

FAITH DEVELOPMENT, DOGMATISM, GENDER,
AND THE MANAGEMENT OF MARITAL
DIFFERENCES

By

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MANUSCRIPT

FAITH DEVELOPMENT, DOGMATISM, GENDER, AND THE MANAGEMENT OF MARITAL DIFFERENCES

Abstract

Using a convenience sample of 107 married evangelical Christian individuals in a southwestern city, this study examined how individuals' reports of epistemology, as manifested through faith development as well as dogmatism, and gender related to perceived overall marital conflict and selected dimensions of that conflict. Results of the series of hierarchical multiple regression equations showed that faith development was negatively associated with overall marital conflict and two aspects of destructive marital conflict: harsh startup and gridlock. Gender differences were evident among some of the models, both directly (for harsh startup) and as a moderator of the association of faith development and overall marital conflict and two aspects of destructive conflict (harsh startup and gridlock). Specifically, the post hoc analyses showed that men who reported lower faith development were more likely to perceive more overall destructive conflict, especially the components of harsh startup and gridlock in their marital relationships, than men who reported higher faith development.

Introduction

Watzlawick, Bavelas, and Jackson (1967) proposed that perception is reality. According to Bateson (1972, 1979, 1987) and Keeney (1982) perception emerges in the

context of a network of underlying beliefs and assumptions that act as a lens or filter through which personal reality is constructed. This underlying network comprises one's epistemology, or way of viewing the world (Bateson), and serves as the basis for the expectations and rules that govern behavior (Rosenblatt, 1994). Since epistemology generally exerts its influence outside of conscious awareness, individuals tend to be less aware of how perception is constructed and more aware of the perceived reality that results. Consequently, if a spouse is experienced as violating an expectation or rule, the partner is more likely to be cognizant of that perceived reality than the epistemological factors that gave it birth. In practical terms, this means that people often focus on what they cannot control (the spouse) rather than on what they can (the self). This tendency can have profound implications for marriages (Bowen & Kerr, 1988) since one of the best predictors of marital success is a couple's ability to manage their differences (Fincham, Stanley, & Beach, 2007; Gottman, 1999, 2011; Gottman & Notarius, 2000; Gottman & Silver, 1999). Thus, examining how marital partners perceive their management of differences holds important potential for developing prevention and intervention strategies designed to strengthen marriages.

The area that may offer the best reflection of how the management of differences in marriage is perceived is the style of marital conflict. When differences emerge, they become potential sources of disagreement that can be handled either constructively or destructively (Gottman & Ryan, 2005). How spouses choose to manage their disparities is not only based on their proficiency with appropriate skills but also on how those differences are perceived (Gottman, 2011; Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977). If the difference is conceptualized as being located within the partner (e.g., "he's a slob," "she's controlling"), then the logical response is to point that out (often critically) and pressure the partner to change. If, however,

the difference is located as emerging between them (e.g., “we pushed each other’s buttons,” “I invited that reaction”), then spouses are more likely to look at themselves and accept their role own in creating and addressing the difference.

While the perception of differences and their consequent management is considered relevant to couples in general, for evangelical Christians in particular, it may be of special relevance. Generally defined as persons who consider themselves “born again,” attend church regularly, believe that the Bible is the infallible Word of God, that Jesus is the divine son of God, that he physically rose from the dead and will someday return to earth (Dougherty, Johnson, & Polson, 2007; Smith, 1990; Steensland, Park, Regnerus, Robinson, Wilcox, & Woodberry, 2000), these Christians also emphasize the sanctity of traditional marriage (Dobson, 2004). Yet, with divorce rates similar to the general population (Barna Group, 2008), it appears that evangelical Christians find the management of differences as challenging as their non-Christian counterparts. Among evangelicals, the one subgroup that had the highest divorce rates of any Christian group was referred to by Barna (2008) as nondenominational and consisted primarily of those affiliated with the Charismatic and/or Pentecostal traditions, which were the traditions from which the participants of this study were drawn. Since there is some debate, however, over whether Pentecostals should be considered nondenominational (Dougherty et al., 2007; Smith, 1990; Steensland et al., 2000) as they have formed several well-organized networks of churches (e.g. Assemblies of God, Foursquare, Church of God), the broader term, evangelical, will be used in this study to refer to those Christians who fit the previously described profile.

Although the high divorce rates among evangelicals may be due, in part, to the tendency of highly religious people to marry at younger ages than the national average

(Sassler, 2010; Uecker & Stokes, 2008), in the present study the focus is on the possibility that their epistemology, as manifested through their level of faith development and dogmatism, may be a critical factor in understanding how they perceive marital conflict and thus, an influence in their decisions to divorce. Mahoney (2010) proposes that a more in-depth understanding of the connection between religion and marital stability requires a greater focus on individuals' approaches to religion, which may include aspects epistemology such as one's level of faith development or dogmatism.

Generally distinguished by a view of Scripture as literal and authoritative (Borg, 2001), evangelicals tend to measure at lower levels of faith development based on Fowler's (1981) six stage model (see Figure 4 for a summary). In researching how individuals differed in their conceptualization and relationship to that which they conceived as transcendent, Fowler (1981, 1996) distinguished between six basic styles that were generally associated with similar stages of psychosocial, cognitive, and moral development. According to Fowler's (1981) model, evangelicals were generally identified with stage three. At this level an all-encompassing belief system is typically adopted, which comprises the epistemological lens through which they see the world. Authority is placed in the representatives of this belief system who tell them what is truth and what is error, often creating an us versus them mentality (Fowler, 1996). As a consequence, the underlying assumptions comprising this epistemology tend toward dualistic, linear premises that can be held dogmatically. In contrast, level four of Fowler's model (individuated-reflective faith) results from a questioning attitude that leads people to begin thinking for themselves in deciding where they stand personally in relation to the previous belief system they had embraced. This level can be reflected in attitudes that range from skepticism in questioning everything, to arrogance in

believing that they have finally found the truth. At level five (conjunctive faith), persons have developed the ability to transcend the either-or distinctions characteristic of earlier stages by recognizing the both-and, and often paradoxical, nature of truth and reality. They accept mystery in becoming comfortable with unanswered questions and are able to live in the tension between extremes (Fowler, 1981, 1996).

Evangelicals operating with this epistemological lens are expected to report lower levels of faith development and higher dogmatism, which in turn may increase the likelihood that they experience marital differences as negative and thus, perceive the aspects of destructive conflict (criticism, defensiveness, contempt, stonewalling, gridlock) as outweighing the constructive aspects (accepting influence, soft startup, compromise). All of these aspects were identified by Gottman (1999) as critical indicators of how well couples were managing their differences. Further, Gottman (1994, 1998) noticed a gender difference in that men are more likely than women to engage in destructive forms of managing marital differences such as being unwilling to accept influence, stonewalling, and inviting gridlock. Based on these ideas, this study examined the association of faith development, dogmatism, and gender of the marital partner in relation to the overall style of conflict management (constructive v. destructive) and the five selected aspects of which it is comprised—gridlock, startup, accepting influence, compromise, and the four horsemen of the apocalypse, which is the name Gottman (1999) gave to a common marital pattern of interaction consisting of criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling.

Cybernetic Perspectives on Managing Marital Differences

A cybernetic perspective provides a helpful approach to understanding how husbands and wives perceive their style of addressing differences (Jackson & Lederer, 1958).

Concerned with the communication processes that regulate systems, cybernetics emphasizes pattern, organization, structure, and information (Bateson, 1979). Using a cybernetic approach, Bateson (1978) defined epistemology as “the basic premises, assumptions, and presuppositions underlying action and cognition” (p. 364) and, along with Keeney (1982) distinguished between two types—linear and nonlinear. A linear epistemology views systems primarily in terms of a deterministic and reductionistic understanding of cause and effect (e.g., “my spouse ruined my evening”), while a nonlinear epistemology focuses on holistic and circular perceptions that see cause and effect as emerging from mutual influence and interaction (e.g., “my spouse and I both contributed to a disappointing evening”). A linear epistemology involves looking inward for conflicts or defects, downward for root-causes, and backward for starting points while a nonlinear epistemology looks upward for context, outward for patterns, and forward for emergence. A linear epistemology lends itself to fault-finding, blaming, and viewing oneself as the victim of the other’s behavior and is reflected in statements such as “it’s your fault, you started it, I would never have done what I did if you hadn’t first done what you did, you’re just selfish.”

When it comes to managing differences, Gottman (1999) uses the term “negative sentiment override” (NSO) to describe the tendency to focus on the partner’s role in creating differences. NSO is characterized by the “subtext,” which is an internal conversation similar to the subtitles of a Woody Allen movie, where what the person says to the self is different and typically more negative than what they say to the other (Hawkins, Carrerre, & Gottman, 2002). When perpetual issues keep resurfacing, the distance and isolation cascade (Gottman, 1999) is descriptive of the emerging pattern where spouses become emotionally flooded, assume that their issues are severe, and conclude that they need to work them out separately

resulting in parallel lives and loneliness. As a characteristic of linear premises, NSO locates problems within the partner and attributes responsibility for the difference to the partner (e.g., “we’re running late because you don’t care about time,” “we don’t have sex because you’re frigid”) and then recasts the entire relationship history in terms of the current negativity (e.g., “I’m not sure I ever loved him,” “she has always been selfish”). As a result, the underlying premises of perception are only reinforced rather than changed (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). Since people tend to be instinctively protective of their taken-for-granted epistemological presuppositions, change at this level can be challenging and typically requires a deep second-order change.

Second-order change is contrasted with first-order change as two ways of addressing marital differences (Fraser & Solvey, 2007). First-order change essentially constitutes variations on the same theme (Watzlawick, et al., 1974). While often comprising actual changes in behavior, the underlying premises and assumptions informing that behavior remain the same. In reference to managing marital differences, it involves all of the various strategies that spouses might use to change each other. Even though their specific interactions are changing, thus providing them with the illusion of change, these behaviors are still informed by the same underlying beliefs and rules (e.g., “my partner needs to change”) and often resulting in the same outcome. The definition of insanity often used by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), *trying the same thing but expecting a different result*, and the French proverb, *the more things change, the more they stay the same*, are descriptive of this level of change. Second-order change, on the other hand, involves a change in the underlying assumptions by which the differences are being conceptualized. Such a shift might include a reframing of those differences (Watzlawick et al., 1974). For example, rather than viewing

differences as a reflection of their spouse's need to change, a new frame might include a recognition of the mutual influence between them, thus lending itself to an increased awareness of how each contributes to the perpetual issue (e.g., "I am part of the problem"). Such a shift in perception may encourage spouses to focus more on the part they can control, which is their own participation in creating their differences rather than their partners' and allow for more acceptance and dialogue.

Within Fowler's (1996) approach to faith development, the transition from one stage to another requires a second-order change. Since each stage involves a different way of knowing, in the sense that it constitutes a new set of assumptions by which reality is constructed, a shift from one to another necessitates a change in the previously held premises. These shifts challenge the ways of knowing associated with the previous stages, which were often embraced dogmatically at the time (Fowler). For those who are unwilling to make these shifts, approaches to managing marital differences simply reflect first-order changes in that the different strategies they attempt are simply variations on the same theme (Fraser & Solvey, 2007). In other words, all of their seemingly diverse approaches to conceptualizing and managing conflict are actually being informed by the same set of underlying assumptions, which tends to lend itself to more of the same results.

Marital Differences

Gottman's (1999) research not only distinguished between resolvable and perpetual problems but indicated that of the two, perpetual problems are by far the most common. Their frequent and persistent presence is due to the fact that they are reflections of differences in personality and basic orientations to life. Familiar examples of perpetual problems include differences in punctuality, sexual desire, money management, neatness, and

organization (Gottman, 1999). Since these differences may never be fully resolved, the goal is managing them, which requires an important set of skills such as the ability to dialogue, accept influence, soften startups, self-soothe and compromise. Other approaches to marital conflict emphasize a similar set of skills, especially learning to speak for self and summarize what is heard, along with a compatible mindset that allows for collaboration rather than competition (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994; Miller, Miller, Nunnally, & Wackman, 1991). A cultivation of this mindset and an effective exercise of these skills are believed to require a nonlinear epistemology that recognizes a multiplicity of perspectives and the interconnectedness of all things.

The management of differences, as conceptualized according to Gottman's (1999) Sound Marital House (SMH) theory (now the Sound Relationship House theory, Gottman, 2011) distinguishes between constructive versus destructive marital conflict (Gottman & Ryan, 2005). The SMH was developed out of longitudinal research that sought to identify the distinctions between those couples who developed stable, satisfying relationships and those who did not (Gottman & Tabares, 2002). From this research, the management of differences, as reflected in the style of conflict, was identified as a critical variable. Constructive conflict was characterized by accepting influence, compromise, and soft startups while destructive conflict was reflected in the four horsemen (criticism, defensiveness, contempt, stonewalling), harsh startups, and gridlock. Destructive conflict contains many of the predictors of divorce and is related to low levels of marital satisfaction (Gottman, 1999), which heightens the risk for marital dissolution.

Faith Development and Dogmatism as Epistemology

Common elements of personal epistemology for evangelicals are faith development (Fowler, 1981) and dogmatism (Altemeyer, 2002). Fowler described faith development as involving predictable shifts in ways that people understand and relate to that which they believe has ultimate concern, while Altemeyer defined dogmatism as “relatively unchangeable, unjustified certainty” (p. 713). In influencing how people see the world and make meaning of their experiences, these elements are considered epistemological. An evangelical mindset is thought to comprise lower levels of faith development and higher levels of dogmatism, which are believed to influence their perception and management of marital differences (Borg, 2007; Fowler, 1986).

Faith development. In suggesting that faith has two basic dimensions, one relational and the other epistemological, Fowler’s model (1981) finds common ground with Bateson’s epistemological ideas. According to Fowler’s (1981, 1986) stages of faith model (see Figure 4), higher levels of faith development contain elements that are descriptive of Bateson’s nonlinear epistemology, such as the ability to embrace paradox, the interconnectedness of all things, the relational nature of reality, and an epistemological humility based on the realization of the partial nature of perception. On these points Fowler’s discussion is strikingly similar to Bateson’s epistemology in its description of a shift from the lineal emphasis on substance to the relational emphasis on pattern (Bateson, 1972, 1979). Fowler’s description of lower levels of faith development tend to reflect a more linear mindset, as characterized by one-way notions of cause and effect, an excessive focus on important others, and an either-or, dualistic logic. When combined with high levels of dogmatism, perceptions influenced by these lower levels of faith development tend to be presented in

right versus wrong terms that do not make much allowance for difference. This assumption lends itself to an either-or, right v. wrong mindset that leaves little room for accepting influence, compromise or dialogue.

Overall, Fowler (1981, 1996) and Bateson (1979, 1987) place a similar emphasis on the critical nature of epistemological change for relational change to occur. While approaching the construct from different perspectives and expressing their insights in different language, they both seem to recognize that for the human race and the environment on which it depends to survive, radical epistemological changes are necessary and these changes should involve a move toward systemic, dialogical thinking that is expected to be of benefit in addressing conflict. This movement is referred to by both Bateson (1972, pp. 146-147) and Keeney (1982, pp. 133, 191) as “wisdom.” Fowler (1996) summarized this by describing this nonlinear epistemology as embracing process, relativity, subjectivity, interdependence, tension, and inclusiveness of all perspectives. If such an epistemological shift does not occur, ongoing gridlock characterized by power-struggles for dominance and control will continue to threaten marital stability.

Dogmatism. While faith development provides a means for distinguishing between basic religious mindsets, dogmatism seems especially relevant for understanding the mindset of nondenominational evangelicals (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). Those higher in dogmatism tend to conceptualize differences in categorical terms, (e.g., right-wrong, good-bad, either-or). If people high in dogmatism think they are right, then logically the difference being encountered must be wrong or if they see themselves as rational, then others who see things differently must be irrational. With such an either-or mindset, there is little room for negotiation of differences. Instead, powers of persuasion are typically employed in an

attempt to get the other to change or if that does not work, more hostile reactions such as discrediting (contempt) the other may be employed.

Representing a “don’t confuse me with the facts” mentality, one study asked college students how their beliefs would be affected if scientifically validated scrolls were discovered that proved that the story of Jesus had just been borrowed from ancient Greek mythology (Francis & Robbins, 2003). Students who indicated on a pretest that they believed Jesus was the divine Son of God and scored high in dogmatism indicated that their beliefs would not be affected by such evidence while others who also believed that Jesus was the divine Son of God yet scored low in dogmatism indicated that such a finding would have a significant impact on their beliefs. These findings add support to Gottman’s (1999) emphasis on dialogue, which involves a willingness to consider another’s perspective even to the point of possibly being influenced by it. Accepting influence, especially around areas of difference, seems to necessitate low levels of dogmatism and an ability to recognize mutuality in relationship issues, both of which are purported to be characteristic of a nonlinear epistemology.

Demographic Considerations

Gender. Based upon research findings, Levenson, Carstensen, and Gottman (1993, 1994) concluded that gender was a key part of understanding the management of marital differences, as epitomized in the statement, “marriages will work to the extent that husbands accept influence from and share power with their wives” (Gottman, 1999, p. 52). Additional findings indicate that men may be more inclined to stonewall (one of the four horsemen) when feeling emotionally flooded and to escalate negativity when they experience their wives as being negative (Gottman). Others suggest that men are more likely to compete than

connect and to interpret wives' attempts to have an influence as control (Gottman & Jacobson, 1998; Gottman & Levenson, 1999; Markman et al., 1999; Wanic & Kulik, 2011). These tendencies create obvious challenges for the management of marital differences.

Gender differences may be apparent in faith development as well. Fowler (1981) notes that a common characteristic of men is to function emotionally at a lower level of faith development than cognitively, and to be attracted to fundamentalist-type religious systems. While these men tend to be confident and authoritative in professional/occupational domains, they are unaware of the limits of their empathic abilities in identifying with the phenomenological experience of others. Fowler (1996) says that as spouses, parents, and bosses they are at best insensitive and at worst, rigid, authoritarian, and emotionally abusive.

Theoretical Model and Hypotheses

Based on the above conceptualization, this study was designed to examine (a) how faith development, dogmatism, and gender were associated with selected aspects of marital conflict (overall destructive conflict, gridlock, harsh startup, four horsemen, compromise, accepting influence) among married evangelicals and (b) whether gender or dogmatism moderated the association between faith development and overall destructive conflict or any of the selected dimensions of marital conflict. A theoretical model was developed and tested which hypothesized a negative association between individuals' reports of faith development, dogmatism, and gender. Specific hypotheses follow: (a) reports of faith development will be inversely related to destructive approaches to conflict (overall destructive conflict, gridlock, harsh startup, four horsemen) and positively related to constructive aspects of conflict (compromise, accepting influence), (b) reports of dogmatism will be positively associated with destructive approaches to conflict (overall destructive conflict, gridlock, startup, four

horsemen) and negatively related to constructive aspects of conflict (compromise, accepting influence) and (c) compared to women, men were expected to report greater destructive conflict and less constructive conflict in their marriages. Because of the possibilities that (a) gender may exacerbate or attenuate the strength of the association between faith development and marital conflict and (b) reports of dogmatism may exacerbate or attenuate the strength of the association between faith development and marital conflict these potential moderators were examined.

Method

Participants and Procedure

This study was conducted after a review by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix D). Participants consisted of a convenience sample, collected specifically for this study, of 107 married individuals, 61 female and 46 male. The most frequent age range was 51-65 with 40% of participants falling into that range. Of the total sample, 42 were married less than 20 years, 31 were married 20-40 years, and 33 were married over 40 years. These participants were recruited from an evangelical population, most of who were affiliated with the Charismatic and Pentecostal religious traditions from an urban area in a southwestern state. Data collection procedures involved meeting with participants at the local churches and religious schools they attended (e.g., Assemblies of God, Independent Charismatic) and explaining the purpose of the study. Questionnaires were handed out, which contained a Participant Agreement Form that described the purpose of the study, procedures, benefits and risks of participation, confidentiality, contacts, and participant rights (see Appendix C). Husbands and wives were

asked to complete the survey separately and return it in the accompanying self-addressed stamped envelope.

Measures

The measures consisted of demographic items and self-report questionnaires (see Figure 5 for a summary). Specific instruments were included to measure how marital differences were being managed as reflected in the nature of conflict, destructive or constructive, being experienced in the marriage. Other questionnaires were incorporated to identify the levels of faith development and dogmatism at which each respondent was operating.

Marital differences. The Sound Marital House Questionnaires (SMHQ) were developed by Gottman (1999) to measure various aspects of the Sound Marital House (SMH) theory (now referred to as the Sound Relationship House, Gottman, 2011). A composite variable of overall marital conflict style, *Couple Destructive versus Constructive Marital Conflict* (CDCMC) consisting of selected subscales from the SMHQ was developed and validated by Ryan and Gottman (2000) in a study of psycho-educational interventions with moderately and severely distressed couples. This variable contains the five selected aspects of marital conflict (accepting influence, compromise, gridlock, four horsemen, startup) with which this study is concerned. On each subscale, participants are asked to respond to each statement on a five point Likert-type scale ranging from A = *strongly agree* to E = *strongly disagree*. Each participant's total score consisted of the sum of the gridlock, four horsemen, and startup scales minus the sum of the accepting influence and compromise scales. After the data were coded, the results were recoded with 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree* so that higher scores would indicate a greater experience of that aspect of conflict. On this

overall marital conflict style composite variable, a higher score means that there is a greater experience of the destructive dimensions of conflict (gridlock, harsh startup, four horsemen) than the constructive (compromise, accepting influence). The Cronbach's alpha using this data was .81.

The accepting influence subscale (20 items) measured the extent to which individuals perceived that each of them are open to the other's perspectives and desires (e.g., "I usually learn a lot from my spouse when we disagree," "I believe in lots of give and take in our discussions"). Using the present data, the Cronbach's alpha was .95. The compromise subscale (20 items) measures the extent to which individuals perceived that their marital interactions are characterized by flexibility, negotiation, accepting influence, and yielding power (e.g., "I think that sharing power in a marriage is very important," "I am able to yield somewhat even when I feel strongly on an issue"). Cronbach's alpha using the present data was .89. The gridlock subscale (20 items) measured the extent to which individuals perceive their marital relationship as characterized by a pattern of "stuckness" around perpetual problems due to the spouses being excessively focused on changing each other rather than dialoguing about their differences (e.g., "My partner wants me to change my basic personality," "My partner rarely makes a real effort to change"). Using the present data, Cronbach's alpha was .97. The four horsemen subscale (33 items) measured the extent to which individuals perceived criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling in their marital relationship (e.g., "I feel attacked or criticized when we talk about our disagreements," "I have to defend myself because the charges against me are so unfair"). Cronbach's alpha for this data was .96. Finally, the startup subscale (20 items) measured the perceptions of individuals regarding how conversations around conflictual issues begin,

ranging from harsh to soft (e.g., “I seem to always get blamed for issues,” “I hate the way my partner raises an objection”). The Cronbach’s alpha using this data was .95. Each separate subscale was computed by simply adding its total score, with higher scores indicating a greater experience of that dimension of conflict.

Faith development. The Faith Styles Scale (FSS; Barnes, Doyle, & Johnson, 1989) was designed to measure faith development based upon Fowler’s (1981) conceptualization of faith development stages. This measure consists of nine pairs of forced choice options. Each of the statements paired together reflect qualities associated with different stages from Fowler’s model, of which the test taker must select one [e.g., “(A) A good way to relate to God is to do what God wants, so that God will help you in return” (stage 2), “(B) It is best to think of God as utterly and freely giving” (stage 5)]. Since each statement is indicative of a specific faith stage, the results allow for a general identification of the stage of faith (2 through 5) in which a person is currently located. Respondents’ choices were recorded based on the level of faith it reflected. Using the example above, if they chose option A, it was recorded as 2 and if they chose option B, it was recorded as 5. Mean scores were established based upon individuals' responses about their levels of faith development. The Cronbach’s alpha using this data was .65.

Dogmatism. The Dogmatism Scale (DOG) was designed to measure the extent to which respondents think dogmatically, especially about the big issues in life such as beliefs about truth and reality (Altemeyer, 2002). The DOG consists of 20 Likert-type items that are answered on a 9-point scale, ranging from -4 (strongly disagree) to +4 (strongly agree) with 0 representing a neutral position (e.g., “anyone who is honestly and truly seeking the truth will end up believing what I believe,” “it is best to be open to all possibilities and reevaluate all

your beliefs”). These items were recoded for data entry as 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree). Items 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 13, 18, and 19 were worded in the undogmatic direction so they were reversed scored when entered. Cronbach’s alpha for this data was .89.

Analytic Approach

Bivariate correlations were used to examine the association of the predictor variables with each aspect of managing marital differences before testing the theoretical model with each of those aspects (i.e., the composite variable of destructive conflict, compromise, accepting influence, startup, four horsemen, and gridlock). Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken’s (2003) approach to examining moderators using hierarchical multiple regression was used followed by post hoc probing (Dawson, 2010, Dawson & Richter, 2006). First, before conducting the analyses, the gender of the participants variable was dummy coded (*men* = 0, *women* = 1) (Cohen et al., 2003). Second, the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations were established. Third, predictor variables except gender were centered by subtracting the mean score from each individual score (Cohen et al., 2003). Fourth, all possible two and three-way interaction terms were created for each of the predictors (gender x faith development, dogmatism x faith development, dogmatism x gender, faith development x dogmatism x gender).

Next, sets of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted involving the following steps. The first set of analyses allowed for a consideration of the collective role of the five dimensions of managing marital differences, which are involved in the overall marital conflict style variable (destructive v. constructive conflict), by examining it as the criterion variable before looking at each of the five aspects separately. For both the overall marital conflict style variable and each of the five dimensions, a series of hierarchical

multiple regression equations were conducted to examine (a) the theoretical model with gender, faith development, and dogmatism in relation to one of the marital conflict variables (Step 1) and (b) whether any of the two-way interaction terms showed significant betas (Step 2). Separate hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted for each of the two-way interaction terms (faith development x gender, dogmatism x gender, and faith development x dogmatism). Each of these terms was added individually in Step 2 of the hierarchical multiple regression equations. These analyses were conducted for both the overall conflict variable and for each of the each five aspects of marital conflict. To examine if the three-way interaction (faith development x dogmatism x gender) was significantly associated with the overall conflict variable or any of the five aspects of marital conflict, a set of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted involving faith development, dogmatism, and gender in Step 1, adding the two-way interactions comprising the three-way interaction in Step 2, and adding the three-way interaction in Step 3 (Cohen et al., 2003). Based on these analyses, the final hierarchical multiple regression models were established for overall conflict and each of the five aspects of marital differences with the primary predictor variables (faith development, dogmatism, and gender) in Step1 and, when an interaction term yielded significant betas in preliminary analyses that interaction term was entered in Step 2. None of the final models included Step 3 because none of the three-way interaction terms were significant in the preliminary models. Post-hoc analyses were conducted on significant two-way interaction terms to establish the pattern of slopes for the predictors and to determine if the slopes were significant (Dawson & Richter, 2006).

Results

Descriptives and Bivariate Correlations

The bivariate correlations, means, and standard deviations before centering are presented in Table 1. As hypothesized, men reported greater harsh startup in the marital relationship than did women. Faith development was negatively associated with dogmatism as well as perceptions of gridlock and the four horsemen in the marital relationship. Dogmatism showed negative non-significant associations with each dimension of marital difference.

Overall Conflict

In Step 1 of the hierarchical multiple regression analyses, the composite variable of overall conflict was regressed on faith development, dogmatism, and gender. None of the predictor variables were significantly associated with overall conflict and Step 1 did not achieve significance ($F = .40, p = .75$), accounting for 1% of the variance in overall conflict (see Table 2). In the preliminary analyses only one of the two-way interaction terms (faith development x gender) achieved significance. Thus, Step 2 included the addition of faith development x gender. Step 2 achieved significance ($F = 2.543, p = .025$) explaining 14.1% of the variance in destructive conflict. In Step 3, faith development was significantly negative associated with overall conflict ($\beta = -.611, p = .000$) and the faith development x gender was also yielded significance ($\beta = .573, p = .001$) in association with destructive conflict. Post hoc probing revealed that men reporting low faith development reported significantly greater overall conflict in their marital relationship (gradient slope, -2.66 ; t -value, -3.72 ; p -value, $.00$) than those reporting high faith development (see Figure 1). There was not a significant difference in overall conflict reported by women reporting low compared with high faith development (gradient slope, $.61$; t -value, $.95$; p -value, $.35$).

Selected Dimensions of Marital Differences

Startup. In Step 1 of the hierarchical multiple regression analyses, startup was regressed on faith development, dogmatism, and gender. In Step 1 both gender ($\beta = -.27, p = .03$) and faith development ($\beta = -.27, p = .010$) achieved significance as did Step 1 ($F = 4.0, p = .01$). Step 2 included the interaction term of faith development x gender, ($\beta = .29, p = .05$) which achieved significance as did Step 2 ($F = 4.08, p = .00$), which explained 10.4% of the overall variance in startup. Post hoc probing revealed that men reporting low faith development reported significantly greater presence of harsh startups in their marital relationships (gradient slope, $-.59$; t -value, -3.00 ; p -value, $.00$) than those reporting high faith development (see Figure 2). There was not a significant difference in startup in their marriage indicated by women reporting low compared with high faith development (gradient slope, $-.09$; t -value, $-.54$; p -value, $.59$).

Gridlock. In Step 1 of the hierarchical multiple regression analyses, gridlock was regressed on faith development, dogmatism, and gender. Step 1 did not achieve significance ($F = .50, p = .70$), but Step 2 did ($F = .2.6, p = .04$), explaining 9.1% of the variance in gridlock. Step 2 yielded a significant interaction term, faith development x gender ($\beta = .43, p = .00$). Post hoc probing revealed that men measuring at lower levels of faith development reported significantly higher experiences of gridlock in their marital relationships (gradient slope, -1.09 ; t -value, -4.34 ; p -value, $.00$) than those reporting high faith development (see Figure 3). There was not a significant difference in gridlock in women's reports of their marriages when comparing low with high faith development (gradient slope, $.27$; t -value, 1.70 ; p -value, $.09$).

Four horsemen. Since none of the interaction terms were significant in the preliminary analyses, the final model involved regressing four horsemen on faith

development, dogmatism, and gender. The final model did not did not achieve significance ($F = 1.2, p = .33$) (see Table 5).

Accepting influence. Since none of the interaction terms were significant in the preliminary analyses, the final model involved regressing accepting influence on faith development, dogmatism, and gender. The final model did not did not achieve significance ($F = 1.23, p = .30$) and none of the predictor variables were significantly associated with accepting influence (see Table 6).

Compromise. Since none of the interaction terms were significant in the preliminary analyses, the final model involved regressing compromise on faith development, dogmatism, and gender. The final model did not did not achieve significance ($F = .136, p = .94$) and none of the predictor variables were significantly associated with compromise (see Table 7).

Discussion

The results of this study provide substantial support for the idea that having a nonlinear (or holistic) epistemology, characterized by higher levels of faith development, may protect men against the tendency to perceive destructive conflict in their own marriages, as indicated by the linear (or cause and effect) epistemology that was reflected in men's reports of destructive approaches to the management of marital differences. The present results show that the relationship of faith development to overall destructive conflict, especially the two dimensions of harsh startup and gridlock, are moderated by gender. This finding indicates that among evangelicals, it is men, not women, who are more likely to report destructive patterns of conflict in their own marriages when their own faith development is lower.

Results of this study support the idea that faith development provides men with interpretative lenses through which they make meaning of their experiences of conflict management in their marital relationships. According to these results, men at lower levels of faith development are more likely to interpret their wives' behavior around areas of difference in negative ways, as defined by one or more of the destructive aspects of conflict, especially gridlock and harsh startup. This tendency may reflect the dualistic, linear epistemology that is characteristic of the lower stages of faith and if so, offers support for Fowler's (1996) finding regarding the common profile of men who functioned cognitively at a higher stage of faith development than they did emotionally. The result was that they struggled to empathize with their partners' experiences and consequently were insensitive, even to the point of being rigid and authoritarian. Such husbands would not be expected to utilize the skills necessary for effectively managing marital differences (e.g., dialogue, compromise, and accepting influence). Rather, such a mindset would presumably lend itself to blaming and pressuring the partner to change, approaches that tend to invite gridlock. An interesting question, however, is why the relationship between faith development and the perception of destructive conflict is only predictive for evangelical men and not for women. What is it about evangelical men that seems to facilitate this relationship? The nature of the outcome variables where significance was found may offer some insight.

Significant reports of harsh startups suggest that men are sensitive their perceptions of how differences are addressed in marital relationships. The most common example of a harsh startup is criticism (Gottman, 1999), which is also the first of the four horsemen and the one generally responsible for setting that whole pattern in motion. Criticism is more likely to be employed by wives than husbands as the wife is usually the first to call attention to issues of

concern (Gottman, 2011). As a result, whenever wives attempt to initiate such a discussion, husbands may frequently have the experience of feeling defensive as though they are being criticized and thus, blamed for the problems in their marriage. This reflects the common demand-withdraw pattern that has been identified as gender specific, with wives tending to occupy the demanding (initiating) position while husbands withdraw (avoid) (Gottman & Levenson, 1999). For evangelical men this experience may be especially troubling as their literal view of the Bible leads them to believe that they are to be the head of the house with wives who live in submission to their authority (Mahoney, 2010). If their epistemology contains such a premise, then it is reasonable to expect that any attempt by the wife to call attention to an area of concern could easily be interpreted as criticism or even disrespect, whether she intends it that way or not, thus creating a negative perception of marital conflict.

The outcome variable of gridlock, with which significance was found, may suggest a similar scenario. Described as a power struggle in which both spouses are resisting the influence of the other (Gottman, 1999), gridlock could be interpreted by evangelical men as a failure of their wives to submit. If so, the underlying premises comprising their epistemology would once again be playing an influential role.

In addition, implied in both the harsh startup and gridlock variables is the unwillingness to accept influence, which is a critical skill for managing differences. Gottman (1999) states that criticism (harsh startup) invites defensiveness, the second of the four horsemen, and that its antidote is being willing to accept some responsibility for the issue being raised. Since the critical skill for managing gridlock is dialogue, and since dialogue requires a willingness to be influenced by the other, being able to accept some responsibility

for what is being called to one's attention would appear to be an important step toward effectively managing differences (Gottman, 2011).

If lower levels of faith development are characterized by linear premises that tend to view cause and effect in either-or, simplistic terms, and if evangelical men are prone to functioning at even lower levels emotionally than cognitively (Fowler, 1981), their epistemology may prevent them from engaging in the skills needed to effectively manage their marital differences. Instead, this epistemology may yield a construction of the reality of marital conflict as primarily destructive. This negative perception appears to be influenced not only by underlying cognitive premises but also by primitive emotional reactions that make it difficult for evangelical men to enter the phenomenological world of others and empathize with their experience (Fowler, 1996). If so, this would suggest a need for second-order change in which some of those underlying premises can be exposed and examined. Since those premises tend to be held dogmatically, this level of change may be easier said than done.

While the hypothesis related to gender as a moderator of the association between faith development and destructive conflict was supported, the hypothesis related to dogmatism as a moderator of this association was not. This finding was somewhat surprising as dogmatism and faith development were highly correlated negatively as expected. Since lower levels of faith development are characterized by identifying with a belief system and placing authority in the leaders who represent it, the resultant view of the world is expected to be held dogmatically. Though this expectation was supported by the significant negative correlation in this sample between faith development and dogmatism, it did not translate into a moderating affect.

This study has several limitations. First, the participants in the study were based on a convenience sample rather than a random sample, which limits generalization to other groups. Second, all of the measures in the study are based on self-report, which introduces an additional element of subjectivity as it has to assume that the respondents are both self-aware and not given to a social-desirability bias. In addition, the use of the same participants for both the predictor and criterion variables introduces the possibility of shared method variance which may result in inflated findings. Third, the measures of faith development and dogmatism are only an approximation of the variable under consideration, which is the linearity of personal epistemology. Future research might address these issues by incorporating measures that are more appropriately designed to measure personal epistemology and using a random sample from the population under consideration. Fourth, since the outcome measures related to marital conflict asked about the marital relationship rather than about personal behavior in conflict management, the results must be interpreted accordingly.

Implications for practice include the importance of challenging couples to become more aware of their underlying epistemological assumptions, especially those regarding the meaning of marital differences. Through the use of reframing, a counseling technique designed to change the meaning of a situation by placing it in a different frame, differences could be viewed as opportunities for growth and thus, the skills necessary for that growth to occur (e.g. dialogue, accepting influence, compromise, soft startups, emotional regulation) could be emphasized. Also, counselors in training might benefit from understanding how the beliefs of this religious population influence their perception and management of marital differences.

Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from this study is the importance of epistemological change, which Keeney (1982) says is the deepest level of change that humans can experience. Echoing Bateson (1987) and Fowler (1996), these research findings suggest that the mindset of some evangelical men may need to change if their marriages are going to survive or at least be satisfying. Such a mindset change essentially constitutes an epistemological shift, which is an example of a deep second or possibly third-order change. This level of change, while profoundly transformative, is not easily experienced. Often it requires a precipitating event, such as a crisis, that first upsets the status quo so that a change of this magnitude can occur. However it happens, the hope is that an epistemological change conducive to managing differences will occur at all levels of society so that growth and peace might come.

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Table 1
Summary of Measures

Variable	Measure	Source	Format	Response Choices	Number of Items	Reliabilities
Faith Development	Faith Styles Scale	Barnes, Doyle, & Johnson (1989)	pairs of forced choices	vary by question	8	.53 Cronbach's alpha; .62 Spearman-Rho test-retest reliability
Dogmatism	Dogmatism (DOG)	Altemeyer & Hunsberger (1992)	9 point Likert-type	4=strongly agree; 4=strongly disagree	20	.90 inter-item reliability
Marital Satisfaction	Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale	Schumm, Paff-Bergen, Hatch, Obiorah, Copeland, Meens, & Bugaighis	7 point Likert-type	1=extremely dissatisfied; 7=extremely satisfied	3	Alpha .93
Gridlock	Gridlock Scale	Gottman (1999)	5 point Likert-type	A=strongly agree; E=strongly disagree	20	.91 to .96 Cronbach's alphas
Four Horsemen	Four Horsemen Scale	Gottman (1999)	5 point Likert-type	A=strongly agree; E=strongly disagree	33	.90 to .91 Cronbach alphas
Startup	Harsh Startup vs. Soft Startup	Gottman, (1999)	5 point Likert-type	A=strongly agree; E=strongly disagree	20	.91 to .93 Cronbach alphas
Accepting Influence	Accepting Influence Scale	Gottman (1999)	5 point Likert-type	A=strongly agree; E=strongly disagree	20	.37 to .39 Cronbach alphas
Compromise	Compromise Scale	Gottman, (1999)	5 point Likert-type	A=strongly agree; E=strongly disagree	20	.90 to .91 Cronbach alphas

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations^a (N = 107)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender ^b	-							
2. Faith development	-.059	-						
3. Dogmatism	.193*	.167*	-					
4. Gridlock	.016	.177*	.030	-				
5. Four horsemen	-.053	.205*	.036	.912**	-			
6. Startup	.189*	-.147	.031	.673**	.672**	-		
7. Accepting influence	-.134	-.094	.016	.349**	.334**	.376**	-	
8. Compromise	-.031	-.030	.040	.199*	.173*	.284**	.752**	-
Mean	.57	3.39	5.41	2.14	2.29	1.78	1.90	2.01
SD	.50	.35	1.65	.83	.74	.48	.47	.36
Range	1	2	8	3	3	2	4	3

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$ ^aBefore centering.^b(0 = male, 1 = female)

Table 3

Marital Conflict Model (Destructive Conflict): Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Gender, Faith Development, Dogmatism, and Destructive Conflict (N = 107)

Variables	Step 1			Step 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Gender ^a	.07	.30	.02	.05	.29	0.02
Faith development	-.46	.45	-.11	-2.5	.69	-.57***
Dogmatism	-.04	.10	-.05	-.26	.17	-.28
FD x gender				2.9	.90	.51**
<i>R</i> ²	.01			.10		
Adj <i>R</i> ²	-.02			.07		
<i>F</i> for change in <i>R</i> ²	.40			3.0*		
<i>F</i> for step						

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$,
*** $< .001$

^a(0 = male; 1 = female)

Table 4

Marital Conflict Model (Startup): Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Gender, Faith Development, Dogmatism, and Startup (N = 107)

Variables	Step 1			Step 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Gender ^a	-.21	.09	-.22*	.21	.09	-.22*
Faith development	-.37	1.4	-.26**	-.70	.20	-.50***
Dogmatism	-.04	.03	-.15	-.05	.03	-.20
FD x gender				.52	.26	.31*
R^2		.08			.10	
<i>Adj R</i> ²		.08			.10	
<i>F</i> for change in R^2		4.01**			4.07***	
<i>F</i> value for step		4.0**			4.1***	

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

^a(0 = male; 1 = female)

Table 5

Marital Conflict Model (Gridlock): Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Faith Development, Dogmatism, Gender, and Gridlock (N = 107)

Variables	Step 1			Step 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Gender ^a	.01	.17	.00	.01	.17	.00
Faith development	-.30	.25	-.12	-1.1	.36	-.45***
Dogmatism	-.03	.05	.07	-.04	.05	-.08
FD x gender				1.4	.50	.43***
R^2		.01			.09	
Adj R^2		-.01			.06	
<i>F</i> for change in R^2		.50			8.6***	
<i>F</i> value for step		.50			2.6*	

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

^a(0 = male; 1 = female)

Table 6

*Marital Conflict Mode (Four Horsemen):
Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression for
Faith Development, Dogmatism, Gender, and
Four Horsemen (N = 107)*

Step 1			
Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Gender ^a	-.11	.15	-.07
Faith development (FD)	-.38	.22	-.18
Dogmatism	-.05	.05	-.10
R^2		0.03	
<i>Adj R</i> ²		0.01	
<i>F</i> for change in R^2		1.2	
<i>F</i> value for step		1.2	

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

^a(0 = male; 1 = female)

Table 7

Marital Conflict Model (Accepting Influence):
 Summary of Multiple Regression for Faith
 Development, Dogmatism, Gender, and
 Accepting Influence ($N = 107$)

	Step 1		
Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Gender ^a	-.14	.09	-.15
Faith development	-.17	.14	-.13
Dogmatism	-.02	.03	-.08
R^2	.04		
Adj R^2	.01		
<i>F</i> for change in R^2	1.23		
<i>F</i> value for step	1.23		

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

^a(0 = male; 1 = female)

Table 8

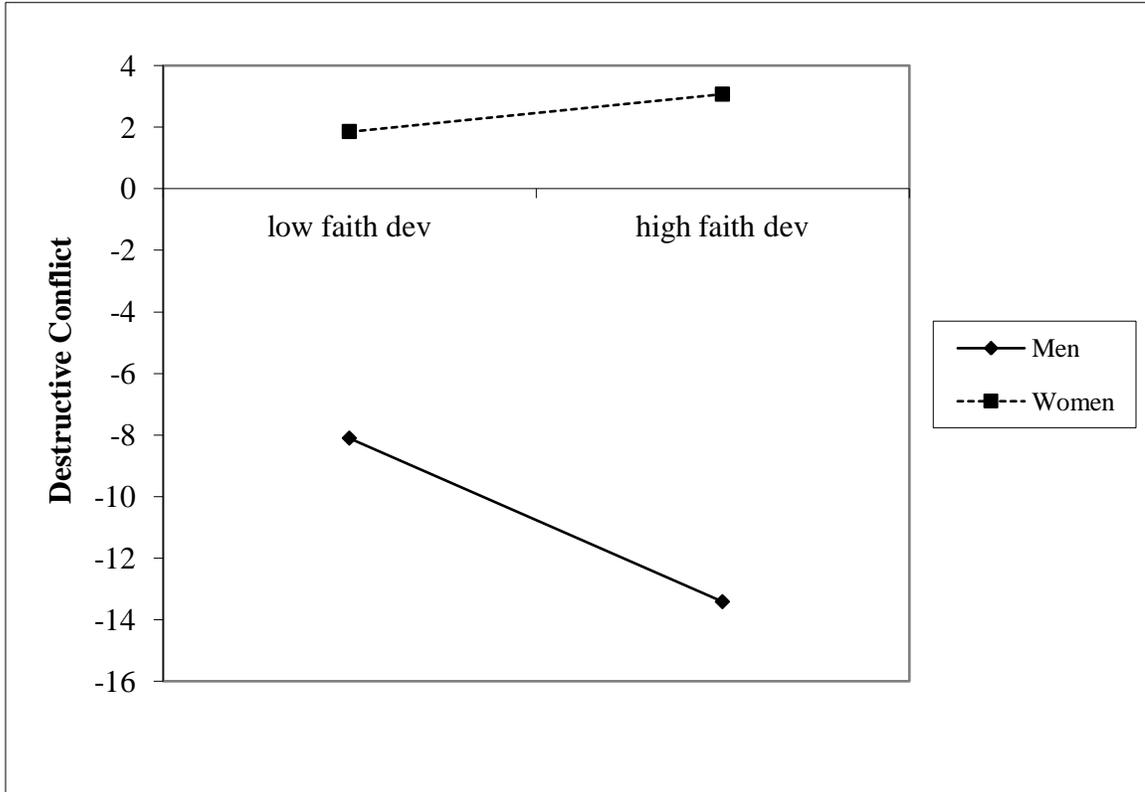
Marital Conflict Model (Compromise): Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Gender, Faith Development, Dogmatism and Compromise (N = 107)

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Gender ^a	-.03	.07	-.04
Faith development	-.03	.11	-.03
Dogmatism	-.01	.02	-.06
R^2		.00	
<i>Adj R</i> ²		-.03	
<i>F</i> for model		.14	
<i>F</i> for step		.14	

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

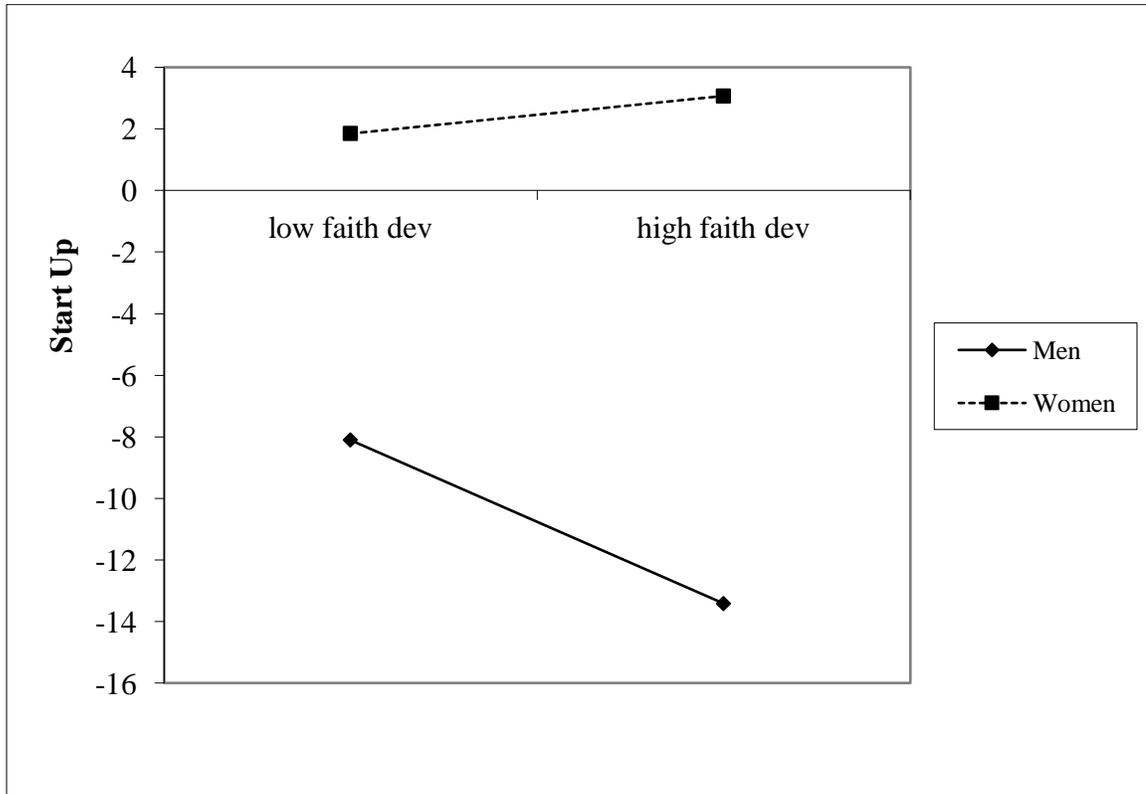
^a(0 = male; 1 = female)

Figure 1: Slopes: Faith Development x Gender, and Destructive Conflict



Gradient of slope for Men	-2.657
t-value of slope for Men	-3.724
p-value of slope for Men	0.000
Gradient of slope for Women	0.607
t-value of slope for Women	0.948
p-value of slope for Women	0.345

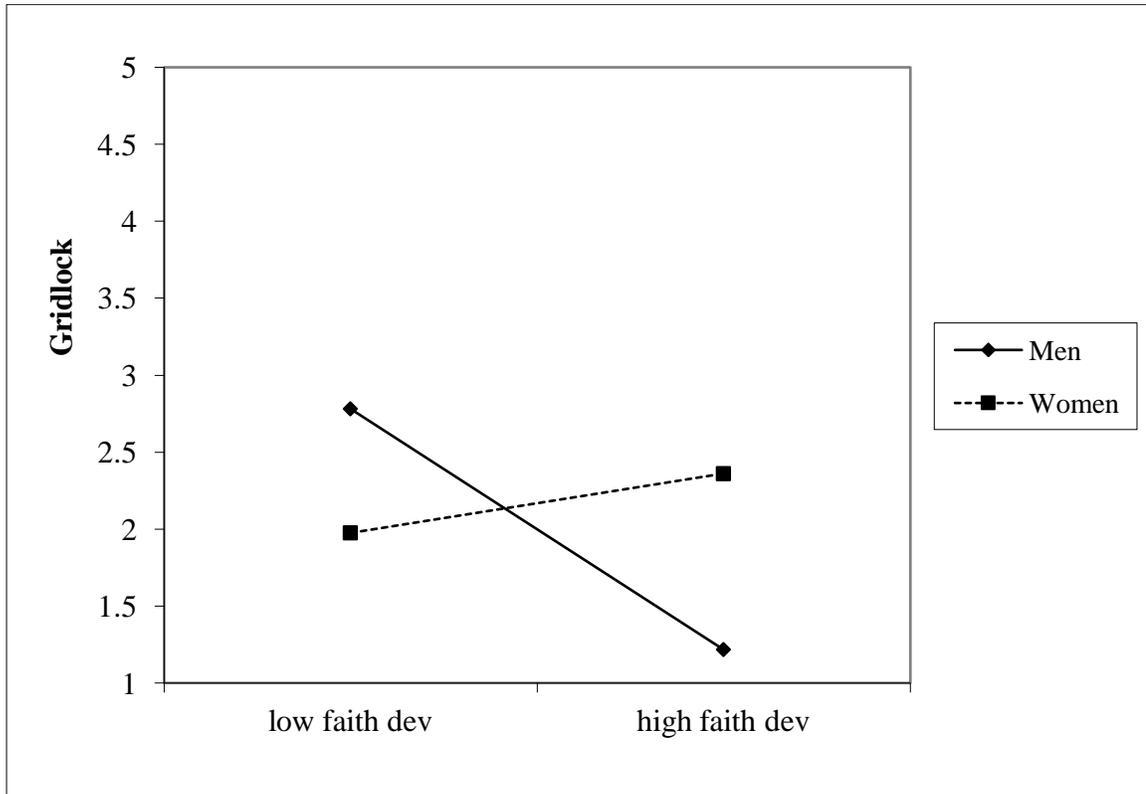
Figure 2: Slopes: Faith Development x Gender, and Startup



Gradient of slope for Men	-0.592
t-value of slope for Men	-2.991
p-value of slope for Men	0.004

Gradient of slope for Women	-0.090
t-value of slope for Women	-0.537
p-value of slope for Women	0.592

Figure 3: Slopes: Faith Development x Gender and Gridlock

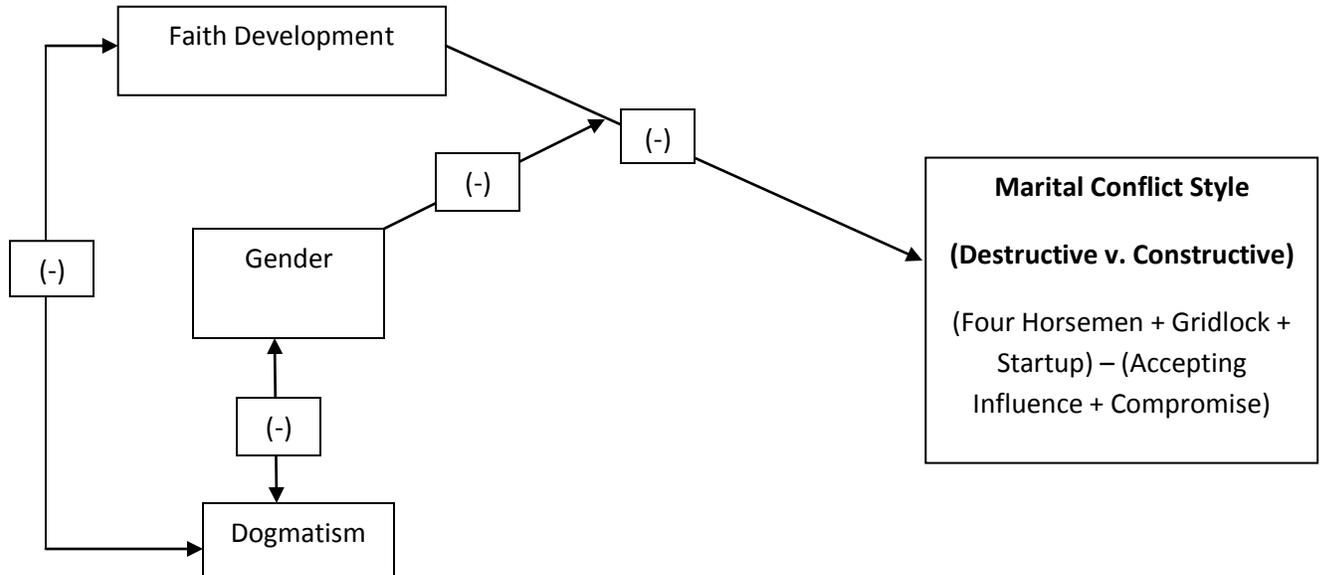


Gradient of slope for Men	-1.086
t-value of slope for Men	-4.344
p-value of slope for Men	0.000
Gradient of slope for Women	0.267
t-value of slope for Women	1.693
p-value of slope for Women	0.094

Figure 4: *Fowler's Stages of Faith*

Stage of Faith	Description
Primal or Undifferentiated Faith	Period in which the infant seeks to bonds with his/her caretakers as they seek to work out a relationship mutuality through which trust can be formed and a sense of love shared. Through both somatic (bodily) and interactive (shared rituals) means, children begin to be involved in the meanings and values of significant others whose responsibility it is to welcome and socialize the child.
Intuitive-Projective	Around 18 months of age, with the acquisition of language skills, the child transitions into this stage of faith, which lasts until age 6/7. During this period the child forms lasting images of the spiritual powers that influence his/her experiential world and awakens to the reality of death and mystery, although fantasy and reality are often mixed together. As the child seeks to form a sense of self, he/she often begins by indentifying with the qualities and values of significant adults.
Mythic-Literal	As the child moves into the elementary school years, which is characterized by the cognitive stage of concrete operations, he/she begins to adopt the stories and beliefs that are a part of his/her community. Images of God are generally anthropomorphic and constructed on one's images of parents. These God-concepts are usually based on ideas of moral reciprocity and fairness. Some remain in this stage throughout their lifetime.
Synthetic-Conventional	The adolescent begins to synthesize the values and information it receives from a variety of sources--family, school, work, peers, media, religion--which provide a basis for identity and perspective. The Ultimate Environment is structured in interpersonal terms, with its images of value and power being formed as extensions of qualities experienced in personal relationships. The mutual social perspective taking associated with this stage tends to encourage conformist behavior. An all-encompassing belief system is adopted and authority is placed in those who represent that system. Many remain in this stage throughout life.
Individuative-Reflective	The stage of faith development where young adults begin to take serious responsibility for commitments, lifestyle, beliefs, and attitudes. This often involves dealing with the tensions between such issues as: individuality vs. being defined by the group, subjectivity and the strength of one's feelings vs. objectivity and the importance of critical examination, self-fulfillment vs. self-service, and relatives vs. absolutes. Both the strength and weakness of this stage is found in its capacity for critical reflection, especially in the areas of identity and worldview. This stage often reflects disillusionment with the belief system of the former stage
Conjunctive	The person moves beyond the "either-or" logic of stage four to embrace the paradox of "both-and." In accepting the axiom that truth is multidimensional and interdependent, this type of faith seeks to open itself to other traditions, recognizing that the reality about which they all speak is larger than their mediation of it. Because persons of conjunctive faith are secure in their experience of that reality, they can allow the truth they encounter in these various sources to complement or correct their own. Emphasis is on the relational nature of reality.
Universalizing	People at this stage have a concept of an ultimate environment that is inclusive of all being. Their concern with issues of justice and oppression often cause them to be experienced by others as subversive. As a result, many at this stage become targets of attack, even to the point of martyrdom. Universalizers are typically charismatic individuals who, while seeing the world as their community, value the particulars through which the universals are expressed. In loving life through a detached yet involved approach, they often seem more lucid, more simple, yet more fully human than others

Figure 6: *Theoretical Model of Faith Development, Dogmatism, Gender, and Marital Conflict*



LITERATURE REVIEW

Faith Development, Dogmatism, Gender, and the Management of Marital Differences

Introduction

As suggested by the oft used reason for divorce “irreconcilable differences,” learning to manage difference must be important to marital success (Fincham, Stanley, & Beach, 2007; Papp, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2007; Sassler, 2010; Uecker & Stokes, 2008). Research has offered support for this deduction but indicated that the practical challenge of managing marital differences may be complicated by both the range and persistence of such differences (Gottman, 1999). The range of differences can include everything from superficial issues such as taste in music/food, to core issues such as religious/political beliefs, while the persistence of differences refers to the reality that only some of these issues may actually be resolvable whereas the vast majority may remain perpetual (Gottman). These areas of perpetual differences, whether over superficial or core issues, are especially challenging as they can easily become ongoing sources of irritation and conflict. If not handled well they tend initially to result in gridlock and if they remain unresolved over time, they ultimately increase distance between partners, which is the most common cause of divorce (Gottman). Learning to effectively manage perpetual differences, therefore, is believed to be a critical factor in determining whether or not couples are able to develop satisfying and stable marriages.

This study explores the idea that effectively managing perpetual differences is related to perception, which is related to epistemology. How differences are perceived, and in particular how one’s spouse is perceived, are influenced by the set of underlying assumptions, premises, and presuppositions that comprise one’s way of knowing his/her

world, i.e., their epistemology (Bateson, 1972). This largely unconscious epistemological filter informs how people draw distinctions and thus, how they see the world and create meaning out of their experiences (Keeney, 1982).

For the purposes of this research, two basic types of epistemology will be considered based on Bateson's (1979) and Keeney's (1982) distinctions between lineal and nonlinear. The broad influence of these two epistemologies can be seen in the extent to which spouses draw distinctions dualistically, interpreting difference as a reflection of their separate essential natures, or dialogically, viewing differences as a reflection of their relational interconnectedness. In other words, to what extent do they conceptualize their differences as a reflection of each other's essential nature/personality, e.g., "that's just the way s/he is," versus a reflection of their relationship, e.g., "we invite what we get," "we call forth the best/worst in each other," or "this problem is our joint creation." A lineal/dualistic epistemology suggests that whenever a problem is identified as existing within a person, it would be expected to be present in any and all relationships that this person enters. A dialogical/systemic epistemology, on the other hand, suggests that the problem, as a creation of specific relationship dynamics, would not necessarily exist in other relationships.

These differing epistemologies appear to have a profound effect on how differences are managed. For instance, if a couple's underlying assumptions sway them to see the world in terms of dualistic distinctions, as placing differences in either-or categories, then whenever they encounter a difference it is typically placed in the opposite category of where they place themselves. If persons think they are right, then whatever difference they are encountering must be wrong. Or, if those persons think they

are rational, then the difference must be irrational. Such people tend to see more separateness than interconnectedness between them and others, and as a result will tend to blame the other for the difference or seek to change the other as a way of managing the difference (Christenson & Jacobson, 2000; Gottman, 1999). For those couples, however, whose epistemological filters allow them to create relational distinctions, a dialogical world emerges where differences are seen as the product of relationship dynamics. Because they are better able to embrace “both-and” distinctions and see the interconnectedness between them and the other, they can also conceptualize differences on a continuum, as more or less rather than either-or, and as an indication of preference or belief rather than right or wrong. Any problems that they encounter in managing their differences are more easily recognized as a product of their interactions around the difference rather than an essential aspect of their spouse’s nature. This nonlinear way of seeing enables them to avoid the trap of trying to manage their differences by seeking to change the other and it allows them to better hear and accept influence from each other’s perspective without feeling as if they are losing their own position. Such an epistemology is conducive to dialogue, which is the essential skill that Gottman (1999) has identified for effectively managing perpetual differences.

Faith development theory as described by Fowler (1981) and dogmatism as defined by Altemeyer (2002) provide a means of understanding and measuring these differing ways of seeing the world. Fowler describes faith as an epistemology and distinguishes his six stages of faith development in part on epistemological shifts. Early stages of faith development are characterized by higher levels of dogmatism as reflected in categorical, either-or perspectives (right and wrong, good and bad). These dualistic

lenses correspond to other aspects of social and cognitive development across the life span, but it is not until stage five (Conjunctive Faith) in the theory that Fowler sees people as characterized by the capacity to think dialogically. Fowler recognizes this “both-and” perspective in a person’s ability to embrace paradox, see interconnectedness, and think relationally. Fowler (1981, 1987) found, however, that many people never arrive at this level of faith development, but rather remain arrested at earlier stages.

In emphasizing the distinctions between dialogical and dualistic perspectives, both faith development theory and dogmatism are describing concepts similar to Bateson and Keeney’s discussion of lineal and nonlinear epistemologies. In so doing, they offer an operational way of defining and measuring these distinctions. Operationally, a lineal epistemology is defined as faith development below level five and high dogmatism. A nonlinear epistemology is defined as faith development of level five and above combined with low dogmatism. As such it is believed that these measures can provide a means of exploring the relationship between a person’s perception of difference and how s/he seeks to manage that difference. In the specific area of perpetual issues in marriage, levels of faith development, dogmatism, and especially the interaction between the two, may help to explain why some couples manage their differences well while others conclude that they are irreconcilable.

Statement of the Problem

The problem that this study seeks to address is whether marital conflict can be explained by the underlying epistemological assumptions of married individuals who are nondenominational evangelical Christians. Specifically, this study will focus on how aspects of lineal thinking (i.e., faith development and dogmatism) reported by married

adults who are nondenominational evangelicals relate to perceptions of overall marital conflict and selected aspects of marital conflict. Further, the study is designed to examine whether dogmatism and/or gender moderates the relationship between faith development and marital conflict (overall or selected aspects).

A lineal epistemology, which tends to view differences as the result of substantive, essentialist characteristics internal to persons, is believed to present a notable challenge to managing marital conflict, especially that of a perpetual nature. As long as partners see the world through lineal eyes, their ability to effectively manage difference by employing the skills of dialogue and of accepting influence will be limited. Rather, they will tend to exacerbate their differences by employing unhelpful coping strategies. Examples of such unhelpful strategies include, seeking to change their partner's behavior, and if that does not work, resorting to blaming the partner as the cause of their problems and exonerating oneself as the victim of their spouses' behavior, a tendency known in sociology as the "punctuation fallacy" and reflective of a lineal epistemology (Gottman, 1999; Keeney, 1982). The end result of these unhelpful strategies is often gridlock, where the focus is on changing the partner, resulting in increasing distance in the relationship if the pattern continues over time. This common sequence of events, described by Gottman (1999) as the "distance and isolation cascade," places couples at risk for "stuckness" and inhibits their ability to work through marital conflicts.

Although researchers, theorists, therapists, and other helping professionals may discuss whether the institution of marriage is currently in a state of decline or adaptation, evangelical Christians often express concern over factors that they perceive as indications of decline. With their strong emphasis on the sanctity of marriage, to the point where

some groups believe it rises to the level of a sacrament, conservative religious groups actively call attention to what they believe is a “moral crisis,” not only in America but also around the globe (Barna Group, 2008). The problem involves what they perceive as a growing threat to the institution of marriage coming from four primary sources—the high divorce rate, the increasing cohabitation rate, the trend to have children outside of wedlock, and the increasing pressure to sanction gay marriages. Yet, concern about the decline in marriage is somewhat ironic as evangelical Christians on the one hand emphasize the sanctity of marriage while on the other hand have not dealt effectively with marital conflict themselves and as a result, show risk for divorce. According to Barna’s (2008) research, conservative Christians are more likely to marry, less likely to co-habit, but are equally likely to divorce as compared to the rest of the population. Incidents of domestic violence within conservative Christian homes also seem to be on a par with the general population (Mahoney, 2010; Miles, 1983).

Thus, the problem being addressed in this project appears to have both internal and external aspects. Internally individuals perceive marital conflict through epistemological filters that inform perceptions of differences. Externally individuals respond on the basis of those perceptions in their attempts to manage those differences. To summarize, the problem addressed in this study is a lineal epistemology, as defined by levels of faith development and dogmatism, which when addressing perpetual issues lends itself to actions that are more likely to invite destructive conflict (e.g., gridlock) rather than constructive conflict (e.g., dialogue involving compromise or accepting influence).

Research Questions

To explore this connection between married individuals' epistemology and managing marital differences, this study is designed to examine the relationship between Bateson's cybernetic epistemology, as operationalized in Fowler's stages of faith combined with levels of dogmatism, and extent of destructive marital conflict couples report around their perpetual issues. The following research questions will be examined.

1. Are married individuals' reports of faith development, dogmatism, and gender related to marital conflict (overall selected aspects)?
2. Does either dogmatism or gender moderate the association of married individuals' reports of faith development and marital conflict (overall selected aspects)?

Rationale

The rationale for this study exists on several levels. At the grass roots level, where this study will be focused, it is projected that both marital satisfaction and marital stability will be positively affected if couples can learn to manage their differences well. Whenever differences are not effectively managed, marital satisfaction is negatively affected by the gridlock that tends to result, especially around perpetual issues. Such situations are often characterized by the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" (Gottman & Levensen, 1992), a common yet potentially destructive interactional pattern, consisting of criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling, that generally emerges around gridlock. Marital stability is affected by the growing distance that tends to develop between couples who are experiencing low satisfaction. This process is described by the Distance and Isolation Cascade (Gottman, 1999), a typical pattern that unfolds over time

when couples are unable to manage their differences. This pattern is set in motion by persistent experiences of emotional and physiological flooding whenever the perpetual problem surfaces, which lends itself to a growing perception that this problem must be severe. As a result, couples conclude that due to the severity of the problem it is best to work on it alone, thus leading to the creation of parallel lives and the experience of loneliness. This undesirable state lends itself to increased emotional vulnerability, which may include the consideration of alternatives that could lead to affairs and/or divorce (Gottman, 1999). The hope is that this study will promote increased insight regarding how faith development and dogmatism relate to perceptions of the effective managing of marital conflict in conservative Christian marriages. In turn, these insights could potentially become useful to helping professionals in their work of assisting conservative Christian couples to develop satisfying marital relationships.

At another level, is the issue of faith development and how that process may need to be conceptualized more broadly by evangelical Christians to include a range of stages. Rather than becoming developmentally arrested at lower levels of faith development, continued progress involving multiple experiences of second-order change could be normalized. In fact, marriage relationships could be conceptualized as providing a path toward spiritual development, which would allow for a more positive perspective on marital differences. One final level of rationale acknowledges how this challenge of managing differences exists at every level of society. Perhaps the greatest relational challenge facing the world today at all levels, from relationships between nations and religions to relationships between families and friends, is the ability to manage differences. Can people at these varying levels learn how to preserve and prioritize

relationships despite differences, especially when some of those differences are substantial and perpetual? Can they develop the necessary skills of dialogue that would enable them to listen and accept influence rather than demand and impose?

One area where this challenge seems especially pronounced is in the current war on terrorism. To a great extent this conflict appears fueled by fundamentalist thinkers on both sides, who tend to see the world in primarily dualistic terms, e.g., black-white, right-wrong, good-bad, truth-error. Such categorical thinking makes the challenge of managing differences formidable if not impossible. Whenever categorical (lineal) thinkers encounter difference, they automatically place it in the “other” category. If dualistic thinkers believe they are right, the difference must be wrong, or if they are good, the difference must be bad, or if their way of seeing the world is truth, the difference must be an error. The result is often a dogmatic perspective that not only is not open to new ideas but also is prone to feeling threatened by those ideas and thus, attacking them and those who purport them. It would appear that any insight, even those possibly gained from a minor study like this, could potentially be of some benefit to this difficult challenge of managing differences that seems to exist at every level of society.

Theoretical Perspectives

Both family therapists and scholars in faith development have advocated for a significant shift in epistemology that recognized the systemic (or dialectical), complex, interconnected nature of phenomenon (Bateson, 1972; Bowen & Kerr, 1988; Fowler, 1981, 1996; Keeney, 1982). Bateson (1972) warned that there may only be a limited amount of time for humans to learn to think systemically before they destroy their environment and thus, themselves. Bateson emphasized that “the most important task

today is, perhaps, to learn to think in this new way” (p. 468). Capra (1996) echoed Bateson’s (1972) concern as did the biologist, Varela (1991), in suggesting that the way to overcome the Cartesian anxiety created by such dualistic ideas as the belief in a separate, independently existing self, is to learn to think systemically. Fowler (1996) agreed and wondered if the current postmodern trend might be an attempt to move beyond Cartesian dualism and Enlightenment arrogance to an experience of interconnectedness and epistemological humility.

Fowler’s (1996) theory of faith development suggests that the current transition that is happening at the cultural level actually parallels what people experience at the individual level as they move through the various stages of faith. Just as culture historically moved through identifiable periods, (e.g., Pre-Enlightenment (pre-modern), Enlightenment (modern), and Post-Enlightenment (postmodern)), so also individuals in the course of the life spans can be distinguished by similar worldviews and transitions as they move through the stages of faith. The implication of these parallels, according to Fowler, is that the epistemological shift that many have advocated may actually be part of a normal developmental process, which his stages of faith describe. As with any developmental course, however, there is no guarantee that everyone will complete the process. Developmental arrests and regressions can occur to which faith development may be especially prone. Even in a postmodern culture people will be at various developmental stages, which means that their ways of knowing will actually be more reflective of earlier cultural periods. For many, their faith development process will never reach fully mature levels, thus leaving them somewhat out of sync with larger cultural advances. In describing this process, Fowler (1981, 1996) offered an explanation for how

the epistemological shift that Bateson and others have outlined could occur. As such, Fowler's model may be a way of measuring whether or not experiencing such an epistemological shift, as indicated by the transitions between stages of faith, actually makes a difference in terms of enabling people to function more effectively in their world of relationships. Such a possibility is the interest of this project.

Bateson's Epistemology

In referring to cybernetics as the biggest bite out of the apple from the tree of knowledge that mankind has taken in 2000 years and in suggesting that man has a limited time to learn to think in this new way before he destroys himself, Bateson (1972) was adamantly advocating for epistemological change. His emphasis probably had its biggest impact on the field of family therapy, which for a few years seemed to take up his cause. A literature review revealed that academic journals and books from the late 70s and early 80s regularly addressed this concern but subsequent years have not appeared to maintain the same emphasis. Nichols (2010) noted that the field seemed to shift its focus in the 90s from an emphasis on systems theory to that of meaning-making, as reflected in contemporary approaches to family therapy such as Narrative Therapy. While White & Epston (1990) credit Bateson as an influence, especially in relation to understanding the mapping process by which realities are constructed, they do not seem to carry forth Bateson's passion for cybernetic epistemology. Others, however, such as Nichols and Schwartz (2007), have wondered if the future of family therapy might include a renewal of interest in the cybernetic metaphor. Whether such a renewal occurs or not may have something to do with whether Bateson's cybernetic epistemology is accurately understood.

Bateson's (1972, 1987) concept of cybernetic epistemology goes beyond the typical description of control processes created by communication feedback loops, which seems to stereotype the perception of many regarding the science of cybernetics, to emphasize what its primary epistemological distinction—a shift from substance to pattern. This shift involves the distinction between substance, matter, energy, and essentialism on one side, with pattern, form, information, and organization on the other side. In other words, it is the distinction between a lineal versus a nonlinear epistemology. Rather than explaining a phenomenon by referring to its essential nature, an error that a lineal epistemologist might make and what Bateson (1979) would refer to as the inappropriate use of “dormitive principles,” a nonlinear epistemologist would seek to explain the same phenomena by referring to the relational dynamics out of which the phenomena emerged, a concept known as nonsummativity (Becvar & Becvar, 1999). For instance, a lineal epistemologist might explain a perpetual issue in marriage as simply a reflection of one spouse's personality, e.g., “he is just disorganized,” or “she has OCD.” A nonlinear epistemologist, on the other hand, might call attention to the manner in which each spouse influences the other, out of which the perpetual issue emerges, e.g., “when he is disorganized, she feels that things are out of control and when she attempts to influence him to become more organized, he feels unaccepted, as though she is out to change him, and so he becomes more obstinate to prove that he cannot be controlled.” In explaining the perpetual issue relationally, in terms of patterns that emerge, blame is not placed on individuals, as though it is due to some personality defect in one of them that gives rise to the problem, but rather responsibility is placed on both spouses for the part each plays in creating and maintaining the pattern together. This “double description,” to

use Keeney's (1982, p. 37) phrase, invites people to think holistically about their interactions with others, recognizing that one person cannot control the whole. The larger pattern, which encompasses them both, is best addressed when each participant is able to focus on him or herself and find an effective way of fitting into, or coupling with, that which is bigger than they are. This larger, encompassing pattern reflects a dynamic that Bateson (1972) recognized as a "mind" due to the mental properties that it exhibited. This equating of mind with cybernetic systems may be one of the most profound aspects of Bateson's cybernetic epistemology.

The idea that a cybernetic system constitutes a mind has profound implications. It recognizes that the mental processes of thinking, acting, learning, remembering, and deciding are relational issues and thus, not contained within any one individual alone but are immanent in the entire interacting system. Using the analogies of a blind person with a walking stick and a man cutting down a tree with an axe, Bateson (1972) suggested that the mental properties of thinking, acting, deciding, learning, and even memory were imminent in the entire interacting system, not just within the brain of the individual. As a result, there is no such thing as an independent self contained solely within the physical body that acts upon other bounded selves in a manner similar to the way billiard balls control each other through the force of their contact. Rather, the self is a subjectively delimited component of a larger network of informational pathways, both conscious and unconscious, that together comprise a mind. Since the mental properties involved in any given interaction exist in the larger, interacting informational network, no part (self) of a system can have unilateral control over the whole. Once this mind (cybernetic system) as an emergent property comes into existence, it tends to exert more of an influence over

those who created it than they can continue to exert over it (Bowen & Kerr, 1988). Thus, how the individual components, that comprise any given cybernetic system, relate to this larger mind becomes an important concern. This concept has special relevance to perpetual issues in marriage, especially in understanding the gridlock that often surrounds them.

A cybernetic explanation of perpetual problems. From a cybernetic perspective, the manner in which perpetual problems are managed is a reflection of the underlying epistemology of those involved, which is reflected in the premises or rules of the system. While premises are basic assumptions about how the world works, rules are spoken or unspoken prescriptions that guide actions and are backed by sanctions, e.g., disapproval, criticism, rage, deprivation of affection, or labels (Fraser & Solovey, 2007). Premises and rules are reflections of the deeper relational assumptions, symmetrical or complementary, that impact the communication feedback loops and, in turn, control the perception, behavior, and physiological reactions of those involved in any given interaction. As spouses act and react to each other, they create a cybernetic system consisting of a variety of communication feedback loops through which control and influence are exerted. This network of informational pathways constitutes a larger, emergent system that actually exhibits mental properties, which Bateson (1972) recognized and identified as a mind.

Couples interacting around a perpetual issue create a cybernetic system. Since this system exhibits mental properties, it could justifiably be labeled a “marriage mind.” This emergent mind encompasses the spouses who created it and must be respected and related to accordingly. Unfortunately, when the epistemology of the spouses involved is

dualistic and lineal, they typically do not recognize the existence of this larger mind and instead tend to perceive their differences in substantive terms, e.g., he's just a slob" or "she's controlling." Such a perception avoids double description by locating the problem within the essential nature or personality of the spouse and implies that if they would just change who they are, everything would be fine. As a result of this lineal diagnosis, spouses end up in the frustrating position of blaming and trying to change each other. The competition that ensues invites gridlock and is more conducive to demands and power struggles than to soft start-ups and accepting influence. Consequently, repetitive patterns begin to emerge around perpetual issues that leave spouses with consistent experiences of *here we go again*. Learning how to relate to this larger system (mind), of which each spouse is only a part, is critical to the health of marital functioning but may actually require a change in underlying epistemology.

Symmetrical and complementary premises and dogmatism. According to Bateson (1972), when it comes to relating to larger systems (minds), complementary premises are to be preferred. To relate symmetrically is to act dogmatically, in pride and ignorance based on the false premise of control. Any control that a member of a system is able to exert on the larger system will only be temporary and will ultimately result in consequences that could have dire implications, such as when people seek to control their environment in ways that could damage that environment and in so doing endanger themselves since they are dependent on that environment. These differing premises are so deeply imbedded, however, that Bateson (1972) places them at the level of epistemology and suggests that any change in them constitutes an epistemological shift that has a profound effect on a person's experience of his or her world.

Symmetrical premises are reflected in interactions characterized by similarity, thus leading to competitiveness. For example, the more one spouse engages in an action, such as giving a gift, the more the other will engage in a similar action in an attempt to match or even outdo the actions of the partner. This pattern leads to a competitive type of relationship for which the phrase, “keeping up with the Jones,” is descriptive. The motivation for symmetrical premises, according to Bateson (1972), is an inherent pride. This pride is not based in past achievements but rather in a stubborn insistence of “I can” and a willingness to assert oneself to the point of taking unnecessary risks in order to prove that point.

Complementary premises, on the other hand, are reflected in dissimilar interactions that seek to fit with the actions of the other. For example, the more one spouse engages in a particular action such as dominance, the more the other will engage in a complementary response such as submission in an attempt to balance or fit with the partner. While this can allow for a more harmonious relationship, it also can be prone to extremes and abuse, such as when one spouse seeks to dominate to the point of using violence, to which the other spouse submits and even engages in self blame for “causing” the violence.

A third pattern, which Bateson (1958) called “reciprocal” and Jackson (1958) called “parallel,” consists of alternating expressions in a relationship of both symmetrical and complementary premises. Whenever something new in a relationship needs to be negotiated or something old needs to be changed, the partners may engage in a symmetrical pattern of interaction to facilitate the change and subsequently settle back

into a complementary fit. This reciprocal or parallel pattern is conceptualized as characterizing healthy, harmonious relationships (Nichols & Schwartz, 2007).

Since both of these patterns, symmetry and complementarity, are prone to extremes, there exists the possibility of what Bateson's (1972) described as "schismogenesis." In other words, if these patterns progress to extremes, they eventually break down in some type of crisis, as exemplified by the alcoholic whose symmetrical battle with the bottle eventually ends in the classic "hitting bottom" experience. So, while neither category of premises is necessarily exhaustive in terms of being the sole guide to interactions, yet when it comes to relating to the larger systems of which one is only a part, complementary premises are to be preferred (Bateson, 1972; Keeney, 1982). This preference for complementary relating is based on the systemic principle that one component of system cannot and should not control the whole. In fact, Keeney and Sprenkle (1987) state that complementary premises are just another way of describing the part-whole relationship. Symmetrical relating to that which is bigger than oneself only invites severe consequences as the larger system eventually reminds the part that a higher power exists. The pride that fuels symmetrical relating tends to resist this principle. Thus, many who struggle with hubris find themselves needing to be repeatedly reminded of this reality. Even when it seems that a part of a system is successful in exercising control over the larger mind, that success is only temporary and not without eventual consequences. Dogmatism, as the tendency to express oneself in unjustifiable certainties that are often imposed on others, is a reflection of symmetrical premises. Yet, to change from symmetrical to complementary relating is no easy task.

Due to the fundamental nature of symmetrical and complementary premises, any shift from one to the other is so profound, that Bateson (1972) refers to it as epistemological in nature. Keeney (1982) concurs and suggests that epistemological change, since it involves an entire reorientation of life, is the deepest form of change that human beings are capable of experiencing. As a result, it is rarely volunteered for but rather facilitated through the windows of opportunity created by the crises that are produced when a person realizes that symmetrical interactions with the larger system(s) are futile. The larger system ultimately wins. From a cybernetic perspective, this reality has to do with what has already been described as the mental properties of systems.

Summary

Bateson (1972) was the first to equate a cybernetic system with mental properties or a mind (Keeney, 1982). These minds are constituted by the various communication feedback loops that comprise any given cybernetic system. There are as many minds as there are cybernetic systems and there are as many cybernetic systems as there are ways of drawing distinctions (Keeney). How the individual relates to these larger systems (minds) is determined by the person's underlying epistemological premises and is reflected in the personal experiences that result. Those operating from underlying symmetrical premises tend to engage the larger systems competitively, with the typical results of unhealthy relationship patterns (four horsemen of the apocalypse, gridlock, distance) and eventually hitting bottom experiences, as the larger mind that encompasses them reminds them that it cannot be controlled, at least not without serious consequences. For those operating from underlying complementary premises, the ability to dialogue, accept influence, and couple effectively with the larger system(s) is more probable. Thus,

in relating to the larger mind(s) of which one is a part, complementary premises are to be preferred (Bateson, 1972). This is due to the hierarchical nature of systems (minds).

The *marital mind* that emerges in any given interaction between spouses is part of other, larger minds (cybernetic systems), with the largest Mind of all being equivalent to what some might call God (Bateson, 1972). Since each mind is embedded in an increasingly larger mind, in a potentially infinite hierarchical ordering, and since any mind, once it emerges, exerts more control over its “subminds” that they do over it, complementary interactions are preferred. If effective coupling is to occur at any level, individuals must be capable of dialoguing with difference and accepting influence, for which complementary premises are more conducive.

The idea that the mental properties involved in any action are not located in the individual alone but in the larger mind of which the individual is only a part, is revolutionary. It suggests an entirely different way of conceptualizing and relating to self, others, and the universe. But, since it constitutes such a different way of thinking and viewing the world, entering this new paradigm typically involves an experience of change at a deep, often unconscious, level and may explain why it is not experienced more frequently.

Review of Key Concepts

To provide a foundation for the research hypotheses of this study, the next sections provide a review of scholarship on the concepts of marital differences, faith development, and dogmatism. After a brief review of marital conflict, Gottman’s work on marital differences, especially those of a perpetual nature as described in the Sound Marital House Theory (SMH), is emphasized. In the section on faith development,

Fowler's theory is described at some length with special emphasis on how the fifth stage of Conjunctive Faith parallels Bateson's cybernetic epistemology. Regarding dogmatism, the concept is defined and explored in terms of its role in relationships. Finally, the interaction between faith development and dogmatism is discussed in relation to its expected influence on the managing of differences in marriage.

Marital Conflict

In looking at the broad subject of marital conflict, the literature contains a host of studies that consider this issue from multiple perspectives. Some studies consider the impact of marital conflict on the well-being of the spouses and find a problematic effect, in the sense that direct links could be identified between marital conflict and various psychological and physical problems (Cordova, Jacobson, Gottman, Rushe, & Cox, 1993; Heene et al., 2007; Lemmons et al., 2007; Papp et al., 2007). Choi et al. (2008) found that marital conflict is associated with depression and functional impairment and for midlife and older adults it is a significant risk factor for both psychological and physical health. Whiffen, Foot, and Thompson (2007) focused on the self-silencing tendency of wives who attempt to avoid conflict by suppressing their true thoughts and feelings and found both men and women tended to suppress their anger, increasing their risk for depression. Leggett (2007) found a significant positive relationship between spousal cooperation and marital happiness, but in a negative direction between spousal conflict and marital happiness.

Many studies look at the impact of parental conflict on child and adolescent development and find, as expected, that it is detrimental (Goeke-Morey, Cummings, & Papp, 2007; Keller, Cummings, Davies, & Lubke 2007; Shelton & Harold, 2008). Van

Doorn, Branje, and Meeus (2007) looked at the process of transmission and found that the manner in which parents resolve their conflict with each other is related to how adolescents resolve conflict with their parents. Shelton and Harold (2007) found that venting of negative emotions by children mediated the long-term effects of marital conflict in children. Schudlich, Du Rocher, and Cummings (2007) identified a link between parental dysphoria (chronic low grade depression) and child adjustment, which was mediated by marital conflict and parenting. The emotional security of children in the context of parental conflict was also a factor in mediating the relationship between parental dysphoria and child adjustment. Ramos (2007) explored the link between daily marital conflict and levels of negative mood and behavior in children and found a significant relationship between the two for both boys and girls. When factoring in global anxiety levels, Ramos found that boys with overall higher anxiety exhibited more negative behaviors on days when their parents had conflict. Yu (2007) studied the effects of parental conflict and divorce on young adult relationships with fathers, mothers, and romantic partners and found that while divorce is associated with less closeness and support between fathers and adult children as well as higher insecurity in children's romantic relationships, it helped ameliorate some of the negative effects of children's adjustment by removing them from chronic exposure to dysfunctional marital conflict.

Taken together, these studies indicate that chronic marital conflict is of great concern and should be taken seriously by all the relevant helping professionals.

Whisman, Beach, and Snyder (2008) conducted a study in which they demonstrated that marital discord can be given a taxonomic status that can be assessed reliably. This indicates that discordant couples differ qualitatively from nondiscordant couples. Rather

than marital conflict being reflected in a quantitative difference, this study indicates that a qualitatively different environment is created, the negative effects of which have already been noted.

Gottman (1999) noticed that the amount of contempt in a marriage was a good predictor of the number of infectious illnesses that the recipient would contract and that the resting heart-rates of husbands in conflictual marriages were an average of 17 beats per minute (bpm) higher than their non-conflictual counterparts. Gottman's Sound Marital House (SMH) approach appears to be one of the few marital therapies that includes the physiological component and in so doing recognizes the mutual relations between interactive behavior, perception and physical functioning.

The Sound Marital House Theory

The SMH was developed out of research conducted to identify the basic differences between couples who make it in marriage as compared to those who do not. The results of this research revealed one especially important distinction. Couples who ultimately made it by creating stable, satisfying marriages had the ability to repair their relationships when things fell apart, while those whose marriages eventually dissolved were ineffective, in spite of their efforts, to repair their problems (Hawkins, Carrere, and Gottman, 2002). This basic distinction led Gottman to explore the potential variables behind successful repair attempts in an effort to identify the primary components of effective repair. This research led to the identification of a key variable—the quality of the marital friendship. Couples who were good friends were more effective at repairing their relationship than those couples who were not. From this insight Gottman went on to

define what a good marital friendship looks like, which became the foundation for his theory of marriage as expressed in the framework of the SMH.

The SMH consists of seven levels that describe Gottman, Driver, and Tabares' (2002) concept of a sound marital relationship. The first three levels describe a healthy marital friendship. The first level is labeled Cognitive Room or Love Maps and is concerned with the experience of knowing and being known. Couples who are good friends feel like "I know my partner and my partner knows me." It is as if they carried a mental map of their partner's world in their head, to which they allot significant cognitive room and on which they intentionally work, through shared conversation and shared activity, to keep up-to-date and detailed. The Fondness and Admiration System constitutes the second level of the SMH. This is concerned with the extent to which couples give each other the experience of being desired and appreciated in their relationship. Couples who are good friends tend to pay attention to what they value in their partner and find creative ways to call attention to it, thus giving their partner a sense of being valued as opposed to feeling taken for granted. The final level of the marital friendship is defined as Turning Toward versus Turning Away or The Emotional Bank Account. This level calls attention to what appears to be a mundane dynamic between couples, but actually turns out to be a significant contributor to the quality of connection that exists in the relationship. This dynamic has been termed "bids." A bid consists of anything that one partner does that invites an acknowledgement from the other. While they can be overt or covert, verbal or nonverbal, many are quite subtle. They often consist of seemingly insignificant incidents, such as a husband laughing out loud while reading the paper (bid) to which his wife responds, "what's so funny" (acknowledgement) or a

wife pinching her husband while walking by (bid) to which he responds by tickling her (acknowledgement). These incidents of bidding and acknowledging create moments of connection in which a couple turns toward each other momentarily and makes a little deposit in the emotional bank account of their relationship. Bids can occur scores of times throughout a typical day and couples how are good friends will respond to them around ninety percent of the time.

The fourth level of the SMH, Positive Sentiment Override (PSO), is determined by the quality of the marital friendship, as described in the first three levels. When the foundational levels are vibrant, the corresponding sense of feeling tuned-in to each other, along with being known and appreciated, create an overriding sense of positivity in the relationship, as opposed to Negative Sentiment Override (NSO), which tends to emerge when the friendship is in disrepair. The type of sentiment exhibited at this level is likely to influence the perception each partner tends to have of the other, especially when any negativity is expressed (Hawkins et al, 2002). For those with PSO, negativity from their partner is perceived as temporary and due primarily to external factors. For instance, if a husband is irritable, the wife with PSO will probably perceive it as due to a hard day at work and she will be less likely to take it personally, but may reassure herself that he will feel better after he gets some sleep. When NSO is present, however, the same negativity will tend to be perceived as a more permanent condition of the spouse that is due to internal factors, e.g., “he’s just selfish, everything is more important to him than I am.”

The fifth level of the SMH, which continues to build upon the previous four, is concerned with how couples manage their resolvable conflicts. For those with strong friendships, constructive conflict tends to be characterized by soft start-ups, accepting

influence, compromising, and soothing, which subsequently leads to productive outcomes. Of course, the opposite is true of couples where the previous levels are unhealthy. Those with poor friendships, resulting in NSO, tend to handle conflict in a destructive manner that is characterized by harsh start-ups, refusal to accept influence, stubbornness, along with escalating physiologies and complete shutdowns (stonewalling).

The sixth level of the SMH consists of two important aspects of marriage—managing perpetual problems and honoring each other’s dreams. Gottman’s (1999) research indicates that approximately two-thirds (69%) of the differences that couples encounter in their marriages end up falling into the perpetual, rather than resolvable, category. This means that a different mindset (e.g., acceptance) and new skills (e.g., dialogue) may need to be developed if these perpetual issues are to be managed effectively. If not, gridlock, a power struggle in which each partner demands that the other change to accommodate him/her, will be the unfortunate yet common result. Honoring each person’s dreams is the other aspect of this level and is concerned with the importance of both spouses knowing and supporting their partners’ goals. Sometimes this support involves actively sharing the dream while at other times support may simply involve understanding and encouragement, but it is always about showing interest.

The seventh and final level of the SMH is concerned with the challenge of creating shared meaning in the marriage. This existential component includes everything from daily rituals and routines of family life (e.g., morning, evening, and mealtime rituals), to annual celebrations (e.g., birthdays, anniversaries, holidays), to once in a lifetime events and rites of passage (e.g., death, divorce, graduations, weddings, births). Since every marriage, regardless of the similarities of the spouses’ histories, is a cross-

cultural experience, the partners must face the task of creating a new culture in which their children will be socialized and their relationship imbued with meaning. Successfully completing this challenge requires the strength of the previous six levels, especially the first three of the marital friendship, thus bringing the process full-circle and tempting Gottman (2001) to rename his SMH as the “Sound Marital Bagel.” With this theoretical framework in mind, a more informed discussion of perpetual problems and the gridlock that often surrounds them is possible.

Perpetual problems. Through longitudinal studies, Gottman (1999a) observed that couples often discussed the same concerns in current interviews that they had previously discussed years before. Gottman (1999b) commented that in replaying tapes of couples’ previous conversations he would find them strikingly similar to what they were presently expressing, almost to the point where one tape would be an accurate reflection of the entire series of interviews and observations. Upon closer examination he realized that certain types of conflict appeared to be perpetual. These perpetual issues were often related to differences in the spouses’ core personalities or basic needs, such as differences in neatness, punctuality, sexual desire, or money management. Gottman’s (1999) efforts to understand how couples handle their perpetual differences uncovered some important distinctions between what he termed “the masters and disasters of marriage” (p. 161).

Essentially, Gottman (1999) discovered that the “masters of marriage,” those couples with happy, stable marriages, had learned to establish a dialogue around their perpetual problems. Similar to learning how to manage a chronic physical condition, e.g., arthritis or irritable bowel syndrome, these couples accepted the chronic nature of their differences and learned to dialogue about them, even exhibiting positive affect in the

process, such as joking about their idiosyncrasies and dissimilarities. On the other hand, couples who ended up in gridlock over their perpetual issues tended to not accept influence from each other or exhibit much positive affect, which usually resulted in heated conflict or increased emotional disengagement. In fact, there were two patterns of gridlock that emerged.

The first pattern of gridlock involved the repeated presence of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse and was predictive of early divorcing, within the first seven years of marriage (Gottman, 2001). The Four Horsemen consist of a common relationship pattern in marriages that is set in motion by the first horseman, criticism. Criticism is a form of harsh start-up and is usually initiated by wives. This is not to suggest that wives are to be blamed for this pattern, as the origins can be traced back much further in the couple's interactions. A typical scenario might involve the wife noticing something in the marriage that troubles her, e.g., seeing her husband's clothes left on the floor where he took them off. Initially she chooses not to say anything hoping that he will remember how irritating that is to her and self-correct. When this does not occur and she once again notices that he leaves his clothes on the floor, a tipping point is reached and she confronts him with her concern. Since her concern has built up over time, her confrontation tends to reflect her frustration and gets expressed harshly in the form of a criticism. Criticism often makes use of "you" statements, thus suggesting that the problem is located within the personality of the spouse. Gottman (1999b) states that any complaint about a person's behavior can be easily turned into a criticism by simply adding the phrase, "what's wrong with you."

Since criticism is typically experienced as blaming or an attack, it tends to invite defensiveness, which is the second Horseman. Defensiveness sends the message that the person being accused does not take responsibility for the actions of which the spouse was critical and has not understood or appreciated the concern being voiced. It may be expressed in the form of excuse-making, e.g., “I was too busy to pick up my clothes,” or denial, e.g., “I do too pick up my clothes,” or simply blaming back, e.g., “you’re not so neat yourself.”

Since the husband’s defensiveness is generally perceived by the wife as an indication that he has not understood her concerns and is not taking any responsibility for his behavior, she may up the ante by letting her concerns be known a little more forcefully. This escalation may lead to the appearance of the third Horseman, contempt. Contempt is the most toxic of the four Horsemen and the most predictive of divorce (Gottman, 1999). It involves any type of interaction that serves to put down the other, as if one is placing oneself in a superior position to one’s partner. Name-calling and correcting are common examples. Ekman and Friesen (1978) found a universal facial expression of contempt that involved a facial muscle called the buccinator being pulled to the side creating a dimple in the cheek, accompanied by an eye roll and upward glance, as if looking heavenward for help and vindication.

As this dance of the Horseman unfolds, the physiology of the partners escalates, often reaching diffuse physiological arousal (DPA). At this point, usually when the heart rate reaches around 100 bpm, the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system activates by secreting adrenalin and creating the flight or fight reaction. To regulate this level of arousal, one of the spouses, typically the husband, engages in the fourth

Horseman, stonewalling. In stonewalling the husband essentially withdraws and becomes non-responsive. This reaction is generally an extreme attempt to self-soothe and thus, manage his escalating physiological arousal. The effect it has on the wife, however, is quite different. She now realizes that any possibility of engaging her husband in a discussion of her concern is quickly fading so, in frustration, her physiology escalates even further as she makes whatever final attempts she can to connect and be understood. Whenever this pattern of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse is not recognized and managed, it can literally become a “sign of the end” for a marriage.

A second pattern of gridlock involves emotional disengagement and affectlessness, which predicts later divorcing (approximately sixteen years into the marriage) (Gottman, 2001). By this point in their relationship the spouses have begun to live parallel lives as a result of feeling flooded by their problems, which they now perceive as severe. With the emotional distance increasing between them and minimal affective expression of any kind, positive or negative, occurring, loneliness sets in creating vulnerabilities that often involve a consideration of alternatives. This gradual distancing between spouses is generally credited as the most common cause of divorce (Gottman, 1999).

Managing gridlock. Avoiding gridlock over perpetual issues involves the couple’s ability to establish a dialogue around their differences (Gottman, 1999). The key to this dialogue is the emotional affect with which it occurs (Gottman, 2001). In emotionally intelligent marriages, two key skills conducive to dialogue are practiced, the use of softened start-ups by wives and the accepting of influence by husbands. When husbands are emotionally responsive to their wives, it makes it easier for the wives to

engage in softer start-ups and when wives engage in softer start-ups, it makes it easier for husbands to be emotionally responsive. In describing these two skills further, it is important to recognize how they reflect a systemic perspective in that they are good examples of the cybernetic concept of recursion or circular causality, which recognizes that in interactions, partners tend to invite what they get.

Soft start-ups are distinguished from harsh start-ups in that they seek to call attention to what is desired as opposed to what is undesired. Rather than harshly stating “your clothes are on the floor again after I’ve told you how important it is to me that you pick them up, you’re such a slob” a soft start-up might sound something like “I know that picking up your clothes isn’t important to you but when you do pick them up I feel like I’m important to you and that’s how I want to feel.” Softened start-ups become increasingly important when considered in light of Gottman’s (1999b) research, which states that couples can only reverse a conversation that begins with a bad start about 4% of the time. In other words, 96% of the time how a conversation starts up determines where it goes. This seems especially true of perpetual issues which, due to their persistent, annoying nature, have created sensitive areas that are often reflected in emotional reactivity whenever those issues are broached.

The second skill that is conducive to dialogue involves emotional responsiveness on the part of the husband to the wife (Gottman, Rabin, Levenson, Carstensen, Jacobson, & Rushe, 1994). One of Gottman’s hypotheses, developed out of collaboration with Jacobson (1998) on understanding domestic violence, was that marriages will work to the extent that husbands accept influence from and share power with their wives. A striking observation in studying battering husbands was that they showed no evidence of ever

accepting influence. Whenever their wives sought to express an opinion or desire, it was batted back to them as a baseball player would consistently hit back baseballs in a batting cage. These men could tolerate no difference and if any emerged, it became a power struggle to the point of using violence to enforce their will. In a less violent manner, this same dynamic seemed characteristic of many marriages. Possibly as a result of their different socialization experiences, where men are socialized to compete and get ahead while women are socialized to connect and get along (Tagney, 1999), husbands seemed to interpret their wives' attempts to gain influence as a competition. If husbands acknowledged their wives' opinions or responded favorably to their desires, it was as if they thought their wives had won and they had lost. Since that was not how they were socialized to relate, they instinctively resisted her attempts at influence and would often label them and her as controlling. As a result, wives struggled with the experience of not having a voice in the relationship and thus, feeling insignificant and powerless. In those model relationships, however, characterized by the masters of marriage, husbands accepted influence by being responsive to their wives' concerns and, in so doing, gave their wives the experience of being heard and important. While these masters of marriage still had their perpetual differences, they managed them more effectively by establishing a dialogue around them, characterized by positive affect, which was created and maintained through softened start-ups and accepting influence.

This process of establishing dialogue around perpetual issues reflects the cybernetic concepts of circular causality and recursion. These systemic concepts call attention to the presence of mutual influence in relationships (Becvar & Becvar, 1999). The interconnectedness of system components reveals itself in social interactions where

the communication process requires that the participants constantly play off of each other. How actions are intended are often different from how they are interpreted. But how actions are interpreted is important in determining one's response, which in turn influences the other's reaction and so on. This recursive feedback loop, created as the affects of one's actions come back to their starting point, illustrates how constant adjustments are required to maintain stability in a system, a phenomenon described by such systemic concepts as morphostasis (behaviors designed to maintain stability) and morphogenesis (behaviors designed to facilitate change) (Bateson, 1979; Becvar, 1999). When a spouse is either unaware or unwilling to be influenced by this process, gridlock develops and an escalating symmetrical competition ensues. For that type of rigid system to remain stable, one partner has to be consistently giving in to the other, thus creating an extreme version of the complementary dominant-submissive pattern.

However, when either of these patterns, symmetrical or complementary, becomes extreme, it eventually leads to the ultimate breakdown of the system or "schismogenesis" (Bateson, 1972). Thus, the relationships that might appear to be satisfying and stable on the surface may be dissatisfying and eroding underneath. This highlights Gottman's (1999) emphasis on the critical nature of the SMH foundation, which is comprised of the marital friendship and mutually created by partners willing to be influenced by each other. A willingness to be influenced, however, is a reflection of one's epistemology, which may require a transition from the dogmatic dualism of lineal thinking to the dialogical openness of a non-lineal filter. Such is the concern of Fowler's (1981) faith development theory.

Fowler's Faith Development Theory

While the developing human has been conceptualized from a variety of perspectives (e.g., physical, cognitive, social, sexual), the primary work related to spiritual development is faith development theory. Although not essentially spiritual in nature, faith is usually seen as reflecting the spiritual dimension of persons. As such it offers insights into how individuals construct images of the ultimate and organize their lives accordingly. Of the various faith development theories expounded, Fowler's (1981) is generally considered the classic. In the following sections, Fowler's seven-stage theory is described.

Definition of faith. As Fowler (1981) began exploring faith development, the first step was to operationally define the construct and to distinguish between faith, religion, and belief. Fowler defined belief as the holding of certain ideas or doctrines that usually reflect one's cumulative religious tradition (religion), while faith was defined as reflecting a person's trusting, committed relationship to the transcendent about which those beliefs are fashioned. Fowler identified two basic dimensions of faith, one relational in nature and the second, a way of knowing.

The relational nature of faith. In describing the relational nature of faith, Fowler (1986) insists that there is always an "other" in faith, which begins in relationships with significant others and involves the aspects of trust, attachment, loyalty, and commitment. These relational ties, however, are mediated, formed, and deepened by common faith in shared centers of value and power (scvp). This reveals the triangular nature of faith, which Fowler says illustrates its basic covenantal pattern.

Persons are typically involved in many faith-relational triads. Each relationship constructs its meaning as its interactions are interpreted in light of its scvp. Examples of an scvp include (a) the principles of justice and equality, as outlined in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution, that govern relationships among American citizens, (b) the commitment to academic freedom and intellectual honesty that govern relationships in university contexts, and (c) the covenant of fidelity that governs the marriage relationship. These, as well as numerous others of different levels and significance, guide and inform the relationships that are conducted under their influence.

Fowler (1981) adds to this relational nature of faith a larger context, known as the ultimate environment. This grows out of the most transcendent centers of value and power and comes to constitute one's most comprehensive frame of meaning or worldview (Fernhout, 1986). These "largest theaters of action" influence how persons organize the scenery of their lives and understand the plots of their lives' plays (Fowler, 1981). In the process of development, these plots change and become linked with other plots. Through these, Fowler stated, the complexity and contextual nature of faith development is revealed. Throughout multilevel and reciprocal interactions, conducted under various scvp's and within an overarching ultimate environment, persons construct meaning as they interpret their interactions in light of their understanding of and relationship with the transcendent.

The epistemological nature of faith. The second basic dimension of faith is the epistemological capacity (Fowler, 1981). Thus, faith is a way of knowing. This assertion calls attention to how faith enables persons to see their lives in relation to their concept of an ultimate environment. In relating actions to this larger frame of meaning, persons

construct images of “self in context” that exert an ordering influence on their lives. In referring to “faith as imagination” Fowler (1981, p. 25) suggests faith has a way of grasping the ultimate conditions of existence and unifies them into a comprehensive image by which persons shape their actions. Taken in this sense, faith is a verb or a dynamic process emerging out of the multiple and diverse experiences and interactions, which make up the contents of life.

In using the word *image* to describe faith’s way of knowing, Fowler (1981) referred to the deeper and/or higher knowing of which faith is capable. Defining images as “a vague, felt inner representation of some state of affairs and of our feelings about it” (Fowler, p. 26) means they contain knowledge that is both prior to and deeper than concepts. Thus, a person registers the impact of experiences to a much greater extent than the conscious mind can monitor. This deeper knowing is known as “imaginal knowing” (p. 25) whereby even when persons are paying conscious attention to events, they cannot recognize what is being attended to until it is linked to previously formed images.

Faith operates at this imaginal level in ways that unify concepts and feelings, interpreting them in light of an ultimate environment and holding them together until they are formed and expressed. Through this process persons are eventually able to narrate in some form, whether symbolic or propositional, what their images know. Thus, the distinctions between faith, beliefs, and religion become clearer. Faith is an imaginal way of knowing which, when expressed, takes the form of beliefs, which are often shaped into the rituals and symbols that religion uses to celebrate faith’s images of the ultimate environment and a person’s relationship to it.

With these two dimensions of faith in mind—relational and epistemological—Fowler (1981) offers this formal definition:

People's evolved and evolving ways of experiencing self, others and world (as they construct them) as related to and affected by the ultimate conditions of Existence (as they construct them) and of shaping their lives' purposes and meanings, trusts and loyalties in light of the character of being, value and power determining the ultimate conditions of existence (as grasped in their operative images—conscious and unconscious—of them) (pp. 92-99).

This definition provides a comprehensive expression of what Fowler is attempting to measure. Thus, Fowler (1996) presented faith as providing an integral, centering process that underlies the formation of beliefs, values, and meanings that holds potential to: (a) provide coherence and direction to people's lives; (b) link them in shared trusts and loyalties with others; (c) anchor their personal and communal stances in a sense of relatedness to an ultimate environment, and; (d) enable them to respond to the limitations of existence by relying on that which they consider ultimate.

More specifically, Fowler described seven stages of faith development that are distinguished in part by the contents and the structures of faith. The stages of faith development were constructed to reflect changes in the structures of faith but not necessarily the contents. In other words, Fowler's stages focus on how persons believe as opposed to what they believe.

Contents of faith. The contents of faith, which shape a person's perceptions, interpretations, priorities, and passions, consist of centers of value, images of power, and master stories (Fowler, 1981). The centers of value constitute those causes, concerns, or

persons to which, consciously or unconsciously, are attributed greatest worth. These are usually reflected in a person's loyalties and commitments. Images of power consist of what a person looks to for sustenance during times of challenge, expecting them to provide him/her with safety, security, and significance. These powers come in different forms, varying from persons to institutions. Master stories are the myths and narratives that reveal a person's concepts of power-in-action. These reflect ultimate meanings and are used to interpret and respond to life's events.

Structures of faith. The structures of faith comprise a particular person's unique way of constituting self, others, and the world through operations of faith knowing, judging, valuing, and committing. Fowler (1981) presented these in seven categories that interact to reveal the structural aspects of faith and thus, a person's current stage of faith development. These structures draw heavily on other theories of development, primarily Piaget's, Selman's, and Kohlberg's. They include a person's form of logic (Piaget), level of social perspective taking (Selman), stage of moral reasoning (Kohlberg), bound of social awareness, locus of authority, form of world coherence, and symbolic function. Each faith stage is thought to reflect a particular level of development in these areas and a certain pattern of interaction between them. For instance, the first stage of Intuitive-Projective faith is characterized by preoperational thinking (Piaget), egocentrism (Selman), and preconventional moral reasoning focused on punishment and reward (Kohlberg). The fifth stage of Conventional Faith, however, is characterized by formal operations (dialectical thought), mutual perspective taking including groups other than one's own, and postconventional moral reason based on the principles of higher law.

From this perspective the maxim “grace presupposes nature” is considered valid since authentic faith growth and maturity presupposes authentic psychological growth and maturity (Forsyth, 1997). As Kohlberg (1984) suggested, faith/religious development presupposes moral development (reasoning behind moral decisions), which presupposes cognitive development (form of logic), which presupposes psychosocial development (resolving relationship tasks with significant others), especially social perspective taking (ability to assume another’s perspective). The reciprocal influence of “grace perfects nature” is also considered valid, although that becomes more of an issue for theology to address.

While changes in the structures of faith do not necessarily produce a change in the contents of faith, they involve a reworking of those contents, which often leads to new understandings and applications. Fowler (1981) reserves the term conversion to describe changes in the contents of faith. This involves a significant re-centering of one’s images of value and power as well as an adoption of a new set of master stories by which to govern and interpret experience. Although conversion can lead to a transition in faith stages, it does not guarantee it and, in fact, in some instances appears to actually prevent it.

Stages of faith. The following brief descriptions of Fowler’s (1981, 1986, 1987, 1996) faith stages are integrated from four of his writings. Special attention has been given to the initial comprehensive formulation of the stages of faith (Fowler, 1981) and to Fowler’s (1996) most recent reflections. The fifteen years separating these two works were marked by significant cultural change, especially in the transition from modern to postmodern consciousness. This transition involved a shift in understanding reality as an

independently-existing objective essence (modern) to the realization that it may be more of a participatory, constructed experience. Fowler seeks to address these changes and their implications for his theory in his latest work.

In terms of their relation to each other, Fowler (1996) claims that his faith stages are sequential, invariant, and hierarchical though not necessarily universal. More developed structural stages are considered to be more adequate and comprehensive than less developed ones and thus, capable of “knowing” in ways that are “more true” (Fowler, 1981). Development should not be rushed, however, as each stage has its time of ascendancy with unique strengths and graces that need to be fully realized and integrated before moving on. While Fowler (1981) believes that faith is a universal, generic feature of all human beings, he is not ready to claim universality for his theory, although he contends that the formal descriptions of his stages are generalizable and can be tested cross-culturally.

Primal/undifferentiated faith. The pre-stage of faith development is primal/undifferentiated faith encompassing the period of infancy. During this time infants are attempting to bond with their caretakers as they seek to work out a relationship mutuality through which trust can be formed and a sense of love shared. As this prelinguistic disposition of trust forms, it will help to offset the anxiety and mistrust that inevitably comes with separation and differentiation.

Through both somatic (bodily) and interactive (shared rituals) means, children begin to be involved in the meanings and values of significant others whose responsibility it is to welcome and socialize the child. These somatic and interactive means include such activities as body contact, play, vocal and visual interplay, ritualized

interactions, feeding and tending, adequate mirroring, and development of interpersonal affect attunement. Fowler (1996) emphasizes how “experiences of mutuality, of consistent and undistorted mirroring and of the informal rituals that convey meaning and dependability do much to confirm children’s sense of being ‘at home’ in their life spaces” (p. 58). Inadequate mirroring results in an empty or incoherent sense of self and inconsistent care results in a sense of mistrust.

Intuitive-projective faith. Following the pre-stage of Primal-Undifferentiated Faith, the first stage begins at around eighteen months, with the acquisition of language skills, children transition into the intuitive-projective stage of faith, which continues until age six or seven. During this period children form lasting images of the spiritual powers that influence their experiential world and awaken to the reality of death and mystery. As children seek to form a sense of self, they often begin by identifying with the qualities and values of significant adults.

Although children at this stage lack simple perspective-taking skills and do not understand cause and effect relations well, the acquisition of language skills enables them to develop a style of meaning-making based on an emotional and perceptual ordering of experience. Their imagination responds well to stories, symbols, and dreams but their lack of consistent logical operations leads to a construction or reconstruction of events in episodic fashion. Fantasy and make-believe are not distinguished from reality. This stage begins at the time of first self-consciousness when children begin to stand on their own two feet, become aware of being seen and evaluated by others, and recognize the existence of standards, which reveal how things are supposed to be. This self-consciousness makes the child sensitive to the polarities of pride and shame.

Earliest God images are dominated by the internalized images of parents, especially with the dominant emotional characteristics associated with those relationships. If parental approval seems based on performance, it often leads to the developing of a false self. In faith terms, this invites a construction of God as the taskmaster deity who requires a certain level of performance, as well as shame and guilt about failures, in order to qualify for grace and approval. Images of power and size are attractive to children's constructions of faith. Stories of good vs. evil help them identify and acknowledge their own fears and they are often reassured by vicariously identifying with the triumph of good.

Mythic-literal faith. The second stage of faith development occurs as children move into the elementary school years, characterized by Piaget's (1954) cognitive stage of concrete operations, they begin to adopt the stories and beliefs that are a part of their community. Narratives become the primary form for gathering meanings but these stories are not reflected upon from a larger perspective. Logical and rational ways of knowing begin to replace the previous stage's episodic and intuitive modes. The cognitive operation of reversibility enables a better understanding of cause and effect relations. Simple perspective-taking becomes possible, which ensures differentiation of one's own experience. As a result of these new structures, the world is generally constructed in terms of predictability and linear notions of cause and effect.

Images of God are usually anthropomorphic in having human qualities and often constructed on one's images of parents. These initial God-concepts are generally based on ideas of moral reciprocity and fairness. Since the interiority of the self (feelings, attitudes, internal guiding processes) has not yet been fully constructed, images of God

are not particularly personal. God is not attributed with highly differentiated internal emotions and interpersonal sensitivities. Generally, images of God are constructed along the lines of a consistent and caring but just parental figure that rewards goodness and punishes badness.

The ultimate environment also gets structured in this stage. Consistent with other features of this period, children's ideas about God's cosmic pattern of ruling the universe are usually constructed along the lines of simple fairness and moral reciprocity. The transition to the next stage often begins as they discover that the universe does not always seem to function based on "quick –payoffs" or simple fairness.

Synthetic-conventional faith. The third stage of faith development, usually associated with adolescence, occurs as persons begin to construct a basis for identity and perspective by synthesizing the values and information received from a variety of sources, such as family, school, work, peers, media, and religion. With the development of early formal operational thought (Piaget, 1954) individuals become capable of appreciating abstract concepts as evidenced through such activities as thinking about their thinking, reflecting upon their stories, and synthesizing their meanings. Mutual social perspective-taking (Selman, 1980) emerges, as characterized by the lines: "I see you seeing me; I see the me I think you see. You see you according to me; you see the you you think I see." Since they have not yet developed third person perspective-taking, which would give them a transcendent position from which to evaluate self-other relations, they often depend on others for confirmation and clarification of identity. Fowler (1981) refers to it as being trapped in the "tyranny of the they." As a result, the mutual perspective-taking associated with this stage tends to encourage conformist

behavior. Persons at this stage adopt beliefs, values, and a personal style that connects them in conforming relationships with significant others.

Images of God are constructed in more personal terms during this stage. The ultimate environment is depicted interpersonally with its dominant features often including such characteristics as acceptance, loyalty, understanding, and support. Images of value and power are also generally formed as extensions of qualities experienced in personal relationships. Much of what persons claim to know at this stage, however, is tacitly held. In other words, they seem to know more than they can express. As a result, their ideology and worldview are simply lived and asserted rather than serving as objects of critical reflection.

Individuative-reflective faith. In the fourth stage of faith development, young adults begin to take responsibility for commitments, lifestyle, beliefs, and attitudes. This often involves dealing with the tensions between such issues as: individuality vs. being defined by the group, subjectivity and the strength of one's feelings vs. objectivity and the importance of critical examination, self-fulfillment vs. self-service, and relatives vs. absolutes. Both the strength and weakness of this stage are found in its capacity for critical reflection, especially in the areas of identity and worldview.

The previous stage's tacit system of values, beliefs, and commitments are critically examined. The self, which previously has been sustained by roles and relationships, must now struggle with an identity and worth separate from these defining connections. The authority that persons had previously given to others, for defining themselves in their roles and relations, must now be reclaimed. This is made possible through the emergence of third person perspective-taking, which generally arises out of

the conflict between external and internal authorities. From this perspective persons are capable of assessing conflicting expectations and thus, empowering their own inner authorization. Symbols, rituals, and myths get demythologized and translated into conceptual formulations. In other words, mystery gets replaced by rational explanations.

The emphasis on consciousness at this stage may cause many to ignore unconscious processes and thus, become vulnerable to burn out. This can be especially true for those who have been living according to life scripts based on a false sense of self. They may need therapeutic and spiritual intervention in order to name, grieve, and express their anger over the price they have paid for approval and the energy tied up in defenses for maintaining the false self.

Conjunctive faith. The fifth stage of faith development, conjunctive faith, is where a person moves beyond the “either-or” (dualistic) logic of stage four to embrace the dialogical paradox of “both-and.” In accepting the axiom that truth is multidimensional and interdependent, this type of faith seeks to open itself to other traditions, recognizing that the reality about which they all speak is larger than their mediation of it. Because persons of conjunctive faith are secure in their experience of that reality, they can allow truth encountered from various sources to complement or correct their own views of truth. At this stage the willingness to dialogue with other perspectives allows for an enhanced ability to manage difference as persons come to appreciate that deep understanding requires mutual perspective-taking, an insight that appears to illustrate the systemic concept of double description (Keeney, 1982).

The confidence about the boundaries of self and faith experienced at the individuative-reflective stage must be relinquished as the realization dawns that this

confidence is based in part on illusion or at least seriously incomplete knowledge. Moving from an essentialist to a relational perspective, Conjunctive Faith recognizes that persons are made of up many selves, which include a conscious mind as well as many unconscious patterns. Persons at this stage must come to terms with their own unconscious in accepting that they are driven by motives, desires, hungers, and lures of the spirit that often exist outside of their awareness yet desire to be recognized and integrated. At this point Fowler's discussion is strikingly similar to Bateson's epistemology in its description of a shift from the lineal emphasis on substance to the relational emphasis on pattern (Bateson, 1972, 1979).

Conjunctive faith exhibits an epistemological humility in accepting that truth must be approached from different directions and angles. The conjunctive self is a tensional self as it comes to terms with indissoluble paradoxes, e.g., strength is found in weakness, God is both transcendent and immanent. Faith must learn to maintain the tension between these multiple perspectives. Instead of analyzing and demythologizing symbols, metaphors, and narratives, conjunctive faith enters back into these realities, allowing them to exert their illuminating and mediating power. This faith exhibits a readiness and curiosity to enter into the rich meanings that symbols, ritual, and myth can offer.

This stage requires a safe context of love and grace in bringing to light deep wounds. This becomes a spiritual task of naming, raging over, and grieving the pain and effects of shame. Engaging in and continuing this process requires reliance upon the spirit of love, healing, and forgiveness that goes beyond the powers of humans alone to provide.

Universalizing faith. The sixth and final stage of faith development,

universalizing faith, occurs when persons develop a concept of an ultimate environment that is inclusive of all being. In this stage people are concerned with issues of injustice and oppression that may result in being perceived by others as subversive. In turn, individuals at this stage may become targets of attack, even to the point of martyrdom. Universalizers are typically charismatic individuals who see the world as their community and value the particulars through which the universals are expressed. In loving life through a detached but involved approach, they often seem more lucid, more simple yet more fully human than others.

The transition to universalizing faith requires overcoming conflicting loyalties, which the paradoxical nature of conjunctive faith often creates. Universalizers recognize the unity that transcends the plurality of culture. Their locus of authority is in a personal judgment that has been purified of egoic striving and is linked to the principle of being. They become “activists incarnations” offering tangible expressions of absolute love and justice. This often involves spending and being spent for the cause of transforming current reality in the direction of transcendent reality (universals). Their seeming lack of concern for their own preservation enables them to exhibit qualities that generally threaten the status quo. While exposing injustice and oppression, they also penetrate self-righteousness and complacency.

Universalizers are comfortable interacting with persons from other stages of faith as well as other faith traditions because of their inclusiveness of community, their radical commitment to justice and love, and their selfless passion for a transformed world. Fowler (1981) claims that universalizers are exceedingly rare but offers several examples of those he thinks may have operated at this stage. These include Martin Luther King Jr.,

Mother Theresa, Dag Hammarskjold, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Abraham Heschel, and Thomas Merton.

Faith Development, Epistemology, and Marital Conflict

Based on Bateson's (1979) definition of epistemology, each stage of faith development represents a potential epistemological shift. In defining epistemology as the network of basic premises, assumptions, and presuppositions that underlie action and cognition, Bateson (1979) called attention to the key factors that influence a person's construction of reality. In Fowler's (1981) model, these same factors are applied to how concepts of the Ultimate are constructed. Each new stage is thought to involve a shift within these factors, which both influences and is influenced by shifts in understandings of God. Such shifts also influence perceptions of self and others. Each transition to a new faith stage, therefore, essentially involves an epistemological shift, entailing changes in underlying premises, assumptions, and presuppositions by which concepts of reality are constructed. Such shifts result in new experiences of the world, creating new possibilities and challenges. In describing the relational nature of faith, Fowler (1981) emphasized how concepts of the ultimate influence how self and others are viewed, and vice versa. Any change in one affects the others. On a practical level, transitions from one faith stage to another, along with the corresponding epistemological shifts, influence constructions of reality, which influence relationship dynamics, especially the management of differences.

In earlier stages of faith, relationships with significant others tend to be essential to the construction and maintenance of the self. During these periods, a person's sense of self is considerably dependent on how it is validated by others, especially the Ultimate

Other (God) (Harter, 2002). But with transitions from one faith stage to another, values and principles become internalized that become more important to the integrity of the self than the validation of others. The result is reflected in relational shifts where living consistently with internalized values and principles becomes the primary guiding influence rather than external validation.

Fowler describes the transitions between each stage as unfolding in three phases, endings, neutral-zone, new beginnings. The shift in underlying presuppositions, which is thought to occur during each of these phases is for Bateson (1979) the essence of epistemological change. During times of transition Fowler (1996) suggests that persons may experience a protracted time of dis-ease and disquilibrium as they begin to realize that their ways of living and making meaning are no longer adequate. These transitions are often precipitated by crises, which consist of situations where events and experiences can no longer be assimilated into existing schemas. As a result, accommodation is required whereby persons are challenged to find new patterns of knowing and valuing in order to cope with new realities. The first phase of transition, endings, involves disengagement with previous constructions of reality, which results in an overall disorientation. This leads into the second phase, neutral zone, which is often experienced as a chaotic time of antistructure frequently described by the phrase “dark night of the soul.” As uncomfortable as these times are, they are necessary to discovering new aspects of knowing and wisdom that can inform the third phase, new beginnings. This final phase of transition involves the gradual and comprehensive reintegration of life in light of the insights gained while in the neutral zone, thus constituting an epistemological shift.

With each new transition and epistemological shift, corresponding shifts are believed to occur in how marital differences are managed. Earlier stages of faith that are typically characterized by more of a dualistic, essentialist epistemology are thought to lend themselves to less effective responses to differences as compared to later stages, which are increasingly characterized by a dialectical, relational epistemology. As persons are able to successfully negotiate the stage-transitions, more effective management of differences is believed possible. Fowler suggests that these transitions and their corresponding practical benefits are not only applicable at the personal level but also at the cultural.

Fowler (1996) compared his adult stages of faith development to recent periods of historical transition, called “tempers of cultural consciousness” (p. 164). Fowler relates the synthetic-conventional stage to pre-enlightenment perspectives and refers to them as the “orthodox temper.” This is characterized by tacit, interpersonal knowing based on an external locus of authority where one’s position is assumed to be superior because the personal qualities of their leaders reflect an authoritative mastery to which others should submit.

Fowler relates the individuative-reflective stage to the Enlightenment period and refers to it as the progressive temper. This is characterized by an internal locus of control with an emphasis on autonomy and critical reflection. This stage’s dichotomous truth claims compete on an either-or, right vs. wrong basis. Value is placed on specialization and differentiation. Rationality is considered the best means for dealing with all realities, from defining self to organizing bureaucracies.

Fowler posited that culture is in the transition to the conjunctive stage of faith, or postmodern consciousness. This is characterized by the acknowledgement and interaction of multiple perspectives and systems. Commitments are made in the context of pluralism. All perspectives on reality are recognized as constructed, with God's reality exceeding any person's constructs. Ecological interdependence is accepted and organizational flexibility prized, while dialectical and multi-perspective structures of knowing and valuing are required.

Overall, Fowler (1981, 1996) and Bateson (1979) seem to be making the similar emphasis that epistemological change is critical to relational change, which itself is critical to the survival of the human species. While approaching the construct from different perspectives and expressing their insights in different language, they both seem to recognize that for the human race and the environment on which it depends to survive, radical epistemological changes are necessary and these changes should involve a move toward systemic, dialogical thinking. Fowler (1996) summarized it best by describing this new epistemology as involving:

The awareness of the fundamental participation of everything in *process*; the relativity to each other, and to what they observe, of all perspectives on the universe and experience; the intrusion into and involvement of any investigator within phenomena being scientifically studied; the ecological interdependence of all systems, including systems of thought and consciousness; the maintenance of the cosmos through the counterpoising pull and force of tensional vectors, giving rise to a unit of such variegated and pluralistic inclusiveness as to challenge the

human capacity to fathom, even using a panoply of the infinitely fast computers now available to us for synchronous knowing (p. 158).

If such an epistemological shift does not occur, an ongoing gridlock characterized by power-struggles for dominance and control will ensue creating an increasingly dangerous world at all levels. Possibly one of the greatest challenges to such a transition in epistemology comes from the nature of the dogmatic mind.

Dogmatism

The construct of dogmatism was first developed by Rokeach (1960) and defined as the relative openness or closedness of a person's cognitive framework through which they receive, understand, evaluate, and act on information. Highly dogmatic persons have a closed way of thinking, relatively impervious to change, that led to a distortion of information, intolerant attitudes, and authoritarian perspectives (Rokeach, 1960). Low dogmatism people on the other hand tended to be more open-minded and less defensive about differences.

Rokeach (1960) theorized that all persons have multiple belief systems that they either accept or reject. These beliefs and disbeliefs can be evaluated on three dimensions—*isolation*, *differentiation*, and *comprehensiveness*. The dimension of *isolation* is concerned with the extent to which people see divergent beliefs as interrelated and are willing to embrace contradiction versus the tendency to deny contradiction, maximizing differences, and minimizing similarities. *Differentiation* refers to the development of the belief system in terms of its complexity and the richness of information contained therein along with the person's ability to articulate an understanding of its nuances. *Comprehensiveness* refers to the total range of disbeliefs

contained within the system. While the beliefs and disbeliefs of highly dogmatic persons were often isolated and compartmentalized, those of low dogmatism were more willing and ready to make connections between diverging beliefs.

Also important in Rokeach's (1960) construct of dogmatism was the role of authority in influencing people's beliefs. Highly dogmatic persons tended to be readily influenced by authority and often relied upon what they considered to be authoritative sources not only for information but also for understanding of what that information means. Persons with low dogmatism, however, tended to be more tentative regarding authority and were willing to rationally evaluate what they heard. Wald, Owen, and Hill (1989) found that conservative Christians, while not evidencing authoritarian personalities, did exhibit "authority-mindedness" in that they were willing to defer to authority, especially religious authority, which often involved a strong commitment to the authority of Scriptures. Jelen and Wilcox (1991) suggest that this reliance on the authority of Scripture may lead to a sense of certitude on religious and political matters. They go on to say that a belief system that views the Bible as the inerrant word of God, a dogmatic attitude, may also exhibit an epistemological style that only sees the world through one religious truth. They suggest that the source of such "evangelical certitude" lies in their religious socialization and is reflected in a particular cognitive style, which like Rokeach they label as "religious dogmatism" but unlike Rokeach see it as a style of reasoning rather than a personality trait. They hypothesize that religiously dogmatic citizens will be intolerant of diversity and hesitant to relegate to the private sphere what they believe are important activities. Jelen and Wilcox (1991) refer to other studies that indicate that dogmatism is most strongly predicted by doctrinal orthodoxy and religious

decision-making and that those who simply indicated an evangelical denominational affiliation were more likely to display higher levels of dogmatism (Wald, Owen, & Hill, 1988; Wilcox & Jelen, 1990). They interpret these findings to indicate that denominations, especially conservative protestant varieties, provide social contexts in which their people are socialized into the cognitive style of religious dogmatism. Thus, Jelen and Wilcox (1991) state that “dogmatism is a genuine intervening variable between religious and political values” (p. 43) of which they believe the Christian Right is a classic example.

Other studies appear to confirm Rokeach’s (1960) and Jelen and Wilcox’s (1991) assertions that a dogmatic mindset lends itself to authoritarian perspectives and relational challenges, especially with those who are different. Carlozzi, Bull, Eells, and Hurlburt (1995) found that empathy was inversely related to dogmatism. Specifically, in a study of counseling students, those who were closed-minded were less capable of accurately understanding affective messages than their more open-minded counterparts whose empathic abilities were significantly greater. These authors interpreted the findings to suggest that the diminished accuracy among closed minded students may have been due to their tendency to distort incoming information. In a similar study, Roberts and Vinson (1998) tested students’ *willingness to listen* and found that there was a negative correlation between that construct and dogmatism. Brown (2006) found that a larger verbal working memory capacity corresponds with lower levels of dogmatism. These findings may offer an explanation as to why highly dogmatic people tend to distort incoming information based on a lower working memory capacity. In a study of beginning masters’ level counseling students, Parker (1990) found that the combination

of dogmatism and orthodox Christian beliefs were incompatible with ethical acuity, suggesting that highly dogmatic counselors are less likely to exercise sound ethical judgment than their less-dogmatic colleagues. In a study of the relationship between dogmatism, family ideology, and religiosity among masters'-level counseling students, Hunter, Harris, and Trust (1998) discovered a significant relationship between dogmatism and adherence to traditional family values, as measured by husband-wife roles and attitudes toward child-rearing. In a comparison of dogmatism, religion, and psychological type, Ross, Francis, and Craig (2005) found that higher dogmatism was associated with the psychological types of sensing, extraversion, and judging. Since sensing and judging types are found to be more prevalent in evangelical Protestant denominations (Bramer, 1996; Carskadon, 1981; Ross, Weiss, & Jackson, 1996), it lends further support for the connection between conservative religiosity and dogmatism.

Francis and Robbins (2003) took issue with such findings by pointing out that the operationalization and assessment of religious faith varied widely and often focused on religious affiliation or church attendance. These researchers suggest that such variables may not be the best determinants of religious faith and argue that attitude toward religion is the best empirical indicator against which psychological factors should be compared. Since attitudes reflect underlying predispositions, they tend to be more stable and thus, better indicators of religious faith than behaviors that may be subject to various personal and contextual constraints (Francis & Robbins). Using attitudes toward Christianity, which looks at affective responses toward God, Jesus, Bible, church, and prayer, a significant relationship between dogmatism and religious faith was not found (Francis, 1989). These findings have been supported in two studies, one with 15-16 year old

students and the other with first year undergraduates, and suggest that the relationship between religious faith and dogmatism may be more complex than previously indicated (Francis & Robbins, 2003).

Dogmatism and Marital Conflict

In relation to managing marital differences, dogmatism is considered to be a critical variable, primarily due to its dualistic nature. With its insistence on being right, in spite of inadequate justification, and its resistance to change, it is believed that those who are high in dogmatism will tend to respond to difference by seeking to change the other or, if that is unsuccessful, diminishing the other. This tendency is expected to be correlated with all sub-measures of marital conflict but to be especially reflected on the *accepting influence* and *compromise* scales. While it is anticipated that highly dogmatic individuals will also engage in *harsh start-ups* that set the *four horsemen* in motion often resulting in *gridlock*, it is thought that their unwillingness to *accept influence* and *compromise* will be the strongest indicators of their dogmatism.

Relationship between Faith Development and Dogmatism

Fowler (1981) emphasizes that one of the clearest indicators of higher stages of faith is lower levels of close-mindedness (dogmatism). Earlier developmental stages are characterized by the process of first internalizing the faith of significant persons and later, by working out one's own. This process typically evolves into early adulthood. Not until the middle adult years does Fowler see open-mindedness, as signified by conjunctive (both-and) thinking, becoming a distinguishing trait. Faith development, however, does not correspond to age. Just because persons arrive at middle age does not mean that their faith development is also at that level. Actually some may never reach the stage of

Conjunctive Faith because doing so requires greater openness to new ideas and the capability of dialoguing with those who are different. Fowler (1996) states that a common pattern is to become emotionally arrested at the mythic-literal stage, but to function cognitively at the individuative-reflective stage. Such individuals tend to be confident and authoritative in professional and occupational domains but unaware of the limits of their empathic abilities in identifying with the phenomenological experience of others. Thus, they are often drawn to religious fundamentalist-type systems. Fowler says that as spouses, parents, and bosses they are at best insensitive and at worst, rigid, authoritarian, and emotionally abusive.

In sum, partners at higher levels of faith development are expected to experience lower levels of destructive marital conflict. Spouses at lower stages of faith development, such as those preceding Conjunctive Faith, are expected to experience higher levels of destructive marital conflict. Furthermore, this relationship between faith development and marital conflict is thought to be mediated by dogmatism. Individuals who are at lower stages of faith development and are high in dogmatism are anticipated to exhibit higher levels of destructive marital conflict, especially in terms of the lack of accepting influence and compromising. On the other hand, partners at higher stages of faith development and lower levels of dogmatism are anticipated to experience lower levels of destructive marital conflict, as they will be more likely to accept influence and compromise. This difference can be explained as a result of the increasing ability to think systemically (nonlinearity) that comes with recognizing the dialogical nature of reality that is characteristic of higher stages of faith.

Conceptual Definitions

This section summarizes definitions of key concepts in the study. The definitions are presented in alphabetical order.

Accepting influence describes the willingness to listen to one's partner and to allow one's own thoughts and actions to be affected as a result (Gottman, 1999).

Autopoiesis literally means self-making (auto—self, poiesis—making). It reflects the ability of living systems to constantly renew themselves through generating new structures while preserving their basic organization (Capra, 2002).

Complementarity is a relationship pattern where the behaviors or aspirations of the participants differ yet fit (complement) each other (Bateson, 1972).

Compromise in marital interactions characterized by flexibility, negotiation, accepting influence, and yielding power (Gottman, 1999).

Conflict in marriage describes disagreement over differences. The differences can be either resolvable or perpetual (Gottman, 1999). Types of conflict in marriage are described below.

1. *Destructive marital conflict* is disagreement characterized by higher levels of gridlock, harsh start-ups, and the four horsemen, and lower levels of accepting influence and compromise.
2. *Constructive marital conflict* describes disagreement characterized by lower levels of gridlock, and the four horsemen, and higher levels of soft start-ups, accepting influence, and compromise.

Cybernetics describes the theory of control processes through the various communication feedback loops in a system (Keeney, 1983).

Dialogue is the ability to engage in a discussion of differences while exhibiting positive affect and genuine curiosity (Gottman, 1999).

Dogmatism refers to a “relatively unchangeable, unjustified certainty” (Altemeyer, 2002; p. 713).

Dormitive principles occur whenever the two sides of a double description are separated and located within an individual. If a husband were to say, “she is a nagger,” rather than “when I withdraw, she pursues,” a dormitive explanation is created (Bateson, 1972).

Emergence is often referred to by the term, nonsummativity, or the phrase, *the whole is greater than the sum of its parts*. It reflects the possibility of novelty emerging from the interactions of parts that in turn transcends, incorporates, and controls the parts (Capra, 2002).

Epistemology describes the basic premises, assumptions, and presuppositions underlying action and cognition (Bateson, 1973).

Evangelical Christians are individuals who believe in the divinity of Jesus, the divine inspiration of the Bible and consider a literal interpretation of its teachings to be the authoritative source for faith and practice (Borg, 2000).

Faith development describes the means by which people understand and relate to that which they consider ultimate. It constitutes a centering process that provides meaning and underlies the formation of values and beliefs. It also provides persons with coherence and direction while connecting them with others

in shared meanings and loyalties, enabling them to deal with the limitations of life (Fowler, 1996).

- *Immature faith development* occurs when a person's level of faith development is inappropriate to other levels of development
- *Mature faith development* occurs when a person's level of faith development is appropriate to other levels of development

Four horsemen of the apocalypse describes a common pattern in marriages initiated by the first horseman of criticism, which invites the second horseman of defensiveness. The dance of these two horsemen sometimes escalates to involve the third horseman of contempt. In an effort to manage the escalating physiological reactions created by these preceding horsemen, the fourth horseman of stonewalling completes the pattern (Gottman, 1999).

Gridlock is a pattern of “stuckness” around a perpetual problem created as a result of spouses being excessively focused on changing each other rather than dialoguing about their differences (Gottman, 1999).

Linear premises are underlying assumptions that conceptualize experience in terms of cause and effect, reductionism, and essentialism (Keeney, 1982).

Metarules are rules about rules or communication about rules, especially in terms of how to apply rules, exceptions to rules, and consequences for breaking rules (Simon, Stierlin, & Wynne, 1985).

Mind is any delineated cybernetic system exhibiting mental properties (i.e., deciding, acting, and thinking; Bateson, 1972; Keeney, 1982).

Morphogenesis describes self-directing processes allowing for change, growth, creativity, and innovation within a context of stability (Becvar & Becvar, 1999).

Morphostasis describes self-correcting processes that seek to maintain stability in the context of change (Becvar & Becvar, 1999).

Negative feedback is a communication process that seeks to counter deviation, thus returning a system to a stable, steady state (Becvar & Becvar, 1999).

Nonlinear premises are underlying assumptions that conceptualize experience in terms of circular causality, emergence, and relationship (Keeney, 1982).

Perpetual problems are recurring conflict between spouses that reflects differences in their personalities or basic needs (Gottman, 1999).

Positive feedback is a communication process that amplifies deviation, thus expanding a system beyond its limits (Becvar & Becvar, 1999).

Recursion refers to mutual interactions and influences such that one person's actions both invite and are influenced by the response of the other person (Keeney, 1982).

Rules are spoken or unspoken prescriptions that guide the actions of family members and are backed by sanctions (Simon et. al., 1985).

Stages of faith—a developmental period during which persons are conceptualizing and relating to the Ultimate in predictable ways that also

influence one's relationship with self and others (Fowler, 1981, 1996). Fowler describes the following stages of faith development

1. *Primal/undifferentiated faith* is the period in which the infant seeks to bond with his/her caretakers as they seek to work out a relationship mutuality through which trust can be formed and a sense of love shared. Through both somatic (bodily) and interactive (shared rituals) means, children begin to be involved in the meanings and values of significant others whose responsibility it is to welcome and socialize the child.

2. *Intuitive-projective faith* occurs around 18 months of age, with the acquisition of language skills, the child transitions into the Intuitive-Projective stage of faith, which lasts until age 6/7. During this period the child forms lasting images of the spiritual powers that influence his/her experiential world and awakens to the reality of death and mystery. As the child seeks to form a sense of self, he/she often begins by indentifying with the qualities and values of significant adults.

3. *Mythic-literal faith* develops as a child moves into the elementary school years, characterized by the cognitive stage of concrete operations, he/she begins to adopt the stories and beliefs that are a part of his/her community. Images of God are generally anthropomorphic and constructed on one's images of parents. These God-concepts are usually based on ideas of moral reciprocity and fairness.

4. *Synthetic-conventional faith* is the stage faith begins to synthesize the values and information it receives from a variety of sources--family, school,

work, peers, media, religion--which provide a basis for identity and perspective. The Ultimate Environment is structured in interpersonal terms, with its images of value and power being formed as extensions of qualities experienced in personal relationships. The mutual social perspective taking associated with this stage tends to encourage conformist behavior.

5. *Individuative-reflective faith* is the stage of faith development where young adults begin to take serious responsibility for commitments, lifestyle, beliefs, and attitudes. This often involves dealing with the tensions between such issues as: individuality vs. being defined by the group, subjectivity and the strength of one's feelings vs. objectivity and the importance of critical examination, self-fulfillment vs. self-service, and relatives vs. absolutes. Both the strength and weakness of this stage is found in its capacity for critical reflection, especially in the areas of identity and worldview.

6. *Conjunctive faith* moves beyond the "either-or" logic of stage four to embrace the paradox of "both-and." In accepting the axiom that truth is multidimensional and interdependent, this type of faith seeks to open itself to other traditions, recognizing that the reality about which they all speak is larger than their mediation of it. Because persons of conjunctive faith are secure in their experience of that reality, they can allow the truth they encounter in these various sources to complement or correct their own.

7. *Universalizing faith* occurs as people have a concept of an ultimate environment that is inclusive of all being. Their concern with issues of justice and oppression often cause them to be experienced by others as subversive. As a

result, many at this stage become targets of attack, even to the point of martyrdom. Universalizers are typically charismatic individuals who, while seeing the world as their community, value the particulars through which the universals are expressed. In loving life through a detached yet involved approach, they often seem more lucid, more simple, yet more fully human than others.

Start-up describes the manner in which conversations regarding potentially conflictual issues begin. Start-up can be characterized as either harsh or soft (Gottman, 1999). Two types of startup described by Gottman follow.

1. *Harsh start-up*—beginning a conversation by criticizing one’s partner, usually for something that s/he is not considered to be doing appropriately.

2. *Soft start-up*—beginning a conversation by calling attention to what is desired, usually by affirming one’s partner for what s/he has done well.

Structural coupling is the process of a system connecting with its environment through recurrent interactions, which in turn triggers structural changes in both the system and the environment (Becvar & Becvar, 1999).

Symmetry is a relationship pattern that strives toward equality and seeks to minimize differences and is often characterized by competitive behaviors (Bateson, 1972).

Theoretical Limitations

Gottman’s SMH theory, since it was birthed out of ongoing research, has fared well in terms of its predictive ability related to the areas of divorce, marital stability,

marital satisfaction, adaptability to parenthood, and retirement (Gottman & Notarius, 2000; Gottman, 1999; Gottman, Driver, & Tabares, 2002; Gottman & Levenson, 2002; Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977). A mathematical model of marital interaction has also been developed out of the theory (Gottman, 2000). This model takes into account data ranging from verbal and facial expressions to questionnaires and physiological readings. In a 10 year study with over 700 couples, Carrere and Gottman (1999) claims 94% accuracy in predicting which marriages will end in divorce. The model also seeks to help couples identify problems in their relationship so that help can be sought sooner rather than later.

Fowler's theory, while remaining the gold standard of faith development research, has critics. These criticisms have ranged from the limited generalizability of the sample (Nelson & Aleshire, 1986) to the lack of clarity in terminology (Fernhout, 1986) to the lack of parsimony and examination of assumptions (Miles, 1983). Other criticisms have included Fowler's approach, in starting with theory and then looking for supportive data, as well as the tendency to be too cognitive (Philibert, 1988; Ford-Grabowski, 1988) and less inclusive of female distinctives (Gilligan, 1977, 1980).

Bateson's cybernetic epistemology has been criticized for being too mechanistic and his concept of mind as inadequately addressing consciousness (Butz, 1997; Capra, 2000). Some have claimed that Bateson is difficult to understand (Keeney, 1982). Nevertheless, his ideas like Fowler's and Gottman's continue to have wide influence and are acknowledged as providing the theoretical impetus for the field of family therapy (Nichols & Schwartz, 2007).

In terms of how the various criticisms of these theories impose any theoretical limitations on this study, it appears that they are minimal. One possible limitation comes in the form of the abstract nature and unfamiliarity of the concepts that may make it difficult for a larger audience to embrace. The language of both cybernetics and faith development are not widely used and represent potential barriers to understanding. As much as possible, this limitation has been addressed through seeking to clearly define terms in the section on conceptual definitions, and to illustrate those concepts through examples from every-day life.

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APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRES

SURVEY

Thank you for taking this survey.

Please respond by circling your answer to each question.

PART A – PLEASE RESPOND TO THESE ITEMS.

1. Gender
 - A Male
 - B Female

2. Age
 - A 18-25
 - B 26-35
 - C 36-50
 - D 51-65
 - E 66 and above

3. Race (respond, if applicable)
 - A Caucasian
 - B African or African American
 - C Asian or Asian American
 - D Native American
 - E Hispanic

4. Race (respond, if applicable)
 - A Race other than those noted on #3
 - B More than one race

5. Native of
 - A United States
 - B Europe
 - C Africa
 - D Asia
 - E Other

6. Current marital status
 - A married and living with spouse
 - B married and separated from spouse

7. Number of times married
 - A 1
 - B 2
 - C 3
 - D 4
 - E more than 4

8. Years married to current spouse
 - A 1 year or less
 - B 2 to 7 years
 - C 8 to 20 years
 - D 21-40 years
 - E over 40 years

9. Number of children or stepchildren under 18 living in your home
 - A 0
 - B 1
 - C 2
 - D 3
 - F 4 or more

10. Number of children or stepchildren over 18
 - A 0
 - B 1
 - C 2
 - D 3
 - F 4 or more

11. Religious Affiliation
 - A Charismatic/Pentecostal
 - B Baptist
 - C Mainline (Methodist, Lutheran, Prebyterian)
 - D Catholic
 - E Other

PART B - ON EACH ITEM, INDICATE THE EXTENT TO WHICH YOU AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT.

A = strongly agree, B = agree, C = neither agree nor disagree, D = disagree, E = strongly disagree

The Bible is...

12. ____ a human product
13. ____ a human product, but divinely inspired
14. ____ a divine product

PART C – ON EACH QUESTION INDICATE THE STATEMENT WITH WHICH YOU MOST AGREE

15. A Those who do what God wants are given special rewards.
 B God grants comfort and strength to those who are loyal and faithful.
16. A God can do whatever God wants without any particular reason.
 B It is important to try to make sense out of how God acts and why.
17. A A good way to relate to God is to do what God wants, so that God will help you in return.
 B It is best to think of God as utterly and freely giving.
18. A Following Christ with loving devotion is more important than having a thorough and correct understanding of true doctrine.
 B It is important to reflect on one's beliefs to make them reasonable and logically coherent.
19. A True followers of Christ will often find themselves rejected by the world.
 B Most people in the world are doing their best to live decent lives.
20. A God's revealed truth is meant for all people everywhere.
 B No set of religious beliefs is the whole and final truth for everyone.
21. A It is important to follow the leaders to whom God has entrusted his church.
 B Religious leaders must respect the need for reasonableness, consistency, and coherence in their interpretation of doctrines.
22. A It is often hard to understand why people are disloyal to their family and religion.
 B People have to make their own best choices about religion, even if it means following new ways.
23. A The moral teachings of the church are objectively valid for all people, even though many do not realize this.
 B Love of neighbor requires being open to new ideas and values.

PART D – THINK OF YOUR MARITAL RELATIONSHIP TO RESPOND TO THIS SECTION.
PLEASE INDICATE THE EXTENT TO WHICH YOU AGREE WITH EACH STATEMENT.

A= strongly agree, B = agree, C = neither agree nor disagree, D = disagree, E = strongly disagree

When we discuss our marital issues:

24. ____ I feel attacked or criticized when we talk about our disagreements.
25. ____ I usually feel like my personality is being assaulted.

26. ___ In our disputes, at times, I don't even feel like my partner likes me very much.
27. ___ I have to defend myself because the charges against me are so unfair.
28. ___ I often feel unappreciated by my spouse.
29. ___ My feelings and intentions are often misunderstood.
30. ___ I don't feel appreciated for all the good I do in this marriage.
31. ___ I often just want to leave the scene of the arguments.
32. ___ I get disgusted by all the negativity between us.
33. ___ I feel insulted by my partner at times.
34. ___ I sometimes just clam up and become quiet.
35. ___ I can get mean and insulting in our disputes.
36. ___ I feel basically disrespected.
37. ___ Many of our issues are just not my problem.
38. ___ The way we talk makes me want to just withdraw from the whole marriage.
39. ___ I think to myself, "who needs all this conflict?"
40. ___ My partner never really changes.
41. ___ Our problems have made me feel desperate at times.
42. ___ My partner doesn't face issues responsibly and maturely.
43. ___ I try to point out flaws in my partner's personality that need improvement.
44. ___ I feel explosive and out of control about our issues at times.
45. ___ My partner uses phrases like "You always" or "You never" when complaining.
46. ___ I often get the blame for what are really *our* problems.
47. ___ I don't have a lot of respect for my partner's position on our basic issues.
48. ___ My spouse can be quite selfish and self-centered.
49. ___ I feel disgusted by some of my spouse's attitudes.
50. ___ My partner gets far too emotional.
51. ___ I am just not guilty of many things I get accused of.
52. ___ Small issues often escalate out of proportion.

53. ___ Arguments seem to come out of nowhere.
54. ___ My partner's feelings get hurt too easily
55. ___ I often will become silent to cool things down a bit.
56. ___ My partner has a lot of trouble being rational and logical.
57. ___ The same problems keep coming up again and again in our marriage.
58. ___ We rarely make much progress on our central issues.
59. ___ We keep hurting each other whenever we discuss our core issues.
60. ___ I feel criticized and misunderstood when we discuss our hot topics.
61. ___ My partner has a long list of basically unreasonable demands.
62. ___ When we discuss our basic issues, I often feel that my partner doesn't even like me.
63. ___ My partner wants me to change my basic personality
64. ___ I often keep quiet and withdraw to avoid stirring up too much conflict.
65. ___ I don't feel respected when we disagree.
66. ___ My partner often acts in a selfish manner.
67. ___ What I say in our discussions rarely has much effect.
68. ___ I feel put down in our discussion of key issues.
69. ___ I can't really be myself in this marriage.
70. ___ I often think that my partner is manipulating me.
71. ___ Sometimes I think that my spouse doesn't care about my feelings.
72. ___ My partner rarely makes a real effort to change.
73. ___ There are some basic faults in my partner's personality that he or she will not change.
74. ___ My partner disregards my fundamental needs.
75. ___ Sometimes I feel that my values don't matter to my spouse.
76. ___ When we discuss our issues, my partner acts as if I am totally wrong and he or she is totally right.
77. ___ Our decisions often get made by both of us compromising.
78. ___ We are usually good at resolving our differences.

79. ___ I can give in when I need to, and often do.
80. ___ I can be stubborn in an argument but I'm not opposed to compromising.
81. ___ I think that sharing power in a marriage is very important.
82. ___ My partner is not a very stubborn person.
83. ___ I don't believe one person is usually right and the other wrong on most issues.
84. ___ We both believe in meeting each other half way when we disagree.
85. ___ I am able to yield somewhat even when I feel strongly on an issue.
86. ___ The two of us usually arrive at a better decision through give and take.
87. ___ It's a good idea to give in somewhat, in my view.
88. ___ In discussing issues we can usually find our common ground of agreement.
89. ___ Everyone gets some of what they want when there is a compromise.
90. ___ My partner can give in, and often does.
91. ___ I don't wait until my partner gives in before I do.
92. ___ When I give in first my partner then gives in too.
93. ___ Yielding power is not very difficult for my spouse.
94. ___ Yielding power is not very difficult for me.
95. ___ Give and take in making decisions is not a problem in this marriage.
96. ___ I will compromise even when I believe I am right.
97. ___ I find that I am really interested in my spouse's opinion on our basic issues.
98. ___ I usually learn a lot from my spouse even when we disagree.
99. ___ I want my partner to feel that what he or she says really counts with me.
100. ___ I generally want my spouse to feel influential in this marriage.
101. ___ I can listen to my partner.
102. ___ My partner has a lot of basic common sense.
103. ___ I try to communicate respect even during our disagreements.
104. ___ I don't keep trying to convince my partner so that I will eventually win out.

105. ___ I don't reject my spouse's opinions out of hand.
106. ___ My partner is rational enough to take seriously when we discuss our issues.
107. ___ I believe in lots of give and take in our discussions.
108. ___ I am very persuasive, but don't usually try to win arguments with my spouse.
109. ___ I feel important in our decisions.
110. ___ My partner usually has good ideas.
111. ___ My partner is basically a great help as a problem solver.
112. ___ I try to listen respectfully even when I disagree.
113. ___ My ideas for solutions are not better than my spouse's
114. ___ I can usually find something to agree with in my partner's position.
115. ___ My partner is not usually too emotional.
116. ___ I am not the one who needs to make the major decisions in this marriage.
117. ___ My partner is often very critical of me.
118. ___ I hate the way my partner raises an objection.
119. ___ Arguments often seem to come out of nowhere.
120. ___ Before I know it we are in a fight.
121. ___ When my partner complains I feel picked on.
122. ___ I seem to always get blamed for issues.
123. ___ My partner is negative all out of proportion.
124. ___ I feel I have to ward off personal attacks.
125. ___ I often have to den charges leveled against me.
126. ___ My partner's feelings are too easily hurt.
127. ___ What goes wrong is often not my responsibility.
128. ___ My spouse criticizes my personality.
129. ___ Issues get raised in an insulting manner.
130. ___ My partner will at times complain in a smug or superior way.
131. ___ I have just about had it with all this negativity between us.

- 132. ____ I feel basically disrespected when my partner complains.
- 133. ____ I just want to leave the scene when complaints arise.
- 134. ____ Our calm is suddenly shattered.
- 135. ____ I find my partner's negativity unnerving and unsettling.
- 136. ____ I think my partner can be totally irrational.

PART E – ON EACH QUESTION, INDICATE THE NUMBER THAT SHOWS HOW MUCH YOU AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT

*1=Extremely Dissatisfied, 2=Very Dissatisfied, 3=Somewhat Dissatisfied, 4=Mixed
5=Somewhat Satisfied, 6=Very Satisfied, 7=Extremely Satisfied*

- 137. ____ How satisfied are you in your marriage?
- 138. ____ How satisfied are you with your husband/wife as a spouse?
- 139. ____ How satisfied are you with your relationship with your husband/wife?

PART F – ON EACH QUESTION, CIRCLE THE NUMBER THAT SHOWS HOW MUCH YOU AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT

Respond to the following statements according to the scale described below.

-4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4

Strongly Disagree Neutral Strongly Agree

140.	I may be wrong about some of the little things in life, but I am quite certain I right about all the BIG issues.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
141.	Someday I will probably think that many of my present ideas were wrong.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
142.	Anyone who is honestly and truly seeking the truth will end up believing what I believe.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
143.	There are so many things we have not discovered yet, nobody should be absolutely certain his/her beliefs are right.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
144.	The things I believe in are so completely true, I could never doubt them.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
145.	I have never discovered a system of beliefs that explains everything to my satisfaction.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
146.	It is best to be open to all possibilities and ready to reevaluate all your beliefs	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
147.	My opinions are right and will stand the test of time	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
148.	Flexibility is a real virtue in thinking, since you may well be wrong	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
149.	My opinions and beliefs fit together perfectly to make a crystal-clear “picture” of things.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
150.	There are no discoveries or facts that could possibly make me change my mind about the things that matter most in life.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
151.	I am a long way from reaching final conclusions about the central issues in life.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
152.	The person who is absolutely certain s/he has the truth will probably never find it.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
153.	I am absolutely certain that my ideas about the fundamental	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4

	issues in life are correct.									
154.	The people who disagree with me may well turn out to be right.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
155.	I am so sure I am right about the important things in life, there is no evidence that could convince me otherwise.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
156.	If you are “open-minded” about the most important things in life, you will probably reach the wrong conclusions.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
157.	Twenty years from now, some of my opinions about the important things in life will probably have changed.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
158.	Flexibility in thinking” is another name for being “wishy-washy.”	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
159.	No one knows all the essential truths about the central issues in life.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
160.	Someday I will probably realize my present ideas about the BIG issues are wrong.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
161.	People who disagree with me are just plain wrong and often evil as well.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4

APPENDIX C

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Wednesday, August 04, 2010
IRB Application No HE1047
Proposal Title: Faith, Beliefs, and Managing Differences in Marriage

Reviewed and Exempt
Processed as:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 8/3/2011

Principal

Investigator(s):

William James Buker	Carolyn Henry
9524 S. Maplewood	340 HES
Tulsa, OK 74137	Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,


Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX D

Participant Information Sheet

Project Title: Faith Development, Dogmatism, and Managing Marital Differences

Investigators: Bill Buker, DMin, Associate Professor, Oral Roberts University
Carolyn Henry, PhD, Professor, Oklahoma State University

Purpose: In an effort to build upon existing research, which indicates that one of the best predictors of marital success is a couple's ability to manage their differences, the purpose of this research study is to explore how an individual's spirituality is related to his/her perception of marital differences and how those differences are managed. Focusing on those who self-identify as Christians, this research study is designed to investigate the relationship between a spouse's spirituality and the various components of marital conflict, which can range from constructive to destructive.

Procedures: Completing the following questionnaire should take approximately 40 minutes, which should be done in one setting. Please respond to the questions without consultation with anyone, including your spouse. When finished, please return in the envelope provided.

Risks of Participation: There are no known risks to your participation in this research study. Some questions may evoke an emotional response, due to their focus on personal faith and beliefs, but are not expected to provoke any risks greater than would be encountered in everyday life. If you wish to discuss any aspect of this process further, a list of recommended professional counselors is available.

Benefits: The results of this research study will contribute to the knowledge base that therapists and other helping professionals can draw upon to better understand the relationship between spirituality and relationship challenges, especially those challenges that come in the form of chronic differences.

Confidentiality: The results of your responses to the questionnaire will be kept completely confidential and the records of this research study will be kept private. No identifying information is requested and all results will be reported as group findings with no individual responses being identified. Research records will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet in Bill Buker's office for one year and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff, but they are responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

Compensation: No compensation is offered for your participation in this research study except in the form of sincere appreciation.

Contacts: If you have questions about the research study, you may contact:

Bill Buker, DMin, 5215 E. 71st St., Ste 1300, Tulsa, OK 74136; 918-299-4357,
bjbuker@sbcglobal.net

Carolyn Henry, PhD, carolyn.henry@okstate.edu, Professor, Oklahoma State University,
Department of Human Development and Family Science, Stillwater, OK 74078-6122,
405-744-8357

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, Dr. Shelia Kennison, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Participation: Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You are free to refuse to participate or to terminate your participation at any time. If during the course of answering the questions you become uncomfortable for any reason, you can simply stop. There will be no repercussions for your refusal to participate or for your discontinuation of participation.

Returning your completed survey in the envelope provided indicates your willingness to participate in this study.

VITA

William James Buker

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: FAITH DEVELOPMENT, DOGMATISM, GENDER, AND THE
MANAGEMENT OF MARITAL DIFFERENCES

Major Field: Human Environmental Science

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy/Education in your major at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December, 2011.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in Christian Counseling at Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA in 1993.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Theological and Historical Studies at Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA in 1982.

Experience:

Associate Professor of Counseling at Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK 1998-present

Licensed Professional Counselor in Private Practice, Tulsa, OK 1993-present.

Adjunct Professor of Psychology at Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK 1993-1998.

Professional Memberships:

American Psychotherapy Association, Fellow

American Counseling Association

American Association of Christian Counselors, Charter Member

National Council on Family Relations

Christian Association for Psychological Studies

Society for Pentecostal Studies

Name: William James Buker

Date of Degree: December, 2011

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: FAITH DEVELOPMENT, DOGMATISM, GENDER, AND THE
MANAGEMENT OF MARITAL DIFFERENCES

Pages in Study: 139

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Human Environmental Science, Human Development and Family Science

Scope and Method of Study:

This study examined the relationship between Bateson's (1972) concept of epistemology as applied to the conservative Christian mindset [approximated by Fowler's (1981) model of faith development and Altemeyer's (2002) concept of dogmatism] and Gottman's concept of marital conflict style (destructive v. constructive), which consisted of five dimensions (gridlock, startup, four horsemen, accepting influence, compromise). Data were collected from a convenience sample of 107 married individuals, 60 female and 47 male from local churches, mostly affiliated with the Charismatic or Pentecostal religious traditions, in an urban area of a southwestern state. A series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to (a) examine the association of reports of faith development, dogmatism, and gender with overall marital conflict, including each of its five dimensions and (b) explore the possibility that dogmatism and gender moderated the association between faith development and marital conflict style and its five selected dimensions.

Findings and Conclusions:

Results of the series of hierarchical multiple regression equations revealed that faith development was negatively associated with overall marital conflict (destructive v. constructive) and two aspects of destructive marital conflict: harsh startup and gridlock. Gender differences were evident among some of the models, both directly (for harsh startup) and as a moderator of the association of faith development and overall marital conflict as well as two aspects of destructive conflict (harsh startup and gridlock). Specifically, the post hoc analyses showed that men who reported low faith development were more likely to perceive greater overall destructive conflict, especially harsh startup, and gridlock in their marital relationships, thus indicating that epistemology may be a factor in the perception of marital differences.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Carolyn S. Henry, Ph.D.
