Evaluating the Impact of Marriage Renewal Workshop on Marital Satisfaction, Communication, Conflict Management, and Forgiveness: A Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

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EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF THE MARRIAGE RENEWAL WORKSHOP ON MARITAL SATISFACTION, COMMUNICATION, CONFLICT MANAGEMENT, AND FORGIVENESS: A QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY PROGRAM IN SOCIAL WORK

BY HIEN T. KIM NGUYEN

CHICAGO, IL

MAY 2020
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Loves bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
1Corinthians 13:7
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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study were to examine the impact of the Marriage Renewal Workshop (MRW) program for relationship satisfaction, communication skills, conflict resolution skills and levels of forgiveness among Vietnamese American married couple participants and their perceptions of the program’s impact regarding these outcome variables. This evaluation mixed-method study employed a group of 64 participants who participated in before, after (using 4 closed-ended and open-ended questions) and six-week follow-up surveys and a group of 11 program participants who volunteered for in-depth interviews. Quantitative data were examined by using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test and Mann-Whitney U Test, whereas qualitative data were analyzed by utilizing thematic analysis. Results from quantitative analysis showed no significant differences between before the workshop and at the six-week follow up for the four outcome variables. In contrast, qualitative results indicated that participants experienced improvements in these four outcome variables, normalizing problems, changes in perspectives as well as spiritual growth in relationship with God and their spouses. The program equally influenced both male and female samples in these outcome variables. Integration of spirituality, cultivation of communication and conflict resolution skills and discussion of forgiveness are suggested for pastoral social work practice with Catholic Vietnamese immigrant couples and families in the United States. Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness and long-term effect of the MRW enrichment intervention in
supporting marital relationship given the lack of significant differences in quantitative analysis results and the positive qualitative results.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Intimate relationships are capable of promoting the health and well-being of adults and the children whom they raise (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012). Strengthening couple relationships and increasing their capacity to create healthy families are likely to require direct and indirect strategies that protect couples from marital distress (Lavner & Bradbury, 2017). Many governments and community agencies in developed countries, such as the United States, Japan, Australia, and Norway have endorsed the distribution of couple and relationship education (CRE) programs in an effort to decrease the negative personal, social, and economic consequences associated with high rates of relationship conflicts and divorce (Halford et al., 2008). In the early 1950s, the Catholic Church and other religious organizations started offering structured relationship education programs in a group format for premarital or marrying couples (Hunt et al., 1998). Secular organizations also began to provide programs to support marital relationships in the mid-1950s in the United States, Australia, and other Western countries. By the late 1990s between one quarter and one third of marrying couples in the United States, Australia, and Britain were attending some form of relationship education (Halford et al., 2003). According to Davis (2015), some of secular and faith-based marriage enrichment programs have been used in the United States, were such programs as Relationship Enhancement (Cavedo & Guerney, 1999), Marriage Encounter (Bosco, 1972), the Couples Communication Program (CCP, Miller et al., 1975), PREPARE/ENRICH - Growing Together Workshop...
(Olson & Olson, 1999), the Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills (PAIRS, Gorden & Durana, 1999), the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP, Markman et al., 1991), the Weekend to Remember (FamilyLife, 2020) and, the focus of this study, the Marriage Renewal Workshop (MRW, 2005).

The Marital Renewal Workshop (MRW) was developed as a community–based marriage enrichment program (see Appendix A for full program schedule). As one of many marriage enrichments programs, the Marriage Renewal Workshop was developed to support married couples who are of the same or mixed Christian faith and who are experiencing difficulties and dysfunctions in their marriage and relationship. The workshops have often taken place in religious settings including parishes and retreat centers. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of MRW on enhancing the quality of marriage among targeted Vietnamese American married couples. It was hypothesized that this program would help couples increase their relationship satisfaction, levels of forgiveness, and improve their skills in conflict resolution and communication. This chapter presents the data on divorce and marriage in the United States, the negative consequences of marital distress and dissolution on intra-and interpersonal relationships as well as positive associations between marriage enrichments programs on marital relationship.

**Consequences of Marital Discord in the United States**

The U.S. National Vital Statistics System – NVSS (2017) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that the divorce and annulments rates were generally 3.2 per 1,000 people in 2016 compared to 4.0 per 1,000 people in 2000. The divorce rate dropped in the United States from 2000 to 2016. Nonetheless, the primary reason this number has
declined is because there are fewer marriages taking place. The marriage rate in 2016 was 6.9 per 1,000 compared with 8.2 per 1,000 in 2000. According to the Georgetown Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA, 2013), 26% of all American adults were divorced in 2010 and 2012, whereas 20% of all Catholics experienced divorce. By comparison, 31% of Protestant American adults were divorced; 24% American adults without religious affiliation, and 26% for other religious affiliations. Moreover, data showed that Catholics who marry people of the same faith have a lower divorce rate (27%) than Catholics who marry non-Catholics (32%) (CARA, 2013). Still, this indicates many couples experience difficulties and dysfunctions in marriage before they end their marriage. Additionally, evidence indicates that marital distress and family separation are related to a broad spectrum of risks for both adults and children, including problems with mental health, behavior, physical health, and economic stability (Markman et al., 2010).

**Effects of Marital Relationship on Well-being**

**Marital Relationship and Couple’s Well-being**

**Marital relationship and individual health.** While most people entering marriage report a high initial relationship satisfaction, relationship satisfaction drops across the next 10 years of marriage (Halford et al., 2003). According to these authors, many couples endure marital/relationship distress before they end their marriage. Studies showed that the quality of marital relationships was also associated with physical and psychological health outcomes (Robles et al., 2014; Proulx et al., 2007). In their meta-analysis study, Robles et al. (2014) examined the relationship between marital quality and health outcomes by reviewing 126 published empirical articles over the past 50 years. They found that greater marital relationship
quality was significantly associated with better physical health across all studies with mean effect sizes from $r = .07$ to .21. The results included a lower risk of mortality $r = .11$ and a lower cardiovascular reactivity during marital conflict, $r = -.13$. Likewise, Dush and Amato (2005) found that relationship happiness was associated positively with self-esteem, life satisfaction, and general life happiness, while negative relationships were related to distress. Additionally, relationship discord predicted the onset of psychopathology, such as mood, anxiety, and substance use disorders (Whisman & Baucom, 2012). In the representative surveys of the U.S. population, Whisman (2007) found a moderate to strong association between relationship distress and common psychological disorders in the spouses, especially depression, anxiety disorders, and drug and alcohol abuse. By analyzing a large data set (N = 1,383 married individuals) from the National Comorbidity Survey Replication (NCS-R), Robustelli et al. (2015) concluded that marital discord was significantly and positively linked to suicidal ideation and attempts. Individuals who reported suicidal ideation or made a suicide attempt in the prior 12 months experienced higher levels of marital discord relative to individuals who did not report these outcomes. In other words, relationship discord relates to couple’s well-being at the individual level.

**Marital conflict and relationship dissolution.** Furthermore, marital conflict may lead to later divorce as a study by Markman et al. (2010) showed that negative and less positive communications were meaningfully related to later divorce. Also, longitudinal self-report studies have demonstrated that a couple’s communication during conflict is predictive of subsequent divorce (Birditt et al., 2010). This finding was also evident in observational studies (Markman et
al., 2013). Therefore, marital discord has a critical impact on intra- and interpersonal well-being of couples.

Marital Relationship and the Well-being of Offspring

Marital conflict or distress and child well-being. Empirical research also documents the link between marital conflict and child well-being and adjustment (Kelly, 2000; Goeke-Morey et al., 2013; Fosco & Feinberg, 2015). Children learn vicariously through exposure to certain behaviors in accordance with social learning theory (Bandura, 1986). Thus, parents who openly display their destructive marital conflicts in front of their children model the expression of emotions in aggressive and hostile ways (Coln et al., 2013). Specifically, findings demonstrated that destructive marital conflict (e.g., aggressive, violent, withdrawal or hostile behaviors) significantly predicted negative parenting practices (e.g., hostile/intrusive parenting) as well as children’s internalizing (e.g., self-blame or depression) and externalizing (e.g., disruptive behaviors) problems (Coln et al., 2013). Similarly, research by Knopp et al. (2017) used secondary data from a larger randomized controlled trial testing the impact of a relationship education intervention, PREP for Strong Bonds, delivered to couples by U.S. Army chaplains. The study’s participants (N= 1,033) married, heterosexual couples with children, were examined in five waves of a larger study of marriage in the U.S. Army. The study examined the associations over time between parents’ marital functioning and their children’s well-being after controlling for between-family differences. Marital functioning was measured through parental verbal conflict, marital satisfaction, and constructive communication. Inversely, variables of internalizing and externalizing problems (e.g., disobedience at home, withdrawn, and moody) were used to assess child well-being. The results for between-family marital functioning reported
that each marital functioning variable (e.g., parents’ marital satisfaction, verbal conflict, and constructive communication), was significantly associated with child internalizing and externalizing problems. In contrast, within–family relations with children’s internalizing and externalizing variables were found only marginally significant for parents’ constructive communication behaviors, but not significant for marital satisfaction and verbal conflict. Meaning, when parents reported increasing their constructive communication and a lower level of marital conflicts, they also reported a decrease in their children’s internalizing and externalizing problems (Knopp et al., 2017). Further research demonstrates that marital discord or conflict has long-term effects on children’s emotional and behavioral problems from childhood (Brock & Kochanska, 2016; Frankel et al., 2015; Braithwaite et al., 2015; Fosco & Feinberg, 2015) to adulthood (Gager et al., 2016).

Based on family systems theory, Frankel et al. (2015) argued that the family environment may be a major contributor to children’s development of emotion regulation in the preschool years and through adulthood. The marital and parent-child subsystems interdependently predict toddlers’ later emotionality, such as flat affect or emotional withdrawal and negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, distressed vocalization, anger/aggression). Parents’ distressed responses were measured by their nonverbal displays of emotional distress, including anger, stress, frustration, or anxiety in their voice tone or movement. In their longitudinal study, these authors examined the relation of parents’ marital conflict, assessed when their child was at 8 and 24 months old, and parents’ distressed responses to their infant’s negative emotions at 8 and 24 months. They also tested interactions between parents’ marital conflict and their distressed responses as predictors of their toddlers’ negative and flat/withdrawn affect at 24 months. After controlling for
children’s reactive temperament, child gender, family income, and both parents’ distressed responses to their children’s negative emotions at 8 and 24 months, the results indicated that greater marital conflict at 8 months predicted greater marital conflict at 24 months, which in turn, directly predicted greater flat/withdrawn and negative affect in toddlerhood. Only parents’ marital conflict predicted toddlers’ flat/withdrawn affect, but parental distressed responses did not. The findings also suggested that mothers’, but not fathers’, distressed responses at 24 months were associated with toddlers’ negative affect, even after controlling for the marital conflict and all of the control variables. However, a father’s distressed responses did interact with marital conflict to predict toddlers’ negative affect at 24 months. In the same way, toddlers’ flat/withdrawn affect were reported high when marital conflict and fathers’ distressed responses were high. In addition, these authors found that toddlers who experienced higher marital conflict during infancy and toddlerhood were more likely to show both increased negative emotions and increased flat/withdrawn affect during toddlerhood. Thus, these results suggest that the infant’s exposure to marital conflict may directly affect their development of emotion regulation and expressivity (Frankel et al., 2015). Regarding the effects of marital discord on children’s well-being, Gager et al. (2016) found that children in high conflict families whose parents stayed together, had significantly higher rates of relationship dissolution than children in intact, low conflict families. Based on observational learning theory, these authors argued that when parents who argue and stay together, children may learn through observing and modeling the parents’ conflict styles over their entire childhood. Accordingly, the longer children were exposed to the parental conflicts, the higher likelihood that they reported “a union dissolution” in their current
romantic relationships in their adulthood (Gager et al., 2016, p.257). Meaning, the adult children carry their childhood experiences of their parental conflicts with them into their adult life.

**Marital dissolution and child well-being.** The findings of Weaver and Schofield (2015) suggests that divorce or separated families are directly and indirectly associated with children internalizing and externalizing behaviors when compared with their peers from intact families. In association with parental divorce, research has shown that parental divorce or separation emotionally and psychologically affects child development (e.g., Amato & Anthony, 2014; Kim, 2011). Amato and Anthony (2014) used the child fixed effects models – “each child serves as his or her own control” (p.2) to estimate the effects of divorce on children in two large data sets designed by the National Center for Education Statistics: 1) Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS -K, kindergarten through the 5th grade) and 2) the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS, 8th grade to the senior year of high school). The results showed that parental divorce was significantly associated with declines in reading scores, mathematics scores, positive approach learning (attitudes about learning), interpersonal skills, self-control, and increases in internalizing and externalizing problems for ECLS-K. Most estimated effects were modest in magnitude, with effect sizes of less than 0.2 or 1 SD. Only internalizing problems yielded an effect size of almost 0.3 SD. For the NELS dataset, divorce was significantly related to decreases in reading and math, self-esteem, internal locus of control, failing educational expectations, and increase in smoking. The effect sizes were reported between 0.1 and 0.2 SD. Although the effect sizes were generally modest, they were significant (Amato & Anthony, 2014). Meaning, parental divorce has significant effects on children’s related outcomes, but the mean differences are small. Hence, Amato and Anthony (2014)
concluded that divorce was associated with consistent declines in children’s achievement and adjustment. In association with effects of parental divorce on children, parental divorce knowingly associates with the quality of children’s romantic relationships as adults (Cui & Fincham, 2010).

Accordingly, hostile family environments can lay the foundation for trajectories of psychopathology (Fosco & Feinberg, 2015). This possibility suggests a fundamental need to assist enhancing and maintaining the relationship quality of all couples in order to promote healthy marriages and familial relationships. This mission is an important focus of not just clergy, but also mental health professionals (Fawcett et al., 2010). Thus, the development of many marriage and relationship education programs were created to help improve marital relationships and develop strong family cohesion. Like many other marriage education programs, the Marriage Renewal Workshop (a faith-based marriage enrichment weekend program) was developed to advance the quality of marital relationships by increasing levels of satisfaction, promoting effective communication, improving conflict resolution skills, and increasing forgiveness that can lead to a healthy marriage through a workshop format.

**Marriage and Relationship Education and Its Impacts**

Marriage and relationship education (MRE) were developed from the work of religious clergy including priests, rabbis, and ministers who prepared and offered brief premarital counseling in the hopes of strengthening marriages before they even began (Halford, et al., 2003). MRE focuses on 1) bettering communication and problem-solving skills through diminishing criticism and enhancing listening skills; and 2) presenting information related to marital quality – couples learn how to deal with their issues effectively through discussion about
fundamental virtues associated with relationship quality such as commitment and forgiveness (Hawkins et al., 2008). MRE provides educational interventions to groups of couples and individuals before problems become too serious. It does not however, offer one-on-one couples counseling between participants and professionals on specific personal problems, which differentiates it from couple therapy (Hawkins et al., 2008). Moreover, MRE programs are made up from a combination of four different components: awareness, feedback, cognitive change, and skills training (Halford et al., 2003). “Awareness” is the transmission of information and clarification of expectations. The goal of these programs is to increase couple’s awareness of their relationship process that may influence the relationship outcomes. The term “feedback” refers to individualized assessment (e.g. inventory) as well as feedback to the couple about their current relationship functioning (Halford et al., 2003). In the MRW program, feedback comes in the form of individual reflection questions in each session, group discussion, and program evaluation forms. Through these activities, couples are intensely involved in capturing diverse dimensions of couple functioning. “Cognitive change” is defined as encouraging cognitions that are believed to uphold positive couple relationships. Lastly, skills training is related to relationship skills that couples receive from a mixture of lectures, demonstrations, and audio-visual presentations, plus opportunities to practice these new skills (Halford et al., 2003). Skills training includes communication and conflict resolution that are relatively embedded in language and in each activity in the MRW program (MRW Manual 2005). Through awareness, feedback, cognitive change, and skills training, the quality of marital relationship is believed to be improved.
An increasing body of research has demonstrated the positive effects of marriage and relationship education programs on couple relationship quality (Blanchard et al., 2009; Hawkins et al., 2008; Bodenmann et al., 2014). In a review of marriage enrichment programs, Halford et al. (2003) examined 12 controlled trials of programs that had follow-up assessments of at least 6 months. The results suggested that marital education programs consistently lead to an enhancement of communication skills and relationship satisfaction. Relatedly, Halford and Bodenmann (2013) found that relationship education programs helped to maintain relationship satisfaction in 14 studies of the 17 published studies evaluating relationship education programs with a follow-up assessment of at least 1 year. Couples with high evaluations of modifiable risk factors benefited substantially from relationship education, whereas benefits for couples with low risk were not reliably demonstrated. Therefore, improved communication is a predictor of relationship satisfaction (Halford et al., 2003; Halford & Bodenmann, 2013). Communication and relationship quality variables reciprocally influence each other (Halford et al., 2003) because “relationships are established, maintained, and changed by the communicative interactions among members” (Duncan & Rock, 1993, p.48). This suggests that teaching communication skills should enhance relationship quality.

Furthermore, Worthington et al. (2015) stated that “communication interventions that effectively strengthen emotional bonds by helping couples forgive and reconcile offenses could potentially be a strong enrichment intervention” (as cited in Fincham et al., 2005, p.15). In fact, many research studies on forgiveness interventions have demonstrated that forgiveness is an effective intervention to enrich married life and a couple’s relationship (Ripley & Worthington, 2002; Aalgaard et al., 2016). Studies illustrated that forgiveness is positively correlated with
marital satisfaction (Fincham & Beach, 2002; McCullough et al., 1998). Other studies have shown that spouses who are more forgiving of each other's transgressions experience more positive marital relationships (Fincham et al., 2002; Paleari et al., 2005). Inevitably relational transgressions happen in marriage which can provoke strong negative feelings and disrupt the relationship (Fincham et al., 2004). These disruptions or transgressions may fuel conflict and hinder effective conflict resolution. Therefore, when the spouses choose to forgive their partner’s transgressions, they eliminate their internal hurdles to connectedness caused by transgressions (Fincham et al., 2004, 2007). The results from two studies by Fincham et al. (2004) suggest that positive and negative forgiveness is associated with couples’ conflict resolution. In this sense, forgiveness is a predictor of conflict resolution as it prepares couples to resolve future conflicts, and, in turn may lead to improving marital satisfaction. In addition, David and Stafford (2015) found that forgiveness by husband and wife was positively linked to marital satisfaction, whereas, a lack of forgiveness by husband and wife was negatively related to marital satisfaction. Hence, focusing on couples’ satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and their levels of forgiveness appears to enhance marital quality. These qualities are targets of many marriage enrichment interventions or programs such as the MRW program (Worthington et al., 2015; Blanchard et al., 2009; Hawkins et al., 2008). In the next section, a brief overview of the MRW program is presented.

**An Overview of Marriage Renewal Workshop**

The Marriage Renewal Workshop (MRW) was created to enrich and support marriage and family life (see Appendix A). It emphasizes knowledge, skills, and cognitive change that couples will experience by engaging in the weekend program.
Historically, the MRW program was developed in 1997 by a Catholic married couple, Dennis and Marikae Moraski, after they attended a weekend retreat with the Parish Marriage Enrichment Program (PMEP) in Upland, California (M. Moraski, personal communication, March 2, 2017). Taking benefits and experiences from this program, Mr. and Mrs. Moraski designed a parish-based enrichment weekend retreat program that could serve a variety of married couples. As a result, they started working in collaboration with the pastor and some other volunteer couples in their home parish at St. Madeleine Sophie Catholic Church in Bellevue, Washington. They built the MRW curriculum based on PMEP and at first served couples in their parishes and then extended it to many other neighboring parishes (M. Moraski, personal communication, March 2, 2017).

In 2005, the first Vietnamese couple, Mr. John and Mrs. Kim Anh Vu who had been members of the U.S. Christian Community Life (CLC-US) organization, sought a marriage enrichment program in which Vietnamese American married couples and families with marital and family problems could find support. They attended the MRW program at St. Madeleine Sophie Catholic Church in Bellevue, Washington. Their positive experience in the program led them to promote it to Vietnamese American couples and families who had experienced living in both Vietnamese and American cultures. Mr. and Mrs. Vu introduced MRW and encouraged some other Vietnamese married couples in CLC to participate. Finally, their team had four couples who were trained and became founding leaders of the Vietnamese MRW program. It was a long process of preparation and translation to get translations ready. The first Vietnamese language workshop was held in 2006 in New Jersey (H. Nguyen, personal communication, June 16, 2017). With the permission and support of Mr. and Mrs. Moraski and their team, the
Vietnamese core team leaders translated the English MRW manual (a 300-page book) into Vietnamese. Although they first hired a translator, the first translation was not consistent with the English copy, so they decided to translate the 300-page manual by themselves. After the translation was done, they reviewed and compared it with the original English version. It took them more than a year to create the present version of the Vietnamese MRW manual (H. Nguyen, personal communication, June 16, 2017).

The MRW program includes workshops, sharing life experiences, exercises, and social events to support couples’ relationships (MRW manual, 2005). Both the husbands and wives are required to attend all events and exercises together (H. Nguyen, personal communication, June 16, 2017). All the activities in the MRW program are guided by its mission that is “to invite, excite, and empower couples to grow closer to God, and to one another through the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony, to deepen their commitment to one another, and to serve others in the Church and the community” (MRW manual, 2005). Similar to the SANCTUS marriage enrichment program (Sager & Sager, 2005), the MRW also underlines a pattern of love and relationship with God, oneself, and others. Thus, the teachings and exercises in MRW focus on relationship building with one’s “Higher Being,” oneself, and one’s significant other.

The MRW is disseminated by clergy, 3 MRW leadership team couples, and 5 trained volunteer couples. They all meet in an online conference 3 months prior to the workshop. The core team couples are responsible for recruiting five potential volunteer couples who are good at reading, writing, and public speaking, and then supervise and train them in writing their own experiences of their relationship for presentations. Through writing, reflecting, and sharing life experiences, the healing process reciprocally helps both presenting couples as well as
participating couples. This education approach is guided by the principles of “we are all learners and we are all teachers” (MRW manual, 2005). Furthermore, the richness of this program is in the diversity of life experiences and perspectives on how to live a healthy married life (H. Nguyen, personal communication, June 16, 2017). Relationship enrichment programs are “examples of marital health promotion interventions and typically designed to help couples who wish to increase their levels of relationship satisfaction” (Markman & Rhoades, 2012, p.170). This means that couples who wish to enliven and enhance their marital relationship are potential candidates for relationship enrichment programs. Therefore, participants in MRW will learn to graciously serve, fully accept, and genuinely respect the entire spectrum of married couples in today’s Catholic Church. This includes active or inactive Catholics, couples in good marriages and those who are struggling, those who are engaged or newly married, the long-time married, those with young children, no children, and empty-nesters (MRW manual, 2005).

The Marriage Renewal Workshop takes place in weekend retreats from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon with 9 sessions. On Friday evening, two topics: “God’s Plan for Marriage” and “A Blueprint for Marriage” are shared to help couples understand the importance of marriage for participants, for the speaker personally, for God, for the church, and for society. On Saturday, five topics are presented to engage the couples in gaining communication skills that will help them understand themselves and their spouses better, manage conflicts in marriage, and reconcile to each other. Sunday topics engage couples in understanding the role of marriage in the Church and the community as demonstrations of God’s love. All topics and exercises (e.g., shared life experiences or stories, and silent moments, social events) help participating married couples to view their marriage relationships through a new lens with the goal of gaining greater
understanding, acceptance, and respect for each another (MRW manual, 2005).

For the past eleven years, the MRW program has been run in many Vietnamese communities by the non-profit U.S. Christian Life Community as a faith-based program. Fifty-four workshops have been conducted in the United States, including one in Canada and 8 in Vietnam. More than a thousand Vietnamese American/Canadian couples have enriched their marital relationships in the MRW programs. Many positive feedbacks from previous program participants reflected that the program was very helpful to support them to enhance their marital relationship quality. While MRW was used as a successful marriage enrichment intervention, it was not evaluated or studied. Therefore, this current research aimed to assess and document the impact of Marriage Renewal Workshops with Vietnamese Americans first-generation couples. This study sought to formally evaluate the MRW program and provide credible findings to support this anecdotal feedback from prior participants and leaders of the MRW program examining the variables of relationship satisfaction, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and forgiveness. These four variables were the focus of the MRW program when working with couples.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

Although the MRW program has served more than a thousand Vietnamese American married couples living in and out of the United States (e.g., Canada, Vietnam), it has not been empirically evaluated. Moreover, no mixed method research has investigated the impact of the MRW program, yet this program has been implemented in various Vietnamese Catholic parishes throughout the United States. Thus, the current study examined how Marriage Renewal Workshops help to enrich the marital relationship quality in Vietnamese American heterosexual
It is hoped that the MRW program helps participating couples improve their communication skills, relationship satisfaction, conflict resolution, and levels of forgiveness, which can ultimately lead to more successful marital relationships.

**Summary.** The first chapter has outlined the potential benefits of marriage enrichment programs in helping couples improve their marital relationships, while admitting that more research is needed to evaluate these programs. It highlighted the negative and positive impacts of marital relationships at varying levels of satisfaction upon individuals, couples, families, and societies. It also provided a brief history of research samples who identified as foreign-born Vietnamese American. In addition, this chapter delineated the mission of the MRW program in which it sought to test whether this program does what it is supposed to do in enriching marital relationship.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The person-in-environment perspective in social work is a practice-guiding principle central to direct clinical social work practice. For without it, a professional cannot appreciate and attempt to improve the lives of individuals and society and the relationships between them (Weiss, 2008). This perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding how the individual behaves and acts in his/her environmental contexts. Similarly, ecological systems theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, (Rothery, 2007) concluded that a person’s development was affected by everything in his or her surrounding environment. Ecological systems theory also focuses on the relationship between individuals and their environment and how this relationship can lead to understanding an individual’s problems. The person and the social environment are reciprocally maintaining and shaping one another (Rothery, 2007). Therefore, social work practice not only assesses individuals’ problems and social interactions, but also looks beyond these issues to environmental factors, such as culture, socioeconomics and family experiences. Accordingly, this second chapter discusses the comprehensive theories of systems theory, social learning theory, and social exchange theory as they illuminate the processes occurring in MRW. In addition, an overview of the MRW program is described, along with the definitions of terms used in this research. This chapter also examines the impact of the marriage enrichment programs that have been scientifically evaluated and found to share similar characteristics with the MRW program as a faith-based group approach. Lastly, the gaps found in other studies on
marriage and family provide the rationale for why this study was needed.

**Theoretical Framework of Marriage Renewal Workshop**

**Systems Theory**

Systems theory was developed during the 1940s and 1950s when mathematicians, physicists, biologists, engineers, psychologists, cultural anthropologists, and sociologists started to look at inanimate, organic, and human organizations and structures as a complex arrangement of component parts and interacting elements. These interacting elements together form interdependent entities labeled as “systems.” Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1969), a biologist, is considered the father of general systems theory (Rasheed et al., 2010). Functionally, systems theory developed to explain the complexities of relationships and to help resolve problems and distress inherent in relationships (Duncan & Rock, 1993). “A systems perspective gave the observer the lens to examine and explore how the individual both influences and is influenced by the dynamics within the interior of a family system” (Rasheed et al., 2010, p.19). Meaning, it focuses on what takes place between couples rather than on the individual psychology of each member. When two individuals come together in a relationship, something is created that is different from, bigger, and more complex than those two individuals apart; a unique system (Duncan & Rock, 1993). Thus, the couple’s relationship is established, maintained, and changed by their communication and interactions with each other (Duncan & Rock, 1993; Wadsworth & Markman, 2012; Bodenmann & Randall, 2012).

In the marriage field, Elliott and Saunders (1982) discussed three key assumptions for the systems marriage enrichment program. The first assumption “circular causality” is that a marital partner’s behavior both influences and is influenced by the behavior of the other partner. It functions in a dynamic cyclical linear model. It is understood that discrete events become part of
a causal chain with each event both affecting and being affected, as opposed to a linear model in which one event is caused by a previous event (Rasheed et al., 2010). So, any conflicts and relationship distress in marriage must be understood in a sequence of reciprocal exchanges which fit together to bring about a given change. Especially, in Session 3: All in The Family of the MRW program, couples are invited to explore the way their love is influenced, stressed, and strengthened by their nuclear extended families and to share helpful skills, resources, and traditions and habits (MRW manual, 2005). This program raises couples’ awareness of their individual and their partner’s unique differences in behavioral and communicative patterns. When couples understand their strengths and weaknesses in their relationship, they can better avoid conflicts and maintain a healthy and stable relationship.

The second assumption in systemic marital enrichment programs is that communication and interaction patterns presented by a couple can be organized into a predictable pattern. The couple system creates certain regulations which govern the ways they interact with each other - who makes what decisions, how conflict is handled, etc. The interactional sequences are relatively stable and predictable in most common situations (Elliott & Saunders, 1982). In this context, the MRW program, Session 4: Communication in Marriage, helps couples acknowledge the importance of open and honest communication as well as harmful communication patterns in a marital relationship. The program promotes effective communication skills in relationships and reduces negative communicative and/or interactive behaviors that cause conflicts in marriage. Essentially, couples learn not only information about communication, but also how to improve their problem-solving skills.

Finally, the third assumption of systems theory for marriage enrichment is that marriages have both morphogenic and morphostatic tendencies. Morphogenic refers to an ability to adapt to
change; in contrast, a morphostatic tendency describes the ability to resist change for maintaining the homeostatic balance of the system. Relationship discord is considered an unbalanced system; therefore, working to restore the homeostatic balance in marital systems is a central focus of marriage enrichment programs (Elliott & Saunders, 1982). Capuzzi and Stauffer (2015) used the concept of feedback (negative and positive) in relation to the system’s ability to adapt and resist. Negative feedback contributes to homeostasis by the process of self-regulating and maintaining a stable relationship as well as reducing the tendency toward deviation from the family norms. In contrast, positive feedback leads to change when it is used by the family system to identify a pattern. Through the sessions in the MRW program, couples collect helpful feedback from couple presenters, from other couples in table discussion, as well as from MRW team leaders. Through their feedback, couples learn to recognize their strengths and weaknesses in their marital relationship as well as how to improve their skills in empathic communication and problem-solving. Therefore, systems theory provides a framework to understand the ways in which marital relationships act as relatively stable systems in which couples’ influence and are influenced by one another. This systematic adaptability maintains and influences their relationship, some form of learning or change occurs in one or both members of the couple.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory views behavior and conditioning as central to understanding relationships. As we learned in the behavioral movement in the second wave of psychology, classical conditioning demonstrates that people learn from repeated associations. We also learned that people learn from consequences, that is, operant conditioning (Baum, 1994; Davis, 2015). Behavior modification and cognitive theories as applied to enrichment programs tend to employ concepts from social learning theory, using methods of modeling, behavior rehearsal,
stimulating, and reinforcement (Hunt et al., 1998). Per these theories, unhealthy skills and
dysfunctional patterns observed with distressed couples were originally learned via different
familial, cultural, or societal avenues (e.g., modeling, associations, rewards/consequences, etc.).
These skills and patterns are capable of being unlearned and exchanged with positive skills and
more effective patterns using educational and experiential approaches. Hence, reeducation about
cognition, cognitive functions, and behaviors is encouraged (Hunt et al., 1998). According to
Davis (2015), this change process can occur on the individual and the systemic levels.

**Individual as a system change.** Individual changes are understood to be changes that
happen within the self or individual. Davis (2015) claimed that these changes “could be small
modifications operating within current assumptions or knowledge an individual holds about their
relationships” (p.23). Individuals who can recognize these differences can improve their
relationships. In Marriage Renewal Workshops, individual changes are addressed through the
relationship education component and the improved ability to understand him/her/self better
(MRW manual, 2005). The program enables individual changes through specific skills such as
staying attentive or focused, reflecting, praying, recognizing, listening to other’s story,
understanding, accepting, expressing emotion and thoughts, asking clarifying questions,
dialogue, seeking and granting forgiveness.

**Couple as a system change.** Systemic changes occur as a result of couples learning new
ways to interpret and view their relationship. These systemic changes are delineated as
“discontinuous changes in the system or modifications in shared system schemas and behaviors”
(Davis, 2015, p.24). In this sense, marriage enrichment programs help couples to change their
thoughts, interpretations, and ways of perceiving their relationship and consequently how
partners react toward one another. In the MRW program, acknowledgement of the relationship
between perceptions and behaviors is highlighted and fortified (MRW manual, 2005). For instance, couples learn to recognize the meaning and role of their marriage. The function of marriage serves not only for the self but also for others; as a husband is to his wife, as a wife is to her husband, as parents are to their children, and as community members are to community development. The program aids couples in examining how their understanding of the nature of marriage is functioning in their own marital relationships by providing relationship education and discussion. Particularly, perceptions and behaviors are seen in Session 1: God’s Plan for Marriage; Session 2: A Blueprint for Marriage, and Session 6: Intimacy in Marriage. In these sessions, couples are invited to recognize their roles in the relationship and how love is expressed (MRW manual, 2005). So, skills and knowledge are obtained through relationship education, modeling, and reinforcement.

Noticeably, the group format of marriage enrichment programs enables social reinforcement as originally described by Skinner (1969). This reinforcement happens during the learning phase and is viewed as secondary to the influence of repeated practice and modeling (Davis, 2015; Hunt et al., 1998). Meaning, couples may learn new behaviors by observing and hearing repeated stories or examples of other participants and couple presenters in the program. The role of social reinforcement in relationship enrichment programs has been suggested to be most effective in increasing positive feelings participants have about themselves and hopes for their relationship (Davis, 2015; Chance, 2003). In the MRW program, social reinforcement is assumed as an influential tool to enhance and continue developing relationship skills, even after the program finishes. Through the MRW program, participants learn social skills (e.g., conflict management, communication skills) and how to maintain them by continually practicing these skills in Session 4: Communication in Marriage, and in Session 5: For Better or Worse.
**Relevance to Marriage Renewal Workshop.** The comprehensive frameworks of system theory and social learning theory provide a broad scope for understanding the dynamics and functioning of marital relationships by looking at the whole system, interactions in a social exchange context, and patterns of dysfunctional thoughts that influence emotions and behaviors in the marriage and family. As one of the marriage enrichment programs, MRW is consistent with the same theoretical framework of many other relationship enrichment programs (e.g. focusing on couple communication and conflicts in its marriage systems). In this program, couples learn to understand that behaviors are related to communicative patterns and conflict management. They gain understanding of how negative and positive behaviors impact their marital communication and influence their relationship. The principles of first and second changes in social learning theory can be applied as interventions in which couples are encouraged to be aware of their unrealistic assumptions about marital relationships and learn how to alter their assumptions. If a couple values their marital relationship, it is a good intervention technique for groups. Couples can motivate each other by encouraging each other with constructive feedback in the safe environment of the group. These factors enable positive feelings for participants about themselves and their marital relationships. Following is the review of previous studies on evaluation of the effects of marriage enrichment programs.

**Evaluation and Effectiveness of Marriage Enrichment Programs**

Many marriage enrichment programs are available to support couple relationship (Hawkins et al., 2008). The development of these programs is generally independent of one another and, consequently, lacks a single theoretical framework. However, teaching a variety of skills (e.g. communication skills, problem-solving skills) and principles (improving skills associated with improvement of relationship satisfaction) in the service of enriching relationship
health over time is the main goal shared by most marriage relationship education programs. Theoretically, improvement in communication skills, conflict resolution, and coping should occur prior to enhancement of marital satisfaction and the prevention of declines in relationship functioning (Wadsworth & Markman, 2012). Additionally, “studying what people say about themselves is no substitute for studying how they behave… Questionnaires and scales of marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction have yielded very little. We need to look at what people do with one another” (Raush et al., 1974, p. 5). This statement places an emphasis on the analysis of marital communication, particularly communication over conflicts and differences of opinion for marriage studies. Researchers working from the perspective of social learning theory took this method and organized their studies around the premise that when conflict creates a conflict cycle, it is fed by one or both partners’ aversive responses that contributes to maintaining that coercive cycle (Brad & Karney, 2004; Koerner & Jacobson, 1994). Therefore, couple dysfunctional behaviors that are learned can be re-learned through reinforcement, encouragement, modeling, and rehearsal of behaviors in accordance with social learning theory.

Also, couples’ interactions in marriage, and the potential for self-actualization with regards to self and others, theoretically occur in its systems (Bowling et al., 2005). Recently, systems and social learning theory are delineated by Davis (2015) in her dissertation about the effects of Weekend Remember, a couple enrichment program on relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict management, and forgiveness. Although learning and systems theories were not mentioned in the MRW program, they function as theoretical perspectives for change process in this marriage enrichment program.

Although more than a thousand Vietnamese American married couples have been served by the MRW program in the United States and beyond (i.e., Canada, Vietnam), it was not
systematically evaluated or studied. This leads to a lack of credible evidence on the impact of the MRW. To further promote the MRW and be assured of its positive impact on helping couples, the program needed to be evaluated. Even though there are many distinct existing marriage enrichment programs, only a few of the programs similar to MRW will be reviewed. These programs look like MRW in its format of weekend retreat or 3-day program, in its purpose, and in its content of educational training program. These marriage enrichment programs have also been evaluated for their effects on the relationship quality among married and diverse populations in both religious and community settings.

**Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP).** The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program has been found to be one of the most effective marriage and relationship education programs (Jakubowski et al., 2004). PREP has been successfully applied to both community samples in secular and religious settings (Laurenceau et al., 2004). Generally, PREP is a “skills-oriented approach based on etiological factors basic to marital failure” (Jakubowski et al., 2004, p.529). The PREP’s goals are to teach couples better communication and conflict-resolving strategies, support couples in clarifying and evaluating expectations, encourage understanding of choices reflecting commitment, and improve the positive closeness in the relationship. The PREP can be used in counseling, group settings, or in self-study by couples. Training materials are accessible which include a leader’s manual and materials for conducting the program. The PREP program consists of 12 hours held in a group format. It occurs in six 2-hour sessions, a weekend retreat, or other formats as needed (Jakubowski et al., 2004).

Studies assessing the effectiveness of PREP resulted in an association with increased positive communication for couples in comparison to couples in the control groups (cited from
Blumberg, 1991), increased communication and problem-solving skills (Stanley et al., 2001), lower rates of divorce, greater relationship satisfaction and less intense problems (Halford et al., 2001). Likewise, MRW aims to teach couples how to communicate with one another and manage their conflicts through modeling. Especially, in Session 3: Communicate in Marriage, couples learn to understand their own and their spouses’ patterns of communication. This session also teaches couples how to recognize causes of their marital conflicts and how to change their negative behaviors into positive ones. Through the MRW workshop, couples learn to express themselves in an appropriate manner, and respect their spouses (MRW manual, 2005). Thus, PREP and MRW both influence the biopsychosocial well-being of couples through education programs that occur during 3-day weekends. However, the PREP program focuses extensively on the improvement of communication and problem-solving skills to increase relationship satisfaction, but does not include forgiveness in their discussions (see Jakubowski et al., 2004; Laurenceau et al., 2004) whereas forgiveness is considered as one of the critical variables in the MRW program as it relates to the marital satisfaction.

SANCTUS. The SANCTUS Marriage Enrichment Program was created as a faith-based practice to support married couples (Sager & Sager, 2005). This marriage enrichment model consists of a 48-hour intensive weekend, five to seven group sessions after the weekend, 50 days of couple meditations and a daily exercise called FSP+, or the Five-Step Process of Cleansing the Heart. SANCTUS emphasizes a pattern of love and relationship with God, one’s self, and others. Additionally, the main objectives of the SANCTUS Marriage Enrichment Program include:

1. Awareness of each person’s own relationship with his or her God or Supreme Being;
2. Mindfulness of each person’s internal thoughts, emotions, and expressions of the same;
3. Awareness and rebuilding of each person’s primary relationship with spouse or partner via the resources of communication, self-disclosure, forgiveness, and hope (Sager & Sager, 2005, p. 214-215).

By using a pre- and posttest design study, Sager and Sager (2005) collected and compared ratings from 512 surveys completed by participants at the start and conclusion of the 12-weekend seminars. “The SANCTUS Marriage Enrichment seminar has been offered twice annually in the Minnesota area since 1998” (p.215). The results showed that there were significant differences between pre-and posttest scores for each week as well as positive changes in individual scores between pre-and posttest self-assessments. For example, the variables of relationship with God and spouse, emotional intimacy, support of spouse, and marriage commitment were self-measured in the allocation of a continuum from 0 to 10 before and after the SANTUS weekend. The results showed that the participants’ self-reported relationship with God and spouse improved after the program. Emotional intimacy and support of spouse were also significantly different, but there was a lack of significance for marriage commitment. In addition, the study demonstrated that the SANTUS program increased marital satisfaction and increased satisfaction in one’s relationship with God and spouse (Sager & Sager, 2005).

Similar to the SANCTUS Marriage Enrichment program (Sager & Sager, 2005), the Marriage Renewal Workshop is also a faith-based marriage enrichment program. The MRW program also uses a 48-hour intensive weekend format (from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) and emphasizes a pattern of love and relationship with God, one’s self, and others, and rebuilding of couple relationship with each other via the resources of communication, self-disclosure, and forgiveness. This takes place, for example, in Session 4: Communication in Marriage and Session 7: Forgiveness in Marriage (MRW Manual, 2005). All leaders who take
roles in presenting, praying, or caring for participant couples in the 48-hour intensive weekend or in the MRW program are trained to adhere to the program structures exactly. Of course, writing tips are addressed in detail in the MRW manual to keep consistency with the times the program occurs. Like the SANCTUS program, the MRW program training manual makes extensive use of readings from the Christian Bibles. However, Marriage Renewal Workshop (MRW), as a faith-based program, expands its services to couples who are also having trouble and some interpersonal dysfunction, and couples who come from other religious background.

An increasing number of research studies on the effectiveness of marriage enrichment programs found that marital relationship quality was positively and significantly changed after the intervention (Halford & Bodenmann, 2013; Sager & Sager, 2005; Halford et al., 2003). A meta-analytic study was conducted to examine the efficacy of Marriage and Relationship Education (MRE) programs on two common outcomes: relationship quality and communication skills among married couples (Hawkins et al., 2008). They searched for studies since 1975 and concluded with 86 reports that yielded 117 experimental and quasi-experimental studies for their review. These variables were inclusively coded as moderators relevant to the effect of MRE programs: publication status, sample characteristics (i.e., race/ethnicity, relationship distress, gender), and program intensity. Samples in the 117 studies consisted mostly of white, middleclass, heterosexual, married couples, experiencing low relationship distress. More than 500 effect sizes in 117 studies were analyzed. Immediate post-assessments and follow-up assessments were examined to evaluate the deterioration of effects over time. For experimental studies, the follow-up timing ranged from 1 to 60 months following the intervention; 3 – 6 months were most common following the treatment. Timing of follow-up for quasi-experimental studies was reported ranging from 1 to 36 months after the program, again with 3-6-month
follow-ups being most common interval between intervention and follow-up assessment.

Experimental evaluation studies of marriage enrichment programs indicated the effect sizes from $d = .36$ ($p < .001$) at post-assessment to $d = .306$ ($p < .05$) at follow-up for relationship quality and from $d = .435$ ($p < .001$) at post-assessment to $d = .45$ ($p < .01$) at follow-up for communication skills. Quasi-experimental studies resulted in smaller effect sizes from $d = .20$ ($p < .05$) at post-assessment to $d = .29$ ($p < .10$) at follow-up for relationship quality and from $d = .23$ ($p < .01$) at post-assessment to $d = .143$ (no significance) at follow-up for communication skills. Hawkins et al. (2008) concluded that marriage enrichment program effects overall were modest, but significant and did not decline over time. Nonetheless, the researchers concluded that there was a lack of racial/ethnic and economic diversity in the samples that might impact reliable conclusions about the effectiveness of marriage enrichment programs (Hawkins et al., 2008). Hopefully, this gap could begin to be addressed in this research study by having a focus on Vietnamese American married couples.

Furthermore, Jakubowski et al., (2004) conducted a comprehensive review of the outcome research of marital enrichment programs based on established criteria for determining Empirically Supported Treatments (ESTs). They searched major databases (e.g., Digital Dissertation, ProQuest, ERIC, PsychINFO, Social Citation Index, Social Science Abstracts, and Family and Society Studies Worldwide) for marital enrichment studies conducted between 1970 and 2003. Only programs which had been empirically examined since 1990 were included in their review, which led to only 13 programs being eligible for review. The programs were evaluated and classified as: 1) *efficacious* – meaning the program was supported by two or more published studies by separated researchers using control/comparison group with random method, 2) *possibly efficacious* – the program was supported by one published study or more than one
study by the same research team with control randomization, and 3) empirical untested - no published controlled randomized studies on the program. Because of these criteria, only 4 programs resulted in being labelled efficacious: Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), Relationship Enhancement (RE), Couple Communication Program (CCP), and Strategic Hope-Focused Enrichment. Three programs were found to be possibly efficacious: Couple Commitment and Relationship Enhancement (Couple CARE), Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment (ACME), and Couple Coping Enhancement Training (CCET). Six programs were empirically untested (Jakubowski et al., 2004). From these results, the researchers concluded that generally the effectiveness of marriage enrichment programs on improving relationship satisfaction has been supported. Yet, most marriage enrichment programs have received little or no rigorous empirical validation. As noted, none of these validated programs is a faith-based program. Also, there is the need for higher quality outcome studies for marriage enrichment programs (Jakubowski et al., 2004). It is expected that research on the effect of MRW on relationship satisfaction, communication skills, problem-solving skills, and forgiveness might help to address the gap of getting more rigorous marriage enrichment programs with empirical outcome research to serve diverse groups (e.g. Vietnamese families) in faith communities.

A cluster randomized controlled trial was conducted to test the PREP effects on self-report relationship satisfaction, negative behavior, and positive behavior in 217 couples in the Denver metropolitan area (Laurenceau et al., 2004). Couples were recruited from 57 religious organizations (RO) and randomly assigned to one of three study groups: U- PREP (PREP was received from university members of the research team, n = 85 couples), RO-PREP (PREP was disseminated by PREP trained clergies, n = 81), NO (control group/couples received normal
premarital training from their religious communities, n = 51). The 12-hour PREP version was facilitated in a three-session format (including a one-day session and two weeknight sessions) in RO-PREP and U-PREP conditions. The materials used in this study included the playing of videotapes for 4 of the 14 content lectures that composed 2 hours (of 12 hour) of material. Inversely, “NO” participating couples received premarital programs by religious organizations. The interventions were assessed at pretest, posttest and 1 year- follow-ups. The findings showed that relationship satisfaction in the three groups reported no change over time and no difference across intervention conditions. Negative communication in husbands and wives were reported to have significantly declined across intervention conditions. The RO-PREP wives yielded the greatest declines over time compared with both U-PREP and “NO” wives showing significant decline over time. The effect sizes based on t-scores for the differences were $d = .06$ for RO-PREP versus “NO”, $d= .076$ for RO-PREP versus U-PREP. For trajectories of observed positive communication, “NO” wives and U-PREP wives showed significant deteriorations, but no significance for RO-PREP wives. The effect sizes for the differences were $d = .7$ for NO wives versus RO-PREP wives, and $d = .55$ for U-PREP wives versus RO-PREP wives. For positive communication, there were no significant declines for RO-PREP husbands and U-PREP, but significance for “NO” husbands. The effect sizes based on t- scores for the difference were .72 for NO husbands versus RO-PREP husbands. “NO” husbands resulted in no significant declines compared with U-PREP husbands (Laurenceau et al., 2004). The results suggested the effects of PREP intervention when integrated into existing community settings and the importance of communities, such as religious organizations, in supporting functional marriages. The study’s findings also showed that religiosity predicted lower risk for future couple relationship problems (Halford & Bodenmann, 2013).
Regarding mixed methods evidence, Braga (2017) conducted an evaluation study for her dissertation and assessed the usefulness of the 24-week long *MarriageCore* program on relationship satisfaction, relational attachment, and perceived spirituality. *MarriageCore* is a multi-couple marriage and relationship education program grounded on attachment theory and Christian doctrine. It is established to help enhance the relationship quality through a multi-sessions educational format. By using the online concurrent mixed methods approach, the researcher wanted to examine: 1) What is the impact of the *MarriageCore* program on each partner’s level of satisfaction with his or her romantic relationship, as well as on the quality of their attachment to one another and on their spirituality? And, 2) how did each partner’s sense of spirituality interplay with the effectiveness of this newly developed Marriage and Relationship Education (MRE) program? Nineteen participants from a church located in the southwestern region of the United States completed the same online closed-ended and open-ended questionnaire survey at time 1 (6-week follow-up) and time 2 (after 6-month *MarriageCore* program). At time 1, this open-ended question was included: “You may remember that at the end of *MarriageCore*, we asked you questions regarding marital satisfaction, attachment to your partner, and your spirituality. Now at this follow up, about six weeks after *MarriageCore*, what are several changes you have experienced in your marriage that you learned through the *MarriageCore* program?”

The results from both qualitative and quantitative data supported the researcher’s hypothesis that *MarriageCore* had an impact on participants’ relationship satisfaction, the quality of their bond with their partners, and their sense of their partners’ spirituality. Particularly, relationship satisfaction is associated with various relational factors such as good communication skills, problem-solving skills, the couple’s sex life, as well as various demographic variables
including spirituality/religiosity. The qualitative findings indicated some themes in relation to satisfaction, such as Changed Perspective, Improved Communication, Improved Togetherness, Improved Conflict Resolution, Emotional Regulation, Disappointment, and Normalization. In the Changed Perspective, participants indicated a higher level of satisfaction due to a different way of looking at themselves, their partners, and/or their relationships, while the Improved Communication had higher levels of satisfaction due to a sense of more effective communication patterns. Several participants reported experiencing higher relational satisfaction because they simply felt closer to their partners (Improved Togetherness) and/or because they were better able to handle conflict more effectively (Improved Conflict Resolution). However, one participant reported Neutral at the end of MarriageCore, and two which were present only at the 6-week follow up (Loving Behaviors and Continued Work). For participants’ experiencing higher levels of relationship satisfaction due to an increased ability to manage their own emotional content, the theme of Emotional Regulation yielded similar results both at the end of MarriageCore as well as at the 6-week follow up. Besides, some participants indicated being more satisfied with their relationships because they were expressing more loving behaviors such as kindness and forgiveness toward their spouses (Loving Behaviors) at the follow up assessment. A small number of participants reported having fewer positive experiences in the program. Disappointment was found to have increased between the end of MarriageCore and the 6-week follow up.

Likewise, the quantitative data demonstrated that participants reported higher scores in relationship satisfaction at the 6-week follow up than at the end of the program. Consequently, the qualitative and quantitative findings suggest that research participants found MarriageCore to be a useful marriage and relationship education program to help improve participants’ overall
satisfaction with their relationships (Braga, 2017). Although Braga (2017) used the online concurrent mixed methods approach to conduct her evaluation study, she did not explain the purpose of mixed methods and what paradigm was used as the guideline. This is consistent with the conclusion in a mixed methods content-analysis study in the Marriage and Family Therapy field by Grambrel and Butler (2013). They found 16 mixed methods studies, many of which used surveys and interviews, focused on the process of therapy, and did not discuss their methodology as mixed. Grambrel and Butler (2013) suggest that authors of mixed methods studies explicitly define design types, provide a clear rationale for the combination of methods, explain how qualitative and quantitative methods and data were mixed, and employ theory effectively. Taking mixed findings into account, the current study would use mixed methods methodology to evaluate the impact of MRW on relationship satisfaction, communication skills, conflict resolution skills as well as levels of forgiveness.

**Study Variables and the Relationship Quality**

**Relationship Satisfaction.** Though many different terms have been used to describe the overall quality of a romantic relationship, the most commonly used terms are: *Marital or relationship satisfaction, quality, adjustment, and happiness*. It is difficult to differentiate between these constructs because they are poorly defined in the measurement literature (Graham et al., 2011). Moreover, the term “satisfaction” is examined the most frequently in relationship studies (Davis, 2015). However, Graham et al. (2011) state that relationship adjustment, satisfaction, quality, and happiness are either the same construct or part of a higher order factor – some may prefer one to the other. In this evaluation study, the term relationship or marital satisfaction was employed interchangeably to discuss the intimate relationship between a husband and wife.
Satisfaction within a marital relationship is defined as how people experience their need to be taken care of, to be valued, and to be loved by a significant other (Clements et al., 1997). Although there emerges an overarching need among individuals for love, support, and acceptance, many couples find themselves dissatisfied in their romantic relationships. When dissatisfaction happens in this relationship, personal, work, and family problems tend to increase (Clements et al. 1997). In review of previous research work on couple relationship education, Halford et al. (2003) summarized and pinpointed out four extensive classes of variables that influence the course of relationship satisfaction over time: couple interaction (e.g., the cognitive, behavioral, and affective processes that happen when partners interact), life events (i.e., stress or chronic circumstances), individual partner characteristics (i.e., stable historical, personal, and experiential factors that individual partners brings into relationship) and contextual variables (i.e., cultural context). These factors are theorized to impact the likelihood of partners maintaining a satisfactory relationship over time or contributing to the dissolution of the relationship (Halford et al., 2003). It is acknowledged that life events and contextual variables are resistant to intervention making them less amendable to targeted intervention efforts (Davis, 2015). Sometimes, life events and/or social factors occur unexpectedly and can be difficult to change. However, other factors such as couple interaction and individual partner’s characteristics are amendable to change by way of strategic influences. As a marriage enrichment program, the Marriage Renewal Workshop stresses couple interactions with a focus on communication patterns (couple interaction) and conflict tendencies (couple interaction). These activities are addressed in Session 3: All in Family; in Session 4: Communication in Marriage; Session 5: For Better or Worse; Session 6: Intimacy in Marriage.
**Communication.** Couple communication is one of the most broadly studied aspects of couple interaction (Halford et al., 2003). Effective communication tends to predict relationship satisfaction over time (Kearney & Bradbury, 1995; Markman & Hellweg, 1993). Interestingly, effective communication between engaged couples seems to result in no association with their later level of relationship satisfaction, but is observed to predict stable and highly satisfying relationships in at least the first five to ten years of marriage (Markman & Hahlweg, 1993). In this sense, “communication difficulties don’t stop couples from falling in love or forming committed relationships, but sustaining relationship satisfaction is more likely when there is good communication and conflict management” (Halford et al., 2003, p. 387). Hence, having good communication supports sustaining relationship quality. Similarly, studies showed that effective communication predicted continuing relationship satisfaction and a decreased risk of relationship dissolution in couples who have been married for many years (Clements et al., 1997; Markman et al., 2001). It seems likely that relationship satisfaction and communication reciprocally affects one another (Halford et al., 2003).

Communication is a critical component of couple relationships in a theoretical model of relationship functioning, such as systems theory (Galvin & Brommel, 2000). “Theoretically, couples’ ability to manage negative communications as well as enact positive communications can enhance the health and viability of the relationship. Negative communication between partners can tear away at psychological vulnerabilities, which in turn can inhibit positive sentiments, affects, and connections within the relationship (Owen et al., 2013, p. 336). The purpose of relationship enrichment programs is to integrate communication specific interventions to support couples in diminishing negative communication patterns, modifying their behaviors, and forming new positive patterns of communication within their relationship.
Although this concept of communication is widely accepted as essential to the couple relationship, it is not clear how healthy couple communications are most successfully achieved (Owen et al., 2013). Citing other studies, Davis (2015) states that healthy communication compasses the following characteristics: respect and non-rejecting (Jekielek et al., 2004), cooperation (Lewis et al., 2004), and listening without countering, making eye contact, speaking for oneself, seeking clarification, sticking to the subject, self-examining for motives, asking for behavioral change, remembering partner’s triggers, remembering one’s own triggers, agreeing to disagree at times, and apologizing (Stanley et al., 2002). On the other hand, unhealthy communication is characterized as having “criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and ‘stonewalling,’ a form of withdrawal” (Lewis et al., 2004, p.199). Of critical importance is the knowledge that couples develop and learn communication skills within their families of origin, where familial communication is culturally and explicitly coded (Galvin & Brommel, 2000). However, these patterns can be altered within the dynamic relationship of the couple, for better or worse.

In Session 4: Communication in Marriage, Marriage Renewal Workshops help couples to recognize their difficulties in communication. Couples are taught that each person communicates in distinct ways, and misunderstanding can develop when they have opposite styles. Consequently, each member of the couple must learn to allow the other the freedom for differences in communication styles. Individuals also can promote healthy communication by regulating their own style to honor each other, listen to each other and share feelings appropriately (MRW manual, 2005).

Conflict Resolution. Conflict or “ineffective arguing” seems to be a common issue found in couple relationships (Kurdek, 1994). According to Kurdek, a couple’s argument style is
ineffective when it is a “unidimensional couple interactional pattern” (p.706). Neither husband nor wife give in to arrive at a consensus when they argue. In ineffective arguments, each partner thinks they are right, and their partner is wrong. Often, they fight over repetitive issues, end their argument with unresolved problems, or end the argument with neither partner feeling that they have been given a fair hearing. This conflict pattern is critical because it is a key aspect of relationship maintenance and relationship stability. Therefore, Kurdek states that conflict resolution strategy should focus on positive problem-solving skills (e.g. compromise and negotiation), and positive means to manage instead of verbally attacking each other, losing control), withdrawing (e.g. refusing to discuss the issue further and tuning the other partner out), or overtly complying (e.g., giving in and not defending one’s position).

In Session 5: For Better or Worse, the MRW program helps couples learn to accept their conflicts, even major conflicts, as a call to deepen their commitment (MRW manual, 2005). Through their stories, couples learn to find resources that help them deal with the issues and behaviors that contribute to their hurts and loneliness in their marriage. Couples are invited to face their conflicts rather than avoid them. They learn to identify factors that lead to their conflicts and then to work together on them. Sometimes couples are so mired in problems that they fail to recognize any goodness in their partners. They easily get critical or negative when they think or talk about their partner. The literature supports that when couples learn and acknowledge that there is a positive dimension in their marital relationship, and give increased attention to social support in marriage, to understanding the history of the conflict, and to self-regulatory mechanisms that located within the dyad. This knowledge provides the couple with ways to forge deeper connection or to effect repairs of the relationship (Fincham et al., 2004).
Through the systems perspective, marital conflict can be viewed in a broader context to include an individual’s family of origin where behaviors are shaped (Rasheed et al., 2011; Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015). Within Session 5: For Better or Worse, social learning theory plays a critical role for couples who learn to better their knowledge of conflict emergence and to handle it in effective ways to increase the happiness in their relationship.

**Forgiveness.** As a growing body of evidence has suggested there exists a positive effect of forgiveness on psychological health and interpersonal relationships with others (Lawler-Row & Piferi, 2006), life satisfaction (Eldeleklioglu, 2015), and especially relationship satisfaction (Fincham et al., 2002; Paleari et al., 2005). Rye et al. (2001) delineated forgiveness as “letting go” of negative affect (e.g., hostility), negative cognitions (e.g., thoughts of revenge), and negative behavior (e.g., verbal aggression) in response to considerable injustice, and responding positively toward the wrongdoer (e.g., compassion)” (p.319). By this definition, forgiveness is not reconciliation, condoning, forgetting, legal pardoning or excusing the wrongdoing (Rye & Pargament, 2002; Wade et al., 2014). In contrast, “forgiveness represents a willingness to exit from a potential cycle of abuse and recrimination (Fincham et al., 2004, p.73) allowing people to forgive without compromising their safety or their right to seek social justice (Rye & Pargament, 2002). Thus, forgiveness involves a lessening of negative or painful feelings, thoughts, and behaviors and increasing positive feelings, thoughts and behaviors (Wade et al., 2008). In a sense, forgiveness is a unilateral act of mercy offered to the wrongdoer by the forgiver (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). In marriage, when interpersonal wrongdoings occur, they can incite strong negative feelings and disrupt the relationship. In other words, resentment or bitterness provoked by partner wrongdoings may fuel relationship conflict as well as hinder successful conflict resolution (Fincham et al., 2004). Promoting forgiveness is more than simply eliminating
negative thoughts and feelings but also includes helping couples move toward a more positive and better functioning relationship (Wade et al., 2014).

In Session 7: Forgiveness in Marriage, couples are drawn to a process of change through an act of forgiveness in their relationship. It is inevitable that couples hurt each other’s feelings. However, when this hurt results in withdrawal and patterns of silence, it reduces relationship trust and affection. Frequently, it is not big, but small, issues that add up every day, like bricks to a wall, to separate or alienate couples from their partners. Accordingly, forgiveness in marriage helps to restore unity where there was division (MRW Manual, 2005). Learning to forgive and mastering knowledge about benefits of forgiveness in healing relationship conflict are focal points for couples in Session 7. Couples learn to forgive through modeling (e.g., couple presentation) and rehearsal (e.g., writing letter to one another; couple activity or forgiveness ritual). Couples are asked to practice forgiveness by using concrete words, such as: “Will you forgive me?” but not just say “I am sorry” Or “Yes, I forgive you” instead of “it was nothing” (MRW Manual, 2005). In other words, couples learn to express their hurt feelings and forgiveness using effective methods that lead to an increase in compassion and positive behaviors. “Because systems behave as a whole, change in any one part will cause change in other parts through the entire system” (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015, p.187). In marriage, it is essential when, if one partner takes the first step to move toward change, the other partner may well follow in response to this change. Hence, marriage enrichment programs are established to support the process of transforming couple relationships through modeling, an aspect of social learning theory, and an understanding that when one partner changes, the whole system can be shifted.
Gender differences. Many marital researchers admit that women and men experience marriage differently (Jackson et al., 2014). Studies have showed that wives reported significantly lower satisfaction than husbands’ in marital satisfaction surveys (Kamp Dush et al., 2008; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009; Whiteman et al., 2007). A feminist perspective suggests that this difference may take into account the dominance and privilege of men and the subordinate position of women in society and families (Ferree, 1991; Jackson et al., 2014). This leads to women’s unequal power role in marriage and families. Additionally, men benefit more than women from marriage, with husbands having significantly better health than wives. Women also take the major responsibility of childcare and household duties. This leads to a lack of equitable division of labor in their relationship. Being busy with childcare makes wives unable to provide an equitable amount of time supporting their husbands and managing the emotional climate of the relationship (Jackson et al., 2014, as cited from Bernard, 1972).

Results of a meta-analysis study (N = 226 independent samples) on gender differences in marital satisfaction indicated that on average, women reported less marital satisfaction than men, with a very small effect size of the over gender differences in marital satisfaction ($d = 0.04; p < 0.002$). Wives were only 7% less likely to be satisfied than men. When the 201 community-based samples were analyzed separately from the 21 marital therapy samples, results of the moderator analyses yielded significant gender differences in marital satisfaction for samples who participated in marital therapy, with an effect size of 0.22. Wives were 51% less likely to be satisfied than husband. Yet, there were no significant gender differences in marital satisfaction among couples in community-based samples. The effect size was 0.002 (Jackson et al., 2014).

For the variable of communication, improvement of communication relates to better relationship satisfaction across wives and husbands (Bodenmann et al., 2008; Stanley et al.,
For instance, reduction in wives’ and husbands’ negative communication predicts the future relationship satisfaction (Stanley et al., 2007). Regarding forgiveness, men reported more marital forgiveness in the marriage and more empathy toward their spouse after a still-troublesome transgression than did females. Females perceived their male partners as being more forgiving of them than male partners perceived their female partners’ forgiveness (Miller & Worthington, 2010). These results were inconsistent with what Miller et al. (2008) found, “females are more forgiving than males by a bit more than a 1/4 of a standard deviation” (p. 853). In regard to “why”, the researchers sorted out some outstanding rational differences among the 70 individual samples, such as the type of sample (children vs. adults, college students vs. post-college), targeting of forgiveness (romantic partner, friendship, so on), trait or state of forgiveness (marital or familial), measurement modality, and type of forgiveness measures. In terms of conflict resolution, problem solving associates with higher relationship satisfaction. Men are slightly more likely to involve in problem solving (Woodin, 2011).

In relation to the influence of gender on the impact of marriage enrichment programs, a meta-analysis study showed no significant differences between men and women’s effect sizes for relationship quality and communication skills at post-assessment and follow up in experimental and quasi-experimental studies (Hawkins et al., 2008). Meaning, marriage and relationship education produces no discrepant effects for women and men. Unlike, Halford et al. (2010) investigated the impact of two enrichment programs on couples and found a small effect size difference with women in both enrichment programs reporting higher satisfaction than men ($r = .17, p < .05$) following engagement in the intervention. Due to the varied research in this area, this mixed method study explored the presence of gender differences among four relationship variables of relationship satisfaction, conflict resolution, communication, and forgiveness in the
research question 2: *Do men and women differ in perceived relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness?*

**Demographic and Historical Background of Vietnamese Americans**

Originally, the MRW program was established to help couples in American faith communities. In 2005, this program was introduced to a few Vietnamese American couples, and then adopted and used among Vietnamese American populations still today. The MRW program’s goal is to help Vietnamese American couples to increase their relationship satisfaction by bettering their skills in communication and problem-solving and consequently lead to greater marital forgiveness.

**Historical background.** A large number of Vietnamese immigrants are made up of various waves of migrations. The first major wave of Vietnamese refugees arrived with some English skills and made a quick adjustment to the United States (Tran et al., 2016, as cited from Gall, 1995). The second wave included people who fled Vietnam in the late 1970s by boats to refugee camps in Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and others before settling in the United States or other countries such as Canada, Australia, Germany, and France. In the late 1980s, the third wave of Vietnamese immigrants arrived in the United States through a formal immigration agreement between Vietnam and the United States. This wave consisted of former political detainees who were South Vietnamese military soldiers or government officials imprisoned by the Communist Vietnamese government as well as children of American soldiers left behind after the war. The fourth wave began in the mid-1990s and comprised of Vietnamese immigrants who arrived under family reunification visas (Tran et al., 2016).
Statistics by Pew Research Center–Asian Americans (PRC-AA, 2012) revealed that the number of Vietnamese Americans in the United States reached 1.6 million in 2015. Among those, 43% were Buddhists, 30% were Catholics, 20% were unaffiliated, and 6% were Protestants. These numbers brought the number of Vietnamese up to 10% of the Asian U.S. population in 2010 (PRC-AA, 2012). Eighty-four percent of Vietnamese Americans aged 18+ were born outside of the U.S. compared with 74% of Asian American adults. Regarding marriage, 57% of Vietnamese Americans were married compared with 59% of Asian Americans and 51% of U.S. adults. When asked about one of the most important things in their lives, 61% of Vietnamese Americans reported “having a successful marriage” compared with 54% of all Asian Americans and 34% of the general public (PRC-AA, 2012). Additionally, Vietnamese Americans tend to be less likely to marry outside of their culture. The 2008–2010 data showed 73% of the newlywed Vietnamese Americans married Vietnamese partners, about 18% married outside their culture (non-Asian), while only 9% of the newlyweds married into non-Vietnamese Asian groups (Pew Research Center – Vietnamese Americans, 2012). This lower intermarriage rate is because native-born Vietnamese Americans seem to “maintain stronger family ties and ethnic attachment, including retention of mother tongue” (Min & Kim, 2009, p.455). Obviously, these statistics indicate that successful marriages are highly valued by most Vietnamese Americans.

Yet, Cohen (2014) interpreted the 2008–2012 American Community Survey data and elucidated that the divorce rate in the Vietnamese group was 16.1 per 1,000 married people, aged from 18 to 54, compared to 10.4 per 1,000 for Chinese group, 12.6 per 1,000 for Hmong group, 13.8 per 1,000 for Japanese group, 17.3 per 1,000 married people for Filipino group, and 24.2 per 1,000 for Cambodian group. Recently, López et al. (2017) reported that as of 2015,
Vietnamese populations in the U.S reached 1.9 million compared to 20.4 millions of all Asians in the U.S. Particularly, Vietnamese in the U.S., aged 18 and older reported 55% for married and 13% for divorced/separated/widowed in comparison with 59% for married and 12% for divorced/separated/widowed of all Asians in the U.S who are at the same group age (Pew Research Center- Vietnamese in the U.S. Fact Sheet, 2017). This difference could be taken into account by culture dissonance or acculturation gap by those who have lived in both cultures.

**Acculturation effect.** Studies have shown that acculturation gaps influence individuals’ health, wellness and family relationships in Vietnamese families (Nguyen et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2011; Ho, 2010). Acculturation is generally defined “as the array of psychological changes that occurs when members of a minority group adapt into a mainstream group” (Sun et al., 2016, p. 2). Likewise, Vietnamese immigrants have transitioned from living in their own traditional culture to moving into a way of life in American culture. In regard to divorce issue among Vietnamese Americans, many Vietnamese Americans today who have lived for years in the U.S. have accepted divorce because they have been influenced by social media and news that talk about divorce as an acceptable and common topic in American culture (see Do, 2017). This is just the opposite of traditional Vietnamese culture in which “divorce is considered a taboo that carries a stigma and shame” (Nguyen, 2014, p.182). Gender roles also have changed whereby both husbands and wives hold outside jobs. Women can no longer fulfill their role of being traditional wives who are supposed to be home, do housework, and take care of parents and children (Nguyen, 2014; Do, 2017). Both single and married women are able to financially support themselves and their families and are no longer dependent on their husbands. A subpopulation of Vietnamese American men still want traditional wives who submit to them and carry out traditional duties in families. Many Vietnamese couples have to deal with the challenge
of reconciling their different expectations of each other (Nguyen, 2014). These distinctive expectations can cause marital conflicts.

Research has demonstrated that immigrants continued to deal with problems in family relationships, especially intergenerational conflicts between parents and their adolescent children (Nguyen et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2011). Some of these parent-child conflicts are assumed to be the result of the cultural conflicts between traditional Asian values which are collectivistic and the American values of individualism (Ho, 2010). Vietnamese adolescents are expected to uphold family togetherness values while still dealing with the tasks of acculturation and individuation (Ho, 2010). Meaning, each family member harmoniously represents the whole family in Vietnamese culture. So, an individual’s successes and failures directly relate to all other members in the family. In other words, the conception of self in Eastern culture develops in relation to the family and to the community; however, the self-concept in Western cultures is encouraged to develop to be consistent with the social norms of autonomy and independence (Nguyen et al., 2011).

Furthermore, Asian parents who are immigrants, including Vietnamese parents, tend to use an authoritarian parenting method, whereas many parents who were born in the United States use the non-authoritative parenting method (Nguyen, 2008). These parenting styles can be defined in two dimensions: demands of the child and responsiveness to the child’s individuality. Those who score high on both dimensions are described as having a non-authoritative parenting style; inversely, those who are high in demands and low on responsiveness are described as authoritarian parents (Nguyen et al., 2011). Research shows that parenting styles have been associated with children’s mental health outcomes, such as depression, anxiety, stress, and problems with self-esteem (Nguyen et al., 2011; Nguyen, 2008; Cheung & Nguyen, 2001).
Specifically, adolescents in authoritarian homes tend to report lower self-esteem than those who reported non-authoritative parenting methods. A higher percentage of Vietnam-born adolescents than American-born adolescents experience negative effects because of the clash of cultures they face every day (Nguyen, 2008).

Therefore, all of above research evidence for cultural dissonance and gender role expectations suggest that acculturation gaps critically influence marital conflicts and familial relationships as well as the well-being of individuals in its systems. Halford et al. (2003) indicated that cultural and social factors within which the couple relationship exists impact the trajectory of the couple relationship. Therefore, cultural conflicts also likely affect martial relationships when parents are not aware of their cultural dissonance problems or are unable to resolve them. As a result, the parents may blame one another for family conflicts even when the conflicts may be between parents and children rather than between spouses. The development of an incentive intervention such as the Marriage Renewal Workshops (MRW) program is essential therefore to support Vietnamese immigrant families who encounter difficulties and challenges in their marital and familial relationships.

Gaps in the Literature and the Current Study

Marriage enrichment programs/interventions are “examples of marital health promotion interventions and are typically designed to help couples who wish to increase their levels of relationship satisfaction” (Markman & Rhoades, 2012, p.170). Although enrichment education programs are for married couples who want to strengthen their marital relationships, more recently marriage enrichment programs have shifted to target couples who experience difficulties and dysfunction in marriage and relationships (Sager & Sager, 2005). Yet, there are still only a small number of studies that evaluate marriage enrichment programs with disadvantaged and
racial/ethnic samples (Hawkins et al. 2008; Hawkins et al., 2012). Jakubowski et al. (2004) reported 13 marriage enrichment programs in their systematic review study, however, few of them were faith-based programs, such as Marriage Encounter and PAIRS. This suggests there is a need for higher quality outcomes studies in faith-based marriage enrichment programs to serve this particular Vietnamese American group. Additionally, Hawkins et al. (2008) specifically found that very little qualitative research was conducted on programs with racial/ethnic and disadvantaged couples. Likewise, even though the Marriage Renewal Workshop (MRW) program has widely worked in Vietnamese American married couples (e.g. having offered 54 workshops since 2006 to-date), this program has not been scientifically studied and/or evaluated.

Although mixed methods research has many benefits for systemic research, it is currently underused in the marriage and family therapy field (Grambrel & Butler, 2013; Gambrel & Piercy, 2015). Grambrel and Butler (2013) conducted a mixed methods content analysis and reviewed all studies from 1999-2009 in the marriage and family therapy field. The results showed only 16 out of 2,400 published articles were found to meet the definition of mixed methods research supplied by Creswell and Clark (2007). Grambrel and Butler (2013) concluded that “there is a lack of mixed method research in MFT overall” (p.171). This conclusion suggests that there is a need for quality mixed methods research to help better understand the efficacy and effectiveness of programs that enhance relationship quality and marriage. In conclusion, this proposed evaluation study addresses these gaps by conducting a convergent, mixed-method evaluation to examine MRW’s impact on relationship satisfaction, communication skills, problem-solving skills, and levels of forgiveness among Vietnamese American heterosexual married couples.
Research Questions and Hypothesis

This mixed method study addresses the need of evaluating the impact of the Marriage Renewal Workshop by posing two questions: (1) Does the Marriage Renewal Workshop (MRW) program help couples increase their communication skills, relationship satisfaction, conflict management skills, and levels of forgiveness? (2) Do men and women differ in their perceptions of relationship satisfaction, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and levels of forgiveness? (3) How do the participants perceive the impact of the MRW regarding these outcome variables? The following specific research hypotheses and question are examined:

Hypotheses:

H1: Participants in the MRW program will improve their relationship satisfaction, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and levels of forgiveness.

H2: Relationship satisfaction will significantly correlate with communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and levels of forgiveness before the workshop and at the six-week follow up.

Quantitative data was collected to answer the first and second research questions. The third question was asked to understand the in-depth experiences of couples who attended the program. These questions warrant a mixed-methods methodology. It was hoped that quantitative data would help to provide possible evidence of significant change in the couples’ marital quality in relation to relationship satisfaction, communication skills, conflict management skills, and the levels of forgiveness post MRW program. The qualitative data was assumed to provide an in-depth exploration of the program’s impact on marital relationships relating to these above constructs through face to face interviews. It was hypothesized that MRW would help participants improve their relationship satisfaction, their skills in communication and conflict resolution, and their capacity for forgiveness as a result of their completion of the program. The
analysis of the correlation between relationship satisfaction and communication skills, conflict management skills, and forgiveness would also be constituted.

**Summary.** This chapter has presented the theoretical framework for marriage enrichment programs, MRW in particular, by reviewing systems and social learning theories which explain the relationship dynamics essential in marriage retreat workshops. Included in Chapter 2, the development of the MRW program and its functions in supporting married couples was reviewed. This chapter also provided a review of the results of previous studies on this study’s major variables (relationship satisfactions, communication, conflict management, and forgiveness) as well as the impacts of marriage enrichment programs in bettering the quality of marriage. Finally, gaps in the existing research shaped the hypothesis and addressed research questions in this study.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This mixed method evaluation study employed convergent mixed methods design (QUAN + qual) which occurred when the results of the quantitative and qualitative data analysis were brought together so they could be compared and combined. The advantage of comparing two types of results is to obtain a more complete and accurate understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Principally, the use of the mixed methods approach is to seek a wider, deeper, and more comprehensive social understandings of different facets of the same complex phenomenon (Greene, 2007; Creamer, 2017). A complementary purpose of mixing methods results when different methods are used to “elaborate, enhance, deepen, and broaden the allover interpretations and inferences from the study” (Greene, 2007, p.101). In this study, qualitative data was used to explore deeper understanding of the significant impacts of MRW on relationship satisfaction, communication skills, conflict management, and forgiveness which were measured using standardized measures for the collection of quantitative data. Even though four common variants of the convergent mixed methods design have been found in the literature; namely, the parallel-databases variant, the data-transformation variant, the questionnaire variant, and the fully integrated variant (See chapter 3 in Creswell & Clark, 2017), the data-transformation variant design was utilized in this evaluation study, since this study places a greater emphasis on the quantitative strand than on the qualitative strand. In this design, data
transformation was used during the merging process. After the initial collection and data analysis of the two data sets, this researcher employed procedures to quantify the qualitative findings (e.g., counting codes or themes during analysis). The transformation allows the results from the qualitative data set to be combined with the quantitative data (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Figure 1 in the research methodology section depicts the structure of the study including concurrent data collection and data analysis for the quantitative and qualitative strands.

Figure 1. Diagram of the Study's Design and Methodology

Figure 1 presents the basic procedures of how this evaluation study was analyzed by using the convergent mixed methods design (see Creswell & Clark, 2017). First, quantitative and qualitative data were concurrently collected. Quantitatively, one-group pretest-posttest design was utilized with standardized instruments to measure dependent variables: relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness. Concurrently, in-depth interview procedures were employed to gather richer data on the experiences of participants who
attended the MRW program. These two types of data collection procedures were conducted concurrently and separately with the understanding that the qualitative data collection does not depend on the quantitative results. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are important for addressing the purpose of this study. Second, this researcher analyzed both types of data sets separately and independently by employing quantitative and qualitative analyses. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test and Pearson’s Correlation were used to analyze quantitative data. On the other hand, thematic analysis method (see “Analysis Procedures” section) was used to identify themes from the qualitative data on the four major outcome variables. Third, the qualitative themes were transformed into quantitative variables (i.e., percentages), before merging the results from both strands. Then, this researcher merged quantitative results and related codes and themes from both datasets, and compared, contrasted, and synthesized the results in the evaluation of the MRW program. By comparing the two types of data, this researcher was able to look for convergence as well as divergence as it emerged. This chapter with discuss how the two types of data help facilitate better understanding of the impact of MRW on marital quality through the variables of relationship satisfaction, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and levels of forgiveness.

Thus, the priority in this convergent mixed methods evaluation study is given to the quantitative strand because this study seeks to test the impact of the MRW program on relationship satisfaction, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and levels of forgiveness. The qualitative strand, in contrast, was used to explore participants’ perceptions and experiences of the influence of the program in relation to these outcome variables. Timing of data collection was concurrent (Creamer, 2017). In a sense, “the two types of data are collected independently at the same time or with a short time lag” (Mertens, 2010, p.298). In this mixed
methods evaluation study, an interview was scheduled after the follow up surveys were collected. Therefore, the findings from quantitative and qualitative data sets helped to understand better the quality and meaningfulness of the implementation of the MRW program from the participants’ perspective.

With the complementary purpose of mixed methods, pragmatism was considered as the best fit paradigm for this study since this paradigm is described as “outcome-oriented and interested in determining the meaning of things or focusing on the product of the research” (Shannon-Backer, 2015, p.322). Likewise, this evaluation study assesses the quality and meaningful outcomes of the MRW, as this program is supposed to improve the quality of marital relationships through intensive weekend retreat workshops. In this way, pragmatism helps us to understand how research methods can be mixed in ways that offer the best opportunities for answering the research questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The philosophical assumption of pragmatism is in favor of “what works in a particular setting or for a particular of set of questions” (Creamer, 2017, p.45). The beauty of applying pragmatism to this study is that it not only answers the sets of quantitative and qualitative questions, but also helps us to understand the value of the participants’ experiences (e.g., communication with one’s partner in real life) in the MRW program (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The Marriage Renewal Workshop is a faith-based program that serves mixed or same-faith couples who want to enrich their marriage relationship, and couples who have difficulties and dysfunctions in their marriage (MRW manual, 2005). Programs are often organized in a religious or faith community (e.g., parishes). From this point, pragmatism can “provide an umbrella paradigm” (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p.78) for this research.
Quantitative Strand

Participants

Couples who were invited to participate in this study attended the Marriage Renewal Workshop (MRW) during the summers of 2018 and 2019. To be eligible for this study, participants had to be Vietnamese, married, ages 18 to 65 years old, and have lived in the United States for at least 5 years. Participants with or without children were also included in this study. Anyone married with a person from outside the preceding cultural context was excluded from this study (e.g., a Vietnamese husband or wife married to a non-Vietnamese). Finally, only those participants who were first-time participants of MRW and were literate in English or Vietnamese were included.

In total, 135 heterosexual individuals volunteered for this study and completed the before workshop surveys. One-hundred twenty participants also filled out the evaluation forms at the end of the workshop. At follow up, 81 participants returned the follow-up surveys. Seventeen out of 81 surveys were excluded on account of not meeting this study criteria. Finally, only 64 (N = 64) participants who completed both before-workshop and six-week follow-up surveys were eligible to be included in this study. Table 1 below displays the demographic information of participants who completed all phases of assessment and interview.

Table 1. Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Quantitative Strand (N = 64)</th>
<th>Qualitative Strand (N = 11)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender, N (%)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33 (51.6)</td>
<td>6 (54.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 (48.4)</td>
<td>5 (45.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age, mean (SD), years</td>
<td>46 - 55 (.875)</td>
<td>46 - 55 (.701)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of Birth, N (%)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>63 (98.4)</td>
<td>11 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1 (1.6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education Status, N (%)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>1 (1.6)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>High School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training certificate</td>
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<tr>
<td>College/associate degree</td>
<td>7 (10.9)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advance degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<th>Country receive education, N (%)</th>
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<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>7 (10.9)</td>
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<td>USA</td>
<td>57 (89.1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Marriage</td>
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<td>Second Marriage</td>
<td>4 (6.3)</td>
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<tr>
<th># Years of Marriage, mean (SD)</th>
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<td>20 (9.11)</td>
<td>19 (7.07)</td>
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<th># Children, mean (SD)</th>
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<tr>
<td>2 (1.28)</td>
<td>2.36 (.81)</td>
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<tr>
<th># Years Living in USA, mean (SD)</th>
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<tr>
<td>31 (10.43)</td>
<td>30.73 (9.8)</td>
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<tr>
<th>U.S. citizenship, N (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>63 (98.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1 (1.6)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Annual Income, mean (SD), dollars</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; $100,000 (1.01)</td>
<td>$100,000 (1.04)</td>
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<th>English skills, N (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat well</td>
<td>8 (12.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well</td>
<td>24 (37.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very well</td>
<td>32 (50.0)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Speak English</th>
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<tr>
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<td>1 (1.6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>9 (14.1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Well</td>
<td>20 (31.3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very well</td>
<td>34 (53.1)</td>
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<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>7 (10.9)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Well</td>
<td>23 (35.9)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very well</td>
<td>33 (51.6)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>10 (15.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well</td>
<td>26 (40.6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very well</td>
<td>27 (42.2)</td>
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<th>Spouse’s English Skills, N (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Read English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>1 (1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>8 (12.5)</td>
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</table>
The final sample of 64 participants consisted of 33 males (51.6%) and 31 females (48.4%), with a mean age of 46 – 55 years old. Most of respondents were married. Their mean years of marriage was 20 years. Among respondents, fifty-nine of them reported their current marriage as first marriage (93.7%), and four respondents were married once before their current marriage (6.3%). As far as the number of children was concerned, the mean of number children was two. Participants self-identified as being well educated, with fifteen having advance/graduate degrees (23.4%), thirty with Bachelor degrees (46.9%), and seven with some college and associate degrees (10.9%). The majority (89.1%) received their education in the United States, while seven participants (10.9%) completed it in Vietnam. Their annual mean

<table>
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<th>Well</th>
<th>25 (39.1)</th>
<th>4 (36.4)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very well</td>
<td>30 (46.9)</td>
<td>6 (54.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Speak English
| Not at all | 2 (3.1) | 1 (9.1) |
| Somewhat | 7 (10.9) |
| Well | 23 (35.9) | 4 (36.4) |
| Very well | 32 (50.0) | 6 (54.5) |

Understand English
| Not at all | 1 (1.6) | 1 (9.1) |
| Somewhat | 8 (12.5) |
| Well | 24 (37.5) | 4 (36.4) |
| Very well | 31 (48.4) | 6 (54.5) |

Write English
| Not at all | 2 (3.1) | 1 (9.1) |
| Somewhat | 7 (10.9) |
| Well | 27 (42.2) | 4 (36.4) |
| Very well | 28 (43.8) | 6 (54.5) |

# Non-Vietnamese Speaking Friends, N (%)
| None | 22 (41.5) | 3 (27.3) |
| 1 – 10 | 13 (24.5) | 2 (18.2) |
| 11 + | 18 (33.9) | 3 (27.3) |

Motives for Attending the Program, N (%)
| Marriage/relationship enrichment | 42 (65.6) | 8 (72.7) |
| Requested/introduced by someone | 12 (18.8) | 2 (18.2) |
| Other | 5 (7.8) | 1 (9.1) |
income was more than $100,000. Relating to English skills, Table 1 displays that the vast majority rated themselves and their spouses as “well” or “very well” in reading, speaking, writing, and listening English and similarly for their spouses. In regard to the participants’ motives coming to the MRW program, the majority of participants expressed that they have a desire to have a better marriage or relationship with their spouse.

**Procedures**

This researcher traveled to the workshop and met all workshop participants at the beginning of the program for 10 minutes to introduce the study and briefly explain the volunteer process as described in the verbal script for participant recruitment attached in Appendix E. The researcher then distributed the survey forms and verbal consents to every participant. Five minutes were allowed to answer questions before the researcher left the workshop. All workshop members were asked to write their first names with the initial of their last name on the removable labels on the top of the surveys. A random number was assigned for each case, with its name label removed from the survey. Participants were provided brown envelops for their surveys (whether completed or not) which were deposited into a survey collection brown bag. This process provided both anonymity and confidentiality, so that it would not be evident to either the researcher or the leadership team who had consented.

For the before-workshop survey, participants were given from 10 to 20 minutes to review the verbal consent form and to complete the survey. Participants were asked to answer the surveys independently without exchanging or discussing their answers with their spouse and/or others. Before the participants left, this researcher met with all workshop participants again to thank them for their participation in this study. Participants were given a stamped envelope which included the follow-up survey with detailed introductions for sending in the follow-up
survey six weeks following the end of the workshop. Participants also received a reminder email or letter in the fourth week after the end of the workshop to complete the follow-up survey, and to return it in the attached self-addressed envelope. A second reminder was sent again a week after the first reminder.

All before-workshop and follow-up survey data were collected and entered in the SPSS software for quantitative analysis. Participants who were interested in being interviewed by checking the “yes” box on the follow-up survey were contacted based on their provided information and scheduled for interviews. Participants who participated in the research, completed the before-workshop and follow-up surveys, and volunteered for the qualitative interview had their ID numbers entered in a raffle. Five winning numbers were matched to the identified participant via the master list, contacted and sent a $50 Visa gift card.

**Instruments**

**Demographic variables.** Participants reported age, gender, education, income, years of marriage, years of living in U.S., number of children, comprehension of English, number of social friends, and motives coming to the program (see Table 1). The main focus of the data collection was the use of standardized measurements which this study employed to measure the four major variables of marital satisfaction, communication skills, conflict resolution skills and levels of forgiveness.

**Couples Relationship Index.** The Couple Relationship Index (CSI: Funk & Rogge, 2007) is a 32-item self-report instrument designed to measure the level of perceived relationship satisfaction. An abbreviated version of the CSI was developed by its authors through identification of the four items that yielded the greatest amount of information in the assessment of relationship satisfaction. This abbreviated version was applied in this study in order to reduce
the amount of time required for participants to complete the survey. These items are rated on 6 or 7-point scales and added to yield a total score with higher scores indicative of higher levels of relationship satisfaction. The internal consistency for the full and abbreviated CSI versions were very good with Cronbach’s alpha of .98 and .94 (p<.001) being found for total scores respectively (Funk & Rogge, 2007). The CSI has strong convergent validity with existing relationship satisfaction measures (Dyadic Adjustment Scale/DAS, Spanier, 1976; Marital Adjustment Test/MAT, Locke & Wallace, 1959; Quality of Marriage Index/QMI, Norton, 1983; Kansas Marital Satisfaction/KMS, Schumm, Nichols, Schectman, & Grigsby, 1983; Semantic Differential/SMD, Karney, & Bradbury, 1997; Communication Patterns Questionnaire/CPQ-CC, Heavey, Larson, Zumtobel, & Christensen, 1996; Love Attitude Scale/LAS, Hendrick & Hendrick, 1989; Eysenck’s Personality Questionnaire/EPQ-N, Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975) and with positive correlations in the expected direction ranging from $r = 0.87$ to $0.96$ (p < .001). In this study, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .93, suggesting the very good internal consistency reliability for the CSI scale with this sample.

**Marital Communication Inventory.** The Marital Communication Inventory (MCI, Bienvenu, 1970) was designed to assess the *process* of communication as an element of marital interactions rather than the *content* of communication. It focuses on the process, characteristics, patterns, and styles of communication such as the “couple’s ability to listen, to understand each other, to express themselves and their manner of saying things” (Bienvenu, 1970, p.27). This is a self-report inventory with 46 items arranged on a 4-point rating scale with options of: usually, sometimes, seldom, and never. The instrument yields a single total score. The total scores range from zero to 138. Higher scores indicate better communication. The author reports a split half reliability of .93. The tool’s discrimination has also been found to be significant between
individuals with good and poor communication. In this study, the MCI was adjusted to use a 4-point scale from 1 (Usually) to 4 (Never). The total scores ranged from 1 to 184 with higher scores suggesting better communication. The MCI has been widely utilized in marital research, evaluation of marital counseling and marriage and family education programs (see Kannekanti, 2013; Davis, 2015; Schumm et al., 1983). In this study, the internal consistency reported for the total MCI scale was .71.

**Ineffective Arguing Inventory.** The Ineffective Arguing Inventory (IAI, Kurdek, 1994) is an 8-item self-report measure that is used to assess “the extent to which couple members perceive that they and their partners engage in a pattern of arguing that has been linked to adverse couple functioning” (Kurdek, 1994, p. 717). The development of the IAI is based on the conceptual theory of characterizing “ineffective arguing” as a global, unidimensional couple interactional pattern (Kurdek, 1994). The selection of items is based upon the conceptualization of negative interactional patterns: being repetitive arguments ending without a sense of resolution, arguments ending with one or neither partners feeling they were given a fair hearing and knowing how the argument will end before it is over (Kurdek, 1994). Participants are asked to circle the number on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (Disagree Strongly) to 5 (Agree Strongly) which indicates how much they agree with the corresponding statement as applied to their relationship. The IAI is scored by summing the items with higher total scores indicative of perceived poorer conflict resolution in the couple’s relationship. Three items (1, 3, 8) are reverse scored. Internal consistency for the IAI has been found to be high with coefficient alpha ranges from .86-.89 when completed by gay, lesbian, and straight couples (Kurdek, 1994). Evidence for test-retest reliability was found to be moderate with a one-year interval between administration ($r = .63$ to $.84$) with the same populations (Kurdek, 1994). Concurrent validity evidence has been
found between individual total scores and global relationship satisfaction (as measured by the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS) and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)) (Kurdek, 1994). In this study, the IAI instrument has good internal consistency. A Cronbach alpha coefficient was .85 for this sample of Vietnamese American heterosexual married individuals.

**Rye Forgiveness Scale.** The Rye Forgiveness Scale (RFS, Rye et al., 2001) was designed to measure forgiveness toward a particular offender. The scale was developed as part of an earlier study involving college women who had been wronged in a romantic relationship (Rye, 1998). Similar to the Enright Forgiveness Inventory (Subkoviak et al., 1995) items were created to measure affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses to wrongdoing. The Rye Forgiveness Scale consists of 15 items that measure forgiveness toward a particular offender. RFS is divided into two subscales: The Absence of Negative subscale (Forgiveness AN) consists of 10 items and measures the extent to which one has overcome negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward an offender (e.g., ‘I have been able to let go of my anger toward the person who wronged me’). The Presence of Positive subscale (Forgiveness PP) consists of five items and measures positive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward an offender (e.g., ‘I have compassion for the person who wronged me’). Participants indicate their agreement with each item on a 5-point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Scores can range from 10 to 50 for Forgiveness (AN), 5 to 25 for Forgiveness (PP), and 15 to 75 for RFS total. The Cronbach alpha coefficients were reported for the RFS, .86 (Forgiveness AN) and .85 (Forgiveness PP), and .87 (for RFS total) (Rye et al., 2001). The test-retest for the RFS scores were correlated $r = .76$ (Forgiveness AN), $r = .76$ (Forgiveness PP), $r = .80$ (RFS total). The reliability for the Rye Forgiveness Scale was retested in this study with this sample. The findings resulted an alpha of .82 for Forgiveness AN, an alpha of .79 for Forgiveness PP, and an alpha of .86 for RFS total.
All surveys and consent forms were available in both English and Vietnamese. The English to Vietnamese translations were checked for translation quality assurance by peer reviewers for errors and contextual barriers. All translations in this study had been peer reviewed by two doctoral candidates and an existing faculty member at accredited universities in the United States. All three are native bilingual Vietnamese speakers and knowledgeable of regional differences of the language. All materials were written at a basic reading level (below 8th grade). Thus, all translations had been checked to see that they maintained the same tone and reading level as the original. All surveys, interview questions, and IRB approved informed consents in Vietnamese were submitted as addendums to the application once the English versions had been approved by the IRB. Peer checking helped to reduce mistakes and increase the rigor and consistency of the translation.

**Analysis Procedures**

Following quantitative data collection, the data were transferred to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for data analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze demographic information including frequency distributions, measures of central tendencies, and standard deviations. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test and Pearson’s Correlation analysis were performed to assess whether or not there were statistically significant differences between before-workshop and six-week follow-up measures on an individual level. Participant results on the four scales used in the study (CSI, IAI, MCI, and RFS) were treated as dependent (outcome) variables, while time (at before-workshop and six-week follow-up) was treated as independent variable. The corresponding method to be employed for research questions and hypotheses is addressed below:
Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test were used to analyze the following research hypothesis and data from three close-ended questions about assessing the overall impact of the MRW program before the workshop, at the end of the workshop, and at the six-week follow up:

Hypothesis:
H1: Participants in the MRW program would improve their relationship satisfaction, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and levels of forgiveness at the six-week follow up.

Questions:
1. How do you rate your current marital relationship on a scale from 1 (poor) to 10( excellent)? (Before the workshop and at the six-week follow up)
2. How would you rate overall the workshop on a scale from 1 (Poor) to 10 (Excellent)? (At the end of the workshop and the six-week follow up)
3. How satisfied are you with how the MRW program has met your expectations on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 10 (Very satisfied)? (At the end of the workshop and the six-week follow up)

Pearson’s correlation was utilized to analyze Hypothesis 2:

H2: Relationship satisfaction would significantly correlate with communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and levels of forgiveness before the workshop and at the six-week following up.

Mann-Whitney U tests was used to analyze this question:

Q1: Do men and women differ in their perceptions of relationship satisfaction, communication, skills, conflict resolution skills, and levels of forgiveness before the workshop and at the six-week follow up?
Qualitative Strand

Samples

Qualitative sampling was purposive and convenient because participants attended the workshops and volunteered in this research project. Twelve participants volunteered to be interviewed by checking “yes” box to the question “Are you interested in volunteering to participate in the in-depth interview to further discuss your experiences in this MRW program?”. One was excluded due to violation of this research’s inclusion. Eleven participants who completed both before-workshop and six-week follow-up surveys consented and scheduled for interview. Five out of eleven qualitative participants were female; six of them were male. Among these participants, two couples were husband and wife, but they were interviewed separately and individually. Their mean age ranged 46 - 55 years old. The median of participants’ years marriage was 21 years. On average, participants have lived in the United States for 33 years and have 2 children. In term of education status, more than half of participants reported having a bachelor’s degree. The rest of participants completed some college degree, high school diploma or training certificate. Their mean annual income was more than $100,000. More detailed characteristics of participants were presented in the table 1.

A sample of 11 participants may be suitable size, according to Padgett (2008), in terms of the need of saturation in phenomenological studies, which aim for depth, have often used sample sizes ranging from 6 to 10 subjects. In regard to samples in the mixed method convergent design, Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) suggest that the size for the qualitative sample is much smaller than the quantitative sample because, “this helps the researcher to obtain a rigorous in-depth qualitative exploration and a rigorous high-power quantitative examination of the topic”
This is applicable to this mixed method study when the emphasis is placed more on the quantitative than the qualitative data.

**Procedures**

Based on their provided contact information on the pre-survey form, eleven individuals volunteered to be interviewed and returned their follow-up survey by the 6th week after the end of workshop. A follow-up email was sent out to these qualitative participants to thank them for their survey participation and ask to set up a date for an interview. Because of the limitation of budget, this researcher could not afford to travel to different places to have face to face interviews with individuals. Instead, participants were offered choices to conduct their interview either via phone, Skype or Zoom. All the participants preferred to be interviewed via phone. During the 30 to 45-minute interview, participants were asked to discuss their workshop experience in relation to their marital relationships (see interview questionnaires below). The interview was audiotaped for transcription and data analysis only. Audio files will be destroyed once this study ends as required by Loyola IRB. Participants were allowed to speak either in English or Vietnamese. Participants were asked to not state their names during the recording.

Although collecting qualitative data is time and energy consuming, the advantage is an in-depth understanding of the participants’ marital life and new insights that may relate to what can contribute to enrichment of marital quality as well as the MRW program in general. Following are the open-ended questions used:

1. Briefly describe your experience in the MRW program?

   *Probe: Was it good or bad? So- so? Why?*

   *Did the MRW program meet your expectations or not?*

   *Was it helpful? Not helpful?*
2. How was your marital relationship before the program? How is your marital relationship now after the MRW program?

*Probe: Was the MRW program helpful or not to your marital relationship? Why? Give specific one or two examples.*

*If no change, why? If changed, why? How changed?*

3. How was it when you tried to resolve your conflicts in the past? How do you manage your conflicts now when they occur?

*Probe: Was the MRW program supportive or not to your marital relationship? Why? Give specific one or two examples.*

*If no change, why? If changed, why? How changed?*

4. How did you communicate with your partner in the past? How do you communicate with your partner now after the MRW?

*Probe: Was the MRW program helpful or not to your communication? Why? Give one or two specific examples.*

*If no change, why? If changed, why? How changed?*

5. When you felt slighted in the past or faced some misunderstanding how did you deal with it? Under the same circumstances, how do you deal with it now?

*Probe: Was the MRW program helpful or not in this area? Why or why not? Give one or two examples.*

*If no change, why? If changed, why? How changed?*

6. In general, what if anything did you learn from the program? What else would you like to say about how the program impacted or did not impact your marital relationship?
Analysis Procedures

To analyze qualitative data, this study used the inductive thematic method. According to thematic analysis, coding breaks the data apart in analytically relevant ways to lead towards further questions about the data. Each chunk or quotation is organized in two contexts. The first context is its origin in the narrative and the second is a “pool of meaning” located in higher levels of abstractions. Somewhat like a funnel, coding begins at a descriptive level and moves upward to greater selectivity and synthesis (Padgett, 2008). In this study, data was chunked and coded in 4 columns: 1) original narrative, 2) significant quotes; 3) pattern meaning; and 4) themes. Themes and sub-themes were identified by data from eleven transcripts and labeled in correspondence with the quantitative outcome variables of relationship satisfaction, communication, problem solving, and forgiveness.

The coding was done manually by two coders: this researcher and a colleague, who is a researcher and has a doctoral degree in Higher Education, speaks both Vietnamese and English, and was approved by Loyola IRB for this study. Because most of the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, this researcher could not find any software for qualitative data analysis, which could read transcripts in Vietnamese. Following the steps of thematic analysis process, each coder independently went through initial coding to identify broader themes and sub-themes. After that, both lists of codes were compared for the purpose of arriving at a common list of codes for the interview data. Due to the limitation of time in this study, only the major quotes and themes were translated by this researcher in English after coding. Peer briefing and support with a Clinical Counselor and a Social Work Professor was used as a strategy to improve the rigor of the data analysis (Padgett, 2008).
Rigor in qualitative analysis also focuses on the role of the researchers. Finlay (2002) related trustworthiness to “reflexivity,” where researchers take part in self-aware analysis of their own role. Reflexivity is a great tool in qualitative research especially as, “the researcher is aware of experiencing a world and moves back and forth in a kind of dialectic between experience and awareness” (Finlay, 2002, p. 533). In this study, this researcher wrote down any thoughts and reflections that she observed and experienced in the world and in literature in relation to this topic. She also journaled before, during, and after each interview, and what was on her mind while coding. By doing this, this researcher could minimize biases and improve the rigor of data. In relation to reflexivity, this researcher discusses this topic in more details in the section of “Potential Biases of the Researcher” at the end of this chapter. Lastly, the trustworthiness of this study was embedded in small steps: Forming the research problem, choosing the guiding paradigm, conceptualizing and defining the problem, forming the research questions, collecting data and analyzing, and discussion. Every single step matched one another to produce the trustworthy of this study’s findings. In short, all these above tools helped improve the credibility of this study’s qualitative findings.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

This research project was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Loyola University Chicago. All protocols relating to human subject protection, as well as additional requirements made by the IRB, were implemented before this study was conducted to better ensure the involvement and protection of participants in this study. Participants who willingly chose to volunteer for this study remained anonymous. Their personal information was kept confidential at all times, as participants’ responses were kept separately from their identifying data. All data was stored in a password-protected excel spreadsheet on this researcher’s
computer. All informed consents and hard copies of completed surveys were kept in a locked file cabinet in a private house; only this researcher had access to it. Participants were allowed to freely drop out of this study even after they had done the before-workshop assessment and had chosen not to answer any question that they did not want.

**Potential Biases of the Researcher**

The researcher’s own biases that might have affected this research project were bracketed to help minimize their potential subjective effects on the research process (Tufford & Newman, 2012). The Hawthorne effect is a “widely used research term” and refers to the concerns of “research participation, the consequent awareness of being studied, and possible impact on behavior” (McCambridge et al., 2014, p. 268). This effect may influence the quality of research outcome. In this study, although program participants personally did not know this researcher except seeing her in religious habit and a brief introduction about herself, this researcher acknowledged that her status as a religious sister (nun) might influence the way people behaved and responded to survey questionnaires and interviews. It would be possible that participants might have felt compelled to participate in this study because of the researcher’s religious role. In fact, more than one-third of program attendants voluntarily participated in this study and completed both before-workshop and follow-up surveys. This indicated that knowing the researcher’s identity did not influence much people’s research participation. Additionally, Vietnamese American families with depression problems tend to consult with spiritual leaders about their problems instead of reaching out to mental health professionals (Nguyen et al., 2011). Thus, it made sense that this researcher decided to wear her religious habit while coming to the program for the purpose of building trust rapport. She also felt participants’ trust and openness throughout the interviews.
Moreover, this researcher’s cultural assumptions could be potentially biased and affect how she conducted in-depth interviews and interpreted the findings. In coming from the same culture as the participants, this researcher understands that it is taboo to tell a strange person about your family issues, especially conflicts or family problems. This prevented her from probing for in-depth information. However, this cultural assumption did not make her hesitant to ask when things needed to be clarified because she acknowledged her role as researcher in front of participants. Lastly, the researcher was aware of her own personal relationship with the developer of MRW since she began setting up this evaluation study. To minimize some of these biases, this researcher assured participants by repeating the study’s confidentiality policy in order to increase participant trust as well as to remind herself of her researcher role. Thus, the intention was that the self-influence biases on the study’s rigor and quality were also addressed and eliminated through reflexivity.

**Summary.** With discussing assumptions of the use of mixed method concurrent design in this study, Chapter 3 outlines procedures of data collections and analyses in accordance with each quantitative or qualitative methodology. As well, human protection and self-reflection by this researcher are included to show respect to participants’ confidentiality as well as to seek out any the subjective bias that might influence participants’ responses.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Through a concurrent mixed methods design, this evaluation study of the weekend MRW program was conducted by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data from individuals before the program, at the end of the program, and at a six-week follow up. The quantitative data included participant responses to a demographic questionnaire, the Couple Relationship Index (CSI: Funk & Rogge, 2007), the Marital Communication Inventory (MCI, Bienvenu, 1970), the Ineffective Arguing Inventory (IAI, Kurdek, 1994), and the Rye Forgiveness Scale (RFS, Rye & Pargament, 2001). Qualitative data came from self-created semi-structured interview guide. The quantitative data were analyzed by using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test and Mann-Whitney U test. These non-parametric tests were appropriated for the quantitative data analysis because the samples in this study were self-selected, but not randomized (Pallant, 2010). Thus, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used to analyze this study’s Hypothesis 1. Responses to the qualitative questionnaire were analyzed by this researcher and a secondary coder. As a reminder, frequencies and percentages of these demographic variables that describe the sample are displayed above in Table 1.

Quantitative Results

Hypothesis 1

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of the program of outcome variables regarding the marital relationship in the areas of relationship satisfaction, communication skills,
conflict management skills, and forgiveness attitude by comparing the participant scores before the workshop and at six-week follow up. Hypothesis 1 (H1) predicted that participants who engaged in the MRW program would improve in relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict management, and forgiveness at the follow-up assessment. Mean Ranks of the four outcome variables were reported in Appendix C. Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test results revealed no statistically significant differences in relationship satisfaction ($z = -1.87, p = .062$), communication skills ($z = -1.37, p = .172$), conflict resolution ($z = -.50, p = .622$), Forgiveness Absence of Negative ($z = -1.234, p = .217$), and Forgiveness Presence of Positive ($z = -1.56, p = .199$). Participants did not statistically significantly improve in these four outcome variables in six weeks following up after the program. Therefore, this study’s hypothesis was rejected.

**Hypothesis 2**

The aim of hypothesis 2 (H2) was to examine whether relationship satisfaction related to a set of variables of communication, conflict management, and levels of forgiveness before the workshop and at the six-week follow up. It was assumed that there would be statistically significant correlations between relationship satisfaction and communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness at the before-workshop assessment and follow-up assessment. The Pearson correlation was employed to test this hypothesis. The correlation results are presented in Table 2. Before the workshop, the findings indicated that relationship satisfaction was significantly correlated with conflict resolution ($r = -.67, p = .000$) and with Forgiveness Absence of Negative ($r = .58, p = .000$). Participants’ relationship satisfaction increased, whereas their conflict resolution skills decreased, and their Forgiveness Absence of Negative attitude increased. No significant correlations resulted in relationship satisfaction and communication skills, and Forgiveness Presence of Positive. Similarly, at the six-week follow up, relationship satisfaction
significantly linked with conflict resolution \((r = -0.64, p = .000)\) and with Forgiveness Absence of Negative \((r = 0.53, p = .000)\). Participants who experienced lower conflict resolution experienced higher relationship satisfaction. Inversely, higher levels of Forgiveness Absence of Negative increased higher relationship satisfaction. Again, there was no significant relationships for communication nor Forgiveness Presence of Positive at the six-week follow up. To sum up, participants’ relationship satisfaction increased when their experiences of Forgiveness Absence of Negative increased and conflict resolution decreased.

Table 2. Correlations Among Four Outcome Variables

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<td>1. Pre CSI</td>
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<td>2. Pre IAI</td>
<td>-.67**</td>
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<td>3. Pre FAN</td>
<td>.58**</td>
<td>-.35*</td>
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<td>5. Pre MCI</td>
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<td>.065</td>
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<td>6. Post CSI</td>
<td>.80**</td>
<td>-.65**</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Post IAI</td>
<td>-.70**</td>
<td>.84**</td>
<td>-.40**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.64**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Post FAN</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>-.32*</td>
<td>.67**</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.53**</td>
<td>-.43**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Post FPP</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td>.51*</td>
<td>-.34*</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Post MCI</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>.65**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: CSI = Couple Satisfaction Index; IAI = Ineffective Argument Inventory; FAN = Forgiveness Absence of Negative; FPP = Forgiveness Presence of Positive; MCI = Marital Communication Inventory; **\(p < 0.01\); *\(p < 0.05\), two-tailed

**Question 1**

The research question asked if gender influenced relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness before the workshop and at the six-week follow up when participants engaged in the MRW program. For this question, the use of Mann-Whitney U Test was utilized to examine differences between males and females in perceiving
relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness at two points in
time before the workshop and at six-week follow up. Before the workshop, results showed that
husbands did not significantly differ from wives in their perceptions of relationship satisfaction
\[ z = -26, p = .80 \], communication \[ z = -.75, p = .452 \], conflict resolution \[ z = -.46, p = .642 \],
 Forgiveness Absence of Negative \[ z = -.81, p = .42 \], and Forgiveness Presence of Positive \[ z = -.75, p = .452 \]. Likewise, at the six-week follow up, no significant difference was found between husband and wives for relationship satisfaction \[ z = -.50, p = .625 \], communication \[ z = -.25, p = .803 \], conflict resolution \[ z = -.24, p = .81 \], Forgiveness Absence of Negative \[ z = -.15, p = .90 \], and Forgiveness Presence of Positive \[ z = -1.24, p = .22 \]. Consequently, men and women
attending the MRW program did not experience significant differences in perceived relationship
satisfaction, conflict resolution, communication, or forgiveness before the workshop and at the
six-week following up after the program. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of four
outcome variables by gender.

In summary, the quantitative results showed a lack of statistically significant evidence to
support that the MRW program had an impact on four outcome variables - relationship
satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness. Moreover, male samples did
not differ from their counterpart females at before workshop and at the six-week follow up.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Four Outcome Variables by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before workshop</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>17.27</td>
<td>4.09</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16.63</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>17.82</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17.17</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before workshop</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23.82</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up</td>
<td>Female 29</td>
<td>24.72</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 31</td>
<td>24.07</td>
<td>5.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 26</td>
<td>23.85</td>
<td>8.0</td>
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</table>

**Forgiveness Absence of Negative**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before workshop</th>
<th>Male 31</th>
<th>36.65</th>
<th>6.9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female 29</td>
<td>35.07</td>
<td>7.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up</td>
<td>Male 32</td>
<td>36.91</td>
<td>6.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 29</td>
<td>36.87</td>
<td>6.74</td>
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</table>

**Forgiveness Presence of Positive**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before workshop</th>
<th>Male 31</th>
<th>18.9</th>
<th>4.3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female 29</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up</td>
<td>Male 30</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 28</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Communication**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before workshop</th>
<th>Male 29</th>
<th>96.2</th>
<th>11.5</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female 24</td>
<td>98.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up</td>
<td>Male 27</td>
<td>98.56</td>
<td>10.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 26</td>
<td>99.04</td>
<td>10.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rating Overall Workshop Impact**

Three additional close-ended questions were used to evaluate the general participant experiences of workshop impact before the workshop, at the end of the workshop, and at the six-week follow up. Again, the samples in this study were self-selected, so the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used to analyze data of these variables (Pallant, 2010). Results indicated a statistically significant increase in levels of current marital relationship following the program ($z = -2.13, p = .033$), with a moderate effect size ($r = .30$). The mean score on current relationship increased from before the program ($M = 4.09$) to follow up ($M = 4.24$). Thus, participants in the program gave significant higher rating to their current relationship with their partner following the workshop. Similarly, results showed significant differences in rating overall the workshop ($z = -2.5, p = .013$), with a moderate effect size ($r = .34$), and in participant satisfaction of how the
workshop meeting their expectations ($z = -5.08, p = .000$), with a large effect ($r = .65$). However, the mean score on rating overall the workshop at the end of the workshop ($M = 4.9$) was slightly higher than it was at the six-week follow-up ($M = 4.75$). Also, the participants’ mean score on satisfaction with the program meeting their expectations decreased from the end of the workshop ($M = 5.71$) to follow up ($M = 5.03$). In summary, participants who attended the workshop gave significantly higher ratings to their current marital relationship at the six-week follow up than theirs before the workshop. The participants’ ratings on the overall evaluation of the MRW program and ratings on meeting expectations decreased over time.

**Qualitative Findings**

In relation to the purpose of evaluating the impact of this Marriage Renewal Workshop on marriage relationship, skills of problem solving and communication as well as marital forgiveness, the qualitative strand was utilized to explore in-depths the participants’ perception of the effect of the MRW program regarding these outcome variables. The qualitative analyses included six interview questions and two open-ended questions that were added on short form surveys at the end of the workshop and on six-week follow-up surveys. To analyze these two open-ended questions, this researcher utilized a theme counting method.

**Interview findings**

Eleven quantitative participants ($N = 11$) who completed both before-workshop and follow-up surveys as well as end-workshop questionnaires (4) were purposefully sampled. They were individually interviewed at follow up by this researcher with the use of six opened-ended questions (see research questions in Chapter 2) in order to have a better understanding of participant experiences in this MRW program in relation to relationship satisfaction,
communication, problem-solving skills, and forgiveness as well as emerged codes about the impact of Marriage Renewal Workshops.

**Changed Perspectives**

The findings demonstrated that 72.74% of respondents (N = 8) experienced changes in thinking and seeing things differently after the program. For example, one participant stated, “Psychologically, I try to look differently with a different angle. I just think, but have not put it in action yet” (male, age 46-55, married 10 years). Cognitively, he had changes in his way of thinking and seeing things. Through the workshop, participants had a broader view about life. They could see beyond things and their problems.

Although they [couple presenters] had struggles like I did, they still viewed them as God’s blessings. I only accepted but did not see them as His blessings to make me stronger in life. However, their experiences brought me to a higher or spiritual level than my human thoughts. (female, age 46- 55, married 24 years)

What this participant experienced in the workshop helped her see her struggles and perceive them at a spiritual level. Also, participant experiences in the workshop brought a higher level of consciousness. For instance, a male participant, aged 46- 55, married for 15 years, stated, “My daily life is about the same and has not changed much. After the workshop, I became more aware of how I think and react. Now, I am aware of my judgments when relating to others.” Although he claimed that his life has not changed much, he did feel an increase in awareness or consciousness after the MRW program when reacting to and judging others. Therefore, the workshop influenced participants’ viewpoints as they saw things in different eyes.

**Spiritual Gains**

After the workshop, participants experienced improvement in their spiritual lives. Particularly, 54.6% of participants (N = 6) identified that they prayed more as an individual, as a
couple, and as a family after the program. “The workshop helped me to pray more” (female, age 36-45, married 10 years). As a couple, “in the past, we did not pray together. After the workshop, we have prayed together. Although we cannot pray regularly, we pray while working” (female, age 45-55, married 24 years). As a family, participants learned to pray together with children before bedtime. “I don’t know whether we learned from the daily retreat program or the MRW, but we do examinations more often in our family rather than only evening prayer” (male, age 56-65, married 24 years). Examination is a program ritual or activity, in which participants are engaged in praying together and reflecting on their day together. In this example, he meant that his family has increased examinations or reflections together more than just reciting prayers after the workshop. By doing examinations or reflections, they were engaged in a deeper spiritual level of reflecting on themselves and on what they have done daily. Likewise, a female participant, aged 46-55, married for 24 years, shared how she applied examination which she learned from the workshop with her children:

Two things that I learned from the workshop are: 1) blessing my children every morning before they go to work. They are actually waiting for it; 2) I do examination with them every evening… Actually, I feel I understand my children better when I listen to their sharing about their days and difficulties which they had at work or in life. It is so simple a ritual, but I really appreciate and realize how God works in their lives.

In this case, she felt more understanding and developed a closer relationship with her children through listening to their sharing about work and life. Along with spiritual gains, 36.4% of interviewees (N = 4) said that they developed more trust in God and recognition of His presence in marriage after the program. They learned to bring God into their marriage and family more often (male, age 56-65, married 24 years). For instance, a respondent said,

God is the foundation, not us by ourselves. So often I forget that. God is in our marriage, but sometimes we forget to include Him. We try to solve [our conflicts] by ourselves.
Thus, we need to go back to the foundation that God is the center of our life. (male, age 56-65, married 30 years)

Another respondent stated, “Through the workshop, I just said, I trust in God, as long as I am healthy and still working. Having enough things for daily use is ok. God will take care of my children” (female, age 36-45, married 15 years). Thus, these participants thought of God as a spiritual source in their marriage, in which they could turn to seek for problem solutions.

Normalizing One’s Problems

About 54.6% of the respondents (N = 6) learned normalizing one’s problems through listening to and reflecting other couples’ stories. As one respondent said, “it is helpful because I found out that we are not the only couple in the world which has issues. We all have issues. Also, I learned and related [my problems] to theirs” (male, age 36-45, married 10 years). Through the program, participants found similarities from other couples’ sharing and connection to their own problems. Through the sharing, participants learned to manage their conflicts in a better way.

Improved Communication

Regarding communication improvement, 54.6% (N = 6) of interviewees reported that they developed more openness and listening to each other. “Just like the program helped us open up to talk and listen to each other” (female, age 36-45, married 10 years). Understanding that learning to be open to each other is not an easy thing that can be done overnight. Rather that, it takes husbands and wives times to practice. When couples are more open with each other, they are also willing to listen to each other. Besides, participants (63.7%; N = 7) agreed that the program improved their emotion regulation and patience in reaction to situations and conflicts. Participants learned how to hold their tongue, to calm down and/or to walk away and wait for conflicts or situations to calm down. They also learned to talk pleasantly to each other, to use
gentle language, and especially to pay more attention to their tones and voices when communicating.

Whenever I was angry with him [husband], I used the heavy or strong words. That was how I felt. All my anger and hurt I dumped on him to make him feel the way I felt. Currently, I don’t use these words anymore. I think that these words are not effective, they only hurt him. I don’t want him to be hurt. Therefore, I don’t use negative words anymore, but consider what I should say to him. (female, age 46-55, married 24 years)

In association with improved communication skills, interviewees (63.7%; N = 7) reported *having more interaction* with each other than before the workshop. After the program, participants’ better communication and expression of feelings and thoughts allowed their partners to better understand them. Through interaction, they could overcome difficulties and misunderstandings.

After the workshop I recognized that even though it is not a big change, there is a change between us. What I wanted to talk to my wife about to make her understand me, I could not say it. I thought I needed a third person who could mediate between us. Now, things are said and being heard, even without help. (male, age 46-55, married 24 years)

*Improved Problems Solving Skills*

Almost all interviewees (91%; N = 10) gained *more awareness and understanding of roots of conflicts* after the MRW program. Through the program, participants learned such factors as original family, differences between men and women, differences in cultures, different interests, personality differences, and so on. These factors had negative effects on their relationships and contributed to their conflicts. By acknowledging and understanding the roots of their conflicts, participants were able to work effectively on conflict resolutions.

My husband often felt uncomfortable and jealous when I went out and interacted with others. On the other hand, I felt ok, he could talk with anyone he wanted. I was ok and not jealous with him. I learned that the original family is the root of conflicts. Before I did not recognize that; I just thought it was his nature. Then, I felt so uncomfortable about it. Now, I understand that his nature was from his original family. He also accepted that and said, he would work on changing. (female, age 46-55, married 24 years)
More interestingly, participants (36.4%; N = 4) also learned from other couples in the workshop that they needed to turn to *praying and/or seeking for God’s guidance in solving problems*. For participants, those struggles and/or problems were seen as impossible to solve. They then turned to God whom they believe and trust, the problems became possible to face and manage.

Yes. If I had not gone to the workshop, I would have thought of divorce. I could not accept it. After the workshop, I learned that I had to hope and trust more. Then, I slowly ask God to help him change. Sometimes, it is hard if I just depend on my own effort. (female, age 36-45, married 15 years)

Regarding enhancing problem-solving skills, interviewees (54.6%; N = 6) provided evidence that they learned to *solve problems together via interaction and listening to each other*. Unlike before, participants engaged more in identifying their issues right away and discussing them respectfully while listening to each other. They did not delay solving problems or leave them unsolved without plans to continue working on them.

Yesterday we were talking to each other. I said something that made her unhappy. She told me that what I just said made her feel heavy hearted; that she felt unhappy. I recognized it and explained that I did not mean it [in the way she understood it] while talking to her. We worked it out right there. (male, age 56-65, married 24 years)

**Increased Closeness with Spouse**

The qualitative findings also indicated that almost a half of the participants (45.5%; N = 5) expressed that they had a sense of *paying more attention to each other*. Participants cared for one another more by sharing responsibility for childcare and by appreciating one another more. They even expressed their loving care for each other through gestures and emotions.

When we talk to each other, we look in the eye of each other more, and pay more attention to each other. It means to have a little bit of emotion to each other. We overcome problems easier. I don’t know what I have done differently, but I feel that he starts to talk with me more. (female, age 46-55, married 24 years)
Respondents (54.6%; N = 6) experienced having a better relationship. Compared to their past, they felt more satisfied with their current relationship. They said, they could better adjust to each other’s idiosyncrasies through talking, sharing and understanding. Even though their relationship was not perfect, but it was ok. It could be said that their marriage was 30 to 40% stronger. A male respondent said,

She (wife) did not like me to serve others in our parish. She did not support me and complained about what I did. Now we can interact easier. I can share with her about what I am doing in the parish. I can say to her that this week our group has a prayer service together and ask her to cook a pot of sticky rice for us. She is happy to do it. I mean she now supports me for what I am doing in the church. I am very happy about that. (male, age 46-55, married 24 years)

Enhanced Forgiveness at Theoretical and Practical Levels

Relating forgiveness, participants (72.74%; N = 8) described they enhanced forgiveness at theoretical and practical levels. Participants became more aware of the importance of forgiveness in their relationships. Due to forgiving each other, participants could move forward and find more pleasure in their relationship. Through practicing forgiveness, they were able to let go and accept one another more.

After the workshop, he [husband] has not mentioned about gambling. I know and ignore it. I don’t want to talk to him about it because I want to keep the happiness in our family. Sometimes, he said to me that he went to this place, but he actually went to the other. I know it, but I accept and believe him. I did not argue with him as before...Nevertheless, I only wish when he has God in his life, he will become better. I wish for him to get better or more virtuous. The more virtuous he is, the more obstacles he may overcome. (female, age 36-45, married 15 years)

However, interviewees admitted that saying forgiveness was easy, but doing forgiveness was difficult. Because forgiving required more effort through actions rather than just saying it. Additionally, participants could forgive, but they could not forget. When there was a small trigger like a conflict or argument, that pain of memory would come back.
For example, he threatened to divorce me. This hurt me. Whenever we have conflicts or arguments, this hurtful memory pops up in my mind. It is in my brain and cannot be forgotten. Always, I am psychologically ready to do what is next if we could not be together. The pain has still been in my head even after this workshop. I can forgive him, but not forget the pain of this memory. I cannot forget it because it stays in my mind. (female, age 46-55, married 21 years)

Seven weeks after the end of the MRW program, respondents experienced changing perspectives, increasing levels of closeness with one another in relationship, improving communication and problems solving as well as increasing levels of forgiveness. By applying their learned knowledge from the program and from other couples, participants made progress in their relationship; especially participants who interacted with and paid more attention to each other. In problem solving, the program helped respondents to look at the roots of conflicts rather than only the problems. They used different strategies (e.g., interacting/talking about issues, or seeking God’s guidance) to deal with conflicts, and did not leave them incomplete. Interviewees though, who experienced saying they forgive found it more difficult to totally forgive their spouse. Forgetting past hurts was a major challenge. However, they forgave one another and tried to see things in a broader view rather than focus only on their problems. Finally, participant communication skills were improved through better interaction with each other, becoming more aware of emotions, and accepting/respecting each other.

Participants’ Feedback on MRW

Despite the positive impacts of the MRW program, interviewees (27.3%; N = 3) suggested that there was a lack of time in the program for couples to work together and go deeper in their conversations about their intimate relationship. The presentations were too scripted. Reading scripts made presenters’ experiences not real. In addition, another interviewee commented:
Although this program is good and touched on many different topics. Every topic was presented too briefly and not in depth. Many big and serious problems have not yet been discussed in detail. Problems were basically, but not deeply discussed to understand them better, because there was a lack of time. I think we need more discussion to focus on the issues and their solutions. There was not enough time for everyone to share their thoughts during the table discussion. Moreover, more time was needed for the couple to discuss with one another. Or maybe have a coaching couple who would coach one participant couple in conversation. (female, age 36-45, married 10 years)

Hence, a lack of time for table and couple discussion was mentioned. This lack of time might reduce the chance for lasting effects.

**Lessons Learned from and Participants’ Feedback to MRW**

Participants were asked, “What were the most important things you learned from the MRW program?”. Table 4 displays a summary of the most important things that participants learned from the MRW program at the end of the workshop and at follow up. The findings demonstrated that 15.8% of participants at the end of the workshop indicated that normalizing one’s problems was the most important thing they learned. Compared to 9.4% of participants at follow up who reported having the same response. More than 20% of participants said gaining knowledge for marriage at the end of the workshop in comparison to 11% of participants responding in the same coding at the six-week follow up. Regarding communication, 29.8% of the respondents who participated in the workshop reported that the use of good communication skills was the most important thing they learned at the end of the workshop compared to 63.2% of participants at the six-week follow up (see table 4 for sub-themes).

Likewise, 18.9% of participants reported learning forgiveness was the most important thing at the end of the workshop, whereas 38% of participants experienced this at the six-week follow up. Almost 32% of respondents reported spiritual gains at the end of the workshop as well as at the six-week follow up. Less than 5% of samples at the end of the workshop said that
the most important thing which they learned in the workshop was *conflict resolution* compared to 6.4% of samples who had the corresponding one at the six-week follow up. Additionally, 4.8% of participants stated, the most important thing they learned was the *importance of marriage* at the end of the workshop and at the six-week follow up. In a category of *others*, the findings indicated 4.8% for *acceptance of self and spouse* at the end of the workshop and at the six-week follow up; 3.1% for *compassion* at the end of the workshop compared to 11% for the same one at the six-week follow up. Eight percent and nine-point four percent were reported for *love* at the end of the workshop and at the six-week follow up. Interestingly, 6.4% of participants mentioned respect as the most important learned thing at the six-week follow up, whereas no response was reported at the end of the workshop. Two participants did not fill out the surveys. Overall, more participants at the six-week follow up reported their gains in the targeted outcome variables of communication, marital relationship, conflict resolution, and forgiveness, which they viewed as the most essential lessons learned in the program. These qualitative responses from the 64 participants support the qualitative findings from the 11 interviews that indicate participants’ improvements in these four outcome variables (see Chapter 5).

Table 4. Lessons Learned from the MRW Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes &amp; Sub-Themes</th>
<th>End-Workshop (N = 64)</th>
<th>Follow-Up (N = 64)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normalizing one’s problems</td>
<td>10 (15.8)</td>
<td>6 (9.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining knowledges for marriage</td>
<td>13 (20.6)</td>
<td>7 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>19 (29.8)</td>
<td>40 (63.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>11 (17.2)</td>
<td>18 (28.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to each other</td>
<td>3 (4.8)</td>
<td>6 (9.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding one another</td>
<td>1 (1.6)</td>
<td>10 (15.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being honest and open to each other</td>
<td>2 (3.1)</td>
<td>3 (4.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Forgiveness 12 (18.9) 24 (38)
  Forgiveness/ forgiving 10 (15.8) 21 (33.2)
  Saying “I apologize” or “I am sorry” 2 (3.1) 3 (4.8)

Spiritual Gains  20 (31.8) 20 (31.8)
  Importance of having God in Marriage 7 (11) 3 (4.8)
  Trust in God 3 (4.8) 2 (3.1)
  Faith 5 (8) 2 (3.1)
  Prayer and praying together 5 (8) 13 (20.3)

Conflict resolution  3 (4.8) 4 (6.4)
  Seeking God’s guidance 1 (1.6) 1 (1.6)
  Problem-solving skills via interaction 2 (3.1) 3 (4.8)

Importance of Marriage  3 (4.8) 3 (4.8)
  View of marriage as a sacrament 1 (1.6) 2 (3.1)
  Need of marriage enrichment 2 (3.1) 1 (1.6)

Marital Relationship  11 (17.3) 23 (36.6)
  Acceptance one another 3 (4.8) 3 (4.8)
  Compassion 2 (3.1) 7 (11)
  Love 5 (8) 6 (9.4)
  Sacrifice 1 (1.6) 3 (4.8)
  Respect 4 (6.4)

Others:  7 (11)
  Community/ community support 4 (6.4)
  Spirit of servant of volunteers at workshop 3 (4.8) 1 (1.6)

People did not fill out the form.  2 (3.1) 6 (9.4)

Following are some quotes in relation to the close-ended question about the most important things that participants learned at the end of the workshop and at the six-week follow up.

_Marital Relationship (love, acceptance, respect, and compassion):_ A female participant, aged 46-55, married for 21 years described, “I learned that love is very important in marriage life. Because love leads us to sacrifice, forgiveness, and compassion” at the end of the workshop and “love and respect each other. Don't let family matter interfere with your own family” at the six-week follow up.
Conflict Resolution (seeking God’s guidance and problem-solving skills via interaction):
“...and I learned to solve problems by listening to God's words and modeling Him,” by a female participant, age 36-45, married for 15 years at the end of the workshop and at the six-week follow up.

Communication (openness, listening, and interaction). A male participant, aged 46-55, married for 10 years, said, “I learned to listen to one another” at the end of the workshop and “I learned to courageously express feelings and thinking to my spouse and acknowledged that our problems are not the most difficult ones” at the six-week follow up.

Forgiveness (saying “sorry”, forgiveness). “I learned to say a word “sorry”” and “I learned to say “sorry” and forgive one another,” by a male participant, aged 46-55, married for 24 years at the end of the workshop and at the six-week follow up.

Normalizing One’s Problems. “It was helpful to hear others going through some of the issues that we were going through. It affirmed that we were not alone in our struggles and that it was normal through the cycles of marriage and to become closer to God and each other” and “the issues in our marriage happen to other couples as well. We are not alone struggling with these issues,” by a female participant, aged 36-45, married for 16 years at the end of the workshop and at the six-week follow up.

Gained Knowledge for Marriage. “I learned ways of living in marriage” and “to realize what we need to improve for our relationship,” by a male, aged 46-55, married for 17 years at the end of workshop and at the six-week follow up.
Spiritual Gains (trust in God, faith, and prayer). “to pray together as a couple” and “pray together as a family more often,” by a female, aged 46-55, married for 18 at the end of the workshop and at the six-week follow up.

Regarding the open-ended question, “Do you think any improvements are needed in the MRW program? If yes, what suggestions do you have to improve the program?” Table 5 presents participants’ feedback and suggestions in percentage and frequency at the end of the workshop and at the six-week follow up.

Table 5. Participants' Feedback to Improve the MRW Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes &amp; Sub-Themes</th>
<th>End-Workshop (N = 64)</th>
<th>Follow-Up (N = 64)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>22 (37.9)</td>
<td>8 (12.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good (program, topics, food)</td>
<td>2 (3.1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22 (34.8)</td>
<td>8 (12.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long (Saturday and Friday program)</td>
<td>12 (19.2)</td>
<td>12 (19.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making short (topics, instructions, rituals)</td>
<td>5 (8)</td>
<td>1 (1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talks were scripted, technical in words</td>
<td>4 (6.4)</td>
<td>9 (14.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 (4.8)</td>
<td>2 (3.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More time for prayer</td>
<td>11 (17.4)</td>
<td>14 (22.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More time for discussion</td>
<td>3 (4.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More time for couple interaction</td>
<td>4 (6.4)</td>
<td>10 (15.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for bilingual training</td>
<td>2 (3.1)</td>
<td>4 (6.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need visual aids for training</td>
<td>1 (1.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others: (Childcare, guest speaker, support group after the program)</td>
<td>3 (4.8)</td>
<td>2 (3.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People did not fill out questionnaires</td>
<td>16 (25)</td>
<td>25 (39.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table results show that 37.9% of participants provided positive feedback (“excellent” and “good”) on the program at the end of the workshop compared to 12.6% in relation to the same topic at the six-week follow up. This positive feedback was for program contents, topics, foods, and services (e.g. welcoming, volunteering, activities etc.). For negative feedback, 12.9%
of participants who assessed at the end of the workshop and at the six-week follow up felt that the program was long, needs to be shorter (topics, program, and instructions), and disliked the scripted talks and use of technical words. For suggestions, 17.4% of participants postulated that the program needs more time for prayer, more time for discussion, more time for couple interaction, a need for bilingual training, and visual aids for training at the end of the workshop (see Table 7 for details). On the other hand, 22.3% of participants suggested more time for couple interaction and more time for table discussion at the six-week follow up. They did not report a need for prayer and visual aids and a need for bilingual training. Lastly, in a category of others, a small number of participants (4.8%) mentioned childcare, inviting guest speakers, and creating support groups after the program. In general, participants’ positive and negative feedback together with their good suggestions were given to help program organizers to improve the program. Following are some quotes.

Positive Feedback. “Excellent! I am quite impressed and amazed at how well the MRW is organized; how carefully and thoughtfully it was. It is tailored to the need of the retreatants. I truly and deeply appreciate the time and effort of the organizers” and “better choice of mine. Other than that, it is great overall”, by a female participant, age 36-45, married 17 years, at the end of the workshop and at the six-week follow up.

Negative feedback. “The program should be shortened. The program on Saturday was too long to make us tired be the end of the day” and “too many topics and long program. It makes us have less focus on the talk by the end of the day,” by a male participant, age 46-55, married 20 years, at the end of the workshop and at the six-week follow up.
Suggestions. A female, aged 56-65, married for 36 years, commented that “topic speakers can shorten their talks to give more time for discussion” at the end of the workshop and “less talk, more discussion” at the six-week follow up.

Summary. Quantitative data which were collected from a group sample of 64 participants resulted that the program did not had an impact on participants’ relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness at the six-week follow up. Yet, qualitative data which were collected from a smaller sample size of 11 out of 64 quantitative participants indicated that participants had benefited from the program as they described some needed improvements in these outcome variables. Additional themes which emerged were: Changes in perspectives, spiritual growth, and in normalizing one’s problems were seen as benefits which these participants gained in the MRW program. Additionally, this chapter included the results of the analysis for three close-ended and two open-ended questions which can be viewed in Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5.
CHAPTER FIVE
INTEGRATION & DISCUSSION

The development of marriage and relationship education programs (MRE) was to provide participants with education, skills, and principles to enhance their chance of enjoying healthy and stable marital relationships (Markman & Rhoades, 2012). Applying a convergent mixed method design, this study’s purpose was to investigate the impact of Marriage Renewal Workshops (MRW) on Vietnamese American couples’ relationship satisfaction, conflict resolution skills, communication skills, and levels of forgiveness. In this study, the integration involved merging the results from the quantitative and qualitative data so that a comparison could be made, and a more complete understanding could emerge than that provided by the quantitative or the qualitative results alone (Creswell & Clark, 2017). This Chapter 5 presents the merging of the quantitative and qualitative results. After integrating the results and identifying areas of similarities and differences, recommendations for future research and marriage relationship education program interventions are identified.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

Merging at the methods level occurred when the quantitative and qualitative strands were connected through sampling, through matching of domains across the survey items and in qualitative interview questions. Furthermore, merging was affected in the integration and presentation of the quantitative and qualitative results in a narrative discussion with meta-inferences (e.g., interpretations made based on quantitative and qualitative findings) and through
discussion of merging results. Prominently, the results from two datasets were explicitly merged through presenting the quantitative results and the qualitative results to discuss the points of convergence and divergence among the results (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

**Relationship Satisfaction, Communication, Conflict Resolution, and Forgiveness**

Quantitative results reveal that participants did not significantly increase in levels of satisfaction, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and levels of forgiveness at the six-week follow up. Inversely, qualitative findings suggested that participants improved in these four outcome variables. In regard to relationship satisfaction, interview participants described increased closeness with their spouses which they described as paying more attention to each other and having a better relationship. Regarding communication skills, participants grew better in interaction with each other, openness and listening to each other, and emotion regulation. In relation to forgiveness, qualitative respondents improved levels of forgiveness from letting go resentments against their spouse to having compassion toward and wanting good things for their spouse. In regard to the variable of conflict resolution skills, having better understanding of the roots of conflicts, involving in problem solving by more interaction, listening to each other, praying, and seeking God’s guidance were identified in the qualitative data. Moreover, the interview results demonstrated that participants learned normalizing their problems, changing perspectives to see things from different angles, and growing deeper in relationship with God through the workshop. These characteristics were not captured in the survey data. Thus, both quantitative and qualitative results diverged when their data sets were dissimilar.

**The Overall Workshop Impact**

In general, the MRW program benefited participants who attended the program. Qualitative findings showed that participants improved in marital relationship, communication
skills, conflict resolution skills, and levels of forgiveness (see Table 4) when they answered an open-ended question about the important things learned at the six-week follow-up. Similarly, the quantitative findings resulted in significant mean differences between participants’ rating current relationship before the workshop and at the six-week follow up. Accordingly, the mixed results suggest that participants benefited from the attending the MRW program in their marriage enrichment.

Furthermore, the survey results demonstrated that participants significantly rated the workshop overall and their expectations at the end of the workshop higher than at the six-week follow up. This is congruent with the qualitative results indicating participants providing more positive “good or excellent” and same negative “long or shortening” feedback at the end of the workshop than at the six-week follow up. They had higher satisfaction with the program at the end of the workshop than at the six-week follow up. Despite this, these participants asked for more time for table discussion and couple interaction. So, these findings indicate that participants found the program beneficial for improving their marital quality and functioning.

**Discussion**

Many studies have shown results which indicate that relationship enrichment programs are successful in improving relationship functioning (Blanchard et al., 2009; Hawkins et al., 2008; Halford et al., 2003; Laurenceau et al., 2004; Braga 2017). The results from this mixed method evaluation study of the Marriage Renewal Workshop, a faith based marriage enrichment program, provide suggestive evidence in regard to how helpful this specific program is in improving some targeted aspects of marital relationships: relationship satisfaction, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and levels of forgiveness. In addition, the results offered information on how gender did not influence the impact of the program on couples’
levels of relationship satisfaction, communication skills, conflict management skills, and levels of forgiveness.

**Relationship Satisfaction, Communication, Conflict Management, and Forgiveness**

This mixed method research aimed at evaluating the impact of the program on improving participants’ relationship satisfaction, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and levels of forgiveness. The quantitative results showed that participants did not significantly improve in the four outcome variables over time. Just the opposite, the qualitative results provided meaningful evidence that participants bettered in their relationship, in interacting with each other, solving conflicts, and willingness to forgive and let go. These qualitative findings were supported by this study’s additional findings from the close-ended and open-ended questions analyses which displayed participants significantly experiencing improvements in these four outcome variables. Therefore, these integrated findings suggest that participants who attended the MRW program benefited from it. Despite not scoring significantly different on quantitative data, there is a need of more research to further explore the impact of the MRW program on participants’ relationship satisfaction, communication skills, conflict management skills, and levels of forgiveness.

This current study’s findings are inconsistent with previous evaluation research which revealed that marriage enrichment programs helped couples improve their marital relationship (Halford & Bodenmann, 2013; Hawkins et al., 2008; Sager & Sager, 2005; Halford et al., 2003; Jakubowski et al., 2004), communication skills (Laurenceau et al., 2004), conflict resolution skills (Braga, 2017; Davis, 2015), and levels of forgiveness (Braga, 2017). But it is consistent with an evaluation study finding no significant differences in relationship satisfaction, communication skills, and forgiveness attitude over time (Davis, 2015). These differences could
be on account of the mediator and moderator factors which might influence the effect of marriage enrichment intervention programs (Halford & Pepping, 2017). A randomized controlled trial study by Williamson et al. (2016) evidenced that communication-based interventions delivered to couples living with low-incomes could improve relationship satisfaction for lower risk and for higher risk couples and observed communication for higher risk couples only. Low or high risk couples were identified in relation to their sociodemographic risk (e.g., low education, unemployment, poor social support etc.) This study did not classify participants as high or low risk.

Moreover, the lack of statistically significant evidence in this current study could be that this study used a too small sample size, but not large enough to produce the power of significant levels (Abu-Bader, 2011). Another reason could be the use of a short timeline, six weeks following after the program. Interviewed participants commented that it was difficult to see a big change in these outcome variables in just six weeks after the program, because nothing that considered a major problem, had happened yet, which would have allowed couples to apply what they had learned. These limitations need to be addressed in future studies to see the effect of the MRW program on couples’ marital quality.

**Relationship satisfaction and conflict management.** The interview results supported the survey results showed the link between couple satisfaction and problem-solving skills before the workshop and at the six-week follow-up. The qualitative evidence showed that participant couples were more active in coping with their marital problems by understanding the root of their problems, interacting with and listening to each other, and seeking for another possibility to resolve problems instead of turning away or leaving them unsolved. According to Kurdek (1994), facing and resolving problems rather than avoiding or withdrawing is an imperative
aspect of relationship maintenance and relationship homeostasis. This congruently mixed finding supported one of the MRW program’s goals, which is to support participant couples to improve their knowledge of conflict emergence and to handle it in effective ways to bring happiness in their relationship.

**Relationship satisfaction and communication.** Targeting at improving couples’ communication skills was another goal of this MRW program. Quantitative results showed no correlation between relationship satisfaction and communication skills before the workshop and at the six-week follow up. In contrast, some emerged themes from the qualitative data such as *more open and listening to each other, more interaction with each other, and emotion regulation and patience* illustrated characteristics of positive communication, which interview participants learned in the workshop. Therefore, Marriage Renewal Workshop, a faith-based marriage enrichment program in some cases successfully achieved its goal which aims at improving relationship satisfaction via cultivating communication skills. By engaging couples in enacting positive communication can help to better their marital relationship (Owen et al., 2013; Davis, 2015). Nonetheless, this relationship between satisfaction and communication was only articulated in the interview data, but not in the survey data. It is supportive to the result from a quantitative study by Lavner et al. (2016) showed that communication in some cases was associated with relationship satisfaction, but not over time. These incongruently mixed findings propose a question whether this relationship between relationship satisfaction and communication may be affected and/or moderated by other factors (e.g., external stressors or environmental context) (Lavner et al., 2016). Again, this question should be addressed in future studies.
**Relationship satisfaction and forgiveness.** Another key component of the MRW program is forgiveness. Through an act of forgiveness, this workshop engages couples in the healing process and moving forward in relationship with hope. Assumed that relationship satisfaction would relate to forgiveness before the workshop and at the six-week follow up. Relationship satisfaction was significantly correlated with Forgiveness Absence of Negative, but not with Forgiveness Presence of Positive before the workshop and at the six-week follow up. This finding is congruent with what participants described in the qualitative data. For instance, participants learned to let go of their negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and to accept the reality of each other which enable them to move on in and maintain their marital relationships. This articulates well that forgiveness is not only an exist from a cycle of abusive and revenge (Rye & Pargament, 2001), but also a mercy act (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Therefore, forgiving each other is not an easy thing to do, as interviewed participants commented because of the life events and circumstances which may serve as triggers to bring hurtful or painful experiences back.

**Gender Difference**

Regarding gender, this study’s finding of no significance in gender responses indicates that the MRW program equally affected participants to improve their marital quality regardless of gender. It is consistent to previous studies showing no gender differences in marital satisfaction, communication skills (Jackson et al., 2014; Hawkins et al., 2008; Davis, 2015), conflict resolution skills, and levels of forgiveness (Davis, 2015). This mixed method evaluation study contributes to the literature in this area and provides evidence for no gender differences between males and females in these four outcome variables before the workshop and in six weeks following up after the MRW program.
**Benefits of the MRW Program**

The primary goal of the Marriage Renewal Workshop (MRW) is to enrich the quality of marriage among Vietnamese American couples. Theoretically, marital relationship has been linked to life events, couple interaction, individual spouse characteristics, and context variables (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Halford & Pepping, 2017). These aspects are theorized to effect how relationship satisfaction is or not maintained over time. Couple interaction and individual partner characteristics are two common aspects which are capable of impacting relationship satisfaction. These two aspects have been targeted to improve couple relationship in MRE interventions as well as in the MRW program (Halford & Pepping, 2017; Halford et al., 2003). The MRW program concentrates on these two aspects as means to improve relationship satisfaction with its emphasis on communication patterns (couple interaction), conflict tendency (couple interaction), and forgiveness attitude (individual partner characteristics). Qualitative participants in this study experienced improvement in their interaction with and listening to each other. Laser-Maira and Nicotera (2019) posit that effective communication in marital relationship is not simply to acknowledge what people are listening to, but also to say what they mean. Through this dialogue, couples learn to regulate their emotions, give each other a chance to express their thinking and feelings relating to marital conflicts, and then resolve them together in a calm manner rather than walking off and leaving issues unresolved.

According to social learning theory, couples’ positive behaviors can be stimulated and reinforced by improvements in their relationship. Gradually, their positive skills will exchange the negative one through educational and experiential approaches (Hunt et al., 1998) as seen in a study that showed husbands and wives experienced a decrease in negative communication over time, but no significance for positive communication (Laurenceau et al., 2004). This study’s
findings favor the principles of the first and second order changes in social learning theory being discussed by Davis (2015). At first order change or individual change, the interview participants were helped in the MRW program to renew their perspectives of thinking and seeing their relationship differently in a positive manner (i.e., changed perspectives). After the workshop, they saw more hope than hopelessness (i.e., normalizing one’s problems) by reflecting on other couples’ real experiences; they also learned to hold firm on their trust in God and in each other. All these individual changes made a transformation in their relationship at second order or systematic change. This transformation is echoed in the survey findings which participants changed toward positive direction in their marital relationship after attending the workshops. As a consequence of the individual change, couple relationship will eventually change. These principles of first and second changes can work in the opposite direction as well. If an individual stonewalls and shuts down his/her communication channel, then his or her relationship conflict will become stuck and unresolved.

As a faith-based intervention program, the MRW program also focuses on the contextual aspect as a mean to influence relationship satisfaction which is addressed in discussing marital function in joint religious communication (i.e., prayer together, talking about God’s role in marriage) (David & Stafford, 2015). Research has shown that forgiveness by husband and wife contributes to positive marital satisfaction, whereas unforgiveness by husband and wife negatively impacts marital satisfaction. In addition, couple’s joint religious communication is positively associated with marital satisfaction (David & Stafford, 2015). According to a relational perspective, an individual’s relationship with God can influence marital relationship through different pathways. It may reinforce virtues such as love, forgiveness, compromise, and sacrifice (Ellison et al., 2010). In this study, the qualitative participants prayed together more as a
couple and family as well as trusted in God who is seen as the center of their marriage. Through reflecting on their relationship with God, participants described that they recognized and enacted the gifts of acceptance of one another, love, sacrifice, respect, compassion, and forgiveness as the most important things learned. These findings support the “person-in-environment” perspective which emphasizes the influence of environment (i.e., religious and cultural context) where individuals reside and belong to. These findings further suggest that spirituality is a critical component in marital relationships, especially when marriage enrichment programs are offered in a faith community. Although the spirituality variable was not included in the quantitative measurement, it naturally emerged in the qualitative data. Hence, adding the spirituality variable in future research is recommended for the investigation of its impact on enhancing marital relationships.

Nevertheless, the additional significant results indicated that more participants at the end of the workshop said they were satisfied with how the program met their expectations than those studied at the six-week follow up. Also, rating the overall program score at the end of the workshop was higher than it was at the six-week follow up. This discrepancy could be explained by the participants’ idealistic expectations immediately following the program. So, when they could not reach their expectations, they became disappointed. That could influence their rating of the overall program and satisfaction of how the workshop met their expectations.

Through providing knowledge, skills and principles, the goal of the MRW program is to help couples change their view of life and marriage, accept and search for alternative ways to solve marital conflicts. This is consistent with the goals of marriage and relationship education programs, which help participants develop better communication and problem-solving skills, while also providing them with information pertaining to relationship quality such as working
through differing expectations, managing finances, and cultivating commitment and forgiveness.

MRE intervention programs are ultimately designed to promote healthy relational practices, prevent distress, and improve unsatisfactory interactions which already exist (Hawkins et al., 2008). This study’s findings suggest that participants reported receiving some beneficial experiences in these four outcome variables, however, this study does not provide strong evidence that couples increased their relationship satisfaction, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and levels of forgiveness by attending the MRW program.

**Strengths and Limitations**

With the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods, this study was designed to evaluate the impact of the Marriage Renewal Workshop on couple relationship satisfaction, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and levels of forgiveness. A major strength of this study is that it provided rich integrated evidence to suggest that the MRW program has been a helpful faith-based marriage enrichment program as employed with Vietnamese American married couples for the past 13 years. Moreover, this study contributed strong evidence for the test-retest reliability of these standardized instruments: Couple Relationship Index (CSI: Funk & Rogge, 2007), Ineffective Arguing Inventory (IAI, Kurdek, 1994), Marital Communication Inventory (Bienvenu, 1970), and Rye Forgiveness Scale (RFS, Rye & Pargament, 2001) and offered the reliable Vietnamese versions of these instruments to the marriage research field.

In spite of strengths, this study has some limitations. The self-selecting sampling method was purposive and convenient. But it threatened the external generalizability of the study because it might be a biased sampling not representing the entire target population. Extrinsically, most of participants (65.6%) came to the program with a desire for marriage enrichment. Their initial expectations could account for a higher quality of relationship. It made it difficult to assess
the impact of such an intervention because of the self-selection effect. Although this mixed method study expected to recruit 100 participants for the quantitative method, only 64 participants were finalized for the data analysis. This small sample size might affect the power test of significance. Along this line, this study’s timeline was short, six weeks after the end of the program. It did not give enough time for participants to practice what they had learned in the program. Another limitation is that this mixed method study’s findings only evaluated the short-term impact of the program, but not its long-term effects. Finally, these strengths and limitations of the MRW program yield some suggestions and questions for pastoral social work practice and future research.

**Implementations for Pastoral Social Work Practice and Research**

The results of this study provide some implications for pastoral social work practice with immigrant couples and families. Because social work practice dwells on the person-in-environment perspective we are reminded not to only focus on the individual’s problems but also to be concerned the environment in which these individuals live (Weiss, 2008). This study’s findings suggest that Vietnamese Catholic couples from faith-based communities viewed their healthy relationship as related to their relationship with God through praying together and acknowledging the presence of God in their marriage. Immigrant couples and families such as those participating in this study require consideration of the larger societal context which includes the couple, family of origin, the community, culture, and particularly their religion/spirituality. It is vital that social workers consider the religious beliefs and practices when providing marriage and family interventions for immigrant couples and families. Couples benefit from understanding how their marriage is shaped and impacted by their faith and beliefs. The faith-based community in which the couple resides can be an important resource of strength
that social workers can use while working with couples and family. Social workers can serve as a cultural broker and mediator not only within the family but also between the family and their community.

This study’s findings also confirm prior research that indicates how critical communication and problem-solving skills are to couples. For instance, Vietnamese American married participants experienced greater relationship satisfaction by having more interactions with each other, more openness and listening to each other, and greater emotional regulation and expression. Couples in this study reported that learning these vital communication patterns helped to open up their dialogue and lead them to understand each other better. In collectivistic culture such as in Vietnamese immigrant families, a sense of self is understood interdependently relating to family and community (Nguyen et al., 2011). People are less likely to talk to each other about their feelings for fear of upsetting family harmony. Consequently, it is essential to educate couples about affective listening skills, how to dialogue with each other in respect without judgment, and to express their thoughts and emotions to each other. The methods taught in the marital enrichment program included teaching the “I”-statement techniques as a tool to facilitate more emotional expression. For those couples who found it difficult to use “I” statement in their talk with each other, handouts and assignments to practice writing down sentences with “I” statement, for example “I hear…I feel…I think…” were helpful and would likely be helpful in working with other similar couples. Again, it would be very useful if social workers could help couples by encouraging and engaging couples through role playing with these communication techniques.

Furthermore, seeing the potentials and capabilities in clients and encouraging them to move on with their lives are the purposes of social work practice built into the Strengths
Perspective (Saleebey, 2008). We all are blessed with abilities and strengths to deal with the circumstances and problems in our lives. Embracing their strengths does not mean that they do not think of their problems, rather, it means to view their problems with another perspective, or at least to normalize them in order to make a road for hope and emergence of a solution. The results of this study support that participants were capable to manage their marital conflicts when they changed their perspectives and normalized them through reflecting on other couples’ sharing. Couples admitted that they thought their problem was big; they were only ones having problem. After hearing other couples’ sharing, they recognized that their problems were small that they could deal with it. So, it would be very helpful if social workers listen to couples’ thoughts and feelings about their marital problems and ask them how they could see their problems differently or in third eye. It would be effective that social workers can help couples recognize any inner strengths and abilities that can help solve their problems.

Additionally, this study’s results emphasize the importance of forgiveness in marriage interventions among faith-based community couples and families. When people choose to forgive, it means they let go any hurts and pains which were caused by their partners. These hurts and pains can prevent them from “being” and “doing” with their spouse in the present tense as they are so focused on the past. Forgiveness does not mean to forget, but it is to accept and to learn to live with what has happened in the past and to move on. Thus, it would very significant if social workers could support couples to explore and embrace the virtue of forgiveness and encourage them to open up to the healing process. More in depth understanding of forgiveness is needed to determine all of the contextual factors that can impact that process.

The results of this study indicate that the true experimental research design would be a powerful tool in evaluation programs. The addition of a control group would allow for a deeper
investigation of the impact of the MRW program. Longer term follow-up assessments in future research can be used to explore, what if, any lasting effects are of this program. In terms of data collection, surveys could be made available and distributed in both hard copy and online, so that it might provide participants with different options and convenient access to complete them anywhere at their leisure using any smartphone or computer device. Choosing different times for data collection could be considered in any future research because the quantity and quality of data can be impacted by client activities (e.g., family vacation, graduation, wedding, traveling) happening in summertime.

To the extent of the model “person-in-environment”, this study’s findings indicate that the spirituality variable should be treated and considered as a key component factor in the next research to investigate two questions: whether the spirituality variable is associated with a couples’ relationship satisfaction, and whether the spirituality variable mediates and/or moderates the relationships between a couples’ relationship satisfaction, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and levels of forgiveness. More samples are needed to be added in future research to produce significant outcomes and to further explore the associations among the four outcome variables. Likewise, future research is needed to assess whether persons from diverse populations and lower levels of relationship satisfaction would benefit from this intervention.

**Conclusion.** This current study provided a comprehensive understanding of the MRW marriage enrichment program in helping Vietnamese American married couples enhance their quality of their relationship. No significant findings were found in the quantitative method. On the other hand, the qualitative findings provided meaningful evidence that participants improved in the four outcome variables as well as in their interpersonal relationship with God and others.
which were not seen in the quantitative analysis. The results from this study suggest how beneficial the workshop has been to strengthen the marital relationship quality among Vietnamese American couples. Focusing on essential variables of spirituality, communication patterns, conflict resolution skills and the virtue of forgiveness to improve couple relationships is a suggestion for pastoral social work practice with Catholic Vietnamese immigrant couples and families in the United States. There is still a need for future research in order to explore the rich usefulness of the MRW program.
APPENDIX A

PROGRAM OF MARRIAGE RENEWAL WORKSHOP
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5:30 PM</td>
<td>Registration and Taking photos for each couple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00 PM</td>
<td>Supper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:30 PM</td>
<td>Welcoming and introducing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:25 PM</td>
<td>Session 1: God’s Plan for Marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:50 PM</td>
<td>Session 2: A Blueprint for Marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:40 PM</td>
<td>Liturgy # 1: Receiving candles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Friday**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00 AM</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30 AM</td>
<td>Liturgy # 2: Blessing Rituals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:15 AM</td>
<td>Session 3: The Me in We</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:25 AM</td>
<td>Session 4: Communication in Marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:35 AM</td>
<td>Taking pictures of all participants together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:50 AM</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:55 PM</td>
<td>Role play and table/group discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:55 PM</td>
<td>Session 5: For Better or Worse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:25 PM</td>
<td>Intimacy in Marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:10 PM</td>
<td>Liturgy # 3A: Couple Prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:40 PM</td>
<td>Liturgy # 3B: Procession with Candles to Dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00 PM</td>
<td>Wedding Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30 PM</td>
<td>Session 7: Forgiveness in Marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:05 PM</td>
<td>Liturgy # 4: Sand Ritual and Sacrament of Reconciliation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Saturday**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00 AM</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sunday**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30 AM</td>
<td>Liturgy #5: Build Your House on Rock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30 AM</td>
<td>Liturgy with the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 AM</td>
<td>Session 8: Belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 PM</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:45 PM</td>
<td>Session 9: Sacrament of Matrimony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:25 PM</td>
<td>Program evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:15 PM</td>
<td>Introducing couple companion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:35 PM</td>
<td>Reflection on the program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNARIES
The following questions ask about your demographic background and how you see yourself in your marital relationship. There is no perfect answer. We are interested in your experiences about the marriage life in relation to communication skills, conflict resolutions, marital satisfaction, and forgiveness. Please circle an answer that it applies to you. Throughout this survey, we ask you not to share your answers with your partner so as not so influence how he or she may answer these questions.

1. This is my first time that I participate in the workshop. a. Yes  b. No. Please, specify_____

2. Age range:  a. 29 or bellow  b. 30-39  c. 40 - 49  d. 50- 59  e. 60 or above


6. Education
   a. Graduated 8th grade
   b. Graduated High school or got GED
   c. Training Certificate
   d. Some college, but no degree
   e. Associates degree
   f. College degrees
   g. Graduated degree
   h. Other, please specify____________

7. Marital status
   a. Engaged, but not married
   b. Married
   c. Single
   d. Living together but not legally married
   e. Dating, but not living together
   f. Other, please specify____________________

8. Years of Marriage
   a. Less than 5 years
   b. 5- 15
   c. 15 -25
   d. 25 – 35
   e. 35 – 45
   f. 45 up, please specify____________________
9. Years of living in the U.S.A
   a. 2 – 5
   b. 5 – 10
   c. 10 – 15
   d. 15 – 20
   e. 20 – 25
   f. 25 up
10. Number of children
    a. 1  b. 2  c. 3  d. 4 - 8
11. Income
    a. Less than $10,000
    b. $10,000 - $19,999
    c. $20,000 - $29,999
    d. $30,000 - $49,999
    e. $50,000 – $90,999
    f. $100,000 up
12. How do you rate your current marital relationship?
    Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent
13. What do you hope to get out of this MRW program?
14. Are you interested in volunteering to participate in the in-depth interview to talk about my experiences in this MRW program?
   a. Yes. If so. (Please, provide your information contact at below)  b. No

Name:___________________________________________________________
Address:________________________________________________________
Email:__________________________________________________________
Phone #:_________________________________________________________
APPENDIX C

MEAN RANKS OF FOUR OUTCOME VARIABLES
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Sum Ranks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post CSI – Pre CSI</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25.86</td>
<td>465.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Ranks</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26.08</td>
<td>860.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ties</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post IAI – Pre IAI</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21.55</td>
<td>474.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Ranks</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24.39</td>
<td>561.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ties</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post ForgiveAN – Pre ForgiveAN</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25.07</td>
<td>576.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Ranks</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28.48</td>
<td>854.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ties</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post ForgivePP – Pre ForgivePP</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23.47</td>
<td>399.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Ranks</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23.52</td>
<td>682.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ties</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post MCI – Pre MCI</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22.83</td>
<td>342.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Ranks</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20.76</td>
<td>560.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ties</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: CSI = Relationship Satisfaction; IAI = Conflict Resolution; FAN = Forgiveness Absence of Negative; FPP = forgiveness Presence of Positive; MCI = Communication; Negative Ranks = Post < Pre; Positive Ranks = Post > Pre; Ties = Post = Pre
APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Evaluating the Impact of the Marriage Renewal Workshop on Couples’ Relationship Satisfaction, Communication, Conflict Resolution, and Forgiveness: A Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

Researcher(s): Hien Nguyen, MA/MSW
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Terry B Northcut, Ph.D. L.C.S.W.

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Hien Nguyen, a Social Work Doctoral Student at Loyola University Chicago, for her dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Terry B Northcut, PhD in the Department of Social Work at Loyola University Chicago.

You are chosen to participate in this study because you have registered to attend the Marriage Renewal Workshop at St. Domique Center in Houston, Texas and volunteered in the quantitative study as a part of this research. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose:
The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand your deep experiences in the Marriage Renewal Workshop program in regard with your relationship satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness.

Procedures:
The interview will be scheduled on the 7th week after the end of the Workshops. In the interview, you will be asked to share with the researcher your workshop experience for approximately 30 to 45 minutes. You will also be given the same random numerical code as you were assigned for the surveys and consents. Keeping the same numerical code will help this researcher track the survey and interview results and combine all three sets of data on the same subject. Participants who volunteered for the surveys are automatically invited to volunteer for the interview. While everyone is invited to participate in all research activities, only a few of the quantitative participants who volunteered for the interview will be selected. These interview subjects will be chosen to allow a diverse representation of age.

The interview will be conducted at the parish office or a convenient place of your choosing (e.g., a local coffee house). The interview will require being audiotaped for transcription and data analysis only. You will not be asked to state your name on the recording. The researcher may contact you by your phone later to verify any unclear information from the interview.

Risks/Benefits:
The risks of participating are no greater than those experienced in everyday life, though you could possibly experience some minimal temporary discomfort with some of the questions being asked. If you become tired or upset, you may take a break as needed. You may also skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering or stop your participation at any time.
If you feel you want to talk to a professional about any discomfort or distress, the researcher can refer you to the core leadership team of the Workshop and/or the spiritual director of the Workshop who is professionally trained in marriage and family counseling. You can contact them via the following contacts:

- Hung and Kim Anh via email vuduchung@cox.net or phone: (623) 412-9030.
- Rev. Luong Uong via email uquong7363@gmail.com or phone: (832) 752 – 9520

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research. However, you may find it interesting to talk about the issues addressed in the Marriage Renewal Workshop, and your marriage. It may also be beneficial to the field of social work and to future individuals who attend Marriage Renewal Workshops.

**Compensation:**
For participants who complete the pretest and posttest surveys, and volunteer for the qualitative interview, their random ID number will be entered in a raffle. The winning number will be matched to the identified participant via the master list, contacted, and sent a $50 Visa gift card. The drawing raffle will take place 2 days after both survey and interview data collections are completed.

**Confidentiality:**
Your responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. At no time will your actual identity be revealed. You will be assigned the same random numerical code which you had on the surveys. Only the research team who will assist with this study and access the data will be able to identify you. Interviews will be recorded via a digital audio recording device. The audio recordings will be stored in a password-protected computer and deleted once the study ends. The transcriptions will be password-protected and stored on a secure server for 3 years before they are destroyed. It ensures the security of these materials and enables a backup if needed. All contact information and email addresses of each participant will be kept in a separate location from the data. In case the results of the study are published in scientific magazines or journals, your name and any other identifying information will not be included.

**Voluntary Participation:**
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question, and may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

**Contacts and Questions:** If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact: Hien Nguyen at hnguyen9@luc.edu or 857-919-8996. You may also contact the faculty member supervising this work: Dr. Terry Northcut at tnorthc@luc.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Chicago Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.
Statement of Consent:
Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Participant’s Signature ___________________ Date ________________

Researcher’s Signature ___________________ Date ________________

Loyola University Chicago: Lakeside Campuses
Institutional Review Board for
The Protection of Human Subjects

Date of Approval: 06/06/2018

Approval Expires: 06/06/2019
APPENDIX E

VERBAL SCRIPT FOR PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT
Verbal Script for Participant Recruitment

Good afternoon everyone! My name is sister Hien Nguyen, a Social Work Doctoral Student at Loyola University Chicago. I am conducting research for my dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Terry B Northcut, PhD in the Department of Social Work at Loyola University Chicago. This research aims to evaluate the impact of the Marriage Renewal Workshop on Couples’ Relationship Satisfaction, Communication, Conflict Resolution, and Forgiveness. The working title is: A Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis among married Vietnamese Americans who have attended the Marriage Renewal Workshop.

Therefore, I would like to invite all of you who have registered to attend the Marriage Renewal Workshop at Our Lady of Vilna Parish in Worcester, Massachusetts, participate in my research. Participation in this study will involve two 10 to 15-minute surveys and a potential 30-45 minute interview. This research requires 100 participants for the surveys and 15 out of 100 participants for interview. To have a better understanding about this research, please read the information described on the distributed verbal consents before you answer the survey questions. If you have any questions about this research, I am happy to answer them. Participation in this research is voluntarily. For anyone who volunteers in the surveys and is interested in interview, please answer the question number 20 on the first survey form by checking “yes”, and then provide your contact information. Based on your provided information, I will contact you later for the interview.

Once again, thank you so much for your time and interest in this research. Please feel free to contact me if you have further questions regarding this study.
APPENDIX F

FOLLOW-UP EMAIL
Follow-up Email

Dear Research Participants,

Thank you for consenting to participate in my evaluation study of the Marriage Renewal Workshop! We kindly remind you that you were sent home with a post-survey to fill out. Please complete this questionnaire on your own, without consultation with your partner within one week, and then return it to us in the provided envelope. Your responses will not be shared with anyone. The questionnaire will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Everyone who completes all phases of the research will be entered in a drawing to win a $50 Visa gift card.

We appreciate the donation of your time to participate in this research!

Thank you in advance for completing our questionnaire.

Sincerely,

Hien Nguyen
APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE EMAIL
Setting Interview Schedule - Email

Dear Qualitative Participant,

Thank you for returning your follow-up survey! Your contributions in this study are sincerely appreciated. We would also like to schedule an interview with you. Please reply this email by October 8th and let us know when and where you want to have interview. If we don’t hear anything from you through your email, we will contact you via your provided phone number. The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. Everyone who completes all phases of the research will be entered in a drawing to win a $50 Visa gift card.

We are grateful to you for your participation in this research!

Sincerely,

Primary Reacher
Hien Nguyen
APPENDIX F

PERMISSION TO USE FORGIVENESS SCALE
February 23, 2018

Dear Hien:

You have my permission to use and translate the Forgiveness Scale (Rye et al., 2001) for your research.

Best wishes with your project!

Sincerely,

Mark S. Rye, PhD
Professor and Chair
Department of Psychology
Skidmore College
REFERENCE LIST


Rye, M.S. (1998). Evaluation of a secular and a religiously integrated forgiveness group therapy program for college students who have been wronged by a romantic partner. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH.


VITA

Dr. Sister Hien T. Kim Nguyen is the daughter of Vinh Q. and Du P. Nguyen. She was blessed to be born in a Catholic family in Hanoi, Vietnam on November 11, 1982. She grew up in Tan Do, Hanoi with her five siblings, Linh, Quang, Sang, Thu, and Thuy. She entered the Convent, Sisters of the Lovers of the Holy Cross Hanoi in 2000 and became a religious sister in 2008. She currently resides at her religious community in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Before attending Loyola University Chicago, she attended the Phuong Dong University, Hanoi, Vietnam, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in German Linguistics in 2005. In 2012, she earned a Bachelor of Science in Psychology at the Stonehill College, Eastern, Massachusetts. From 2012 to 2015, she attended at the Boston College, where she earned a Master of Social Work and a Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry.

While at Loyola, Dr. Nguyen worked as a PACES coordinator in spring 2017 and a graduated assistant from 2015 to 2017. She also worked as a research assistant for the BRAVE project from 2018 to May 2020. In spite of academic, she has done retreats and gave presentations at parishes.