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Qualitative analysis of couple decision-making

Tara Danielle Dekkers
Iowa State University

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Qualitative analysis of couple decision-making

by

Tara D. Dekkers

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Human Development and Family Studies

Program of Study Committee:
Megan J. Murphy, Major Professor
Mary Jane Brotherson
Sedahlia J. Crase
Jennifer Margrett
Janet Nieuwsma Melby

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

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Abstract

Couple decision-making is a complex process which includes a variety of factors. Little research has been done that considers reflections after a decision has been made. The ways that couples make decisions varies but there are a number of underlying issues that are considered when making a family or couple decision. This qualitative study was a feminist grounded theory study in which the decision-making practices of nine couples were explored. These nine couples were interviewed together and separately about their decision-making practices. Themes indicate that outside influences such as one's faith, family, and friends affect most aspects of decision-making. An overarching theme that emerged was that couples tend to think about what was best for the family when making decisions. Power strategies, perspectives, and personal beliefs also emerged and were explored as part of the decision-making process. Reflections on satisfaction and discontentment of how decisions were made with one's spouse were explored. Implications for practitioners were made suggesting that family background, faith, power strategies, and personal beliefs and ideals be explored. Recommendations for future research were made.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Couples make many decisions with each other on a regular basis. Few studies have been conducted in terms of couple decision-making. Even fewer studies are of a qualitative nature. Studies on decision-making and family power issues have been strongly criticized. The first criticism is that the measurement of decision-making is on the outcome or final say. This is one way to measure decision-making power, however it avoids examining the process (Becker, Fonseca-Becker, & Schenck-Yglesias, 2006) and affect (Ting-Toomey, 1984) which may be as or more important than the final outcome. The second major criticism is that the focus is on just one person's point of view. In essence, there may be another perspective that is left out. Furthermore, one person's perspective may not be an entirely accurate representation of reality. This relates to the third major criticism which is that self-report measures are heavily relied upon (Gray-Little, Baucom, & Hamby, 1996; Kingsbury & Scanzoni, 1989). A fourth criticism of studying decision-making among couples is that decision-making has been elusive and has had theoretical and definitional inconsistencies (Becker et al., 2006; Marks, Huston, Johnson, & MacDermid, 2001). Finally, there has been a failure of many studies involving decision-making have failed to consider the importance of the level of the decision being made to the individual (Szinovacz, 1979; Ting-Toomey, 1984).

An additional problem in measuring couple decision-making is that decision-making can be a complex process that may not always be easily and accurately captured in quantitative measures. Qualitative research would be particularly helpful in studying decision-making because decision-making has been shown to be complicated and a difficult

concept to fully explain and comprehend (Russo, 1988). Very few qualitative studies have been conducted that examined what decision-making means to couples. Many studies have been conducted quantitatively that tried to explain the relationship of decision-making to relationship satisfaction and quality yet the explanations given are from the perspective of the researcher rather than the respondents being researched.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Blood and Wolfe (1960) were among the first to examine decision-making influence in couples. Their influential study provided support for resource theory—that the most powerful spouse or the spouse with the most resources has the most decision-making power within families. Couples who bring in relatively equal amounts of income or resources have been found to have more equity within decision-making (Godwin & Scanzoni, 1989). Kingsbury and Scanzoni (1989), however, suggested that resources alone cannot predict overall power within dyadic relationships.

In more recent years a number of authors have examined decision-making between couples. Some of these studies were conducted with married and cohabiting couples (Antonides & Kroft, 2005; Bartley, Blanton, & Gilliard, 2005; Blair 1993; Gager & Sanchez, 2003; Marks et al., 2001; Mickelson, Claffey, & Williams, 2006) others have considered engaged (Burgoyne, Clarke, Reibstein, & Edmunds, 2006) or newly married couples (Pittman, Kerpelman, & Solheim, 2001; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006) and child-free couples (Ting-Toomey, 1984). Still others have considered couples at various transitions in the life cycle such as couples in the transition to parenthood (Grote & Clark, 2001), first married and remarried couples (Allen, Baucom, Burnett, Epstein, & Rankin-Esquer, 2001; Orleans et al., 1989), retired couples (Kulik, 2001), or older couples (Mackey, Diemer, & O'Brien, 2004). Other demographics have also been considered in relation to decision-making such as dual-earners (Antonides & Kroft, 2005; Bartley et al., 2005; Kingsbury & Scanzoni, 1989; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006;) and single earners (Godwin & Scanzoni, 1989).

The majority of the research devoted to decision-making among couples has been in quantitative terms while only a handful of studies have been conducted from a qualitative perspective. The issue of decision-making, despite being regularly studied, is a phenomenon that changes over the course of time and is difficult to fully understand through quantitative means. The present study will examine the process of decision-making from a qualitative perspective. The following is a review of the literature and unless I stated otherwise, the cited studies were quantitative studies.

Decision-making

Lack of Theoretical/Definitional Consensus

Decision-making within couple relationships has long been a topic that has been difficult to grasp and to fully understand. In general there has been a lack of consensus as to the actual definition of decision-making. Theoretically speaking, decision-making has been measured in terms of communication (Godwin & Scanzoni, 1989; Mackey et al., 2004), power (Godwin & Scanzoni, 1989), role balance (Marks et al., 2001), level of influence (Van Willigen & Drentea, 2001), and parenting (Danes, Oswald, & DeEsnaola, 1998). However, the majority of studies on decision-making in relationships have considered who has the final say in decision-making (Allen et al., 2001; Bartley et al., 2005; Danes et al., 1998; Dyck & Daly, 2006; Godwin & Scanzoni, 1989; Kulik, 2001; Lundgren, Jergens, & Gibson, 1982; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006; Russo, 1988). In most cases whoever had the final say in decisions or had the ability to make a decision without consulting one's partner or had the freedom to make a decision without repercussions from another person is thought to have more power. Van Willigen and Drentea (2001) considered decision-making as who had the most influence with the most important decisions. Russo (1988) suggested that measuring

decision-making and power in a way that only measures who had the final say does not seem to be useful or an appropriate way to measure these constructs. He also suggested that decision-making as measured by who has the final say in decisions does not always help in predicting relationship satisfaction (Russo, 1988). Although some studies have used definitions of what decision-making was, other studies included measures such as the Marital Decision-making Scale (MDMS; Beach & Tesser, 1993) which considers the degree of agreement of the couple, the primary decision-maker, the importance of the decision being made, and the importance to the individual participating in the decision (Beach & Tesser, 1993; Skukla, 1987).

Still other studies have examined decision-making as a way to measure for egalitarian relationships (Kulik, 2001). When one partner has more say than another over family and household decisions, the relationship is not defined as an egalitarian relationship (Godwin & Scanzoni, 1989; Marks et al., 2001; Webster, 2000). Another measure used to assess family decision-making was developed by Hortacsu (2000). This measure considered four areas of decision-making, including networking issues, wife issues, husband issues, and housekeeping. The final measurement was whether or not the wife or husband had the final say in these particular areas. Houlihan, Jackson, and Rogers (2001) measured decision-making by considering how couples made decisions involving low, medium, and high levels of difficulty.

Beach and Tesser (1993) investigated issues of power and marital satisfaction within the framework of the self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) model (Tesser, 1988). The model includes issues regarding which partner should be expected to exercise power in various situations, how easily the couple should reach agreement about decision-making, and the

relationship between less than optimal decision-making arrangements on marital satisfaction. The assumption was that individuals wanted to maintain positive self-evaluations. The findings suggested that when agreement with a spouse's decision could result in benefits, the agreement with the spouse's decision-making was high and the opposite was true when there were perceived threats to self-evaluation (Beach & Tesser, 1993). This model gave partial explanation for consensus and agreement among couples in intimate relationships. Furthermore, it supported the reasons that couples usually try to make decisions that increase the positive self-evaluation of both individuals over making decisions that only bolsters one person's positive self-evaluation (Beach & Tesser, 1993).

Many quantitative studies have only measured how decision-making occurred within a dyad. However it was often the case that a number of influential factors were pushing individuals to make the decisions that they did. Quantitative measures have not considered other influences on the decision-making processes. For example, some decisions made might be influenced by family influences, past experiences, word of mouth, media associations, or a number of other factors (Bonds-Raacke, 2006). In this study, I asked the couples to express important values in their decision-making rather than use my own or others' definitions of decision-making. In this way, they determined what decision-making looked and felt like in their unique situations.

Power/Influence and Decision-making

Power has been tied to decision-making (Frisco & Williams, 2003) which in turn has been related to relationship satisfaction. Decision-making has often been used as a measure of power within a relationship (Kulik, 2001; Wesson, 1995) as well as equity (Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006). Not only were there various definitions and measurements of

decision-making, there were also a number of ways that power was defined in previous studies. Power as defined by Rollins and Bahr (1976) was the “potential or actual modification of one’s behavior by another” (p. 620). Decision-making has also been viewed as an outcome variable of power and was defined by Mirowsky (1985) as “the balance of influence between husband and wife in the major decisions” (p. 558). This power could be one gesture or it could be the use of multiple tactics to influence another person. Therefore marital power may best be thought of as the ability of one spouse to influence the behavior of the other. In general, most studies suggested that more equal levels of power led to more equal decision-making and higher marital satisfaction (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Coltrane, 1996b; Weigel, Bennett, & Ballard-Reisch, 2006).

In the context of decision-making, one person’s attempt to get the partner to agree with a decision or outcome was a display of power (Beach & Tesser, 1993). Another way to examine power was to say that one did not need to influence the partner directly but may influence another person by what was not said or what was kept silent. If one person had to influence the other, then there may not be power after all. This form of influence or power is referred to as hidden power (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Kompter, 1989; Zip, Prohaska, & Bemiller, 2004). Ball, Cowen, and Cowen (1995), in a qualitative analysis of decision-making and power, found that when discussing issues surrounding power, couples rarely used the word power and instead talked about influence, taking over, control, and other descriptors of power. Every couple must make rules that manage the decisions made within relationships. The manner in which couples made decisions was a way that power was distributed and could influence a number of behaviors which occurred within partner interactions (Beach & Tesser, 1993). In the current study, I examined ways that partners

influenced one another and held power over one another even if the exact phrases used did not include the word “power.”

Understanding power differences between genders was one way to examine relationship dynamics (Wesson, 1995). The ways that individuals come to understand what power is can vary in a way related to gender. Miller and Cummins (1992), in their study on the ways that women defined and experienced power, found that the perception that women held of power is different than how women view society’s definition of power. Miller and Cummins (1995) asked women about feeling powerful as well as how they viewed society’s definition of power. In general these women reported that their perception of power was tied to having personal authority and having independence and control over one’s self. The women generally viewed society and men to have similar definitions of power. The general consensus was that power was defined in society and by men as having control over others and that society gave power to women only in the roles of reproduction and family life. However the women also reported that these roles did not make them feel powerful. Essentially the power that these women perceived as having from society was invalidated in their inexperience of feeling power in their roles (Miller & Cummins, 1992). Many women have said that in order for them to have power and to be taken seriously, they feel the need to know more than men as well as outwit and outperform men. It was often the case that the men were assumed to have more competence than women even when women actually knew more about a topic than their male counterparts (Carli, 1999).

In the past, three main theories have attempted to explain power within marital couples. The first has been resource theory as previously mentioned (Blood & Wolfe, 1960). Other theories include gender ideology which takes culture, beliefs, and social context into

consideration in the power that spouses maintain or afford to one another. A third perspective is the least interested partner theory which suggests that persons who have the least invested essentially have more power because they have less to lose if the relationship ends (Webster, 2000).

Zvonkovic and colleagues (1994) considered how men and women attempted to influence one another. They considered direct and indirect attempts of influence and found that in general, men and women used similar means to influence each other. These direct influence strategies could include bargaining or offering a reward in exchange for compliance whereas the indirect influence strategies could include using emotions or others' opinions to persuade the other to comply. Another finding that came out of this was that traditional spouses tended to be more direct than non-traditional spouses in their influence attempts (Zvonkovic, Schmeige, & Hall, 1994). In general, men appeared to be dominant in family decision-making power (Zvonkovic et al., 1996).

Other authors have found that some ways that couples attempted to control each other was in the use of silence or by simply ignoring or not responding to their partner (Godwin & Scanzoni, 1989; Komter, 1989). Godwin and Scanzoni's (1989) study supported this idea; they examined ways couples attempted to influence each other and found that couples who did not try to use coercion and manipulation strategies had more non-traditional or egalitarian relationships. In general these couples were more committed to their relationship (Godwin & Scanzoni, 1989).

Aida and Falbo (1991) investigated influence strategies used by couples in attempts to exert power or convince the spouse of some matter. They found that egalitarian couples used fewer power strategies to attempt to get their way. The use of indirect strategies to try to get

one's way led to decreased relationship satisfaction and was related to traditional marriage relationships (1991). They also found that in traditional marriages in which women were viewed as being the weaker partner, fewer overt power tactics were used by the women than the men who were assumed to have more power. These women tended to use more subtle power techniques to gain power. These tactics included manipulation, hinting, becoming overly emotional, and acting helpless. More powerful partners on the other hand used more coercive and direct means of employing their power such as complaining, criticizing, and ignoring (Aida & Falbo, 1991).

Carli (1999) suggested three types of power that were taken from French and Raven (1959), the first of which was "legitimate power" which is gained because of one's status or position. Next was expert power, which was power due to a perceived expertise in a matter. The third type of power was referent power, which was power based within the relationship and given to someone based on a skill or trait he/she possessed (French & Raven, 1959). In general, women who displayed legitimate or expert power typically were less able to influence others. Women who were direct, displayed competence, and showed authority were not as able as men to influence others. Although men did have success in using these influence tactics, women who used these same strategies did not have success. Women therefore have been found to be more effective with referent power. According to Carli (1999), referent power was a form of power that was more effective with other women. It was suggested by Carli (1999) that women had higher levels of power when they use referent forms of power. That is, women who were more subtle and indirect, agreeable, social, and warm actually influenced others more than women who used direct strategies (Carli, 1999).

Level of influence and persuasion has been shown to differ based on both gender and on communication style. Men were most often more influential than women and tended to win more arguments than women (Thompson & Walker, 1989). However, this difference in gender power differences could depend on a number of factors. First, when women attempted to use dominant forms of communication they tended to be less influential than men who used the same communication patterns and styles. Second, men were less influential in domains that are traditionally viewed as feminine. That is, men who were less direct, warm, and did not display high levels of self-interest are not as influential as men who do not display these characteristics and instead show more dominant forms of communication. Third, a single man was not as influential in groups with more than one woman. Finally, although men in general were found to be more influential than women, men resisted the influence of women more than women resisted influence from other women; this was especially true when women displayed more competence in their communication. In addition, women who displayed communality and warmth as opposed to self-interest and coldness were more likely to be influential than women who did not display these characteristics (Carli, 2001).

Other studies have been conducted that examined gender differences in communication. Hawkins and Power (1999) found a gender difference in group discussions and in the questions that individuals asked when making a decision. They considered five different types of questions: information, opinion, probing, paraphrasing, and confrontation questions. They discovered that men and women who were attempting to make a group decision both ask a similar number of questions of the group but that women ask significantly more probing questions than men (Hawkins & Power, 1999).

In addition to gender differences regarding decision-making in communication patterns of influence within couple relationship, perspectives of those on the outside such as children, relatives, or friends also appear to influence decision-making. Schonpflug (1999) conducted a study on adolescents who were asked to rate the decision-making power of their parents. The adolescents afforded the greatest levels of decision-making power to the fathers, followed by the mothers, and then the children. The higher the level of power that the adolescent gave to the father, the higher the individual perceived levels of marital satisfaction to be between his or her parents (Schonpflug, 1999).

An Israeli study examined power distances in order to assess for equity within families. Power distance referred to the degree of inequity people experience in power and in decision-making. In general individualistic cultures tended to value obedience and see some individuals as entitled to hold authority over others. These cultures also tended to have more power distances between husbands and wives and between parents and children meaning that men held more authority over women. However the opposite was true of collectivist cultures in which low power distance is strived for in the attempt to decrease social inequity. A decision made by one person that influences others is thought to be a source of inequity. Teenagers in Israel were found to be more influential in family purchase decision-making than teenagers in the United States (Sholam & Dalakas, 2003). In relation to relationship satisfaction and power, an early study which was conducted by Kolb and Straus (1978) determined that the larger the power difference between parents and children, the more satisfied parents were in their marital relationships; whereas the more power children had, the less satisfied the parents were in their marriages. The measure of decision-making was determined by how many direct suggestions were made that actually influenced a change in

the other person's behavior (Kolb & Straus, 1978). Parents and children often form coalitions in order to influence the other parent (Scanzoni & Szinovacz, 1980).

Part of having power includes the perspectives others have regarding the power that a person has. Another part of power includes holding power over others. A study was conducted on the level of risk individuals in power would be willing to take (Maner, Gailliot, Butz, & Peruche, 2007). Researchers concluded that individuals who desired a good deal of power were more likely to be conservative in their decision-making; however, this was only the case when the individual perceived a potential loss of power. When people were told that their power would not be diminished or when it was obvious that power would not be diminished due to maintaining the status quo, they made more aggressive and riskier decisions (Maner et al., 2007).

Rather than assuming that individuals were aware of the strategies used to influence another, asked individuals to explain how they tried to make changes in their relationships with concrete examples (Komter, 1989). Women reported caution when bringing up points of change in the relationship, and when women did bring up an issue they did so indirectly. This was reported to be a more effective strategy used by women. Men reported being reasonable and ignoring topics that they did not wish to discuss. The reason for this was to assess the hidden power of which individuals were unaware (Komter, 1989).

Whether or not a person is completely aware of the power he/she possesses, there is usually some perspective of the role one has in relationships. In an earlier study by Rollins and Bahr (1976) it was determined that power cannot be separated from one's perception of it. In order for one person to have power, there must be a level of perception of having that power and that level of perception may be different for the person with power and the person

without it. It has been suggested that actual or perceived power differences between genders began and continue due to social and historical structures (Wesson, 1995). Socialization is an example of how a woman might perceive the power of her husband differently than her husband perceives it. Although some studies examine power in relationships, or what the study defines as power, what is actually assessed is a concept that is not considered to be power by those being researched (Ball et al., 1995). Therefore men and women may need to define what power is for themselves before researchers proceed with measuring power. I allowed partners to define decision-making together and asked them to talk individually with me about the influence they had on their partner and the influence their partner had on them.

Roles in Decision-making

In many cases husbands were expected to be the main breadwinner and the leader of the family. A deviation from thinking about male headship often goes against societal expectations and could reflect poorly on the family (Webster, 2000; Zvonkovic et al., 1996). In previous decades, husbands in an egalitarian family may have been portrayed as incompetent to lead their family or may be viewed as being poor at handling conflict (Kolb & Straus, 1978). Because husbands typically earn more than wives, women tend to offer more in terms of domestic labor to balance out her role even if she works just as many hours in paid labor (Marks et al., 2001).

Decision-making has been investigated in terms of perceptions and expectations of roles. Women who were less traditional and expected equity in spousal relationships tended to perceive more equity in terms of decision-making when she was employed outside the home and when she spent less time doing household labor and childcare than traditional women. Non-traditional men likewise felt more balanced when their expectation was

fulfilled. These non-traditional men were more satisfied with their relationship when they spent more time in household labor and with their families. In addition, when expectations and actual contributions of non-traditional spouses matched, the decision-making was more equitable (Marks et al., 2001). As will be discussed in another section, it is important for spouses' gender ideologies to match if satisfaction and equity are going to become more of a reality (Marks et al., 2001).

Roles and making decisions are a regular part of family dynamics. Orleans, Palisi, and Cadell (1989) examined married couples who were a part of stepfamilies; in particular they focused on stepfathers. They found that stepfathers were most happy with their marriage if they perceived themselves as having sizeable contributions to decisions-making. Another noteworthy part of this study was that husbands who agreed with their wives' decisions reported feeling like they made contributions to the decisions. Collaboration and consensus with decision-making seemed to be the most important factors for stepfathers' happiness within the marital relationship rather than carrying out the decision or having a say in the process (Orleans et al., 1989).

Some studies have considered different demographics in relation to marital decision-making. Wesson (1995) discovered that the more education the wife had, the lower her decision-making power appeared to be. The explanation given for this is that women who work outside the home give up the decision-making power within the home (traditionally where a woman's power was located). Because a working woman gives up some of her household responsibilities, she may be losing decision-making power within the home and family. Authors in another study conducted in Turkey suggested that men with higher education appeared to have lower levels of perceived power (Schonpflug, 1999).

Married versus remarried couples were found to have similar decision-making power (Allen et al., 2001). Clarke (2005), however, determined that second marriages provided more equity than first marriages. Other studies have determined that dual-earners and those with more education and therefore higher wealth generally had more equity in decision-making power (Becker et al., 2006). Perhaps more education made people more aware of their power which made their relationships more equitable or gave them the skills required for collaboration and consensus.

Still other studies have focused on pre-retired and retired individuals and found that retired individuals are more content than pre-retired individuals in how power was divided as expressed through decision-making. From a resource theory perspective, after retirement a man's resources diminish due to a lack of earned income, whereas a woman's resources increase due to social resources gained. Therefore the couples gain more equity as well as have more time to communicate with one another. Perhaps there is more time to communicate which then leads to gains in equity. Kulik (2001) also discovered that there was greater role flexibility in the division of household labor (especially in regard to traditional feminine tasks) and greater flexibility in who made final decisions after retirement (Kulik, 2001). It could be that more time leads to better balance of roles and an increased awareness of relationship inequities.

Ting-Toomey (1984) reported some interesting findings regarding affect and decision-making. She found that when men perceived their wives as having more decision-making power than they themselves had, relationship satisfaction, the importance of the decision, and the satisfaction with the decision made all decreased. Likewise when women perceived themselves as having more decision-making power than their husbands had,

satisfaction with the decision and relationship satisfaction both decreased (Ting-Toomey, 1984). It could be that the lack of equity led to dissatisfaction with the relationship or the decision made. The lack of satisfaction may also be due to a tension between how culture suggests they should be versus the way people actually are in their personal lives.

Power differences may be maintained due to a lack of communication about power or due to a lack of communication in general. Forte (1998) explained that role-taking theory suggests that society and power arrangements influence communication processes among individuals. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) concur that mutuality in trust, respect, and understanding were key factors in having successful communication. Likewise, communication appeared to be a key factor in maintaining and/or working toward equitable relationships (Van Willigen & Drentea, 2001). Furthermore, communication about equity may need to continue because life-cycle changes bring new responsibilities and needs (Van Willigen & Drentea, 2001).

Interpersonal processes also seem to be reflective of the ways couples develop, negotiate, and renegotiate gender roles (Zvonkovic et al., 1996). Consensus on gender roles is related to marital satisfaction (Zvonkovic et al., 1996). Dyadic negotiation and open communication is essential in building equitable relationships and emotional intimacy (Ting-Toomey, 1984), which makes sense because in some ways it may be easier to maintain traditional gender roles than to negotiate and maintain equitable roles which may be more ambiguous.

Division of household labor and decision-making. Decision-making power has also measured by examining who does what in terms of household labor. Household labor involves a number of areas including finances, cleaning, cooking, shopping, children, and

maintenance/repairs. Therefore, family decision-making involves household labor. Studies suggest that men generally have more decision-making power in finances, major purchases, socialization of children (Becker et al., 2006; Cowan & Cowan, 1988), and work outside the home; women generally have more decision-making power when it comes to social and religious activities (Cowan & Cowan, 1988), cooking, and childcare (Becker et al., 2006).

Women, even though they may work as many hours at a paid job, still come home and put in another shift at home in unpaid labor which Hochschild (1989) termed the “second shift.” Women are working more in paid labor than in previous decades yet the division of labor has not changed (Kluwer et al., 1996). In most situations the woman contributes significantly more to household labor than the man (Becker et al., 2006; Felmler, 1994; Hochschild, 1989; Kluwer, Heesink, & Van De Vliert, 1996; Komter, 1989; Mickelson et al., 2006). Kluwer and colleagues reported that wives were less content with the division of labor the less their husbands contributed. In general, men and women desired for the man to spend less time in paid work and that working overtime created more conflict (Kluwer et al., 1996).

Sometimes it appears as though women justify this imbalance or do not see the division as imbalanced. Spouses may not be monitoring daily contributions as measured in one study through 10-week periods in which partners kept daily logs of their personal contributions to the home (Pittman et al., 2001). Among couples who report having egalitarian relationships, only about half truly did (Blaisure & Allen, 1995; Webster, 2000). Couples with unequal division of labor often viewed roles as being fair (Felmler, 1994; Webster, 2000; Zuo & Bian, 2001). Perceived distribution of labor and power may not therefore be great predictors of perceived equity and fairness (Felmler, 1994). When couples admitted to having unbalanced power in relationships, it was most often that the man had

more power (Felmlee, 1994). The social expectation was that women would do more household labor. Therefore men who minimally contributed to household labor may be viewed more positively than men who did not contribute at all. This may maintain the view of fairness despite the unequal division of labor. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983), when examining marital satisfaction, determined that satisfaction with the ways couples divide household labor rather than equity in the division of household labor influences marital quality (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983).

Equity in the division of labor appeared to influence marital quality as well as other relationship qualities. Mickelson and colleagues (2006), for example, found that women have higher marital satisfaction when they felt more supported and appreciated for their contributions to the home and the family regardless of the degree of imbalance in the division of labor was (Mickelson et al., 2006; Van Willigen & Drentea, 2001). Lundgren and colleagues (1982) conducted a similar study in which they investigated perceived responses of the spouse in relation to decision-making power. Wives who viewed their relationships as having more equitable decision-making power perceived their husbands as having more favorable responses, whereas husband-dominated decision-making power was associated with wives' perceptions of negative evaluations of their husbands.

Becker and colleagues (2006) found some discrepancies between couples as to who makes the final decisions regarding household labor. When asked who has the final say in household decisions, women tended to underreport their power when compared with their husbands. This may point to societal expectations and the perception of men being the head of the home. Women who have more power than their husbands may be seen as out of place. Couples tended to disagree around half of the time on who made the final decision regarding

household decisions (Becker et al., 2006). Recall may be difficult and perhaps decisions are not consistently made by just one partner and the final decisions may be a shared endeavor. In general, men tended to have more power in decision-making. Additionally, couples tended to report that men were less emotionally involved, giving them more power. Being less emotionally involved seemed to coincide with having more decision-making power (Felmlee, 1994).

Other studies have considered specific areas of household labor and how individuals make decisions about those particular areas. An example of this is Meier and colleagues (1999) who examined decision-making involving investment decisions with married couples. They found that in general, husbands were the ones who made the final decisions involving where and how to invest money. The exception was only when the wife had more relative expertise regarding investing (Meier et al., 1999). Likewise, Wilkie, Ferree, and Ratcliff (1998) determined that husbands not only did less in terms of household labor but also had more power to set the agenda for what he and his spouse do in terms of household labor. It is most often the husbands' personal preference rather than the wives' that determines how household labor was divided (Wilkie et al., 1998).

Kluwer (1998) conducted a study in which couples were given a scenario and asked to make a decision about whether or not the couple in the scenario should maintain the status quo or stand up against it in favor of an alternative role. She found that most often the status quo was upheld in these scenarios. Furthermore, this finding was tied to the thought that individuals who want to make a change against the status quo needed to have cooperation from their partner in order to do so. If cooperation was not reached the status quo most often was retained. The finding also suggests that men have more power because the status quo is

most often on their side thereby maintaining the advantages that men have over women (Kluwer, 1998; Komter, 1989). Komter (1989) asserted that husbands and wives unconsciously reinforce the subtleties of the ways couples accept traditional gender roles and identities and these reinforcements portrayed a sense of what was deemed as right or normal. It is through the invisibility of the power that the inequity remained and is maintained (Komter, 1989).

Zip, Prohaska, and Bemiller (2004) confirmed hidden power. They interviewed couples separately about topics of politics and household responsibilities. While one spouse was interviewed, the other spouse observed without the knowledge of the spouse. Next, the observing spouse was interviewed on the same topics. Overall, women were found to change her responses to match their husbands' more than the husbands' responses changed to match the wives' and thus there appeared to be more spousal agreement when men were interviewed first. This finding confirmed hidden power by suggesting that husbands may unknowingly shape their wives' perspectives. Women's opinions changed to match their husbands even when the woman had more resources, income, or education than their husbands (Zip et al., 2004).

There are a number of theories that attempted to explain how the division of labor was determined. Parkman (2004) made the suggestion that the three theories (time availability, exchange theory, and gender ideology) are complimentary theories that together help to explain division of labor decisions. Exchange or resource theory has been explained above. Time availability theory posits that the person with more time contributes more to other labor that needs to be done. Gender role theory has been used in a number of studies (Kluwer, Heesink, Van De Vliert, 1997; Wilkie et al., 1998) and states that interpersonal

interaction is how gender roles are produced and maintained in everyday life (Parkman, 2004; Thompson & Walker, 1995).

Some authors have attempted to determine how couples come to determine who makes decisions about the family and household. Grote and Clark (2001) considered justice norms for ways in which couples determined decision-making in terms of the division of household labor. According to Grote and Clark (2001), there seems to be a set of norms that determine the division of labor and decision-making power. The first norm was the communal norm which suggests that the partner pays attention to the needs of his/her spouse in determining what is done. Second was the exchange norm which suggests that partners attempt to do a comparable or equal amount of household labor. The third norm was the equality standard which suggests that spouses share tasks equally (Grote & Clark, 2001).

Decision-making and Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship Satisfaction

Decision-making power appears to have influences on marital quality and relationship satisfaction. How decisions are made is often viewed as a measure of equity within relationships and equity within relationship is often associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Coltrane, 1996a; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006; Rosenblueth, Steil, & Whitcomb, 1998; Thompson & Walker, 1989; Zvonkovic et al., 1996). Findings are somewhat mixed as to which couples are most satisfied with their relationships based on who has more decision-making power. In summarizing studies conducted on power within marriages, Gray-Little et al. (1996) concluded that couples had lower marital satisfaction in marriages that were wife-dominated. Many studies suggest that couples in which husbands are dominant in decision-making power are more satisfied in their relationships (Felmlee,

1994; Kolb & Straus, 1978; Ting-Toomey, 1984). This is counter to Russo's (1988) findings that wife-dominant couples are as satisfied in their relationships as husband-dominant relationships.

New studies suggested that higher levels of relationship satisfaction were found in couples with egalitarian decision-making marriages (Aida & Falbo, 1991; Houlihan et al., 2001; Lundgren et al., 1982; Skudla & Kapoor, 1990); these are couples who in general reflect equality when making decisions and feel more supported and supportive of one another (Van Willigen & Drentea, 2001). In addition, egalitarian couples may hold their partners in higher esteem and contribute to more positive feelings toward one's spouse (Lundgren et al., 1982). Perhaps equity and fairness in decision-making were not a determining factor in relationship satisfaction. Rather, it could be that the processes involved in decision-making and the ways that partners feel and influence each other have more to do with relationship satisfaction. This study examined the thoughts and reflections tied to the decision-making process as well as thoughts and reflections post decision-making.

Among blue-collar subjects, Szinovacz (1979) suggested that wife-dominant decision-making led to decreased marital satisfaction whereas white-collar subjects were less satisfied with their relationship when making traditional gender-typed decisions, which included women making feminine decisions while men make traditionally masculine decisions (Szinovacz, 1979).

Gender Ideology

Ideologies occur on a continuum between traditional and egalitarian. A traditional ideology implies that the division of labor is separate and each partner has a set of duties that they are responsible for. The task that each individual is responsible for is based on gender

norms and it is the responsibility of the person in charge of the task to make decisions regarding that task. Traditional decision-making describes relationships when men have increased decision-making power overall (Hochschild, 1989; Scanzoni & Szinovacz, 1980; Van Willigen & Drentea, 2001) and tend to be dominant in the area of decision-making especially in family matters, whereas women typically have more decision-making power only within housekeeping matters (Hortacsu, 2000). In contrast, an egalitarian ideology refers to a partnership in which spouses have similar rights, duties, and responsibilities. One spouse does not dominate over the other in any way based on the grounds of gender norms. In general, decision-making power is equal or balanced in an egalitarian relationship (Meier et al., 1999).

It has been suggested that traditional ideologies are easier to implement because there are set expectations with established and predictable roles. Non-traditional ideologies may create an environment of confusion and uncertainty because the roles may change. Traditional expectations are not enforced and couples may feel resistance from society and perhaps within themselves (Ting-Toomey, 1984). Felmler (1994) suggested that male dominance may be a factor that keeps couples stable. She found that couples in which men were reported to be more dominant had longer-lasting relationships than did relationships that were reported to be female-dominant or equal (Felmler, 1994).

Gender ideology contributes greatly to relationship satisfaction in relation to decision-making and household labor (Blair, 1993; Mickelson, et al., 2006; Thompson & Walker, 1989). Some studies suggest that the attitude or ideology of the wife appears to be the best predictor of the power she has in decision-making. Non-traditional wives have the ability to accept or resist decisions being made. Furthermore, women who are less traditional negotiate

for power whereas traditional women accept the power of the husband. The traditional role or ideology of the wife prevents her from negotiating or changing the relationship to be more egalitarian (Blair, 1993; Gager & Sanchez, 2003; Marks et al., 2001). On the other hand, some studies suggest the opposite—that the male's ideology is most important in determining whether or not a couple maintains an egalitarian relationship. Antill and Cotton (1988), for example, suggested that men's egalitarian ideology is thought to have more of an effect on role-balance and sharing than women's egalitarian ideology (Antill & Cotton, 1988).

Although couples often believe that their gender ideology is equitable, the practice of equitable division of labor and decision-making is not always practiced (Grote & Clark, 2001; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006). There appears to be an increase in couples claiming to have egalitarian partnerships and yet there has not been an increase in joint decision-making. Meier and colleagues (1999), for example, suggested that many couples who are thought to be equal in their decision-making are actually autonomic, which implies that each person makes a decision individually and not collectively as a couple.

Certain changes in a person's position in the life-cycle may change equity in decision-making. There appears to be an increase in gender stereotyped decision-making after the birth of a first child (Allen et al., 2001; Danes et al., 1998; Grote & Clark, 2001; Hochschild, 1989; Kulik, 2001; Orleans et al., 1989). Often more equity is present before children enter into the relationship; therefore it could be that women would be more dissatisfied with the relationship and with the division of household labor after children are born. Hortacsu (2000) found that feelings toward one's spouse did not change negatively after the birth of children even though relationship satisfaction decreased (Hortacsu, 2000). It may be that the birth of children brings changes to the relationship dynamics of the couple

but that the feelings about one's spouse become endearing or positive as one sees how the partner interacts with the child.

Working women are more likely to have a non-traditional gender ideology as are men with working wives (Kingsbury & Scanzoni, 1989). In addition, couples in which both partners work tend to have more equal decision-making than couples in which only one person (usually the man) is employed in paid work (Kingsbury & Scanzoni, 1989). When both partners are employed, couples report that women have more influence and men have less influence in relation to decision-making (Coltrane, 1996b; Hochschild, 1998; Pleck, 1997). Men who hold to traditional attitudes report lower levels of relationship satisfaction when their wives are employed (Wilkie et al., 1998).

Traditional gender ideology can also have harmful relationship effects, perhaps because the traditional ideology can create a place for conflict to arise. Withdrawal from one's partner during conflict has been found to have negative consequences on relationships. Klewer and colleagues (1997) determined that wives who were highly discontent with the division of household labor were more likely to withdraw and not address their negative feelings if they had a traditional gender ideology than if they had a more egalitarian gender ideology (Klewer et al., 1997). Kulik (2001) also found that traditional couples tend to use more direct and indirect power strategies with their spouse in order to get their way when compared with couples in egalitarian marriages. Perhaps non-traditional couples do not tend to use power strategies to influence one another and instead accept the differences or discuss the differences in ways that do not attempt to take power.

Having egalitarian relationships may mean that communication is more open; however, it appears as though there are some difficulties that may need to be overcome as a

result of having an egalitarian relationship. Earlier researchers suggested that spouses who espouse egalitarian attitudes in relation to gender roles may feel more uncertainty and therefore experience more conflict as the result of having ambiguous gender roles that may be constantly subject to change when compared to traditional spouses who know what to expect from their role (Scanzoni, 1978). Conflicts have also been found because of communication difficulties between those with different levels of power. Because traditionalists are less able to take on the perspective of the others, conflicts over different perspectives arise and people lean on stereotypes to guide their decision-making and power (or lack of power) over others (Forte, 1998).

Sometimes stereotypes work well for couples. It may be that discussion of roles and ideologies, including a discussion of stereotypes, before a relationship becomes committed may be helpful. Zvonkovic and colleagues (1996) discovered that some couples discussed their goals, attitudes, and beliefs before being married. Therefore making decisions today was based on the understandings they had agreed upon earlier in the relationship thereby maintaining their initial gender ideology (Zvonkovic et al., 1996).

Previous Qualitative Research

Household Labor, Perceived Fairness, and Resources

Zuo and Bian (2001) conducted a qualitative analysis in urban China, which has a collectivist culture. Maximizing theory was employed in order to gain a variety of perspectives. Maximizing theory involves gathering respondents who are as diverse as possible. They examined the topics of household labor, resources, and perceived fairness with respondents and discovered that even though the division of labor was unbalanced the arrangement was viewed as being fair. Many women expressed some ambivalence about an

egalitarian division of labor and an unwillingness to not do a majority of the household labor (Zuo & Bian, 2001). Results indicated that traditional gender norms are in place in the Chinese couples interviewed even when equity was favored and valued. Men were expected to bring in the majority of the income and were seen as less masculine if they were unable to do so (Zuo & Bian, 2001).

Topics in Decision-making Studies

Household labor. A few years later, Zuo and Bian (2005) conducted another study in China directly relating to family decision-making power. They conducted interviews with each individual separately. They used grounded theory to explore why it appeared that Chinese women had more power than their husbands (Zuo & Bian, 2005). Individuals were asked about their decision-making power in regard to routine and non-routine household responsibilities. Routine responsibilities included tasks such as washing the dishes, doing laundry, cooking, and child care. Non-routine tasks included making household purchases, making repairs, and making outside contacts. The non-routine tasks included mostly tasks outside the home whereas the routine tasks were responsibilities within the home. Couples generally agreed on their own and their partner's decision-making power. When there was a lack of consensus, another interview was conducted to reassess the differences (Zuo & Bian, 2005).

Husbands reported generally performing more non-routine household tasks while women performed more of the routine tasks. Yet it is noted in this study that often the non-routine tasks gave more power by giving resources and buying power to the person who made these choices. These are decisions that involve larger commitment and more money than routine tasks of doing laundry and washing the dishes.

Zuo and Bian (2005) suggested that women are highly active in decision-making processes, have higher levels of veto-power than men, and have more power in relation to making suggestions and finalizing a decision. The authors came to this conclusion even though the couples reported that they preferred making decisions together as a couple. Some couples, however, had different experiences. A few marriages included husbands who did most of the routine household tasks yet had very little decision-making power. However, in general, these families made decisions in a way that served the group best (typical of a collectivist culture) which essentially encouraged joint decision-making in most matters (Zuo & Bian, 2005). In the present study, I examined families in an individualistic culture and attended to how the couples talked about the process of decision-making and their feelings during and after the process of decision-making.

Jobs and relocating. Challiol and Magnonac (2005) studied a specific type of decision-making: deciding whether or not to relocate when one spouse was offered a job elsewhere (Challiol & Mignonac, 2005). The participants were dual-earners gathered through snowball sampling and included a large age range in order to obtain a more diverse set of respondents. Interviews were conducted jointly so as to decrease modest or exaggerated responses from one spouse. The researchers also wanted to conduct joint interviews so as to allow the overall story to be enriched or challenged by the partner. The drawback of this conjoint interview style may have been that consensus may appear too high when the partners simply do not want to disagree in front of a researcher and when they desire social approval (Challiol & Mignonac, 2005).

Decision-making questions included inquiries about what the work situation was like prior to the relocation offer, what the offer entailed, benefits and costs of the offer,

individuals involved in the decision-making process, the conflicts that came up in the decision-making process, and how the couple came to a consensus when disagreements arose. The researchers also considered ways in which the couple interacted: how individuals organized family and career, attitudes about their gender role and role in the family, and how their role in the family has or has not changed over the course of time (Challiol & Mignonac, 2005). Deciding if and how to relocate displayed one example of the complex process of decision-making between couples. Whether or not the family was seen as a main priority in the offer seemed to have a large influence on whether or not a job offer was ultimately accepted. In general, both spouses had to be satisfied with a solution that fit into each person's priorities. Compromise was found to be an important ingredient when couples could not agree on whether to relocate. The compromise may have forced one person to change his/her initial response to the idea of relocating. The researchers suggested that future studies may consider the exchange patterns that occurred during disagreements (Challiol & Mignonac, 2005).

Finances. Another qualitative analysis regarding decision-making among couples was conducted in relation to finances (Burgoyne et al., 2006). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with engaged couples who were both employed outside the home. One of the key determinants of whether or not couples decided to pool their money and make joint financial decisions had to do with the perceptions of to whom the money belonged. Another key factor in determining shared financial decision-making and pooling of finances had to do with individuals' beliefs about sharing possessions with one another versus having some notions of independence. Having some level of independence from one's fiancé included ensuring that some financial decisions were made by both individuals and others were made without

necessarily having to consult with the partner. In general, most couples in this study were deciding to have either entirely separate accounts or were pooling only part of their money (Burgoyne et al., 2006).

Personality factors. Webster (2000) conducted a qualitative analysis in India regarding personality factors. The study was an ethnography which assumed that decision-making power between couples is a phenomenon that is culturally mediated. The study's purpose was to examine power in Indian families to determine possible reasons why and antecedents for Indian women having more decision-making power within a predominantly patriarchal society (Webster, 2000). The authors found that aggressiveness was a strong influential factor among Indian women. Those who were dominant and outspoken, especially in the final parts of the decision-making process, usually had the most decision-making power. The aggressiveness that couples discussed included effective and skilled communication in order to coerce and convince others of their ideas. Another interpersonal factor for obtaining power within Indian culture was a strong internal locus of control. Women who had high levels of internal control were not as influenced by societal pressures, and were generally more assertive and therefore more persuasive than those with more of an external locus of control. A third characteristic of power was detachment which included a sense of indifference and a general lack of involvement. Husbands were often indifferent or disinterested in decisions being made by their wives which in a sense gave more power to the wives to make decisions. Compliance was also a characteristic of influence. In this collectivist culture, compliance by the husband implied avoiding conflict. This conflict avoidance gave wives the ability to make decisions while husbands went along with the decision made by the spouse (Webster, 2000).

Gender attitudes. Zvonkovic, Greaves, Schmiede, and Hall (1996) conducted a study on family and work decisions from a feminist critical standpoint. The study made the case that gender is an influential factor since the outcomes of decisions have different meanings for men and for women (Zvonkovic, Greaves, Schmiede, & Hall, 1996). Findings suggest that perceptions of decisions were influenced by attitudes regarding gender. Even when the reasoning about a husband's career shift did not center on gender role beliefs, the wife's work was most often limited or restricted. Beliefs about gender were uncovered through couples' discussions of their expectations of one another and of the relationship. If the decision to be made was in relation to the husband's job, both individuals seemed to know what their spouse wanted in terms of the decision and both spouses usually wanted the same outcome. However when the decision was surrounding the wife's job, fewer than half of spouses agreed on the final decision to be made and fewer than half also knew what the other person wanted in relation to the decision (Zvonkovic et al., 1996). Perhaps these findings go along with the social norm that women are supposed to be more in touch with how their partner is feeling about the relationship. It may also be that the husbands talk to their wives more about their stance whereas women are more reserved about making their wishes known.

In general, not many couples spoke about power when discussing family and work decisions. However those who did directly talk about power were those in unhappy and dissatisfied marriages. Usually, decisions were made by only one partner and most often the decision was by the husband who was typically dominant. Women who were unhappy with the gender divisions were those who were also challenging their current gender role. Happily married couples, on the other hand, discussed how they were able to share feelings and make

decisions mutually. Even so, the decisions that were reportedly made were decisions that favored the husband (Zvonkovic et al., 1996).

Couple time. Dyck and Daly (2006) conducted a qualitative study on decision-making regarding how couples decide to spend time together, apart from children. In particular the study focused on the ways fathers contribute to negotiating time alone with their wives. They applied a symbolic interactionist and feminist perspective to examine this issue. The symbolic interactionist perspective considered the ways respondents used language to find meaning in their world which then impacted how they viewed and lived in the world. They also considered a feminist perspective by examining power and control issues in relation to gender (Dyck & Daly, 2006). This study used an emergent design in examining dual-earners. The interviewers used questions about time spent together without children, and the perception of their time together being a priority. The study then considered how couple time was negotiated and carried out. Questions in these areas were asked in semi-structured interviews. Ten couples were interviewed separately and four were interviewed together as a couple. The last interviews were conducted together to better be able to understand the couples' shared narratives in deciding how they negotiate and implement time together as a couple (Dyck & Daly, 2006).

The study outlined ways that couples experienced ambivalence in deciding when and how to spend time together as a couple. The first ambivalence was the pull to accomplish tasks while at the same time wanting to get away from life and take a break. The second difficult ambivalence was around wanting to spend time with the kids while simultaneously wanting to get away from the kids. The third ambivalence had to do with wanting to be spontaneous while feeling too scheduled to do so and wanting to therefore schedule

spontaneity. Other findings in this study included the role of the mother being the one who scheduled activities. In other words, the father would often have an idea of getting away as a couple but the mother would be in the role of putting the plan into motion, making reservations, and arranging childcare (Dyck & Daly, 2006).

Dyck and Daly (2006) also took gender ideology into consideration. There were some similarities between traditional and non-traditional couples. Non-traditional mothers reported a dislike for being the one to make all of these arrangements yet these concerns were reported to rarely be shared with the father. These mothers conceded that being in charge of the scheduling gave them power yet put them in a more traditional role (Dyck & Daly, 2006). The symbolic interactionist perspective in this study suggested that couples shared the thought that spending time together as a couple was important. Fathers and mothers differed in their approach in making couple time transpire. A feminist perspective suggested that a traditional power arrangement occurred between these couples wherein the male would make a suggestion and leave the mother to make the plans with the children and accomplish the unseen work (Dyck & Daly, 2006).

Conflict in decision-making. Mackey, Diemer, and O'Brien (2004) conducted a qualitative analysis of ways in which older couples together for at least 15 years dealt with conflict and stayed satisfied within their relationships. Researchers defined equity as an individual's perception of fairness within the relationship. Interview questions consisted of four areas including questions about the relationship, questions about social influences of money and culture, similarities and differences of parents' relationship, and changes from early years to the present. In addition there were questions that considered how couples dealt with conflict. Conflict management styles were self-reports of how individuals dealt with

disagreement in their relationship, including ways that couples made decisions and talked about making decisions when they disagreed about how to make a decision (Mackey et al., 2004).

Relationship satisfaction was determined by the ways that individuals talked about what was satisfying to them in the relationship rather than a predetermined set of factors. After using constant comparison methods, researchers concluded that satisfaction in the relationship was related to ways that couples kept conflict in check as well as the psychological intimacy that partners had between them. Psychological intimacy was described by respondents as a feeling of safety in sharing inner thoughts and feelings as though the partner accepted those inner thoughts. Couples who described unsatisfactory relationships discussed avoiding conflict. The authors suggested that couples who were able to keep their conflict in check also had communicated about the ways that they communicate with one another. Sexual orientation did not appear to make a difference in relationship satisfaction, nor did education level, income, race, or religion (Mackey et al., 2004).

Equity. Grounded theory was used in Clarke's (2005) qualitative study on the power in household labor for women in second marriages. In general, women reported that their first marriages were not as satisfying as their second and they had a more equitable relationship in their second marriage when compared with the first marriage. Power was generally more balanced in these later life relationships regarding division of household labor and decision-making power. When division of household labor was unequal it was justified in the extra amount of paid work that husbands did when compared with wives (Clarke, 2005).

Only three of the 24 women interviewed reported dissatisfaction with their later marriages. These three women reported being unsatisfied with the way household labor was divided in the home. These same three women also appeared to have fewer resources and had more dependence on their husbands for finances and health resources. The authors point to a change in society and culture to allow a more equal distribution of power and resources between married couples. However it remains a question whether or not older couples are more egalitarian in these areas because of age, a lack of children in the home, or for some other combined factor (Clarke, 2005).

Quek and Knudson-Martin (2006) conducted a qualitative inquiry regarding decision-making within Singapore (a collectivist culture). Equity was measured as the balance in the decision-making power between newlyweds. Researchers conducted conjoint interviews with couples in order to allow couples to listen to the ways each person responded and then to agree or disagree with the way the information was presented. The study was conducted using grounded theory and considered ways in which a social reality was produced and put into process. Questions asked of the couple included inquiries about what was important to individuals in marriage, specifically, whether equity was important (Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006).

Most couples agreed that equity should exist in marital relationships. An interesting finding of this research was that couples in this study seemed to use equity tactics during conflict including: self-reflection, open expression of feelings, active negotiation, and challenging traditional gender patterns. Another finding was that gender roles were determined by who was available for the role, areas of expertise, and willingness to do a task rather than what the traditional gender role suggested. Singaporean couples suggest that their

relationships are traditional when in reality they show many egalitarian characteristics. Collectivist cultures generally promote equity in marriage because couples are encouraged to marry someone who is socially equal, to make family a priority, and to be conscious of the entire group (Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006). It may be that collectivist cultures have values that promote more equity within relationships.

Family background. McMullin (2005) recently conducted a qualitative study on how power, social context, and family background influenced paid and unpaid labor. He used a case study perspective to examine three generations and their perspectives on labor in and out of the home. He considered the three types of division of labor approaches, namely, differential power, contextual, and socialization approaches. Differential power studies focus on the differences between husbands' and wives' domestic labor and assume that because men make more money they can choose to participate or not in household labor. The less popular contextual studies focus on major life transitions and how these changes influence contributions to domestic labor. The final approach to examining household labor considered socialization studies and how children and parents influence each other. These studies assume that children mimic their parents and carry these patterns with them into adulthood or rebel and do the opposite because of those experiences (McMullin, 2005).

McMullin (2005) explained that cohort effects seemed to be strong for the family under investigation. The couple, who was born during the 1930s, experienced the first wave of the feminist movement in which women contributed small amounts toward paid labor even though they were able to live on one salary. These children grew and began their families in the 1940s and 50s when families were feeling economic hardships and women were forced to work to support their families during the depression. In response, the next

wave of women in the 1960s and 70s associated paid work with economic hardships and resisted working outside the home. Since that time, women have been working more and more outside the homes. This particular family followed the socio-historical patterns of the time (McMullin, 2005).

Influence. Some studies have been conducted on the process of decision-making rather than the final outcome or who has the final say. Thomson, Laing, and McKee (2007) recently conducted a study on the nature of influence, which differed from previous studies that only measured the rank of influence. The purpose was to examine family purchase processes, communication patterns, and behavioral patterns of families making decisions. The researchers considered how children influence family decisions regarding major purchases being made. They conducted in-depth interviews separately with parents as well as children in their analysis of ways that children directly or indirectly influence purchases. They chose to conduct separate interviews in order to capture the unique perspective of every person involved. They also had the family construct a map of the way that decisions are typically made when all members do not agree. Thomson and colleagues (2007) suggest that family members do not all agree on decisions about consumption of products because there are numerous perspectives at play (Thomson et al., 2007).

According to the interviews, it appeared as though children were highly involved in decisions regarding family purchases. It was found that the most influential strategy for making a convincing argument for making a purchase was acquiring actual knowledge and information about the purchase at hand. This knowledge was reportedly acquired from experiences, reading, and peer influence. Forming coalitions with a sibling or a parent was

another strategy used by children in order to make an attempt at influencing the decision being made (Thomson et al., 2007).

Ball, Cowan, and Cowan (1995) conducted a mixed method study in relation to marital satisfaction, household labor, communication, and decision-making power. They used a phenomenological and grounded theory analysis with couples 25 to 45 years old. They investigated the topic of partners' perceptions of influence in decision-making. Couples took part in a three- to four-hour session in which they were asked to discuss a problem area concerning the division of labor in the home. The study focused on each person's unique experience and description of the discussion after watching it on video. Individuals were asked how they personally influenced and how the partner influenced the process of the discussion, how each person's role influenced the communication, and parts of the discussion that were normal or abnormal.

There appeared to be a somewhat predictable pattern of interaction in problem-solving. First was the mobilizing phase in which couples come together to discuss the problem. Next was the phase of defining the problem, then finally the planning phase which was coming up with a plan to execute the decision reached. Wives and husbands agreed that women were most active during the first phase of mobilization whereas husbands were more active in the second phase of defining the problem. The third phase showed that wives tend to push more toward the final step of planning whereas husbands were most likely to determine the actual final decision (Ball et al., 1995). Results also indicated that women would usually raise the issue and push the husband to discuss it early in the process. The men, however, were the ones who tended to control what was said in the discussion and regulated the level of emotionality that came about. Women frequently reported becoming

emotional while their husbands attempted to remain rational and leave emotions out. Men also tended to have more influence in the final stages of the decision and in the actual decision made at the end of the discussion. Women reported that they were careful about how they brought up the issue to be discussed in an effort to keep the peace. Problem issues were brought up softly and only when women sensed that the husband would be receptive to hearing about it. When husbands brought up topics for discussion, they rarely considered whether or not it would be appropriate or the right time to do so (Ball et al., 1995).

Husbands in this study appeared to have higher veto-power as well as more power over whether or not a discussion would even take place. Women appeared to have less power than men in discussions about the division of household labor. Wives often talked about the indifference they felt from their husbands and the husbands' lack of care and understanding about the topic. Furthermore, men tended to have the final say in the problem being discussed even though the topic was brought up by the wife. This finding coincided with the tenets of exchange theory that the person who is less invested in any situation essentially has the most power (Ball et al., 1995).

Quantitative portions of this study indicated that there appear to be some gender differences in overall marital satisfaction. Women seemed to be more tolerant than men when there was conflict surrounding the division of labor but they were not as tolerant of men who attempted to dominate the discussion itself. When there was agreement about the conflict itself, women's marital satisfaction increased, suggesting that the perceptions spouses have about how labor is divided is an important component when trying to understand areas of difficulty and processes in communication (Ball et al., 1995).

This study suggested that future research should explore gender differences about perceptions with couples at different stages of the life cycle. The researchers suggest that future qualitative analyses would be helpful to gather detailed perspectives of marital interactions and in gathering important information that quantitative data may easily miss. Qualitative analyses would also aid in this field to decrease the assumptive conclusions made by interpreting the numbers of the data rather than how the individuals themselves feel and think about the particular phenomenon (Ball et al., 1995). The present study gathered details about decision-making processes and interactions of couples.

Summary of Literature Review

In summary, couple decision-making has been studied largely through quantitative means. Decision-making is complex and involves many factors. In addition, decision-making has had theoretical inconsistencies throughout the literature with the majority of the measures examining who has the final say in the decision. Measuring decision-making from one angle fails to take other factors such as family background, faith, or past experiences into consideration. Power has also been tied to decision-making in that the person who makes the most decisions is said to have the most power.

Power has been assessed as one person's ability to influence another person to think or behave differently; however, power has also had theoretical inconsistencies in the literature. Researchers have suggested that gender ideology is culturally mediated and that power lies within the cultural expectations and allowances of each gender. Direct and indirect influence strategies were examined by Zvonkovic and colleagues (1994). They suggested that men and women tend to influence each other in similar ways but Aida and Falbo (1991) reported that women tend to use fewer power strategies to influence men and were more

subtle when they did so. Researchers have examined power differences between couples in individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Couples in individualistic cultures tend to have greater differences in power than couples in collectivistic cultures since those in collectivistic cultures look down on making decisions that influence others (Sholam & Dalakas, 2003).

Roles in the decision-making processes are also an important component to understanding couple decision-making. Dual-earners are more likely to have equity in their relationship, tend to be less traditional, and often had more equity in financial earnings and household responsibilities (Marks et al., 2001). Conversely, Schonpflug (1999) reported that women who have more education tend to have less power because traditional power given to women in the home is not present.

Household labor is another way that decision-making has been assessed in the past. Women still contribute many more hours to household labor than men even though many women are working more outside the home (Becker et al., 2006; Felmler, 1994; Hochschild, 1989; Klewer, Heesink, & Van De Vliert, 1996; Komter, 1989; Mickelson et al., 2006). When men do contribute to household labor, they are viewed positively even if there remains a large imbalance (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983) and the roles are viewed as fair (Felmler, 1994; Webster, 2000; Zuo & Bian, 2001). Couples tend to have more decision-making power in terms of gender domains (Becker et al., 2006; Cowen & Cowen, 1988) in that women often make more decisions about the family whereas men make more decisions about finances. Traditional male-dominant relationships are said to be the easiest relationships to emulate since the role expectations are more acceptable to society (Felmler, 1994). This study examined gender roles by asking dual-earning couples about the domain of parenting.

Increasingly, couples claim to have equitable relationships when the reality suggests that these relationships are not equitable (Meier et al., 1999). Life-cycle changes such as the birth of a child tend to magnify traditional gender roles in couples (Allen et al., 2001; Danes et al., 1998; Grote & Clark, 2001; Hochschild, 1989; Kulik, 2001; Orleans et al., 1989). Hence, couples who had relatively young children were chosen as participants in this study to examine the life-cycle change and gender roles.

Few qualitative studies have been conducted in the area of couple decision-making. Those studies that are qualitative in nature have been loosely tied to decision-making. Zuo and Bian (2001) examined couples' comfort level with having equity in household. Later, Zuo and Bian (2005) examined gender performance of non-routine household tasks and traditional household tasks and reported that these task divisions gave men more power even though women had more veto-power and more power to finalize a decision made by men. Challiol and Mignonac (2005) qualitatively examined decision-making about job relocating and suggested that compromise and prioritizing were important ingredients to making a decision. Zvonkovic and colleagues (1996) also examined job decisions and discovered that career decisions made generally favored the man over the woman.

Burgoyne and colleagues (2006) examined engaged couples' finances and whether or not couples had decided to pool their money or keep money independently. The key ingredient to making decisions about shared money was one's beliefs about sharing possessions with one another. Webster (2000) qualitatively assessed couples in India and reported that Indian women tended to be aggressive in the final parts of the decision-making process, were assertive and persuasive, and had husbands who were uninvolved and wished to avoid conflict. These characteristics gave these women more power in decision-making.

Dyck and Daly (2006) examined couples spending time away from children and found traditional roles to be in place among couples wherein men would make a suggestion and that women would carry the suggestion out and arrange for childcare. A qualitative study conducted by Mackey and colleagues (2004) suggested that keeping conflict in check, not avoiding conflict, and communicated openly were more satisfied in their relationships and had more ease in making decisions. Individuals in their second marriage were found to be more satisfied with their division of household labor and had more equitable power and resources when compared with first marriage (Clarke, 2005). Thompson and colleagues (2007) examined the influence children had on decision-making and determined that children have the most say in major financial purposes when they display factual knowledge about the product. Singaporean couples were examined for gender roles. These couples suggested that equity should exist in relationships but that traditional roles should also exist. Quek and Knudson-Martin (2006) suggest that the collectivistic cultures employ many communication procedures that display equity. McMullin examined generational acceptance of paid work through exploring three generations and tied views of paid work to the economic hardships of the context and socio-historical experiences. Regarding household labor decisions, Ball and colleagues (1995) reported that men tended to have more veto-power and were more likely than women to make the final decision.

Few studies have assessed the actual process of decision-making, the factors that go into decision-making, and studies were not found that qualitative examined how couples make decisions around parenting. Studies have also failed to examine how couples think about their decision-making process and reflections on the time after decision-making.

Purpose

Qualitative studies on couple decision-making have used a grounded theory framework; and only a few studies that included a feminist perspective to collect and analyze the data. Qualitative research is necessary to explore and develop concepts that are difficult to fully comprehend (Forte, 1998). Forte (1998) has suggested that qualitative research is necessary in the area of decision-making.

Zvonkovic and colleagues (1994) suggested that in order to gain a better understanding of how couples make decisions and the processes surrounding this topic, qualitative studies should be conducted to more closely examine how couples operate in this realm. Research on the topic of decision-making is generally limited in scope. Very little research has been done qualitatively within the area of couples and the process of decision-making, which is surprising considering the complex and elusive nature of decision-making between couples.

Many of those qualitative studies that have been done have been conducted outside of the United States. Qualitative studies around decision-making have been conducted in countries considered to be collectivist cultures such as Singapore (Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006), China (Zuo & Bian, 2001, 2005) and India (Webster, 2000). Other studies have been conducted in countries considered to be more individualistic such as Canada (Dyck & Daly, 2005; McMullin, 2005), Scotland (Thomson et al., 2007), and France (Challiol & Mignonac, 2005). Some qualitative studies have been conducted on individuals and couples from relatively similar in backgrounds who have young children (Burgoyne et al., 2006), older women (Clarke, 2005) and older couples (MacKey et al., 2004), dual-earners (Challiol &

Mignonac, 2005; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006; Zvonkovic et al., 1996) and stepfathers (Dyck & Daly, 2006).

Some of the qualitative research on power and decision-making in couples have considered grounded theory (Ball et al., 1995; Clarke, 2005; Zuo & Bian, 2005) and others have used ethnography (Webster, 2000), feminist (Dyck & Daly, 2006; Zvonkovic et al., 1996), phenomenology (Ball et al., 1995), case study (McMullin, 2005), and symbolic interactionism (Dyck & Daly, 2006). Studies were have found that have taken grounded theory together with feminist theory when conducting and analyzing a qualitative study on decision-making. Qualitative studies have been conducted with individuals (Burgoyne et al., 2006; Clarke, 2005; Zuo & Bian, 2001, 2005), conjoint couples (Challiol & Mignonac, 2005), families (Thompson et al., 2007), or a combination of individual and conjoint couples (Dyck & Daly, 2006).

In this study, I qualitatively examined decision-making processes within couples from both the couple and individual perspectives. Although a handful of qualitative studies have focused on decision-making, there seems to remain a lack of understanding of the processes and contributing factors involved in spousal interaction, the various characteristics that lead to a decision, and reflections after a decision is made. Qualitative research is better able to account for contextual variables and is a necessary part of understanding how couples make decisions (Mickelson, Claffey, & Williams, 2006; Zuo & Bian, 2001).

I chose to include married heterosexual couples who had child(ren) under the age of five. Dual-earners were chosen to explore how couples who are both involved in paid labor make decisions and attempt to influence one another. In addition, working women are more likely to have a non-traditional gender ideology as are men with working wives (Kingsbury

& Scanzoni, 1989). When both partners are employed, couples report that women have more influence and men have less influence in relation to decision-making (Coltrane, 1996b; Hochschild, 1998; Pleck, 1997). Dual-earning couples with children under the age of five face unique challenges that other couples do not face. Parents dealing with young children who are not yet school-aged face child-care issues when both parents work outside the home. Even though there would appear to be some level of equity in that both partners earn money, other studies suggest that there is an increase in gender stereotyped decision-making after the birth of a first child (Allen et al., 2001; Danes et al., 1998; Grote & Clark, 2001; Hochschild, 1989; Kulik, 2001; Orleans et al., 1989) because of the dependence of young children and an increased demand for one's attention and care.

Existing studies have considered couples but have interviewed couples separately. In the present study, couples were interviewed jointly and then separately. The purpose of this study was to qualitatively assess couple decision-making processes, influence (power) strategies, and the thoughts following these processes and decisions. The research questions in this study were: What factors influence the process of couple decision-making and how a decision is reached? What are individuals' thoughts after decisions are made?

Chapter 3: Method

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a part of feminist research. Reflexive statements are statements that attend to biases, values, experiences (Creswell, 2003; Olesen, 2005), theoretical position, and issues that may make transparency difficult for the researcher (Merriam, 2002). As a feminist researcher, I was aware of the assumptions I had about the participants in the study. These assumptions influenced the questions I asked, how I asked them, the interview, my relationship with the respondent(s), and the interpretation of the data; however, I was not always completely aware and conscious of these issues. I therefore needed to be mindful of the possibility of holding assumptions about the respondents and have attended to them when necessary.

The researcher was the primary research instrument (Litchman, 2006) which meant that any interpretation and data analysis were conducted through the lens of the researcher with my personal biases and assumptions about respondents and the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Being reflexive throughout the research process was also a key part of building credibility of the research. Researcher reflexivity was important so that those who read about the research could understand who I was and how decisions were made and conclusions determined (Merriam, 2002). I worked hard to capture my own biases through reflexive statements and journaling.

I held some biases and values that may influence how I related to respondents as well as how I asked questions and interacted with the data. One of my biases is relating to the methodology. I place much value on qualitative methodology and in telling a story with

words rather than numbers. Another bias was that communicating about one's emotions and feelings is an important part of a high quality relationship. I did not assume that all couples discussed their feelings and emotions with one another. In fact, I tend to assume that couples do not communicate emotions very often and therefore do not know how their own actions may influence their partner's feelings and emotions. Communicating about the actions of loved ones, especially with significant others, is a skill that I assume will enrich relationships. However it may be that some couples have a relationship in which these actions do not need to be discussed in order to have a satisfying relationship. Likewise, I assumed that most couples were open to discussing their feelings with one another. This may not be the case in that it may be difficult to pinpoint an emotion and talk about it with one's partner as the conversation may be awkward and unfamiliar. During the initial interviews, individuals did not label their emotions and feelings, so even though my assumption was that communicating these emotions is positive, many individuals had a negative view of being emotional and resisted talking about how they felt and instead shared other stories about their decision-making process.

My experience and training in marriage and family therapy has led me to the belief that talking about feelings and emotions would lead to more understanding of one's partner and likely increased intimacy. I realize that this may not always be the case, however, and may lead to hurt feelings for some couples. I needed to be cautious in interpreting the data and not assume that there were emotions there that were not stated by the respondent. Assuming that communicating about feelings and emotions may lead to better understanding may put the individuals in a situation of more conflict toward one another. I therefore did not pressure individuals to share emotions and instead pursued the stories they told.

Another bias that I had was that couples were aware of decision-making processes that occurred in their relationship and that they were aware of the emotions that were present. It could be that the individuals were unable to recall how decisions were typically made and how they felt before, during, and after the process. Therefore asking about emotions may not have made sense or may have led to dishonest answers by the respondents and may have therefore distorted how I interpreted the responses.

A value that I had was that there should be respect for one's partner. My training in therapy has also confirmed this belief. If I saw a person disrespected by a partner, it may have affected how I interpreted that person's statements. I may have felt some compassion for the person who was not being respected and wished to have that person speak more or somehow allow that person to have more power. I also valued equity in decision-making. I assumed that individuals who had more balanced roles and decision-making had more fulfilling relationships than relationships that were unbalanced. This may not have always been the case. If there was a clear imbalance in which one person made nearly all of the decisions, it may have influenced the way I saw the relationship. I may have viewed the relationship as being less stable or the individuals as being less satisfied than they really were in the relationship.

I grew up in a conservative Christian home, went to Christian schools, and was surrounded by a Christian community. My parents guided me to know Christ and I still place high value and importance on God and have Him at the center of my life and at the center of my family's life including in the area of decision-making. I weekly attend a Bible-believing church, go to a weekly Bible-study, and I would label myself a Christian.

I believe that I have many faults but I also believe that if I claim to be a Christian, then my life should reflect that faith in what I do. Because of my own personal faith I was sensitive to talking about faith with other people and quick to pick up on religious phrases. It is my own personal bias that those who claim to have faith are influenced by their faith in many ways. In this study I found this to generally be the case.

I picked up on this aspect of the couples' lives and was sensitive to their stories about how their faith played a role in their decision-making. One couple did not mention a faith at all and one couple mentioned having similar faiths but did not discuss how it impacted decision-making. My bias about religion influencing decision-making was strongly supported in this study with the exception of two couples who did not report faith as having a major role in their decision-making processes. Because of these faith experiences and beliefs the results and conclusions of this study may have been heavily influenced by my own knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith.

Feminist researchers pay attention to the position of the researcher, that is, the gender, class, race, and power which influence how data are collected and analyzed as well as how data are constructed and reported (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). My position as a white, middle-class woman who grew up in a conservative Christian home, as well as my experiences since going to graduate school and having children of my own affected how I conducted interviews, collected data, came up with categories, gave account of themes, and reported results (Merriam, 2002). In my own experience, I grew up with parents who had relatively traditional roles except that my mother worked full-time outside the home. She did most of the housework and my dad performed the typical outside yard work. However when it came to making decisions, it appeared to me as though my parents did so together. A topic my

parents did not speak much of was how they made the decision or how the ending decision was made.

Growing up I paid attention to the roles my parents took on. I was married at the age of 20 and it wasn't until I was married that I really began to consider the injustices of those roles and pay closer attention to gender roles between my husband and me. In some ways we are traditional but in some ways we are not. My husband works full time and I spend the bulk of my time during the day at home with the children. However, when he comes home, I leave and go to work and he stays home with our two children at night. We both do yard work and both have household responsibilities although I do end up doing most of the household responsibilities because I am home more. We are not traditional in that I am in graduate school pursuing a PhD which will be a title he does not have; he has a bachelor's degree. I would also suggest that we make the bulk of our decisions together but still have the freedom to make decisions independently of one another. My husband and I see ourselves as partners. We strive to encourage one another in our strengths and in areas such as our careers, parenting, and relationships, and we resist being bound to traditional gender roles and expectations. He and I see ourselves as a team in parenting. Neither one of us would suggest that one person has the final say. We work together to come to a mutual agreement when making decisions.

Growing up I was sensitive to injustices due to gender. As a young girl, I resented going to Thursday church night and being separated from the boys to do arts and crafts. I wanted to be shooting a bow and arrow, learning how to tie knots, fish, and canoe with the boys rather than be stuck inside learning how to make dolls, sew, and be taught proper table etiquette. I remember an instance in which my dad asked my brother if he wanted to go ice

fishing. When I confronted my dad about it, he was surprised that I would want to go out fishing with him in the cold. There were different expectations growing up regarding housework; my brother rarely vacuumed, dusted, did laundry, or cleaned up in the house while I frequently did these things. These experiences along with my undergraduate and graduate training in areas such as feminism and sociology have shaped me to become sensitive to gender roles, cultural norms, values, and expectations placed on women and men in our society.

Grounded Theory

In the 1960s, Glaser and Strauss (1967) together devised a new way to conduct, gather, and analyze data. The purpose of what they called grounded theory is “the discovery of theory from data” (p. 1). The reason is that the theory would highlight the meanings, actions, and processes of those telling the story and living the experience. Social structures are continuously being changed and undergoing modification, so there is a constant need for emergent data that is new (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theorists ask: What is happening and what are people doing (Charmaz, 2005)? Grounded theory does not start with a theory and then set out to prove the theory right or wrong. The researcher starts with one area of study and then considers the data as it emerges (Merriam, 2002). One of the strengths of grounded theory is that it provides a way to see beyond the research and empirical process and pushes the researcher to examine more deeply in order to “portray a picture of the whole” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 530).

Grounded theory is assessed for goodness by: fit, understanding (workability), generality, and modification (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Fitness of theory means that the theory should correspond with the place or field it will be used. It should fit within the

empirical studies in the corresponding field to which it is linked, give understandable explanations of the context, and should speak to the audience it is intended for. According to the workability or understanding standard, laypersons should be able to understand the theory. The generality assessment seeks to ensure that the theory is general enough to apply to more than just a specific situation. Finally, the modification is assessed by the ability to be flexible in altering or changing the theory as situations change over time (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Charmaz (2006) adds to grounded theory criteria for goodness in the area of social justice inquiry by including credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. Credibility includes appropriate familiarity with the data, becoming familiar with other comparison groups, and providing evidence for claims made by the researcher. Later in this chapter I will address ways that I approached and dealt with credibility in the present study. Originality refers to data that give new insight to meaning of the data or challenges that which is already in place. Resonance involves making connections with the broader topics and drawing meaning to the interactions and processes. I used resonance in this study by tying decision-making issues to couple interactions and power. Usefulness portrays accurate interpretations, offers implications, and contributes to understanding (Charmaz, 2005). I contributed to usefulness by addressing issues of trustworthiness and rigor.

Grounded theory is conducted in a way that examines how respondents would react or have reacted to a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 1997); it examines the “actions, interactions, and social process of people” (Litchman, 2006, p. 27). Grounded theory is particularly suited for the present study as I examined the ways couples reportedly interacted in decision-making and how they dealt with social processes. Charmaz (2005) noted that

grounded theory is particularly suited for social justice research. “An interest in social justice means attentiveness to ideas and actions concerning fairness, equity, equality, democratic process, status, hierarchy, and the individual and collective rights and obligations” (p. 510). Social justice researchers openly bring up what they feel should and ought to change about society and culture (Charmaz, 2005). Social justice is also at the root of feminist thought in that social justice research makes the assumption that research can “further equitable distribution of resources, fairness, and eradicate oppression” (p. 507).

In grounded theory, theory is emergent and comes from the data itself (Crotty, 1998). Grounded theory includes collecting data while at the same time analyzing it. Data analysis begins very early in the research process so that future data can be focused and altered if necessary. The emphasis on human processes aids in understanding how social structures and human activities connect. The results might portray qualified interpretations and implications of these connections (Charmaz, 2005).

Some grounded theorists are more reflexive than others in how they come to know and understand life and their interpretations of the lives of others. Using a grounded theory perspective means being active in the theorizing process. The final theory is an end result of how the researcher interacted and interpreted the data along with the respondents (Charmaz, 2005). Grounded theory is open to leads that have been found in previous empirical studies. This can inspire the researcher to follow emerging questions and then change the direction of examination. The theory emphasizes the details behind the process as well as the context. Grounded theorists also go into the social setting and examine the larger picture rather than just the story under examination. Grounded theory is used to examine how a process becomes a conventional practice (Charmaz, 2005).

Attending to my power as a researcher is an important component of the research process. Hierarchy of power may be reflected in the research relationship. The people who have power are able to and are open to speaking out. It is the oppressed who are not as likely to speak and are often the ones who are silenced. Therefore, in grounded theory research it is also important to pay attention to silence. It may be in silence that language, meaning, and action are most clearly understood. Some people may choose to be silent while others have been forced into remaining silent (Charmaz, 2005).

Feminist Method and Methodology

Feminist theory grew from the thought that traditional theories of research have made it very challenging to understand how women have contributed to social life. Feminist research also grew out of a reaction to incongruent power, politics, and equity between researcher and respondent. As women began to be included in research, there were more questions about how appropriate current approaches were for studying power differences (Litchman, 2006). Traditional methods of research have left out the thought that women could bring about knowledge and that in general the voices given to the scientific realm have been from males. Feminist research philosophy and epistemology also grew from thinking about how men contributed to social life was seen as the norm rather than as a gendered role (Harding, 1987).

Feminist theory has gained strength and can be conducted from a variety of perspectives. One purpose of feminist research is to deal with the difficulties that women face in life and various contextual situations in the hope of emancipating or leading the way to change in the current social structure (Olesen, 2005). Feminist research is often viewed as a research method rather than a theory because it examines the power issues and disparities

faced by women. This method can be used with many different perspectives or theories (Litchman, 2006). Harding (1987) questions whether or not there is really a feminist methodology. She suggests that since feminist theory can be applied to any methodology, it is not itself a methodology. The present study employed the use of a feminist perspective and grounded theory to inform the research process. As many feminist researchers would point out, perhaps one of the biggest affordances of feminist research is its ability to use multiple theories (Bloom, 1998; Brown & Strega, 2005; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007).

Feminist research seeks to break apart the walls around the experiences of women (Bloom, 1998). Two facets that all feminist researchers should pay attention to are the complexity of relationships and the power dynamics in each relationship. The feminist researcher may pay attention to how these power dynamics might shift and change within each context (Bloom 1998). I kept in mind the context of the respondents while interpreting the data and reporting it. A purpose of feminist research is to point out power disparities, particularly the power disparities between females and males which permeate our society (Harding, 1987). I used the voices of the respondents in order to allow their story to be told and not place value-judgments on them. Feminist researchers see the world and culture as patriarchal, in which masculinity is portrayed as being normal and right (Crotty, 1998).

Nonunitary subjectivity was explored by Leslie Bloom (1998). To have a unitary subjectivity would mean that all people see the world in a similar fashion. The ability to give up the notion that there can be a single perspective that each person has is a strength of taking a feminist perspective in that it gives respect to each individual and her/his complex situation and allows each experience to be told. Furthermore, after a story is told, nonunitary subjectivity allows for the story to be retold or considered differently (Bloom, 1998). I held

close to nonunitary subjectivity when considering the ways that couples reported their own power and the power of their partner. Even when those stories did not match up, I held to the notion that each person's perspective was legitimate.

Qualitative research focuses on the data being the words of the respondents. Together the researcher and the respondent create themes and categories for the topic of investigation (Merriam, 2002). In this study, I used the words as taken from the respondents; I heard them voice their experiences and then used their language to portray their stories. There is more than one voice being presented within qualitative research and there are multiple representations of the meaning that could be taken from the presentation of the data. To further complicate representing data, the ways that the respondents think about decision-making may change over time (Merriam, 2002). I remained sensitive to multiple perspectives and portrayed the story as accurately as possible at the time the data were gathered.

Relationship with Respondents

Qualitative researchers examine words or actions and then attempt to describe the situation that the respondents experience. They consider the meanings given to words and to behaviors. In other words, qualitative research examines ways to gain an understanding of the constructed reality of the respondents (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Researchers are an important component of the research itself and are often viewed as the main research instrument with personal sets of experiences, backgrounds, and domains of knowledge (Litchman, 2006; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The researcher is the only instrument that is complex enough to capture complex forms of human activities and interactions that cannot be captured completely through quantitative measures (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Grounded theorists suggests that researchers pay attention to what is said and unsaid as well as what is acted upon or not acted upon (Charmaz, 2005). Grounded theory is often used to examine inequity in social and historical contexts (Charmaz, 2005). Interviewers and researchers are allowed into a moment of the respondents' lives and obtain a point of view as told by the respondents as they choose to present themselves and their narrative. Intensive data collection may be important to understand what people say as well as what they do (as the words and actions of respondent may not always be the same Charmaz, 2005).

Respondents are not viewed as subjects but as participants in the research and the research process. The respondents in feminist research are referred to as participants or even co-researchers (Fine, 1992). Participants are the experts in their own experiences and the researcher should take on an active role (Fine, 1992) in discussing the inequities in the researcher and respondent relationship (Litchman, 2006). The researcher will frequently therefore share preliminary findings and final conclusions with those who have been researched (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007).

The feminist researcher is confronted with the test of putting oneself in a similar place with the respondent in order to build good and positive relationships. In doing so, the researcher is better able to establish trust and create an environment in which differences in opinion can be discussed (Bloom, 1998). It has been said that researchers often have more power because of their education, background, or race. Researchers also have power in that they have the ability to change the course of the conversation for the benefit of their research, to label a population or group of people the way they see fit, or simply the freedom to leave the relationship whenever they so desire (Bloom, 1998).

The interview itself is influenced by the relationship between the researcher and the participant. Feminist perspectives take power dynamics and hierarchy into consideration when dealing with the relationship. This relationship may be a complex one but as researchers we should attempt to build a collaborative relationship with respondents (Bloom, 1998). I shared my own experiences with parenting children and being in a dual-earner marriage when appropriate. The balance of when to and not to share is a decision I was conscious of and I did not share too much about those experiences but did share when I could relate or when respondents asked about my own experiences. I have some experience as a therapist in this regard which helped me to reach an appropriate balance.

It has been suggested that interviewing can be pseudo-therapeutic. It is often the case that in the interviews, individuals are entrusting personal information and experiences with someone they trust and view to be somewhat of an expert in a safe environment. As such, the respondents may be looking for guidance or advice especially in conjoint interview situations (LaRossa, Bennett, & Gelles, 1985; Litchman, 2006). It might be that the researcher could be in a position in which she felt inclined to help the couple work through a disagreement. This could be especially true because the respondents were aware of my background in marriage and family therapy. I talked with couples about my background and how this may seem therapeutic but that my intention was not to conduct therapy but to learn from them as a researcher.

In feminist research, researchers are self-reflexive and share information. Differences between researcher and respondent may create a feeling of anxiety (Bloom, 1998). I had some anxiety when talking to a man who used blunt manipulation in his choice of power strategies. On the other hand, most of the respondents were quite similar to me and I found

many similarities between them and me. Most respondents reported a challenge in balancing work/professional life with family life, most of the respondents shared a common Christian faith, and they were all married with children which at times made the interview more of a conversation in which we shared experiences and faith stories back and forth. After each interview, I wrote in a journal about the experience with the couple and how I related to each of them.

The experience I have as a therapist has heightened my awareness of power in relationships. I listened to the ways that couples influenced each other but did not assume that I knew exactly what it is like for them or that their experiences were similar to mine. The goal was to ensure that if I did share with them, it did not create an alliance with one person over the other or that my personal experiences pushed them in a direction they were not thinking about.

Method

Sampling

Qualitative research includes sampling that is purposive rather than random (Merriam, 2002). Purposive sampling involves the researcher making specific judgments about the sample to be included in the data (Litchman, 2006). It is the knowledge of individual contextual variables that individuals are chosen to participate while keeping in mind generalizability is not the goal (Creswell, 2005; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

I interviewed nine married couples (18 individuals) with at least one child under the age of five. The age of participants ranged from 26 to 36 years old with an average age of 29.89. One couple reported being three years apart in age with the husband being older. All of the other couples in this study reported being within one year of age of one another. The

length of the relationship ranged from seven to 13 years with an average relationship length of 9.67 years. The number of years married ranged from four to nine years with an average of 6.9 years. The number of children ranged from one to three. Three couples had one child, three couples had two children, and three couples had three children. The participants came from a variety of fields such as healthcare, accounting, information technology, and research. All participants had at least a college level degree. Three women and two men held master's level degrees. Two couples included both partners with advanced degrees, and one couple had only the woman holding an advanced degree.

Thirteen participants labeled themselves as Christian, two Methodist, one Catholic, one Protestant, and one reported no religion. One person reported an annual income of \$0-\$10,000, four people reported earning \$10,001-\$30,000 a year, six people reported earning \$30,001-\$50,000 a year, and seven people reported earning \$50,001-\$70,000 per year. Four of the nine couples came from a previous research study that involved couples who were above average in their Dyadic Adjustment Scores (DAS; Spanier, 1976) for relationship satisfaction. These first four couples were taken from a list of 64 couples that were recruited for a previous research project on decision-making. The original 64 couples were recruited from the community using fliers. The couples who were contacted to be a part of the current study were contacted based on age as well as the age of the child. Twenty couples from the original list were contacted to participate in the present study. Contact information for five of the 20 couples was no longer valid. Two couples had relocated and lived too far away to meet, two couples were no longer married, one couple was a part of a second marriage, and five couples did not have children or did not have children under the age of five. One couple met the criteria but was unable to meet for four hours. The remaining four were the

participants in the present study. Four of the remaining five couples were referred by two of these original study couples. The final couple was referred to me by one of the latter couples.

Interview Process

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively assess couple decision-making processes, influence (power) strategies, and the thoughts following these processes and decisions. Respondents were located using couples who were part of a previous quantitative study which included a decision-making measure. Inclusion criteria for this sample were heterosexual couples who were at least 18 years old, married for at least one year, in their first marriage, dual-earners, and had at least one child under the age of five.

A telephone script was used (see Appendix A: Telephone Script) to explain the purpose of the study and what would be involved and to ensure that inclusion criteria were met. A four hour meeting was then set up with the couple at a location determined by the participants. During the first few minutes of the meeting time, I talked with participants about the nature of the study, a bit about my background and experiences, and generally got acquainted with them. I then discussed the purpose of the study and presented them with the Informed Consent Document (see Appendix B: Informed Consent). I reviewed the informed consent document with the couple and explained the procedures, issues of confidentiality, their right to drop out at any time during the process, and their right to not answer any of the questions. The participants were then given the chance to ask questions about the informed consent and any of the procedures. Once the participants agreed to participate, they signed the consent form. This study, including the Informed Consent Document, was approved through the Iowa State University (ISU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix C: IRB Approval Form) before the study began. After participants signed the consent form, they

were given a copy to keep. The participants were then asked to fill out a demographics form which collected information such as name, age, spouse's name, length of relationship, length of marriage, race/ethnicity, occupation, number and ages of children, and religion (see Appendix D: Demographic Form).

Partway through the data gathering process, I received funding through a grant from the ISU Human Development and Family Studies Department for gift-cards for participation incentive. After IRB approval of the incentive, I had the participants sign a new consent form that they would have a chance to win one of five \$50 gift cards to a local department store after all of the data were collected.

After obtaining informed consent, I then gave the couples a debriefing form which explained possible risks of talking about the issues and also included a list of community resources in case they felt the desire to discuss any issues further (see Appendix F: Debriefing Form). The participants were then encouraged to talk with other interested parties about the study and refer them to the researcher. Once all of the data were collected and saturation was reached, I conducted a drawing for each of the five \$50 gift cards. Participants who were selected to receive a gift card were asked to fill out a confidential form from the funding department stating that they had received the card.

The conjoint interview followed. The conjoint interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. I built up enough rapport with the participants so that they could trust me enough to open up and share their experiences with me. This began with the first telephone call to ask for their participation. Following the conjoint interview I interviewed each person individually and these interviews lasted 35 to 60 minutes.

In qualitative research, interviews are conducted in order to learn about what cannot be directly observed such as feelings, thoughts, intentions, and meaning (Patton, 1990). The task of the interviewer is to be allowed into the world of the interviewee. The researcher starts with an area of interest for inquiry and then begins the interview process. Whatever is significant and relevant to that topic is ultimately what emerges through data collection and analysis (Straus & Corbin, 1990).

Journals/memos are an integral part of qualitative research and include one's personal thoughts, insights, understandings, interpretations, questions, recurrent phrases, and reflections (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) which should be maintained from the beginning of the research process to the end of the study. Field notes are another important part of qualitative research. The field notes are used to keep notes that come from interviews or from being in the field. Field notes are basically one's assessment of what has happened. Facts and interpretations should be kept separate from one another, which may be accomplished by writing down exact phrases (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In this study, memo-writing began before the very first interview. Data memos were written in the journal as well. When themes emerged from the data collected, I wrote about them. When the research question began to shift, I wrote about that to document and describe the change and my justification for the change. This pushed me to modify the outline of the project (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007).

In the beginning of this study I had intended to emphasize emotions. In my experience as a therapist, emotions play a part in how couples understand one another in intimate relationships and in the decision-making that occurs therein. I personally have had training in talking with couples about emotions through my background in marriage and family therapy. I have had the opportunity to witness and to hear about the influence that

individuals have on one another. I have been able to help facilitate discussions about the emotions that often go unspoken. I have been influenced by Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) and Susan Johnson (2004). The thought behind EFT is a focus on emotions and the ability of emotional awareness to create change in relationships. In the past, discussion of emotion has been almost non-existent and viewed as secondary to a discussion of cognitions and behaviors (Johnson, 2004).

Very few studies have examined emotion and ways that individuals are influenced by affect. EFT is often used to make individuals aware of their emotions and to then communicate those emotions to their partner in a way that allows their desires and need to be made known to the partner. Only recently have therapists and researchers begun to examine emotion more closely in healing relationships (Johnson, 2004). Gottman (1999) for example suggests that emotions, even negative emotions, can be dealt with effectively through processing the emotions and taking steps toward repairing hurt feelings. Emotional disengagement is often one of the final steps toward relationship dissolution. When couples are emotionally engaged, they are still fighting to improve their relationship. Emotional disengagement usually signals that individuals do not desire to work toward resolution (Gottman, 1999). It would seem that a discussion about one's emotions could therefore allow individuals to understand their partner better and to communicate needs and wants in an area such as decision-making. However what I discovered through the first couple interviews was that couples and individuals were not sharing stories of emotions and were reluctant to label emotions and feelings. Instead, the respondents told stories about being rational and not putting much emotion into decision-making. It was therefore not easy to pull emotions from individuals. I found that the research question that I had initially hoped to answer was

changing. When asked about how individuals felt about their decision-making process or how they felt about their partner during the decision-making processes, I would get stories about decision-making and reasons that decisions were made rather than feelings and emotions. I therefore did not continue to ask individuals to label emotions and feelings and instead shifted the research question and purpose while letting go of the emotional aspect of decision-making.

When conducting interviews from a feminist perspective, the interactions between researcher and respondent should ideally be engaging, multi-directional, and open-ended. The hope is that high quality relationships can be developed and a space created in which the respondents would share and express themselves in ways they wanted to share. The feminist interview involves giving respondents adequate room to share their stories and to follow-up on portions of the story that are of great importance to them (Bloom, 1998). When conducting feminist interviews, some individuals would suggest that there be mutual sharing and self-disclosure within the research relationship. Traditional researchers might reject this notion and attempt to stay objective and remain a professional distance with the respondent which would resemble a relationship between strangers (Bloom, 1998; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007).

The interviews occurred at the place and time agreed upon by the participants and me in a place that was quiet as well as private (Litchman, 2006). Three of the nine interviews were conducted in an office-setting and the other six were conducted in the homes of the participants.

A common form of data collection in qualitative studies is interviewing the participants (Merriam, 2002). In this study, I gathered data to address the research question

by interviewing married, heterosexual, dual-earning couples, with children under the age of five. Saturation was reached when I knew that no new information had been obtained from participants. Saturation was reached after about five months of interviewing, as data collection took place from November 2008 through March 2009.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interview questions were based on the literature review and from research in the areas of marriage and family therapy (MFT) and social sciences (see Appendix E: Semi-Structured Interview Questions). As a recent graduate of the MFT program, I felt prepared and trained to interview couples and individuals. Even though I felt prepared to interview couples and individuals, I also knew that my role as a researcher was to learn their stories rather than to change the way they made decisions or interacted with one another.

In the current study, each couple's interviews took place all at one time wherein the conjoint interview took place first followed by two individual interviews (see Appendix E: Semi-Structured Interview Questions). The individual not being interviewed was asked to go to another room or area where she/he could not hear the individual interview with the partner. Participants were made aware that their participation could last up to a year and were asked if they could be contacted for member checks that would last up to a half-hour.

During the interviews I wrote down key words and phrases used by the participant as well as follow-up questions for clarification or additional information. Immediately following the interviews, I filled out the Interview Summary Sheet (see Appendix G: Interview Summary Form) and then I would write additional thoughts about the couple, their

process, the interview, and additional questions for future interviews in my researcher journal.

An audio recorder was used to record the interviews between myself and the participants and me. The recorder was turned on following the signing of the informed consent. Following the interviews the recorder was turned off. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim by me. Researcher notes were written during the transcription process to aid in the development of themes and to help in interpretation. The transcripts and researcher notes were then put into a column with a narrower column to the right so that notes and codes could be entered next to the transcript. After the transcripts were typed using pseudonyms, I listened to the recording one final time while looking at the transcript in order to ensure accuracy of the written transcript. The recording was then deleted.

I used semi-structured interviews which included a general set of questions used for all respondents. Using semi-structured interviews, the interviewer is allowed to alter and change the questions when the situation changes (Litchman, 2006).

As has been previously discussed, some researchers have examined decision-making from the perspective of one person, whereas others have examined the perspective of both members of a couple, and still others have considered views of the entire family. In this study I initially interviewed couples conjointly and then interviewed them each as individuals. In the next section, I outlined some of the advantages and disadvantages of interviewing couples conjointly.

Interviewing Together or Separately

The interviews were conducted conjointly and individually to ensure comfort. Sharing sensitive information about oneself and one's partner could produce anxiety and

cause undue harm to a relationship. In this study, individuals were asked about how they try to influence or hold power over one another. Sharing such information in the presence of one's partner could provoke uneasiness. As a researcher I wanted to gain information from participants that may not have been presented when people were interviewed as a couple.

The study of couples has been going on for many years. However, the majority of the studies employed self-report measures which posed a threat to full understanding of processes because the family is composed of more than one individual's subjective meaning about his/her family (Halverson, 1995). A single person could not possibly have all of the information necessary to report on the functioning of the entire family system (Carlson, 1995). Other concerns arise with the underreporting of fathers' role and experience. Past research has shown that mothers more accurately assess the lives of their children than fathers however this may be changing with the changes in the workforce and with fathers taking more responsibility in the home and with children (Casper & Hofferth, 2007). Essentially, half of the story is therefore missing.

Advantages of conjoint interviews. There are many advantages to interviewing couples conjointly. Part of one's context includes the partner with whom he or she engages. The presence of both individuals pushes spouses to be more open and honest even though social desirability may become a problem (Kingsbury & Scanzoni, 1989). It has been suggested that interviews be conducted jointly so as to decrease modest or exaggerated responses from one spouse or another (Challiol & Mignonac, 2005). Partners may challenge each other to share information that would not otherwise be shared.

Another advantage of conjoint interviews is to allow the overall story to be enriched by the partner. In essence, the partner can bring out details left out by the one respondent.

The partners can also draw upon each other's memories and expand on opinions in order to offer a clearer understanding to the researcher (Valentine, 1999). A similar advantage is that the story or narrative of one person can be challenged. The reasoning is to get an accurate picture (Challiol & Mignonac, 2005) and a picture that is more detailed (Valentine, 1999).

It has also been suggested that conducting interviews jointly helps researchers to gain a better understanding of the ways that couples interact. Rather than just having the couple explain how they interact, they will be interacting directly in front of the researcher. Essentially the researcher can assess how each person responds to her/his partner when there are disagreements with the information presented (Challiol & Mignonac, 2005).

Interviewing couples together allows for more accurate and rich explanations of the experiences couples have. Also, conflicts and contradictions may also be pointed out (Valentine, 1999). Additionally, qualitative inquiry allows for a way to study couples together as a unit. As Merriam (2002) points out, qualitative research is useful for studying the context of what is being studied, multiple perspectives, and can take circular causality into consideration. The meanings that are placed into perspectives are viewed as being socially constructed (Merriam, 2002).

Conjoint interviews also consider the perspective of several family members simultaneously rather than just one perspective. This type of research strategy also allows for sensitive topics to be addressed as well as providing opportunities to address topics and issues that quantitative studies have overlooked. Qualitative data allow individual and family members to have their own voice and allow personal stories to be told (Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993).

Disadvantages of conjoint interviews. There is a downside to interviewing couples conjointly—one person may challenge the other’s story. Although in some ways a challenged story may be an advantage in that it allows for a more accurate story, it is also a disadvantage because it might be setting up a place for one person to display power over another. For this reason, some researchers prefer individual interviews in order to capture the unique perspectives of every person involved. It may therefore be difficult to hear both stories (Challiol & Mignonac, 2005).

Another drawback of conjoint interviews is that there may appear to be consensus when there normally is not. Some people do not feel comfortable with challenging his/her partner. The partner, therefore, may appear to have similar ideas when they really do not. There may be a social desire to agree in front of the researcher and gain approval from the researcher or the respondents may not want to be poorly represented (Challiol & Mignonac, 2005).

Conjoint interviews may be difficult. Transcripts in and of themselves cannot capture body language and non-verbal cues (Valentine, 1999). The researcher may recall a conversation in which one person appeared to be upset with the partner but did not display this in her or his words. The freedom to be open about how one is feeling at the moment may be important for the researcher to discuss with participants.

Interviewing couples may mean building rapport with two people rather than one. If a disagreement should arise, the couple may expect the researcher to work the problem out or to take a side (Valentine, 1999). There were times during the interviews for this study when I had to take a step back and try to gain insight into both perspectives and resist taking a side. Writing memos about the experience helped me deal with these issues.

Confidentiality may also be an issue in conjoint therapy. An ethical consideration in any research is maintaining confidentiality. One partner may not have a problem sharing certain information with others while the other partner wishes not to share the information with anyone else. In conjoint interviews there is more than one opinion that needs to be taken into consideration (Olesen, 2005). I had an open conversation about confidentiality before the interview began to help ensure that confidentiality would be maintained at all times.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent and confidentiality are issues that any researcher faces. However in conjoint interviews this is especially true as the responses of one person are shared with more than just the researcher but the partner as well (Olesen, 2005). I used quotes from respondents but altered information that would give any identifying information. The respondents and I talked about the issue of confidentiality and taking care with sharing their and their partner's response with others. I was clear to the respondents that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer any question if they wished.

Another ethical concern already discussed is conflicting professional and research roles. As a therapist I had a desire to assist couples in working through difficulties in their marriage, yet my awareness of this desire helped me to avoid entering into a therapist role. As a feminist therapist, I attended to power and value equity in relationships; however, my role as a researcher was to gather information and not to step in to assist them in working on their problem areas (Olesen, 2005). Before beginning the semi-structured question, I did tell the respondents that I was working on my dissertation and that I had a degree in marriage and family therapist but I was clear with respondents that I was not there to be a therapist for them to work through their issues or to help them gain relationship equity.

Researchers are often viewed as holding more power than the respondent. Some have suggested that the power given to the researcher may be false, weak, and may be confused with the responsibility of the researcher (Bloom, 1998). Researchers may be more powerful when they write in the field but may not have as much power in the researcher and respondent relationship. I attended to the power dynamics between myself and the respondents and was ready to address the topic if there seemed to be an imbalance of power. This issue did not come up during the interviews that were conducted.

Analyses

In grounded theory, comparative analyses are generally the means by which data are analyzed. Constant comparison of data is used in grounded theory which involves continuous comparison of one part of the data with new and incoming forms of data so that concepts of the theory may be developed (Merriam, 2002). Grounded theory includes emerging categories with a set of properties. The constant comparative method compares the data with itself, the data with the emergent categories, and the categories with the categories (Charmaz, 2005). The researcher uses hypotheses in order to explain relationships between the categories and the properties of the categories. The hypotheses, however, are made only tentatively and were proposed hypotheses rather than tested ones (Merriam, 2002).

In the grounded theory analysis of data, the use of the constant comparative method of analysis occurred in four stages. The first stage involved comparing evidence applicable to each category which emerged from the data. The data were first coded into as many categories as possible as they emerged from the data in the margins of the transcripts. When categories emerged from the data, I put the theme into a category and made a note in bold letters describing the theme.

The second stage involved integrating categories and their properties through the use of memos. Continuous memos were used to keep track of thoughts in order to ensure that the theory made sense in the end (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as well as to write insights, thoughts, and connections between data and interviews (Straus & Corbin, 1990). The third stage was delimiting the theory which was a stage in which smaller modifications and changes were made in the categorization.

A field worker knows what he [sic] knows, not only because he has been in the field and because he has carefully discovered and generated hypotheses, but also because “in his bones” he feels the worth of his final analyses. He has been living with partial analyses for many months, testing them each step of the way, until he has built his theory. What is more, if he has participated in the social life of his subject, then he has been living by his analyses, testing them not only by observation and interview but also by daily living (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 225).

The final stage was the actual reporting and writing of the theory based on the categories that emerged (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Themes that emerged from grounded theory and data were discovered by struggling with the data, comparing the data, coming up with categories, and then incorporating the data all together (Charmaz, 2006). Constant comparative method of data analysis was used in the analysis of the data. Litchman (2006) suggests that the researcher first describe what is learned by interpreting minimally. I wrote down what was reported by the respondents and stayed close to what was portrayed by participants’ feelings, thoughts, and actions as they related to decision-making. I then compared each category or sub-category to the other chosen categories and then grouped those with other similar units. Categories emerged and were then open to change and alteration (Litchman, 2006).

The transcripts were coded and put into categories throughout the process of research.

I contacted the participants via email addresses obtained from the first interview to see if they would like to have a second meeting to look through the accuracy of transcriptions and to see if they would like to add any new information. During this time I also presented them with a visual of the emerging themes and asked them for feedback. Six participants agreed to the second meeting and all agreed that the transcriptions were accurate and reflected the process, their thoughts, and their feelings. Two individuals added some additional information which was recorded and later transcribed and put into the transcript. Four participants were shown the visual face-to-face and four participants requested the visual to be sent to them via email. Two participants were only shown their transcripts as the visual had not yet been developed in the research process. If the visual was sent via e-mail, the participants also received a typed explanation of the visual. If the visual was shown to them in person, I explained the visual using similar words as the typed explanation. The feedback that I received from the visual was considered and alterations were made based on most of the feedback given (see Figure 1). The feedback that was received was put into the research journal. Figure 2 displays changes to the visual over time based on the feedback and data analysis procedures.

While conducting interviews, I was also transcribing, coding, and categorizing the codes. I read through the transcripts once without taking notes. The second time through I took notes and wrote in the margins of the transcripts on the topics and possible themes. I also underlined solid phrases compared those phrases with what had already been said in the preceding interviews. During a third and fourth read through of the first three interviews, I made notes and underlined themes using four main categories with different ink colors. Red ink included codes having to do with what was important to the couple and feelings. Black signified that which was part of one's background or personality. Green indicated power and

communication issues. Blue outlined stories and gender issues. Each color also had sub-themes and phrases that went along with the broader category. I used this method through coding of the fourth interview. After interviews five and six were transcribed, I began to expand the codes into more specific categories that were more solid and consistent. When I determined that a theme was indeed emerging consistently, I gave the theme a number (see Appendix H: Master Coding Key). The transcripts were then read to explore the theme further and to code and make notes for that particular theme. I looked back at my researcher journal and interview summary sheets when themes developed and checked for previous thoughts about themes. When themes emerged, I wrote about them in my research journal and came up with hypotheses about the relationships and connections between the themes. I then went back to the transcripts and looked at the underlined phrases, notes in the margins, and coded numbers and highlighted the parts that best described the theme. I developed a visual of the emergent themes developed and went through subsequent changes over the course of coding, transcribing, member checks, and peer checks.

Saturation

I interviewed nine couples, after which point I felt saturation was reached. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), saturation is the point at which no new information is being acquired through interviews. Using grounded theory, the researcher cannot say at the onset of the study how many persons will need to be interviewed. The researcher can count the number at the end and after saturation has been reached. One knows when saturation is reached when no new information is being discovered and when no new properties of categories can be formed. When saturation is reached, the researcher may know by realizing that there are no gaps remaining in the categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I felt that

saturation was reached after the eighth interview but conducted an additional interview to be sure.

Grounded theory calls for some accountability. For example, accountability should be practiced in determining that saturation has been reached and how the conclusion was reached. Too often saturation is used to justify small sample sizes which leads to decreased credibility and puts all work into question (Charmaz, 2005). I checked for saturation through constant comparison to see if additional themes were emerging. No new themes emerged, so I knew that I had reached the point of saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Rigor and Trustworthiness

Conveying credibility is extremely important in qualitative research and grounded theory. It helps readers understand the theoretical framework. To do so, the researcher should give a detailed description of the framework being used for the research. This helps the reader to understanding what was heard and said and how that then points back to the theory. Another important component of credibility is to explain to the reader how the data were analyzed and how the theory was created (Glaser & Straus, 1967).

Glaser and Straus (1967) suggest that there are a number of ways in which credibility is judged. First, credibility may be judged in the rich and thick descriptions that allow those who read the results to nearly become the researcher in the field and become convinced of the theory. Another way to judge credibility is by knowing how the researcher came up with conclusions. This may assist in understanding the events, the respondents, who was compared with the respondents, the experiences of the researcher, and the researcher's appearance to others (Glaser & Straus, 1967). I have given descriptions of each theme as well

as quotations as examples of those themes to support them. I also wrote about how the themes emerged in a journal.

I addressed four areas of trustworthiness in this study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Researchers in qualitative research display trustworthiness by describing the trail that was used to make conclusions as well as the role in the research (Sullivan, 2001).

Credibility. In quantitative terms, credibility is likened to internal validity or ensuring that the researcher is measuring what is purported to be measured. In the present study, I used triangulation, member checks, and peer examination to ensure credibility (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Triangulation may be done in terms of data, method, investigator, and theory triangulation (Litchman, 2006). In this study, I used grounded theory and feminist theory when examining the data. I also used data triangulation by gaining the perspective of both individuals of the couple in conjoint interviews and individual interviews. Investigator triangulation was also achieved by employing the members of my graduate colleagues and committee in testing out my conclusions which is discussed below.

I used member checks to ensure credibility. Member checks involved sharing with the respondents the conclusions that have been made (Merriam, 2002). I contacted each couple via email to see if they were interested in holding a second meeting. Three couples responded to the email for a second meeting. I brought the transcript of the couple interview back to six of the respondents (three couples) and shared with them some of the emerging themes from the interviews. I asked them for feedback on the different themes as presented in a visual and made appropriate alterations where they suggested. Four of the six respondents agreed with the visual and said that it was accurate and appropriate. One person gave comments on

making the visual easier to understand in a visual sense so that it flowed better. The other person suggested that the points of discontent and points of satisfaction could influence the power strategies and the perspectives during decision-making. After making these changes, I took the new visual to another couple, a peer reviewer, and to my major professor for approval. I also shared with a peer examiner and with my major professor the informed consent, interview questions, demographics form, emergent themes, codes, visual, and theme graphic.

Transferability. Transferability is another part of trustworthiness. Transferability of the findings refers to the generalizability to the population but is different from quantitative generalizability. Qualitative research views the readers as judges in determining whether or not the study is transferable. In essence the researcher or reader can determine if the findings can translate across time and context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). One way to set up a context for transferability is to provide rich descriptions of the context and findings. I discussed the participants and gave examples of their stories to support the findings (Creswell, 2003; Litchman, 2006).

Dependability. Dependability is consideration of the context of the research and where the research takes place (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The researcher can ensure better dependability by discussing the setting of the study as well as the changes that occur. A goal of dependability is to confirm that if other researchers would conduct similar research, the same observations and conclusions would occur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Maintaining and presenting a clear audit trail was one way to go about ensuring dependability. The audit trail included a path of evidence that could be used in verifying the conclusions made and how decisions were made and conclusions reached. The audit trail in this study included field

notes, journal memos, themes, codes, and changes in visual representations (Merriam, 2002). Another way to ensure dependability that was used in this study was making convincing arguments that conveyed the importance of the research to a larger context using clear communication in writing (Litchman, 2006).

Confirmability. Confirmability is when the data can be examined by others and similar conclusions made. People outside the research, if examining the same data, would come up with findings similar to those that the researcher discovered. Triangulation of data, reflexivity of the researcher, and an adequate audit trail are all ways to reach confirmability in qualitative studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As seen in the method section, I have been reflexive about the biases I had and the ways that those biases played into my own interpretation of the data. I also used triangulation and provided a clear audit trail throughout the research process.

Chapter 4: Results

The following themes and subthemes reflect the outcomes of the individual and conjoint interviews based on decision-making. Figure 1 depicts the process of decision-making and some of the factors involved in the process, beginning with outside influences which affects all parts of the process. In general, the overarching value of decision-making was making decisions based on the good of the family. With that value in mind, decisions were then made based on a person's perspectives, communication style, and personal beliefs and characteristics. Following a decision, individuals would often reflect on the positives and negatives of the process and/or the decision reached. My training in systemic perspectives has influenced my thinking about how the factors influencing decisions impact each other. According to systems theory, one part of a system influences and affects all of the other parts to some extent. As a result, Figure 1 shows mutual influences that may be constantly changing the flow and direction of the way decisions are made. Table 1 shows the main themes, sub-themes, and gives an example of each theme.

Outside Influence

Outside influence was a topic that was considered to come before the final decision was made. Outside influence was on the perimeter of the decision-making process and permeated every part of the decision-making process including how the decision was reached and the actual decision that was reached. Individuals interact with others on a daily basis. A number of couples reported that factors such as the Bible, God, friends, and family influenced the ways their decisions were made. This theme emerged while transcribing the second interview and I began to realize that couples did not just go back and forth between the two of them and that there were outside situations and other factors guiding their joint

decision-making. This theme was brought up by couples in conjoint interviews as well as in the individual interviews.

Faith

Eight of the nine couples interviewed specifically talked about the importance of religion in their decision-making. Sue and Carl were the only couple who did not talk about how their religious or spiritual beliefs impacted their decisions making process. Couples and individuals who did discuss this did so in terms of the importance of “reading the Bible” and “listening to what God has to say about the decision” and “making sure the decision is Christ-centered.”

At times, faith was a source of comfort and guidance. Wade and Lucy said that when they were not sure just what decision to make, that “we’ve had to pray about things. We stop and pray about it” and a similar statement from Kari and Griffin, “We’re from a Christian family and so we’ve got that [faith and God] at the center of our life.” Doug and Ann spoke about the influence of their faith on making decisions on parenting:

Doug: I’d say we look at the Bible a lot for our parenting and just make sure that we’re doing right.

Ann: In that regard, I think we agree that we want to raise our children in a Godly way, we bring it back to the Bible in the sense that, the Bible says to honor your father and mother. It’s not necessarily about us, it’s about how are you living for God?

For Tanya, faith was the standard for how she interacted with her husband, “Sometimes we’ll bicker and I’ll hear something harsh come from my mouth and go ‘oh no, God doesn’t want me to speak to my husband that way.’” Viv also talked about how God sets the standard for her to love her husband, “I try to love him like God loves me and try to be self-less and not self-serving.” Todd described the standard of his faith:

My worldview and whatnot dictates this but we both believe that our lives are centered around Jesus Christ and we would both say we have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and we live our lives to please him. We live our lives according to the standards that are written down in the Bible and when you're living your life according to those standards, you're living your life according to a higher standard, one of the Bible's basic premises and teaching about marriage is that it's not about you. It's about total selflessness, the Bible talks a lot about wives submitting to their husband but it also talks about husbands loving their wives as Christ loved the church and when you put it together, that's how marriage relationships work and it's demonstrated over and over and over again throughout history and if you don't have that dynamic, I hold to the belief that if you don't have Christ as the center of your home then you're only going to go as far as you can humanly take it and as our society, shows, that's not very far in most relationships.

Kari reported, "I think the main thing to me is just that the decisions that we're going to make are ones that are going to glorify God." Likewise, Lora said that she and Ger "strive to involve God in our decision-making."

Family Background Experiences

I have been trained as a therapist and so this theme inevitably came out of my training in marriage and family therapy. I have the assumption that one's background and experience with parents are influential on the present. Coming from a systemic perspective, I look at how many factors or sub-systems influence the presenting issue and those involved. Individuals may have had experiences with their families and from their background that they try to emulate. There are other times that those experiences are negative and without knowing anything different, those patterns of behavior are repeated, or there is a tendency to resist that experience and do the opposite. My assumption is that individuals, whether or not they are aware of it, either resist what they know and try to do the opposite or imitate what they have seen in their families of origin. This assumption was confirmed by the reports of the participants.

Although I did not explicitly ask about family of origin until the sixth (individual) interview, it came out in conjoint and individual interviews. In many cases, couples took what was beneficial from what they observed from their family of origin and left behind that which was ineffective. Others tried to emulate their parents and others tried to do the opposite.

Some couples rejected what they grew up with and their preconceptions about decision-making changed as a result of what they experienced. Ann said:

My mom is very much old school and totally thinks that the husbands shouldn't have to do anything. We'd eaten supper and we were all sitting at the table talking afterward and my husband got up and got people's plates and my mom made the comment like "What are you doing?" or something like that and he's like, "She cooks and I do the dishes." I've heard him say that lots of times.

Another example that Ann gave regarding her differences from her family of origin was in relation to money. She said her father had control of the money because he earned more. Ann reflected on how her husband made more money than she did but that they shared the spending decisions. Ann and Doug both rejected their parental style when it came to decision-making. Doug talked about how he did not want to be like his father when it came to decision-making:

My dad can be really overbearing on my mom and with us. I try to avoid doing that, knowing that's how it was and being able to make decisions equally makes me feel like I'm doing a better job...My dad feels more entitled to make more decisions 'cause he makes the money.

Kari rejected the experience in her home growing up and talked about wanting her own home to be different, "Growing up in my family was tough and it was just unpleasant...we're not yelling, we're coming to an understanding." She also mentioned that she barely witnessed her parents ever talk and did not know how decisions between her

parents were reached but she did know that, “I always wanted to be able to talk to my husband whenever I got married and I wanted to make it right and not have the relationship that my mom and dad had...the total opposite of them.” Tanya also discussed how different her home was compared to her parents’, “My mom was and still is much more forceful and I would say more of the decision-maker from what I see of their relationship...we are very different, my parents’ home is not calm and peaceful.”

Lora also talked about her experience and how she wanted to have a relationship that was different from her parents’. Even though she wanted to live differently, at the beginning of her marriage, she tended to emulate what she witnessed growing up and has had to resist what she was taught:

Lora: I think we’re very different! My parents had a very unhealthy relationship and are now divorced and yeah, I can’t think of one healthy discussion they ever had. I mean, my dad beat the crap out of my mom and so that was like what she had and if she ever tried to make a decision. I mean I think that’s significantly been carried into our marriage. I mean, I think that’s something that at the beginning, I think could have been a big part in my decision-making...I think sometimes I was like my mom like oftentimes my mom would push at my dad and push and push and push him until he snapped and so there were times when I would do that to see if he would snap and just push and push and disagree and disagree with him and then he never snapped and so for me that was like you know that was just weird because that is what I’d always known and so then when he never snapped it was like ‘okay, now what do I do?’ I mean, and then my mom would always threaten to leave my dad if she didn’t get things a certain way. I did that when we first got married, I would say ‘if you don’t do this, I’ll leave you’ and then I had nowhere to go and I didn’t really want to leave and then I stopped doing that but it worked for a while and he would say ‘okay, fine’ and then it stopped working cause he figured it out, ‘she’s not going anywhere’ so there was a lot of unhealthy things that I carried into our marriage that I think that I’ve been working on changing within myself.

Interviewer: How have you been able to do that?

Lora: It’s through God, really, I mean, praying and him [Ger] being very patient with me and yeah, just him standing his ground in times like and when I was saying I was going to leave ‘okay, I’ll be here when you come back’ and like well, that’s not fun.

That takes the fun out of whatever and so yeah, but it's just, it's through the grace of God, really!

Not all couples rejected what they experienced growing up. Some couples took some characteristics from their parents and resisted other characteristics. Sue reported how she and Carl were similar in some ways but also different:

My parents were old fashioned, where my dad, I mean, I guess I am working outside the home but my mom stayed home while my dad worked all the time and probably made all the decisions, at least the financial decisions. I mean, my mom's still pretty dominant but I think growing up when it came to the big decisions, my dad probably made them so we're pretty different that way.

Carl also reiterated a similar experience growing up where his mom stayed home and his dad made the decisions. At the same time, Sue and Carl agreed that they were similar to their parents:

Carl: We just say it like it is. I think we come from pretty open families.

Sue: That is very accurate.

Carl: There's not many things in our backgrounds, not a lot of situations where we had parents or anybody ever sort of hide anything.

Sue: We never had any family secrets, we had healthy families.

Viv took some of what was positive and left the negative that she witnessed from her own parents as well. She talked about how her mother yelled a lot so she rejected that part but was similar to her mother in that she is able to voice her opinion and be strong in her convictions. James talked about how he could recognize the good and bad ways his own parents made decisions and that he took the good parts of what he witnessed in his family and made those aspect work for him. Similarly, Ger talked about how he witnessed his own parents not communicating well and his father not listening to his mother. He talked about how he tended to be similar and not always listen to Lora or communicate well with her. At the same

time, Ger talked about how he “saw a good model for marriage” by the respect and love his parents showed to one another.

Zane and Jill also talked about their similar backgrounds and upbringings but also how the way their families communicated was different which led to difficulties in their communication. They tended to mirror Zane’s family and shy away from how Jill’s family communicated:

Zane: I’m more instantaneous, ‘I’m sorry.’

Jill: Your family is so like that, it drives me nuts! “I’m so sorry,” like right away, and I’m like, “I wish I could do that.” I’ll maybe talk to you in a couple of hours.

Zane: I’d say you think it’s [the apology] only a half-hearted one. I mean, I’ll do something and yell right there and 30 seconds later go and give her a hug and make everything better and she won’t have it.

Zane went on to talk about how he is similar to his father in that there are not roles that he expects Jill to do. He talked about how he will get into the kitchen and clean since, “My dad was around and home lots so he cooked and things like that so I have no problem getting in the kitchen and cooking, I enjoy it.” Jill talked about how she was different from her own family experiences. She discussed how there had been a lot of yelling and arguing in her own home growing up and did not want that for her own family. She turned away from what she experienced in her own family and instead she reported that she “tries my hardest not to say anything harsh or mean...I don’t want a lot of yelling in my house!” At the same time, Jill recognized that despite the yelling and arguing that went on in her home growing up she appreciated and learned from them, “My parents have a lot of respect for each other and they really listen to each other and I know my grandparents do too. We were raised to be kind and love each other and respect each other...my parents are just more vocal about it.”

Similarities to a person's family of origin were reported on a regular basis. Lucy and Wade's parents were similar and their own relationship mirrors their parents': "I think we're like our parents that way and we expect him [their son] to be a certain way and we discipline like them." Wade talked about how he and Lucy are similar to his parents, "My parents were similar to us in regards to their decision-making. My dad made a lot of the decisions but I know that my mom was involved and included. I think our relationship is a lot like that." Wade later talked more about how his father as well as Lucy's father were both head of the home and made the final decisions and how he takes that role on in his own home. Lucy described how her role with Wade mirrored her parents', "I guess that was the kind of way I grew up too. I saw my dad as being the head of the household and I know my mom had input but I know that he made the decision." Todd talked about the huge impact his own parents had on the way he now makes decisions with Viv:

It had a huge amount of influence, I saw the huge respect, I saw that my mom respected my dad and I saw that my dad loved my mom and I don't, I cannot remember a time, there were obviously times when they argued but I cannot remember a time when they were in an extreme heated disagreement about something. That just didn't happen. So when you grow up around that type of love and respect, it's just something that you see that how it should be and how you think it should be anyway. I think that that influence played a huge part in how I think about what family dynamics should be regarding decision-making.

Chad talked about how similar he is to his own father when it comes to decision-making, "My dad is a quiet decision-maker...They [his parents] always had good discussions. They were partners. My mom always voiced her opinion and my dad always listened." He went on to say that, "He [his father] never told her to be quiet and always encouraged; he was very similar to me."

Some couples discussed how their backgrounds helped them with the decision-making process. Some couples talked about how their background similarities contributed to commonalities and lack of disagreement regarding most decisions. When their backgrounds matched up couples reported ease in decision-making; Bethany said, “We are both from the Midwest, have the same family-type situation, you know, both raised similarly so we haven’t really had any tough decisions.” Carl and Sue agreed, “We have similar upbringing and temperament, we’re from the same hometown and our families were roughly in the same economic status. In some ways we have a pretty shared background experience.” Lucy and Wade mentioned, “We were both raised in Christian homes, both had strict parents, we were both the oldest in the family.” Sue later said, “We have similar ideas so it doesn’t, we just agree on a lot so it makes the decision-making pretty easy.” Zane and Jill also said that they “came from similar church backgrounds so our faith was the same and that helped to determine how we raise our kids to believe in Jesus...we already had that, we didn’t have to discuss it.” Wade also agreed: “Lucy and I grew up in very similar households so most of the things...we’re very similar.” Lucy followed Wade’s comment with:

It [similar backgrounds] makes our decision-making easier...it kind of makes us feel the same way about a lot of things like parenting and stuff and so, it’s not too hard to come to a decision about what to do because of our backgrounds and we feel the same way. It seems like that’s been something to make it easier so far.

Todd and Viv discussed how they would talk about their childhood while they were dating and the conversations would often go back to their experiences growing up and how they hoped to be in the future with their own children: “This is what our parents did, you’d probably say ‘is that what we’re going to do with our kids?’ and then we’d discuss that...how we both were raised and then we would just discuss the differences and commonalities.”

Other times, outside influence was viewed as burdensome and difficult to handle. James and Bethany talked about how they struggled with what to do with family members who want to have a say in how decisions are made:

We have constantly had the discussion around the holidays about how we were going to see your family and how do we see my family. We try to be accommodating but another person who wants to make decisions in our marriage is my mother-in-law. Every year we have that 3rd decision-making person involved...we try to accommodate while still managing to do what we felt was best...she [mother-in-law] makes decisions for us based on herself and I know that's her mentality so sometimes I just say 'nope' to what she wants but I'm not going to go along with it just because I know why she's doing that.

James and Bethany tried to take the other person into consideration while realizing that a third perspective complicated matters and added yet another point of view which led to a longer process.

Some outside influence served as a form of social support and encouragement, "We talk to other people and that sort of thing and talk to parents...about how to be, like when and how to spank." Although Todd specifically said that he did not talk to other people about decisions he makes with his wife, Viv talked about how Todd is aware that she inquires of her friends and talked about how, "I talk it over with my friends... 'What do you think? Do you have any experiences with that?'" Lora and Tanya also reported talking decisions over with their friends. Lora and Ger went to their pastor for Biblical support and encouragement when trying to decide whether or not Ger should travel with other women for his place of employment. Viv and Todd also reported going to their pastor but only if they had a difficult decision to make.

Social Comparisons

Social comparisons can play a part in how couples make decisions. The emphasis on social comparisons emerged after I noticed that couples talked about others they knew. The comparisons were most often made in a way that conveyed appreciation of their own way of making decisions. James gave an example of how his brother and sister-in-law make decisions in a much different way based on their different personalities. He specifically talked about how he and Bethany made decisions in a more equitable way because their personalities matched up as opposed to his sister-in-law who tended to be less egalitarian because her personality was more soft-spoken and indecisive.

All participants, in their individual interview, were asked whether or not the way they made decisions was typical of their generation. In every interview, individuals talked about how they felt that their decision-making was not typical of couples of the same generation or was not typical of their peers. Todd said, “I think people are more independent and opinionated...when you look at the marriage and divorce rate and obviously people get divorced because there is a lot of conflict around decision-making...there’s a lot of decisions made with selfish ideals.” Griffin mentioned that couples in his generation tended to be “independent and marginally oppositional and defiant or they just do their own thing...if it wasn’t that way there wouldn’t be so many getting divorced...I’d say we’re quite different than our generation.” Bethany reiterated that she thought that many couples in her generation seem to be more self-centered, less accommodating, and less likely to have “core values that rein them in.” Ger also made a similar comment but also talked about how other households seem to operate:

I think that ours is more civil, it is more with a level of compromise, it's not a lot of yelling and screaming and just mad tantrums and not then coming back and resolving things and remaining stubborn and doing your own thing or whatever, I think there's a lot of that especially in my line of work. I see a lot of home-settings and I see a lot of things and hear a lot of people talk and it's just like so different then what Lora and I experience and so I mean, maybe that is the minority but I guess you just watch the news and hear stories and so many situations, divorce rates and all this different stuff. I guess I'd say it's not typical.

Chad reflected on the media and how he thinks he is different from the rest of his generation:

I don't think we're typical of our generation and maybe that's 'cause I'm influenced by TV but it doesn't seem like the people on TV, if they're representative of our generation, go through the same decision-making process as we do. TV is made to show conflict and to draw in viewers...TV tries to be more confrontational but that's what people do who strive for conflict to entertain. We can't put people in a coliseum and kill them anymore but we can sure show some spouses getting mad at each other and when you watch these reality shows, the more I see the battle between people.

Chad later talked about how he was different from his friends in some of the ways he makes decisions with Tanya:

I think that some of the guys [friends] are, some males in the relationships are a little bit more domineering in the decision-making and maybe a little bit less a little less free than I am, I mean some guys like to have the ship run one way and I'm kind of, I like to have it run one way as long as my wife is in accord with how it's run, not just me.

Tanya acknowledged that she has many friends who might make decisions in a similar way but that in general, society portrays women as trying to "step over their husbands and have more say instead of being in an equal partnership." Lora talked about how they are unique in that they involve God in their decision-making process. Viv added to this by saying that she "wouldn't think that people spend a lot of time in prayer...the majority of people probably want their own way...I guess that's how the world would do it if they didn't have Christ."

Bethany talked of her appreciation for how she and James make decisions as opposed to some of their friends: “They get upset and take it personally or they think you’re attacking and I think we’re both good about being able to have agreements with each other and disagree on things and not have the other one upset.” Carl also talked about how “Other friends you hear fight all the time...That’s not even an issue for us.” Carl went on to give an example of friends who had separate checking accounts and how confusing and tense it would be if he and Sue had to make decisions with separate accounts.

Ann talked about how she felt like she and Doug made decisions like people at her place of employment but very different from couples at her church:

I would say that we’re pretty much in line with other couples in our generation but it depends on the context. I think of friends at work and I think we are [typical] but I think of friends at church and I feel like we’re the minority because a lot of young couples were raised very conservatively...I’ve struggled with relating to some of the families there and I think they question us too.

In a separate interview, Doug reiterated this feeling of being in a church where his own way of decision-making was different from others in his church and that he and Ann's way of making decisions was more equal. Similarly, Jill discussed how she thought she and Zane made decisions in a way that was typical of their generation but different from peers and family members. She gave an example of her sister, “She doesn’t work and her husband does and she doesn’t get a stand on things and her husband gets a lot of the upper say on a lot of things.” Zane also said that he knew of fathers who made all the decisions in the home whereas he and Jill ask each other about decisions and discuss back and forth. Griffin mentioned that, “Couples don’t really even talk to each other. They really don’t talk about decisions together, so you can’t be good at it if you don’t do it.” Doug said that he thought that “our generation is more equal than any other generation in the past.”

Children

Children change the lives of their parents. When children enter the picture, husbands and wives are often required to make shifts in their way of thinking about decisions. Children inevitably influence the decision-making process but for some couples the shift in decision-making is more profound than for others. While transcribing the third interview I noticed that the couples were talking about their children and how they influenced parts of the decision-making process. Therefore in the fourth interview I began to ask couples how their decision-making process has changed since having children. Couples time and again talked about how their own parents impacted their own decision-making with their partner. I began to wonder: how then do couples think their own decision-making practices are influencing their children? Therefore, after the sixth interview, I began to ask couples how they thought their own children would be influenced by their decision-making process.

Couples often reported that children changed parts of their decision-making process or time spent on making decisions. Ann talked about how difficult it was to maintain a household with three children and how difficult it was to find time to have discussions with Doug. Lucy and Wade agreed that their decision-making process has been significantly shortened since having a child. James had a six month old daughter and had only recently felt the effects of being a parent and he realized that since having children, he and Bethany now think more about themselves and their child when making decisions before considering others. Before children, James reported that they worried more about friends and outside family members and put themselves second. Viv mentioned that since having children, the amount of time spent on a decision has significantly decreased and that the types of decisions that are made are different although the actual process of decision-making has not changed

for her and Todd. Ger reiterated this and said that the kinds of decisions that they make now are less about them as a couple and more about the kids. Tanya and Chad talked about how they thought that time spent on decisions has decreased and they are a lot quicker to make decisions, “Before kids, everything was discussed and little things were bigger things then.” Lucy and Wade as well as Kari and Griffin both schedule time to discuss decisions now that they have less time because of the presence of children.

Ger and Lora also talked about the change in decision-making after having children:

We’ve definitely had to be more careful about what we discuss and when...whether it could be discussed around the kids or if we need to wait until they go to bed or when we’re more private...because the kids are around, we are more civil in our discussions.

Carl reported that since having their child, he and Sue are quicker to recognize when they are not making progress on a decision and are quicker to call a break rather than argue the same points over and over. Zane and Jill admitted that since having children, they worry more about making decisions for the children than for themselves. Before children they did not worry as much about finances. They also talked about how they have much less time to make decisions so the process has been shortened and they acknowledged that most decisions are made on weekends and when the kids are not around. Jill talked about ways that their decision-making is more efficient:

We don’t have a lot of alone time together and we don’t get to do stuff on our own...he’ll research and be prepared and lay it [his findings] on the board and I’ll have the day to look it over before discussing it...I’ll be able to see that before we actually discuss it and so I won’t be unprepared.

Couples also talked about a feeling of responsibility they had to model good decision-making behaviors for their own children. Todd reported a sense of responsibility to model good decision-making in hopes that his children would see that.

I value Viv's opinion and I hope they see that it's not my way or the highway either that she is a very very valuable part in the decision-making process of the household. I hope they see us praying about decisions and I want our kids to take away from that it's not, we're not in ultimate control over our lives and I want them to see that we're dependent on God for the decisions we make.

Viv talked about how "I don't want my kids to think I'm a yeller, and I want my kids to always think we have a really good relationship." Ger and Lora also talked about how they hoped their children would see them talk through differences no matter how difficult the topic. They too wanted to be a model to their children to help them learn how to resolve conflict in a positive way and from a Biblical perspective. Lucy talked about how she felt that since having a child she and Wade are more supportive of each other's decisions and that she and Wade back each other up when decisions are made. Zane talked about how important it was to him that his children saw the love he had for Jill which he tried to model for them, "I want my children to be this close and to find a spouse that they can do the same thing with."

Good of Others

Couples were each asked together about the most important characteristic to them when they made decisions that influenced them both. In various ways and using different examples, couples suggested a common concern for making decisions as a couple that contributed to what they felt was best for the family as a whole or for one's spouse in particular. The most important characteristic for a spouse or one's family was the underlying quality for which personal characteristics and couple processes were based. In every instance the most important characteristic when couples thought about making decisions together was ensuring that the best thing for the spouse or family was being done. The following are examples of doing what was best for the family and will be portrayed in the following

paragraphs: the decision was best for the family, each person was aware of the other person's schedule, attention was paid to the needs of the spouse, the couple was working toward long-term family goals, both partners had input into the decision, both partners were content with the decision, both people were committed to the decision, and the decision was framed around what was best for the family.

Concern for Spouse

There was a concern for one's partner as well as the family when considering the whole. The family or the spousal subunit is a part of the whole. Doug said, "If I'm going to go out, is that going to be beneficial for her schedule or is there a different time for me to go out later?...if I'm going to be gone, I have to be fair and think about how that's going to impact her and be good for her." Ann suggested, "We both have a stake in whatever it is we're deciding and I think that's important to both be involved." In a decision over which house to buy, Kari commented that she wanted him to have the house with the backyard and the garden that he desired. Jill also said, "I think it has a lot to do with making each other happy...I like to make him happy and I hope he likes to make me happy."

Couples reported that they were concerned with a mutual satisfaction with the decision that was made. Doug stated, "I'm going to think about what's best for both of us and go from there...I think the main thing is that we think about the other person's needs before we think about our own when we're trying to make a decision and about how it will impact the family if it's something big." Likewise, Carl stated, "I think we need to make sure that we're both happy or at least content with the decision" and Wade also said, "When we make decisions together, I want to know that we're both on board and that we're both committed to the decision." Kari reiterated, "I want to make sure that we're both comfortable with the

decision we make.” Todd and Viv as well as Tanya and Chad talked about how they try to be selfless by putting themselves aside and thinking of one’s spouse before themselves. James too talked about his concern for Bethany’s happiness, “I would still rather have Bethany be happy with the decision first and then I’ll worry about the decision later.”

Concern for Family

When asked about the most important value when making a decision, Doug stated how important it was to “be aware of the needs of the family as a whole while at the same time you figure out the benefits and the cons.” His wife Ann went on to say, “Whatever we’re deciding is going to be for the benefit of the entire family.” Ger also mentioned that it was important for him “to have a decision that’s best for the family” while Viv reported asking herself this question when making decision: “How will it affect our family?” Jill and Zane decided to finish part of their basement so that their children would have a place to go play. Their son had been sleeping in a large closet and they decided that he should also have an actual room. So, for the good of the entire family, they planned to put their saved finances toward a project that would benefit the family and they finished their basement and added another room for their son. Jill later commented, “Making decisions that are good for the entire family makes me feel responsible and happy.” She also commented about how making choices that were good for the family “make our family stronger.” Zane reiterated this but in a slightly different way,

When we can come together for the good of the family, to be happy, keep ourselves financially stable, and still be able to send the kids to school, and still tithe to the church and things like that, you just feel good.

James talked about his concern for the family as coming before fairness and equity, “I think that we want to be fair and equal although I think most of our decisions we do what’s

best for our family.” His wife, Bethany, later talked about how she considers the long-term goals and how the decision will help the family reach those goals. Carl also emphasized the importance of reaching family goals, “I think that there’s an overall plan of where we’re going and what we hope for the family.” Another example of a concern for the whole family was discussed in terms of buying a home. This couple found themselves living in an apartment with a small baby and realized that “they needed more space and more room” so they would all be more comfortable.

James and Bethany talked about the desire to break away from their extended family in order to do what they felt was right for their own immediate family:

We always said when we had kids our first priority is our family which is us three and you know making sure that we do what’s best for our daughter and everything first and so of course that means Christmas morning at our own house and we want to do it our certain way.

This family talked about a concern for the immediate family over and above their concern for extended family.

Sue was concerned about the growing number of hours her husband was putting into his job. She was concerned for him, herself, and their new baby:

I had just had a baby and the reason I wanted him to get a new job was because he would leave at six in the morning and not get back until seven at night. He was gone all the time at a pretty stressful job, and hardly saw the baby.

Carl later stated, “I just tend to think now in terms of my family rather than what I’d really like to do.” Sue reported that the job was not good for the entire family and therefore felt a need to make some changes for the good of the family. At the same time, she also left her full-time career and began working part-time to spend more time with her child. Every

couple that was interviewed also choose to have the wife work part-time after having children.

Another example of thinking of the whole of the family was summarized by Zane:

You have kids and start to realize the responsibility that it brings and you realize that it's not all about you and what you get. They [the family] come first and then you start thinking about everything else and over time you have to basically get used to it. We stay home more and sometimes I need a slap on the head to not be selfish and when I want to go out a guys' night or something like that I have to remember, my guys are right here. I try to think unselfishly and I think that changes what I argue for and about.

Each couple, in one way or another, expressed concerns about making decisions that were not just about themselves but were concerned with someone else.

Perspectives during Decision-making

The perspective that a person takes during the decision-making process influences the decision that is ultimately made and the way that the decision is viewed. Four perspectives were identified. The first perspective involves taking on either a broad or a narrow perspective of the decision and/or situation. Most couples reported that there was a balance in that one person kept the big picture in mind while the other person thought about the details of making the decision. The second perspective that one could take is the level of importance that a particular decision holds. A third possible perspective that influences the decision reached is the level of acceptance that a person has of her/his partner and the differences between herself/himself and the partner. The final perspective is the role that emotion plays in the decision-making process. This involves whether or not a couple will tolerate intense emotion or if they will have the perspective that strong emotions are negative and should be avoided.

Balance: Big Picture vs. Details

Balance is a part of one's perspective during the decision-making process. The big picture mentality and thinking about the details mainly came out in the conjoint interviews when discussing the process of making a decision. At times this theme came out at the individual level. The thought behind balance was that couples take on a certain perspective based on their viewpoint and how they viewed the decision and the outcome. In most cases wives and husbands agreed that the husbands were the ones who looked at the big picture whereas the wives paid attention to the details. When one person was weak on one characteristic, the other person was often reported to be strong on the other side of the characteristic. Couples reported balance as helping make the best decision, "we're opposites where we can balance each other out." Bethany talked about how her perspective was one that considers the details whereas James did not always remember or think about the details, "I'd say he doesn't really remember details like I do, so for him, I think it's like, 'Hey, let's do this' then I say, 'Oh, remember we did this' and he'd say, 'Oh, okay.'"

Carl reported being the person in his relationship with Sue who looked at the bigger picture:

She's really good at attention to detail and the bigger picture thinking is what I would do. So, day-to-day finances and what's in the checking account right now, she's better at making decisions on that. In terms of long-term goals and that kind of that kind of thing, that's something I like to do more and that's where my emphasis is.

Tanya said, "I'd say he has more foresight in general and I'm much more in the details...how is that going to work and play out in the future?" Todd also said, "I generalize more and look at the bigger picture, she narrows her focus in." Doug talked about how he pays attention to

the big picture, takes a number of factors into consideration, tries to be thoughtful, and then makes a decision based on the whole. He described Ann as someone who tends to make decisions more quickly without seeing the larger scheme. Bethany also talked about the big-picture mentality, “All my decisions I make for the long-term and I don’t really have a short-term mentality which is unlike James.” She went on to talk about how she tends to see the long-term even when that may mean they are less happy with the decision in the present:

We’re trying to look at the future, the big picture and what’s the best thing to do to help us tomorrow and down the road...I might make a decision that I’m not happy with in the short-term but I know that long-term it’s going to work out better.

Zane and Jill reiterated the thought of one person’s perspective being long-term while the other person’s perspective seemed more present and detail oriented:

She looks at the cost only and I’m more of a big or long picture. If we sell the house, I look at curb appeal, things like that; I don’t want to have to redo it. I want to make it look like how we talked about it before she heard the prices. We’ll save that \$1000 but that money will come back and help us later. She’s very much into the ‘now.’ I’m very much future...we do balance well.

Level of Importance

Level of importance was a theme that emerged from the couple interviews as the couple discussed how they go through the decision-making process and come to a decision. Part of a person’s perspective during the decision-making process was the level of importance of the decision. There were times (as will be seen in the section on power) when one person just wanted to be “right” about a decision. There were other times when the participant weighed the importance level of a decision to their spouse or themselves and considered that over being “right” or “winning.” The importance level was based on one’s perspective of the particular decision at hand.

One way that couples began to assess the importance level of a decision was by “whoever brings it up” or “whoever wants something the most.” When a decision needed to be discussed, the person who saw the issue as important would be the one to bring it up. Another way to determine the importance level of a decision was whether or not the decision would affect the future, or the “big picture.” Bethany said, “I can tell if it’s something that is important to him because he’s less inclined to just drop it. He’d be more persistent.” Carl talked about the importance of putting the relationship first and recognizing and “putting things into context” and then “the recognition that it’s not that big of a deal” and knowing when “there’s bigger fish to fry.” Carl later said that he recognized if a decision was important to Sue when she “makes the same set of core arguments over and over.”

A decision may seem important to one person more than another. In times like these, couples recognized the importance level their partner placed on the decision and put their own opinions to the side and allowed their partner to make the decision. Zane and Jill agreed that the importance could be assessed if one person kept bringing up the same issue. Todd could recognize when a decision was important to Viv because she would make her opinion known, “She’d be very into it, it’s obvious...there’s not a lot of beating around the bush.” Likewise, Viv could recognize when a decision was important to Todd, “He has stronger words and longer length of the conversation...he’s got points A, B,C,D, he has it all laid out.” James talked about how he knows when a decision is important to Bethany when she continues to bring the issue up and argues her point:

If she brings it up multiple times, it’s on her mind, it’s important...I realize how big of a deal it is to her. If it’s not a big deal, she’d drop it and say ‘okay do it your way’ or ‘your point is more valid’ but within that same conversation, you know if she would continue to emphasize how important it is to do x, y, or z, then I would know

that this is going to take more of me in the conversation to either agree or come to a compromise or be accommodating or she'd just drop it right way.

Sue reiterated the notion that when she recognizes that a decision is important to Carl, "That might sway my decision a bit and then I see that it's important and may try to understand [his side] harder." Carl said, "We both recognize the magnitude of the decision, taking it not too seriously but understanding when it is important." An example of this that Carl and Sue gave was searching for a job for Carl that fit their family:

I think that she understood at one point in time that the career aspect of my life was an important thing to me so I think that even though we had different ideas of what I should be doing, I think that she would lay off on that a little bit to figure out what I wanted to do in making a decision. I think in some ways for a while there was a wall that she would hit if she disagreed with me on something on that topic and then she found a way to give it some time and then it resolved itself in a way we were both happy with.

Sue recognized the importance of Carl's job and finding a career that fit him. She found a different way to address the issue in a way that Carl would be more receptive to. Carl also mentioned that he knew how important it was to Sue that he acquires a new job and once he realized how anxious she was about it, he began to look harder for the job. Zane described knowing when a decision was important to Jill, "When either one of us will not care enough to argue a point, we'll just agree and be done with it." Zane later talked again about how some decisions were just not worth arguing over, "There's no point in fighting for this [the issue] if I really don't need it."

There was one exception when looking at importance level to one's spouse. Ger had this to say regarding paying attention to importance level:

I'm not very good at having pre-thought about her, what she's passionate about or what her greater interest would be. I'm not real good at considering that up front. I'm thinking about what's logical...I think she's good at just stating, 'well this is what's

more important to me about this,' you know and then it's at that point where I recognize that and try to take that into consideration.

Ger did not report paying attention to his wife's non-verbal cues regarding how important a topic was to her. In the individual interview, Lora however talked about an instance when she wanted her husband to think about not traveling with other women and she talked about how this was an issue that was extremely important to her, "I argued that till I was blue in the face, that was something that I was really passionate about...but other things, I realize we disagree and I'm just like, 'Okay fine.'"

View of Emotions

In this study, I initially wanted to explore emotions and how individuals felt about the decision-making process and power. However, individuals often did not label their feelings as such and instead conveyed that being emotional and basing their decisions on their feelings was negative. Couples and individuals would say that when the process became difficult, it was often because emotions became involved or because one person became passionate about the issue. This theme about emotions evolved later in the process of coding, as I realized that there was talk of feelings and emotions but not in the way that I had hoped would be conveyed in the study. Instead of hearing about participants' feelings about the decision-making process, I heard about factors that led to how a decision is reached and reflections on decisions and the process, not always how one feels in the decision-making process.

In most cases, individuals reported having a negative view of emotions and feelings, and instead emphasized being rational and logical. There were comments regarding the use of women being more "emotional" and men being more "logical" and that logic took

precedence over emotion. Bethany talked about emotions in decision-making, “The only time I’ve maybe made a decision that I would regret is if it’s more of an emotional-type decision...I don’t get emotional or involved or anything like that...I don’t really have that emotional side.” Bethany then went on to talk about how she and James are able to be objective when making decisions without taking emotions into account. Sue and Carl also talked about how “neither one of us is overly controlled by emotions.” Carl mentioned that as long as they put forth reasonable and logical explanations toward an argument, either person may concede to the other person’s wishes. In the individual interview, Carl talked about using different appeals to convince Sue of his way of thinking about the decision including the use of emotional appeals as well as logical appeals and he talked about how almost every decision could have an emotional side to it. Carl then went on about the use of emotional appeals:

If she’s presenting a logical argument but you can really tell it’s emotional, it’s the emotion behind it that’s driving it, then sometimes, yeah, sometimes I’ll call her out on it and say, ‘Really, are you sure this isn’t because of your emotions and something that you want to do?’

Even though Carl reported using emotional appeals to convince his wife, he also reported calling her out when she used emotional appeals. A discussion between Ger and Lora also conveyed this humorous interaction:

Ger: I think we come from two ends of the continuum, logic versus empathetic or whatever.

Lora: I thought you were going to say illogical.

Ger: Empathetic is illogical to me!

Wade talked about how he and Lucy wait until they are both “less emotional” to have important conversations. Todd also talked about emotions, “I think she [Viv] uses emotion to strengthen her opinion.” He also talked about how he tries to convince Viv of his way of thinking, “I like to have well-reasoned thought out processes...I’m going to convince you based on my arguments that what I’m trying to convince you of is logical. It’s more logical than what you are thinking of.”

Griffin also talked about how he uses actual examples and logic and Kari, “would try to influence me by feelings, it would feel better if we did this or I would feel better.” Griffin also went on to talk about how even though he and Kari might use different words to convey an argument, their meanings would be the same: “I’m going to give you the cerebral answer and Kari will give you the happy, bubbly, ‘This is how I feel’ answer and it’s going to mean the same thing but sound very different.”

Acceptance of Differences

Couples often refer to their differences when making decisions especially when they talk about a difficult decision. Each couple has differences but the level of acceptance of those differences is part of one’s perspective. Many of the participants interviewed talked about how they had been together long enough to know they had differences and understood and welcomed their partners’ different thoughts and opinions. My personal assumption was that an open acceptance of the differences that a person has with one’s partner depends on the person’s perspective on differences and one’s ability to accept those differences of opinion. I also assumed that when a person could accept those differences and see the value in a different opinion, without trying to change the other person, there would be a higher level of respect for one another and ease in making decisions. These assumptions were supported by

the participants in this study with most couples accepting each other's differences and respecting each other despite the differences.

Sue mentioned, "We know that at times we'll agree and sometimes we won't..." and she later went on to clarify, "We just understand that we're in it for the same reasons, we might just have slightly different opinions on the way to get here." Carl and Sue recognized that there would be differences but they talked with me about how knowing that they had similar goals helped them accept each other's differences. Sue later said that she should "expect that he might have an opinion of his own." Viv also recognized that when she was able to look at Todd's intentions and recognize that he wants what is best for the family, "You can still have your opinion and not be selfish in your own desires." She kept in mind that their goals were the same and accepted the fact that they would have differences in opinion.

Jill and Zane talked about how they have dealt with their different parenting styles. Jill reported being more calm and patient with the children and Zane reported having higher expectations and a lower tolerance of poor behaviors. Jill talked through negative behaviors and Zane used spanking or time-outs. Yet they both respected and accepted how the other person parented and they allowed each other to do so in different fashions. Jill and Zane said:

Jill: The main thing is that even if I wouldn't do it that way, you have to let him do it and say, "Don't interrupt, let him do it his way and the kids will learn." I'll back off.

Zane: We don't want to have a conflict of interest and have them run to the other parent. We have to be behind each other and always in the end support that difference.

Another example that Jill and Zane gave is how they have come to accept that Zane is a talker and Jill not a talker. Zane described her acceptance this way: "She accepts the fact

that I'm going to hound her for a while and try to get answers and I respect that she won't give them to me anyways." Wade also talked about how he has come to an acceptance that Lucy has difficulty putting her thoughts into words and has therefore tried to give her more time to respond to him and has become comfortable with her personality. Griffin talked about how even though it can be difficult to wait for Kari to go through trial and error before making decisions, "I can't just walk in the door, make a decision, and walk back out...that doesn't do any good." He has come to accept that aspect as a part of who Kari is and how she functions and feels like, "I can understand Kari."

Ger talked about how he came to accept his differences with Lora because he recognized that those differences were largely due to their differences in family background experiences. Ger talked in the conjoint interview about how they have learned that they each have "valuable opinions, even if they're drastically different." Later in the individual interview, Ger discussed how he wished that he had thought about their different experiences while growing up and accepted those sooner in their marriage rather than fight the way they did early on in their marriage:

I've really changed in recognizing that [there are differences] more now and just being able to talk about why...I can relate that to the difference in how she and I grew up and that is it just what it is, let's acknowledge it and find a way to work with it to the positive. I don't think there was a lot of that early on and recognizing that it's the way we grew up in two totally different ways but I think that we can openly state that now and do at times and say, "Hey, that's just because of the ways we grew up were so different."

Chad talked about how Tanya has been accepting of his ideas even when they are different. Even though Tanya might have a different opinion about a decision, Chad reported that Tanya has the ability to listen to what he has to say. He talked about how he respects that

Tanya does not tell him that his way is necessarily wrong or that her way is the only way but that they can work together to come to an agreement.

Power

Participants were asked as individuals how they attempted to influence their partner when trying to make a decision. The participants were then asked to describe how their partner tries to influence them. At times there was disagreement regarding how one person reported influencing and how one's partner reported the influence. Rather than pit couples against each other in an effort to determine which individual were correct, I assumed that each person's perception of the influencing power was true for her/him even if what the individuals reported was different. Some people are more powerful than others based on temperament, personality, or social status. The eight types of power that emerged in this study were: Presentation, Hypothetical Situations, Expertise, Information and Research, Personality Traits, Perspective-Taking, Manipulation, and Non-Verbal Cues.

Presentation

Many individuals, when asked how they try to convince their partner of their argument, discussed presenting their partner with ideas, coming up with a list, thinking in advance about how to present the argument to their partner, or sharing their personal thoughts and feelings about the situation. This type of power was reported more often than any other form of power by the participants.

Griffin talked about how Kari tries to present him with an argument involving how their daughter would feel, "She tries to influence me by how she perceives that our daughter would feel if we made a certain decision." He went on to say that this form of trying to influence him does not work well because he focuses more on making decisions that are

good for his daughter rather than worry about how a two-year-old feels. Kari later said that she will make decisions without Griffin's input and then present her reasoning to him after the decision is made and wait to see if he disagrees. She suggested that most of the time, he does not like to make a fuss and just goes along with her choices.

A few individuals discussed how they think in advance before presenting an argument to their partner. Ger mentioned, "I probably have thought it through to the point where I have the one best argument...and the basic premises of that one best argument." He admitted to having more than one argument but really playing up the best one. Todd discussed his pre-thought out presentation, "I tend to think in process and thought out steps so when I try to convince somebody, I like to have a lot of logic...well-reasoned thought processes to try and convince somebody." Viv concurred and said that when Todd is trying to convince her of a decision he has long drawn out points and arguments. Chad also discussed how he tends to think of evidence to present to Tanya to convince her of his way of thinking and then "turn her toward my way of thinking." Carl also talked about presenting his case in a list form, "I present my evidence and in the case of a bullet-point list, these are the reasons, this is why...". If this form of presenting does not convince Sue, Carl reports coming up with a different strategy such as a story or hypothetical situation to appeal to her emotions. Carl also reported that Sue might think about using an emotional appeal to convince him, "She presents the argument that it will make her really happy and she knows that that argument has some weight...she doesn't go overboard in using that though." Jill initially tries to understand where Zane is coming from but if she is not convinced of his ideas, she reports that she will wait and think about "why it wouldn't work either now or at all." Zane in turn talked about how he tries to "market the idea" by coming up with different arguments and

thinking about how his way would be better than any other ways. He then comes up with a list of all of the positives to present. Lucy reported being caught off guard at times and needing to take time to think about Wade's argument and then come up with arguments of her own. Wade in turn talked about how he thinks in advance, "I would have already thought through...what are the pros and cons and if I'm convinced it's something I want to do then I'll talk to her about it."

Other individuals reported coming up with presentations more spontaneously. Lora said, "I just argue my points...reasons why I want to make that decision or why I think that way." Tanya discussed a similar approach, "I calmly try to tell him what I think and I usually just try to lay it out almost list-form...and just make a case." Todd too talked about sharing his opinion, "If I have an opinion about a subject matter and she doesn't share my opinion, I still almost always share my opinion." Todd discussed how Viv presents an issue to him and how she does not have many details in her arguments whereas he has a list of arguments to share, "She basically has one opinion on something and maybe one item of support. I don't think she feels the need for a lot of support...one thing is enough for her." Chad talked about how Tanya tries to convince him of a decision, "She'll say her thought and decision about how she thinks something should go but she won't try and convince me that my way is wrong or her way is the only way." Doug talked about how he will present Ann with the strengths of his argument to convince her to think in his way. When Ger and Lora disagree, Ger suggested that they just say, "I don't agree with you and this is why" and then proceed to present the argument. Bethany talked about how James tends to present all of his arguments at the beginning of the conversation and make his opinion known, "He's more likely to say, 'This is what I want and this is why' and it's all up front. He's not likely to reflect on

something and come up with more arguments.” Bethany reported that she will have thought about her arguments and will pull out the arguments that match James’ ideas. When asked how he tries to impact Bethany, James agreed that he gives his opinion and presents how important he thinks his opinion is. If it is an important decision and James feels he is right, he will continue to suggest his same argument and present his thoughts and feelings. Zane talked about how Jill does not think too much about her arguments, “She just says, ‘nope’ or ‘No, we can’t afford it’ or ‘No, I don’t like the look of that’ and that’s it.”

Hypothetical Situations

Some individuals reported considering past decisions as a way to make decisions in the present or made-up scenarios for why a decision would or would not work out. In every case in which hypothetical situations were presented, the person reported using this type of power themselves rather than suggesting that her/his partner used this tactic. Participants talked about convincing their partner of their way of thinking about a decision by suggesting that the decision worked well in the past and would work again. Bethany talked about how she might remind James of an example of a decision made in the past that seemed to work well. Viv also talked about how she looks at past decisions, “Knowing and looking at what’s going to happen down the line helps because we know how it turned out before.” Viv also talked about the hypothetical parenting situations that she and Todd discussed when they were dating and had agreed upon back at that time. Ger also talked about how he looks at the past history of what has worked in the past and tries to convince Lora. Doug described how he tries to convince Ann of his argument based on past decisions, “If we’ve done it a certain way and it worked, why don’t we do it again?”

Another example of a hypothetical situation was coming up with scenarios for why one person's decision might not be best or why one's one decision might work better. Zane talked about how he likes to spend money whereas Jill usually disagrees with making purchases. He described how he has talked about scenarios in which Jill might see his perspective or try to expose her to the gadget or item so she can understand why that gadget is so great. Ann also suggested that she uses actual scenarios from friends to create hypothetical scenarios for herself and Doug in order to convince him of her way of thinking. Chad also suggested that he uses made-up situations to convince Tanya, "I express other hypothetical situations, 'Well what if this happened and what if this happened?' and maybe taking it to extremes." Kari talked about how she first thinks of scenarios in her head and then talks through those scenarios with Griffin and how he then tries to help her make sense of the scenarios before going ahead with a trial and error method of decision-making. Griffin concurred and suggested, "I use somebody that we know or a real life example to show her that that would be the best decision." He went on to discuss how he gave her an example of some of his co-workers who swap kids during the days they have off so that they do not have to pay for child care.

Expertise

One way that couples tended to make decisions was based on one person's expertise or knowledge in a particular area. Oftentimes, the partner would concede to the individual with the expertise because the thought was generally that one could not present a better argument or did not have knowledge to counter what the "expert" was deciding or suggesting. Expertise is a form a power and having expertise in an area gives the one with the expertise a one-up position.

Individuals “recognize strengths in each other” or “see the strength in that area.” In most instances, the person with the most expertise in a particular area was granted the right to make the decision or at least have the major say in how the decision was made, “I make a lot of decisions about areas that I seem to know more about.” When couples were asked about how they made decisions about parenting, the mother was seen as the “expert” because of an increased interest or effort in reading about parenting issues, she spent more time with the children, she had more social supports, she reported having more education on the topic, or she had more experience with children.

Ann stated that when she knows what she is talking about in relation to parenting, “I come in boldly and start talking, I don’t necessarily say, ‘Okay, let’s figure this out, what do you think?’ I offer my own expertise.” Carl said:

In terms of parenting, I’m more inclined to listen to ideas from her especially if I know that she does a more active job in researching parenting. She has a social network with play groups and things. If she has an idea about parenting she can lay the idea out pretty well.

Viv also reported having more expertise in the area of parenting and spoke about making parenting decisions, “I make the majority of the decisions for our kids...probably 90% of them.”

Lora and Ger reported, “We recognize and hopefully respect that expertise in whatever area it may be.” They went on to describe their particular areas of expertise; Ger’s areas of expertise were finances, education, mathematics, science, and religion whereas Lora’s areas of expertise were kids, parenting, friendships, and an emotional insight on people. Todd and Viv also talked about times when they disagree about a decision based on expertise. Viv works in the medical field; she said, “If I knew more, like if it was a medical

thing or about the kids, he would go with me.” Viv went on to talk about how she would make her opinion on a topic known, “Depending on how much knowledge I have on the topic, if I’m well-versed or have more knowledge than him then I’m going to be stronger.”

Some partners reflected on their partners’ expertise in a particular area, and expressed feeling powerless to counter the decision or offer other suggestions. For instance, Doug revealed that he would like more say in parenting decisions but felt that he could not because his partner knew more about the topic which in turn frustrated him. Carl said, “She knows what she’s talking about...a lot of times she’ll give examples of friends or of something she’s read.” Doug mentioned that his wife “has more experience with children” and then later commented, “A lot of times she’ll say ‘I’ve read this somewhere’ and she’ll say what it was and what happened and what was beneficial about it.”

Bethany and James laughed about her expertise when it came to dressing their daughter:

James: Bethany likes to dress her up and I try and sometimes it doesn’t turn out [both laugh].

Bethany: I guess I’m the boss on that ‘cause I’ll make you change her clothes.

Another example in which the wife reported more expertise in parenting was with Griffin and Kari. Griffin talked about how he was not always sure about how to use discipline with their children because he wanted to be consistent with how Kari disciplines.

In response Kari said,

Griffin might say, “Why’d you do that” or “Which direction did you go for disciplining in this situation” or something like that. I’ll say “We’ve been doing a little bit of time-out and a little bit of spanking.”

Other partners valued the expertise of their partner and were content with not having that particular area of expertise. Zane said, "I'll throw stuff her way, she handles the money, she does it well, so I say, 'It's up to you, if we can afford it, we'll do it, if not, we'll wait.'"

James said:

We both understand our areas of expertise within the relationship and our roles but I don't think there's a case where one person takes advantage of that. I always feel that even though in the parenting aspect for instance, she might play a stronger role in that decision-making but I don't feel that she jeopardizes it and I feel like she still asks for input on that whereas I feel like it could be easy for her to say, 'Oh he won't have a better idea' but you know, I think she is dedicated to the decision-making process with me.

Information/Research

One way of gaining or having power was based on information or research that one person knew or read about. Chad talked about how Tanya does quite a bit of research regarding parenting and she presents evidence of what she has read and shares those findings with Chad. They also talked about how when they do not agree, one of them will go back and do some more research and look into the decision farther before making a decision. Doug talked about how Ann looks into different studies and uses research and readings to support her arguments. Jill talked about how Zane "researches absolutely everything" and becomes well-informed and educated on whatever his argument is going to be. She talked about how Zane will do the research, print out the materials and findings and then put them on the table for her to look through and think about. She recognized that Zane's research was probably biased since he was trying to convince her. Jill also admitted that she did not make the effort to do the opposing research and usually went with Zane's argument.

Sue gave an example of a time when she and Carl disagreed about which recreational classes their son should take--she brought out the costs and bills and presented him with the

costs per hour in each of the classes. James talked about how he and Bethany may table a decision when they do not agree. James discussed how he would then go out and try to gather information in order to educate himself and Bethany further on the topic.

Personality Traits

In a later section, I will describe how personality traits contribute to the decision-making process. Personality traits in this section are those personality traits that individuals reported as being a part of how they try to convince or have power over their partner. Individuals frequently reported that stubbornness played a part in the power they had in the decision-making process. Ger talked about how he was stubborn and tended to not listen to Lora because he wanted his way and that his stubbornness got in the way of listening to what Lora was really saying. Lora also admitted that she too was stubborn which made compromising with Ger more difficult. Todd talked about how his stubbornness as well; when he had an opinion he tended to also become defensive and wanted to argue his points at length. Viv also discussed Todd's stubbornness and how even though he was very laid back, he could be stubborn and would argue and "talk and talk." Bethany also talked about how she was more stubborn than James and tended to get her way because she was less likely to compromise or abandon her thoughts, "I'll be more likely to compromise or convince him."

Other individuals discussed their power in terms of how much they or their partner talked. Kari admitted that she tended to talk about the situation often when she is trying to convince Griffin of her perspective although she also admitted that she talked more than he does. Ger also reported that he does most of the talking and tended to be dominant verbally whereas Lora tended to back down more quickly, "She'll get to the point where she kind of pulls out and I just push harder and I push my perspective more and try to lay out this is why:

point one and point two.” Lora also reported that Ger tended to dominate the conversation and that he tended to say the same phrases multiple times. Ann reported being dominant while making decisions with Doug. She discussed how she was fine with his lack of input and her dominance in the conversation because she could go ahead and make the decision that she desires, “I think it’s implied that what I said is what we’re going to do.”

Zane and Jill separately discussed how Zane tended to dominate the conversation. Zane in particular talked about how he talked a lot and tried to “slowly wear her down.” Wade also reported dominating the conversation with Lucy and he talked about how he thought that because he talked more and expressed himself more than Lucy, he tended to have more power in the decision-making process, “I’m very much more an influencer.” Lucy concurred and suggested that she needed more time to think about how to influence Wade and that he was more quick at coming up with arguments. She shared that this intimidates her and that she becomes flustered when he comes right back with an argument against what she had just suggested. Zane reported that when Jill did have an opinion she usually got her way because she so rarely disagreed. Zane felt like Jill did not need to come up with arguments against her case and that he respected her opinion even if he did not know the reason for it.

Manipulation

A couple of individuals reported using forms of manipulation to influence their partner or convince them that their way was the way to go. The way that individuals manipulated their partner or the situation varied but essentially the person was changing their argument or trying to get their partner think about the decision in a way that was manipulative.

Bethany said, “I try to make him think that it’s his idea or try and give him a benefit...I think it’s easier if he thinks it’s his decision too...try to make it seem like it’s better for him.” Zane talked about putting Jill in a situation in which she would be convinced of his way of thinking. He gave an example of intentionally taking Jill on a ride with a friend who had a GPS system so that she could see how useful it was when they got lost or faced construction.

Doug talked about how he tended to play to the strengths of his argument. He gave the following example:

If I wanted to golf this weekend, you could have this next weekend so it’s like trying to manipulate her into thinking, “Oh, that’d be good this weekend so I can have the next weekend off.” I get to have a fun day where she’d have a work day.

Griffin discussed the way Kari tends to influence him. Griffin suggested that Kari would agree with him initially but would later go and “do her own thing” after making a mutual decision, “She might second-guess herself and want to do something else and not tell me about it until after the fact.” Griffin also gave another example of how he feels Kari manipulates him, “She makes a decision without me and then convinces me that the consequence to do it differently would be more uncomfortable than just agreeing to her decision.”

Ger had a more drastic approach to the use of manipulation. He discussed the way he might use manipulation to convince Lora:

I don’t know if I try to embarrass or humiliate her. I set up a situation to prove that her way was wrong and kind of set up a false environment for her approach to take place but then sabotage it so that it makes it look like her way doesn’t work or something like that or set it up to an advantage that my way looked right...I’ve said, “Sure, I agree, let’s try it that way” but then if I don’t agree, I’ll try to sabotage it.

Perspective-Taking

Another way of influencing one's partner is to take on his/her perspective and essentially to think like he/she would think so as to be more effectively convincing. Bethany talked about taking on James' perspective, "If I can right away see he doesn't agree with me and why it is and what his angle is and try to frame my reasoning to fit his so that we do come out of it the same." Jill also discussed looking at Zane's perspectives and arguments and reasoning and then trying to think of reasons why his arguments would not help him in the ways he suggests.

Carl discussed how he uses marketing strategies to convince Sue. He looks at her perspective on the situation, tries to think like her, and then comes up with the appeal that would best fit her argument. Tanya suggested that Chad tends to think like she does in that he tries to think the way she does and then convince her that way, "He knows that I'm more of a detailed, rational thinker." Griffin talked about how he tries to take on Kari's perspective in order to cut out the trial and error part of the process she tends to go through. He discussed how he tries to think like she would and then guide her to make the decision she would eventually end up with, "I try to eliminate that process by going, 'No, you would probably do this or this but your aren't going to like that'...I'll suggest that and then she'll often realize that it's what she would do."

Non-Verbal Cues

Only a few individuals talked about how non-verbal cues were used to try and influence one's partner. Non-verbal cues are certainly used and could be observed during the interviews but they were not often spoken of in terms of decision-making process or power. Ann talked about how she might "huff and puff around the house" until he realizes

something is wrong although admittedly she said this was not always the most effective strategy to influence Doug. She also talked about how she tries to pay attention to her tone of voice and keep a kind tone to stay away from Doug becoming defensive. Viv discussed how she and Todd tend to raise their voices and “get more passionate” when trying to influence one another. Viv later talked about how she might take on an “angry stance” or have “angry eyes.”

Although the participants did not recognize silence as being a source of power, they talked about it and discussed how silence could lead to power. Doug talked about how at times his silence with Ann is his way of disagreeing with her and how she might pick up on that frustration and try to see his point of view. He also talked about how his silence most often meant that he did not agree and then if it has to do with parenting, he probably would not follow through with the decision that Ann made. Jill’s silence had a powerful influence as she did not need to say much to convince Zane of her way of thinking. In Lora’s case however, her silence suggested to Ger that she was agreeing with him and that he felt vindicated in his argument. Lora, however, used her silence as a way of trying to make herself heard when Ger was not listening to her.

Personal Beliefs and Characteristics

My assumption was that a person’s beliefs and characteristics were factors that were relatively stable and not easily changed. One’s level of trust for his/her spouse, one’s thoughts about gender roles, one’s expertise, and one’s personality are often quite stable by adulthood. These characteristics are not static, and yet there may be life events or changes in a person’s life that greatly alter any one of these characteristics. In general, these

characteristics seem to be lasting and not easily transformed unless there is an unexpected occurrence.

Trust

Many individuals conveyed a level of trust with their spouse's ability to make decisions; often this trust was established over time and in various situations. This level of trust endured because of common goals and ideals, or a mutual respect for including the other in important decisions. Ann said:

Small things—we both make decisions independently but we share a common worldview and common goals for the kids. We're both familiar with what those are. Even if we couldn't verbalize exactly what they were, I think we know each other well enough to understand what we both want from the kids and so we're able to make smaller decisions independently without friction or questioning.

Todd and Viv also reflected on this trust of one another due to having similar goals and commitments:

I think if there is respect in the relationship and love in the relationship, then no matter what the decision is and no matter what the opinions are, it's going to work out, so I mean, that's just, that's a commitment that we have to make towards one another and if you've made that commitment, then you know, your attitudes and your emotions and your concessions and your opinions are all going to reflect around that commitment.

At times participants would discuss mutual trust of one another, whereas at other times they would talk about the trust they had for their spouse. Participants often talked about mutual trust present in the relationship regarding decision-making. Ann described how she and Doug trusted each other to make decisions with her in mind, "I feel like neither one of us makes decisions without consulting the other person." Bethany also conveyed a sense of mutual trust, "I think we both have a tendency to make decisions that we feel are appropriate. We know what we both like and what we both want to see in our relationship." Zane also

talked about the level of trust he and Jill had for one another, “I think we both trust each other. I completely trust her with any decision she makes and vice versa; I’d like to think we’ve grown to that.” Ger also talked about the level of trust with Lora and in allowing each other the freedom to make decisions in areas in which they each knew more about:

Whatever the decision is, there is a level of trust in the other person’s expertise. You know my expertise and I trust her with things about the kids and those kinds of decisions and the trust she has with me in finances and those kinds of decisions.

Other participants talked about trust for their partner. Sue talked about the trust she had in her husband to make decisions because, “He’s a pretty smart guy and if he’s got reasons, I’ll take them seriously.” Lucy also talked about her trust in Wade to make decisions even if they have differences, “I trust him. I know he has my best interest in mind or if he deals with our son, he has his best interest in mind even if we don’t agree.” Kari also talked about how Griffin knows her well enough to make decisions with her in mind, “It makes me feel good to know that he knows exactly what I want.” Chad conveyed a sense of trusting Tanya with parenting decisions, “I usually give him the hows and whys of what I’m doing and you just usually agree.” Chad responded with, “Yeah, that’s right, you can’t argue what’s right...and it works well!” Tanya then gave an example of struggling with a decision and then trusting Chad to give her helpful suggestions to move forward in making the right decision.

James also talked about how he trusted Bethany to make sound decisions in regards to their child, “I’m confident that Bethany would make the right decisions and I trust her and am behind her in those decisions.” One participant talked about how his spouse trusts him to make decisions. Ger commented on Lora’s trust, “Lora trusts me to take care of that [finances] and the details...she’s made it known that she does trust me to do it.”

Gender Roles

Gender roles are thoughts about what one gender is expected to do or how each gender is supposed to act in order to fulfill their manhood or womanhood. The comments about gender roles were made in both individual and conjoint interviews. Gender role comments permeated areas such as expertise, appearance, household labor, parenting, and most social roles and interactions. Culture most often defines these roles and expectations set forth for each gender. In the discussion section, I will expand upon the gender roles that were present for these participants but for this section, gender roles thoughts address what the participants themselves had to say regarding gender roles. All the participants in this study had some source of income which may suggest that the couples might be a bit more open to less traditional gender roles. It should be noted that every woman worked part time and every man worked full time since the birth of their children. Zane talked about how he was concerned that he might:

Throw it out there and if she didn't contribute [financially], I could see myself saying, "If you'd work, we'd have the money" or "If you want to go shopping, I make all the money here"...it's just better she works, even if it's not as many hours or as much money.

Many individuals talked about how they felt more freedom in their own gender roles as opposed to the roles of their parents and previous generations. Viv described her experience growing up compared Todd's early experience:

I think I'm similar to my mom as in she was able to voice her opinion whereas Todd's mom didn't voice hers...They always grew up churched where the wife always went along with what the husband said...you didn't necessarily share your opinion unless you were asked. I felt like I could share my opinions as my mom did it. I can do it though without worrying that he's going to be angry or that it's not my place.

Ann talked about how different her own parents were in that her own father felt as though he had the right to spend the money. She talked about how her mom would have to ask for permission to spend money because she did not earn money herself. Doug also discussed how his father and grandfather seemed to have “a sense of entitlement to make decisions.” Sue commented on how her parents were “old-fashioned” and how her mom took care of the kids and her father made all the important decisions and made money. In her individual interview Sue commented on how she appreciated her role over that of her mother’s, “Carl and I both cook and make meals and we both have baby duties” as well as shared household responsibilities. Carl also commented in the individual interview how his own parents had very traditional gender roles but that, “It’s nothing for Sue to go in and work because she wants to keep a career and it’s nothing for me to spend nights at home with our son.” Bethany also spoke of the way previous generations were more confined to making certain decisions based on gender, “The husband made all the decisions and the wife went along with it.” Bethany later compared this to her own relationship, “We’re not traditional in our gender roles. James does a lot around the house and it’s not my job to take care of the baby and his job to work...we both take care of the baby and the house.”

Todd talked about an increased level of freedom in his gender role in relationship to his peers. He talked about how some of his male friends tended to be more dominant in decision-making whereas he was able to have more equity with Viv. Ann also talked about the freedom she felt to be able to approach her husband and offer suggestions and challenge her husband’s ideas. She went on to discuss how some wives may not feel that it would be their place to challenge their husbands decisions. Ann said, “We are a couple that tries to be on a level playing field. I’d like to say that we think of each other as equals in the

relationship.” Carl also talked of his “equal partnership” with Sue and how his own “parents and grandparents probably made decisions more on gender-norms...even if it wasn’t their strength.”

On the contrary, Zane talked about how his own parents had less traditional gender roles. His mom worked and was the disciplinarian and his dad was home more often and did the cooking and cleaning. It left an impression on Zane and he reported having no problem cooking and “getting into the kitchen.” He went on to say, “They [his parents] didn’t spend a lot but when they did, they agreed on it.” Lucy and Wade had more traditional gender roles which were similar to their own parents’ gender roles:

Lucy: My dad would make the final decision.

Interviewer: So how does that work between the two of you? How do you make a final decision?

Wade: Like how both of our parents did, absolutely, yeah.

Interviewer: Where you [Wade] make the final decision?

Wade: For the most part, but often my decision is something that we both agree on.

Interviewer: Would you say that’s how it goes with all areas, not just in the area of finances or purchasing or parenting?

Wade: I would say so, everything that is a fairly major decision and then the little things, you know, the little things were, you know we talk with each other, and I think of her input too.

Although Lucy and Wade talked about how they both want to be heard and have a say, Lucy recalled a time during the individual interview in which they were having difficulties deciding whether or not Lucy would go back to work after their child was born. She wanted to stay home but because Wade had the final say, she went back to work after her

maternity leave. In the end, she knew he had the best interest of the family in mind so she willingly went back to work. Lucy spoke of her view on Wade having the final say:

I'm happy to have my say. There aren't too many times that he has to make a final decision that I don't agree with...but if he does, I understand and somebody has to make a decision and I'd rather it would be him than me sometimes...I think it makes it easier on me, I don't have to have that responsibility...To me, it makes sense that someone in the household has to make a final decision.

Ger talked about a “fundamental difference between males and females” in relation to wanting to feel understood. He suggested that women have a desire to be and feel understood whereas men just want to make a decision and move on. Todd agreed with this statement but took it a step further, “Guys in general, we're not thinking what she's saying at hand, I may have listened to one of things she's said before coming up with all the things to prove that wrong.” Chad also talked about a difference between men and women when he was discussing the relationship of decision-making to relationship satisfaction:

I think her response to me would enhance the relationship because men are really responsive to the way their wives treat them and they don't necessarily say that but if a woman doesn't respect her husband, guys are pretty shallow and we'll just brush it off and the relationship doesn't grow much...It sounds like that popular psychologist lady who is on the radio...uh, what's her name? It's a show at night, anyway, she says 'you know, if you want to, if there's problems in your marriage,' she'll say that sometimes the wife isn't respecting her husband and she's not treating him like a man, or a guy, or a champion or something like that so what would happen is that I think she would respect me more and so then I would probably feed off of that.

In essence, Chad suggests that Tanya first treating him with respect would make him treat her better. He also suggests the relationship would not grow because he would not pay enough attention to determining whether a relationship should be enhanced.

For many participants their spiritual beliefs also played into the gender role expectations. Todd talked about how “It stems from our Biblical worldview...the wife's main responsibility is the taking care of the children.” Viv went on to say that this was her

desire as well and how they talked when they were dating that she would only work part-time after they had children. Tanya also discussed how the topic of submission is included in the Bible and if she and Chad disagree:

I'm going to end up going with his decision and that doesn't mean that I won't give my input...and argue my case...if we would really disagree like that and he's dead-set on his decision, it would be something that he's really prayed about...before he would make a decision against my wishes.

Tanya and Chad both admitted that it has never reached this point and so far they have made decisions in agreement with one another. Wade spoke of his role in the family as being "head of the household" while also saying that he and Lucy were "pretty much equal in making decisions about raising children." He explained that the role of "head of the household" was necessary because "you need someone to make the final decision and that's my role." Wade went on to talk about how important it was to do what he could to be sure that Lucy was also happy with the decisions made.

Ann and Doug shared the feelings of frustration they felt from individuals in their church who looked down on them because Ann did not stay at home with the children or adhere to more traditional gender roles. They both talked about how they feel as though they have an equal partnership not based on submission of one person to another. Ann said:

Couples in our church were raised in very conservative Christian homes and they adhere to very traditional gender roles. The wife stays home, takes the kids, has supper on the table at 5:30 and that's just not us. I've struggled with that...and the questions they have for us too, "So, you're working and with the kids?"

Despite the fact that both individuals had income, there were some struggles with gender roles that mothers in particular faced. Tanya talked about how she reads parenting books that other mothers have suggested and gets parenting advice from other moms. She suggested that fathers do not talk with one another about parenting issues and that men

therefore have fewer resources. Bethany spoke of the clear line she has had to draw in which she leaves work at work and when she's home she does the "mom-job" and how hard it can be to have a career and children. Ann too spoke of this struggle and wanting to be able to do it all and yet still do the "mom-thing" as well as mothers who choose to stay home full-time. Zane and Jill discussed how Jill stayed home for a few months but that she found it difficult to not have any outside interaction and how she became overwhelmed staying home all the time. Zane encouraged her to go out and find a job and since then she has been more content.

Personality

Personality was considered to be a personal and relatively unchanging characteristic. In the section on power, I discussed ways that personality made one person more convincing or more able to influence the other person. Sometimes couples would talk about how their personalities were similar and at other times their personalities were different. One's personality or the personality of one's spouse was frequently mentioned when discussing the decision-making process. This theme came out in both the couple and individual interviews and appeared to be a stable factor in the decision-making process.

James discussed how similar his personality was to Bethany's and how that contributed to their decision-making:

Similarities probably play a main role because the fact that we align in a similar way means that to make a decision we have a dominant trait of the way we like to make decisions and because they align and that in itself, there isn't a lot of conflict in the process and it allows us to discuss the issue that we're making a decision...it allows us to center more on the actual issue rather than the process.

Sue agreed and had a similar reaction, "It [decision-making] was something that just came. I don't remember working on it or not getting along about a decision, like he [her husband] said, we have very similar backgrounds...and personalities." Carl talked about how their

personalities align in that they are both calm and collected, level-headed, able to listen one another, and able to have a sense of humor which helps in making decisions and in moving forward by not staying mad at each other for long.

Other couples pointed out differences in personalities. These differences led to more difficulties in making decisions whereas those who were similar had an easier time making decisions. Ann talked about how she and Doug's personalities were different in that, "I'm the kind of person who doesn't like to leave things unresolved... There are times when he needs time to cool down." She reported being more talkative and Doug being quieter. Another example is when Doug talked about making purchases. He reported that Ann is the kind of person who tends to make quick decisions whereas he likes to pull back and think before making an important purchase.

Couples who have different personalities may have to work harder at making decisions. Kari and Griffin reported that they have to work at their decision-making process which is not always easy:

I'm completely direct and open and upfront and honest in my communication style and Kari is not always that way. It is a challenge but lots of people are married who are opposites in maybe a number of different things so that would be the challenge.

Griffin went on to talk about how he is confident when he makes decisions but it can be difficult when Kari second-guesses and goes through trial and error. He went on to talk about how this difference might be due to their differences in that he tended to be a leader and Kari a follower. Wade talked about some decisions that can be difficult to make based on their personalities, "If I'm just kind of alone, that recharges me and for her it's if she's with her relatives." He went on to talk about how they are both calm and introverted but that Lucy is more introverted than himself and that he tends to dominate discussions and conversations

because it can be difficult for her to express herself. Wade talked about how these personality differences can cause tension, “She holds thing in and lets things spew and if it gets drawn out longer, then it gets worse and takes her longer to get over.”

Some couples reported differences as well as similarities. Ger and Lora reported both being stubborn which made it difficult to make decisions. At the same time they also reported that their personalities were different in that Ger is “more prone to want to talk through it and how it could potentially play out this way or that way and try to follow all the different trails of how things could work out.” Lora reported wanting to just make a decision without the lengthy discussion. Similarly, Tanya talked about how she likes to make decisions quickly, “I’m not very patient” whereas Chad is more “laid back” and willing to talk decisions through at length. Viv and Todd had a similar situation in that Viv reported that she and Todd are both stubborn but that in general Todd is very “laid back” and easy-going whereas she makes decisions at a much quicker pace, “I like to do this fast and talk fast and he’s more of a talker...he’s got a lot of words.” Zane and Jill reported both being agreeable with one another, easy going, and loving while at the same time having differences as well as having “very similar tastes and ideals and we are both conscious about money and family.” When talking about parenting styles Zane said, “She’s way more patient, I kind of don’t want to be their best friend...I’m in charge.” Similar to other couples, Zane likes to talk about decisions and list scenarios whereas Jill is not much of a talker and tends to hold differences in and is slower to bring issues up for discussion.

Although James and Bethany talked about how their personalities lined up, they also discussed how he tends to be more accommodating and she more stubborn during decision-making. Bethany elaborated on the importance of personality in the individual interview,

“I’m less likely to completely abandon my decision and go along with someone else’s decision, I’m more likely to compromise or stay with my decision.” Overall they report very similar personalities, “We’re closer to the same strong personality as opposed to one of us being more passive.” James later reported, “We both recognized quite early that our personalities aligned and made our relationship stronger and the ability to make decisions allowed us to be closer.”

Points of Discontent

Sometimes decisions were made in a way that was less than perfect. There were times when couples forgot about what was most important to them and made decisions that were not in line with some of their core values. Individuals from time to time reflected on what happened after a decision was made or after an action had been taken. After some reflection, individuals may be content and feel as though they accomplished a task and feel good about the decision. Other reflections were also made that caused persons to reevaluate themselves, their process of decision-making, or their partner. The wives and husbands interviewed often referred to these as either regrets or frustrations. Regrets consisted of times when a person portrayed some disappointment or distress over one part of a decision. Frustrations, on the other hand, were times when an individual was annoyed or irritated by someone or some event.

Regrets

Regrets were a personal reflection of what the individual wished he/she had done differently. Ann said, “When Doug says or does things in his parenting that I don’t agree with...there are times when I say ‘Doug, chill out’ and come to our son’s defense which in a way undermines him and is not good on my part so that’s something I’m trying not to do.” In

response, Doug talked about how he regrets losing his temper by raising his voice rather than having patience.

Doug talked about a regret he had about a decision that was made earlier in his relationship with Ann—he was in a job where he was unappreciated and he decided to quit the job without consulting Ann. They ended up having to talk about how they would have to make major career decisions together and he had to work at regaining a level of trust. Doug regretted not including Ann on a decision that affected them both. Ger talked about how early on in his relationship with Lora, there were some major arguments and fights that did not go well, “Early on we disagreed on most things and neither one of us knew how to handle that very well.” Lora too talked about regretting how they made decisions early in the relationship. Tanya talked about regrets early in her relationship with Chad, “I remember a couple times getting mad and going to our room and slamming the door...I remember praying about it and praying that God would change me.”

Similarly, Bethany said, “I regret making decisions where I was quick to judge someone” rather than wait and understand what he/she really meant. Likewise, Bethany also said that she regrets when she makes a decision “that makes somebody else have a ramification.” Tanya talked about a decision to buy a vehicle. The vehicle purchase was made quickly and still today is a “sore subject” because it has led to many trips to the maintenance shop. Ger talked about how he has regrets when he does not listen to what Lora is “trying to say” and instead thinks of his own arguments. Ger elaborated about disagreeing with Lora:

I kind of push her towards withdrawing by being too strong or not hearing her or showing that I understand her or not compromising...it’s bothersome to realize that

it's something that I did wrong and need to amend and apologize and it feels bothersome.

Consequences suffered are one way that individuals experienced regret after they made a decision that excluded their most important value. For Griffin, it was failing to make decisions that were "Christ-centered" and failing to ensure both spouses were comfortable with the decision made about choosing a home to buy. When this happened he "felt discontented because some of those things we had to suffer were the consequences of maybe acting quickly and not conversing about it or praying about it." A similar topic was reported by Tanya regarding the rash purchase of the vehicle, "It wasn't honoring to God and I don't think that it was His [God] will that we bought it." Todd talked about a regret he had making a purchase of computers that he hoped to make a profit from but ended up losing large amounts of money. He said, "I felt like an idiot...I let my family down...it was a fairly profound effect and not one that I felt good about at all."

Zane gave an example of a regret with his own behavior, "I probably want too much from them [the children], you know, I expect, I don't know if I think they're older or what but I know that they're good kids" and later he said that "sometimes I put too much of an emphasis on wanting to provide and spoil them and give them fun toys and things like that whereas they'd probably have just as much fun playing with their dad." Wade also expressed some regret about "those times when things get emotional and when I might be dominating the conversation." Chad also expressed regret of being "lazy" and not helping in gathering information to make informed decisions about the children and help his wife in that area rather than just rely on her to do it all.

Two individuals did not report any regrets, at least no regrets that they could recall. Carl and Sue separately said that they did not have any regrets about their decision-making process or regrets about the actual decisions they made and Sue said, “I don’t think there’s much we’d change.”

Frustrations

Some individuals talked about their frustration with themselves while at other times, they talked about frustrations with someone else or a spouse. Frustration usually was displayed as the result of one person not living up to the expectations of the other person. Couples often reported frustration with one another. There are many times when husbands and wives do not agree with each other and a lack of consensus led to frustration. Carl reported feelings of frustration when Sue does not agree to his perspective, “Honestly you think, ‘no, that’s not right’ you know, you’re sometimes frustrated when it seems like the same argument is being made over and over again.” Sue agreed but added that, “I might be a little frustrated that he’s even bringing up opposing arguments but at the same time, I know it’s reasonable and I should expect that he might have an opinion of his own.” Viv talked about how she gets annoyed when Todd has a strong opinion because he tends to use a lot of words. She reflected, “I need a bridge, not the whole book...get to your point, let’s go, I want to hear it.”

Zane reported frustration with Jill when she remains silent:

It can be frustrating because you want to know why she’s not a talker so I say, “Tell me, why can’t we paint it this color?” She’ll say, “I don’t like that color” and I’ll say, “Well why?” or whatever. She just doesn’t like to talk or discuss, she’ll listen but even then, she just lets me babble on...I just know how it is and I know she’s not going to go with it and me arguing with her is pointless...I would like a little more input, you know, the reasons of why she disagrees with what I would like...I want to

hear why it was a stupid decision I was trying to make and have her talk me out of it. I guess that's how I learn, I think about why the decision is a dumb one.

Wade reported having a similar experience as Zane. He talked about how it was difficult for Lucy to express herself and the way she feels about decisions. He also talked about the challenge he faces as a result. Wade reported that because he does most of the talking he usually 'wins' and this can be frustrating because of the uncertainty of where Lucy stands on the decision. Frustration came up for Zane and Jill as well in regards to parenting, "We know for the most part how the other is going to react but every once in a while if Zane gets really upset or angry, I'm just like, 'pipe it down', and I'll say that and he can say to me, 'you don't have to be a push over either.'"

Ann discussed her frustrations around the imbalance of housework and about how she feels a sense of injustice because her husband does not contribute to the housework. She shared about how she felt exhausted and frustrated by having to maintain her home nearly alone without her husband's contribution, even though they both work outside the home:

I've told him that I shouldn't have to ask him, he should want to help me...I think me having to ask him, even if he ends up doing it, is not very satisfying because I feel like I shouldn't have to ask...there are things that I do without him asking me because he's my husband and because I love him...I feel like that's not always reciprocated.

Doug talked about his frustration which tended to come out in sarcasm. He used sarcasm to argue his point but felt like it was not helpful to accomplish what he wanted. Doug talked about how what he really wanted to know was that his opinion counted and was valued by his wife. Ann's response was, "I think the way you said it to me before has been more of an attack or something like, 'I know, I'm stupid,' and that's like the opposite of what you're telling me now which is that you have a valuable opinion." Griffin also talked about

the expectation he had that his wife would consult with him when making purchasing decisions. He talked about feeling frustrated with his wife and helpless to have a voice in the household decision-making when Kari does not consult with him, “It’s important to me and when we’re rushed, I’m pretty uneasy about it. It affects me all day long.” This couple talked about how they had to take a lot of time to ensure that Kari is on board with the decision. Griffin discussed the frustration with how long the process can take to get Kari on board with his way of thinking, “Kari takes a really long time to either go against it [the decision] and try something else and then she goes through the process [trial and error] and then finally comes to the realization that she’s going to agree to it...I want to remove the trial and error part that is her natural tendency.” Lora discussed her frustrations of not feeling understood and heard in the context of a disagreement, “I felt like he had already formulated in his mind already what I was going to say...and that’s just not what I was saying.” Lora also talked about her frustration with Ger making the same argument over and over and how “I feel like a kindergartener, I’m like, ‘Okay, I’ve heard you’...I don’t know if he thinks I’m not hearing him.”

Points of Satisfaction

Sense of “We”

There are not just points of discontent that couple discussed about their decision-making processes. In fact, there were a number of satisfactory ways that these couples made decisions. One of the ways couples talked about how they were satisfied with a decision-making process is a shared sense of responsibility and of “being on the same page.” When talking about how they make decisions, couples conveyed a certain level of shared responsibility or burden as a cohesive unit rather than having just one person make the

decision alone. Bethany said, “I don’t think we ever think of it like me versus you winning. It’s just whatever worked. We’re trying to reach the right end goal.” A different couple explained the sense of “we” as sharing in carrying out a decision. For example, Kari and Griffin were working on some home improvement projects. Kari would do the research for the project, look up phone numbers, and gather information. Griffin would actually make the arrangements and contact the contractors and carried out the details of the project.

Couples recognized that certain decisions required sacrifices that they both needed to make, “I don’t push for unnecessary stuff as much ‘cause I realize that she’s giving up this and that for the kids and the family...so I try not to be selfish, but I still dream.” Having mutual agreement created cohesion, “We’re happy because we’re so often on board with the decision we make” and “We both just had this satisfied feeling that we both agreed and we came to a decision and it turned out to be the right decision and that was exciting for us.” Chad mentioned, “We both have input and it’s a mutual decision and one person isn’t out on their own and just saying ‘hey, this is the way it’s going to be.’”

The general sense was that these couples were in it together and would back each other up on the decisions that were made. Even if one person had more say or made the final decision, the other person stuck to the decision and owned it as if it was his/her own decision, “Whenever we make a decision, he always owns it like it’s his decision even if it’s something we made together” and “I don’t think there’s ever a person to blame in a bad decision because it’s usually to the point where we felt good about it and we were both wrong” and “If someone wanted something and the other one said, ‘no way’ we just wouldn’t buy something or we wouldn’t go into something.”

On the contrary, lacking a sense of “we” could lead to feelings of tension. This occurred when the couple was not on the same page about a decision and rather than having a sense of “we” and ownership, there was some resentment and uncertainty, “It’s frustrating when our son says, ‘Well, mom does it this way’ or ‘Mom said this’.” Griffin discussed feeling helpless when he was not included in part of the decision-making, “Sometimes I feel pretty helpless and I don’t have a lot of time and energy to try and disagree with a decision...I feel helpless when she makes the decision without involving me.” Another comment about the tension was discussed in terms of feeling stress:

I think that helps a lot that we’re on the same page most of the time cause we would be a lot more stressed if we didn’t know what one person was wanting to do ‘cause that could be a real stress point...it’s beneficial for both of us to know that we’re on the same page and we’re happy about the decision and we actually agree on it.

There are times when couples did not include each other in decisions that affected them both and this created some apprehension, “If she’s not completely on board, I’ll deal with it later which is why I’m uneasy if I haven’t been able to spend the time [making the decision] I need to with her.” After this tension, couples tried to reach the sense of “we” again by talking through differences to ensure that they are “on the same page again.” Chad suggested, “She might make the decision and we might have to discuss it later and figure out something different for the next time but that discussion happens more post-decision I guess.” Bethany and James stated that they “don’t feel comfortable walking away from whatever the decision is if we both don’t agree” and Wade and Lucy said, “We really need each other’s input and that would be the best for our relationship...We both listen to the other person and acknowledge their opinions and respect their opinions so that’s healthy for us.”

Griffin, Wade, and Chad however, were opposing cases in that when talking about how they felt after a decision had been made, they felt that they deal with the consequences of decisions made. These three men in their individual interviews talked about how they wanted to take on the consequences for poor decisions rather than sharing the burden as a couple. Griffin tried to ensure that if they made a poor decision together which resulted in a negative consequence, he would carry the burden, "I try to deal with the consequences and take responsibility for that decision as best I can." Chad said, "I'm the one who is ultimately responsible in the long-term, like way-long-term like judgment long-term, that's what the husband's responsibility is." Wade also said, "My role is the head of the household and to make a decision and bear the consequences for that."

Respect and Appreciation

In this study all participants conveyed respect for their partner as a person as well as for their partners' ideas and thoughts. Each person also conveyed an appreciation for the relationship and for who their partner was as a person. This theme emerged from both the conjoint interview in which one person showed respect and appreciation in the presence of the partner as well as in the individual interview when the partner was absent.

Individuals would speak of ways to show mutual respect. Doug and Ann spoke of having respect for their partners by paying attention to them, their needs, and their schedule when making a decision. James had this to say regarding respect in decision-making, "I think that both of us respect each other at the highest level and no matter what we say or do at the end of the day we know that both of us are working for the other." Sue and Carl agreed, "We look to each other for guidance" in the decision-making process and in times of personal

struggle. Jill and Zane talked about the respect they had for one another despite differences in parenting styles. Jill related:

Sometimes it's better to have two separate ways to do things than to always do things the same way. Maybe it's more effective that way or maybe the kids will think that his way of disciplining or his way of doing this are better or they will take them to heart more than mine...we recognize that we were raised differently and have different ways of doing things but I never want to lose that respect for the other person.

In the individual interview Jill went on to say, "I have a lot of respect for him. Even when he does discipline the kids differently...it just makes you respect the other person and love him that much more." In turn, Zane discussed how, "The first couple years you try and get her to change to the way you think but in the end you realize that's the way she is and that's why you love her so much."

Other times individuals talked about ways that they respected their spouse. Ann talked about how appreciative she was of her husband for being attentive to and respectful of her. In the individual interview, Ann talked about doing extra household chores for him without being asked in order to help Doug because of her respect and appreciation for him. Doug also mentioned in the individual interview that he tried to help Ann out with different responsibilities when she becomes overwhelmed and involved in too many activities. Doug spoke of respect for Ann in terms of listening and paying attention to her opinions even when they do not agree on an issue.

Bethany also appreciated the way James presents his thoughts and opinions to her as well as his ability to keep an open mind during disagreements. Bethany continued on to speak about her respect for James' ability to be diplomatic when dealing with difficulties with extended family members. In turn, James discussed his respect for Bethany in how she

“aligns with how I also make decisions and so I appreciate that.” Viv talked about how she appreciated her husband’s similar worldview, “I’m thankful that we don’t argue much and I’m thankful that we’re on the same page and get along well.” Viv continued to say that she showed her husband respect by “serving him” which in turn helped her love and appreciate her husband more. She also spoke of how much fun she has with Todd and their enjoyment of one another. Todd later talked about how the presence of mutual respect helps him fulfill his commitment to Viv and leads to a higher quality relationship, “Without that [respect], it’s very hard to make a good decision and you need to put yourself aside a lot of times, well, all the time.” Ger spoke of the self-less love and respect he has for Lora, “I do respect and value her...to truly express the action of self-less love is important...she deserves that kind of love.” Chad commented on how he listens and respects his wife when they disagree, “because usually she has a good opinion.” Kari discussed the respect she had for Griffin, “He has some really great insight. He’s really smart...he explains things really well.” Sue conveyed that she respected Carl’s thoughts and ideas, “I take his opinion pretty seriously.” Carl also expressed respect and appreciation for Sue:

I owe her credit for my personal success. She offered a level of support and understanding...when I had to take entire weekends to crank through something [for his thesis]. We have a level of respect and understanding of where the other person is coming from and I think we sort of have the same vision for what the other person’s goals are.

Wade said, “I definitely don’t want to make decisions without her input...I definitely need her opinion on pretty much most things...I absolutely have to respect what she says.”

Other individuals talked about the ways that they felt respected by their spouse. Lora too talked about how she felt respect, “I feel respected when he thinks that I’m important in the decision-making process.” Tanya also spoke about how much it meant to her that Chad

respected her and it helped her feel good about the marriage. She also said, “He listens to my input. He’s always said, ‘You have good input and I know you have good thoughts and a lot of your thoughts are correct’ so he never shuts me down...he respects my input.”

Ann spoke of respecting Doug and treating him with respect when she approached him to ask for more help with household labor. She slowed herself down and “tried to make sure that my tone of voice was kind and respectful.” Tanya also talked about how she tries to “use gentle words and just be loving towards him.”

Contentment and Accomplishment

Participants were first asked as a couple what the most important characteristic was to them when they made decisions together as a couple. In the individual interview the person was asked what it felt like for him/her to make a decision that included this most important characteristic. This characteristic was one that was discussed and agreed upon by the couple. Each individual talked about some sense of contentment and/or accomplishment. Different words and feelings were used to describe this but essentially they felt a sense of peace and satisfaction. Tanya recalled decisions that included their most important characteristic as ones that gave her peace and allowed her to not have any regrets. She went on to talk about how that made her feel about her marriage, “Just content in my marriage and in that I have a husband who respects me and I feel good about my marriage.” James talked about having contentment which was conveyed as an “internal feeling” or a “gut feeling” that he and Bethany made the right decision and would not have to second-guess the decision. Wade suggested the he feels more comfortable and at ease when he is able to make good decisions. Sue described making a good decision as having relief and being able to “rest easy” as well as the feeling that now she is able to move forward with other areas of life. Chad also said

that the confidence and security with making good decisions helps him to “look forward to the net issue and I don’t have to worry...of the effect of one bad decision leading to another...it keeps me on the straight path.” Carl talked about feeling “A sense of accomplishment...sometimes the solution itself is the accomplishment of making a good decision.” Griffin said it this way, “Kari would use the word ‘comforting’ maybe, I would use the word ‘content.’”

Another way to describe this feeling of contentment and accomplishment was expressed by Jill, “I’d always say, oh we just made a decision that was really responsible...it makes me feel like I’m being a good mother and a good spouse to Zane...it just gives me a lot of joy.” Todd had a similar feeling of “happiness and pride.” Zane talked about how he enjoys being able to step back and look at the decisions he has made and see how it has all come together. Stepping back also gives him a new perspective and a new direction for future decisions. Lora talked about being “confident in our decision, even if we don’t go with how I wanted. I just feel confident that at least he heard what I said and we talked about it.” Ger reiterated the feeling of confidence in that when they are both on the same page there is a stronger sense of partnership. Chad too spoke of confidence, “It makes me feel like a wise decision has been made and that we can be confident that the decision will be successful...if we include those factors, we can be very sure about the decision.”

Reflections on Ideal Processes

Decision-making and Relationship Satisfaction

Without fail, participants reported that decision-making influenced their relationship satisfaction to some extent. When the participants were involved with poor communication and poor decision-making processes they reported having lower relationship satisfaction

whereas positive and open communication and positive decision-making processes led to higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Participants were asked in the individual interviews if they thought that their decision-making process influenced their relationship satisfaction.

Todd discussed how negative decision-making processes influenced his feelings about the relationship, “If we struggled to make a decision and we’ve come away from that decision and we’ve maybe made a concession and we don’t feel right about it, that’s going to affect our relationship.” Viv also talked about how her attitude or happiness about the relationship might be affected if they have a major disagreement about a decision. Chad also said, “If you have poor decision-making process you can be ridiculed and then you don’t want to communicate...you don’t have to have all the evidence.” Bethany talked about how she would not be satisfied in a relationship in which her partner could not make decisions or did not have an opinion and was therefore appreciative of her and James’ process. Sue also commented that difficulty in making decisions would lead to frustration. Jill discussed the effects of negative decision-making on other areas of her life, “If we argued all the time, the kids would pick up on that, there’d be less cuddling, less laughter, and less time spent together.” Likewise Wade said, “If we’re butting heads about things, I think it would be more difficult for our relationship...it would be too much stress.” Griffin discussed how he is impacted personally by Kari’s willingness to let him in on the parenting decision-making:

Kari’s allowance of me to be a very big part of the decision-making process is very important to me and she can influence that [relationship satisfaction] quite a bit by doing that. She knows that but she still can decide whether she wants to include me or not.

Ger did not know how much his relationship satisfaction was influenced by his decision-making process with Lora but he did admit that it did have an impact:

It depends on how you're feeling and the level of communication with your spouse, how satisfied you are and can you communicate? If you're effectively communicating, there is a level of compromise, you know, yeah. I don't know if I can actually say to what extent but I think it definitely plays into it.

James suggested that their process does impact relationship satisfaction but it does not make or break them, "We don't let the decisions we make determine our relationship. Our relationship is strong and we could be polar opposite and if in the end one person had to give in, it wouldn't break us."

Ger talked about how much it would mean to Lora and her relationship satisfaction if he heard and understood her perspective and set himself aside and was more purposeful about paying attention to her in the process, she would be impacted and happier in the relationship. Likewise, Chad talked about how much positive decision-making would mean to Tanya, "I think it would enhance it [relationship satisfaction] and make her feel more valued."

Participants discussed how positive decision-making processes had positive influences on relationship satisfaction. Lora said, "If I'm feeling honored and respected and heard then I think it helps a lot and it impacts how satisfied I am and that we're partners." Tanya also talked about how positive decision-making processes would "be more honoring to God and that in turn would make me think that our marriage is being honoring to God and that would be the reason that I would be happier in our marriage." Chad talked about how his decision-making process with Tanya enhanced the relationship and "makes it easier to state your opinion and talk about things. You don't have to feel like you're going to be ridiculed or told you're wrong for a decision."

James offered a very helpful metaphor for understanding his underlying thoughts curing the decision-making process with Bethany. He talked about silos and how the decisions they make and the areas of their lives are in silos and ideally, those silos do not run into one another but stay separate. James discussed how having those silos helps them to be “able to not let one decision or area of our life greatly influence the other areas of our life...we don’t allow that to upset other areas of life and I think that is very helpful.” He went on to talk about how without those silos, there would be more tension and how issues would come up when they should not. Using the metaphor of the silos, every issue stays in its place within its own sphere.

Relativity and Desired Changes

One comment couples stated perhaps indirectly was that the way they made decisions was ideal for them. This theme was one that came out through the individual interviews. Most people said that they would not change anything about themselves, their partner, or their decision-making process. However after saying this, some couples suggested one or two ways that they might want to change. A few individuals said they would make changes but the changes were very minor and only included small characteristics about themselves or their partner rather than about the process as a whole. Most couples talked about how their decision-making process generally worked well. Not only did they suggest that their decision-making process worked well but they went on to say that their decision-making process might not work for everyone even though it was right for them, “Whatever the situation is we deal with that...I’d say that’s a strength and it helps us; maybe for others it might hurt to talk about things the way we do.” Zane, when talking about his ideal decision-making process, said, “I would say that our decision-making is ideal, but we may not be

perfect in it.” Wade described how his decision-making with Lucy was ideal even if when they do not go through the process in a perfect way and even when they do not have equal amounts of input. He went on to say that even though in their eyes their decision-making is ideal, others might do things differently.

Many individuals pointed to characteristics about themselves and their partner that made their decision-making process ideal. Carl said, “It wouldn’t work for everybody. I think it sort of takes a specific personality type...maybe it’s because we’re so practiced at it, I don’t know, I think that it is kind of ideal for our situation.” His wife, Sue, agreed that her decision-making process with her husband Carl was ideal for them and that she would not desire any changes in how the process goes. Jill and Zane also commented on personality types, “For us it [decision-making] is ideal, for our personalities, for how we have both grown up making decisions, and from learning how others make decisions.” Similarly Carl said, “Both of our moms were, ‘Say it like it is’ people and to people who aren’t used to that, it’s intimidating but it’s worked out for us and it’s helped us to be honest with each other.” James agreed that personalities determined the best ways to make decisions for the couple, “Some couples debate and deliberate for weeks and weeks before making a decision that works for them...other people may have an experience that is quick and that is also the best way.”

Despite the frustrations about the amount of time and effort it takes for Griffin to make decisions with Kari, he still reported that the process was ideal for them. He said that when they did not actually have enough time to make decisions with each other is when it becomes less than ideal. When Griffin and Kari skip the ideal decision-making process, Griffin reported that his relationship satisfaction decreased significantly. Kari went on to talk

about how easy it was for them to go through the process, “It just seems like it’s a normal thing. It doesn’t seem like there’s much to it, we just do it.”

Five of the 18 individuals interviewed reported a lack of ideal decision-making. Bethany reported that there would be a factor that she would change about the decision-making process with her husband, “I would change just one thing about myself and that would be sometimes I think I have a tendency to want to be right or to win. I think it’d be better if I could get over that.” Tanya and Chad both wanted to make changes in themselves when it came to making decisions. Tanya wanted the process to slow down whereas Chad said, “I could spend more time collecting more data to make a more informed decision as opposed to relying on her to do that.” Ger and Lora also separately agreed that their decision-making was not ideal. Lora discussed how she would like to be less defensive and be more open to really understanding Ger whereas Ger said that he would like to be less stubborn and more willing to listen to Lora.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Couple decision-making is a complex process involving many factors including internal characteristics and external characteristics that are both part of one's personality and one's environment. This grounded feminist theory study aimed to better understand the process of decision-making and how couples try to influence one another and to understand the reflections after a decision was made. In this chapter, discussions of themes in regard to outside influence, good of others, perspectives during decision-making, power, personal beliefs/characteristics, and post-decision reflections which emerged from the data will be presented and compared with previous research studies, and followed by explanations. Next, implications for practitioners as well as for the field of marriage and family therapy will be offered. Last, limitations of this research study and suggestions for future research will be addressed.

Outside Influence

A new finding that has not been addressed in literature is the impact of family of origin, social comparisons, and children on decision-making processes. Bonds-Raacke (2006) made the suggestion that future research should look at how couple decision-making may be influenced by family. The present study specifically addressed those concerns and found that one's background and family had a great deal to do with how decisions were made.

Although McMullin (2005) recently considered how power, social context, and family background influenced paid and unpaid labor, little published research has examined how family background influences the process of decision-making. McMullin (2005) and I both assumed that children mimic their parents and carry these patterns with them into adulthood or rebel and do the opposite because of those experiences (McMullin, 2005). I did

not explicitly ask about family of origin until the sixth interview which is when I began to code for it specifically. Family of origin issues came out in conjoint and individual interviews although when I asked about family of origin experiences, I did so in the individual interviews. In many cases, couples took what was positive from what they observed from their family of origin and left the negative behind. Others tried to emulate their parents and others tried to do the opposite depending on whether or not they wanted to be like their own parents. There was not a case where a person could not think about how her/his family of origin impacted her/his own decision-making process in one way or another.

Good of Others

I asked about how individuals felt in relation to others in their generation and the responses indicated that the respondents felt different from others in their generation. In general, they wanted to separate from the “me-first” thinking and individualization of western culture and in turn think of the whole family or what would be helpful for their spouse. Zuo and Bian (2005) reported on a collectivist culture and reported that couples in collectivist cultures tend to make decisions that best serve the group or the whole. Similar to the present findings, Zuo and Bian’s (2005) study from a collectivist culture also reported that in general, both spouses had to be satisfied with a solution that fit into each person’s priorities.

Previous research suggests that there appears to be an increase in gender stereotyped decision-making after the birth of a first child and that couples tend to have less equity in their roles after having children (Allen et al., 2001; Danes et al., 1998; Grote & Clark, 2001; Hochschild, 1989; Kulik, 2001; Orleans et al., 1989) with women taking on an additional

shift with the children (Hochschild, 1989). The participants in this study reflected traditional gender roles after children in that before the birth of children, women worked full-time and after the birth of a child, the women stayed home and worked less outside the home while the man was the full-time bread-winner. This study touched on the ways that decision-making processes might change after the birth of children. In general, couples who did comment on this issue suggested that children helped them to prioritize which decisions to make and forced them to make decisions in a faster way since there was much less time to spend with one another. Couples agreed that they did not want to spend all of their alone-time just talking about decisions and therefore made decisions more quickly than before children entered into their relationship.

Perspectives during Decision-making

Husbands emphasized being logical and reasonable when they made decisions. In addition, the husbands were proud to have a wife who was also logical rather than emotional. Husbands also talked about how reasoning based on emotions was something that did not convince them of their wife's way of thinking about a decision. In general, the emotions and feelings were viewed as being weak and illegitimate. This goes along with Felme's (1994) finding that couples tend to report that men are less emotionally involved, giving them more power. Being less emotionally involved coincided with having more decision-making power (Felme, 1994) which goes along with being emotional rather than logical and rational is negative and seen as less legitimate as a source or influence. Wives too reported that they tried to be rational and use logical arguments when making decisions. The wives in this study may have reported that they were less emotional so as to gain more or have equitable power with their husbands.

A feminist perspective would examine how culture and society has portrayed that which is masculine and patriarchal to be normal and right (Crotty, 1998). In this case, that which is logical and rational as opposed to emotional was viewed as being the right way to go about making decisions. In this context being gendered (Bloom, 1998) means that women, in order to have more power, need to think, interact, and influence others in the same way men do.

Power Strategies

Power strategies used in making decisions is not a topic that has been addressed in the literature in a qualitative way. Although, numerous studies have looked at decision-making and power in a quantitative way, this approach minimizes the unique characteristics, qualities, and dynamics that are experienced by the couple. This study was able to give voice and explanation to the ways that individuals report using power and have power over them by their partner.

There were often instances where individuals' reports of their own power differed from the way their partner reported their power and influence. I decided to take each respondent's words and stories as their own rather than try to figure out who was correct. Socialization is an explanation of why a wife might perceive the power of her husband differently than how her husband perceives it (Wesson, 1995).

The present study included similar findings as Ball and colleagues (1995) in that when couples discussed issues surrounding power, they rarely used the word power. The majority of couples talked about how they try to influence or convince their partner of a decision. Zvonkovic and colleagues (1996) reported that in general, not many couples spoke about power when discussing family and work decisions. However those who did directly

talk about power were those in unhappy and dissatisfied marriages. In my opinion, the couples in this study came from healthy and satisfied marriages overall; perhaps this is one reason why the participants did not talk directly about power but instead used words such as influence or convince.

Resource theory has been discussed in the literature review as it related to decision-making. When one person has more resources, he/she has more power to make decisions (Blood & Wolfe, 1960). This coincided with women having the power to make parenting decisions in particular because of their increased resources of other mothers, play dates, and society. Another perspective on power was the least interested partner theory which suggests that persons who have the least invested or the lowest interest essentially have more power (Webster, 2000). The least interested partner theory was not supported in this study. In fact, in regards to parenting, the person who had the most interest would most often bring the issue or decision up to their partner. The person who was most interested and invested in the decision was most often afforded the right to make the decision.

Zvonkovic and colleagues reported that men dominate in family decision-making power (Zvonkovic et al., 1996). This was not the case in the present study at least to the extent of parenting. Women were the dominant ones and most often brought the topic of parenting up, had expertise in parenting, offered suggestions, and were afforded the right to make a decision about the children. Having expertise in an area afforded the person a sense of entitlement to make a decision. This expertise also gave the individual confidence to go ahead with a decision without too much thought to make their opinion heard. In contrast, the non-expert was silenced and unable to counter their partner when it came to a topic that

she/he was an expert in. In this society parenting is not often valued. Those with more power (usually the men) are glad to have a wife who will take over the responsibility of parenting.

One form of power that I reported was the use of silence—it is through the use of silence that a few individuals reported standing up to their spouse. Godwin and Scanzoni (1989) also found that couples attempt to control each other through the use of silence or by simply ignoring or not responding to their partner. This study added to the understanding of the use of silence was that silence could also be used as a way of disagreeing. At times spouses saw this silence as the opposite. Even though one person may be silently disagreeing, the partner might interpret this silence as an unspoken agreement by their partner. Although silence is one way partners reported influencing one another, the silence may have the opposite effect.

Most couples in the present study agreed that they were partners and desired mutual respect for one another's opinions. When couples talked about the process of how they made decisions, they often discussed open expression of feelings, active negotiation, and self-reflection which are characteristics that have all been described by Quek and Knudson-Martin (2006) as acts that promote equity in relationships. On the other hand, couples did use manipulation to try and convince each other and at times it was deceptive and inappropriate. In some cases the manipulation was done in a way to try to change one's way of thinking while in other cases the manipulation was explained as sabotage which could be harmful and hurtful to one's partner and relationship. If and when manipulation was used, it was used in a potentially damaging way if one's partner would have been made aware of it although there was little evidence of awareness of manipulation by the partner.

In the present study, I identified six types of power used by individuals during the decision-making process. These power categories overlapped with French and Raven's (1959) types of power but were more specific in some categories. I did not have a category for legitimate power since couples did not talk about this type of power. Expert power overlapped with my category of expertise in that one person is viewed as being more specialized in a particular area. The categories of information/research, manipulation, presentation, hypothetical situations, non-verbal cues, and perspective-taking could all be classified as sub-categories under referent power. These categories of power were all based on either a skill that has been learned or on a personality trait that then affords the ability to influence and have power over another person.

Bonds-Raacke (2006) made the suggestion that past experiences may influence the decisions made in the present or the future however this was a finding that was not confirmed in the present study. Although this was a topic that was not considered indepth, I identified these past experiences when looking at sources of power. One person could use the example of a past experience to influence and convince their partner of a decision.

Personal Beliefs and Characteristics

Trust

Trusting one's partner in making decisions is a new topic that has not been established indepth in the exisisting literature. In the present study, couples talked about trust especially when they discussed making decisions independently of one another. Trust was often built based on a common history, goals, and ideas for the future. Because of these commonalities, individuals trusted one another to make decisions without first consulting with each other at all times. Women and men were both afforded this freedom to make

decisions when decisions were smaller even when they affected both individuals because respondents felt that their partner would make decisions that were appropriate.

Gender Roles

Every couple that participated in this study included dual earners. However, I did not place a limitation on income or hours worked for couples to participate. In every couple, the woman was the one who had been working full-time and dropped down to working part-time to be able to spend more time at home and with the children. The men continued to work full-time. In one situation, Carl changed his career so that he was not working as much but the emphasis was still on him maintaining full-time work. Perhaps the women were only working part-time because society reinforces women for not building up a career; perhaps it was because the couple thought that having the woman stay home more with the children would be what was best for the family. Careers that women traditionally enter tend to pay less than careers that are typically male-dominated. In addition, in careers where men and women do the same job, although the wage gap is narrowing, women are still paid less (Sampson & Moore, 2008). The ways that women tend to lead and perform often go unrecognized and are undervalued (Sampson & Moore, 2008). Additionally, when women go from working full-time to part-time, as the respondents did in this study, women lose income and money which is more valued in our society than parenting. Furthermore, women who make the choice to work part-time while their children are young become even more disadvantaged when they are unable to climb the career ladder and face the “glass ceiling” (Sampson & Moore, 2008). Women also face additional challenges if they choose to leave their partner because they have fewer financial resources and are less able to provide for their family after taking a break from their career to be home with children.

These couples reflected the dominant discourse that suggests that the woman should stay home. Some women had a desire to be home with the children while others felt responsible to do so and others felt some pressure from church or friends to be at home with children. In one situation, a woman wanted to stay home but her husband wanted her to work so they decided that she should work part-time. In the end, women and men agreed to this arrangement because they thought it was best for the family for the woman to be home with children.

Similarly, women were clearly seen as being the “expert” when it came to making decisions about parenting. In some situations this expertise was justified because the couple reported that the woman had more resources, more support from other women, and I would suggest, more reinforcement from culture. Men did not report having conversations with others about parenting and children in particular whereas many of the women did make the comment that they shared experiences and stories with other women at play-groups, at work, or with their own sisters, friends, colleagues, or mothers. The dominant discourse of our culture suggests that women are nurturers and are “better suited” to care for children and stay at home with children.

As Ann and Doug explained, they were looked down upon by others even though she stayed at home part of the time and worked part-time. The culture reinforces women for staying home; women are not questioned if they stay at home but if a man stays home, questions may begin about where he was employed before he stayed home. A man’s identity is often based on his career and on being the breadwinner. In no case was the man’s word taken over the woman’s when it came to parenting. Men were not viewed as having the best suggestions or explanations about parenting issues in particular. In another case, Lucy

wanted to stay home full-time and did not want to work but in order to do so, the family would have to down-size their home and make additional sacrifices. As a result, she and Wade decided that she would continue to work. Again, western culture emphasizes earning money, living the “American dream” and having all that one desires: the latest technology, the newest car, the nicest home, the healthiest food. The pressure to have these objects may push some men and women to work more in order to obtain these luxuries.

Gender Ideology

A theory that helps to explain the findings includes gender ideology which takes culture, beliefs, and social context into consideration in the power that spouses maintain or afford to one another (Webster, 2000). Women are viewed in our culture as being the nurturer and the one who most often makes sacrifices for the family. In this study it was more acceptable for women to alter their careers for their family than it was for men to do so. The social context places these couples next to others who value women being the nurturer and men being the provider and bread-winner while viewing different roles negatively.

I selected the couples in this study with the intent that both members of the couples earned an income. What was discovered was that for these couples with children who were too young to go to school, all of the women worked part-time after working full-time before children. This coincided with many other studies which suggested that there appears to be an increase in gender stereotyped decision-making after the birth of a first child (Allen et al., 2001; Danes et al., 1998; Grote & Clark, 2001; Hochschild, 1989; Kulik, 2001; Orleans et al., 1989). Most couples described the male as being the primary breadwinner and the female as being in charge of the children and home. A deviation from male headship often goes against

societal expectations and could reflect poorly on the family (Webster, 2000; Zvonkovic et al., 1996).

The majority of the couples in this study suggested that if there was a major disagreement the wife would yield to her husband and concede to what he felt was best to do. This suggests a lack of equity in six of the nine couples. There was only one instance when a couple reported that the husband had to make a decision against the wishes of his wife. Even though couples suggested that the man would have the final say in situations of disagreement, only one couple reported actually practicing this arrangement. The other couples talked more about compromising and coming to mutual agreement.

Post-Decision Reflections

Qualitative studies thus far in the literature have not explored individual or couple thoughts after a decision is made. The couples in the present study talked about regrets that they had during the decision-making process and regrets about actual decisions that were made. The couples also shared frustrations regarding how they dealt with or had influence over their power and frustrations with their spouse.

Points of Satisfaction

An additional finding of this study was that couples felt a sense of accomplishment when their decision-making processes occurred in a positive and successful way. Individuals talked about the trust and respect they had toward their partner when decisions were made positively. Participants also discussed feelings of contentment when they make decisions where both people are respected, able to voice opinions, and are able to do what was best for the family.

One theme that emerged from the data was that couples desired to be on the same page or have a sense of “we” in which they were in agreement with one another. This theme is supported by Beach and Tesser (1993) who suggested that couples are most satisfied in their relationships when they are in agreement with one another. They proposed that when couples were on the same page, their self-evaluation was positive and one’s personal reasons for a decision were justified. Couples try to make decisions that increase the positive self-evaluation of both individuals over making decisions that only bolsters one person’s positive self-evaluation (Beach & Tesser, 1993). I think of this theme as a metaphor: “being on board.” Imagine two people on board two separate ships with separate uses, separate cargo, and separate experiences. These two people on these two separate ships come together and face a storm and the storm forces them to abandon one or both ships and come together for a common purpose. The individuals have to choose which ship to board, which to abandon, or they need to choose an entirely new ship to both get on. One or both people abandon his/her ship and jumps on board another ship. Moving forward means that both people now have to be responsible for the ship’s upkeep, and the consequences of abandoning the other ship(s). It does not help to worry about the lost ship(s), because it is gone. Both people must now adapt to the one ship and keep it from sinking. So it is with making decisions. Each person has different opinions about decisions but once a decision is made, both people felt responsible and supported one another moving forward in order to keep the current ship afloat.

Trust and appreciation was a topic that made sense to me. I assumed that trust and appreciation should be present in a committed relationship and that without those factors it would be difficult to have a healthy relationship. The characteristic of trust and appreciation made me wonder about the topic of manipulation. Although only a handful of individuals

reported using manipulation to convince their partner, those who did use manipulation also reported a great deal of trust and appreciation for their spouse. Ger discussed sabotaging Lora's ideas but later in the interview talked about having a self-less love for Lora. Kari also talked about her appreciation for the great ideas Griffin had but was also reported to go against his ideas. Perhaps some individuals do not see a connection between trust/appreciation and the power strategies used to convince their partner of a decision. It may be that when it comes to an argument, individuals may not think that how they interact with their partner is connected to how they feel about their partner. In addition, it could be that to admit that one does not appreciate or trust his/her partner could be viewed negatively in front of a researcher, especially knowing that I am a marriage therapist.

Reflections on Ideal Processes

Previous studies have revealed that there was a trend toward equity in decision-making as being related to increased relationship satisfaction (Coltrane, 1996a; Dekkers, 2007; Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2006; Rosenblueth, Steil, & Whitcomb, 1998; Thompson & Walker, 1989; Zvonkovic et al., 1996). The participants in the present study strengthened this finding and found that without fail, respondents reported that their decision-making process was clearly related to relationships satisfaction. They suggested that if they had poor decision-making processes, did not hear one another, or did not match on their opinions, their relationship satisfaction would suffer. In contrast, when their decision-making process was positive, when both individuals were able to voice their opinion, and when there is open communication, relationship satisfaction increased. This would make sense given what couples had to say about the sense of accomplishment they felt after making a good decision with their partner.

The individuals reflecting on their decision-making processes admitted that their process might not work for every couple and/or every personality. Interestingly, most individuals suggested that their decision-making processes were ideal even when they did not get the desired outcome. This goes back to accepting the differences of one's partner. Perhaps these couples have been together long enough that they have accepted each other's differences and have been able to work with each person's personality in order to reach what they now view as ideal.

Recommendations

Practitioners may find it helpful to think about the findings of this study when counseling couples with a variety of presenting problems. Decision-making covers a variety of topics and situation and often couples come to therapy because of difficulties communicating about any one of these decisions. The following suggestions are offered to clinicians who work with couples who are in intimate relationships.

Practitioners may find it helpful to discuss background, parenting ideas, faith, perspectives, and power strategies in pre-marital counseling. Zvonkovic and colleagues (1996) discovered that some couples discussed their goals, attitudes, and beliefs before being married. Therefore, making decisions after the marriage was based on the understandings they had agreed upon earlier in the relationship (Zvonkovic et al., 1996).

Often couples do not have children when they begin to date. Couples may be more likely to talk about whether or not they want children at some point in the future but most couples might not talk about how they will discipline and what kind of parenting style they will have or what parenting style each experienced growing up. These differences can be magnified when couples become parents. On the other hand, if these differences have been

discussed and a couple knows how they will handle parenting in advance, it can ease the transition to parenting.

Because every person mentioned that their relationship satisfaction was tied to their decision-making process, it might be helpful to explore the decision-making process. Practitioners might also find it helpful to map out the ways that couples make decisions and then explore with them how their family background has influenced the couple's decision-making process. If couples have difficulties it may help to consider what was learned and witnessed while growing up and how to change any negative aspects of the process. In addition, it might also help for couples to think about how their own processes and interactions influence and impact their children.

In this study, individuals commented on how they do not think about their power and the ways that they influence their partner. It may be beneficial for couples to talk with one another about how they are feeling when their partner is attempting to influence them. As was seen in this study, one's personal perception of power might differ from their partner's perception of it. A discussion about power strategies might assist in overcoming poor communication, abusive situations, and might lead to better communication and conflict-resolution strategies.

Limitations

This study included a very homogenous group of people. All but one person reported being a part of a Christian faith; in fact, 13 of the 18 individuals were from an evangelical Christian faith. The findings are thus loaded with strong religious language. It would be interesting to look at how individuals from a different religion, ethnicity, sexuality, race, or socio-economic status would make decisions and if their process would look very different

than the process these couples explained. In addition, it might also be interesting to compare decision-making processes in couples with older children or no children.

In this study, I asked individuals to recall past information and experiences. Individuals were asked about how they have made decisions in the past. Recall is not always an accurate way to measure and tell stories as the stories told about decisions that may have happened a day ago or years ago.

Another note about the findings of this study is that couple interviews were conducted before the conjoint interviews. As such the conjoint interview may have influenced the individual interviews in that the conjoint interview began with a discussion of the most important characteristic when making couple decisions. The individual interviews may have been led by the conjoint interview. Individuals may have been thinking about that most important characteristic when reporting on topics such as the use of power in the individual interview.

Respondents were asked about how they made decisions about parenting. There were two couples who had one child under the age of two. In fact, one couple just had a six-month old. The parenting issues that new parents faced were much different than parents who had a seven-year-old. The parenting issues around a six-month old involve what to wear and when to go to a doctor whereas parents of older children face more difficult issues such as discipline, respect, obedience, and other issues.

In this study individuals were asked about decision-making processes and power strategies apart from their partner. I assume that the participants would desire to have positive self-regard and not share everything with me as a researcher especially if what they reported shed a bad light on themselves or their marriage. They may have not wanted to

share parts of themselves or their partner which would reflect poorly on them or the relationship. Observations on the decision-making process may have been helpful to determine what the participants were describing more accurately and would have given more explanation to their reports of power.

Couples who were interviewed appeared to be relatively healthy and to have stable relationships. This was displayed in their reports that the decision-making processes were effective and that individuals generally had positive feelings about the process and their partner. Few individuals desired changes in the process. It may be that troubled relationships and couples who face challenges in their relationship may need a different model in order to effectively and successfully make decisions together.

Future Research Suggestions

One topic that was not addressed in this study were non-verbal cues such as the tone of one's voice, one's use of silence, one's actions, and one's rate of speech. Future research might examine these factors as well as ask about whether or not individuals are aware of their use of these non-verbal cues and their influence on power and decision-making dynamics.

In this study, participants had difficulty recalling their feelings and emotions during the decision-making process. Future research might also consider having individuals make a difficult decision and then have the couple talk about their feelings, emotions, and thoughts about the process and about their awareness of these feelings and emotions during the process. Participants could recall their feelings and thoughts more often when there was a strong disagreement but it would be interesting to know how individuals are feeling when the situation is not as intense.

Future research might consider addressing the issue behind why the woman was seen as the expert in parenting whereas the man was not. Mothers and fathers become new parents simultaneously and they start at the same point. Why is it that women emerge as the expert so early on? How is it that couples are still relatively traditional despite belief that they have achieved equity in their relationship?

Women are supposed to find their fulfillment and joy in being a wife and a mom, yet inequity between females and males is not often viewed as being unfair or unjust. In many cases, the inequities are viewed simply the way things are supposed to be (Goodrich, 1991). In this study the same arrangement took place wherein the mothers reported being the “expert” mother to her children as well as making decisions for her home and children while the father had less involvement or input. In addition, because women worked less after having children, they therefore had decreased income and became more dependent on their husbands for financial care. This dependence then led to increased vulnerability and decreased power for the women (Parker, 2003). The lack of resources meant that the man had more power and therefore the “right” to make rules and have power and to decide how finances and purchases were used. This justification could be detrimental to women, especially women in abusive relationships; women need to have the resources available to them if they are going to leave the abusive relationship. How is it that despite all the disparities faced by women, couples still accept this as the norm?

Further, a woman’s career, needs, wants, desires, and goals are not often viewed as important as the man’s (Goodrich, 1991). Children are reared and socialized to sexist beliefs (Goodrich, 1991). So too, the children in this study were learning sex roles that gave their fathers more power and privilege in social, economic, and political realms. Women generally

have more egalitarian thoughts about gender roles than men and yet men have not been convinced to take on equal roles nor have women expected men to take on similar responsibilities in their roles. These dissimilar and unequal roles are often hidden (Parker, 2003). An example of how the roles might be justified is in the thought that women have higher standards for the children and since the men do not have similar standards, the responsibility falls on the women to meet their own expectations. Meanwhile the men benefit from the extra work women put into the high standards.

As I was transcribing interviews from the eighth couple, I began to realize that I wished that I had asked about how couples decided to have the wife stay home with children rather than continue to work full-time. Why did they not decide to have the husband work part-time? These couples were all dual-earners but every wife only worked part-time and every husband worked full-time and I didn't ask until the last interview about how that decision was reached! Doug gave an example without prompting of a fair decision in which they together decided to have Ann stay at home more with the new baby. Lucy and Wade also have an example of how Lucy wanted to stay home but Wade ultimately made the decision for her to stay at work. The only time I actually asked about the decision was with Chad and Tanya and this couple discussed how they felt it was the woman's role to stay at home and Tanya's desire to be there as well and how they had discussed it before they got married and agreed she would be home more with the children. In addition, it coincided with their beliefs about gender roles and what they thought women should do.

There have been studies that examine decision-making differences after retirement (Kulik, 2001) and the differences in decision-making between one's first and second marriages (Clarke, 2005). However an interesting area for future research would be to

examine how the decision-making process changes before and after the birth of a first child. It might be helpful to gather information from both self-report as well as observation to see if and how the process changes. Previous research shows that gender roles change and become more stereotypical after the birth of a child (Allen et al., 2001; Danes et al., 1998; Grote & Clark, 2001; Hochschild, 1989; Kulik, 2001; Orleans et al., 1989). It would be interesting to see if and how these changes influence the ways couples interact with one another and make decisions.

A final research suggestion would be to consider a different population. As mentioned in the limitations section, this study included a very homogenous group of people. It would be interesting to look at how individuals from a different religion, sexuality, ethnicity, race, life-stage or socio-economic status would make decisions different, if their process would look very different, and if their process would replicate the visual that emerged from the study.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has added to the literature on decision-making by providing a more inclusive account of the contributing factors used by couples to reach a decision. Involvement of outside influences has been explored and reported to be a major contributing factor to the ways that decisions were made. Of particular importance to the ways decisions were made were the religious beliefs of the couples and the family background--neither of which has been previously explored in depth in the qualitative literature. Another contributing factor is noting and understanding how decisions are made and considering the individuals' and couples' perspectives, power strategies, and personal beliefs before decisions are made. Very little research has communicated the thoughts and ideas that

individuals and couples have following decision-making. This study examined the areas of satisfaction and discontent following decisions and conveyed the reflections about decision-making processes from the respondents using their words and stories.

Individuals involved in intimate relationships can consider these factors when making decisions and consider how such factors are in play in their own decision-making processes. Practitioners can take the stories shared by these respondents and work to better understand differences and help couples work toward cohesion and open communication. These considerations about how decisions are made include how outside pressures, gender roles/norms, and previous experiences impact the present relationship.

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Table 1: Table of Themes

Theme	Sub-Theme	Interview	Explanation	Example
Outside Influences				
	Faith/God	Couple and Individual	Influence of religion and faith in decision-making.	"We're from a Christian family and so we've got that [faith and God] at the center of our life."
	Social Comparisons	Individual	Comparing others' decision-making processes with one's own.	"Other friends you hear fight all the time...that's not even an issue for us."
	Family Background Experiences	Individual and Couple	Influence of one's background and experience in decision-making.	"Growing up in my family was tough and it was just unpleasant...we're not yelling, we're coming to an understanding."
	Children	Couple and Individual	Influence of children on decision-making processes.	"Before kids, everything was discussed and little things were bigger things then."
Good of Others				
	Concern for Spouse	Individual and Couple	A concern for one's partner as decisions were made.	"I think the main thing is that we think about the other person's needs before we think about our own"
	Concern for Family	Individual and Couple	A concern for one's family as decisions were made.	"I think that we want to be fair and equal although I think most of our decisions we do what's best for our family."
Perspectives During Decision-making				
	Balance : Big Picture vs. Details	Couple	Couples balance each other out; one person sees the big scheme picture and the other looks at the details decisions.	"I'd say he has more foresight in general and I'm much more in the details...how is that going to work and play out in the future?"

Table 1: Table of Themes, Continued

Theme	Sub-Theme	Interview	Explanation	Example
	Level of Importance	Couple	The magnitude and weight of a particular decision.	“We both recognize the magnitude of the decision, taking it not too seriously but understanding when it is important.”
	Acceptance of Differences	Individual	One’s acceptance and/or tolerance for differences with his/her partner.	“We just understand that we’re in it for the same reasons, we might just have slightly different opinions on the way to get here.”
	View of Emotions	Individual	One’s view of emotions and the usefulness of emotions.	“The only time I’ve maybe made a decision that I would regret is if it’s more of an emotional-type decision...”
Power Strategies				
	Presentation	Individual	Presenting ideas, making lists, advanced thinking or sharing personal thoughts and feelings about a decision.	“I present my evidence and in the case of a bullet-point list, these are the reasons, this is why...”
	Hypothetical Situations	Individual	Considering past decisions or made-up scenarios	“If we’ve done it a certain way and it worked, why don’t we do it again?”
	Expertise	Individual	One person’s expertise or knowledge about a decision.	“I make a lot of decisions about areas that I seem to know more about.”
	Information/ Research	Individual	Gathering information or research about a decision.	“[He] researches absolutely everything”
	Personality Traits	Individual	Personality traits that individuals reported as being a part of how they try to convince or have power over their partner.	“I’m very much more an influencer.”
	Manipulation	Individual	Manipulating one’s partner or situation to influence them.	“I try to make him think that it’s his idea.”

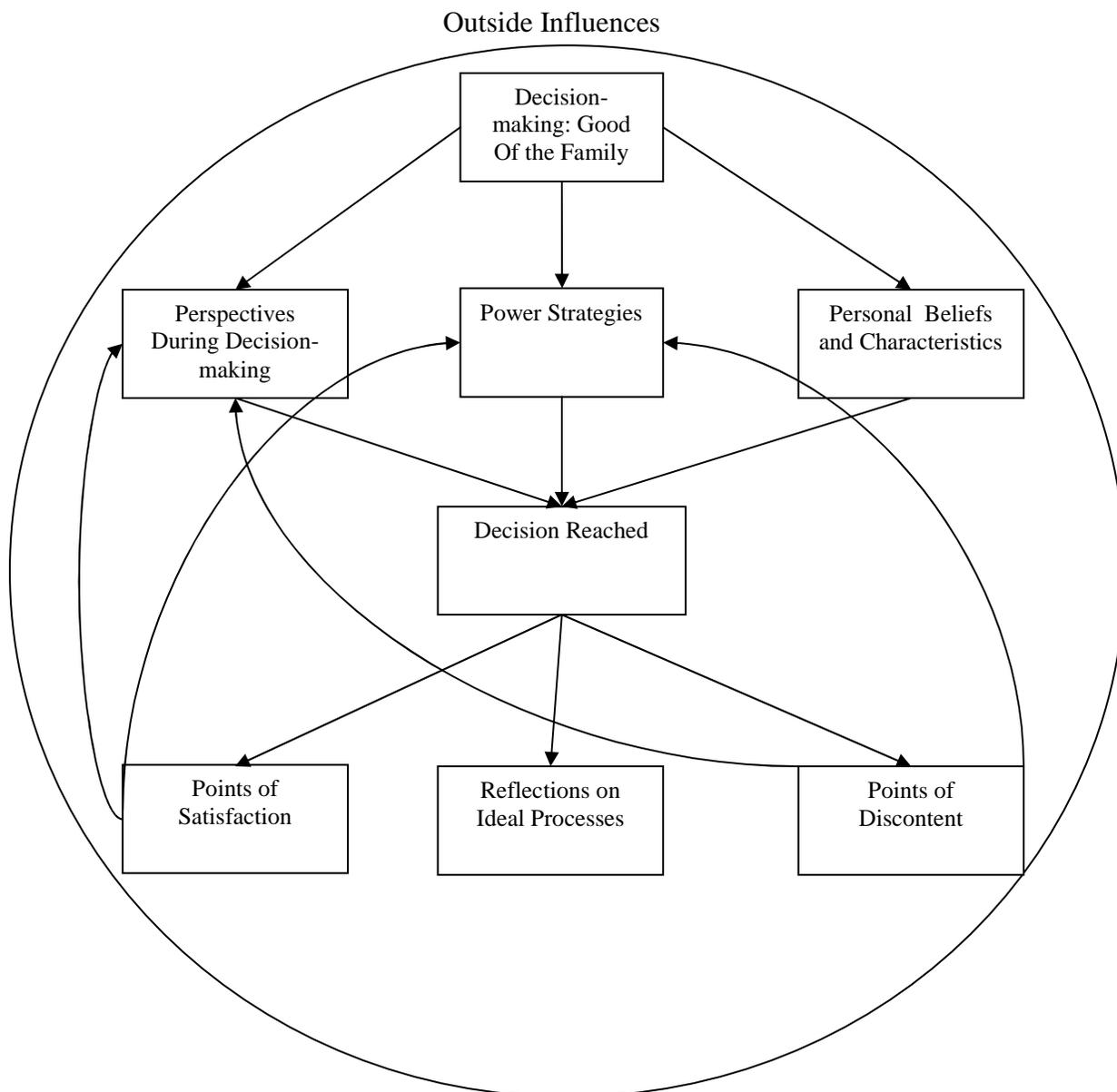
Table 1: Table of Themes, Continued

Theme	Sub-Theme	Interview	Explanation	Example
	Perspective-Taking	Individual	Taking the perspective of one's partner and thinking like her/him.	"I try to frame my reasoning to fit his."
	Non-Verbal Cues	Individual	Use of non-verbal cues to convince.	"I huff and puff around the house."
Personal Beliefs/ Characteristics				
	Trust	Couple and Individual	Trusting the spouse's ability or judgment in making decisions.	"I'm confident that she would make the right decisions...I trust her and am behind her in those decisions."
	Personality	Couple and Individual	Personal and relatively unchanging characteristics.	"I like to do this fast and talk fast and he's more of a talker...he's got a lot of words."
	Gender Roles	Couple and Individual	Ideas about what one gender is expected to do or how each gender is supposed to act.	"We're not traditional in our gender roles...we both take care of the baby and the house."
Points of Discontent				
	Regrets	Individual	A personal reflection of what one wished he/she had done differently.	"I let my family down...it was a fairly profound effect and not one that I felt good about at all."
	Frustrations	Individual	One person's frustration of another for failing to live up to his/her expectations.	"I felt like he had already formulated in his mind already what I was going to say...and that's just not what I was saying."
Points of Satisfaction				
	Sense of "We"	Individual	A level of shared responsibility or burden about decisions made.	"I don't think there's ever a person to blame in a bad decision because it's usually to the point where we felt good about it and we were both wrong"

Table 1: Table of Themes, Continued

Theme	Sub-Theme	Interview	Explanation	Example
	Accomplishment/ Contentment	Individual	A sense of peace and satisfaction in making decision.	“A sense of accomplishment... the solution itself is the accomplishment of making a good decision.”
	Respect and Appreciation	Couple and Individual	A respect and appreciation for one’s partner as a person and their ideas.	“I think that both of us respect each other at the highest level and no matter what we say or do at the end of the day we know that both of us are working for the other.”
Reflections on Ideal Processes				
	Decision-making as Related to Relationship Satisfaction	Individual	Decision-making influenced relationship satisfaction.	“If I’m feeling honored and respected and heard then I think it helps a lot and it impacts how satisfied I am and that we’re partners.”
	Relativity and Desired Changes	Individual	Decision-making was seen as ideal for the couple but some changes were desired.	“For us it [decision-making] is ideal, for our personalities” and “I would change just one thing about myself...”

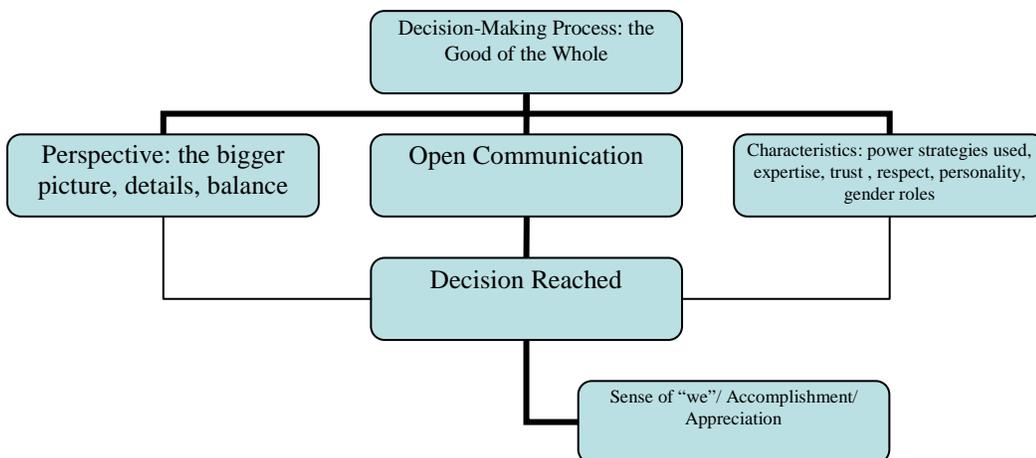
Figure 1: Visual of Themes



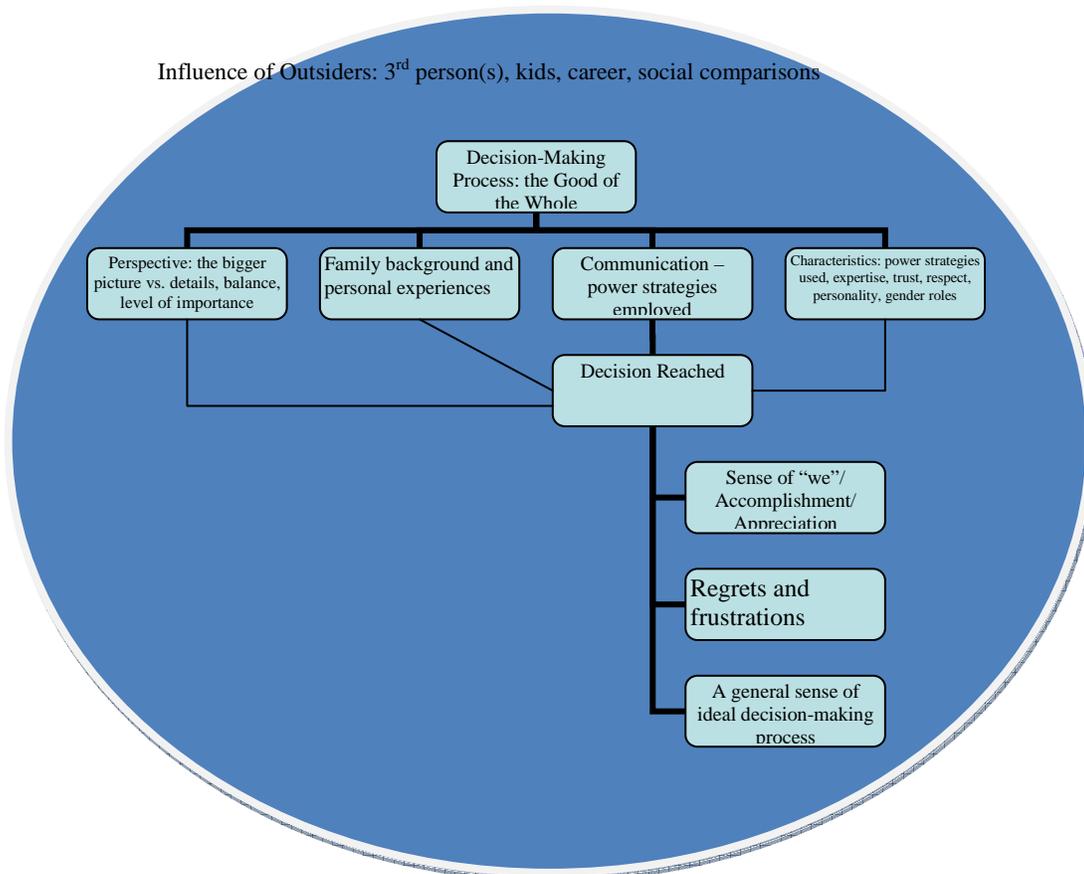
This is a visual of the themes based on the interviews. The influence of outsiders affected all parts inside of the circle. In general, the underlying process of decision-making was concerned with the entire family. The middle 3 boxes: each person's perspective, power strategies, and personal beliefs/characteristics, influenced the decision that was made. Following the decision, points of satisfaction and discontentment along with reflections on the decision-making process were made. The satisfactory and discontented points in turn influenced the power strategies and perspectives which in turn influenced the decision reached.

Figure 2: Changes in the Visual of Themes

Influence of Outsiders: 3rd person(s), kids, career, social comparisons



Influence of Outsiders: 3rd person(s), kids, career, social comparisons



Appendix A: Telephone Script

Telephone script:

Hello, my name is Tara Dekkers and I am a PhD student in Human Development and Family Studies at Iowa State University. Back in 2005 you and your partner participated in a study in which you filled out a number of questionnaires and discussed an area of difficulty in your relationship. On that form, you agreed to be contacted for future research. I am doing my dissertation on feelings and emotions involved in couple decision-making. The reason that I am contacting you is to see if you and your partner would be willing to participate in this study. Agreeing to participate is entirely voluntary. If you agree to participate, I will need to be sure that you and your partner would both be willing to participate in a conjoint interview and an individual interview lasting approximately 4 hours total. The interviews will be audio-recorded. I first need to ensure that you and your partner are both in your first marriage, that you have at least one child under the age of 5, that you and your partner both earn an income, and that you have been married for at least one year.

Would you be willing to participate in this research?

Where would be a convenient place/time for us to meet?

Thank-you so much, I look forward to meeting with you both face-to-face.

Appendix B: Informed Consent Document

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: Qualitative Analysis of Couple Decision-making

Investigator: Tara Dekkers

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to look at how emotions and feelings play a role when couples are going through the decision-making process and to qualitatively assess couple decision-making power. Another purpose of this study is to look at the perceptions that couples have in areas of fairness and equity in decision-making, influence (power) strategies used in decision-making, and the emotions involved within these processes. You are being invited to participate in this study because you and your partner are in your first marriage, have been married to your partner for at least a year, have at least one child under the age of five, both bring in some household income, and agreed to participate in the interview together and individually.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for approximately one year. During this time you will be asked to fill out a demographics form followed by three audio-recorded interviews lasting for up to four hours. The first interview will be a conjoint interview and the following interviews will be with you and your partner separately. You may also be contacted up to two more times in order to ensure accuracy of interpretation, verify the results, or gain other details of your experience or to clarify previous explanations. The possible follow-up visits may last for about a half an hour or less. During the study you may expect the following study procedures. First, you will fill out a demographics form. Then, you and your partner will be asked a series of questions about how you make decisions in your home as well as how the process makes each of you feel. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable. You will then be interviewed in as individuals. The audio-recordings will be stored in a locked drawer until it is transcribed by the interviewer. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the transcript. Once the transcripts are complete, the audio-recordings will be erased (within one month).

RISKS

While participating in this study you may experience the following risks: possible emotional stress and perhaps some tension between yourself and your partner.

Appendix B: Informed Consent Document, Continued

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be a direct benefit to you. You may gain more understanding of your relationship and the role you play in the relationship with your partner and how your actions might influence how your partner feels and responds toward you. You may also find it helpful to discuss emotions in the future by discussing them in an interview setting. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by providing valuable information in helping couples learn how to communicate about feelings and emotions successfully, and by making therapists aware of the emotional impact that couples can have on one another.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will have the option of being in a drawing for one of five \$50 gift cards to Target when the interviews are complete.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. You may choose to skip any question that you do not feel comfortable answering. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken:

- Your name, any name you use in the interview, address, and interview location will be uniquely changed.
- Certain data such as your occupation, number of children (if applicable), and length of marriage may be kept the same unless you wish for the investigator to change it.
- The informed consent documents, demographic forms, transcriptions, interview tapes, interview notes, and other documents related to the research will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the principle investigator's office. Only the principle investigator will have access to the file cabinet.
- When transcribing the interviews, the computer will be password protected.
- The files will be obtained for the duration of the dissertation before they are destroyed.
- If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

Appendix B: Informed Consent Document, Continued

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact Dr. Megan Murphy at 515-294-2745.
- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office of Research Assurances, 1138 Pearson Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

(Participant's Signature)

(Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Signature of Person Obtaining
Informed Consent)

(Date)

Appendix C: IRB Approval Form

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
 OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

DATE: 30 October 2008

TO: Tara Dekkers
5416 Kansas Drive, Ames, IA 50014

CC: Megan J. Murphy
4380 Palmer Bldg.

FROM: Jan Canny, IRB Administrator
Office of Research Assurances

TITLE: Qualitative Analysis of Couple Decision-Making

IRB ID: 08-350

Institutional Review Board
Office of Research Assurances
Vice President for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
515 294-4566
FAX 515 294-4267

Approval Date: 30 October 2008
Date for Continuing Review: 29 October 2009

The Chair of the Institutional Review Board of Iowa State University has reviewed and approved the modification of this project. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

Your study has been approved according to the dates shown above. To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- **Use the documents with the IRB approval stamp** in your research.
- **Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes** to the study by completing the "Continuing Review and/or Modification" form.
- **Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences** involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) **any other unanticipated problems involving risks** to subjects or others.
- **Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses**, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- **Complete a new continuing review form** at least three to four weeks prior to the **date for continuing review** as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Research investigators are expected to comply with the principles of the Belmont Report, and state and federal regulations regarding the involvement of humans in research. These documents are located on the Office of Research Assurances website [www.compliance.iastate.edu] or available by calling (515) 294-4566.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office of Research Assurances, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

Appendix D: Demographics Form

DEMOGRAPHICS FORM

Name (Last) _____ (First) _____

Age _____

Length of Marriage _____ (nearest year)

Length of Relationship _____ (nearest year)

Is this your first marriage? _____

Race/Ethnicity _____

Occupation _____

Religion _____

Annual Personal Income (circle one):

0-\$10,000

\$10,001-\$30,000

\$30,001-\$50,000

\$50,001-\$70,000

\$70,001-\$100,000

More than \$100,000

Number of children: _____

Number of children living at home: _____

Ages of children living at home: _____

Other explanations:

Appendix E: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Conjoint Interview Questions

- What is most important to you in making decisions in your relationship... (examples: mutual satisfaction, equity, fairness, shared communication, etc).
 - o What does _____ mean to each of you?
 - o How do you define _____ in your relationship?
 - o Help me to understand _____ in your decision-making
 - o What does _____ look like?
 - o How do you make decisions in this way?
- Explain to me how decisions are made in your home regarding and parenting/raising children. What would I hear from each of you if I were a fly on the wall?
- Is there another area of your lives you could explain how decisions are made (or make one up; finances...)?
- How do you work it out when you disagree on a decision?
 - o What does that process look like?
 - o What happens next?
- Tell me about a time when you made a decisions where you were both satisfied with the process
- What are strengths about how you make decisions in your relationship

Individual Interview Questions

- How did you feel in the situation in which you made a decision which included your most important characteristic?
 - o What did this way of making a decision mean to you personally?
- Tell me about a time when you made a decision that was not _____.
 - o Thinking back to that situation, how did you feel in that situation?
 - o How do you think your partner felt about it?
 - o Are these examples typical for you?
- Talk with me about a time when you disagreed about a decision.
 - o Did you try and convince your partner of your argument? If so, how did you go about doing that?
- Does your partner try and influence you when you disagree about a decision? If so, how?
 - o How does it feel when your partner does or does not try to influence you? In other words, what is going through your mind at this time?
 - o How, if at all, have you dealt with those feelings?
 - o Do you suppose your partner is aware of these feelings? Have you talked about them?
- How much do you think your way of decision-making impacts your relationship satisfaction?
- Is the way you make decision with your partner your ideal? If not, ideally how would you go about making decisions with your partner? If so, how were you able to to reach the ideal?
 - o If not, what would it mean to you to make decisions in your ideal way?
 - o If your decision-making process was ideal, what would that mean to you? OR what does it mean to you?
 - o If things are ideal, do you think that it would impact how you feel toward your partner?
- Do you feel that decision-making in your relationship is typical for your generation?
 - o How do suppose things are different for you?
- Anything else that you feel is important for me to know or anything else you'd like to add

Appendix F: Debriefing Form

Debriefing

Thank you for your participation. The study you just participated in was designed to better understand different aspects of decision-making and of the power one has in a relationship (i.e., influencing one's partner). Increased understanding of the relationship between relational power, satisfaction with the relationship, and decision-making processes may lead to better treatment for couples in distress and may even lead to preventative solutions for couples starting to develop problems.

As mentioned before, all responses will be kept confidential and identifying information (i.e., names) will be replaced with pseudonyms at the end of your participation today. Tapes and supporting material will be transcribed and then erased. The transcriptions will be kept in a locked cabinet, in a locked office.

Again, thank you for your valuable contribution to our study. We realize the topic covered can be difficult or frustrating to talk about and we appreciate your sharing personal information with us. Couples may have trouble discussing these issues. Often times the topics discussed have been an issue for a long time. If you have any concerns about the discussion you just had with your partner or what would happen later because of that discussion please talk to one of the experimenters about your concerns. We have also provided, below, some community resources for those couples or individuals interested in talking to someone about relationship issues. In addition, if you have any additional questions about this investigation you may contact the Principal Investigator: Tara D. Dekkers, M.S., 4380 Palmer Building, Department of Human Development and Family Studies; tdekkers@iastate.edu, or Megan J. Murphy, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, 4380 Palmer Building, Suite 1325, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011; 294-2745; mjmurphy@iastate.edu. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the Human Subjects Research Office, 1138 Pearson Hall, (515) 294-4566; austingr@iastate.edu.

Community Referrals

Marriage and Family Therapy Clinic. 4380 Palmer HDFS Building, Ames, IA. 294-0534.

Lutheran Social Services of Iowa. 1323 Northwestern Avenue, Ames, IA. 232-7262.

Richmond Center. 125 South 3rd Street. Ames, IA. 232-5811.

Student Counseling Services. 2223 Student Services Building. Ames, IA. 294-5056.

Youth & Shelter Services Inc. 420 Kellogg Avenue, Ames, IA. 233-2250.

Debriefing statement written by David Vogel.

Appendix G: Interview Summary Form
Interview Summary Sheet
Qualitative Analysis of Decision-making

Interviewer:

Date/Location:

Participant:

1. Briefly describe/reflect on person(s) involved.

2. What were the main impressions or issues that struck you in this contact?

3. Summarize the information/ideas you got (or did not get) on target research questions:

Research Question	Information
How do couples/individuals feel about decision-making and power in relationship with their partner?	
How do couples/individuals feel about the process of decision-making in the relationship with their partner? How do couples/individuals feel after a decision is made?	

4. Are there any areas needing clarification/further exploration in subsequent observations/interviews?

Appendix H: Master Coding Key

Coding Key:

1. Trust
2. Respect/Appreciation
3. Expertise
4. Balance – between individuals as a part of a couple
5. Children/Career Pull
6. Sense of “We”
7. Involvement from Others – family, God, faith, etc.
8. Social Comparisons
9. Good of the Whole/Family
10. Background Influences
11. Communication tactics
12. Personality Characteristics
13. Gender Roles
14. Accomplishment
15. Regrets
16. Power Tactics Used
 - A. Hypothetical Situations
 - B. Presentation
 - C. Expertise
 - D. Information and Research
 - E. Personality Traits
 - F. Perspective-Taking
 - G. Manipulation
 - H. Non-Verbal Cues
17. Decision-making and Relationship Satisfaction
18. Post Decision-making Reflections
19. Frustrations
20. Acceptance of Differences
21. Decision Importance Level
22. Relativity – it works for them but perhaps not for all couples
23. Small vs. Big Decisions
24. View of Emotions (positive or negative)
25. Desired Changes