A RURAL XHOSA WOMAN'S EXPERIENCE OF MARITAL SATISFACTION

By

ZIYANDA MAVUMENGWANA

Student nr: 209200714

Submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree

MAGISTER ARTIUM in CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

in the

FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES

at the

NELSON MANDELA METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

Supervisor: Ms T. Lambert

2016
DEDICATION

This treatise is dedicated to my daughter, Onothando, who had to sacrifice quality time with me in my pursuance of the seeing this study to fruition.
DECLARATION

I, Ziyanda Mavumengwana, student number 209200714, hereby declare that this treatise for the degree Magister Artium in Clinical Psychology is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another university or for another qualification.

Signature: __________________________________________________________

Date:   _____________________________________________________________
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study has been completed with the help of several people whom I would like to acknowledge and thank. I would like to especially express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to:

- My research supervisor, Ms Tania Lambert for her supervision and guidance throughout the process of producing this study. I especially wish to thank her for her genuine enthusiasm in the merit of this study; her thorough approach in guiding me and for sharing my excitement and frustrations throughout the research process.
- My mother, Nobathini Mnyila, and my father, Mzwandile Goodwell Mavumengwana, for their unwavering support and guidance.
- My partner, Thando Daki, for his unfailing love, support, encouragement and tireless belief in my abilities.
- Gail Klopper for her amazing editing and guidance during the data analysis process.
- Siyanda Qoto, for ensuring nothing was lost in translation.
- My family and friends for their motivation, support and understanding.
- Finally, the participant who willingly and openly shared her marital journey with me.
ABSTRACT

Satisfaction (fulfillment of one’s wishes, expectations and needs or the pleasure derived from this) has been shown by studies to be manifested through various things, including marriage. It has been found that marriage and the satisfaction experienced are positively correlated to higher levels of happiness. Marital satisfaction (also referred to as marital quality and marital happiness) is defined as one's subjective evaluation of favourability towards one’s spouse and the marital relationship and the mental state of perceived gains and losses of the marriage. Research shows that the factors that affect marital satisfaction vary across cultures as well as geographic space within cultures, as well as gender. The present case study explored marital satisfaction as experienced by a Xhosa woman who resides in a rural setting in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. This qualitative exploratory-descriptive study utilised an in-depth case study method and the subject was selected by purposive sampling. Thibaut and Kelley’s (1959) Interdependence Theory, in conjunction the life-cycle stages of marriage as proposed by Markey (2005), were used as a framework to understand dynamics that occur in the course of a marital relationship as well as the variations in satisfaction in the different stages of marriage. Data was obtained through semi-structured interviews and a content analysis approach proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was followed as a framework for data analysis. The findings of the present study are presented according to two broad groupings: 1) marital satisfaction arises from one’s state of mind, and 2) the participant provided lessons on dealing with issues that arise in marriage. These in turn permitted the identification of sub-themes connected to each main theme allowing recommendations for future research to be deduced.

Key words: Culture, marital satisfaction, rural, woman, Xhosa
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Themes and subthemes relating to a rural Xhosa woman’s experience of marital satisfaction..........................58
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ............................................................................................................. i

DECLARATION ......................................................................................................... ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ............................................................................................... iii

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................... iv

LIST OF TABLES ....................................................................................................... v

TABLE OF CONTENTS ............................................................................................. vi

CHAPTER 1 .................................................................................................................. 1

INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................... 1

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND MOTIVATION FOR STUDY ............................ 3

1.2 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS .............................................................................. 3

CHAPTER 2 ................................................................................................................ 5

THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE ................................................................................. 5

2.1 MARITAL SATISFACTION ................................................................................. 5

   2.1.1 Marital Satisfaction across the Life Courses: The U Shape Trajectory. ........ 7

   2.1.2 Factors contributing to marital satisfaction ............................................... 11

       2.1.2.1 The impact of the presence of children on marital satisfaction .............. 11

       2.1.2.2 The role of sexual satisfaction ............................................................. 16

       2.1.2.3 The role of culture on marital satisfaction ........................................... 18

       2.1.2.4 Gender differences in marital satisfaction ........................................... 21

2.2 CONCLUSION .................................................................................................... 24
CHAPTER 3 .................................................................................................................. 26

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ............................................................................. 26

3.1 INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 26

3.2 INTERDEPENDENCE THEORY .................................................................. 27

3.2.1 Social Exchange Theory ......................................................................... 27

3.2.2 Interdependence Theory ......................................................................... 29

3.2.3 Rewards and Costs .................................................................................. 32

3.2.4 Outcomes .................................................................................................. 33

3.2.5 Evaluation of Outcomes: Comparison Level and Comparison Level for
Alternatives .......................................................................................................... 33

3.3 THE LIFE-CYCLE STAGES OF A MARRIAGE ........................................... 35

3.3.1 Being Newly Married .............................................................................. 37

3.3.2 Building Marriage with Young Children .................................................. 38

3.3.4 Refocusing Midlife Marriage with Adolescent ......................................... 39

3.3.5 Launching Children and Moving On .......................................................... 40

3.3.6 Shaping Later Life Marriage .................................................................... 41

3.4 CONCLUSION ............................................................................................. 41

CHAPTER 4 ............................................................................................................. 43

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ............................................................................. 43

4.1 INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................... 43

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN .................................................................................... 43

4.3 SAMPLING OF PARTICIPANTS. ................................................................. 46
4.4 PARTICIPANTS ........................................................................................................................................47

4.5 DATA COLLECTION ..................................................................................................................................48

4.6 PROCEDURE .............................................................................................................................................49

4.7 DATA ANALYSIS .......................................................................................................................................51
  4.7.1 Data reduction .......................................................................................................................................51
  4.7.2 Data display ........................................................................................................................................51
  4.7.3 Conclusion drawing/verification ...........................................................................................................52

4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ....................................................................................................................56

4.9 CONCLUSION ...........................................................................................................................................59

CHAPTER 5 .....................................................................................................................................................60

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION ..........................................................................................................................60

5.1 INTRODUCTION .........................................................................................................................................60
  5.1.1 Overview of major themes ....................................................................................................................60
  5.1.2 Theme 1: Marital satisfaction arises from one’s state of mind ..............................................................62
  5.1.2.1 Sub theme 1: Marriage provides a woman with dignity and status within her community ...............63
  5.1.2.2 Subtheme 2: Marriage provides a source of support from both families .........................................68
  5.1.2.3 Subtheme 3: Marriage enables the woman to show love to her “adopted” family ..........................77
  5.1.2.4 Subtheme 4: Marriage is the fulfilment of all cultural expectations/obligations .............................81
5.1.3 Theme 2: The participant provided some lessons on dealing with issues that might arise in the marriage ................................................................. 91

5.1.3.1 Subtheme 1: Developing skills to deal with challenges in the relationship in a culturally acceptable manner. ...................................................... 91

5.1.3.2 Subtheme 2: Knowing that she has a responsibility of maintaining her husband’s dignity at all times ......................................................... 105

5.2 CONCLUSION ......................................................................................... 107

CHAPTER 6 .................................................................................................. 109

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ...................... 109

6.1 INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................... 109

6.2 CONCLUSIONS ...................................................................................... 109

6.2.1 Methodology summary ........................................................................ 109

6.2.2 Summary of findings ........................................................................... 110

6.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY ............................................. 113

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS ........................................................................... 115

6.5 PERSONAL REFLECTIONS OF THE RESEARCHER .............................. 116

6.6 CONCLUSION ........................................................................................ 118

REFERENCES ............................................................................................. 119

APPENDIX A: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH .............. 136

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE/ AIDE MEMOIR ................................. 138

APPENDIX C: LIFE-CYCLE STAGES OF MARRIAGE (MARKEY, 2005) .... 139
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Life satisfaction can be defined as the way a person perceives how his or her life has been and how they feel about where it is going in the future (Ubesereka & Luo, 2008). In contemporary times, which are often characterised by a variety of stresses, life satisfaction has acquired significance (Stutzer & Frey, 2006). General life satisfaction is influenced by a number of factors such as health, economic status, relationships (marital, personal, social and family) and job satisfaction (Raina & Balodi, 2013; Stone & Shackelford, 2007). It has been found that marriage is, to a large degree, positively correlated with higher levels of happiness in general (Stutzer & Frey, 2006). The current study explored satisfaction as manifested through the marital experience and the aim of the study was to explore and describe marital satisfaction as experienced by a rural Xhosa woman.

The level of marital satisfaction is dependent on the perceived benefits and costs of marriage to a particular person (Stone & Shackelford, 2007). Research has attempted to identify the various factors that impact marital satisfaction. In particular, the link between personal characteristics (e.g., personality traits, attitudes, and values) and marital satisfaction has received much attention (Luo, Chen, Yue, Zhang, Zhaoyana & Xu, 2008; Golestani, Tavakoli, & Tavakoli, 2012; Najarpourian, 2012; Coclidge, King, Rhoades, Rosowsky & Segal, 2012). Additionally, the level of marital satisfaction has been found to vary throughout the course of the marriage, being particularly high at times and significantly lower at other times (Patrick, Sells, Giordano, & Tollerud, 2007). Factors such as the presence of children in the home, length of marriage, sexual satisfaction and personal characteristics have been found to explain this variation of satisfaction during the course of the marital relationship (Archuleta, Britt, Tonn, & Grable, 2011). For example, the presence of children has been largely associated with a decrease in marital satisfaction while the initial stages (before
presence of children) have been shown to correlate with higher levels of satisfaction (Archuleta, Britt, Tonn, & Grable, 2011). These variables differ across cultures, being particularly significant in some cultures and of little importance in others (Adonu, 2005) and further vary in their significance across geographic space within those cultures (Sigaba, 2000). For example, Wendorf, Lucas, Imamoglu, Weisfeld and Weisfeld (2011) explored the association between decreased marital satisfaction and the presence and number of children across three cultures (United States, United Kingdom and Turkey). While there was a decrease in satisfaction in those sampled in the United States and United Kingdom, the decrease was not reported by Turkish participants. In another cross-cultural study (Hong Kong, Beijing and United Kingdom), stable family finances and spousal support were much more significant predictors of marital satisfaction than the presence of children (Wong & Goodwin, 2009). Additionally, the majority of studies confirming the dip in marital satisfaction when children were present have been based on samples of participants from more individualistic, Western cultures (Wendorf, Lucas, Imamoglu, Weisfeld & Weisfeld, 2011; Shaw, 2010; Hirschberger, Srivastava, Marsh, Cowan & Cowan, 2009).

A meta-analysis conducted by Dillon and Beechler (2010) that aggregated the findings of fifteen studies containing samples from collectivist cultures found a low correlation ($r = -0.5$) between the presence of children and lower levels of marital satisfaction. They attributed this to the prevalent practice within collectivist cultures to foster shared childcare within the extended family, and that this arrangement buffers stressors that people from individualist cultures are more likely to face.

The present study focused particularly on the Xhosa culture and how a woman who resides in a rural setting experiences satisfaction in her marriage. Findings regarding the differences in how men and women experience satisfaction are inconsistent, with some results showing men benefit more from marriage and experience greater satisfaction than
women while other studies found no gender differences (Idemudia & Ndlovu, 2013; Faulkner, Davey, & Davey, 2005; Fowers, 1991). The focus of the present study was on a woman’s experiences of marital satisfaction.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND MOTIVATION FOR STUDY

Marital satisfaction has been widely studied for decades, with a great deal of research having been done on the variables that predict marital satisfaction. However, the majority of research that informs our current understanding and knowledge of the experience of marital satisfaction has been done outside South Africa. Moreover, theory suggests that aspects such as gender, culture and demographics account for variations in marital satisfaction, yet very little has been done on South African cultures and South African women, and whether or not these aspects are applicable in a South African context. This in-depth exploration into this particular aspect of human experience helped to address this gap in literature, and gave a South African Xhosa woman the opportunity to explain in her own words how she feels, what she thinks and how she makes sense of the world and marriage in which she lives. The advantage of undertaking this in-depth case study is that it provided rich, meaningful data and insight into the complexity of marital satisfaction with all its contradictions, differences and idiosyncrasies and created impetus for further research and theory development.

1.2 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The present study comprises six chapters including the current chapter. Chapter two will present a review of literature pertaining to the phenomenon under enquiry. In particular it reviews the existing body of knowledge while identifying contrasts, gaps and themes within existing literature. Chapter three will provide an overview of the theoretical foundation of the present study namely, the interdependence theory. Furthermore, it discusses the stages of marriage and how satisfaction varies in these stages. Chapter four will consider the
methodological procedure that was selected and followed in pursuance of the aim of this study. The findings of the present study will be presented and discussed in chapter five while chapter six will offer a summary of the findings, recommendations formulated from those findings and the limitations of the current study. In addition, this final chapter will include the personal reflections of the researcher pertaining to the process of completing the study.
CHAPTER 2

THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter the author provides a review of the literature pertaining to marriage and the satisfaction experienced within a marital relationship. The concept of marital satisfaction has been widely studied, is very broad and encompasses a variety of aspects that cannot all be included in a single study (Ayub, 2012; Dush, Taylor, & Kroeger, 2008). For the purposes of the current study, this brief review of literature will cover those aspects of marital satisfaction that are in accordance with the aim of the study as one cannot capture all the variables and their nuances in one study. The review includes a broad overview of marriage as an integral part of satisfaction and well-being. More specifically, it examines current knowledge on marital satisfaction, identifies gaps within existing research about marital satisfaction and some of the variables that play a part in how marital satisfaction is experienced. The discussion centres on contextual variables such as culture, gender and demographics and how they are interlinked to the experience of marriage.

2.1 MARITAL SATISFACTION

Life satisfaction is defined as having a favourable attitude towards one’s life as a whole (Jan & Masood, 2008). It has also been explained as the way a person perceives how his or her life has been and how they feel about where it is going in the future, a measure of wellbeing (Raina & Balodi, 2013). In modern life with all its various stresses, life satisfaction has acquired supreme significance. Life satisfaction is manifested through a variety of aspects such as health, economic, marital, personal, social, family and job satisfaction (Raina & Balodi, 2013).
Recently, there has been an increased interest in the effect of marriage on people’s happiness (Dillaway, 2001). Many studies undertaken in different countries and at different times have found that marriage is associated with higher levels of happiness (Jan & Masood, 2008; Raina & Balodi, 2013; Stutzer & Frey, 2006). Married persons report greater subjective well-being than persons who have never been married or have been divorced, separated or widowed (Stutzer & Frey, Does Marriage Make People Happy or Do Happy People Get Married?, 2006). In accordance with the aim of this study, satisfaction is explored through the marital experience.

The definition of marital satisfaction in recent years has undergone several changes (Kamp Dush, Taylor, & Kroeger, 2008) giving rise to several conceptual definitions of marital satisfaction by scholars. Hendrick and Hendrick (1997) defined marital satisfaction as a subjective experiencing of one’s own personal happiness and contentment in the marital relationship. It has also been defined as an individual’s global evaluation of the marital relationship (Wong & Goodwin, Experiencing Marital Satisfaction Across Three Cultures: A Qualitative Study, 2009), or a mental state that reflects the perceived benefits and costs of marriage to a particular person (Stone & Shackelford, Marital Satisfaction, 2007) to mention a few.

For the purposes of the current study, marital satisfaction (also referred to as marital quality and marital happiness) is defined as one's subjective evaluation of favourability towards one’s spouse and the marital relationship and the mental state of perceived gains and losses of the marriage. It is concerned with how a marriage functions during its existence and how each partner feels about it (Borani-Ganth, Thiyagarasan & Nigesh, 2013; Stone & Shackelford, 2007).

The concept of marital satisfaction has been widely studied over decades across various disciplines. The magnitude of data derived from these marital studies attests to the continued
importance placed on understanding the concept of marital satisfaction. Nearly 90 percent of all individuals marry at least once in their lifetime. This can be taken as an indication of the value placed on the marital union (Sanders, 2010). Happy marriages make valuable contributions to a person’s life and to society as a whole. There is a wide range of benefits from marriage. These benefits have been studied in psychology, sociology, epidemiology and economics. Researchers in these fields have documented that, compared to single people, married people have better physical and psychological health and live longer (Archuleta, Britt, Tonn, & Grable, 2011; Dush, Taylor, & Kroeger, 2008; Stutzer & Frey, 2006).

Unfortunately, irrespective of these perceived benefits of marriage, international findings indicate that nearly half of marriages end in divorce (Faulkner, 2002; Haseley, 2006).

Sanders (2010) argues that the rate of marital dissolution is affected by levels of marital satisfaction and happiness within the marriage. Although individuals seem to value being married, that value is only retained if the marriage is happy and functional. Thus, marital satisfaction remains an important point of inquiry in research.

2.1.1 Marital Satisfaction across the Life Courses: The U Shape Trajectory. Marital relationships are not static over time; rather, they follow a developmental trajectory (Kamp Dush, Taylor, & Kroeger, 2008; Umberson, Williams, Powers, Chen, & Campbell, 2005). When examining marital quality during the course of a marriage, researchers have found that the level of marital satisfaction tends to follow a path of satisfaction that is high during the initial stages of the marriage and then declines for approximately 10 to 20 years, and then picks up again in later life (Patrick, Sells, Giordano, & Tollerud, 2007). Therefore according to existing research, marital happiness follows a U-shaped trajectory over the duration of a marriage (Umberson et al., 2005). The stages of marriage within this U-shape are being newly married, building marriage with young children, refocusing midlife marriage with
adolescents, launching children and shaping later life (Markey, 2005; VanLaningham, Johnson & Amato, 2001). These stages will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

While research has been conducted about the initial decline and eventual upturn in satisfaction, no one particular reason has been identified (Hirschberger, Srivastava, Marsh, Cowan, & Cowan, 2009). Several studies have attempted to explain this dip and rise in marital satisfaction and will be discussed in later sections of this chapter.

The manner in which marital happiness changes over the life course has been a major topic among scholars (VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). As mentioned above most studies suggest a U-shaped association characterised by marital happiness in the early years of couples (Anderson, Russell, & Schumm, 1983; Glenn, 1989; Rhyne, 1981).

Earlier cross-sectional studies supporting the U-shape trajectory of marital satisfaction include Burr (1970), Glenn (1989), Kuderk (1998), Rhyne (1981), Roberts (1979), Rollins and Cannon (1974), Peterson (1990) and Spanier, Lewis, & Cole (1975). Findings from these cross-sectional studies support the theory that marital satisfaction declines steadily from the beginning of the marriage to the stage with school going children, levels off as children grow into adolescence and increases from the empty nest to the retirement stage (VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001).

Although the majority of the data from these studies suggest and support this U-shape trajectory some longitudinal studies suggest alternative patterns to the marital life course. Some cross sectional studies do not reveal the much supported U-shaped association. Evidence found in Blood and Wolfe’s (1960) study suggested an alternative pattern namely, a gradual decline in marital satisfaction throughout the child-rearing years, a slight rise after the launching of children and a further decline through the years of retirement (VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). Similarly, Gilford (1984) and (Karney & Brandbury (1995) have
also failed to find the expected U-shaped association between marital satisfaction and marital duration using cross sectional data.

VanLaningham and colleagues (2001) reported that this U-shaped curve was not supported longitudinally. They attributed the misreporting of this curve to older cohorts of married couples experiencing higher levels of marital satisfaction than younger cohorts. In other words, it is not life transitions that affect trends in marital satisfaction but simply that older married couples are happier overall (Sanders, 2010). Umberson et al. (2005) support this and adds that marriages of poorer quality may be removed from the population as divorces occur, leaving only marriages of higher quality among individuals of older ages. Longitudinal studies of marital quality show that marital happiness (satisfaction) declines in the first few years of marriage and continues to decline (Karney & Brandbury 1995 as cited in VanLaningham, 2001; Kelly & Conley, 1987; Pineo, 1961). Research along these lines found that marital quality tends to gradually decline over the course of a marriage, with no support for an upturn in the later years (Anderson, Van Ryzin, & Doherty, 2010; Karney & Bradbury, 1997; VanLaningham et al., 2001). Umberson and her colleagues (2005), in their longitudinal study, support VanLaningham and colleagues’ findings that marital satisfaction declines over time. They found that the older the spouses, the more likely they are to have a good marriage, perhaps because they are less emotionally reactive in marital conflicts than younger people or because they better appreciate their partner’s positive traits (Doyle, 2006). Many of these studies begin with newlyweds however, and most last less than 10 years. Very few studies have followed couples from the middle years of marriage into the later years. Consequently, most longitudinal studies have been unable to determine whether marital quality improves, flattens out or continues to decline in the later years of marriage (VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). Moreover, some marriages last longer than the professional lives of researchers (Vaillant & Vaillant, 1993). Therefore, given the small
number of studies and the inconsistency of findings, additional longitudinal research is necessary to determine how marital happiness changes in the later years of marriage (Vaillant & Vaillant, 1993; VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). However, data from both cross sectional and longitudinal studies provide some basis for understanding marital relationships and the satisfaction derived from them.

As the U-shaped pattern in satisfaction was considered one of the few indisputable patterns and was widely accepted in research, it is important to understand what variables accounted for this pattern. Some scholars have attempted to explain the U-shape trend in marital satisfaction using widely accepted models focused on social psychological processes in the early years of marriage and changes in family roles (VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). Social psychological explanations for the early decline in marital satisfaction refer to interactional processes between spouses i.e. couples are faced with many challenges such as redefining ties to kin, division of labour, establishing roles etc. (VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). Pineo (1961), as cited in VanLaningham, Johnson and Amato (2001), suggests that couples marry when they are the most compatible with each other but as time passes they go through individual changes which inevitably leads to a poorer fit and thus a decline in marital happiness. According to the exchange theory, the marital relationship is based on the valued characteristics that each partner brings to the marriage. If these characteristics change over time, then equity in the exchange relationship is disrupted, resulting in a decline in marital happiness or satisfaction (VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). Finally, simple habituation to the partner may also contribute to the disenchantment process. Behavioural psychologists have demonstrated that individuals gradually habituate psychologically and physiologically to a repeated stimulus; in other words, partners can become so used accustomed to each other that the things that used to
stand out for them don’t have the same effect anymore because of being repetitively exposed to them (VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001).

The change in family roles, particularly the presence or absence of children, is also another widely accepted theory of conceptualising the U-shaped pattern of marital satisfaction (VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). Adding children and children leaving home seems to have a pervasive effect on marital happiness amongst couples (Archuleta, Britt, Tonn, & Grable, 2011; Patrick, Sells, Giordano, & Tollerud, 2007; VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). The impact of children on marital satisfaction will be discussed further in later parts of this chapter.

2.1.2 Factors contributing to marital satisfaction. As mentioned, a number of factors have been identified as potentially impacting upon the levels of satisfaction within a marriage. According to Archuleta, Britt, Tonn and Grable (2011), the most widely recognised of these are the presence of children, sexual satisfaction, length of marriage, and culture. Although literature is inconsistent in terms of how these factors predict satisfaction, there is consensus that these factors all impact on the level of marital satisfaction (Archuleta et al., 2011).

2.1.2.1 The impact of the presence of children on marital satisfaction. Firstly, studies on the impact of children on marital satisfaction have found that the introduction of children into the marriage often leads to a period of greater instability and less closeness between spouses, whereas children leaving home would allow the couple to grow closer (Patrick et al., 2007). Two broad perspectives can be identified within the broader literature relating the transition to parenthood to changes in marital satisfaction (Lawrence, Cobb, Rothman, Rothman, & Bradbury, 2008). Lawrence and colleagues (2008) explain that in the first perspective, the transition to parenthood is viewed as instigating a shift in the marriage whereby most couples are expected to experience a qualitative change in their relationship
that is relatively abrupt, adverse in nature, relatively large in magnitude and that is likely to persist (VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001; Sanders, 2010). In the second perspective, the transition to parenthood is understood as a significant but transient stage in the development of marriages and families (Lawrence, Cobb, Rothman, Rothman, & Bradbury, 2008). Lawrence et al (2008) further add that a newborn’s arrival may produce temporary changes in the quality of the marital relationship of a varying degree among different couples as determined by their capacity to adapt to these new challenges.

Although these two perspectives represent different assumptions about the basic nature of marital change over the transition to parenthood and which may shape decisions about sampling, research design, and intervention, the available research does not permit clear discrimination between them (Lawrence et al., 2008; Sanders, 2010). Notably, they differ regarding the nature and duration of the changes children bring to a marriage. There is, however, consensus in literature regarding the definite change in marital quality when children arrive, irrespective of how long those changes will last or how drastic they are.

Many married individuals experience significant changes in their lives after they become parents, including identity changes, shifting roles within the marriage as well as outside the family, and changes in the relationship with their own parents (Hirschberger et al., 2009). Marital satisfaction following the transition to parenthood and the birth of the first child, presents a significant challenge for married couples, as their relationship undergoes a transition from a dyadic unit to a family of three or more (Hirschberger et al., 2009). Several studies suggest that the presence or absence of children would account for changes in levels of satisfaction and that parents are generally less satisfied in marriage than non-parents (Lawrence, Rothman, Cobb, & Brandbury, 2008, Mathews, 2002; Sanders, 2010).

According to Wendorf, Lucas, Imamoglu, Weisfield and Weisfield (2010), evolutionary pair bonding is thought to evolve in species with highly dependent young so that the father
remains available to help provide and care for them. Children qualify as highly dependent, requiring lengthy gestation, extended nursing, and many years of care and protection before reaching maturity (Wendorf et al., 2010). Moreover, from a psychological viewpoint, a child can provide a sense of fulfilment, new meaning in life, and can strengthen the bond between husband and wife, thus contributing to a sense of family cohesiveness (Sanders, 2010). It is therefore puzzling, from an evolutionary and a psychological viewpoint, that children seem to have a negative effect on marital satisfaction as it is argued from an evolutionary perspective that a couple having successfully reproduced together ought to have heightened satisfaction (Dillon & Beechler, 2010).

Attempts were made to explain the negative impact children seem to bring into the marital relationship. LeMasters (1957) was the first to conduct a study attempting to explain this negative impact on marital quality after producing offspring. This author suggested that the addition (or removal) of a family member could force a reorganization of the family system as reflected by Sanders (2010) and Twenge, Campbell, and Foster, (2003). At this stage, couples have to share their intimate duo and emotional resources with a third person (Sanders, 2010). With the transition to parenthood, changes occur in parents’ daily behaviours and routine as they incorporate the newborn into their individual lives, their dyad, and their important social networks (Sanders, 2010). New parents must renegotiate their roles and their relationship. LeMasters (1957) described this reorganisation as a crisis, a decisive change for which old patterns are inadequate. Further research has supported LeMasters (1957) findings and added that the presence of children reduces husband-wife interaction, rigidifies the division of labour, causes role strain and tension, and that these changes in marital structure and process reduce the perceived quality of the marriage (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003; Sanders, 2010).
The transition to parenthood signifies the formation of a family stage. This concept is based on the idea that there are intervals in time during which the structure and interactions of role relationships in the family are noticeably and distinctively divergent from other periods of time (Sanders, 2010). Findings from interviews with parents in several studies show that the transition to parenthood may bring several changes into the marital relationship, such as an increase in chores, less time for couple specific interactions or leisure activities, a decrease in sexual responsiveness and interference with couple companionship (Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Glen & Weaver, 1981; Lawrence, Rothman, Cobb, & Rothman, 2008; Wallace & Gotlib, 1990). In interviews with parents who had at least one child under the age of 5 years, mothers reported experiencing loss of sleep, chronic tiredness, confinement to the home and concern about their appearance, while fathers reported similar experiences and added problems such as experiencing a decline in their wife's sexual responsiveness, economic pressure resulting from their wife's withdrawal from the workplace and general disenchantment with the parental role (Sanders, 2010). Thus it appears that the transition to parenthood may result in a number of consequences that decrease marital satisfaction.

Some investigations have challenged the belief that the presence of children decreases marital satisfaction and have begun to examine factors associated with both positive and negative changes experienced by new parents (Wallace & Gotlib, 1990). Evidence from cross cultural studies offers an alternative to the widespread belief that children impact marriage negatively.

In most cultures relationships in which both individuals would likely care for any resultant children are important (Sanders, 2010), but differences regarding the impact of children across different cultures are present. The universality of the findings that children have a negative impact on satisfaction in marriage is limited since the vast majority of the studies were conducted in Western countries. For example, a cross-cultural perspective on
family dynamics would suggest that what occurs in Western societies is not always typical of non-Western populations. Indeed, cross-cultural literature using the Individualism-Collectivism distinction generally indicates that there are cultural differences in the dynamics of paths of development of mating and parent-child relationships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Wendorf et al.; 2010). Therefore, because there is more focus on satisfying one’s own desires and needs than those of other family members in individualistic cultures, there may be higher expectations of passion and romance for marital satisfaction and more potential for conflict. In collectivistic cultures, because there seem to be lower expectations for refuelling passion and novelty in emotional intimacy, it may be easier to satisfy each other’s expectations and feel content with the harmony and smoothness of one’s marital relationship (Wendorf, Lucas, Imamoglu, Weisfeld, & Weisfeld, 2010).

Wendorf and colleagues investigated whether children lower marital satisfaction to a similar extent in different cultures and for husbands and wives. The study included participants in relatively collectivistic Turkey and the relatively individualistic countries of Britain and the United States. Consistent with past research and their predictions (Lawrence et al., 2008; Twenge, Campbell, & A. Foster, 2003; Wallace & Gotlib, 1990), their results indicated that on average, the number of children has a significant negative impact on marital satisfaction at least across the three countries they studied. This effect was statistically significant and relatively equivalent in the United States and Britain for both husbands and wives. In Turkey, however, a similar size effect (but not statistically significant) was noted for husbands and a very small and statistically non-significant effect was found for wives. This result may be explained by the collectivistic tendency in Turkey that places greater value on spousal interdependence and close relationships with the extended family.

Wendorf et al (2010) also points out, as is typical in cultures of collectivist tradition, that married children often live very close to their in-laws or extended families so they can
benefit from the material and psychological support of their significant others (Jose & Alfons; Wendorf at al., 2010). Therefore, it is possible that the decline in marital satisfaction with the advent of children is especially pronounced in Western, individualistic societies.

Secondly, length of marriage has also been considered as a factor related to marital satisfaction as research on marriage has found evidence for the eventual upward turn in marital satisfaction, which also tends to coincide with children leaving home (Archuleta, Britt, Tonn & Grable, 2011). Although the duration of marriage and presence of children are among the most widely researched aspects of marital satisfaction, there is evidence to suggest that other factors such as spousal support and financial stability can also significantly impact satisfaction in marriage (Hirschberger et al., 2009).

2.1.2.2 The role of sexual satisfaction. Thirdly, the role of sexual satisfaction has been highlighted as a metaphorical barometer of relationship satisfaction, indicating that sexual satisfaction is vital in an intimate relationship (Yen, Lorenz, Wickrama, Conger & Elder, 2006). Many studies investigating the relationship between sexual and marital satisfaction indicated that these two variables significantly predict each other (Basat, 2004). There is substantial literature indicating that low levels of sexual satisfaction promote marital instability and significantly increases the likelihood of divorce (Ashdown, Hackathorn & Clark, 2011; Yen et al., 2006). Thus, sexual satisfaction in marriage is an area that cannot be ignored when examining marital satisfaction.

In addition to the listed variety of factors, research has suggested that satisfaction with the sexual relationship also plays a vital role in creating and maintaining a happy and satisfying marriage (Ashdown, Hackathorn & Clark, 2011; Litzinger & Gordon, 2005). Researchers have attempted to conceptualize and measure sexual satisfaction in a number of ways. From a social exchange perspective, a sexual relationship may be considered an interpersonal exchange of rewards and costs. Rewards are satisfying exchanges, such as
having fun during sex, while costs are those exchanges which produce anguish or result in a loss, such as having one’s sexual advances ignored (Yucel & Gassanov, 2010). It has also been defined as the mere absence of dissatisfaction (Renaud, Byers, & Pan, 1997). The present study will make use of Lawrance and Byers’ (1995) definition of sexual satisfaction which explains sexual satisfaction as the affective response arising from one’s evaluation of his or her sexual relationship including the perception that one’s sexual needs are being met, fulfilling one’s own and one’s partner’s expectations, and a positive evaluation of the overall sexual relationship.

Researchers have recently demonstrated that satisfaction with the sexual aspects of the relationship plays a significant role in the overall relationship satisfaction of married couples. It has been found that sexual satisfaction, perception of spouse’s sexual satisfaction and the frequency of sexual intercourse are positively associated with marital satisfaction (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005; White & Keith, 1990; Yucel & Gassanov, 2010). In addition, Donnelly (1994) as cited in Litzinger and Gordon (2005), demonstrated that the lower the marital satisfaction, the greater the probability of sexual inactivity and separation, demonstrating a strong link between marital and sexual satisfaction. Edwards and Booth (1994) further state that low sexual satisfaction promotes marital instability.

Researchers have tried to identify factors that impact on marital sexual satisfaction. These studies have included investigations into the relationship of sexual satisfaction to a number of factors including physical aspects of sexual appearance, psychological factors individually and within couples, religiosity, cultural factors and gender role ideology (Ashdown, Hackathorn & Clark, 2011). Considering the multi-faceted nature of sexual satisfaction, findings have been positive that married couples are generally sexually satisfied (Ashdown, Hackathorn & Clark, 2011; Mathews, 2002; Yucel & Gassanov, 2010). However, despite the importance of the sexual relationship to the marriage relationship, there has been
relatively little scholarly work on the topic to date. The topic of sexuality within marriage is important to explore because of its significant relationship with overall relationship satisfaction (Ashdown, Hackathorn & Clark, 2011; Yucel & Gassanov, 2010).

2.1.2.3 The role of culture on marital satisfaction. In addition to the abovementioned factors, and of particular interest to the present study, is culture and the role it plays in the experience of marital satisfaction (Jose & Alfons, 2007; Lucas, Parkhill, Wendorf, Imaamoglu, Weisfeld & Weisfield, 2008). Adonu (2005) has pointed out that cultural systems (values, beliefs and worldviews) help people in forming internalised social norms that are prime sources of relationship behaviour. In particular, research suggests that satisfaction with one’s spouse may largely depend on the degree to which a marriage fulfils culturally determined expectations and obligations (Lucas, et al., 2008). Very few studies have been conducted to explore in detail how cultural context influences the perception and experience of marital satisfaction (Wong & Goodwin, 2009). The aim of the current study is to explore and describe marital satisfaction as experienced by a rural Xhosa woman. Although individualism and collectivism is not the only dimension of looking at cultural dynamics, it might explain some differences in how people from different cultures behave and think (de Vries, 2011). Individualism and collectivism are cultural values that influence the way that the individual versus group relationship should be organized and have been used to explain cultural variation in the importance of marital love and intimacy (Wong & Goodwin, Experiencing Marital Satisfaction Across Three Cultures: A Qualitative Study, 2009). From an individualistic perspective, family and society exists to maximize the individual. This means that there are a variety of practices and customs that encourage individuals to prioritize their own personal goals ahead of those of the collectivistic (de Vries, 2011). In western society, for example, family is generally understood to refer to the conjugal pair who maintains a household with their -biological or adopted children. Anyone else outside this
circle is extended family (Siqwana-Ndulo, 1998). In African society generally, and among
the Xhosa in particular, family refers to a much wider circle of people (Sigaba, 2000;
Siqwana-Ndulo, 1998). As in western society, marriage is the basis for family. The basic
difference is that while western marriage is based on individualism and independence,
African marriage is based on the principle of collectivism and interdependence (Siqwana-
Ndulo, 1998). Romantic love and psychological intimacy are more likely to be an important
basis for marriages in individualistic as compared with collectivistic, cultures. Moreover,
psychological intimacy may play a more important role in marital satisfaction in
individualistic cultures (Dion & Dion, 1993). In such societies close relationships, including
marriages, are regarded as avenues for personal fulfilment and self-expression (Wong &
Goodwin, 2009). In collectivistic societies, individuals are integrated into in-groups, which
usually include the extended family, and they prioritize the interests of the in-groups rather
than their own interests (de Vries, 2011; Wong & Goodwin, 2009).

Norms, customs and expectations that are derived from culture are guide interpersonal
relationships. In particular, satisfaction with one’s spouse may largely depend on the degree
to which a marriage fulfils culturally determined expectations and obligations (Adonu, 2005;
Lucas, et al., 2008). For example, a traditional Chinese marriage may be satisfying to the
extent that it fulfils familial duties that include the production of a male heir for the
continuance of a family line, the acquisition of a daughter-in-law who will provide support
for the husband’s parents, and the begetting of sons who will provide for the security of the
couple in their old age (Lucas, et al., 2008). In addition, traditional Chinese marriages often
represent the formation of an alliance of two extended families, whose interests supplant
those of the to-be-married couple. Adonu (2005) adds that this is typical for African families
as well. In particular, marital satisfaction may be enhanced to the extent that a marriage fulfils
the culturally determined expectations and obligations of husbands and wives. In particular,
the criteria for a satisfying marriage may be highly varied and may depend on a unique set of culturally enforced norms, values and obligations (Lucas, et al., 2008).

While culture may play a particular role in marital satisfaction, literature also suggests that some aspects of marital satisfaction may be universal (Adonu, 2005). With regard to universal aspects, evolutionary research and theory has emphasized that, besides satisfying culture-specific functions, marriage must also enhance the basic adaptive objectives of both partners. Specifically, marriage should facilitate not only procreation but also appropriate caregiving behaviours for offspring, and marital satisfaction may be important to the extent that it enables this (Lucas, et al., 2008).

It is important that culture be taken into consideration in marital studies. This study focuses on the experience of marriage as perceived by a woman in the African Xhosa culture. In African culture, marriage between a man and woman is an important cultural rite that is extensively celebrated (Adonu, 2005). In this context, the family is maintained through marriage: children are expected to not only be properly raised by parents, but also by extended family members and the community at large (Idemudia & Ndlovu, 2013).

According to Adonu (2005), in African marriages where there is a strong dependence between spouses, romantic love is deemed unimportant as a basis for marriage contrary to individualistic cultures who consider romantic love a significant basis for marriage (de Vries, 2011). Conversely where there is no strong instrumental/material dependence between spouses, romantic love is important as a basis for the marital experience. Further, Adonu (2005) suggests that in cultures where marriage is seen as a breadwinner-homemaker relationship (traditional marriage roles), dyadic interactional processes such as self-disclosure are not important as determinants of marital satisfaction. Sigaba (2000) adds that this is the case in African, specifically Xhosa, marriages. However there is a dearth of South African based research, particularly on the Xhosa population and the experience of marriage and
A RURAL XHOSA WOMAN’S EXPERIENCE OF MARITAL SATISFACTION

satisfaction. The current study addresses this gap in research to some degree. Further, a salient feature in the Xhosa culture is the different marital expectations of men and women (Sigaba, 2000). Sigaba (2000) makes the point that the duties of the wife in Xhosa married life fall into three categories, namely marital, domestic and social responsibilities. The most important marital duty of the wife is to care for the husband by preparing food for him and keeping him clean. The domestic duties include care of the children and teaching the children various domestic duties. Further, in Xhosa communities the daughter-in-law has to care for her parents-in-law. Socially, the wife has to carry herself with dignity. She has to preserve harmony and dignity within the household and within the community (Sigaba, 2000). If the marital experience in this culture and possibly other cultures is largely determined by gender and gender roles, the subjective experiences of each gender in a marriage are important to consider when doing research in the field of marital life.

Cultural patterns are shown to differ across locations. Thus, certain cultural patterns may be specific and unique to certain locations. Cultural patterns are said to coincide with geographic space (Adonu, 2005), hence the present study finds it significant to localize the study in a specific area as cultural patterns might be exclusive to a particular area e.g. a rural village and not the whole culture (Xhosa). From the little information available, Xhosa cultural norms seem to be the most preserved in rural settings as there is very little western urban influence (Sigaba, 2000). The proposed study will be conducted in a rural area where there is more likely to be cultural homogeneity and where original cultural values and beliefs are still likely to exist and be upheld (Sigaba, 2000). The rural area in the Eastern Cape is where the majority of the Xhosa population resides (Cocks & Dols, 2000).

2.1.2.4 Gender differences in marital satisfaction. Fourthly, regarding whether men and women experience different levels of marital quality, marital scholars generally acknowledge that men and women experience marriage differently. Studies have shown that
men benefit more from their marriages than women (Dillaway & Bronman, 2001; Jackson, Henry Miller, Oka & Henry, 2014). Findings in research indicate that husbands generally report greater marital satisfaction than do wives (Dillaway & Bronman, 2001; Fowers, 1991; Jackson, Miller, Oka, & Henry, 2014; Kamp Dush, Taylor, & Kroeger, 2008; Schumm, Webb, & Bollman, 1998). Hess and Soldo (1985) supported this view and added that women derive mental and physical health benefits when they are in satisfying marriages, whereas men benefit from marriage regardless of its quality. Ayub (2012) supported this view but argued that male and female satisfaction with respect to their marriage varies in degree rather than in kind. Women have a greater degree of satisfaction when their sexual needs are met. It indicates that men and women use different criteria in the assessment of sexual gratification or that their expectations differ (Ayub, 2012). Women are far less satisfied than men with all other aspects and, in particular, with the spouse’s help at home and spending time with children, suggests that day-to-day routine of family life is important in shaping satisfaction with marriage. However, findings that women experience less satisfaction than men are not consistent, and research is unable to account for variances in findings across studies (Fowers, 1991). Additionally, there is some evidence, although it is limited, that disputes gender differences as a factor in the experience of marital satisfaction (Idemudia & Ndlovu, 2013).

Scholars have given several explanations to account for these gender differences in marital satisfaction. Firstly, women tend to have greater primary child care responsibility than men (Jackson, Miller, Oka & Henry, 2014). Jackson and colleagues (2014) also state that, in addition to having primary child care responsibility; wives also provide an inequitable amount of emotional work by supporting their husbands and managing the emotional climate of the relationship. Wives are generally more aware of the emotional climate of the relationship and they are more likely to monitor the relationship’s emotional quality.
Men benefit more than women from marriage because women shoulder the majority of child care and housework (Mathews, 2002). Indeed, the inequitable division of household labor and child care has been a central focus of feminist theory and research (Jackson, Miller, Oka & Henry, 2014). After decades of research on this topic, satisfaction with the division of labour is still a great predictor of marital satisfaction across the life course than most variables. Negotiations between wives and husbands within the home about the division of household tasks directly affect marital satisfaction (Dillaway, 2001). It is found that wives with a more egalitarian gender role experience less satisfaction in their marriages (Prasetya, 2010). Amato and Booth (1995) supported this finding on less traditional wives experiencing less satisfaction. Prasetya (2010) offered definitions for these two different ideologies. Those who have the traditional gender role believe that women and men have their own specific role that is determined by their sex, as man or woman, in their marital relationship. This refers to the gender role behavior stereotype, e.g. the man’s role is the breadwinner, the head of the family, responsible for the social connection between family members and the people outside, whereas the woman’s role is staying at home, doing the household chores, taking care of the children and providing emotional support for the family (Prasetya, 2010). Those couples who have modern or egalitarian gender roles are not tied down to the role behavior stereotype. Instead, the difference between the role of man and woman is not clearly delineated. Therefore, they are more flexible in playing the roles during the course of marital relationship. The wife may perform tasks that are also carried out by her husband at a different time.

Couples with higher education, who are middle class and who tend to be egalitarian or nontraditional in their views, are more likely to at least attempt to divide tasks more equally around the home and will not necessarily avoid the role conflict that arises around this division.
Census and aggregate data reveal that the mostly rural Transkei population, where the present study is being conducted, is impoverished. Many have an income below the estimated Household Subsistence Level, which is itself reported to be an underestimation of the expenses that people incur to survive (Siqwana-Ndulo, 1998). Additionally, traditional roles and ideologies are most like to be upheld (Sigaba, 2000). Thus, the presumption is that wives in similar settings will experience more satisfaction with regards to the division of labour. Those with egalitarian attitudes towards family life are, however, inclined to be less satisfied with their marriages if they perceive there is an unequal division of labor (Dillaway, 2001). However research has been inconsistent. Some research has indicated that individuals who hold more egalitarian perceptions of gender roles are more satisfied in their marital relationship than those holding more traditional attitudes (Craddock, 1991). Matthews (2002) emphasizes that it is not so much about the distribution of labour but the perception of fairness regarding the distribution of labour. As a whole, the research on marital satisfaction and gender roles seems to indicate that marital satisfaction is related to the couple’s view of gender roles and gender expectations. It would appear that partners who have different ideas regarding gender roles and role expectations in turn have differing levels of marital satisfaction depending on their spouse’s fulfillment of those expectations (Haseley, 2006).

2.2. CONCLUSION

Marital quality is not as easily defined and researchers have interchangeably used the terms marital quality, marital adjustment, marital satisfaction and marital happiness to refer to marital satisfaction. Over the decades a multitude of factors have been identified that contribute to the success of marital unions. There are a number of several factors that have not been included in one study. The magnitude of work done on this topic attests to the continued importance placed on understanding satisfaction in marital unions. Despite the volume of available data, there are still inconsistencies in findings and sometimes a dearth of research in
some aspects of the marital union. This provides impetus for continued further research. The next chapter will focus on the conceptual framework/s that will inform the researcher’s understanding of the data.
CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Interdependence Theory in conjunction with the life cycle stages of marriage proposed by Markey (2005) will provide the theoretical framework for this research.

Interdependence Theory is part of a larger scale of social exchange theories (Thibaut & Kelley, 1965). Social exchange theories look at how people exchange rewards and costs in a relationship (Wang, 2004). Interdependence theory takes it a step further and demonstrates how these rewards and costs collaborate with peoples’ expectations of interpersonal relationship (Reis & Arriaga, 2014). The concept of satisfaction plays a significant role in the discussion of social exchange. Satisfaction is determined by the rewards minus the costs. Thus, if rewards outweigh the costs, the relationship is considered to be relatively satisfying (Knowles, 2004). This theory is based on research on the behaviors that are exchanged in interaction and has been guided by the premise that gratifying and positive behaviors improve the global evaluation of marriage whereas punitive or negative behaviors tend to affect said evaluation adversely. Through time, the accumulation of experiences during and after interaction influences the spouses’ judgments regarding the quality of their marital relation (Cabrera Garcia & Aya Gómez, 2014).

To interdependence theorists, there are two primary processes in the growth of dependence, which are marital satisfaction and quality of alternatives (McCray, 2015). Quality of alternatives represents the degree to which an individual may need to find alternative involvement to fulfil unmet needs. Thus, according to interdependence theory, higher marital satisfaction and poor alternatives would lead to greater dependence in a
A RURAL XHOSA WOMAN’S EXPERIENCE OF MARITAL SATISFACTION

relationship (McCray, 2015). This theory’s demonstration of the concept of marital satisfaction and its variations within intimate relationships makes is particularly relevant for the current study. In conjunction with the Interdependence Theory, this study will also look at the various stages of the marriage life cycle and how satisfaction varies across the different stages. Notably, while there is agreement among scholars about what goes on at times of change in the cycle of marriage, there is little consensus regarding the names and definitions of each stage of change (Markey, 2005; Storaasli & Markman, 1990). For the purpose of the current study, the lifecycle stages of marriage as proposed by Markey (2005) (Appendix A) and the developmental transitions that occur within those stages will be used as matrix with which to map the research participant’s own marital journey. This matrix will enable the researcher to explore the change process that precipitates movement from one stage to the next. This map will outline common stages in the marriage life cycle informed by literature while it makes room to discuss the personal and unique variables that specifically impacted the participant’s marriage.

3.2 INTERDEPENDENCE THEORY

3.2.1 Social Exchange Theory. Social exchange theory was introduced in 1958 by the sociologist George Homans with the publication of his work Social Behavior Exchange. He defined social exchange as the exchange of activity, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two persons (Turner, 2006). Although many refer to social exchange as a theory, it is more accurate to think of it as a theoretical orientation or approach (Collect, 2010). It is a way of looking at social life and interaction that is used as a guiding principle in a set of theories.

There is no one theory of social exchange; rather, a number of theorists rely on similar assumptions that individuals will act to maximize their interpersonal rewards and minimize
their interpersonal costs (Dunbar, 2000). Theories of social exchange also share certain analytical concepts like *rewards* that are the elements of relational life and that have a positive value, *costs* that are the elements of a relationship and that have a negative value (West & Turner, 2006) and *resources* that are usually shared in dyadic relationships such as time, goods, love etc (Dunbar, 2000; Collect, 2010). Specifically, exchange theorists are interested in relationships of mutual dependence that recur over time, as actors behave in ways that help them (Blau, 1964; Dunbar, 2000; Thibaut & Kelley, 1965). According to Kelly and Thibaut (1959), individuals are willing to remain in relationships that are perceived as equitable and able to meet their needs. As a marriage progresses, individuals invest themselves and expect their partner to do the same, consequently reaching a form of interdependence, in terms of setting goals for the future and demonstrating prorelationship behaviors (McCray, 2015). In general, however, if it is perceived that rewards exceed costs, the relationship is relatively satisfying, but if costs outweigh rewards, the relationship is perceived as comparatively dissatisfying (Dunbar, 2000).

Thibaut and Kelley (1959) focused on dyadic relations and thought about the role of rewards and costs in exchange. They argued that individuals initiate relationships that are valuable to them and maintain those relationships as long as they continue to benefit from the interactions (Collect, 2010). A pivotal concept of this theory is dependence - the extent to which one’s outcomes are contingent on exchange with another (Dunbar, 2000). Interpersonal interdependence is defined as "the process by which interacting persons influence one another's experiences - the effects individuals exert on other persons' motives, preferences, behaviour, and outcomes" (Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996, p. 564). In marriages, interdependence theory emphasizes the dependence of each spouse upon the marital relationship, and the ability of that relationship to fulfill individual needs (Rodrigues, Hall, & Ficham, 2005). The conceptualisation of interdependence as a core characteristic of
relationships led to an offshoot of social exchange theory - the interdependence theory. While Rusbult and Van Lange (1996) argue that it is a misnomer to call interdependence theory a social exchange theory, it shares many of the assumptions of social exchange, including that individuals seek to maximize outcomes and that the theory is a means to understanding interaction processes (Dunbar, 2000).

3.2.2 Interdependence Theory. Interdependence Theory was first proposed by Thibaut and Kelley (1959) to help explain how people represent and consider situations of interdependence with respect to choosing among potential courses of action (Arriaga & Reis, 2014). Interdependence theory presents a logical analysis of the structure of interpersonal situations, offering a conceptual framework in which interdependence situations can be understood (Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). Interdependence theory postulates that closeness (e.g. intimacy, connectedness and mutuality) is the key to all relationships that people communicate to become closer to one another. This theory provides concepts that are useful for understanding how members in a couple affect each other and how what couples do in specific interactions influences the general course of their relationship (Arriaga, 2013). The theory, however, does more than explain couple behaviour in interactions. It also provides a formal classification of interpersonal situations that is practical as a guide for understanding how interpersonal situations affect people (Arriaga, 2013).

Interdependence theory makes two key assumptions. The first assumption is that the most important features of situations are found in their interpersonal core i.e. the extent of connectedness and interaction (Reis & Arriaga, 2014). The second assumption is that the fundamental ground for an analysis of social situations is the study of social interactions, which are best understood by considering people’s interdependence with respect to the nature and extent to which co-acting individuals or groups are dependent on each other in order to attain desired outcomes (Reis & Arriaga, 2014). Interdependence theory postulates that
interdependence is a core characteristic of relationships. In intimate relationships, the extent
to which partners affect each other is profound and pervasive. The very idea of there being an
on-going relationship between two individuals means they are connected by frequent
interactions that involve mutual influence (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Interdependence
theory is fundamentally about predicting how interactions between partners affect each
person individually and the relationship more generally (Arriaga, 2013). Interdependence
theory does not identify a predominant need or drive that fuels interpersonal behaviour (e.g.,
reproduction, security, mastery etc.); instead, it is assumed that humans have diverse
instrumental and social-emotional needs, that some are biologically based whereas others are
learned, that needs cover a spectrum from survival to spirituality, and that some needs are
pervasive whereas others are unique to specific situations and partners (Rusbult & Van
Lange, 1996). Many needs are inherently interpersonal and can be gratified only in the
context of dyads or groups (e.g., belonging, sexuality, security) (Baumeister & Leary, 1995;
Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). Additionally, another assumption of Interdependence Theory is
that people recognize the nature of their interdependence with others and the impact that their
behavioural choices may have for the well-being of others. Each interpersonal situation
specifies the ways in which two persons are dependent on and influence each other with
respect to their outcomes hence the term interdependence (Arriaga, 2013; Holmes, 2001).

The theory is relevant to intimate relationships, in that a defining characteristic of
intimate relationships is that two partners are interdependent by having frequent interactions
over an extended time - they are connected in ways that involve each affecting the other and
being affected by the other (Arriaga, 2013; Fletcher & Overall, 2010). The central idea of
interdependence theory is that individuals belonging to the same dyad affect one another in
complex ways (Reis & Arriaga, 2014; Wickham & Knee, 2012). The theory maintains that in
addition to the mutual (direct) influence that dyad members exert on each other, the joint
combination of decisions or attributes exhibited by dyad members also plays a role in determining the outcome for each individual. As a result, changes in the attributes or behavioural decisions of either dyad member may affect the outcome for both dyad members; for example, if one member were to leave his or her job, the other member may also suffer financially after losing that income or if one member does not display gratitude after a pleasant gesture from the other member, he or she may feel hurt and unappreciated (Wickham & Knee, 2012). Most importantly, interdependence theory is also unique among social-psychological theories in addressing questions about how interacting people influence each other’s preferences, motives, and actions (Reis & Arriaga, 2014). As stated earlier, in marital relationships, interdependence theory emphasizes the dependence of each spouse upon the marital relationship as opposed to the partner, and the ability of that relationship to fulfil individual needs. It hypothesizes that couples in which one or both partners exhibited low levels of relationship dependence would experience lower levels of satisfaction and be at higher risk for relationship dissolution (Rodrigues, Hall, & Ficham, 2005).

Interdependence theory is also a functional theory. It assumes that interpersonal behaviour, ultimately, is driven by securing interpersonal ties that are personally adaptive, ties that function to maximize the odds of having fulfilling experiences and minimize the odds of having harmful or aversive experiences (Arriaga, 2013). Suggesting that interpersonal interactions have functional value does not mean that the people interacting are consciously seeking benefits to be gained in a given interaction. Interpersonal tendencies that guide interactions with a partner may do so in ways that are relatively automatic (Arriaga, 2013; Murray, Holmes, & Pinkus, 2010). Central to the functional analysis of interaction is the idea that one can define operationally how much personal benefit (versus cost) would be incurred from interacting with another person in a given situation that is, the positives or negatives each interaction partner experiences as a result of their joint action. This affective
dimension - how positive, neutral, or negative an interaction feels - has assumed different names, such as payoffs, rewards or benefits versus costs, and gains versus losses (Arriaga, 2013; Dunbar, 2000; Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996).

3.2.3 **Rewards and Costs.** Interdependence theory stipulates that an ideal relationship is characterized by high levels of reward and low levels of cost (Arriaga & Reis, 2014). Rewards are exchanged resources that are pleasurable and gratifying, while costs are exchanged resources that result in a loss or punishment (Dunbar, 2000). This theory distinguishes between four types of rewards and costs. These types are as follows: emotional, social, instrumental, and opportunity (Thibaut & Kelley, 1965). Emotional rewards and costs are the positive and negative feelings, respectively, that are experienced in a relationship. Social rewards and costs are those related to a person’s social appearance and the ability to interact in social environments. Social rewards deal with the positive aspect of a person’s social appearance and the enjoyable social situations in which one must engage. On the other hand, social costs are those that relate to the negative aspect of a person’s social appearance and the uninteresting social situations to which a person must attend (Thibaut & Kelley, 1965). Instrumental rewards and costs deal with activities and/or tasks in a relationship. Instrumental rewards are those that are obtained when a person’s partner is proficient in handling tasks, such as assisting with chores. Instrumental costs are the opposite: they occur when a person’s relationship partner causes unnecessary work or the partner impedes the other’s progress in a task (Thibaut & Kelley, 1965). Finally, opportunity rewards and costs are associated with the opportunities that arise in relationships. Opportunity rewards are those gains that a person is able to receive in their relationship, which they would not be able to receive on their own. Opportunity costs occur when a person must give up something that they normally would not for the sake of the relationship (Thibaut & Kelley, 1965).
Arriaga (2013) adds that interactions that are immediately bad or costly can have benefits in the future. For example, pleasing partner at one’s own expense on a few occasions may provide the long-term security of having a trusting partner. Thus actions that are costly in the short-term but increase the odds of a relationship lasting, ultimately are beneficial if the relationship yields longer term benefits (Arriaga, 2013; Tooby & Cosmides, 1996).

3.2.4 Outcomes. Interdependence theory uses the concept of outcomes to refer to how the interaction is experienced subjectively, namely the valence associated with an interaction (positive, neutral, or negative) (Arriaga, 2013). As such, outcomes are units scaled to reflect how an interaction feels subjectively rather than tangible or objective rewards and costs per se (Arriaga, 2013). One assumption of interdependence theory is that with every relationship there is an outcome (Arriaga & Reis, 2014). These outcomes are determined by comparing the amount of rewards present in a relationship versus the amount of costs present. According to interdependence theory, people mentally account for rewards and costs so they can evaluate the outcome of their relationship as either positive or negative (Sedikides, Ariely, & Olsen, 1999). The outcome is determined to be positive when the rewards outweigh the costs in a relationship. Conversely, the outcome is negative when the costs outweigh the rewards (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). According to this theory, interactions, such as marriages, are only likely to continue if both parties feel they are coming out of the exchange with more than they are giving up – that is, if there is a positive amount of profit for both parties involved (Wang, 2004).

3.2.5 Evaluation of Outcomes: Comparison Level and Comparison Level for Alternatives. In evaluating the adequacy of their relationship, the members of a dyad need a standard to gauge the acceptability of the outcomes they receive from it. Two kinds of standards have been identified for making such an evaluation, namely the comparison level (CL) and the comparison level for alternatives (CL-alt).
Interdependence theory also posits that relationships involve the expectation of the kinds of outcomes a person expects to receive in a relationship (CL) and how these expectations compare to a person’s past relationships and current observations of the relationships of others (Rodrigues, Hall, & Ficham, 2005). Satisfaction depends on an expectation, which is shaped by prior experience (Griffin, 2008). A person will have a high comparison level, if all the relationships that they have been exposed to are happy (Rodrigues, Hall, & Ficham, 2005).

The CL is the standard against which the participant evaluates the attractiveness of the relationship or how satisfactory it is. This is the standard that reflects the quality of outcomes that the participant feels he or she deserves. Outcomes falling above CL are experienced as relatively satisfying and those below CL as unsatisfactory. The location of CL on the individual’s scale of outcomes is determined by all the outcomes known to the member, either by direct experience or by observation of others (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Griffin, 2008).

This is linked to the concept of quality of alternatives, which refers to the understanding of ‘alternatives’ one has outside of their current relationship (Wang, 2004). The CL-alt can be defined informally as the lowest level of outcomes a member will accept in the light of available alternative opportunities in other relationships. So defined, it follows that if outcomes drop below CL-alt the participant will leave the relationship. The location of CL-alt depends mainly on the quality of the most attractive of the alternative relationships readily available to the participant (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978).

The key point of the theory is that it assumes the two parties are both giving to and receiving items of value from each other. The factors that determine an individual’s evaluation of a relationship include the actual rewards and costs, the individual’s expectation
for what he or she should receive (comparison level), and the dependence an individual feels on the continued existence of the relationship (comparison level for alternatives, or how appealing other options appear) (Wang, 2004).

The two standards are distinguished in recognition of the fact that circumstances may require a person to stay in a relationship that they regard as unsatisfactory. When an individual considers whether he or she is satisfied with a particular relationship, the individual weighs the costs and benefits of the relationship and compares that balance with a standard that might be expected given his or her position in the relationship (comparison level) and what they could likely get in an alternative relation (comparison level of alternative). The relationship between outcomes and CL-alt influences the stability of the relationship. If people believe that they could get better outcomes elsewhere, particularly when the current relationship is dissatisfying, they are more likely to leave (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959)

3.3 THE LIFE-CYCLE STAGES OF A MARRIAGE

As stated in previous chapters, marriage is not static over time. It follows a developmental trajectory through its life course (Kamp Dush, Taylor, & Kroeger, 2008). Social scientists have observed that marriages typically move through a series of stages; however, there have been various views about the number or name of these stages (Burr, 1970; Markey, 2005; Storaasli & Markman, 1990). The current study will look at the various stages of the marriage life cycle and how satisfaction varies across the different stages and explore the dynamics involved in a lifelong marriage commitment (see chapter five). It will explore the change process that precipitates movement from one stage to the next and the consequent potential that exists for either break-down or new growth in the marriage relationship.
The general findings in literature are that marriage follows a U-shaped pattern of marital happiness over the life course, with marital happiness and satisfaction declining in the early years of marriage and rising in the later years (Chen, Campbell, Powers, Umberson & Williams, 2005; VanLaningham & Johnson, 2001). The current study used the lifecycle stages of marriage as proposed by Markey (2005) (Appendix C) and developmental transitions that occur within those stages as the matrix with which to map the research participant’s own marital journey. This matrix will be used as a map to enable the researcher to explore the change process that precipitates movement from one stage to the next. It will outline common stages in the marriage life cycle and discuss personal, situational and social variables that impact a maturing marriage. Additionally, this map will outline common stages in the marriage life cycle informed by literature while it makes room to discuss personal and unique variables that specifically impacted the participant’s marriage.

As stated earlier, there is agreement among scholars about what goes on at times of change in the cycle of marriage but there is little consensus regarding the names and definitions of each stage of change (Markey, 2005; Storaasli & Markman, 1990). Irrespective of the consensus in literature regarding the developmental tasks that happen in each stage in the cycle, the current study acknowledges the possibility of circumstances that will influence the sequence and some content of the stages, tasks and issues of the life cycle. Notably, individuals within a marriage may develop differently because of gender, age, background and environmental conditions (Markey). Ethnic patterns and social class have an impact on the exact sequence of roles and tasks; marriages with children have major differences from marriages without children and remarriages have additional issues within certain developmental stages (Markey). The main purpose of Markey’s framework is to provide foundational categories to describe the developmental tasks and issues across a marriage life cycle.
The life cycle stages of marriage proposed by Markey (2005) were selected for the current study. Markey proposed eight stages of the marriage life cycle namely (i) childhood experience of marriage (ii) adolescent and young adult experience of male/female relationship (iii) leaving home and decision to marry (iv) being newly married (v) building marriage with young children (vi) refocusing midlife marriage with adolescents (vii) launching children and (viii) moving on, shaping later life marriage. However, for the relevance and scope of the current study; only the stages within a marital relationship will be utilised i.e. starting from being newly married to moving on and shaping later life marriage. These stages and the developmental tasks that occur within each stage will be briefly discussed below.

There has been a growing interest in understanding and describing changes in marital satisfaction as perceived by husbands and wives over their family life cycle (Rollins & Feldman, 1970; Schram, 1979). Different stages of the family life cycle may be viewed as being more satisfying than others (Rollins & Feldman, 1970). How satisfaction has been found to vary across these stages will also be discussed.

3.3.1 Being Newly Married. Forming a marital system requires that a couple renegotiate together multiple personal issues they have previously defined for themselves or that were defined differently in each of their families (Markey, 2005). During this stage, newlyweds are tasked with forming a marital system and re-aligning their relationships with extended family and friends (Markey).

Irrespective of these systemic changes, literature suggests this stage is characterised by high levels of marital satisfaction. There are disagreements in how long this experience lasts. Early cross-sectional surveys of marital satisfaction suggested that marital satisfaction starts high and declines steadily during the first 10 years of marriage (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993). Karney and Brandbury 1995 as cited in VanLangingham (2000) found this
continuous decline in marital satisfaction using cross-sectional data. Other studies however reveal a curvilinear (U-shape) picture of marital satisfaction (Anderson, Russell, & Schumm, 1983; Burr, 1970; Condie & Doan, 1978). Recent studies have also confirmed this pattern (Patrick, Sells, Giordano, & Tollerud, 2007; Umberson, Williams, Powers, Chen & Campbell, 2005). These latter studies postulated that marital satisfaction begins high, dropping sharply after the birth of children and rising again in later life. These findings may contrast as to the pattern of marital satisfaction following this stage or how long the degree of satisfaction lasts during this stage; however, there is general consensus that satisfaction at least starts high amongst newly married couples in all these studies.

If the newly married are to build well for the future stages of their marriage, the changes presented in this early key stage need to result in renegotiation for a special kind of togetherness (Markey, 2005). This interdependence can allow for the development of good conflict resolution and includes a balance of positive and negative interactions experiences (Gottman & Silver, 1995; Markey, 2005). Well-managed restructuring of the relationship forms the foundation for healthy movement to new stages and issues (Markey, 2005).

3.3.2 Building Marriage with Young Children. Shifting to the stage of raising children requires that a couple moves up a generation and becomes caretakers of the younger generation while continuing to build the strength of the marriage relationship (Markey, 2005). In balancing the system to include children, the couple has to renegotiate financial, household and childrearing tasks; they have to realign relationships with extended family to include parenting and grand-parenting tasks with both families of origin (Markey, 2005). This time is seen as a significant transition in marital quality studies. There is vast literature that suggests that the birth of the first child is associated with a decline in marital quality (Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Lawrence, Cobb, Rothman, Rothman & Brandbury, 2008; Sanders, 2010; Twenge, Campbell & Foster, 2003; Wallace & Gotlib, 1990). Almost all of the studies show
an initial decrease in marital satisfaction after the birth of the first child although the speed and intensity of this decline in marital satisfaction varies from one study to another (Schram, 1979). The multiple adjustments to be negotiated in the relationship help explain why the marriage satisfaction rate drops significantly for parents with young children (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003). Having children both centres the marriage and changes the overall quality of the marriage. Couples spend much time and energy with the young children and have less time together as a couple (Markey, 2005). They often do not have time and energy for sexual affection and they have much more to argue about (Markey, 2005; Sanders, 2010). This dissatisfaction is found to further intensify as the children move towards adolescence.

3.3.4 Refocusing Midlife Marriage with Adolescent. The increase in the weight of developmental tasks occurs in this stage of the marriage cycle when both adolescent children and midlife parents face major reorganization issues at the same time (Markey, 2005). Conflict over child rearing could be especially salient when children are adolescents because of the psychological and social changes associated with the adolescent transition (Collins, 1990). Midlife marriages often include adolescents or almost young adults whose own developmental cycle requires independence and separation along with parental guidance and appropriate limits (Markey, 2005). All this change within the system presents major challenges for the marriage relationship (Cui & Donnellan, 2009; Markey, 2005). Indeed, the adolescent transition seems to represent an important point of change in the family system that places new demands on family members, especially parents; these factors may explain why the transition to adolescence is empirically associated with increases in the affective intensity of parent-child conflict (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006). Relationships with children must shift to meet their growth needs. Simultaneously, a relationship with the senior generation is changing. The marriage partners become the middle generation who must
provide more for both their adolescent children and their parents who may have become emotionally, physically or financially dependent. Such difficulties may spill-over to become a source of conflict between the parents, which may in turn affect their marital relationships (Cui & Donnellan, 2009). Marital satisfaction has been said to be at its all-time low when children are adolescents, only begin to increase again as the children leave home (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993).

3.3.5 Launching Children and Moving On. This phase of the marital life cycle is the newest and the longest because people are living longer lives (Markey, 2005). Until a generation ago, most married couples were occupied with raising their children for their entire active adult lives until they were near old age. Now, because of the low birth rate and the long life span of most adults, couples launch their children almost 20 years before retirement and must then find other life activities (Markey). Some view this stage as being characterised by loneliness (Liu & Guo, 2008), while those in support of the U-shaped association would view this as a time of greater marital quality (Chen, Campbell, Powers, Umberson & Williams, 2005; VanLaningham & Johnson, 2001).

This has been referred to as the second half of marriage because the children do not always leave the home and therefore the stage is not always characterised by physical emptiness (Arp, Arp, Stanley, Markman, & Blumberg, 2000). Grown children are launched and then their spouses, in-laws and children enter the picture and become part of a crowded family scene (Markey, 2005). Couples in this stage are tasked with renegotiating the marital system as a dyad and realigning relationships with extended family. For many couples, there is the excitement of a new time together. Cross-sectional research has generally found that older couples whose children have left home report higher marital satisfaction than younger couples with children at home (Anderson, Russell, & Schumm, 1983; Gorchoff, John, & Helson, 2008; Rollins & Cannon, 1974). Increased marital satisfaction after children have left
home may be related to lessened role strain; that is, partners who no longer have children at home may engage in fewer roles and engage in those roles less intensely, freeing up time and energy that can be invested in the marriage (Gorchoff, John, & Helson, 2008). It is in this stage that a peak in marital satisfaction is observed following the decline experienced when raising children.

3.3.6 Shaping Later Life Marriage. People live longer today, some of those people are the partners in a marriage that has survived over the extended life cycle (Markey, 2005). The major developmental task in this final stage of the marriage life cycle is to maintain and, hopefully, build couple functioning and interest in the face of physiological decline and financial changer, many of the cross-sectional studies noted above have reported marital happiness, satisfaction or adjustment levels to be higher among couples in the later stages of the life cycle than among those in the middle (Kuder; 1998; Peterson; 1990). The identified catalysts for such restructuring are often retirement and decline in health and physical or mental abilities (Markey, 2005). Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether the heightened satisfaction experienced in the previous stage continues to increase, plateau or decline. This gap in literature is impetus for further research.

3.4 CONCLUSION

All interactions or relationships have a give and take, an exchange of some kind. This is applicable to social situations, particularly dyadic interactions. This view was taken further by interdependence theorists and applied to dyads that identified interdependence as the core essence of relationships. Being involved in a relationship means the members of a dyad are connected and dependent on one another in some way.

The theory is relevant to intimate relationships, in that a defining characteristic of intimate relationships is that two partners are interdependent by having frequent interactions over an extended time - they are connected in ways that involve each affecting the other and
being affected by the other. This interdependence is assumed to also serve a functional purpose with the assumption that interpersonal behaviour is ultimately driven by securing interpersonal ties that are personally adaptive, ties that function to maximize the odds of having fulfilling experiences and minimize the odds of having harmful or aversive experiences.

As identified in previous chapters, marriage is not static over time. It follows a developmental trajectory through its life course. Attempts have been made to study the relationship between marital satisfaction and family life cycle stages. The findings however have been inconsistent with a popular view being that marital satisfaction is curvilinear (U-shaped) while the alternative view is that it decreases steadily with no eventual upturn. There is a salient gap in literature regarding satisfaction in later life; this is an impetus for further research.

The subsequent chapter will focus on methodological processes of the current study.
CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the aim of the current study and the methodological procedures that were followed to realise that aim. These include the research design, sampling procedures, data collection and analysis. Furthermore, the chapter presents motivations for the selection and suitability of these methodological procedures for this current exploration. Finally, the chapter concludes by orienting the reader to the ethical considerations pertaining to this study.

The aim of the study is to explore and describe marital satisfaction as experienced by a rural Xhosa woman. To successfully meet this aim, the following design, sampling techniques and data collection measures were utilised in the current study in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subjective perceptions of rural Xhosa women on marital satisfaction.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The current study applied a qualitative paradigm from an interpretive viewpoint. Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context specific settings (De Vos, Fouche, Strydom, & Delport, 2011). The qualitative approach was selected for the current study based on the belief that the contexts that individuals inhabit influence their perceptions.

The advantages of the qualitative approach are that it is an interpretive paradigm that places emphasis on the meaning of participants’ actions and the actions of others, allows the researcher to ask questions flexibly, permits the placement of participants in their natural
setting, and acknowledges multiple realities. It is also less expensive to conduct as it relies on smaller sample sizes (Willing, 2001).

Additionally, the paradigm adopts a holistic perspective as opposed to a particular analytical perspective, thus encompassing all properties in an individuals’ context (De Vos et al., 2011). Criticisms and possible disadvantages of the qualitative approach are that it is value laden and therefore risks potential researcher bias and that generalisation cannot be made outside the scope of the sample. However, it is not the objective of the current study to make generalisations outside of the sampling frame.

Moreover, the current study adopted a phenomenological viewpoint: phenomenology emphasises subjective experience and interpretation (Gavin, 2008). Phenomenology states that the phenomena studied are the lived experiences of individuals in their particular context (Applebum, 2012). Therefore, interpretation will be based on the participant’s subjective experiences. Although phenomenological research overlaps with other essentially qualitative approaches including ethnography, hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism, pure phenomenological research seeks essentially to describe rather than explain, and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions (Lester, 2011). Epistemologically, phenomenological approaches are based in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, and emphasise the importance of personal perspective and interpretation (Groenewald, 2004). As defined previously, for the purposes of this study, marital satisfaction is considered a subjective evaluation, thus a phenomenological allowed for the study to place particular importance on the participant’s own personal perspective. The qualitative approach is an interpretive paradigm and is the preferred choice for the current study because the phenomenon being explored was relatively unknown thus requiring a complex detailed understanding of the phenomenon from the participant’s point of view and lived experience. Additionally, the exploratory nature of this study aided the researcher in
gaining a deeper understanding into a relatively under-researched phenomenon. Moreover, providing rich, detailed descriptions of the phenomenon is the goal of phenomenological research (Groenewald, 2004), thus providing congruence between its goals and the aim of this study.

Moreover, the current study employed an exploratory-descriptive case study approach in the order to meet its primary aim of exploring and describing marital satisfaction as experienced by a rural Xhosa woman. Case study research is an investigation and analysis of a single or collective case, intended to capture the complexity of the object of study (De Vos, Fouche, Strydom, & Delport, 2011; Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). Yin (2003) added that a case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. The qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources (interviews, observations, behaviour etc.). This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses, which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The qualitative case study methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The current study explored the phenomenon of marital satisfaction within the context of the participant—a rural Xhosa community, making the case study approach useful for the study. According to Yin (2003), indications for a case study design include (a) the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. The current study was exploratory-descriptive i.e. the
focus is to answer why and how questions; the behaviour of participant is intended to be autonomous, the cultural/demographic contextual dynamics are believed to be relevant to marital satisfaction and the boundaries between the context of the participant and their experience of marital satisfaction is unclear. The case study design was therefore selected for this study. This in-depth case study approach allowed for a series of interviews with the one participant in order to establish rapport and trust, explain the research process and capture their experience in detail and as extensively as possible in order to have rich, in-depth data.

Furthermore, due to the phenomenological nature of the study, the participant’s experience was considered to be unique, subjective and context specific. The objective of the study was therefore not to generalise findings to a wider population but to explore and understand the uniqueness and the dynamics of marital satisfaction as experienced by a rural Xhosa woman. A case study approach sufficiently met this objective. This approach allowed the researcher to explore the individual’s complex interventions, relationships and communities (Yin, 2003). Additionally, it allowed the researcher to obtain data from the original source with adequate opportunity to establish rapport and engage in back and forth interaction for dialogical clarification and verification of information shared. Finally, the case study approach facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context (Baxter & Jack, 2008), further enhancing its suitability for the current study.

4.3 SAMPLING OF PARTICIPANTS.

Purposive sampling is generally used in case study research (Yin, 2003). The current study used of this sampling technique. Purposive sampling involves selecting individuals for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research phenomenon (Gavin, 2008). Selection of participants in purposive sampling is done in a purposeful manner by selecting information-rich cases based on the judgement of the researcher (Gavin, 2008). Applying the purposive sampling technique ensured the selection of an information rich case
based on the judgement of the researcher, thus ensuring that the sample was composed of elements that contain the most characteristics as the population and that served the purpose of the study best. Moreover, the purposive sampling technique is consistent with the principles of case study research. As a study design, case study is defined by interest in individual cases (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). The participant was selected based on the judgement of the researcher as she carried the characteristics that would meet the aims of the study best and she was thus considered to be unique and especially informative. Therefore, purposive sampling ensured that the sample met and recognised the interests of the current study. Sampling of the participant will be discussed in greater detail under the “procedure” section of this paper.

4.4 PARTICIPANTS

The case was sought from a rural area of the researcher’s choice, in one of the district municipalities of the Eastern Cape (Intsika Yethu Municipality). The majority of the Xhosa population resides in the Eastern Cape (Sigaba, 2000). The inclusion criteria were: The participant had to identify with the Xhosa culture, be female and Xhosa speaking. Additionally, the participant had to be married to one husband for a minimum period of 20 years, never divorced, reside in a Xhosa community (where the language of communication was Xhosa and members identified with the Xhosa culture). Additionally, although the age of the participant had to accommodate the required marital duration and increase the probability of cultural preservation, the participant had to be below the age of 74 years to minimize if not entirely rule out the possibility of impairment and frailty and therefore being harmed or strained by the research. According to Sigaba (2002), Xhosa beliefs are more preserved and intact in the older generation. Moreover, the participant must not have been exposed to multiracial university education to minimize possible compromise of the participants’ cultural homogeneity.
The participant met all the required criteria: she was a Xhosa speaking woman who competely identified with the Xhosa culture, was Xhosa speaking and resided in a community where the residents are Xhosa speaking. She was 71 years old and had been married for over four decades to her current husband. The participant reported that she was in good physical and mental health. Although there were no overt signs of frailty, the researcher kept the interviews short and conducted them over a period of time to ensure the participant had adequate opportunity to rest and fully comprehend the research process. Finally, the participant had not been exposed to any multiracial or multicutural input thus enhancing the presevation of cultural homogeneity.

4.5 DATA COLLECTION

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were the method of data collection for the current study. The method allowed the researcher and participant more flexibiliy as these interviews gave the researcher control through the use of an interview guide and allowed the participant freedom of expression through the open-ended nature of of the questions (Fox, 2006). The advantages of in-depth semi-structured interviews are that they permit the researcher to probe and follow up on interesting avenues that emerged during the interview, while allowing the participant to give fuller, detailed explanations of their responses, thus complementing the phenomenological nature of the study (De Vos, Fouche, Strydom, & Delport, 2011). Additionally semi-structured interviews open up the possibility of participants introducing issues the reseacher had not thought of, allowing for the collection of large amounts of data quickly. The possible disadvantage is that because semi-structured interviews involve interaction, co operation is essential and there is a risk of untruthfulness from the participants (De Vos et al., 2011). However, establishing good rapport and ensuring confidentiality and non maleficence will aid in minimising this disadvantage. Information pertaining to the research study was provided to the participant verbally and on paper before
commencement of data collection. These interviews were conducted in isiXhosa by the researcher and were conducted in a series of four interviews over a period of two weeks. Digital audio-recorders were used to record the interviews. These recordings were first transcribed in vernacular and then translated into English. The interviews were coded by the researcher and an independent coder was used to verify themes that emerged.

4.6 PROCEDURE

Permission to conduct the study was gained from the Faculty Postgraduate Studies Committee (FPGSC) at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. This comitte also granted ethical approval for this study.

The rural village was purposefully selected from one of the Eastern Cape’s district municipalities, Intsika Yethu Munucipality, because it is one the researcher has most familiarity with and has most knowledge of, e.g. one where the details of the village are known to the researcher. There are 213 villages under the Intsika Yethu Municipality and one of them was chosen using the descretion of the reseacher. Once the village was selected, the ideal particpant was purposefully selected and personally contacted telephonically to arrange a meeting where the research was introduced and explained.

Due to the collective and cohesive nature of villages, the participant and researcher were inevitably known to each other on some level although they had not previously interacted personally. Qualitative research makes allowance for this process and is considered under the concept of reflexivity. Familiarity with the participant was therefore acknowledged but not avoided. Reflexivity entails the researcher being aware of her effect on the process and outcomes of research based on the premise that knowledge cannot be separated from the knower; it is the process of examining both oneself as researcher, and the research relationship (Shaw, 2010). The concept of reflexivity acknowledges the place for
potential influence from the researcher and the inevitable relationship between researcher and participant (Watt, 2007). Reflexivity as a research process means the examination of research decisions, selection of participants, the analysis of the data, and the relationship between the researcher and participant (Dowling, 2008). The extent to which researchers engage in reflexivity depends on the methodological approach they have adopted for their study (Given, 2008). The researcher was interested in how meanings are made within particular social, cultural and relational contexts and therefore recognized the interview and relationship itself as one such context of interactive meaning making. Thus, reflexivity in the current study involved making the research process itself a focus of inquiry, laying open pre-conceptions and becoming aware of situational dynamics in which the interviewer and respondent are jointly involved in knowledge production (Shaw, 2010). The concept of reflexivity was particularly relevant for the current study as the researcher shared the same culture and home language as the participant which undoubtedly impacted on the establishment of rapport, the nature of questions and responses and the situational dynamics between participant and researcher.

The researcher made personal contact with the participant once she had been identified through the sampling technique. The initial meeting involved obtaining consent and explaining the research process before commencing with the interviews. The interviews were conducted in the home of the participant to ensure a safe, unthreatening environment for the participant, the participant did not indicate that she preferred another option. An audio-recording device was used to ensure accurate capturing of data and this was explained to the participant. Interviews were conducted by the researcher in isiXhosa over a period of two weeks. A translator whose home language is IsiXhosa was employed to ensure accurate translation to minimise loss of meaning in translation. This process was followed by an additional process of back translation by an additional, independent translator. Formal
termination at the end of data collection was done by providing adequate information about the next phases of the research. The phase of data collection ended when data was saturated.

The research process and findings were formulated into a treatise for submission in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Magister Artium in Clinical Psychology at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. A copy will be made available in the university library for use by all with access to the library. Finally, the research will be presented at research conferences as the opportunities arise.

4.7 DATA ANALYSIS.

Qualitative data analysis is the range of processes and procedures whereby we move from the qualitative data that have been collected into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the people and situations we are investigating (Bernard & Ryan, 2009). After the data was gathered, Miles and Huberman’s (1994) content analysis was followed as a framework for data analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that qualitative data analysis consists of three procedures: data reduction, data display and conclusion and verification.

4.7.1 Data reduction refers to the process whereby the mass of qualitative data you obtain through methods such as interview transcript and observations is reduced and organised, for example through coding, writing summaries, and discarding irrelevant data and so forth. At this stage, the researcher discarded all irrelevant information, such as the wedding details, days of the week certain events occurred in, rituals performed etc. but ensured that there is access to it later if required by keeping the original transcripts safely and securely stored, as unexpected findings may need the researcher to re-examine some data previously considered unnecessary (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

4.7.2 Data display refers to a visual format that presents information systematically so the researcher can draw conclusions and take needed action. To draw conclusions from the mass
of data, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that a good display of data in the form of tables, charts, networks and other graphical formats is essential. The researcher used tables display the data and arranged it coherently to permit careful comparisons, detection of differences, noting of patterns and themes, seeing trends and so on. This is a continual process rather than one that is only carried out at the end of the data collection (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher wrote brief notes and trends to follow up on even during the data gathering process. Ideally, the display should allow the researcher to begin to develop conclusions regarding the study. These initial conclusions can then be verified, that is their validity examined through reference to the existing field notes or further data collection. This process is known as

4.7.3 Conclusion drawing/verification and involved the researcher making interpretations from the displayed data and then formulating meaning from it (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher used an independent coder to verify the themes that emerged and drew conclusions from them. The interpretations made and the themes that emerged will be discussed expansively in the following chapter.

Although many critics are reluctant to accept the trustworthiness of qualitative research, frameworks for ensuring rigour in this form of work have been in existence for many years (Shenton, 2004). Guba’s (1981) model will be employed to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the study as Guba’s constructs have won considerable favour. According to Krefting (1991), Guba’s model is based on the identification of four aspects of trustworthiness that are relevant to both quantitative and qualitative studies: (a) truth value, (b) applicability, (c) consistency, and (d) neutrality. A brief definition of each aspect of trustworthiness is outlined below:

- Truth Value: Truth value asks whether the researcher has established confidence in the truth of the findings for the subjects or informants and the context in which the
study was undertaken. In the current study, the researcher made use of supervision to ensure credibility. Lincoln and Guba argued that ensuring credibility is one of most important factors in establishing trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004). Provisions are made by researchers to promote confidence that they have accurately recorded the phenomena under enquiry. The adoption of well-established research methods is recommended as a way of enhancing credibility. The methods utilised in this study, such as the sampling method, data collection techniques and data analysis, are supported by empirical evidence. The selected methods have been widely and successfully used in scientific studies and similar investigations.

The development of an early familiarity with the culture of participating organisations or communities before the first data collection dialogues take place is recommended by Shenton (2005) as a way of enhancing credibility. Fortunately the researcher and the participant in the current study were from the same culture and the researcher was familiar with the community of the researcher. Shenton (2004) added that participants should be given opportunities to refuse to participate in the project so as to ensure that the data collection sessions involve only those who are genuinely willing to take part and who are prepared to offer data freely. In this study, the participant’s autonomy was carefully communicated to the participant and the rapport that was established enhanced the truthfulness of responses.

Frequent debriefing sessions between the researcher and his or her supervisors are encouraged to enhance the truth value or credibility of a study (Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004). The researcher achieved this through her research supervisor and colleagues within the department of psychology. Through discussion, the vision of the investigator was widened as others provide their experiences and perceptions. Such collaborative sessions can be used by the researcher to discuss alternative approaches, and others who are responsible
for the work in a more supervisory capacity may draw attention to flaws in the proposed course of action (Shenton, 2004).

Guba and Lincoln consider member checks to be the single most important provision to bolster a study’s credibility (Shenton, 2004). Here the emphasis should be on whether the informants consider that their words match what they actually intended, since, if a tape recorder has been used, the articulations themselves should at least have been accurately captured. Paraphrasing was done throughout the data collection sessions to ensure the researcher had understood accurately what the participant had said. Additionally, thick description of the phenomena under enquiry is considered an important provision for promoting credibility as it helps to convey the actual situations that have been investigated and, to an extent, the contexts that surround them (Shenton, 2004). This has been illustrated in the current study under the “procedure” section. Finally, Shenton (2004) stated that examination of previous research findings to assess the degree to which the project’s results are congruent with those of past studies is a key criterion for evaluating works of qualitative inquiry. Examination of previous research findings for the current study can be found in Chapter Two while the findings of the current research will be demonstrated in the following chapter (findings and discussion).

- **Applicability**: Applicability refers to the degree to which the findings can be applied to other contexts and settings or with other groups; it is the ability to generalize from the findings to larger populations. Whilst it was not possible to make generalisations about a wider group based on a small qualitative study, findings from the current study may be transferrable to other similar situations or groups (De Vos, Fouche, Strydom, & Delport, 2011). This was achieved as the researcher provided sufficient information about the self (the researcher as instrument) and the research context, processes, participants, and researcher-participant relationships to enable the reader to
decide how the findings may be transferred (Morrow, 2005). The research context, details of the participant, the research process and the role of the researcher were explained in detail in earlier sections of this treatise.

- **Consistency:** The third criterion of trustworthiness considers the consistency of the data, that is, whether the findings would be consistent if the inquiry were replicated with the same subjects or in a similar context. Guba (1981) argued that variability is to be expected due to the naturalistic nature of qualitative research, however, the researcher made a significant attempt to illustrate in detail the processes followed in the current study in case replication becomes essential at a later stage. The changing nature of the phenomena scrutinised by qualitative researchers makes this difficult. In order to address the dependability issue more directly, the processes within the study were reported in detail from the beginning of the process until termination. This will enable future researchers to repeat the work or conduct similar research. The design and its implementation have been thoroughly reported.

- **Neutrality:** This refers to the freedom from bias in the research procedures and results and is based on the acknowledgment that qualitative research is never entirely objective. Neutrality refers to the degree to which the findings are a function solely of the informants and conditions of the research and not of other biases, motivations, and perspectives. Here steps must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work’s findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). The use of independent coders was utilised to ensure neutrality. The extent to which the researcher admitted his or her own predispositions reflects neutrality in qualitative research. The researcher’s own underpinnings were discussed under the concept of reflexivity.
4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher acknowledged that the study included an older adult as it was aimed at someone who has been married for a minimum of 20 years and who has been through all stages of the marital lifecycle, increasing the likelihood of the participant being an elderly woman. This was indeed the case in the current study. Older adults are defined as persons who are 60 years of age and older (Abeles, 1998; Forman, Berman, McCabe, Baim, & Wei, 1992). Although ageing does not intrinsically make one vulnerable, the researcher acknowledges that older adults do experience age-related changes, both physical and cognitive (Abeles, 1998), and for this reason the study paid considerable attention to the ethical principles of research aimed at protecting the participant from any physical or cognitive vulnerabilities (discussed under “participants” section). The researcher also acknowledged the possibility of the participant’s spouse being alive, which was the case with this study’s participant, and will therefore treat data with utmost sensitivity and apply the ethical principles discussed below. Ethical principles that will be taken into account in the current study include informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, adhering to principles of beneficence and non-maleficence, respect for privacy, consultation, autonomy, justice and maintaining researcher integrity and competence.

Informed consent is the major ethical issue in conducting research. It means that a person knowingly, voluntarily and intelligently, and in a clear and manifest way gives his or her consent to participate in the research (Fouka & Mantzorou, 2011). The application of this principle in the current study included three aspects: capacity, voluntariness and information. Taking into account the various impairments, both known and unknown, that might be present in old age, the capacity of the participant to give consent was considered in the selection of the participant. In this case, no impairment was known; however, the researcher communicated at the onset the right to withdraw or defer participation should any discomfort
arise. In addition to capacity, information was provided to ensure that the consent obtained was “informed”. The researcher took responsibility to ensure the information communicated to the participant was understood and captured accurately. This was done by asking the participant to restate the information in her own words. Opportunities were provided for the participant to ask questions at any time during the research, special care was taken to ensure information sheets, consent sheets, and verbal communication, used a font (size and readability) and vocabulary that was appropriate for the target participant. The participant relied heavily on verbal explanations as her literacy was limited. Copies of the consent sheets were provided to be retained by the participant for safe-keeping and verification of content in whichever way they preferred. The participant in this study preferred not to keep the copy as other occupants of her household would then have access to it. Lastly, voluntariness of participation was considered. The participant was informed that she may, without penalty or coercion, choose whether or not to participate in the study. Even when consent had already been obtained and the study was underway, the participant still retained the right to withdraw at any time. The current study did not warrant any amount of deception that may be harmful to the participant.

Another ethical principle at the core of the study is the principle of beneficence and non-maleficence. The ethical principle of beneficence refers to the "be of benefit, do not harm" principle, which includes the professional mandate to do effective and significant research so as to better serve and promote the welfare of our constituents (Fouka & Mantzorou, 2011). No intentional harm was included in the objectives of the study and the researcher undertook the responsibility to minimize and, ideally, avoid any currently unforeseeable harm or distress of any nature to the participant as a result of her participation in the study. As much as the social value and clinical significance of the study is a benefit to
society, the well-being of the participant took precedence and the benefit would not be achieved at her cost.

The issue of confidentiality and anonymity is closely connected with the rights of beneficence, respect for dignity, and fidelity (Fouka & Mantzorou, 2011). Fouka and Mantzorou further added that anonymity is protected when the subject's identity cannot be linked with personal responses while confidentiality is the management of private information by the researcher in order to protect the subject's identity. Both these principles were employed in the current study and the methods to ensure these principles were communicated and explained to the participant at the onset of the research. The data is anonymous to ensure that no response given can be linked to the particular individual and all information obtained was held in the strictest confidential manner. Although an individual or group of people has consented to participate in a research study, this does not mean that they should be expected to divulge information on any aspect of their lives, however sensitive and personal to them (Conolly, 2003). This information was communicated to the participants, particularly because the current study is a small scale study where there was face to face intimate contact that may lead the participant to feel more pressured to share private information. This was ensured by clarifying at the onset of the interviews that the participant may only share that which was comfortable and appropriate for them and that there was no obligation to share any details they may not wish to. Finally, to ensure privacy in terms of setting, the interviews took place in the privacy of the participant’s home since the participant did not indicate an alternative preference.

Finally, although ethical review boards scrutinized the research proposals, the researcher retained the responsibility to conduct the research ethically and professionally, paying special consideration to specific needs and vulnerabilities of the target population, fairness and respect for the dignity and well-being of the participant. Special care was taken
by the researcher to be aware of the relationship and rapport built and thus the distress that may arise when terminating communication with the participant. Termination of the research process was pleasant as the participant felt she had assisted the researcher and had been of help; she ended by wishing the researcher well.

4.9 CONCLUSION

This study utilized a qualitative approach and followed qualitative research methods in pursuance of its aims. The participant was identified through purposeful sampling and thereafter the data was obtained through semi structured interviews and analysed through Miles and Huberman’s (1994) content analysis. Throughout the research process, ethical guidelines for research as outlined by the Health Professional Council of South Africa were followed and adhered to. Findings from this research will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The results of this study are presented in this chapter. The findings are presented according to the conceptual themes and sub-themes that emerged from analysis. Miles and Heuberman’s (1994) model of content analysis was utilised in order to identify, analyse and report on those themes that became evident from the data.

Conceptual themes that emerged are contextualized utilizing relevant concepts of Thibaut and Kelley’s (1959) interdependence theory and the lifecycle stages of marriage proposed by Markey (2005) as outlined in Chapter 3 where applicable. Additionally, throughout this discussion contrasts, similarities and discrepancies will be drawn from the literature review outlined in Chapter 2.

In addition to the conceptualisation of themes and sub-themes using the selected theoretical framework, external research sources based on the literature have been used where relevant related to triangulate and substantiate some of the themes. This is to highlight where the findings may be congruent with current research and identify instances where there are discrepancies further increasing the credibility of the findings.

As this is a qualitative study, the participant’s subjective lived experiences of the phenomenon were of importance in the findings and discussion of the study. Where relevant direct quotes from the participant will be used to personalise the phenomenon to the participant and her lived experiences.

5.1.1 Overview of major themes. The findings of Miles and Heuberman’s (1994) content analysis of the interview transcriptions can be broken down into two main themes. These themes represent an overview of the most salient aspects of how the participant experienced
marital satisfaction and they became evident through the coding process based on the frequently repeated information, comparisons, detection of differences, noting of patterns and themes and seeing trends across the data set.

Although there are several themes with sub-themes subsumed under each theme, it is important to note that this was a single case study and that all of this is information is drawn from the experiences of a single individual. Nevertheless, the information sufficiently met the aim of the present study which was to explore and describe marital satisfaction as experienced by a rural Xhosa woman; and important findings from the current study may be transferrable to other similar situations or groups.

Overall, the findings depict two main themes with sub themes and categories subsumed under each theme. The two main themes with their linked sub-themes and categories are outlined in the table below:
Table 1: *Themes and subthemes relating to a rural Xhosa woman’s experience of marital satisfaction.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES</th>
<th>SUB-THEMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. **Marital satisfaction arises from one’s state of mind** | The participant stressed the importance of the following as contributing to marital satisfaction:  
1.1 Marriage provides a woman with dignity and status within her community  
1.2 Marriage provides a source of support from both families  
1.3 Marriage enables the woman to show love to her “adopted” family  
1.4 Marriage is the fulfilment of all cultural expectations/obligations |
| 2. **The participant provided some lessons on dealing with the issues that might arise in the marriage** | The participant identified issues that might be reflect badly in the relationship  
2.1 That she has the responsibility of maintaining her husband’s dignity at all times  
2.2 Developing skills to deal with challenges in the relationship in a culturally acceptable manner e.g. private discussions, |

The main themes identified are: 1) marital satisfaction arises from one’s state of mind, and 2) the participant provided lessons on dealing with issues that arise in marriage. These in turn permitted the identification of sub-themes connected to each main theme. A discussion of these findings will follow.

5.1.2 **Theme 1: Marital satisfaction arises from one’s state of mind.** The attitudes around marriage and the perceptions drawn from the events and dynamics that occur in a marriage shaped one of the main themes that emerged. This theme was created by the strong emphasis the participant placed on the subjectivity of the experience of marital satisfaction and the extent to which the evaluation of marital satisfaction depended on one’s state of mind.
i.e. one’s understanding of how marriage happens or one’s attitude towards marriage. She provided a definition of her understanding of marital satisfaction:

“To be satisfied is to be content on all things and not stress yourself about yesterday’s troubles. Even if you didn’t like something, tell yourself it is fine.” “You are calm, inside yourself.” “They (satisfaction and loving your husband) are not mutually exclusive, because no matter what the husband does, I am not troubled. I am content with everything.”

The participant stressed the importance of a variety of factors as contributing to the experience of marital satisfaction. These have been broken down into sub-themes that further highlight the subjectivity of her evaluation of satisfaction in the marital union and the factors considered as significant in this experience by the participant within her context.

Broadly, four the sub-themes that are subsumed under this theme are: marriage provides a woman with dignity and status within her community; marriage provides a source of support from both families; marriage enables the woman to show love to her “adopted” family; marriage is the fulfilment of cultural expectations/obligations.

5.1.2.1 Sub theme 1: Marriage provides a woman with dignity and status within her community

The participant stressed the importance of a variety of factors as contributing to marital satisfaction, one of which was the dignity and status marriage provides to a woman within her community. She identified this as a positive trait that otherwise cannot be achieved. She stated: “It’s wonderful to marry because you are settled in one place. You are not here and there. The fact that you are settled in one place, you have no affairs on the side because affairs are full of disappointments”

Similar findings are present in literature. Mbiti (1991) stated that marriage puts the individual and his family on the social and physical map of his community. Everyone recognizes that the individual has achieved full adulthood when she or he is married. The
participant persuasively conveyed her view of marriage and how marriage provides one with respect and dignity. She said: “You earn a respectable name. Marriage makes you dignified. What you gain is the respect/dignity of being a wife who will remain a wife, who will die a part of this home. You have that dignity; by your good deeds you retain that dignity; because you have done well. What have you kept? The counsel you received!”

These sentiments have been echoed by Afolayan (2004) who referred to marriage according to Africans as the only acceptable and appropriate status that every adult male or female must attain to be viewed with respect and honour in the community. The full attainment of adulthood is achieved through marriage. To be unmarried is to be considered incapable of adult responsibilities. This view as expressed by Afolayan (2004) was evident in the attitude of the participant. She further emphasised the dignity she believes marriage provides while expressing her negative attitude towards being unmarried, which to her, equated to being undignified:

“It’s not acceptable to have a child before marriage. That’s one of the things. You first need to marry to have children. Secondly, something that usually happens when you’re unmarried is settling down, because nothing stops you from doing what you like. You, as a young woman who is unmarried can sleep wherever because nothing stops her. Likewise, a man can sleep wherever he wants because nothing controls him”

She added: “It’s nice to marry, it’s not a pain. What’s painful is to be wandering unmarried”

Some scholars have attributed the dignity associated with marriage to the popular African custom of Ilobolo (bride wealth). Shope (2006) in a study that focused on examining the contradictory meanings of lobolo and the internal power struggles that emerge over its interpretation and practice, found that ilobolo affirmed women’s value; it was a symbol of respect for the worthiness of women. One of the participants in Shope’s study was cited as
saying “If you don’t pay ilobolo you don’t respect your wife. But if you do pay lobolo for your wife, you respect her and you understand where this person comes from and then how she is linked to you and then the meaning of her to be in your house with you. So that’s why you start to respect the ilobolo. You give your wife respect if you pay ilobolo.”

The views of the participant in the current study are consistent with those expressed by the theoretical framework of this study, the interdependence theory’s concept of rewards which are considered significant as contributing to one’s evaluation of their satisfaction in a marital union. Rewards are defined as exchanged resources that are pleasurable and gratifying (Dunbar, 2000). This theory distinguishes between four types of rewards and costs. These types are as follows: emotional, social, instrumental, and opportunity; their definitions were presented in chapter three (Thibaut & Kelley, 1965).

It is clear the participant perceived the dignity obtained from her marital status as a great social reward as it gives her status in the community. The social benefit was not the only reward the participant considered having gained from being married. She noted children to be a benefit of marriage. This can be understood in two ways. Firstly as an opportunity reward (gain she would not have been able to receive otherwise). This can be seen from her view of reasons for marrying when she stated: “It’s not acceptable to have a child before marriage. That’s one of the things. You first need to marry to have children.” From this statement it is clear that the participant believes this is an opportunity (reward) offered to her by marriage. Secondly, it can be seen as closely linked to dignity as can be understood from her statements when she said:

“They (children) strengthen that marriage to the point that you vow never to leave your children”

“They are yours now. And I am going nowhere, leaving my children behind.”
The notion of holding on to your marriage, which is evidently influenced by having children, is directly linked to dignity according to the participant, who stated, “It (having children) strengthens the marriage. I cannot leave and leave my children here. It’s a nail to nail yourself to this family. Because I can’t leave my children.” She added, “Marriage is beneficial. I am dignified, I am settled. I have become dignified through marriage because I have held on (influenced by having children) to my marriage”

One might then wonder why children serve either as a barrier to the possibility of dissolution of a marital union or solidify the marriage as the participant expressed when she said, “You’re firm now. You’re rooted here.” Ngema (2013) explains that in customary practice, the parental rights are determined by the payment of ilobolo. If the husband has complied with his duty to pay ilobolo, he and his family group have full parental rights to the children borne by the wife during the existence of the marriage. The participant confirmed:

“If you leave, they will remain here in their home. This is why one needs to sit down and persevere”

The finding that children play a positive and functional role within a marital union that emerged in this study is contrary to that stated in literature, which states that children impact a marriage negatively resulting in dissatisfaction (Lawrence, Rothman, Cobb & Brandbury, 2008; Matthews, 2002; Sanders, 2010; VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). Mbiti (1991) reported that children are greatly valued in African family life. They are the seal of marriage. In many parts of the continent, once a marriage has produced children; it is very rare to see it broken up since nobody wishes to part with his or her children. Children add to the social stature of the family and both boys and girls have their social usefulness in the eyes of the family. Mbiti further stated that the supreme purpose of marriage according to an African is to bear children, build a family and extend life. The positivity brought by children in a marriage was confirmed by the participant:
“It (bearing a child) brings joy in the family. It’s beautiful for everyone when there is a child.”

“You feel like you’ve achieved once you give birth.”

“They (husband and wife) are feeling good; after all they have a child.”

“She (the wife) always hopes and prays that she falls pregnant to see herself become a mother in this family.”

This variance could be explained by the fact that the things identified in literature as contributing factors to the negativity that arises when children are born, such as increased roles, less time between spouses, less time for relationships etc. (Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Lawrence, Rothman, Cobb, & Brandbury, 2008) are not particularly significant in the Xhosa culture and the communal nature of the culture. In other words the involvement of others in the upbringing of the children assists in alleviating some of these challenges (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Studies on the impact of children on marital satisfaction have found that the introduction of children into the marriage, for the above-mentioned reasons, often leads to a period of greater instability and less closeness between spouses, whereas children leaving home would allow the couple to grow closer (Patrick et al., 2007). The communal nature of the Xhosa culture and its contribution to marital satisfaction will be discussed in later sections of this chapter. The participant identified more benefits to the presence of children such as assisting in chores when they grow up. She also added:

“It’s good when there are children around because you even tell yourself that you now have people to protect yourself. Even when you are not getting along with your husband, you are able to sit with the children and have a good chuckle about things, and you forget you had misunderstandings”

As discussed in chapter three, interdependence theory uses the concept of outcomes to refer to how the interaction is experienced subjectively, namely the valence associated with
an interaction (positive, neutral, or negative) (Arriaga B. , 2013). The outcome is determined to be positive when the rewards outweigh the costs in a relationship. Conversely, the outcome is negative when the costs outweigh the rewards (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Thus, an interaction such as marriage is likely to be perceived as satisfying if the rewards outweigh the costs. Some of the rewards as expressed by the participant have been outlined above, while she identified no costs or aversive experiences as a result of being married. When asked if there was a downside to marriage compared to the gains she expressed:

“\textit{A new home, new sibling,}”

“\textit{No not even the smallest of them. Marriage is all benefit, only benefits. I have experienced no sense of loss or compromise by getting married. My brothers are all married, so it wouldn’t be good for me to be unmarried girl. I don’t even have a place to sleep. Moreover, you’ll hear your parents say, “Your sister wants us to build her a hut there. You’re being chased away when they want you to build a small hut outside. In your own parent's home!”}”

As stated by Afoloyan (2005) in African culture, marriage is considered as the barometer according to which adulthood is measured. Additionally, as stated by the interdependence theory, outcomes are shaped by the subjective evaluation of rewards and costs; indeed being married can shape one’s state of mind (satisfaction) positively regarding the marital experience if they feel it is a gain that contributes positively to their lives, as was seen in this case.

5.1.2.2 \textit{Subtheme 2: Marriage provides a source of support from both families.} The participant identified marriage as a source of support. For the African in general and the participant in particular, a philosophy of existence can be summed up as: I am because we are, and because we are therefore I am. A comparison of African and Western social
organization clearly reveals the cohesiveness of African society and the importance of kinship to the African lifestyle (Cobbah, 1987). This was particularly salient in the participant’s explanation of the various sources of support one has access to through marriage i.e. her own family, husband’s family and the community at large which will be discussed below.

Scholars have attempted to explain the development and significance of this kinship through the concept of ilobolo and its functions. One of the key functions of ilobolo that is highlighted in the literature is the relationship and bond it created between the families of the bride and the groom (Posel, Rudwick, & Casale, 2011). Paying ilobolo and getting married were understood as transactions of reciprocal rights and duties and prescribed relationships between the two groups of relatives which continue past the death of the married individuals (Posel, Rudwick, & Casale, 2011). Shope (2006) echoes similar sentiments and adds that ilobolo forged a relational bond among between families and, as the older women in the community recall, it celebrated the addition of the woman into the husband’s family. Most rural women perceive ilobolo as very good for them because it creates a great friendship. It is a way of forging a relationship between two families. Through the negotiation of ilobolo, families are brought together and united; the transfer of ilobolo creates a web of affiliations. Additionally, further understanding of marriages amongst Africans suggests that one of the functions of ilobolo is that marriage is a transfer of legal rights over a woman from her kin to her husband (Kyalo, 2012). A process well understood by those involved that also symbolises trust amongst members of different kin groups i.e. trusting that they (bride’s family) will take care of their daughter and trusting that the groom’s family are receiving a valuable additional member to their own family.

From the above one can then understand how communality is a cardinal part of African marriages that involves more than just the married dyad, hence the dynamic web of sources
of support. Firstly, the participant pointed out how her own family is one of the sources in the sense that she knows they are in support of her marriage, her spouse and the family she marries into, which to her amounts to the right thing and a positive state of mind. She provide context:

“The marriage of the old is not like contemporary marriage because before, the suitor’s family would approach the girl’s family to ask for her hand in marriage. Meanwhile, the family may not even know the suitor or his family. The elderly family members of both families would gather in the name of building friendship”

She added, “As that happens, the dowry being paid concluding the marriage - you are counselled/advised before you leave your home.” And “You are gone. Which means there is nothing of yours left in your parent’s home.” Kanjo (1994) explains that the marriage is seen as a transaction between two kin-groups upon whose final approval the prospective couple would either marry or break off. The kin-group has a lot of influence on who the prospective spouse will be. There is, as a result, a curtailment of the woman’s or the man’s freedom of choice as the kin-group has overriding powers over personal wishes of the individual. The participant’s further explanation conferred this:

“You must submit to your parent’s guidance”

“No, he (prospective husband) doesn’t inform his parents. Instead, if she (the girl of interest) was seen wherever, the parents will decide. He (prospective husband) then subjects his will to that of his parents, irrespective of who he saw and liked”

Lassiter (2000) identifies the traditional African family as a setting wherein the vertical power structure of the society is introduced and sustained as predominant over the freedom of individuals. According to Nyasani (1997) there is a fundamental difference between the traditional African child and a child in the Western culture. The child in Africa was muzzled
right from the outset and was thereby drilled into submission to authority from above. Respect and obedience are the cardinal guiding principles for behaviour within the family and in the society at large; this was not considered as an aversive or harmful experience by the participant. Instead it meant support, love and trust as the participant described:

“They (parents) trust you, and you also trust your parents not to just give you away to some idle place. There is a reason why they’d tell you of the people who came to request your name in marriage”

“He has chosen you (me). Even if I was chosen for him by his parents, still he chose me”

“You were loved before you were even seen. They loved your father’s home”

It is important to note that the participant’s definition of marital satisfaction was contentment and peace within yourself and that it arose from one’s state of mind. It is clear from the above that the marital experience is considered good and beneficial by the participant as it was supported by her own parents and family, with the belief that it was good for her and she has done well. It can then be postulated that this support, approval and symbol of love contributes to subjective experiences of marital satisfaction/contentment or state of mind. Moreover, the interdependence theory also helps to conceptualise this. One of the assumptions of the theory is that the fundamental ground for an analysis of social situations is the study of social interactions, which are best understood by considering people’s interdependence with respect to the nature and extent to which co-acting individuals or groups are dependent on each other in order to attain desired outcomes (Reis & Arriaga, 2014). This interdependence of all involved was important in the participant’s journey and the extent of influence the co-actors had on one another and the desired outcome was profound and pervasive i.e. it was the deciding factor of the marriage occurring in the first place.
Secondly, the family of the spouse was identified as another significant source of support in the marital journey. As the participant explained earlier, after the payment of ilobolo the woman now belongs to the marital family. Whereas Westerners are able to carry out family life in the form of the nuclear family and often in isolation from other kin, Africans do not have the concept of a nuclear family and operate within a broader arena of the extended family (Cobbah, 1987). Thus, the woman has a new family, a wider web of affiliations meaning a wider support system. The participant stated that through the marital union, “you gain a new home, new siblings.” In African society generally, and amongst Xhosa in particular, "family" refers to a much wider circle of people. Similarly to western society, marriage is the basis for family. The basic difference is that, while western marriage is based on individualism and independence, African marriage is based on the principle of collectivity and interdependence (Sinqwana-Ndulo, 1998). The participant expressed the crucial role played by the family in a marital union. She provided examples:

“When you are not treated well you go to your in-law; this is your parent. She is your mother, he is your father. You tell your mother that there is a matter you are not satisfied with regarding your husband’s behaviour. You understand? Because if I just address the issue with my husband, he’ll leave me on the spot and respond to what I’m saying. But, if I take the issue to his mother, it is his mother who will admonish him for his unfair treatment of me. Even during the time of receiving counsel he was told never to mistreat me. He cannot hit you. If he does, you have the right to report it to his parents”

“If he hits you, go home and tell your mother (in-law) or your sister-in-law. They, in turn, will talk to him. He will calm down”

The role the family plays is far more extensive than just intervening when there are troubles in a marital union. They are sources of affection and offer a sense of belonging. The
participant shared an example from her journey: “Eh (yes) I am your father, he’d say. “I am your father.” He wouldn’t say, “I am your father-in-law”. I am your father! Hold me. You do realise that Father is respected... With a low tone of voice he’ll say, “Oh, my daughter-in-law. I have been missing you, hold me.” I’ve just come from visiting home for example that time. Maybe I’ve been to see people. Now I arrive and greet people. I greet, “Greetings at home.” And father would say, “It’s been a while since I last saw you, hold me. Hold me, I am your father.” You see, it is that relationship that I speak of; that is how it grows”

The family also governs the interaction between the couple, making them an integral part of the marriage itself. The participant elaborated:

“The marriage is not yours and your husband’s alone. Wherever your husband works, Cape Town or Johannesburg, you will, you’ll never go to him without your (in laws) parent’s consent”

“If the time has come for you to be released, you won’t be released even if he has asked for you. It must be up to them. The whole family”

“You can’t just leave and go to your husband. You’d never do that. You must get permission from the family”

She expressed however that this is not easy at the beginning as you do not know them but added that this relationship develops and grows with time and love. She stated, “At first it’s difficult getting used to them, but because there are loving parents you get used to them quick. You need to familiarize yourself with the way your in-laws are... Then you’ll get used to them. For example, father was not a man to be touched by anyone, but with me he’d be open to me touching him as a daughter. He’d say I must touch him (e.g. handshakes and hugs). She further explained that with time it becomes home, like you belong and she added,
“Mmh (yes), his mother. She is also your mother. You were born here. You were told you were born there; all that is of this home is yours too.”

In the interdependence theory, it is assumed that humans have diverse instrumental and social-emotional needs, that some are biologically based whereas others are learned, that needs cover a spectrum from survival to spirituality, and that some needs are pervasive whereas others are unique to specific situations and partners (Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). Many needs are inherently interpersonal and can be gratified only in the context of dyads or groups (e.g. belonging, sexuality, security) (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). The participant highlighted that family and their support serves needs extensively in a positive way that assists in the shaping of one’s state of mind or determination of outcomes. As already outlined, people maintain relationships wherein positive experiences outweigh negative ones; the participant expressed the positivity she attaches to the abovementioned thus influencing her degree of satisfaction or contentment according to her definition.

Another assumption of the interdependence theory is that people recognize the nature of their interdependence with others and the impact that their behavioural choices may have for the well-being of others (Arriaga, 2013). This is particularly relevant considering the web of affiliations that characterise marriages such as the participant’s. In terms of rights, the principle of restraint requires that family members remain flexible in terms of their own rights and always consider the requirements of the group as a whole. Responsibility is a much broader concept for African families than for Western families, given their larger size of African families (Cobbah, 1987). An example of this would be the recognition that the failure or success of her marriage would reflect badly on her family. She provided context:
“Because I’ve not brought shame on anyone. People who feel shame the most are your parents because when you have done shameful things people will say ’so and so’s child.’ They won’t say, ‘so and so did something wrong’ instead you’ll hear that ‘it’s so and so’s child.’ Do you see who it is that you have put to shame?”

This simply suggests that a person does not have complete freedom. Individual rights must always be balanced against the requirements of the group; in this case all the members of the family (maiden and marital) and possibly also the community.

Finally, another source of support obtained through marriage is the wider community. The principle of communality in African society is well documented in literature. It is a common notion that whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: ‘I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am’ (Lassiter, 2000). Good neighbourliness is highly valued beyond the bounds and obligations of kinship. Neighbours, whether related or not, are often those in close contact with one another and are expected to assist each other (Afolayan, 2004). This plays a pivotal role in the marriage and its experience as it minimises or alleviates aversive experiences such as poverty and labour. The participant provided context:

“In the community. Someone can see if you’re poor/need help and decide to lend you e.g. their child to assist you. You don’t find that in the cities.”

“When you don’t have something, you can borrow/get from your neighbour”

She further applied the importance of this in a marriage and stated, “It builds because that next door neighbour becomes your friend. In the location/township, even if someone knows you, they can pass you speedily without greeting. The person won’t even look at you. People in cities don’t greet much” She added “It (living in rural areas) builds a marriage in that
you’re building relationships. You can’t go to bed hungry while your neighbour next to you eats.”

The participant identified the importance of building wider ties beyond your immediate kin and she repeatedly stressed the value of this support received from her community. She provided examples to illustrate the benefit that is obtained from good neighbourliness, particularly in a rural setting;

“It (married life in rural areas) differs a lot. They (people who don’t reside in rural areas are not familiar with life here. Today you find them at my place and the following day at another house. They are constantly causing conflict, so to speak. Because they don’t know how life is here. She may not know that if you don’t have, you can get from your neighbour”

“Life is better here because even when you have nothing, you have your neighbours to assist.”

“Whether I work or I don’t, in the city my next door neighbour couldn’t be bothered about my well being. Whereas if I’m sick here and people know I’m alone, I’ll see people bringing me water and others will even cook. Someone else will see that the house needs to be cleaned or tidied and they’ll do that. That’s here in rural areas. It’s love”

“It makes it (life) a bit better and I see people visit. You have not established yourself by your own efforts only but by the support of other people. All the time”

“If your child is a good child, you can give your child to anyone. Before you even give the child, they will remark that you can’t always take care if the child on your own.”

According to Kelly and Thibaut (1959) of the interdependence theory, individuals are willing to remain in relationships that are perceived as equitable and able to meet their needs. It is understandable then how the abovementioned factors have led the participant to a positive evaluation of her marriage, considering the needs met through this union and the benefits derived from it in general. However, if it is perceived that rewards exceed costs, the
relationship is relatively satisfying, but, if costs outweigh rewards, the relationship is perceived as comparatively dissatisfying (Dunbar, 2000). It is the view of the author that being married is a gain that offers remarkable support, serving as a reward. Collect (2010) argued that individuals initiate relationships that are valuable to them and maintain those relationships as long as they continue to benefit from the interactions.

5.1.2.3 Subtheme 3: 

Marriage enables the woman to show love to her “adopted” family. The participant identified an additional gain or benefit of marriage as being a platform to show love to her adopted family. This was understood in two ways, one as being the establishment and extension of one’s identity (keeping the concept of family, belonging and affection) since one changes family. The second way was the recognition of interdependence and being aware of how one’s behaviour affects others. Either way, the family is one of the most significant features of African culture. It is looked upon as the most important unit and, if the family is affected by the process of change such as marriage, every other segment of society follows suit. (Kanjō, 1994).

The process of marriage separates the woman from her original kin; however that doesn’t nullify the concept of family as it has been established that marriage is communal. The participant explained that as integrating into the “new” family, whereby she identified ways such as showing love to them that aids in this integration. It is important at this stage to note what the participant considers to be love - servant hood/obedience – and, according to her, “loving” your family through your good deeds is an opportunity afforded by marriage as it gives one a stable family and cloaks a woman with dignity, which she considers cardinal as was previously established. Serving/loving the new family is not an unpleasant experience according to the participant; in fact it is a duty she expects to carry out with diligence, one which she prides herself she has carried out fruitfully. She provided insight into this revelation:
"The piece of advice I remember them giving me is ‘go my child and be a servant in that home’. Do you realise that being a servant/to worship is difficult?"

She further provided explanations i.e. counsel she received from her own parents before leaving her original home that allowed insight into why servanthood amounts to love and why it is a good thing.

“You are there to serve/worship! You are not going to that home to rule. Even when you arrive at your new home, you are again counselled that your arrival at the new home shouldn’t change things; the children (sons and daughters) who felt free to visit must continue to feel free to visit, as you will also visit back home. So, with your stay at the home, the children must not stop visiting... and for neighbours to stay away from us... Where you find as neighbours we’d come and go into each other’s homes asking for sugar, but now because you are here they are afraid/uneasy to come over. You have come to open gates (opportunities). You have come to forge friendship... to consolidate it, you understand?”

Through this, the participant forged her own place in the family and became an instrumental part of the family, one that held that family together to a large degree and enhanced the frequency of good interactions and peace in the home. This also fulfilled the fundamental need to belong in a family, as the wife did not feel like a guest or a peripheral part of the family. She considered her presence to be valued as much as she also valued being part of the family. The statements below evidence and affirm that:

“My husband’s family gains from my presence. You benefit the most because you arrived and did not destroy your new home.”
“The home becomes dignified through you. Indeed, when you arrived there are people who didn’t come to the home, not so?”

“You have gathered them. They come now because you have presented yourself as someone who is approachable, who is dignified, who is loving, doing all things. Then those who couldn’t bring themselves to come to the home are now able to. Maybe, the family didn’t get along.”

“You (I) brought peace in the family/home. Those who didn’t come before could now come because the home is now welcoming, because of you. What did you (I) bring? Peace.”

One might wonder then if such an instrumental role was not a loss to the original family or a gain to the marital home at the expense of the wife’s happiness. The participant refuted this and explained why this was not the case:

“No, those who gain are my in-laws because your burial will be held here/in their home. You have no business/stake back at home (your parents’ home). Even if you die, your parents have no claim over you. If you are here in your home, your body will never be taken back home to be buried, never! Therefore, those who gain are these (in-laws), because your end is here.”

The view that her presence in the home was invaluable and irreplaceable was something that came out strongly from the participant; but what was even stronger was the sense of responsibility she felt towards this role. It was not an automatic position she found herself in within the family but one she believed was her purpose and responsibility:

“In this new home, is it not what I have already told you before? To come and serve this family. Maybe the people in this home are scattered and you come in to bring them
together, as you’ve been told you’ve not come to destroy but to build. Your role as a married woman is to determine whether the relationships in this family are in good or bad taste for her to see if she can make a way to try and fix things that are not well”

The participant was also not selective about whom this love should be expressed to. As much as she is married to her husband, her servanthood was directed at everyone because she considered everyone to be her family now. She illustrated:

“Some are rude…”

“Some are good people… There are rude people here when you arrive and you need, must be patient with them. They’re family…”

“You make tea for everyone. . You make tea when people arrive, of course. You make tea for everyone with a pleasant face, and avoid showing irritation.”

“He (the husband)’s mine, and the sister-in-law is mine. The house is mine. I am going nowhere else”

This might appear strenuous and unpleasant, however, as mentioned earlier, this is merely an extension of one’s identity as a woman, as perceived by the participant. She explained that this was something a woman was already doing in their own home and this was also a display of discipline already instilled at home. She concurred and stated that, “things were good because you were already used to discipline at home. You were disciplined at home. No is no, yes is yes. So, if in this home there is something they don’t like, you too ought not to like it”

Finally, another view of the expression of love is the realisation and recognition of the impact of one’s action or behaviour on others, the impact others have on the new wife and how this dynamic shapes the desired outcome. This is a pivotal concept in the
interdependency theory; it states that the most import features of a situation are found in the extent of connectedness and interaction (Reis & Arriaga, 2014). The participant strongly expressed the extent to which she feels she gains from marriage or depends on the marital union for certain benefits. She also expressed how the family in turn depends on her in her statement, “They are also dependent on me; they are not very concerned with their own daughters. Their attention is on me and their son” indicating the level of connectedness amongst all involved. This highlights the functionality of the interdependence theory in that it assumes interpersonal behaviour is driven by securing interpersonal ties that are personally adaptive (connectedness, support, love etc.) and that function to maximize the odds of fulfilling experiences and minimising the odds of having negative experiences (conflict in the family, being unmarried, shaming your parents etc). As already learnt from this theory, satisfaction in a marriage is shaped by the ratio of these experiences i.e. whether good experiences outweigh the bad. It the case of the participant, it was obvious that she perceived the abovementioned actions/behaviours to be adaptive and functional and to serve a good purpose.

5.1.2.4 Subtheme 4: Marriage is the fulfilment of all cultural expectations/obligations.

A theme that emerged strongly over the course of data collection was the notion of marriage being a means to fulfilment of cultural expectations or obligations. It emerged over several interviews that the participant's behaviours and perceptions in her marriage were guided by a certain standard of doing things. Kyalo (2012) explained that in African societies, the obligation to get married is the only means of human survival as far as the views of African peoples are concerned; for that reason it is a religious obligation. It is as old as human society, through marriage and childbearing, humanity is preserved, propagated and perpetuated. Through them life is also deepened vertically and spread horizontally. Therefore marriage and childbearing are the focus of life; they are at the very centre of human
existence. Mbiti (1991) echoed the same sentiments and added that it many African societies believed that, from the very beginning of human life God commanded or taught people to get married and bear children, therefore marriage is looked upon as a sacred duty which every normal person must perform. When the participant was asked about the reasons for getting married her response indeed echoed the sentiments of these scholars:

“The purpose of marriage? Marriage was there from the beginning. When Adam was made, he was told he couldn’t be without an equal/partner/wife. You understand? His rib was taken out of him and his partner was made from it and they lived together. That is why we marry. It is necessary for you to be with someone – that builds. It was also said that we must reproduce and multiply... how will we reproduce alone?”

As already established from earlier sections of this chapter, from the point of view of indigenous custom, a marriage is to be regarded primarily as an alliance between two kinship groups and only in a secondary aspect between two individual persons (Kanjo, 1994). The marriage is seen as a transaction between two. As already stated, the kin-group has a lot of influence on the marriage process e.g. who the prospective spouse will be, and as a result the family has overriding powers over the personal wishes of the individual. Thus, subjective desires for love, intimacy, companionship and beauty do not usually form a basis for marriage, but rather the husband’s capacity and the woman’s procreative and domestic aptitude. In addition to her view of marriage as a fulfilment of a religious/cultural myth, the participant also reflected this view that the purpose of being married and her taking the role of being a wife was primarily to serve the bigger kin-group as opposed to fulfilling personal needs. This was reflected in her statement:

“To come and serve this family. Maybe the people in this home are scattered and you come in to bring them together, as you’ve been told you’ve not come to destroy but to build.”
This pattern of the family’s needs and wishes having overriding powers over desires or subjective experiences of the individual was consistent throughout her marriage. For example, even in instances where the participant might have subjectively felt wronged, what the family thought was more important than whatever personal feelings she may have. She provided an example:

“Sadness must not show. If I have had a misunderstanding with my husband, I must wake up and not show we have had a misunderstanding. That way, there’ll be peace. Because my mother-in-law won’t see that I and her son had a misunderstanding in the evening. Instead, she’ll be under the impression that all is well. Then things will be well at home”

She repeatedly stressed the communality of marriage. The communality aspect of marriage is something representative of the African culture thus it is determined by the culture itself and not the individual (Afolayan, 2004). The participant’s understanding of what marriage is or rather what it should be according to cultural standards is a crucial part in this exploration of marital satisfaction. Herewith are some statements that help contextualise her interpretation:

“I say that the marriage is for everyone. ...”

“No, it’s (marriage) not yours... it’s not yours and you husband’s.

“Yes, you’re married to everyone”

It is therefore of paramount significance that culture be considered when trying to understand this phenomenon, if it is the principle that governs the phenomenon and its experience thereof to start with. This is significant to marital satisfaction because, as Wendorf, Lucas, Imamoglu, Weisfield and Weisfield (2010) explained; marriage is heavily guided by norms, customs, and expectations that are derived from culture. In particular, satisfaction with one’s spouse may largely depend on the degree to which a marriage fulfils
culturally determined expectations and obligations. In particular, the criteria for a satisfying marriage may be highly varied and may depend on a unique set of culturally enforced norms, values, and obligations (Adonu, 2005). This knowledge is important when studying how individuals in a particular society perceive and react to situations. It is also important to understand and know about both cultural and social attributes of the culture in which they live (Mtini, 2001). Broadly, the ways that culture shaped the participant’s evaluation of her marital union was firstly the cultural attitudes regarding marriage roles, particularly gender roles and secondly, the communal aspect of marriage where needs of the individual are secondary to that of the larger group as stated by the culture.

As stated earlier, cultural shaping of marriage roles, particularly with regard to gender roles, is something that was salient in this study. Broadly, marriage roles are considered in two forms: egalitarian and traditional (Adonu, 2005). Conceptually, the operational definitions of egalitarian and traditional forms of marriage offered by Dunn (1960) as cited in Adonu (2005) are adopted in this present work. According to Dunn (1960), the traditional form of marriage is a family structure containing some four distinct characteristics i.e. the husband provides the primary source of income for the household, the wife’s responsibilities are primarily contained in the home, she has primary responsibility for the care of the children and the husband is to make decisions for the household. The egalitarian (or companionship) marriage form involves a structure where financial responsibilities are shared, responsibility for the home is shared and both husband and wife share responsibility for the care of children and in making decisions. The participant undoubtedly held a traditional view of marriage, as can be seen from her statements regarding her and her husband’s roles in the marriage. She shared her views:
“Let me not hide it... women are born to bear hard times/persevere, as I’ve told you about how you bear responsibilities. If there is work happening in/on the house, the wife is on the forefront. The husband does little…”

“They (men) build, come on. They provide the money”

“It’s (husband’s duties) to bring home his money. As a wife, you’ll see what needs to be done.”

“No, they don’t do that (wash dishes). Except if the husband is sweet.”

“Being helped is a good thing, but you choose what the father should do.”

“It’s no law/not customary at all. You choose, especially now that he’s older. Earlier in the marriage he did none of that because you knew you’d be ashamed if people arrived and he was in the kitchen washing dishes”

“Yes, he must sit down. You stop him. You are concerned with the possibility of someone walking into the house with him in the kitchen scrubbing pots”

“Women must humble themselves/be submissive. Also, be dignified in the home.”

“Men don’t settle and justify it by saying they are men, whereas you are a woman, and women should be well behaved. To behave accordingly... Women must act accordingly by their own accord. Even if the husband is a riff-raff, you protect him/hide his waywardness”

Literature has found that household labour impacts marital satisfaction (Dillaway, 2001). However, variations have been found amongst those who hold traditional views and those who are egalitarian in their marriage views. As already revealed in the literature review, wives with more egalitarian beliefs regarding gender roles experience less satisfaction in their marriages (Booth & Amato, 2001; Prasetya, 2010). It has been shown that couples with higher education tend to be egalitarian or non-traditional in their views and are more likely to attempt to divide tasks equally around the home and will nor avoid the conflict that arises
around this division (Dillaway). Findings from this study supported this view and the participant strongly refuted the possibility of a marriage being affected by the division of household labour. She expressed:

“No, can’t be upset by that. Why would you be upset?”

“No, you don’t get upset over that”

“No, this isn’t something you’d argue over and ruin your marriage”

“No, the fact that he ate and didn’t wash dishes has no effect on the marriage. He eats and leaves his dishes there. You must see the dirty dishes… see whether he ate and finished or not.

“And you clean up after him.”

Culture is a concept that is acknowledged universally. Its relevance to different phenomena may vary from society to society. What is acceptable in one society may likely be an abomination in another. This view derives from the fact that culture is an all-embracing concept as far as man is concerned; it encompasses every bit of man’s life and experience (Awoniyi, 2015). African scholars have consistently claimed that there have been, are and will continue to be widespread psychological and cultural themes and patterns that are unique to Africa’s residents. All the scholars surveyed believed that there are categories and processes of thought that are unique to Africa (Lassiter, 2000). African scholars also believed that the African way of organizing and cognitively engaging the world derives from a strongly restrictive indigenous sociocultural milieu. Lassiter believed that in the same way reference is made to the other cultural civilizations, it must be quite appropriate and legitimate to refer to a particular strand of mind that is peculiar to the culture. This particular thinking is evident in the statements made by the participant, making it clear that those types of cognitions allowed her to adapt quite well if not optimally to the situations her culture demanded of her and that she did not consider it a negative experience in anyway.
Lassiter (2000) postulated that Africans are linked by shared values that are fundamental features of African identify and culture. These were seen from interacting with the participant and included hospitality, friendliness, the consensus and common framework-seeking principle, Ubuntu, and the emphasis on community rather than on the individual. These features typically underpin the variations of African culture and identity everywhere.

The interpretive exposition and presentation of values generated by traditional African societies covers many aspects of the African cultural life. Although, it is important to note that talking about African cultural values does not by any means imply that there are no cultural disvalues or negative features of the African cultures. However, what is important is how the individual experiences these and whether they consider them as negative. This was not the case with the participant, as she strongly expressed in statements like “marriage is not a sacrifice,” “marriage is beneficial” etc. Marriage is positive in as far as it guarantees a modicum of social cohesion, social harmony and social mutual concern (Lassiter, 2000).

The other aspect that highlights marriage as a means of fulfilling cultural expectations and obligation is the communality of marriage i.e. individual needs being secondary to that of the larger group. The value that traditional African societies place on communalism is expressed in the sharing of a common social life, commitment to the social or common good of the community, appreciation of mutual obligations, caring for others, interdependence, and solidarity (Awoniyi, 2015). This has been a prominent characteristic in the client’s state of mind. Although she globally considered her marriage to be a satisfying one; one of the important measures of this was how her behaviour had reflected on others and how it impacted on them. She stated

“The home becomes dignified through you. Indeed, when you arrived there are people who didn’t come to the home, not so?”
“My husband’s family gains from my presence. You benefit the most because you arrived and did not destroy your new home.”

Although the claims of individuality are recognized, African ethic however, urges the avoidance of extreme individualism, which can be seen as potentially destructive of human values and of the whole meaning and essence of a human society (Awoniyi, 2015). The encouragement of avoiding any needs that might only serve the individual were shown in the views of the participant, such as focusing only on the spousal unit, sexual satisfaction and engaging in leisure activity with your husband. This can be gathered from the statements she made:

“*It is for the whole family, not just for you and your husband. Not just between you two because you are the two who married.*”

“That’s (sexual satisfaction) something insignificant, It does not build/strengthen the marriage, neither does it destroy/weaken it”.

“*Only now and then (frequency of sexual contact)*”

This is contrary to the literature findings that indicate sexual satisfaction is a significant aspect of marital satisfaction. Many studies investigating the relationship between sexual and marital satisfaction indicated that these two variables significantly predict each other (Basat, 2004). Literature indicates that low levels of sexual satisfaction promote marital instability and significantly increases the likelihood of divorce (Ashdown, Hackathorn & Clark, 2011; Yen et al., 2006). As can be seen from the above statement’s from the participant, this has not been the case in her marriage as personal needs are rendered less significant than the needs of the collective. Other instances or examples where the needs of the larger group override the needs of the individual have been seen in the earlier sections of this chapter. However, what must be brought to the attention of the reader is the affective evaluation or response of this principle by the participant. It might appear as though the individual matters less and this is
something negative but, because this is what “should be” done, the affective response is positive. The global view of marriage imposing no disadvantage is seen in the participant’s response when she said, “No. Marriage is not a compromise or loss, because you let people know of where you’ll be buried. Where will you go now? Even when you have children... I’m making an example, let’s say you have children. And you realized that marriage is a compromise and you leave, your children fetch you to come back. Is it not so? They remark that you are in the streets and fetch you. Where is the compromise/loss there?” This confirms the view that the degree of satisfaction may be enhanced by the extent to which it fulfils culturally determined standards and the participant confirmed this by saying, “You see it as an achievement, for you’ve put no one to shame. You’ve done what was expected of you.”

In evaluating the adequacy of their relationship, as postulated by the interdependence theory, the members of a dyad, or in this instance the group, need some kind of standard for gauging the acceptability of the outcomes they receive from it. As discussed in chapter three, two kinds of standards for making such an evaluation have been identified- the comparison level (CL) and the comparison level for alternatives (CL-alt).

Interdependence theory also posits that relationships involve the expectation of the kinds of outcomes a person expects to receive in a relationship (comparison level) and that these expectations are compared to a person’s past relationships and current observations of others’ relationships (Rodrigues, Hall, & Ficham, 2005). Satisfaction depends on expectation, which is shaped by prior experience (Griffin, 2008). A person will have a high comparison level if all the relationships that they have been exposed to are happy (Rodrigues, Hall, & Ficham, 2005). It is sensible then that if this is the culture of the society i.e. relationships the participant is exposed to are the same; her comparison level could have been enhanced. Essentially, the participant’s marriage worked out the way she knows all marriages to work, thus meeting her expectations or placing her global evaluation/outcome above her...
comparison level. Outcomes falling above CL are experienced as relatively satisfying and those below CL as unsatisfactory.

This is linked to the concept of quality of alternatives, which refers to the understanding of ‘alternatives’ one has outside of their current relationship (Wang, 2004). The CL-alt can be defined informally as the lowest level of outcomes a member will accept in the light of available alternative opportunities in other relationships. So defined, it follows that if outcomes drop below CL-alt the participant will leave the relationship. The location of CL-alt depends mainly on the quality of the most attractive of the alternative relationships readily available to the participant (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). What came out strongly in the interviews and is influenced by the culture to some degree, is the perception that there are no alternatives to staying in your marriage and enjoying it; that marriage is final. The participant expressed this as follows:

“Even if you die, your parents have no claim over you. If you are here in your home, your body will never be taken back home to be buried, never! Therefore, those who gain are these (in-laws), because your end is here”

“There is no other way. If you keep looking back, you’ve lost the plot. That is no longer a marriage. The person you keep looking back at – reminiscing of the time he was your partner – will someday just see that you still love him”

“You are focused on your marriage. You don’t even think about your old partner”

“No! There’s none of that (considering other options). Your attention is on your husband.”

To summarise, the total evaluation of how satisfying the relationship is depends on the expectation, whether that expectation is being met and the participant’s understanding of alternatives outside the relationship. As seen above, the participant’s expectations have been
met and there is absolutely no consideration of alternatives. If anything, there was absolute denial of their existence

5.1.3 Theme 2: The participant provided some lessons on dealing with issues that might arise in the marriage. Another theme that emerged in the interaction with the participant was on the lessons she provided on dealing with issues that might arise in a marriage. As seen from the overview of the first major theme, the participant had a very positive view of the marital experience and found very little fault with it; however, she did not deny the existence of challenges in the marital journey but rather shared ways in which these challenges could be understood and dealt with so as to maintain the global positive evaluation of the marriage itself. The sub-themes associated with this theme were: 1) Developing skills to deal with challenges in the relationship in a culturally acceptable manner, and 2) knowing that she has the responsibility of maintaining her husband’s dignity at all times.

5.1.3.1 Subtheme 1: Developing skills to deal with challenges in the relationship in a culturally acceptable manner. One of the lessons the participant offered was in dealing with challenges of the marital journey. She stressed the importance of developing skills or strategies for dealing with these challenges in a culturally appropriate way in order to keep the relationship intact and keep all parties involved happy. In all the interactions with the participant it was found that all behaviour is governed by the ultimate desire of preserving the marital union, thus these strategies are directed towards that outcome and are ultimately behaviours for the survival of the relationships and all the things that come through marriage as discussed under the first theme.

Broadly, a consistent finding in how to resolve challenges or deal with them included avoidance of conflict at all costs and, at most times, refraining from behaviour that might create a negative atmosphere between the dyad and the home. The participant had very strong
beliefs about this, strongly recommended it and found positive outcomes or advantages in these strategies. She offered insights as follows:

“Even if there was a misunderstanding at night, you must not see that we had a misunderstanding. Is that not understanding/peace?”

“When I wake up... I need to wake up feeling fresh. It must not show that we had a misunderstanding...”

“It doesn’t matter what had happened... you sweep the yard, make tea, and cook for people.”

“Yes... even if you’re sad, you don’t show your sadness.”

“Sadness must not show. If I have had a misunderstanding with my husband, I must wake up and not show we have had a misunderstanding. That way, there’ll be peace. Because my mother-in-law won’t see that I and her son had a misunderstanding in the evening. Instead, she’ll be under the impression that all is well. Then things will be well at home.”

The current research study suggests that the communality of African marriage is one of the factors that perpetuate this approach i.e. the awareness of marriage being more than just a dyadic unit, in addition to the desire to preserve the marriage. This was seen in the participant’s reasoning regarding the avoidance of fighting, which was to maintain peace within the family home and not hurt the family members by revealing that there is dysfunction in the spousal unit. She explained:

“No! Not just between my husband and I but to all... If it’s only between my husband and I, there’ll be misunderstanding/conflict, and people will see that my husband and I have had a misunderstanding. You can see understanding/peace; it spreads”
“To everyone, you spread it... because there must be peace in the home when he arrives. You understand?”

“Because the other thing that ruins marriage is making obvious/showing that you had a misunderstanding. The parents won’t like that, and it will pain them. You understand? They must not know.”

What this current research study found is that in addition to having the interests of the larger group at heart, the participant exercised this avoidant conflict resolution strategy to preserve her own dignity and that of her spouse. She appeared to attach a negative connotation to expressing discomfort with her own marriage and found it an embarrassment that threatened the peace in the family and the marriage itself, thus showing that this strategy is actually to protect the marriage and all those involved. She was also of the view that it is her responsibility to do this i.e. she’s merely doing what a wife should do. She elaborated on this as follows:

“Who am I embarrassing? My father-in-law must not know that that my husband and I are having misunderstandings. He must feel that, indeed, there is love between us.”

“Yes... there must always be a peaceful environment. Conflict usually destroys marriage.”

“If there’s conflict, you will persevere as the wife. That’s what it means to be the wife...”

The participant provided examples of what these some of these challenges could be by drawing from her own marital journey and continued to provide insights into how they can be faced successfully and appropriately. It is to be noted however that these are just a few examples and not the totality of challenges a marriage faces or that her marriage has faced. Some of these challenges included infidelity, ill communication, different personalities of
family members to mention but a few. The first example she made was facing the challenge of encountering different personalities of existing members in the marital home that may not necessarily be pleasant. Similarly to how she often resolved conflict, her approach of dealing with this challenge was typical of her views regarding conflict. She provided context:

“There are good people... There are rude people here when you arrive and you need... must be patient with them. They’re family...”

“There are different types... if my sister-in-law arrives; I must not be troubled by that no matter how much I may dislike her. I must seem pleasant.”

“I try my best. I am always trying not to be bothered. For if we can’t love each other in the family home, it is easy for us to divorce.”

“No, I must love them all.”

“No, you can’t have resentment about what happens in the home”

A second example she provided as one of the things that might be an issue in marriage is ill communication amongst spouses. She gave an example of this:

“It is when you point out to your husband the things that need to be done in the house and he says he has no money for that. Meanwhile, he gets paid but he spends the money elsewhere which is why he’s unable to spend money on the household. He has the money because he gets paid, but he spends it irresponsibly. He buys alcohol, etc... actually; it’s not even a matter of him coming back on a full stomach. He still expects me to cook.”

What was interesting though, is that it was irrelevant to the participant what the challenge was, the response to it was the same, and so was her belief in the effectiveness and positivity of the approach. There is ample research regarding the relationship between conflict
resolution styles and marital satisfaction. Thomas (1976) presents two dimensions of behavior in conflict situations, namely, assertiveness (the attempt to satisfy one’s own concerns) and cooperativeness (the attempt to satisfy the concerns of others). Under these two dimensions, five different conflict management styles are typically used by scholars, these are: 1) competing, which is behavior that both assertive and uncooperative. It is associated with forcing behavior and win-lose arguing. 2) Collaborating, which includes behavior is assertive and cooperative. It has been identified with confronting disagreements and problem solving to find solutions. 3) Compromising is intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. It is identified with the proposal of a middle ground. 4) Avoiding behavior is unassertive and uncooperative and is associated with withdrawal and failure to take a position in a conflict situation and 5) Accommodating which behavior is unassertive and cooperative; it is seen as an attempt to soothe the other person and seek harmony. Although scholars differ in the specific names of these styles, there is consensus regarding the behaviours (Crohan, 1992; De Kock, 1995; Gottman, 1993). The participant largely exercised accommodating and avoidant behaviours in conflict situations, as will be illustrated in this section. Even with the above example, when the husband fails to provide, as the wife, demonstrated behaviours to preserve her marriage and put the interests of the relationship first. Examples of how she dealt with this are found in these statements:

“No! He can’t not eat even if he hasn’t bought the food as he should have. You must nourish him so that he can be presentable amongst other people. He can’t be presentable on an empty stomach. Even if I’m going to pester him about the issue, I still have that duty to feed him.”

“He must be clean, and be fed. And come across whatever he comes across. When he comes back, you talk to him about how you don’t like how his money is all over the
place while the house needs to be built (developed) and there being things that need to be done. The aim is to better the home.”

“You continue… a man depends on his wife. Let me tell you that…”

“The husband just sees when things are done. As the wife, you seek to see certain things being done in the home. But, you won’t steal. However, you want it. You take from his money if he gives you the money. If he doesn’t give you money, you make alternative plans. You even sell what can be sold if needs be”

A final example that carried lessons from the participant on how to handle challenges in a marital journey is the challenge of infidelity. Typically, dealing with this challenge is no different according to the participant. The study found that the desires are still the same and the ultimate goal is to preserve the union and peace. Some research typically associates problem solving/collaboration as associated with satisfactory marriages (Rands, Levinger, & Mellinger, 1981; Schaap, Buunk, & Kerkstra, 1988). However, the participant’s preferred strategy and its advantage to peace of mind (marital satisfaction) was also supported by scholars who found avoidance strategies, to be associated with satisfied and non-distressed couples (Gottman, 1993; Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1988). As was recorded in earlier sections in this chapter, the participant has no consideration for or other alternatives other than keeping her household intact and her family peaceful. She offered lessons on how to approach situations of spousal infidelity:

“Speak with him in your bedroom (privately). If he walks out, keep quiet and he’ll come to his senses on his own.”

“There’s no issue with him. One day he’ll come back and stay with me again. That’s why you forget all his wrongdoings when he comes back”
"I focus on what’s here/the present because he’s here now. Just for the fact that he’s here now”

"Even if in January he goes back to same old tendencies, he’ll come back in December bearing many gifts. And I’ll say thanks.”

"It’s not that we don’t know what’s happening. We know. You shut your mouth…”

"You’ll ruin your marriage. You are trying to sustain your marriage by keeping quiet. If you talk to these things, you destroy it”.

The participant refuted the notion that this amounts to being oblivious to the dysfunction because she is not confronting the issues. She explained:

"No, he’ll give me inadequate responses (when confronted). He’ll ask why I’m asking.”

"I am waiting. Until he stops.”

When questioned about the belief that eventually this will go away without being confronted and addressed, she explained why silence on its own was effective in addressing the issue and said, “He wouldn’t (cheat again) if he has indeed disciplined himself. He only does it again if he hasn’t disciplined himself. He’ll see the expression in your face and know that you know about his affair(s)” To further show the inflexibility of this approach the participant added that, “He even comes back already telling you about another child he has elsewhere. You accept the child because it’s his, he will brief you. Because the child must live at the end of the day, you accept it.”

It came out very strongly that the lessons offered by the participant are inflexible and are not altered according to the weight of the challenge that might arise. Although she did not deny the existence of challenges, the approach to dealing with them was unchanging.
Research has suggested that individualistic cultures (e.g., United States) place an emphasis on values of individual achievement and personal freedom, whereas collectivistic cultures (e.g. Africa) value group success and harmony (Afolayan, 2004). From ethnic-comparative studies, we learn that adults in individualist cultures generally prefer confrontational strategies to resolve conflict, as compared to those in collectivistic cultures who generally prefer more passive strategies, such as avoiding conflict; (Pearson & Stephan, 1998; Rahim, 1983)

Despite the approach to dealing with unpleasant marital dynamics, the participant did express that these challenges are particularly salient at a certain time in a marriage. This view is supported by the literature in that marital satisfaction is not static over time (Kamp Dush, Taylor, & Kroeger, 2008). However, it must be noted that according to the participant the presence of these challenges doesn’t necessarily equal dissatisfaction as she considered marital satisfaction to be contentment and state of mind, which evidently remained unchanged for her amidst those challenges. She identified this phase of marriage where challenges are numerous as the “middle stage.”

It can be deduced from this that the beginning was not like that. The current research study utilised the life cycle stages of marriage proposed by Markey (2005) to map out the developmental trajectory of the participant’s marital journey. Markey proposed eight stages of the marriage life cycle namely, (i) childhood experience of marriage, (ii) adolescent and young adult experience of male/female relationship, (iii) leaving home and decision to marry, (iv) being newly married, (v) building marriage with young children, (vi) refocusing midlife marriage with adolescents, (vii) launching children and (viii) moving on, shaping later life marriage. However, for the relevance and scope of the current study, only the stages within a marital relationship will be utilised i.e. starting from being newly married to moving on and
shaping later life marriage. These stages and the developmental tasks that occur within each stage will be briefly discussed below.

The participant shared that before these “middle stage” things are good in a marriage and the initial phase is characterised by joy and pleasantness. She shared some things that characterise this time:

“The happiest time is when you are newlywed”

“Things are very nice in the beginning”

“You are called pet names and made to feel young/new”

“You are treated like an egg. Even when your home when you are back you are welcomed with warm arms because you were dearly missed and then you realise that indeed you are now a child of this family. Clearly, the love now overflows”

This is consistent with the findings from Markey’s fourth stage (being newly married). According to Markey (2005) forming a marital system requires that a couple renegotiate together multiple personal issues they have previously defined for themselves or that were defined differently in each of their families (Markey, 2005). During this stage, newlyweds are tasked with forming a marital system and re-aligning their relationships with extended family and friends (Markey). Irrespective of these systemic changes, literature suggests this stage is characterised by high levels of marital satisfaction (VanLaningham, Johnson & Amato, 2001).

The participant’s responses showed that things do not necessarily remain like that always, that there comes a time where things become difficult. However, the participant also added that there is an eventual upturn after this middle to this where things are good again. This further reinforces her belief that it is good to persevere. She revealed:

“There are challenges/disturbances after a while you’ve been in the marriage.

Concerning them – because you had sworn/vowed – you pay no mind to them.”
“Yes, but in the middle there becomes a problem, but if you persevere it goes away eventually.”

“In the middle you just don’t know why there are suddenly things that interfere between you and your husband. His exes become a threat in your marriage. But, you must stay put in the midst of that and not be shaken.”

As seen from the above statements, the participant attributed this bad middle stage to things such as previous lovers. She added other factors like different views in disciplining children that impact or perpetuate this difficult stage:

“Maybe the father doesn’t want one of the boys to be disciplined by the mother, whereas you treat all of the children the same way – you set no distinction between boy and girl. You expect every child to perform duties. You start arguing about whether the boys should grind mealies, for example. Whereas, the girls can also be expected to wash the clothes…”

She also added the childbearing period perpetuates this as it opens up opportunity for infidelity. Culturally, on average, children are weaned at about three years, and full sexual intercourse is forbidden between the couple until this stage is passed (Afolayan, 2004). This then can make this middle stage an extensive period if one has more than one child as in the case of the participant. She confirmed the literature finding:

“So, the child brings joy. We are both responsible for bringing the child into the world. It’s just that he now has the chance to cheat. Meanwhile, you’re breastfeeding and raising a child…”

What seemed to be significant to the participant and appeared to have helped with her peace of mind through all the challenges of this middle stage is the counsel she received from
her elders when she arrived at her marital home. It normalised these things and prepared her to some extent. She shared the following:

“In good times and in bad times. There are two things were spoken of. It’s the good, it’s the bad. You don’t know how the bad comes. When it comes you must remember that this this is the bad that was spoken of. “

“I wasn’t told how the bad times would come or what kind of bad it would be. When you go through bad times you realise that this is what you were told about”

“They (elders) don’t advise going home. You are told to bear all things—persevere. No matter what happens”

“You are relaxed. You thank them because they helped you. They forewarned you of things you will go through such as these……they prepared me so that when the challenges come I am already aware”

The participant considered this stage to be the middle stages that encompassed two of Markey’s (2005) stages namely stages five and six i.e. building marriage with young children and refocusing middle marriage with adolescents. Building a marriage with young children comes right after the “being newly married stage” where satisfaction was shown to be high. According to Markey (2005), shifting to the stage of raising children requires that a couple moves up a generation and becomes the caretakers of the younger generation, while continuing to build the strength of the marriage relationship (Markey, 2005). In balancing the system to include children, the couple has to renegotiate financial, household and childrearing tasks; they have to realign relationships with extended family to include parenting and grandparenting tasks with both families of origin (Markey, 2005). This time is seen as a significant transition in marital quality studies. There is a vast array of literature that suggests that the
birth of the first child is associated with a decline in marital quality (Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Lawrence, Cobb, Rothman, Rothman & Brandbury, 2008; Sanders, 2010; Twenge, Campbell & Foster, 2003; Wallace & Gotlib, 1990). The participant refuted the notion that parenting tasks are an additional role that takes up more time resulting in less attention to the spousal unit. She did not consider the additional roles to be a problem at all and said “you put your child on your back and go fetch water, that’s no problem” and “Everyone is your responsibility, mother, father, children....that’s why I say women are elephants”. However, as earlier stated, she did highlight this time as an opportunity for infidelity. Moreover, the task of realigning relationships with other members was seen as an additional benefit as it opened access to wider sources of support in terms of child rearing. She provided an example and said, “You can take the child home if needs be because there are women in the family.” Ample the studies indicate an initial decrease in marital satisfaction after the birth of the first child, although the speed and intensity of this decline in marital satisfaction varies from one study to another (Twenge, Campbell, and Foster, 2003; Sanders, 2010; Schram, 1979). The multiple adjustments to be negotiated in the relationship help explain why the marriage satisfaction rate drops significantly for parents with young children (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003). Having children both centres the marriage and changes the overall quality of the marriage. Couples spend more time and energy with the young children and have less time together as a couple (Markey, 2005). They often do not have time and energy for sexual affection and they have much more to argue about (Markey, 2005; Sanders, 2010). This dissatisfaction was found to further intensify as the children move towards adolescence.

The next stage in Markey’s (2005) life cycle stages of a marriage that can be placed within what the participant termed the middle stage is the sixth stage, which is called refocusing midlife marriage with adolescents. There was no distinct marker in the marital journey of the participant to mark the transition from the previous stage to this one. To her,
all these things (developmental tasks) happened in the middle phase. According to Markey (2005), conflict over child rearing could be especially salient when children are adolescents because of the psychological and social changes associated with the adolescent transition (Collins, 1990; Cui & Donnellan, 2009; Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006). We have seen the same in the life of the participant when she shared the disagreements around disciplining the children. However, some ambivalence was noted as the same stage was beneficial to some degree in terms of the children being old enough to help around the household and having people to talk to when she was distressed. For example, she said, “It’s good when there are children around because you even tell yourself that you now have people to protect yourself. Even if you are not getting along with your husband, you are able to sit with the children and have a good chuckle about things. And you forget you had a misunderstanding with their father.” This is then contrary to the literature finding that marital satisfaction has been said to be at its all-time low when children are adolescents and only begins to increase again as the children leave home (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993). The study found that the stages between being newly married and the launching of children were characterised by unpleasantness in general although the participant did not find this to be more pronounced at certain stages than others.

The participant was quick to include though that this difficult phase is temporary and there is an eventual upturn in the levels of happiness around old age. She explained:

“They leave as you grow older. They leave on their own. Eventually, peace is restored back to how it was as newly-weds.”

She further accounted for this eventual upturn:

“It’s because there are no longer any distractions. The children have grown, they’re old. No one leaves to go anywhere. We’re always together helping each other.”
“It’s ageing. He’s given up all, and now you just enjoy yourselves. He’s not thinking about anything, except to prepare for your deaths.”

“What makes old age great is that you know that your husband won’t have any business outside the home. It’s just us and we do whatever we want to do. We take care of the home now.”

The tasks in this phase, as related by the participant, are consistent with those proposed by Markey (2005) in her life cycle stages of a marriage, particularly in stages seven and eight. As stated earlier, there were no distinct markers of moving or transitioning from one stage to another in the marital journey of the participant, but rather a global view in the pattern of happiness levels i.e. high in the beginning, low in the middle and high again in later life. Nevertheless, inferences can be drawn from the stages as experienced by the participant even if they were not distinct and fragmented. According to Markey (2005), stage seven is characterised by launching children and moving on and is viewed by some as being characterised by loneliness (Liu & Guo, 2008), which the participant refuted and said, “No (it is not lonely), we chat, watch TV and laugh; which is enjoyable.” Those in support of the U-shaped association would view this as a time of greater marital quality as the participant confirmed (Chen, Campbell, Powers, Umberson & Williams, 2005; VanLaningham, Johnson & Amato, 2001).

Increased marital satisfaction after children have left home may be related to lessened role strain. That is, partners who no longer have children at home may engage in fewer roles and engage in those roles less intensely, freeing up time and energy that can be invested in the marriage (Gorchoff, John, & Helson, 2008). It is in this stage that a peak in marital satisfaction is observed following the decline experienced when raising children or the “middle stage” as reported by the participant. Stage eight of marriage i.e. shaping later life, is where the participant can be postulated to be. According to Markey (2005), the major
developmental task in this final stage of the marriage life cycle is to maintain and hopefully to build couple functioning and interest in the face of physiological decline and financial changes. Many of the cross-sectional studies noted previously have reported marital happiness, satisfaction or adjustment levels to be higher among couples in the later stages of the life cycle than among those in the middle stages (Kuderk, 1998; Peterson, 1990; Rhyne, 1981; VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). In this stage the participant reported being highly satisfied.

Broadly, the participant considered the avoidance of unpleasantness and conflict as an essential skill in dealing with challenges in marriage. She was not oblivious to the presence of challenges but was, however, unshaken in her ultimate desired outcome which was to preserve her marriage. To better understand this, it must be mentioned again that the participant defined satisfaction as contentment and state of mind. This approach suits her well as alternative strategies of dealing with challenges could threaten her peace of mind. She further encouraged this approach because of the nature of these challenges being temporary and therefore not worth being fought against as they will go away. She had no regrets over this approach and said, “How would you have seen how good it gets in the end (if you left)?” These findings support the general findings in literature that marriage follows a U-shaped pattern of marital happiness over the life course, with marital happiness and satisfaction declining in the early years of marriage and rising in the later years (Chen, Campbell, Powers, Umberson & Williams, 2005; VanLaningham, Johnson & Amato, 2001.)

5.1.3.2 Subtheme 2: Knowing that she has a responsibility of maintaining her husband’s dignity at all times. Another theme that emerged as part of the lessons offered by the participant was the knowledge or belief that she has a responsibility to maintain the dignity of her husband at all times. This awareness greatly affected the approach she used to deal with marital challenges as the ultimate goal was to ensure that her husband’s dignity was
not exposed and that it was her role to ensure that. She illustrated this by using an example of the husband misusing his finances and explained:

“He must be clean, and be fed. And come across whatever he comes across. When he comes back, you talk to him about how you don’t like how his money is all over the place while the house needs to be built (developed) and there being things that need to be done. The aim is to better the home.

This view was perpetuated by the belief that it is through the wife and her devotion that eventually such behaviours will subside. Additionally, it is to be noted that this was not considered strenuous or unpleasant by the participant, and even if some unpleasantness was experienced, her belief in the temporary nature of these challenges and the absolute correct way of dealing with them was unshakable. She elaborated:

“He’ll come right... you make him come right. He’ll become what he needs to be through you.

“Even if it’s not nice you must persevere. The one back home remembers the vow,

“Till death do us part,” and “ If that person is indeed your other half to whom you’ve devoted yourself and sacrificed everything for, you will survive”

In spite of the presence of challenges in a marriage, that might even appear to have disadvantaged the participant the most, the subjective experience of the participant is contrary. It was significant that she was merely fulfilling her duty and believes she has done it well. Additionally, she felt she essentially benefited as her husband’s lack of dignity would equate to her own lack of dignity and well. She illustrated this as follows:

“To hide his sins in whatever he does because his shame is yours. You’re the one who’ll be embarrassed when that side of him comes up. Now he’s hit me, now he’s done that... that’s embarrassing because he’s mistreating you. You must communicate with him to address his behaviour, or if that proves to be futile you can ask one of your sisters-in-law to
“Even if the husband is a riff-raff, you protect him/hide his waywardness. Protect him for the riff-raff he is. You defend him, that’s your responsibility.”

Thus; all the study found that indeed there is. I must hide his nakedness/weaknesses/waywardness.”

As already noted from the interdependence theory and the above-mentioned themes, one recognizes the impact their behaviour has on others and vice versa, therefore the dynamics affect all parties concerned. It has already been established that the participant defines marital satisfaction as contentment and held the perceived dignity offered by marriage in high regard; as such the responsibility to maintain her husband’s dignity is maintaining her own and essentially her contentment with her marital union.

5.2 CONCLUSION

This chapter gave an overview of the findings of a rural woman’s experience of marital satisfaction. A broad overview of two themes and several sub-themes emerged from the study to illustrate the phenomenon of marital satisfaction from the participant’s perspective. These findings were interlinked and not fragmented and should be understood as intertwined parts of her marital journey. Additionally, although these findings attempted to provide details regarding the participant’s marital experience, the exploratory nature of the study means these findings are not the totalities of her experiences and should be understood as such.

Throughout this discussion the findings were triangulated with the literature review and the theoretical framework of the study. Additional sources were consulted to substantiate these findings while pointing out gaps in the existing body of literature, and identifying similarities and idiosyncrasies.

Broadly, the participant conceptualised marital satisfaction as arising from one’s state of mind and identified it as contentment and total acceptance of where you find yourself in
the marital journey. Several factors such as culture and perceived benefits of marriage informed this view to varying extents. The participant had a very positive view about marriage in general and her own in particular. Despite this positive view, the participant was not oblivious to the non-static nature of the marital journey and acknowledged that there were challenges. Nevertheless these did not equate to dissatisfaction to her and she provided insightful ways of dealing with these challenges while preserving the marriage and maintaining the satisfaction thereof.

The following chapter will provide a summary of the conclusions of the study and its limitations and will offer recommendations for further studies, as informed by the findings of the current study.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter, the closing chapter of the study, provides the conclusions of the current study. A rural woman’s experience of marital satisfaction is summarised and used to formulate recommendations for the reader and for future research. Additionally, the limitations of the current study are reviewed and acknowledged.

Notably, a single subject case study cannot be generalised to the larger population, however noteworthy insights obtainable from the depth of information that was uncovered using the case study approach can be used to draw inferences that can be applied in the understanding of similar phenomena and research.

6.2 CONCLUSIONS

The following section briefly outlines the study’s findings, which have been summarised according to the main themes that emerged and the subthemes subsumed under those themes; and the methodological procedures followed to reach these findings.

6.2.1 Methodology summary. The current study utilised a qualitative research paradigm. Additionally, the phenomenological viewpoint was adopted to emphasise subjective experience and interpretation of the participant’s marital journey and the satisfaction experienced in it. Moreover, in the pursuance of meeting its primary aim, the study employed an exploratory-descriptive case study approach to capture the complexity of the phenomenon of marital satisfaction in the participant’s context.

The particular case was sought from a rural area of the researcher’s choice, in one of the district municipalities of the Eastern Cape (Intsika Yethu Municipality). The majority of
the Xhosa population resides in the Eastern Cape (SouthAfrica.Info, 2003). The inclusion criteria are: participant must be female, be Xhosa speaking and identify with the Xhosa culture; be married to one husband for a minimum period of 20 years, never divorced and reside in a Xhosa community (where the language of communication is Xhosa and members identify with the Xhosa culture). The 72 year old participant met all the stated criteria.

A purposive sampling procedure was used to select the specific participant who carried the characteristics that would purposefully inform understanding of marital satisfaction as experienced by a rural Xhosa woman, in order to arrive at the findings outlined in the previous chapter. A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted over a period of two weeks to obtain the data which was then analysed using Miles and Huberman’s (1994) content analysis as a framework for data analysis. Throughout the study, ethical principles pertaining to research were followed and the trustworthiness of the study was ensured using Guba’s (1981) model.

6.2.2 Summary of findings. The purpose of the study was to explore a rural woman’s experience of marital satisfaction. Through the abovementioned methodological procedure, the aim of the study was sufficiently met and the participant provided valuable insight into the understanding of the phenomenon of marital satisfaction in her personal context. A summary of the findings will be outlined in this section and will be presented according to the themes and subthemes that emerged. Broadly, the two main themes were 1) Marital satisfaction arises from one’s state of mind and 2) The participant provided some lessons on dealing with the issues that might arise in the marriage.

One of the themes that emerged in the study, with subthemes incorporated, hypothesised that marital satisfaction arises from one’s state of mind. This was synonymous with the view of marital satisfaction being a subjective evaluation of one’s marital experience
that is found in literature. Several factors were found to contribute to the experience of marital satisfaction. Firstly, marriage was found to offer a woman with dignity and status in the community through the stability and social validation it offers. This belief was found to be a significant contributor to the overall evaluation of the marital experience and the satisfaction experienced therein. Secondly, marriage was identified to be a source of support from both families associated with the spousal unit. Due to the communal nature of the participant’s context and life, this family refers to a wider web of affiliations than one might think, thus offering a greater source of support. This perceived support was found to have shaped the experience of marriage directly and indirectly. Additionally this support was found to enhance the experience of marital satisfaction. Thirdly, marriage was found to be a platform for a woman to display love and affection to her new family. The study found that the definition of love was fluid and complex, beyond the conventional definitions i.e. love incorporated servanthood, submission, respect and collectivism. This instrumental role undertaken by the woman was experienced as a means to an identity and value for the woman as they now played an invaluable role and were a significant addition to the family, further enhancing the overall subjective evaluation of marriage. Finally, marriage was found to be the fulfilment of cultural expectations/obligations. Culture may therefore be seen as a way of maintaining an identity in a dynamic world. Thus, satisfaction was found to be influenced by the extent the marriage or the spouse fulfils and meets cultural demands. It was clear from the findings of this current study that culture has a considerable impact on the way people live and understand their lives.

Another theme that emerged was the acknowledgement of the presence of challenges in a marital journey but what was salient was the way, considered to be effective by the participant, to deal with these challenges in a manner that does not threaten one’s subjective evaluation of the marital union. Broadly, a consistent finding in how to address challenges or
deal with them included avoidance of conflict at all costs and at most times, refraining from behaviour that might create a negative atmosphere between the dyad and the home. This was found to be significant and salient in the study and perceived positive outcomes or advantages of these strategies were identified.

Largely, the study found that emphasis was placed on the understanding that any behaviour a woman displays in a marriage reflects on both families and therefore should be in the best interest of the family. The study found that the communality of African marriage is one of the factors that perpetuate this approach i.e. the awareness of marriage being more than just a dyadic union, in addition to the desire to preserve the marriage. This was seen in that the ultimate desired outcome was to maintain peace within the family home and not hurt the family members by revealing that there is dysfunction in the spousal unit.

Furthermore, these challenges were considered and expected to be temporary thus not worth causing conflict over; to some degree they were considered typical. The challenges were also found to be salient at certain stages in the marriage. The study confirmed the literature findings of marital satisfaction following a U-shape trajectory i.e. starting high, gradually dropping and rising up again in later life. It is important to note that the study found that these variations in happiness and pleasantness were not directly linked to marital satisfaction and in this context these attributes were not associated with marital satisfaction by the participant. In addition the skills to deal with these challenges and their appropriateness were found to be culturally determined.

Finally, the study found that the above responsibilities were placed on the woman thus carrying them out was a fulfilment of a rightful role and therefore was not a threat to the marital union or marital satisfaction. It was noticeable that she considered she was merely fulfilling her duty and believes she has done it well. Additionally, she felt she essentially
benefited from observing these responsibilities/expectations, as any shortcomings of the marital union or her spouse would equate to her lack of dignity and shortcomings as a wife as well.

In summary, despite this positive view, the participant was not oblivious to the non-static nature of the marital journey and acknowledged challenges; nevertheless these did not equate to dissatisfaction to her as they were considered and expected to be temporary; and she provided insightful ways of dealing with these challenges while preserving the marriage and maintaining the satisfaction thereof. A positive view of marriage in general and specific to the participant’s own marriage was found and the participant considered herself to be generally satisfied in her marriage.

6.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Research limitations recognized in the process of producing the study are acknowledged in this section. Broadly, the limitations encountered were related to the context of the study, the chosen methodology and the researcher involvement and will briefly be discussed below. Noteworthy, the same factors yielded considerable advantage to the study but this section aims to serve as a caution for the reader to remain mindful and conscious of possible shortcomings when interpreting information provided in the study.

Firstly, what may be considered as a limitation is the methodological procedure undertaken in this current study. The study did not follow the marital union in all stages of the marriage as would have been possible if it was a longitudinal study therefore all information received from the participant regarding earlier times in the marriage was a retrospective recollection of those times. One might wonder then if how she feels about those dynamics now in old age is how she felt about them in their time of occurrence. Thus, the conclusion that couples in later life are more satisfied should be interpreted with caution as
this current study collected data from a woman currently in this stage of perceived satisfaction and reporting everything prior to that in hindsight.

Secondly, a marital union is a dyadic unit characterised by on-going interdependence between two individuals. Thus, the perceptions, behaviours and view may be affected directly and indirectly by those of the participant’s counterpart. This study completely excluded any involvement of the husband and how they may have shaped this outcome as the study specifically focused on a woman.

Additionally, singling out the woman only also meant the sample size was relatively small i.e one case. Although this was considered an instrumental resource and an advantage in this particular study, it does mean that the findings of the study are not generalizable to the wider population. Rather, transferability is the aim in qualitative studies such as this one; the particular context and specifics of the study have been outlined to allow for transferability for those who wish to use the study for similar phenomena in similar contexts.

Thirdly, the data collection of the study occurred in the context of a rural community. Due to the communal and cohesive nature of rural communities the researcher and participant’s meetings may have sparked the interest and curiosity of many, posing a threat to the principle of anonymity. The researcher took extra caution to protect the contents of the study and not include any information that would make the participant’s identity known.

Finally, researcher bias is a criticism of qualitative studies. Reflexivity and the subjectivity incorporated into it were considered strengths in this study as opposed to being a shortcoming. The identity of the researcher as a Xhosa woman from the same environment as the researcher aided great rapport and enabled certain information to surface that a different researcher without these traits may not have easily elicited. Undeniably, the study was influenced by my beliefs and identity which may be considered as a limitation to the credibility of the study, to address this Lincoln and Guba’s (1981) principles of
trustworthiness was adopted to help alleviate bias. Additionally, an independent coder was employed to verify the themes that emerged in the study.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study’s findings, avenues for future research emerged. Some of the outcomes for the current study yielded significant information that adds value to the existing body of literature; at the same time these outcomes provided impetus for further research to enhance this body of knowledge. This section provides recommendations and suggestions for future research.

- Firstly, as seen from the limitations of the study, the present study focused on a singular unit of the spousal unit (normally a dyadic unit) in exploring the phenomenon of marital satisfaction. It would be of great value to explore the complex concept of marital satisfaction from the perspective of both members of the dyadic unit and how their interaction shaped the overall marital experience for each concerned.

- Secondly, it cannot be conclusively decided from the present study whether marriages that are satisfying in old age are those that have always carried positive characteristics or whether the satisfaction seen is as a result of reduced or possibly forgotten conflicts. A longitudinal study exploring this phenomenon in this particular context would aid greater understanding of whether the eventual upturn in marital satisfaction is inevitable or more likely for some marriages than others.

- Thirdly, to enable effective cross-cultural discussion and understanding of the ways by which different societies live and understand their lives, the present researcher recommends and calls out to future researchers to guard against the
tendency of globalising and generalising concepts of research and professional disciplines adapted from one cultural perspective to members of all communities. Instead, the researcher recommends that scholars and professionals seek to identify how different cultures satisfy their needs and comprehend events of their lives. Moreover, it is recommended that scholars justly inspect and observe specific cultural behaviour patterns, values and norms within different cultural systems so that inferences can be made between that which is found to be universal and that which is culture specific. This will greatly aid in the formulation of effective interventions and services for particular subgroups in various phenomena, not just marriage.

- Fourthly, this study found that African marriage and family life can only be understood in the context of the kinship system of society and recommends that researchers incorporate this systemic approach in scholarly work and for professionals to intervene in a similar fashion. Finally, the present researcher was confronted with the scarcity of literature pertaining to the phenomenon under study in a South African context and more so in a rural Xhosa context. Further exploration in this context is strongly encouraged to address this gap in literature.

6.5 PERSONAL REFLECTIONS OF THE RESEARCHER

As the study was qualitative and phenomenological in nature, the research process inevitably involved and affected me as the researcher as well. As I reflect on the whole research and how it met its intended aims, reflections on how the research journey affected me as a person and vice versa and personal acumen also emerge.

Firstly, the journey of undertaking this study was filled with many ups and downs but overall the experience was extremely valuable to me as an academic and as a person.
Throughout the compilation of the study, I learnt valuable lessons about the phenomenon under enquiry and about myself as a person.

Conducting this research demanded so many different elements at different times and I feel extremely grateful to all who were of aid to me during this trying time.

As earlier stated, the research process had its highlights and challenges. One of the aspects that served as a highlight in my research study was the shared identity and background between me and the participant. To speak so deeply, openly to someone who had preserved a phenomenon I had observed all my life, while listening with an ear that had been informed with various knowledge from other sources as a result of my education was such a privilege. The interview process was so authentic with tremendous rapport that almost felt like second nature; and to be able to merge these two worlds together and produce something so informative was a magical privilege and reward to me as a person and scholar. Moreover, exploring the phenomenon of marital satisfaction taught me so much about the diversity of the phenomenon and exposed to me to the reality of how pervasive the impact of context is in understanding any aspect of an individual. Finally, it was truly honouring to be trusted by someone enough to share intimate and personal details of their lives so kindly and generously.

As rewarding as the experience was, I encountered several obstacles along the journey. The greatest challenge and cost of conducting this study was the amount of time and energy it demanded from me, inevitably resulting in spending less time with my loved ones or on activities of leisure and other aspects of my life. Additionally, I experienced tremendous frustration with producing the study within the obligatory time as it is a requirement governed by deadlines and obligations. Nevertheless, my unrelenting pursuance, patience and desire to
complete the study in due time is the reason I can now see the fruits of my perseverance and I truly honour myself for it in retrospect.

Having produced something so dear to me, learning so much in the process and realising that it is indeed my work and my contribution is a joyous and fulfilling feeling. In light of all the ups and downs experienced, the whole research process is a pleasant reflection.

6.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a summary of the findings deduced but the current study and the methodological procedure followed to reach those findings. Though the aim of the study was sufficiently met, some of the findings provided impetus for further research and the current chapter presented recommendations for such research. Furthermore the chapter highlighted the strengths and limitations of the present study and finally revealed the researcher’s reflections on the entire research journey and her personal leanings.
REFERENCES


Journal of Personality, 76(5).


Prasetya, B. (2010). *Correlation between Gender Role and Marital Satisfaction among Filipino Wives*. Satya Wacana Christian University


APPENDIX A: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH

Purpose of Research

We are asking you to take part in a research study because we are trying to learn more about older women’s perceptions on marital satisfaction (happiness levels in your marriage).

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study you will be expected to be part of an interview and answer a few questions about your marital life.

Risks

The research is not intended to harm you in any way. If at any stage you feel uncomfortable in any way, you can withdraw your participation. You do not have to explain your reasons.

Benefits

Your involvement in this study will help us to understand marital happiness among older rural Xhosa women, in that way, we will understand these women better and help them more effectively.
Alternative Procedures and Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is up to you. You can withdraw at any time, no form of punishment will be applied if you withdraw and you will not be asked to explain your reasons.

Confidentiality

All of your records about this research study will be kept locked up so no one else can see them. It will be ensured that your responses cannot be matched to you.

Person to Contact

You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn’t think of now, you can call me (Ziyanda: 0798122873) or ask me next time.

Consent

Signing my name at the bottom means that I agree to be in this study.

_____________________________________ __________________________
Date Signed.....................................................
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE/ AIDE MEMOIR

The initial interview/meeting is intended to be an introductory intake interview aimed and getting to know the participant and establishing rapport.

The interviews will be semi-structured and asked in an open ended fashion starting with the broad statement “I would like to see how a woman in the Xhosa culture is experiencing marriage..............” “Tell me about your marriage; let’s start from when you got married.”

Depending on the quality of responses, the following “headings” will be used as probing guidelines:

- The stages of marriage (discussed in proposal)
- Happier times in the marriage and perceived reasons
- Less happy times in the marriage and perceived reasons
- Perceptions of what makes a marriage satisfying or not

The semi-structured nature of interviews allows for adequate opportunity for the participant to bring up aspects they see as relevant that the researcher did not ask.
### APPENDIX C: LIFE-CYCLE STAGES OF MARRIAGE (MARKEY, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marriage Life Cycle Stage</th>
<th>Developmental Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Being Newly Married</strong></td>
<td>a. Formation of marital system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Transitioning from single to couple life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Realignment of relationships with extended families and friends to include spouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Adjustment of career decisions to married life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e. Dealing with changing issues of time, sex and money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Building Marriage with Young Children</strong></td>
<td>a. Adjusting marital system to make space for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Joining in childrearing, financial and household tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Realignment of relationships with extended family to include parenting and grandparenting roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Balancing marriage and career choices with parenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Refocusing Midlife Marriage with Adolescents</strong></td>
<td>a. Shift of parent child relationships to permit adolescents to move in and out of system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Refocus on midlife personal, marital and career issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Launching Children and Moving On | a. Renegotiation of marital system as dyad  
| | b. Development of adult to adult relationships  
| | between Grown children and their parents  
| | c. Realignment of relationships to include in-laws and grandchildren  
| | d. Dealing with disabilities and death of older extended family  
| Shaping Later Life Marriage | a. Maintaining couple functioning/interests in face of physiological decline and financial changes  
| | b. Renegotiate marriage partnership in retirement  
| | c. Life review and integration  
| | c. Beginning shift toward joint caring for older generation  