

**THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE PREPARE PROGRAM
ON MARRIAGES WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN
CONTEXT**

By

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**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree**

MSW

in the Department of Social Work and Criminology at the

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

SUPERVISOR: PROF. CE PRINSLOO

JUNE 2017

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Completing this dissertation was one of the greatest challenges I have ever faced, I accomplished it with the guidance and support of the following people who stood by me during a very difficult period in my life.

First and foremost, our Heavenly Father. There were days where continuing this dissertation seemed impossible. However, through prayer and faith, He helped me through it.

Secondly, to my dearest husband, Brendan Dunn. Thank you that you supported me in completing my dream and that you always believed in me. Thank you for your patience and for understanding how many hours were required to complete this dissertation. Thank you for loving me the way you do.

I would also like to thank my immediate family members and my extended family members for all their love, support and belief in me. I would especially like to thank my late mother, Elmien Herron, who passed away 2016-03-20 while I was in the process of writing my dissertation. Her passing delayed my progress as I struggled to come to terms with it but then I remembered that my Mom always believed in me and would often phone me and encourage me to complete this mammoth task that was my dissertation. I will always remember her.

I would like to thank Dr. David Olson and Life Innovations for giving me the permission, tools and materials to complete this study and contribute to the research field.

I would like to thank Pam Gillingham of family Life Centre for helping me obtain the research participants and liaising with Dr Olson.

I would like to thank Laura Noik and Sheila Fuhrman from Chevrah Kadisha for all their hard work in obtaining information about research participants, providing materials for the study and permitting use of the facility to conduct the research.

I thank all the research participants who volunteered for this study. It has contributed positively towards research. Thank you for welcoming me into your homes and sharing your intimate stories with me.

To save the best for last, I would like to sincerely thank my Supervisor, Professor Reineth Prinsloo. I got to know and build a relationship with Prof Prinsloo in my undergraduate studies of Social Work. Even upon graduating, I knew that the journey was not over and that sometime in the future we would meet again and I would have the honour of presenting a dissertation with her professional guidance and supervision. This dissertation has been a journey and she has held my hand every step of the way and for this, I am extremely grateful. She was there for me during the challenging times and the good times and thus, our bond has just grown stronger.

ABSTRACT

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE PREPARE PROGRAM ON MARRIAGES WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

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Marriages and intimate relationships have undergone significant changes over time. These changes have brought challenges, especially in the 21st century. The high rate of divorce is an indication that couples are not always prepared to deal with the challenges that marriage presents. Two worlds collide when a couple enter a relationship and it is how they negotiate these changes and challenges that determines the success of the marriage and the couples' marital satisfaction levels. Therefore, it is imperative that couples receive marriage preparation to assist them in negotiating the changes and challenges before embarking on the journey of marriage.

South Africa is a country characterised by diversity in terms of race, language, culture and class, to name but a few. Despite global impacts on marriages and families, such as legislation and the development of technology, these country-specific diversities heighten the challenges that couples experience in marriage and intimate relationships.

The PREPARE program is a widely-used marriage education program in South Africa. It uses a combination of assessment methods and skill building exercises to assist couples in preparing for marriage and improving their marital satisfaction levels. Many studies have been conducted on the PREPARE program internationally, but not in South Africa. As this program is widely used in this country, this study has explored the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context.

The research methodology used for this study was based on a mixed-methods research design. In the quantitative phase of this study, the couples' marital satisfaction levels were obtained using a standardised measuring instrument known as the Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS). As the PREPARE program is based on assessing the marital components of a relationship, a report is provided where couples are scored, based on positive couple agreement. The MSS scores are then compared to the initial scores as indicated in the PREPARE program. The purpose of this is to determine whether the PREPARE program has had an impact on couples' marital satisfaction levels, after being married for some time. The second phase of the research study, the qualitative phase, focuses on documenting the experiences of couples to determine how the PREPARE program has impacted on their marriages. A semi-structured interview was used for this purpose. To examine the effects of the PREPARE program in more depth, the researcher interviewed the counsellors/facilitators who administer the program, to ascertain their findings.

An in-depth literature study was done on the various components of marriage, as well as intervention in marriages, with specific focus on the PREPARE program as an intervention method. Comparative studies were conducted on the challenges and successes of the PREPARE program with the premise that these challenges may or may not be applicable within the South African context.

Using a mixed-methods research design, this study revealed that the PREPARE program does positively contribute to marriages of couples in South Africa too, after couples have been married for some time. It also has a positive effect on the counsellors administering the program. Several benefits of the program were identified by the participants. One of the major limitations of the study was that the research participants represented a homogenous population, and further research would therefore need to be conducted on other populations to yield generalised results. However, the data gathered from the counsellors/facilitators rendered insightful recommendations on how the program could be adapted to accommodate couples from diverse cultural and language backgrounds within the South African context.

The research question was answered in that the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages in South Africa was explored; although further research will

need to be done to conclude these findings. From the results of this study, conclusions were deduced, and recommendations made.

KEYWORDS

- **Marriage**
- **Marital satisfaction**
- **PREPARE program**
- **Marriage preparation**
- **Marriage education**
- **Marital therapy/counselling**
- **Marriage enrichment**

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Relationships endure challenges and changes within the broader global socio-economic context. Men and women have both entered the working environment to contest rising financial pressures, thus adding strain on the intimate relationship in terms of role changes, quality time with family and child rearing. The divorce rate of couples is on the increase, thereby altering the family structure to include single-parent households and re-married families. Couples are pursuing cohabitation in response to the high divorce statistics and the abundance of choices available to them (Craig, 2013). The diversity of possibilities has changed the dynamics in relationships, especially in South Africa with the development of the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 120 of 1998 and the Civil Unions Act 17 of 2006 (Hosegood, McGrath & Moultime, 2009:283). Craig (2013), Judelsohn (2013) and Rennie (2013) concur that couples are not always prepared to deal with the challenges in their relationships without proper preparation, a vital step in developing a successful marriage.

One of the widely used marital education programs presented in South Africa is the PREPARE program developed by the renowned Dr. David Olson, Professor Emeritus from the Department Family Social Science University in Minnesota, USA, where he taught for over 25 years. He is also the founder and CEO of Life Innovations, responsible for dispensing the PREPARE program. The program is widely used in South Africa but its contribution has not been explored within the country-specific context. This research study is specifically aimed at exploring the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages in Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa.

The following key concepts apply to the research study:

- **Marriage:** Williams, Sawyer and Wahlstrom (2006:12) define marriage as “a socially approved mating relationship ... consisting of five components: emotional, ceremonial, legal, sexual faithfulness and parenting”. Pierson and Thomas (2010:309) simplify marriage to mean “a socially acknowledged relationship or

union between two adults”. In the context of this research study, marriage is a legal union between two adults who share a commitment to a familial and economic bond.

- **Marital satisfaction:** Canel (2013:99) defines marital satisfaction as, “how couples feel about themselves and their spouses about their marriages in a subjective, situational and relatively constant manner”. Moreover, marital satisfaction refers “to whether a husband or wife sees their marriage as good” (Benokraitis, 2005:269). Within the context of this research study, marital satisfaction will be how everyone perceives his/her level of happiness in marriage over time.
- **PREPARE program:** The PREPARE program, is a leading international relationship skills-based inventory used to prepare couples for marriage and to enhance their existing marital relationship. On the PREPARE-ENRICH website (prepare-enrich, [Sa]) significant research has been done to ensure the validity and reliability of the program.
- **Marriage preparation:** Marriage preparation and marriage education, which are both skills-based approaches; usually focus on prevention, remediation and support and can be short term (Larson, 2004:421). Marriage preparation is short-term and skills-based, focusing on issues concerning communication, conflict resolution, sexual compatibility, finances, child rearing and extended family. The premise is that helping the couples discuss their roles and expectations before marriage, would prevent divorce (Howe, 2012:235).
- **Marriage education:** Compared to marital preparation, marriage education is more long-term as it focuses on the couple before the wedding and no therapy is involved (Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin & Fawcett, 2008:723; Larson, 2004:421; Murray & Murray, 2004:349). Couples who participate in marital education do not have major relationship issues; however, where there are serious issues, marital therapy should be sought (DeMaria, 2005:242). Marriage education is normally based on a curriculum that provides couples with skills to maintain their marital satisfaction levels (Dion, 2005:140; Ooms, 2005:1).
- **Marital therapy/counselling:** Couples experience stressful situations in their lives, which impact on their marriage. Couples’ therapy allows the couple to explore these issues in a safe emotional environment with the help of a neutral third party (Bradley & Furrow, 2013:277; Edwards, 2011:75). The therapist is usually trained

in a specific model which determines the length and content of the sessions. Such models include: solution-focused strategic therapy; emotionally focused therapy; cognitive behavioural therapy and psychodynamic therapy (Bradley & Furrow, 2013:277; Edwards, 2011:17). The following scenarios may not be helped through couples' therapy: when one or both partners are struggling with addiction; when one or both partners are violent towards each other; when one or both partners are having an affair, but do not wish to end the affair; and when one or both partners have unresolved mental health disorders (Bradley & Furrow, 2013:247-277).

- **Marriage enrichment:** Marriage enrichment is usually sought after some years of being married, where the couple feels they want to enrich their marriage. Enrichment can be conducted in a group setting or with the couple only during which the therapist helps the couples to evaluate their relationships and determine ways of enriching their marriages (Brown & Brown, 2002:189). It is also skills-based and focuses on providing on-going support for skills learnt (Brown & Brown, 2002:189).

More research needs to be conducted on marriage education programs in South Africa, specifically the PREPARE program. The researcher will now provide a brief literature overview on the changing nature of marriage as an institution.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Marriage as an institution is changing due to many factors. For many years, specific intervention methods have been developed by professionals to assist couples to prepare for it to decrease the rate of divorce world-wide (Howe, 2012:205). The following highlights some of these changes.

1.2.1 THE CHANGING NATURE OF MARRIAGE AS AN INSTITUTION

Marriage is no longer what it used to be. As an institution, it changed over the last half century in societies all over the world (Bath, 2010:1). Howe (2012:205) adds that marriage has become de-institutionalised. This means that in the past, measures would exist to determine why, how and when people would eventually marry; however, these social control measures used to influence how marriage was done have become

weaker and thus, marriage rates are declining (Howe, 2012:205). In contemporary marriages, people decide to marry once their “finances, education and maturity levels have stabilized” (Howe, 2012:205). In addition, weddings have become glamorous events indicative of status, wealth and personal achievements instead of focusing on the marriage (Howe, 2012:205).

Change in marriage and family patterns is due to developments in technology (cell phones, social media and online dating), law and social context (Isen & Stevenson, 2010:1). Benokraitis (2011:22-24) specifies broader factors which include economic forces, popular culture (including television and media); social movements (including the gay rights movement); and family policies (referring to global norms, laws and regulations regarding marriage, such as gender roles). Moreover, Benokraitis (2011:22) and Marano (2010:68) argue that the abundance of choices has led to the changed nature of marriage as an institution. People choose to pursue their careers and to get married later in life, or not to get married at all (Isen & Stevenson, 2010:1). Alternatively, some couples cohabit instead of getting married. This decision could be due to the fast pace of life today, immigration and the western ideal of individualisation, whereby an individual’s needs are considered more significant than those of the couple. (Judelsohn, 2013; Rennie, 2013). In addition, the introduction of legislation such as the Civil Unions Act 17 of 2006 and the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 120 of 1998 in South Africa, and other international gay rights movements, have altered traditional marriages and relationships. Same-sex marriages and customary marriages have the same recognition and rights as civil marriages in many parts of the world.

Because of all these changes, intervention strategies in dealing with couples have had to be adapted as well. The following section will now discuss intervention in marriages and intimate relationships.

1.2.2 INTERVENTION IN MARRIAGES AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Changes in marriage and intimate relationships have resulted in complications. There is a need to identify appropriate interventions to deal with these complications. Extensive research has been conducted into the phenomenon of marital preparation

and education over the last century internationally and locally (Barnacle & Abbott, 2009; Busby, Ivey, Harris & Ates, 2007; Fawcett, Hawkins, Blanchard & Carroll, 2010; Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty & Willoughby, 2004; Larson, 2004; McGeorge & Carlson, 2006; Murray & Murray, 2004). Existing programs include Facilitating Open Couple Communication (FOCCUS), Premarital Preparation and Relationship Enhancement (PREPARE); Relationship Evaluation (RELATE) and Preventative and Relationship Enhancement (PREP) (Bath, 2010:13; Wilmoth, 2006:25). Intervention and marriage education programs have been developed to assist couples with marriage and relationship problems.

One of them is the PREPARE program. It is known as the leading relationship inventory (Olson, Olson & Larson, 2012:2). Several studies have been done over the years on its validity and reliability (Fowers & Olson, 1986; Fowers & Olson, 1989; Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011). A more recent study indicated that out of eight Marriage Preparation Education Programs, PREPARE was ranked top (Childs, 2009: [Sa]). It aims to prepare the couple for marriage by making them aware of their strengths in their relationship and educating them on skills to enhance their marriage (Olson et al., 2012:2).

There is a difference between marriage education and marriage counselling. Marital education and premarital counselling share several similarities in that marital education is skills-based; used for prevention and remediation and support throughout the marriage and can be long-term (Larson, 2004:421). DeMaria (2005:242) adds that marriage education is appropriate for stable couples who suffer no discord. In other cases, marital therapy should be used as an intervention (DeMaria, 2005:242). Marital preparation differs in that it focuses on preparing the couple for marriage at the beginning without any therapy (Murray & Murray, 2004:349). Howe (2012:235) further elaborates that premarital counselling is short-term and skills-based focusing on issues concerning communication, conflict resolution, sexual compatibility, finances, child rearing and extended family. Furthermore, it necessitates couples discussing their goals and expectations before marriage to prevent divorce. However, despite the development of these interventions, the effectiveness of premarital education programs has been questioned (Barnacle & Abbott, 2009; Burgoyne, Reibstein, Edmunds & Routh, 2010; Busby et al., 2007; Fawcett et al., 2010; Hawkins et al., 2004;

McGeorge & Carlson, 2006). Larson (2004:422) believes that not many marriage education programs reviewed by researchers stipulate the effectiveness of the program on the marriage. Data validity is furthermore questionable because marital programs are voluntary (Burgoyne et al., 2010:292; Larson, 2004:421). Despite the development of marriage educational and preparation programs, their effectiveness remains an area for further research.

One of the reasons for not being able to measure the effectiveness of marriage education and preparation programs is because it is difficult to obtain such data. Insufficient research has been done on marriage patterns in South Africa due to the difficulties of collecting and interpreting the data (Budlender, Chokobane & Simelane, [Sa]:2). This is due to the diversity of cultures, languages, and religion and marriage forms in South Africa (Budlender et al., [Sa]:1). Craig (2013), Judelsohn (2013) and Rennie (2013) believe that the success rate of marriage preparation programs is unique as it depends on the couple's compatibility and no post-evaluation measures have been established to measure the success rate.

In research, few longitudinal studies have been conducted as it is difficult to obtain data. The researcher will now give a brief overview of the PREPARE program and what marital components are assessed as this is discussed in detail in chapter 3.

1.2.3 COMPONENTS OF THE PREPARE PROGRAM

Couples marry to develop a special relationship with a significant other. The various reasons why people get married include love and companionship; having children; personal fulfilment and permanence (Benokraitis, 2011:260-261). However, some people also get married for the wrong reasons such as social pressure; rebellion and for economic security (Benokraitis, 2011:260-261). The above-mentioned factors all affect the marital satisfaction of the couple throughout the lifespan of the marriage. When people get married, their lives go through drastic changes, including legal; personal, friendship changes; marital changes; parents and in-law changes and financial changes (Knox & Schacht, 2010:217-220). Judelsohn (2013) and Rennie (2013) agree that couples are not always prepared, without proper preparation, to deal with the changes that marriage will bring. Preparation is a vital step in developing a

successful marriage. Furthermore, Knox and Schacht (2010:234) state that marital success “is measured in terms of marital stability and marital happiness. Stability refers to how long the spouses have been married and how permanent they view their relationship, whereas marital happiness refers to more subjective aspects of the relationship” (Knox & Schacht, 2010:234). Although there are many positive and negative reasons as to why couples marry, proper preparation for marriage is essential as this determines the stability of the couple and thus, the marital success.

The PREPARE program offers materials to assist couples in readying for marriage. In the *Building a strong marriage workbook* (2008:3), the PREPARE Program is designed to assist couples to work together, strengthen their communication skills and share their goals. There are several aims of the PREPARE Program. To achieve them, there are exercises designed to help couples improve their relationship skills and encourage communication and planning for several topics (*Building a strong marriage workbook*, [2008:3]). The PREPARE website (prepare-enrich, [Sa]) states that the program assesses the following areas of a couple’s relationship in the form of a questionnaire: 12 Relationship Scales - communication, conflict resolution, roles, sexuality, finances, spiritual beliefs and more; 5 SCOPE Personality Scales; 4 Couple and Family Scales, based on the Circumplex Model; 4 Relationship Dynamic Scales and 30 Customized Scales.

The program helps couples to:

- Explore **strength and growth areas in their relationship**
- Strengthen **communication** skills
- Resolve **conflict** using the Ten Step Model
- Explore **family-of-origin** issues
- Discuss **financial** planning and budgeting
- Establish personal, couple and family **goals**

One aspect that is measured in the PREPARE program is the ability of the couple to handle conflict. No marriage is without conflict. It is inevitable in any relationship including marriage (Knox & Schacht, 2010:110). Benokraitis (2011:282-284) identifies that the common areas of conflict and disagreement in marriage include gender roles,

fidelity; sex; money; power; privacy; and children. However, good communication skills are prerequisite for successful marriages and relationships. Partners should be able to listen and share their deepest thoughts and feelings with their partners in clear, non-judgemental and non-punitive ways (Benokraitis, 2011:279). Ignoring issues in a marriage can lead to decreased marital satisfaction (Knox & Schacht, 2010:111). Gender roles and responsibilities such as household work can cause conflict in relationships if not properly negotiated (Benokraitis, 2011:283; Knox & Schacht, 2010:218). There are many areas for conflict in marriage; however, if partners listen to each other and use effective communication skills, their marital satisfaction may stay intact.

Another area for conflict includes the issue of fidelity in marriage. Fidelity is expected during marriage as it is a commitment. Therefore, when trust is broken, or extra-marital affairs occur, the possibility of divorce is high as it will impact negatively on the couple's marital satisfaction (Benokraitis, 2011:283; Knox & Schacht, 2010:14). Breaking trust and intimacy through practising infidelity leads to decreased marriage satisfaction.

Sex is another possible area of conflict for couples. The sexual relationship of a couple changes when they get married as intercourse may not happen as frequently as during the dating phase (Knox & Schacht, 2010:219). Benokraitis (2011:283) adds that women equate sex with emotional intimacy. Therefore, if partners do not have realistic expectations about how their sex lives will change, this may have a negative impact on the couples' marital satisfaction as partners may feel that their partners do not love them because they are not having sex as frequently as they used to.

Deciding on who has the upper hand in marriage will certainly lead to conflict. Power struggles can be a major source of conflict in the marriage, especially economic power (Benokraitis, 2011:282). Decisions regarding children, parenting, in-laws, household chores and friends need to be negotiated prior to marriage to avoid major sources of marital dissatisfaction. In some marriages, the exercise of power can be negative, including violence, manipulation; threat and disengagement (Benokraitis, 2011:282). Couples must work together to overcome power struggles in their marriages and it should not be abused in marriage.

One of the major reasons for marital conflict is money (Benokraitis, 2011:283; Knox & Schacht, 2010:219). In some relationships and marriages, one partner likes to spend while the other partner likes to save. A point of argument is the way in which the money should and should not be spent; this depends entirely upon the values of the couple (Benokraitis, 2011:283). Therefore, before marriage, the following questions must be answered and negotiated: who, when, where and how is the money going to be managed. This may lead to a decrease in marital dissatisfaction and possibly divorce, if couples do not agree.

Marriage and living together may result in the loss of privacy and time alone (Benokraitis, 2011:283; Knox & Schacht, 2010:219). Marriage partners need to learn to respect their partner's request for privacy and alone time. Some couples equate privacy with secrecy, but these elements should not be synonymous (Benokraitis, 2011:283). This may be an indication that the level of trust between the partners is low at the beginning of the marriage and can result over time, in diminished marital satisfaction levels.

Becoming a parent is daunting. Having children may be a source of conflict due to the added responsibility, and the couples' differing perceptions of how many children to have, how to discipline the children, timing of the children and child-rearing approaches (Benokraitis, 2011:283-284; Knox & Schacht, 2010:112). Furthermore, this has a direct impact on the family-in-law because of an increase in contact with the extended kin when children arrive (Knox & Schacht, 2010:219). The differing perceptions and the level of involvement of the family-in-law need to be discussed and agreed upon as they may have serious implications on the future of marital satisfaction if not agreed upon.

Positive qualities that couples need to have to ensure a successful marriage include (Benokraitis, 2011:268-270; Knox & Schacht, 2010:235):

- Compatibility (people who have similar social backgrounds: religion, ethnicity; common interests and education).
- Flexibility (accept each other and allow for compromise instead of wanting everything their way).

- Positive attitude (being good friends; having realistic expectations of marriage and having the emotional commitment to stay married).
- Conflict resolution (The ability to fight fairly without criticising and to solve problems without damaging the relationship).
- Emotional support (to accept each other without trying to change each other to offer emotional support).
- Trust.
- Religiosity.
- Forgiveness.

The PREPARE programme assesses these aspects. The researcher will now discuss the theoretical framework used for this study.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The understanding of a phenomenon is shaped around a theory. The theoretical framework applicable to the context of this research study is the Bioecological theory of Bronfenbrenner because people do not exist in isolation (Kunz, 2011:16). The premise of the Bioecological theory is based on studying human behaviour within multiple interactive systems, namely the Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem and Chronosystem (Kunz, 2011:16; Neal & Neal, 2013:725). Human development is determined by the interaction of the multiple interactive systems around it including the family, community and larger ¹societal norms and values (Bindler, Butkus, Goetz, Power, Steele & Ullrich-French, 2012:14; Neal & Neal, 2013:722). The PREPARE Program and Marital satisfaction scale which will be used in this study are designed to assess the multi-faceted nature of couple relationships including: personality; the couple's dynamics in the family-of-origin and friends. All this impacts on marital satisfaction of the couple (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:1). In Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory, this is referred to as the Microsystem.

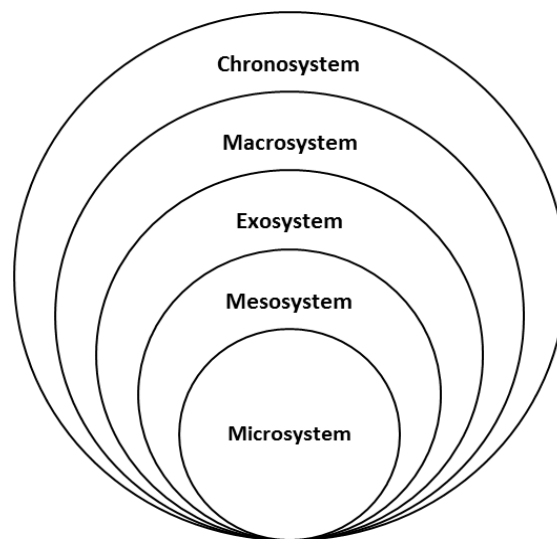
¹ The researcher acknowledges that there are various terms for Bronfenbrenner's theory, which includes: the Bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005a:3; Lerner, 2005:xiii); Bioecological model (Lerner, 2005:xiv; Kulik & Rayyan, 2006:458); and Bioecological PPCT (Bronfenbrenner, 1973:70-85; Tudge et al., 2016:427) theory that are used interchangeably; however, for the purpose of this research, the term Bioecological theory will be used.

Couples do not exist in isolation; they interact with other people in their worlds. The Mesosystem may be described as the interactional relationship between two key areas of the individual's surroundings (Neal & Neal, 2013:725). For example, a positive relationship between one marital partner and his/her in-laws may foster positive changes in marital satisfaction. The relationship that a spouse may have between social friends and his/her spouse may also significantly impact on how the marriage partner perceives the marriage. For example, if a partner constantly socialises with his or her friends to the exclusion of his/her spouse due to differences in marriage expectations, it is likely that the partner will develop resentment towards the other partner and this may lead to marital conflict and in turn, less marital satisfaction.

In the Exosystem, extended family members, in-laws and employment factors may affect couples' marital satisfaction (Neal & Neal, 2013:275). The individual does not actively participate in the Exosystem; however, it impacts on the individual nonetheless (Neal & Neal, 2013:275). Today, cross-cultural marriages are accepted because of policy implementation. The individual does not directly participate in the development of the said policies; however, the policy still has an impact on the individual's life. The culture and sub, community influences, religious views and beliefs of the couple may affect the couple's marital satisfaction. Same-sex marriages and cultural marriages have been given legal status. Therefore, legislation has a significant impact on the marriage satisfaction of couples. This is known as the Macrosystem (Benokraitis, 2011:35; Swick & Williams, 2006:371-373). This research study explored the influence of these interactive systems on marriages and intimate relationships within the South African context.

Everything has an element of time attached to it, including relationships. The Chronosystem refers to the history of the development of the relationships as each couple has come from a different background and family-of-origin and this may impact on the marital satisfaction (Benokraitis, 2011:35; Swick & Williams, 2006:371-373). This research study explored how the Chronosystem impacts on marriage and intimate relationships within the South African context and will be discussed in detail in chapter 3.

FIGURE 1: THE BIOECOLOGICAL THEORY OF BRONFENBRENNER



(Adapted from Kunz, 2011:16)

Following the discussion of the theoretical framework; the rationale and problem statement will now be discussed.

1.4 RATIONALE AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The researcher, who is a social worker by profession, attended the PREPARE Course facilitated by Family Life Centre in Johannesburg, South Africa in April 2013. It was found that the Centre had intentions to explore the contribution of the program; however, it had neither the work force nor the time to pursue such an endeavour. South Africa is a country that can be described as an epitome of diversity in terms of race, culture, language and marriage forms. It was valuable to determine whether the PREPARE program of North American origin addressed the needs of South African couples based on the dynamics of South African relationships.

South African statistical data indicates that a high percentage of divorces occur among couples who were married between five and nine years, closely followed by marriages that lasted less than five years (Statistical release Marriage and Divorces 2014). Marital satisfaction is usually at its highest between two and three years of marriage, before child rearing begins (Benokraitis, 2011:276; Swick & Williams, 2006:213). Fawcett et al. (2010:235) and Burgoyne et al. (2010:398) recommend that research should be done after the “honeymoon” period, as this would give a more accurate

representation of the quality of the marriage. Zimmerman and Easterlin (2006:514) discuss the honeymoon effect as that stage where the couple experience elevated levels of satisfaction during the first year of marriage and the year thereafter. Hence, this research was conducted at a stage in the couples' lives where the researcher measured the couples' levels of marital satisfaction realistically.

To obtain realistic results, the research question formulated for the study was: "What is the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context?"

With the rationale and problem statement discussed; the researcher will now discuss the goal and objectives of the study.

1.5 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of this study was to explore the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context.

Its goal was to be achieved through the following objectives:

- Contextualising modern marriage and intervention strategies for marriage and intimate relationships.
- Exploring and discussing the components of marital relationships within the Bioecological theory.
- Exploring and discussing the content of the PREPARE program related to the unique and diverse South African circumstances.
- Identifying couples' levels of marital satisfaction against their initial PREPARE program scores.
- Exploring the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context.
- Drawing conclusions and making recommendations to the service providers of the PREPARE program about the contribution of the program on marriages within the South African context.

With the goals and objectives of this study stated, the researcher will now discuss the research approach.

1.6 RESEARCH APPROACH

The research approach in this study was a mixed-methods approach, which was most appropriate for this study as it entailed collecting, analysing and interpreting both quantitative and qualitative data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied; rather than using the qualitative and quantitative approaches separately (Creswell & Clark, 2011:5). This study was conducted in two phases. The first approach was quantitative. The objective of this was to determine the relationship between the independent variable (PREPARE Program) and the dependent variable (marital satisfaction of couples). In the quantitative phase, a Marital Satisfaction Scale was used as a measuring instrument to determine the level of marital satisfaction of the respondents who participated in the PREPARE program and who had been married for a few years.

The mixed-methods approach has many benefits and advantages for the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena being studied by asking both confirmatory and exploratory questions (Lund, 2012:157). Therefore, the quantitative method was used to test whether the marital satisfaction of couples, a few years after marriage, improved or not and this was further explored via the qualitative method, as to how the PREPARE program contributed towards couples' marriage.

The premise of qualitative research is to study the meaning that individuals attribute to a social problem or phenomenon and is usually studied in a natural setting (Creswell, 2007:37). In the quantitative phase, couples completed the Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS) and received their results. Thereafter, couples participated in joint semi-structured interviews. To add to the data and for comprehensive results, this study included exploring the contribution of the PREPARE program, from the viewpoint of the counsellors/facilitators administering the program. Semi-structured interviews were used to further probe the individual experiences and views of couples and counsellors/ facilitators on how the PREPARE Program contributed towards marriage.

The researcher discussed the research approach; the following section will discuss the type of research that was conducted for this study.

1.7 TYPE OF RESEARCH

The type of research applicable to this study was exploratory research as it served to explore the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages in a South African context (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95). Exploratory research is used to gain insight into a new phenomenon or to develop a hypothesis and answers a “what” question (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95). As the PREPARE program had never been explored in South Africa, exploratory research was fitting for this particular purpose. Furthermore, research on the contribution of the PREPARE program, on marriages in a South African context, from the perspective of the counsellors had never been done and hence the use of exploratory research. Furthermore, the research can also be categorised as applied research (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:94; Haight, 2010:102) as the findings and recommendations may directly impact on the program in practice.

The research design will be discussed next.

1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN

A mixed-method research design was used; more specifically, a triangulation-mixed-methods-design. The one-phased nature of the design was used to substantiate and validate the results achieved using different methods (Delpont & Fouché, 2011:442; Hesse-Biber, 2012:137; Torrance, 2012:111). Further, Torrance (2012:114) claims that an advantage of using this approach is to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied, by gathering two perspectives.

In the quantitative phase, the one-shot pre-experimental case study design was used as the aim of this study was to determine how the independent variable (PREPARE Program) impacts on the dependent variable (marital satisfaction) and was only used once to determine if the desired effect of the PREPARE Program was achieved. Fouché, Delpont and De Vos (2011:145) as well as Wang and Morgan (2010:1082) suggest that pre-experimental designs need to be followed up with controlled studies,

as data collected as an after-effect, may have other plausible explanations for the outcome. Additionally, Wang and Morgan (2010:1082) criticise the design as weak because there is no comparison group, threatening the internal validity. Reliability of the data needs to be confirmed to ensure the precision of measurement instruments over time (Gushta & Rupp, 2010:1237). The PREPARE Program and Enrich Marital Satisfaction Scale have been given considerably high ratings in terms of validity of data collections and reliability of the research instruments.

For the qualitative phase, the researcher did semi-structured interviews with the couples. The experience of how the PREPARE program contributed to the couples' marriages was unique for each couple, and by extension, each partner. As an extension to the qualitative part of the research, a unique perspective was offered by counsellors/ facilitators, who administer it, on its contribution towards marriage. The goal of this study was to identify collective themes that the South African couples and counsellors/ facilitators experienced. A collective case study design was therefore the most appropriate as it was used to collect thorough information from a variety of participants' view points (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:316; Ramirez, 2013:94).

Now that the researcher discussed the research design, the following section will discuss the research methods that were used in this study.

1.9 RESEARCH METHODS

The researcher approached Family Life Centre, and the Chevrah Kadisha organisation in Johannesburg to recruit participants for the project. No participants could be recruited through the Family Life Centre as there was little interest expressed in the project. However, at the Chevrah Kadisha, five couples expressed interest and were recruited through the snowball sampling method. Recruitment criteria included: first marriage and couples who have or do not have children. During the recruitment phase of the couples, it was suggested, to gather a comprehensive view of the contribution of the program, that the viewpoints of the counsellors/ facilitators who administer it, be collected. Seven counsellors/ facilitators, were recruited, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context, not only from married couples' perspectives but from PREPARE

facilitators as well. Despite the concern for small sample sizes, research indicates that having a small sample size is of no real concern, especially where the participants' responses address the research question sufficiently (Mason, 2007:134). It is not the size of the sample that is important but rather the reason for the inquiry, especially in the case where in-depth subjective information and perceptions are gathered (Patton, 2002:44). This was the purpose of this research, to understand in-depth, the perceptions of the couples and counsellors with regards to the contribution of the PREPARE Program on marriages in South Africa and not just to generalise information with respect to the wider population (Creswell, 2013:157; Yin, 2009:15 & Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006:61). As the experiences of research participants are subjective, the data gathered may therefore have many variations and Thorne (2008:98) discourages qualitative researchers to rely on the "theoretical saturation or redundancy" to rationalise the size of their sample.

The couples who participated in the PREPARE program were asked permission to peruse the scores they received for the various marital components on the PREPARE report. The researcher obtained permission from Dr. Olson to make use of the Marital Satisfaction Scale to measure the couples' current marital satisfaction levels and compare them to the initial PREPARE scores. The researcher then conducted semi-structured interviews which allowed the couples to elaborate on their experiences of the PREPARE program. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with the counsellors/ facilitators to gain their perspectives.

Once the interviews had been completed, the researcher transcribed the documentation. The completed transcriptions were then forwarded to the participants for verification (Lietz, Langer & Furman, 2006:447; Torrance, 2012:114). The data was thereafter analysed and categorised according to the relevant themes.

In this section, the study populations and sampling methods; data collection and data analysis process and the pilot study were discussed. The researcher will now present the chapter outline of this dissertation.

1.10 CHAPTER OUTLINE

This research report consists of the following:

TABLE 1: CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter	Description
Chapter 1: Introduction to research study	The problem statement, goal and objectives of the study as well as the research statement are discussed. In addition, this chapter discusses the extent of the problem and the rationale for the research. It gives a detailed overview of the chapter outline for this dissertation. The limitations of the study are also discussed.
Chapter 2: A Bioecological theory perspective of marriages and intimate relationships	The Bioecological theory is discussed in this chapter to contextualise how global factors such as Microsystems, Mesosystems, Exosystems, Macrosystems and Chronosystems impact on marriage and intimate relationships. A brief introduction is given to the different systems as indicated in the Bioecological theory of Bronfenbrenner for further understanding. However, this chapter specifically focuses on explaining how the Microsystem and Chronosystem impact on marriage and intimate relationships. The other systems are discussed in detail in Chapter 4, as these cover marital components and are extensive.
Chapter 3: Intervention in marriages and intimate relationships.	The purpose of this chapter is to explore in-depth, existing literature pertaining to marriage and couples' education. The chapter begins with providing history of marriage education and differentiating between the various intervention methods for marriage and intimate relationships. The PREPARE program is introduced and an in-depth literature review is conducted. A literature study is conducted on the effectiveness of marriage education programs from a global and South African perspective.
Chapter 4: Components of marriages and intimate relationships	An in-depth literature study is conducted on all the marital components impacting on marriage and intimate relationships that exist within the Microsystem,

according to the PREPARE marital education program	Mesosystem and Exosystem according to the Bioecological theory of Bronfenbrenner. This chapter indicates how PREPARE assesses these components and assists the couple in developing a strengths-based relationship. Some of these components include: Communication, conflict handling, sexuality and affection, spirituality, family-of-origin, partner styles and habits, financial management; leisure activities; children and parenting; couple closeness and flexibility and relationship roles.
Chapter 5: Empirical research	This chapter discusses whether the goals and objectives of this study were achieved and gives for variations. The chapter also evaluates the research methodology used in this study, including sampling, sampling methods and data collection methods used in the triangulation- mixed-methods research design. The findings of the study are presented in themes and sub-themes.
Chapter 6: Conclusions and recommendations	This chapter presents key findings, the conclusions from the study and discusses recommendations for future research and practice in the field.

Now that the chapter outline of this dissertation has been tabled, the researcher will discuss the limitations of the study.

1.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The following were identified as limitations of this study:

- The sample size of the research population was small, as couples expressed very little interest in participating in the study. However, the information that was gathered, provided rich data as it explored participants individual experiences.
- The sample size of the counsellors/ facilitators was also small and homogenous. However, the information that was gathered, provided rich data as it explored participants individual experiences.
- The population that was studied is homogenous in that all participants were Jewish, White, well-educated and were middle to upper class earners.

- Some of the information on the couples' results in the initial PREPARE scores were difficult to source as they were not located in the archives and had to be requested from Life Innovations in America. This delayed the researcher quite significantly in the empirical chapter. But the researcher nevertheless managed to get all the pertinent information for this study.
- It was difficult to measure factors impacting on marriage relating to the South African context as the married couples belonged to similar cultural, religious and racial backgrounds.
- The researcher was disadvantaged because she had not been trained in the latest version of the PREPARE program. Her knowledge was based on the previous version.
- The counsellors/facilitators were also newly acquainted with the latest version of the PREPARE program which may have impacted on their responses regarding the latest program.
- During some of the interviews, the recorder did not record properly. Therefore, the researcher had to call back the participants to re-record the interviews. This led to a loss of some significant information as the second interview was a summary of what was previously discussed in the first interview that was not recorded.

1.12 SUMMARY

The introduction of this chapter reveals that marriage and intimate relationships in general are very complex and that marriage as an institution is continuously changing. South Africa is a country that may be categorised by diversity in terms of race, culture, religion and sexual orientation. These diverse factors significantly impact on marriages and intimate relationships. Research indicates that couples are not always prepared to deal with the challenges and changes where marriage is concerned, especially if there are serious differences in the couple's relationship and therefore, marriage preparation is so vital.

The PREPARE program is a widely-used marriage education program that was established in America. Studies have been conducted on its contribution in other

countries but not in South Africa. This study is aimed at exploring its contribution on marriages within the South African context, taking into consideration the diversity that exists in the country.

The brief literature review focused on the changing nature of marriage to better contextualise the modern-day challenges that couples are facing as well as the intervention methods available for marriage and intimate relationships. This chapter also briefly introduced the PREPARE program and discussed the various marital components that the program assesses.

The theoretical framework, based on the the Bioecological theory of Bronfenbrenner, is introduced in this chapter to contextualise the dynamics that exist in marriage and intimate relationships. The rationale and problem statement of the study is explained. The goal and objectives of the study are clearly defined in this chapter as well as the type of research, research approach and research design that is used in this study. Chapter 5, the empirical chapter, expands on the research methodology and findings of this study. The next chapter will focus on the theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 2

A BIOECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE OF MARRIAGE AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As indicated in Chapter 1, the PREPARE program is a tool that assesses the multi-faceted aspects of marriages and intimate relationships. One theory that can be used to understand the multi-faceted aspects of marriages and intimate relationships is the Bioecological theory. The premise of this is studying human behaviour within multiple interactive systems, namely the Microsystem (home and school environment); the Mesosystem (the relationship between the Microsystems); the Exosystem (societal factor, e.g. influence of work on marriage) and the Macrosystem (which includes cultural, economic and political aspects) (Arnett, 2016:25; Bronfenbrenner, 2005c:80; Kunz, 2011:16; Kulik & Rayyan, 2006:458; Neal & Neal, 2013:725). Couples exist within different systems and there is an influential reciprocal relationship between the individual and the environment (Arnett, 2016:25; Bronfenbrenner, 2005c:80; Kunz, 2011:16; Kulik & Rayyan, 2006:458; Neal & Neal, 2013:725).

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory will be used as a comprehensive theoretical framework to briefly analyse which factors in an individual's life and his or her surroundings, have a significant impact on marriage and intimate relationships. The individual is continually interacting and adapting to other people, information, and other contexts that impact on the individual's life (Boon, Cottrell, King, Stevenson & Millar, 2012:389). A premarital preparation program teaches the individuals to become a couple, new ways of interacting with each other and skills to ensure a healthy marriage even in difficult times. In this study, the researcher investigates how a premarital preparation program, PREPARE, impacts on marriages within the South African context.

This chapter will specifically focus on the impact of the Macrosystem and Chronosystem on marriage and intimate relationships. A literature review will be conducted on marriage and intimate relationships through the lens of gender, race, class, media, legislation and culture. Chapter 4 will specifically focus on the impact of

the Microsystem, Mesosystem and Exosystem on marriage and intimate relationships as marital and relationship components.

A discussion of the theoretical framework follows in the next section.

2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE BIOECOLOGICAL THEORY

Individuals are constantly interacting with their environments and the systems around them. This bi-directional influence (Kulik & Rayyan, 2006:458; Martorell, Papalia & Feldman, 2014:37; Rosa & Tudge, 2013:243) results in continuous change.

The renowned and respected developmental psychologist, Professor Urie Bronfenbrenner, was committed to understanding human development and had a vision to improve it. According to Lerner (2005:ix) contemporary human development is “characterised by a commitment to the understanding of the dynamic relationships between the developing individual and integrated, multilevel ecology of human development”. Bronfenbrenner (2005a:3) further defines development as “the phenomenon of continuity and change in the biopsychological characteristics of human beings both as individuals and as groups. The phenomenon extends over the life course across successive generations and through historical time, both past and present”. The initial ecological model focused specifically on the context in which the individual exists in and the interaction between the two (Rosa & Tudge, 2013:244).

The first phase of Bronfenbrenner’s theory (1970-1979) was primarily focused on describing the different systems of influence namely the Microsystem; Mesosystem; Exosystem and the Macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005c:80; Rosa & Tudge, 2013:244). It was during this stage that he showed a keen interest in the development of the adolescent by studying the parent-adolescent relationship (Rosa & Tudge, 2013:245).

The initial studies of human development were extremely experimental and bound by laboratory observations (Lerner, 2005:x; Rosa & Tudge, 2013:245). Bronfenbrenner identified that studying children in a laboratory setting was limiting and proposed that they should be studied in their own environments, such as their home and school

settings. (Lerner, 2005:x; Rosa & Tudge, 2013:244). He paid particular attention to what he termed, “ecological transition”, which encompasses the normative changes in roles and environments that take place in an individual’s life over time and which are not limited to one system (Rosa & Tudge, 2013:247). He also highlighted that a researcher’s own involvement in ecological research has an impact on the subject being studied and termed this “second-order effects” and “third/higher-order effects” (Rosa & Tudge, 2013:247).

In 1974, politicians started demanding social policies on children, adolescents and families and as a result, Bronfenbrenner started to look at how social policy interchangeably impacted on human development and stressed that “engagement in social policy not only enhances developmental research but also augments understanding of key theoretical issues pertinent to the nature of person-context relations” (Lerner, 2005:xii; Rosa & Tudge, 2013:245). Bronfenbrenner (1973:28) stressed that the importance of being knowledgeable about the ecology of human development was a prerequisite “for the design of programs intended to foster the child’s cognitive emotional or social growth” (Bronfenbrenner, 1973:28).

In 1977, Bronfenbrenner stated that human development occurs within “interrelated ecological levels, conceived as nested systems” (Lerner, 2005:xiii). As noted in Anderson, Sabatelli and Kosutic (2013:132); Arnett (2016:25); Boon et al. (2012:390); Kulik and Rayyan (2006:458); Lerner (2005:xiii); Martorell et al. (2014:37); Neal and Neal (2013:722); Paat (2013:355); Smith, Cowie and Blades (2011:2), these systems are known as: the Microsystem (the setting within which the individual is behaving at a given moment in his or her life (e.g. social clubs, school, family, friends); the Mesosystem (set of Microsystems constituting the individual’s developmental niche within a given period of development e.g. teacher-parent; parents-neighbour interactions); the Exosystem (composed of contexts that while not directly involving the developing person, have an influence on the person’s behaviour and development, e.g. a mother’s work environment indirectly affects a child as the work environment of the mother impacts on her emotional state and behaviour which impacts on the quality of the mother-child relationship; and the Macrosystem (superordinate level of the ecology of human development; it is the level involving culture, macro institutions and

public policy e.g. the larger areas of influence including cultural values, customs and laws and has cascading effects on all levels of interaction).

The second phase of the development of Bronfenbrenner's theory took place between 1983 and 1993 (Rosa & Tudge, 2013:248). He critiqued his previous work and renounced some of the theories previously developed (Rosa & Tudge, 2013:248). The focus then shifted from the role the individual plays in his/her own development to the processes of development, emphasising the influence of time (Rosa & Tudge, 2013:248). During this time, Bronfenbrenner formulated a research paradigm that was used for studying human behaviour through the ages. This was the Person-Process-Context model (Bronfenbrenner, 1973:70-85; Rosa & Tudge, 2013:248; Tudge, Payir, Mercon-Vargas, Cao, Liang, Li & O'Brien, 2016:427). Within this theory, three interrelated components to be studied were taken into consideration, namely: process (involving the fused and dynamic relation of the individual and the context); person (with his or her repertoire of biological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural characteristics); and context of human development (conceptualised as the nested levels, or systems, of the ecology of human development depicted by Bronfenbrenner) (Lerner, 2005:xv; Rosa & Tudge, 2013:251). He later criticised some studies using this model as they did not indicate the bi-directional influence of the systems as intended in the model (Rosa & Tudge, 2013:249).

Bronfenbrenner later introduced the fifth system as the Chronosystem which is the last level of influence. It deals specifically with a time element which was lacking in this model. Time can be either external or internal (external, referring to the timing of a parent's death; internal referring to the physiological changes a child experiences with age or changes in society over time) (Anderson et al., 2013:132; Arnett, 2016:25; Boon et al., 2012:390; Lerner, 2005:xiv; Martorell et al., 2014:37 & Smith et al., 2011:4).

In 1979, Bronfenbrenner recognised a gap in his theory and hypothesised that it would only be complete once it included the biological, psychological and behavioural aspects of the individual and he then developed the identity of the Bioecological theory (Arnett, 2016:25; Lerner, 2005:xiv). Cairns and Cairns (2005:17) further emphasised the inevitability of change and maturation over time. They also stated that change not only happens within the individual but occurs simultaneously within society,

community, personal relationships and social networks as well as across generations (Bronfenbrenner, 1995:630; Cairns & Cairns, 2005:17,19). Research aims to track these developmental changes and to identify interrelations among them (Cairns & Cairns, 2005:18). Systems are complex and inevitably go through various changes.

Like the changing nature of the development of a human being, Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory evolved and adapted over time. (Lerner, 2005:xiii; Bronfenbrenner, 2005a:3; Rosa & Tudge, 2013:243). It is characterised by two very different but related developmental processes as defining properties (Bronfenbrenner, 2005a:4). Bronfenbrenner (2005a:4) and Rosa and Tudge 2013:251) identify these processes as "the first defines the phenomenon under investigation: namely, that of continuity and change in the biopsychological characteristics of human beings". The second focuses on "the development of scientific tools - the theoretical models and corresponding research designs required for assessing continuity and change" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005a:4) Once again the research design that researchers were using for bioecological research, developed by Bronfenbrenner, namely the Person-Process-Context model, was adapted in the final phase of the Bioecological theory to include the element of time (involving ontogenetic time, family time and historical time). He further subdivided time into microtime, mesotime and macrotime (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:796). Microtime was defined as "continuity versus discontinuity in ongoing episodes of proximal processes; mesotime has to do with how often these episodes occur over days and weeks, and macrotime focuses on the changing expectations and events in larger society, both within and across generations" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:796; Rosa & Tudge, 2013:254). Although time became a focus factor, Bronfenbrenner did not really include the influence of the Macrosystem in the third and final phase (Rosa & Tudge, 2013:255).

Despite all the changes regarding the Bioecological theory, the researcher believes it is an appropriate model to use when studying couples, as in this study.

After this overview of the Bioecological theory, the researcher will now briefly differentiate between the levels indicated in the system as well as how they impact on marriage and intimate relationships.

2.3 A BIOECOLOGICAL THEORY OF MARRIAGE AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Understanding families, marriages and intimate relationships is most challenging; however, Howe (2012:41) states “to truly understand the puzzle of marriages and families, we need to consider individuals in the family, their interactions within the family system, and the family’s and individual’s contexts in the larger social world”. As mentioned above, Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological theory will be used as a paradigm to briefly study marriage and intimate relationships according to the Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem and Chronosystem.

When two partners enter an intimate relationship and eventually marry, their systems intertwine. Tudge et al. (2016:430) and Neal and Neal (2013:723) critique Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological theory that even though it is stated that the various systems of the model influence one another on a continual basis, the structure of the model indicates that each level is observed as being separate from the individual. The researcher concurs with this observation and explanation. Below the researcher has restructured the existing Bioecological model to indicate how the various levels are in constant interaction with one another, unlike Bronfenbrenner’s model, which indicates that the levels are separate. The following figure indicates how the systems do so, intertwine and influence one another on a continual basis:

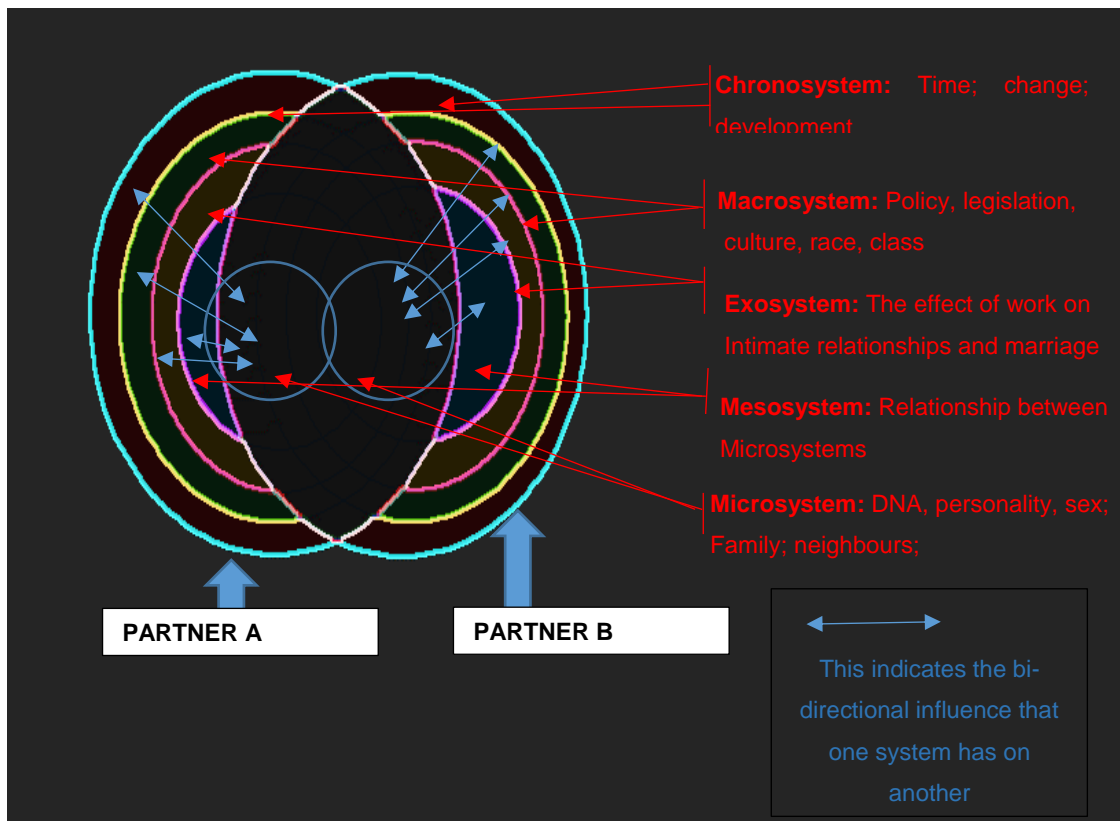


Figure 2: The functioning of the Bioecological theory in marriage and intimate relationships

As indicated in this figure, bringing two partners together to begin an intimate relationship or marriage, can be extremely complex. The fully highlighted section in the middle of the figure signals that systems are continuously influencing one another. This means that the Chronosystem of partner A may have an impact on the Exosystem of partner B. Similarly, Microsystem of partner B may have an impact on the Mesosystem of partner A. In addition to critiquing Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological model, Neal and Neal (2013) developed a model that indicates that the various systems (Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem and Chronosystem) should be depicted as networked rather than nested as in Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological theory (Neal & Neal, 2013:723). Below is a depiction of what this model entails:

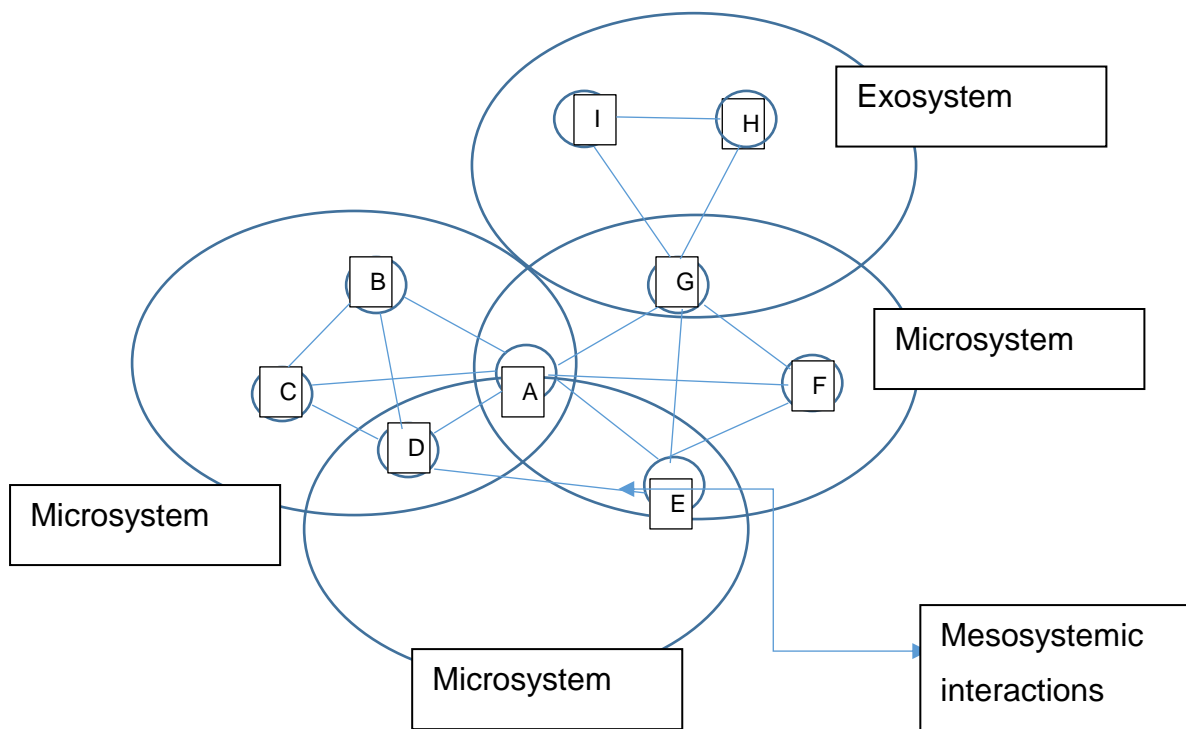


Figure 3: Networked Model of Ecological Systems, focused on person A

In the figure above, “A” is represented as the focal person while B-H includes other people with whom the focal individual is interacting in the various microsystems (Neal & Neal, 2013:728). The solid lines indicate the mesosystemic interactions between the microsystems (Neal & Neal, 2013:728).

This model challenges Bronfenbrenner’s idea of nested systems and states that it “undermines the theoretical coherence and conceptual utility of EST” (Ecological Systems Theory) (Neal & Neal, 2013:726). The benefit of applying this model is that one can see what systems are impacting on others other than the focal person (Neal & Neal, 2013:728). For example, person C’s development is influenced by one microsystem (A-B-C-D), no Mesosystems and three Exosystems (A-D-E-, A-E-G-F and G-H-I) (Neal & Neal, 2013:728). However, the researcher believes that when it comes to discussing how the various systems influence each other regarding couples, it is difficult to depict how these systems intertwine using a networked diagram. Further, this model fails to depict how the Macrosystem and Chronosystem impact on the individual, compared to the researcher’s model of interaction when it comes to couples; although the authors do make mention of the influence of the Macrosystem

and Chronosystem in their model (Neal & Neal, 2013:728). What this would entail is that each person indicated as B-H would have to have their own concentric circles depicting their Microsystem influences and Exosystem influences, which would ultimately result in a very complicated diagram. The fact that there is difficulty in trying to graphically depict how different systems influence one another, this indicates how complex relationships really are.

In the researcher's depiction, there is a clear indication that all levels of the Bioecological theory impact on a continuous basis and bi-directionally when a couple come together in a marriage or intimate relationship. Therefore, this is contradictory to the model that Tudge et al. (2016) and Neal and Neal (2013:728), present. There are various possibilities regarding the influence of one system on another within the individual and between the individuals in a marriage or intimate relationship.

Following the explanation of the functioning of the Bioecological theory in marriage and intimate relationships, ahead lie more detailed examples of the elements existing in each system.

2.3.1 THE BIOECOLOGICAL THEORY INFLUENCING MARRIAGES AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS.

2.3.1.1 Microsystem influences

The Microsystem is the every day level of interaction that the individual experiences with parents, friends, classmates, teachers and neighbours (Arnett, 2016:25; Martorell, et al., 2014:36; Paat, 2013:956; Rosa & Tudge, 2013:243). Individuals themselves are complete with "biological matter, DNA, genes, hormones, neurotransmitters- all of the biochemical processes within you affect your development, behaviours, traits, and characteristics.... that make you unique" (Howe, 2012:42). Microsystems may supersede each other and either increase or decrease as the individual develops (Paat, 2013:956). For example, the influence of family-of-origin for a couple, could supersede that of their working-environment and as a couple develop and start to have a family of their own. The Microsystems increase and decrease accordingly. (Paat, 2013:956). Developmental psychology primarily focuses

on the microsystem of the child and usually refers to it as the context in which the child/person exists (Arnett, 2016:25; Smith et al., 2011:2). This was one of the pertinent elements missing in what Bronfenbrenner termed the ecological theory. This then became the bioecological theory with the acceptance of biological and psychological characteristics impacting on human development and in this context, impacts on marriage and intimate relationships. For example, if one individual in a relationship/marriage has been clinically diagnosed with hereditary depression, it could impact negatively on the couple if it is not dealt with. The depressed party may withdraw emotionally, lose interest in sex, engage in violent or dysfunctional behaviour and generally reduce the level of satisfaction of the other partner. On the other hand, if both partners come from securely attached families of origin and do not present with any psychological illnesses, they are likely to have a marriage or intimate relationship without violence and dysfunction. In addition, the development of an individual is also influenced by the processes and contexts in which he/she exists. In marriage and intimate relationships people are closely linked to friends, family members and their own partners (Howe, 2012:43). These elements refer to the Microsystem level of influence. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

The next level of influence is the Mesosystem.

2.3.1.2 Mesosystem influences

The Mesosystem (Anderson et al., 2013:132; Arnett, 2016:25; Howe, 2012:473; Lerner, 2005:xiv; Martorell et al., 2014:37; Paat, 2013:956; Rosa & Tudge, 2013:246; Smith et al., 2011:2) refers to the relationship between elements of the Microsystems (Howe, 2012:473). When some couples decide to marry, they may approach their local pastor at their community church to do so. In most instances, churches offer a premarital program to help the couple prepare for marriage. The couple then attend a number of sessions with the pastor where they get to know more about themselves and are taught skills to help them create a solid marriage. The implication of this is that if couples do not participate in premarital programs, the marriage may not be stable. Couples can also enrol for marriage preparation and education classes at a Non-Governmental Organisation in their community. This corresponds with Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory, in that the individual is interacting with persons

(Person) within a church (Context) for the purposes of learning skills to improve his/her marriage (Process) and conducted over various sessions (Time). The Mesosystem (Anderson et al., 2013:132; Arnett, 2016:25; Howe, 2012:473; Lerner, 2005:xiv; Martorell et al., 2014:37; Paat, 2013:956; Rosa & Tudge, 2013:246; Smith et al., 2011:2) refers to the relationship between elements of the Microsystems (Howe, 2012:473).

Another example would be the relationship between a husband and his mother-in-law. If it is a good relationship, the husband and mother-in-law might strive to enhance and maintain the relationship. This in turn could have a positive impact on the other spouse, as room for conflict is decreased. On the other hand, if the relationship between the husband and mother-in-law is difficult, it could impact negatively on the marriage/intimate relationship if boundaries are not put in place. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Following this is a brief discussion of Exosystemic influences on marriages and intimate relationships.

2.3.1.3 Exosystem influences

Exosystem influences mainly comprise of societal influences that have an indirect but crucial impact on the development of an individual (Arnett, 2016:25; Martorell et al., 2014:37; Paat, 2013:956; Rosa & Tudge, 2013:246; Smith et al., 2011:4). Workplace activities account for influences on the couple through the Exosystem lens (Howe, 2012:473). Some of these social institutions include schools, religious institutions, the workplace and the media (Arnett, 2016:26). A good example to illustrate this point is when the wife/partner is the main breadwinner in the family and has to work long hours, quality time spent with her spouse and children is compromised, which has a negative effect on the family. Furthermore, the husband/partner may have more responsibilities to do around the house while the wife/partner is away at work, which could lead to increased anxiety, stress and resentment and consequently lower levels of marital satisfaction. On the other hand, both partners could be working, balancing their time and, developing quality time and sharing domestic responsibilities which could lead to increased levels of marital satisfaction and a sense of security within the

marriage/intimate relationship. Exosystemic influences may have positive or negative influences on couples. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

The fourth level of influence, is the Macrosystem and will be discussed in detail in this chapter.

2.3.1.4 Macrosystem influences

Aspects such as feminist movements, policy changes; structural and democratic changes have an influence on marriages and intimate and are known as the Macrosystem level of influence. The Macrosystem (Anderson et al., 2013:132; Lerner, 2005:xiv) is the “superordinate level of the ecology of human development; it is the level involving culture, macroinstitutions and public policy e.g. the larger areas of influence including cultural values, customs and laws and has cascading effects on all levels of interaction”. This includes economic and governmental systems impacting on the individual/ couple (Arnett, 2016:26; Martorell et al., 2014:37; Paat, 2013:956). Rosa & Tudge, 2013:246; Smith et al., 2011:4).

One of the major movements in history that impacted on intimate relationships was the introduction of the feminist movement, which came into being to promote the prominence of women in the workplace. (Allen, Walker, McCann, 2013:139; Marks, 2009:921). Furthermore, feminists emphasised the importance of gender relations of the family and social institutions in larger societal contexts rather than focusing solely on women (Allen et al., 2013:139) Therefore the aim was not only to emancipate women; it was social change fostering inclusivity (Allen et al., 2013:140). However, this movement had a major impact on the structure of a family over the various life stages, namely: dual-earning households were developed because of financial pressures; self-fulfilment was prioritised; a decline in child bearing; women entering different types of professions and being regarded as alternative cheap labour (Inglehart & Welzel, 2009:39; Marks, 2009:921).

One of the major characteristics of post industrialist societies, was the emphasis of self-expression. In traditional societies, the focus was predominantly on religion, conforming to authority and pride within nations, whereas post industrialist societies

emphasized self-expression (Inglehart & Welzel, 2009:39). Inglehart and Welzel (2009:33) further argue that “self-expression values give high priority to freedom of expression, participation in decision-making, political activism, environmental protection, gender equality, and tolerance of ethnic minorities, foreigners, gays and lesbians”. This impacted on marriage and intimate relationships significantly because people became more interested in themselves rather than their country and religious beliefs, which previously shaped the norms for marriage.

Other Macrosystem factors that have impacted on marriage and intimate relationships include structural and demographic changes, such as the increased level of education, women moving into the workforce, using contraceptives and cohabitation. It has had a major impact on the attitudes of people, as they veer away from the traditional view of marriage and prefer to partake in liberalist views, thus weakening the traditional views (Wilcox, Wolfinger & Stokes, 2015:114; Gubernskaya, 2010:182). Marriage and intimate relationships have been influenced by structural and demographic changes, which are still evident in today’s societies.

With an understanding of the elements of the Macrosystem, the researcher will now discuss these elements in detail starting with race.

2.3.1.4.1 Race

Race has always been a factor to consider when studying marriages and intimate relationships. The neo-liberal term “marriage”, which was created and embraced by the White middle class, has been reinforced by various institutions including, the media, and often calls into question the intimate and marital patterns of African people and people from other races and sexual orientations (Bilchitz & Judge, 2007:498; Donner, 2016:1150; Henderson-Espinozo, 2016:281; Johnson & Lescocco, 2015:142). This implies that any deviation to the normative ideal, assumes that African and other cultures are deficient (Donner, 2016:1178; Henderson-Espinozo, 2016:281; Johnson & Lescocco, 2015:148). In extension, enacting the role of a wife in white society, makes it difficult for women of different races, to perform their roles (Johnson & Lescocco, 2015:142). Slavery perpetuated the fact that women could not practice wifehood and motherhood (Johnson & Lescocco, 2015:146).

Marriage is a societal construct and experiences paradigm shifts over time. (Dreyer, 2008:499). This is in line with Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory which states that changes take place over time and bring about new meaning.

African families traditionally rely on support from their extended family members, which originated during times of social and economic oppression. (Johnson & Lescocco, 2015:150; Raley, Sweeney & Wondra, 2015:89). This is in contrast to the modern marriage term and practice. However, studies have also revealed, that African people living in urban cities and trying to raise their own family, found the financial reliance of external family members as a source of stress. (Johnson & Lescocco, 2015:151). Some African women elect not to get married, but there is an increasing trend for others to get married later in life. However, they have unstable marital relationships (Raley et al., 2015:89). This may be due to the increased rates of incarceration of African men, as well as the declining opportunities for employment, as economic disadvantage is still synonymous with race (Raley et al., 2015:89). Marriage is a neoliberalist social construct which does not generally apply to all races and consequently, whether deliberately or not, results in exclusion.

The researcher will now discuss level of education as a Macrosystem factor influencing marriages and intimate relationships.

2.3.1.4.2 Age and level of education at marriage

Age and education has a significant impact on marriages and intimate relationships. Women may delay marriage because they want to pursue a higher education, there is a trend that indicates that they will ultimately get married and stay married to their spouse and thereby reduce the chances of having a child out of wedlock (Raley et al., 2015:103; Wilcox et al., 2015:111). On the other hand, uneducated women are more likely to have children born out of wedlock (Wilcox et al., 2015:119). The relationship between marriage and fertility indicates that the older the women are when they marry, the fewer children they will have (Nahar, Zahangir & Islam, 2013:227). The age at which women marry, impact on the rate of children born-out of wedlock and the number of children that they may have, especially if they choose to pursue education first.

Educated couples tend to have the resources to make choices regarding their profession and their intimate and family lives (Wilcox et al., 2015:116). Young educated couples have the necessary resources to recover from failure, as opposed to young uneducated adults who do not have a financial cushion (Wilcox et al., 2015:116). Conversely, in *Delayed marriage leading to increase in out-of-wedlock births* (2013:16) it states that there is a significant difference between birth rates of young people who have an average of a high school qualification versus college educated people, with the birth rates being significantly higher in the former. The article states that young people who delay marriage are more likely to have stable relationships and families than those who marry younger and have lower educational levels. Marriage infidelity, the rate of divorce or separation, drug use, single-parenting and decreased levels of religious attendance are far more prevalent in less educated groups. (*Delayed marriage leading to increase in out-of-wedlock births*, 2013:16; Raley et al., 2015:100; Wilcox et al., 2015:117). However, a study conducted by Johnson & Lescocco (2015:150), found that women who acquired higher levels of education than their partner of the same race, had lower levels of marital satisfaction as they viewed the unequal share of housework and caring for children as unfair. Educated individuals prefer partners who are also educated at the same level and not higher than themselves (Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008:745). However, one cannot generalise, because there are educated men who prefer their wives to stay at home and care for the family (Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008:745). Obtaining an education reduces child marriages and bearing children out of wedlock and promotes more stable marriages.

Globally, women have benefited by being older when they get married for the first time. The benefits include improved education, reduced maternal mortality rates, decreased exposure to HIV, equitable marital relations and decreased marital violence (Jackson, 2012:2; Longmire-Avital & Reavis, 2017:96). There are various factors that may impact on the age at which women marry such as: residence; religion; region; wealth index; education and occupation (Nahar et al., 2013:227). Education is the most influential factor impacting on the age of women when they get married for the first time. (Nahar et al., 2013:234). Women are choosing to get married later in life; the average age at which women marry is between 27-30 years of age (Akin & Platt, 2016:246; Longmire-Avital & Reavis, 2017:77; Raley et al., 2015:90; Statistical release: Marriages and

Divorces, 2014; Wilcox et al., 2015:114). Marrying later in life is a buffer for high fertility rates and unwanted pregnancies as well as decreased levels of HIV infection and violence.

Spousal quality depends significantly on the age of the couple at the time of marriage (Akin & Platt, 2016:246). The spousal availability pool for African American women is much lower compared to women in other cultures for reasons including: incarceration of men; early death rates of men; unemployment rates of men and men's lower educational attainment (Longmire-Avital & Reavis, 2017:77). Financial security seems to be associated with marital satisfaction in African American women (Longmire-Avital & Reavis, 2017:78). However, this view is changing, considering that women are becoming self-sufficient and require partners for companionship (Longmire-Avital & Reavis, 2017:94) rather than just financial security.

Now that the researcher has discussed how age and education impacts on marriage and intimate relationships, socioeconomic status will be discussed.

2.3.1.4.3 Socio-economic status

In a study done in Bangladesh, it was found that people living in more developed areas rather than poorer areas were likely to delay marriage because they had opportunities to pursue education and develop their income (Kamal, 2012:326). Several other studies confirm that lower levels of education and income lead to divorce and instability in marriages (Chun & Sohn, 2009:786; Pazvakawambwa, Indongo & Kazembe, 2013; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007). In fact, Chun and Sohn, (2009:786) found that economic problems were the major divorce determinant amongst lower-educated and lower-earning people, which also led to an increased deviant lifestyle including physical abuse and drinking problems. However, with the change in the economy and the influx of women into the labour force; women choose men with a higher socioeconomic standing (Raley et al., 2015:89). In recent years, the recession that has taken place on a global scale, has led to an increasing rate of unemployment (Jacob & Kleinert, 2014:839). Research shows that lower levels of education and earnings, lead to destructive behaviour, unstable relationships and divorce.

As much as socioeconomic status has an impact on marriage and intimate relationships, so does culture. The researcher will now discuss this factor.

2.3.1.4.4 Culture

A prominent factor impacting on marriages and intimate relationships with regards to culture, is migration. Studies conducted on the influence of migration on marriage have found that migration allows the migrant relative freedom from the structures and culture of their homeland tradition (Raley et al., 2015:90; Remennick, 2009; Sam, [sa]:740). Migration has therefore led to the development of intercultural relationships. The term “intercultural relationships” has been developed as a more appropriate term to use than “interracial relationships” as it is inclusive of many attributes including (Remennick, 2009:719):

Partners of one whom belongs to the hegemonic majority (the dominance of one social class over others) and the other comes from a minority group, or both come from two minorities; or one is a recent immigrant of the same or different ethnicity.

One must understand the difference between marriage systems to understand marital culture. Cultures are free to choose which marriage system is applicable to them. There are various marriage systems including monogamy which entails one partner marrying another partner at a time and is in an exclusive relationship with that partner (Benokraitis, 2005:10-11; Dreyer, 2008: 507; Low, 2006:17; William et al., 2006:13). It is the most predominant marriage system in Western societies. Another marriage system is polygamy where one partner, either opposite sex or same-sex has more than one partner (Benokraitis, 2005:10-11; Dreyer, 2008:508; Low, 2006:17; William et al., 2006:13). A sub-division of polygamy is known as polygyny. In this case, the husband has more than one wife at the same time (Benokraitis, 2005:10-11; Dreyer, 2008: 508; Low, 2006:17; William et al., 2006:13). Men who choose to marry more than one wife at the same time need to be economically stable, especially if the women have children as this means that there will be more mouths to feed (Dreyer, 2008:209). Furthermore, first wives normally have more status than the other wives; but, to minimise jealousy tendencies, the husband needs to spend equal time with the wives (Dreyer, 2008:509). Sororal polygyny describes the marriage between a woman and men who are brothers and marriage between a man and women who are sisters.

(Benokraitis, 2005:10-11; Dreyer, 2008: 508; Low, 2006:17; William et al., 2006:13). Another sub-division of polygamy is known as polyandry where the wife specifically is married to more than one husband at a time (Benokraitis, 2005:10-11; Dreyer, 2008: 508; Low, 2006:17; William et al., 2006:13). However, this is generally a very rare form of marriage (Benokraitis, 2005:10-11; Dreyer, 2008: 508; Low, 2006:17; William et al., 2006:13). There are various marriage systems, constructed by society, which poses challenges for marriage and intimate relationships.

Polygamy poses many challenges for women while on the other hand; there are considerably more benefits for men, especially those who are successful (Low, 2005:20). In the man's case, polygamy entitles a man to have more than one wife and therefore he is able to have many offspring. A woman who is taken as a second wife, has smaller chances of bearing children because she gets married later in life and the ability to conceive decreases (Low, 2005:20). The various marriage systems have both positive and negative effects on marriage and intimate relationships.

Marriage and family can not be separate terms as they are co-dependent on each other and are also applicable to diverse cultures. Silverstein and Auerbach (2005:33), define a family as "two or more people who are in a relationship created by birth, marriage or choice. Some families have legal protection and privileges, while others do not". Different families may include: "polygynous hunting-gathering families in the Kalahari Desert; polyandrous families in the mountains of Nepal, lesbian families in the Netherlands, and non-gay step-families in Brooklyn, New York" (Silverstein & Auerbach, 2005:33). The diversity of family and marriage systems has an impact on the marriage itself and therefore, requires deep understanding to identify the possible challenges the couple (s) may experience. This needs to be considered when designing therapeutic interventions such as the PREPARE Program.

In extension, it is important to differentiate between traditional, modern and post-modern families within the various cultures, when looking at marriage and intimate relationships around the globe as it provides insight into the nature of the marital or intimate relationship union (Silverstein & Auerbach, 2005:33). Firstly, the traditional family may be defined as "a heterosexual two-parent nuclear family with a husband /breadwinner and a wife/homemaker" (Silverstein & Auerbach, 2005:33). Then there

is the modern family which may be defined as “Dual-earner family in which men and women both work outside the home, but only women are responsible for childcare and housework” (Silverstein & Auerbach, 2005:33). The post-modern family according to Silverstein and Auerbach (2005:33), may be defined as families that “represent a deconstruction or transformation of at least one aspect of the traditional family”. Some examples of these families include lesbian couples and single mothers and couples conceiving children with technological advances (egg implantation or surrogacy).

It is often extremely difficult to contextualise marriage and intimate relationships within a specific country because there are diverse groups within the country that differ significantly regarding traditional marriage and intimate relationship practices which can not be generalised. These differences can include choice of spouse, monogamy versus polygamy, the role of the husband and wife, matrilineal versus patrilineal courtship; gender equality and preference; sexuality and geographical location. Furthermore, acculturation of the various groups has influenced the development of marriage and intimate relationships over time (Lenz, 2013:101). For example, Chinese culture values the involvement of family. This is especially true for marriage (Zavoretti, 2016:1192). In Chinese culture, elderly parents still play a significant role in match-making their children (Zavoretti, 2016:1192). However, the impact of modern marriage has had a significant impact on Chinese cultural marriages such as the display of lavish weddings and the spread of consumer culture (Zavoretti, 2016:1197). Culture has a significant impact on marriages and intimate relationships. The next factor to be explored is class.

2.3.1.4.5 Class

Class is another factor that impacts on marriage and intimate relationships and has undergone radical changes in recent years. Previously, men from middle class backgrounds exercised unquestioned authority over their wives and families (Benson, 2010:421). Wives relied on their husbands for economic support as they themselves had been deprived of educational opportunities. They also had no legal rights and were psychologically demoralised by their husbands (Benson, 2010:420). Streib (2015:19) and Leonard-Wright ([sa]:529), hold the view that there is divided opinion of whether adult relationships stemming from the same class background (homophily)

are more compatible than adult relationships stemming from different class backgrounds (heterophily). His study revealed the former to be true (Streib, 2010:35; Leonard-Wright, [sa]:530). Therefore, similarity in class creates compatibility in marriage and intimate relationships. Class also has an impact on how the partner's treat each other.

The following section will focus in legislation as a factor that influences marriage.

2.3.1.4.6 Legislation

Legislation has had a significant impact on marriage and intimate relationships. In Western societies, family patterns have undergone significant changes which include increasing divorce rates, increasing number of children born out of wedlock, absenteeism of fathers as a result of globalisation, the recognition of same-sex marriages and increasing rates of cohabitation (Vorster, 2008:463; Wilcox et al., 2015:111). This is particularly prevalent in the case of less educated people (Wilcox et al., 2015:121). To address these issues, policies and legislation may be introduced to regulate the effects that these changes have on marriage and intimate relationships, for example, African marriages did not enjoy the recognition and legal status of civil marriages until the inception of the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 120 of 1998 which was enforced according to Section 15(3(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Amien, 2013:357).

With regards to uneducated people, an effort needs to be made to increase learning opportunities for them through vocational training and apprenticeships, thereby increasing their self-esteem and dignity (Wilcox et al., 2015:121). In the context of marriage and intimate relationships, this includes relationship education programs (Wilcox et al., 2015:121). Therefore, policy and legislation development are vital to ensure equality for all and address the challenges facing marriage and intimate relationships.

Another example to illustrate the necessity of policy and legislation development is that, in South Africa, Muslim marriages are not legally recognised. The Department of Home Affairs embarked on a journey to train Muslim Imams to conduct marriage

ceremonies for Muslim marriages to obtain legal status and recognition according to the Constitution (Mohammed & Seedat, 2014:68). There are still challenges that need to be rectified within the Muslim tradition, however, the Muslim Marriages Bill is a piece of legislation that has been developed to allow couples to apply legally for dissolution of marriage, maintenance claims, contact and care of children should marital disputes arise (Amien, 2013:357; Mohammed & Seedat, 2014:69).

One of the challenges that is impeding the finalising of the Muslim Marriages Act, is the belief that civil marriages are against Islam law (Unislamic). Civil marriages prohibit polygamous marriages and couples would be joined in community of property by default (Amien, 2013:360; Denson, 2009:245; Neels, 2012:486). The Islamic religion advocated for polygamy from the time that it was created and attracted strong opposition from the Westernised ideal of marriage which involves exclusivity; and therefore, has not been legally recognised (Denson, 2009:245). According to the Qur'an, a husband may only marry up to four wives simultaneously, provided he is in an economic position to take care of all his wives' needs equally (Denson, 2009:246). Therefore, the Muslim Marriages Bill has not been referred to Parliament as yet (Neels, 2012:486). This may be deemed unconstitutional since Section 15(1) of the Constitution states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, thought, belief and opinion. Included in the right to religious freedom is the right to hold religious beliefs, to propagate religious doctrine and to manifest religious belief, worship and practice" (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996; Denson, 2009:264). Therefore, Muslim people may be married under Muslim Law as the decision to marry is based on religion which is sanctioned by the Constitution (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996; Denson, 2009:264). Furthermore, Section 30 of the Constitution reads "everyone has the right to participate in the cultural life of their choice and to enjoy their culture, practice their religion and use their own language". Therefore, it is inferred from this statement that Islam marriages, whether polygamous or not, should be afforded recognition as they are permitted to participate in the cultural life of their choice (Denson, 2009:266). As a result of Muslim marriages not being recognised in South Africa, Muslim marriages are usually concluded without the necessary legal protection that civil marriage offers (Amien, 2013:361; Denson, 2009:245). As a result, it is mainly Muslim women who are affected by this as they do not have access to legal recourse when problems arise (Amien, 2013:361; 365; Neels,

2012:505). Therefore, legislation needs to be developed which takes into consideration the context in which the targeted beneficiaries live, to ensure that they are adequately protected. (Amien, 2013:384.

On another note, change in legislation has resulted in the legal recognition of same-sex marriages and relationships. This is especially true for liberal democracies that are still overcoming sub-ordination, discrimination and marginalisation of these groups (Bilchitz & Judge, 2007:466). One of the main concerns raised by public policy developers in legalising same-sex marriages, is that it may lead to a decreased amount of heterosexual marriages (Dinno & Whitney, 2013:1). The term marriage in most countries is defined along the lines of “one man and one woman” and by implication, excludes same-sex couples (Dinno & Whitney, 2013:1). However, the study conducted by Dinno and Whitney (2013) proved that there was no correlation between an increase of same-sex marriages leading to a decrease of opposite sex marriages. Whereas in South Africa, the Constitution, the overarching public policy ensuring human rights, changed the definition of marriage to include the word “spouse” so that there would be no exclusion of couples to marriage based on their sexual orientation and changed the definition of marriage to mean “union, while it lasts, between two adult persons to the exclusion of all others for life” (De Vos & Barnard, [sa]:798, 806). However, after several political and constitutional debates, the Civil Union Act was drafted and provided recognition to same-sex marriages and asserted the parties with the legal privileges as heterosexual marriages (De Vos & Barnard, [sa]:820). It is evident that the development and implementation of legislation holds power over those whom it governs and therefore has a significant impact on individuals and couples. This echoes the Bioecological theory in that even though the Macrosystem does not directly engage with the individual or couple, it still has an impact on the marriage or relationship by way of legal rights and what is determined as accessible.

Following the discussion of the various aspects of the Macrosystem and how it may influence marriages and intimate relationships, the researcher will discuss the Chronosystem as the last level in the Bioecological theory.

2.3.1.5 Chronosystem influences

The final level of influence is the Chronosystem and refers to the element of time. This can either be in terms of the couple's development over time or due to historical changes (Arnett, 2016:26; Martorell et al, 2014:37; Paat, 2013:956). The Institution of marriage has changed significantly since the social concept was first developed thousands of years ago. Stevenson and Wolfers (2007:27) and Roopnarine and Gielen (2005:6) add that marital trends have changed; the rate of marriage has decreased, and divorce rates are on the rise. Marriage was an institution used to arrange people into various economic and political hierarchies, but old traditions have become abandoned, especially in an information technology world (Coontz, 2004:977; Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008:737). The emphasis was not individual benefit but rather "a way of raising capital, constructing political alliances, organizing the division of labour by age and gender, and deciding what claim, if any, children had on their parents, and what rights parents had on their children" (Coontz, 2004:977). Arranged marriages are on the decrease while "love" marriages are on the increase (Donner, 2016:1147; Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008:737).

To illustrate these changes, in some Indian cultures, the elderly still believes in close-kin marriages, where an uncle can marry a niece, as a means to ensure that property developments stay within the family. However, as time has passed, parents find it more desirable for their child to marry someone unrelated to the family (Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008:742). One of the main reasons for this is that interbreeding in families increased the risk of congenital diseases and disabilities (Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008:742). This is an indication of how historical changes impact on marriage and intimate relationships over time.

Previously, the division of labour between men and women was specialised, meaning that men would primarily be the sole earners and women would specialise in domestic responsibilities, such as raising children and managing household responsibilities (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007:27).

Many years ago, marriage served for procreation purposes and child labour was common during this time (Fussell & Pollini, 2004:1202; Stevenson & Wolfers,

2007:27). With the increase in longevity and declining fertility rates in modern societies, adults spend a lot of their adult life without their children in the house which can lead to remarriage with no intention of bearing children.

Longevity and declining fertility rates are not the only Chronosystem factors influencing marriages and intimate relationships, marrying into an upper-class family was a means of moving up the wealth, property and political chain (Coontz, 2004:977). Marriage was also seen as an investment for people in lower classes; however, couples would invest in each other's skills and ability to develop their families as much as their personality and attractiveness (Coontz, 2004:977; Donner, 2016:1154). In summary, marriage was an economic investment and the symbol of adulthood and respectability for all socioeconomic groups (Coontz, 2004:977).

Divorce occurred if the family which had been married into, failed to fulfil its side of the arrangement, rather than the individuals falling out of love. It was believed that love would develop after marriage and would therefore not be a prerequisite (Coontz, 2004:977). Marriage rates in America rose significantly during the two World Wars and dropped during the Great Depression (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007:28). In America, the divorce rates doubled between the mid -1960's and mid-1970's due to the following factors: women's liberation movement; the sexual revolution and the Supreme Court's granting of marriage as a fundamental right. These are just some of the historical changes that affected marriages and intimate relationships.

The 18th Century sparked the revolution of the love ideal in most Western and European countries. The emphasis was on emotional investment in each other as a couple and the children, rather than friends and kin (Chun & Sohn, 2009:786; Coontz, 2004:978; Donner, 2016:1147). Even strong culture-orientated countries such as Korea, who viewed divorce as a family dishonour, have, over time relaxed to the idea that marriage should be about the relationship rather than socio-economic and other factors.

When the focus of marriage shifted from serving society through labour distribution and capital creation, to the couple themselves, they started exerting their right to divorce, if their partner was an unsuitable love match for them. Furthermore, it was

during this time that a strong appeal for the decriminalization of homosexuality and the acceptance of same sex marriages was made in all parts of the world (Coontz, 2004:978).

Another factor influencing marriages and intimate relationships is the development of malls and shopping centres. It changed how people started meeting each other and developing intimate relationships. Prior to this development, men and women used to meet each other at school, university and through their families (Donner, 2016:1147). Malls and shopping centres created the opportunity for men and women to mingle and even display affection in public (Donner, 2016:1148). Time has a significant impact on everything. As time moves on, so change becomes an inevitable outcome that impacts on the individual in all matters of their lives.

The next section will summarise the most important aspects that were discussed in this chapter.

2.4 SUMMARY

When two individuals form an intimate relationship, two worlds collide in all aspects and may be very complex to understand and interpret. Therefore a theoretical framework is necessary in research of this nature, to make sense of couples existing within marriages and intimate relationships. The PREPARE program assesses the very complex nature of marriages and intimate relationships. Therefore, it is important for the PREPARE counsellor/facilitator to be knowledgeable about these aspects in order to truly determine the contribution in a country-specific context.

Models, such as the Bioecological theory of Bronfenbrenner and the Networked Model of Ecological Systems of Neal and Neal (2013), have been developed to depict graphically how the various systems that an individual exists in intertwine. In this chapter, the researcher has discussed these models, but has also critiqued the existing models, especially because it is more applicable to individuals, rather than couples. The researcher has designed a model to explain these complexities by intertwining the various systems of the Bioecological theory for each couple. Their individual personalities, genetic make-up and learned behaviours impact on who the

individual chooses as his/her intimate partner. This also impacts on the way in which the relationship develops over time, depending on the couple's social support, careers and ability to survive economically. The possibilities of how a relationship may change over time, as indicated in the Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem and Chronosystem, are infinite.

This study adhered to the principles of the PPCT research design of the Bioecological theory of Bronfenbrenner. This chapter clearly depicts how couples (Persons) participating in premarital program sessions (Process and time), administered by the local church (Context) or Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) for the purposes of improving their marriage, incorporates the principles of the Bioecological theory and is therefore, the appropriate theoretical framework for this study.

As human development has changed over time, Bioecological theory has similarly been adapted and changed by the incorporation of a crucial element – time.

The second part of this chapter focused on how the numerous factors, within the interactive systems of the Bioecological theory, impact on marriages and intimate relationships. The focus of this chapter was on the Macrosystem and Chronosystem influences as Chapter 4 discusses marital components, in respect of interactive systems, included in the Bioecological theory, in more detail.

To summarise some of the major impacts of Macrosystem influences, the researcher explained how workplace settings affect all relationships. Features of the Macrosystem such as the age at which women marry, culture and socioeconomic status, have a significant impact on marriage and intimate relationships. The diversity of cultures around the world that exist today has created diversity in marriage and intimate relationships and has now become seemingly impossible to generalise. The Macrosystem highlighted how the broader political environment has an impact on marriages and intimate relationships. Furthermore, the researcher explained how the Feminist movement led to the emancipation of women and how their allowance in the employment sector, has radically changed the dynamics of marriage and intimate relationships. Finally, the changing nature of marriage was briefly explored using the insights of the Chronosystem.

CHAPTER 3

INTERVENTION IN MARRIAGES AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

High divorce rates are an indication that couples may not be prepared to deal with the challenges that marriage presents, however, attending marriage education programs of high quality, may reduce levels of divorce and contribute towards marital satisfaction (Morris, McMillan, Duncan & Larson, 2011:16; Olson, Larson & Olson-Sigg, 2009:5; Childs & Duncan, 2012:77). As a result, various therapeutic interventions for working with couples have been developed to address high divorce rates. These include marriage preparation, marriage education, marital therapy or counselling and marriage enrichment. In this chapter, these intervention strategies will be discussed in line with available literature. A brief history of marital education programs will be given to conceptualise the need for developing marriage education programs.

Despite the development of marital intervention programs, especially marriage education programs, the effectiveness of premarital education programs is questionable (Barnacle & Abbott, 2009; Bernstein, 1992:1; Burgoyne et al., 2010; Busby et al., 2007; Fawcett et al., 2010; Hawkins et al., 2004; McGeorge & Carlson, 2006). Larson (2004:422) believes that not many marriage education programs reviewed by researchers stipulate the effectiveness of the program on the marriage. This is particularly the case in South Africa, due to the difficulties of collecting and interpreting the data (Budlender et al., [Sa]:2). This is because of the diversity of cultures, languages, religion and marriage forms in South Africa (Budlender et al., [Sa]:1). Craig (2013), Judelsohn (2013) and Rennie (2013) believe the success rate of marriage preparation programs is unique as it depends on the couple's compatibility and no post-evaluation measures have been established to measure the success rate.

One of the most widely used marital education programs utilised in South Africa is the PREPARE program, developed by the renowned Dr David Olson, Professor Emeritus from the Department Family Social Science University in Minnesota, USA, where he taught for over 25 years. Furthermore, he is the founder and CEO of Life Innovations, responsible for dispensing the PREPARE program globally. The program is widely

used in South Africa, but its contribution has not been explored within the context of this country. The PREPARE program will be discussed in-depth as a marriage education intervention to ascertain where it fits in as a therapeutic intervention.

The next part of this chapter will critically analyse the effectiveness of existing marriage education programs globally, as well as in South Africa, as this has been identified as a gap in previous research. A brief literature analysis will be conducted on the effectiveness of the PREPARE program in other countries to determine the level of adaptability of the program to accommodate diverse aspects of relationships such as: race; culture; sexual orientation, language and spirituality. If the program can be adaptable to these various aspects in other countries, it may be adaptable in a South African context.

With an introduction to this chapter provided, the researcher will now provide a literature overview of the history of marital and education programs and marital therapy.

3.2 HISTORY OF MARITAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND MARITAL THERAPY

The marital therapy movement, also called the marriage counselling movement, began in the 1920's as a preventative measure. At that stage, professionals comprising social workers, lawyers, gynaecologists, clergy and professors deemed themselves to be family life specialists whom couples would consult when they experienced problems in their marriages (Rasheed, Rasheed & Marley, 2011:10). In 1929, two physicians by the names of Abraham and Hannah Stone opened a marriage counselling centre in New York City and published a marriage manual in 1935, which was the first of many publications about marriage (Center for the History of Medicine; Rasheed et al., 2011:10). In the 1930's, marriage counselling became institutionalised and associations such as the American Institute of Family Relations and the Marriage Counsel of Philadelphia and led to the implementation of therapeutic approaches (Rasheed et al., 2011:10).

Marriage education, as a therapeutic approach, has its beginnings in the 19th century and has been vital to the success of marriages ever since. Researchers had to develop appropriate solid theoretical and research evidence underpinning marital intervention programs, to combat the rising rates of divorce which were mainly prevalent in the 1960's and 1970's (Dinkmeyer, 2007:315; Markman, Rhoades, Stanley & Peterson, 2013:165; Ooms, 2005:3). The rate of divorces, out of wedlock births and cohabitation increased rapidly in the 1990's (Ooms, 2005:3). The pioneer who claimed to develop the first marital education program in the form of a couple's retreat weekend, was the late Gabriel Calbo of Barcelona in Spain (Dinkmeyer, 2007:315). Simultaneously, other therapists such as Dave and Vera Mace, in Pennsylvania, started with marital education programs, which they believed was a necessary addition to therapy (Dinkmeyer, 2007:316). Interestingly, the marital education period developed around the time equalitarian relationships were being sought by couples who were moving away from autocratic relationships (Dinkmeyer, 2007:316). Marriage education developed as a preventative measure, based on research, to combat the rising rates of divorce around the world.

The main components of these programs were communication and conflict-management, which still feature strongly in today's marriage education programs (Dinkmeyer, 2007:316; Karahan, 2009:222; Markman et al., 2013:165).

With this discussion on the origins of marriage education, the next section will differentiate between the types of marital interventions.

3.3 TYPES OF MARITAL INTERVENTIONS

Marriage is complex, challenging and a long-term. Therefore, there is a need for marriage preparation or education to reduce the risk of failure.

3.3.1 MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Marriage preparation and marriage education are both skills-based approaches and usually focus on prevention, remediation and support (Larson, 2004:421). Marriage preparation is short-term and skills-based focusing on issues concerning

communication, conflict resolution, sexual compatibility, finances, child rearing and extended family. The premise is that through helping the couples discuss their roles and expectations before marriage, it could prevent divorce (Howe (2012:235). To summarise, marriage preparation is a short-term skills-based approach, which prepares couples to deal with the various complexities that marriage presents.

The next therapeutic approach is marriage education.

3.3.2 MARRIAGE EDUCATION

Compared to marital preparation, marriage education is more long term, as it focuses on the couple before the wedding without any therapeutic intervention. (Hawkins et al., 2008:723; Larson, 2004:421; Murray & Murray, 2004:349). Couples who participate in marital education do not have major relationship issues. However, if they exist, marital therapy should be sought (DeMaria, 2005:242). Marriage education is normally based on a curriculum that provides couples with skills to maintain their marital satisfaction levels (Dion, 2005:140; Ooms, 2005:1). In summary, marriage education empowers couples with skills to enhance their marital satisfaction and does not involve therapy.

3.3.3 MARITAL THERAPY/COUNSELLING

Couples undergo stressful situations in their lives and these impact on their marriage. Couples-therapy allows the couple to explore these issues in a safe emotional environment with the help of a third neutral party (Bradley & Furrow, 2013:277; Edwards, 2011:75). The length and content of the sessions are determined by the model in which the therapist is trained such as: Solution-Focused Strategic Therapy; Emotionally Focused Therapy; Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Psychodynamic Therapy (Bradley & Furrow, 2013:277; Edwards, 2011:17). The following scenarios may not be helped through couples-therapy: When one or both partners are struggling with addiction; when one or both partners are violent towards each other; when one or both partners are having an affair, but do not wish to end the affair and when one or both partners have unresolved mental health disorders (Bradley & Furrow, 2013:247-277). The researcher's understanding of marital therapy is where a therapist

who is a third neutral party, provides a safe emotional environment for a couple to explore problematic areas of their relationship or marriage.

Following the definition of marital therapy/counselling, the researcher will now define marriage enrichment as the final intervention approach.

3.3.4 MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

Marriage enrichment is usually sought after some years of being married for purposes of enriching their marriage. It can be conducted in a group setting or with the couple only and the therapist helps the couples to evaluate their relationship and determine ways of improving their marriage (Brown & Brown, 2002:189). It is also skills-based and focuses on providing on-going support for skills learnt (Brown & Brown, 2002:189). Therefore, marriage enrichment is a short-term therapeutic approach, where a therapist, who is a third neutral party, assists the couple with skills development to enhance their marital relationship.

The previous section differentiated between the diverse types of intervention methods for marriages and intimate relationships; the next section will discuss the PREPARE Program which this study specifically focuses on.

3.4 THE PREPARE PROGRAM

The PREPARE Program is a marriage education program. The acronym PREPARE stands for Premarital Preparation and Relationship Enhancement (Busby et al., 2007:280). The PREPARE program is made up of an online assessment and skill-building exercises which makes it accessible to people from various locations (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:1, 11). Each person completes the online relationship inventory separately and the questions on the assessment are randomly arranged to prevent couple collusion (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:1). Once the assessment has been completed, the report of between 20 and 25 pages can be printed by the facilitator. This information covers the couple's relationship, highlighting the strength and growth areas. (Childs, 2009:2; Knutson & Olson, 2003:536; Olson, Larson & Olson, 2009:2; Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:1). Using inventories in assessment can assist the

counsellor in placing couples in a program specifically focusing on their needs, such as sexual problems or family-of-origin problems (Busby et al., 2007:280). In the PREPARE sessions, the couple also receives a workbook with instructions on how to complete the various exercises, to teach effective communication and conflict resolution skills, determine possible and current stressors in the relationship, emphasise the team work approach and help partners grapple with their partner's personality traits (Childs, 2009:2). The PREPARE program assesses the couple's relationship and then provides them with feedback and the necessary skills to work on their growth areas.

The program is comprehensive and can be used with dating, engaged and married couples as well as couples in different life phases such as families with children, step-children or intergenerational issues (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:1). In addition, the program has strong scientific and empirical backing and has been successful in assisting couples who come from different ethnic groups (Hawkins et al., 2008:724; Olson et al., 2009:2). The PREPARE program is accessible to couples at different life phases as well as diverse cultures.

The PREPARE Program has two components. The first is the assessment phase which measures the personality of each person, the couple's interpersonal dynamics, their couple and family system, their relationships strengths and major stressors (Busby et al., 2007:279; Childs, 2009:2; Olson et al., 2009:2; Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:1). Assessment is an extremely critical factor in therapy and is often underutilised (Busby et al., 2007:279; Olson, [sa]:1). Lack of assessment may lead to unsuited individuals who may have serious psychological problems or perpetrate domestic violence, which would require intensive intervention (DeMaria, 2007:242). The empirical benefits of using assessment in couples' therapy include a 30% improvement of the impact of a family program, a comprehensive picture of the couple's relationship can be obtained and an assessment inventory can save time in identifying the challenges facing the couple (Busby et al., 2007:279-280; Olson, [sa]:1-4). The program incorporates assessment, which gives the counsellor a glimpse of the relationship and couples needs and provides the opportunity for referral.

A marriage preparation program can be tailored to a couple's needs by asking questions to gain a better understanding of the couple's relationship or by assessment using reliable and valid measures. This has been shown to have a positive impact on their relationship (Busby et al., 2007:280). This was proved in the study conducted by Busby et al. (2007:267). Assessment with the guidance of a counsellor, assists couples to identify their strength and growth areas and provides perspective (Busby et al., 2007:280; Olson et al., 2009:22; Olson, [sa]:1-4). Assessment provides the opportunity to give feedback to the couple as they like to have the results of their assessments (Olson et al., 2009:22; Olson, [sa]:1-4). Research indicates that through assessments, couples feel more open to discussing difficult components of marriage (Busby et al., 2007:280; Olson, [sa]:1-4). Finally, initial assessment serves as a pre-test and a post-test can be used to determine the impact of the program (Olson, [sa]:1-4). Currently, there is little information on whether inventories and receiving reports about the relationship influence the relationship after marriage preparation is completed (Busby et al., 2007:280). As indicated, assessment is a pertinent factor that is lacking in marriage education programs.

The first component of the PREPARE program is assessment, which consists of ten core scales (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:1). The first and most critical aspect is idealistic distortion. The assessment is designed in such a way that it can identify when couples are not indicating their true feelings about their relationships but rather fill in the questionnaire to achieve social acceptability. The other scales that are assessed include: communication; conflict resolution; partner style and habits; financial management; leisure activities; affection and sexuality; family and friends; children and parenting; couple flexibility and couple closeness; relationship roles and spiritual beliefs (Busby et al., 2007:280; David & Stafford, 2015:234; Ebrahimi & Kimiaei, 2014:452; Knox & Schacht, 2010:108; Olson et al., 2009:3; Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:1). The PREPARE program scientifically assesses all the important marital components of intimate relationships.

The second component of the PREPARE program is theoretically psycho-educational, solution-focused and structural as it attempts to teach relationship skills which the assessment has indicated the couple need (Busby et al., 2007:279; Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:2). Furthermore, Busby et al. (2007:279) state that combining

assessment with skills development in marriage education programs, offers an opportunity to tailor the program according to a specific couple's needs. In addition to this, the couple each receive a Couples' Workbook which contains 20 exercises aimed at identifying and sharing strength and growth areas (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:2). Secondly, the purpose of the exercises is to strengthen communication skills-teaching, assertiveness and active listening (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:2). The PREPARE program also helps couples build a relationship through negotiation procedures. (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:2). It assists in understanding couple and family systems (based on the Circumplex model of cohesion and flexibility and it assists in identifying and resolving major stressors (Busby et al., 2007:280; Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:2). Finally, the exercises are purposefully constructed to help the couple understand their personalities and build compatibility in the relationship (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:2). The exercises contained in the PREPARE program is a practical way to assist couples putting the theory that they learn into practice.

The PREPARE Program is so advanced that it can accurately predict by 80 to 85%, which couples will be happily married and which couples will get divorced (Knutson & Olson, 2003:532; Olson et al., 2009:8). For example, a therapist specialising in cognitive-behavioural therapy may use the results of the assessment to challenge the thinking patterns of the couple; whereas a rational-emotive therapist may use the program for educational purposes (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:11). The PREPARE program is very comprehensive, user-friendly and can be adapted according to the various therapeutic approaches.

The main advantage of this program is that it explores the interconnectivity of various systems including the person, couple and family systems (Bindler et al., 2012:14; Kunz, 2011:16; Neal & Neal, 2013:722; Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:11). This is in line with the Bioecological theory that is used as a theoretical underpinning of this study. The nature of the skill-building exercises encourages couples to talk to each other and improve their communication (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:11). The PREPARE Program is a holistic program that covers all marital components while exploring the interconnectivity of systems as in the Bioecological theory.

The PREPARE program has many benefits, for both the counsellors administering the program as well as the couple who are participating it (Olson et al., 2009:16). The comprehensive report provides the counsellor with diagnostic information about the couple. It is a detailed guide of how to assist premarital couples as well as marital couples and includes meticulous data about the challenges facing the couple (Busby et al., 2007:287; Olson et al., 2009:16). The report provides both partners' perspectives of how they perceive their relationship and to what extent they agree on certain categories (Olson et al., 2009:16). The PREPARE program allows couples to openly discuss their issues and to learn skills in how to cope with the matters identified as their growth areas (Olson et al., 2009:16). Finally, the PREPARE is preventative in nature and provides an opportunity for the couple to work through their differences before they develop into more serious problems in their marriage (Benokraitis, 2011:286; Olson et al., 2009:16). The PREPARE program is a comprehensive program that gives both counsellors and couples a glimpse into understanding their relationship and learning important skills to deal with the challenges that are identified through the program.

The PREPARE program has been discussed in detail; the researcher will now discuss the effectiveness of marital education programs.

3.5 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MARITAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

There is a great need for marital education programs; however, the effectiveness of these programs is still in question.

The next section will discuss marriage education programs and its applicability to stable versus unstable marriages.

3.5.1 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MARRIAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND THEIR APPLICABILITY TO STABLE VERSUS UNSTABLE MARRIAGES

The objective of marriage education is to assist couples in building strong, long-lasting, happy marriages (Blanchard, Hawkins, Fawcett & Baldwin, 2009:203). Most marriage education programs fall within the prevention category, focusing on developing the

couple's strengths and relationship skills to prevent future problems (Blanchard et al., 2009:203).

Previously research has indicated that marital education is only appropriate for couples who do not have serious marital problems and are at a high risk for divorce (Blanchard et al., 2009:203; DeMaria, 2005:242). The study of Blanchard et al. (2009:208), it confirms what research indicates; that marriage education programs provided positive results on increased communication and skills development for well-functioning couples and couples who were experiencing some levels of distress. There was no indication in this study whether highly distressed couples would benefit from marriage education programs as a preventative intervention measure. On the contrary, recent studies indicated that a marital education program can have a positive effect on couples' marital satisfaction even after a high marital risk such as infidelity and becoming parents; even if it may be short-term (Allen, Rhoades, Stanley, Loew & Markman, 2012:32; Petch, Halford, Creedy & Gamble, 2012:501). Divorce is twice as likely to happen because of an affair and is very difficult to recover from (Bradley & Furrow, 2013:207). Marriage education programs are considered effective prevention measures even after divorces, which is very difficult to recover from. However, further research needs to be conducted on whether marriage education programs are effective with highly distressed couples.

3.5.2 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MARRIAGE EDUCATION ON MARITAL SATISFACTION

Existing research that has been done on marital education programs indicates that there is a positive correlation between the success of the program and marital satisfaction (Markman et al., 2016:166). However, Markman et al. (2013:166) state that there have been few research studies conducted on how marriage education programs prevent divorce. Therefore, their study compared divorce rates of couples who had attended the PREP program (Prevention and Relationship Program) in religious organisations, compared to couples who participated in normal premarital programs as organised by the pastor of the church who is marrying the couple (Markman et al., 2013:166). In the study conducted by Markman et al. (2013:166) they aimed to test the theory that the PREP program could moderate the impact of divorce

by dealing with observed negative communication patterns as well as physical aggression.

The research yielded interesting results that were contrary to their predictions. Firstly, there was no significant difference in the divorce rates for couples who attended the PREP program, compared to those couples who attended normal premarital programs conducted by the pastor of their specific religious organisation (Markman et al., 2013:167). Furthermore, in terms of the negative communication and physical aggression; couples who experienced higher levels of observed negative communication and physical aggression and then attended the PREP program were more likely to divorce than those who participated in the normal premarital programs organised by the church where the marriage will be taking place (Markman et al., 2013:169).

The opposite was found to be true for couples who had lower levels of negative communication and physical aggression who attended the PREP program. They were less likely to divorce, compared to those couples who attended normal premarital programs organised by the church where they were getting married (Markman et al., 2013:169). One of the interpretations offered (which is to be read with caution because of the limitations of the study) was that those couples who communicated well and then attended a normal premarital program, were not made aware of future difficulties they may have to face, that is not currently present in the couple's relationship. Perhaps couples attending normal premarital program were not given the tools and skills for dealing with the difficulties, as opposed to the PREP program which is mainly skills-based (Markman et al., 2013:170). The PREPARE program maintains that it can accurately predict (between 80-85%) whether couples who received low scores in the inventory, (due to problems with communication, conflict handling, finances) will be happily married or divorced three years after the PREPARE inventory (Knutson & Olson, 2003:532). This indicates that negative communication and physical aggression can lead to unhappy marriages and divorce even if they attend marriage education programs.

Another interesting interpretation of this study is that premarital programs conducted by religious organisations stressed the sanctity of marriage and how divorce can

impact on a couple's faith (Markman et al., 2013:170). This was hypothesised because "the relationship to God" appeared to be one of the most prevalent topics discussed in premarital programs hosted by religious organisations (Markman et al., 2013:170). Findings indicate that in religious marital education programs, couples are encouraged to preserve marriage because getting divorced, can impact on their faith negatively. Further research would need to be done to confirm this.

The next section explores the effectiveness of longitudinal studies on marriage education programs.

3.5.3 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LONGITUDINAL STUDIES ON MARRIAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

One of the critical aspects mentioned in studying the effectiveness of marriage education programs, is to do longitudinal studies of the program to determine short-term and long-term effectiveness. Fournier, Druckman, Robinson and Olson (1979) (in Knutson & Olson, 2003:531), conducted one of the earliest studies on the PREPARE marriage education program. The study consisted of four groups that took part in a pre-test and post-test phase (Knutson & Olson, 2003:531). The first group was the control group and did not participate in the PREPARE program until after the study had been concluded (Knutson & Olson, 2003:531). The second group participated in a marriage education program offered by clergy and the final group participated in the PREPARE program, but only received feedback three months after their wedding (Knutson & Olson, 2003:531). The final group participated in the PREPARE program but only received one feedback session (Knutson & Olson, 2003:531). The studies revealed that groups 2, 3 and 4 experienced higher marital satisfaction levels than the control group (Knutson & Olson, 2003:531). This study pioneered the need for longitudinal research to measure the long-term effectiveness of the PREPARE program (Knutson & Olson, 2003:531). As with the PREPARE program, longitudinal studies need to be conducted on other marriage education programs to determine their effectiveness.

The purpose of the first PREPARE longitudinal study conducted by Fowers and Olson in 1986 "was to determine the predictive validity of the PREPARE inventory" (Knutson

& Olson, 2003:531). Validity refers to “the ability of an instrument to measure the characteristics it was designed to measure” and reliability refers to the ability of an instrument to measure the same results of an instrument over time (Olson et al., 2009:7). The study of Fowers and Olson (1986) was conducted with couples, three years after they had taken the PREPARE program (Knutson & Olson, 2003:532). A research instrument was developed to measure couple satisfaction and it was found that there were four groups of couples identified namely: happily married couples, unhappily married couples, divorced couples and couples who had cancelled their wedding (Knutson & Olson, 2003:532). The initial PREPARE score accurately predicted which couples would separate and divorce and which would remain happily married three years after taking the PREPARE program (Knutson & Olson, 2003:532). Longitudinal studies result in more accurate results.

A second study, similar in methodology to the former study, was conducted by Larson and Olson in 1989. Once again, the PREPARE program scores accurately indicated that the higher the score on the PREPARE program, the happier the couple was, as opposed to the couples who had low scores on the PREPARE program, who were either separated or divorced. (Knutson & Olson, 2003:532).

The third longitudinal study was conducted by Fowers, Montel and Olson in 1996 (Knutson & Olson, 2003:532). In this study, not only was the clinical reliability and validity of the program confirmed, but 4 couple types were developed, based on the data collected (Knutson & Olson, 2003:532). These couple types include: Vitalized couples; Harmonious couples; Traditional Couples and Conflicted couples (Knutson & Olson, 2003:532). Vitalized couples are gauged as the happiest couples, as they agree on most items and have more strengths than growth areas (Olson et al., 2009:14). Harmonious couples have strengths but often experience “children and parenting” as a growth area (Olson et al., 2009:14). Conventional couples, also known as traditional couples, have many strengths in areas such as: children and parenting; traditional roles and spirituality. However, they have problems with issues such as personality, communication and conflict resolution (Olson et al., 2009:14). The last type is categorised as conflicted as their growth areas far outweigh their strength areas (Olson et al., 2009:14). The PREPARE program categorises couples to identify working areas and compatibility.

Another longitudinal study was then conducted on the PREPARE program by Olson and Miller in 2007. By this time, the ENRICH marital enrichment program had also developed and was based on the PREPARE inventory. This study took place with couples who had taken part in both the PREPARE and ENRICH programs and who had been married between one and five years (Olson & Miller, 2007:1). In this study, 52% of couples found the feedback given in the PREPARE program as “very useful”; 30 % of the couples said that the feedback was “generally useful” and 18% stated it was “somewhat useful”. Couples were also requested to rate the “Building Strong Marriages Workbook” and couple exercises (Olsen & Miller, 2007:2). 40% of the couples found the book to be “somewhat useful”; while 32% of the couples thought that that the booklet was “generally useful” and 28% of the couples found it “very useful” (Olson & Miller, 2007:2). The couple communication part of the program was also evaluated. It was found that 75% of the couples rated it as “very useful”, while 25% of the couples found it “generally useful”. Furthermore, 46% of the couples reported that they sometimes used the skills that they were taught regarding communication, whereas 14% of the couples reported that they still use the skills obtained on a regular basis. The couples concluded that participating in both the PREPARE and ENRICH programs was a very valuable experience. Longitudinal studies provide the opportunity to test measuring instruments and materials, for purposes of improving the existing program.

In all these studies, one can argue that the effectiveness of the PREPARE program has been studied by Dr Olson, the founder of the program and therefore, the findings may be influenced by researcher bias; however, it is important to note that most of the studies conducted by Dr Olson also include neutral third-party researchers. Furthermore, other studies have been conducted on the PREPARE program that do not include Dr Olson and therefore it can be concluded that the PREPARE program is indeed an effective marriage education program that produces data validity and reliability across short-term and long-term studies.

Another aspect that has received limited attention, regarding the effectiveness of marriage education programs, is the effectiveness of the pedagogic alliance in marriage education, which is discussed next.

3.5.4 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PEDAGOGIC ALLIANCE IN MARRIAGE EDUCATION

Limited studies have been done on the effectiveness of marriage education programs which take the pedagogic alliance, which is the professional relationship between the therapist and the client, into consideration, even in the PREPARE program (Hawkins, Stanley, Blanchard & Albright, 2012:3). The hypothesis is that a positive pedagogic alliance may enhance the effectiveness of marriage education programs (Hawkins et al., 2012:3). However, in the study conducted by Busby et al. (2007:288) it was found that couples appreciated the input and perspective of the counsellors and facilitators and it agreed that further research needs to be conducted on why the facilitator makes the difference in the pedagogic alliance (Hawkins et al., 2012:3). Even the participants in the conditional group of the Busby et al. (2007) study, who did not have a facilitator assisting them with the marital education program, stated that it would be more desirable to have a facilitator go through the program with them (Busby et al., 2007:288). The difference between using inventory assessments to structure a session, versus the facilitator structuring a session by asking questions, is that the couple's needs come to the fore in the former and the therapist is the focus in the latter (Busby et al., 2007:288). Further research needs to be conducted on the role of the counsellor in evaluating the effectiveness of marriage education programs, as there seems to be insufficient research on this topic.

The next section will discuss the effectiveness of marriage education programs according to their accessibility.

3.5.5 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MARRIAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMS ACCORDING TO THEIR ACCESSIBILITY

One of the challenges presented by research, is the accessibility of marital education programs to low-income and low-educated communities and across cultures. Marital education material that is of a high language quality is likely to lead to dropouts of couples from lower income and lower educational backgrounds (Petch et al., 2012:506). Therefore, marital education material would have to be written at the lowest educational level of the community and would have to be audio-visual in nature (Petch

et al., 2012:506). It is important to take into consideration, the characteristics of the target group, to ensure that they will have accessibility to the program.

Research indicates that experts believe that marriage education programs are universally standard, and all include basic components such as communication and conflict handling skills (Dion, 2005:145). However, experts who have worked with low-income couples have found, that using the traditional approach such as lectures and didactic instruction, do not accommodate literacy levels and learning styles of low-income couples (Dion, 2005:145). Thus, conventional programs have been adapted to specifically accommodate the needs of low-income couples. Furthermore, the curriculum is structured in such a way, that equipment and materials used for the programs have been revised to focus less on written exercises, reading and homework and focus more on role-play, storytelling and practicing skills (Dion, 2005:145). The traditional marital components have been revised to include issues more relevant to low-income couples, such as: trust; fidelity and commitment; multiple partners; fertility; setting and achieving economic goals as a team; healing from past psychological injuries such as physical and sexual abuse and understanding characteristics of healthy marriages and relationships (Dion, 2005:145).

Low income couples struggle to get access to marriage education programs, because they are accessible through media campaigns, websites; self-help books and self-guided internet courses, (Ooms, 2005:2) which low-income couples cannot always afford. Marriage education programs are still not widely available in all communities and in some communities, they are not available at all (Ooms, 2005:4). Furthermore, the quality of the programs differs, as no standard credentials have been developed for marriage education yet (Ooms, 2005:4). A Lack of material resources creates obstacles for low income couples to access marriage education programs.

Most marriage education studies have been done on white-middle to upper class couples (Dion, 2005:139; Hawkins, Stanley, Cowan, Fincham, Beach, Cowan, Rhoades, Markman & Daire, 2013:110; Olson et al., 2009:136; Ooms, 2005:2). Furthermore, insufficient research has been conducted on the effects of marriage education programs in ethnic and racially diverse communities, which makes it difficult to draw conclusions about its efficacy (Asai & Olson, 2004:412; Hawkins et al.,

2008:724). Cultural backgrounds are an issue as many programs are not culturally applicable; not just in terms of their methodology (pen and paper vs online) but also due to the fact that a comprehensive adaptation process to ensure cultural sensitivity has never been done (Asai & Olson, 2004:412). In some cultures, family contexts are very significant and have an impact on the relationship between individuals, especially in the case of arranged marriages. In this instance, the extended families have a key role to play in the couple's relationship (Asai & Olson, 2004:412). Therefore, these factors need to be understood and integrated when developing a culturally sensitive program (Asai & Olson, 2004:412). Research has indicated that collaborative processes rarely take place between the originators of a program and the minority group to establish a culturally applicable program that suits the needs of that population (Asai & Olson, 2004:413). To achieve this, the constructs of the original program may need to be altered to accommodate the intimate relationship patterns of that population (Asai & Olson, 2004:413). When developing marriage education programs for other populations and cultures, the collaborative process is very important.

The PREPARE program has conducted studies of the applicability of the program in other countries. In 2004, Asai and Olson (2004) conducted a study that prioritised cultural sensitivity and adapted the PREPARE program to suit the needs of Japanese couples (Asai & Olson, 2004:411). This was a lengthy process that involved a group of people comprising of American and Japanese researchers to translate, back-translate and modify constructs of the PREPARE program, to ensure cultural sensitivity for Japanese couples (Asai & Olson, 2004:411). Language differences also contribute to the need for the collaboration process to ensure that cultural sensitivity is maintained when adapting it from the original program (Asai & Olson, 2004:413). It was found that the religion aspect in the American version of the PREPARE program had to be changed to accommodate Japanese couples because it focused on the Judeo-Christian religion rather than on their beliefs (Asai & Olson, 2004:415). In addition, relationships with parents and in-laws have extreme significance for Japanese couples, as opposed to White- middle class couples and this had to be incorporated into the Japanese version of the PREPARE program (Asai & Olson, 2004:416). The program was then presented to Japanese couples and it produced positive results on the effectiveness on marital satisfaction (Asai & Olson, 2004:422).

However, Asai and Olson (2004:423), state that additional research needs to be conducted within the diverse Japanese culture to confirm the effectiveness of the program. It is important to understand the cultural context of a population, to ensure that the marriage education program remains applicable.

Similarly, a study was conducted in Korea where the PREPARE Program was slightly modified to suit the needs of Korean couples and it became known as the K-PREPARE (Kim, 2009:1). In this study, 2344 Korean couples were selected for purposes of translation, verification, and component structure and reliability analysis of the program (Kim, 2009:1). A team of people who consisted of Korean and English-speaking people were put to the task of translating the PREPARE into Korean. It was found that 3 factors identified in the American version needed to be converted to two various factors in the K-PREPARE version (Kim, 2009:1). Personality, communication and conflict resolution were changed into personality and communication and conflict avoidance (Kim, 2009:1). The K-PREPARE was then presented to the Korean couples and findings revealed that it was culturally relevant, the reliability coefficient of the data collected was acceptable and the program was effective in assisting couples to prepare for marriage (Kim, 2009:2). Prior to the development of the K-PREPARE, there was no premarital tool available; therefore, it proved to be a positive development for the marriage education field in Korea (Kim, 2009:1).

Similarly, another study was conducted in Hungary on the effectiveness of the CONNECT program, which is based essentially on the structure and exercises presented in the PREPARE Program (Mihalec, 2014:1). This program was administered to 54 couples and a control group of 58 couples (Mihalec, 2014:1). A pre-test and post-test were conducted with the couples and the results indicated, that the experimental group's results from the various categories of the program (e.g. finances, communication, goals) increased positively whereas the control group's results decreased; thereby confirming the program's effectiveness (Mihalec, 2014:2). Research confirms, that using collaboration when developing a marriage education program, can positively contribute to how couples prepare for marriage.

3.5.6 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MARRIAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF SAME-SEX COUPLES

Another challenge presented by research is that marital education programs are designed for hetero-sexual couples and may not be appropriate for couples of the same sex (Buzzella, Whitton & Tompson, 2012: 306). Although same-sex couples may experience the same stressors of hetero-sexual couples; they also experience additional stressors that can have a negative effect on their relationship satisfaction such as “discrimination, limited social support and lack of well-established relationship norms (Buzzella et al., 2012:308). In response to this need, Buzzella and Whitton developed a same-sex group marital education program in 2009 (Buzzella et al., 2012:308). The program was developed based on existing marital education program content, but further modified to suit the unique needs of same sex couples, i.e. discrimination (Buzzella et al., 2012:308). This model indicated improvements in the couple’s relationship quality and may be used as a guideline on how to modify existing marriage education programs to meet the needs of same-sex couples (Buzzella et al., 2012:316). Same-sex couples sought to find and interact with other couples who had been through the program, to form part of their support system as many had been discriminated against or rejected by their family and friends (Buzzella et al., 2012:319). Therefore, marriage education programs need to be adapted to cater for the unique needs of same-sex couples and further research needs to be conducted on the applicability of marriage education programs to same-sex couples.

With the effectiveness of marital education programs having been discussed, the researcher will now provide a discussion on marital education programs in South Africa as this is the context for this study.

3.6 MARITAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN SOUTH AFRICA

As indicated above, significant research has been conducted into the effectiveness of marital education program globally and since this study is taking place in South Africa, it is important to explore the studies that have been conducted on the effectiveness of marital education programs locally. The effectiveness of marriage education programs needs to be assessed to determine whether it is indeed a prevention measure for the

rising rates of divorce in South Africa. Most couples opt for divorce when marriage circumstances become unsatisfactory (Bernstein, 1992:4). Furthermore, high divorce rates are an indication that couples need urgent assistance in dealing with the realities of marriage (Bernstein, 1992:6). Statistical data in South Africa indicate that there has been a general trend in the decrease of marriages and an increase in divorces from 2003-2014, with the highest number in 2005 (32484) and the lowest number of divorces in 2011 (20980) (Statistical release: Marriages and divorces, 2014). The table below indicates the findings:

Table 2: Number of published divorces in South Africa by population group, 2003-2014

Year	Total	Numbers						%						
		Black African	Coloured	India/Asia	White	Mixed	Unspecified	Total	Black African	Coloured	India/Asia	White	Mixed	Unspecified
2003	31566	7657	3911	1508	12639	532	5319	100.0	24.3	12.4	4.8	40.0	1.7	16.9
2004	31768	8965	3300	1648	12437	594	4824	100.0	28.2	10.4	5.2	39.1	1.9	15.2
2005	32484	8672	3568	1635	11585	538	6489	100.0	26.7	11.0	5.0	35.7	10.7	20.0
2006	31270	9113	3451	1676	11079	613	5338	100.0	29.1	11.0	5.4	35.4	2.0	17.1
2007	29639	9055	3558	1715	9935	865	4511	100.0	30.6	12.0	5.8	33.5	2.9	15.2
2008	28924	10110	3057	1802	9481	902	3572	100.0	35.0	10.6	6.2	32.8	3.1	12.3
2009	30763	10528	4016	1610	9981	2912	1716	100.0	34.2	13.1	5.2	32.4	9.5	5.6
2010	22936	8169	3189	1294	6995	31	3258	100.0	35.6	13.9	5.6	30.5	0.1	14.2
2011	20980	7517	3473	1359	6730	-	1901	100.0	35.8	16.6	6.5	32.1	0.0	9.1
2012	21998	7311	3967	1036	7238	22	2424	100.0	33.2	18.0	4.7	32.9	0.1	11.0
2013	23885	8656	3888	1425	7561	24	2331	100.0	36.2	16.3	6.0	31.7	0.1	9.8
2014	24689	9167	4994	1522	6970	842	1194	100.0	37.1	20.2	6.2	28.2	3.4	4.8

It is clearly shown that from 2003-2007, divorce was more dominant in the White population, but that from 2008-2014, Black couples have the higher rate of divorce (Statistical release: Marriages and Divorces, 2014). The number of divorces in the Indian and Coloured population remained relatively the same until 2013 and 2014, when there was an increase in divorce rates amongst Coloured couples. (Statistical release: Marriages and Divorces, 2014). Generally, statistical data reveal that divorce rates are increasing, while marriage rates are decreasing in South Africa.

Table 3: Number of divorces by age and population group (male divorcees), 2014

Age group	Population group						
	Total	Black African	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White	Other	Unspecified
Total	24689	9432	5225	1736	7136	125	1035
<25	99	10	22	16	47	-	4
25-29	1019	179	296	119	392	-	33
30-34	2798	806	705	255	942	5	85
35-39	3851	1561	892	290	965	7	136
40-44	4634	1844	1074	316	1230	15	155
45-49	4051	1631	872	252	1143	6	147
50-54	2888	1254	574	150	792	5	113
55-59	1729	730	296	63	550	2	88
60-64	901	374	130	32	320	2	43
65-69	417	147	63	14	174	2	17
70-74	199	71	24	6	87	-	11
75-79	84	31	11	4	34	-	4
80+	38	19	2	-	14	1	2
Unspecified	1981	775	264	219	446	80	197

Table 4: Number of divorces by age group and populations group (female divorcees) 2014

Age group	Population group						
	Total	Black African	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White	Other	Unspecified
Total	24689	9466	5370	1648	7085	29	1091
<25	481	102	99	57	207	-	16
25-29	2184	710	483	200	704	3	84
30-34	4132	1742	902	296	1056	6	130
35-39	4470	1940	963	299	1105	2	161

40-44	4412	1732	1004	264	1229	2	181
45-49	3374	1246	843	210	930	2	143
50-54	2101	763	464	123	634	-	117
55-59	1006	337	171	41	399	1	57
60-64	501	161	110	12	198	1	19
65-69	188	45	32	8	94	-	9
70-74	57	12	5	3	33	-	4
75-79	21	6	2	-	11	-	2
80+	10	-	2	-	8	-	-
Unspecified	1752	670	290	135	477	12	168

The statistics indicate that men were more likely to divorce between the ages of 40-44 and this was similar for all population groups (Statistical release: Marriages and Divorces, 2014). In White and Coloured populations, women were likely to divorce between 40-44, whereas with African and Indian Couples, women were more likely to divorce between 35-39 (Statistical release: Marriages and Divorces, 2014). The average age of divorce is in the age group 40-44, which gives an indication that couples are getting married later when they are older, because the divorce rate is high in the first five to nine years of marriage.

Table 5: Number of divorces by duration of marriage and age group (male divorcees), 2014

Age group of husbands	Duration of marriage									
	Total	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35+	Unspecified
Total	24689	4553	6751	4623	3324	2248	1180	616	503	891
<25	99	85	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
25-29	1019	699	285	4	1	-	2	-	-	28
30-34	2798	1094	1378	224	8	-	2	7	-	85
35-39	3851	761	1687	1032	238	6	1	2	4	120
40-44	4634	577	1204	1344	1042	306	8	1	9	143
45-49	4051	372	736	809	870	852	240	4	15	153
50-54	2888	251	432	422	493	552	487	146	15	90
55-59	1729	149	229	222	240	230	233	250	98	78
60-64	901	83	129	109	116	97	69	103	152	43
65-69	417	37	64	48	56	41	34	29	88	20
70-74	199	24	26	30	21	14	13	13	49	9
75-79	84	20	11	6	12	2	6	3	17	7

80+	38	6	6	6	3	3	2	6	6	-
Unspecified	1981	395	577	367	224	145	83	52	50	108

Table 6: Number of divorces by duration of marriage and age group (female divorcees), 2014

Age group of wives	Duration of marriage									
	Total	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35+	Unspecified
Total	24689	4553	6751	4623	3324	2248	1180	616	503	891
<25	481	388	69	-	-	-	-	-	-	24
25-29	2184	1151	910	52	-	-	4	-	-	67
30-34	4132	1089	2106	755	42	-	-	12	-	128
35-39	4470	654	1465	1480	687	59	-	-	5	120
40-44	4412	408	830	1070	1188	689	63	1	10	153
45-49	3374	296	477	517	651	802	447	40	21	123
50-54	2101	171	252	242	316	343	381	277	34	85
55-59	1006	67	108	111	130	120	126	159	145	40
60-64	501	36	58	57	58	49	50	45	124	24
65-69	188	18	19	19	16	8	15	13	72	8
70-74	57	2	8	6	5	5	5	6	15	5
75-79	21	3	2	1	-	2	2	2	9	-
80+	10	3	3	2	-	-	-	-	2	-
Unspecified	1752	267	444	311	231	171	87	61	66	114

The peak of divorce rates (27,3%), took place between 5-9 years for all populations; whereas 45.7% of marriages lasted less than ten years (Statistical release: Marriages and Divorces, 2014). The trend also indicates that the amount of divorces decreased after nine years, as the duration of marriage increased (Statistical release: Marriages and Divorces, 2014). Therefore, the theory which states that the first few years of marriage are the most difficult, has been proved correct, as this is the period when most divorces occur, regardless of the population type.

Table 7: Number of registered civil marriages in South Africa, 2003-2014

Year of registration	Number of civil marriages
2003	178689
2004	176521
2005	180657
2006	184860
2007	183030
2008	186522
2009	171989
2010	170826
2011	167264
2012	161112
2013	158642
2014	150852

The number of registered civil marriages fluctuated between the years 2003 to 2008, with the highest number of registered marriages in 2008 (Statistical release: Marriages and Divorces, 2014). From 2009, the number of registered civil marriages steadily began to decrease (Statistical release: Marriages and Divorces, 2014). This is in line with the theory that the number of marriages is decreasing as divorce rates are increasing.

Table 8: Number of registered customary marriages in South Africa, 2003-2014

Year of registration	Number of marriages
2003	17283
2004	20301
2005	19252
2006	14039
2007	20259
2008	16003
2009	13506
2010	9996
2011	5084
2012	4555
2013	3498
2014	3062

Like civil marriages, traditional marriages are in drastic decline. The highest number of civil marriages (20301) was registered in 2004 (Statistical release: Marriages and Divorces, 2014).

Even though the statistics posed on marriage speak to the populations, age groups and duration of marriages; very little research has been conducted on marriage patterns in South Africa to get a deeper understanding of why customary marriage numbers are declining so and why divorces are occurring for most population groups between the age of 40-44 both in men and women. One can see the numbers but there is no explanation for these trends.

In order to obtain explanations for these trends, there is a need for postgraduate studies to be conducted on marriage patterns in South Africa. Limited postgraduate studies and research have been conducted on marriage education in South Africa, due to the problems experienced for collecting and interpreting the data (Budlender et al., [Sa]: 2). The reasons for this, are the diversity of cultures, languages, religions and marriage forms in this country. (Budlender et al., [Sa]:1). Diversity is one of the obstacles to conducting research studies on marriage education in South Africa.

The earliest study of marriage education was conducted at the Rand Afrikaans University, by Pretorius in 1983 and published in 1988. This study aimed to develop a marital education program tailored to a South African context, which could be used to measure the effectiveness of the program on marital adjustment of couples. The study was based on elements of a standard marriage education program that was conducted in a group and which consisted of the following: Session 1 focused on establishing the group contract and structuring the sessions; Session 2 focused specifically on communication; Session 3 focused on effective listening and speaking skills development; Session 4 was about teaching the couples conflict handling skills; Session 5 focused on teaching the couple about intimacy in marriage and the final session was focused on evaluation and setting up contracts (Pretorius, 1988:164). Although her study did look at African marriages, it was limited to a study done in America (Pretorius, 1988:63) and at that time, no research on marital education had been conducted on Indian, Coloured or Black people (Pretorius, 1988:63). This may have been because South Africa was still very much in the throes of the Apartheid system. The results of this study revealed, that the marriage education

program that was developed through this study, was applicable to the South African context and that it also had short-term and long-term effects on marital satisfaction in couples (Pretorius, 1988:166).

The next study conducted on marriage education in South Africa by Arlene Bernstein was in 1992. She focused on a follow-up study of a marriage preparation program in Johannesburg, to determine whether the program helped couples to adjust to marriage (Bernstein, 1992:3). Bernstein (1992:6) argued that the first few years of marriage are the most challenging for the couples, as they would negotiate various aspects such as role division, allocation of time and space, financial decision-making and parenthood. It was further argued that the exact degree to which couples could remember and implement the skills learnt in the marriage education program, could not be determined fully, due to the fact that the couple would barely have begun their journey with its possible difficulties and reality-checks (Bernstein, 1992:35,84). It was then recommended that marriage education programs be followed up with other programs, like enrichment programs, to ensure continuity (Bernstein, 1992:91). Follow-up studies are an effective way to determine the effectiveness of marriage education programs over time.

After the Apartheid era, South Africa became a democratic country, where all people had equal rights. This had a significant impact on marriages. The introduction of policies such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the introduction of the Civil Unions Act in 2006 and the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act in 1998, as well as other international gay rights movements, have changed marriages and relationships. Same-sex marriages and customary marriages have been given the same recognition and rights as civil marriages in many parts of the world. Even though there have been changes, there still is insufficient research on marriage education for other ethnic groups. These studies were conducted prior to South Africa becoming a democracy and therefore, focused on white couples.

A study was conducted in 2000 by Duncan and he reached a similar conclusion to Bernstein (1992), which is, the effect of marriage preparation on marital satisfaction is short term (Duncan, 2000:ii) and which similarly recommended that education programs should be followed up with enrichment programs. However, Duncan (2000:ii) proposes that enrichment programs should be in line with the life cycle changes that occur in

marriage. Like Bernstein's study, Duncan agrees that the early years of marriage are the most difficult, because couples come out of the dream world and have a more realistic view of what married life is about (Duncan, 2000:4). Furthermore, Duncan (2000:4) argues, that the way in which the couple communicates, sets the foundation for the future of marriage, determining whether there will be progression or deterioration. Some couples who participate in marriage education programs, do not always experience an increase in marital satisfaction, but for others, participating in a marriage education program could reveal insights into their prospective partners, which they do not like and result in them deciding not to get married (Duncan, 2000:12). Studies conducted on marriage education programs in South Africa are known to enhance couple's knowledge about marriage; develop realistic understandings of marriage and make the couple aware of their communication styles and conflict resolution techniques (Duncan, 2000:26). However, Duncan (2000:26) argues, that marriage education should take place at least six months after marriage as engaged couples are "too starry eyed" to enjoy the benefits of marriage education.

A study conducted in America yielded insightful results regarding the amount of time that couples should spend on marriage education programs, to get the most benefit out of the program. Hawkins et al. (2012:8) found that 9-20 hours of participation in a marriage education program yielded much more positive results in the couples' satisfaction compared to programs that were conducted in less than 9 hours. This may be due to the time needed to learn and to implement new skills (Hawkins et al., 2012:8). However, more than 20 hours of participation in marriage education programs did not have any more significant impact on the effectiveness of the program (Hawkins et al., 2012:8). It was however argued, that more time should be spent on marriage education if couples are disadvantaged or distressed. (Hawkins et al., 2012:8). They compared these studies to a weekend marriage education workshop. The results indicated that a weekend workshop had more modest effects than other marriage education programs and therefore concluded that weekend workshops have a place in the marriage education field (Hawkins et al., 2012:8). It is effective to conduct research on the amount of time that couples spend on marriage education programs, to ensure that they receive the maximum benefit of the program.

The former studies have mentioned how difficult the first few years of marriage are, because there are so many negotiation processes that need to take place. One study did briefly explore the challenges that couples face in the early years of their marriage but was unpublished as it was a pilot study. Only one study was conducted on the PREPARE program in South Africa. It was conducted at the Chevrah Kadisha in Johannesburg, Gauteng. The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences and challenges of newly married couples; to explore their support systems and determine the impact on the PREPARE program (Rome, 2011:1). This study confirmed that marriage consists of both highlights and challenges. Some of the highlights that the couples experienced in their first years of marriage include: "building a home together; alone time together; a greater level of comfort and security; enjoyment of living together, and having babies" (Rome, 2011:1). The challenges that couples faced included: "serious illnesses experienced by one partner, financial difficulty, and having to grow up and take responsibility for their own home" (Rome, 2011:1). Creating a home together and sharing space was one of the biggest challenges (Rome, 2011:1). Other conflict areas included: "adjusting to new roles, financial, and in-law issues" (Rome, 2011:1). One couple experienced significant difficulties and dropped out from the program, until eventually they sought a therapist to assist them with their problems (Rome, 2011:1). Taking part in the PREPARE program helped couples to mitigate these factors, by facilitating couple discussion on issues in their relationship and most of the couples reported that they had a positive experience of the program (Rome, 2011:1).

Another positive aspect for the couple regarding the program, was the counsellor, who was non-prescriptive and non-judgemental and who created a safe emotional space in which to discuss the relationship (Rome, 2011:1). Couples reported that they took part in the program when things were stressful in their lives, especially with the wedding; however, Rome (2011:1) believes, that this is the perfect time for couples to seriously look at their relationship. Couples struggle to recall the components of the program as well as the skills that they learnt; but what most prominent for them, was the experience of the "counselling" process in the PREPARE program (Rome, 2011:2). Most of the couples experienced the PREPARE program as positive, despite the challenges that are presented to them in the early years of marriage and the most significant aspect for the couples was the role of the counsellor as a neutral third party who creates a safe emotional space and who is non-descriptive and non-judgemental.

In this section, previous studies conducted on marriage education programs were explored, including a pilot study of the PREPARE program, which is the main focus of this study. The researcher concludes this chapter by consolidating all the pertinent points of discussion.

3.7 SUMMARY

There is sufficient evidence in research, to prove that effective marriage programs have a positive impact on couples' marital satisfaction levels. Despite the development of marriage education programs, statistics indicate that divorce rates still seem to be increasing, while marriage rates seem to be decreasing. The timespan of marriages is decreasing in South Africa as well as globally and this highlights the necessity for the implementation of marriage education programs as a preventative measure. Furthermore, several studies indicate marriage education is not sufficient on its own and needs to be followed up with marriage enrichment programs that run parallel to the life cycle development of the family. Moreover, this chapter proves that longitudinal research is necessary for obtaining the validity and reliability coefficients of marriage education programs. As research indicates, more studies need to be done on the effectiveness of marriage education programs on highly distressed couples globally and in South Africa.

Even though the PREPARE Program is known as one of the leading marriage education programs globally, research has shown that it may not be applicable to specific populations in other countries, due to cultural diversity. South Africa can be described as a country with diversity in terms of culture, race, religion and socio-economic status. The PREPARE program seems to cater mainly for White-middle class people, which is limiting in marriage education studies. Similarly, in South Africa, there is insufficient research done on ethnically diverse marriages in South Africa. As Olson, mentioned in his studies, a collaboration process would need to be done with researchers who are well versed in family and marriage patterns of that population. Due to the differences in race, culture, language and socio-economic status, a collaboration process would need to be done with each of these populations to adapt the PREPARE program to suit the specific needs of the identified population.

CHAPTER 4

COMPONENTS OF MARRIAGE AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS ACCORDING TO THE PREPARE MARITAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Every marriage consists of components, like communication, conflict handling, finances and sex to name a few and it is how the couple manages these components, that determines the level of success of the marriage. It has been assumed that the predictability of the quality of a marital relationship rests on the quality of a premarital relationship (Olson et al., 2009:3). Therefore, marital preparation is so vital.

In chapter 3, the PREPARE Program was discussed in detail as a therapeutic marital education intervention was discussed in detail. It is designed in such a manner, that the various marital components are explored, and the couples' strength and growth areas identified as tools with which to work on strengthening the relationship. Furthermore, in chapter 2, the Bioecological theory of Bronfenbrenner was discussed as a theoretical framework to explain the constant interaction between the couples themselves and with their environments, results in ongoing personal change and change in their relationship. The researcher developed an interactive model indicating how the various levels of the Bioecological theory (the Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem and the Chronosystem) interact and influence the individual, as well as the couple on a continuous basis.

It is also vital that the counsellor or professional is well researched in the components of marriages and intimate relationships for the purposes of working effectively with complex couple situations.

The PREPARE program gives a comprehensive and unique overview on all aspects of the couple's relationship (Olson et al., 2009:2). It consists of ten core scales which further explore: relationship dynamics; couple and family scales; SCOPE personality profiles; stress profiles and other customised scales (Olson et al., 2009:2). The marital components explored in the PREPARE program include: communication; conflict resolution; partner styles and habits, finances; leisure activities; affection and sexuality; family-of-origin;

children and parenting; couple closeness and flexibility; relationship roles and spirituality. These marital components form part of the various levels of the Bioecological theory that impact on the individual and the couple on a continuous basis, leading to ongoing change within the individual and in the couple system.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a couple's workbook, with various exercises on the components, are supplied once the program is complete and is designed to assist the couple in discussing concerns identified in the assessment (Olson, et al., 2009:6). This is once again in line with Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory, as the couple (Person) are partaking in a marriage education program (Process), which consists of a couple of sessions (Time) to strengthen their marriage (Context). There are six core couple exercises that include: sharing strength and growth areas; creating a wish list using assertiveness and active listening; ten steps for resolving conflict; couple and family maps (mapping your relationship); personal stress profile (identifying critical issues) and personality exercise based on SCOPE (Olson et al., 2009:6) As there is a wealth of information available on these marital components, a detailed discussion will be given on existing marital components listed in the PREPARE program, as well as the exercises that assist the couple to negotiate their differences in these various components.

The first section will critically look at all the components of marriage and intimate relationships as per the PREPARE program and within the Bioecological theory of Bronfenbrenner. Chapter 2 discussed the impact of the Macrosystem and Chronosystem on marriage and intimate relationships, whereas this chapter will explore the impact of the Microsystem, Mesosystem and Exosystem, as marital components, on marriage and intimate relationships.

4.2 COMPONENTS OF MARRIAGE AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Marriages and intimate relationships consist of many components and the way in which the couples manage the components, determines the success of the marriage or intimate relationship. Marriage is a very complex and challenging relationship to cement and requires continuous effort and development from both partners (Olson et al., 2009:2). In summary, marriages are challenging work.

The researcher will now discuss communication as the first component of marriage and intimate relationships.

4.2.1 COMMUNICATION

One of the most significant marital components is communication. The quality of communication may have a direct impact on marital satisfaction.

4.2.1.1 Relationship communication

When more experienced marital couples are asked, “what is the secret to a long-lasting marriage?” the answer is generally, effective communication. Effective communication involves being able to openly express thoughts and feelings and to be able to listen effectively (Benokraitis, 2005:281; Knox & Schacht, 2010:108). People communicate on three distinct levels, which include verbal communication (talking to each other); visual communication (reading illustrations, signs and images) and non-verbal communication (body language) (Knox & Schacht, 2010:108; Kunz, 2013:45; Williams et al., 2006:291). Williams et al. (2006:292-293) expand on non-verbal communication to include interpersonal space; eye-contact; facial expressions; body movements and gestures (leaning backwards with open arms may indicate that the person is being open, warm and inviting) and touch (which is the most intimate type). Couples engage in several types of communication including verbal and non-verbal communication in marriage and intimate relationships.

Communication between two or more people is a process and involves receiving information, reacting to the information and then interpreting the information; the interpretation of the information is highly dependent on the emotional state of a person (Knox & Schacht, 2010:108; Kunz, 2013:45). For example, if someone is angry, his or her emotions may stand in the way of rationalising the message that has been given and the individual may need to calm down before he/she can engage with the other. Emotions play a pivotal role in intimate relationship communication and couples need to be made aware of this.

Other aspects that couples need to become aware of in marriage, are their communication styles and skills, which is discussed next.

4.2.1.2 Communication styles and skills

Communication is experienced in a unique manner and contributes to intimacy, which impacts directly on marital satisfaction (David & Stafford, 2015:234; Ebrahimi & Kimiaei, 2014:452; Knox & Schacht, 2010:110). There has been a continuous debate in theory regarding whether the initiation of conversations about problems encountered in a marriage impacts positively or negatively on a couple's marital satisfaction (Burleson & Denton, 2014:148). In their study, Burleson and Denton (2014) confirm, that if the initiating spouse uses supportive communication and regularly shows love and support during the marriage, the receiving spouse is more likely to respond in a positive way. This approach usually encourages a problem-solving approach to disputes in the marriage (Burleson & Denton, 2014:148). In the Bioecological theory of Bronfenbrenner, the interaction of couples to resolve problems, is an indication of how the Microsystems interact with each other. If the exchange process is positive, it may result in a positive outcome for the individual and the couple's marital satisfaction. Alternatively, if the outcome is negative, it may have negative repercussions for the individual and the couple. However, research indicates, that couples should not raise every unnecessary small stressor and criticism, as this begins to destroy the core relationship; occasionally it is just better for spouses to keep their thoughts to themselves (Flora, 2014:56). One of the main reasons for avoiding certain topics, is protection from vulnerability and embarrassment (Flora, 2014:56). Moreover, avoidance can become common in relationships and marriage when partners fear that the discussion of the topic will lead to the deterioration of the marriage or relationship or that their partner may become judgemental (Flora, 2014:56). However, research indicates that partners who withhold discussion of salient topics are usually less satisfied than those who do not and this has resulted in adverse health issues (Flora, 2014:56). Research clearly shows that it is more advantageous for couples to discuss their concerns openly, rather than to avoid expressing them. The latter may lead to ill health and unhappiness in their marriage.

The way in which families and couples discuss concerns and communicate, depends to a considerable extent on race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, demographics, social

and economic factors (Burleson & Denton, 2014:149; Flora, 2014:60; Kunz, 2013:47). In some cultures, and according to some races, open communication is valued, whereas in others it is not. Research has indicated that families, who experience elevated levels of conversation orientation (the degree to which families encourage open exchange of ideas on a variety of subjects), assist their children to develop strong social skills, which assist them in positive adaptation to the broader world (Kunz, 2013:49). The changing nature of families, is resulting in changes in communication patterns (Kunz, 2013:47). Various factors impact on the way in which couples communicate and changes in communication patterns are evident. Race, gender, ethnicity as well as social and economic factors, form part of the Macrosystem in the Bioecological theory. It is clearly indicated, that these factors located in the Macrosystem influence how couples experience and value different prospects of communication.

Communication patterns also include family affection patterns (Kunz, 2013:49). Affectionate communication can be verbal, non-verbal and supportive (Knox & Schacht, 2010:108; Kunz, 2013:49). Verbal refers to spoken words such as “I love you”; non-verbal may include hugging, kissing and holding hands and supportive means showing support when a loved one is experiencing a crisis (Kunz, 2013:49). Communication may be expressed in different forms and is learned behaviour. This stems from the influences of the Microsystem and Macrosystem of parents, who then pass this on to their children. When they become adults, they incorporate this behaviour into their marriage.

Poor listening skills are learned behaviour and are the primary reason for breakdown in communication (Benokraitis, 2005:284; Knox & Schacht, 2010:115; Kunz, 2013:50). Poor communicators revert to blaming and scapegoating another person, to avoid taking personal responsibility in a situation, rather than trying to solve the problem (Benokraitis, 2005: 284; Knox & Schacht, 2010:115; Kunz, 2013:50). People with poor communication skills unconsciously suppress feelings of anger and express it in other ways. In certain instances, displaced anger is directed to people or things that are important to the other partner, such as friends or hobbies (Williams et al., 2006:281). John Gottman, a leading social psychologist specialising in marriage and intimate relationships, has identified five types of destructive interactional patterns between spouses, which are known as “the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” (Benokraitis, 2005:284; Duffield, 2013:211; Williams et al., 2006:296). The first horseman is contempt, which includes: eye rolling; expressing to

one's partner that he or she is inferior or undesirable; forcing one's views on one's partner without understanding the other's point of view; name-calling and public humiliation (Benokraitis, 2005:284; Duffield, 2013:211; Williams et al., 2006:281;296). Shouting at one's partner is the most ineffective communication pattern (Benokraitis, 2005:287). The second horseman is criticism; this entails making disapproving judgements or evaluations about one's partner, blaming through generalisation and using manipulation tactics (Benokraitis, 2005:284; Duffield, 2013:211; Williams et al., 2006:281;296). The third horseman of the apocalypse is defensiveness, which involves not listening to one's partner, but rather defending oneself against a presumed attack (Benokraitis, 2005:284; Duffield, 2013:211; Williams et al., 2006:296). The fourth horseman of the apocalypse and presumably the most destructive, is stonewalling. Stonewalling is refusing to listen to one's partner, particularly his or her complaints, giving one's partner the silent treatment and refusing to discuss the problem presented (Benokraitis, 2005:284; Duffield, 2013:211; Williams et al., 2006:281;296). An additional horseman of the apocalypse, belligerence, has been included in research, as it has a significant impact on interaction patterns of couples. Belligerence involves being provocative and challenging one's partner's power and authority (Benokraitis, 2005:284; Duffield, 2013:211; Williams et al., 2006:296). Poor listening skills and the "five" horseman of the apocalypse are negative communication horsemen that couples need to be aware of in their marital and intimate relationships as this impacts on their marital satisfaction.

There are other negative communication patterns. Benokraitis (2005:281) and Williams et al. (2006:297) found, that lack of self-disclosure is another form of destructive interaction patterns. According to Williams et al. (2006:297) "... self-disclosure means telling another person deep personal information and feelings about yourself". Two elements exist within self-disclosure, namely, honesty and levelling (Williams et al., 2006:298). Honesty entails being honest with oneself and one's partner, without deliberately speaking untruths and omitting information (Knox & Schacht, 2010:118; Williams et al., 2006:298). Levelling is the ability to speak openly and be transparent about emotions concerning conflict and hurt in the relationship (Williams et al., 2006:298). Benokraitis (2005:281) adds a third element to self-disclosure, which is reciprocity. Being able to reciprocate self-disclosure in a relationship, enhances trusting and liking in the relationship and minimises unspoken expectations that the partners have of each other (Benokraitis, 2005:281). Research has indicated that women tend to disclose more than men; however, should women feel that

they will receive an uncaring, uninterested response, they withhold disclosure. It is important for couples to self-disclose with honesty and integrity to build the emotional intimacy of their relationship.

Self-disclosure involves risk, because if used incorrectly, the one partner may use the information against the other partner for manipulative purposes and once this violation has happened, partners may feel hesitant to reveal intimate things about themselves in the future (Benokraitis, 2005:282). In this case a poor communicator is focused on preserving the ego, rather than strengthening and developing the relationship (Kunz, 2013:50). Communication that is clear, direct, honest, non-prejudicial with a willingness to listen, can prevent misunderstandings (Knox & Schacht, 2010:115; Kunz, 2013:51). The researcher is of the opinion, that this is difficult for couples to do because it involves being vulnerable to the partner, but it is necessary for the growth of trust and intimacy in the relationship.

Another way to build trust and intimacy is to engage in active listening, which involves listening to what the other person is saying, asking questions to clarify and trying to understand the other person's point of view (Knox & Schacht, 2010:124; Kunz, 2013:51). Benokraitis (2005:284) adds that one cannot control a partner's communication style; however, a partner can change his or her own communication style, which may lead to more effective communication. In this scenario, if the individual can change the communication style to a more positive response (Microsystem), it may have a positive response on the relationship between the couple (Mesosystem). Couples need to learn to listen to each other and not to focus on their own thought processes. It is beneficial if one of the partners can develop active listening skills, especially if the other partner does not wish to change their communication style.

Communication styles have changed with the introduction of technology. The researcher discusses this in the next section.

4.2.1.3 Technology and communication

Technology is shaping the way relationships are changing. Technology specifically impacts on couple's intimate relationships (Murray & Campbell, 2015:117).

Communication technology includes email, instant messaging and mobile phones (Ruppel, 2015:670). The choice of communication technology used, depends on the relationship of the partners, as well as the consequences of the conversational outcomes (Ruppel, 2015:670). The internet and social media and online dating websites have had a significant impact on the formation and rituals of intimate relationships and have opened the pool of eligible partners, as well as the possibility of engaging with people all over the world (Howe, 2012:165; Kunz, 2013:47; Murray & Campbell, 2015:118). Technology has increased the accessibility of significant others, without the necessity of being directly involved with them. Technology may be an example of an Exosystem influence on the individual and the couple's relationship. If one of the partners (person) has access to pornography or is having an affair through technology (process), without the knowledge of the other partner (context), it may have negative implications for the marriage at a later stage, because the unknowing partner would be devastated if they were informed of their partner's behaviour (time). (Bronfenbrenner, 1973:70-85; Tudge, et al., 2016:427). There are so many more communication options for intimate relationships since the development of technology, which presents challenges to intimate relationships.

Technology has also brought on some difficulties with regards to intimacy in close relationships. The influence of technology has also impacted on boundary setting in a family situation, especially when technology is used in negative ways, for example, to access pornography (Hertlein, 2012:377; Murray & Campbell, 2015:122). Partners are more willing to have cybersex at the expense of their actual relationships, because their partners are oblivious of their online interactions with others (Hertlein, 2012:378). Sexual and emotional intimacy is compromised by the availability of the internet and social media (Hertlein, 2012:380). Technology opens up the opportunity for couples to engage in infidelity online and in person, as they can lock access to their accounts or arrange online to meet the other party in person (Murray & Campbell, 2015:121).

The online world is impacting significantly on relationships and intimacy within couples and essentially offers a secret alternative reality. People hide their true identity when on the internet and disclose only positive aspects of themselves. In this way, they feel safer online than in real life (Hertlein, 2012:377; Howe, 2012:164; Knox & Schacht, 2010:118). Hiding behind social media allows people to feel safe in disclosing their innermost thoughts and feelings (Howe, 2012:165; Knox & Schacht, 2010:118; Murray & Campbell,

2015:123). This is often to the detriment of couple and family relationships (Hertlein, 2012:377). Interestingly, Hertlein (2012:378) and Howe (2012:165), have found in research, that media desensitises people to the risks and dangers of online conversations and as a result, people may not exercise caution with regards with whom they interact with; this may lead to greater exposure to on-line violence. Fortunately, there are also moderators in the online world that allow people to enforce healthy boundaries, such as blocking applications for e-mail and mobile phones (Hertlein, 2012:377). Interacting with people online creates a safety net for peoples' identities; however, it also contributes towards the risk of on-line violence and infidelity.

Despite online violence, self-disclosing intimate information may have a negative impact on the relationship. Rushing the disclosure of intimate content, may slow the growth in a relationship (Howe, 2012:165). However, Knox and Schacht (2010:118), state that "self-disclosure is a psychological condition necessary for the development of love". As with any relationship, building up intimacy and trust requires time, because it involves partners being vulnerable with one another (Howe, 2012:165). It is also reported in research that the use of communication technology is expected to decrease as the relationship develops and the couple becomes more emotionally intimate (Ruppel, 2015:271). However, Murray and Campbell (2015:124) state that overuse of technology may reduce the intimacy the couples experience in their own relationship, often leading to feelings of exclusion. Furthermore, partners may conceal their behaviour and use of technology, because their partner disagrees with the level of usage (Murray & Campbell, 2015:124). Technology provides a distraction from their intimate relationships and is also a drain on energy and time (Murray & Campbell, 2015:124).

People who are online daters for the first time, tend to express many emotions using text messages and if they do not get the expected response, suspicion arises (Howe, 2012:165). Communicating via text or technology is seen as an inauthentic means of communication and leads to the development of superficial relationships (Murray & Campbell, 2015:134). However, Rains, Brunner and Oman (2016:43) state that superficial disclosure has its role to play in relationship maintenance and development, especially when dealing with non-intimate topics at the developing stage of a relationship and communication technology has made this information more accessible. As the relationship develops, self-disclosure is expected to become more intimate (Rains et al., 2016:44).

However, if the relationship develops and the communication remains superficial, the partners may feel emotionally distant from each other (Rains et al., 2016:45). Furthermore, sending messages has a permanency about it and cannot be easily forgiven and forgotten like a conversation (Howe, 2012:165). Another negative aspect about communication through technology, is that it makes it easier to harass and break up with people, rather than talking directly to them (Hertlein, 2012:378; Howe, 2012:166). Cyberbullying and cyberstalking are serious social issues that are on the increase in the online world (Hertlein, 2012:378). Interacting online is changing the way in which couples and people interact and how they progress to the next phase of their relationships.

Technology does not only pose challenges, it also offers solutions to establishing and maintaining intimate relationships. On a positive note, the online world can prove beneficial, as it is a quick way to get into contact with people and to communicate over long distances. It also allows people to screen their calls or messages, which gives them the option of only connecting with people they are interested in (Hertlein, 2012:377; Howe, 2012:166; Murray & Campbell, 2015:119). Moreover, Murray and Campbell (2015:119), state, that when couples establish relationships with their significant others in the same area where they reside, the relationship is more likely to last if the one partner moves away because technology allows them to communicate on an ongoing basis. Having access to the online world presents people with risks but also benefits, including having access to loved ones residing all over the globe.

Having access to technology has helped couples share information. Couples are able to share interesting and humorous content with their loved ones, read up on information on how to improve their relationships, as well as assist in planning and managing activities with their partner (Murray & Campbell, 2015:135). As a result, technology has become a new area for consideration when working with couples in therapy, necessitating the development of specific strategies, which focus on positive technology behaviour (Murray & Campbell, 2015:118). When dealing with couples and technology, one needs to be aware of both the positive aspects of technology as well as the negative and to be able to determine how couples deal with the impact of technology on their relationship.

The next section will discuss how communication is used as an exercise in the PREPARE program.

4.2.1.4 Communication content and exercise in the PREPARE program

In the PREPARE Program, the items regarding communication assess the extent to which couples are comfortable to discuss their feelings and emotions with one another (Olson et al., 2009:17). Moreover, they evaluate the actual couple's listening and speaking skills, as well the couple's perceptions of their listening and speaking skills (Olson et al., 2009:17). The PREPARE program takes it one step further and allows the couples to practice their communication skills through an exercise which involves sharing their strength and growth areas in their relationship.

The couples are requested to select what they think are their three strengths in their relationship as well as their three weaknesses and this is done independently of each other (Olson et al., 2009:29). This approach assists the couple to discuss how each partner views his or her relationship, identifies strengths of the relationship and improves on couple communication (Olson et al., 2009:29). This is an example of the influence of the Mesosystem on the individual and the couple. A facilitator assists the couple to use the PREPARE assessment tool, so that they can understand their relationship better and, in this way, improve their marriage or intimate relationship. The PREPARE program is both theoretical and practical, allowing couples to practice the skills that they learn, to better navigate conflicts later in their marriage or intimate relationship.

After the discussion of the communication component, the second component, conflict resolution, will now be discussed.

4.2.2 CONFLICT RESOLUTION

4.2.2.1 Conflict in intimate relationships

All relationships experience conflict. Conflict is natural and desirable (Knox & Schacht, 2010:110; Williams et al., 2006:281). Society has contributed to the development of the conflict taboo, which states that conflict and anger is wrong (Williams et al., 2006:281). Conflict being taboo by society, is a Macrosystem influence on the individual and the couple's relationship. Because of this, people do not engage in conflict, but rather prefer not to not address their concerns. This causes partners to grow emotionally distant from each other and as a result, resentments build up. It is therefore, much healthier to talk about the problems (Knox & Schacht, 2010:111). Resentment throughout marriage leads to breakdown in communication, trust and intimacy.

There are several causes of conflict, which will be discussed in the following section.

4.2.2.2 Causes of conflict

The main source of conflict in marriages and intimate relationships is power struggles. Benokraitis (2005:285), states that "sociologists define power as the ability to impose one's will on others". Marital power is largely determined by resource theory in which the premise is that the partner with the most resources often has the most power (Benokraitis, 2005:285; Williams et al., 2006:277). Furthermore, the principle of least interest states that the partner who is the most committed in the relationship has the least power, because they are more willing to submit to their partner's interests (Benokraitis, 2005:285; Williams et al., 2006:279). Power may also be divided according to talents and abilities. In traditional families, men tend to exercise power over financial and house maintenance decisions, whereas women exercise their power over the running of the house and child care (Benokraitis, 2005:285; Knox & Schacht, 2010:113). Power struggles are usually the underpinning factor of conflict in most marriages and relationships.

Conflict is not only negative but is necessary for the growth of the relationship. It is how couples manage the conflict that matters. Conflict can be productive for relationships in that it clarifies differences between partners, it reduces the progression of problems

becoming more difficult to handle and it equalises power imbalances (Williams et al., 2006:283). Conflict management can be beneficial for relationships if it is handled in the correct way.

Numerous factors contribute to conflict in intimate and marital relationships. Benokraitis (2005:285), Howe (2012:231) and Williams et al. (2006:277; 282-287) identified seven broad topics that couples usually fight about; these include: gender roles; fidelity; sex; money; power; privacy and children, which will be explored in more detail later in this chapter. It was interesting to find that in Papp, Goeke-Morey and Cummings' study (2013:68) that conflict regarding intimacy was discussed separately from other issues, such as children and finance. Furthermore, it was found that conflicts regarding intimacy were dealt with positively and constructively, compared to other areas of conflict (Papp et al., 2013:68). There was an exception when husbands suffered from depression as this would escalate the conflict (Papp et al., 2013:69). Highly distressed couples may struggle with dealing with intimacy, especially when the issue is related to self-esteem and adequacy (Papp et al., 2013:69). According to the Bioecological theory, this is an example of how the Microsystem (the depression experienced by one partner) has a negative impact on the individual and the couple relationship. The social learning theory states, that couples learn how to deal with conflict from their families of origin (Allen, Crowell, Hauser, Schulz, Waldinger & Whitton, 2008:275). The 2008 Allen et al. study contributed to existing research, in that they found that men are more at risk for marital maladjustment if they experienced hostile interactions in their family-of-origin (Allen et al., 2008:283). Conflict resolution is learned behaviour. This relates to how the Mesosystem (the parents teaching the child conflict management skills) impacts on the individual's relationship as an adult. This study highlighted that how assessing the couples' families of origin experienced conflict, could help the couple determine their risk for marital conflict and further recommended that this assessment process should be included in marriage education programs (Allen et al., 2008:284). Conflict is necessary for a healthy relationship and the ways in which conflict is handled is usually learnt by observation from the family-of-origin.

Even though conflict is present in marriages and intimate relationships, there are ways in which to manage it. This is discussed next.

4.2.2.3 Conflict management strategies

The good news is that there are effective ways to handle conflict which can lead to the improvement and growth of the marriage and intimate relationship. Dealing with conflict may not be easy and can result in uneasy feelings between partners in the short-term; however, the long-term benefits are that the couple deal with their feelings immediately and this results in emotional intimacy (Benokraitis, 2005:287). Managing conflict in marital and intimate relationships is not easy; however, there are strategies to address marital problems, so that they do not become long-term problems. Learning conflict management skills through a program (Mesosystem), can have a positive influence on the individual and the couple relationship.

One of the more popular ways of managing conflict includes submission. Submission takes place when one submits to the other's demands; either willingly or unwillingly (Benokraitis, 2005:286; Duffield, 2013:209; Knox & Schacht, 2010:113; Williams et al., 2006:287-288). Couples may also discuss issues openly and reach a middle ground in their positions; which is known as compromise (Benokraitis, 2005:286; Duffield, 2013:209; Knox & Schacht, 2010:113; Williams et al., 2006:287-288). During the compromise stages, couples should ask for more information from their partner, try and understand where their partner is at emotionally speaking and be supportive of their partner (Benokraitis, 2005:276, 287; Williams et al., 2006:298-299). Being supportive, attentive, and non-judgemental, increases a partner's desire to talk about problems (Benokraitis, 2005:276, 287; Williams et al., 2006:298-299). Sometimes, couples cannot reach an agreement and inevitably agree to disagree; which is known as standoff (Benokraitis, 2005:286; Duffield, 2013:209; Knox & Schacht, 2010:113; Williams et al., 2006:287-288). In some couples, one partner is more dominant than the other; as a result, the subordinate partner may withdraw in a conflict situation (Benokraitis, 2005:286; Duffield, 2013:209; Knox & Schacht, 2010:113; Williams et al., 2006:287-288). Power struggles inevitably underlie conflict and sometimes one partner may force his or her view on their partner with the intention to win; which is known as competing (Benokraitis, 2005:286; Duffield, 2013:209; Knox & Schacht, 2010:113; Williams et al., 2006:287-288). Some couples do not feel comfortable and avoid conflict altogether to attain peace; however, the peace is only temporary (Benokraitis, 2005:286; Duffield, 2013:209; Knox & Schacht, 2010:113; Williams et al., 2006:287-288). There are various conflict management strategies and it

may be beneficial for couples to become aware of their strategy, as self-awareness can lead to improvement. Becoming aware of one's conflict management style and changing it to a more positive style is an indication of how the Microsystem can influence the individual and couple system in a positive manner.

It is important that couples take note of how they interact with their partner during a conflict situation. Research indicates that couples need to address the problem and not attack their partner's traits and abilities (Benokraitis, 2005:276, 287; Knox & Schacht, 2010:114-117; Williams et al., 2006:288-299). Couples are more likely to work through conflict effectively, if they are honest about their feelings and identify exactly what the problem is (Benokraitis, 2005:276, 287; Knox & Schacht, 2010:114-117; Williams et al., 2006:288-299). Furthermore, if the couple develops the premise that they are a team, it assists them to work together using a problem-solving approach (Benokraitis, 2005:276, 287; Knox & Schacht, 2010:114-117; Williams et al., 2006:288-299). In conflict management, it is important that couples ask specifically for what they want from their partner and then to express appreciation to their partner if their needs are met (Benokraitis, 2005:276;287; Knox & Schacht, 2010:114-117; Williams et al., 2006:288-299). Most importantly, couples must be able to listen to each other without interrupting and really try to understand what their partner is saying (Benokraitis, 2005:276;287; Knox & Schacht, 2010:114-117; Williams et al., 2006:288-299). Couples should be mindful about the way that they interact with their partner during a conflicting situation. Working as a team and respecting one's partner, is the most effective way to solve problems.

The following section will look at how the exercises in the PREPARE program, assist couples to solve problems.

4.2.2.4 Conflict resolution content item and skill exercise in the PREPARE program

In the PREPARE Program, the conflict resolution items identify couple's perceptions of whether conflict exists in their relationship and how they manage it (Olson et al., 2009:17). Once this is measured, the facilitator assists the couples to identify areas of conflict and helps them work through it using the PREPARE exercises as tools. Two exercises exist to assist the couple with conflict resolution; the first one is creating a wish list using

assertiveness and active listening and the second exercise consists of ten steps for resolving conflict.

The wish list involves the facilitator asking the couple to list three things that they would like their partner to do on a regular basis and then to take turns in sharing their wishes with each other (Olson et al., 2009:29). The counsellor then gives feedback on their assertiveness, active listening skills and refers to the personality SCOPE which consists of: assertiveness, avoidance, self-confidence, partner dominance and the communication scale and shares this with the couple (Olson et al., 2009:29). This will be discussed in more detail, later in this chapter under "Partner styles and habits". Practicing these skills allows couples to move away from the negative cycle of avoidance and partner dominance, towards the positive cycle of assertiveness and self-confidence (Olson et al., 2009:29). The wish list is an easy practical exercise that couples may use at any stage in their relationship or marriage, to reassert themselves and improve their active listening skills.

The second exercise is called the ten steps for resolving conflict. The counsellor reads the steps of conflict resolution to the couple and they choose one growth area as homework. They are expected to apply the ten steps to try to resolve the issue themselves. It is then discussed in the next session (Olson et al., 2009:30). This exercise allows the couple an opportunity of working through the problem on their own but provides a safety net in that the counsellor will be available in the next session to assist, if they cannot resolve the problem. The ten steps involve: Set a time and place for discussion; define the problem or issue of disagreement; establish how each partner contributes to the problem; list past attempts to resolve the issue that were not successful; brainstorm; list all possible solutions; discuss and evaluate these possible solutions; agree on one solution to try; agree on how each individual will work toward this solution; set up another meeting and reward each other as you each contribute toward the solution (Olson et al., 2009:30). The PREPARE program is not complicated, as can be attested by these easy and practical steps. These are very easy and practical steps for couples to follow. The PREPARE program is not complicated.

With the conclusion of conflict management, the next section will deal with the third component, namely, partner styles and habits.

4.2.3 PARTNER STYLE AND HABITS

Couples may experience similarities and differences because of their upbringing, the degree of attachment they experienced with their primary care givers and their personalities. However, differences may lead to conflict and couples need to develop effective communication skills to be able to navigate their differences.

4.2.3.1 The influence of individual functioning

There is a saying, “birds of a feather flock together” which has led to contentious debates on how partners choose each other for marriage and intimate relationships. Research has generally indicated, that the more similarities the couple has, the higher the level of marital satisfaction and relational stability (O’Rourke, Claxton, Chou, Smith & Hadjistaropoulos, 2011:244; Rushton & Bons, 2005:555). Furthermore, Rushton and Bons (2005:555), attribute similarity in cognitive and cultural factors, such as the way in which the partners grew up, as a means for mate selection. In the Bioecological theory, partners choosing each other based on the similarity of their upbringing, is an example of how the Mesosystem (parent’s upbringing), over time (Chronosystem), impacts on the individual’s choice of an intimate partner as an adult (Chronosystem). The overall reason for choosing a similar person (who is especially genetically similar) is to ensure the continuation and survival of the gene pool for future generations (Rushton & Bons, 2005:559). Similarly, Claxton, O’Rourke, Smith and DeLongis (2011:377), attribute “openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness to marital satisfaction”. Couples enter marriage with preconceived ideas and perceptions about their partners and when problems arise, judgement is usually based on generalisations and past experiences, rather than on the actual issue at hand and may lead to unresolved issues and a potential break-up (Busby, Holman & Niehuis, 2009: 451; Howe, 2012:233). On the other hand, couples who deem themselves as more important than their partners, are at risk for experiencing common relationship problems, because they may be more prone to shifting blame on their partner instead of working as a team (Busby et al., 2009:451). The opposite may also be true, partners who experience higher levels of affability towards their partners than over themselves, may experience higher relationship satisfaction, as they are more focused on meeting the needs of their partner, than their self-interest (Busby et al., 2009:451). Moreover, an individual’s life satisfaction prior to marriage, may predict the quality of the

marriage or intimate relationship and may be regarded as a preventative factor for later marital adjustment (Stanley, Ragan, Rhoades & Markman, 2012:168). Couples usually choose their partners based on similarity of upbringing and it is important that the couple speaks about their differences and unvoiced expectations about their partner's styles and habits, before marriage, to prevent ongoing conflict in these areas.

The way couples are raised, which is known as attachment, has an impact on marital relationships. This will be discussed in the following section.

4.2.3.2 Attachment

The only way to study marriage, is to explore which factors contribute towards a successful marriage. Research conducted on the perception of happily married couples versus unhappily married couples, indicates that happily married couples rarely focus on the negative aspects of their partner, but rather praise the positives (Howe, 2012:232). Unhappily married couples tend to emphasise the negative aspects of their partners and rarely acknowledge the positive aspects. This behaviour could be linked to cognitive patterns developed, because of the partner's relationship with caregiver, or past relationship experiences (Howe, 2012:233; Kunz, 2013:85; Williams et al., 2006:114). This is known as the attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby, a psychoanalyst trained in the Freudian School of thought. The attachment theory states, that infants may develop different attachment styles, according to the relationship they have with their care-giver and which could predict the nature of future relationships. Attachment between the child and the parents may be explained by the Mesosystem influence on the individual and couple relationship over time, according to the Bioecological theory. The first attachment style is known as the secure attachment style. Secure attachment results from children growing up in loving and secure emotional relationships with their parents. People who have secure attachment generally are friendly, intimate and not overly dependent on others (Benokraitis, 2005:147; Topham, Larson & Homan, 2005:104; Williams et al., 2006:114). Children who grew up with the avoidant attachment style, generally become anxious, overly dependent adults who struggle to develop trusting relationships and often feel neglected (Benokraitis, 2005:147; Topham, et al., 2005:104; Williams et al., 2006:114). The final attachment style is the anxious/ambivalent style. In this case, children were often left to their own devices and the caregivers were not regularly present

(Microsystem influence); therefore, they become overly dependent adults (Chronosystem influence) who have a significant fear of neglect and often cling to their partner. This can chase potential partners away (Benokraitis, 2005:147; Topham et al., 2005:104; Williams et al., 2006:114). How couples relate with their partners in adulthood, stems from the relationship that they had with their caregivers and has significant implications for intimate relationships in later life.

Attachment has a key role to play when choosing an intimate partner. Interestingly, longitudinal research has been done on the attachment theory and it has been found that attachment styles may possibly change according to the experiences that people have in their lives (Benokraitis, 2005:148). For example, if a person was born with an anxious ambivalent attachment style (Microsystem influence) and later marries an adult who has a strong attachment style (Chronosystem influence). It could diminish the insecurities of a person and help to develop a more secure attachment style. Moreover, research by Boden, Fischer and Niehuis (2010:121), hypothesised that emotional intimacy could be a learnt skill and a skill that can be modified in later stages of life. The results of their study provide strong empirical support, that developing intimacy skills during late adolescence to young adulthood, tends to have a positive impact on marital adjustment 25 years later (Boden et al., 2010:131). For those couples whose intimacy levels decreased over time, the reasons were attributed to financial status changes, negative life events, marital status change and the loss of a child (Boden et al., 2010:131). An attachment style has an impact on the choice of a partner and it may change through exposure to a more stable attachment type, or by learning appropriate skills.

With the impact of attachment on marriage and intimate relationships discussed; the researcher will explore the impact of personality types.

4.2.3.3 Personality types

It is important to consider personality types when entering a long-term, committed relationship or marriage. Personality remains a constant throughout the relationship and couples naively believe that they can change their partner (Olson et al., 2009:34). Partners can improve their skills, but one can not expect one's partner to change from an extrovert into an introvert; this will only result in ongoing frustration (Olson et al., 2009:34). It must

be noted, that there are no “right” or “wrong” personality types; however, that some personality combinations experience more challenges, as they perceive many aspects of their relationship differently (Olson et al., 2009:34). For example, narcissistic people (Microsystem influence) have the need to be self-important, they see themselves as smarter and as more attractive than other people (Benokraitis, 2005:156). In the short term, this relationship will be exciting, but in the long-term, they do not like commitment (Benokraitis, 2005:156). They are more involved in meeting their own needs, than the needs of others (Benokriatis, 2005:156). In this case, they may not fear break up and they may not fear being unfaithful towards their partners (Benokraitis, 2005:156). In the long-term, people with narcissistic tendencies, may be the cause of a lot of tension in the marriage or intimate relationship, as they care more for themselves than their significant other. Personality is a constant factor in marriage and some are more compatible than others.

In terms of compatibility, the difference in cognitive styles of marital partners (Microsystem influence), may also influence the marital satisfaction levels. Skinner and laboni (2009:1111) conducted research on how cognitive styles and differences could mediate the success of marriages. There are two types of cognitive styles, the adaptor cognitive style and the innovator cognitive style (Skinner & laboni, 2009:1111). Innovators are perceived by adaptors to be rude and insensitive, whereas innovators perceive adaptors as rejecting and unable to work together to reach a common goal (Skinner & laboni, 2009:1112). The complementarity view states, that people are attracted to people’s personalities who are different to their own, whereas the similarity view states, that people are attracted to people’s personalities that are like their own (Skinner & laboni, 2009:1112). Kilmann and Vendemia (2013:196) add that “spousal discrepancy theory states that couples who experience differences in personality are more prone to marital distress”. This hypothesis was supported in Kilmann and Vendemia’s research as well (2013:209). There are various views regarding the choice of partner according to personality compatibility, which includes cognitive styles.

The results of Skinner and laboni’s (2009:1115) study indicated that mismatches between cognitive styles may lead to interpersonal, communication and other difficulties and concluded that 70% of successful marriages comprised of adaptor/adaptor dyads as they are able to respond better to change and manage stressors better in their marriages, than

innovator/adaptor dyads or innovator/innovator dyads. Stressors that result from circumstances (e.g. loss of a job) (Exosystem influence), spouse's vulnerabilities (neuroticism) (Microsystem influence) or adaptor processes may impact on marital satisfaction of the couple and depending on how they respond to the stressors, determines the likelihood of physical aggression (Langer, Lawrence & Barry, 2008:754). It was concluded in the study of O'Rourke et al. (2011:351) that similarities experienced within the couple predicated marital satisfaction; but not necessarily where husbands or wives experienced higher or lower levels of similarity. Research indicates that couples who have similarities, including cognitive styles, are more likely to be compatible in marriage and less-likely to be involved in violence.

Kilmann and Vendemia (2013:207) hypothesised that the longer the duration of the marriage, the less the partners would demonstrate insensitivity, exploitation (demonstrating lack of empathy towards others) and impulsivity (difficulty in regulating thoughts and behaviours), than those married for a shorter time and their study validated this hypothesis somewhat (Langer, et al., 2008:758). Besides the cognitive styles, personality traits such as impulsivity and exploitation (Microsystem influence), are likely to lead to partners becoming physically aggressive (Langer et al., 2008:758). It was also found, that partners who are aggressive in nature, were more likely to experience stress, argue more and become hostile towards their partner (Langer, 2008:764) (Chronosystem influence).

Kilmann and Vendemia (2013:209) recommend the findings of their study, to assist therapists exploring how broad personality differences can be a liability in the marriage and to develop appropriate communication skills to navigate these differences. The researcher agrees with Kilmann and Vendemia (2013:209) that there are some partner's traits which cannot be changed, as they are inherent qualities. Partners should therefore be willing to learn to accept differences that cannot be changed. and partners should be willing to learn to accept differences they cannot change. Personality traits play a significant role in the dynamics of a marital couple.

Jealousy is a personality trait (Microsystem influence). Although many people experience jealousy, it is a personality trait to consider when entering a committed relationship. People who are jealous by nature, are overly-dependent on their partner (Mesosystem

influence), to boost their self-esteem and image (Benokraitis, 2005:157). People who experience jealousy are more likely to be unfaithful to their partners, for fear that their partner will be unfaithful to them (Benokraitis, 2005:158). A contemporary debate by evolutionary psychologists, states that men and women are innately different when it comes to jealousy (Benokraitis, 2005:158). It was found that men feared sexual infidelity, because they would raise a blood line which is not their own and women feared emotional infidelity, as this could lead to the abandonment of the family and put the children's survival into jeopardy. (Benokraitis, 2005:157). Jealousy turning into obsession, may lead to (Chronosystem influence) stalking and cyber stalking (threatening behaviour or unwanted advances toward someone using e-mail, instant messaging, and other electronic communications devices). Along with jealousy, other unhealthy behaviour patterns can be a result of other personality traits, such as withholding love to manipulate the other partner's behaviour; an example of this is "if you love me then..." (Benokraitis, 2005:158). Jealousy as a personality characteristic, may be detrimental to intimate relationships to the extent that it may result in violence. Conditional love in marriage breeds resentment and should be avoided at all costs.

It would be beneficial if facilitators are knowledgeable about personality traits and how they impact on marriages and intimate relationships. The researcher will now explore how partner styles and habits are assessed and dealt with in the PREPARE program.

4.2.3.4 Partner styles and habits content item and exercise in the PREPARE program

In the PREPARE program, this item evaluates how each partner relates to their partner's behaviour and traits including moodiness, stubbornness and temper (Olson et al., 2009:17). Furthermore, it assesses the extent of the partner's dependability, general outlook and tendency to be controlling (Olson et al., 2009:17). It is important that couples can accept distinctive character traits, because they generally will not change.

The SCOPE personality profile measures the social aspects of the couple, including their willingness to participate in social activities and associate with people (Olson et al., 2009:20). The second aspect that is measured, is the couple's ability to deal with change to be flexible (Olson et al, 2009:20). The third aspect evaluates the couple's organisation

skills and their ability to pursue goals (Olson et al., 2009:20). Fourthly, the extent to which the couples please and cooperate with other people is measured (Olson et al., 2009:20). The last aspect that is measured, is the emotional stability of the partners and whether they can remain calm under stressful situations (Olson et al., 2009:20). This is a very comprehensive tool when identifying partner traits in couples and can assist the couple to understand certain behaviours of their partners.

With partner styles and habits discussed in this section, the researcher will now discuss financial management as a component.

4.2.4 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Finances (Microsystem influence) are one of the marital components that couples often argue about. Men and women think differently about finances. Open communication, including honesty, is required to discuss the expectations of how finances will be handled in the marriage, to avoid serious conflict that can destroy marriages and intimate relationships.

4.2.4.1 Finances and marriage

One of the most common causes of conflict in marriage is the way in which each partner of the couple handles money matters (Microsystem influence). Marital satisfaction has been linked to increased income in the home and agreement regarding how the money will be spent (Atwood, 2012:10). Furthermore, Atwood (2012:14) adds that when the couple achieves increased financial status, improve their financial status and save a sufficient amount (Microsystem and Exosystem influences), they experience elevated levels of financial satisfaction, which may in turn lead to (Chronosystem influence) increased marital satisfaction. A study done by Kinnunen and Feldt (2004:529) revealed that there is a positive correlation between tough economic circumstances (Macrosystem influence) and lower levels of marital adjustment, because of the psychological stress experienced by both partners (Microsystem influence). The higher the levels of psychological stress experienced by the wife, the lower the levels of marital adjustment experienced by the husband (Mesosystem influence) and vice versa (Kinnunen & Feldt, 2004:529). Marital adjustment (Mesosystem influence) is directly related to the financial

circumstances (Macrosystem influence) of the couple and is exacerbated by the difference in the way partners handle the finances (Microsystem influence).

Some people use money to sustain other agendas. Money may sometimes be used as a substitute for love and affection; to demonstrate it or become a measure of self-worth (Atwood, 2012:11-12). Sometimes, the primary reason for marriage is financial security for both men and women (Howe, 2012:232). Some couples may marry for the wrong reasons, such as financial security at the expense of their happiness and power play in the marital or intimate relationship.

In the 19th century (Chronosystem influence), men were considered the breadwinners and women were financially dependent on their husbands; alternatively, in the 21st century (Chronosystem influence), both men and women have entered the job market and want to claim ownership of their earnings, which has led to significant conflict in marriages (Howe, 2012:232). Research indicates that in families, men's employment is extremely important and if the employment is threatened, it may really test the relationship (Exosystem influence) (Kinnunen & Feldt, 2004:529). Furthermore, long-term unemployment may lead to social functioning problems (Microsystem and Exosystem influences), such as abuse of alcohol, which may further degrade a couple's perception of his or her marriage (Kinnunen & Feldt, 2004:529). Howe (2012:232) refers to issues regarding finances as: "financial infidelity" which means "keeping bank accounts, credit cards or debts outside the awareness of one's spouse; people may hide income or purchases". As people are choosing to marry later in life, after fulfilling their tertiary education, they may enter marriage with financial baggage, such as student loans, medical bills and credit card accounts (Howe, 2012:232). Atwood (2012:2) further adds, that some families do not teach their children about money (Mesosystem influence) and they grow up (Chronosystem influence) having irrational beliefs about money and the fact that money is a taboo subject. When this conflict is addressed in the marriage, it is usually the women who require their husbands to earn more income; while the husbands require their wives to spend less and save more (Atwood, 2012:4; Howe, 2012:232). Husbands may come to resent their wives, who were financially independent before the marriage (Exosystem and Chronosystem influence) and then become stay-at-home wives, because this increases the financial pressure (Howe, 2012:232). Earning patterns and employment opportunities between men and women have changed over time (Chronosystem

influence) and have had a significant impact on intimate relationships, ultimately resulting in conflict and the introduction of social issues including alcohol abuse. Differences in expectations on how to deal with money, need to be clearly negotiated before the onset of marriage.

One way to achieve this is to communicate about how finances will be spent. This is discussed next.

4.2.4.2 Communication about finances

Open communication regarding finances is important for the healthy functioning of a marriage or intimate relationship (Microsystem influence). If partners do not disclose their financial status to their partner before marriage, and the partner then learns of their spouse's negative financial situation, feelings of resentment and betrayal may arise in the marriage and in turn damage the trust in the relationship (Howe, 2012:232). Interestingly, Howe (2012:232), states, that people may be evaluated by the way in which they handle their finances, as it reveals what they most value and prioritise is valued and prioritised the most. The use of money may also be used negatively, to gain a sense of power and control over the other partner in the marriage (Atwood, 2012:4; Howe, 2012:232). Higher earners in the marriage, who do not disclose their additional earnings, or give their partners allowances, tend to create mistrust in the marriage and a sense of betrayal of the marital vows (Howe, 2012:232). Open communication regarding the use of finances, is essential to avoid arguments and break trust in marriage.

Another issue that couples argue about with regards to money, is whether they should have joint accounts or manage their expenditure independently (Atwood, 2014:5; Howe, 2012:232). According to Howe (2012:232) holding separate accounts "is a bad sign for relationships". The way in which the couple will manage their finances, should be discussed before committing to marriage and prenuptial agreements should be put in place, to prevent complication of asset division, if there is dissolution of the marriage (Howe, 2012:232). The delay and hesitation in discussing these important topics, is due to the fact, that spouses do not wish to anger or upset their partners in any way (Howe, 2012:232). However, this communication is crucial for the couple to create realistic expectations about how they are going to manage the finances in the marriage going

forward. It is also normal to disagree about the way in which financial matters are dealt with, however, the couple must reach an agreement that is suitable for both, for future financial planning to be successful.

Facilitators/ counsellors of the PREPARE program, assist couples to discuss financial matters and therefore, need to be knowledgeable about effective financial management. This is also an exercise in the PREPARE program, which is discussed next.

4.2.4.3 Finance content item and exercise in the PREPARE program

In the PREPARE program, the couple's tendency to be savers or spenders is assessed, as well as the way they perceive money management and how major financial decisions are made (Olson et al., 2009:17). A practical user-friendly exercise is available, that involves the couple developing a budget and indicating monthly income and expenditure, as well as setting individual and couple financial goals. The facilitator assists with this process.

This section discussed financial management as a marital and intimate relationship component. In the next section, the researcher will discuss leisure activities.

4.2.5 LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Couples need to make time for play and take an interest in each other's hobbies (Microsystem influence), otherwise they may become estranged during the child bearing phase and ultimately when the children get ready to leave the nest.

4.2.5.1 Leisure activities and marriage

Life is so busy, that couples need to schedule time with each other, to ensure the growth and to ensure that they nurture the marriage or intimate relationship (Microsystem influence). Glorieux, Minnen and Van Tienoven (2011:281) state that it is crucial that couples have one-on-one face-time to ensure marital quality. However, this time is being compromised by women having to work having to work very long hours (Exosystem influence) (Glorieux et al., 2011:281). A man's emotional involvement, time spent with his

wife and sense of commitment in the marriage, outweighs the division of the market and household responsibilities (Wilcox & Nock, 2007:104). Marital satisfaction is dependent on quality time spent together as a couple and may be obstructed because women are now working, and this results in changes of the family components.

Family components have changed over time (Chronosystem influence), due to increasing individualisation, where individuals pursue their own interests which impacts on the couple's leisure time (Voorpostel, Van Der Linde & Gershuny, 2012:244). According to Voorpostel et al. (2012:245) "individualisation refers to processes of de-traditionalisation, in which the roles of men and women are less strictly defined, making partner relationships more susceptible to free choice and negotiation" (Voorpostel et al., 2012:244). As women have entered the workforce, they have become less dependent on their spouses for support and this has led to marriage being negotiated (Chronosystem influence) according to individuals' preferences (Voorpostel et al., 2012:247). Jackson (2009:16) stresses the importance of couples, to develop their own interests and friendships, apart from their children, because when their children "leave the nest", their lives still must continue. Balancing time with one's self and with a partner is extremely important in a marriage or intimate relationship (Microsystem influence).

Leisure time is necessary for normal functioning. Men and women perceive and experience their leisure time differently (Voorpostel et al., 2012:248). Research has indicated, that in the past men used to spend most of their time at work and women used to spend most of their time with household duties; however, since increased labour participation for women (Chronosystem influence), the roles seem to have been reversed (Voorpostel et al., 2012:248). If both partners work, they are not able to spend time with each other anyway and most of the time spent together is during mealtimes, in the evenings and at night time (Glorieux et al., 2011:285). Furthermore, the study indicated, that the difference regarding time spent together as a couple between dual-earner families and single earning families, is marginal (Glorieux et al., 2011:286). However, Sharaievska, Kim and Stodolska (2013:454), highlight that sharing leisure activities with one's spouse, is a vital component for a healthy and happy marriage, in that it encourages the couple to communicate and spend quality time together. Furthermore, it was found that when couples engage in shared interests and leisure time, they perceive their marriages to be far more interesting (Sharaievska et al., 2013:454). In their study of interracial marriages,

Sharaievska et al. (2013:454) identified strategies for coping with their diverse cultural backgrounds in terms of leisure time spent with their partner and the following mechanisms were identified: compromises and adjustment in leisure; being respectful of solitary leisure and differences in leisure preferences and using leisure to learn about each other's culture. Even though this study (Sharaievska et al., 2013:454) dealt specifically with intercultural marriage, the same strategies may be applied by intra-cultural marriage to enhance marital satisfaction. For example, partners can learn about their spouse's interests and grow with them. Leisure time alone and with one's partner is crucial in the fast-paced life that couples lead today.

Leisure time impacts on marital satisfaction. The researcher will discuss this in the following section.

4.2.5.2 Marital satisfaction and leisure activities

The extent to which couples spend leisure time together, impacts on marital satisfaction (Microsystem influence). In a study conducted by Sharaievska et al. (2013:548) the more positive the attitude of a partner to their spouse's leisure time, the higher the level of marital satisfaction. Spouses should be willing to try new things and accommodate the needs of their partner (Microsystem influence). The results of a study (Voorpostel et al., 2012:260) disproved the hypothesis that couples in the 20th century, are spending less time with their partners due to their busy lives. In fact, they found that couples spend more leisure time together today, than they did four decades ago, especially regarding social activities, such as going out to bars, restaurants, cafés and parties (Marano, 2008:53; Voorpostel et al., 2012:260). This is also true for couples who engage in in-house leisure activities, such as visiting friends and having friends come over and playing games (Mesosystem influence) (Voorpostel et al., 2012:260). As a result, research has indicated that couples have developed more intimacy by spending leisure time together than it was experienced four decades ago, which is in line with the changing nature of marriage (Voorpostel et al., 2012:260). Marital satisfaction is directly related to the amount of leisure time that a couple share and even though life has become fast paced and occupied with work commitments; couples spend more time together than they did four decades ago.

Men and women seem to be engaging in similar activities, because of the equal demands of child care, work and their levels of education (Voorpostel et al., 2012:260). Voorpostel et al. (2012:261) found that having children decreases the amount of joint leisure time for the couple, which remains consistent with previous research findings (Microsystem influence). Furthermore, research indicates, that when women experience increasing workloads, they tend to spend less one-on-one time with their children but more time with their family because they can then enjoy the company of all the family members, including their spouse (Roeters & Treas, 2011:286). The contrary is true for men, as they do not differentiate between one-on-one time and family time (Roeters & Treas, 2011:286). This research has limitations with regards to its findings, as it is context-specific to Dutch families. Employment hours are flexible in the Netherlands, compared to other countries in the world (Roeters & Treas, 2011:287). The way in which leisure time is experienced by both men and women is gender-specific and context-specific.

Leisure activities are assessed in the PREPARE program. The following section will discuss how this is done.

4.2.5.3 Leisure activities content item and exercise in the PREPARE Program

In the PREPARE program the leisure content item measures the extent to which the couple likes to spend time together, as well as partake in mutual activities (Olson et al., 2009:18). There is no exercise that is specifically set in the workbook; however, if leisure activity is identified as a growth or strength area, couples are afforded the opportunity to discuss it with the counsellor, include it in the wish list or if it is a conflict area, discuss it in the ten steps to resolve conflict exercise.

Having concluded the discussion of leisure activities, the researcher will now discuss affection and sexuality.

4.2.6 AFFECTION AND SEXUALITY

Affection and sexuality are experienced differently by men and women and societal norms provide standards for how sex and affection should be conducted (Macrosystem

influence). However, the expectation that society has, regarding open communication between men and women about their sexuality, may not be realistic.

4.2.6.1 Affection and sexuality in intimate relationships

Affection and sexuality are sensitive aspects, which a couple must address and have realistic expectations about, before engaging in marriage or a committed relationship; otherwise, it may be a continuous source of conflict, that may become detrimental to the marriage or intimate relationship. As research indicates, men show “love” and “affection” differently (Schoenfeld, Bredow & Huston, 2012:1396). Men usually express their love and affection by initiating sex, helping with household responsibilities and spending leisure time with their partner (Microsystem influence) (Schoenfeld et al., 2012:1396). On the other hand, women express love and affection by physical touch such as giving hugs and kisses and expressing their feelings (Microsystem influence) (Schoenfeld et al., 2012:1396). Research has also revealed that men experience love from their women, when women refrain from antagonistic behaviour (Schoenfeld et al., 2012:1399). Affection and sexuality are experienced in a unique manner by everyone; however, they are influenced by societal norms.

Societal norms such as media, has contributed to how people perceive sexuality and affection. Television and popular culture, such as music videos, movies, the internet and magazines, have drastically changed the way in which people view and learn about sex (Macrosystem influence) (Williams et al., 2006:165; Yu, 2012:561). Other ways of learning about sex include: parents, religion, friends and siblings, sex education and people’s partners (Howe, 2012:105; Kunz, 2013:100; Williams et al., 2006:170-172). Howe et al. (2012:105) view the influences of sexuality, based on the Bioecological theory and state that sexuality is influenced by the Microsystem, which includes the level of hormones that people have, impact on their sexual desire and the way in which parents raise their children (Chronosystem), impacts on how they perceive sex. Religion also impacts on the way in which people perceive sex (Howe, 2012:105). From a Macrosystem perspective, cultural norms determine sexual norms and formulation of marriage and intimate relationships (Howe, 2012:105). Today, pornography is easily accessible to the youth and despite parental guidance systems, children are watching R-rated movies, which often represent unrealistic expectations about sex, which they then replicate (Williams et al.,

2006:165). Often, what is portrayed in the media raises unrealistic expectations of sex and this continues to put pressure on marriages and relationships (Macrosystem influence).

Couples need to explore expectations about sex using open communication. The differences in expectations about sex (time and frequency) that partners have, may cause conflict and a decrease in marital satisfaction (Microsystem influence), if it is not negotiated to suit both partners (Williams et al., 2006:166). The researcher is of the opinion, that like financial management, issues regarding sex should be discussed before marriage and entering committed relationships; otherwise the couple may develop unrealistic expectations of their partner and feel rejected, angry or unsatisfied, if these unvoiced expectations are not met.

Expectations are created by individuals; the following section will discuss how individuals perceive sex and affection differently.

4.2.6.2 Individual differences

The meaning of sex is unique and sensitive to everyone (Microsystem influence). According to Williams et al. (2006:167) “sexual values are deeply held beliefs about what is right and wrong, desirable and undesirable sexual behaviour” which acts as a guide for sexual behaviour. Whereas a “sexual script is a set of expectations as to how one should behave in sexual situations”, which is normally learned from society (Macrosystem influence) (Williams et al., 2006:172). Kunz (2013:99) refers to this, as sexual norms and further differentiates between proscriptive norms and prescriptive norms. Proscriptive norms “are the rules that proscribe or prohibit certain behaviours”; whereas prescriptive norms are “rules that recommend or require certain behaviours” (Benokraitis, 2005:167; Kunz, 2013:99). If one values faithfulness, it is likely that one will remain sexually faithful; whereas in polygamic cultures, shared sexual relations are valued (Howe, 2012:109; Williams et al., 2006:166). For example, Swedish people are “sex-positive” and encourage engaging in sex as a normal part of good development (Macrosystem influence) (Howe, 2012:109).

Society expects that men are supposed to be in charge, confident, and aggressive, not tender and compassionate (Macrosystem influence) (Williams et al., 2006:172). The purpose of sex for men is orgasm, rather than intimacy (Macrosystem influence). Men know what women want, are always ready for sex, and any physical contact and even touching, is expected to lead to sex (Williams et al., 2006:172). Society also states, that men objectify women, talking about physical aspects, size and shapes of body parts. (Williams et al., 2006:172). Williams et al. (2006:172) term these societal expectations as sexual scripts (Macrosystem influences). The sexual scripts expected from women include, to be beautiful, loving, nurturing, and accommodating (Williams et al., 2006:172). Unlike men, they are not supposed to talk about sex, or be overly interested in sex, especially casual sex (Williams et al., 2006:172). Society has developed norms of how men and women should conduct themselves sexually and therefore, people act accordingly (Macrosystem influences). This includes sexual satisfaction, which is discussed next.

4.2.6.3 Sexual satisfaction

The perception of the lack of sex in a marriage or relationship because of unspoken expectations, can have negative impact on the marriage or relationship. In turn, this may lead to partners engaging in extramarital sex and affairs (Kunz, 2013:102). Affairs are often a result of unrealistic expectations as partners rely on their partners for their happiness, emotional and sexual satisfaction (Howe, 2012:122; Kunz, 2013:102). It is not the partner's responsibility to resolve and nurture childhood issues or fill emotional voids; instead partners should communicate openly and honestly with each other and take responsibility for their own lives (Microsystem influence) (Howe, 2012:122). Despite the reality that affairs (Exosystem influence) destroy marriages; affairs are also known to strengthen marriages if the couple can work through their unrealistic expectations and resolve problems in the marriage or intimate relationship (Kunz, 2013:102). Women appear to be the most deeply emotionally hurt by infidelity, than men are (Howe, 2012:110). Furthermore, Howe (2012:110) points out, that in research it has been found that higher rates of men, highly educated and with low levels of religiosity, tend to approve of extramarital sex. The temptations of affairs often result from unmet expectations and therefore, require the couple to work on the marriage on a continuous basis.

As marriage is a long-term commitment, it is important for the couple to keep working at the romantic aspects of their sexual lives (Microsystem influence). Once a couple has been married or in a committed relationship over a period, sex tends to become routine and as a result, couples lose the “spark” they once had in the early stage of the marriage or intimate relationship (Williams et al., 2006:181). Kunz (2013:101) adds, that research has indicated that marital satisfaction is closely linked with marital sexuality (Microsystem influence). Moreover, sexual satisfaction for women is dependent on their overall satisfaction of the marriage or intimate relationship, especially regarding emotional closeness and mutual respect (Howe, 2012:110; Kunz, 2013:101). Howe (2012:110) further adds, that sexual satisfaction is also dependent on relationship processes namely: “power struggles, conflicts and communication patterns of couples” (Microsystem influences).

Interestingly, research has shown that the level of sexual satisfaction does not differ between gay, lesbian and heterosexual relationships; in fact, it is related to the level of overall relationship satisfaction (Howe, 2012:110). However, gay men tend to have sex more frequently, than lesbian women (Howe, 2012:110). Research has indicated that sexual satisfaction is closely related to: young-age; a childhood where there was minimal exposure to religion (this may be because churches emphasise sex within a marital union for procreation purposes only and condemn sex for pleasure) (Macrosystem influence); and the confidence that the couples experience in their sexuality (Kunz, 2013:101).

It was also found that women tend to experience lower levels of sexual satisfaction than men, due to women having sex at a much older age and experiencing less sexual confidence, due to the conservative views about sex (Macrosystem influence) (Kunz, 2013:101). Interestingly, sexual satisfaction is closely linked with body image perception; the more positive a person feels about their body image, the more satisfying their sex lives (Microsystem influence) (Kunz, 2013:101). The converse is also true. Today, men have become obsessed with becoming muscular, based on what is seen in men’s magazines and has been termed the “Adonis complex” by researchers (Macrosystem influence) (Kunz, 2013:101). Benokraitis (2005:172) adds that these ideal body images may lead to women and men engaging in eating disorders or plastic surgery, to aspire to these images (Macrosystem influence). Sociological factors, such as role strain, impact on the couple’s level of sexual satisfaction, as the partners may feel neglected in this regard (Howe,

2012:117). Couples need to constantly work on their sexual relationship by working on themselves, to ensure that they feel comfortable in their own appearance (Microsystem influence), as the pressures of society regarding sex add pressure to marital and intimate relationships.

Couples need to constantly work on their sexual relationship and develop separate ways of achieving ongoing excitement (Microsystem influence) to ensure continued marital satisfaction. Research indicates that couples should experiment with having sex in various locations, trying different sex positions and purchasing sexy lingerie that they feel comfortable with (Williams et al., 2006:181). Stress impacts on couple's sexual arousal and therefore, sex should be planned after stress levels have decreased (Williams et al., 2006:181). Making time for sex is extremely important and includes taking couple weekends (Williams et al., 2006:181). Sex does not necessarily need to include intercourse, it can also be daily touching, hugging and kissing and even watching erotic material, not including pornography (Williams et al., 2006:181). Reaching sexual satisfaction in marriage is an ongoing process that requires imagination and trying various other techniques.

If couples are still not satisfied with their sexual lives, they should seek assistance. Couples are advised to seek marital therapy, counselling or consult a sex therapist if their problems persist (Mesosystem influence) beyond the measures a couple has taken as mentioned above (Williams et al., 2006:182). In some marriages and intimate relationships, unhealthy sexual behaviour may impact on the marital satisfaction of the partners; for example, a partner who is addicted to sex (Microsystem influence) may have an urge for compulsive masturbation and insatiable sexual desire, which is not easy for the other partner to sustain (Williams et al., 2006:182). This may lead to the partner who has the addiction, resorting to affairs, pornography and other frenzied sexual behaviour (Exosystem influence) (Williams et al., 2006:181). Sexual compulsivity may be a result of physical and emotional abuse a partner may have experienced in their childhood (Microsystem and Mesosystem influence), resulting in the realisation, that for them, sex is not nurturing, but a devastating experience, in which their emotions alternate between extreme feelings of anxiety and self-loathing (Williams et al., 2006:182). Sex becomes a means of escaping emotional pain, rather than a nurturing act of pleasure (Williams et al., 2006:182). Fortunately, there is professional assistance for couples, who struggle with

issues concerning their sexuality and sex lives, to help them deal with the challenges, before they begin to impact on their marital satisfaction (Mesosystem influence).

Facilitators/ counsellors of the PREPARE program are not always qualified enough to deal with the sexual concerns of couples. However, the program assesses how partners view sex and affection in their relationship. The following section discusses this

4.2.6.4 Sexual expectations content item and exercise in the PREPARE program

In the PREPARE program, the sexual expectation item measures how the partners view affection and sexuality in their relationship (Microsystem influence); this also involves the level of comfort they experience in discussing their sex lives, family planning, birth control and infidelity (Olson et al., 2009:18) There is no exercise that is specifically set in the workbook; however, if affection and sexuality are identified as growth or strength areas, couples are afforded the opportunity to discuss them with the counsellor, include them in the wish list, or if they are conflict areas, discuss them during the “resolve conflict exercise”. Furthermore, the counsellor can refer them to sex therapy, if there is a need.

In the next section, the researcher will discuss family and family-of-origin, as a component in marital and intimate relationships.

4.2.7 FAMILY

The way in which couples are raised (Mesosystem influence), strongly correlates with the way, in which they manage their own marriages and intimate relationships. This is prevalent when couples have come from dysfunctional families and they usually perpetuate this behaviour in their own family relationships. Therefore, the next section will explore family-of-origin.

4.2.7.1 Family-of-origin

Family is everything and impacts on the psychological, emotional and spiritual development of individuals. Howe (2012:4), defines family-of-origin, as “the family we grew up in”. Furthermore, family (Mesosystem influence), may be defined as a group of

two or more people, connected by blood, adoption, marriage, or choice, who may rely on each other for social, emotional and financial support” (Kunz, 2013:6; Howe, 2012:4; Williams, 2006:14). The importance of family-of-origin is summed up by Kunz (2013:11), as:

Table 9: Positive and negative effects of family and friends

POSITIVE EFFECTS	NEGATIVE EFFECTS
Elevated levels of parental affection during childhood are associated with an improved ability to regulate negative emotions in childhood	Early exposure to violence in the family correlates with positive attitudes toward marital violence
Elevated levels of parental warmth during childhood are associated with better physical health in adulthood	Mothers with maladaptive eating habits may increase the likelihood of their daughters developing eating disorders
Parents who are involved in their children’s school activities have children with higher educational aspirations	Lack of parental affection and elevated levels of conflict at home may result in poor emotional regulation and maladaptive coping styles
Children whose parents model and explain financial tasks to them are better prepared to take on financial roles and responsibilities themselves	Children from divorced families are more likely to get divorced themselves
	People who perceived their family-of-origin as less healthy are more likely to have negative attitudes towards marriage

Family dynamics (Mesosystem influence) and history (Chronosystem influence), contribute to the development of emotional intimacy in couples. In a study done by Hortacsu (2007) it was found that family-initiated marriages are likely to experience more enmeshment with their family-of-origin, than couple-initiated marriages (Mesosystem influence). Couple-initiated marriages have stronger levels of couple affection, lower levels of conflict and autonomy regarding the emotional distance from their family-of-origin, than family-initiated marriages (Hortacsu, 2007:113). Family-of-origin influences (Mesosystem influences), may lead to relationship problems and conflict and this may

intensify as the partners enter an intimate relationship or marriage and start their own family (Topham et al., 2005:103). According to Social Learning Theory, a child who has grown up in a family with poor parental marital quality (Mesosystem influence) and divorce, is more likely to become hostile in their own marriages (Allen et al., 2008:275; Topham et al., 2005:103). This may be due to the fact, that children model their parents' behaviour and use the same behaviour (Mesosystem influence), whether functional or dysfunctional, in their own marriages and intimate relationships (Topham et al., 2005:103). Interestingly, the research produced by Topham et al. (2005:115) indicates that marital hostility is predicted by the nature of the experiences of the wife's family-of-origin (Mesosystem influence), rather than the husband's. The wife sets the emotional climate of the relationship or marriage (Topham et al., 2005:115). According to Dinero, Conger, Shaver, Widaman and Larsen-Rife (2011:26) the quality of parent-child attachment in adolescent phase (Mesosystem influence), predicted attachment security at the age of 25 (Chronosystem influence). Furthermore, research indicates that couples who were involved in positive romantic interaction (Mesosystem influence), experienced greater attachment security at 27 years of age (Chronosystem influence) (Dinero et al., 2011:26). Therefore, it can be concluded that both family-of-origin and romantic interactions influence attachment, however, as the relationship develops, the influence of the romantic attachment becomes more significant, than the family-of origin attachment (Dinero et al., 2011:26). Experiencing better relationships with the families of origin (Mesosystem influence) have contributed to higher levels of couple satisfaction (Bertoni & Bodenmann, 2012:182). Emotional intimacy is established by family dynamics and history and research indicates, that women tend to set the emotional climate of their marriage or intimate relationships. Family-of-origin is one of the chief conflicting areas in marriages and unvoiced expectations only lead to further marital deterioration.

The PREPARE program assesses family-of-origin issues, as this has an impact on marital satisfaction. In the following section, the researcher explores how this is achieved.

4.2.7.2 Family-of-origin content item and exercise in the PREPARE program

In the PREPARE program the family-of-origin item measures how the couple feel about their in-laws and spending time with extended family members (Mesosystem influence) (Olson et al., 2009:17). Once this is determined, an effective couple-map is used as a tool

to assist the couples in plotting their own relationship, in comparison to their family-of-origin; these differences are then discussed with the counsellor (Olson et al., 2009:30).

Having discussed the family-of-origin, the researcher will now discuss children and parenting as a component of marital and intimate relationships.

4.2.8 CHILDREN AND PARENTING

Having children impacts on marriages and intimate relationships, as parents need to navigate how they are going to ensure marital satisfaction, what kind of parenting style they are going to adopt as well as contraceptive and fertility measures.

Following this section, the researcher will now discuss parenting and its effect on marriage.

4.2.8.1 Parenting and marriage

Becoming a parent can be a very daunting task. The introduction and development of modern medicine (Macrosystem influence) has allowed people to live longer, healthier lives and therefore, some parents may choose to postpone having children, until they have finished studying and have set up their careers (Kunz, 2013:133). In some cases, couples choose not to have children, but rather to focus on their careers and their marriage; this is known as DINK's (Double Income, No Kids) (Howe, 2012:278; Kunz, 2013:133). Research has indicated that having no children increases life satisfaction, but despite these findings, for some, having children is a positive life-experience and ensures the continuation of the next generation (Microsystem influence) (Howe, 2012:278). Howe (2012:278) further argues that parenting impacts on children, however, children also impact on the social, cognitive and emotional development of the parent (Mesosystem influence) (Howe, 2012:278). This is known as the transactional model, where influences are reciprocal (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:429). Unrealistic expectations (Macrosystem influence) of raising successful children and being "wonder-parents", place significant responsibility and pressure on families (Howe, 2012:280). Becoming a parent has become optional with the availability of modern medicine and remains a difficult phase in adult life,

especially with the pressure of adhering to societal norms and standards and being the “super parent”.

Prior research has focused on the mother being the primary caregiver and nurturer, with the premise, that men are not able to parent, however, more recent research has indicated the opposite to be true (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:425). Men are just as capable of parenting and responding in a loving manner towards their children, as women are. According to societal-norms (Macrosystem influence), women tend to be responsible for the day-to-day caring activities of child would such as feeding and cleaning; whereas fathers tend to engage in playful activities with their children (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:425). If need be, men can assume the primary role as caregiver, especially now that women have entered the working market and do not have a lot of time at their disposal (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:425). Gender roles in parenting have been challenged with women entering the job market.

Parenting is not an easy task and should not be taken lightly, as couples need to consider the financial implications and the effect that having a baby will have on their ability to manage responsibilities (Microsystem influence) and maintain their marriage as well as the physical and psychological implications of having a child (Kunz, 2013:134). Recent research has indicated, that the father’s role of care and control regarding the child, has a direct impact on the adjustment (Mesosystem influence), mental health, academic competence, high self-esteem, positive social skills, peer acceptance and a strong sense of morality for the child (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:427; Yin, Li & Su, 2012:1406). In other words, fathers who exhibit too much control and too little care during their parenting, can cause children to develop mental disorders (Mesosystem influence) according to the DSM-III-R categories. These include: major depression, dysthymia, social phobia, agoraphobia, panic disorder, alcohol and drug abuse, and alcohol dependence (Joussemet, Mageau & Koestner, 2014:859; Yin et al., 2012:1406). Mothers and fathers are both considered to be care givers, contrary to traditional beliefs and recent research indicates, that the father’s responsibility towards the child can influence the psychological and social functioning of the child.

Parents need to love and support their children; however, they also need to establish a balance when controlling their children. This is known as acceptance-responsiveness and

refers to the extent to which parents are supportive, sensitive to their child's needs, and willing to provide affection and praise, when their child meets their expectations (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:426). Demandingness-control refers to how much control over decisions lies with the parent, as opposed to with the child. Controlling and demanding parents set rules (Mesosystem influence), expect their children to follow them and monitor their children closely, to ensure that rules are followed (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:426). To ensure that children become well rounded model citizens, parents should exercise a balance between acceptance-responsiveness and demandingness-control.

The way in which parents achieve this balance is determined by their parenting style, which will be discussed next.

4.2.8.2 Parenting styles

As people are unique and have come from diverse backgrounds, so are parenting styles. Researchers have categorised parenting styles into four types namely: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and neglectful parenting (Alegre, 2011:57; Sigelman & Rider, 2006:426-427; Uji, Sakamoto, Adachi & Kitamura, 2014:294). Authoritarian parenting involves elevated levels of demandingness-control and lower levels of acceptance-responsiveness. Disciplinary measures such as physical punishment, is put in place to ensure that the rules are followed (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:426-427). Parents who make use of authoritative parenting, balance demand and control with responsiveness and acceptance. Children's views are often taken into consideration regarding family issues and decision-making (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:426-427; Uji et al., 2014:293). Furthermore, Uji et al. (2014:293) found that, maternal and paternal parenting authoritarian parenting styles, worsened children's mental health development, whereas the authoritative parenting style, mitigated negative mental health development. Permissive parenting relates to parents who are overly permissive and allow their children to control situations without setting boundaries includes rarely exerting control over their children. They are overly-permissive and allow the child to control the situation (Alegre, 2011:57; Sigelman & Rider, 2006:426-427). Finally, with neglectful parenting, parents are often uninvolved in their children's lives and often reject their children. Parenting styles (Mesosystem influence) are developed from personal exposure to parenting during one's childhood and

determine how much acceptance and control is considered adequate for a child, when one is a parent.

Parenting styles affect all aspects of a child's development (Mesosystem influence). Longitudinal research has captured the effectiveness of the different parenting styles on children's' behaviour (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:427; Uji et al., 2014:295). The findings indicated that children, who were raised by parents exhibiting authoritative parenting on their children (Mesosystem influence), were better adjusted than any of the other children, who were exposed to different parenting styles (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:427; Uji et al., 2014:293). Children who were exposed to authoritarian parenting, were unhappy, moody, and difficult. The children who were raised in permissive environments, often lacked independence and were self-centred (Sigelman & Rider, 2006:427). The most holistic parenting style, which leads to the development of well-rounded citizens, is the authoritarian parenting style and should be encouraged in all families.

In a marriage or intimate relationship, partners should, as parents, discuss their own parenting styles, as well as the parenting styles of their parents, to identify similarities and thereby work around the differences with regards to raising their own children.

The PREPARE program provides a safe environment for couples to discuss their views on parenting and parenting styles. This is discussed next.

4.2.8.3 Parenting content item and exercise in the PREPARE program

In the PREPARE program, the expectations of the couple having children or not, is measured (Olson et al., 2009:20). This also includes the couple's awareness of how having children will impact on their relationship; the division of roles and responsibilities, views on discipline and the number of children (Olson et al., 2009:20). There is no specific exercise for parenting, however, if this subject is disputed and identified as a growth area, it can either be discussed with the counsellor through the wish-list exercise, or the ten steps of conflict management exercise.

In this section, parenting and children as a component was discussed. The researcher will now discuss couple closeness and couple flexibility as a component.

4.2.9 COUPLE CLOSENESS AND COUPLE FLEXIBILITY

As much as couples need to make time for each other and their marriage or intimate relationship, couples also need their own space to grow and develop individually, with the support of the other partner.

The next section focuses on how couples can exercise closeness and flexibility, to obtain the ideal intimate relationship.

4.2.9.1 Couple closeness and flexibility in marriage and intimate relationships

Couple closeness and flexibility are concepts that are generally not explored in marital components. However, these concepts are extremely vital in any marriage and relationship and the couple should have a clear understanding of their levels of closeness and flexibility (Microsystem influence). Olson, Olson-Sigg and Larson (2008:24) define flexibility as “how open to change couples are in their relationships. It described the amount of change that occurs, for example, in leadership, role relationships and relationship rules”. On the other hand, closeness refers to “how emotionally connected you feel to another person. It involves how you balance the separateness and togetherness- your private space and your intimate connection” (Olson et al., 2008:25). Another more commonly used term for couples’ closeness is intimacy (Yoo, Bartle-Haring, Day & Gangamma, 2014:276). Olson et al. (2009:26) refer to balanced and unbalanced relationships, where balanced relationships are flexible and connected, whereas unbalanced relationships are overly flexible or completely inflexible (Microsystem influence), as well as over-connected or disconnected. A partner’s ability to communicate positively immediately enhanced feelings of sexual and emotional intimacy which resulted in increased levels of relationship satisfaction (Yoo et al., 2014:288). For men in heterosexual couples, it is imperative that they satisfy their female partners sexually, as this predicts their relationship satisfaction (Yoo et al., 2014:288). Couples need to be open to becoming flexible in their marriages, while maintaining their emotional intimacy, which is usually achieved through effective communication and balancing couple closeness and flexibility.

To assist couples to balance their closeness and flexibility, the PREPARE program allows an opportunity to discuss this. The next section discusses this.

4.2.9.2 Couple closeness and flexibility content item and exercise in the PREPARE program

In the PREPARE program, the couple closeness and flexibility content item measures how the couple utilise leadership, dominance and flexibility in their relationship and whether they can be flexible with roles and responsibilities and rules (Olson et al., 2009:19). There is no specific exercise for couple closeness and flexibility, however, if this issue is in dispute, it can be discussed with the counsellor using the wish-list exercise or the conflict handling exercise. Furthermore, it is plotted in the family map.

With couple closeness and flexibility discussed in this section, relationship roles will now be discussed as a marital and intimate relationship component.

4.2.10 RELATIONSHIP ROLES

Division of labour has changed between men and women, due to increased demands in the workforce and men and women have had to renegotiate their tasks and responsibilities, to make their marriages and intimate relationships work.

The following section will discuss how relationship roles impact on marriage and intimate relationships.

4.2.10.1 Relationship roles in marriage and intimate relationships

Relationship roles are usually a major source of tension in marriages and intimate relationships. There is an on-going debate regarding the division of labour in traditional marriages, versus modern marriages. Wilcox and Nock (2007:105) state that women who came from “traditionally-gendered” (Macrosystem and Chronosystem influence) households, where the husbands are the main breadwinners, experience higher levels of marital satisfaction. The level of equality of housework (Microsystem influence) is what determines the marital satisfaction level of women. If women experience the division of

housework as fair, they experience happier marriages (Wilcox & Nock, 2007:105). However, Evangelical marriage discourse (Macrosystem influence), which is strongly influenced by religious beliefs (Macrosystem influence), entrenches the belief that men are the providers and authoritative figures, while women are expected to fill a subordinate role (Baker, Sanchez, Nock & Wright, 2009:148). Lower levels of marital adjustment in women, were associated with the length of time that the husband would be unemployed (Kinnunen & Feldt, 2004:528). Their study found that poor economic circumstances led to economic strain (Exosystem influence) and a decrease in overall marital adjustment. Interestingly, Wilcox and Nock (2007:105) found, that women who are stay-at-home-moms have more time to focus on their marriage, instead of having to balance married life, raising children and working at the same time and therefore experience happier marriages (Exosystem influence). Relationship roles are also influenced by societal norms and values (Macrosystem influence) and have an impact on marital satisfaction, especially where economic strain is concerned.

Following this, is a discussion on how relationship roles impact on marital satisfaction.

4.2.10.2 Relationship roles and marital satisfaction

Men and women perceive differently how relational roles impact on marital satisfaction. Women tend to be happy when their partner is the breadwinner, in some instances due to the fact, that their partner is fulfilling the gendered provider role (Macrosystem influence) (Wilcox & Nock, 2007:106). Furthermore, women who stay home, while their partners work on a full-time basis, do not feel that domestic housework responsibilities are unfair (Wilcox & Nock, 2007:106). Some women may feel, that while their partner is a breadwinner, they can pursue an interesting employment or hobby (Wilcox & Nock, 2007:106). Some women perceive the benefits of having a partner who is a breadwinner and relate it to their increased marital satisfaction.

In contradiction to this, (Wilcox & Nock, 2007:106) highlight, that women who experience division of household responsibilities as “unfair”, generally complain, that their husbands do not spend enough quality time with them and hypothesise that the increase in the demand of quality time spent with the husband, leads to marital conflict and emotional withdrawal from the husband (Microsystem and Exosystem influence), which results in the

cycle of decreased quality time being spent with the wife, being repeated. Some women have a negative view regarding their husbands being breadwinners, because they get to spend less time with their husbands and to shoulder more household responsibilities.

Research indicates, that men perceive certain household chores to be in the woman's domain, which results in them only doing a third of household duties. (Arrighi, 2007:254). However, this is not consistent with the responsibility of child-rearing, where men are more likely to take care of children, than other tasks (Arrighi, 2007:255). The notion that men should be afforded the breadwinner status, has been challenged by younger cohorts, who believe that both men and women should enter the workforce (Arrighi, 2007:255). In Arrighi's study (2007:257) it was found, that college students still see employment through a gendered perspective (Macrosystem influence) and that men are more suited for specific jobs, than women, as it defines their masculinity. Despite the many changes in the employment sector and households, couples generally associate house responsibilities according to a gendered perspective.

The PREPARE program does not work from a gendered perspective, but rather, it assists couples to discuss how they wish their role allocations to be decided on. This is discussed in the next section.

4.2.10.3 Relationship role content item and exercise in the PREPARE program

In the PREPARE program, the relationship role content item measures how the couple view role and responsibility allocation (Olson et al., 2009:18). Furthermore, research has indicated, that equalitarian role and responsibility allocation, can be related to increased levels of marital satisfaction (Olson et al., 2009:18). There is no specific exercise for relationship roles and responsibilities in the PREPARE workbook, however, if these are in dispute, they can be discussed with the counsellor, using the wish-list exercise, or the conflict management exercise.

In this section relationship roles and responsibility were discussed. The researcher will now discuss spirituality as a component of marital and intimate relationships.

4.2.11 SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality as a marital component has been gaining significant recognition in the study of successful marriages and marital programs. Research indicates, that spirituality (Microsystem and Macrosystem influence) may be used as a means of negating conflict, especially when the couple transition into parenthood (Kusner, Mahoney, Pargament & DeMaris, 2014:605). Becoming a parent, means that the couple needs to decide in which what religious affiliation (Microsystem and Macrosystem influence), they would like to raise their child (Walsh, 2010:335). Obviously, the more similar the religious beliefs of the couple, the easier it would be to raise the child and to reduce conflict areas. (Kusner et al., 2014:605; Perry, 2015:224; Walsh, 2010:335; Wicker, 2016:34;40). Therefore, it is imperative, that parents maintain open communication between themselves and their children (Kusner et al., 2014:605; Walsh, 2010:335). Spirituality is gaining significance in marital programs and it is found that the more similar couples are in their spirituality the more they can negate conflict especially in the child-rearing phase.

Spirituality is experienced in a unique manner by each person in an intimate relationship or marriage (Microsystem influence). Like finances, spirituality is high on the conflict list of what couples argue about. Spiritual beliefs are important in that “they provide a foundation for the values and behaviours of individuals and couples” (Olson et al., 2008:18). In a national survey conducted in the USA, it was found that couples who express spirituality in the same way, were happier married, than those who did not (Olson et al., 2008:18; Perry, 2015:224; Wicker, 2016:34;40). Interfaith marriages and relationships may pose problems, as the couple need to negotiate religious rituals, holidays and which primary faith denomination to practice (Larson & Olson, [Sa]: 2). It is important that the couple discusses the importance of spirituality and can respect their partner’s spirituality, before they decide to pursue marriage or an intimate relationship.

There is a difference between religion and spirituality and both impact families and relationships differently. Walsh (2010:331) defines religion as “organized faith systems, with shared traditions, beliefs, practices, and structures (Macrosystem influence). Spirituality, a broad overarching construct, involves an active personal investment in transcendent beliefs and practices lived out in daily life and relationships” (Microsystem influence) (Walsh, 2010:331). Spirituality is not always a part of religion and can be

experienced as a belief in a higher being, a divine spirit, that exists in all beings, or as a higher human condition to which people strive (Walsh, 2010:331). Furthermore, spirituality can be expressed and practiced through healing rituals, prayer and meditation (Walsh, 2010:331). Deep spirituality is usually practiced by couples and family members, who have a very deep intimate connection (Holland, Lee, Marshak & Martin, 2016:224; Walsh, 2010:331). Spiritual intimacy has a positive correlation with marital intimacy and well-being (Holland et al., 2016:224). Couples' interpretation of religion and spirituality may differ, however; it is vital that the couple support each other in the way in which the religion or spirituality is practiced.

Through the ages, the practice of spirituality and religion have changed (Chronosystem influence). Research indicates that in America, there is a significant percentage of African Americans, who belong to religious bodies, a practice which originated during times of slavery, when the church was seen as a source of support and resistance (Chaney, Shirisia & Skogrand, 2016:25; Walsh, 2010:333;). The relationship between faith and strong family relationships is reciprocal (Chaney et al., 2016:25; Kusner et al., 2014:605; Walsh, 2010:334). If a family experiences strong faith (Microsystem influence), it is likely that their faith will impact positively on their family relationships. The same is true for families who experience faith (Microsystem influence) as negative and punitive, where it is likely that they will lose faith and that family relationships could break down (Walsh, 2010:334). Marriage ceremonies are based more on spirituality, because marital vows are indicative of love, loyalty, mutual respect and trust, no matter what religious denomination the couple belong to (Walsh, 2010:335). Interfaith marriages are also on the increase, where a person may choose a partner from a different faith, to separate from the beliefs of their family-of-origin (Walsh, 2010:338). Families of origin (Mesosystem influence) feel rejected by their children, when they choose a partner from a different religious background and this has negative implications for future generations thereafter (Walsh, 2010:338). In non-religious families, the parents allow the children to decide for themselves, what their religious or spiritual orientation will be (Walsh, 2010:339). The practice of spirituality and religion is changing and is perceived differently by different faiths and cultures and therefore, impact either positively or negatively on their relationships.

As much as religion has a positive impact on couples and families, it may also be used negatively. Some patriarchal religious practices (Microsystem and Macrosystem influence) are used to justify the abuse that women experience today (Walsh, 2010:337). Furthermore, same-sex couple marriages have been condemned (Macrosystem influence) in many places of the world and this has led to their alienation (Walsh, 2010:337). Therefore, religion and spirituality also have been used as manipulative measures to achieve other agendas, rather than developing the faith and spirituality of couples.

The next section briefly discusses, how the PREPARE program assesses this aspect.

4.2.11.1 Spiritual beliefs content item in the PREPARE program

In the PREPARE program the spiritual beliefs content item assesses, how the couple experience and live their religious beliefs and practices, as well as the significance and role of religious beliefs in the relationship (Olson et al., 2009). There is no specific exercise for spiritual beliefs, however, if this is a disputable item it can be discussed with the counsellor, by using the wish-list or conflict management exercise.

In this section, the researcher discussed spirituality. In the following section, the researcher summarises the chapter and highlights the most pertinent points of discussion.

4.3 SUMMARY

In summary, this chapter contextualises the dynamics of how human intimate relationships can be understood according to the Bioecological theory of Bronfenbrenner. It is clear that the individual is constantly engaging with different levels of influence from personality in the Microsystem influence, family-of-origin issues indicated in the Mesosystem influence, to the working environment in the Exosystem influence, to the practice of religion and sex in the Macrosystem. This all impacts on the individual and couple system with the influence of time (Chronosystem) being a constant factor.

There is so much more that could have been included on these dynamics; however, due to the nature of this project, only the relevant components were discussed according to

the PREPARE program. Furthermore, it confirms that counsellors should be well researched on marital components when working with couples in marital education and therapeutic interventions. The PREPARE program is a very comprehensive, scientifically based program that accurately covers all the marital components that are usually addressed in premarital preparation. All the components were looked at in depth to gain a better understanding of the challenges the couples may face in their intimate or marital relationships. Hence, it is vital that these differences are discussed prior to marriage to prevent lower levels of marital satisfaction in the future.

Marriage as a system is influenced by and again influence many other systems. It is a complex and challenging relationship in which different components are interwoven. Couples should be aware of the complex interplay of these components, as discussed in the chapter.

CHAPTER 5

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The research question for this study: What is the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context? Therefore, the goal of this study is to explore the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context. The purpose of this chapter is firstly to provide an overview of the research methodology and ethical guidelines used in conducting the research study and secondly to present analysed research data.

The researcher will begin this chapter with discussing the research approach used for the study.

5.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

A mixed-methods approach was used for this study, to gather rich data on the experiences of counsellors' and couples' who participated in the PREPARE program and to determine how the program contributed to marriages in a South African context. The quantitative approach was used to obtain the current level of the couple's marital satisfaction and to compare these results to the initial Positive Couples Agreement (PCA) scores obtained in the PREPARE program report, after the couple had completed the program. The qualitative approach was used to further explore, in the case of the couples, how the PREPARE program contributed towards their marital satisfaction. Subsequently, the qualitative approach was used to go deeper into understanding how PREPARE counsellors/ facilitators experienced the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context.

The next section will discuss the type of research used for this study.

5.3 TYPE OF RESEARCH

Several studies have been done on the PREPARE program, however, not in a South African context. This study thus focuses on an existing program. Exploratory research, was used, to explore the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages in South Africa from the perspectives of both couples' participating in the program and counsellors administering the program (Fouché, 2011:95). Furthermore, the research can also be categorised as applied research (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:94; Haight, 2010:102) as the findings and recommendations may directly impact on the program in practice.

The next section will focus on the research design and methodology that was used in this study.

5.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

5.4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

As the approach to this study was a mixed-methods approach, it is only fitting that a mixed-methods design was necessary for this study, specifically a triangulation-mixed-methods design. Although the design has a one-phase nature, it uses two different types of methods to substantiate and validate the overall findings and bring two perspectives together (Delpont & Fouché, 2011:442; Hesse-Biber, 2012:137; Torrance, 2012:111). The researcher made use of the explanatory sequential design; where the intent of the researcher is to start with the quantitative phase and then conduct the second qualitative phase to explain phase one results (Creswell, 2015:38). The purpose of this design, is to ensure that although the two phases are separate and unique, that they also build on one another and merge data so that the researcher can draw inferences (Creswell, 2015:38). Within the explanatory sequential design, each of the phases consisted of an appropriate design.

In the quantitative phase, the one-shot pre-experimental case study design was used as the purpose of the study was to determine how the independent variable (PREPARE program) impacted and caused the desirable effect on the dependent variable (marital satisfaction), once off. The Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire was used to calculate the

level of the couples' marital satisfaction at that point and compare it to the PCA scores that the couple achieved when they first completed the PREPARE questionnaire.

Researchers have criticised pre-experimental designs as weak, as no comparison group exists to confirm internal validity (Wang & Morgan, 2010:1082). One way to ensure that reliability of data is not compromised, is to ensure that measuring instruments remain precise over extended periods of time (Gushta & Rupp, 2010:1237). In this study, the PREPARE questionnaire and Marital Satisfaction Scale have both scored high in terms of validity of date and reliability of measuring instruments.

The goal of the study was to explore the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context. Couples who took part in the PREPARE and counsellors who administer the PREPARE were chosen to provide their own experiences. Therefore, the qualitative collective case study design was used. To ensure data validity, the researcher sent the transcribed interviews back to the participants, to confirm that it was an accurate reflection of what had been discussed. This therefore confirms the trustworthiness of the data and prevents researcher bias (Lietz et al., 2006:447; Torrance, 2012:114). Within the context of this study, these designs accurately captured the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within South Africa and assisted the researcher to draw inferences from the research gathered.

5.4.2 RESEARCH POPULATION, SAMPLE AND SAMPLING METHOD

Initially the researcher wrote a research proposal and approached Family Life Centre in Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa, to recruit research participants as this is one of the largest organisations that administer the PREPARE Program and therefore the best location within which to study the topic (Boeije, 2010:34). The Family Life Centre deals directly with Dr Olson, the pioneer of the PREPARE program in the United States of America. Therefore, written permission had to be obtained by Dr. Olson, to conduct the research in South Africa, as this has never been done before.

An e-mail with the full consent form attached, was sent out by the PREPARE coordinator of Family Life Centre, to all the couples who participated in PREPARE in 2010. The purpose of this, was to recruit couples that were past the honeymoon phase of the

marriage and moving into the child rearing phase, to ensure an accurate depiction of their marital satisfaction levels (Fawcett, et al., 2010:235; Burgoyne et al., 2010:398). However, after several follow-ups, even with couples that were not necessarily married in 2010, which were included to broaden the recruitment pool, there were no responses from the proposed research participants. This created a time-line delay in completing the research in the time initially planned (Boeije, 2010:40).

The researcher was put in touch with another facility called the Chevrah Kadisha in Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa, which is also responsible for administering the PREPARE program. Five couples volunteered to participate in the research study, they had not married in 2010. Initially, systematic sampling was to be used as the sampling method to recruit 26 couples from a larger sample (Plowright, 2011:39). Every third couple on the list would be chosen, until a total of 26 couples was recruited (13 with children and 13 without children). Two of the couples would be used in the pilot testing phase. However, due to lack of interest in the study, only five couples volunteered to participate in the study. The names of the couples were obtained by the counsellors who administered the PREPARE program with their couples; a total of five couples was identified with the snowball sampling method (Boeije, 2010:40; Plowright, 2011:43). One of the couples participated in the pilot testing phase, where the data collecting methods were verified. Despite the concern for small sample sizes, research indicates that having a small sample size is of no real concern, especially where the participants' responses address the research question sufficiently (Mason, 2007:134). It is not the size of the sample that is important but rather the reason for the inquiry, especially in the case where in-depth subjective information and perceptions are gathered (Patton, 2002:44). This was the purpose of this research, to understand in-depth, the perceptions of the couples and counsellors with regards to the contribution of the PREPARE Program on marriages in South Africa and not just to generalise information with respect to the wider population (Creswell, 2013:157; Yin, 2009:15 & Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006:61). As the experiences of research participants are subjective, the data gathered may therefore have many variations and Thorne (2008:98) discourages qualitative researchers to rely on the "theoretical saturation or redundancy" to rationalise the size of their sample.

During the recruitment process of the couples, it was suggested that the researcher also include the counsellors at the Chevrah Kadisha who have administered the PREPARE

program. Seven counsellors who were located through the snowballing sampling method, were willing to share their views on the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context (Boeije, 2010:40; Plowright, 2011:43). A separate data collection tool was used to obtain this information and was pilot tested with one counsellor.

The following posed the criteria upon which the research participants were supposed to be chosen:

- Couples who participated in the PREPARE program in 2010 at Family Life Centre, Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa.
- 13 Couples with children
- 13 couples without children
- First marriage
- Married for at least three years

However, due to lack of interest in the study, the criteria upon which the research participants were chosen included:

- Couples who participated in the PREPARE program at the Chevra Kadisha in Johannesburg.
- First marriage.
- Couples who have or do not have children.

The criteria upon which the PREPARE counsellors were chosen included:

- Volunteers who have been trained to administer the PREPARE program through the Chevrah Kadisha in Johannesburg.
- Professionals who administer the PREPARE program through the Chevrah Kadisha in Johannesburg.

The sample for the study constituted the couples and counsellors selected according to the mentioned criteria.

5.4.3 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

As this study was conducted according to a mixed-method approach, data was collected separately in the quantitative and qualitative phases. In the first phase, the quantitative phase, the Marital Satisfaction Scale was used as a standardised instrument, to measure the couples' current marital satisfaction levels.

During the recruitment phase, the researcher sought permission from the research participants, to have access to their Positive Couple Agreement scores, as indicated on the comprehensive results of the initial PREPARE program report. The Positive Couple Agreement Score is the extent to which the couple both agree or disagree on certain marital components (Facilitators report, 2008:9). The PCA scores and the Marital Satisfaction Scores were compared, and the results are tabulated further on in this report.

In the qualitative phase, the researcher conducted joint interviews using interviews guided by a semi-structured interview schedule. The couples were given a choice to conduct the interviews separately, if they did not feel comfortable with joint interviews. A semi-structured interview schedule was an appropriate choice of data collection instrument, because it allowed the research participants to lead the interview, as well as ensure that all the important aspects of the research topic were covered (Barbour, 2008:119). Counsellors/volunteers who administer the program, were rescruted to obtain their views of the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages, within the South African context. A semi-structured interview schedule was also used to obtain data. The research participants were informed in the informed consent letter, that the interviews would be voice recorded for transcription purposes to ensure an accurate collection of data. Furthermore, the research participants were informed, that as soon as the data had been transcribed, the researcher would send the transcriptions back to the research participants, so that they could verify, that the data collected was a true representation of what transpired in the interview. This is known as respondent validation (Torrance, 2012:115).

5.4.4 PILOT STUDY

A very important phase of the research process includes “test-driving” the study; which is known as the pilot study (Delpont & Fouché, 2011:446; Neuman, 2011:303). The purpose of the pilot study, is to identify potential problems that may occur before the actual study commences. The Marital Satisfaction Scale, which is used as a measuring instrument, did not need pilot testing, because it is a standardised instrument. The researcher did however want to pilot the semi-structured interview schedule for both the couples and counsellors/facilitators, to make sure that the responses would answer the research question.

Initially two couples of the 26 that were supposed to be randomly and systematically selected for the study, were supposed to be included in the pilot study; however due to the limited response of research participants, only one couple was used to test semi-structured interview schedule. Seven counsellors/facilitators were recruited for the actual study, while one was used to test the semi-structured interview schedule. During the pilot test phase, it was found that the semi-structured interview schedules were effective in obtaining answers to the research question. However, the researcher concluded, that the limitation was not the measuring instrument, but rather the homogenous nature of the research sample in respect of the couples. No amendments were made to the semi-structured interview schedules for both the couples and the counsellors/ facilitators.

5.4.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis “is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data”. (Creswell & Clark, 2011:204). Creswell and Clark (2011:204) add that, although data analysis in mixed-methods research is conducted separately, it follows certain steps, which include preparing the data for analysis, exploring the data, analysing the data, representing the analysis, interpreting the analysis and validating the data and interpretations. The mixed-methods nature of this research, required two separate analysis stages for the quantitative and qualitative phases; however, both stages follow the same analysis procedure (Creswell & Clark, 2011:204).

This process was based on the data analysis process presented by Creswell and Clark (2011:203-259; Fouché & Bartley, 2011:248-276; Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011:397-423). The data analysis procedure presented below differs from the initial planning, because the research population and sample changed. Furthermore, the researcher only got access to the initial Positive Couple Agreement Scores of the couples a long time after the quantitative and qualitative phase of the research had been completed. Therefore, simultaneous data analysis procedures were not possible.

The procedure is demonstrated in the table below.

Table 10: Quantitative and qualitative data analysis process

PROCESS	STEPS
Preparing the data for analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The collection of the Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire data was conducted on the same day that the researcher interviewed the couples. This took place between January and February 2016. The researcher obtained permission from the participants in the informed consent form to use a voice recorder for transcribing purposes. • Once all the interviews had been completed, the researcher started with the transcription process. This took place between March and June 2016. The research participants were then e-mailed the transcriptions for data validation purposes and to avoid researcher bias (Lietz et al., 2006:447; Torrance, 2012:114). However, due to the lack of availability of the research participants, the researcher had to then follow up with the couples individually. This took place between June and July 2016. • The researcher only received the Positive Couple Agreement Scores in October 2016 and preparations for analysis could only be done then. • The researcher ensured that the data was treated as valuable and made two back-up copies. • The data was stored in a lockable cupboard to ensure that participant confidentiality was maintained always.
Exploring the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researcher studied the results of the Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS) to develop a means of comparing the data obtained from the Positive Couple Agreement (PCA) scores.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researcher also read through and consulted the field notes that she had made during the interview. • The researcher compiled a table of comparison between the PCA scores and the MSS scores and this included the following items: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Number of children for each couple b. Combined PCA scores % c. Highlighted strength areas in the PREPARE. d. Highlighted growth areas in PREPARE e. Individual MSS scores % f. Combined MSS scores % g. Highlighted possible growth areas in MSS h. Highlighted strength areas in MSS i. Interpretation of findings • As there were too many components to consider, it was not possible to make use of a bar diagram to plot the findings. • The researcher read through the transcribed material and coded it using assorted colours to identify core themes. • Once the core themes were identified, the researcher again tabulated the themes in accordance with the participants' responses. This included tabulating how each couple believed the PREPARE program contributed towards their marital satisfaction, specifically exploring all the marital components.
Analysing the data and interpreting results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researcher read through the identified themes several times to determine whether the study had achieved the objective of studying the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context. • Through the analysis process, the researcher realised that because the sample was drawn from a homogenous population, in respect of the couples, it made it difficult to generalise the findings across a South African perspective. • However, the researcher interpreted the data as being accurate, because most of the participants confirmed that the PREPARE program contributed positively to marital satisfaction.

Validating data and interpretations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The participants were e-mailed the transcribed data to ensure respondent validity. Once the researcher received feedback from the research participants, she correlated the new data with the existing data and took note of the comments made. Most of the responses from the research participants indicated that it was an accurate reflection of what had transpired in the interviews. • The researcher submitted the findings to Professor Prinsloo, the research supervisor and expert in the field of marriages and families at the University of Pretoria, to ensure a non-biased interpretation of the data. This is known as triangulation and peer debriefing and ensures the trustworthiness of the study.
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The researcher discussed the research methodology in detail in the previous section; this included the research design; the research population and sampling methods; the data collection method; pilot study and the data analysis process. The next section will discuss the ethical aspects taken into consideration when conducting this study.

5.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It has often been debated whether qualitative researchers contribute to the emotional harm of their research participants (Boeije, 2010:44; Ryen, 2011:431). As researchers, seeking knowledge from research participants needs to be closely aligned with ethical research practices. These practices will be discussed below.

5.5.1 AVOIDANCE OF HARM

The researcher should consider avoidance of harm as the major obligation, when conducting research. The avoidance of physical and psychological harm was achieved by informing the research participants about all aspects of the study, especially their part in it (Israel & Hay, 2006:61; Plowright, 2011:155; Strydom, 2011b:115). If research participants feel uncomfortable at any time during the study and wish to withdraw, they should feel free to do so, without incurring any penalties, (Boeije, 2010:45; Plowright, 2011:156; Strydom, 2011b:116).

This study was sensitive in nature, as it was measuring the couple's marital satisfaction levels, after a few years of marriage together. In addition, the researcher who is a stranger to the couple, expected the couple to share very intimate details about their marriage to meet the objectives of the study. To ensure the avoidance of harm of the research participants, the couples were given the option of conducting a joint interview with their spouse or an individual interview, to ensure that their emotional needs were accommodated. All four of the couples that participated in the research interviews, indicated that they felt content with a joint interview with their spouse. During the interview process, only one of the couples experienced major conflict and were referred to the Chevrah Kadisha for further intervention.

5.5.2 INFORMED CONSENT

Second on the list of ethical obligations when doing research, is to ensure that when informed consent is requested from the research participants, it is stated in a clear and sensitive way in a language they can comprehend. (Boeije, 2010:45; Israel & Hay, 2006:62). According to Johnson and Christensen (2008:125) "obtaining informed consent of participants is one of the vital components of conducting ethical research because this is the component that recognises the autonomy of the research participants". Transparency is a crucial element in informed consent and participants should be allowed to ask questions from the beginning of the study right through until completion if there are any uncertainties. Furthermore, Strydom (2011b:117) and Israel and Hay (2006:61) state, that any changes that are made throughout the study, need to be renegotiated between the researcher and the research participants (Boeije, 2010:45). The researcher had to alter the permission to obtain the PCA scores and this was discussed with each couple individually during the research process and thereafter they signed the informed consent forms.

The researcher obtained signed consent forms from the research participants. The consent form comprised of a letter discussing the nature of the study and how the participants would be involved. The consent form indicated in writing that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Moreover, it was indicated in the informed consent form, that the interviews would be voice recorded for transcription purposes and that their names would not be used in the research report, but pseudonyms would be used instead.

5.5.3 VIOLATION OF PRIVACY

The privacy and anonymity of the research participants must be ensured at all times to avoid any harm (Johnson & Christensen, 2008:125; Plowright, 2011:156). Privacy can refer to both personal privacy and the way in which the information is handled (Strydom, 2011b:119). Most importantly, the researcher needs to emphasise, that the information that is offered voluntarily by the research participants, will remain confidential (Israel & Hay, 2006:78). In this study, the researcher ensured confidentiality by informing the participants that no identifying data would be used, and their names would not be included in the research report. Pseudonyms or letters of the alphabet would be used.

5.5.4 DEBRIEFING OF PARTICIPANTS

Debriefing of participants is essential for ethical research. According to Johnson and Christensen (2008:126) debriefing should be an active process which the researcher will undertake and includes discussing the purpose of the research and the way in which the study was done and being available to answer any questions that participants may have. Necessary referrals would be done to Chevrah Kadisha counsellors, should any psychological harm have been done. Furthermore, Strydom (2011b:122) adds that “after completion of the project, the researcher has to rectify any misperception that may have arisen in the minds of participants”. After the research project was completed, the researcher contacted the couples telephonically for a debriefing session, as the researcher had relocated to the Western Cape and was not able to schedule sessions with the couples and the counsellors/ facilitators. The purpose of the debriefing session, was to allow the couples and counsellors/ facilitators to talk about their experiences and feelings while participating in the research process (Strydom, 2011b:122). This aspect was included in the written consent forms given to participants.

5.5.5 RELEASE OF FINDINGS AND COMPETENCE OF THE RESEARCHER

A huge responsibility lies with the researcher to publish data that is true and clearly written for the public to understand (Strydom, 2011b:126). The participants were informed that the research report would be published, and the data would be stored at the Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, for a period of fifteen years.

The participants were informed that the final report would remain the property of the University of Pretoria and could be used as a scientific article and be presented at symposia/conferences and used for staff training. Researchers should maintain competence in their work and realise their limitations. Researchers should exercise “intellectual honesty in proposing, performing and reporting research; accuracy in representing contributions to research proposals and reports, fairness in peer review and collegiality in scientific interactions, including communications and sharing of resources” (Israel & Hay, 2006:113). Israel and Hay (2006:113) and Strydom (2011b:126) include preventing fabrication (making up of data); falsification (distortion of data) and plagiarism (no acknowledgement of authors in consulted sources). The researcher adhered to these ethical obligations.

5.5.6 RESPONDENT VALIDATION

The researcher considered that it is important for research participants to be reassured, that the data the researcher captured, is valid and true. Respondent validation allows participants to authenticate their own contributions by reading transcripts (Torrance, 2012:115). The researcher ensured that the research participants received an opportunity to scrutinise the transcribed data, to ensure that the data was a true reflection of what the research participants discussed.

5.5.7 OBTAINING ACCESS TO RESEARCH FIELD VIA GATEKEEPERS

A gatekeeper may be described as a person who is in control of the location where the research may be conducted, which refers to organisations, companies and schools to name a few (Oliver, 2010:39). In the context of this study, it was important to consider that the researcher and the gatekeeper, Chevrah Kadisha, hold the same views in terms of the research. The researcher was transparent with the gatekeeper in terms of the research process, to prevent significant negative implications for the organisation (Oliver, 2010:40). The research could be beneficial to their organisation, as research on the PREPARE Program has not previously been conducted in a South African context.

Now that the researcher has discussed the ethical considerations that were applied in this study, the presentation of empirical data will be discussed.

5.6 PRESENTATION OF EMPIRICAL DATA

In the first phase of this study, the quantitative phase, the researcher measured the couples' marital satisfaction levels using the MSS. This was then compared to the initial PREPARE scores as indicated in the PREPARE report. Before the scores are assessed and compared, the researcher will indicate the biographical information of the couples and counsellors who participated in this study.

5.6.1 BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF COUPLES

Table 11: Biographical data of Couple A

Couple A				
BIOGRAPHICAL CATEGORY				
Duration of dating relationship before marriage	1 year			
Years of cohabitation	N. A			
Current age	Male	33	Female	31
Age at marriage	Male	31	Female	29
Number of years married	22 months			
Number of children and age	1	5 months old		
Age when first child was born	Male	33	Female	30
Highest education achieved	Male	Post graduate	Female	Post graduate
Current employment	Male	Accountant	Female	Actuarial sciences
Number of years employed	Male	7	Female	8
Religious affiliation	Male	Jewish	Female	Jewish

Table 12: Biographical data of Couple B

COUPLE B				
BIOGRAPHICAL CATEGORY				
Duration of dating relationship before marriage	2 years			
Years of cohabitation	10 months			
Current age	Male	33	Female	29
Age at marriage	Male	30	Female	26
Number of years married	3			
Number of children and age	1	0-12 months' old		
Age when first child was born	Male	32	Female	29
Highest education achieved	Male	Post graduate	Female	Post graduate
Current employment	Male	Software developer	Female	Housewife
Number of years employed	Male	11	Female	
Religious affiliation	Male	Jewish	Female	Jewish

Table 13: Biographical data of Couple C

COUPLE C				
BIOGRAPHICAL CATEGORY				
Duration of dating relationship before marriage	1 year			
Years of cohabitation	N/A			
Current age	Male	39	Female	28
Age at marriage	Male	37	Female	26
Number of years married	2.5 years			
Number of children and age	1	1 year, 11 months		
Age when first child was born	Male	39		27
Highest education achieved	Male	Post graduate		Degree
Current employment	Male	Accountant		Teacher
Number of years employed	Male	15		5
Religious affiliation	Male	Jewish		Jewish

Table 14: Biographical data of Couple D

COUPLE D				
BIOGRAPHICAL CATEGORY				
Duration of dating relationship before marriage	5 years			
Years of cohabitation	2 years			
Current age	Male	29	Female	31
Age at marriage	Male	27	Female	29
Number of years married	2			
Number of children and age	0			
Age when first child was born	Male	N/A		N/A
Highest education achieved	Male	Degree		Post graduate
Current employment	Male	Marketing		Corporate training manager
Number of years employed	Male	6		10
Religious affiliation	Male	Jewish		Jewish

As indicated in the above tables, it is evident that the couples have been married for between 1-3 years. Eighty-seven percent of the couples are employed, while all the couples are highly educated and practice Judaism as a religion. Most of the couples have young children.

The researcher discussed the biographical information of the participants and will now discuss the Biographical data of the PREPARE counsellors.

5.6.2 BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF PREPARE COUNSELLORS/ FACILITATORS

Table 15: Biographical data of Counsellor/ facilitator A

BIOGRAPHICAL CATEGORY	
Profession/ Occupation	Home executive
Highest qualification	Matric
Years of experience in your field of study	N/A
Year/months experience of administering the PREPARE program	6 years
Gender	Female

Table 16: Biographical data of Counsellor/ facilitator B

BIOGRAPHICAL CATEGORY	
Profession/ Occupation	Property administrator
Highest qualification	BA LLB in Law
Years of experience in your field of study	12 years
Year/months experience of administering the PREPARE program	12 Years
Gender	Female

Table 17: Biographical data of Counsellor/facilitator C

BIOGRAPHICAL CATEGORY	
Profession/ Occupation	Social worker
Highest qualification	B. SocSci Social Work
Years of experience in your field of study	7 years
Year/months experience of administering the PREPARE program	7 years
Gender	Female

Table 18: Biographical data of Counsellor D

BIOGRAPHICAL CATEGORY	
Profession/ Occupation	Speech therapist Currently a home executive
Highest qualification	BSC (Logopaedics)

Years of experience in your field of study	20 years
Year/months experience of administering the PREPARE program	13 years
Gender	Female

Table 19: Biographical data of Counsellor/ facilitator E

BIOGRAPHICAL CATEGORY	
Profession/ Occupation	Teacher
Highest qualification	Higher Diploma in Education
Years of experience in your field of study	30 years
Year/months experience of administering the PREPARE program	10 years
Gender	Female

Table 20: Biographical data of Counsellor/ facilitator F

BIOGRAPHICAL CATEGORY	
Profession/ Occupation	Reflexologist but currently a home executive
Highest qualification	Diploma
Years of experience in your field of study	24 years
Year/months experience of administering the PREPARE program	2 years
Gender	Female

Table 21: Biographical data of Counsellor/facilitator G

BIOGRAPHICAL CATEGORY	
Profession/ Occupation	Teacher/ Rabbi
Highest qualification	BA Rabbi Ordinal
Years of experience in your field of study	35 years
Year/months experience of administering the PREPARE program	24 Years
Gender	Male

From the above biographical information regarding the counsellors/facilitators administering the PREPARE program, it is shown that all the counsellors are female except for the one male counsellor. Most of the counsellors are volunteers, whose primary occupation is not in the field of social sciences. It is noteworthy, that most counsellors/facilitators have had between 2 and 35 years of experience administering the PREPARE program. Some of the female counsellors are home executives and this is probably the reason they have time to volunteer to administer the program to couples. The responses to the questions provided by the social worker were very much in line with theoretical knowledge about couples.

The next section will discuss the comparison of the MSS score and the PREPARE score. Below the researcher has tabulated the comparison of the PREPARE score with the Marital Satisfaction Score for each couple. An interpretation of the findings is then offered. The abbreviations are: PCA: Positive Couples Agreement Score from PREPARE report and MSS: Marital Satisfaction Scale.

Table 22: Table of Comparison: PCA scores VS MSS scores, Couple A

COUPLE A		
	Male	Female
	Partner 1	Partner 2
Number of children	1 (5 months)	1 (5 months)
Combined PCA scores %	61%	61%
Highlighted growth areas in PREPARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial management
Highlighted strength areas in PREPARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marriage expectations • Personality issues • Communication • Conflict resolution • Leisure activities • Sexual expectations • Children and parenting • Family and friends • Role relationship • Spiritual beliefs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marriage expectations • Personality issues • Communication • Conflict resolution • Leisure activities • Sexual expectations • Children and parenting • Family and friends • Role relationship • Spiritual beliefs

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Couple closeness • Family closeness • Couple flexibility • Family flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Couple closeness • Family closeness • Couple flexibility • Family flexibility
Individual MSS scores %	88%	74%
Combined MSS scores % (Positive agreement)	70%	70%
Highlighted possible growth areas in MSS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner styles and habits • Friends and family • Leisure activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner styles and habits • Friends and family • Leisure activities
Highlighted strength areas in MSS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Communication ✓ Conflict handling ✓ Financial management ✓ Affection and sexuality ✓ Roles and responsibilities ✓ Couple closeness and flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Communication ✓ Conflict handling ✓ Financial management ✓ Affection and sexuality ✓ Roles and responsibilities ✓ Couple closeness and flexibility
Interpretation of findings	<p>The findings for this couple have yielded very insightful results. Firstly, in the initial PREPARE report, financial management was identified as a growth area. This is interesting because both partners of the couple have specialised in finance as their occupation and therefore hypothesise that this should not be a growth area for the couple.</p> <p>Secondly, this couple has a very young baby and it is insightful to see how leisure activities have become a growth area, because raising a young child is extremely demanding on a couple's time and that they struggle to find time for leisure activities.</p> <p>Thirdly, friends and family have featured as a growth point in the marriage. This may also be because having a child reignites the family-of-origin issues and the</p>	

	<p>couple becomes acquainted with the differences they experience in raising children. This also includes how each partner's personality adjusts to having a child. It is also interesting to see that the PREPARE scores are much lower than the MSS scores, because the PREPARE has idealistic distortion built into it; whereas the MSS does not.</p>
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Table 23: Table of Comparison: PCA scores VS MSS Scores, Couple B

COUPLE B		
	Male	Female
	Partner 1	Partner 2
Number of children	1 (6-12 months)	1 (6-12 months)
Combined PCA scores %	59%	59%
Highlighted growth areas in PREPARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marriage expectations • Family closeness • Family flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marriage expectations • Family closeness • Family flexibility
Highlighted strength areas in PREPARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality issues • Communication • Conflict resolution • Financial management • Leisure activities • Sexual expectations • Children and parenting • Family and friends • Role relationship • Spiritual beliefs • Couple closeness • Couple flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality issues • Communication • Conflict resolution • Financial management • Leisure activities • Sexual expectations • Children and parenting • Family and friends • Role relationship • Spiritual beliefs • Couple closeness • Couple flexibility
Individual MSS scores %	76%	76%
Combined MSS scores % (Positive agreement)	60%	60%

Highlighted possible growth areas in MSS (40%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial management • Affection and sex • Friends and family • Leisure activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial management • Affection and sex • Friends and family • Leisure activities
Highlighted strength areas in MSS (60%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Communication ✓ Conflict handling ✓ Partner styles and habits ✓ Roles and responsibilities ✓ Couple closeness and flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Communication ✓ Conflict handling ✓ Partner styles and habits ✓ Roles and responsibilities ✓ Couple closeness and flexibility
Interpretation of findings	<p>This couple did not live together before they got married. This is one of the reasons why marriage expectations were a growth area in the initial PREPARE scores. Family issues have been an ongoing problem for this couple. It is evident in these quantitative findings as well as in the interview. The couple explained that having a child has financial implications and they have had to readjust their budget, to ensure that all the financial aspects are covered. This couple also like to travel and they explained that it has become a bit more difficult to do with a child, as it requires money and time. The couple do enjoy their sexual lives, however, they do admit that this part of their lives has been neglected since the baby has come, as the baby is extremely demanding of their time and attention. This couple seems to view their relationship quite realistically because their PREPARE scores are not as different as the MSS scores.</p>	

Table 24: Table of Comparison: PCA scores VS MSS Scores, Couple C

COUPLE C		
	Male	Female
	Partner 1	Partner 2
Number of children	1 (23 Months)	1 (23 months)
Combined PCA scores %	63%	63%
Highlighted growth areas in PREPARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marriage expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marriage expectations
Highlighted strength areas in PREPARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality issues • Communication • Conflict resolution • Financial management • Leisure activities • Sexual expectations • Children and parenting • Family and friends • Role relationship • Spiritual beliefs • Couple closeness • Family closeness • Couple flexibility • Family flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality issues • Communication • Conflict resolution • Financial management • Leisure activities • Sexual expectations • Children and parenting • Family and friends • Role relationship • Spiritual beliefs • Couple closeness • Family closeness • Couple flexibility • Family flexibility
Individual MSS scores %	98%	94%
Combined MSS scores % (Positive agreement)	100%	100%
Highlighted possible growth areas in MSS (0%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner styles and habits • Friends and family • Leisure activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner styles and habits • Friends and family • Leisure activities
Highlighted strength areas in MSS (100%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Communication ✓ Conflict handling ✓ Partner styles and habits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Communication ✓ Conflict handling ✓ Partner styles and habits

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Financial management ✓ Affection and sexuality ✓ Friends and family ✓ Leisure activities ✓ Roles and responsibilities ✓ Couple closeness and flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Financial management ✓ Affection and sexuality ✓ Friends and family ✓ Leisure activities ✓ Roles and responsibilities ✓ Couple closeness and flexibility
Interpretation of findings	<p>PREPARE makes provision for idealistic distortion. It is not known if MSS makes provision for idealistic distortion. This couple displays idealistic distortion because during the interview the researcher noticed possible growth areas in communication; conflict handling; partner styles and habits; friends and family and couple closeness and flexibility.</p> <p>Furthermore, they were referred for marital therapy and both partners agreed to go. Partner 2 indicated that she had struggled with postpartum depression since her child was born and this had exacerbated the problems that the couple are experiencing. This is in line with theory which states, that couples who have serious issues like depression, alcohol or drug addiction need to go for more intensive marital therapy (DeMaria, 2005:242).</p>	

Table 25: Table of Comparison: PCA scores VS MSS Scores, Couple D

COUPLE D		
	Male	Female
	Partner 1	Partner 2
Number of children	0	0
Combined PCA scores %	75%	75%
Highlighted growth areas in PREPARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family flexibility

Highlighted strength areas in PREPARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cohabitation issues • Personality issues • Communication • Conflict resolution • Financial management • Leisure activities • Sexual relationship • Children and parenting • Family and friends • Role relationship • Spiritual beliefs • Couple closeness • Family closeness • Couple flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cohabitation issues • Personality issues • Communication • Conflict resolution • Financial management • Leisure activities • Sexual relationship • Children and parenting • Family and friends • Role relationship • Spiritual beliefs • Couple closeness • Family closeness • Couple flexibility
Individual MSS scores %	88%	98%
Combined MSS scores % (Positive agreement) (90%)	90%	90%
Highlighted possible growth areas in MSS (10%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leisure activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leisure activities
Highlighted strength areas in MSS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Communication ✓ Conflict handling ✓ Partner styles and habits ✓ Financial management ✓ Affection and sexuality ✓ Family and friends ✓ Roles and responsibilities ✓ Couple closeness and flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Communication ✓ Conflict handling ✓ Partner styles and habits ✓ Financial management ✓ Affection and sexuality ✓ Family and friends ✓ Roles and responsibilities ✓ Couple closeness and flexibility

Interpretation of findings	<p>The findings yield very insightful results. This couple indicated that they have both been struggling with leisure time, because of the demands of work and responsibilities, although this was recognised as a relationship strength when the couple first completed the PREPARE program.</p> <p>Family flexibility was identified as a growth area when the couple initially took the PREPARE. This also came up as an issue in the interview, but the couple stated that they have learnt how to set boundaries. The researcher observed that they are a very mature couple and have couple flexibility. At this stage in their marriage, they do not have children and the added pressures of parenthood. The couple's marital satisfaction may look different once they have children.</p>
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After analysing and interpreting the MSS scores versus the PREPARE scores of the couples, the researcher provides a summary of the themes and main themes.

5.7 SUMMARY OF THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

For the qualitative data analysis, the researcher identified themes and sub-themes for both the couples and the counsellors. These themes will now be presented.

5.7.1 OVERALL EXPERIENCE OF THE PREPARE PROGRAM

In response to the researcher exploring the overall experience of the PREPARE program, the following responses were received. The discussion firstly focuses on the experience of the couples and thereafter on the experience of the counsellors.

5.7.1.1 Main theme 1: Couples' and counsellors' experiences of the PREPARE program

The overall experience of the PREPARE program is positive.

5.7.1.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1 Couples' experiences of the PREPARE program

The general feedback indicated a very positive experience of the PREPARE program. This is substantiated in the following verbatim excerpts from research participants.

- *The experience was positive for both of us,*
- *Yeah, I agree. Also, I mean very positive, um I think it just forced us to talk about things, um, what I particularly found useful as well is....*
- *Um... very beneficial actually. I think we ironed out a lot of sort of issues that we hadn't thought of beforehand, before going you know and thrashing out some of the stuff that we hadn't thought of before*
- *PREPARE was uh... like very beneficial. It got us talking, um, even though when you're dating and you're in the process of getting married, and the cohabitation, before marriage, you might tend to still be in that romantic period where you... you... The PREPARE Program really got you into that, like, let's dig in order to actually expose the issues in each topic.*
- *I think with PREPARE, it touched on a lot of those topics, um... we just had to talk about and we got into that rhythm and that pattern of just, it worked, we spoke about it, we felt that it worked in the end and we carried it forward, so it was really useful.*
- *A very wonderful program. ... I think there were three sessions or four sessions we enjoyed.*
- *I quite liked it, not necessarily from what they did with us, but I liked having time during our pre-wedding build up to just go and spend an hour and kind of just focus on each other and remember why we were getting married and all the nice things.*
- *I agree with her, um I really enjoyed because we were all really busy running around talking about finance, talking about the wedding preparations. Um, and it actually have us time to actually forget about everything else and just talk about us, and us as a relationship,*

It is evident by the above-mentioned statements, that all the couples had a positive experience participating in the PREPARE program. As these opinions are subjective, it is difficult to link it back to literature. However, literature indicates, that there is a positive correlation between the success of marriage education programs, including the PREPARE, and marriage satisfaction (Knutson & Olson, 2003:531; Markman et al., 2016:166; Olson & Miller, 2007:2). All the couples experienced the PREPARE as positive.

5.7.1.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2 Counsellors experiences of the PREPARE program

The attitude of counsellors as in this case, can have an influence on how the couples experience a program. In considering the counsellors' feedback on their experience of PREPARE, no one gave negative responses. From their experience in presenting the program, they firmly believe in the positive impact and value of the program.

- *Very fulfilling from my point of view. I found that 98% of the couples when they come in are very eager and receptive. Those with issues are very willing to discuss it, and those that, where one partner does have a problem, actually see this as a forum where they can voice it. They look forward to their sessions. They are all very appreciative at the end, and have all left in an exceptionally positive frame of mind. I found it very easy to work through the program with them. I love working with the program.*
- *I enjoyed all aspects of it, especially the life line personal journey that we, that they did.*
- *So, I have found the whole experience very rewarding. I have loved every couple that I have done except for the one or two.*
- *... You know I can see no downs to the program, I really can't! I am a great believer in it.*
- *I think it has been overall, very positive experience, both in terms of the impact I feel that I have had in helping couples and giving them direction.*
- *I think it's a wonderful program, I really do, I believe in it and I do believe that it has to help couples because it creates awareness and hopefully, um, it helps with a decrease in the divorce rate because it will encourage couples if they have had a good experience in the sessions to hopefully go for counselling first before resorting to divorce.*

There were no negative comments given by the counsellors regarding the experience of The PREPARE program. Most of the counsellors believe it is a good program. As the nature of the PREPARE program focusses on assessment; this assists the counsellor in identifying strength and growth areas of the couple's relationship with relative ease (Busby et al., 2007:280; Olson et al., 2009:22; Olson, [sa]:1-4). Assessment can act as feedback and encourage the couple to discuss their relationship, as well as ease any fears and doubts about the assessment (Olson et al., 2009:22; Olson, [sa]:1-4). Counsellors all agree that it provides value for couples participating in the program.

5.7.2 BENEFITS OF THE PREPARE PROGRAM

Numerous benefits of the PREPARE program were identified in the data analysis. A prominent benefit was that the counsellor plays a significant role in diverse ways.

5.7.2.1 Main theme 1: The counsellor plays a significant role in the benefits of the PREPARE program

Interacting with the PREPARE counsellor falls, within the Mesosystem level of influence for the couple, according to Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory. The interaction and influence are bi-directional for both the couple and the counsellor. Below, research responses indicate some of the influences that counsellors have on couples.

5.7.2.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1. Couples experienced the counsellor as professional

The following verbatim examples gleaned from the couples indicate that the couples experienced the counsellors as professional.

Couples indicated their counsellor as a role model whom they respected.

- *We also had a counsellor who we respected as well and looked up to as a role model kind of thing, um. It also facilitated a number of discussions which we had in private and I thought it was good.*
- *... but it was someone who we connected with and you know I think it is important that you have a counsellor who you know you can respect, you know.*
- *I think just the encouragement from the counsellor... just saying... yeah, we are on the right track. You know, this is good, you know. It was actually quite affirming*
- *... listen I felt we were quite fortunate with our counsellor, I'm saying is we really respected her and we thought she was really good.*

In the responses below, it is evident that the couples experienced the ability of the counsellor to create a comfortable and safe atmosphere.

- *I also think what is important is, it created quite a comfortable atmosphere*
- *Yeah, and very sort of approachable, you know, she... I felt that she, she was quite a good person to guide us and to help us listen, to... help us sort of thrash out what we had to...*

Another important aspect that the couples identified, was the fact that the counsellor was not judgemental and that she also had extensive marriage experience. ‘

- *She wasn't judgemental, when you enter marriage, it's... quite a, it is a commitment and it is a work in progress and she had a lot of marriage experience for a long time. Uh, so she was able to impart quite a bit of that important knowledge and I think that one of the things that going into the program, you come with, you, you come with that baggage that you grew up with going into marriage and...*
- *It's subtle how you they guide you, um, there is no forced way. Like now we deal with it; it's also very like personalised, like a little bit of background opinion of you know, guess what, this is how it works, a little life experience behind it.*
- *I think, how they achieved this was that she allowed us to talk about such topics and we didn't feel like she was going to judge us, we didn't feel like we couldn't bring up something that drove us mad or you know, we were able to say...to her... this is what irritates us and go help us with this.*

One of the PREPARE facilitators stated that clients have provided her with verbal feedback confirming that she makes them feel emotionally safe.

- *But it is interesting; they kept on saying in my sessions, with the couple that I am talking about because it is so fresh in my mind, and you know now after the fourth session she says, "I feel so safe, I feel so safe, I feel so safe" and so did he. I feel so safe so I think that creation of that safety makes them feel, you know, better even though they haven't said all that they wanted to say.*

Feedback from three of the couples was that they had a counsellor who was open, trustworthy and garnered respect. This aided in the facilitation of effective discussions between the partners. Two of the couples mentioned that the counsellor created a comfortable atmosphere, especially when dealing with difficult topics of discussion. There has been limited research conducted on the effectiveness of marriage educational programs, taking into consideration the therapeutic relationship between the client and the facilitator, known as the pedagogic alliance (Hawkins et al., 2012:3). The hypothesis is, that a positive pedagogic alliance may enhance the effectiveness of marriage education programs (Hawkins et al., 2012:3). However, in the studies conducted by Busby et al. (2007:288) and Rome (2011:1) it was found that couples appreciated the inputs and perspectives of the counsellors and facilitators and agree that further research needs to be conducted on why the facilitator makes the difference in the pedagogic alliance (Hawkins et al., 2012:3). Even the participants in the conditional group of the Busby et al. (2007) study, who did not have a facilitator assisting them with the marital education program, stated that having a facilitator to go through the program, would be more desirable (Busby et al., 2007:288). The difference between using inventory assessments to structure a session, versus the facilitator structuring a session by asking questions, is that the couple's needs come to the fore in the former and the therapist is the focus in the latter (Busby et al., 2007:288). Further research needs to be conducted on the role of the counsellor in evaluating the effectiveness of marriage education programs, as there seems to be inefficient research in this on this topic.

5.7.2.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2. Couples experienced the counsellor as neutral

Another benefit of the PREPARE program that was identified by couples, is that they experienced the counsellor as a neutral third party. This can be seen in the excerpts obtained below during the data analysis process.

- *Yeah and someone who ... so not a parent, not a, not anyone from either side; someone totally neutral*
- *It's not like sitting with my mom and getting her opinion or sitting there with partner A's mom and saying, and telling her our issues. Obviously, we would get an opinion that is bias. You know, she would listen to us and, she doesn't know us from a bar of soap, you know she doesn't know our families, she has never seen our bank accounts, she doesn't know what's going on, so it was great ...*
- *Yeah, it's that neutral territory. I suppose what was important is that partner B would speak to the counsellor and get it off her chest and I would be hearing it.*

One of the counsellors provided feedback on the benefit of being a neutral third party.

- *I think actually one of the biggest things I think, um, which is quite incredible about this program, is that you are this third party who is completely, generally, I think, impartial but you create a safe place and I think things that couples haven't been able to say to one another before, you sort of facilitate and I think you create a sort of strength, you create a willingness, you create an opportunity and then, what happens is once they have had that experience, they carry it forward. So, you know? It seems weird, here you are a stranger in the room and couples are saying things to you and to one another that they haven't been comfortable to say before...*

One of the couples discussed the benefit of having a counsellor who is neutral. Because of having a neutral facilitator or counsellor, the couple felt more at ease to discuss difficult topics that they have not been able to discuss before. This was also concluded by a statement from one of the counsellors/ facilitators, who has conducted the PREPARE. According to research, there is evidence to prove the hypothesis, that couples appreciated inputs and perspectives of the counsellors and facilitators who are neutral (Bradley & Furrow, 2013:277; Busby et al., 2007:288; Edwards, 2011:75; Rome, 2011:1). However, further research needs to be conducted regarding why the facilitator makes the difference in the professional relationship (Hawkins et al., 2012:3). According to the couple, one of the benefits of having a neutral counsellor/facilitator is that there would be no bias, unlike if the couple had to approach their parents for marital intervention. Furthermore, the couple expressed that it was comforting to speak to someone who had no knowledge of their former backgrounds.

5.7.2.1.3 Sub-theme 1.3: Couples experienced the counsellor as skilled

A third benefit of the PREPARE program identified in the data analysis process, was the fact that couples experienced their counsellors as skilled and able to handle the difficult issues that required discussion between the couple. This is clearly indicated in the responses below.

- *I think It is important to get counsellors who are open, understand, you know couples, who are, who have been married themselves and that's important.*
- *But I think it requires, for it to be very beneficial, I think the, obviously there have been counsellors who have been doing it forever and ever, clearly did better than the ones that just started, unless they have had some sort of, been to university and done some other Psychology degree or, or, something else if they have already got skills that they learnt.*
- *I think also just these observations of us, I think I found quite useful so, you know she was picking up, you know how we were interacting and if we were discussing something, she might highlight something, you know, this might be the issue here, or*

it's something that one of our personalities, you need to watch out for so I think, that was quite handy.

- *... And we had quite a good lady, anyway because she did kind of pre-empt and take stuff out or she would stay with something that she saw we were connecting to.*

The PREPARE program encourages the counsellors to go for supervision when working with the couples. This impacts on the counsellor's continuous professional development. It also assists the counsellors to identify their limitations when working with couples and refers them for more appropriate intervention. In terms of the Bioecological theory, the impact of the counsellor's supervisor would fall in the exosystemic level of influence, because even though the couples are not interacting with the supervisor directly, the supervisor is empowering the counsellor to work more efficiently and effectively with the couple; thereby improving their marital satisfaction.

Below, counsellors attest to the benefit of going for supervision sessions after working with the couples.

- *A lot of my happiness in doing this and like, satisfaction, is because I go to Supervisor A who is my supervisor. And I just adore her; I think she is just the best thing and I love going to her because I just... she just knows what I am talking about and she just hits the nail on the head and she understands me going back to the couple and, um having concerns makes it easier because she really does have all that wealth of experience behind her. She knows what I am talking about when I say that I don't understand this, or I am not sure about that. So, having a supervisor really does make a difference.*
- *But I do think that, um, with supervision, from a very skilled social worker or psychologist, we can incorporate that because we don't have that experience ourselves or training for that matter, but we can incorporate that into our sessions; the advice that we have been given. So, I do see it as a form of counselling.*
- *You know you then must dig deep and use a lot of supervision. I mean it's doable but we, we are restricted, and we are limited, and we have to remember that.*
- *I often find that when I went for supervision. Possibly because of their training and experience, the supervisors were able to read a lot more into the program results than I could.*
- *One normally sees a supervisor after every session to prepare you for the next session. This is great because you always know how to structure each session, what questions to ask, and specifically what your goals are to be discussed in that session. Supervisors seem to see a lot of factors that you don't interpret from the report and can direct you to address specific issues... Which I found is tremendously supportive. It gives me a lot of confidence in what I am doing and basically in how I am interpreting the report, how I'm handling the couple. The acknowledgement and affirmation from the supervisor of what I am doing is also very important to me.*

Some of the counsellors admitted that there are limitations when working with the couples, as the focus of the PREPARE program is marital education. The counsellors attested to the fact that another benefit of the PREPARE program is that it offers opportunities for referral when there are more serious issues at hand with the couple.

- *And if it is beyond my area of competence because I am not a social worker or psychologist; if they feel they need it then I can make a suitable referral after discussing it with my supervisor.*
- *Another thing is that you know, we don't know what type of couple we are going to get and so some of us as volunteers haven't or had the experience or haven't all had the training...*

The counsellors further elaborated that when they encounter couples with serious psychological problems, they are aware that they must refer the couple for more appropriate intervention. This is in line with research which indicates that couples who present with serious psychological issues should be referred for more intensive therapy (DeMaria, 2005:242).

- *So occasionally, you get some really tough, often, more often than not challenges and then you just have to you know, and know that you have got limitations... You know, sometimes they would need to go for other therapy; you have to remember that you are not; it's not a therapy session, but then you, I think um, you realise your limitations when you are within very complicated, conflicted challenged couples.*
- *I think they all, with the exception of one or two of the couples who have done it, have said we would go for counselling.*
- *I just had a couple recently with tremendous, tremendous, heavy background issues that is so heavy it is unbelievable, and I suggested to them that they should go for support, especially the guy, that he should go for support after marriage.*
- *And if it is something that you see as being an issue, then you might have to, with supervision, refer them further.*
- *Um, but I think that if there, and I am talking for a lay person's perspective now, that if there are serious problems, we know what to do with that and they would have to be referred out.*
- *And that is the thing, if you see the individuals; if you see that they have got some issues, from the past that need to be addressed, then you have to refer them and say something like "I see this may be something that is interfering with your relationship; it may be causing stress in your relationship, maybe that would be an area where you would want to go and see a qualified therapist or counsellor about?"*

Counsellors also referred to being skilled and how it assists in opening issues to discuss. From the responses, the counsellors highlight that being skilled facilitates the interaction between partners.

- *If the counsellor is skilled, and as a professional it is maybe easier for me in the sense to be able to guide them and help them realise that it isn't so, it's not so painful to be*

able to discuss issues or bring it to the table or bring it to awareness and it is not going to end the relationship because there is always that fear, especially with couples that haven't been going out for a long time.

- *Well they say so. I mean it's amazing, they all verbalise they can't believe that they are saying such intimate things to one another that they were not comfortable enough to say before. But here you are, some stranger and you suddenly have, and you are able to say hugely sensitive things...*
- *I think it also prevents it from spiralling because they wouldn't dare, they just wouldn't, scream at one another and go off because they know it's all very controlled. So, I think it facilitates very civil and controlled, constructive communication. Which once they feel they seem actually to apply.*

Couples agreed it is exceptionally beneficial to have a counsellor/ facilitator who is skilled. Feedback from the couples included that if the counsellor/ facilitator is skilled, it makes it easier for the couple to discuss difficult topics and if the counsellor/facilitator uses his or her skills appropriately, then the environment becomes more civil and controlled, thus, resulting in constructive communication. According to research, the therapist is usually trained in a specific model which determines the length and content of the sessions. Such models include solution-focused strategic therapy, emotionally focused therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy and psychodynamic therapy (Bradley & Furrow, 2013:277; Edwards, 2011:17). Furthermore, the PREPARE program allows a counsellor/facilitator or a therapist, specialising in a therapeutic approach, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy, to use the results of the assessment to challenge the thinking patterns of the couple; whereas a rational-emotive therapist may use the program for educational purposes (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:11).

The presence of a skilled counsellor/facilitator in the PREPARE program assists couples to feel at ease knowing that their counsellor/ facilitator is skilled and able to assist them with their concerns. Couples found it beneficial to have someone who is objective in the relationship, who can point out issues that the couple were not even aware of.

5.7.2.2 Main theme 2: PREPARE creates a platform for open communication

Couples and counsellors referred to facilitation of communication as a benefit of the PREPARE program. Open communication contributes to intimacy in marital and other relationships (Knox & Schacht, 2010:110). The responses below clearly confirm that the PREPARE program assists with open communication.

- *I found it fascinating just actually, you may think things, but actually being forced to say things out loud, uh... to try find the right words to express things*
- *I think one of the big plusses of the PREPARE Program was that it kind of covers also bases so it knows what are the conflict areas and it forces you to discuss them.*
- *Completely! I have a recollection. I remember one evening after PREPARE we were sitting in my car and I was saying like, I think we, like wow I am so glad that we had that chat and brought that out in a way that we were able to discuss. I think it was about finances.*
- *And also, to bring up topics that you sort of put in the back of your mind and didn't bring it up, you know, with each other.*
- *Overall, definitely! So yeah, we can say the worst part, not the worst part, like anything bad, but the worst part of it was before PREPARE. We still had our arguments afterwards of course, like anyone would, um... it's not going to solve everything, but we found it as lot easier to talk to each other and get things out in the open.*
- *It wasn't anything we hadn't thought about or discussed. But it did start us talking about maybe we need to be going deeper into our financial planning and financial futures.*

Participants elaborated that the communication went even deeper after sessions and that it led to meaningful insight and growth.

- *We had the discussions and afterwards we sat in the car and while we were driving back home, and we were having long debates about do we agree with what they said or don't we agree with what they said*
- *... and we did it in the car (P1: Laughing). But it just sparked us talking about or maybe we need to be thinking more about finances because there was the one where the questions were superficial but there was the one area that if they went deeper, we wouldn't have been able to go into to.*

Counsellors, in their responses attested to the fact that the content of PREPARE assisted couples to open channels of communication.

- *Not on a superficial level but to communicate at a level that is a meaningful communication level, you know, not just like what I did today or whatever. I try to get them to communicate on a much deeper level and share stuff that is sore and hard and that is difficult.*
- *And then they start to... when they start to communicate about it and talk about it, then they can usually work it out.*
- *And just another amazing benefit of PREPARE is sometimes just being able to take a step back and facilitate couples being able to talk to each other*
- *Sometimes there is that underlying fear that things will be revealed, and you know, the ship, the boat will be rocked and so there is a fear of um, exposing things that might rock the boat and I think the program in itself tries to sort of penetrate that fear and rather bring it into the open so that we can talk about it, rather like remain like and keep it quiet. You see because ultimately when there is a friendship with the couple, there is a friendship with the couple, they feel safe. So, when there is this guardedness or this fear of revealing things, that you grow a sense of friendship.*
- *...It brings things to the surface, there is no escaping.*
- *I think it creates a lot of discussion.... I think however, it does stimulate some discussion and thought which is good. I encourage the couple to enter into an equal, open financial partnership*

It is evident in the above statements, that the PREPARE program creates a platform for open communication. All the couples reported that the PREPARE program helped them openly discuss difficult issues and issues that they were not even aware of. Two of the couples and one counsellor pointed out, that the structure of the PREPARE program forces the couple to talk about their relationship and the difficulties they may be experiencing, without being able to escape and they are then able to resolve their issues. One of the couples mentioned, that it was extremely beneficial to listen to what their partner was saying and that before their participation in the PREPARE, they were not able to share their thoughts and feelings as easily with each other, because they were not able to listen to each other. According to one of the counsellors, one of the main reasons couples do not want to talk to each other, is fear of “rocking the boat” in the relationship. One of the main reasons for avoidance in discussing certain topics, is because spouses wish to protect themselves from vulnerability and embarrassment (Flora, 2014:56). Moreover, avoidance can become common in relationships and marriage when partners fear that the discussion of the topic will lead to deterioration of the marriage or relationship and their partner will become judgemental (Flora, 2014:56). However, research indicates that partners who withhold discussion of salient topics, are usually less satisfied, than those who do not and consequently experience health issues (Flora, 2014:56).

The PREPARE program accesses this fear and assists the couple to communicate openly with each other. Research indicates that through assessments, couples feel more open to discussing difficult components of marriage (Busby et al., 2007:280; Olson, [sa]:1-4). In addition to this, the PREPARE program helps couples to build the relationship that they both desire, through negotiation procedures (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:2). It assists in understanding couple and family systems of cohesion and flexibility and it assists in identifying and resolving major stressors (Busby et al., 2007:280; Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:2). Finally, the exercises are purposefully constructed, to help the couple understand their personalities and build compatibility in the relationship (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:2).

5.7.2.3 Main theme 3: PREPARE creates awareness for couples

Participants’ responses confirmed that the PREPARE program assisted in creating an awareness for each other’s needs as well as affirming their compatibility as a couple.

- *There were a few things, I would mean I would say, through PREPARE I started to understand partner 2 a little bit better, um... since we started talking about growth*

areas or you know, he commenting on our relationship. So now I am more aware of that, so I am saying I am aware that sometimes he might dismiss his need more, uh, he is more likely to do it than I am. So, I know I need to be more aware of it.

- *I learnt about it too. Yeah so, yeah, I remember thinking there wasn't... I think it was also nice that there weren't any red flags (ha-ha) P2: Yeah (ha-ha).*

Counsellors further added that they facilitate the awareness and then witness the result in the communication between partners.

- *(Awareness) Of their couple compatibility, of their areas of strength and growth areas and hopefully to try and resolve issues that may rise within those sessions.*
- *When you think about the marriage relationship and you look at the model that they deal with, it covers all areas of relationships, most areas of the relationship in terms of communication, in terms of conflict, in terms of family where you come from where you have grown up; so generally, and I am not going into all the details, as a model, it will bring awareness and an ability to address these areas which new couples in the romantic phase of their relationship might not think about addressing. So, it gives an opportunity for couples to address their relationship, to talk about their relationship and to address those very important areas that make up the importance of a relationship.*
- *It brings an awareness of maybe two different personality types and how we deal with ourselves in different areas of operating. Um, as I said, the stress profile is very significant because different people deal with stress differently. So, it gives them an opportunity to become aware of that in challenging circumstances because they may have not confronted many challenging circumstances in their dating period, um, yeah.*
- *So, it might give them an opportunity either to work on those issues and resolve them or to come to a realisation that these things are not going to be resolved and maybe it would be better to break off the wedding.*

It appears that the PREPARE program assists in creating awareness about the strengths and weaknesses of the couple, in their marriage or relationship based on the above-mentioned responses. One of the couples reported that through the PREPARE program, they became more aware of the personality trait of their partner and as a result experienced a better understanding of their partner. This is an example of the Microsystem interaction according to the Bioecological theory, where each partner has their own personality traits. Another couple reported that the PREPARE program created awareness about their compatibility as a couple and confirmed that they are compatible, which was reassuring for the couple.

Some of the counsellors/ facilitators stated that the PREPARE makes the couple aware of their compatibility levels, as well as their strength and growth areas in their marriage. They further stated, that the PREPARE program helps the couple deal with their differences, but that it also creates awareness if they are incompatible as a couple. This

can them assist the couple in deciding whether to work at the relationship, or terminate the relationship.

Counsellors stated that during the dating phase relationship, the couple do not really address potential issues that may become major conflict points later in the marriage, because they are too in love with each other. Studies conducted on marriage education programs in South Africa are known to enhance couple's knowledge about marriage; develop realistic understandings of marriage and make the couple aware of their communication styles and conflict resolution techniques (Duncan, 2000:26). However, Duncan (2000:26) argues, that marriage education should take place at least six months after marriage, as engaged couples are "too starry eyed" to enjoy the benefits of marriage education. However, the PREPARE program offers the opportunity to talk about and deal with potential issues, before they become major sources of conflict.

The exercises in the PREPARE program are purposefully constructed to help the couple understand their personalities and build compatibility in the relationship (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:2). For the couple, one of the main benefits is, that it creates awareness and helps them identify their strength and growth areas (Busby et al., 2007:287; Olson et al., 2009:16). The PREPARE program is effective in creating awareness for couples about their marriage.

5.7.2.4 Main theme 4: PREPARE is user-friendly and can be applied to diverse family structures

In terms of how comprehensible the PREPARE program is, counsellors gave the following responses.

5.7.2.4.1 Sub-theme 4.1: Counsellors experience the PREPARE as user-friendly

Counsellors experienced the PREPARE program as user friendly. None of the couples gave any response regarding the user-friendliness of the PREPARE program.

- *Definitely (I agree that PREPARE is user-friendly). There are a few items in it that I sometimes find I have difficulty in addressing.*
- *You know what, the new program I found it was very difficult in the beginning to sort of get into it and understand what it was all about. But now that I am into it I found that it offers structure. It is more user-friendly and it gets involved.*

PREPARE is an easy to use program. "PREPARE is rooted in systems and multidisciplinary theories of structural theory, personality strengths and communication and it compliments other models and theoretical approaches" (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:1, 11). This is one of the benefits of the program, however, the researcher believes this may not necessarily be the case for couples who are less educated and computer illiterate, who may experience the program as complex and difficult to comprehend.

5.7.2.4.2 Sub-theme 4.2: PREPARE accommodates people with special needs

One counsellor commented on the fact that the PREPARE program can accommodate people with special needs. In this case, the client was illiterate. This may not be specifically classified as special needs specifically. Research indicates that experts who have worked with low-income couples, have found that using the traditional approach such as lectures and didactic instruction, do not accommodate literacy levels and learning styles of low-income couples (Dion, 2005:145). This is contrary to the counsellor/ facilitator's experience as she stated that they "did a brilliant program".

Furthermore, the counsellor/ facilitator indicated that it is also the role of the counsellor/ facilitator to manage the level of input to ensure that the program is accessible to all couples.

- *I think that it absolutely can be, I mean having from personal experience, I had a couple who um, the girl for example was very disable.... Was challenged...So for example, she couldn't read any of the questions, so I had to help her and we went through each question and she answered it for me and um, that gave me an indication of someone who is illiterate effectively...And we did a brilliant program and I can tell you that today they are married and extremely happy so I think that, um, probably as the counsellor, you have to just manage your level of input or level of expectation or verbal expectation or whatever it is but I think if you simplify it, every single point is relevant...It can touch any level. Because you are talking about a couple; a happy married couple, doesn't matter, blue, white, clever or not clever, able to read or not able to read.*

Accessibility of the program for people with special needs was mentioned as a benefit. This however, still refers to couples from the same cultural and religious background and does not include cultural diversity and people with physical special needs. Further research would need to be done, to determine whether the PREPARE program provides for persons with physical special needs, as persons experiencing mental special needs may not be able to work with the program.

5.7.2.4.3 Sub-theme 4.3. PREPARE accommodates diverse family structures

A prominent theme throughout research on the PREPARE program, is that it accommodated diverse family structures. This can be concluded according to the response from one of the PREPARE counsellors.

- *It's covered and it's discussed and it's there to bring out the customised version, someone who has got kids. The issue related to the kids, what the particular issues are, will all have been asked and then of course it broadens as you start discussing it.*

Only one of the counsellors/ facilitators commented on the fact, that the PREPARE program accommodates diverse family structures. However, there is research to indicate that the PREPARE is comprehensive and can be used with dating, engaged and married couples, as well as couples in different life phases, such as families with children, step children and intergenerational issues (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:1). Furthermore, the program has strong scientific and empirical backing and has been successful in assisting couples who come from various ethnic groups (Hawkins et al., 2008:724; Olson et al., 2009:2). There is evidence to prove that the PREPARE program can accommodate different family structures. This was also confirmed in this research.

5.7.2.5 Main theme 5: The online version of the PREPARE has more benefits than the manual version

The development and influence of technology has broadened the accessibility of the PREPARE program for some couples but has limited the access for others. The fact that the PREPARE program is now online, is indicative of the chronosystem influence on couples. There seem to be many benefits with the latest online version of the PREPARE program, for example, it is more easily accessed which saves time and makes it more convenient.

5.7.2.5.1 Sub-theme 5.1: The online version of the PREPARE saves time

From the counsellors' responses below, it is evident that the online version of the PREPARE program saves time, as compared to the manual version.

- *But now that they are doing their questionnaire online, that is already behind them.*

- *Well look, what I find is that you don't have to spend time with a session filling in forms. So, that first session, they have already filled it in online and they really know what the couple is about, and you can really get into, um, go through the program with them in that very first session. So, it just gives you a better, its better.*

Some of the counsellors/ facilitators reported that the latest version of the PREPARE that is now online, saves time. The counsellor/ facilitator no longer needs to spend the entire first session doing the questionnaire with the couple, as they have already completed it online. This enables the report to be prepared and sent to the counsellor. Therefore, the counsellor/ facilitator can use the first session to provide feedback, as she/he would have already received the assessment report on the couple. Using an assessment inventory can save time in identifying what challenges the couple are facing (Busby et al., 2007:280). By immediately identifying these challenges, the counsellor/ facilitator can use the rest of the sessions to work with the couple.

5.7.2.5.2 Sub-theme 5.2. The online version of the PREPARE has new content

Another benefit of the latest online version of the PREPARE program, is that it consists of updated content, which makes the program even more comprehensive than the previous versions. Two major additions are the SCOPE personality scale and the stress profile. The SCOPE personality profile measures the social aspects of the couple, including their willingness to participate in social activities and associate with people (Olson et al., 2009:20). The second aspect that is measured, is the couple's ability to deal with change to be flexible (Olson et al., 2009:20). The third aspect evaluates the couple's organisation skills and their ability to pursue goals (Olson et al., 2009:20). Fourthly, the extent to which the couples please and cooperate with other people is measured (Olson et al., 2009:20). The last aspect that is measured, is the emotional stability of the partners and whether they can remain calm under stressful situations (Olson et al., 2009:20). This is a very comprehensive tool when identifying partner traits in couples and can assist the couple to understand certain behaviours of their partners.

The following responses from the counsellors/ facilitators indicated that there is updated content in the latest version of the PREPARE program and that it is more comprehensive than previous versions.

- *Ok, so it will show, partner A's Social is above-average; partner B's is average or whatever. What it tries to show you is how their personality is in being organised or*

social, pleasing or, um... it just shows the difference in the couple, but the explanation is that just because the one is higher on social that the other is lower on social; it doesn't make the person who is higher a better, a nicer person because he or she is more sociable. It just is where you explain the difference and I think the explaining of the SCOPE is to reinforce the differences between each other and how can you learn from those differences and benefit from each other because of those differences.

- *The stress indicators are a questionnaire that they fill in about what is stressing them the most. And then my supervisor explained it to me how to do it properly but now I have learnt how to use it because it is new.*
- *Things like stress which we didn't touch on before this and personality. So, there is added, added, things which make it much better now.*

Three out of the seven counsellors/ facilitators explained, that the latest online PREPARE program consists of updated content. It is indicated that the SCOPE personality profile is new in this version of the PREPARE program. Moreover, there is also an exercise that measures the couples' stress indicators, which assists the couple to identify and manage their stressors. The exercises are not conducted out of a workbook but consist of separate exercise sheets.

The PREPARE program is made up of an online assessment and skill-building exercises, making it accessible to people from various locations (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:1; 11). Each couple completes the online relationship inventory separately and the questions on the assessment are randomly arranged to prevent couple collusion (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:1). Once the assessment is completed, the facilitator can print the couple's report which generally consists of between 20 and 25 pages of feedback regarding the couple's relationship, particularly their strength and growth areas (Childs, 2009:2; Knutson & Olson, 2003:536; Olson et al., 2009:2; Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:1).

Assessment can act as feedback to the couple and encourage the couple to discuss their relationship as well as ease any fears and doubts about the assessment (Olson et al., 2009:22; Olson, [sa]:1-4).

5.7.2.6 Main theme 6: PREPARE influences the counsellors personal and professional growth

A final benefit of the PREPARE program according to the counsellors' responses below, is that the PREPARE program influences the counsellor's personal and professional growth. Working with the program influences the counsellor positively as indicated in the

responses; therefore, this is a Microsystemic level of influence, which is bidirectional in nature. The first aspect is the effect of the PREPARE program on the counsellor's personal growth.

5.7.2.6.1 Sub-theme 6.1: The PREPARE program has an influence on the counsellor's personal growth

The following verbatim excerpts, obtained from the counsellors, indicate that PREPARE program does impact on the counsellor's personal growth.

- *That was very enjoyable for myself and meeting the people who participated in it with me and for learning some stuff about myself. So, it was a personal experience.*
- *Hahaha, it's helped me, the whole marriage thing has helped people like me, with my marriage, with my children... with my mother, you know what I mean?*
- *I think it actually, uh, it actually gives you some personal growth as well, you know?*
- *In other words, you know, you gain more for your next couple as well... Yeah, it's not just a one-dimensional program you know?*
- *Also, maybe, very aware of issues in my marriage and how to attempt to deal with it, not always successfully, but...*

Five of the counsellors reported that they have experienced personal growth in their own lives, because of learning about the PREPARE program and administering it to couples.

5.7.2.6.2 Sub-theme 6.2: The PREPARE program influences the counsellor's professional growth

The counsellors' responses below indicate that not only does the PREPARE program assist in the personal growth of the counsellor's but also the professional growth.

- *But for me, when I look back, my first couples, I struggled with. It was hard. Now I don't find it so hard. I still don't well I find some things hard but I have a bit more experience and I am a bit more comfortable. A bit more, um, sure of myself and I think that that must come across to the couple because they often say, "how long have you been doing this and are you getting paid"? And they want to check you out; you know?*
- *It has allowed me to use my teaching skills and to refine my counselling skills; my communication skills.*

One of the counsellors indicated, that administering the PREPARE program and working with couples in the beginning was difficult, but as she has been working with the program, her confidence levels increased. Another counsellor reported, that administering the PREPARE program assisted her in refining her counselling and communication skills.

Now that the researcher has discussed in depth the benefits of the PREPARE program according to the responses obtained from the couples and the counsellors, the next prominent theme will be discussed which includes the diverse perceptions that couples have of the marital components impacting on their relationship.

5.7.3 COUPLES HAVE DIVERSE PERCEPTIONS OF THE MARITAL COMPONENTS IMPACTING ON THEIR RELATIONSHIP

No couple experiences or perceives their relationship the same as another couple. Couple dynamics are unique as both individuals are unique. The next section will discuss how couples perceive communication as a marital component according to the PREPARE program.

5.7.3.1 Main theme 1: Couples' perceptions of communication as marital component

Communication is learned behaviour and stems from the Microsystem and Mesosystem influences of the parent, who taught the individual communication skills when he/ she was a child and which the individual incorporates into his/her marriage as an adult.

The following verbatim excerpts gleaned from the couples, indicate how communication, as a marital component, impacts on their relationship.

- *I would say PREPARE did help in communicating, well generally. I'm saying, just having those few sessions where whatever, positively, you know, giving you know, um affirmations to your partner or um... just talking out whatever came up through the discussion. Even that process alone, I think just um... got me thinking more about how we communicate with each other and um, how it can be done, how it should be done.*
- *Exactly! (PREPARE Helped us to talk) and knowing that we could bring up the topic, don't be scared of it, if there is an issue, then say it.*
- *I suppose but one of the things that we do which we worked from the PREPARE Program; one of the things I said is that I would let you know when I would leave work.*
- *Communication. I battled to just be, like sharing space and time with someone else. It was hard.*
- *Yeah, we battled a lot, especially with communication.*
- *I would have to say that it (communication) was something we had to learn (Prior to PREPARE), quite the hard way with a lot of arguments and a lot of (P1 laughing) fighting, but um, we knew what the bigger goal is and I think we learned each other better and now believe, well I feel our communication is one of our strongest assets at the moment as a couple.*

In the above-mentioned statements, most of the couples reported that effective communication used to be a problem, prior to attending to the PREPARE program. It has since improved after completing the PREPARE program. The PREPARE program helps couples to build the relationship that they both desire, through negotiation procedures (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:2).

As part of the exercises regarding communication, the couples are requested to select what they think are their three strengths in their relationship, as well as their three weaknesses and this is done independently of each other (Olson et al., 2009:29). This approach assists the couple to discuss how each partner views their relationship identifies strengths of their relationship and improves on couple communication (Olson et al., 2009:29). The couples think that their communication skills improved after attending the PREPARE program.

5.7.3.2 Main theme 2: Couples' perceptions of conflict handling as marital component

In the Bioecological theory of Bronfenbrenner, the way couples interact with each other to resolve problems, indicates how Microsystems interact with each other. If the exchange process is positive, it may result in a positive outcome for the individual and the couple's marital satisfaction. If the outcome is negative, it may have negative repercussions for the individual and the couple.

The second component which is assessed in the PREPARE program is conflict handling. The couple's responses below indicate how the PREPARE program assisted them to handle conflict in their relationship.

- *I'm not sure I would attribute the skills to PREPARE specifically I'm saying because we.... I think actually, we are level headed people who don't get hugely excited and start throwing dishes around and stuff like that, um so I think yeah, just naturally we tend to, uh. You know find a quiet time, if something is bugging us, we will, will express it you know, try not to let it harbour.*
- *... it will be a bit more intense, um... you don't want to hurt each other's feelings about a certain topic, then once we had gone to the sessions, after the six sessions (of PREPARE), I would say we knew what each other were a little, well, we knew more about each other in the sense of what, um... what our issues were and then we knew, so if something, if an argument came up, we know what our feelings are towards it and then we would have spoken about it in the sessions.*

- *Um, so I think where the PREPARE Program helped was... the active listening taught us to be quite good at...*
- *Yeah, we went through a stage where we were fighting quite badly about nothing so that we tried the active listening and it helped, you know?*
- *I think it (active listening) just helped diffuse the... fights.*
- *Oh! Like you say, is "so what I am hearing you say is..." and then he had to repeat what I am trying to say.*

Two of the couples reported that they had good conflict management skills prior to participating in the PREPARE program and that they did not learn anything new from the PREPARE. The second couple reported that before attending the PREPARE, they would fight a lot more and they were afraid to broach difficult subjects. Attending the PREPARE program helped them discuss those issues in a safe environment and helped them to understand their partner better. The third couple explained that the active listening exercise that they learnt about in PREPARE helped them to diffuse their fights.

All relationships experience conflict. Conflict is natural and desirable (Knox & Schacht, 2010:110; Williams et al., 2006:281). If couples do not address issues that cause conflict in the marriage; this causes partners to grow emotionally distant from each other because of resentments that build up, so it is much healthier to talk about the problems (Knox & Schacht, 2010:111). Couples may also discuss issues openly and reach a middle ground in their positions; this is known as compromise (Benokraitis, 2005:286; Duffield, 2013:209; Knox & Schacht, 2010:113; Williams et al., 2006:287-288). During the compromise stages, couples should ask for more information from their partner, try and understand where their partner is at emotionally speaking and be supportive of their partner (Benokraitis, 2005:276;287 & Williams et al, 2006:298-299). Furthermore, if the couple develops the premise that they are a team, it assists them to work together in a problem-solving approach (Benokraitis, 2005:276, 287; Knox & Schacht, 2010:114-117; Williams et al., 2006: 288-299). As indicated in the above statements, the PREPARE program assists couples in navigating conflict in their relationships more effectively.

5.7.3.3 Main theme 3: Couples' perceptions of finances as marital component

Finances (Microsystem influence) are one of the marital components that couples often argue about. Men and women think differently about finances. The responses from the couples below, indicate how the PREPARE program assisted them in handling finances as a marital component in their relationship.

- *I would say, look there have been like spattering's of conversations (about finances) before but I would say the major discussion actually happened on PREPARE. Well at least it uh... got us thinking about it all.*
- *I just remembered that we chatted about... say how we were going to split the expenses and then how things would change before we are married and after and then the stuff around... expectations around money and how...*
- *I think what has been very is good is um... maybe that started it is I think we are very open and we talk it out about money and how it should be spent and saving and organising our life insurance and this and that,*
- *A lot better (Since attending the PREPARE). I think we knew where each other stood, we knew partner 2 needs to take a bigger chunk of it than me. Obviously, I, partner 2 is the bigger earner of the two of us he had to take more of a responsibility financially. After speaking about that we both knew, partner 2 knew where he stood on that. I knew where he stood on that financially and what our expectations were because maybe partner 2 was expecting,*

One of the couples further elaborated that the way they managed financial matters in their relationship prior to marriage, differed from when they were married. The couple attests to the fact that the PREPARE program assists with talking about that transition.

- *I don't know if it was assumed responsibilities without really touching on who has final responsibility for what, um because I mean you still before marriage you are together, but you are still dealing with your own expenses so now it becomes pooled expenses and common things like a bond and a car and who and you have got to help each other out. Um, but I think maybe what, it just happens that the PREPARE program helps you deal with that.*

The responses below indicate that one area of conflict was finances especially when the one partner was a spender and the other a saver.

- *I think we are good with that (finances), Partner 2 is not really a spender, I am not really a spender. With our child, we have moved towards, not a stricter budget, but we have moved to slightly more of a strict budget. It was never identified as a problem in PREPARE.*
- *Sometimes we would have a bit of an argument about it (finances). Yeah, because I would like to spend more. Ha-ha. Partner 1 is much more conservative. But I don't think it was an issue actually,*
- *But it did start us talking about well maybe we need to be going deeper into our financial planning and financial futures and so forth.*
- *and we did it (homework on finances for PREPARE) in the car (P1: Laughing). But it just sparked us talking about or maybe we need to be thinking more about finances*

For one of the couples, the PREPARE assisted them with the physical application of drafting up a budget.

- *We worked out a budget; that was it, from the PREPARE, because we... I think one of the questions was draw a budget or something and we didn't have a budget*

Most of the couples stated that participating in the PREPARE program helped them to explore their finances in more detail. It also helped them to discuss their expectations of how the finances would be handled once they were married. One couple stated that the exercise they did for homework (which involves setting up a budget, personal, couple and family goals), assisted them in discussing further planning for their financial future. One couple explained that the managing of finances was not a growth area for them prior to participating in the PREPARE program.

When conflict about finances is addressed in the marriage, it is typically the women who require their husbands to earn more income; while the husbands require their wives to spend less and save more (Atwood, 2012:4; Howe, 2012:232). Marital satisfaction has been linked to increased income in the home and agreement regarding how the money will be spent (Atwood, 2012:10).

In the PREPARE program, the couple's tendency to be savers or spenders is assessed, as well as the way they perceive money management and how major financial decisions are made (Olson et al., 2009:17). A practical user-friendly exercise is available, that involves the couple developing a budget and indicating monthly income and expenditure, as well as setting individual and couple financial goals. The counsellor assists with this process.

5.7.3.4 Main theme 4: Couples' perception of sex and affection as marital component

Affection and sexuality are experienced differently by men and women and societal norms provide standards for how sex and affection should be conducted (Macrosystem influence). Sexuality is one of the marital components assessed by the PREPARE program. The couples did not have specific responses about this component. It was only discussed if it was indicated as a growth point. For those couples who were not living together, this component was not even addressed by the counsellors.

- *We, we try to, um, look it's been a bit more challenging I guess with the baby now, but I mean we do try*
- *we did not live together before we got married...*
- *Look, it (sex) was pretty much glossed over (in the PREPARE), I mean with ours, it was not really relevant at that time.*

Some of the couples attested to the fact that their sexual lives have been interrupted, because raising children takes a lot of their time. This aspect was not relevant to the couples at the time they initially participated in the PREPARE program.

- *You actually have to make time and you have got to get those date nights (as indicated in the PREPARE) and sometimes those can actually fall by the wayside if you, well if you let life take over. It is important to still keep being intimate. Still have those intimacies. At the moment ... yeah... a kid throws a spanner in the works. But we still need that.*
- *I don't know it's never been, we have always said that we need to increase the frequency, but it is even harder now so.... Even harder with a baby but we tried. But it's hard*

In the above-mentioned responses, most of the couples stated that PREPARE did not really touch on issues of sex and affection. Most of the couples have young children. They all mentioned that they try to prioritise sex and affection; however, they find it extremely difficult because their children demand so much of their attention. One of the couples reported that it is so important to keep up with date nights and intimate moments. Some of the couples did not cohabit before getting married and as a result, the sex item was glossed over in the PREPARE program. The differences in expectations about sex (time and frequency) that partners have, may cause conflict and decrease in marital satisfaction, if it is not negotiated to suit both partners (Williams et al., 2006:166).

There is no exercise that is specifically set in the PREPARE workbook, however, if affection and sexuality are identified as growth or strength areas, couples are afforded the opportunity to discuss this with the counsellor, include them in the wish list and if they experience conflict, discuss this in the ten steps to resolve conflict exercise. Furthermore, counsellors can refer the couple for sex therapy if there is a need.

5.7.3.5 Main theme 5: Couples' perceptions of spirituality as marital component

Spirituality is experienced in a unique manner by each person in an intimate relationship or marriage (Microsystem influence). In the PREPARE program the spiritual beliefs content item, assesses how the couple experience and live their religious beliefs and practices, as well as the significance and role of religious beliefs in the relationship (Olson et al., 2009). There is no specific exercise for spiritual beliefs, however, if this is a disputable item, it can be discussed with the counsellor, by using the wish list or conflict management exercise.

The following verbatim excerpts obtained from the couples, indicate that the PREPARE program did not impact on spirituality as a marital component.

- *What I'm saying is time in the day spent praying or with certain festivals and times etc.... its actually just core to what we do. um... so. Um the only thing I remember from PREPARE is our counsellor saying to me, you can't force your husband to do more, you know or.... Um you know if your wanting to, be more, or do this or do that, you can't force it, you can encourage in certain ways or whatever. That is also just something that resonated with me. So... it was always something I kept in mind.*
- *Spirituality we have never changed (since doing the PREPARE).*
- *We are traditional thinking and we um, I suppose we appreciate that we have shared customs and beliefs.*

Some of the couples' responses indicated the importance of agreement in terms of spirituality.

- *You know, um, but it is also important to be on the same spiritual level because if you are not, that can really interfere.*
- *No but I think, for our family, it was better that we were both on the same page. When we had a child, we just decided to do it together, but I think at the time we went to the PREPARE program we were already doing that*
- *I mean what we have always said, what we are lucky with is that our beliefs are aligned. Um we both, so first of all we both have the same religion which helps but also, our beliefs within that religion are very much aligned. So, it makes a lot of things simpler; like how we want to raise children and connect it to our religious beliefs.*

Most of the couples reported that the PREPARE program did not impact on their spirituality after attending the program. They already had strong religious beliefs prior to attending the program. One of the partners reported that the PREPARE made her aware that she could not force her partner to be more religious than what he was, thereby creating awareness for this couple. Most of the couples explained how important it is for the success of the marriage, to be on the same page where religion and spirituality are concerned.

Becoming a parent means that the couple needs to decide in which religious affiliation they would like to raise their child (Walsh, 2010:335). Obviously, the more similar the couple is in terms of religious beliefs, the easier it will be to raise the child and to decrease conflict areas (Walsh, 2010:335). In a national survey that was conducted in the USA, it was found that couples who express spirituality in the same way, were more happily, married than those who did not (Olson et al., 2008:18). It is important for couples to be on

the same page regarding spirituality and religion when raising children, as this may become a serious conflict point and impact on marital satisfaction later in the marriage.

5.7.3.6 Main theme 6: Couples' perceptions of parenting as marital component

Parenthood should not be taken lightly, as couples need to consider the financial implications and the effect that having a baby will have on their ability to manage responsibilities and maintain their marriage and the physical and psychological implications of having a child (Kunz, 2013:134). This is an example of the microsystemic level of influence that takes place between the spouses when they have to readjust their lives and responsibilities.

The verbatim responses below indicate couples' perceptions of parenting as a marital component.

- *I came to realise through the PREPARE Program and through other discussions I had that um... a, look it was a bit naïve, the expectations that I had (being a parent) and also, I didn't really know what I wanted either. I am saying you haven't even had your first child and uh... know what's involved, its, yeah, you don't really know what you are getting yourself into,*
- *But it was a good discussion again, I think we reached a.... We had slightly different views (about parenting) ...it's something that you have got to see when kids come.*
- *Yeah and I think after a child, uh, if you had cracks in the marriage, it will show. It shows it quickly, um, so we knew we had to back each other up, we had to fill in where one person, say for example, Partner B wasn't able to drive, uh or do chores, it was important for me to step in and do that. So, you can't shirk your responsibility to the other partner. Um, she is bearing a child and um, it's a huge, huge burden on her. Um and then when a child comes in, then you have to realise that she is going to be exhausted and you have to take that on your shoulders. So, I think only afterwards did you realise where you are backing each other up. Um, I think the PREPARE helped maybe just get us on to that wavelength of knowing we have to back each other up in marriage.*
- *And having quite real and deep conversations. Because we even spoke on some of our views on child... see from the talks we had been to, I remember that one about the or something and we had a discussion about children and marriage and the kind of lives we wanted to build for ourselves and paths to follow. And that was before we even went out.*

As indicated above, most of the couples stated that the PREPARE program helped them discuss realistic expectations about parenting and to work through their differences. One couple reported that they had already spoken about children and expectations of becoming parents, even before participating in the PREPARE program.

In the PREPARE program, the expectations of the couple having children or not is measured (Olson et al., 2009:20). This also includes the couple's awareness of how having children will impact on their relationship, the division of roles and responsibilities, views on discipline and the number of children (Olson et al., 2009:20). There is no specific exercise for parenting, however, if this item is disputed and identified as a growth area, it can either be discussed with the counsellor through the wish list exercise, or the ten steps of conflict management exercise.

5.7.3.7 Main theme 7: Couples' perceptions of partner styles and habits as marital component

Personality remains a constant throughout the relationship and couples naively believe that they can change their partner (Olson et al., 2009:34). In the Bioecological theory, partners choosing each other based on the similarity of their upbringing, is an example of how the Mesosystem (parent's upbringing) over time (Chronosystem) impacted on the individual's choice of an intimate partner as an adult (Chronosystem). It is clear in the below responses of the couples, that the PREPARE program assisted couples in understanding their partners and accepting the parts of their partners that they could not change.

- *But it is something that, that was highlighted to me through the PREPARE course. That it is his personality and it's something that will come up every time in a conflict, though because it is core to how he handles conflict.*
- *I feel like I have come to understand partner 1 a lot better now (that I have done the PREPARE), um, so whereas previously, something, you know I would have read uh... something that she said or even her move in a certain way, okay, she is in this mood, this implies this... therefore... if she is cross with me or something like that, now it's like, oh, oh, partner 1 is just being partner ... I have learned to understand you (to P1), you know?*
- *... A few things (I liked about PREPARE), I mean, the one, I think, even just the, um... giving positive feedback I think, even just through that, we started to... it just really emphasised what I like about Partner 2.*
- *Yeah for me the personalities are still the same (Since doing the PREPARE). But the openness to dealing with issues is a lot easier*
- *And that was very hard for me because I, I'm a bit of a controlling person around that, um, I had to learn how to be more spontaneous...*
- *...So, I had to learn to be a bit more spontaneous because partner 2 is very spontaneous (laughing). Um, so yeah, I had to like really... and I have, I have grown tremendously in our relationship.*

Three of the couples reported, that the PREPARE program helped them to understand their partners better and to accept their personality traits. One partner reported that it was

a positive experience when his partner affirmed what she liked about him. One couple reported that there were no real changes regarding their partner's personality traits after attending the PREPARE program. One partner indicated that she had to change some elements of her personality to suit that of her partner and as a result, she feels that she has grown tremendously in the marriage.

Research has generally indicated, that the more similarities the couple have the higher their level of marital satisfaction and relational stability (O'Rourke, Claxton, Chou, Smith & Hadjistaropoulos, 2011:244; Rushton & Bons, 2005:555). Furthermore, Rushton and Bons (2005:555) attribute similarity in cognitive and cultural factors, such as the way in which the partners grew up, as a means for mate selection. Similarly, Claxton, O'Rourke, Smith and DeLongis (2011:377) attribute "openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness to marital satisfaction".

Partners can improve their skills, but one cannot expect their partner to change from an extrovert into an introvert, this will only result in ongoing frustration (Olson et al., 2009:34).

In the PREPARE Program, this item evaluates how each partner relates to their partner's behaviour and traits including moodiness, stubbornness and temper (Olson et al., 2009:17). Furthermore, it assesses the extent of the partner's dependability, general outlook and tendency to be controlling (Olson et al., 2009:17).

The SCOPE personality profile measures the social aspects of the couple, including their willingness to participate in social activities and associate with people (Olson et al., 2009:20). The second aspect that is measured, is the couple's ability to deal with change and to be flexible (Olson et al., 2009:20). The third aspect evaluates the couple's organisation skills and their ability to pursue goals (Olson et al., 2009:20). Fourthly, the extent to which the couples please and cooperate with other people is measured (Olson et al., 2009:20). The last aspect that is measured, is the emotional stability of the partners and whether they can remain calm under stressful situations (Olson et al., 2009:20). This is a very comprehensive tool when identifying partner traits in couples and can assist the couple to understand certain behaviours of their partners.

5.7.3.8 Main theme 8: Couple's perceptions of leisure activities as marital component

Life is so busy, that couples need to schedule time with each other, to ensure the growth and sustenance of the marriage or intimate relationship. This is a Microsystem influence according to the Bioecological theory. It is crucial that couples have one-on-one face-time to ensure marital quality (Glorieux et al., 2011:281).

The responses below, obtained from the data analysis, indicate the couples' perceptions of leisure activities as a marital component.

- *...Maybe after sessions we did more, you know, because she also encouraged us you know, go out and do stuff together. Do what you enjoy together. So maybe, we did slightly more things, like maybe go to movies more, not at the moment with the baby but um, you know that sort of thing. So, we did travel.*
- *Yeah that was our big activity. It was always our next upcoming adventure together we were always travelling.*
- *No I think it (leisure time) was particularly good before and after. It wasn't a weakness that the PREPARE Program helped us with*
- *So, I think we were always good at that (leisure time) as well (before the PREPARE). I think we are used to doing things together and we like to spend time together so often, our weekends are very much kind of family time...*
- *Yeah, I think I did have an issue with it though when we were at the PREPARE Program. You were always like out and... you were like busy, you were more busy before we had child A. Much more busy.*
- *you would like to do more things with your partner, so I was teasing partner 2 because it is something that we have been speaking about, taking up more activities and doing more, so I said agree and he said disagree, and it's more like, somewhere in the middle*

Some responses attested to the importance of planning for leisure activities even when they are married.

- *...So, what we do is, even though we are married, we do date nights. So, I prepare something...*
- *It's a shared kind of responsibility, so someone has something a month and you plan for... a surprise and something else and something fun, so just to like not getting stuck into just like being in Joburg and not doing anything.*
- *It can be anything; it could be going for a walk, or it could be something going out or...*
- *A picnic or Hartebeespoort or...*
- *Yeah, it depends on how you want to spend it and it's your choice, if its day/night, how you want it, it is your time to plan whatever you wish to do.*

Most of the couples reported that leisure activities were not identified as a growth area in their marriage. However, the couples with children reported, that they struggle to find leisure time because of their children. One couple reported that their facilitator/counsellor

encouraged them to go out and do activities that they enjoyed together on a regular basis. One of the partners indicated, that leisure activities were a growth area in her marriage, because her husband was always busy with his own activities, even before they had a child. This couple still experiences leisure activities as a conflict point and as a result, the researcher referred the couple back to the Chevrah Kadisha for further counselling. It is interesting, that the couple without children actively ensure that they plan date nights for each other on a regular basis, as they have the time.

Family components have changed over time (Chronosystem influence), due to increasing individualisation, where individuals pursue their own interests, which impacts on couple's leisure time (Voorpostel, Van der Linde & Gershuny, 2012:244). Jackson (2009:16) stresses the importance for couples to develop their own interests and friendships apart from their children, because when their children "leave the nest", their lives must continue. Furthermore, it was found, that when couples engage in shared interests and leisure time, they perceive their marriages to be far more interesting (Sharaievska et al., 2013:454).

In the PREPARE program, the leisure content item measures the extent to which the couple like to spend time together as well as partake in mutual activities (Olson et al., 2009:18). There is no exercise that is specifically set in the workbook, however, if leisure activities are identified as a growth or strength area, couples are afforded the opportunity to discuss it with the counsellor, include it in the wish list, or if it is a conflict area, discuss it in the ten steps to resolve conflict exercise.

5.7.3.9 Main theme 9: Couples' perceptions of friends and family marital component

Family dynamics, a Mesosystem influence, and family history, a Chronosystem influence, contribute to the development of emotional intimacy in couples. Family-of-origin influences may lead to relationship problems, such as conflict and this may intensify as the partners enter an intimate relationship or marriage and begin their own family (Topham, Larson & Holman, 2005:103).

The following verbatim excerpts indicate the couples' perceptions of friends and family as a marital component.

- *I agree, I think, uh... I think there is potential for boundaries to be crossed, um and I think we were aware of that also through PREPARE. I think we raised it as well. I think on the whole, we have actually been pretty good, um... we are learning.*
- *So, I came with a lot of family baggage, well um... not a lot of family but a lot of baggage that is attached to the family, you know? But that would be important to discuss and then getting on the same page...*
- *I mean they were really good parents that brought us up really well but the role models of what really goes into a marriage and how to be supportive. I don't know it kind of disintegrated a bit later in my life, well my teenager years. Um, well and what the PREPARE Program did is gave us space to talk it out so this is bugging me, it's going to be a big issue and it gave her that space just to get it out in the open.*
- *Which is great. It's frustrating for us that it keeps happening over and over again but the boundary is set (which we learnt from PREPARE).*
- *Yeah, we did an initial questionnaire of something who you are, what you are, your family*
- *Like family relationships. How issues kind of popped up*
- *I think boundary setting hasn't been a problem*
- *Um, I think at times, its more my family than partner 1's family but I think more at times, um, like it never really changed anything in the preparation (PREPARE)*

Most of the couples indicated that the PREPARE program was beneficial to them, when it came to deal with issues stemming from their families-of-origin. Most couples indicated that the PREPARE program helped them to establish healthy boundaries when it came to their families-of-origin interfering with their marriages.

One of the partners indicated that family-of-origin issues are still prevalent in their marriage. This was the couple, that the researcher referred to the Chevrah Kadisha for further counselling. One of the couples indicated, that they did not have issues with family-of-origin, prior to taking part in the PREPARE program.

According to Social Learning Theory, a child who has grown up in a family with poor parental marital quality (Mesosystem influence) and divorce, is more likely to become hostile in his/her own marriage (Allen et al., 2008:275; Topham et al., 2005:103). This may be because children model their parents' behaviour and use the same behaviour (Mesosystem influence), whether functional or dysfunctional, in their own marriages and intimate relationships (Topham et al., 2005:103).

In the PREPARE program the family-of-origin item measures how the couple feel about their in-laws and spending time with extended family members (Mesosystem influence) (Olson et al., 2009:17). Once this is determined, an effective couple map is used as a tool

to assist the couples in plotting their relationship, in comparison to their family-of-origin, whereafter these differences are discussed with the counsellor (Olson et al., 2009:30).

5.7.3.10 Main theme 10: Couples' perceptions of relationship role as marital component

One of the last components that is assessed by the PREPARE program, is relationship roles. This can be a major area of conflict for couples. The below responses indicate the couples' perceptions of relationship roles as marital component.

- *Yeah but you really help a lot so... look I mean I think, um if I remember our answers for there in PREPARE, I think we had a lot of, we had a lot of views that was quite similar I'm saying, um... like when we wanted, both of us were willing to help out, we also still had quite traditional views of you know, the woman should do more in the house and things like that.*
- *I think we discussed this (in the PREPARE) remember? That I would do the woman role? (ha-ha). I suppose yeah, not in a weird way, we were happy with that*
- *We had a very traditional; our roles seemed to be very traditional*
- *And that was it because we had developed roles but we never defined them to each other; we had just taken on certain roles and responsibilities (in terms of finances) (Before PREPARE)*

Two couples reported, that they already discussed and implemented roles and responsibilities, prior to participating in the PREPARE program. One couple reported, that they discussed and confirmed their roles and responsibilities by participating in the PREPARE program.

Wilcox and Nock (2007:105) state, that women who came from "traditionally-gendered" (Macrosystem and Chronosystem influence) households, where the husbands are the main breadwinners, experience higher levels of marital satisfaction. The level of equality of housework (Microsystem influence) is what determines the marital satisfaction level of women. If women experienced the division of housework as fair, they experience happier marriages (Wilcox & Nock, 2007:105). In addition, research has indicated, that equalitarian role and responsibility allocation can be related to increased levels of marital satisfaction (Olson et al., 2009:18).

In the PREPARE program the relationship role content item measures how the couple view role and responsibility allocation (Olson et al., 2009:18). There is no specific exercise for relationship roles and responsibilities in the PREPARE workbook, however, if this is a

disputable item it can be discussed with the counsellor using the wish list exercise, or the conflict management exercise.

5.7.4 CHALLENGES OF THE PREPARE PROGRAM

Even though participants had very positive feedback on their experiences of the PREPARE program, they also mentioned challenges. Within the context of exploratory research, it is important to highlight the limitations and challenges so that the program to be adjusted.

5.7.4.1 Main theme 1: Difficulty recalling content

When asked what specific aspects of the PREPARE program couples could remember, some responded that they struggled to remember specific content. They had a general opinion of their experience, which was positive, as discussed as the first main theme in this chapter.

- *It's difficult to always attribute it to the PREPARE Program specifically, also because, personally, I can't really remember much about the program*

Two of the couples indicated, that they had trouble recalling some of the content of the PREPARE program. It was further argued, that the exact degree to which couples can remember and implement the skills learnt in the marriage education program, cannot be fully determined, as the couple are only starting their journey, which could involve reality checks and difficulties (Bernstein, 1992:35, 84). Although couples struggle to recall the components of the program as well as the skills that they learnt, the experience of the “counselling” process in the PREPARE program (Rome, 2011:2). It was recommended that marriage education programs be followed up with other programs, like enrichment programs, to ensure continuity (Bernstein, 1992:91). Duncan (2000:ii) proposes, that enrichment programs should be in line with the life cycle changes that occur in marriage, which will be the Chronosystem of influence, as the relationship changes over time.

5.7.4.2 Main theme 2: Lack of awareness and accessibility of the program to the broader community

One of the challenges that was identified by the counsellors, is the fact that there is a lack of awareness of the PREPARE program and a lack of accessibility to the broader community, as the latest version of the PREPARE program is online. Therefore, couples who do not have access to internet, are not able to do the program. As this project is exploratory research, the findings may be used to make recommendations that more awareness be created around the PREPARE program and that measures be put in place to make the program accessible to the broader community. The following responses from the counsellors indicate their concerns regarding the awareness and accessibility of the PREPARE program.

In terms of advertising the PREPARE program, these were the responses gleaned from the counsellors.

- *I mean how would you do it, would you go to court for your civil marriage you get a pamphlet, there you go, that would be good you know? I am not too sure where the contact point is...*
- *Or how is it advertised? Or how is it put forward?*
- *So, one of the parts that we do in terms of promoting the program where it has been slipping through the cracks, we do try, we do try and be more proactive because we do see people slipping through the cracks.*

A few of the counsellors questioned whether the broader communities are aware and have access to the PREPARE program.

- *Do you think they are aware? Is it advertised? I wonder if there is awareness*
- *I think also on a practical level, you know, those people who are involved in churches or different faith groups, so there is a pastor involved that directs them and should tell them about it so they can get involved. Maybe there are couples who are totally not connected to anything. What percentage of couples, you know, actually have a religious ceremony that is part of their tradition?*
- *The fact that it's now online, that makes it less successful too.*
- *Where, where, again, it's an awareness. How do we make people aware of it?*
- *So there needs to be someone out of there, taking an example of what we do, exactly what we do and bring it to the wider community. And where there will be more awareness of relationships, and not the frustrations when people let out frustrations, that are scary.*

One of the counsellors pointed out the fact that participation in the program involves cost. Some couples are unable to afford the expenditure, which curtails the number of couples participating in the program.

- *You see, that's the thing. Firstly, there is a cost involved and how do they access it? Yes.*

Three of the counsellors identified, that there is a need to advertise the PREPARE program to the broader community. They also tried to identify contact points, which include pastors, courts where civil marriages are registered and places within the broader communities, who do not have access online.

Marriage education programs are still not widely available in all communities and in some instances, they are not available at all (Ooms, 2005:4). Marital education material that is of a high language quality, is likely to lead to dropouts of couples from lower income and lower educational backgrounds (Macrosystem influence) (Petch et al., 2012:506). Therefore, marital education material would have to be written at the lowest educational level of the community and would have to be audio-visual in nature (Petch et al., 2012:506). Furthermore, the curriculum is structured in such a way, that equipment and materials used for the programs, have been revised, to focus less on written exercises, reading and homework and more on role-play, storytelling and practising skills (Dion, 2005:145).

Low income couples struggle to get access to marriage education programs, because they are mainly accessible through media campaigns, websites; self-help books and self-guided internet courses (Ooms, 2005:2), which low-income couples cannot always afford (Macrosystem influence).

Now that the researcher has discussed the challenges of the PREPARE program according to the participants' responses, the relevancy of the PREPARE program in A South African context will now be explored.

5.7.5 THE RELEVANCE OF THE PREPARE IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Studying the relevance of the PREPARE program in a South African context was the main purpose of this study. Although there was not a lot of diversity among the small sample of

research participants from a homogenous population, the views gleaned from the participants with regards to the PREPARE program which accommodates different languages and cultures, were insightful.

5.7.5.1 Main theme 1: PREPARE and cultural differences

South Africa is a very diverse country, especially in respect of diverse cultures and languages. These systems appear within the Macrosystem level of influence, according to Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory and these aspects have a significant impact on marriage and intimate relationships. In this study, a specific Jewish population was studied, which limited the ability of the researcher to study the effectiveness of the PREPARE program, when working with diverse cultures. Research findings indicate that administering the PREPARE program to other couples from diverse cultures, may require for the program to be adapted.

5.7.5.1.1 Sub theme 1.1 Cultural differences

The counsellors' responses indicate which cultural aspects the PREPARE program should be mindful of when working with people from diverse cultures.

- *The other point is that they are universal skills. So, whichever context you are going to apply them to, I think there is a level of... maybe in a culture there is... maybe in a very rural culture, you know it is for like an urbanised society, I can imagine, maybe in a very rural area, it might be different terminology that people might use, different ways of relating to these things. But I think basic communication, and basic dealing with conflict, are universal aspects of any relationship.*
- *You would have to adjust the whole program, you couldn't do it like that, you would have to do it more like on a verbal level. You couldn't, you could use the things in order to just verbally discuss it, but you would have to do it on, within a cultural milieu of those people because it's like, there is a level of cultural um, bias in a sense because it's more for the urban type population. But as I was saying like something like communication and conflict could be utilised but would have to be completely restructured.*

For the PREPARE program to be presented in all cultural contexts of the country, knowledge of and sensitivity to cultural diversity is crucial for counsellors. Counsellors emphasised that this would be necessary for the program to have an impact on the marriage satisfaction of couple in diverse contexts.

- *I think that it would also have to take into account the cultural morale of whoever it is who will be coming to the sessions and um, you know, be very sensitive to that. So, I*

think that the counsellor as well would have to be aware because I think otherwise they would not be on the same page. Um, so I think that could be a problem.

The unique compilation of the South African population, asks for a program that would be developed in accordance and with input from diverse cultures. Counsellors agreed that a program cannot be imposed on people, if their unique functioning is not considered.

- *It would have to be a program sort of developed based on the needs of those communities. Obviously, there is a need across the board for communication and conflict, but it would have to be developed based on the basic needs of those communities. It couldn't be imposed on them; you know like it doesn't apply. It would have to be adapted.*
- *The problem is that if you think of South Africa, you think multi-cultural, racial and you are thinking economic things, you know? I'm sure that it is always applicable. We are a very small sample of the population. Um, so for the population we serve, you know, I'm absolutely sure it's basic. It's basic things, it's basic communication which is applicable everywhere. You know, I haven't really seen it applied. Yeah only with the PREPARE, not other populations. I mean I can only imagine that it can't... it must be relevant to everybody.*

Regarding interracial couples, the following responses were received.

- *Now that whole scenario (Jewish man marrying a black woman), gosh, you know there are just so many kinds of those scenarios that the South African community would gain if they could get, um, this kind of input (PREPARE).*
- *I think it would be great. I think it would be a lot more challenging. I definitely don't think that it could be done in five sessions as with a couple from a similar background, culture and religion. I think if you are talking about couples in South Africa; white, black, cross culture, um...*

Some of the counsellors/ facilitators stated, that it would be extremely beneficial if other couples from various cultures participated in the PREPARE program. Two of the counsellors/facilitators indicated, that the program should apply to everyone as the relationship skills taught in the PREPARE program are universal skills. Most of the counsellors/ facilitators believe the PREPARE program would need to be adapted for people who share diverse cultures.

Most marriage education studies have been done on white-middle to upper-class couples (Macrosystem influence) (Dion, 2005:139; Hawkins, Stanley; Cowan; Fincham, Beach, Cowan, Rhoades, Markman & Daire, 2013:110; Olson. Larson & Olson-Sigg, 2009:136; Ooms, 2005:2). Moreover, insufficient research has been conducted on the effects of marriage education programs in ethnic and racial diversity, which makes it difficult to draw conclusions about its efficacy (Asai & Olson, 2004:412; Hawkins et al., 2008:724). Cultural

issues are a background factor and a lot of programs are not culturally applicable (Macrosystem influence), not just in terms of their methodology (pen and paper vs online), but also due to the fact, that a comprehensive adaptation process to ensure cultural sensitivity has never been done (Asai & Olson, 2004:412).

Research has rarely indicated that collaborative processes take place between the originators of a program and a minority group, to establish a culturally applicable program that suits the needs of that population (Asai & Olson, 2004:413). In this case, the constructs of the original program may need to be altered to accommodate the intimate relationship patterns of that population (Asai & Olson, 2004:413). The same adaptation procedure would need to be followed with the PREPARE program in South Africa.

5.7.5.1.2. Sub theme 1.2. Language differences

This research study focussed on a very specific sample of Jewish people. The language of the PREPARE program is English. However, with the focus on the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context, language must be considered within the diversity of the country (Macrosystem influence). Counsellors were aware that the language would have to be adjusted to benefit people whose mother tongue is not English.

- *And there is another thing too, language. Maybe the language would have to be what the people doing the program understand because a lot of people are maybe not proficient in English for example. Maybe Zulu would be their home language.*
- *I don't know, I am just saying in terms of the program, it's an international program. I am not talking about the African languages, but I am saying relative to the other languages, it is, um, it does cater for... so the actual questionnaire; I am saying this is a different point, covers across the board different languages.*

Two of the counsellors/ facilitators identified, that the language of the program would have to be considered, if the PREPARE program is to cater for the needs of couples who originate from other cultures. Research states, that language differences also contribute to the need of the collaboration process, to ensure that cultural sensitivity is maintained, when adapting from the original program (Asai & Olson, 2004:413). A collaborative process would need to be followed when adapting the PREPARE program to a South African context, especially to those couples whose mother tongue is not English.

5.8 CONCLUSION

This study focused on answering the research question “What is the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context?” The findings were drawn from both couples who participated in the PREPARE program as well as counsellors/ facilitators who administer the program. This was done to obtain a comprehensive exploration of the PREPARE program.

When comparing the initial scores from the PREPARE with the Marital Satisfaction scores that were measured during this study, all the couples’ scores indicate an increase in marital satisfaction over time: Couple A showed an increase of 10% in marital satisfaction; couple B showed an increase of 1% in marital satisfaction; couple C showed an increase of 37% in marital satisfaction and couple D showed a 15% increase in marital satisfaction. This is in line with theory, which indicates that there is a positive correlation between the success of the marriage education program and marital satisfaction (Markman et al., 2016:166). It was insightful to see that the MSS scores were much higher than those of the PREPARE scores. This is because idealistic distortion is built into the PREPARE inventory and is more likely to give accurate responses. It was insightful to see that the couples with young children who experienced leisure and activities and family-of-origin as strength areas in the PREPARE, experienced it as a growth area in the MSS. This proves that having a child, impacts on the quality time that the couple must spend together. Furthermore, family-of-origin issues become more prevalent when a couple is raising a child.

This study indicated that both the couples who participated in the PREPARE program and the counsellors/ facilitators who administer the program, had a positive experience of the program.

Although more research needs to be done on the role of the therapist/ counsellor’s impact of the couples’ positive experience of marital education programs, this study proves that couples appreciate the open, trustworthy and professional demeanour of the counsellor/ facilitator. The counsellor/ facilitator creates a safe space, without judgement, where the couple can explore issues regarding their marriage.

Couples also found, that the counsellor's/ facilitator's neutrality was very beneficial, as they felt more at ease to discuss difficult issues, in contrast to approaching their parents for marital advice, where opinions would inevitably be more biased against one partner than the other. According to research, there is evidence to prove the hypothesis, that couples appreciated inputs and perspectives of the counsellors and facilitators, who are neutral (Bradley & Furrow, 2013:277; Busby et al., 2007:288; Edwards, 2011:75; Rome, 2011:1).

Another benefit of the PREPARE program is, that the counsellor is skilled in facilitating the program. Most of the counsellors/ facilitators believe, that it is effective to have a skilled counsellor/ facilitator, who can control and guide the couple through different and difficult topics of discussion. Furthermore, a skilled counsellor can help couples identify issues in their marriage that they were not even aware of.

One of the contributions of the PREPARE program on marriages in South Africa is, that it creates a platform for open communication for couples. This was proven by the responses that the couples and counsellors/ facilitators provided. By participating in the PREPARE program, couples were forced to talk about and resolve issues that may have become major conflict points later on in the marriage. While facilitating open communication, the PREPARE program assisted the couples in listening to each other and helped them communicate openly with each other. Research indicates that through assessments, couples feel more open to discussing difficult components of marriage (Busby et al., 2007:280; Olson, [sa]:1-4).

In this study, it was proven, that not only does the PREPARE program result in open communication, but it also assists in creating awareness about the strengths and weaknesses of the couple in their marriage. In this study, a couple indicated that the PREPARE program helped them become aware of and more accepting of their partner's personality traits. Some of the counsellors/ facilitators stated, that the PREPARE makes the couple aware of their compatibility levels as well as their strength and growth areas in their marriage.

The PREPARE program has been commended as being user-friendly, in that it accommodates people with special needs and diverse family structures. This is in line with

existing literature, which states that the PREPARE is comprehensive and can be used with dating, engaged and married couples, as well as couples in different life phases, such as families with children, step children or with intergenerational issues (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:1). The latest version is online. This version has been recommended by the couples and counsellors/ facilitators in this research, because it is convenient, it saves time and has additional content dealing with personality and stress profiles, which makes the program more effective.

With the various marital components, some of the couples, who participated in this study, indicated, that attending the PREPARE program helped them dealing with issues relating to those specific components, whereas other couples stated, that attending the PREPARE program did not really make a difference to their perception of marital components. Only if the components were identified as growth areas, were they discussed in detail. Overall, the couples seem to have gained from the program.

There is always room for improvement where marital education programs are concerned. In evaluative research, it is important to identify limitations of the program being studied, to make recommendations for the improvement of the program. Two challenges of the PREPARE program were raised in this study. Firstly, the fact that couples experienced problems in recalling the content of the PREPARE program. This has also been confirmed in prior research regarding the effectiveness of marital education programs.

The second challenge that was identified in this study, is the accessibility of the program to the broader population. This has also been identified as a criticism in the effectiveness of marital education programs with other programs, besides the PREPARE program and includes the language barrier.

One of the main aspects that was covered in this study, is the relevance of the PREPARE program in a South African context. The major limitation of this study was the fact, that the population that was studied was homogenous and the research participants were similar in their education, religion, earning potential and culture. However, when the researcher posed the possibility of using the program with other cultures, the research yielded insightful results. Most of the counsellors/ facilitators in this study indicated, that other cultures would benefit from using the PREPARE program. However, two of the

counsellors proposed that the PREPARE program should apply to everyone, because the relationship skills taught in the PREPARE are universal. Most of the counsellors/facilitators believe the PREPARE program would need to be adapted, for people who share diverse cultures; which concurs with previous research conducted on the PREPARE program. Cultural issues are a background factor and a lot of programs are not culturally applicable; not only in terms of their methodology (pen and paper vs online), but also because a comprehensive adaptation process to ensure cultural sensitivity, has never been done (Asai & Olson, 2004:412).

This study has provided in-depth answers to the question “What is the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within a South African context?” Based on the findings, the PREPARE is a very comprehensive program, which has been proven to improve the marital quality of couples, by allowing couples to openly discuss difficult topics with a neutral counsellor whom they can trust. The PREPARE program is constantly evolving and with the development of technology, it is now online and caters for diverse family structures. Despite the positive aspects of this program, there are still challenges which exist that need further attention.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed in detail, the findings of the research study, according to a mixed-methods approach. This chapter will focus on concluding the study, by answering the research question, as well as discussing how the goal and objectives of this study were met. Conclusions will be drawn from the most pertinent factors indicated in this study. Recommendations will subsequently be made, based on the conclusions derived from this study.

In the next section, the researcher will discuss whether the research goals and objectives were obtained in this study.

6.2 RESEARCH GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of this study was to explore the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context. This was obtained by achieving the following objectives:

6.2.1 CONTEXTUALISING MODERN MARRIAGE AND INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR MARRIAGE AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

An in-depth literature review was done in Chapter 2 contextualising modern marriages and the challenges that exist for marriages and intimate relationships. This was discussed within the theoretical framework of the Bioecological theory of Bronfenbrenner. This theoretical theory was also discussed in detail in this chapter. Chapter 3 differentiated between the diverse types of marital interventions. As the PREPARE program is the marital intervention that is the heart of this research, it was discussed extensively in Chapter 3. In addition, the researcher included a comparative study in Chapter 3, on the existing longitudinal research studies that have been conducted on the PREPARE program, in the various countries, to identify limitations and ascertain whether these limitations would be applicable in a South African context.

6.2.2 EXPLORING AND DISCUSSING THE COMPONENTS OF MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE BIOECOLOGICAL THEORY

This objective was obtained by doing an in-depth literature review of the various components that exist in marriage and intimate relationships. The marital components explored in detail in Chapter 4, are also assessed in the PREPARE program and therefore extremely relevant. Counsellors and therapists must be knowledgeable about the various marital components when dealing with couples, to ensure that they render a holistic service that caters to the needs of the couple. The researcher consequently discussed how the PREPARE program assesses these components and assists the couple in strengthening their relationship. These marital components were discussed according to the Bioecological theory of Bronfenbrenner.

6.2.3 EXPLORING AND DISCUSSING THE CONTENT OF THE PREPARE PROGRAM RELATED TO THE UNIQUE AND DIVERSE SOUTH AFRICAN CIRCUMSTANCES

The content of the PREPARE program was adequately captured throughout this research, as the researcher engaged in extensive reading on this topic and the counsellors/facilitators and couples provided rich data regarding the content of the PREPARE program. This was captured in detail in Chapter 3. It was quite difficult to explore unique and diverse circumstances in a South African context, because the participants were from a homogenous population. The intention of this study was to involve couples from diverse cultures and religions, however, because there was limited interest in this study, only a homogenous sample could be selected. Nonetheless, the researcher managed to obtain rich data from the research participants, with which to explore the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages in South Africa, a country characterised by diversity in terms of culture, language and religion. Although the data received was based on the thoughts or opinions of the counsellors/facilitators and couples and not their experiences, the responses given by the participants, related back to theory, regarding the challenges that marriage education programs have in accommodating diversity in terms of culture, language and religion. Therefore, it provided insightful information, enabling recommendations for future research on the PREPARE program.

6.2.4 IDENTIFYING COUPLES' LEVELS OF MARITAL SATISFACTION AGAINST THEIR INITIAL PREPARE PROGRAM SCORES

This objective was successfully achieved and was the highlight of this study. This was the quantitative phase of the research study. It was clear in the empirical investigation, that the PREPARE program does assist in increasing marital satisfaction of couples. It was informative to see what marital components identified in the PREPARE report, shifted to become strength and growth areas for the duration of the marriage, particularly when children were introduced to the marriage.

6.2.5 EXPLORING THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE PREPARE PROGRAM ON MARRIAGES WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

It was difficult to obtain the experiences of the research participants relating to the South African context, because the population sample was homogenous and small. However, the researcher did obtain the participants' views and opinions regarding the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context and it provided rich data, that has contributed to the recommendations for future research on the PREPARE program, later in this chapter.

6.2.6 DRAWING CONCLUSIONS AND MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE SERVICE PROVIDERS OF THE PREPARE PROGRAM ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE PROGRAM ON MARRIAGES WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

In this study, the data that was collected regarding the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context, is very descriptive and will be used to make relevant conclusions and recommendations to the service providers, who implement the program.

The research question for this study was "What is the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context?". This question was answered during the research study, however, due to the limitations of the study, the South African context was not adequately explored. Nonetheless, the views and opinions did relate back

to existing theory, which speaks to the challenges of marital education programs in accommodating diversity in terms of culture, language and religion.

The goals and objectives were met in this study. The key findings will now be discussed.

6.3 KEY FINDINGS

The following were the key findings that were obtained when exploring the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context:

6.3.1 KEY FINDINGS REGARDING THE BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

- In terms of the couples, most of them were married between 1 and 3 years.
- Most are employed.
- All are highly educated and practise Judaism as a religion.
- Most have young children.
- The couples are in the 27-39 age cohort.
- In terms of the counsellors/ facilitators, most of them were female. There was only one male.
- Most are volunteers whose primary occupation is not in the field of social sciences.
- It is striking that most counsellors/facilitators have had a lot of experience administering the PREPARE program to couples married between 2 and 35 years. Some of the female counsellors are home executives, probably the reason they have time to volunteer to administer the program to couples.
- The responses to the questions provided by the social worker (counsellor/facilitator) were very much in line with theoretical knowledge about couples. This may be an added advantage when working with couples and administering a marriage education program, as compared to volunteers who only received training on the PREPARE program.

The key findings for the comparison of the PREPARE scores and MSS scores will be discussed in the next section.

6.3.2 KEY FINDINGS REGARDING THE COMPARISON OF PREPARE SCORES VS MSS SCORES

The researcher assessed each of the couple scores separately and therefore presented the information separately in this section.

- For couple A, the findings have yielded telling results. Higher scores achieved indicate that the partner may have unrealistic views/ expectations about a certain marital component as indicated in the PREPARE report. According to the results, the female has more realistic expectations about their marital satisfaction. Significantly enough, the PREPARE scores are much lower than the MSS scores because the PREPARE has idealistic distortion built into it; whereas MSS does not. Firstly, in the initial PREPARE report, financial management was identified as a growth area. This was because both partners have specialised in finance as their occupation. Therefore, the hypothesis is that this should be a strength area in their relationship. Secondly, this couple has a very young baby and it is interesting to observe how leisure activities have become a growth area because raising a young child is so demanding on a couple's time that they struggle to find time for leisure activities. Thirdly, friends and family have featured as a growth point in the marriage. This may also be because having a child reignites the family of origin issues and the couple become acquainted with the differences they experience in raising children. This also includes how each partner's personality adjusts to having a child.

For couple B, higher scores achieved indicate that the partner may have unrealistic views/ expectations about a certain marital component as indicated in the PREPARE report.

- This couple seem to view their relationship quite realistically because their PREPARE scores are not as different as the MSS scores. This couple did not live together before they got married. This is one of the reasons why marriage expectations were a growth area in the initial PREPARE scores. Family issues have been an ongoing problem for this couple. It is evident in these quantitative findings as well as in the interview. The couple explained that having a child has financial implications and they have had to readjust their budget to ensure that all financial aspects are covered. This couple also likes to travel, and they explained that it has become a bit more difficult to do so with a child as it requires money and

time. The couple do enjoy their sexual lives; however, they do admit that this part of their lives has been neglected since the baby has come as the baby is extremely demanding of their time and attention.

- For couple C, the growth area initially identified in the PREPARE program was marriage expectations. This may be because this couple did not live together before they got married; therefore, the couple may transpose marital expectations until attending the PREPARE program. It helped the couple openly discuss and agree on their marriage expectations. This is then seen as a strength area in the MSS results. Higher scores achieved indicate that the partner may have unrealistic views/ expectations about a certain marital component as indicated in the PREPARE report. This couple display idealistic distortion because during the interviews the researcher experienced intense conflict between the partners and noticed possible growth areas in: communication; conflict handling; partner styles and habits; friends and family and couple closeness and flexibility. a young child, could also exacerbate family of origin issues as raising a child reignites difference in parenting styles based on the family of origin. The couple then must grapple and negotiate these differences. If they lack effective communication skills in dealing with the negotiation process, then conflict may be exacerbated, and marital satisfaction may decrease.

Couple C were referred for marital therapy, and both partners agreed to go. Partner 2 indicated that she struggled with postpartum depression since her child was born, and this has exacerbated the problems the couple are experiencing. This is in line with theory that couples who have serious issues like depression, alcohol or drug addiction need to go for more intensive marital therapy (DeMaria, 2005: 242).

- For couple D, the findings yielded distinctive results. This was the only couple who did not have children. Their MSS scores were much higher than some of the other couples which may indicate unrealistic views of marital satisfaction levels for both partners. However, marital satisfaction may be higher at this stage of the marriage because there are no children. At this stage in their marriage, they do not have the added pressures of parenthood (finances, less time for intimacy, roles etc.). It would be informative to measure this couple's marital satisfaction once they have

children. This couple indicated that they have both been struggling with leisure time because of the demands of work and responsibilities; whereas this was recognised as a relationship strength when they first completed the PREPARE program. This indicates that no relationship is constant; as the couple go through the various life stages, so needs and challenges in the relationship change. Family flexibility was identified as a growth area when the couple initially took the PREPARE. This also came up as an issue in the interview, but the couple stated that they have learnt how to set boundaries. The researcher observed that this couple is very mature and have couple flexibility. The female is also working in the social services profession and conducts training on communication and counselling skills. This may also contribute to the maturity and strength of the relationship.

A comparison of the PREPARE scores and the MSS scores yielded noticeable results. The researcher will now discuss the key findings relating to the overall experience of the PREPARE program.

6.3.3 KEY FINDINGS REGARDING THE OVERALL EXPERIENCE OF THE PREPARE PROGRAM

- Both the PREPARE couples and counsellors/ facilitators experienced the PREPARE program positively. Most counsellors/ facilitators reported that it is valuable for couples.

With the key findings of the overall experience of the PREPARE program discussed, the benefits of the program will be discussed.

6.3.4 KEY FINDINGS REGARDING THE BENEFITS OF THE PREPARE PROGRAM

The skills, attitude, experience and knowledge of counsellors/facilitators were highly valued in the overall experience of the PREPARE program.

- Most couples appreciated the professional demeanour of the counsellor/ facilitator. They explained that the counsellor/ facilitator was open, trustworthy and respectable. This aided in the ability of the couple to have effective discussions on difficult topics.

- Part of this professional demeanour was the ability of the counsellor/ facilitator to create a safe emotional environment to explore some of the difficulties that marriage poses.
- Another benefit of the counsellor/ facilitator is that the couples experienced the counsellor as neutral. This assisted them to feel at ease when they had to discuss delicate topics. The couples also found it beneficial that the counsellor was not judgemental and there was no bias, unlike if the couple had to approach their parents for marital intervention. Furthermore, the couples found it beneficial that the counsellor was someone with no knowledge of the couples' backgrounds.
- Couples found it beneficial to have a counsellor skilled in dealing with their matters. Couples also indicated that the skilled counsellor could assist them in identifying issues in the relationship they were not even aware of.
- A counsellor, a social worker by profession, pointed out that a skilled counsellor/ facilitator in the PREPARE program facilitates constructive communication between couples.
- One observation by the counsellors/ facilitators is that part of their skills development is attributable to the compulsory supervision sessions that they need to attend once they have seen a couple. This aids in their continuous professional development and indirectly impacts positively on the couples' marital satisfaction.
- Because most counsellors/ facilitators are volunteers, who do not necessarily have experience in the counselling field, they are aware of their limitations when working with couples. The PREPARE program makes provision for supervision for the counsellors/ facilitators, it creates the opportunity for the counsellors/ facilitators to refer couples who need more intensive therapy. This is a benefit of PREPARE.

The PREPARE program created an awareness for several areas of marriage functionality.

- A significant benefit is that it creates a platform for open communication. All the couples agreed on this. It forces the couples to talk about things without being able to escape. And as a result, it helps the couples listen to each other.
- The PREPARE program helps to create awareness about the strengths and weaknesses of a couple's relationship. Some of the couples indicated that through the program, they became aware of their partner's personality traits and could begin accepting them. For some couples, attending the PREPARE program created awareness of their compatibility levels and this provided reassurance for

some of them to know that they are suitable. If they are not compatible, the PREPARE program also creates awareness of this and can assist the couple in coming to a decision to terminate the relationship.

There are also specific key findings regarding benefits of the structure of the PREPARE program.

- Most of the counsellors found it to be user-friendly.
- One of the counsellors reported that it helped her with a couple who had special needs; although did not have special needs specifically, they were from a lower educational background.
- The PREPARE program is designed in such a way that it accommodates diverse family structures, ranging from dating, engaged and married couples as well as couples in different life phases such as families with children, step-children or intergenerational issues (Olson-Sigg & Olson, 2011:1). Additionally, the program has strong scientific and empirical backing and has been successful in assisting couples who come from various ethnic groups (Hawkins et al., 2008:724; Olson et al., 2009:2).
- The latest version of PREPARE is conducted completely online. Although it may have challenges, one of the benefits of this new online version is that it saves time. The first session may be used as a feedback session to the couple instead of doing the questionnaire.
- The latest version of PREARE has also introduced the personal stress profile. This examines each partner's personal stress level over the last year (Facilitators sample report, [sa]:8). The counsellor assists the couple to prepare and discuss lists of their top stressors (Facilitators sample report, [sa]:8). This is not applicable to the couples in this study those in this study completed a previous version of PREPARE which did not consist of this exercise.

Key findings regarding the benefits of the PREPARE program for counsellors/facilitators are also formulated.

- Another benefit cited by the counsellors/facilitators is it contributes towards their personal and professional growth.

- Some of the counsellors indicated that the skills they learnt in the program helped them to deal with issues in their own personal relationships with their family members.
- One counsellor indicated that her confidence levels in working with couples and administering the program had increased since working with the program.

The researcher captured the benefits of the PREPARE program in depth. The next section will focus on couples' diverse perceptions of the marital components impacting their relationships.

6.3.5 KEY FINDINGS REGARDING COUPLES' DIVERSE PERCEPTIONS OF THE MARITAL COMPONENTS IMPACTING ON THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

- Couples reported that communication used to be a growth area before attending the PREPARE program. However, there are indications that this has improved since the couples have participated in it.
- In terms of conflict management skills, two of the couples stated that they had good conflict management skills prior to attending the PREPARE program and they had not learnt anything new.
- Attending the program helped couples discuss issues in a safe environment and helped them understand their partners better.
- Couple C explained that the active listening exercise that they learnt about in PREPARE helped them to defuse their fights.
- The PREPARE helped couples explore their finances in more detail. It also helped them to discuss their expectations of how the finances would be handled once they were married. An exercise for homework which involves setting up a budget, personal, couple and family goals, assisted couples in discussing further planning for their financial futures.
- Most of the couples stated that PREPARE did not really touch on issues of sex and affection.
- Most of the couples have young children. They all mentioned that they try to prioritise sex and affection; however, they find it extremely difficult because their children demand so much of their time and attention. PREPARE made couples

aware that it is important to keep up with date nights and intimate moments to keep the marriage strong.

- Some of the couples did not cohabit before marrying and as a result, the sex item was glossed over in the PREPARE program.
- In the Jewish culture, there is a separate program which need to attend that deals with sex and affection according to their religious practices.
- Couples reported that the PREPARE program did not impact on their spirituality. They already had strong religious beliefs prior to attending the program. PREPARE made couples aware of differences in practising religion, creating awareness that it is important for the success of the marriage to agree where religion and spirituality are concerned.
- Couples stated that the PREPARE program helped them discuss realistic expectations about parenting and enabled them to work through their differences.
- Regarding personality traits, couples reported that the program helped them understand their partners better and to accept the traits of their partners. Adjusting elements of one's personality to suit that of a partner may result in personal growth in the marriage.
- Leisure activities were identified as a growth area in some of the couples' marriages, especially those with children because- their children demand so much of their time and energy, they struggle to create the time and energy for themselves as a couple. In cases where couples struggle to agree, even with the assistance of a facilitator, the PREPARE program makes provision for them to be referred for more intensive therapy.
- Through the facilitator/counsellor, the PREPARE encourages couples to go out regularly and do activities that they enjoy together.
- It is noticeable that couples without children seem to have more time for leisure activities than couples with children.
- Most of the couples indicated that the PREPARE program was beneficial to them when it came to dealing with issues stemming from their families of origin.
- Some signalled that the program helped them establish healthy boundaries when it came to their families of origin interfering with their marriages.
- Attending the program assisted couples to discuss and confirm their roles and responsibilities in the marriage.

Now that the researcher has discussed the key findings of the couples' experiences of the marital components impacting their relationships, the challenges of the PREPARE program findings will be discussed.

6.3.6 KEY FINDINGS RELATING TO THE CHALLENGES OF THE PREPARE PROGRAM

The two challenges relating to the program included difficulty recalling content, and the lack of the availability of the program to the broader community.

- Some of the couples indicated that they had trouble recalling some of the content of the PREPARE program.
- Some of the counsellors identified the need to advertise the PREPARE program to the broader community. They also tried to identify contact points through which couples who could get access to the program including pastors, courts where civil marriages are registered, and within the broader communities which do not have online access.

There were not many challenges identified in the PREPARE program, proving that it is a very comprehensive and effective one. The findings regarding the relevance of the PREPARE program in a South African context are discussed next.

6.3.7 KEY FINDINGS REGARDING THE RELEVANCE OF THE PREPARE PROGRAM IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

It has never been evaluated in a South African context with its dynamics; so, it was relevant to obtain the views of the counsellors and the couples on this aspect. Cultural and language differences were explored.

- Some of the counsellors/ facilitators stated that it would be extremely beneficial if other couples from various cultures participated in the PREPARE program.
- Some of the counsellors/facilitators suggested that the program should apply to everyone as the relationship skills taught in PREPARE are universal skills.
- Most of the counsellors/ facilitators believe the program would need to be adapted with people who share different cultures.

- Some of the counsellors/facilitators identified that the language of the program would have to be considered if the program is to cater for the needs of couples who originate from other cultures.

The key findings of this study according to the various themes offered insightful information. In the next section, the researcher will discuss the conclusions of this study.

6.4 CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of this study will be based on the key findings according to the themes identified in this study.

6.4.1 BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

- The couples in this study were relatively young and most of them had children, which impacted significantly, on their marital satisfaction as compared to the couple without children. All the couples came from the same socio-economic background, are white and Jewish, making it difficult to generalise research results.
- Counsellors were well acquainted with administering the PREPARE program due to the many years of involvement in it. Most of the female volunteers were house executives, providing them with time to work with the couples and the program.
- Working as a social service professional with the program provides added advantage as the counsellors already have prior knowledge about couples and relationships due to their formal training.

This section focused on making conclusions regarding the biographical data of the research participants. The researcher will now discuss the conclusions drawn from the data relating to the comparison of the PREPARE and MSS scores.

6.4.2 COMPARISON OF PREPARE AND MSS SCORES

- The PREPARE program does have a positive effect on couples' marital satisfaction.
- Having children impacts on the marital satisfaction of couples.

- Having idealistic distortion designed into research instruments, especially when it comes to dealing with couples, is so important to ensure that accurate results are captured.

The researcher made conclusions from the data presented for the comparison of the PREPARE scores and the MSS scores. The next section will focus on the conclusions drawn from the overall experience of the PREPARE program.

6.4.3 OVERALL EXPERIENCE OF THE PREPARE PROGRAM

- It was experienced positively by both the couples who participated in the program and the counsellors who administered it.

With the conclusions discussed regarding the overall experience of the PREPARE program, the researcher will now make conclusions on its benefits.

6.4.4 BENEFITS OF THE PREPARE PROGRAM

- Couples appreciate the professional demeanour, neutrality and non-judgemental attitude of the counsellors as this assists them in openly talking about difficult topics and learning to listen to each other more effectively.
- Couples experienced their counsellors/facilitators as skilled. The skills development of the counsellors/ facilitators arises from their attending supervision sessions after they have worked with the couple.
- The program also creates the opportunity to refer couples who have challenges that cannot be addressed at the level of the program.
- It creates a platform for open communication and discussion and forces the couple to deal with difficult topics of conversation.
- The program creates awareness for couples regarding their compatibility and the strengths and weaknesses of their relationship.
- The counsellors/facilitators find the PREPARE program as user-friendly.
- The program assists couples with special needs.
- It accommodates diverse family structures, in the various life phases.

- The latest version of the program is online, saves time and has additional content which makes the program more comprehensive and effective.

The conclusion here is that the PREPARE program is very beneficial. The next section will discuss the conclusions on the diverse perceptions of the marital components impacting couples' relationships.

6.4.5 COUPLES' DIVERSE PERCEPTIONS OF THE MARITAL COMPONENTS IMPACTING ON THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

- Couples either learnt certain aspects regarding identified marital components through the PREPARE program, though some did not. It also depended on what were identified in sessions as strength and growth areas for the couple, as this guided the direction of the discussions. Overall, the couples learnt how to deal with the differences they experienced that stemmed from the marital components.

Conclusions were drawn from the couples' diverse perceptions of the marital components impacting on their relationships. The conclusions pertaining to the challenges of the PREPARE program will be discussed next.

6.4.6 CHALLENGES OF THE PREPARE PROGRAM

- Couples had trouble recalling the content of the PREPARE program. This brings into question whether they continue to practise the skills that they acquire through the program. Therefore, it is necessary as research indicates, to follow up education programs with marriage enrichment programs.
- The PREPARE program is currently not sufficiently advertised for people who live in the broader communities and who do not have access to the internet.

The researcher made conclusions regarding the challenges of the PREPARE program in this section. Now conclusions will be drawn on the relevance of PREPARE in a South African context.

6.4.7 THE RELEVANCE OF THE PREPARE IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

- It was difficult to measure this as the population sample was homogenous. However, counsellors believe that PREPARE could be very beneficial to couples from various cultures.
- It teaches universal relationship skills. But, when conducting the program with couples from different socio-economic strata, would have to be adapted, incorporating changes in the language and the structure of the program.

The conclusions in this research have been obtained from the key findings and themes presented in the empirical chapter. The researcher will now conclude this chapter with recommendations.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The PREPARE program is quite comprehensive. The researcher would like to make recommendations relevant to future research for it.

6.5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The following have been identified as recommendations for future research:

- As this will be the first published study of the PREPARE program in South Africa, more research needs to be conducted on it. This study was not able to accurately capture the dynamics that exist in the South African context. A longitudinal study would be recommended as relationships shift with time.
- A larger sample size should be used to obtain more conclusive data and to obtain generalisations for research.
- The program should be made available to people with physical special needs. This can be done by installing technology like JAWS to read the program to the couple.
- The PREPARE program should be followed up with an enrichment program during the different life phases of the couple because they experience problems recalling content and implementing the skills learnt during PREPARE.

6.5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The following recommendations are provided for practice:

- The PREPARE program should be advertised to the broader communities in South Africa, as it is in the researcher's opinion a very good program and there is empirical evidence to prove that it is effective. This should include people with physical special needs.
- Research should be done with same-sex couples, inter-cultural couples and couples from other cultures and religions to obtain more results on the effectiveness of the program.
- The PREPARE program should be adapted in language, content and structure to accommodate couples from different socio-economic strata. This should be a collaborative process done with people of that culture and language to ensure that the PREPARE program meets the specific needs of the couples according to their cultural and religious practices, as well as their language. More research should then be conducted on this to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.
- The program should be made available to people with physical special needs. This can be done by installing technology like JAWS on the computer that allows it to read the program to the couple.
- The PREPARE program should be followed up with an enrichment program during the different life phases of the couple because couples experience problems recalling content and implementing the skills learnt during PREPARE.
- Make the PREPARE program available in many formats and not solely online.

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APPENDICES

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT: COUPLES



Faculty of Humanities
Department of Social Work and Criminology

08/02/2018

INFORMED CONSENT

1. NAME OF RESEARCHER

Name: Jacqui Dunn

2. NAME OF UNIVERSITY

Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 0002

Contact person: Prof CE Prinsloo

3. RESEARCH TITLE

The contribution of the PREPARE Program on marriages within the South African context.

4. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within South African context.

5. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The PREPARE program is widely used in South Africa. It has also been used in other countries around the world and its contribution has been explored in other countries but not in South Africa. This research will be a mixed-methods study and will be conducted in two phases. Firstly, couples who participated in the PREPARE Program who consent to form part of this study will meet with the researcher in the comfort of their own homes as per agreement. The researcher will, with the consent by the couples, have access to their records of initial participation to be able to evaluate the PREPARE program. Upon arrival of the researcher, couples will be asked to complete the Couple Satisfaction Scale separately; thereafter, the scores will be calculated and disclosed to the couple.

Directly after that, joint semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the couple using a semi-structured interview schedule to further explore the contribution of the PREPARE program on their marriage. The interviews will be audio recorded for the researcher to transcribe (put on paper the interview word for word) the content of the interviews. Thereafter it will be e-mailed back to the research respondents where they will have a chance to validate the information gathered and

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Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Departement Maatskaplike Werk en Kriminologie
Lefapha la Bomotho
Kgoro ya Modiro wa Leago le Bosenyi

elaborate where they feel necessary. A sample of couples will be selected to participate in the research. The criteria for the selection process are the following:

- Couples who participated in the PREPARE program at the Chevrah Kadisha in Johannesburg
- First marriage

6. NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

5 couples have agreed to participate in the research as collective case study.

7. RISKS INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH STUDY

It may be difficult for couples to disclose their level of satisfaction to a stranger. As the scales are completed separately, the participants have the option to have an individual interview instead of a joint interview if they do not feel comfortable with disclosing their level of marital satisfaction to their partner. The researcher will ensure that everything is done to minimize harm to the participants. Should the participants experience any discomfort, they have the option of leaving the study at any point as it is voluntary and if further assistance is required, they will be referred to the Chevrah Kadisha in Johannesburg for further intervention.

8. BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

Couples can identify their level of marital satisfaction and will be provided an opportunity to discuss how the PREPARE Program contributed toward their level of marital satisfaction at that point with their partner. The couple may inform each other of how they feel about their marital satisfaction. It will provide an opportunity for the couple to revisit the principles that they learnt in the PREPARE Program and possibly apply them to their marriage going forward.

Recommendations can be made on how to improve the program to meet specific needs of diverse couples in South Africa.

9. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Please note that this study is voluntary. Your participation would be greatly appreciated as through the research we aim to improve areas of service delivery and programs as marriage and families are the cornerstone of our society. However, you have a choice to participate in the research or not and there will be no negative implications. Upon initial contact, if you are interested in the study, a request for permission to contact you directly will be necessary to conduct the study. Furthermore, your consent to allow me to have your initial PREPARE scores will be requested as this study aims to explore if the PREPARE Program contributed towards your marital satisfaction.

10. RECORDS OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH

The records of the audio-taped interviews will be transcribed by the researcher only. Therefore, no one will have access to the transcriptions and therefore, confidentiality will be maintained. The transcriptions will be e-mailed back to you to ensure that I have captured the data from the interviews correctly. You will then be requested to confirm and add more information if you so desire and then your comments will be e-mailed back to me for the comparison and compilation of data. Data will be captured using **pseudonyms or alphabetic letters, not your names**. The only persons having access to your profile information are **the counsellors from Chevrah**

Kadisha Johannesburg whom we have approached for permission for you to remain confidential.

Once the research has been published, it is a mandate that the research is safely stored at the Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria for a period of fifteen years for purposes of further research and archiving. Research results will be sent to Chevrah Kadisha, Johannesburg and Life Innovations to add to the research archives as research on PREPARE has been done in many countries.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY

My signature indicates that I have read, or listened to, the information provided above and that I received answers to my questions. I have freely decided to participate in this research and I know I have not given up any of my legal rights.

Please print your name next to signature if you approve to participate in this study.

I hereby freely give my permission to participate in this research project.

This document was signed at _____ on the _____ day of _____ 2016.

NAME:

SIGNATURE:

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER:

MS. JA DUNN

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT: COUNSELLORS



Faculty of Humanities
Department of Social Work and Criminology

08/02/2018

INFORMED CONSENT

1. NAME OF RESEARCHER

Name: Jacqui Dunn

2. NAME OF UNIVERSITY

Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 0002

Contact person: Prof CE Prinsloo

3. RESEARCH TITLE

The contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context.

4. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore the contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context.

5. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The PREPARE program is widely used in South Africa. It has also been used in other countries around the world and its contribution has been explored in other countries but not in South Africa. This research will be a mixed-methods study and will be conducted in two phases. Firstly, couples who participated in the PREPARE Program who consent to form part of this study will meet with the researcher in the comfort of their own homes as per agreement. The researcher will, with the consent by the couples, have access to their records of initial participation to be able to evaluate the PREPARE program. Upon arrival of the researcher, couples will be asked to complete the Couple Satisfaction Scale separately; thereafter, the scores will be calculated and disclosed to the couple.

Directly after that, joint semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the couple using a semi-structured interview schedule to further explore the contribution of the PREPARE program on their marriage. The interviews will be audio recorded for the researcher to

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transcribe (put on paper the interview word for word) the content of the interviews. Thereafter it will be e-mailed back to the research respondents where they will have a chance to validate the information gathered and elaborate where they feel necessary. A sample of couples will be selected to participate in the research. The criteria for the selection process are the following:

- Couples who participated in the PREPARE program at the Chevrah Kadisha in Johannesburg
- First marriage

The third and final phase of the research project entails evaluating the PREPARE Program from the professional perspective of counsellors working/ volunteering at the Chevrah Kadisha in Johannesburg. A minimum of ten counsellors will be selected for purposes of conducting a focus group using a semi-structured interview schedule to capture data. The focus group will take place at the Chevrah Kadisha Centre in Johannesburg for the convenience of the counsellors. The focus group will be audio recorded with the permission of the research participants. The information will then be transcribed (put into words on paper) and e-mailed back to the participants for verification of the information and elaborate on their responses where they feel necessary. The researcher will only use the names of the counsellors on the field notes, so she can track who said what and e mail the response back to them directly. The name will then be converted into a pseudonym or alphabetical letter when discussing the findings in the research paper.

The criteria for selection:

- Counsellors/ volunteers administering the PREPARE Program at the Chevrah Kadisha in Johannesburg.

6. NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

5 couples have agreed to participate in the research as collective case study for the first and second phase of the study. A minimum of ten counsellors/ volunteers will be selected for the third phase of the study.

7. RISKS INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH STUDY

For phase one and two of the research study, it may be difficult for couples to disclose their level of satisfaction to a stranger. As the scales are completed separately, the participants have the option to have an individual interview instead of a joint interview if they do not feel comfortable with disclosing their level of marital satisfaction to their partner. The researcher will ensure that everything is done to minimize harm to the participants. Should the participants experience any discomfort, they have the option of leaving the study at any point as it is voluntary and if further assistance is required, they will be referred to the Chevrah Kadisha in Johannesburg for further intervention.

No risks are involved for professionals evaluating the PREPARE Program as they will just be adding their professional input and will not be able to be identified.

8. BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

In the first and second phase of the research study, couples can identify their level of marital satisfaction and will be provided an opportunity to discuss how the PREPARE Program contributed toward their level of marital satisfaction at that point with their partner. The couple may inform each other of how they feel about their marital satisfaction. It will

provide an opportunity for the couple to revisit the principles that they learnt in the PREPARE Program and possibly apply them to their marriage going forward. Recommendations can be made on how to improve the program to meet specific needs of diverse couples in South Africa.

The professional input on the exploration of the PREPARE Program is extremely necessary to gather a holistic exploration of the program. Counsellors will be able to shed light on the strengths of the PPREPARE Program and the growth areas which will be very valuable to this research project.

9. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Please note that this study is voluntary. Your participation would be greatly appreciated as through the research we aim to improve areas of service delivery and programs as marriage and families are the cornerstone of our society. However, you have a choice to participate in the research or not and there will be no negative implications. Upon initial contact, if you are interested in the study, a request for permission to contact you directly will be necessary to conduct the study.

10. RECORDS OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH

The records of the audio-taped interviews will be transcribed by the researcher only. Therefore, no one will have access to the transcriptions and therefore, confidentiality will be maintained. The transcriptions will be e-mailed back to you to ensure that I have captured the data from the interviews correctly. You will then be requested to confirm and add more information if you so desire and then your comments will be e-mailed back to me for the comparison and compilation of data. Data will be captured using **pseudonyms or alphabetic letters, not your names**. The only persons having access to your profile information are **the counsellors from Chevrah Kadisha Johannesburg whom we have approached for permission for you to remain confidential**.

Once the research has been published, it is a mandate that the research is safely stored at the Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria for a period of fifteen years for purposes of further research and archiving. Research results will be sent to Chevrah Kadisha, Johannesburg and Life Innovations to add to the research archives as research on PREPARE has been done in many countries.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY

My signature indicates that I have read, or listened to, the information provided above and that I received answers to my questions. I have freely decided to participate in this research and I know I have not given up any of my legal rights.

Please print your name next to signature if you approve to participate in this study.

I hereby freely give my permission to participate in this research project.

This document was signed at _____ on the _____ day of _____ 2016.

NAME:

SIGNATURE:

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER:

MS. JA DUNN

ETHICAL APPROVAL



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities
Research Ethics Committee

25 April 2014

Dear Prof Lombard

Project: The contribution of the PREPARE program on couple's marital satisfaction within the South African context
Researcher: J Herron
Supervisor: Dr CE Prinsloo
Department: Social Work and Criminology
Reference number: 26088968

Thank you for the well written and prepared application that was submitted for ethics review.

I am pleased to be able to inform you that the above application was **approved** by the **Research Ethics Committee** on 24 April 2014. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

The Committee requests you to convey this approval to the researcher.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'KH' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

Prof Karen Harris
Acting Chair: Postgraduate Committee & Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
e-mail: Karen.harris@up.ac.za

Research Ethics Committee Members: Dr L Blokdand, Prof/Prof M-H Coetzee, Dr JEH Grobler, Prof KL Harris (Acting Chair), Ms H Klopper, Dr C Penabazco-Warren, Dr Charles Putbergill, Prof GM Spies, Dr Y Sulea, Prof E Tajard, Dr P Wood

APPROVAL FROM DR OLSON TO CONDUCT THE RESEARCH IN SOUTH AFRICA



October 31, 2013

Jacqui Herron
South Africa

Dear Jacqui:

I have enclosed the 10 item **Couple Satisfaction scale** based on PREPARE/ENRICH. I am willing to give you permission to use this scale in your project. You would simply administer the scale (last page in enclosure) and you would ultimately score it yourself. The scoring provides a raw score a percent score. You would use the percent score for your research.

Also, we would be willing to provide the individual and couple scores from PREPARE/ENRICH for the 25 couples in your study. As I mentioned previously, you need to obtain the couple I.D., the counselor I.D. and the date PE from Pam Gillingham from the Family Life organization and we will send you the data. Pam needs to also approve this project on behalf of the Agency.

Good luck!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "D Olson".

David H. Olson, Ph.D.
CEO, PREPARE/ENRICH
Professor Emeritus, U of Minnesota

Life Innovations, Inc. • PO Box 190 • Minneapolis, MN 55440-0190

tel: fax: 1.800.331.1661 • office: 1.612.635.0511

www.prepare-enrich.com

APPROVAL FROM FAMILY LIFE CENTRE TO CONDUCT THE RESEARCH

THE FAMILY LIFE CENTRE
FAMSA Johannesburg
Families South Africa



University of Pretoria

Department of Social Work and
Criminology

2013-10-30

Inquiries: Mrs Pam Gillingham

Family Life Centre

Johannesburg

**RE: PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH TO BE CONDUCTED AT FAMILY LIFE CENTRE JOHANNESBURG
FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**

Dear Sir/ Madam

Ms Jacqui Herron, a registered masters preparatory student at the University of Pretoria, approached Family Life Centre Johannesburg to request for a study to be done on one of the programs we run here at the centre called the PREPARE/ ENRICH Program for marriage or cohabitation. She was part of the PREPARE/ENRICH training on the 29th of April until the 30th of April 2013 and discovered that research had not been done on the PREPARE program in a South African context.

It is usually in our policy that we do not allow research to be conducted with clients, as it breaks the confidentiality however, as this research is related to an existing program offered at the organisation, and it is ethically checked by the University, we endorse the research project.

Ms Herron briefly described her research project and proposed that through Family Life Centre 26 respondents who participated in the 2010 PREPARE Program (13 with children and 13 without children) be recruited by the counsellors who conducted the counselling sessions with the couples who took PREPARE in 2010. Two of the couples will be used for the pilot project.

THE FAMILY LIFE CENTRE
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South Africa
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Fax: (011) 788-4781
E-mail: famlife@isfrica.com
Cell: 082 231 0370/1

APPROVAL FROM LIFE INNOVATIONS TO OBTAIN PCA SCORES FROM AMERICA

THE FAMILY LIFE CENTRE
FAMSA Johannesburg
Families South Africa



1 November 2016

Dear Jacqui

Please be advised that permission is granted to obtain the PCA scores of the couples from Dr Olson for your research.

Sincerely

Pam Gillingham

Director

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E-mail: famlife@familife.com
Cell: 082 231 0370/1

BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE AND SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PREPARE COUPLES

BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE

BIOGRAPHICAL CATEGORY				
Duration of dating relationship before marriage				
Years of cohabitation (if applicable). Please indicate N.A. in the right column if not applicable				
Current age	Male		Female	
Years married				
Age at marriage	Male		Female	
Number of years married				
Number of children and age	1			
	2			
	3			
	4			
Age when first child was born	Male		Female	
Highest education achieved	Male		Female	
Current employment	Male		Female	
Number of years employed	Male		Female	
Religious affiliation	Male		Female	

1. How would you describe your overall experience of the PREPARE Program?
2. How do you feel about your score we calculated using the Marital Satisfaction Scale?
3. How do you see the way you handle conflict in your marriage **after** you participated in the PREPARE Program?
4. How do you see the quality of communication in your marriage **after** completing the PREPARE Program?
5. How would you describe the way you manage home responsibilities and work **after** the PREPARE Program? (If you were cohabiting, if not what were your expectations of your partner in terms of house work and responsibilities.
6. How do you think your and your partner's spirituality affect your marriage **after** attending the PREPARE Program?
7. How would you describe the way you and your partner experience activities together **after** attending the PREPARE Program?
8. How would you see the way you manage your finances as a couple **after** attending the PREPARE Program?
9. How would you describe your sexual relationship **after** you attended the PREPARE Program? (If this is applicable to you) If not applicable to you, How did the PREPARE Program contribute to the way in which you experience your sexual relationship currently?
10. How would you describe the way in which you manage Family-of-origin issues (such as time spent with in-laws; boundary setting etc.) **after** attending the PREPARE Program?
11. What were you and your partner's views regarding childrearing **after** attending the PREPARE Program?
12. How would you describe your attitude towards your partner in terms of his/ her personality characteristics **after** participating in the Program?

**BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE AND SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FOR
PREPARE COUNSELLORS/FACILITATORS**

BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE

BIOGRAPHICAL CATEGORY	
Profession/ Occupation	
Years of experience in your field of study	
Current occupation:	
Years/ months of experience with administering the PREPARE Program	
Gender	

1. How would you describe your overall experience of the PREPARE Program as professionals?
2. To what extent do couples come back for marital therapy or enrichment after completing the PREPARE Program?
3. How would you view the PREPARE Programme’s effectiveness in a South African context?
4. What are the challenges that you have faced with the PREPARE Program in a South African context?

“South Africa may be characterised by diversity in terms of language, race; sexual orientation; spirituality; religion and culture to name a few. These factors all impact on how couples build and develop their marriage especially when it comes to the marital components including conflict handling; communication; spousal roles; spirituality; closeness and flexibility; financial management; sex; children rearing; family-of-origin and personality.

5. How does the PREPARE Program prepare the couples to handle conflict in their marriage in a South African context?
6. How does the PREPARE Program prepare couples to improve their communication skills in a South African context?
7. How does the PREPARE Program assist couples in negotiating spousal roles and domestic responsibilities in a South African context?
8. How does the PREPARE Program deal with negotiating spirituality and religious matters in their marriage in a South African context?

9. How does the PREPARE Program assist couples in negotiating couple closeness and flexibility in their own relationship as well as other significant others such as friends in a South African context?
10. How does the PREPARE Program equip couples to deal with their finances in a South African context?
11. How does the PREPARE Program assist couples to negotiate their sexuality in their marriage in a South African context?
12. How does the PREPARE Program help couples deal with family-of-origin issues? (Such as time spent with in-laws; boundary setting etc.)
13. How does the PREPARE Program assist couples in preparing for childrearing in a South African context?
14. How does the PREPARE Program assist couples to manage personality differences in the marriage in a South African context?

APPROVAL FROM THE CHEVRAH KADISHA TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ON COUPLES AND COUNSELLORS



The University of Pretoria
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Social Work and Criminology
Pretoria
0002
2017-09-27

Re: Permission for Mrs Jacqui Dunn (student number 26088968) to conduct her Masters research study (MSW) at the Chevrah Kadisha

Title of the research: The contribution of the PREPARE program on marriages within the South African context

To whom it may concern

I would like to hereby confirm that Jacqui Dunn, a MSW student at the University of Pretoria, first approached Family Life Centre in Johannesburg to do her research on PREPARE. However, she was not able to get research participants at FAMSA and was then referred to the Chevrah Kadisha as we make use of the PREPARE program and was, at the time of her request, working under the auspices of Family Life Centre who holds the license for presenting the PREPARE program in South Africa.

Our organisation gave her permission to conduct the research and we assisted her in finding research participants. Five couples (10 research participants) were recruited. As this was not a large enough sample, Mrs Dunn requested permission to interview counsellors who were trained in PREPARE. We were able to assist her with recruiting willing counsellors and we agreed that this would add significant value to exploring the contribution of the PREPARE program in a South African context.

Chevrah Kadisha gave Mrs Dunn permission to interview the couples as well as the counsellors trained in presenting the PREPARE program.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any further questions.

Yours sincerely

Tova Goldstein

Tova Goldstein
PREPARE programme coordinator
Chevrah Kadisha
Jewish Community Services

Tova Goldstein | Social Worker | Community Projects Coordinator | Chevrah Kadisha Community Social Services

85 George Avenue, Sandringhamt: +27115329806 | f:+27 86 729 7489