you know, it just depends on the situation -- I probably would give it a little more time if it were a serious situation.

Charles described his thoughts about distance, as follows.

Charles. I try to stay out of the way. At those times, it's often the case where people don't want to touch one another, so that rules out anything having to do with physical contact.

It appeared that the waiting time has something to do with the seriousness of the situation. The length of this period however, is not always a clear cut decision. This was nicely explained by Bill, a computer programmer, who experienced the dilemma of how long to wait, before initiating corrective actions.

Bill. There have been some instances when we've really had bad things happen, and I've waited and then she got mad because I've waited too long. And then there have

been times when stuff has happened, and if I have waited it's been okay, and there have been times when I didn't wait at all and I was wrong -- I don't know.

He later stated he saw the benefit of waiting, but immediate correction was often his initial choice of action. Similarly, another respondent, Sam, also saw the benefit of waiting but, he too preferred immediate correction as his choice of action. He felt there was a need to fix the situation as soon as possible. For him, it appeared that less time was a better solution.

Sam. ...let's fix this thing -- it's broke, let's fix it now. In other words, don't let the sun go down on our wrath -- which sometimes I have done that, but I have learned over the years if you can resolve it right away, don't let it turn into a slow cancer.

The use of creating distance was effective in most cases, however Terry stated that if he felt he had hurt his wife immensely he would deal with it right then.

Terry. Somewhere between a very, very hurt feeling, obviously I am going to jump all over it. -- So I can't say that there is always going to be a consistent atmosphere that's going to make me want to make it right, right away, but a very hurt posture, yes.

During times of distancing, several wives reported that they used the cool down period as a time to reflect on their own actions, as well as their motives behind these actions. One respondent described her behaviors to create distance as leaving home, driving around, and thinking about the incident.

Susan. I just sped out and then drove around and then I decided -- this is too silly to go back and try to have a conversation about. That's something else I have to learn. Not every thing needs to be discussed.

As such, this comment showed that the use of distance may be used to think about the situation, which in some cases, a decision is made to drop the incident, and not discuss it further.

In summary, the first step, creating distance, appears to provide the initial condition necessary to begin the repair process. Couples were able to readily identify when this step took place, as well as the importance of this step in the repair process.

### Consider Other Perspectives

The second step in the process for many of these couples to repair the negative consequences of a transgression was consideration of the spouse's perspective. This step was endorsed quite frequently by husbands. The step required husbands to think about their spouse's point of view or to cognitively place themselves in the "her shoes".

Kenneth. I tried to understand the other person's point of view, putting yourself in their, role playing, putting yourself in their, self in their place.

This step also reflected the husbands' willingness to gain insight into the situation. On several occasions the use of a friend, or other sources, as an intermediary or as a negotiator was found to be a useful strategy for husbands.

Charles. I might use a mediator, seek help from a friend.

To accomplish this step, three husbands stated that they were willing to seek out spiritual guidance. This took the form of prayer, where they would ask for spiritual help, as well as turn to the Bible as a means to gain further insight. Sam, for example, stated that he has learned over the years to respond to difficult situations within his marriage in a spiritual way. In using this method, he commented that he turned to God for spiritual guidance.

Sam. Hey, -- we're approaching that now. We weren't always doing these things. It's sort of like -- God has taught me, over the years through the wisdom of the Scriptures. -- It's sort of like Moses in the Median Desert, it took me a long time to get there. But now that I'm getting there and walking in that, I'm finding that, "Lord, why did I have to bump my head so long against the wall?"

Wives also found that taking the other's perspective was also a useful strategy. For example, Carrie, a lawyer, expressed the following.

Carrie. ... I try to see things from his perspective and try to convey that to him, and if it's not quite right, ask him, "Is this what you're feeling?" Because he's also not very good at telling me his feelings, but he'll agree if I've got them right.

Carrie goes on to describe a situation where perspective taking was successfully employed and led to a resolution of a disagreement. Her husband, Steve, a Banker, was disturbed by a growing interest by one of her male colleagues. He informed her that he was uncomfortable with the increasing number of phone calls, lunch dates, etc.

Her response to his concerns appeared to typify the intent of this second step, consider other perspectives, in the process of repair.

Carrie. Once I saw it from the perspective that he was seeing, I felt it was my responsibility to deal with it, and I did. -- I had to establish a comfort level -- in order [inaudible]to accept the situation.

Given that this colleague was seen as a source of genuine support by Carrie, she felt it necessary to continue the relationship. As such, this resolution did not require her to sever the relationship from the colleague, but rather make adjustments that were amenable to both her and her husband.

In summary, it appeared that both husbands and wives found perspective taking to be an important dimension in the initial stages of the repair process. This step afforded them the opportunity to introspect and seek out a variety of sources, (i.e., friends, God) in their quest to rectify the situation. These two steps were important precursors for the remaining four steps in the repair process.

#### Accept Responsibility for Own Actions

Once one had given time, thought and attention to the situation, through creating distance and considering the other's perspective, further progress required a willingness or desire to accept responsibility for their actions. To accept responsibility, it appeared that these spouses self-examined and accepted the fact that they were wrong and were willing to admit it. This was more than simply saying, "I am sorry." It was more directive in that it involved the actual voicing of their understanding of their role in the transgression. Six of the twenty-six spouses recognized the need to say, "I was wrong" for committing the transgression.

The husbands stated that this was a difficult thing for them to do, given that it was contrary to the "macho" stereotype. It is interesting to note that they had learned to engage this painful step over the course of their marriage. Some wives realized and stated that this was difficult for them to do, as well. This was clearly expressed by Phil, an engineer, and Terry, an insurance executive, as follows.

Phil. I guess the biggest thing, especially if I was just flat out wrong, is to admit it, which is something that's tough for me to do.

Terry. With her I would probably have to say, "It's my fault," "I blew it, I'll take care of it right now." Or if it's a situation where I can't take care of it right now, I will say

“Can I take care of it then?” and just let her know it will happen. That recognize the situation if you will.

Concerning wives, three expressed a willingness to admit or recognize that they were "wrong." Carrie's response perhaps provided insight as to why this step was so infrequently cited.

Carrie. One thing that I must always do, and that is probably stemming from the fact that Steve very rarely does it, is I'll admit that I'm at fault. There is something that I've done, that has caused a problem ... it's my fault ...

Perhaps wives were reluctant to admit when they were wrong, because they felt that their husbands seldom do so. As will be seen later in the process of repair, both wives and husbands have significantly less difficulty in saying "I'm sorry" than saying “I was wrong.” However, to truly accept responsibility for one’s transgression, requires a bit more than saying, “I’m sorry.” The clear recognition of the fact that one has done something wrong, or transgressed, suggests the relationship is operating at a qualitatively more mature level. It is possible that the reluctance to admit wrongdoing may prevent one from having to acknowledge failure and thus, vulnerability and in need of assistance. This may be particularly difficult for "independent, high functioning" dual-career individuals. This was reflected in the comment given by Ronnie.

Ronnie. ...Okay, I did this and this and this, I did xyz. I need your help.

In conclusion, acceptance of responsibility, while important, is nonetheless difficult. Given the possible independent nature of these dual-career couples, admitting wrongdoing may reflect the undesirable characteristic of vulnerability.

#### Take Corrective Action

The admission of wrongdoing, as discussed above, leads to the initiation of corrective action in this repair process. Within the Corrective Action stage of repair, there existed three themes, which provided a progression of sub-steps taken, which ultimately leads to a genuine discussion of the issues. The three themes were Reestablish Physical Closeness/Intimacy; Make Conciliatory Gestures; and Communicate Genuine Regret. Within this latter category there are two sub-themes, namely Offer Apology and Request Forgiveness. A brief discussion of each follows.

Reestablish Physical Closeness/Intimacy. For these couples it appeared that reestablishing contact could take several forms including verbiage and actions (i.e., hugs, pats and kisses). The most common mode of actions to reestablish closeness was verbal - comforting words and phrases and gentle tones of voice.

Charles. If I were to exchange or offer words comforting her, compassion, repentance, if I should have erred in some significant way.

Concerning actions, two husbands stated that when a transgression occurred they used the same strategy, namely, physical contact. This involved the initiation of actions following several days of strained conversation, or no conversation at all. They felt that physical contact was an effective strategy to resume positive conversation. Inherent in the strategy was the underlying use of humor. This is typified by Steve's following comment.

Steve. Most of the time she'll come around or if I can - what I'll do is when she sits down, I'll keep bothering her -- until she starts to laugh because I'm kind of a humorous guy...

The second husband, Terry stated that he was able to "lighten the air" with Barbara by doing the following.

Terry. Okay, I will come through and make myself known, that's more of a sarcastic way of giving her attention, -- while it might not be an affectionate [strategy] -- it's a given that I'm going to do it.

Terry did go on to explain he only does this if he is sure she is not busy doing something serious.

Additionally for the wives, responses included a willingness to be more romantic and sensitive to their husbands' emotional/sexual needs. For Carolyn, efforts to amend a mistake she made included a gesture as simple as giving a kiss.

Carolyn. Yeah, he may kiss me closer to my mouth.

Make Conciliatory Gestures. Actions within this theme demonstrated the spouse's desire to repair the relationship through reparative gestures. Many husbands' reactions to their wives following their own transgressions were aimed toward the restoration of trust in the relationship. Richard, stated he would do something to restore trust, but again he acknowledged it would be something small.

Richard. Add something or another on the trust side of it. Do simple, quality things that may be small.

For the most part, their actions reflected genuine concern for their wives. Interestingly, husbands and wives engaged somewhat different behaviors during this step.

Many times, the husbands' behaviors included the purchase of token gifts. A common attribute of the gifts was its simplistic nature. They all admitted that it was always something inexpensive, such as a card, balloon, and so forth. This was concisely

stated by Bob, who recognized his use of gifts was to let his wife, Mary, know that he was concerned about her following a transgression.

Bob. Buying little nothings. Not anything expensive -- little nothings that show that I care and that I'm thinking -- trying to get back into the daily routine to try to show that I care.

The seriousness of the error may dictate the action taken. Charles' statement contributes an additional characteristic of the gift giving.

Charles. The other things, depending on the gravity or the severity of the situation. ornaments, gifts.

He goes on to say that he recognizes the gift is not a substitution for needed discussion of the incident.

Charles. Anything that has monetary implications, really can't take the place of genuineness and sincerity and dialogue.

Key here is the acknowledgment of the gift not taking the place of what was really important, and that is genuine regard for her feelings and sincere interest in getting the relationship back to normal.

While the purchase of gifts was a common strategy, the specific goal of the gift was to restore the relationship. Six of the 13 husbands responded that buying gifts was a strategy they used to assist in the restoration of their relationship.

The wives also felt the need to employ actions that would help to repair the relationship, given they had transgressed in some way. Contrary to husbands, none of the wives stated that they would buy gifts or a token item to repair the relationship. The action most often used was to converse about the incident, which will be addressed later.

The second most common action by wives was their allowing their husbands time to engage in a behavior of his choice. Given that “time” is such a rare commodity, amongst these dual-career couples, this seemingly simple gesture was a significant one. Carolyn’s attempt to repair using this action is depicted below.

Carolyn. I let him go ahead and take his five-mile run. Praying, "Okay, Lord if he's going to leave this time [to run], make sure I don't say anything that I don't need to say when he comes back through that door."

Another interesting gesture for repairing the relationship, was the use of penance, even though it fell short of restoring the situation, as stated by Jennifer, a registered nurse.

Jennifer. Sometimes you can do something, I guess you would call it penance or something. -- you know, do something to try to make up for it, but generally, that's not, I mean, if you didn't do whatever it was that you needed to do, then it's, you know, that's really of little significance.

Similarly, for Pat, a registered nurse, penance does little to repair her mistake.

Pat. It is, he sees the effort in trying to make it up, but it doesn't still, what do I want to say, he sees the effort in me making it up, but he doesn't really, the fact is still that I did not do what I said I was going to do.

Hence, for Pat, her way to correct her mistake was to perform the action she neglected to do originally. Her way to repair was to simply perform the required action.

Pat. I try to do the action that I let him down --go back and try to do the thing was suppose to do.

It appeared that gestures of various types were employed by both husbands and wives. It was often the case that the intent behind the gesture seemed to be of greater

significance than the gesture itself. Such gestures seemed to set the stage for the next step, namely, communicate regret.

Communicate Genuine Regret. The next step in the corrective action category of the repair process, was communicate regret. This communication usually began with expressions of sorrow in the form of apologies and sometimes included requests for forgiveness. A brief description of each of these expressions follows. This theme was divided into two areas.

Offer Apology. Seven of the men and six of the women in this project stated they would apologize as a means to repair the damage caused by the transgression. Concerning men, the difficulty in expressing an apology did not prevent them from expressing regret over their "hurtful" actions. Given the difficulty in apologizing, husbands often made the following comments: "she knows that this is hard for me", or "I just need to swallow my pride." Perhaps apologizing is difficult for husbands because it acknowledges that "I've let her down" or "I have hurt her." Nonetheless, the apology was important. One corporate executive, stated he knew communication was important, but the apology was most important in his strategy.

Bob. The first thing I do is apologize, verbally. And it's tough because it's not like anything will change overnight, you need to work on it. -- it's a matter of apologizing probably more than once.

It appeared that the apology met an objective that enabled him to express his sorrow for his actions, as well as express a willingness to change. He realized change would take time, however, the appreciation of her disappointment was essential.

Understanding of the wives' disappointment was similarly conveyed by Bill, whose expression of sorrow was accompanied with regret over the effect of his action.

Bill. It's usually something like talking things out, communicating about it. Usually, it's the, "I'm sorry, I didn't realize that you were going to feel this way or this was going to happen."

For wives the expression of "I'm sorry" was not always easy for them either. For Jennifer, expressing an apology, was something she learned to do over the years.

Jennifer. Talk about it, say you are sorry, -- I mean that's the main thing. And I think that was something that was really hard for us earlier on, was to say "I was wrong" and "I'm sorry." I was a spoiled brat, -- it was just something that was hard for me to say, "I'm sorry," "I was wrong." That was earlier on, because I have to say that at this point, we very seldom have a crossword.

Given the frequency of the use of saying "sorry," it appeared that this strategy was not only effective, but beneficial as well, as was stated by Sarah.

Sarah. Well, when a situation like that occurs, I try to be quick to apologize ... and to discuss what went on exactly. But certainly apologizing has helped our marriage tremendously -- apologize because we recognize that both of us have strengths and both of us have weaknesses -- so that seems to always help, at least start the restoration process.

It appeared the act of apologizing is a somewhat difficult act for these men and women. Perhaps it was a difficult in that it necessitates a certain level of humility. With regard to the husbands, apologies, to be effective, must be accompanied by some level of expressed understanding and appreciation for wives' disappointment. For the wives it is

difficult as well, however, they were able to do so in a more immediate fashion. Both husbands' and wives' ability to apologize is enhanced over time in the marriage, as stated by Jennifer above.

Request Forgiveness. The second theme in the repair process was the request for forgiveness. Of those respondents that stated they would apologize, three husbands and one wife commented that they would ask for forgiveness. It appeared that these spouses thought the additional step of not only stating they were sorry, but also requesting forgiveness was important. The one female respondent described her actions as doing perhaps more than is required. Her description for repairing her marriage began with the following.

Ronnie. ... I go above and beyond, probably, the call of duty with things at home, I ask him for forgiveness.

A husband stated he asked his wife for forgiveness and admitted that it was difficult for him to do so. He felt however, that this gesture was beneficial in the restoration of the relationship.

Phil. ... asking, does she forgive me for what it was that I did -- works.

It can be noted that few spouses stated they engaged in the process of forgiveness. Those who did however, were highly aware of its valuable impact on restoration.

In summary, the category of take corrective action, proved to reflect three types of actions these couples engage to repair the marriage. The resuming of physical closeness through verbiage and actions proved to be beneficial in couples' reestablishing the state of the marriage. Often these behaviors are accompanied with conciliatory gestures that move the process along. The third component, communicate genuine regret, consisting of

offering an apology and requesting forgiveness. It was interesting to note that few participants actually requested forgiveness. These steps serve as effective precursors to the next step of this process, Talk Heart-to-Heart.

### Talk Heart-to-Heart

The next step in the process was the category of Talk Heart-to-Heart. At this point couples actually discuss the incident in detail. That is, a discussion takes place about what went wrong, how it happened, and an attempt is made to explain the transgression in light of “good intentions.” While only three husbands stated they would discuss the incident as a means to get the relationship back on track, ten of the thirteen wives did so. As stated earlier, while husbands were willing to engage a number of actions (i.e., consider wives’ perspective, seek out guidance, and make conciliatory gestures), it was quite difficult to discuss their failures and shortcomings in such instances. Husbands stated that the purpose of these discussions was to genuinely discuss the incident and its impact on the relationship. A necessary first step in initiating this level of interaction was to discuss how it affected the wife, as depicted by Frank, a university assistant professor.

Frank. Well usually if I can swallow my pride -- I'll try to verbally discuss the incident, apologize -- discuss how it hurt her and why ...

Another husband expressed the importance of discussing the incident.

Silas. Just try to talk it out and see if ... something good will come out of it ... something else that I've learned over the years ... instead of just letting it go, I just think that's probably one of the worst things you could do, is not to address a situation ... that has, in other words I guess you could call it a friendly confrontation.

Discussion of the transgression proved to be an important strategy for these husbands, however not all stated they would initiate it.

Ten wives, stated that they would discuss the incident. This discussion served a variety of purposes, (i.e., to determine what happened; to explain their perspective to their husband; to lessen the level of anger; to describe the impact of the event; and to attempt to get things back on track).

One benefit of discussing the transgression, was to determine what had taken place, and the acknowledgment of the error. This is especially important in instances where the spouse had not realized that their actions were offensive, as expressed by Mary.

Mary. And there are so many times when I've done something wrong, and I didn't even know it. But I can tell something is wrong. And so I'll say "Okay, what did I do?", and he'll tell me. I don't have to ask twice. Sometimes I can't believe that's what he's upset about.

For Diane, an attorney, the discussion served the purpose of explaining her actions. Her comments typified this common strategy.

Diane. I'm always messing up with the finances and writing checks ... I would just try to explain to him what it was I needed to buy that kind of maybe took something out of the bank account that we hadn't anticipated doing ... I just try to explain to him why it happened, so he can understand what I was thinking about.

Another strategy, given as a purpose for discussion, was provided by Brenda, a paralegal, who stated that at times she will use alternative strategies to discuss the impact of the situation on her and the relationship.

Brenda. I go to him and talk about how I feel about that situation. -- that I do, - I've found this very effective, and I don't do this often, I reserve it for times that I, I write him a letter, and I explain something, I tell him how I feel, and he gets it in a different way, because he's getting this phone message, he's getting a letter from me. So these are things I use. I use his voice mail, I use sometimes notes.

This strategy is one that is not used often, but it appears that it is designed for those times when sufficient progress is not being made to get things back on track. Additionally, she stated such a variety of ways to convey her feelings enables her husband to understand the importance of the situation.

Brenda. I think the key thing is to keep sort of changing that, to come at it, to communicate in different ways, so that it's not always the same.

As stated above, a primary reason of discussion was to get things back on track as soon as possible. Mary, an attorney, provided some insight here.

Mary. We have to talk about it because if we don't there's an invisible wall. We can just feel it in our conversation. One agreement we have is to say, "I love you" before you hang up. And it's a stiff kind of, you know, "I love you." If there's something, if we haven't talked about the issue.

The timeliness of these discussions appeared to be something of extreme importance, by these wives. Susan, a university administrator, stated it this way.

Susan. I don't like situations to hang, I'm like "Look, let's talk about it." And go on to the next step and, [have] a real serious conversation that's good. Frank and I are willing to talk.

For Carolyn, timing of the discussion is important as well. She used her tone of voice to inform her husband when it was an appropriate time to talk.

Carolyn. Yeah, well he may say something, and I don't have a satirical comment, sarcastic comment or ugly tone or something which lets him know that it may be all right to talk, maybe not right now, but a little later, type of deal.

In summary of the category of Heart-to-Heart Talk, both husbands and wives expressed the importance of how they discussed the transgression; however, it is clear that wives were much more prone to do so than their husbands. This talk most often included the use of soft, warm tones in their voice, and the use of words that express comfort compassion.

Many times these positive aspects took the form of saying, "Don't worry", "I love you" and "I understand." It appeared that this style of communication was a common strategy which proved to be effective in diffusing negative actions that often accompanied these difficult discussions. A primary goal of such confrontations was to not verbally tear one another down, as one respondent, Silas.

Silas. In other words not being the old combatants -- having a verbal war like you're saying words that's going to tear you down, -- let's try to do some things that will be positive, that will build each other, build both of us up.

He went on to say that this strategy is one he had to grow into, and freely admitted he and his wife, Jennifer, did not always employ it.

For some of the couples the heart-to-heart talk was concluded with some sort of affection, as stated by Sarah.

Sarah. Well, sometimes we'll embrace, you know, after that. -- At least we're on the road to recovery.

#### Attempt Resolution/Restoration

The last step in the process of repair, was the attempt to resolve the issue surrounding the transgression. These couples underscored the need to not only simply discuss the incident, but to resolve quickly, as reflected by Richard and Sarah.

Richard. Provide reassurances and then move forward into initiatives.

Sarah. And then we try to discuss other ways to handle the situation differently.

Such a strategy helps to limit the negative impact of the transgression on the marital relationship.

Five of the husbands stated that it was essential that they discuss ways to prevent the reoccurring of the incident if their marriages were to get back on track. One husband's response reflected this issue.

Bob. And promising never to do certain things again, forget things, and then just trying to get back into the daily routine to try to show her that I care. -- that I've heard where ... I've gone awry, and I understand what I need to practice.

He went on to say that he was able to make such clear statements because his wife, Mary, spelled out the steps to be taken in a very precise manner. Note the follow-up response by Bob.

Bob. I mean it is obvious. She outlines for me exactly what it is. ... I can be dense in a lot of areas around, but in any event, she outlines what I need to do.

With regard to wives, they too, felt it was important to resolve their transgressions. They stated that it was important to convey a willingness to make changes and follow through with actions.

One respondent, Mary, also stated that a commitment to adhere to certain actions was a necessary step in this process.

Mary. So after talking about it and coming to some sort of solution, okay, we'll, "I won't do that anymore." -- I'll try to appease the situation, -- any way I can, try to accommodate him. I think that if it's reasonable, which it usually is, I'll just do, not do, or do whatever, he's looking for as long as it is reasonable.

It should be noted that the above repair process was not easily articulated by these respondents. Their openness and willingness to share their vulnerabilities with me was greatly appreciated.

In summary, these couples provided a sincere look into the challenges that accompany such personal areas of their lives. The repair process included the following steps, Create Distance, Consider Other Perspectives; Accept Responsibility for Your Own Actions; Take Correction Action; Talk Heart-to-Heart; and Attempt Resolution/Restoration. While not all responses given were equally representative across respondents, the overriding actions engaged reflected those steps taken in the repair process.

Additional insight was afforded as further questions were asked of husbands and wives concerning their ability to identify strategies engaged by their spouses to restore the marriage. In response to What does your spouse do to get things back on track, all but two respondents were able to provide some description of actions their spouse engaged.

The remaining 24 respondents provided varying levels of agreement regarding their perceptions of strategies engaged. While specific actions were not always identified, what appeared consistent was the recognition of the intended purpose of the action. Two examples are provided to show the similarity of responses within dyads. However it will also be evident that there is an awareness or appreciation of the intent of the action. First a wife's description of her husband's repair actions.

Mary. He likes to talk. He'll open discussion on the topic. -- I'll perceive the discussion as a signal that I've done something wrong.

Her husband, Bob, stated he repairs the marriage as follows.

Bob. Communication is key. I apologize even though she realizes it takes time to correct a situation. ... [I'll] buy little things, nothing expensive, just to show I care, I'm thinking about you. ... I promise to never do certain things again.

Here it is fairly clear that Mary understands that her husband uses communication to correct his mistakes with her. However, she did not articulate the specific actions he may carry out to show concern, like buying the token gifts. It is interesting to note that Mary went on to say that she highly valued his efforts to communicate.

Mary. Well at the beginning of the discussion, I'm not too crazy about it because it just means, ... we have to get into a heavy discussion. -- Of course I'm not too thrilled at this point, but it makes me feel good -- because he's as concerned about maintaining that [equilibrium] as I am.

What is key here is her appreciation of his genuine desire to maintain the equilibrium and his willingness to talk about it. It is obvious that the gifts were not

mentioned, and while they are effective for the husband they were not readily recalled in her response.

To more clearly show how these couples are in tune with each other, I will provide Bob's description of Mary's efforts to restore.

Bob. ... initially she's quiet. ... she cleans, I think after a period of time she communicates. -- I think we understand each other very well.-- There's a period of quiet time -- Eventually she'll talk about it. -- she's very similar to me in this respect, she'll apologize.

Here Mary describes how she corrects a transgression.

Mary. Talk about things. -- Talk about what I've done. -- We have to talk about it because if we don't, there's an invisible wall. We can just feel it in our conversation.

It is fairly clear that Bob was able to convey the primary action his wife, Mary used to repair. He also was able to be a bit more descriptive than Mary in her evaluation of his efforts, in that he could identify more details concerning her actions. It appears that he was correct in his estimation of her repair efforts.

As is evident from this example, responses are somewhat general in their descriptions of their spouses' behavior. This may be due, in part, to the nature of the question asked. That is, in an attempt to not produce extreme discomfort or embarrass anyone, no specific transgression was requested. As a result of this general question, a broader response was elicited. Notwithstanding, the examination of the 24 responses revealed some level of agreement regarding the intentions behind the behaviors, rather than the behaviors themselves. Hence, the vast majority of these couples were able to

accurately identify the positive intentions of their spouse to make amends in situations requiring repair efforts.

A final question posed to these respondents was the identification of unsuccessful repair actions. For the wives it appears that not talking about the issue was their primary concern. They stated that their husbands might ignore the situation or put it off for a while.

For one respondent, Ronnie, her husband's ignoring the situation was perceived as his reluctance to discuss the incident.

Ronnie. When he discounts my feelings, or invalidates them ... that is the most unsuccessful approach with me. -- instead of actually talking it out in the way that we usually [communicate], he won't acknowledge it [the transgression].

Other unsuccessful strategies employed by husbands included the following: moving on to other topics too quickly, poor timing for discussion and for intimacy, denial of the severity of the offense, and the poor follow-through on agreed-upon steps to be taken.

The husbands' description of wives' unsuccessful repair strategies included the following: attempts to make-up too quickly, assuming she knows how her husband will react, not allowing time to vent, and wives' attempt at corrective action only leads to more problems.

This last example exemplifies several of the above mentioned strategies.

Frank. ... when I'm under stress, I like to be alone, and sometimes instead of using her better judgment to stay away, she will try to give something that she thinks will be helpful, and that makes things even worse when all I need is just to be alone.

In conclusion, these comments reflect instances when inappropriate strategies are engaged. It appears that couples learn over time what the most effective strategies are, and when they are most effective. The emotionality surrounding various transgressions often prevents the acceptance of spouses' corrective actions. And further, such emotionality affects the better judgment of the transgressor in their selection and initiation of corrective actions.

## Chapter Five

### Discussion and Conclusions

The primary purpose of this study was to examine actions initiated by 13 African-American dual-career couples to maintain the satisfaction and stability of their marriages. The guiding theory linking this project's findings to a conceptual framework is interdependence theory as elaborated by Rusbult and colleagues (1993, 1994, 1997) and presented as the investment model. The investment model is a theory of the process by which individuals become dependent on and committed to their relational partner. Committed partners are viewed as taking routine and strategic actions to maintain the quality of their relationships. The discussion will include integration of relational maintenance results within interdependence theory in general, and the investment model in particular. The following section describes how the respondents extended knowledge about relational maintenance. Additionally, an explanation of how this research extends our knowledge on relational maintenance is provided. Lastly, how these African-American couples maintain their marriages in light of their demanding lifestyles will be presented.

#### Contributions to Knowledge of Relational Maintenance

This study examined the marital maintenance behaviors displayed by 13 African-American couples as they met the challenges and demands inherent in combining career and family roles. This research sought to extend the relational maintenance literature in two ways, by 1) examining a nonsampled group (African Americans), and 2) employing a qualitative method. For these 13 couples, the findings of this study confirmed the

importance of relational maintenance to marital satisfaction and stability and demonstrated the significance of strategic and routine behaviors to both daily and long-term marital interaction. Additionally, this research extended knowledge of relational maintenance in three ways. First, examination of couple responses lead to the identification of several long-term maintenance behaviors. Second, couple interviews produced a new category of maintenance behavior -- seek a spiritual connection. Third, couples' description of their actions following a transgression allowed the conceptualization of repair as a process. A brief description of each follows.

### Long-Term Maintenance

The responses of these thirteen couples described eight categories of behaviors that they thought contributed to long-term marital success. Among the wide range of actions articulated by this group were Develop Communication Skills; Be Open to Change; Be Adaptable and Adjust; Establish Relational Rules; Manage Conflict Constructively; and Maintain Quality Friendships. Although similar behaviors had been identified in previous research (e.g., Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Dindia & Baxter, 1987; Stafford & Canary, 1991), no reviewed studies had attempted to distinguish between long-term and short-term intent.

Prior research had investigated a variety of maintenance behaviors within several types of relationships (i.e., dating, seriously dating, friends, married). Because this sample consisted only of married couples and was qualitative in nature, it assisted in the discovery of adopted thought patterns that strongly pointed to longevity. Simply put, these couples indicated being strongly committed to the long-term continuation of their

marriages and supported those expectations, both cognitively and behaviorally, in ways that differed from short-term, daily maintenance actions.

#### A New Maintenance Behavior: Seek a Spiritual Connection

For these 13 African-American couples, the stability of marital relationships was strengthened when they involved some dimension of spirituality. Couples stated that the presence of God, use of Bible-reading, church attendance, and times of prayer were profitable strategies for ensuring their marital success. This category represented a characteristic predictive of relational success among African American couples in other studies, namely religious commitment. This finding supports previous literature documenting the positive impact of religion on marriage among African Americans (Taylor, Chatters, Tucker, & Lewis, 1990). The confirmation and validation of one's self-worth by God has proven to be a historical source of strength for this group (Staples & Johnson, 1993). The endorsement of this category therefore, is not surprising. Additionally, the role of religious commitment in establishing stability and support is consistent with these findings (Brody, Stoneman, Flor, & McCrary, 1994).

Religious beliefs were credited with providing a source of confidence and stability not only in couples' day-to-day lives, but particularly, during times of marital difficulty. A consistently researched strength of African American families is the strong establishment of spirituality within the families. Over 50% of this sample expressed the importance of a spiritual lifestyle. These individuals spoke in ways that supported what Hill (1973) referred to as a strong religious commitment and unwavering faith.

Associated with this finding is the predisposition of these couples to rely on their friendships to help them maintain their marriages. Many of these friendships had been

acquired through church related activity. This finding supports the data reported by Dressler (1985) who found that African Americans turn to church members as a resource for coping with a variety of issues, including marital problems. Couples sought and obtained help through established friendships, because they wanted associations with individuals who believed as they did.

### Repair as a Process

A third contribution of this work to the relational maintenance literature was the conceptualization of repair as a process. Prior to this research, Dindia and Baxter (1987) conceptualized relational maintenance to include both preventive maintenance (to maintain) and corrective maintenance (to repair) strategies. They found couples possessed a greater repertoire of maintenance behaviors than repair strategies.

Given that a major portion of this study targeted repair, employing a qualitative methodology, it was possible to develop a more contextual understanding of repair behaviors. Follow-up questions and probes uncovered a wealth of information as couples described specific actions they initiated to repair their marriages (Create Distance, Consider Other Perspectives, Accept Responsibility for Own Actions, Take Corrective Action, Talk Heart-to-Heart, and Attempt Resolution/Restoration). For example, the strategy of Create Distance afforded the offended spouse a “cool down period” to lessen the impact of the transgression on him/her. Through the strategic employment of conciliatory gestures, such as buying flowers and talking, restoration of the positive marital tone was re-established. Similarly, verbal reparative actions consisting of voicing the transgression, offering an apology, requesting forgiveness, and talking about the issues were considered effective in preventing such negative occurrences in the future.

Success of repair strategies was associated with spouses' ability to self-reflect, as well as their willingness to consider their actions from the perspective of their marital partner.

In sum, this research has made unique contributions to the literature by identifying a new category of actions which was labeled long-term maintenance behaviors and discovering a maintenance strategy that relied on making a spiritual connection. With regard to repair, these couples highlighted the importance of strategic maintenance behaviors. Participants revealed a sequence of behaviors that underscored the necessity to understand their spouse, and select and employ the appropriate maintenance strategy at the correct time within the process of restoration of marital goodwill.

#### Conclusions Relative to Theory

Commitment, a key concept within the investment model of interdependence theory, is envisioned as the result of partners' dependence on each other. As partners become committed they develop a long-term outlook for their relationship and a sense of "we-ness" (Rusbult & Arriaga, 1997). Commitment is posited to be stronger when partners 1) strive to please each other and express satisfaction with their relationship; 2) invest time, emotional energy, and other personal resources in their relationship; and 3) view their relationship as better, compared to alternatives (Rusbult & Arriaga, 1997; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Rusbult et al., 1994). Two of these three conditions, satisfaction and investment, were met by the couples in this study, as indicated in the following discussion. The third factor that influences relational commitment, according to Rusbult and Arriaga (1997), is how couples manage tempting and attractive alternatives that come across their paths, given they have chosen to remain in their current relationship. In their conversations, couples did not specifically compare their marriages to other alternatives,

nor did I ask. This project was designed to examine ways to maintain marital satisfaction and stability rather than ways couples sought to protect their relationship from others. Couple reflections included many comments regarding their commitment to one another, as well as how satisfied they were with their relationship. Investments were not specifically mentioned, but emerged naturally from couple responses to other research questions.

### Satisfaction and Investments

Rusbult et al. (1993, 1994) suggest that relationships endure as a function of satisfaction and investments. Partners in this study reported being very satisfied in their marriages. Marital satisfaction was also evident in the supportive, comforting and caring behaviors displayed and voiced by each partner. Such behaviors seemed to provide a strong foundation that enabled couples to experience some level of satisfaction even through difficult times. Established patterns of couple interdependence, as displayed in the execution of relational maintenance behaviors, contributed to long-term positive interactions. It should also be noted that some of the strongest indications of satisfaction were voiced by couples who were married the longest.

Rusbult and Buunk (1993) propose that relationships endure as a function of investments of significant resources to the partner. The more a partner invests in the relationship, the more connectedness experienced between partners. There are two ways individuals may make investments, directly or indirectly. Direct level investments in this study consisted of couples spending time with each other and the family. For example, when spouses adjusted their schedules -- chose to leave work early, or stay home later in the mornings -- to meet familial needs, they demonstrated direct investments. Similarly,

both husbands and wives displayed direct investments of verbal and emotional support within daily routines, as well as during stressful times. For example, couples took weekend trips, went to movies, and visited each other's families. Time and energy investments were also revealed in the purchase of gifts. Spouses spent time learning each other's preferences so they would know what to buy when selecting a gift or planning to pick up a special item.

Investments of emotional support were often conveyed through simple acts of kindness that demonstrated an awareness of the spouse's special needs, like when a partner was under pressure at work or when the parenting responsibilities were especially heavy. Bringing a spouse a glass of juice or a piece of fruit when he or she was working late hours also demonstrated this form of support.

Making sacrifices, another type of direct investment, was displayed by spouses who willingly sacrificed for their partner's career and the attainment of other personal goals. For example, Bob, a corporate vice-president, relocated to provide greater opportunities for career advancement for his wife, who had not been able to develop a career as a lawyer in the small town where they previously resided.

Indirect investments are those resources that may seem extraneous to the relationship, but are inextricably connected (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Shared friendships, for instance, become meaningful resources which tie the partners closer together, as well as contribute to their sense of oneness. Friends know the spouses as a couple and behave as if they belong together. Indirect investments for these thirteen couples included a variety of social and educational activities. For example, periodic social gatherings with friends from college came to served as measuring rods for participants' level of maturity

and commitment which had developed over time. While these gatherings had initially been perceived as times of fun and relaxation, they had come to be quite meaningful in that these couples used them, in part, as opportunities to determine their relative growth in the marriage. This indirect investment often served to bind these couples closer together in meaningful ways.

Investments, direct or indirect, serve to reflect genuine interest in the spouse and the marriage. Commitment is strengthened because individuals are not as likely to dissolve relationships that include continued reciprocal investments that occur repeatedly over time. That is, the thought of losing such personal investments makes it less likely that couples will part. Commitment implies stability, security and readiness to attempt to maintain a relationship in spite of inevitable conflict (Reis & Shaver, 1988; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

### Relational Maintenance

When partners are reciprocally dependent upon each other, as these couples indicated, they develop cooperative routines that facilitate each other's personal and relational goals. As spousal interactions continue to overlap and intertwine, feelings of mutual closeness are generated (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989; Borden & Levinger, 1991). Couples, in effect, adapt themselves to each other. Such closely connected interactions encourage an increased sense of mutual rewards among marital partners (Holmes & Levinger, 1994). Mutual rewards, then, are a by-product of partner's meshed interests and lead to use of relational maintenance strategies. This appears to have been the case with dual-career couples examined in this investigation as evidenced in their supportive daily routines. More specifically, participants' themes reflect active efforts to

demonstrate mutual support in the attainment of both household and career objectives. For example, both husbands and wives showed support through verbal messages (i.e., have a good day) and actions (i.e., assisting with household chores).

Giving both verbal and behavioral support reflected the willingness of these spouses to accommodate each other's needs and goals, thus confirming the bonds of trust and affection. In highly interdependent relationships a spouse's needs become "transformed" over time, whereby responding to their partner's desires actually affords him/her intrinsic value (Borden & Levinger, 1991; Rusbult & Arriaga, 1997). For example, a husband's concern for monitoring his children's TV watching was adapted into his wife's actions such that she made adjustments in her own behavior to accommodate his perspective. Over time she was able to recognize the benefit of his perspective (not viewing sit-coms). This spouse's accommodating her husband's desire led to mutual closeness. In this case, respect for individual (choice of TV watching) and pair (monitoring children's TV watching) goals which led to mutual rewards (agreement in child rearing practices), and ultimately contributed to marital stability.

Because of the long-term orientation adopted by these couples, needed sacrifices, though personally effortful, were readily made. Spouses often agreed to, made, and accepted decisions which resulted in actions that were in direct contrast to their own self-interest. Couples indicated that they had learned that their pro-relationship acts or maintenance behaviors would be beneficial to their marriages in the long term. That is, because of past experiences, they had learned that such decisions would be appreciated and reciprocated. This accommodative pattern of action persisted.

Trust is said to result from an individual's reliance on their partner to be considerate and helpful. Inherent in the idea of trust is the proposition that when assurance is present, both spouses are sensitive and attentive to each other's needs. The result is a sense of security above the stability and rewards of the relationship. These couples talked of being sensitive to each other's needs, especially during times of stress. Both, sensitivity and attention have been found to foster confidence in a partner's benevolent intentions, which in turn increases partner's sense they have a successful and satisfying relationship worth maintaining (Rempel, Holmes & Zanna, 1985).

Many of the behaviors reported by participants in this study reflected both routine and strategic actions as discussed in the relational maintenance literature. That is, many of their behaviors possessed a habitual quality (routine), while others were more directed and accompanied with an intentional purpose (strategic). Each will be examined more closely as this discussion continues. It should be noted that some of the behaviors designated as routine were also strategic, depending upon the context in which they occurred. That is, routine behaviors were considered strategic when they served a directed purpose and were engaged to produce a desired end. For example, when a partner gave gifts within routine behaviors, the act was designed to simply reflect the desire to do something positive for the spouse. However, within the repair category, the buying of a gift served the strategic purpose of saying, "I'm sorry" or "I recognize I have done something wrong and I am trying to make amends."

#### Routine Maintenance Behaviors

One purpose of this research was to examine what routine behaviors were employed to maintain satisfaction in African-American relationships. Routine behaviors

occur within established relationships and are actions that are carried out regularly, seem mundane and trivial and are often performed without notice (i.e., simple greetings when returning home) (Dainton & Stafford, 1993). Routine behaviors may not actually occur everyday, but such behaviors are a manifest part of their normal day. They are typified by their trivial and habitualized occurrence (Dainton & Stafford, 1993). The couples in this study identified five categories of routine maintenance behaviors: Share Recreational Activities; Give Gifts; Show Physical Affection; Make Special Efforts; and Establish Supportive Routines. These behaviors represented actions that occurred throughout the day from morning to evening and reflected generalized rules of conduct. These five categories of behavior were reported to be helpful in keeping couples' marriages in a positive state. These categories reflect two primary areas of concern, maintaining personal interactions and facilitating day-to-day functioning. Each area will be discussed in turn.

Regarding personal interactions, three of the five identified categories (i.e., sharing time together, giving gifts and showing physical affection) were said to maintain the overall positive state of the relationship. For example, couples reported that gift giving played a particularly important role in assuring spouses that they were valued and thought about. Sharing relational activities reflected the stability of the couple's friendship bond as well as their enduring mutual compatibility. Mutual compatibility was also evidenced in descriptions of their shared activities (i.e., lifting weights, going to movies). Showing physical affection seemed to confirm their love and continued support for one another.

Facilitating day-to-day functioning, was composed of two categories, Make Special Efforts and Establish Supportive Daily Routines. Many of these efforts appeared

to be gender-specific. For example, the modifications of schedules by husbands, to assist their wives in reducing their stress level were found to be beneficial in maintaining the positive state of the marriage. Wives, on the other hand, supported their husbands' hectic schedules and valued and solicited their input concerning family matters (i. e., disciplining strategies, determining after school activities). These behaviors were also shown to ensure the smooth flow of daily routines and consequently, the positive state of the marriage. In sum, positive behaviors reflect the only category where responses were divided into gendered themes. For example, it was apparent that the actions within Making Special Efforts reflect marked differences between the husbands' and wives' themes. That is, the husbands' behaviors involved actions designed to assist their wives in the home by assuming her household chores for a time, while the wives' actions seemed to appeal to the husbands' expertise (i.e., request his opinion in his area of competence).

Within interdependence theory, the style of interaction displayed by the respondents is conceptualized to include cooperative routines. While such routines are beneficial in accomplishing mutual goals, they are not without problems. The automatic execution of relational maintenance behaviors over extended periods of time can become so routinized that they may often be overlooked. It is possible that contributions resulting from such actions are taken for granted. Therefore, partners may not readily identify the daily efforts put forth by their spouse which has led to the smooth flow of daily functioning. This shortcoming was mentioned by one of the wives as she described her numerous efforts to keep the household running efficiently. She stated she felt her husband was not aware of all the work she does to keep things running smoothly. While

her husband would acknowledge her effort when asked, he was not inclined to recognize it on his own. This appeared to be the source of her frustration.

### Strategic Maintenance Behaviors

This investigation also dealt with the strategic maintenance behaviors couples enacted to repair their relationships following a transgression. Strategic behaviors are defined as intentional actions that serve a specific and intentional purpose (i.e., conciliatory gestures following a transgression) (Metts, 1994).

While marriages provide important sources of emotional, psychological and physical well-being (Burman & Margolin, 1992), they also hold the potential for negative consequences. Even those marriages that are typically enjoyable are not exempt from difficult situations that may arise in day-to-day living. How couples respond to difficulties that create challenges was a focus of this study. Such unpleasant actions may negatively affect marital satisfaction and stability. Metts (1994) conceptualized these unpleasant actions as transgressions, which are stress inducing breakdowns within the relationship. She states even minor offenses can negatively affect the relationship in that generalized rules of conduct are violated.

These couples chose to repair using a plurality of positive behaviors. Their adoption of a long-term orientation toward their spouses and their marriages most likely fostered a willingness to engage pro-relationship behaviors when disappointments and transgressions led to difficult times within the marital relationship. As Rusbult and Arriaga, (1997) suggest, interdependence is inclusive of actions that not only serve to strengthen commitment, but also motivate a partner to engage in behaviors that keep a relationship in a healthy state. Several types of behaviors that indicate couple

interdependence include constructive conflict resolution and the use of thought patterns that undergird the decision to persist. Both of these behaviors were functional as motivators for participants to repair their marriages. A brief summary of each follows.

Couples' responses produced a six-step process which reflected the summed actions they employed to repair their marriages when transgressions occurred. While all steps were not voiced by all participants, the process depicts the most common actions reported. The repair process included the following steps: Create Distance; Consider the Spouse's Perspective; Accept Responsibility for Your Actions; Talk Heart-to-Heart; and Attempt Restoration /Resolution.

Several steps in the repair process reflected behaviors designed to manage the conflict with minimal difficulty and with the least negative consequences. From allowing for cool down periods, to seeking to understand other perspectives, to admitting wrong doing, to apologizing and requesting forgiveness, all provide a strong framework for effective heart-to-heart talks that lead to resolution. These steps model constructive behaviors that provide opportunity to self reflect, acknowledge the transgression, and move to correct it. Because these couples had developed a long-term tendency to engage pro-relationship behaviors, they demonstrated a proclivity to continue to engage those actions even during times of transgressions (Rusbult & Arriaga, 1997).

Thoughts as well as actions encouraged the partners to persist in their relationship. For example, in the second step of the repair process, spouses considered other perspectives, (i.e., their partners, friends they esteemed highly, and God, through Bible reading and prayer). To turn to these sources, which have an established tendency toward resolution, served to encourage persistence to correct mistakes and protect the

relationship. Couples talked of their commitment to their relationship and their awareness of the many physical, emotional and financial investments made by both partners as they struggled to adopt thoughts and actions that served to sustain of the quality of their relationship. These interdependent couples had seemingly adopted a long-term orientation as was reflected in their use of positive daily interactions. They were motivated to employ pro-relationship maintenance behaviors that would encourage resolution of anything that disrupted the normal routine. Use of constructive conflict resolution and the adoption of thoughts that cause persistence in the relationship can exert profound motivations to engage in behaviors that keep the relationship healthy (Rusbult et al., 1994).

In sum, the process engaged by these 13 African-American couples reflected the unique strategies they employed to restore their marriages to a previous state, which they had described as satisfying. As such, their actions give further support to recent research findings that examine strategies for restoring relationships following transgressions (Aune, et al., 1991; Metts, 1994; & Roloff & Cloven, 1993). Findings indicated that these couples exhibited both routine and strategic behaviors which were typically relational in nature and aimed at attending to one's spouse, and thereby strengthening the relationship.

#### Conclusions Relative to African-American Families

To fully appreciate these couples' responses, it is important to place them within the context of the existing literature on African American couples. A compelling case can be made for the examination of relational maintenance and repair in African-American couples given the "at risk" status for this population. The number of African-American marriages ending in divorce has increased while the number who marry has decreased

(Cherlin, 1992). Of the several reasons reported for the fragile state of many African-American marriages, one that stands out is the greater exposure to stress among African-Americans relative to Whites (Thomas, 1990).

Dual-career status, a characteristic of couples in this investigation, presents its own set of specific stressors and challenges. With regard to dual-career African-American couples within the work place, Thomas (1990) reported that spouses believe they experience a variety problems, including racial discrimination on the job; couples' resentment surrounding perceptions that African-American women get promoted more easily; perceptions of prosperity while relatives and friends live in impoverished conditions; difficulty instilling Black values and cultural appreciation within a White environment; and parent and children's social isolation. Typical problems associated with integration of work and family roles may be exacerbated by these issues.

Nonetheless, some African American families have overcome typical challenges and stressors confronting them in their day-to-day lives. This appears to have been the case with the participants in this study. As such, research reveals the strength of such families and defines their resilience in terms of "relationship patterns, interpersonal competencies and social and psychological characteristics that create a sense of positive family identity." (Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993, p. 461).

Major factors contributing to this sense of positive family identity, were the routine and strategic behavior patterns developed and exhibited by these couples. Further, strategic behaviors employed to repair marriages in times of difficulty reflect spouses' interpersonal competencies (i.e., ability to take spouse's perspective, tendency to admit when wrong) which demonstrate a continued positive view of the relationship.

Positive behaviors which affected the quality of interaction was an essential aspect of these couples' functioning, enabling them to overcome many of their relational obstacles. More specifically, couples developed successful support and communication strategies which afforded them a great deal of mutual satisfaction. The consistent provision of encouraging words and positive gestures seemed to convey a constant sense of support among couples which they described in terms of closeness and intimacy. Additionally, communication of concerns related to both home and work settings were shared, which couples said provided a major source of well-being and satisfaction. In sum, marital satisfaction was maintained due to the positive quality of the daily interactions engaged by these participants.

The manner in which the study participants maintained a balance of relational "give and take" was also linked to their marital success. As Canary and Stafford (1993) point out, relationships require effort in the form of maintenance behaviors or they will fall apart. It was evident that these couples maintained their relational satisfaction by consistently employing a variety of functional and adaptive strategies that contributed to their feelings of interdependence. So effective, were their maintenance behaviors, that these couples had remained committed to their marital partner over significant periods of time (3 - 33 years).

Given the at-risk status of African American marriages, the need to employ repair strategies seems particularly relevant to this group. Although it is impossible to make a definitive connection from this study, the greater number of divorces and separations experienced by this population (Xu, Hudspeth, & Etes, 1997), may have been lessened because such repair strategies were implemented. Within this sample, couples'

performance of the six-step process of repair was described by them as having contributed to the continuation of the positive state of their marriages.

### Limitations

While this study proved beneficial along several dimensions, limitations to this project exist. Although my status as an African-American may have helped me gain access to these couples, it may have hindered the objective interpretation of their comments. It was vital for me to engage a continual reflexive dialogue with myself and my advisor to ensure as accurate an interpretation as possible.

Additionally, perhaps some information was not provided because there may have been an assumption that I was already aware of common issues that confront African-Americans, especially as it related to career issues (i.e., discrimination in the workplace).

While the target of this research was specifically designated as dual-career couples, the inclusion of a wider range of participants, such as dual-earners, may have enriched the findings. That is, life in the 90s presents an array of challenges if one hopes to satisfactorily maintain their marriage and employment stability. Such challenges are not unique to dual-career couples but may transcend education, work status, and work place boundaries. Qualitative investigation of these factors across a variety of types of married couples within the African-American community may prove insightful.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this qualitative effort examined the relational maintenance behaviors of 13 African-American dual-career couples. It was found that relational maintenance behaviors, both routine and strategic, contributed to the stability and satisfaction of couples' marriages. The ability of these African American couples to

sustain their marriages through the engagement of day-to-day interactions was demonstrated through the use of routine positive behaviors. The employment of strategic actions, following a transgression, was detailed and discussed. These strategic actions were conceptualized as a repair process.

These results not only confirm those reported in previous investigations in relational maintenance, but extend these findings to include a new category, seek a spiritual connection. The employment of a qualitative methodology provided a context in which relational maintenance behaviors and the process of repair could be examined.

In sum, these couples abilities to develop, implement and monitor a series of routine and strategic actions proved to be an invaluable asset to both the daily maintenance and restoration of the marriage. These factors may contribute to the marriages' continued satisfactory existence.

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Appendix A

DEMOGRAPHICS

This section requests information that provides some general information needed to help interpret the results of the study.

1. How would you describe your racial identification?

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2. In what year were you born?

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3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

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4. How long have you been married to \_\_\_\_\_?

5. Is this your first marriage? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

7. What are the ages of the children?

Boy(s) \_\_\_\_\_

age      age      age      age

Girl(s) \_\_\_\_\_

age      age      age      age

8. Please describe your career.

---

(Please be specific.)

Appendix B

**RELATIONAL MAINTENANCE INTERVIEW GUIDE  
DUAL CAREER FAMILY PROJECT  
QUESTIONS FOR THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW  
ON  
RELATIONAL MAINTENANCE**

1. There are things spouses do to maintain positive feelings between each other.

Please describe specific activities you engage to maintain this positive atmosphere or interaction.

(Probe: Tell me about the things you do to maintain love and feelings of satisfaction.)

1 (a). How does your spouse respond to these actions?

1 (b). How are they helpful?

2. There are probably some mundane or routine activities you do the maintain these comfortable interactions/positive atmosphere. These may include things you might not think are important because you may do them without much thought. Given that, please give me a description of some things you do on a day-to-day basis to keep your relationship running smoothly.

(Probe: What might you do before going to work?)

(Probe: What might you do during the work day?)

(Probe: What might you do in the evening?)

2 (a). How does your spouse respond to these actions?

2 (b). How are they helpful?

3. In the next question I do not want to know the specific incident, just your actions surrounding it.

At one time or another, most married couples experience some hard times because of one or both spouse's actions. When you have engaged disappointing/hurtful/upsetting actions, what do you do to restore the quality of the marital relationship? Please describe actions you use to restore the positive atmosphere.

(Probe: What do you do to get things back on track?)

3 (a). How does your spouse respond to these actions?

3 (b). Does your spouse recognize what you are doing?

4. What actions have you used to get the relationship on track, but found to be unsuccessful?

LET'S DISCUSS YOUR SPOUSE'S ACTIONS FOR A MOMENT.

5. What does your partner do when they notice things are not going well in your marriage?

(Probe: What do they do to get things back on track?)

5 (a). What actions have they tried to get the relationship on track, but found to be unsuccessful?

WE'LL DISCUSS HOUSEHOLD ACTIVITIES NOW.

6. Now that we have discussed your personal relationship, I would like to discuss what activities you do on a daily basis to keep the household running smoothly, and thereby maintain positive feelings of support.

These may include some routine actions that you are not aware of. Please describe household tasks you perform on a daily basis to maintain positive feelings with each other.

(Probe: What household tasks do you perform before work?)

(Probe: What household tasks might you perform while you are at work, (i.e., going to the bank, making children's Doctor's appointments)

(Probe: What might you do in the evening (i.e., cooking, shopping, car pooling)

QUESTIONS FOR THE COUPLE INTERVIEW

1. You two have been together for a number of years, what is it about your marriage that you think has led to its stability over time -- What makes it work?

2. If a young couple, just embarking on a dual-career marriage, were to ask you for advice, what would you tell them are three basic characteristics of a long-term satisfying relationship?

## Appendix C

### VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

#### Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects

Title of Project: The Dual-Career Family Project

Principal Investigator: Virginia Jones

#### PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a study of how dual-career couples manage work and family stress and also maintain feelings of satisfaction in their marital relationships. This project will include 15 African Americans.

#### PROCEDURES

You are being asked to participate in two interviews in which you will be asked a series of questions about work and family stress and how you and your partner deal with stressful circumstances. You will also be asked questions about the things you do to keep your marriage running smoothly...things you do to maintain feelings of satisfaction in your marriage.

In the first interview I will talk with you alone for sixty to ninety minutes. The second interview will include your spouse and will take about one hour. The interviews will be tape recorded and will take place in your home or at any other location convenient to you, your spouse, and the interviewer.

#### RISKS

The risk to you for participating in this research is minimal. The questions for this project were written so that they should not cause you any undue discomfort or distress.

#### BENEFITS OF THIS PROJECT

Findings from this research are intended to help dual-career families as well as policy makers, employers, educators, and counselors better understand the difficulties as well as the rewards of combining work and family life. Other than the benefit of knowing that this research will provide information valuable to other dual-career couples, no other promise or guarantee is being made to encourage you to take part in this research. Please know that your participation is highly valued and much appreciated.

#### EXTENT OF ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All individuals and couples who participate in this study are assured that all information gathered will be kept strictly confidential. When not being transcribed, all tapes of interviews will be kept locked in a file cabinet. To protect your privacy, all identifying information will be removed and code numbers or pseudonyms will be substituted for real names during transcribing.

Only the principal investigator, her faculty advisor, and the transcriber will have access to the tapes and transcriptions. All tapes will be erased after the research is completed. At no time will your name be identified with this research.

**COMPENSATION**

You will not be compensated in money or in any other goods or currency for participating in this project. Your willingness to participate in this study is much appreciated and thanks are extended for your efforts on behalf of this project.

**FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW**

You are free to withdraw from this project at any time without penalty.

**APPROVAL OF RESEARCH**

This research has been approved as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and by the Department of Family and Child Development.

**SUBJECT'S RESPONSIBILITIES**

You are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study by answering the interview questions.

**SUBJECT'S PERMISSION**

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participating in this project.

I understand that if I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the guidelines set by the researcher.

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Signature

---

Date

Should I have any questions about this project or how it is being conducted, I may contact:

Virginia M. Jones, Project Investigator, at 540-552-3926;

Gloria W. Bird, Faculty Advisor, at 540-231-4791;

Tom Hurd, Chair, Institutional Review Board; Research Division, at 540-231-9359

## Appendix D

Dear Participant,

I wanted to thank you for participating in my project looking at the experiences of Dual-Career African-American couples. I am happy to inform you that my findings thus far have been quite interesting. I am now in the final stages of the project and need about ten additional minutes of your time.

I have enclosed a portion of the Results section, (**ROUGH DRAFT**), of the project which contains three questions. Attached to each question, is a form with two open-ended questions, each of which I would like you to answer. Following each question, I have highlighted your personal response that contributed to the discovery of certain categories and themes. To ensure your anonymity, I have assigned you the names of (**PSEUDONYMS INSERTED**). To reduce your reading time, I have highlighted only your “fictional names” which precedes your responses given during our interview conversation.

Once you have completed the questions, please place the entire document -- Research Question Sheet and the attached Participants’ Responses -- in the enclosed self addressed envelope, and drop it in the mail. Since I am preparing to defend my dissertation soon, I’d like to include your additional comments, and as such, I must have them by **March 10, 1998**. This additional help would be greatly appreciated.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me collect at 540-552-3926.

Cordially.

Virginia M. Jones

## **Virginia Jones**

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409 Floyd Street, Blacksburg, Virginia 24060  
552-3926

Phone: 703-

### **Education:**

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| Ph. D Family Studies, Virginia Tech                              | May, 1998  |
| M.A. Counseling, Virginia Tech                                   | May, 1995  |
| M.A. Curriculum Design and Supervision, University of Pittsburgh | June, 1985 |
| B.A. Liberal Arts, Rhode Island College                          | June, 1979 |

### **Recent Work Experience:**

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| Training Representative, Radford Army Ammunition Plant, Radford, Virginia | 11/87 - 11/93 |
| Teacher, Christian Growth Academy, Christiansburg, Virginia               | 9/84 - 8/86   |
| Proofreader, US Steel Corporation, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania               | 11/79 - 2/84  |

### **Skills:**

|                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Counseling:                      | Completed Practicum at Virginia Tech Counseling Center   |
| Teaching:                        | Instructed classes: EPA and OSHA, Quality Awareness, Supervisory Skills, Sexual Harassment, and Proactive Safety Meetings  |
| Administrative:                  | Managed Quality Awareness Training Program for 4700 employees; Trained 75 wage and salary personnel to be instructors; Scheduled plant population and instructors for attendance; Organized management presentations |
| Leadership:                      | Selected for executive management presentations on Quality Education Course; Served as Lead Trainer for 32-hour Clerical Course; Selected to attend Training Workshop on Sexual Harassment in Wilmington, DE         |
| Technical:<br>quality<br>Writing | Co-authored maintenance manual; developed training modules: awareness, communication, and problem solving strategies   |

**HONORS:**

Commonwealth Fellow Recipient  
University Scholar - University of Pittsburgh  
Dean's List - Rhode Island College