

Running head: THE MINDFULNESS, ATTACHMENT AND SATISFACTION EXPERIENCES OF COUPLES

The mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples

by

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Declaration

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences amongst South African couples in intimate relationships. Despite an abundance of international research on these constructs, there is a paucity of studies exploring mindfulness, attachment and relationship satisfaction amongst South African couples. In addition, research suggests that South African couples' relationships may be influenced by a range of psychosocial challenges. Given the possible influence of these and other factors on relationship satisfaction, it was deemed important to understand the mechanisms that enabled couples to achieve satisfaction and optimal functioning within their relationships. Previous studies have found that both mindfulness and attachment security are related to relationship satisfaction. However, while existing research confirms an association between mindfulness and secure attachment, specifically, the nature of this seemingly indirect relationship remains largely unexplained.

The study was conceptualised within the theoretical framework of interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB) which views both individuals and their well-being as the product of the interaction between their brain, mind and relationships. As no local studies using an IPNB framework were found, this study is concluded to be the first of its kind in terms of the South African context. Furthermore, the focus on optimal couple functioning grounds this study within positive psychology.

A convergent mixed methods research design, using a multiple case study design, was employed. Six married couples, consisting of one homosexual and five heterosexual couples, were selected by means of purposive sampling. Quantitative data collection required participants to complete four self-report questionnaires, namely a biographical questionnaire, the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), the Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire-Revised (ECR-R), and the Couple's Satisfaction Index (CSI). Qualitative data were collected by way of semi-structured interviews. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and participants' unique couple profiles. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data gathered from the participants' interviews.

The findings supported associations between mindfulness and both relationship satisfaction and secure attachment. Several novel findings and conceptualisations regarding intimate relationships were discovered. In particular, the conceptualisation of the “intimate relationship organism” encapsulated the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples. Three main themes supported this conceptualisation. Accordingly, intimate relationships were identified as changing, growing “living” entities, sustained by relational presence while mindful communication facilitated their optimal functioning. Both mindfulness and attachment were emphasised as integral to the creation, growth, functioning and maintenance of intimate relationships. The association between mindfulness and secure attachment was further shown to be facilitated by emotional engagement, relational presence and communication.

This study addressed the gap in the South African literature regarding the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples while making a noteworthy contribution to the existing international body of knowledge regarding the roles of mindfulness and attachment, specifically, within intimate relationships. In particular, a contribution was made towards the understanding of intimate relationships by placing them within a novel conceptual framework that illustrated the different components involved in creating satisfying, flourishing and optimally functioning intimate relationships. As a result, the findings of this study offer valuable suggestions for clinical practice with couples within the field of psychotherapy.

Keywords: Mindfulness; attachment theory; adult attachment; relationship satisfaction; interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB); couples; intimate relationships; well-being; mixed methods research; positive psychology

Table of Contents

Declaration.....	ii
Declaration by Supervisor.....	iii
Proof of Language Editing.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Abstract	vii
Table of Contents	ix
List of Tables	xiv
List of Figures	xv
List of Appendices	xvi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Introduction.....	1
1.2. Rationale for the research.....	1
1.3. Research aim	5
1.4. Brief overview of research methodology.....	6
1.5. Clarification of key concepts	7
1.6. Exposition of chapters.....	9
1.7. Conclusion	11
CHAPTER 2: AN INTERPERSONAL NEUROBIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS	12
2.1. Introduction.....	12
2.2. Conceptual Framework: Interpersonal Neurobiology (IPNB)	13
2.2.1. Development of the field.....	13
2.2.2. The triangle of well-being.....	17

2.2.3.	Attunement connects the brain, mind and relationships.....	20
2.2.4.	Significance of interpersonal neurobiology for the current study.....	22
2.3.	Intimate Relationships	23
2.3.1.	Intimate relationships through an interpersonal neurobiological lens.....	23
2.3.2.	The development of intimate relationships	24
2.3.3.	The value of intimate relationships.....	27
2.3.4.	Diversity within intimate relationships.....	28
2.3.5.	Relationship Satisfaction.....	32
2.3.6.	Mindfulness and Relationship Satisfaction.....	34
2.3.7.	Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction	36
2.4.	Conclusion	38
 CHAPTER 3: MINDFULNESS AND ATTACHMENT AS CONSTRUCTS OF THE MIND AND		
RELATIONSHIPS		40
3.1.	Introduction.....	40
3.2.	Mindfulness	40
3.2.1.	Conceptualising Mindfulness (MF).....	40
3.2.2.	A Way of Being.....	46
3.2.3.	Outcomes of Mindfulness.....	52
3.2.4.	Attunement through Mindfulness	58
3.3.	Attachment.....	61
3.3.1.	Attachment Theory	61
3.3.2.	Adult Attachment	64
3.3.3.	Conceptualising Attachment.....	77
3.3.4.	Attunement through Attachment.....	79
3.4.	Integrating Connections: Mindfulness & Attachment.....	81
3.4.1.	Introduction	81
3.4.2.	Conceptual similarities between Mindfulness and Attachment.....	82
3.5.	Conclusion	88
 CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY.....		89

4.1. Introduction.....	89
4.2. Research aim	89
4.3. Research design	89
4.4. Participants.....	94
4.4.1. Sampling	94
4.4.2. Demographic characteristics.....	97
4.5. Data collection	99
4.5.1. Data collection Phase 1.....	101
4.5.2. Data collection Phase 2.....	103
4.6. Measuring instruments	104
4.6.1. Questionnaires	104
4.6.2. Internal consistencies of the questionnaires	107
4.7. Data analysis.....	108
4.7.1. Quantitative analysis	108
4.7.2. Qualitative analysis.....	108
4.8. Trustworthiness and rigour	112
4.8.1. Credibility.....	112
4.8.2. Dependability.....	115
4.8.3. Confirmability.....	116
4.8.4. Transferability	116
4.8.5. Authenticity.....	117
4.9. Ethical considerations	117
4.9.1. General ethical clearance and conduct	117
4.9.2. Researcher reflexivity as an ethical task.....	121
4.10. Conclusion.....	127
CHAPTER 5: RESULTS.....	129
5.1. Introduction.....	129
5.2. Quantitative results	129

5.2.1.	Descriptive statistics.....	129
5.2.2.	Couple Profiles	137
5.3.	Qualitative results.....	149
5.3.1.	Introduction	149
5.3.2.	Theme 1: The intimate relationship as a changing, growing, “living” entity.....	151
5.3.3.	Theme 2: The intimate relationship as sustained by relational presence.....	168
5.3.4.	Theme 3: Communication as a facilitator of optimal functioning within the relationship entity	199
5.4.	Conclusion	218
	CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS	222
6.1.	Introduction.....	222
6.2.	The Intimate Relationship Organism	222
6.2.1.	The changing and growing relationship entity.....	222
6.2.2.	External and internal influences on the relationship entity	224
6.2.3.	The relationship entity as sustained by relational presence	235
6.2.4.	Communication as a facilitator of optimal functioning within the relationship entity....	247
6.3.	Mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction within the relationship organism	253
6.3.1.	Relationship satisfaction.....	254
6.3.2.	Mindfulness and attachment	255
6.4.	Conclusion	258
	CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION	263
7.1.	Introduction.....	263
7.2.	Contributions of this study.....	263
7.3.	Implications for clinical practice	272
7.4.	Limitations of this study.....	275
7.5.	Recommendations for future research.....	278
7.6.	Conclusion	281
	References	282

Note regarding appendices357

List of Tables

Table 4.1 <i>Summary of Participating Couples</i>	98
Table 4.2 <i>Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for FFMQ, ECR-R and CSI</i>	107
Table 5.1 <i>Descriptive Statistics for Scales (N=12)</i>	130
Table 5.2 <i>Couple 1 Profile: FFMQ, ECR-R and CSI Scores</i>	138
Table 5.3 <i>Couple 2 Profile: FFMQ, ECR-R and CSI Scores</i>	140
Table 5.4 <i>Couple 3 Profile: FFMQ, ECR-R and CSI Scores</i>	142
Table 5.5 <i>Couple 4 Profile: FFMQ, ECR-R and CSI Scores</i>	144
Table 5.6 <i>Couple 5 Profile: FFMQ, ECR-R and CSI Scores</i>	145
Table 5.7 <i>Couple 6 Profile: FFMQ, ECR-R and CSI Scores</i>	147

List of Figures

<i>Figure 2.1.</i> Triangle of well-being (Siegel, 2012a)	18
<i>Figure 2.2.</i> Intimate relationships through an IPNB lens.....	24
<i>Figure 3.1.</i> Secure attachment scale	78
<i>Figure 3.2.</i> Anxious attachment scale.....	78
<i>Figure 3.3.</i> Avoidant attachment scale.....	79
<i>Figure 4.1.</i> Attachment dimensions (Bartholomew, 1990)	106
<i>Figure 5.1.</i> Histogram: FFMQ – Observing subscale.....	131
<i>Figure 5.2.</i> Histogram: FFMQ – Describing subscale	132
<i>Figure 5.3.</i> Histogram: FFMQ – Nonreactivity subscale	132
<i>Figure 5.4.</i> Histogram: FFMQ – Non-judgement subscale.....	133
<i>Figure 5.5.</i> Histogram: FFMQ – Acting with Awareness subscale.....	134
<i>Figure 5.6.</i> Histogram: FFMQ – Total.....	134
<i>Figure 5.7.</i> Histogram: ECR-R Anxiety subscale	135
<i>Figure 5.8.</i> Histogram: ECR-R Avoidance subscale	136
<i>Figure 5.9.</i> Histogram: CSI.....	136
<i>Figure 6.1.</i> The relationship entity	225
<i>Figure 6.2.</i> Relational presence.....	235
<i>Figure 6.3.</i> Relational alignment	239
<i>Figure 6.4.</i> Communication within the relationship organism	248
<i>Figure 6.5.</i> The intimate relationship organism.....	259
<i>Figure 7.1.</i> The intimate relationship organism.....	267

List of Appendices

APPENDIX A: Ethical clearance.....	358
APPENDIX B: Call for participants.....	361
APPENDIX C: Submission to participate.....	363
APPENDIX D: Participant consent form	365
APPENDIX E: Questionnaires.....	370
APPENDIX F: Semi-structured interview 1	378
APPENDIX G: Semi-structured interview 2	381
APPENDIX H: Reflexive journaling excerpts.....	383
APPENDIX I: Nicki and Jaime – Interview 1 Transcript	387
APPENDIX J: Nicki and Jaime – Interview 2 Transcript	408
APPENDIX K: Bianca and Vernon – Interview 1 Transcript	424
APPENDIX L: Bianca and Vernon – Interview 2 Transcript	443
APPENDIX M: Kristin and Wayde – Interview 1 Transcript.....	465
APPENDIX N: Stephanie and Qaden – Interview 1 Transcript	478
APPENDIX O: Stephanie and Qaden – Interview 2 Transcript	496
APPENDIX P: Julia and Zed – Interview 1 Transcript	513
APPENDIX Q: Julia and Zed – Interview 2 Transcript.....	531
APPENDIX R: Susan and Theo – Interview 1 Transcript.....	546
APPENDIX S: Susan and Theo – Interview 2 Transcript	558

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to orientate the reader to the thesis by providing a preview of the study in its entirety. In view of this purpose, the rationale for this doctoral research, including both the personal and professional motivations for conducting the study, as well as the associated existing literature, is presented. The conceptual framework of the study is also introduced before presenting the research aim and a brief overview of the methodology employed. Next, relevant key concepts are clarified before concluding the chapter with a summary of each of the seven chapters contained in this thesis.

1.2. Rationale for the research

"I found someone that I could be home with. It was like my emotional home – I found in him." – Julia, participant

My interest in the psychology and functioning within intimate relationships was, in part, inspired by my own intimate relationship journey with my partner over the last sixteen years. Having met at the young age of 23, we have grown into ourselves, our relationship and our life together. While the journey together has been a blessing and a privilege in terms of companionship and love, it also, at times, has been characterised by discord and painful periods of change and growth. As a result, I knew how distressing those times of disconnection could be. However, I also knew that with commitment and dedication, partners could not only make their way through those difficult times, but that the relationship could even be enriched as a result of those periods of discord.

Serendipitously, in starting my private practice as a clinical psychologist, working with couples became one of my main professional areas of interest as I found a continuous influx of couples reaching out for psychotherapeutic assistance. Both personally and professionally, I hold a view of intimate relationships as having a vital influence on the health and functioning of society. Due to the possibility of unhealthy intimate relationships leading to unhealthy

family units, the ripple effect may also continue by negatively impacting communities. This view is supported by existing literature which presents intimate relationships as the focal point of the family, vital to personal and societal health and well-being, as well as interconnected to other systems and individuals (Becvar & Becvar, 2013; Berscheid, 2010; Chopik & O'Brien, 2017; Dunkel Schetter, 2017; Kiecolt-Glaser & Wilson, 2017; Woods, Priest, Signs, & Maier, 2019). Furthermore, such a view is also aligned with the principles of positive psychology (Compton & Hoffman, 2020; Rosenfeld & Gogineni, 2019; Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), which emphasise the importance of optimal functioning and well-being by focusing on positive subjective experiences, positive individual traits and positive institutions such as the family unit. An understanding that optimal functioning within intimate relationships leads to flourishing and satisfaction for both the partners and their relationship is thus clearly grounded within positive psychology (Compton & Hoffman, 2020; Fowers et al., 2016; Seligman, 2011). Furthermore, given the value placed on the well-being and functioning of the couple as a positive institution and contributor to family and societal functioning (Becvar & Becvar, 2013; Berscheid, 2010; Chopik & O'Brien, 2017; Compton & Hoffman, 2020; Dunkel Schetter, 2017; Kiecolt-Glaser & Wilson, 2017; Rosenfeld & Gogineni, 2019; Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Woods et al., 2019), it becomes evident that intimate relationships matter.

Interdependence and relationality are seen as the catalysts for all forms of human development (Davies, 2014). This notion is mirrored by interpersonal neurobiology (Siegel, 2012a), which views intimate relationships as being part of the triangle of well-being where it exists in continuous reciprocal development with the brain and mind. Moreover, the various developmental models of intimate relationships suggest that relationships are, similar to the individuals in them, growing and evolving entities (De La Lama, De Lama, & Wittgenstein, 2012; Knapp, 1978; Macapagal, Greene, Rivera, & Mustanski, 2015; Reiss, 1971). Given the continuous growth and development of intimate relationships, as well as their interdependence with other systems, an effective understanding of the intimate relationship system would, arguably, be reliant on an integrated understanding of the components and dynamics of and influences on the relationship.

A review of the research on intimate relationships over the past ten years suggests that South African couples are influenced by particular psychosocial challenges, including intimate partner violence, infidelity, substance abuse, gender inequity and dual-career relationships (Lesch, Briedenhann, & Du Toit, 2019; Mohamed, 2019; Mthembu, Khan, Mabaso, & Simbayi, 2016; Parker, Pettifor, Maman, Sibeko, & MacPhail, 2014; Woolf-King et al., 2019). Therefore, achieving relationship satisfaction and well-being may not be a simple undertaking for couples. Moreover, according to existing research, relationship satisfaction may also be impacted by a variety of factors, such as emotional intimacy and expression, trust, communication, respect, honesty, personality traits, sexual satisfaction, and partners' use of technology (Davila, Wodarczyk, & Bhatia, 2017; McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Ruark et al., 2019; Schaffhuser, Allemand, & Martin, 2014; Yoo, Bartle-Haring, Day, & Gangamma, 2014). Thus, in order to experience relationship satisfaction, couples may need to consider and navigate a range of factors and influences impacting their relationship. Few local studies on relationship satisfaction appeared to exist (EBSCOhost database search, 16 March 2020), indicating the need to identify some of the possible factors influencing satisfaction for South African couples in particular. In addition, understanding such factors may further contribute to psychotherapy with couples in clinical practice by indicating areas that could be attended to in order to optimise intimate partners' personal and relationship functioning.

In relation to my work with couples in private practice, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958) has featured as an important construct in understanding the dynamics between partners in intimate relationships. As the security bond between partners, attachment has been shown to be significantly influenced by attachment security (Diamond, Brimhall, & Elliott, 2018; Duggi & Kamble, 2015; Novak, Sandberg, & Davis, 2016; Park, Impett, MacDonald, & Lemay, 2019; Sadikaj, Moskowitz, & Zuroff, 2015; Vollmann, Sprang, & Van den Brink, 2019). In addition, an existing personal and professional interest in mindfulness (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2013) prompted me to consider the possible relevance thereof for intimate relationships. The positive relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction has been equally well documented (Adair, Boulton, & Algoe, 2018; Atkinson, 2013; Kappen, Karremans, Burk, & Buyukcan-Tetik, 2018; Kozlowski, 2013; Krafft, Haeger, & Levin, 2017). Accordingly, it is

posited that both mindfulness and attachment security may be associated with relationship satisfaction.

Moreover, it was the relationship between mindfulness and attachment that piqued my curiosity, particularly the apparent similarity between the two constructs. Conceptually, mindfulness and secure attachment appear to overlap with regard to aspects such as trust, effective emotion regulation, reserving judgement, and nonattachment (Allen, 2013; Baer, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Ryan, Brown and Creswell (2007) also previously suggested certain points of convergence between mindfulness and attachment, such as that both constructs are cultivated by attentive and responsive attention, and that both contribute to positive intra- and interpersonal outcomes. Existing research further confirmed an association between mindfulness and secure attachment (Pepping & Duvenhage, 2016; Pepping, O'Donovan, & Davis, 2014; Pepping, O'Donovan, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Hanish, 2015; Stevenson, Emerson, & Millings, 2017). Despite these findings, the exact nature of the association between mindfulness and attachment appears to be largely unexplained, with Pepping, Davis and O'Donovan (2015) suggesting that the relationship may be distal or indirect rather than bi-directional. Similarly, other studies have suggested that the relationship between mindfulness and attachment may be indirect and, for example, mediated by other factors, such as cognitive processes and emotion regulation (Caldwell & Shaver, 2013; Melen, Pepping, & O'Donovan, 2017; Pepping, Davis, & O'Donovan, 2013; Pickard, Caputi, & Grenyer, 2016; Redondo & Luyten, 2018). Further research is, however, imperative to identify any precipitating or mediating factors underpinning this association between mindfulness and attachment. Taking into account the value of both these constructs with regard to relationship satisfaction, exploring their presentation within intimate relationships was deemed an essential endeavour.

Given the goal of obtaining insight into the various dynamics and influences associated with South African intimate relationships, a conceptual framework that valued the integration of information was regarded as vital for this study. The flexible integration of knowledge leads to an improved understanding and a wider application of knowledge (Baldini, Parker, Nelson, & Siegel, 2014; Codrington, 2010; Frank, 2013). Such an integrative approach is further purported to be in line with the prevalent approach within the fields of psychology

and psychiatry where the development of the human being is viewed as the product of biological, psychological, social, cultural and environmental factors (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Engel, 1977; Morrison, 2014). Interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB) (Siegel, 2012a) was chosen as the preferred conceptual framework for this study, partly due to its shared focus on integration. However, IPNB was also deemed an appropriate framework as a result of its integration of both mindfulness and attachment into its conceptualisation of relational well-being.

Intimate relationships, mindfulness and attachment, are all important constructs within the field of IPNB (Siegel, 2012a), an interdisciplinary approach which suggests synthesis as the mechanism leading to a healthy brain, mind and relationships. Furthermore, Siegel (2012a) advocated that an interdisciplinary fusion of knowledge provides the optimal lens through which the interpersonal and neurobiological development of the mind can be understood. While some South African studies could be perceived as adhering to an IPNB approach (Fourie, Stein, Solms, Gobodo-Madikizela, 2017; Van der Westhuizen & Solms, 2015), no local psychological research officially informed by an IPNB framework could be found (EBSCOhost database search, 16 March 2020). Similarly, despite abundant international research on mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction in intimate relationships, as well as the associations between these constructs, there is a paucity of local research focusing on these elements. The present doctoral study therefore strives to contribute to the existing literature by filling this void in the knowledge body. Hence, the main motivation for the current study is based on providing a more nuanced insight into the functioning of South African intimate relationships. As such, understanding the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of local couples may contribute to both local and international research. Finally, finding strategies to enhance the relationship satisfaction of South African couples will potentially also extend to benefitting the associated family systems and communities within which couples find themselves.

1.3. Research aim

This study aimed to explore and describe the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences amongst South African couples in intimate relationships.

1.4. Brief overview of research methodology

A convergent mixed methods research design was followed (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The deliberate blending of quantitative and qualitative methods involved in this design enables the synthesis of data that may lead to novel insights and perspectives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Schoonenboom & Burke Johnson, 2017). Such an integrated and pluralistic approach was deemed most appropriate for capturing the experiences of couples in intimate relationships as it lends itself to validating and accommodating the diversity of human experiences (Shaw & Frost, 2015). Utilising a multiple case study design (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2018) further allowed for the analysis to be conducted within and across cases to identify any differences and similarities between couples. Data were collected from a sample of six married couples, consisting of one homosexual and five heterosexual couples. Quantitative data collection consisted of each member of a couple completing four questionnaires, namely a short, eight-item biographical questionnaire developed by me, the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) (Baer et al., 2006), the Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire-Revised (ECR-R) (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000), and the Couple's Satisfaction Index (CSI) (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Qualitative data were collected by way of two semi-structured interviews formulated by me. While the questions included in the first interview were based exclusively on existing literature on mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction, the second interview's questions were largely formulated based on participants' responses during the first interview.

The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and by creating unique couple profiles for each participating couple based largely on their responses to the questions in the self-report measures. Moreover, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, & Braun, 2017), a theoretically flexible method of identifying, analysing and reporting on patterns of meaning within and across data, was used to analyse the qualitative data obtained from participants' interviews. The criteria of trustworthiness and rigour (Amankwaa, 2016; Cope, 2014; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Kornbluh, 2015; Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012), as well as ethical conduct as defined by the relevant bodies governing ethical psychological research (Department of Health, 2015; Health Professions Act, 2006; Health Professions Council of South Africa, 2016) were adhered to in the present study.

1.5. Clarification of key concepts

The key concepts used in this study are clarified below. These particular definitions are aligned with the use and conceptualisation of these terms within the present study.

Mindfulness: Mindfulness can be defined as a way of being that involves an awareness of one's internal and external environments in the present moment, viewing them with acceptance rather than judgement while refraining from emotional or behavioural reactivity (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 1994, 2013). This particular form of attention is a valuable function of the mind that can exist naturally as a trait or be deliberately developed through mindfulness-based practices or programmes.

(Five) facets of mindfulness: Baer et al. (2006) conceptualised mindfulness as a multifaceted construct consisting of five facets, in particular. Accordingly, mindfulness enables a person to (1) *observe* experiences, (2) *describe* them factually or neutrally while (3) practising *non-judgement*, and (4) *nonreactivity* to inner experience in order to (5) *act with awareness* (Baer et al., 2006).

Attachment: Attachment refers to the emotional bond or connection between two people, and is motivated by their interpersonal psychological needs and dynamics (Bowlby, 1958). This psychological concept originates from attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby (1958) and Mary Ainsworth (1964). Originally, this term referred only to the bond between infants and their primary caregivers. However, the attachment system is active across one's lifespan into adulthood, where attachment figures can include mentors, close friends or romantic partners (Bowlby, 1988; Fraley, 2019; Siegel, 2012a). The present study focuses on adult attachment between intimate partners. In this regard, the attachment between two individuals can be either secure or insecure and may influence both their intra- and interpersonal functioning and dynamics (Allen, 2013; Fraley, 2019).

Relationship satisfaction: Relationship satisfaction is a psychological construct indicating partners' levels of satisfaction with their intimate relationships. Moreover, relationship satisfaction is considered an indicator of relationship stability (Berscheid, 2010; Funk & Rogge, 2007; Gambrel, Faas, Kaestle, & Savla, 2016; Khaddouma & Gordon, 2018). In

keeping with conventions in the existing literature, “relationship satisfaction” and “satisfaction” will be used interchangeably in the current study.

Couple(s): In the context of this study, the term “couple” refers to the intimate relationship unit consisting of two adult partners who are involved in a longer-term romantic relationship with each other.

Intimate relationship(s): In the context of the current study, “intimate relationships” are defined as interpersonal associations between two persons or “partners”, characterised by acts of emotional, physical, and sexual intimacy.

Partner(s): For the purpose of this study, “partner” refers to the respective individuals involved in an intimate relationship with each other and who form a couple unit.

Interpersonal neurobiology: Interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB), a conceptual framework proposed by Siegel (2012a), offers an integrated view of the interpersonal and neurobiological development of the mind. According to IPNB, the human mind can only be understood through a consilience of various disciplines and fields of study. Both mindfulness and attachment are important constructs within this integrated framework of IPNB. In addition, the theoretical framework underscoring IPNB suggests that the triangle of well-being represents the process involved in the development of both the mind and well-being (Siegel, 2012a).

Triangle of well-being: Within the interdisciplinary field of IPNB, the brain, mind and relationships are not viewed in a mutually exclusive manner or as separate elements of life (Siegel, 2012a). Instead, they are considered intricate parts of an integrated structure that is the triangle of well-being (Siegel, 2012a). Accordingly, individuals are seen as being the product of the interaction between their brain, mind and interpersonal relationships (Cozolino, 2014). In addition, an IPNB framework suggests that it is only through the integration of these three elements that well-being can be achieved (Siegel, 2012a).

Integration: Integration refers to the synthesis of ideas, theories, methods and findings, enabling a flexible fusion of knowledge that leads to a wider application and understanding (Codrington, 2010; Frank, 2013; Siegel, 2012a). Moreover, integration is viewed as the mechanism leading to a healthy brain, mind and relationships (Siegel, 2012a).

Attunement: Attunement entails the awareness of internal emotional and bodily states with the goal of achieving alignment (Siegel, 2012a, 2012b). Functioning on both an internal and interpersonal level, attunement can be experienced by focusing on one's own mind and internal world or that of another person (Siegel, 2007, 2010). Facilitating the development of a healthy connection with oneself or others, internal attunement is proposed to be enabled by mindfulness while interpersonal attunement is the primary trait of a secure attachment (Siegel, 2007, 2010).

1.6. Exposition of chapters

This doctoral thesis consists of the following seven chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The current chapter serves to orientate the reader by providing an introduction to the study. This overview includes background information regarding the rationale for the research, the aim thereof, and a brief outline of the research methodology. Additionally, key concepts relevant to the study are defined before concluding with a summary of each chapter.

Chapter 2: An interpersonal neurobiological perspective on relationships

An optimal understanding of intimate relationships is said to be dependent on an integrated view of the relevant systemic dynamics and influences within and around the relationship (Becvar & Becvar, 2013). Due to its mutual focus on integration, interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB) (Siegel, 2012a) was chosen as the conceptual framework for this study. Chapter 2 provides an introduction to the origin and development, underlying principles, important constructs and value of IPNB for this study. The nature of intimate relationships, in particular, is discussed within an IPNB framework before exploring relationship satisfaction. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the associations between relationship satisfaction and two important IPNB constructs, namely mindfulness and attachment.

Chapter 3: Constructs of the mind and relationships

Mindfulness and attachment, which are vital components of the IPNB framework, are two of the constructs under investigation in the present study. In this chapter, respective overviews of both mindfulness and attachment are provided. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the proposed association between mindfulness and attachment. Moreover, it presents the argument that, bearing in mind certain conceptual similarities and existing research findings, the particular nuances of the relationship between mindfulness and attachment warrants further investigation.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Chapter 4 explains the methodology used to address the aim of the research. A discussion of the research design is followed by an overview of the characteristics of the research participants and the method of sampling used. Thereafter, a summary of the two phases of data collection is given, before presenting the measuring instruments used to gather the quantitative data. In addition to a discussion on the methods of both quantitative and qualitative data analysis, the ethical considerations applied in the study and the strategies used to achieve trustworthiness and rigour are discussed.

Chapter 5: Results

Chapter 5 presents both the quantitative and qualitative data gathered. The quantitative data, consisting of descriptive statistics and couple profiles are introduced first. Next, the qualitative data are presented according to the identified themes contributing to the understanding of the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples.

Chapter 6: Discussion of results

In this chapter, the results from the previous chapter are interpreted while linking these to existing literature on the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples. Novel findings and conceptualisations are highlighted. The themes and subthemes identified in the qualitative data are discussed first. Finally, a summarised discussion of mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction within intimate relationships, based on both the quantitative and qualitative results, concludes the chapter.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The concluding chapter of this thesis offers an overview of the value and innovation of this study. The contributions of the study in terms of research are considered first, followed by the proposed noteworthy clinical implications that inform practice with couples in intimate relationships. In closing, the limitations of the study are discussed before offering recommendations for future research.

1.7. Conclusion

The current chapter provided an introductory orientation to the background, topic and methodology of this study. The rationale for the research, as well as the research aim were discussed, followed by a condensed discussion of the methodology and a clarification of the relevant key concepts. This chapter was concluded with a short introduction to each chapter included in the thesis. The next chapter will present interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB) (Siegel, 2012a), the conceptual framework for this study. Moreover, intimate relationships are discussed and viewed through an IPNB lens before introducing mindfulness and attachment as important constructs in both IPNB and intimate relationships.

CHAPTER 2: AN INTERPERSONAL NEUROBIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

2.1. Introduction

Intimate relationships do not exist in isolation. Instead, an intimate relationship presents as an autonomous, functioning system within itself while interacting in a reciprocal relationship with the other systems internal and external to it (Becvar & Becvar, 2013). A comprehensive conceptualisation of the intimate relationship system is therefore reliant on an integrated understanding of all of its components, dynamics and influences. Such an approach is aligned with the general position within the field of psychology and mental health to understand the person or, in this case, the relationship, through the lens of integration (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Morrison, 2014). Given the current study's aim to understand some of the specific dynamics and functioning of the couple system, applying a conceptual framework that similarly values integration, was identified as imperative. In addition, the role of mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction in couples' intimate relationship experiences are of particular interest in the present study. Interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB) (Siegel, 2012a, 2019) views integration as the mechanism leading to a healthy brain, mind and relationships. Furthermore, as constructs, both mindfulness and attachment are central to the understanding of IPNB's approach to well-being (Siegel, 2012a). Thus, due to this study's mutual focus on integration, mindfulness and attachment, IPNB was chosen as the preferred conceptual framework for this study.

This chapter offers an introduction to the IPNB framework, including its origin and development, underlying principles, important constructs, and value for this study. Next, interpersonal relationships will be examined within the context of IPNB. In addition, the development, value, and diversity of intimate relationships will be discussed before specifically exploring relationship satisfaction within intimate relationships. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the associations between relationship satisfaction and two important constructs within both the IPNB framework and the current study, namely mindfulness and attachment.

2.2. Conceptual Framework: Interpersonal Neurobiology (IPNB)

2.2.1. Development of the field

Interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB) is a term that was first introduced by Dan Siegel in 1999. His book *The Developing Mind* arrived towards the end of a period proclaimed by American President, George H. W. Bush, as the 'Decade of the Brain' (Library of Congress, 1990). At the time, scientific efforts across the globe were focused on gaining a more in-depth understanding of the human brain and its functions – both in a state of health and of disease (Tandon, 2000). IPNB developed alongside the work of other researchers examining the development of the brain, mind and relationships during the 'Decade of the Brain' (Cicchetti & Tucker, 1994; Mesulam, 1998; Milner, Squire, & Kandel, 1998). Allan Schore (1997, 2000, 2001a), for example, extensively investigated the right hemisphere of the brain, its development in relation to our relationships, and its role in regulating both our emotions and sense of self. Other studies, in turn, explored intersubjective communication and expression through the ability to attribute mental states to both the self and others (Aitken & Trevarthen, 1997; Fonagy & Target, 1997). Siegel (2012a) also credits his interactions with other researchers, including Louis Cozolino, John Schumann and Alan Schore, from the Institute for Developmental and Clinical Neural Science study group, previously operating in Los Angeles, California for stimulating his own journey into researching the brain and mind.

Motivated by his contact with professionals from different academic orientations in an attempt to advance the understanding of the mind and its development, Siegel (2012a) proposed a framework that offers a synthesised view of the interpersonal and neurobiological development of the mind. Drawing on neuroscience, psychology, medicine, child development, education, public administration and social work, Siegel concluded that in order to fully understand the human mind, it must be viewed through the lenses of both biology and experience (Siegel, 2012a). Siegel (2012a) asserted that while the various disciplines or fields of study provide us with distinct and valuable insights into the development of the mind, it is, ultimately, consilience which leads to a completely new understanding of the mind. Consilience, the intellectual approach of IPNB, enables information to be synthesised into one coherent conceptual framework (Siegel, 2012a). Notably, it has also been suggested that integration is essential to well-being (Siegel, 2019).

Such an integrated approach is not a novel concept. An integrated approach is characteristically and practically more flexible and adaptable, preventing rigidity and chaos (Baldini et al., 2014). Furthermore, integration allows fusion between “objective science and subjective human knowing” (Codrington, 2010, p. 286) to occur rather than the “fragmentation of knowledge” (Frank, 2013, p. 300). This pluralistic approach of both/and rather than either/or ultimately allows for a flexible integration of knowledge that leads to a wider understanding and application of findings. Engaging in “interdisciplinary cross-fertilisation” (Frank, 2013, p. 310), which would result in the mind being seen through different lenses offered by a range of disciplines and fields of study would, arguably, enable an improved understanding of the development of the mind.

A key focus of the field of psychology lies in understanding the development of the human being, its psyche and the epidemiology of its associated psychopathology as the product of both genetics and environment (Eagly & Wood, 2013; Kitayama & Salvador, 2017; Maltzman, 2016). For instance, Engel’s (1977) biopsychosocial model upholds both health and disease as the result of a careful consideration and understanding of the relational, biological and intrapersonal aspects of a person. It may be argued that IPNB is also built on the much earlier work of John Bowlby (1958) and Mary Ainsworth (1964), who showed that intra- and interpersonal development are at least partly due to the influence of the connection and bond with one’s primary caregivers during childhood. Accordingly, these bonds determine our internal experience of relational security, as well as our external interaction with our relationships as they also influence the structure of our brains (Cozolino, 2014; Siegel, 2012a). Schore (2001a, 2001b), for example, confirmed the effects of both secure attachment and early relational trauma on infant right brain development.

Moreover, the brain is not a static organism as its intricate web of neural connections adjust continuously in response to our external experiences (Pickersgill, Martin, & Cunningham-Burley, 2015). At birth, the limbic and middle prefrontal areas of the brain, which are responsible for relational and emotional processes, are comprised of neurons that are mostly not yet connected (Badenoch, 2008). It is then only through close relationship experiences that these neurons are primed to form connections, leaving the structural quality

of these brain regions dependent on the quality of the infant's external interpersonal interactions (Badenoch, 2008). Similarly, neuroplasticity has been shown to occur in new mothers, with neural changes supporting the positive development of the mother-child relationship, as well as the overall adjustment of the mother to parenting (Kim, 2016).

Research conducted in the last decade, both locally and internationally, confirms the continued relevance of IPNB. Several studies specifically utilise an IPNB framework to explore psychological theory and practice, such as mindfulness in clinical practice, clinical intuition, psychodynamic theory, art psychotherapy, narrative therapy, and play therapy (Baldini, Parker, Nelson, & Siegel, 2014; Chong, 2015; Peña, 2019; Schore, 2012; Wheeler & Taylor, 2016; Zimmerman, 2017). Others make use of an IPNB approach to investigate interpersonal relationships, specifically between parents and children, and in couples (Gambrel et al., 2016; Lunkenheimer, Busuito, Brown, Panlilio, & Skowron, 2019). IPNB has also provided a lens through which to explore socio-emotional development (Goodrich, 2015), emotion coaching for emotional and behavioural well-being (Gus, Rose & Gilbert, 2015), and a newly-developed functional neuroimaging approach for exploring neural signals between multiple interacting brains (Ray, Roy, Sindhu, Sharan, & Banerjee, 2017).

An EBSCOhost database search conducted on 16 March 2020 reveals no recent local studies that are conceptualised in terms of an IPNB approach. However, some South African and international studies could, arguably, be classified as falling within the field of IPNB even though they were not deliberately conceptualised based on an IPNB theoretical framework. For example, when investigating childhood experiences, a study by Lim et al. (2016) found that childhood abuse is associated with neurofunctional abnormalities in important ventral frontal-temporal sustained attention regions. These findings align with that of Johnson et al. (2013) who showed that changes in the relationship dynamics of married couples as a result of a psychotherapeutic intervention led to changes in the brain's representation of threat cues in the presence of an intimate partner. Locally, Van der Westhuizen and Solms (2015) observed a correlation between social dominance and the testosterone and cortisol levels in adult males. While investigating the moral brain through behavioural and functional MRI responses, Fourie et al. (2017) noted that group membership has a great impact on both empathy and behaviour. Given the paucity of existing local studies specifically utilising an

IPNB theoretical framework, the present study aimed to apply this framework to investigate South African intimate relationships.

In preparation for the publication of the updated second edition of *The Developing Mind*, Siegel (2012a) commissioned a group of research interns to assist in testing the relevance and validity of IPNB against the backdrop of new research and evolving technology (Siegel, 2012a). Siegel declared that the results of this investigative process largely supported the original propositions made by IPNB (Siegel, 2012a, 2019). Given the continued validity of IPNB displayed by these investigations, I would argue that the basic theories of IPNB may remain as applicable today as they were two decades ago.

Notwithstanding the contributions of IPNB in terms of understanding the development of the mind, the potential limitations of the approach were considered. Existing research has questioned the assumptions reached by the field of neuroscience with regards to our interpersonal connections (Vivona, 2009). In particular, assumptions of a direct connection between brain and mental activity and the conclusion that a similarity in the location of brain activity between two people signifies a shared experience was argued to not yet be supported by the research (Vivona, 2009). For this reason, Vivona (2009) suggested an awareness of the difference between data and interpretation. No formal critique or criticism overtly against IPNB could be found (EBSCOhost database search, 16 March 2020). Instead, contemplating the potential limitations of a pluralistic approach such as IPNB offered some important insights in this regard. In their reflection on a pluralistic approach to psychotherapy, Cooper and McLeod (2012) emphasised the risk involved in creating yet another polarisation between pluralistic and monistic stances. In this way, the risk exists in holding IPNB as somewhat of a panacea, offering all the answers when it comes to the understanding of the development of the mind. This could easily create another either/or situation where the different parts of the integrated whole are somehow seen as less valuable or rich in content than the integrated product (Cooper & McLeod, 2012).

Therefore, while IPNB offers a way of enriching the existing knowledge gained from different disciplines and fields by creating a more holistic understanding of the mind, the individual in-depth offerings of these individual disciplines cannot be discarded. The more

holistic understanding of the mind perhaps also explains why IPNB appears to be primarily utilised by psychotherapists as a framework for informing and enhancing their work with neuroscience while focusing on the well-being and functioning of patients (Cozolino, 2014). Within an IPNB framework, achieving well-being is the result of a very particular interaction between variables.

2.2.2. The triangle of well-being

The interdisciplinary field of IPNB posits that there is no need to maintain a mutually exclusive stance when viewing the brain/mind, biology/experience or nature/nurture as the creation of such divisions inhibits our understanding of the development of the human mind (Siegel, 2012a). Instead, IPNB's fundamentally integrative approach allows for the brain, mind and relationships to be assimilated into a cohesive whole while enabling the process between the individual elements (Siegel, 2012a). Each individual is therefore seen as being significantly influenced by the interaction between the brain, mind and interpersonal relationships (Cozolino, 2014). IPNB facilitates the integration of relational connections between people, the synaptic connections in the nervous system, notions of culture and family, insights into molecular mechanisms, and even relatedness to other nonhuman sentient beings and the planet (Siegel, 2012a). Cozolino (2014) proposed the idea of a "social synapse" (2014, p. xiv) which entails an invisible space between people filled with both seen and unseen messages, communications and interactions that create their relationship and construct their respective brains. Integration is viewed as the key to health within the brain, mind and relationships. The brain, mind and relationships are therefore not separate elements of life, but rather intricate parts of an interconnected triangle of well-being (Siegel, 2012a) (see Figure 2.1 below).

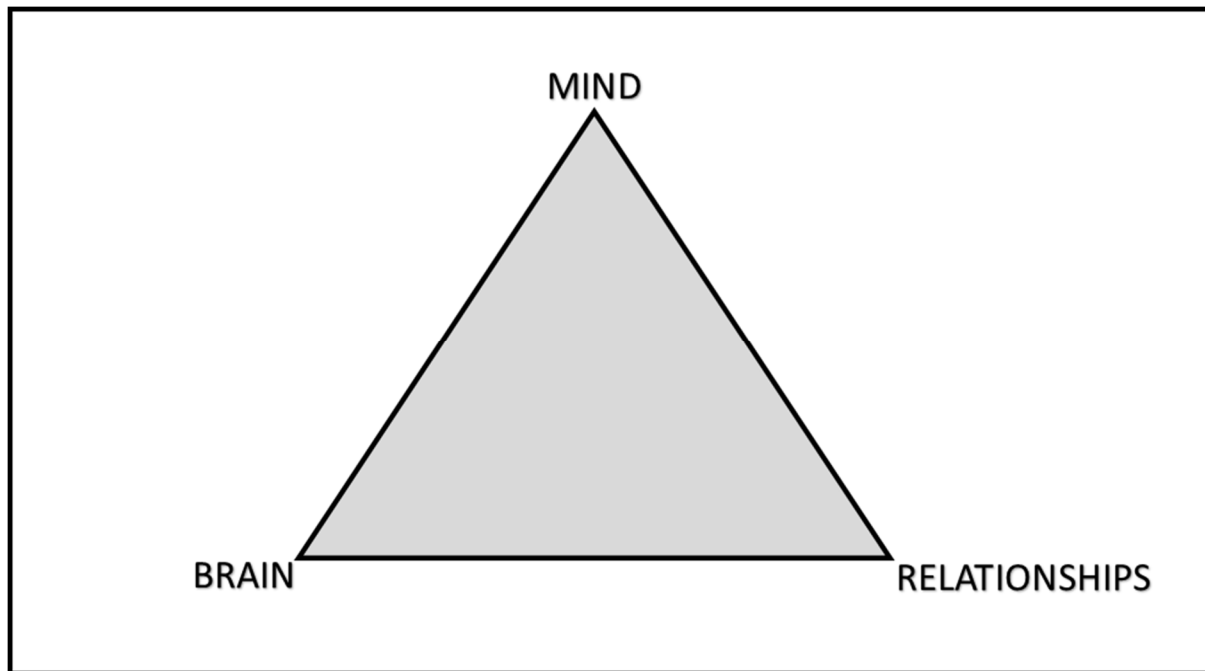


Figure 2.1. Triangle of well-being (Siegel, 2012a)

Based on Siegel's (2012a) triangle, it can be concluded that achieving well-being and optimal functioning are not only dependent on all three individual concepts, but also on the reciprocal exchange between them.

The brain can be understood as a complex physical organ situated within the skull and forming part of the central nervous system (Reber, Allen, & Reber, 2009). Together with the rest of the nervous system, the brain enables us to perceive, engage with, and adapt to our environment as it controls our attention, perception, memory, language, emotions, reasoning, and creativity (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2012). Research has also provided evidence for neuroplasticity, suggesting that the brain is a dynamic and continuously changing organ that can change both in terms of structure and function depending on its environment and our subjective experiences (Davidson & McEwen, 2012; Fishbane, 2011; Kolb & Teskey, 2012; Pickersgill et al., 2015). Almost all of our experiences have the potential to alter our brains, either temporarily or permanently, for better or worse (Kolb & Teskey, 2012). Bearing in mind the complete dependence of infants on their caretakers, the shaping of their brains is greatly influenced by their interaction with those around them (Cozolino, 2014). The field of social cognitive neuroscience, in particular, also considers our brains as social organs that perceive and interpret information from our social interactions and relationships (Grossmann, 2015;

Ochsner & Lieberman, 2001). This led Cozolino (2014) to conclude that a brain cannot exist in isolation, but rather as part of a network of brains where its growth and well-being are interdependent.

In short, the brain is defined as the embodied physical organ representing the nervous system distributed throughout the body and linked with the physiology of the body as a whole (Siegel, 2012a). Its structure and functioning, however, are the product of not only genetics and evolution, but also environmental and relational interactions (Cozolino, 2014). Therefore, to fully comprehend the brain and its functioning, the internal and external environments of the individual need to be understood and taken into consideration.

The mind exists both within our physiology and relationships as an embodied relational process regulating the flow of information and energy by means of subjective experience, awareness, and a regulatory function of the nervous system and relationships (Siegel, 2012a). Siegel (2019) further identified four overlapping facets of the mind, namely subjective experience, consciousness, information processing, and self-organisation. While for some researchers and clinicians the term is used interchangeably to refer to the brain as already discussed, the term most frequently refers to the mind as “the totality of hypothesized mental processes and acts that may serve as explanatory devices for psychological data” (Reber et al., 2009, p. 474). These conscious and unconscious mental experiences include, but are not limited to, consciousness, perception, cognition and intelligence (Reber et al., 2009).

In other words, mind offers the mechanisms through which we engage with, and make sense of, our world and relationships. At the same time, mind is shaped by the reciprocal relationship between our experiences with the environment and the brain’s structure and functioning (Siegel, 2012a). IPNB inherently focuses on the systems of the brain that underlie attachment, attunement, and social interaction, all three of which are also processes of the mind (Cozolino, 2014). Therefore, the mind provides the interpretational filters through which our internal and external experiences are processed. Moreover, these filters are unique to each individual as they are formed by our own reciprocal interactions with the mind itself, the brain, and our interpersonal relationships.

Relationships may be conceptualised as an association or connection between two or more people which can differ in terms of duration, degree of intimacy, qualities, purpose, commitment and social rules of engagement (Reber et al., 2009). In addition, Siegel (2012b) defined relationships as patterns of interaction that involve both the sharing of energy and a flow of information. A strong correlation exists between physical health and social connectedness, with relationships supporting our physical health through the regulation of emotions, metabolism and immunological functioning (Cozolino, 2014). While the child's relationship with his or her caretaker can set him or her on a path of either physical and psychological health or illness, meaningful relationships later in life have the potential to reactivate neuroplastic processes (Cozolino, 2014). Such reactivation may alter not only the biochemistry and structure of the brain, but could also redirect the individual's psychosocial and physical experiences (Cozolino, 2014).

Romantic intimate relationships, in particular, are often understood as being longer term in duration, with high levels of intimacy and commitment (Lamanna, Riedmann, & Stewart, 2014). Moreover, intimate relationships are perceived as existing for the purpose of love, companionship and family while displaying qualities, such as mutual loyalty, availability, security, responsiveness, engagement, sexual intimacy, and support (Lamanna et al., 2014). Within relationships, a variety of factors contribute to a sense of attunement with one's partner, including physical movements, imitation, mirror systems, and resonance (Cozolino, 2014).

Apart from the triangle of well-being, which suggests a conceptual pathway for the development of intimate relationships, I would like to propose that it offers guidance for facilitating optimal individual and relationship growth and functioning while working with couples in clinical practice. Arguably, however, such a process would further benefit from understanding and incorporating attunement.

2.2.3. Attunement connects the brain, mind and relationships

Attunement is identified by Siegel (2012a) as an important contributor to healthy functioning. It entails the awareness of, and connection to, internal emotional and bodily

states with the goal of achieving alignment (Siegel, 2012a, 2012b). As a result of the brain simulating internally what is observed externally, we are able to achieve emotional resonance, empathy and attunement relationally (Cozolino, 2014). From early childhood right through to our intimate relationships as adults, attunement enables us to develop optimally, feel secure, create intimacy and feel connected to both ourselves and others (Siegel, 2010). We can therefore experience attunement with ourselves and others by focusing on either our own minds and internal worlds or on those of another individual (Siegel, 2007). Attunement is therefore understood as being an inherent part of the triangle of well-being, presenting as a common denominator linking all three components. Accordingly, while the brain enables attunement to occur, it further leads to a focus on our own or the other person's mind which, in turn, generates a connection within the relationship with the self or others.

Research has explored attunement on various levels, including emotional attunement (Balzarotti, Piccini, Andreoni, & Ciceri, 2014; Jonathan & Knudson-Martin, 2012; Katehakis, 2017), therapeutic attunement (Rocco, Gennaro, Salvatore, Stoycheva, & Bucci, 2017; Seikkula, Karvonen, Kykyri, Kaartinen, & Penttonen, 2015; Stott, 2018), parental attunement (Miller, Borelli, & Margolin, 2018; Ostlund, Measelle, Laurent, Conradt, & Ablow, 2017), self-attunement (Koloroutis, 2014; Piran, 2016), and physiological attunement (Clauss, Byrd-Craven, Kennison, & Chua, 2018; Nelson, Laurent, Bernstein, & Laurent, 2017; Phan et al., 2019). Bearing in mind the intra- and interpersonal presentation of attunement as illustrated by these studies, effective attunement arguably enables congruent alignment of our own internal states and experiences, as well as the internal states and experiences of others, enabling us to consider and adapt our responses to appropriately complement that of the other person.

Both internal and interpersonal forms of attunement also lead to the growth of the regulatory circuits of the brain and allow us to become more balanced and regulated (Siegel, 2010). Internal attunement leads to a healthier relationship with the self by enabling self-understanding, self-regulation, and self-compassion (Siegel, 2007). In comparison, interpersonal attunement allows two people to feel seen and understood by each other, leading to vibrancy, energy, growth, understanding and a sense of calmness within the

relationship (Siegel, 2007). Our inherent need for connection makes interpersonal integration a vital part of our personal survival and ability to thrive (Siegel, 2007). Moreover, keeping in mind the current study's focus on intimate relationships, it arguably indicates an intersection between the well-being and thriving of the individual partners and that of the relationship.

Internal attunement can be achieved through mindfulness while interpersonal attunement is the product of attachment (Bentzen, 2015; Fogel, 2011; Siegel, 2010). Mindfulness is a trait and way of being that allows for increased awareness, observation and present-centredness of the existing internal and external environments without judgement (Baer, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Attachment, in turn, refers to the security bond that exists between two people and which can be either secure or insecure (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1958; Fraley, 2019). While this bond is first established in childhood between the infant and primary caregiver, its effects continue into adulthood and, notably, into intimate relationships (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1958; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Attunement, therefore, relies on both mindfulness and attachment. Moreover, attunement may be viewed as the link between mindfulness and attachment, as well as our interpersonal connection with others and our intrapersonal connection with the self.

2.2.4. Significance of interpersonal neurobiology for the current study

Within the field of mental health and psychology, the dominant stance views the successful treatment of patients as grounded in the understanding that both the shaping of the mind and the development of mental or emotional dysfunctions are the product of a delicate interplay between the brain and interpersonal experiences (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Morrison, 2014). Accordingly, the psychological perspective within the current study focuses on integration and understanding an individual on all levels of functioning. As previously discussed, within IPNB, integration is viewed as the key mechanism leading to a healthy brain, body, mind and relationships (Siegel, 2012a). Without integration, a system is left moving towards rigidity and chaos instead of flexibility, adaptation, coherence, energy and stability (Siegel, 2012a). The shared focus on an integrated approach makes IPNB an appropriate choice for this study.

In the present study, the goal is to understand the functioning and dynamics of the couple system in the context of intimate relationships and, in particular, how mindfulness and attachment are related to a couple's sense of satisfaction. IPNB offers an integrated and coherent framework within which to explore and understand the association between these constructs, couples' interpersonal dynamics, as well as their intrapersonal functioning and dynamics. Furthermore, mindfulness and attachment are integral concepts within the IPNB framework, mediating intra- and interpersonal attunement (Siegel, 2007, 2012a). In this study, an exploration of mindfulness and attachment within intimate relationships is also believed to have the potential to illuminate not only the comparisons between the two constructs, but also the way in which they mediate intimate relationship dynamics and satisfaction. Taking into account all of these aspects, IPNB is considered the most appropriate framework from which to approach the exploration and understanding of the intimate relationship system within the current study.

2.3. Intimate Relationships

2.3.1. Intimate relationships through an interpersonal neurobiological lens

From an IPNB perspective, intimate relationships are seen as part of the triangle of well-being (Siegel, 2010), therefore existing in a reciprocal relationship with both the mind and its processes, and the brain and physiological functioning. The triangle of well-being offers a structure within which to conceptualise and understand the development of intimate relationships as it relates to the associated reciprocal neurological and psychological processes involved. In this way, intimate relationships are seen as one part of the whole, leading to an integrated understanding of our development and functioning as individuals and couples. Therefore, a thorough understanding of intimate relationships requires consideration of both the brain and mind. The intimate relationship is then further formed by means of intra- and interpersonal processes facilitated by attunement – with both self and other (Siegel, 2012a). Extrapolating from Siegel's (2012a) conceptualisation, I hereby propose that this dynamic process occurs as illustrated in Figure 2.2 below.

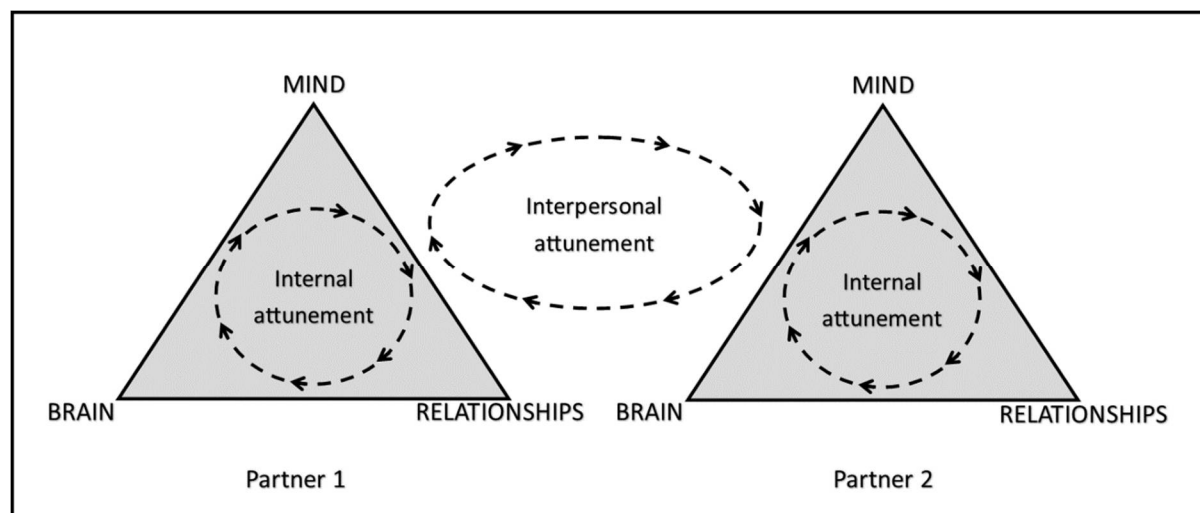


Figure 2.2. Intimate relationships through an IPNB lens

As illustrated in Figure 2.2, within each partner, individual well-being is constructed as a result of the reciprocal relationship between the brain, mind and relationships. This triangle of well-being is further supported on an intrapersonal level by a process of internal attunement, achieved through mindfulness (Siegel, 2012a). At the same time, interpersonal attunement is created between the two partners in an interpersonal relationship. This interpersonal attunement is the product of attachment (Siegel, 2012a). All parts and processes of an intimate relationship, as illustrated in this way, are continuous, dynamic and reciprocal, contributing to its operating as a growing and changing entity. In this regard, it could be inferred that rather than being static constructs, intimate relationships exist in continuous development with their environment.

2.3.2. The development of intimate relationships

Relationality is the environment within which all forms of human development occur (Davies, 2014). Arguably, therefore, the development of the self may, at least in part, be influenced by interdependence. Developmental stages offer a way of describing, predicting and comparing human behaviour, relationships and experiences. Much has been written about the different developmental stages of individuals, including cognitive, psychosocial, physical and moral development (Erikson, 1950; Inhelder & Piaget, 1958; Kohlberg, 1984). Similarly, the intimate relationships within which people find themselves can also be understood by means of models of development.

Reiss (1971), for example, suggested a wheel theory of love, where couples move through four stages, namely rapport, self-revelation, mutual dependency and personality need fulfilment. Moving through these stages, a couple starts by building rapport through mutual trust, respect and interest after which they gradually and increasingly share more information about themselves (Lamanna et al., 2014). Through shared experiences and time together, the couple develops an interdependence, which paves the way for the fulfilment of each other's emotional needs (Lamanna et al., 2014). No recent studies applying Reiss's (1971) wheel theory of love could be found (EBSCOhost database search, 16 March 2020).

Similarly, Knapp's (1978) relational stage model of relationships suggests certain phases through which an intimate relationship progresses from first interaction to permanence. According to the first four stages of Knapp's (1978) model, an intimate relationship moves through initiating, experimenting, intensifying and integrating phases. Finally, couples reach the bonding stage of relationship development, where the relationship becomes more consolidated, stable and committed from that point forward (Knapp, Vangelisti, & Caughlin, 2013). Fox, Warber and Makstaller (2013) applied Knapp's model to the role of social networking websites, specifically Facebook, in the development of romantic relationships. Their findings suggest that Facebook is one of the main factors contributing to the reduction of uncertainty in the initial relationship formation stages (Fox et al., 2013). Moreover, proclaiming one's relationship status on Facebook is deemed indicative of increased relationship commitment. As such, exclusivity occurs when the relationship is considered stable (Fox et al., 2013). Arguably, however, each partner's perception of their relationship status may not always be in alignment with that of their partner. Furthermore, such misalignments might then impact the relationship.

In the context of current intimate relationships, the use of technology may therefore impact the general development of the relationship in a positive or negative way. In contrast to Fox et al.'s (2013) application of the relational stage model, Kallis' (2017) study, exploring the life cycle of relationships on Tinder, discovered that Knapp's (1978) relational stage model does not explain the steps involved in individuals connecting with one another on such location-based dating applications. As a result, Kallis (2017) proposed her own adjustments to Knapp's (1978) model to make it more applicable to the context of technology-based dating

applications. In this regard, it could perhaps be inferred that the applicability of relationship models may be influenced by the particular sociocultural context within which couples and intimate relationships find themselves.

Similarly, while integrating a variety of psychological theories and approaches, the soul mates model (De La Lama et al., 2012) puts forth seven stages through which an intimate relationship passes, namely dating, commitment, intimacy, building a life, integrating the shadow, renewal, and soul mating. Accordingly, by the time a couple reaches the intimacy stage, they would have found each other to be physically, emotionally, ideologically and spiritually well suited, enabling a reciprocal commitment towards each other (De La Lama et al., 2012). They also would have started to develop bonds of intimacy through exploring and mapping each other's inner worlds, and engaging in mutual reflection, revelation and building of meaning (De La Lama et al., 2012). While De La Lama and colleagues (2012) identify this model as being applicable to all couples, irrespective of marital status or sexual orientation, studies exploring the application of the soul mates model do not appear to be available as yet (EBSCOhost database search, 16 March 2020).

In examining relationship development among same-sex couples, specifically, Macapagal, Greene, Rivera and Mustanski (2015) suggested five stages of development: discernment, initiation, negotiation, cohabitation and commitment. Compared to the other developmental models discussed, these stages include many of the previously mentioned milestones in relationships. Bearing in mind the results of these particular models of intimate relationship development, all intimate relationships, regardless of the particular sexual orientation of partners, appear to share certain universal objectives in their development.

In view of the various developmental models, it can be concluded that couples who have been married or cohabiting for 12 months or longer are more likely to have reached a point of relationship stability as proposed by Knapp's (1978) bonding stage of relationship development, Reiss's (1971) wheel of love, and the intimacy stage of the more recent soul mates model (De La Lama, De La Lama, & Wittgenstein, 2012) of relationship development. Therefore, to understand the experiences of couples in intimate relationships, it may be best to examine couples who have been married or cohabiting for at least a year, as their

relationships are likely to have completed the initial stages of development and to have reached a point of constancy.

The various developmental models postulate that relationships are growing, evolving entities. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) supported this view, stating that in relationships, an ongoing exchange between opposing stances is essential for the growth and development of the relationship. Elaborating on this position, Migerode and Hooghe (2012) equated relationships to a project that is continuously “under construction” (p. 375) due to fluctuation and change. Furthermore, an end to the ongoing exchange risks damage or breakdown of the relationship (Migerode & Hooghe, 2012). Additionally, both marriage and cohabitation were shown to be vital facilitators of individual and joint growth (Soulsby & Bennett, 2015). Thus, viewing the intimate relationship, which is considered an evolving entity, in terms of the larger systems and context within which it exists provides and provides an opportunity for exploring its value and interdependence in external environments.

2.3.3. The value of intimate relationships

It has been argued that as a central point of the family system, intimate relationships are a fundamental building block of society, with the health of the relationship contributing to the well-being of each individual partner, as well as that of the family and society (Berscheid, 2010; Dunkel Schetter, 2017). Furthermore, taking into account the cybernetic principle of reciprocal causality, the couple system cannot be viewed in isolation. Instead, an interconnectedness exists between systems and individuals (Becvar & Becvar, 2013). It may then possibly be argued that unhealthy intimate relationships could lead to unhealthy family systems which, in turn, could lead to unhealthy communities. Moreover, keeping in mind the influence of intimate relationships on both our psychological and physical health (Chopik & O'Brien, 2017; Kiecolt-Glaser, 2018; Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2015; Kiecolt-Glaser & Wilson, 2017; Slatcher & Selcuk, 2017; Villeneuve et al., 2015; Woods, Priest, Signs, & Maier, 2019), it becomes clear that intimate relationships influence well-being beyond the immediate realm of the relationship.

Villeneuve et al. (2015) observed that whereas higher levels of marital functioning predict lower levels of psychological distress in partners, marital distress was also shown to be associated with cardiovascular disease, metabolic syndrome and diabetes (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2015). Also, Chopik and O'Brien (2017) discovered that merely having a happy partner could enhance one's health in the same way as striving for one's own happiness. In her review of research focused on health-relevant immune alterations in intimate relationships, Kiecolt-Glaser (2018) identified significant interpartner similarity with regard to health behaviour, immune profiles, gut microbiota, and gene expression. Various other studies have also highlighted physiological correspondence or linkage between partners, where the physiological or emotional state of one correlates with or influences the other (Goldstein, Weissman-Fogel, & Shamay-Tsoory, 2017; Laws, Sayer, Pietromonaco, & Powers, 2015; Papp, Pendry, Simon, & Adam, 2013; Timmons, Margolin, & Saxbe, 2015; Wilson et al., 2018). At the same time, negative couple interaction has been shown to be associated with higher levels of depression in both men and women (Sandberg et al., 2013).

Relationship satisfaction may, therefore, be viewed as a mental and physical health outcome. This view supports the notion of an association between our individual physiology and intimate relationships in what Siegel (2012a) refers to as interpersonal integration. Despite being regarded as building blocks of society, intimate relationships are not identical building units. Much like society, great diversity can be observed amongst them.

2.3.4. Diversity within intimate relationships

When taking into account current research on intimate relationships, it becomes evident that a great deal of diversity exists across intimate relationships in the 21st century. Locally, the changing identity and expression of intimate relationships have been investigated in studies exploring the deliberate consideration of marriage versus cohabitation (Botha & Booyesen, 2013; Moore & Govender, 2013). For instance, Botha and Booyesen (2013) indicated that individual life satisfaction is very similar among cohabitating and married South Africans. In addition, Moore and Govender (2013) investigated the impact of cultural attitudes towards marriage and cohabitation in a sample of 952 South African adults. Their findings revealed various racial differences between rural and urban participants with regard to marriage and

cohabitation (Moore & Govender, 2013). Another interesting finding was that racial groups had different reactions to cohabitation. For instance, while many of their black participants were found to cohabit into their forties, most of their white participants were inclined to get married after they had turned 30 (Moore & Govender, 2013). Generally, their findings showed that cohabitation and marriage may, at times, be significantly influenced by structural variables, such as gender, employment status, education or location (Moore & Govender, 2013).

Moreover, despite the increase in the divorce rate, couples continue to commit to each other through civil unions and marriages, as well as customary marriages (Statistics South Africa, 2017). Statistics indicate that both men and women are, however, delaying the commitment of marriage to a later stage. Thus, on average, men tend to get married at the age of 36 and women at the age of 32 (Statistics South Africa, 2017). Given the longevity of marriage, a staggering 44.4 per cent of marriages last less than ten years (Statistics South Africa, 2017).

Some research also illustrates the diversity of South African couples by focusing on intimate relationships between same-sex partners (Adeagbo, 2015, 2018; Henderson & Shefer, 2008; Ochse, 2011; Sanger & Lynch, 2018), as well as interracial couples (Adeagbo, 2015; Childs, 2015; Jaynes, 2010). Same-sex relationships face many similar challenges and experiences as those encountered by heterosexual couples. However, Adeagbo's (2015) study on the division of household labour between interracial gay partners showed that such challenges are not necessarily based on traditional gender roles that are often prominent in the dynamics of heterosexual couples. The results indicated that household chores were delegated based on the availability, preferences and strengths of partners rather than being influenced by class, status, income or racial background (Adeagbo, 2015). In contrast, the influence of traditional gender roles could be seen in Sanger and Lynch's (2018) study exploring the complexities of intimate partner violence in women's same-sex relationships, with their findings illustrating the salient influence of heterogendered norms and scripts on intimate partner violence. Thus, same-sex relationships are often faced with the stigmatised legacy projected onto them, either internally or externally, by normative heterosexual culture (Sanger & Lynch, 2018).

Same-sex relationships are therefore not only confronted with the usual challenges and experiences associated with intimate relationships, but also with a society that is still very much steeped in prejudice towards couples who veer from the heterosexual norm. Despite same-sex marriage being legalised in South Africa since 2006, the struggle for public and societal acceptance continues as same-sex relationships are still frequently viewed as being incompatible with the religious and cultural views of many South Africans (Breshears & Lubbe-De Beer, 2016; Vincent & Howell, 2014; Van Zyl, 2011; Yarbrough, 2018). Same-sex relationships are often deemed “anti-family” (Adeagbo, 2018, p. 165), “un-African” (Van Zyl, 2011, p. 335), or even “unnatural” (Vincent & Howell, 2014, p. 472). In contrast to the frequent perception that same-sex relationships are unstable and short-lived, a recent local study showed that male same-sex partners seek stable, close-bonded relationships (Adeagbo, 2018). The same study observed that stability and satisfaction are connected to effective communication, trust and equity (Adeagbo, 2018). Encouragingly, findings from Breshears and Lubbe-De Beer’s (2016) study found that, despite many accounts of social nonacceptance, their participants largely experienced other South Africans as having positive attitudes towards, and perceptions of, same-sex families. That being said, their sample of 21 parents and 12 children was largely comprised of white, middle-class participants, which means that their experiences were likely to have differed from those of same-sex families from other racial or socio-economic groups (Breshears & Lubbe-De Beer, 2016).

In terms of interracial couples in South Africa, Childs (2015) argued that attitudes towards interracial intimate relationships are indicative of the overarching realities of race in South Africa. An earlier study by Jaynes (2010) shared this argument in that it was found that the discourses on interracial relationships intersected with those on race. Hence, the interracial or same-sex relationship often becomes a vessel for the greater societal and systemic realities. In addition, research has started focusing on couples with different gender presentations (Scott & Theron, 2019; Theron & Collier, 2013). Theron and Collier (2013), for example, explored the experiences of cisgender females with their masculine identified transgender partners while Scott and Theron (2019) investigated heteronormative respectability amongst transgender-cisgender couples. Heterosexual, married, same-race couples are therefore no longer the only recognised intimate relationship structure. The

landscape of relationships has changed to include couples of different sexual orientations, genders, races, and expressions of commitment.

However, despite the change in the intimate relationship landscape, the majority of research focused on intimate relationships, both locally and internationally, continues to include only heterosexual and married couples (Darbes et al., 2014; Falconier, M. K., 2015; Hagemeyer, Schönbrodt, Neyer, Neberich, & Asendorpf, 2015; Hilpert et al., 2018; Horne & Johnson, 2019; Khunou, 2012; Wechsberg, Myers, Reed, Carney, Emanuel, & Browne, 2013; Woolf-King et al., 2019), with very little consideration for the racial diversity of the participants. South African research on intimate relationships over the past 10 years has duly explored some of the challenges facing such relationships. These challenges include intimate partner violence, infidelity, substance abuse, HIV, gender dynamics and inequity, dual-career relationships, and even couples' use of their cellular phones (Bosch, De Bruin, Kgaladi, & De Bruin, 2012; Darbes et al., 2014; Groves, McNaughton-Reyes, Foshee, Moodley, & Maman, 2014; Khunou, 2012; Lesch & Adams, 2016a; Lesch, Briedenhann, & Du Toit, 2019; Madiba & Ngwenya, 2017; Mohamed, 2019; Mthembu, Khan, Mabaso, & Simbayi, 2016; Onoya, Zuma, Zungu, Shisana, & Mehlomakhulu, 2014; Parker, Pettifor, Maman, Sibeko, & MacPhail, 2014; Pettifor et al., 2014; Wechsberg et al., 2013; Woolf-King et al., 2019).

While exploring and reflecting on the challenges facing intimate relationships in South Africa may paint a grim picture, these studies also offer an opportunity for finding strategies to assist couples in overcoming the difficulties identified. For example, Khunou (2012) concludes that technology such as cell phones can either aid in stimulating intimacy or contribute to conflict and misunderstandings. Therefore, finding ways of using technology in intimate relationships as a connecting rather than a disconnecting factor would, arguably, help to mediate its negative potential. Similarly, Wechsberg et al. (2013) suggest building communication, negotiation and general problem-solving skills to aid couples in negotiating gender equity and sexually risky behaviours. In turn, while exploring the factors contributing to the use of alcohol within a Western Cape couple sample, Lesch and Adams (2016a) pointed to the societal influence on couples. Accordingly, it was suggested that solutions would have to include not only empowering the affected individuals directly, but also mobilising more effective public health discourses or interventions and structural community interventions

aimed at employment and recreation (Lesch & Adams, 2016a). Even though, as mentioned, intimate relationships may hold great value for both the individual partners and the community of which they form part, achieving relationship satisfaction or well-being may not always be easily achieved.

2.3.5. Relationship Satisfaction

As a central concept within intimate relationship research and practice, relationship satisfaction serves as an indication of couples' overall experiences within and towards their relationships, as well as the stability of the relationship itself (Berscheid, 2010; Funk & Rogge, 2007; Gambrel et al., 2016; Khaddouma & Gordon, 2018). Moreover, research indicates that various factors can influence intimate relationship satisfaction. Schaufhuser, Allemand and Martin (2014), for example, indicated that certain personality factors, particularly agreeableness and conscientiousness, were positively related to relationship satisfaction while neuroticism was negatively related in their study of 216 couples. In addition, Davila, Wodarczyk and Bhatia (2017), observed a correlation between positive emotional expression and romantic competence in the relationship satisfaction of different-sex couples. Furthermore, a study of 355 married American couples revealed that emotional intimacy and sexual satisfaction mediated the association between both partner communication and relationship satisfaction (Yoo, Bartle-Haring, Day, & Gangamma, 2014).

Much like intimate relationships in the current societal context, relationship satisfaction is also subject to the influence of partners' use of technology and social media (Khunou, 2012; McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; Papp, Danielewicz, & Cayemberg, 2012). Papp, Danielewicz and Cayemberg (2012), for example, revealed that indications of relationship status and displays of their partner in their profile picture on Facebook were associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction for male and female participants, respectively. Therefore, factors that may influence relationship satisfaction appear to include a combination of intrapersonal partner qualities, as well as interpersonal and relationship behaviours practised by both partners. Arguably, then, there is a need not only to identify the factors influencing relationship satisfaction, but also to find ways in which to practically apply the findings to existing relationships in the current societal context.

Few local studies have investigated relationship satisfaction amongst couples (EBSCOhost database search, 16 March 2020). This gap in the body of knowledge contributes to the motivation for the current study's exploration of the intimate relationship experiences amongst South African couples. Lesch and Engelbrecht (2011) used the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)(Spanier, 1976) to explore the gender differences in relationship satisfaction among a farm-worker community in the Western Cape. Couples who participated in this study were mostly married, Christian, regularly attended religious services, shared views of men as the household leaders, and had lower educational and income levels (Lesch & Engelbrecht, 2011). On average, the results showed that both men and women were satisfied with their relationships (Lesch & Engelbrecht, 2011). Women, however, reported significantly lower levels of satisfaction than their male partners (Lesch & Engelbrecht, 2011).

In a more recent study, Adeagbo (2018) explored relationship stability and satisfaction among interracial gay participants in Johannesburg. The results revealed that both stability and satisfaction were associated with trust, effective communication and equity (Adeagbo, 2018). Similarly, in a study conducted with a sample of adults from Swaziland, a neighbouring African country landlocked by South Africa, Ruark et al. (2019) used in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to describe some of the dimensions related to relationship satisfaction. The characteristics identified as contributing to relationship satisfaction also included trust and good communication, as well as love, respect, honesty, and sexual satisfaction and faithfulness (Ruark et al., 2019). These characteristics may, arguably, provide a context for Belus, Baucom and Wechsberg's (2019) finding that for the female participants in their sample of 286 heterosexual South Africa couples, relationship satisfaction influenced their engagement in sexual concurrency or interaction with partners outside of their relationships. Furthermore, Elegbede and Ogunleye's (2018) study on relationship satisfaction amongst 270 adults in dating relationships in another African country, namely Nigeria, noted that emotional control did not predict relationship satisfaction. This unexpected result was, however, interpreted within the specific cultural context of Nigerian couples, including the potential influence of their collectivist societal views, extended family and gender roles (Elegbede & Ogunleye, 2018). Therefore, the influences on relationship satisfaction within intimate relationships may be largely dependent on the particular sociocultural context within which couples find themselves.

In view of the value of relationship satisfaction as an indicator of the overall state of a relationship, satisfaction is identified as an important construct within the present study. Furthermore, given the importance of mindfulness and attachment as concepts within the theoretical framework of IPNB, as well as the current study, the associations between mindfulness and attachment and relationship satisfaction, respectively, are therefore of particular relevance.

2.3.6. Mindfulness and Relationship Satisfaction

As mentioned earlier, relationships form part of the triangle of well-being proposed by the theoretical framework of IPNB. Within the triangle, mindfulness serves as both an element of the mind and a contributing factor to intra- and interpersonal attunement. Despite the scarcity of South African studies exploring the relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction (EBSCOhost database search, 16 March 2020), the relationship between these constructs has been consistently confirmed in international research (Adair, Boulton, & Algoe, 2018; Atkinson, 2013; Kappen, Karremans, Burk, & Buyukcan-Tetik, 2018; Kozlowski, 2013; Krafft, Haeger, & Levin, 2017). Therefore, the current study is particularly interested in how mindfulness may be applied to enhance the well-being and relationship satisfaction of South African couples.

It could be argued that many of the qualities and characteristics of relationships with high levels of satisfaction are also characteristics cultivated by a mindfulness of being (Atkinson, 2013; Kozlowski, 2013). Wachs and Cordova (2007), for example, discovered that a skilled emotional repertoire – in particular, the ability to identify, communicate and regulate emotions – mediated the association between mindfulness and marital quality in married couples. Similarly, Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell and Rogge (2007) emphasised the role of emotional management as higher levels of mindfulness were shown to predict both higher levels of relationship satisfaction and an increased ability to effectively respond to relationship stress. Their study also indicated that higher levels of mindfulness were related to lower emotional stress responses, more positive post-conflict views of the relationship, and improved quality of communication (Barnes et al., 2007).

Aside from the association between mindfulness and emotional regulation, further studies have also considered the influence of other aspects of mindfulness on relationship satisfaction. For instance, Krafft et al. (2017) explored the presentation of awareness and acceptance, both facets of mindfulness, in relation to relationship satisfaction. The results of their study indicated that low levels of partner acceptance were associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction in the presence of increased awareness (Krafft et al., 2017). However, higher levels of acceptance correlated with greater satisfaction when awareness was moderate to high (Krafft et al., 2017). Successive studies showed similar results, with relationship satisfaction appearing to be facilitated by mindfulness due to an increased perception of partner responsiveness, as well as increased partner acceptance (Adair et al., 2018; Kappen et al., 2018).

In their study exploring mindfulness and satisfaction amongst 127 heterosexual couples, Adair et al. (2018) found that the perception of the partners' responsiveness served as a mediator between mindfulness and satisfaction. In comparison, Kappen et al. (2018) conducted three studies comparing mindfulness, acceptance and relationship satisfaction in a total sample of 501 participants, 53 of whom were complete couples while the rest comprised individual partners involved in intimate relationships. Their findings showed that partner acceptance was the mediating factor between mindfulness and satisfaction. Therefore, given the findings of these studies, it is evident that the more accepting partners are of each other and the more responsive they perceive each other to be, the higher their relationship satisfaction is likely to be.

Khaddouma, Gordon and Bolden (2015a) conducted a similar study exploring mindfulness and relationship satisfaction amongst university students in dating relationships. Maintaining a well-defined sense of self, without becoming enmeshed with one's partner, was deemed crucial in terms of navigating stressful relationship demands (Khaddouma et al., 2015a). Another study conducted by the same authors explored the relationships between the five facets of mindfulness, relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction (Khaddouma et al., 2015b). Based on their findings, sexual satisfaction was specifically related to the observing and non-judging facets of mindfulness, suggesting that noticing internal and external experiences without judgement contributes to relationship satisfaction by increasing

partners' sexual satisfaction (Khaddouma et al., 2015b). Therefore, mindfulness appears to be an important contributor to relationship satisfaction. Moreover, as previously discussed, mindfulness is a part of the mind component of the IPNB triangle of well-being (Siegel, 2012a). Bearing this in mind, mindfulness is also likely to operate in association with attachment which, in turn, is an element of the relationship component of the triangle (Siegel, 2012a).

2.3.7. Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction

Attachment is considered an important facilitator of interpersonal attunement within the theoretical framework of IPNB, as well as a component of both mind and relationships as it relates to the triangle of well-being (Siegel, 2010, 2012a). It has been suggested that intimate relationship attachment may be the mechanism through which mindfulness enhances relationship satisfaction (Jones, Welton, Oliver, & Thoburn, 2011). While exploring the connections between attachment and relationship quality in a largely white female sample of 1 702 adults, Saavedra, Chapman and Rogge (2010) showed that apart from the positive relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction, hostile conflict and insecure attachment (avoidant and anxious) were negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. Changes in hostile conflict over a period of time were also shown to correspond with significant changes in relationship satisfaction (Saavedra et al., 2010).

Similarly, Sadikaj, Moskowitz and Zuroff (2015) found that higher levels of both attachment avoidance and anxiety were associated with a decline in relationship satisfaction in a sample of 93 cohabiting couples. Moreover, attachment avoidance, in particular, was shown to be negatively associated with felt security, both intra- and interpersonally (Sadikaj et al., 2015). In addition, in a largely female sample of 362 participants involved in intimate relationships, Vollmann, Sprang and Van den Brink (2019) observed that gratitude towards one's partner served as a mediating factor specifically between avoidant attachment and relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, regardless of whether partners found themselves in their first or second marriage, or even dating post-divorce, higher attachment security continued to be associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction in a sample of 562 American adults (Diamond, Brimhall, & Elliott, 2018).

A study in India explored the significant differences in relationship satisfaction and attachment amongst couples in arranged versus love marriages (Duggi & Kamble, 2015). Couples in love marriages, where partners were chosen out of their own volition and for love, were found to be significantly more satisfied with their relationships and had higher levels of partner satisfaction than their counterparts in marriages arranged by third parties (Duggi & Kamble, 2015). Moreover, couples in arranged marriages showed much higher levels of both attachment avoidance and anxiety than the love marriage couples (Duggi & Kamble, 2015). Duggi and Kamble (2015) posited that the differences in attachment security between these couples were partly due to partners in love relationships knowing each other better than those in arranged marriages who still had to get to know each other. However, I would hypothesise that a level of intimacy and connection with one's partner may, arguably, be indicative of those participants in a love marriage, which could then further positively impact both relationship satisfaction and attachment security.

Using a sample of 104 American couples, Novak, Sandberg and Davis (2016) investigated the role of specific attachment behaviours, namely accessibility, responsiveness and engagement, in relationship satisfaction. Their findings showed that for both men and women, relationship satisfaction correlated with their perception of their partner's attachment behaviours (Novak et al., 2016). Accordingly, the more satisfied participants were with their relationship, the more they viewed their partners as accessible, responsive and engaged (Novak et al., 2016). Notably, their findings suggest that women who are satisfied with their relationships view their partners as displaying these three attachment behaviours, in turn, resulting in both partners being less likely to be depressed (Novak et al., 2016). Overall, both men and women's perceptions of their partners' attachment behaviours accounted for the majority of differences in relationship satisfaction (Novak et al., 2016).

In comparison, Molero, Shaver, Fernández, Alonso-Arbiol and Recio (2016) discovered negative associations between relationship satisfaction and perceiving either oneself or one's partner as avoidant. In particular, women's relationship satisfaction was highly negatively affected by perceiving their partners as avoidant (Molero et al., 2016). The importance of perception was mirrored in Park, Impett, MacDonald and Lemay's (2019) recent study which indicated that perceiving one's intimate partner as expressing higher levels of gratitude

mediated the effect of attachment insecurity on relationship satisfaction. The perception of the partner's gratitude, in particular, rather than the partner's own self-report of gratitude, protected both anxious and avoidant partners against daily dissatisfaction (Park et al., 2019). Avoidantly attached individuals, in particular, were also shown to experience long-term benefit from their partners' expressions of gratitude as it was perceived as an assurance that they were cared for by their partners (Park et al., 2019). Arguably, these findings emphasise the importance of interpartner perceptions, not only in terms of relationship satisfaction, but also in terms of relationship security.

While a local study by Lowe, Du Plessis and Nortje (2011), using a sample of 130 university students, suggested that parent-child attachment could have an effect on relationship satisfaction in young adults, their study experienced significant limitations in terms of its representation of the general population, leaving the researchers unable to generalise their results. No other South African studies exploring the relationship between relationship satisfaction and attachment could be found (EBSCOhost database search, 16 March 2020). Therefore, given the paucity of available studies, there is a need for South African research on the relationship between relationship satisfaction and mindfulness and attachment in adult couples. The current study aimed to contribute to the body of knowledge in this regard.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of IPNB as the chosen integrative framework within which to situate the current study. Accordingly, partners' individual well-being was found to be the product of a reciprocal relationship that exists between the functioning of their brains, minds and intimate relationships. In addition, this complementary relationship was shown to also benefit the functioning of the brain, mind and relationships, in turn. This level of integrated well-being was further understood as being the product of attunement, facilitated by the brain, to attain internal (mindfulness) and external (attachment) attunement within and between partners. Mindfulness and attachment were identified as important elements within the theoretical framework of IPNB, as well as within the current study which seeks to understand the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of partners in intimate relationships. Hence, both components were considered in terms of

their association with relationship satisfaction which, in turn, is considered an important factor for intimate relationships and the present study. Despite abundant international research investigating the relationships between mindfulness, attachment and relationship satisfaction, respectively, there is a paucity of similar local research. The current study aimed to make a contribution to the existing literature in this regard. Understanding the experiences of South African couples with regard to mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction may contribute to both the local and international body of knowledge on intimate relationships. Furthermore, it may inform clinical practice by indicating ways to assist couples in psychotherapy to achieve optimal relationship functioning. The following chapter will further explore mindfulness and attachment as constructs of the mind and relationships.

CHAPTER 3: MINDFULNESS AND ATTACHMENT AS CONSTRUCTS OF THE MIND AND RELATIONSHIPS

3.1. Introduction

The current study aimed at gaining a more nuanced understanding of the functioning and dynamics of the intimate relationship couple system and, particularly, how mindfulness and attachment are associated with relationship satisfaction for the couple. In this chapter, mindfulness and attachment, which were identified in the previous chapter as vital components of the interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB) framework, will be further conceptualised and elaborated on. Mindfulness will be discussed first by defining the concept and its principles, reflecting on its benefits for the different parts of the triangle of well-being based on existing research, and presenting mindfulness as the facilitator of internal attunement. This will be followed by a similar reflection on attachment by presenting its underlying theory, emphasising, specifically, adult attachment and the various attachment styles as the focus of the current study, and discussing its role as the creator of interpersonal attunement. Possible contemplations and criticisms to be kept in mind with both mindfulness and attachment will also be incorporated into the respective discussions of the constructs. The chapter concludes with an integration of mindfulness and attachment by reviewing their conceptual similarities and reviewing the existing research exploring the association between these two concepts. Accordingly, the argument is made for investigating the particular nuances of the relationship between mindfulness and attachment as it presents within intimate relationships in this study.

3.2. Mindfulness

3.2.1. Conceptualising Mindfulness (MF)

Mindfulness can be considered both a way of being and a practice that originates in the Buddhist spiritual tradition, where it is seen as an essential part of the path to enlightenment (Teasdale & Chaskalson, 2011a, 2011b). As one branch in the Eightfold Path of Buddhism, mindfulness forms part of the four noble truths put forth as the path to the cessation of suffering (Monteiro, Musten, & Compson, 2015). The virtue of “right mindfulness” (Ginsberg, Eckstein, Lin, Li, & Mullner, 2010, p. 428) allows for awareness of

one's feelings, emotions, and state of mind, leading to behaviours that support the alleviation of suffering for the self and others (Ginsburg et al., 2010; Monteiro, Musten, & Compson, 2015). As an inherent part of the human experience, suffering embodies mental, emotional and psychological despair (Ginsburg, Eckstein, Lin, Li, & Mullener, 2010). Over time, mindfulness permeated the West in a number of ways. Apart from its introduction as a technique for stress management through the practice of Buddhist meditation, mindfulness expanded through ongoing dialogues between the Dalai Lama, scientists, clinicians and philosophers on points of integration and convergence (Monteiro, Muston, & Compson, 2015; Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

Mindfulness is widely defined as present-moment open awareness achieved by paying attention to both internal and external stimuli and processes, without judgement and with acceptance (Baer, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). The present study is aligned with this particular definition of mindfulness. Moreover, the term "mindfulness" can be used to refer to a naturally occurring trait, technique or practice, state of mind, or the effects of structured intervention programmes such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) (Childs, 2007; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Mindfulness has been linked to a variety of positive psychological outcomes, including higher levels of psychological well-being, satisfaction with life, self-esteem, positive affect, empathy, and self-compassion (Aakanksha, Byadwal, & Singh, 2019; Cacciatore, Thieleman, Killian, & Tavasolli, 2015; Counson et al., 2019; Janssen, Heerkens, Kuijer, Van der Heijden, & Engels, 2018; Pepping, O'Donovan, & Davis, 2013). Arguably, these benefits of mindfulness are applicable to a global population, given that the above-mentioned studies used adult samples from America, Europe, Australia and India. In addition, mindfulness has been observed as coinciding with lower levels of depression, anxiety, stress, and emotional exhaustion while operating as a remedy to habitual worrying in the same international samples (Counson et al., 2019; Janssen et al., 2018; Verplanken & Fisher, 2014). Mindfulness may therefore be regarded as a valuable function of the mind that can exist naturally or be developed deliberately.

Both attention and awareness are fundamental components of mindfulness (Bishop et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Mikulas, 2015). Through concentration, focused attention is placed on a particular mental or physical object which, through practise, leads to both a

greater sense of control over the content of the mind, and calm relaxation (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Mikulas, 2015). In contrast, awareness does not direct the attention of the mind, but rather encourages an open curiosity that allows one to observe the internal and external environments and experiences as they occur naturally, without judging or interpreting them (Bishop et al., 2004; Mikulas, 2015). As a result, awareness encourages both self-control and insight (Liang et al., 2018; Mikulas, 2015). The combination of attention and awareness brings about a state of present-centeredness in addition to what is often referred to as “beginner’s mind” – an observation of objects as if for the first time and without any preconceived notions (Bishop et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Therefore, being mindful leads to an increased ability to direct, focus and use our attention and awareness of our internal and external environments.

While it corresponds with the aforementioned conceptualisations of mindfulness, Bishop et al.’s (2004) model of mindfulness highlights two components in particular. Firstly, emphasis is placed on the self-regulation of attention focused on the immediate experience and, secondly, a curious, open and accepting orientation towards the present moment (that is, attention/awareness and acceptance) is maintained (Bishop et al., 2004). Acceptance refers to a stance of openness and understanding towards an experience, which allows it to occur without judgement, wishing it to be different or actively attempting to change it (Bishop et al., 2004; Mastrianno, 2012; Polinska, 2010). Approaching every experience with an attitude of acceptance not only enables self-observation, but also allows for a change in the psychological context or subjective meaning attached to experiences, thus decreasing the need for avoidant behavioural strategies in order to navigate unpleasant experiences (Bishop et al., 2004). In this manner, acceptance appears to use an approach of mental flexibility (Mikulas, 2015) also inherent in mindfulness. Mental flexibility challenges the tendency of the mind to cling to certain interpretations and assumptions about the self, others and reality, also known as attachments (Mikulas, 2015). Attachments are considered to be at the root of most psychological suffering, leading to distortions in perception and memory, impairment in thinking, undesired emotions, and an overall decrease in the clarity and breadth of awareness (Mikulas, 2015). A mindful stance of acceptance would therefore enable intimate partners to experience their relationships and partners through accurate mental representations brought

about by mental flexibility rather than misinterpretations and expectations that may lead to suffering.

As already mentioned, mindfulness presents as both a naturally occurring trait and a stance cultivated through practice or action. Accordingly, someone who presents with a high level of trait mindfulness can be understood as having a natural disposition towards operating in the present moment, with an open awareness towards all experiences, a lower tendency towards judgement, and a greater level of acceptance (Baer, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). It has been suggested that early childhood experiences, especially attachment experiences, may contribute to the development of trait or dispositional mindfulness (Pepping & Duvenhage, 2016; Ryan, Brown, & Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, rather than being only a cognitive ability or style, mindfulness has also been proposed as being either related to personality or even a personality trait in itself (Hanley, Baker, & Garland, 2018; Hanley & Garland, 2017; Rau & Williams, 2016; Sternberg, 2000). In this regard, it has been suggested that certain personality traits are associated with trait mindfulness. When comparing mindfulness to the big-five theory of personality, Sternberg (2000) proposed that mindfulness is related to the characteristic of openness to experience. Likewise, strong relationships have been observed between mindfulness and neuroticism and conscientiousness, in particular (Hanley & Garland, 2017; Rau & Williams, 2016). However, mindfulness is not considered a static trait, and can be cultivated through formal practices, such as meditation or informal practices aimed at bringing a mindful awareness into the practising of daily life activities, such as walking, eating and showering (Cigolla & Brown, 2011).

Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), the first and possibly most well-known structured mindfulness-based programme, was first introduced into Western psychology by John Kabat-Zinn in 1982. Later, a variety of other mindfulness-based programmes followed, including mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) (Teasdale, Segal, & Williams, 1995), acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) (Hayes & Wilson, 1994), and dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) (Linehan, Armstrong, & Suarez, 1991). Over the past few decades, mindfulness-informed and mindfulness-based programmes and therapies have surged across the fields of medicine, psychology, education and business (Crane et al., 2017). Research findings suggest

that they are an effective intervention for a variety of emotional and psychological problems, as well as many neurological functions (Gotink, Meijboom, Vernooij, Smits, & Hunink, 2016; Idusohan-Moizer, Sawicka, Dendle, & Albany, 2015; Khoury et al., 2013). Moreover, over the last decade, researchers have increasingly started to consider the efficacy of mindfulness-based programmes by investigating the populations for whom they are most appropriate and effective; applying them to populations, such as children and adolescents, young offenders, military veterans, and homeless mothers and their children (Alhusen, Norris-Shortle, Cosgrove, & Marks, 2017; Combs, Critchfield, & Soble, 2018; Simpson, Mercer, Simpson, Lawrence, & Wyke, 2018; Volanen, 2016). As such, consideration is being given to what the best application for mindfulness-based programmes might be, rather than simply applying them as a remedy to all ailments and populations.

Regardless of the increasing exploration and application of mindfulness in different academic and clinical settings, the longstanding difficulty in reaching consensus on the definition and conceptualisation of mindfulness continues (Chiesa, 2012; Davidson, 2010; Grossman, 2011; Van Dam et al., 2018). The different conceptualisations of mindfulness as a trait, technique, practice, state of mind, or the product of a structured programme, contributes to the critique lobbied against it and the caution expressed regarding the validity of its measurement (Chiesa, 2012; Davidson, 2010; Grossman, 2011; Grossman & Van Dam, 2011; Van Dam et al., 2018). Moreover, these discrepancies are underscored by frequent differences between the traditional Buddhist, Western psychology, and quantitative research conceptualisations of the construct (Chiesa, 2012; Grossman & Van Dam, 2011). In an attempt to bridge this lack in uniformity and enable accurate interpretation and application of mindfulness, both Davidson (2010) and Van Dam et al. (2018) emphasise the importance of clearly stating the operationalised definition of mindfulness in each context where it is used.

Understandings of mindfulness have grown exponentially through the increased academic output from studies such as those discussed in this chapter, as well as through numerous secular and clinical programmes (Monteiro, Musten, & Compson, 2015). However, this rapid growth has raised some concerns in both the Buddhist and academic communities (Hyland, 2015; Monteiro, Musten & Compson, 2015). The first concern relates to the accuracy

of the teachings and a subsequent weakening of the concept of mindfulness if the practice is used as a means to an end without considering the end in itself (Monteiro et al., 2015). In this way, mindfulness is then understood as being little more than a treatment for problematic symptoms. Similarly, Hyland (2015) emphasises the role of corporate objectives and financial pursuit in the distortion of mindfulness into a consumerist type of "McMindfulness". The mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) that come about as a result of these pursuits are often devoid of the necessary ethical considerations, thus raising a second concern (Hyland, 2015). Both academically, as well as in the traditional Buddhist origin of mindfulness, the inclusion of ethics as part of the teachings and application is paramount (Hyland, 2015; Monteiro et al., 2015). Therefore, omitting the necessary ethical considerations constitutes a third concern regarding validity and reliability, as well as misusing mindfulness practices to the degree of transforming them into something malignant (Hyland, 2015; Monteiro et al., 2015). Perhaps this emphasises the importance of establishing an optimal balance between innovatively considering the various ways in which mindfulness could benefit our intra- and interpersonal functioning, and ethically and conceptually maintaining the essence of mindfulness as a construct.

Another concern raised by Farias and Wikholm (2016) relates to the literature on the benefits of mindfulness being both conceptually and methodologically problematic due to weak results being mislabelled as significant. In turn, "the dark side of meditation" (Farias & Wikholm, 2015) consisting of the physical, psychological and neurological problems associated with mindfulness, are under-explored. For example, a study of 30 male meditators in London showed that increased mindfulness through meditative practice could expose meditators to distressing thoughts and emotions that they may have been unaware of or even previously avoided (Lomas, Cartwright, Edginton & Ridge, 2015). In some cases, meditation practice even aggravated existing symptoms of anxiety and depression (Lomas et al., 2015). Apart from concern over the imbalanced investigation of the effects of mindfulness and meditation, the apparent view of mindfulness as a natural cognitive ability which would be beneficial to all people if practiced regularly is also of concern (Farias & Wikholm, 2016). As a result, the individual differences and experiences related to mindfulness, possibly both positive and negative, tend to be disregarded (Farias & Wikholm, 2016). Therefore, in order

to effectively conceptualise and apply mindfulness and meditation, a more balanced view of both the potential positive and negative consequences of mindfulness practice is required.

A further critique regarding mindfulness is its apparent lack of racial and cultural sensitivity (Lyford, 2018). Lyford (2018) highlights the importance of adjusting mindfulness to the particular racial or cultural population in which it is used and keeping in mind that there is not just one approach or application of mindfulness. This is a particularly important concern, bearing in mind the culturally diverse South African context of the current study. In this regard, the present study specifically aimed at gaining an understanding of how mindfulness may present and be applicable to couples within the South African context.

3.2.2. A Way of Being

Given the presentation within the literature of mindfulness as a “way of being”, it may be important to consider the specific ways in which mindfulness could influence a person’s daily actions and functioning, both intra- and interpersonally. As mentioned earlier, mindfulness enables us to approach both our internal and external environments with focused attention and increased awareness, as well as present-centred acceptance towards a situation or experience. The intrapersonal qualities of a mindful person’s way of being are largely captured by Kabat-Zinn’s (2013) seven attitudinal pillars of mindfulness and form part of the current study’s conceptualisation of mindfulness. The seven pillars include non-judging, patience, a beginner’s mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go.

Non-judging – According to Kabat-Zinn (2013), mindful individuals neutrally observe the inherent habit of their minds to label and categorise their experiences. Therefore, instead of instantly forming judgements and labelling experiences or events, awareness is brought to the mechanical reactions of the mind, with the person reminding him- or herself to remain a neutral observer without pursuing or acting on the thoughts in any way (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Bearing in mind the focus of the current study, I would postulate that non-judgement would then specifically involve refraining from judging or labelling one’s partner, their behaviours, or the associated relational dynamics. A study amongst 47 cohabiting couples revealed that intimate partners’ daily moods may be strongly influenced by their partners’ degree of non-judgement (Iida & Shapiro, 2018). More specifically, male participants’ levels of non-

judgement were associated with a more stable mood in their partners (Iida & Shapiro, 2018). Non-judgement was also shown to correlate directly with emotional distress, as well as indirectly, mediated by psychological well-being in a sample of 119 Italian adults (Baroni, Nerini, Matera, & Stefanile, 2018). Further research has elaborated on the possible link between non-judgement, emotional distress and positive mood as suggested by these studies.

Patience – Practising patience is a way of being that demonstrates understanding and acceptance of the fact that experiences and situations cannot be rushed, but should be allowed to unfold in their own time (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Patience relates to a person's ability to "wait calmly in the face of frustration or adversity" (Schnitker, 2012, p. 263). Mindful individuals foster patience towards their own minds and bodies, avoiding impatience in response to emotional experiences or the judgements of the mind (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Practising patience also allows for savouring experiences and present-centeredness as we simply allow our experiences to be (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Therefore, patience within intimate relationships would arguably allow partners to savour their time spent together, while refraining from being reactive in response to each other's emotions, thoughts or behaviours.

Patience has been shown to facilitate goal pursuit and satisfaction in the face of obstacles amongst 389 young adults from America (Schnitker, 2012). The three types of patience, namely interpersonal, life hardship and daily hassles, have also been shown to correlate with higher levels of life satisfaction and lower levels of depression, anxiety and psychological dysfunction in a group of Iranian students (Aghababaei & Tabik, 2015). Similarly, Hashemi, Moustafa, Kankat and Valikhani (2018) identified a significant positive association between mindfulness and patience in a sample of 110 Iranian patients diagnosed with cardiovascular disease. Moreover, patience functioned as a mediating factor between suicidal ideation and mindfulness (Hashemi et al., 2018). Accordingly, patience is understood as allowing higher levels of life satisfaction and management of life's obstacles by fostering a stance of healthy control towards what can or cannot be changed in the present moment.

Beginner's Mind – Mindful individuals approach their lives and experiences with a "beginner's mind", aiming to see and experience everything as if for the first time (Hauptman,

2014). By doing so, they maintain a receptive stance towards experience, without allowing pre-existing knowledge, judgements or past experiences to influence their current experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). This results in freedom from expectation and the ability to see the extraordinary in the ordinary, as well as numerous possibilities becoming visible (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Schram, 2014). Hence, beginner's mind would enable a novel experience of the intimate partner and relationship, regardless of the length or history of the relationship. Based on an EBSCOhost database search (16 March 2020), beginner's mind has been largely underexplored. I would posit that the ability to experience one's intimate relationship with a beginner's mind would potentially enable one to maintain a sense of appreciation and curiosity towards one's partner and relationship. Arguably, research in this regard may be necessary.

Trust – Learning to listen to and trust one's own being is an integral element of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). While being open and receptive to the input and wisdom of others can be beneficial and necessary at times, we are all ultimately responsible for living our own lives (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). The ability to trust oneself, one's own feelings, intuition and authority is therefore central to a mindful way of being (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Becoming oneself more fully and trusting one's own being also makes it more possible to trust others and recognise their basic value (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Applying this notion of trust to intimate relationships, I would propose that the ability to trust one's partner would be preceded and dependent on a strong trust in oneself, as well as a validation of one's own autonomy.

However, this notion of self-trust does not appear to be as frequently considered within the existing landscape of research. To the contrary, the majority of studies explore trust as it presents within interpersonal relationship dynamics (Buyukcan-Tetik, Finkenauer, Kuppens, & Vohs, 2013; Chan, Hamamura, Li, & Zhang, 2017; Khalifian & Barry, 2016). For instance, when exploring trust in 189 heterosexual married couples, Buyukcan-Tetik et al. (2013) noted that trust combined with self-control prevented intrusive behaviours between partners. Similarly, Khalifian and Barry's (2016) study with 81 heterosexual married couples, discovered that trust was positively associated with intimacy in partners who had relatively high attachment avoidance. In addition, trust was negatively associated with disengagement in partners who either had lower levels of mindfulness or higher levels of attachment

avoidance (Khalifian & Barry, 2016). Therefore, trust appears to offset the negative effects of attachment avoidance on partners' intimacy and engagement with each other.

In comparison, Chan et al. (2017) investigated the effects of trust in others on an individual's own health and well-being in a sample of 35 329 adults from South Africa, Ghana, India, China, and Russia. Their findings showed that whereas generalised trust positively predicted happiness, life satisfaction and quality of life, it negatively predicted sedentary behaviour and physical illness (Chan et al., 2017). In contrast to these studies on interpersonal trust, an EBSCOhost database search (16 March 2020) indicated that fewer studies appear to be available on self-trust as encapsulated by Kabat-Zinn's (2013) notion of trust in mindfulness. Further research into the intersection between interpersonal trust and self-trust may be of value, particularly with regard to understanding intimate relationship experiences.

Non-striving – The mindful way of being is one that cultivates an attitude of non-striving, where the only focus is on being oneself – as one is – by trying less and being more (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Instead of prescribing to oneself what emotions, thoughts or experiences to have, the focus shifts to simply paying attention to whatever is already happening (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). The result is that goals are achieved by refraining from striving for results, allowing an unfolding to occur through patience and practice (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Accordingly, within the context of intimate relationships, I would argue that an approach of non-striving would involve partners authentically being themselves without attempting to present themselves in an altered way.

Similar to self-trust, non-striving as a construct is underexplored in the existing research (EBSCOhost database search, 16 March 2020). In the only study on non-striving that could be found, 57 university students from Singapore participated in a "strange loop-based task" of water scooping followed by an immediate word length comparison test to determine its effects on non-striving behaviour and performance (Kee, Aye, Ferozd, & Li, 2019). Based on their findings, Kee et al. (2019) concluded that the Infinite Water Scooping task had primed non-striving behaviour and could, potentially, be applied as part of a mindfulness practice.

It could, perhaps, be argued that such a non-striving stance is somewhat contradictory to the current societal drive in the West for success and achievement. Arguably, such a conclusion is further supported by the comparatively vast amount of research available on achievement and striving in equally varied samples, ranging from students and adults in general to individuals involved in intimate relationships or diagnosed with social anxiety (Goodman, Kashdan, Stikma, & Blalock, 2019; Heckhausen, Chang, Greenberger, & Chen, 2013; Low, Overall, Hammond, & Girme, 2017; Sommet & Elliot, 2017). Given the current study's focus on intimate relationships, Low et al.'s (2017) investigation of striving amongst 146 undergraduate students in intimate relationships and 100 heterosexual couples is of particular interest. Based on their findings, increases in partners' emotional suppression not only predicted an increase in depressed mood and a decrease in perception of support and closeness, but also negatively affected partners' goal striving and effort (Low et al., 2017). It is possible that these results indicate that goal striving and effort might rely on a certain degree of emotional expression for their momentum.

Acceptance – Mindful individuals hold an attitude of acceptance towards their internal and external environments and circumstances, accepting things as they are and seeing them as part of the current reality of the moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Instead of wasting time and energy on denying or resisting the current reality, trying to force matters or imposing our ideas and expectations on ourselves and the situation, change is brought about by accepting ourselves and our experiences for what they are in the moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). I would posit that practicing acceptance within intimate relationships would consist of partners accepting both their own and their partners' internal experiences without attempting to force or change one another. Furthermore, perhaps counterintuitively, an inter-partner stance of acceptance would allow partners to bring about change in their relationships by accepting the current reality of their relationship for what it is.

Research combining mindfulness and acceptance-based interventions emphasises the role of acceptance in mindfulness in both clinical and nonclinical samples including adolescents, students and adults (Cavanagh, Strauss, Forder, & Jones, 2014; Halliburton & Cooper, 2015; Rahl, Lindsay, Pacilio, Brown, & Creswell, 2017). Acceptance was also found to moderate the relationship between stress and psychological quality of life in a sample of 177

LGBT Americans (Vosvick & Stem, 2018). Moreover, in their general community sample of 288 European adults, Kotsou, Leys and Fossion (2018) identified acceptance as being a more accurate predictor of psychopathology and well-being than emotional competence, emotional regulation and mindfulness. Acceptance is therefore understood as facilitating both emotional and mental freedom.

Letting Go – The development of nonattachment or the ability to let go of thoughts, feelings or situations that occupy our focus and experience are fundamental to a mindful way of being (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Letting go is the opposite of holding on. It allows us to release ourselves from attachments of the mind that drain our physical, mental and emotional energy (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). For couples in intimate relationships, I envision the practice of letting go to consist of partners releasing mental or behavioural fixations on internal or external events that may not be serving themselves or the relationships. Particularly in the context of conflict, I would posit that letting go would enable more effective conflict management between partners. Nonattachment was shown to mediate the relationship between mindfulness and psychological and subjective well-being, as well as that between mindfulness and depression, anxiety and stress in a sample of 516 Australian university students (Whitehead, Bates, Elphinstone, Yang, & Murray, 2018). Similarly, in another sample of 348 Australian university students, nonattachment was indicated as being positively related to wisdom, self-actualisation and self-transcendence (Whitehead, Bates, & Elphinstone, 2019). Accordingly, it may be inferred that letting go presents as an action of liberating the self from thoughts, feelings or experiences deemed unhealthy or ineffective.

These seven attitudes of mindfulness are approached as being interconnected, with their individual development both relying on and influencing the cultivation of the other attitudes (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer and Toney (2006) also conceptualised mindfulness as a multifaceted construct, but posited that the construct enables (1) the observation of experiences, through (2) factual or neutral descriptions, leading to (3) acting with awareness, but (4) without judgement, and showing (5) no reactivity to inner experience. The current study strongly incorporates Baer et al.'s (2006) particular conceptualisation of mindfulness. The seven attitudinal pillars of mindfulness further incorporate some of the interpersonal qualities of a mindful individual's way of being (Kabat-

Zinn, 2013). As such, mindful intimate partners are more likely to assume a stance of non-judgement towards their partners, applying patience to the relationship, and reacting to their partners as if for the first time, with open receptiveness. Moreover, they would accept their partners and relationships for who and what they are while letting go of unhealthy attachments that threaten the relationship dynamic.

Other reported interpersonal qualities of a mindful way of being include compassion towards others, as well as a general awareness of interconnectedness with all beings on the planet (Bihari & Mullan, 2014; Cigolla & Brown, 2011; Fulton, 2018; Van Gordon, Shonin, & Richardson, 2018). Therefore, I wish to postulate that mindfulness holds the potential to increase interpartner compassion and raise partner awareness regarding their interconnectedness within the relationship. The notion of interconnectedness also further reiterates the concept of integration and reciprocity found within the theoretical framework of IPNB, as previously discussed. Apart from mindfulness being an element of the mind within the IPNB triangle of well-being, it also holds certain outcomes for the other components of the triangle, namely the brain and relationships.

3.2.3. Outcomes of Mindfulness

Mindfulness has been explored in a variety of populations in both local and international academic research. Moreover, mindfulness offers a multitude of outcomes for our neurological and physiological functioning, our mind and psychology, and our interpersonal relationships.

3.2.3.1. Neurological and physiological outcomes

Studies are increasingly confirming top-down control, showing that mental activity and training such as mindfulness can, in fact, change both the function and structure of the brain (Daubenmier et al., 2014; Hatchard et al., 2017; Paulson, Davidson, Jha, & Kabat-Zinn, 2013). This neuroplasticity is also shown to continue throughout our lives (Paulson et al., 2013). For example, it has been suggested that mindfulness-based stress reduction training (MBSR) leads to changes in the areas of the brain that control attention, introspection and emotional processing (Hatchard et al., 2017). Daubenmier et al. (2014) also explored the relationship between the cortisol awakening response in the body and a person's response

to negative thoughts and emotions. Describing and accepting experiences is part of the foundation of a mindful stance and may buffer the impact of psychological distress on physiological arousal (Baer et al., 2006; Daubenmier et al., 2014; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Studies have also noted the effects of mindfulness on the physical body and its functioning. Such effects include an improvement in symptoms associated with restless legs syndrome, small increases in well-being in patients suffering from Parkinson's disease, and improvements in patients' management of chronic pain (Advocat et al., 2016; Bablas, Yap, Cunnington, Swieca, & Greenwood, 2016; Daubenmier et al., 2016; Petersen & La Cour, 2016). All of these findings corroborate the framework offered by IPNB, which suggests a reciprocal relationship between mind and body.

Several South African studies have explored the psychobiology of mindfulness as it exists in the overlap between our brain and mind (Howells, Ives-Deliperi, Horn, & Stein, 2012; Ives-Deliperi, Solms, & Meintjes, 2011; Ives-Deliperi, Howells, Stein, Meintjes, & Horn, 2013). In their study, Ives-Deliperi et al. (2011) made use of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to identify the particular areas of the brain involved in mindfulness amongst a group of mindfulness practitioners. During mindfulness meditation, a significant decrease in signals in the cortical structures associated with interoception, together with a significant increase in signals within the right posterior cingulate cortex, was observed (Ives-Deliperi et al., 2011). These findings support the notion that the positive effects of mindfulness were mediated by a process of disidentification from thoughts and feelings as temporary and detached from the self (Ives-Deliperi et al., 2011). Furthermore, although focused on a population presenting with bipolar disorder rather than their previous study's nonclinical population (Ives-Deliperi et al., 2011), Ives-Deliperi, Howells, Stein, Meintjes and Horn (2013) discovered that mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) corresponded with increased activation in those parts of the brain associated with cognitive flexibility. Although these studies have focused on very specific research populations, I wish to postulate that the abilities of disidentification and cognitive flexibility, indicated as being associated with mindfulness, potentially offer intra- and interpersonal benefits to the wider population as well. Moreover, these skills may be applicable to the couple population in the current study.

3.2.3.2. Psychological outcomes

The role of mindfulness in psychological functioning has been widely investigated. Various studies have explored the role of mindfulness, specifically with regards to mental health conditions, such as depression (Barnhofer et al., 2015; Schramm, Hediger, & Lang, 2015; Waszczuk et al., 2015), anxiety (Helmes & Ward, 2017; Jianfeng, Pouchan, Nie, & Chengjing, 2016; Mizera, Bolin, Nugent, & Strand, 2016), substance use disorder (Russell, Gillis, & Heppner, 2016), borderline personality disorder (Ellices et al., 2015), trauma (Goodman & Calderon, 2012; Im & Follette, 2016; Nitzan-Assayag, Aderka, & Bernstein, 2015), and burnout (Abdool Karrim Ismail, Coetzee, Du Toit, Rudolph, & Joubert, 2013; Walker, 2013). In view of the findings of the aforementioned studies, it may be concluded that increased levels of mindfulness generally appear to have a positive effect on these clinical conditions.

Accordingly, six patients in psychiatric treatment, who have a history of trauma, experienced a decrease in symptoms of depression and rumination following their participation in an animal-assisted mindfulness intervention (Schramm, Hediger, & Lang, 2015). In addition, a sample of patients with a history of depression and suicidality, partaking in mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, experienced a weakened association between their depression symptoms and suicidal thoughts (Barnhofer et al., 2015). In comparison, a seven-week MBCT therapy group also resulted in significant improvement in anxiety symptoms in older adults in residential care (Helmes & Ward, 2017). Likewise, in their literature review on the association between the five facets of mindfulness and anxiety, Mizera, Bolin, Nugent and Strand (2016) noted that the facet of non-judgement was strongly related to a reduction in anxiety. Accordingly, a decrease in judgement towards the self, others or one's environment is understood as having a potentially beneficial effect in terms of alleviating levels of anxiety.

Apart from generally statistically significant changes in mindfulness pre- and post-treatment, Russell et al. (2016) also observed increases in the non-judging and nonreactivity facets of mindfulness in their sample of 32 young male adults participating in a substance use disorder programme. In addition, exploring the relationship between mindfulness, rumination and trauma amongst 157 college students, Im and Follett (2016) highlighted the importance of providing mindfulness-based treatment in addressing the more severe

symptomatology associated with exposure to multiple types of trauma. Similarly, mindfulness was discovered to have a significant negative relationship with burnout in a South African sample of 209 employees from a financial corporate environment (Abdool Karrim Ismail et al., 2013). Moreover, mindfulness was identified as a predictor of burnout, as more mindful employees were found to be less prone to experiencing burnout (Abdool Karrim Ismail et al., 2013). Given these results, I would postulate that the facets and skills associated with mindfulness may function as a preventative measure against the effects of psychological and life stressors.

South African research has also explored more novel ways of incorporating mindfulness into existing concepts and theoretical frameworks of the mind. Whereas Dugmore (2012; 2014), for example, introduced the concept of psychoanalytic mindfulness as the fifth facet of the psychoanalytic setting, Swanepoel and Beyers (2015) incorporated mindfulness as a component of cultural intelligence to be used when introducing sex education in schools. The potential application potential of mindfulness to matters of the mind and psyche therefore appears to be continuously expanding. Other international studies have explored the relationship between mindfulness and our general psychological functioning in the absence of specific pathology. For instance, several studies have explored the relationship between mindfulness and emotional expression and regulation amongst different samples of young and older adults from America, China and Germany (Hill & Updegraff, 2012; McLaughlin, Luberto, O'Bryan, Kraemer, & McLeish, 2019; Remmers, Topolinski, & Koole, 2016; Weinan & Meixi, 2017; Zhang et al., 2019). These studies showed that mindfulness can facilitate emotional regulation on both implicit and explicit levels, and that it is generally associated with greater emotional differentiation and less emotional difficulty. Emotional expression and regulation are of particular importance in the context of intimate relationships, especially given the reciprocal relationship between mind and relationships within the triangle of well-being.

3.2.3.3. Interpersonal outcomes

The influence of mindfulness on our interpersonal relationships has been investigated across various arenas. For example, several studies have explored the influence of mindfulness within the parent-child relationship (Campbell, Thoburn, & Leonard, 2017;

Parent et al., 2016; Parent, McKee, Rough, & Forehand, 2016). However, it is particularly the role of mindfulness in intimate relationships that occupies the focus of the present study.

Several studies have examined mindfulness in the context of intimate relationships (Atkinson, 2013; Iida & Shapiro, 2017; Kimmes, Jaurequi, Roberts, Harris, & Fincham, 2020; Kozlowski, 2013; Krafft et al., 2017). Atkinson's (2013) literature review discussed twelve studies confirming structural brain changes to areas regulating interpersonal behaviour as a result of mindfulness training. In turn, Kozlowski's (2013) review of the literature showed that higher levels of mindfulness, whether dispositional or cultivated, correlate with increased levels of relationship satisfaction. While exploring the experiences of a sample of 47 cohabiting couples, Iida and Shapiro (2017) also discovered that increased levels of mindfulness in men were associated with increased feelings of love and support. In comparison, increased levels of mindfulness in their female participants coincided with decreased feelings of relationship anxiety and sadness (Iida & Shapiro, 2017). In addition, Krafft et al.'s (2017) investigation amongst a sample of 138 dating or married students found that at least a moderate level of mindful awareness was necessary for acceptance to benefit couples' satisfaction.

Arguably, these studies corroborate the principles of IPNB as their results illustrate the interdependent relationship between the functioning of the mind and our interpersonal processes. Furthermore, in their study with 219 couples who had been in their relationships for a minimum of one year, Kimmes et al. (2020) found that relationship mindfulness was associated, both intra- and interpersonally, with relationship well-being and psychological functioning. In addition, they confirmed the notion that one's internal experiences of mindfulness will generally be expressed in interpartner behaviours (Kimmes et al., 2020). Therefore, intimate relationships dynamics and well-being may greatly benefit from partners' application of mindfulness facets and skills.

In terms of intimate relationship dynamics, in particular, higher levels of mindfulness were consistently shown to be associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction in both individual partners and couple samples (Adair et al., 2018; Kappen et al., 2018; Khaddouma et al., 2015a; Lenger, Gordon, & Nguyen, 2017). Based on their findings with 104

individuals in dating relationships, Khaddouma et al. (2015a) proposed that mindfulness allows a sense of self or autonomy to be maintained without enmeshment with the partner. In turn, such autonomy is suggested by the authors to further mediate relationship satisfaction (Khaddouma et al., 2015a). In addition, in their study on the association between the facets of mindfulness and relationship satisfaction amongst 164 long-term married couples, Lenger et al. (2017) observed that more than any of the other facets, non-judgement towards inner experience predicted one's own satisfaction with one's relationship. In addition, nonreactivity to inner experience predicted both one's own and one's partner's relationship satisfaction (Lenger et al., 2017).

Moreover, in their sample of 127 heterosexual couples, Adair et al. (2018) discovered that an individual's perception of his or her partner's responsiveness facilitated the relationship between mindfulness and satisfaction. Furthermore, the authors concluded that such a process of facilitation may occur due to mindfulness increasing partners' ability to be aware of and perceive their partners' responsiveness (Adair et al., 2018). Similarly, maintaining an accepting stance towards a partner's capacity and limitations was suggested as one of the mechanisms through which mindfulness promotes relationship satisfaction (Kappen et al., 2018). Moreover, results from the same study with a combination of 501 couples and individuals in intimate relationships, found that sustaining a mindful, non-judgemental stance may also benefit the way in which partners cope with their own emotions in response to their partners' behaviour or characteristics (Kappen et al., 2018). In summary, integrating the findings of the aforementioned studies, it could be concluded that mindfulness benefits partners' relationship satisfaction as a result of increasing their autonomy and improving their emotional regulation. In addition, mindfulness facilitates a decrease in interpartner reactivity and judgement, while enabling partners to perceive each other's responsiveness.

Conceivably, the potential for increased mindfulness to assist in enhancing partners' emotional regulation, cognitive management and conflict resolution is a significant component of the benefits associated with mindfulness in intimate relationships. Emotions play a particularly significant role in intimate relationships and, as such, the way in which emotions are identified, communicated, coped with, and expressed largely contributes to a

couple's health and well-being (Wachs & Cordova, 2007). Siegel (2014) illustrated how mindfulness interventions can be used to assist couples in tolerating, understanding and managing the emotional states that can easily become destructive in their relationships. The interruption of thought processes is important for emotional regulation. Mindfulness enables the interruption of automatic thoughts or behaviours which, in intimate relationships, could offer the opportunity for alternative behavioural, emotional and cognitive reactions in relation to one's partner (McCollum, 2011). This becomes especially important in conflict management. During conflict, a mindfulness approach allows for responding with greater awareness. Thus, the goal is not to change the experience of the other person, but rather to change the relationship with the experience (Polinska, 2010).

In their qualitative study amongst older adults involved in long-term meditative practices, Pruitt and McCollum (2010) identified three relational effects associated with the reported meditative traits acquired from their respective practices. These relational effects included less reactivity, greater freedom and safety, and a novel understanding of the relationship connection through greater insight into the dance between unity/separation and intimacy/independence within our relationships (Pruitt & McCollum, 2010). I wish to postulate that these three effects are, arguably, at the core of the potential value of mindfulness in terms of our experiences within intimate connections. Based on a literature review study, relational mindfulness was further indicated as fostering interpartner empathy and accommodation, accompanied by reduced intra-partner self-control and negative affect (Kozlowski, 2013). At the same time, all of these factors have been identified as contributors to overall relationship satisfaction (Kozlowski, 2013). Mindfulness can therefore be seen as a valuable component of well-being due to its impact on all three of the IPNB triangle of well-being elements, namely the brain, mind and relationships. Notably, mindfulness also contributes to our internal attunement.

3.2.4. Attunement through Mindfulness

Within the theoretical framework of IPNB, attunement is considered an awareness of, and a sense of connection to, our internal emotional and bodily states (Siegel 2012a). Attunement allows us to develop healthy relationships and connections with both ourselves and others by focusing on the internal world of either ourselves or others (Siegel, 2007, 2010).

It has been proposed that internal attunement, specifically, is attainable through mindfulness (Siegel, 2010).

Mindfulness attunes our attention to our own intentions. However, as an intentional state in itself, it has been said that it creates an “intention to attend to intention” (Siegel, 2007, p. 164). The process of attunement also refers to the way in which two people attend to each other’s intentions (Siegel, 2007). This is assisted by the mirror neuron system, a set of neural circuits in the brain, which creates representations of intentional states by observing and interpreting the actions of others (Lanzoni, 2016; Plata-Bello et al., 2017; Praszkiec, 2016; Siegel, 2007). Together with the temporal cortex, middle prefrontal regions and insula, the mirror neuron system forms the “resonance circuitry” (p. 165) which, in turn, is involved in the encoding of intention, empathy and emotional resonance (Siegel, 2007). Resonance is the practical result of attunement that allows us to feel experienced by another person (Siegel, 2007). Furthermore, the interaction between mirror neurons and related brain areas also enables us to create a neural picture of another person’s mental state or mind (Siegel, 2012a). This representation is based on what we see physically, as well as what we imagine as occurring in another’s mind (Siegel, 2007). Accordingly, many of our social behaviours, such as imitation and empathy, are believed to be related to mirror neurons (Lanzoni, 2016).

Siegel (2012a) highlights four principles of mirror neurons that particularly relate to the interconnectedness of the brain, mind and relationships. Firstly, mirror neurons respond specifically to actions that are driven by intention and which have a predictable sequence. Secondly, mirror neurons use the perception of another person’s predictable actions to create an image of that person’s mind. Thirdly, this image of a person’s mind is used to initiate behavioural and internal imitation as bodily states are altered to match that of another. Finally, these mirror neurons facilitate empathy as they allow a person to imagine what is happening in the mind of another. Hence, mirror neurons enable one to create an image of one’s partner’s mind which is then used to attune one’s internal and external actions with that of one’s partner while generating and communicating empathy in the process.

Research supports the link between intra- and interpersonal attunement (Gambrel & Piercy, 2015; Jones et al., 2011; Khaddouma et al., 2015a). For instance, mindful attunement to one’s intimate partner has been noted as supporting relationship satisfaction by

developing the ability to successfully manage relational demands without being overwhelmed by them or becoming excessively enmeshed with one's intimate partner (Khaddouma et al., 2015a). The findings also indicate that mindful attunement to one's partner in an intimate relationship may lead to the activation and growth of neural circuitry related to feelings of safety, security and general positive affect within the relationship (Jones et al., 2011). Furthermore, Gambrel and Piercy (2015) administered a mindfulness-based intervention designed to develop internal and interpersonal attunement amongst couples expecting their first child. Participants reported positive intrapersonal changes, such as increased acceptance and awareness, as well as deepened connections with their partners on an intrapersonal level (Gambrel & Piercy, 2015). Such findings illustrate the importance of relationships in our lives and well-being, the necessity for each of us to be attuned to our own internal states as a way of also being attuned to others, and indicate that mindfulness may be a relational skill (Siegel, 2007).

Mindfulness is therefore summarised as a "way of being" that includes a present-centred stance of non-judgement, patience, trust, acceptance, non-striving, and nonreactivity towards the environment, situations and relationships. All experiences are also approached with a neutral and receptive attitude while unhealthy thoughts, feelings or experiences are released from the self. Apart from a range of neurological, physiological and psychological effects, mindfulness also enables essential interpersonal outcomes. The latter is of particular relevance to the present study. Based on the research reviewed in this section, mindfulness was shown to benefit intimate relationship dynamics by enhancing emotional regulation, cognitive management, and conflict resolution. Moreover, higher levels of mindfulness were associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Lastly, mindfulness was found to facilitate intrapersonal attunement while also supporting relationship satisfaction by contributing to the interpersonal attunement with the intimate partner. Interpersonal attunement, in turn, is largely dependent on attachment.

3.3. Attachment

3.3.1. Attachment Theory

Attachment theory was first introduced to the field of psychology through the respective work of John Bowlby (1958) and Mary Ainsworth (1964), both of whom investigated the interactions between infants and their primary caregivers. Attachment generally refers to the emotional bond or connection between two people, including those psychological needs and dynamics which are not necessarily influenced by the degree to which physiological needs are met (Bowlby, 1958). Attachment theory suggests that the bond with the primary caregiver, which is formed within the first year of a child's life and which can be either secure or insecure, contributes to differences in personality, as well as the nature of our intimate relationships later in life (Bowlby, 1958; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). While the term "primary caregiver" most often refers to a child's parent, it is important to keep in mind that in the South African context, the role of primary caregiver often extends to a child's grandparent, sibling or other family member based on kinship (De Wet, 2019; Skinner, Sharp, Marais, Serekoane, & Lenka, 2019). With this in mind, it is recognised that the present study's participants may have nonparent attachment figures.

Given the immaturity and vulnerability of infants, their safety and survival are greatly reliant on proximity to their primary caregiver (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). As such, obstacles that hinder proximity result in feelings of anxiety, anger or sadness, leading to the triggering of associated attachment behaviours with the goal of re-establishing connection or proximity (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Furthermore, these behaviours continue until proximity has been restored, reinstating feelings of security and love (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). This process is known as the typical cycle of attachment system activation and deactivation (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Therefore, the ideal goal would be for primary caregivers to create a secure base from which children feel confident to explore the external world, while knowing that they would be welcomed back upon their return and also attended to in terms of both their physical and emotional needs (Bowlby, 1988).

Accordingly, the attachment relationship may be summarised in terms of four core characteristics. These include proximity seeking when distressed, feelings of distress when separated, depending on the relationship as a source of comfort, and using the relationship

as a secure base for exploring the world (Zeifman & Hazan, 2008). Ainsworth (1967) identified three main attachment styles, namely secure, avoidant and anxious/ambivalent attachment. As such, the latter two styles constitute insecure attachment. A fourth style, disorganised or disoriented attachment, was later added by Main and Solomon (1990).

Based on Bowlby's theories, Wallin (2007), a scholar of attachment theory, concluded that everything in our lives revolves around our intimate attachments. The attachment relationship with the caregiver is central to the child's physical and emotional survival and development, and is also suggested as the foundation for the development of the mind (Wallin, 2007; Siegel, 2012a). Traces of the interplay between neurobiology and interpersonal relationships were already evident in Ainsworth's (1967) work, which emphasised the notion that attachment embodies more than only external behaviour. Instead, it is also represented internally as it brings about changes in the nervous systems of both the primary caregiver and infant (Ainsworth, 1967).

More recent research also reflects this link between neurobiology and interpersonal relationships (Algoe, Kurtz, & Grewen, 2017; Ebner et al., 2019; Ponzi & Dandy, 2019). For instance, in their sample of 129 couples, Algoe et al. (2017) found that increased oxytocin levels corresponded with a greater perception of responsiveness and gratitude in one's partner. In turn, Ebner et al. (2019) confirmed the association between oxytocin and attachment as oxytocin influenced the manner in which relationships and bonds between people were formed and maintained in their sample of young and older adults. Therefore, it can be concluded that both interpersonal relationships and attachment impact the brain.

While attachment theory is recognised as prevalent within research and practice, it is certainly not the only approach to interpersonal relationships. Moreover, some critiques and suggestions have been made regarding attachment theory (Knudson-Martin, 2012; Vicedo, 2017). From a feminist perspective, Knudson-Martin (2012) argued that while attachment theory's focus on relational bonds is aligned with feminist values, it is vital that attachment processes are also viewed from within larger societal contexts, including gender, culture and power. In order to achieve this, Knudson-Martin (2012) emphasised the importance of viewing the social construction of attachment patterns within interpersonal communication

and behavioural patterns while also expanding the value placed on such attachment bonds to extend beyond gender and parental roles. As such, when assessing experiences of human connection, both the influence of emotions and brain development (an IPNB perspective), as well as the societal power dynamics and sociocultural standards and expectations ought to be taken into account (Knudson-Martin, 2012). In addition, placing value on all traits rather than devaluing traits traditionally viewed as “feminine”, such as compassion and emotional expressiveness, is vital (Knudson-Martin, 2012). Finally, Knudson-Martin (2012) highlighted the importance of employing qualitative, participatory research approaches in order to learn more about the nuanced daily presentations of attachment processes rather than focusing on the extent to which people fit predetermined categories of understanding.

It is therefore important to expand the conceptualisation and application of attachment theory to include a consideration of modern-day influences on the bond and understanding of attachment, and to create a more integrated approach by viewing attachment theory within the larger landscape of the current societal environment. Similar to Knudson-Martin’s (2012) view, Vicedo (2017) challenged the lack of attention given to cultural context in attachment theory and research. Accordingly, the overreliance on laboratory studies and data rather than field observations is believed to be a contributing factor in the lack of consideration given to ethnographic and sociocultural data and influences (Vicedo, 2017). For instance, Buchanan et al.’s (2014) study offers an example of contextual information that can be overlooked despite its importance in understanding the formation of attachment. When examining the experiences of women in domestic violence situations, they concluded that such hostile environments offer limited space for mothers and babies to actually form close relationships and attachments (Buchanan et al., 2014). Instead, mothers were left to respond with maternal protectiveness in order to keep their babies safe, regardless of whether a secure relationship had been created (Buchanan et al., 2014).

Researchers continue to explore the complexities of attachment within the primary caregiver and child relationship both internationally (Bureau et al., 2017; Burkhart, Borelli, Rasmussen, Brody, & Sbarra, 2017; Cooke, Stuart-Parrigon, Mohaved-Abtahi, Koehn, & Kerns, 2016; Kim, Chow, Bray, & Teti, 2017) and within the South African context (Aspoas & Amod, 2014; Cooper, Tomlinson, Swartz, Landman, Moltano, Stein, McPherson, & Murray, 2009;

Koen, Van Eeden, & Rothman, 2013; Minde, Minde, & Vogel, 2006; Rawatlal, Kliewer, & Pillay, 2015; Van der Watt, 2014). The potential application of attachment theory does, however, also expand to include adult health-related concerns, such as personality disorders, depression, grief, anxiety and obesity (Diener, et al., 2016; Lioa, Wang, Zhang, Zhou, & Liu, 2017; Guina, 2016; Manning, Dickson, Palmier-Claus, Cunliffe, & Taylor, 2016; Schenck, Eberle, & Rings, 2016). In comparison, the current study focuses specifically on the value of attachment theory within intimate relationship dynamics. Attachment amongst adults is therefore of particular relevance.

3.3.2. Adult Attachment

Despite its origin in early life, the attachment system is believed to be active across our lifespan into adulthood (Bowlby, 1988; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). A significant amount of research has contributed to our understanding of attachment styles and their continued relevance for our adult lives and intimate relationships. As adults, our attachment figures can include mentors, close friends or romantic partners (Siegel, 2012a). It is particularly the appearance of intimate partners as attachment figures that is of interest in the present study. Attachment within adult intimate relationships has been widely explored in different international populations and contexts. For instance, the role of attachment in couples' sleep concordance, relationship satisfaction, post-conflict behaviour, interpersonal control, joined relationship confidence, and experiences of intimacy has been investigated (Gunn, Buysse, Hasler, Begley, & Troxel, 2015; Hudson & Fraley, 2017; Johnson, Lavner, Barton, Stanley, & Rhoades, 2019; Overall, 2019; Prager, Poucher, Shirvani, Parsons, & Allam, 2019).

Reviewing the results from these studies, couples' sleep concordance or harmony was found to vary depending on their attachment style (Gunn et al., 2015). More specifically, husbands with an anxious attachment style were discovered to have higher levels of sleep concordance, while high levels of marital satisfaction in wives predicted higher concordance (Gunn et al., 2015). In those cases where wives had lower satisfaction, their concordance was increased when their husbands had an anxious attachment style (Gunn et al., 2015). In their study amongst 153, 470 adults between 18 and 65 years of age, Hudson and Fraley (2017) concluded that while anxiously attached individuals seek more intimacy in their intimate relationships, they were less likely to perceive intimacy in their relationships. In contrast,

avoidantly attached individuals require less intimacy and are more adept than less avoidant individuals at recognising intimacy (Hudson & Fraley, 2017). Johnson et al.'s (2019) study with 1,294 unmarried but partnered young adults, notably discovered that, on average, participants maintained their levels of relationship confidence over the course of the four-year study. However, substantial variability in trajectories were noticed between male and female participants, with factors such as insecure attachment, frequent positive interactions, few negative exchanges and high relationship satisfaction being identified as consistent predictors of relationship confidence (Johnson et al., 2019).

Moreover, applying an attachment perspective to understanding power and dependence in adult intimate relationships, Overall (2019) concluded that anxious and avoidant attachment styles represent very particular goals, reactions and counter strategies with regards to dependence and control. In particular, partners with an avoidant attachment style experience high control or dependence from their partners as threatening, thereby requiring a "softened" influence and dependence from their partners (Overall, 2019). In comparison, anxiously attached individuals often feel threatened by low levels of control or dependence from their partners, with exaggerated reassurance and dependence needed from their partners (Overall, 2019). Furthermore, Prager et al.'s (2019) study with 115 partners in cohabiting relationships indicated that in relationships where individuals or their partners withdrew following conflict, those same individuals experienced more difficult post-conflict affective recoveries. In addition, their results showed an unexpectedly weak association between an anxious attachment style and post-conflict recovery (Prager et al., 2019). Based on these results, it becomes clear that partners' attachment security could have either a positive or negative influence on their intimate relationship experiences.

Comparatively few local studies appear to explore the effects of attachment on interpersonal relationships in adult participants (Bain & Durbach, 2018; Lowe et al., 2011). In their sample of 130 male and female university students, Lowe et al. (2011) discovered that having overprotective fathers and caring mothers, possibly supported by parent-child attachment, were predictors of the participants' satisfaction with their sexual relationships. In comparison, Bain and Durbach (2018) investigated the experiences of six women who had relatively secure attachment styles even though they had been exposed to intimate partner

violence during their childhood. Apart from the role of adaptation and resilience, their findings suggested that the women's ability to acknowledge their experiences while retaining compassion towards their parents mediated their ability to cope with their pasts (Bain & Durbach, 2018). Unfortunately, no South African studies investigating the influence of attachment styles on the relationships of couples in intimate relationships, in particular, were found (EBSCOhost database search, 16 March 2020). As such, there is a need for South African research on attachment within intimate adult relationships. Making a contribution in this regard is part of the current study's rationale. Moreover, this study aimed to provide insight into the attachment experiences of couples within the South African sociocultural environment.

The adult attachment system is subject to the same cycle of system activation and deactivation found in primary caregiver-child relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). While infant activation behaviours include crying, pleading, and physically clinging or moving towards the caregiver, in adults, the attachment strategy does not necessarily include so-called actual proximity seeking behaviours (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a). For example, relationships consisting of one securely attached and one insecurely attached partner were shown to have higher levels of aggression than relationships in which partners shared the same attachment style, whether secure or insecure (Wilson, Gardner, Brosi, Topham, & Busby, 2013). Similarly, in their study amongst same-sex couples, Mohr, Selterman and Fassinger (2013) observed that attachment insecurity in both partners was linked to poor relationship functioning as expressed in satisfaction, commitment, trust, communication and problem intensity.

Given the sensitivity of the attachment-system's functioning to both the actual or perceived behavioural actions and reactions of an intimate partner (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016), Overall, Fletcher, Simpson and Fillo's (2015) study provided an example of the influence of attachment style on couples' perceptions of their partners' emotions and behaviours. Their findings indicated that both highly avoidant participants and less avoidant participants were accurate in recognising whether their partners were feeling more rather than less negative (Overall et al., 2015). However, highly avoidant participants consistently overestimated their partners' negative emotions, showing a more negatively biased

perception (Overall et al., 2015). In this way, the experience of proximity is also based on mental representations of the partner or relationship rather than only one actual behaviour. Therefore, a sense of security or proximity can also be achieved by the activation of such mental representations of the intimate partner which are experienced as soothing and comforting (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Furthermore, the threshold for the activation of the attachment system in adults tends to be higher as adults usually possess additional problem-solving and coping skills which assist them in regulating their emotions until an attachment figure becomes available (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Results such as those from Overall et al. (2015) also arguably allude to the association between internal working models (IWM) (Bowlby, 1973; Fraley, 2019; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016) and partners' experiences of attachment security. Similarly, stemming from the early primary caregiver-child relationship, IWMs encompass the mental representations that influence one's interpretations and expectations of the self, others and intimate relationship (Bowlby, 1973; Fraley, 2019; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). In addition, these mental representations may influence intimate partners' behaviours and reactions within their relationships (Bowlby, 1973; Fraley, 2019; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Investigating the association between IWMs and the quality of adult intimate relationships amongst a group of female participants with negative childhood parenting experiences, McCarthy and Maughan (2010) discovered insecure working models of attachment to coincide with relational difficulty. Participants with a more secure attachment style generally reported more optimal relationship outcomes (McCarthy & Maughan, 2010). Similarly, in a sample of 136 college students Bethell, Lin and McFatter (2014) found that IWMs consisting of positive views of both the self and others, typical of a secure attachment style, contributed to empathic concern for the other person. In contrast, IWMs based on a fearful type of attachment supported a negative view of the self and others which were likely to lead to increased levels of personal distress and a fear of embarrassment (Bethell et al., 2014). Also, IWMs based on a positive view of others and a negative view of the self – as with an anxious attachment style – may render one immobilised by conflicting emotions resulting from empathic concern for the other yet fear of embarrassment for the self (Bethell et al., 2014). However, an IWM holding a positive view of the self and a negative view of others as

seen in an avoidant attachment style, is likely to foster emotional detachment and a lack of empathic concern for the other (Bethell et al., 2014).

Exploring the experiences of 1, 539 Spanish university students, Monteoliva, García-Martínez and Calvo-Salguero (2016) aimed to determine participants' level of congruence between their perceptions of time spent with their intimate partners and their attachment-based IWMs. Results from their study also supported the notion of differences occurring in the IWMs of participants congruent with participants' attachment styles. More specifically, participants with a relatively secure attachment style perceived more benefits than costs related to time spent with their partners (Monteoliva et al., 2016). This was also true for preoccupied or anxiously attached participants. In contrast, those participants with avoidant attachment styles perceived the costs to outweigh the benefits with regards to time spent with their partners (Monteoliva et al., 2016).

More recently, Kobak and Bosmans (2019) proposed a dynamic model of attachment and psychopathology that is based on an insecure cycle between IWMs and misaligned inter-partner communication. Accordingly, communication amongst intimate partners that exacerbates personal insecurities will lead to the role of attachment compounding the development of psychopathology (Kobak & Bosmans, 2019). Instead, IWMs or communication that is steeped in secure attachment are proposed as mediating psychopathology (Kobak & Bosmans, 2019). Keeping in mind these various literature findings, IWMs are posited to influence one's experience of time spent with one's partner. Furthermore, IWMs that inspire a positive view of the self and the partner may benefit intimate relationships by generating inter-partner empathic concern. Finally, combining such IWMs with communication that supports attachment security between partners will arguably benefit partners' psychological and emotional well-being.

While it has been assumed that attachment styles or working models are fairly stable over time from infancy to adulthood, a consensus on the matter has not been reached (Fraley, Vicary, Brumbaugh, & Roisman, 2011). Bowlby (1988) proposed that our interactions with others throughout life have the potential to alter our attachment system functioning. In line with this view, developmental shifts (Chopik & Edelstein, 2014; Chopik, Edelstein, & Fraley,

2013; Hudson, Fraley, Chopik, & Heffernan, 2015), as well as cultural, environmental and geographical factors (Del Giudice, 2019) have also been shown to impact attachment styles.

While investigating age differences in attachment in a sample of 86 555 American, Canadian and UK participants aged 18 to 70, Chopik et al. (2013) observed that levels of attachment anxiety were highest amongst younger participants and lowest amongst middle-aged and older participants. In contrast, attachment avoidance presented with less of an age difference as levels of attachment avoidance were highest amongst middle-aged participants and lowest among both the younger and older participants (Chopik et al., 2013). Notably, in both younger and older participants, in particular, those individuals reportedly in intimate relationships were found to have lower levels of attachment insecurity than their single counterparts (Chopik et al., 2013). Similarly, Chopik and Edelstein (2014) also considered age differences in attachment in 90 904 participants aged 18 to 64 across 81 different countries. Their findings also indicated that levels of attachment anxiety were highest in younger participants while levels of attachment avoidance were highest in both middle-aged and older participants (Chopik & Edelstein, 2014). Based on these results, it is possible that obtaining a more securely attached bond with one's intimate partner may also be influenced by partners' experiences related to certain developmental stages.

An IPNB perspective posits that "a blow to an attachment relationship would just as readily be a blow to the mind" (Siegel, 2019, p. 225). The impact of change on the attachment system may, therefore, not only be considered significant, but may also be seen to affect other aspects of the person's functioning, given the triangle of well-being (Siegel, 2012a). In addition, it has been argued that adult intimate relationships offer another opportunity to reach a more secure attachment state despite our earlier childhood relationships (Wallin, 2007). Complete attachment relationships in adulthood usually develop over a number of years (Allen, 2013).

Zeifman and Hazan (2008) proposed four stages in the development of attachment. The first stage involves acquaintanceship, an exploratory phase that includes playful behaviours and potentially flirtatious interactions (Allen, 2013). Evidence suggests that the focus is placed on finding partners who are kind, responsive, competent and familiar (Zeifman

& Hazan, 2008). Romantic infatuation is the second stage and is characterised by behaviours, such as physical touch (cuddling, kissing) and prolonged mutual eye contact and gazing (Zeifman & Hazan, 2008). The third or clear-cut attachment stage embodies all four core characteristics of attachment as previously mentioned in relation to the intimate partner: seeking proximity, separation distress, source of comfort, and secure exploration base. The final stage involves the attainment of psychological security (Zeifman & Hazan, 2008). Accordingly, the adult attachment relationship between partners gradually develops based on the nature of their interaction during these stages.

Furthermore, attachment theory perceives intimate adult relationships as being based on the satisfaction of needs, such as emotional support, care, sexual gratification, familiarity and responsiveness (Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015). As such, the potential appeal or attractiveness of an intimate relationship is determined by the kind of relationship that is sought, as well as the needs and desires that are expected to be fulfilled (Chopik & Edelstein, 2014; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015). A kind of “psychological attraction” is therefore understood as influencing one’s choice of partner in adult intimate relationships. Arguably, many individuals seek a relationship characteristic of what would be considered a secure attachment style.

Secure attachment

Allen (2013) summarised secure attachment as feeling confident in the availability and emotional responsiveness of one’s attachment figure during times of distress. Accordingly, when one is securely attached in adult intimate relationships, the relationship is characterised by commitment, trust, stability, reciprocity, cooperation, interdependence, and open communication facilitated by self-disclosure and effective emotional expression (Allen, 2013; Levine & Heller, 2012). However, secure attachment relationships are not unimpeachable and exempt from conflict. Instead, they offer an environment of emotional trust within which a repair process can exist to address and resolve problems (Allen, 2013). Giving one’s partner the benefit of the doubt regarding his or her intentions and practising forgiveness plays a cardinal role in secure attachment (Allen, 2013). Dwiwardani et al. (2014) discovered that a secure attachment style not only related to the development of forgiveness, but also showed support for the development of virtues, such as humility and gratitude.

Their varied resources for dealing with stress makes it unnecessary for the securely attached to resort to psychological defences that distort perception and limit coping flexibility (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a). At the same time, secure attachment facilitates an attitude of kindness and acceptance towards the self, leaving a person to view him- or herself as valuable, worthy and loveable while being able to tolerate criticism from the self and others (Allen, 2013; Homan, 2018). This balanced view of the self allows the person to see and tolerate both the positive and negative aspects of him- or herself and respond with a willingness to adjust to the situation (Allen, 2013; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Based on this idea of an internally secure base, Allen (2013) proposed that the concept of psychological security, as also included in Zeifman and Hazan's (2008) stages of attachment development, be amended to include not only security of attachment, but also security with the self. Ultimately, in a counterintuitive way, secure attachment promotes self-reliance without compromising intimacy (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Furthermore, secure attachment has been shown to be positively correlated with psychological well-being (PWB) (Marrero-Quevedo, Blanco-Hernandez, & Hernandez-Cabrera, 2018). In particular, attachment was found to have the strongest relationship with the positive relations with others subscale of PWB (Marrero-Quevedo et al., 2018). In their study exploring the influence of attachment on the sexual relationships of male same-sex couples, Starks and Parsons (2014) showed that attachment style was relevant to the quality and safety of the participants' sexual relationships. Securely attached participants, for example, had the highest levels of sexual communication in addition to reportedly having sex with their partners at least once a week (Starks & Parsons, 2014). Creating a secure bond with one's partner may be understood as the goal to be actively aspired to by both partners within an intimate relationship even if the relationship was initiated between two insecurely attached partners.

Anxious attachment

Anxious attachment is a hyper-activating pattern associated with insecurity and visibly distressing behaviours designed to elicit a reaction of responsiveness and care (Allen, 2013; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). This lack of confidence in the responsiveness of others is believed

to have developed from a childhood environment associated with inconsistent responsiveness (Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015). Unlike secure attachment, anxious attachment personifies ineffective dependence, with a predisposition towards attachment and away from exploration (Allen, 2013; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Anxious attachment is therefore characterised by a difficulty in regulating distance and closeness in the relationship (Seedall & Lachmar, 2016). Accordingly, anxiously attached individuals often have an increased need for closeness or intimacy that sees them passionately and quickly falling in love, prematurely self-disclosing information, and idealising their intimate partners (Allen, 2013; Hudson & Fraley, 2017; Li & Chan, 2012). They do, however, have a sensitivity to rejection and criticism from others, combined with a fear of being separated from or abandoned by their partners. This may further lead to hypervigilance for signs of inconsistency or betrayal, and an excessive need for reassurance. Moreover, they tend to have difficulty resolving conflict, partly due to a tendency towards emotional reactivity and distrust, which may also see them engaging in behaviours that inadvertently push their partners away (Allen, 2013; Li & Chan, 2012).

The view of the self in anxious attachment is likely to be very negative with significant self-criticism, a belief of being unloved and weak, a lack of self-reliance and competence, and a self-esteem largely dependent on the opinions of others (Cantazaro & Wei, 2010; De Paoli, Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, & Krug, 2017; Martins, Canavarro, & Moreira, 2015; Sheinbaum et al., 2015). Despite what may seem like many potentially unpleasant attributes and behaviours within their intimate relationships, those individuals with an anxious attachment style do, however, also possess some admirable qualities. Due to their history of both positive and frustrating experiences within their relationships, individuals with an anxious attachment style do not give up on their relationships as a source of comfort and security (Allen, 2013). Their ambivalence becomes an expression of hope and a possible pathway to security as they continue to pursue their attachment (Allen, 2013).

Exemplifying this notion, Seedall and Lachmar (2016) conducted a positively themed study in which couples were asked to discuss how they had met. The results indicated that participants high in attachment anxiety generally felt more positive towards their partners. Interestingly, however, while men higher in attachment anxiety held such positive feelings

towards their partners, simultaneous skin conductance showed psychophysiological evidence that their female partners were feeling alarmed and distressed (Seedall & Lachmar, 2016). These findings highlighted a potential dynamic where, regardless of the nature of interaction, men with anxious attachment styles may function in ways experienced as distressing by their female partners (Seedall & Lachmar, 2016). As such, understanding the potential presentation and influence of an insecure attachment bond on one's intimate relationship becomes crucial to effectively navigating its impact.

Avoidant attachment

Avoidant attachment appears to be the polar opposite of anxious attachment in that it adopts a deactivating pattern based on a predisposition towards exploration and distance rather than attachment (Allen, 2013; Levine & Heller, 2012; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). A childhood environment of consistent unresponsiveness is believed to contribute to an avoidant attachment pattern (Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015). Avoidant attachment does not mean that individuals do not have relationships. Rather it suggests that their relationships are more likely to lack closeness, intimacy, and emotional dependence on intimate partners (Allen, 2013; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). This "self-sufficient loner" (Allen, 2013, p. 87) tends to respond to his or her partner's emotional dependence and communication efforts with stonewalling or expressions of contempt. They also display limited responsiveness to their partners' distress and may even become angry, hostile or rejecting in response to their partners' needs (Allen, 2013).

In this regard, a meta-analysis by Li and Chan (2012) revealed that avoidant attachment was negatively related to indicators of relationship quality, such as connectedness, general satisfaction and support. Avoidant attachment is ultimately self-protective, leading individuals to avoid any dependence on others whom they automatically expect to be rejecting. Furthermore, it results in their projecting their own negativity onto others, and adopting a sense of defensive self-inflation (Allen, 2013; Levine & Heller, 2012; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). In contrast to the balanced self-perception of secure attachment and the self-critical view of anxious attachment, avoidant attachment includes a view of the self that is imbalanced by leaning towards self-enhancement or feeling "one-up" (Allen, 2013, p. 89) in relation to others.

It has been suggested that men more frequently score high on attachment avoidance whereas women tend to score high on attachment anxiety (Del Giudice, 2019). Both types of attachment insecurity (anxious and avoidant) were shown to have a generally negative effect on aspects of relationship quality (Givertz, Woszidlo, Segrin, & Jia, 2019; Li & Chan, 2012). Avoidant attachment, in particular, was also shown to be even more detrimental to relationship satisfaction than anxious attachment (Molero, Shaver, Fernández, & Recio, 2017). Attachment avoidance in both sexes, as well as attachment anxiety in males, were further identified as lowering interpartner trust which, in turn, lowered relationship satisfaction (Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017). Co-parenting couples with high levels of anxious and avoidant attachment also reported increased co-parenting conflict and lower marital satisfaction and co-parenting cooperation (Young, Riggs, & Kaminski, 2017). The increase in conflict could, perhaps, be explained by Oka, Brown and Miller's (2016) findings which suggested that insecure attachment leaves partners feeling helpless in their relationships, in turn, leading to relational aggression as they try to regain their perceived loss of power.

When contemplating attachment in adult intimate relationships, it is important to take into account both partners' attachment styles. Ultimately, it is the interaction between the two partners' attachment styles that communicates valuable information about the individuals and their relationship dynamic. In this regard, Allen (2013) emphasised a few important findings regarding the matching or mismatching of partner attachment styles based on existing research. Firstly, while individuals with secure attachment styles tend to partner with each other, some findings suggest that individuals who are insecurely attached also tend to be relatively attracted to other individuals with insecure attachment (Allen, 2013). However, an insecure attachment style can be made more secure by partnering with a securely attached partner, in which case the negative effects of the insecure attachment will be mitigated by the securely attached partner (Allen, 2013).

Secondly, a matching between two individuals who are anxious and avoidant in their attachment styles is associated with a significant degree of dissatisfaction, power struggles and an escalating activation-deactivation cycle that may lead to violence (Allen, 2013). Thirdly, however, and perhaps most importantly, regardless of their attachment styles and

whether it is matched or mismatched, it is possible for a couple to use their particular matching of styles to increase the relationship's attachment security over time (Allen, 2013).

Other research also supports this notion of taking into consideration the influence of partners' attachment styles on their couple dynamics. For example, a number of studies have explored the way in which a particular attachment style influences a person's attitude and behaviours towards typical topics and processes within a couple's relationship, such as arguments and conflict management, forgiveness, partner support and intimacy (Kimmes & Durtschi, 2016; Hudson & Fraley, 2017; Ricco & Sierra, 2017; Tougas, Peloquin, & Mondor, 2016; Wilson et al., 2013). For instance, results showed that relationships that had at least one insecurely attached individual had a significantly higher likelihood of physical or sexual relational aggression than two securely attached partners (Wilson et al., 2013). The highest levels of aggression were observed in couples that had two insecurely attached partners (Wilson et al., 2013). In addition, amongst individuals with an avoidant attachment style, the choice of conflict management tactic was influenced by their consideration of both the benefit and threat associated with the argument while, for those with anxious attachment, only the threat of the argument mediated their choice (Ricco & Sierra, 2017). In the case of avoidant attachment, specifically, arguments are viewed as devoid of benefit, leading to the person being less likely to make use of conflict management tactics oriented towards the other person, for example obliging and compromising (Ricco & Sierra, 2017).

When it comes to forgiveness, Kimmes and Durtschi (2016) indicated that in the case of avoidant attachment, forgiveness was mediated by empathy whereas in anxious attachment, forgiveness was mediated by benign attributions of partner transgressions. Moreover, Hudson and Fraley (2017) confirmed the notion that those with anxious attachment styles require more time, affection and self-disclosure from their partners in order to define the relationship as close while those who are avoidantly attached define the relationship as close in the presence of much smaller quantities of the same aspects. Their overall findings confirmed that partners with avoidant attachment want less intimacy from their partners and are also personally less sensitive to its presence than those with anxious attachment (Hudson & Fraley, 2017). Insecure attachment therefore seems markedly linked to a variety of problematic relationship dynamics and consequences, such as a potential for

relational aggression and a lack of forgiveness. Arguably, these negative aspects increase the motivation for developing a more secure bond between intimate partners.

Individuals whose partners used more relationship maintenance behaviours, such as assurances, sharing tasks and positivity, reported a more secure attachment (Adams & Baptist, 2012). These same relationship maintenance behaviours were also negatively correlated with attachment insecurity (Adams & Baptist, 2012). In turn, a recent study by Taylor, Seedall, Robinson and Bradford (2018) confirmed the systemic interaction between partner attachment styles, showing a reaction in the couple's psychophysiological arousal during conflict. During the conflict process, individuals with higher levels of anxious attachment, who had partners with higher levels of avoidant attachment, were more likely to show increased arousal (Taylor et al., 2018). These findings corroborate both Allen (2013) and Wilson et al.'s (2013) conclusions that higher levels of aggression between insecurely attached partners may lead to power struggles resulting from the activation-deactivation dynamic between anxious and avoidant partners, specifically. Accordingly, it is possible that assisting such insecurely attached partners in developing the relationship maintaining behaviours suggested by Adams and Baptist (2012) would not only aid in breaking the arousal dynamic leading to conflict, but would also possibly aid partners in developing a more secure attachment.

Research on changes in attachment styles following psychotherapeutic intervention has yielded various results. A study by Johnson et al. (2016) examining the patterns of anxious and avoidant attachment change across eight sessions of couples therapy indicated little change in attachment patterns apart from a slight decline in attachment anxiety amongst women. In addition, no association was found between a person's attachment style and that of his or her partner. Similarly, Burgess et al. (2016) considered session-by-session changes in couples across 13 to 35 emotionally focused couples therapy sessions. In contrast to those of Johnson et al. (2016), their results showed a decrease in session-by-session relationship-specific attachment avoidance and anxiety, as well as a significant increase towards security in terms of couples' attachment behaviour (Burgess et al., 2016). While further research is warranted in order to offer greater clarity on the influence of psychotherapy on attachment

style, it could perhaps be hypothesised that changes in attachment style may be related to the duration and nature of psychotherapy.

Given the body of knowledge regarding adult attachment discussed in this section, it becomes clear that partners' attachment security may significantly influence both their individual functioning, as well as their interpersonal couple dynamics. However, despite attachment theory and application having been widely explored in research, I would postulate that succinctly condensing the theory in order to convey it to couples in practice, may not always be an easy task. Moreover, Fraley and Roisman (2019) more recently noted certain challenges related to understanding the development of adult attachment styles based on longitudinal research. Accordingly, it was suggested that attachment styles show greater plasticity during childhood and adolescence than during adulthood (Fraley & Roisman, 2019). Furthermore, while early experiences related to primary caregiving contribute to adult attachment, the contributions are indicated as being less significant than previously believed, as well as perhaps being simply one of many potential environmental and social influences on attachment (Fraley & Roisan, 2019). Arguably, identifying further potential environmental and social influences may also be beneficial to understanding adult attachment.

3.3.3. Conceptualising Attachment

In summary, I envision and propose adult attachment as functioning like a scale that is either in (secure) or out (insecure) of balance. When securely attached, the scale will be perfectly balanced, as illustrated in Figure 3.1 below, with the person experiencing and displaying all qualities and behaviours to a balanced degree. Partners who are securely attached will therefore be able to maintain a healthy balance between intimacy and self-reliance, interdependence and independence, and proximity and exploration. However, if insecurely attached, the scale will tip in either direction, resulting in a predisposition towards those qualities and behaviours.

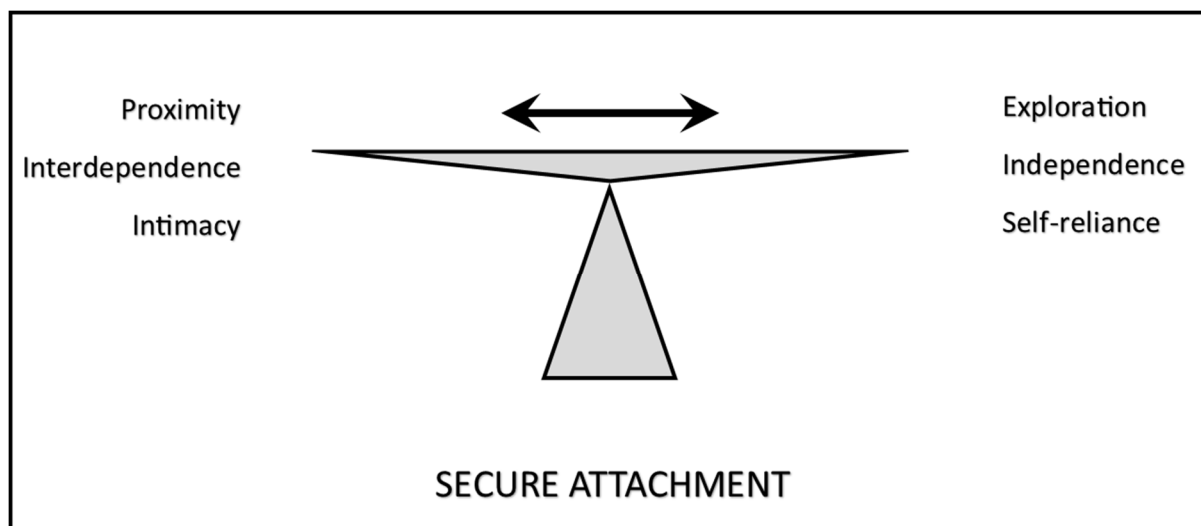


Figure 3.1. Secure attachment scale

In the scale's unbalanced state, this predisposition will lead to the presentation of certain qualities indicative of anxious and avoidant attachment, respectively, as seen in Figures 3.2 and 3.3 below.

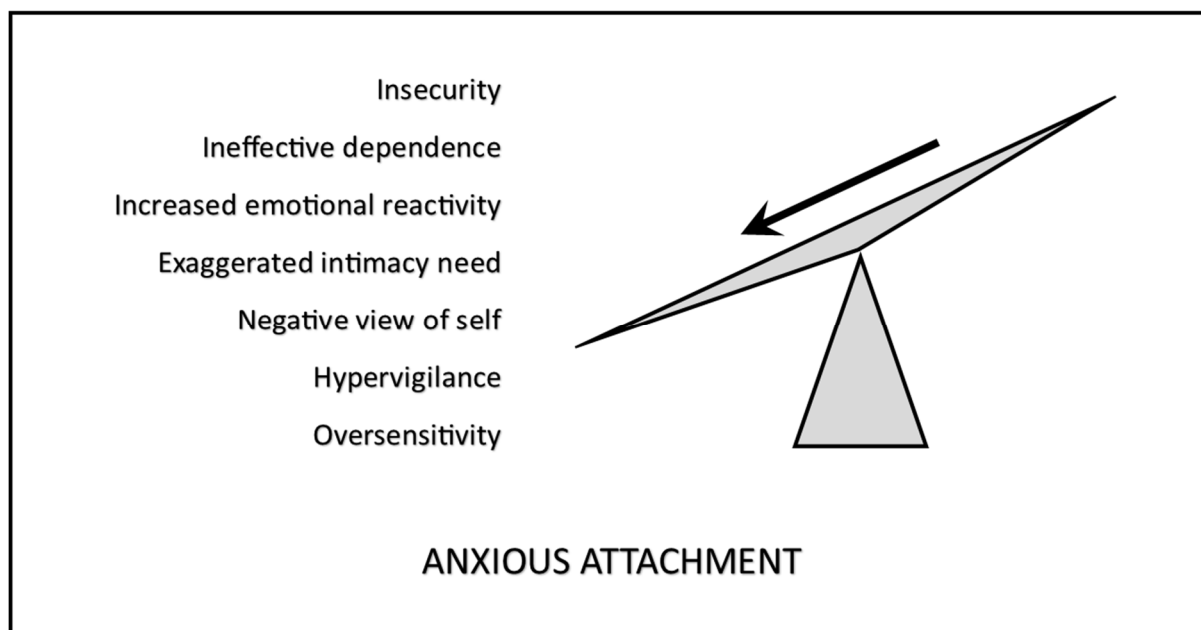


Figure 3.2. Anxious attachment scale

Intimate partners with an anxious attachment style will therefore experience an exaggerated need for intimacy, as well as hypervigilance, oversensitivity and insecurity regarding their relationship. They will likely display ineffective dependence on their partners, increased emotional reactivity, as well as a negative view of themselves.

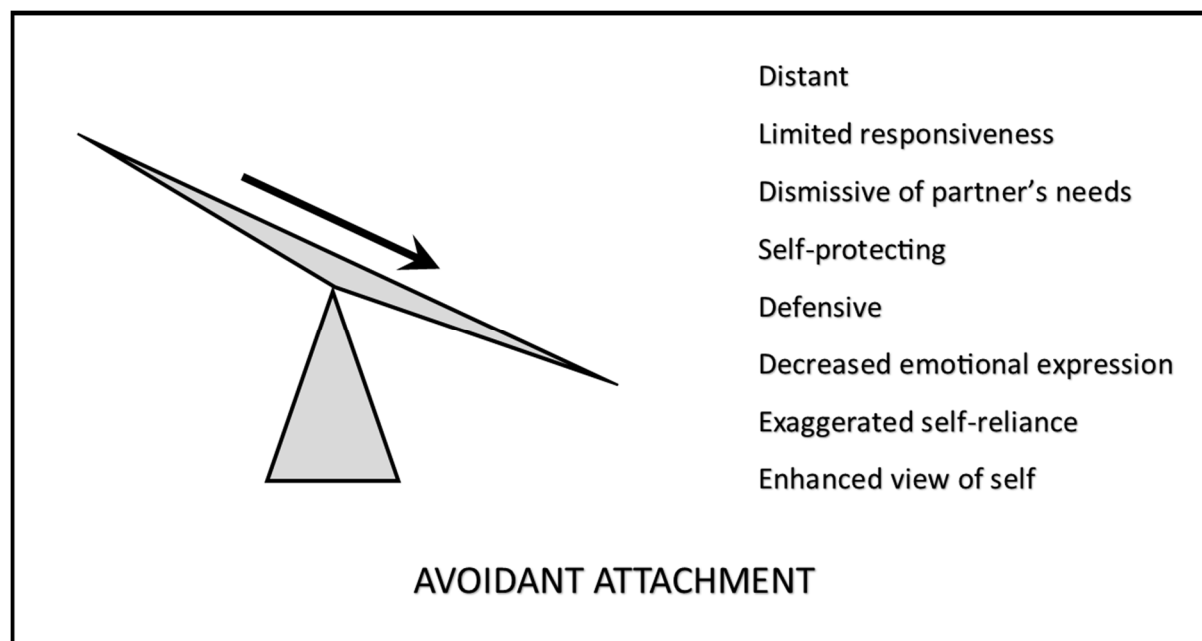


Figure 3.3. Avoidant attachment scale

In contrast, intimate partners with an avoidant attachment style are likely to come across as distant, defensive, lacking in emotional expression, limited in their responsiveness, and dismissive of their partners' needs. Prone to an exaggerated self-reliance, they may come across as self-protecting with an enhanced view of themselves.

As previously mentioned, in accordance with IPNB theory, attunement presents as an intra- and interpersonal connector. In turn, secure attachment is specifically enabled by interpersonal attunement.

3.3.4. Attunement through Attachment

Interpersonal attunement is the primary trait of a secure attachment style (Siegel, 2007). Psychological attunement specifically enables sensitive responsiveness to the self and partner, which is essential to the development of secure attachment (Allen, 2013). According to Siegel (2007), attunement is an essential element of individual survival and thriving, which he further views as the core component of empathic relationships where partners "sense a clear image of our mind in the mind of another" (Siegel, 2007, p. 290). Secure attachment is based on collaborative and reciprocal communication whereby a person's emotional and behavioural experiences are seen, acknowledged and directly responded to by another, leading to an integrative, caring link of communication between them (Siegel, 2012a).

Attachment theory suggests that this “dance of connection” (p. 34) is strongly influenced by the communication dance between infant and primary caregiver during early development (Siegel, 2012a). With this in mind, the ability of the primary caregiver to reflect and mentalise the infant’s internal experience offers the key to attachment security (Siegel, 2012a). Siegel (2012a) refers to this ability to see both the internal worlds of the self and other as “mindsight” (p.34), proposing that it will not only lead to a more secure attachment, but also promote the growth of integrative fibres in the brain.

Similarly, Stephen Porges’ (1995) polyvagal theory supports the notion of human social engagement and connection as being biologically based. Porges coined the term “neuroception” to indicate the neural process involved in environmental risk evaluation based on the interpretation of body movements, gestures, facial expressions, and vocalisations of others (Devereaux, 2017). Accordingly, neuroception determines whether a person will respond to another with open receptivity or interpret the interaction as a threat, resulting in a fight, flight or freeze reaction (Devereaux, 2017). As a result, neuroception becomes a form of biological attunement, influencing interpersonal connection and communication. A study on mindfulness, spousal attachment and marital satisfaction also indicated that attunement between intimate partners encouraged the activation and growth of neural circuitry associated with a sense of safety, security and positive affect within the relationship (Jones et al., 2011).

Likewise, based on their respective reviews of the literature, both Ehrlich (2019) and Pietromonaco and Beck (2019) suggested that adult attachment could be linked to partners’ physiological processes and physical health. In particular, susceptibility to illness and poorer disease outcomes were discovered to be associated with insecure attachment (Pietromonaco & Beck, 2019). These findings support the IPNB triangle of well-being’s perspective of attunement (Siegel, 2012a) as enabled by the functioning of the brain or body which, in turn, stands in a reciprocal relationship with both mind (mindfulness) and interpersonal relationships (attachment).

In summary, while the attachment system is created in childhood and is largely due to the bond with the primary caregiver, it extends into adulthood and across the lifespan.

Divided into secure and insecure attachment styles, the more secure attachment style, in particular, is considered beneficial to intimate relationship functioning and dynamics. Securely attached relationships are often characterised by increased trust, stability, and commitment, cultivated by partners who engage in reciprocity, open communication, and effective emotional expression. Attachment is a vital part of creating interpersonal attunement between partners. However, its contribution to intimate relationships is perhaps optimised by integrating it with intrapersonal attunement (mindfulness) as proposed by an interpersonal neurobiological perspective. As such, an integration of attachment and mindfulness may be necessary in order to gain optimal insight into the role of these concepts within intimate relationships.

3.4. Integrating Connections: Mindfulness & Attachment

3.4.1. Introduction

Both attachment and mindfulness have been presented as important concepts within the field of interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB). As previously discussed, mindfulness has been established as facilitating intrapersonal attunement while attachment determines interpersonal attunement (Siegel, 2010). Mindfulness and attachment have also been shown to have an influence on both our neurobiological and physiological functioning and the functioning of our interpersonal relationships. Thus, intra- and interpersonal attunement, respectively, could influence both one's relationships and the functioning of one's brain and body. However, in the current study, it is particularly the integration between mindfulness and attachment as it concerns one's relational and neurobiological functioning that is of interest.

In keeping with an integrative approach, Siegel (2009, 2010) links the outcomes of mindfulness, not only with the prefrontal functions of the brain, but also with the characteristics of secure attachment. Similarly, Shaver, Lavy, Saron and Mikulincer (2007) emphasised the parallels between the psychological and neurological components of mindfulness, effective regulation of self and emotions, as well as attachment security. However, identifying the processes underlying the relationship between mindfulness and attachment is one of the primary goals of the present study.

3.4.2. Conceptual similarities between Mindfulness and Attachment

From a theoretical point of view, intimate partners who have higher levels of mindfulness have the ability to pay attention to their own intrapersonal processes, as well as the interpersonal dynamics with their partners in the present moment, with a stance of acceptance rather than judgement (Baer, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Furthermore, a link between mindfulness and secure attachment means that intimate partners are more likely to experience commitment, trust, stability, reciprocity, interdependence, open communication, effective emotional expression, and tolerance towards criticism within their relationships (Allen, 2013; Levine & Heller, 2012). Moreover, an overlap appears to exist in the composition of mindfulness and attachment, as both include aspects of trust, effective emotional regulation through considered reactivity to inner experiences, reserving judgement and nonattachment or letting go (Allen, 2013; Baer, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

It is my contention that due to behaviours and traits, such as non-judgement, open-mindedness, acceptance, nonattachment, and observing and describing with awareness, partners with higher levels of mindfulness may be more able to embody characteristics typically associated with secure attachment. For instance, such characteristics of secure attachment would include open communication, effective emotional regulation, and giving one's partner's intentions the benefit of the doubt.

Ryan et al. (2007) highlighted three connections between mindfulness and felt security (attachment). Accordingly, experiences of attentive, responsive and sensitive caregiving are more likely to foster both secure attachment and mindfulness. Furthermore, the association between mindfulness and attachment appears to be bi-directional in nature. Lastly, both mindfulness and attachment security have been shown to contribute to various positive intra- and interpersonal outcomes. These connections further suggest an association between mindfulness and secure attachment while emphasising the importance of both these concepts to the well-being and functioning of intimate relationships. In addition, Mikulincer and Shaver (2007b) noted the importance of availability, sensitivity and responsiveness as ingredients of attachment security. Similarly, Allen (2013) has summarised secure attachment as feeling confident in the availability and emotional responsiveness of

one's attachment figure during times of distress. Accordingly, it can be argued that increased levels of mindfulness enable intimate partners to be more present and engaged without judgement, which is likely to foster qualities, such as availability, sensitivity and responsiveness which are associated with attachment security.

As noted, a sense of security is not always exclusively related to physical security. Emotional security is crucial to both attachment and intimate relationships. In his work on the application of attachment theory in psychotherapy, Wallin (2007) highlights the integration of attachment as a form of intersubjectivity or interaction between two people, "the interface of two minds" (p. 52), which allows for what can be viewed as interpersonal emotional regulation. In this way, the management of emotional regulation and security of partners in intimate relationships can be considered a joint venture. The qualities associated with mindfulness as mentioned earlier (for example non-judgement and observing and describing with awareness), would, arguably, facilitate such interpersonal emotional regulation.

The value of an integrative lens is vital when trying to make sense of the relationship between mindfulness and attachment. Siegel (2007) draws an association between the basic functions of these two constructs and that of the prefrontal cortex, namely body system regulation, balancing emotions, attunement to others, fear modulation, responding flexibly, and a display of empathy and insight. Siegel (2007) also proposes that interpersonal integration or attunement is not only vital for survival, thriving and a sense of being grounded in the world, but is also likely to promote internal attunement and mindfulness. Research evidence provides support for this association between mindfulness and secure attachment, showing that both attachment avoidance and anxiety are associated with lower levels of mindfulness (Pepping & Duvenhage, 2016; Pepping et al., 2014; Pepping, O'Donovan, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Hanish, 2015).

In addition, some studies have suggested that early childhood experiences precipitate the development of mindfulness by means of attachment processes (Medeiros, Gouveia, Canavarro, & Moreira, 2016; Pepping & Duvenhage, 2016) while other studies have proposed that the relationship between mindfulness and attachment is mediated by additional

constructs, such as cognitive processes and emotional regulation (Caldwell & Shaver, 2013; Pepping, Davis, & O'Donovan, 2013). Correspondingly, in their study with 572 Australian undergraduate students, Pepping et al. (2013) concluded that both attachment anxiety and avoidance were associated with lower levels of mindfulness, accounted for by difficulty with emotional regulation. In addition, Caldwell and Shaver (2013) determined that avoidant attachment predicted lower levels of mindfulness, mediated by thought suppression and poorer attentional control in their sample of 93 adults between the ages of 19 and 45. In contrast, anxious attachment predicted lower levels of mindfulness mediated by rumination and poorer attentional control (Caldwell & Shaver, 2013).

Several studies have also shown that the association between mindfulness and attachment is mediatory in nature. For instance, it has been suggested that attachment facilitates the relationship between mindfulness and marital satisfaction (Jones et al., 2011) while mindfulness enables the relationship between attachment and a variety of variables, such as relationship quality, depression, anxiety, and psychological distress (Chen, He, Fan, & Cai, 2018; Martin, Gilliath, Deboeck, Lang, & Kerr, 2017; Saavedra et al., 2010). In their meta-analysis and review of existing research, Stevenson, Emerson and Millings (2017) also observed a significant relationship between mindfulness and attachment. In particular, anxious attachment was more often negatively associated with mindfulness compared to avoidant attachment (Stevenson et al., 2017). Moreover, it has been indicated that anxious attachment is negatively correlated with four of the five facets of mindfulness, namely describing, non-judgement, nonreactivity and acting with awareness (Stevenson et al., 2017). The association between mindfulness and attachment may, therefore, stem from certain direct correlations between different aspects of the two constructs or from mediating variables facilitating the association.

Siegel (2012a) highlighted the importance of both differentiation and linkage as fundamental parts of integration. Accordingly, differentiation offers a way to specialisation and individualisation whereas linkage involves the sharing of energy and information. Linking differentiated concepts, such as mindfulness and attachment, therefore allows both to preserve their central qualities while becoming part of a functional whole that is ultimately greater than the sum of its parts (Siegel, 2012a). As a result, an integration between

mindfulness and attachment could improve both clinicians' and researchers' understanding of not only the functioning of intimate relationships, but also of the components involved in creating satisfactory relationships. Particularly in the case of clinicians working with couples in practice, identifying avenues for assisting intimate partners in achieving optimal relationship functioning is vital. Furthermore, in view of the paucity of local research exploring the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of South African couples, investigations such as the current study are critical for understanding the unique intimate relationship experiences of couples within this particular sociocultural environment. Therefore, exploring the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples within intimate relationships might also offer clearer insight into the association between mindfulness and attachment given its potential for both theory and practice.

The exact nature of the relationship between mindfulness and attachment is still largely unexplained. Pepping, Davis and O'Donovan (2015) suggested that the relationship might not be as bi-directional as previously thought, but rather more distal or indirect. In the first part of their study, Pepping et al. (2015) investigated whether increasing levels of mindfulness through participation in an experimental intervention would increase attachment security and decrease attachment anxiety and avoidance. While they were able to successfully increase participants' levels of mindfulness, no changes in participant attachments were reported. Based on these findings, Pepping and colleagues (2015) posited that the relationship between attachment and mindfulness did not appear to be the result of increased levels of mindfulness allowing for less influence from attachment insecurity. Therefore, a direct relationship between mindfulness and attachment was not supported by their findings. In the second part of their study, Pepping et al. (2015) considered whether an increase in attachment security would, in turn, increase levels of mindfulness. Similar to the findings in the first part of their study, their experimental intervention enabled them to increase attachment security, but not mindfulness.

In contrast to that of Pepping et al.'s (2015) findings, Melen, Pepping and O'Donovan (2017) found that priming attachment anxiety was associated with a decrease in state emotional regulation. In addition, such a decrease in state emotional regulation also decreased state mindfulness (Melen et al., 2017). Based on these results, the authors

concluded that heightened anxiety regarding one's intimate relationship and possible abandonment leads to difficulty in regulating one's emotions, which reduces one's capacity for mindfulness (Melen et al., 2017). In contrast, priming attachment avoidance had no such effects (Melen et al., 2017). Melen et al.'s (2017) study supported the notion that the relationship between mindfulness and attachment may be indirect and explained by the role of intermediary elements. Arguably, existing studies identifying mediating factors between mindfulness and attachment also support the notion of a distal or indirect relationship between mindfulness and secure attachment (Caldwell & Shaver, 2013; Pepping et al., 2013; Pickard, Caputi, & Grenyer, 2016; Redondo & Luyten, 2018).

Previously, Pepping et al. (2015) suggested that the relationship between mindfulness and attachment might be due to a common "developmental precursor" (p. 8) that fosters both constructs. Such an antecedent may, for example, be parental rejection and parental warmth as identified in Pepping and Duvenhage's (2016) study. Parental rejection was indicated as being associated with both attachment insecurity and low levels of mindfulness while parental warmth was shown to be associated with attachment security and high levels of mindfulness (Pepping & Duvenhage, 2016). Melen et al. (2017) have further suggested that attachment may be a precursor to mindfulness. Further research in this regard is, however, warranted. Identifying precipitating and mediating factors responsible for the association between mindfulness and attachment is important in view of their value in intimate relationships.

Thus, the present study strived to contribute to understanding and identifying some of the possible facilitating factors underpinning the mindfulness and attachment experiences of South African couples. Predominantly, however, this study aimed to understand how both mindfulness and attachment contributed to couples' abilities to achieve and sustain relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction can be viewed as a vital part of attaining optimal intimate relationship functioning, well-being and even flourishing within and between partners (Compton & Hoffman, 2020; Fowers et al., 2016; Seligman, 2011). Such a focus on the processes of optimal functioning and well-being is strongly aligned with the principles underlying the field of positive psychology (Compton & Hoffman, 2020; Rosenfeld & Gogineni, 2019; Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology

presents an alternative to the focus on pathology within the field of psychology, instead placing the emphasis on positive subjective experiences, positive individual traits, and positive institutions such as couples and families (Compton & Hoffman, 2020; Rosenfeld & Gogineni, 2019; Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Furthermore, both mindfulness and relationship satisfaction are recognised constructs within positive psychology (Compton & Hoffman, 2020; Ivtzan & Lomas, 2016; O'Connell, O'Shea, & Gallagher, 2016).

Nevertheless, the positive psychology field is often challenged for holding a falsely dichotomous view of personal traits and processes as either positive and promoting well-being or negative and compromising well-being (Held, 2018; McNulty & Fincham, 2012). Such a stance is argued to reduce complex characteristics that need to be assessed within situation specific scenarios as merely good or bad qualities to either be strived for or avoided (Held, 2018; McNulty & Fincham, 2012). Therefore, a more balanced view incorporating the complete and integrated continuum of human experience is proposed (Gruman, Lumley, & González-Morales, 2018). Furthermore, the cross-cultural applicability of positive psychology findings – especially given the field's overreliance on North American and European participants – is also frequently questioned (Compton & Hoffman, 2020; Yakushko & Blodgett, 2018). Critics emphasise that labelling traits and virtues will be dependent on the socio-cultural context within which it occurs (Compton & Hoffman, 2020; Yakushko & Blodgett, 2018). Moreover, the centrality of individualism to positive psychology is reasoned to contribute to a dismissal of the experiences of diverse communities, as well as the systemic and institutional factors influencing their realities (Yakushko, 2018; Yakushko & Blodgett, 2018). As a result, systemic forms of oppression such as racism and sexism are reduced to being nothing more than the product of an individual's state of mind, their choices and ability for self-control (Yakushko, 2018).

Considerations of the socio-cultural, systemic and environmental factors impacting participants' experiences are particularly relevant in the current South African sample. While positive psychology is suggested to be well represented in South African research (Coetzee & Viviers, 2007; Kagee, 2014), its applicability to a society that remains plagued by inequality, social injustice and various psychosocial stressors has been challenged (Kagee, 2014). In

particular, Kagee (2014) warned that in the absence of structural changes to the society and economy, positive psychology within the South African context risks dismissing actual human distress by making the individual responsible for finding a solution to systemic oppression.

In response, the current study duly acknowledges the existing psychosocial stressors and unique context within which South African couples find themselves. Accordingly, the present study aims to explore couples' mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences in an attempt to gain insight into the ways in which couples achieve and sustain optimal relationship functioning and satisfaction despite their particular psychosocial environment.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter endeavoured to provide a detailed overview of both mindfulness and attachment, bearing in mind the current study's focus on the expression of these constructs within intimate relationships. Apart from its general contribution to the IPNB triangle of well-being, mindfulness was shown to be particularly important within intimate relationships due to its influence on relationship satisfaction, emotional regulation, cognitive management and conflict resolution. Mindfulness was also discussed as the facilitator of internal attunement whereas attachment was described as creating interpersonal attunement. Attachment, particularly adult attachment, was discussed in terms of its relevance for intimate relationships, with secure attachment presented as the security bond likely to be most beneficial and aspired to within the intimate relationship between couples. It was further noted that the existing literature not only confirms conceptual similarities between mindfulness and, specifically, secure attachment, but that it also provides evidence of an association between the two constructs. The exact nature of the association, however, has yet to be further explored and elaborated on in future research. Subsequently, the present study seeks to contribute to the understanding of this association between mindfulness and secure attachment, as well as its potential contribution to enhancing couples' relationship satisfaction. In the chapter that follows, the methodology used to explore the aim of this study, namely the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples in intimate relationships, will be presented.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

Identifying and using the most appropriate research design and methods are critical to achieving research aims and answering research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Shaw & Frost, 2015). Keeping in mind the vast spectrum of experiences, thoughts, emotions, and actions that exist in the daily lives of couples in intimate relationships, Gabb and Fink (2015) emphasised the importance of the choice of research method for studies in this domain of interest. This chapter offers an overview of the methodology used to address the research aim of the current study. The research aim is presented, followed by a discussion of the research design according to which the study was conducted. Next, a detailed overview of the research participants is offered, reflecting not only on the method of sampling used but also on their particular demographic characteristics. The two phases of the data collection process are discussed before reviewing the specific measuring instruments used to obtain the quantitative data. This is followed by a discussion of the methods of data analysis. The chapter concludes with a review of the ethical considerations and trustworthiness applied in this study, as well as my subjective reflections on the research process. Khumalo and De Klerk (2018) emphasised that ethical conduct is the product of a researcher who holds extensive yet integrated knowledge of his or her field of study, treats both the participants and methodology in an ethical way, and focuses as much on promoting well-being as on academic output. This chapter aims to illustrate the consideration of, and adherence to, these aspects in the present study.

4.2. Research aim

The current study aimed to explore and describe the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences amongst South African couples in intimate relationships.

4.3. Research design

This study followed a convergent mixed methods research design, which involved a deliberate blending of qualitative and quantitative methods throughout the research process, ultimately leading to a synthesis of data and the generation of novel insights and perspectives

(Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Schoonenboom & Burke Johnson, 2017). Considering the complexity of human psychology and relationships, a mixed methods design was deemed most appropriate in terms of capturing the potentially multifaceted experiences of couples in intimate relationships. Shaw and Frost (2015) specifically identified such a pluralistic approach as validating the diversity of human experiences and accommodating a variety of interpretations and considerations. It has been further argued that such an approach is especially well-suited to the field of psychology due to its propensity for incorporating different perspectives with regard to answering the research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Shaw & Frost, 2015). A mixed methods approach was therefore deemed particularly valuable to the present psychology-based doctoral study.

A variety of other studies within the field of psychology and intimate relationships have made use of mixed methods research designs (Berk et al., 2019; Chonody & Gabb, 2019; Chonody, Gabb, Killian, & Dunk-West, 2018; Kennedy, Dalla, & Dreesman, 2018; Norona, Olmstead, & Welsh, 2018; Sells & Ganong, 2017). For instance, Kennedy et al. (2018) used a mixed methods design to investigate the marriage and well-being experiences of same-sex married partners. Likewise, Norona et al. (2018) used a mixed methods design to explore the precipitating factors to infidelity amongst emerging adults while Chonody et al. (2018) applied it to operationalise and test their newly-developed relationship quality scale. In addition, Chonody and Gabb (2019) used the same design to investigate the relationship maintenance behaviours in which romantic partners engaged in the late adulthood phase of life. Arguably, these studies' application of mixed methods research designs to explore their particularly nuanced research aims support the value of such mixed methods designs for psychology-based studies such as the present investigation. As such, a mixed methods design allows data to be uniquely integrated for novel findings that may not have been as easily captured by only a quantitative or qualitative design, respectively.

Due to its diverse methodology, a mixed methods research design is argued to be more extensive than single method research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Schoonenboom & Burke Johnson, 2017). The overall goal is to reduce uncertainty and achieve a more well-defined understanding of the particular social phenomenon in question (Greene, Benjamin, & Goodyear, 2001). This is not done at the

expense of either approach, but rather with the aim of focusing on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Shaw & Frost, 2015). Often referred to as the third research wave or movement, the logic of inquiry used by mixed methods research includes induction, deduction and abduction (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Underscored by pragmatism, mixed methods research attempts to gain knowledge through the integration of multiple perspectives and positions (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). As such, integration is central to mixed methods research (Plano Clark, 2019).

The current study employed between-method triangulation, which leads to an outcome of convergence, inconsistency and contradiction that allows for an understanding of the constructs in question (Denzin, 1978; Johnson et al., 2007). According to a convergent design, qualitative and quantitative data are collected simultaneously yet independently before converging the data to gain an in-depth understanding of the research phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In merging the data sets, convergence or divergence in findings can be noted, thereby expanding on the knowledge gained (Bartholomew & Brown, 2012). In addition, merging the data may, arguably, find the two data sets addressing and supporting each other's findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Plano Clark, 2019; Schoonenboom & Burke Johnson, 2019). Moreover, another significant advantage of a mixed methods design and approach, especially for the current study within the field of psychology, is the cultural benefit of integration as it provides a psychosocial context for the findings (Bartholomew & Brown, 2012). In this regard, the findings can be analysed and interpreted within the context in which the couples in intimate relationships find themselves, which is likely to further enrich the quality of the findings.

Despite its strengths, there are some proposed weaknesses to a mixed methods research design. Apart from being more expensive and time consuming, mixed methods designs require the researcher to be familiar with multiple methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In addition, problems related to mixed paradigms may need to be worked out while interpreting potentially conflicting results at times (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Some researchers such as Pelto (2015) question whether mixed methods research is altogether such a novel concept considering that it has been used since the early 20th century and for at least 80 years in the social sciences. I wish to further propose

that the degree to which a mixed methods or integrative approach feels new or foreign may be dependent on the particular academic field or theoretical orientation of the researcher or study. For instance, more than 400 varieties of psychotherapeutic approaches, each with its own theoretical model and conceptualisation of the human mind and functioning, exist (Zarbo, Tasca, Cattafi, & Compare, 2015). As a result, mixing theories, methods and knowledge to better understand the individual in his or her particular context is, arguably, a fairly common practice for psychology clinicians.

Timans, Wouters and Heilbron (2019) also identified some concerns with regard to the mixed methods research approach of combining methods. For example, they express concern for what seems like an unnecessary standardised framework for combining methods, as well as certain approaches that lead to recreating the separateness between methods (Timans et al., 2019). They further add their view of methods as “world-making technologies that encapsulate different assumptions on causality, rely on different conceptual relations and categorizations, allow for different degrees of emergence, and employ different theories of the data that they internalise as objects of analysis” (Timans et al., 2019, p. 212). Following Timans et al.’s (2019) view, the current presentation of these methods should be considered within the context of their development and history.

Within this mixed methods approach, the current study used a multiple case study design (Yin, 2018). This design was applied for exploratory, descriptive purposes in order to examine a relatively unknown phenomenon, namely the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples in intimate relationships, on its own terms and in an unbiased manner (Yin, 2018). Moreover, a case study design was particularly appropriate for the current study as it focused on answering “how” and “why” questions, as well as exploring contextual conditions without changing participant behaviour (Yin, 2018). Case studies are further said to convey clinical knowledge in such a way that it offers direct guidance for practical application (Dattilio, Edwards, & Fishman, 2010). This was particularly useful with regard to the current study as the purpose thereof was, at least in part, on presenting findings that might further guide clinicians working with couples in practice to develop interventions that would assist couples in creating satisfying and optimally functioning intimate relationships.

A multiple case study design is considered to be rigorous and dependable, allowing for analysis within and across settings to understand possible differences and similarities between cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2018). Multiple case studies allow for predictability in similar or contrasting results (Yin, 2018). In addition, the practice of applying boundaries to case studies was adhered to. These boundaries are similar to the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied to a quantitative research sample, indicating what will or will not be studied (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2018). As such, the research aim was kept focused and the scope of the study remained reasonable (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2018) by adhering to such boundaries in the present investigation. Accordingly, the potential unwanted influence of unrelated factors on the findings were prevented to the best of my ability as the researcher.

Despite their advantages, several criticisms have been lobbied against case study designs. The first concern relates to a possible lack of a well-defined protocol (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Cope, 2015; Yin, 2018). While the level of flexibility offered by case study research is considered a strength of the methodology (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014), the importance of systematically following a clear procedure is vital to ensure the rigour of the research (Cope, 2015; Yin, 2018). Perhaps the most frequent criticism mentioned against case study designs is that their results are unsuitable for generalising to the larger population (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Schwandt & Gates, 2018). This notion has, however, been repeatedly challenged to show that establishing typicality is not the intent of the researcher and that the case study design still allows for both naturalistic and analytic generalisation (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Schwandt & Gates, 2018; Yin, 2018). Analytic generalisation, in particular, allows for generalisations to be made about theoretical concepts and principles that may be relevant to a larger population rather than the characteristics of the participants in the study (Yin, 2018). Analytic induction further leads to the creation of an explanation for the common features or differences with regard to a particular phenomenon (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). The ability to generalise results from the current study to a larger population of couples was, arguably, further strengthened by the use of multiple case studies.

Moreover, the use of multiple case studies has been criticised as a result of the potential costs involved and the time required to conduct the research (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2018). In addition, reporting on a case study, and even more so on multiple case studies,

may also be challenging as the researcher is required to take what is intrinsically very complex data and to present it in a concise and simplified manner (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2006). Informally- or uncritically-written reports add to the criticism against case studies (Dattilio et al., 2010). Furthermore, concerns with regard to the likelihood of case studies simply confirming the researcher's preconceived ideas have also been raised (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2018). To ensure that the descriptions and interpretations of the case studies were accurate and unbiased, that a clear protocol was followed, and that the report was written clearly and critically, strategies for trustworthiness and rigour (Amankwaa, 2016; Cope, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013; Kornbluh, 2015; Petty et al., 2012) were applied in the current study. Certain strategies were therefore employed to compensate for any potential limitations related to a multiple case study design in the present study. Despite the challenges in terms of reporting on the findings, a multiple case study design was believed to be the most appropriate avenue for gaining insight and understanding into the nuanced phenomenon of the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples in this study.

4.4. Participants

4.4.1. Sampling

The current study aimed to recruit a sample of South African couples in intimate relationships. Purposive sampling is a form of sampling that allows for the creation of a sample that is both representative and comparable (Shneerson & Gale, 2015). It is also a primarily qualitative research technique used to select participants based on their ability to speak to the particular research questions guiding the study (Shneerson & Gale, 2015). In the present study, the goal was to recruit 10 to 12 couples for participation, using purposive sampling.

A call for participants, using electronic mail, was sent to several psychology practices and community organisations or posted on their social media platforms. Paid Facebook advertisements, specifically directed at users in intimate relationships, were also activated over the period of a month to spread the call for participants to potential couples. Utilising online platforms for recruiting participants has become increasingly commonplace in research (Shatz, 2017; Wise et al., 2016). Participating couples had to be married or to have been

cohabiting for at least 12 months, and neither partner could be in psychotherapy or treatment for any mental disorder at the time of participation. Couples who had been receiving medical or psychotherapeutic treatment for a mental disorder were excluded due to concerns regarding the influence of both medication and therapy on the intra- and interpersonal functioning of the couples. In this regard, both psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy have been found, for example, to positively affect intra- and interpersonal skills, such as emotional regulation, self-directed behaviour, and self-identity (McRae, Rekshan, Williams, Cooper, & Gross, 2014; Peterson et al., 2017). Psychotherapy has also been found to lead to changes in attachment security (Kirchmann et al., 2012; Levy, Kivity, Johnson, & Gooch, 2018; Taylor, Rietzschel, Danquah, & Berry, 2015).

Participants who expressed interest in the study were sent the call for participants information sheet (see Appendix B), the participant consent form (see Appendix D), as well as a submission to participate form (see Appendix C) by means of electronic mail. These documents provided participants with all the necessary information on the study that would enable them to decide on as well as commit with full informed consent. The submission to participate form, in Appendix C had to be completed and returned to the researcher prior to participating in the study. The information contained in this form enabled the researcher to ensure that participants met the criteria for participation and that they were accommodated at a suitable date and time during the first phase of data collection.

Despite significant interest expressed through electronic mail and social media messages requesting further information on participation, the final number of couples committing to participation was lower than initially expected. It was suspected that the exclusion of participants in psychotherapy or on medication was a large contributing factor. Seven couples who indicated that they had wanted to participate were excluded due to being on psychotropic medication or in psychotherapy.

As a result, snowball sampling was used in an attempt to recruit more participants for the study. As a type of purposive sampling, snowball sampling attempts to generate more participants from the existing sample (Palinkas et al., 2015). It has been proposed that snowball sampling is the most widely used qualitative research sampling method, enabling

the researcher to access new sampling pools when others have been exhausted (Noy, 2008). In the current study, snowball sampling was used by sending emails to the existing participating couples, inviting them to share the call for participation with their contacts who may have been interested in participating in the study. In addition, apart from the social media advertisements which had been posted and renewed, further electronic mail was sent to colleagues and professional contacts in an effort to recruit more participants.

The recruitment process lasted a total of six months. Given the lower than expected number of participants signing up for the study, attempts were made to recruit more participants even after the first phase of data collection had already commenced. Keeping in mind that the second phase of data collection was dependent on preliminary analysis of the data collected during the first phase, recruitment had to end before the second phase of data collection could commence. The final six couples recruited for the study all signed up prior to the first phase of data collection and within the first four months of recruitment. Despite continued attempts at recruiting more couples, no further couples signed up in the last two months of recruitment. For this reason, it is believed that a further extension in the period of recruitment would not have resulted in a significant increase in participants.

Saturation is a methodological principle in qualitative research indicating the point at which further data collection is unnecessary (Saunders et al., 2018). Many different approaches have been proposed for determining sample size and saturation, including rules of thumb based on considerations of past studies and experience; conceptual models based on, for example, theoretical framework and type of analysis; numerical guidelines drawn from empirical investigation; and statistical formulae (Sim, Saunders, Waterfield, & Kingstone, 2018). A distinction is also made between code saturation and meaning saturation. The former refers to a saturation point where no new ideas or themes are presented while the latter refers to a point where no further interpretations come to the fore (Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2017). With this in mind, the lower-than-expected number of couples recruited in the current study raised some concerns regarding the potential richness and depth of the data collected. A total of six suitable couples were recruited during the recruitment process that lasted five months. Steps were therefore taken to ensure saturation in the study. The results of the preliminary thematic analysis of the first phase of data collection were used to

determine the adequacy of the existing sample size. One of the research supervisors involved in the study also performed an independent thematic analysis on the preliminary data. In addition, a research auditor was appointed to further assess the available data. Based on the results of the analysis, combined with the feedback received from the supervisor and the academic consulted, the existing sample was concluded as adequate in terms of providing sufficiently rich or “thick” (Geertz, 1973) data to inform the research questions. Although the small sample size is unlikely to support saturation across cases, the existing thick data arguably provide nuanced and contextual descriptions of participants’ experiences.

4.4.2. Demographic characteristics

4.4.2.1. Sexual orientation

Both local and international research on intimate relationships largely continues to include only heterosexual couples (Khunou, 2012; Pettifor et al., 2014; Wechsberg et al., 2013). As far as the current study is concerned, the aim was to recruit a research sample that would be representative of both heterosexual and homosexual couples in South Africa. However, despite significant attempts to recruit more homosexual couples, the final research sample consisted of one homosexual and five heterosexual couples.

4.4.2.2. Relationship status and duration

Many existing studies focus only on couples who are married (Falconier, 2015; Jones et al., 2011; Lorenzo, Barry, & Khalifian, 2018; McCoy, Rauer, & Sabey, 2017). In reality, many modern couples, both locally and internationally, cohabit for some time prior to getting married, or opt out of getting married altogether (Moore & Govender, 2013; Willoughby & Belt, 2015; Willoughby, Carroll, & Busby, 2012). For the current study, only couples who had been married or cohabiting for more than 12 months were included. Couples who have been married or cohabiting for 12 months or longer are more likely to have reached Knapp’s (1978) bonding stage of relationship development where relationships become more consolidated, stable and committed. In the final research sample, all six of the couples were married. Table 4.1. provides a summary of the participants’ relationship status, as well as the length of their relationships.

4.4.2.3. Race

No attempt was made to select a participant sample with a particular racial representation. The final research sample consisted of one Black (B) couple, two Coloured (C) couples, two White (W) couples, and one interracial couple (Coloured/White).

4.4.2.4. Age

The participants' ages ranged from a minimum of 30 years old to a maximum of 53 years of age. The average age of the participants (mean) was 39.83, with a standard deviation of 6.77.

4.4.2.5. Home language

In their submission to participate forms, two couples indicated that their home language was bilingual, namely Afrikaans/English and Xhosa/English, respectively. Another participant identified her home language as Afrikaans while the remaining seven participants indicated their home language as English on their submission to participate forms. However, while engaging with these seven participants during their respective interviews, I found that another two out of the seven were, in fact, also bilingual (Afrikaans/English) at home. An example of the submission to participate form is included in Appendix C.

Table 4.1

Summary of Participating Couples

Couple	Status	Number of years married or cohabiting						Sexual orientation	Race	Province
		1-5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-25	25+			
1	Married	X						Homosexual	W	WC
2	Married		X					Heterosexual	C	WC
3	Married				X			Heterosexual	C/W	WC
4	Married		X					Heterosexual	C	WC
5	Married				X			Heterosexual	B	WC
6	Married				X			Heterosexual	W	FS

Table 4.1 provides a summary of the participating couples. As illustrated, the final participant sample for this study therefore consisted of six married couples. Of these six couples, five were heterosexual while only one was homosexual; two couples were Coloured, two were White, one was Black, and another interracial (Coloured/White). The number of years they had been married or cohabiting ranged from 1 to 20. Five of the couples resided in the Western Cape while the remaining couple resided in the Free State. One of the couples withdrew from participation in the study during the second phase of data collection. The data that had already been collected from them during the first phase of data collection was, however, still included in the study, with their consent.

4.5. Data collection

Consistent with a mixed methods research design and methodology, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in the current study. Furthermore, the process of data collection occurred in two phases. Quantitative data were gathered during the first phase of collection and consisted of self-report measures in the form of questionnaires to be completed by each participant. Qualitative data were collected during both phases of collection by way of semi-structured interviews formulated and conducted by me. Before the first phase of data collection, a pilot study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) was done in order to prepare for the semi-structured interview to be conducted with participants during the first phase. The goals of the pilot interview were to test the recording equipment and to pilot the interview questions in order to identify any potential problems with regard to the formulation and order of the questions. In addition, the pilot interview offered me an opportunity to become familiar and confident with the questions prior to conducting the interviews.

The pilot interview was conducted in the same venue as the one used for the participant interviews. Conducting the pilot interview was productive in that it allowed for the previously mentioned goals to be successfully achieved. During the process, I was able to note down certain observations and experiences that would be important in conducting the actual interviews. A short feedback and discussion session was held with the volunteer participant following the interview to gather information regarding his experiences pertaining to the questions and interview, and as a way of dealing with general questions or concerns. Both the volunteer and I experienced some concern regarding these questions potentially

being emotionally triggering to couples (participants), especially in terms of hearing their partners' responses. After some consideration, these concerns were addressed by elaborating on the rapport-building aspect of the interview to include a reflection on what the participants could experience during the interview. At the same time, guidance on how to approach the interview and how to process negative experiences was included.

As a clinical psychologist who regularly performs assessments and psychotherapy sessions with couples in practice, the difference in interviewing goals became extremely apparent to me during the pilot interview. I became aware of the importance of remaining cognisant of the purpose of the interviews. Unlike the research interviews, where the goal is data collection for the purpose of answering research questions, psychotherapy sessions extend beyond mere data and information collection and into the sphere of assisting couples in creating insight and generating growth and change. As a result, I made a note to approach the data collection phase with certain guidelines in mind. For instance, I reminded myself to use clarifying words or phrases during interviews to probe for more information, as necessary, while staying cognisant of interpretative reflections of participants' answers that could derail the focus of the question or even the purpose of the interview.

When scheduling the interviews with the participants, consideration was given to the interview venue, as well as the days of the week and interview times. Participants were given various options in terms of the dates, times of day, and venues that had been set aside for the interviews and were able to select those that best suited them. Two venues in two different parts of the Western Cape were offered, allowing couples the opportunity to choose their preferred location. The venues on offer were my own psychology practice rooms. Interviews were conducted over weekends when no other patients or staff would be present. This minimised disruptions, and ensured the confidentiality of the participants.

For one of the participating couples, the interviews had to be conducted using Skype as they resided in a different province to mine. Given the development of new communication technologies, the options for gathering research data have expanded significantly to include video call options such as Skype (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Jenner & Myers, 2019; Seitz, 2016). Utilising Skype for data collection offers a variety of benefits to

both participants and the researcher, including cost and time efficiency, flexibility in terms of scheduling interviews, and the ability to reach suitable but otherwise inaccessible participants (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). However, a number of concerns have been raised regarding the use of Skype for data collection purposes. These include technical difficulties, such as audio or video quality and loss of signal, difficulty in building rapport with participants, and an inability to properly read body language and nonverbal cues (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Seitz, 2016). In contrast to these concerns, Jenner and Myers (2019) found that there was very little difference between interviews conducted in private settings via Skype and those held in-person with regard to rapport between the researcher and participants, participants' degree of disclosure, or the duration of interviews. Similarly, in the current study, I did not experience any difficulties pertaining to building rapport or obtaining in-depth personal accounts from the couple interviewed via Skype. At times, however, audio quality was found to be somewhat problematic.

The total duration of participation per couple was around four hours, split over two days, approximately five months apart. In this way, data collection consisted of two phases of participation.

4.5.1. Data collection Phase 1

The first phase of data collection involved each member of a couple completing four questionnaires, namely a short, eight-item biographical questionnaire; the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ); the Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire-Revised (ECR-R); and the Couple's Satisfaction Index (CSI). Participants were asked to complete the questionnaires individually, without looking at or discussing each other's answers during the first phase of data collection. Copies of these questionnaires are included in Appendix E. Following the completion of the questionnaires, each couple was interviewed as a unit by means of a semi-structured interview (Beck & Perry, 2008; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). While joint interviews can be an effective mode of collecting information and gaining insight into the particular couple's narrative, care needs to be taken by the researcher to obtain equal input from both parties (Zarhin, 2018). This is particularly important given the possibility that one partner may dominate the interview, whether intentionally or unintentionally (Zarhin, 2018). The possibility also exists that some of the content presented

in joint interviews may precipitate disagreements between partners. However, Bjørnholt and Farstad (2014) argue that while such disagreements very rarely occur, they are also a natural part of couple dynamics, which could provide the researcher with valuable data. Furthermore, joint interviews offer an opportunity to gather valuable information by observing the couple's dynamics first-hand, noting potentially interesting subtleties between partners which may offer rich data and insight into the research questions (Bjørnholt & Farstad, 2014).

In addition to the benefits of joint interviews, semi-structured interviews provide a deeper exploration and understanding of a participant's experience and context (Beck & Perry, 2008). Semi-structured interviews consist of predetermined, open-ended questions posed to all participants, but which allow them the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in a way that is meaningful to them and represents their experiences accurately (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Cridland, Jones, Caputi, & Magee, 2015; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The researcher is further able to expand the inquiry by probing and clarifying participant accounts to extract richer and more detailed information (Cridland et al., 2015; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Interviews were also recorded and saved as audio files to enable me to conduct the necessary transcription and data analysis. The interview questions for this interview are included in Appendix F.

The interviews were conducted in English, which, for some participants, was their second language. In the majority of interviews, this was not identified as problematic since all of the participants were able to speak English proficiently. Interviewing participants in their second language is considered acceptable, assuming the necessary language proficiency of both the participants and the researcher (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In such cases, where participants felt more comfortable expressing themselves in their first language, in this case Afrikaans, they were encouraged to do so. Temple and Young (2004) emphasised the importance of language in our creation of identity and our ability to communicate and represent our own experience alongside that of others. Conducting interviews in a multilingual or multicultural setting such as South Africa therefore requires the researcher to be flexible and well prepared (Filep, 2009).

My academic, professional, yet personal, first-hand knowledge and experiences are believed to have contributed to a sound basic knowledge regarding the different cultural contexts within which participants' experiences may have been grounded in the present study. In addition, as a bilingual, married, middle-class Capetonian, I shared many similarities with my participants. As such, my background, as well as the degree to which participants experienced me as being a "community insider" (p. 63) are therefore acknowledged as potential contributors to participants' eagerness to share information (Filep, 2009). My proficiency in both English and Afrikaans also allowed for interviewing and translating as needed. The importance of accurately transferring participant meaning and nuances within the necessary translations was, however, kept in mind (Filep, 2009; Temple & Young, 2004). Accordingly, care was taken to translate participant experiences objectively so as not to insert subjective influences into the final translated account.

The first phase of data collection required an average of two-and-a-half hours per couple, consisting of approximately 50 minutes to complete the questionnaires and 90 minutes to interview each couple. The time lapse between the first and second phases of data collection allowed for the commencement of the first part of the data analysis. I transcribed the interviews and conducted the first three phases of qualitative analysis according to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), namely familiarising myself with the data, generating initial codes and identifying preliminary themes. The relevant interview questions for the second phase of data collection were designed based on this initial data analysis.

4.5.2. Data collection Phase 2

The second phase of data collection commenced five months after the first data collection phase and involved a second semi-structured interview conducted with each couple. Appendix G contains the questions for this interview. This phase of data collection occurred after the analysis of the data collected in Phase 1 had commenced. Accordingly, the questions for this second interview were based on the analysis of the first set of data, including themes identified in the first interviews. The time required for doing the preliminary analysis of the first phase data, as well as the continued recruitment process as previously discussed, resulted in the lapse of time between data collection phases. As with the first

interview, a recorded audio file of each interview was saved for transcription and data analysis purposes. This second phase of data collection lasted, on average, 60 to 90 minutes per couple interview. Shortly before their scheduled second interview, one of the participating couples withdrew their participation. They did, however, consent to their data from the first phase of data collection being used in the study.

4.6. Measuring instruments

4.6.1. Questionnaires

Participants completed a short, eight-item biographical questionnaire, compiled specifically for this study, relating to their age, gender, race, occupation, and nature of the intimate relationship. In addition, questionnaires measuring mindfulness (FFMQ), adult attachment style (ECR-R) and relationship satisfaction (CSI) were completed by the participants. Copies of these questionnaires are included in Appendix E.

4.6.1.1. *The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ)*

The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006) is a 39-item Likert scale assessing the general tendency to be mindful in daily life. The scale measures mindfulness across five facets, namely observing, describing, nonreactivity, non-judgement, and acting with awareness. Statements to be considered by the participants include: *When I'm walking, I deliberately notice the sensations of my body moving* (observing), *I'm good at finding words to describe my feelings* (describing), *I criticise myself for having irrational or inappropriate emotions* (non-judgement), *I perceive my feelings and emotions without having to react to them* (nonreactivity), and *When I do things, my mind wanders off and I'm easily distracted* (acting with awareness). A total score is calculated for each of the five subscales, as well as a total mindfulness score. Each score will be between 1.0 and 5.0, with a higher score indicating a higher level of a particular facet of mindfulness. In the current study, the respective means were used to determine whether a score could be considered high or low. Accordingly, a score above the mean was considered a high score. Baer et al. (2006) found the five subscales to have adequate to good internal consistency with alpha coefficients ranging from 0.75 to 0.91 for a group of American students. In their study of mindfulness in nursing students in China, the Philippines and South Africa, Arthur et al.

(2017) also found good internal consistency in their South African sample, with alpha coefficients ranging from 0.61 to 0.80. In the Chinese sample, the alpha coefficients ranged from 0.58 to 0.90 while the Filipino samples ranged from 0.24 to 0.74 (Arthur et al., 2017).

4.6.1.2. The Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire-Revised (ECR-R)

The Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire-Revised (ECR-R) (Fraley et al., 2000) is a 36-item Likert scale assessing adult attachment style. Participants are asked to rate their level of agreement with statements, including: *I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me*, *My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away*, and *It makes me mad that I don't get the affection and support I need from my partner*. Scores are measured on two subscales of attachment, namely avoidance and anxiety. A total score between 1.0 and 7.0 is calculated for each subscale. A high score indicates a high level of avoidant or anxious attachment, respectively. A simultaneous low score on both subscales is said to indicate a more secure attachment. Using the scores obtained to classify people into specific attachment categories or styles is not recommended as it risks reduction of the measurement precision and statistical power (Fraley, 2012). However, to interpret and discuss couple profiles in the present study, the median scores for anxiety (MANX) and those for avoidance (MAVOID) were calculated and used to assign participants to four groups according to Fraley's (2012) guidelines:

- (i) If a participant's anxiety score is $<$ MANX, and his or her avoidance score $<$ MAVOID, he or she is assigned to the secure group.
- (ii) If a participant's anxiety score is $<$ MANX, and his or her avoidance score \geq MAVOID, he or she is assigned to the avoidant (dismissing) group.
- (iii) If a participant's anxiety score is \geq MANX, and his or her avoidance score $<$ MAVOID, he or she is assigned to the anxious (preoccupied) group.
- (iv) If a participant's anxiety score is \geq MANX, and his or her avoidance score \geq MAVOID, he or she is assigned to the anxious avoidant (fearful) group.

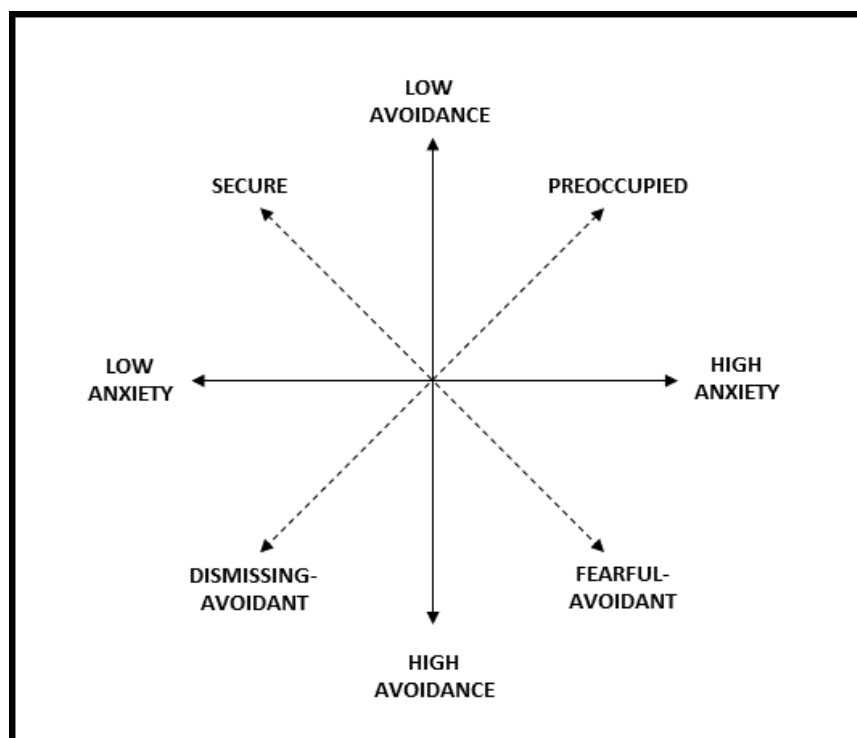


Figure 4.1. Attachment dimensions (Bartholomew, 1990)

Figure 4.1 illustrates the four groups along the dimensions of anxiety and avoidance, with secure attachment existing in the top left quadrant, where scores are low for both attachment anxiety and avoidance.

In their study on the short-term temporal stability and factor structure of the ECR-R, Sibley and Liu (2004) obtained alpha coefficients of 0.95 (anxiety) and 0.93 (avoidance) amongst undergraduate psychology students. They also found the internal reliability to be stable at re-test six weeks later, obtaining alpha coefficients of 0.93 (anxiety) and 0.91 (avoidance). Similarly, Graham and Unterschute (2015) found average alpha coefficients of 0.90 (anxiety) and 0.91 (avoidance) in their meta-analysis of 564 studies on adult attachment.

4.6.1.3. The Couple's Satisfaction Index (CSI)

The Couple's Satisfaction Index (CSI) (Funk & Rogge, 2007) is a 32-item Likert scale that measures satisfaction in a relationship. Some of the questions and statements which participants are required to consider and on which to rate their experience include: *How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?*, *If I had my life over, I would marry or live with the same person*, and *I feel that I can confide in my partner about virtually anything*. A total score on this scale is between 32 and 160. A high total score indicates a high level of

relationship satisfaction. In the current study, the mean was used to determine whether a participant's score could be considered high (above the mean) or low (below the mean). Funk and Rogge (2007) obtained an alpha coefficient of 0.98 for the scale in an American online sample of 5 315 adults. Furthermore, Kumar and Mattanah (2016) also obtained a high internal consistency with an alpha coefficient of 0.97 in their sample of university students in romantic relationships.

4.6.2. Internal consistencies of the questionnaires

The alpha coefficients for the various measuring instruments were calculated to determine the internal consistency of the data yielded by all the subscales for the current sample. The values appear in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2

Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for FFMQ, ECR-R and CSI

Scale	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha
FFMQ – Observing subscale	8	.59
FFMQ – Describing subscale	8	.92
FFMQ – Nonreactivity subscale	7	.49
FFMQ – Non-judgement subscale	8	.90
FFMQ – Acting with Awareness subscale	8	.82
FFMQ – Total	39	.89
ECR-R – Anxiety subscale	18	.86
ECR-R – Avoidance subscale	18	.90
Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI)	32	.97

In general, an alpha coefficient of between 0.65 and 0.80 is considered to indicate adequate internal reliability (Morera & Stokes, 2016; Vaske, Beaman, & Sponarski, 2017). Accordingly, both the describing subscale of The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) and the Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI) had what could then be considered excellent internal reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values of $\alpha = 0.92$ and $\alpha = 0.97$, respectively. Similarly, the FFMQ nonjudging subscale, the acting with awareness subscale, and the total FFMQ scale had good internal reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging between 0.82 and 0.90. In addition, both of the Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR-R) subscales also had good internal consistency reliability of $\alpha = 0.86$ (anxiety) and $\alpha = 0.90$ (avoidance).

In contrast, the FFMQ observing subscale had a relatively low internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.59$) while the nonreactivity subscale had poor internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.49$). Cronbach's alpha is, however, affected by many factors, including the number of items in the particular scale, dimensionality, and the intercorrelations between items (Morera & Stokes, 2016; Vaske, Beaman, & Sponarski, 2017). The alphas obtained for the observing and nonreactivity subscales of the FFMQ are likely due to the low number of items in each subscale. Therefore, while the results need to be interpreted with caution, the data can still be used.

4.7. Data analysis

4.7.1. Quantitative analysis

The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics. In addition, unique couple profiles were created for each participating couple, based largely on couples' responses on the self-report measures completed during the first phase of data collection. These profiles consisted of a short, biographical description of each couple, followed by a summary of their unique scores on the respective measuring instruments (FFMQ, ECR-R and CSI). These summaries of scores were presented in such a way as to allow for comparisons to be drawn between partner scores, as well as between couples. Furthermore, these profiles could be integrated with the qualitative data to enable a more nuanced understanding of the particular mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of the participating couples.

4.7.2. Qualitative analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017) was used to analyse the rich, thick qualitative data obtained from the interviews. This theoretically flexible method of identifying, analysing and reporting on patterns of meaning within and across data is unusual due to its offering a method rather than a methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2017). When applying this method, the researcher functions as a research instrument responsible for seeking out patterns in relation to the research question and making interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Such subjectivity is an essential part of good practice within qualitative research (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Thematic analysis holds the potential for generating unanticipated insights, and makes social and psychological interpretations of the data possible (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The latter is a particularly useful

advantage given the current study's psychological foundation and the associated potential value of such interpretations of the data for clinical practice.

A significant number of studies focused on intimate relationships have made use of thematic analysis (Bell & Hastings, 2015; Fletcher & Macintosh, 2018; Furlotte, Gladstone, Cosby, & Fitzgerald, 2016; Lesch & Adams, 2016b; Lesch, De Bruin, & Anderson, 2018; Moller & Vossler, 2015). For instance, Bell and Hastings (2015) used thematic analysis to investigate the impact of parental approval and disapproval of Black and White interracial couples. In turn, Moller and Vossler (2015) applied it to exploring experienced counsellors' definitions of infidelity based on their work with couples in practice. In comparison, Furlotte et al. (2016) made use of thematic analysis in an effort to understand the expectations, needs and concerns of lesbian and gay couples regarding long-term care facilities for the elderly. A local study by Lesch and De Bruin (2016b) applied thematic analysis to explore the sexual intimacy constructions of heterosexual, Coloured couples living in a low-income, historical farmworker community. Moreover, focusing specifically on couples dealing with substance addictions, Fletcher and Macintosh (2018) used thematic analysis to investigate these couples' relapse experiences. Thematic analysis therefore lends itself to effectively investigating a variety of experiences and factors related to and impacting couples in intimate relationships.

Despite being widely used in qualitative research, thematic analysis can be difficult to conceptualise with poorly-defined boundaries encapsulating its method (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Unlike other forms of analysis, such as interpretative phenomenological analysis or grounded theory, thematic analysis is not linked to any theoretical framework, but can be used within a variety of frameworks for different purposes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While this versatility is an advantage, it also highlights the importance of making the theoretical framework of the analysis known (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At the same time, rigorously following the systematic procedures proposed by thematic analysis is crucial to identifying and interpreting significant aspects of the data as guided by the research questions (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

The six phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017) consist of familiarising oneself with the data through active reading, generating initial codes based

on interesting features of the data, and identifying themes based on the initial codes. Themes are then reviewed and refined, as well as defined and named, before writing the final report of the data and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each of these phases, as applicable to the present study, will be elaborated on next.

4.7.2.1. Phase 1: Familiarising oneself with the data

The first phase of analysis is a process of immersing oneself in the data in an active way by reading, re-reading and writing down thoughts and ideas (Terry et al., 2017). In the current study, I personally conducted all of the interviews with the participants, which allowed me to enter the first phase of analysis with some existing knowledge of the data. Transcribing the interviews further allowed me to familiarise myself with the data. During both the interviews and the transcription thereof, I continued to write down thoughts and ideas that occurred in response to the data in my electronic reflexive journal. The data were also re-read after all of the interviews had been transcribed to increase my familiarity with the “depth and breadth of the content” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). In the present study, this phase was repeated following the second phase of data collection.

4.7.2.2. Phase 2: Generating initial codes

The next phase of analysis builds on the first and involves coding interesting aspects of the data and organising relevant data for each code (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). In the current study, I worked through each transcribed interview individually to identify any initial topics or features of the data that were interesting and potentially relevant to the research questions. Each code was organised with its supporting data. Both semantic and latent content were identified through inductive analysis. Semantic content refers to those themes originating from the explicit words uttered or responses given by participants, without interpreting or reading into them any further (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). In comparison, latent themes or content are derived from delving deeper into the semantic content to identify the underlying or implied content of what has been said (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). Inductive analysis allowed for the data to be coded as it was presented, without attempting to align it with pre-existing thoughts or codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). Following the second phase of data collection (second semi-structured interviews), this phase of analysis was repeated to further collate information

under the previously identified themes and to identify any potential new codes arising from the data.

4.7.2.3. Phase 3: Identifying themes

The process of identifying the codes and organising data was followed by colour coding the respective topics in order to identify recurring patterns across the different interviews which, in turn, allowed for the next phase of analysis to occur. During this third phase of analysis, the goal is to analyse the identified codes in search of potential broader themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). Some codes may, therefore, join to form a main theme while others may become subthemes or even be discarded altogether (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the present study, the themes and subthemes identified in the third phase of analysis determined the questions posed in the interview for the second phase of data collection. In this way, questions were specifically formulated to explore these themes with participants and to gather further information on them.

4.7.2.4. Phase 4: Reviewing and refining themes

The existing themes which had been identified were reviewed and refined following and incorporating the second phase of data collection. During this phase, the entire data set was re-read to determine whether the themes fit in relation to the data set and to code additional data that might previously have been missed (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). As a result, some of the proposed themes merged into one. In other cases, new themes could be created or others discarded for not being themes at all (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding is a continuous and active process, making re-coding a natural part of the data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.7.2.5. Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

Once a thematic overview of the data is in place, a process of refining and naming of the themes can commence (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). Themes need to be simple and focused while creating a narrative around the data and telling a “story” with regard to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following the second interviews in the present study, leading to a repetition of Phases 1 to 4 for the new data collected, the repetition of Phase 5 saw me redefining, reworking and expanding the themes previously

identified during the first phase of thematic analysis. This reworking of themes allowed for a clearer conceptualisation thereof to emerge.

4.7.2.6. Phase 6: Writing the final data and analysis report

The final phase of analysis offers the last opportunity for analysis and creating a report that is representative of the data collected and the narrative and themes identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). The final report is the story of the data and should be presented in such a manner that it communicates the merit and validity of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For the writing of the analysis to occur, I once again worked through all the interview transcripts to identify specific participant accounts that supported the identified themes. This not only allowed for the themes to be well supported by the data, but also further encouraged a continuous reworking and refining of the themes and their context. In writing this PhD thesis, as well as conducting the research prior to the writing of the thesis, it was vital to adhere to criteria for establishing trustworthiness and rigour.

4.8. Trustworthiness and rigour

Trustworthiness refers to the researcher's degree of confidence in his or her study and its results as an accurate reflection and analysis of the lived experiences of the participants (Kornbluh, 2015; Petty et al., 2012). The most commonly used criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative studies are credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity (Amankwaa, 2016; Connelly, 2016; Cope, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Petty et al., 2012). Adhering to these criteria implies an accurate representation of participants' accounts, the ability to replicate findings, results that are free from the researcher's biases and viewpoints, findings that are also applicable to individuals not involved in the study, and a general authentic expression of participant experiences. In the present study, various measures were taken to meet the necessary criteria for trustworthiness.

4.8.1. Credibility

Credibility is equivalent to internal validity and focuses on confirming whether standard procedures were used in the study and whether the data are truthful and

representative of the participants' views (Connelly, 2016; Cope, 2014). In the current study, prolonged engagement, triangulation and member checking were used to achieve credibility.

Prolonged engagement allows for the building of trust and rapport between the researcher and participants (Cope, 2014). In this study, I achieved prolonged engagement and observation by spending approximately four hours in total with each participating couple during interviews and the completion of questionnaires, as well as through informal conversations with them before and after the interviews. Credibility was further enhanced by a triangulation of methods, including both quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews. In addition, observing participants during interviews and noting down my thoughts complemented my analysis of the data. Casey and Murphy (2009) observed that method triangulation, or mixed methods research is, ultimately, focused on confirmation and completeness of the data. Multiple methods allow for a more comprehensive overview of the research phenomenon (Cope, 2014).

Member checking refers to a process of allowing participants to read the verbatim transcripts of their interviews and to reflect on the themes identified by the researcher to confirm whether the data were correctly received and interpreted (Smith & McGannon, 2018; Houghton et al., 2013). In the present study, member checking was conducted once both data collection phases, and the initial data analysis phase of the study had been completed. Initially, I had planned to send the participants the verbatim transcripts of their interviews. However, after careful consideration, some concerns arose regarding performing the member checking in this manner. More specifically, bearing in mind the best interests of the participants and their relationships, I questioned whether giving participants their transcripts would indeed have a beneficial effect on them or their relationships. The literature also supports the notion that simply giving participants their transcripts so that they may read and respond to them might not offer them the proper opportunity to become involved in the way in which their contributions are interpreted and applied (Houghton et al., 2013; Kornbluh, 2015). With this in mind, in the current study, member checking involved a discussion on the identified themes with the participants during a feedback session following the two data collection phases.

In the current study, Kornbluh's (2015) five strategies for conducting member checks while addressing the challenges that might be encountered by both researcher and participants were applied. Firstly, potential barriers related to power and politics (Kornbluh, 2015) that could influence my relationship with the participants were navigated through my own awareness and critical reflection, as well as by engaging in informal conversations with them. The participants were also offered refreshments during the data collection phases in order to ensure that they were comfortable and to assist in negotiating any experiences of imbalanced power dynamics. Secondly, transparency with regard to the data collection and analysis processes is important not only in order to obtain informed consent from participants, but also to emphasise that there are no correct or preferred responses to interview questions which may lead to researcher bias (Kornbluh, 2015). With this in mind, participants were thoroughly informed regarding the processes involved in the collection and analysis of data. Moreover, it was reiterated that they were simply required to answer in a manner that was true and correct for them. Thirdly, Kornbluh's (2015) guideline of encouraging participants to first reconstruct their own memories of the data collection phases was followed. Providing participants in the current study with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences of participating in the study seemed to organically lead to the creation of a structure for theme comparisons according to Kornbluh's (2015) fourth guideline. Participants were then invited to provide their feedback on the themes which I had identified. To avoid the participants' possible lack of interest in the member checking process (Kornbluh, 2015), an effort was made to present the findings as clearly as possible and in a way that would be most valuable to the couples' experiences, without using unnecessary psychological jargon. Lastly, Kornbluh's (2015) final strategy was applied to integrate the information received during the member checks into the final analysis and report, as necessary.

Completing the member checks and facilitating the participants' feedback sessions proved to be a very enjoyable and rewarding experience for me. In thinking about and planning this study, I not only set out to make a contribution to research and theory that would be practically applicable to the couples with whom I work in practice, but also to the layperson interested in psychological well-being and growth. Being able to engage with the couples' concerning the relevance of the study topic and their personal results for the well-

being and understanding of their own relationship dynamics was an inspiring experience and confirmed the relevance of the study topic and findings.

4.8.2. Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of the data across different times and conditions (Connelly, 2016; Amankwaa, 2016). It is often compared to reliability in quantitative research and involves the ability to replicate findings (Cope, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013). A comprehensive audit trail contributed to dependability in the present study, and included but was not limited to, a research journal with process notes, study materials and literature, and interview transcripts. Audit trails include the material and notes used in the research process (Cope, 2014). When followed, the audit trail allows another researcher to reach the same interpretations and conclusions (Amankwaa, 2016; Houghton et al., 2013). In the current study, dependability was further supported by a process of reflexivity.

4.8.2.1. Reflexive journaling

Given the position of the researcher as the instrument of research in qualitative data collection and analysis, his or her values, background and experiences need to be kept in mind in order to avoid research bias (Braun & Clarke, 2014; Tracy, 2010). Accordingly, to maintain reflexivity and self-awareness, I kept a research journal containing general thoughts and observations while writing formal quarterly reflections on my experiences pertaining to the study. These included information on the research rationale and decisions taken, as well as personal challenges and experiences during the course of the study.

Keeping a research journal and writing these reflections created a continued awareness around my role and influence within the study while leading to insights that could be applied to working with couples in my psychology practice. Reflexivity protects the researcher against the risk of over subjectivity and loss of transparency and credibility (Gemignani, 2017; Tuval-Mashiach, 2017). Inherent to qualitative research, reflexivity is a state of critical awareness that offers an inquiry into itself while questioning the notion of a fixed and unchanging reality to be observed (Gemignani, 2017). Much of the value gained from my reflexive journaling related to my own personal growth and experiences in response to the research journey. As the instrument within qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2014),

my functioning and growth became an important consideration. I was aware that stagnating in my own growth and engagement with the research topic could negatively impact the study. In this regard, reflexive journaling enabled me to practice self-awareness. Further insights gained during the reflection process included deliberating on the practical application of both the literature and the data collected during the study to patients in practice. Moreover, the reflection process stimulated further interest in, and thinking about, the relationship between mindfulness and attachment. In addition, throughout the reflexive process, logistical and practical considerations and concerns could be noted, leading to adjustments that enabled me to conduct the study more effectively. Appendix H contains excerpts from my reflexive journaling while a more comprehensive reflection on my role in this study is included under Section 4.9.3.

4.8.3. Confirmability

Confirmability is closely linked to dependability and involves the process of demonstrating that the data are, in fact, representative of the participants' responses and free from any of the researcher's viewpoints or biases (Cope, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013). As is the case with dependability, both the activities of maintaining an audit trail and practising reflexivity contributed to confirmability in the current study. Additionally, in conducting the analysis and writing up the results and discussion of the study, I included rich, thick data collected from the interviews in the form of direct quotations from the participants. This demonstrated the process by which interpretations were made. One of the research supervisors further acted as a second coder, ensuring confirmability of the themes identified. Finally, a second research auditor was appointed to verify whether my data analysis, including descriptions and interpretations, had been accurately representative of participants' accounts.

4.8.4. Transferability

Transferability refers to the applicability and value of results to those not involved in the study (Connelly, 2016; Cope, 2014). While qualitative research focuses on the particular story of the participants involved without claiming it to be a universal account, transferability is possible by providing rich narratives regarding the context of participants, as well as

transparency regarding the methods used (Connelly, 2016). Descriptive case studies such as those used in the present study also offer knowledge as part of case-based reasoning (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). Furthermore, in certain ways, a single case study is reasoned to be typical of the experience being studied, and therefore representative of a wider range of cases (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). As with confirmability, transferability in the present study was achieved using thick descriptions regarding the contexts of the participants' contributions. Once the researcher has provided these detailed descriptions, including information regarding the process of research methods, it is up to the reader to determine the transferability of findings (Houghton et al., 2013). I observed another possible practical illustration of transferability while working with couples in practice, unrelated to the present study. Within that context, many of the results obtained from the current study's cases, particularly some of the concepts and themes identified during analysis, were found to also apply to couples in current psychotherapy.

4.8.5. Authenticity

Authenticity refers to the degree to which the data presented authentically represents the thoughts, feelings and experiences of the participants (Cope, 2014). As such, authenticity is displayed through rich narratives that capture the nuanced experiences of the various participants (Connelly, 2016). Rich, thick descriptions comprising participants' quotations were used in the current study to demonstrate the authentic nature of the data as it corresponded with participants' accounts.

4.9. Ethical considerations

4.9.1. General ethical clearance and conduct

As a health care professional registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), I strove to adhere to the ethical principles of conduct as set out for psychologists, both in terms of practice and research. Accordingly, the principles, processes and structures put forth by the Department of Health (2015) in its guidelines for ethics in health research, were adhered to. The ethical principles broadly emphasised by the Department of Health (2015) specifically include the effective balancing of benefits and harm to participants (beneficence and nonmaleficence), distributive justice (equality), and respect

for participants (dignity and autonomy). In addition, the ethical rules of conduct set out for practitioners registered under the Health Professions Act 56 of 1974 (Health Professions Act, 2006) and the ethical guidelines for health researchers put forth by the HPCSA (2016) were all observed.

Summarising the relevant guidelines and principles for research stipulated by the different bodies, I was expected to plan and conduct research consistent with the law and ethical standards laid out by the government, Health Professions Council of South Africa and university. With this in mind, it was expected that I receive written approval from the relevant University Departments and Committees to conduct the study. In conducting the research, I would have to respect the human rights and dignity of my participants, refrain from discriminating against them, and ensure that they were not harmed in any manner. Written informed consent would need to be obtained from the participants for their participation, as well as for recording their interviews. Moreover, confidentiality regarding participants' identifying information would need to be maintained, while refraining from deceiving participants regarding any aspect of their participation or the study. In addition, refraining from offering inducements that might unduly influence participation, as well as allowing participants an opportunity to obtain feedback on the nature, results and conclusion of the research study was vital. Finally, as a researcher, I was expected to accurately and honestly report on research results, and avoid plagiarism in any part of the study and thesis.

Care was taken to consider and adhere to all of these principles in the present study. For instance, before commencing the current study, written approval to conduct the study was obtained from both the Psychology Department, and the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Free State, based on my submitted proposal. To ensure that the current study was ethically sound, ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Free State (Ethical clearance number: UFS-HSD2016/1458). The Research Ethics Committee later approved an extension on the original 12-month period for data collection. All ethical clearance documents pertaining to the study are included in Appendix A.

Participation in this study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the research. The call for participation by means of which participants were recruited included sufficient information to enable them to make a decision regarding their involvement in the study. The information included details on the nature of the research, the purpose of the study, the particulars of the researcher, the nature of participation, and the potential benefits and inconveniences of participation (see Appendix B). Those parties who had expressed an interest in participating were sent electronic copies of the participant consent form, which included more detailed information on the study and participation, such as information on confidentiality, withdrawal from the study, and the collection and storage of data (see Appendix D). Participants again read and signed a copy of the participant consent forms on their first day of contact with me during the first phase of data collection. The purpose of the study was also discussed with the participants in person before the individual couple interviews took place. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research process at any time during the data collection phases of this study. Before initiating couples' second interviews, they were again reminded of the parameters of the study and their right to withdraw at any point during the data collection. Verbal consent was obtained in this regard.

All information provided by couples during their participation was handled with an awareness of confidentiality. As such, I am the only person with access to the real names and personal contact information of the participants. Accordingly, no other parties involved in the study would be able to link participants to the information which they provided. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym with which to reference their responses as necessary in the study data, publications or any other research activities such as conferences. These pseudonyms will enable participants to remain anonymous in all current and future instances.

The same limitations to confidentiality applied as would in clinical practice (Health Professions Act, 2006). Therefore, during data collection and contact with the participants, I was legally obliged to disclose information to other parties or authorities if a participant was found to be a danger to him- or herself. In such an event, I would have had to make the necessary arrangements to help ensure the participant's safety. Similarly, if a participant's past, present or planned actions indicated a threat of serious harm to another person, the

relevant authorities would have needed to be informed. The same steps would have applied to my becoming aware of any form of abuse towards a child or vulnerable adult, whether emotional, physical or sexual. Finally, if ordered by a court of law, collected data would need to be disclosed. These limitations to confidentiality were explained to participants prior to their involvement in the study.

Reciprocity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) towards participants was practised throughout both data collection phases, including answering other psychology- and relationship-related questions posed by the participants, providing them with referral information as requested, and offering books and further reading resources at their request. To compensate couples for their time invested in participating in the study, a feedback session was held with each couple following the second and final data collection phase. The feedback sessions included information about the study and the themes identified from the collected data, which also formed part of the process of member checking. In addition, information on each couple's mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction profile based on their quantitative data collected in the questionnaires was made available. Moreover, suggestions on how to improve relationship satisfaction based on mindfulness and attachment principles were provided. Finally, any questions posed by the couple were reflected on and answered.

Discussing the couple's profile with them, as well as the themes gathered from the data, also offered an opportunity for respondent verification or member checking. Participants were given a final opportunity to withdraw any of their responses or contributions that they were not comfortable with including in the study. None of the couples withdrew any of their contributions. Once both data collection phases had been completed, and participant responses integrated into the data analysis and interpretation phases of the study, withdrawal was no longer possible.

Consideration was also given to the potential intra- and interpersonal effects of participating in a study of this nature where a process of introspection and personal evaluation is required. Thus, arrangements were made at the outset of the study to identify referral options in case any of the individual participants or couples experienced any emotional or psychological discord during the study. Fortunately, none of the couples

required such referrals. One couple did, however, request referral options for future psychotherapy to address some of their pre-existing stressors.

The hard copies of questionnaires completed by the participants, as well as transcripts of the interviews conducted with them, will be stored for a period of five years following the study in a locked filing cabinet at my clinical practice for future research or academic purposes. The information will also be stored electronically on a password-protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further research ethics review and approval, where applicable. Once the five-year period expires, all hard copies of participant information will be destroyed through a process of shredding. All electronic copies of the information will be deleted from my computer, as well as all backup systems, after eight years.

4.9.2. Researcher reflexivity as an ethical task

The researcher is repeatedly positioned as central to the qualitative research process (Finlay, 2017; Gemignani, 2017; Raheim et al., 2016; Tuval-Mashiach, 2017). Perhaps, this view results, in part, from an acknowledgement of the researcher as being in a continuous relationship with the research participants, the texts, his or her own field or discipline, and the reader engaging with the final research report (Tuval-Mashiach, 2017). Furthermore, it is acknowledged that “to observe something is to change it” (Josselson, 2017, p. 119), causing the researcher to no longer be considered a detached “other”, but rather an inside-observer (Raheim et al., 2016). All research, therefore, occurs and must be viewed in the relational context in which it exists (Josselson, 2017). Josselson (2017) also pointed out that subjectivity can be a benefit rather than an obstruction. Given the particular positioning of the researcher, however, reflexivity is identified as an essential component of the research process (Finlay, 2017; Gemignani, 2017). Presupposing the researcher as an inevitable, intrinsic part of the research process, reflexivity involves a process of examining the self of the researcher while also applying critical self-awareness to investigate the researcher’s interpretation and representation of participant accounts (Finlay, 2017; Gemignani, 2017; Josselson, 2017). In remaining aware of the researcher’s role as both insider and outsider, ongoing reflexivity is necessary to mediate the potential influence of the power imbalances inherent to the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Raheim et al., 2016). Particularly within a mixed methods research approach, psychological researchers use

reflexivity as part of the auditing process, encouraging transparency and credibility, and avoiding over-subjectivity (Finlay, 2017; Gemignani, 2017). Reflexivity within qualitative inquiry thereby assumes an infinite and continuously changing reality, allowing for the contextualised creation of meaning rather than a search for the truth (Finlay, 2017; Gemignani, 2017). In an attempt to reflect on my subjective contribution, I – the researcher – therefore share some of my process of reflexivity with regard to the current study.

Due to my innate thirst for knowledge, I have always been an avid reader, curious to understand different worlds, people and experiences. This curiosity has been a driving force behind my psychology studies. My involvement in research initially began as an extension of my studies in clinical psychology and, given my passion for the field, continuing with my doctoral studies was, in many respects, a natural progression, both professionally and personally. It was, however, important to me that my doctoral work constituted more than a mere academic exercise. Instead, as a clinician who believes in the value of psychology for the everyday living and functioning of all individuals, rather than just those with pathology, the practical application of research and theory is of cardinal importance to me. In this way, this study adhered to the promotion of well-being as an ethical task of the researcher (Khumalo & De Klerk, 2018). Due to my special interest in relational work, specifically intimate relationships, and a large proportion of my clinical work consisting of processes with couples, research in this area was the obvious choice. The integration of clinical and academic knowledge contributed to expanding my knowledge on intimate relationships, thereby further adhering to ethical conduct as identified by Khumalo and De Klerk (2018).

My research and clinical work continued to influence each other during the five-year period of this study. Accordingly, my extensive reading of the existing body of knowledge on intimate relationships expanded my work and thinking with couples in my practice. For example, Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) orientation to communication emphasised the way in which we think about conflict and communication in relationships. While working with couples, I often notice the tendency on their part to want to avoid any conflict, viewing it as the ultimate goal and indication of a healthy and successful relationship. Psychologists who work with couples, myself included, help them to challenge this notion of conflict as something to be avoided, leading them, instead, to view conflict as a natural part of human

relationships. I do, however, think that even psychologists fall prey to the idea that it is simply about the effective “resolution” of conflict. I appreciate the notion put forth by Baxter and Montgomery, or at least my understanding of it, that perhaps the conflict between opposing forces is not only natural for a relationship, but even necessary, as it operates as a force that governs change and growth in relationships. Apart from the influence of this study on my practice, continuous professional development courses and personal growth opportunities in my own intimate relationship further stimulated my thinking and understanding of my field of study. Attending a couples workshop based on attachment theory offered an interesting practical experience of the theory reviewed as part of my study. Such first-hand experience of both the couple experience and the theory enriched my understanding of both the literature and participant experiences during data analysis.

Upon entering the role of researcher, I aimed to deliberately step away from my experience and role as a psychologist to create a space of less distance and equal footing between myself and the couples participating in the study. While I recognise that participants’ knowledge of my professional role as a psychologist may have led them to elaborate on their experiences due to subjectively viewing the interview process as having therapeutic value (Raheim et al., 2016), I maintained a strong awareness so as not to conflate my roles. Accordingly, in my introduction and rapport-building at the start of the first interview with the participants, I shared my stance and goals with them. As I explained to participants, the goal of these questions and the study was to better understand relationships. As such, there were no right or wrong answers, and their relationships were not being judged or scored as either right or wrong, good or bad. I further explained that, as a result, the questions posed in the interviews were meant to elicit an understanding of real-life relationships such as those of the participants.

Moving away from the position of the expert to become a mutual observer or creator is identified as important to cultivating a stance of learning from research participants’ experiences (Raheim et al., 2016; Todd, 2012). As the “prime instrument of data collection” (McGrath, Palmgren, & Liljedahl, 2019, p. 1004), I focused on remaining open and present with participants to hear and further explore their experiences without contaminating them with my own influence as “co-creator of the data” (McGrath et al., 2019, p. 1004). When

participants had their own questions about me, my practice, or even my own intimate relationship, these were answered with openness and honesty, supporting what Rhodes and Carlsen (2018) refer to as ethical vulnerability.

Although I stepped out of my role as a psychologist, some of my existing knowledge and skills as a clinician proved to be useful to the interview process. Due to my experience as a psychologist, creating a warm environment of unconditional positive regard during the participant interviews was easily achieved. The ability to listen actively and adjust the interview guide to complement the unique flow of the particular participants' interview is identified as an important factor of the interviewing process during qualitative research (McGrath et al., 2019). My experience as a therapist performing clinical assessments to gather patient information made me well-equipped to listen actively and adjust the questioning, as necessary. As pointed out by McGrath et al. (2019), the topics and questions focused on during research interviews may, at times, evoke emotional reactions in the participants, which would require the interviewer to be prepared to manage the situation and provide appropriate assistance. Again, my experience as a psychologist left me well prepared for any expressions of emotion during interviews. Participants were given sufficient time and space to experience their emotions before continuing with the interview. Even at times when participants elaborated on matters unrelated to the study, their experiences were validated and reflected on, allowing reciprocity to occur (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Rhodes & Carlsen, 2018). During at least three of the interviews, participants touched on experiences of grief and loss, which led them to be overcome with emotion during the interview. During these moments, I gently reflected on and validated their experiences while allowing them moments of silence to process their experience. Only once participants confirmed that they felt ready to proceed, did I continue with the interview.

My existing therapy experience further enabled me to be especially cognisant of balancing interviews with participating couples to facilitate equal sharing between partners. A deliberate balancing of participants' contributions ensured equal representation of partner accounts in the data and mediated domination of the interview by one of the participants. Zarhin (2018) warned against such imbalanced data sometimes resulting from dyadic interviews. Finally, when it came to the thematic analysis process in the current study,

searching for meaning and connections was experienced as a fairly natural and comfortable process given its relative similarity to what I do on a daily basis with couple and individual experiences in psychotherapy. Qualitative inquiry, therefore, seemed to be associated with a similar line of inquiry used by psychologists in practice.

Bearing in mind the joint creation of data between the participants and the researcher (McGrath et al., 2019), I took some time to consider some of the basic similarities and differences between myself and the participants. As a White, bilingual (Afrikaans/English), middle-class, tertiary-educated woman, I shared some points of similarity and difference with all of my participants. Arguably, the areas of similarity between myself and the participants allowed me to be better prepared for the interview process (Filep, 2009) due to a familiarity with the sociocultural aspects we had in common. The areas of difference, however, demanded increased awareness and a respectful stance of curiosity with regard to the participants' experiences. Such a stance supports relational ethics, where the participants – as the experts of their reality – are able to transfer such knowledge to the researcher (Rhodes & Carlsen, 2018). For example, while five of the participants were White, the majority were Coloured or Black. Although my professional experience as a psychologist and personal experience as a South African gave me some awareness of the potential impact of participants' racial background on their experiences, it was clear that their experiences were still largely different from mine. In those instances, holding a stance of curiosity and interest in learning about the participants' experiences was vital.

Seven out of the twelve participants indicated that their home language was English. However, while engaging with the couples during the interviews, I discovered that two out of the seven were, in fact, bilingual (Afrikaans/English) at home. While another participant identified as Afrikaans, a further two couples identified as bilingual on their participation documents, that is, one Afrikaans/English couple and one Xhosa/English couple. Accordingly, half of the participants were bilingual like me. Being bilingual allowed me to interview the participants effectively, and to translate any Afrikaans participant responses into English, as necessary. Based on the participants' respective occupations, it was speculated that all participants were middle class as well. Five out of the twelve participants had received some form of tertiary education. The majority of the participants were also female. Having been

cohabiting for fifteen years and married to my husband for thirteen years, I could identify with all of my participants in terms of their relationship status and duration. This further allowed me to personally relate to their experiences since my own relationship history over the last fifteen years shared many similarities with the participants' experiences. Not having any children of my own, however, meant that I was unable to identify fully with the experiences of eight of the participants who did have children.

Contemplating these similarities and differences was considered important as they could potentially influence my experience and interpretation of the data. However, the participants' experiences with regard to their involvement in the study could also be influenced by their perceptions of our similarities and differences. Participants did, however, share very rich and personal information with me throughout the interviews, which leads me to believe that existing differences may have been overcome by building rapport and creating an environment of acceptance. For some of the participants, viewing me as a "community insider" (Filep, 2009, p. 63) could, arguably, also have contributed to their willingness to share such personal information.

Continued reflexivity further enabled me to identify and navigate potentially challenging issues during the study. An example of this related to respondent verification. Initially, I envisioned respondent verification to consist of sending participants their interview transcripts so that they could give their final consent to my using their accounts as transcribed. However, in transcribing the interviews, I became aware of how differently the interviews came across while simply reading the transcripts versus listening to the audio files. Much of the subtext offered by the nonverbal communication of emotions, tone and facial expression was unrepresented in the transcripts. While this did not impact on the ability to explore and identify themes in the transcripts, it was identified as potentially problematic to couples reading the transcripts without the context offered by nonverbal communication. Given my experience in working with couples and witnessing the dynamics involved, as well as the discord that could ensue as a result of misunderstanding partners' intentions, I found myself concerned about the planned format of respondent verification. After having contemplated these concerns and having weighed them up against the well-being of the

couples, a decision was made to adjust the way in which respondent verification was to be conducted.

Another challenge experienced during the interview process was refraining from intervening with troubled couple systems. As my role was that of the researcher rather than a psychologist, I had to remain aware of the parameters of the relationship. While I succeeded at staying within these parameters, continued reflexivity enabled me to consider the notion of reciprocity. By practising reciprocity, I was able to offer assistance by aiding the couple in accessing psychological services, as necessary, even though it could not be directly offered in the context of our researcher-participant relationship.

Apart from my influence on the study as the researcher, this study also impacted my knowledge and skill set both as a researcher and as a person. As this was my first research experience using qualitative methods, I had to immerse myself in qualitative research theory and methodology to ensure that I applied the methodology in an ethical manner. Ethical conduct relates to both the methodology and the participants and is, as previously mentioned, part of ethical research behaviour (Khumalo & De Klerk, 2018). On a more personal level, completing my study increasingly presented as an exercise in flexibility, recalibration, and mental management to account for logistical matters of circumstance that were sometimes beyond my control. In view of my focus on the subject matter and the experiences of the participants, I initially expected my personal learning curve to be academic rather than personal. However, I was surprised at the way in which my resilience, self-management and self-reliance had grown and developed throughout course of the study. Perhaps as a final confirmation of reciprocity within the present study, the participants offered positive feedback regarding their participation in the study. While some referred to it as an "eye-opener", others experienced pondering their relationships in response to my interview questions as initiating change and growth for themselves and their partners.

4.10. Conclusion

This chapter offered an overview of the particular methodology used in the current study. As such, a convergent mixed methods research design, employing multiple case studies, was presented as the most appropriate design for exploring the mindfulness, attachment and

satisfaction experiences of South African couples in intimate relationships. Six couples who had met the participation criteria were selected by means of purposive sampling. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and a self-report measure in the form of a questionnaire. Apart from a short, biographical questionnaire developed by me, other measuring instruments included the FFMQ (Baer et al., 2006), ECR-R (Fraley et al., 2000) and CSI (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Quantitative data analysis consisted of descriptive statistics as well as the creation of unique couple profiles. In addition, thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data gathered during the interviews. Throughout the present study, steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness and rigour while ethical considerations guided my conduct, as well as the confidential management of participants' information and general security of data. The chapter concluded with a subjective reflexive account of my role as the researcher within the research. In the next chapter, the results obtained during data collection will be presented.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

5.1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of South African couples in intimate relationships. To achieve this aim, the self-report questionnaire responses and couple profiles (quantitative data), as well as the verbal accounts (qualitative data) of participants were examined. Such an integrated approach and application of both the quantitative and qualitative data is also consistent with the goals of a mixed methods research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Plano Clark, 2019; Schoonenboom & Burke Johnson, 2017) as used in the present study.

This chapter presents both the quantitative and qualitative data that were gathered. The quantitative results, comprising the descriptive statistics and quantitative data profiles compiled for each participating couple, will be presented first. This will be followed by the qualitative results, presented according to the themes identified in the participating couples' interviews. Several themes regarding the intimate relationship experiences of couples arose from the interviews. Bearing in mind the specific focus of the study, only those themes contributing to an enhanced understanding of the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples are discussed. The verbatim interview transcripts can be found in Appendices I to S.

5.2. Quantitative results

5.2.1. Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics, including the minimum and maximum, mean, median, standard deviation and range, were computed for each of the measuring scales and their subscales (Table 5.1). The measuring scales included the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), the Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire-Revised (ECR-R), and the Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI).

Table 5.1*Descriptive Statistics for Scales (N=12)*

Scale	Min	Max	Mean	Median	SD	Range
FFMQ – Observing subscale	2.75	4.75	3.40	3.38	.52	2.00
FFMQ – Describing subscale	1.50	4.38	2.92	3.00	.97	2.88
FFMQ – Nonreactivity subscale	1.50	3.00	2.45	2.50	.44	1.50
FFMQ – Non-judgement subscale	2.00	4.50	2.89	2.75	.76	2.50
FFMQ – Acting with Awareness subscale	1.63	4.00	3.18	3.31	.67	2.38
FFMQ – Total	2.08	3.64	3.04	3.15	.46	1.56
ECR-R – Anxiety subscale	2.50	6.28	3.92	3.75	1.11	3.78
ECR-R – Avoidance subscale	1.67	4.78	3.13	3.06	1.07	3.11
Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI)	33	147	103.00	112.50	32.67	114

The distribution of scores for each of the above scales and subscales was determined through the generation of histograms as shown in Figures 5.1 to 5.9. Each histogram is followed by a discussion of the respective skewness and kurtosis values (Kim, 2013) of the distribution. The cut-off point for skewness was $> |2|$ and $> |4|$ for kurtosis (Kahane, 2008).

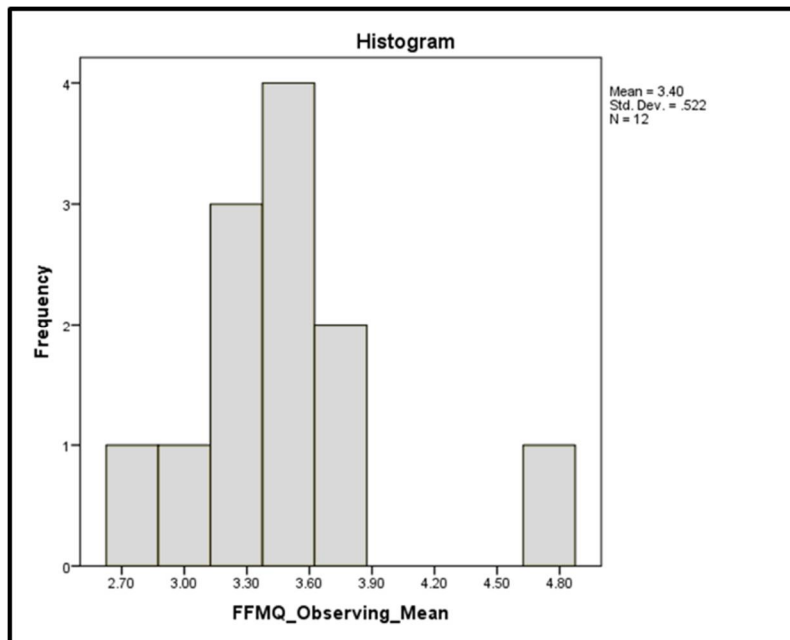


Figure 5.1. Histogram: FFMQ – Observing subcale

The mean scores for the FFMQ *Observing* subcale were positively skewed as illustrated by the histogram in Figure 5.1. This indicated that the majority of the participants had low rather than high scores, which could also be inferred from the skewness value (1.61), which was larger than zero. A value of 0 or close to 0 is indicative of a normal distribution (Cain, Zhang, & Yuan, 2017; Kim, 2013). Kurtosis specifies the tallness and sharpness of the central peak, relative to a normal distribution. A kurtosis value of 3.74 for the *Observing* subcale indicated that the peak and tails were close to that of a normal distribution, as is the case for a kurtosis close to 3 (Kim, 2013).

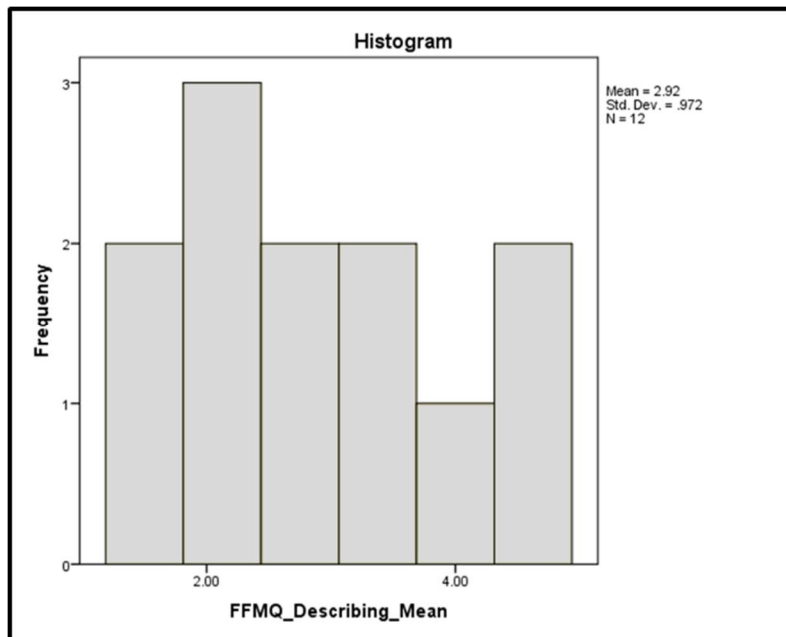


Figure 5.2. Histogram: FFMQ – Describing subscale

The histogram in Figure 5.2 shows that the distribution of the mean scores for the FFMQ *Describing* subscale was close to uniform. Such a flat distribution indicates that an equal number of participants obtained the different scores. Since a uniform distribution is also symmetrical, a skewness value of close to 0 would be expected. Accordingly, the skewness value of 0.18 met this expectation. With almost no peak and no tails, the low kurtosis value of -1.06 was also anticipated.

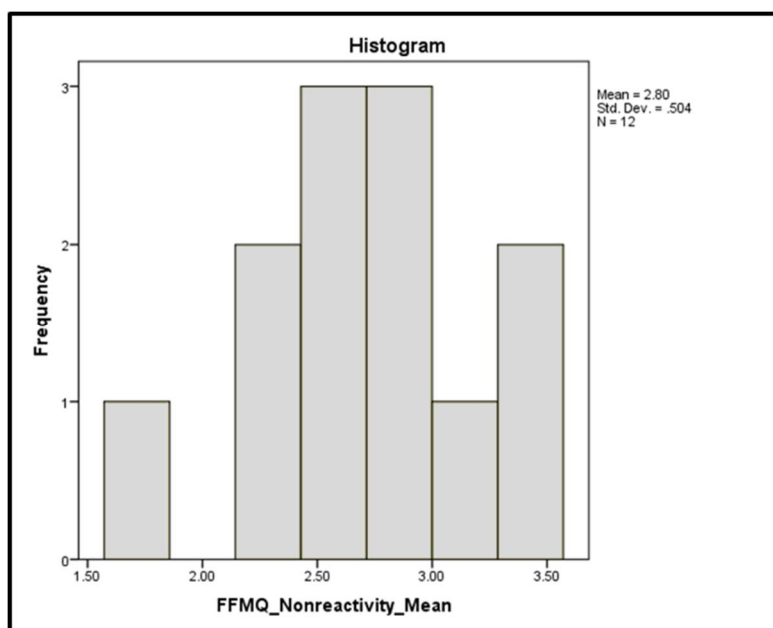


Figure 5.3. Histogram: FFMQ – Nonreactivity subscale

The mean scores for the FFMQ *Nonreactivity* subscale (Figure 5.3) were somewhat skewed to the left (negatively skewed), with more participants having high rather than low scores. This was also evident from the skewness value (-0.70), which was less than 0, bearing in mind that a value of 0 or close to 0 is indicative of a normal distribution (Cain, Zhang, & Yuan, 2017; Kim, 2013). Kurtosis was low (0.48), indicating that the tails were shorter and the peak lower and broader than what would be expected in a normal distribution.

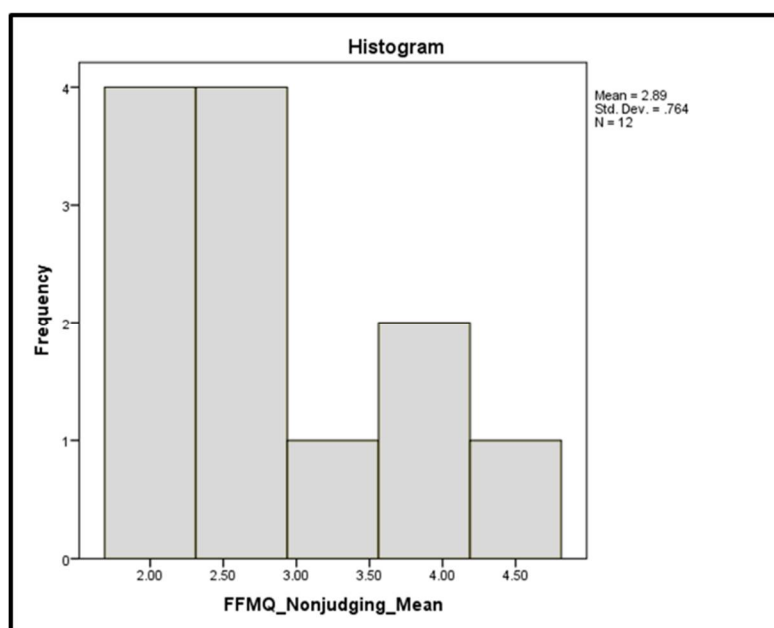


Figure 5.4. Histogram: FFMQ – Non-judgement subscale

Based on the histogram in Figure 5.4, the distribution of the mean scores for the FFMQ *Non-judgment* subscale was skewed to the right (positively skewed). This indicated that the majority of the participants had low rather than high scores, which could also be seen from the skewness value (0.96), which was larger than 0 and therefore indicative of a normal distribution. Kurtosis was low (0.28), indicating that the tails were shorter and the peak lower and broader than would be expected in a normal distribution.

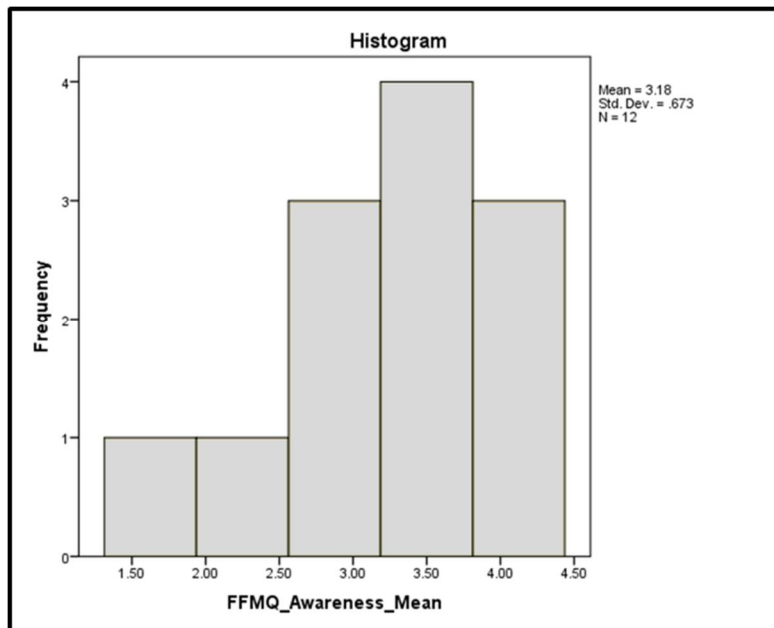


Figure 5.5. Histogram: FFMQ – Acting with Awareness subscale

The histogram representing the FFMQ *Acting with Awareness* subscale (Figure 5.5) shows that the distribution of the mean scores was skewed to the left (negatively skewed), with more participants obtaining high scores rather than low scores on this subscale. This result could also be seen from the skewness value (-1.03), which was less than 0. The kurtosis value of 1.34 indicated a platykurtic distribution, with shorter tails and a lower and broader peak than the normal distribution.

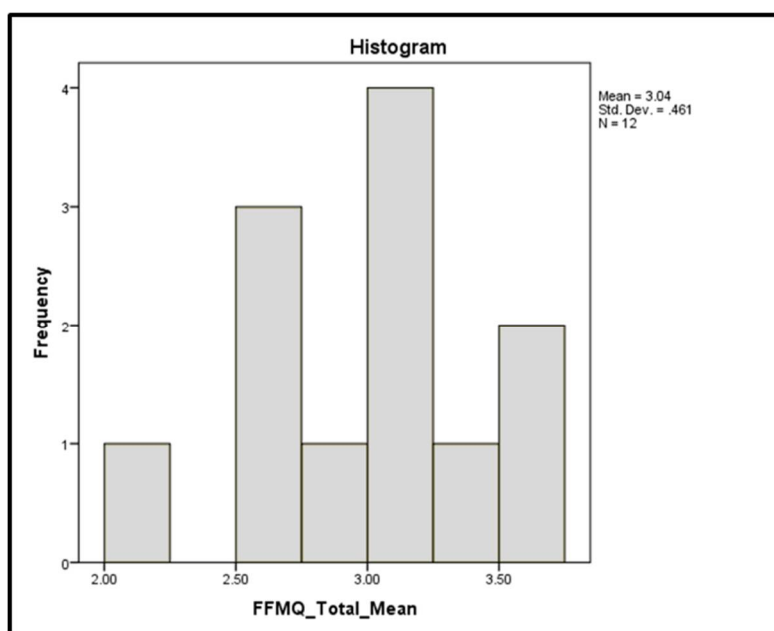


Figure 5.6. Histogram: FFMQ – Total

The distribution of the mean scores for the FFMQ *Total* was multimodal, with three clear peaks or modes as seen in Figure 5.6. The negative skewness value (-0.56) indicated that the distribution was somewhat skewed to the left, with participants more likely to obtain high rather than low scores. In addition, the low kurtosis value (0.20) was indicative of the distribution having shorter tails and a lower and broader peak, when considering all three peaks as a whole, than would be expected in a normal distribution.

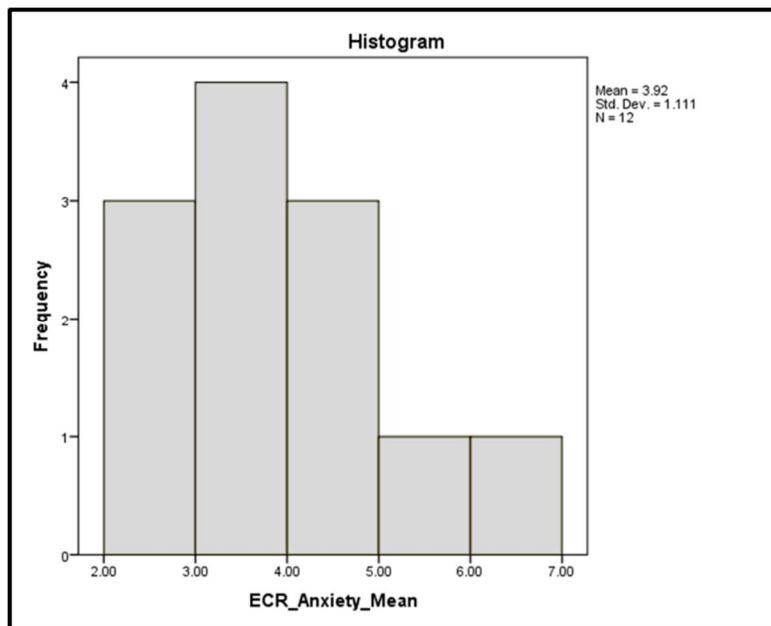


Figure 5.7. Histogram: ECR-R Anxiety subscale

As shown in Figure 5.7, the distribution of the mean scores for the ECR-R *Anxiety* subscale were skewed to the right (positively skewed), indicating that the majority of the participants had low rather than high scores. The positive skewness was also evident from the skewness value (0.72), which was larger than 0, considering that a value of 0 or close to 0 is indicative of a normal distribution (Cain, Zhang, & Yuan, 2017; Kim, 2013). A low kurtosis value (0.26) further indicated that the tails were shorter and the peak lower and broader than would be expected in a normal distribution.

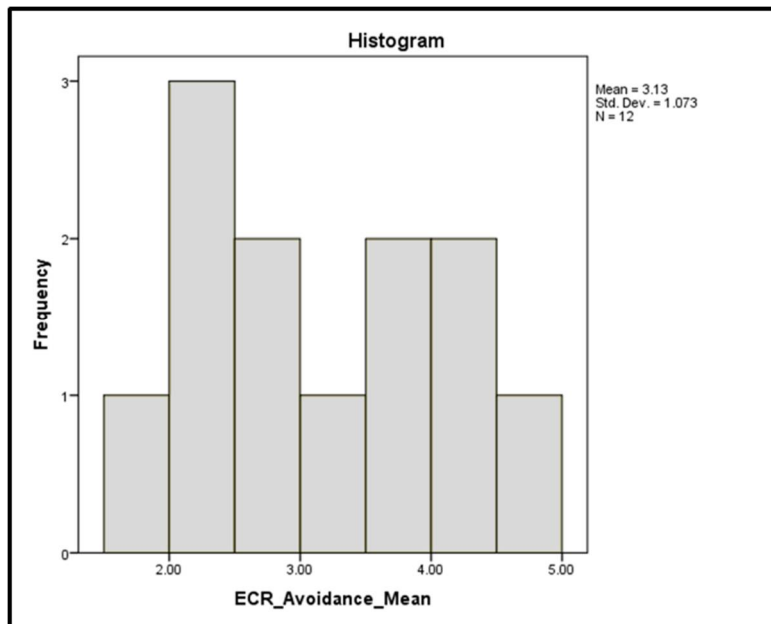


Figure 5.8. Histogram: ECR-R Avoidance subscale

The histogram representing the mean scores for the ECR-R *Avoidance* subscale (Figure 5.8) had a bimodal distribution with two clear peaks visible. The peak on the lower end of the distribution was higher than that on the higher end of the distribution, resulting in a skewness value of 0.13, positively skewed and larger than 0. Furthermore, the low kurtosis value (-1.57) was indicative of an overall broader and less peaked distribution with shorter tails than would be expected in the case of a normal distribution.

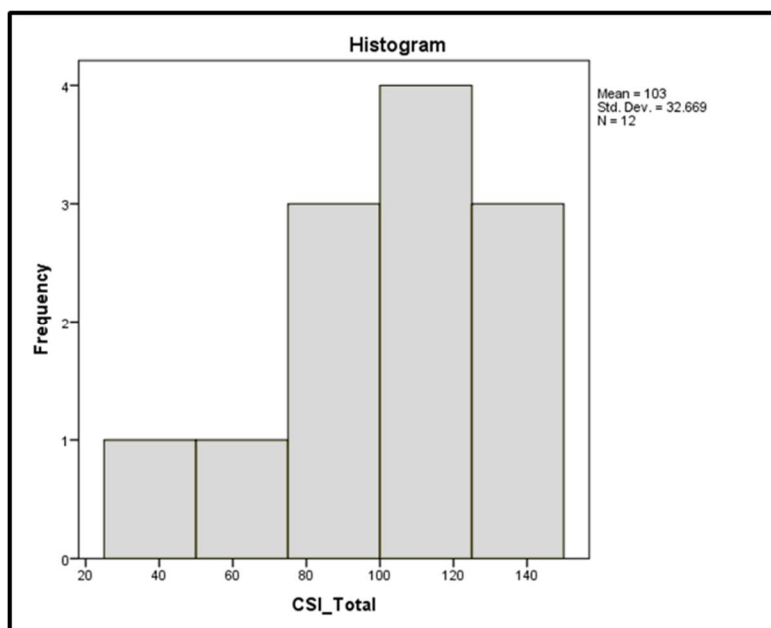


Figure 5.9. Histogram: CSI

The mean scores for the CSI scale were skewed to the left (negatively skewed), which showed that more participants obtained high scores rather than low scores on this particular scale (see Figure 5.9). This was also evident from the skewness value of -0.85, which was lower than 0. A value of 0 or close to 0 would indicate a normal distribution. A kurtosis value of approximately 3 would also be indicative of a normal distribution. The kurtosis value of 0.48 for the CSI indicated a platykurtic distribution (Kim, 2013) with shorter tails and a lower and broader peak than the normal distribution.

The distributions for all of the scales and subscales were, therefore, shown to be non-normal. A normal distribution usually presents with a symmetrical, bell-shaped curve, where half of the data will present to the left of the mean and half to the right (Peters, Schmidt, & Fearncombe, 2017). The non-normal distributions of scores in the above histograms are most likely due to the small sample size. A larger sample size is required to achieve an accurate representation of an entire distribution (Kim, 2013; Krithikadatta, 2014). In addition to the descriptive statistics completed for each of the measuring scales and subscales, profiles were created for each couple.

5.2.2. Couple Profiles

A couple profile was compiled for each participating couple based on the quantitative data gathered from their responses on the self-report measures completed in the first phase of data collection. Each couple profile consists of a short description of the couple, followed by a table and discussion comparing their scores on the mindfulness (FFMQ) (Baer et al., 2006), attachment (ECR-R) (Fraley et al., 2000) and satisfaction (CSI) (Funk & Rogge, 2007) measuring instruments. The couple profiles were intended to inform the qualitative findings by providing context for the couples' narratives regarding their relationships. Furthermore, the couple profiles aid in providing a more nuanced understanding of the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of these couples.

Couple 1 – Nicki and Jaime

Nicki and Jaime, a White, female, same-sex pair from the Western Cape indicated that they had been married for under five years. They had a two-decade age gap between them.

Both partners were employed. Neither of them had been in psychotherapy before, either individually or as a couple.

Table 5.2

Couple 1 Profile: FFMQ, ECR-R and CSI Scores

	Nicki	Jaime
FFMQ – Observing subscale Total	25	22
FFMQ – Observing subscale Mean	3.13	2.75
FFMQ – Describing subscale Total	35	12
FFMQ – Describing subscale Mean	4.38	1.50
FFMQ – Nonreactivity subscale Total	21	16
FFMQ – Nonreactivity subscale Mean	3.00	2.29
FFMQ – Non-judgement subscale Total	18	18
FFMQ – Non-judgement subscale Mean	2.25	2.25
FFMQ – Acting with Awareness subscale Total	27	13
FFMQ – Acting with Awareness subscale Mean	3.38	1.63
FFMQ – Total	126	81
FFMQ – Total Mean	3.23	2.08
ECR-R Anxious Attachment subscale Total	65	92
ECR-R Anxious Attachment subscale Mean	3.61	5.11
ECR-R Avoidant Attachment subscale Total	45	49
ECR-R Avoidant Attachment subscale Mean	2.50	5.72
CSI – Total	118	108

Nicki obtained a higher overall mindfulness score (3.23) than Jaime (2.08). Jaime also consistently had low scores for all five of the mindfulness subscales. While Nicki obtained low scores on the *Observing* (3.13) and *Non-judgement* (2.25) subscales, she had high scores for the other three subscales, namely *Describing* (4.38), *Nonreactivity* (3.00) and *Acting with Awareness* (3.38). With low scores on both the anxious (3.61) and avoidant (2.50) attachment subscales, Nicki appeared to be relatively secure in her attachment. Jaime, however, appeared to have more of an insecure attachment (anxious avoidant group), with high scores

for both the anxious (5.11) and avoidant (5.72) subscales. Both Nicki and Jaime had high relationship satisfaction scores, namely 118 and 108, respectively, on the CSI. Nicki and Jaime were therefore both very satisfied in their relationship even though their levels of mindfulness and attachment were completely different. While Nicki appeared to be secure in her attachment, and demonstrated a high level of mindfulness, Jaime presented with a more insecure attachment and low levels of mindfulness. Therefore, Nicki's scores support the notion of a positive association between mindfulness and satisfaction, whereas Jaime's results do not support such an association.

Couple 2 – Bianca and Vernon

Bianca and Vernon entered the study with both of them having had individual and couple psychotherapy in the past. This Coloured, heterosexual pair from the Western Cape had been married for between five and ten years. They were one year apart in age. While Vernon was unemployed at the start of the first phase of data collection, he had secured another position for himself by the time the second interview was conducted with them. Bianca was also employed.

Table 5.3*Couple 2 Profile: FFMQ, ECR-R and CSI Scores*

	Bianca	Vernon
FFMQ – Observing subscale Total	27	30
FFMQ – Observing subscale Mean	3.38	3.75
FFMQ – Describing subscale Total	25	16
FFMQ – Describing subscale Mean	3.13	2.00
FFMQ – Nonreactivity subscale Total	24	19
FFMQ – Nonreactivity subscale Mean	3.43	2.71
FFMQ – Non-judgement subscale Total	17	16
FFMQ – Non-judgement subscale Mean	2.13	2.00
FFMQ – Acting with Awareness subscale Total	31	23
FFMQ – Acting with Awareness subscale Mean	3.88	2.88
FFMQ – Total	124	104
FFMQ – Total Mean	3.18	2.67
ECR-R Anxious Attachment subscale Total	80	113
ECR-R Anxious Attachment subscale Mean	4.44	6.28
ECR-R Avoidant Attachment subscale Total	68	86
ECR-R Avoidant Attachment subscale Mean	3.78	4.78
CSI – Total	117	99

Based on their overall mindfulness scores, Bianca had high levels of mindfulness (3.18) while Vernon had low levels (2.67) thereof. Despite his low overall score, Vernon had high scores on the *Observing* (3.75) and *Nonreactivity* (2.71) subscales of mindfulness. Bianca had low scores on the subscales of *Observing* (3.38) and *Non-judgement* (2.13) while scoring high on the other three subscales: *Describing* (3.13), *Nonreactivity* (3.43) and *Acting with Awareness* (3.88). Both Bianca and Vernon had high scores on the two attachment subscales, indicating a more insecure attachment (anxious avoidant group). Vernon had an especially high score of 6.28 on the anxious attachment subscale. He also had a low relationship satisfaction score (99) compared to Bianca who had a high score (117) for relationship satisfaction. Therefore, even though Bianca experienced great satisfaction with regard to

their relationship, Vernon did not. Their mindfulness scores appeared to positively correlate with their satisfaction as Bianca also appeared to have high levels of mindfulness, compared to Vernon's low levels of mindfulness. They were, however, both insecurely attached. An association between mindfulness and secure attachment was therefore not consistently supported based on their particular results.

Couple 3 – Kristin and Wayde

Kristin and Wayde, an interracial (Coloured and White) Western Cape pair of the same age had been married for between fifteen and twenty years, and were both employed. Neither of them had had any previous individual or couple psychotherapy contact, but the pair reported unresolved relationship discord related to previous infidelity in their relationship. Psychotherapy was recommended to them. Shortly after their participation in the first phase of data collection, the couple requested and was given a referral letter for accessing state therapy services in their area. Even though they had not yet started a therapy process at the time, they withdrew their participation from the study at the start of the second phase of data collection a few months later. Their withdrawal from the study did not, however, have a direct negative impact on the existing data collection or analysis processes as they still agreed to their data, gathered during the first phase of collection, being used. However, the value of their input on the more focused data gathering done during the second interviews would, no doubt, have contributed even further to the knowledge gained regarding the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences within their relationship.

Table 5.4*Couple 3 Profile: FFMQ, ECR-R and CSI Scores*

	Kristin	Wayde
FFMQ – Observing subscale Total	27	27
FFMQ – Observing subscale Mean	3.38	3.38
FFMQ – Describing subscale Total	27	19
FFMQ – Describing subscale Mean	3.38	2.38
FFMQ – Nonreactivity subscale Total	18	17
FFMQ – Nonreactivity subscale Mean	2.57	2.43
FFMQ – Non-judgement subscale Total	36	22
FFMQ – Non-judgement subscale Mean	4.50	2.75
FFMQ – Acting with Awareness subscale Total	28	26
FFMQ – Acting with Awareness subscale Mean	3.50	3.25
FFMQ – Total	136	111
FFMQ – Total Mean	3.49	2.85
ECR-R Anxious Attachment subscale Total	64	84
ECR-R Anxious Attachment subscale Mean	3.56	4.67
ECR-R Avoidant Attachment subscale Total	75	70
ECR-R Avoidant Attachment subscale Mean	4.17	3.89
CSI – Total	33	63

Apart from an overall high mindfulness score (3.49), Kristin also obtained high scores on four of the five mindfulness subscales: *Describing* (3.38), *Nonreactivity* (2.57), *Non-judgement* (4.50) and *Acting with Awareness* (3.50). She had a particularly high score on the subscale of *Non-judgement*, where she scored 4.50 out of a maximum possible score of 5.00. Conversely, she obtained a low score on the *Observing* subscale (3.38). Except for the *Acting with Awareness* subscale where he obtained a high score (3.25), Wayde scored low on all of the other mindfulness subscales: *Observing* (3.38), *Describing* (2.38), *Nonreactivity* (2.43) and *Non-judgement* (2.75). Subsequently, Wayde's overall mindfulness score was also low (2.85). Kristin scored low on the anxious attachment subscale (3.56) and high on the avoidant attachment subscale (4.17), indicating a relatively avoidant attachment style. Wayde also

appears to be insecure in his attachment style (anxious avoidant group), with high scores on both the anxious (4.67) and avoidant (3.89) subscales. Both Kristin and Wayde scored low in terms of their relationship satisfaction, with Kristin obtaining the lowest satisfaction score for the entire sample (33). The minimum score that can be obtained for satisfaction on the CSI is 32. Wayde obtained a satisfaction score of 63. While they were therefore both very dissatisfied with their relationship, Kristin appeared most dissatisfied. Keeping in mind her high levels of mindfulness, compared to Wayde's low levels of mindfulness, consistent support for a positive association between mindfulness and satisfaction was not found. With both of them further presenting with insecure attachment, an association between mindfulness and attachment was also not consistently supported.

Couple 4 – Stephanie and Qaden

Stephanie and Qaden, a Coloured pair from the Western Cape had been married for between five and ten years and had a two-year age difference between them. They were both employed. While Stephanie and Qaden both reported having had previous individual psychotherapy, they had not had any psychotherapy as a couple.

Table 5.5*Couple 4 Profile: FFMQ, ECR-R and CSI Scores*

	Stephanie	Qaden
FFMQ – Observing subscale Total	27	25
FFMQ – Observing subscale Mean	3.38	3.13
FFMQ – Describing subscale Total	18	14
FFMQ – Describing subscale Mean	2.25	1.75
FFMQ – Nonreactivity subscale Total	21	21
FFMQ – Nonreactivity subscale Mean	3.00	3.00
FFMQ – Non-judgement subscale Total	21	22
FFMQ – Non-judgement subscale Mean	2.63	2.75
FFMQ – Acting with Awareness subscale Total	20	22
FFMQ – Acting with Awareness subscale Mean	2.50	2.75
FFMQ – Total	107	104
FFMQ – Total Mean	2.74	2.67
ECR-R Anxious Attachment subscale Total	70	78
ECR-R Anxious Attachment subscale Mean	3.89	4.33
ECR-R Avoidant Attachment subscale Total	80	61
ECR-R Avoidant Attachment subscale Mean	4.44	3.39
CSI – Total	87	80

Both Stephanie and Qaden were found to have low overall mindfulness, based on their scores of 2.74 and 2.67, respectively. They also scored low on all of the subscales, except for *Nonreactivity*, where they both obtained the same high score of 3.00. Stephanie scored high on both the anxious (3.89) and avoidant (4.44) subscales of attachment, indicating a more insecure attachment style (anxious avoidant group). Similarly, Qaden also appeared to be more insecurely attached (anxious avoidant group), with high scores on both subscales: anxious (4.33) and avoidant (3.39). Both Stephanie and Qaden scored low on relationship satisfaction, with scores of 87 and 80, respectively. Their particular scores supported a positive relationship between both mindfulness and satisfaction, and mindfulness and secure

attachment. For them, low levels of mindfulness coincided with relationship dissatisfaction and an insecure attachment bond.

Couple 5 – Julia and Zed

Julia and Zed, a Black pair from the Western Cape had a four-year age difference between them. The couple indicated that they had been married and cohabiting for between fifteen and twenty years. After more than a decade of being married to each other, their marriage ended in divorce as a result of infidelity. However, they later reconciled and remarried each other. Both partners were employed and reported previous individual psychotherapy experience. They had never had therapy together as a couple.

Table 5.6

Couple 5 Profile: FFMQ, ECR-R and CSI Scores

	Julia	Zed
FFMQ – Observing subscale Total	38	30
FFMQ – Observing subscale Mean	4.75	3.75
FFMQ – Describing subscale Total	31	35
FFMQ – Describing subscale Mean	3.88	4.38
FFMQ – Nonreactivity subscale Total	24	23
FFMQ – Nonreactivity subscale Mean	3.43	3.29
FFMQ – Non-judgement subscale Total	24	23
FFMQ – Non-judgement subscale Mean	3.00	2.88
FFMQ – Acting with Awareness subscale Total	25	31
FFMQ – Acting with Awareness subscale Mean	3.13	3.88
FFMQ – Total	142	142
FFMQ – Total Mean	3.64	3.64
ECR-R Anxious Attachment subscale Total	52	45
ECR-R Anxious Attachment subscale Mean	2.89	2.50
ECR-R Avoidant Attachment subscale Total	36	30
ECR-R Avoidant Attachment subscale Mean	2.00	1.67
CSI – Total	137	147

Julia and Zed both obtained the same high score for overall mindfulness, namely 3.64. Julia obtained an especially high score on the *Observing* subscale of mindfulness: 4.75 out of a potential maximum score of 5.00. This was also the highest score out of all the participants in the study on the *Observing* subscale. Julia further obtained high scores on three of the other facets of mindfulness, namely *Describing* (3.88), *Nonreactivity* (3.43) and *Non-judgement* (3.00). She obtained a low score on the *Acting with Awareness* subscale (3.13). Zed's only low score on the facets of mindfulness was obtained on *Non-judgement* (2.88). He scored high on the other four facets: *Observing* (3.75), *Describing* (4.38), *Nonreactivity* (3.29) and *Acting with Awareness* (3.88). Julia scored low on both the anxious (2.89) and avoidant (2.00) subscales of attachment, indicating that her attachment was relatively secure. Zed's scores also indicated relatively secure attachment with low scores of 2.50 and 1.67 on the anxious and avoidant subscales, respectively. Both Julia and Zed scored high on the CSI for relationship satisfaction, with Zed obtaining the highest score in satisfaction of all the participants in the study, namely 147. Julia obtained the second highest relationship satisfaction score out of all the participants, scoring 137. It could therefore be inferred that they were both very satisfied with their relationship, experienced a secure attachment bond, and functioned in a mindful way. Julia's and Zed's scores supported a positive association between mindfulness and satisfaction, as well as between mindfulness and secure attachment.

Couple 6 – Susan and Theo

Susan and Theo had been married for between fifteen and twenty years, and were living in the Free State. This White pair had a two-year age difference between them, and both partners were employed. While Theo's office was based at home, the nature of his job in emergency management frequently involved his being summoned unexpectedly for duties in the field. As a result, he often worked irregular hours and away from home for extended periods of time. Susan and Theo had had two previous couple psychotherapy processes with different psychologists.

Table 5.7*Couple 6 Profile: FFMQ, ECR-R and CSI Scores*

	Susan	Theo
FFMQ – Observing subscale Total	25	23
FFMQ – Observing subscale Mean	3.13	2.88
FFMQ – Describing subscale Total	24	24
FFMQ – Describing subscale Mean	3.00	3.00
FFMQ – Nonreactivity subscale Total	12	19
FFMQ – Nonreactivity subscale Mean	1.71	2.71
FFMQ – Non-judgement subscale Total	31	29
FFMQ – Non-judgement subscale Mean	3.88	3.63
FFMQ – Acting with Awareness subscale Total	32	27
FFMQ – Acting with Awareness subscale Mean	4.00	3.38
FFMQ – Total	124	122
FFMQ – Total Mean	3.18	3.13
ECR-R Anxious Attachment subscale Total	49	54
ECR-R Anxious Attachment subscale Mean	2.72	3.00
ECR-R Avoidant Attachment subscale Total	40	36
ECR-R Avoidant Attachment subscale Mean	2.22	2.00
CSI - Total	118	129

Both Susan and Theo scored high on overall mindfulness, with scores of 3.18 and 3.13, respectively. Susan scored low on the *Observing* (3.13) and *Nonreactivity* (1.71) subscales of mindfulness while scoring high on the *Describing* (3.00), *Non-judgement* (3.88) and *Acting with Awareness* (4.00) subscales. Theo also scored low on the *Observing* subscale (2.88), but scored high on *Describing* (3.00), *Nonreactivity* (2.71), *Non-judgement* (3.63) and *Acting with Awareness* (3.38). Susan and Theo both appeared to have relatively secure attachment as they scored low on both the anxious (2.72 and 3.00) and avoidant (2.22 and 2.00) subscales. Both of their relationship satisfaction scores were high, with Susan scoring 118 and Theo 129. Susan and Theo therefore experienced high levels of mindfulness, a secure attachment bond, and high satisfaction with regard to their relationship. Similar to Julia and Zed, their

respective scores supported a positive association between mindfulness and satisfaction, as well as between mindfulness and secure attachment.

In summary, based on the unique couple profiles of the participants, seven out of the 12 participants (58%) scored high on overall mindfulness. In addition, five out of the 12 participants (42%) were indicated as having relatively secure attachment while the rest (58%) had a more insecure attachment style. Furthermore, of the seven insecurely attached participants, six could be placed in the anxious avoidant group, showing high scores on both insecure attachment subscales while one had a more avoidant attachment. While exploring some of the potential similarities between the profiles of those intimate partners with a more secure attachment style, the only notable observation was that all five participants scored high on the *Describing* subscale of mindfulness (FFMQ). This may indicate some association between secure attachment and the *Describing* facet of mindfulness, in particular. Further consideration will be given to this observation in the next chapter while discussing the current results in conjunction with the existing literature.

In terms of their relationship satisfaction, seven out of the 12 participants (58%) were found to have high levels of satisfaction with their relationships. Individual partner scores further showed that five out of the six participating couples had similar relationship satisfaction scores. Thus, both partners either had low or high satisfaction scores. The remaining couple (Bianca and Vernon) did not have similar satisfaction scores. Vernon, who obtained a low satisfaction score compared to Bianca's high score, also obtained an especially high score on the anxious attachment subscale of the ECR-R. These findings raise the question as to whether Vernon's mismatched perception and experience of his relationship satisfaction compared to that of his partner could be explained by his very high levels of anxious attachment insecurity. This question will be further elaborated on in the next chapter of this thesis. Finally, participants' unique scores supported a positive association between overall mindfulness and relationship satisfaction. Similarly, participants' scores indicated support for a positive association between overall mindfulness and a more secure attachment style.

The results obtained from these couple profiles should be viewed in conjunction with the qualitative findings to be discussed next.

5.3. Qualitative results

5.3.1. Introduction

The interviews conducted with couples led to the generation of themes around the nature of intimate relationships, its facilitating and supporting influences, and specific vital components of optimal functioning. In analysing the data, an inductive approach was used (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). Accordingly, coding was completed by only considering the pure data and the particular themes that presented regarding the experiences of couples in intimate relationships. Themes were identified at both a semantic and a latent level (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, both the explicit meanings found in participant data, as well as the implied and underlying nuances were considered and analysed. The latent themes were of particular interest in this study due to their potential for providing insight into the subtle nuances of couples' experiences in intimate relationships. Three main themes, further supported by their subthemes, were identified while conducting the thematic analysis. A preliminary summary of the themes and their subthemes is provided to orientate the reader to the section that follows.

Theme 1: The intimate relationship as a changing, growing, "living" entity

- *External factors impacting the relationship entity*
 - *Internal factors shaping partners' experiences within the relationship entity*
-

Theme 2: The intimate relationship as sustained by relational presence

- *Relational presence as supporting relational alignment*
 - *Relational presence-enhancing behaviours between partners*
 - *Partners' awareness as supporting relational presence*
 - *Increasing partners' attachment security through relational presence*
-

Theme 3: Communication as a facilitator of optimal functioning within the relationship entity

- *Improving communication through mindfulness*
 - *Mindful communication as contributing to attachment security*
 - *Mindful communication reveals the unspoken*
-

The first theme will present the intimate relationship as a “living” entity due to its propensity for, and reliance on, both change and growth. Various internal and external factors which may influence both the intimate relationship entity and partners’ respective experiences, will also be discussed. The external influences include having children and parenting, occupational demands, physical health, religious orientations, and partners’ family of origin. The relationship entity may be internally shaped by partner’s internal dialogues, trust, patience, acceptance and appreciation. Next, a presentation of the intimate relationship as being sustained by relational presence is offered. Relational presence as supporting the creation of relational alignment will be discussed, followed by a review of the different presence-enhancing behaviours in which couples may engage. The role of awareness in supporting presence will also be considered before discussing relational presence as a contributing factor to attachment security. The final theme positions communication as an important facilitator of optimal functioning within the relationship entity. The associations between communication and mindfulness and attachment, respectively, are included in this theme. Lastly, mindful communication as the mechanism through which the unspoken internal thoughts, feelings and experiences of the intimate partners are revealed will be reflected upon.

These three themes will be elaborated on in this chapter. While they are presented and discussed separately, it is important to note that based on participants’ accounts, these themes are closely interconnected and exist in a reciprocal association with one another. The complete interview transcripts can be found in Appendices I to S. Each quotation referred to in this chapter can be located in the transcript by using the appendix letter, interview number and paragraph number included at the end of each quotation. Therefore, K[2p18] would refer to a participant comment that can be found in Appendix K, interview 2, paragraph 18. Clarifying information included in quotations appears within square brackets [] whereas a pause in the participant’s speech is indicated by means of three ellipses points (...), and an editing cut is indicated using four ellipses points (...). Where necessary, excerpts from the transcripts have been translated into English from the participants’ home language (Afrikaans). Translations were done in a way that accurately preserves the participants’ accounts rather than encouraging correct English language usage.

5.3.2. Theme 1: The intimate relationship as a changing, growing, “living” entity

Extrapolated from participants' experiences in this study, the intimate relationship between partners has been conceptualised as functioning as an independent system that displayed qualities indicative of a “living”, changing and growing entity. I hereby propose the term “relationship entity” to encapsulate the intimate relationship system as a “living” entity. All of the couples mentioned and described notions of change and growth at some point in their interviews. In the context of the present study, change and growth were interpreted as qualities of the relationship entity, as well as individual and joint behaviours exhibited by the respective partners. During this study, it was interpreted that both change and growth were qualities of the relationship entity, as well as individual and joint behaviours exhibited by the respective partners.

While Stephanie acknowledged that *“Growth is important to me”* O[2p78], Julia emphasised the necessity for both change and growth, saying that *“Change and growth for me is like breathing. So, if it's not there, you might be feeling a bit stagnant”* Q[2p134]. Both change and growth were further presented as ongoing and expected processes as reiterated in Vernon's account of their stance as a couple towards change: *“We've jotted our path down in pencil, because it changes a lot”* L[2p9]. Based on these accounts, change and growth may be understood as noteworthy processes that contribute to relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, change may offer clarity with regard to the self, one's partner and the relationship entity, regardless of what precipitated the change. Such clarity also seemed to pave the way for authenticity within and between partners as Vernon explained, *“We know what we want. Before, when we had started dating, it was just about pleasing the next person. And now it's more about what I really want. You know when we started dating, it's like I want to give you the world, and things like that. But now, I actually realise that you shouldn't promise a woman the world if you don't own it”* L[2p9]. Therefore, based on Vernon's account, it may be inferred that over time, the needs of the individual may become more effectively balanced with those of the relationship entity. Accordingly, change could be seen as a process of development for the self, other and relationship.

Change and growth also appeared to be simultaneously automatic and deliberate processes resulting from a number of precipitating factors. Bianca, for example, mentioned

the role of self-monitoring: *"We're obviously on a constant-always-monitoring our relationship: how it is for me and how it is for him. Yeah, we'll always do like a check-in after months or two, just to see: 'How are you doing? Am I still doing everything ... how can I improve the relationship? Communication skills ... how am I doing for you? Are you saying stuff that I maybe don't like, or the tone or stuff like that?' So, check in"* K[1p2]. Self-monitoring may therefore facilitate awareness of any potential changes that might be necessary within the partners or relationship. At the same time, change and growth may also occur as a result of a negative or challenging event internal or external to the relationship entity. Julia and Zed's relationship history offered a striking account of how a negative event can not only be a turning point for positive change, but also can actually transform the relationship entity into a healthier state than before. After having been married for 14 years, Julia and Zed's relationship entity suffered the impact of infidelity, leading to a divorce. This was, however, not the end of their relationship as both Julia and Zed confirmed a process of ongoing individual and joint change that ultimately led to the revival of their relationship entity into an improved version of itself. Zed reflected on their experience, saying:

Well, the separation has done something, especially for me. Also, I think, for Julia, but more for me. I've had to learn other things to ... you know some stuff you take for granted. And then some ways I believed that I should be like this, and now with that gap I sat and spend a lot of time thinking ... And while we did speak a lot of things, we spoke more often about serious things when we were separated than before. And then I had to learn I had to change this, I had to change that. So that was one of the major things that have had to happen. It was a bit uncomfortable, but I see what it's doing to us. It's positive, so I like that. (Zed) P[1p6]

Improving communication to include serious and potentially uncomfortable topics, as well as not taking each other for granted, were indicated as some of the changes that had brought their relationship back to life. Most of the participants also reported changing and growing through therapeutic collaboration in psychotherapy. Whereas both Nicki and Jaime, and Kristin and Wayne had never embarked on any individual or couple psychotherapy before, Bianca and Vernon had received both individual and couple psychotherapy in the past. In comparison, Stephanie, Qaden, Julia and Zed had previously received only individual

psychotherapy while Susan and Theo had formerly received only couple psychotherapy. Therefore, psychotherapy may often be used as a facilitator of change and growth for the individual partners or couple.

Consequently, growth may also be seen to occur on both the joint level of the couple's relationship, as well as individually for each partner. Theo was quick to point out that for him, individual growth had *"definitely gone with the relationship growth"* S[2p23]. Similarly, Qaden elaborated on the meaning attached to this interconnected growth relationship saying, *"So, for me, it's something that you need to look at when you grow yourself. When you want to grow yourself, your partner must be in tune or must be aware of the growth that you are wanting to achieve. And I think it will be nice if you have one goal, and you work towards it. And then you identify what you need in yourself for that, then you work towards it. Then each one brings something to the party"* O[2p74]. In his account, Qaden underscored the importance of alignment between partners' growth processes. He further proposed that partners work together in identifying and achieving their goals. In contrast, Susan described focusing strongly on her individual growth, perhaps without much consideration for her partner. However, she reflected on how her individual growth had positively impacted their relationship dynamic and functioning, stating:

I've probably become a little bit selfish because I'm so focused on my individual growth. But, I've also realised that it's made me more, uhm, accepting and tolerant and compassionate towards people in general. Which would obviously then include my husband. I've become more aware of my imbalances, and my faults and my hang-ups, and all that. Which helps me to keep the focus on me, instead of putting it on him every time something goes wrong. It's not about him, it's about me going: 'Ok, I have to deal with this myself.' (Susan) S[2p25]

Growing and maturing within herself also appeared to allow Susan to grow in her relationship, enhancing her ability to take control of, and responsibility for, her own intrapersonal matters. In addition, it reportedly contributed to her sense of acceptance, tolerance and compassion towards her husband. Fittingly, Bianca seemed to capture the aspects of individual, couple and relationship growth that appear to steer the relationship

entity in her image of the seed and soil: *"I heard the other day, in a marriage you almost grow like a seed and the soil. They both need each other to grow, but they are separate. But then you can't have the seed without the soil. And vice versa. But the seed has its own stuff, and the soil has its own nutrients that help the seed. But they grow separately, together"* L[2p173]. Couple and individual growth are therefore understood as being two parts of the same necessary process for developing the relationship entity. In addition, neither couple nor individual growth could then effectively occur without the other.

Nicki seemed to identify a commitment to putting in the necessary effort to bring about change and growth as a component of long-lasting relationships. She elaborated, *"I don't think you can actually reach the level you want to. No, it's a daily process. I think you have to reinvent yourself all the time ... because things can get stale, you know. I appreciate people that have been married 60, 70 years. There's definitely something that's there. And don't think they don't make mistakes ... So, uhm, you just need to work at it"* J[2p238]. Accordingly, growth is suggested as a possible requirement for the longevity of a relationship. Similarly, Vernon cited his parents' relationship of 32 years as the product of change and growth, as well as an example of optimal relationship functioning: *"So, I keep forgetting the fact that, in order to become a master at something, you need to do it for a set amount of time. You need to do it over and over before you actually understand how to master that particular skill"* L[2p49]. In this way, reaching optimal relationship functioning may be the result of continuous change, growth, and learning, which comes from both the good and the challenging times in a relationship entity's history. Accordingly, relationship satisfaction may be the result of changing and growing as a couple.

In addition, it is proposed that a willingness to grow communicates a sense of commitment to the relationship entity, as Julia accordingly shared, *"I think for me, as someone who shows up. They're there. First of all. You're there with me. You are making an effort to change things that need to be changed"* P[1p17]. The degree to which one's partner is willing and open to change may, therefore, contribute to a sense of security within the relationship. Nicki's previous sentiment also suggests that growth requires deliberate planning and action. Zed's account of growth also included a notion of planning as he reflected on their concrete plan aimed at growth: *"There is a physical plan ... which, uhm, I*

drew up. Of things we kind of have to do. Like a monthly and yearly thing. And then every now and then, we'll look at it, and see what we haven't yet done" Q[2p127]. Accordingly, a continued process of growth appeared to bring new energy and motivations into the relationship entity, thus preventing it from becoming stagnant.

In summary, based on the participants' accounts, in this study, the relationship entity has been formulated in terms of being a "living" entity due to its continuous transformation and development as a result of change and growth. The participants' experiences also appeared to support individual and couple growth as being closely intertwined and connected. Based on the participants' accounts, individual insight and growth further benefit the interpersonal couple dynamics within the relationship entity. Growth is therefore interpreted as offering an opportunity to defy the mundane, supports the natural progression of partners through their own stages of life, and encourages closeness between partners.

The living relationship entity was further described by the participants as existing in a manner consistent with systems theory (Becvar & Becvar, 2013). In this way, the relationship entity exists both as a system in itself, and as an interconnected system within other systems, such as extended family systems, social systems and occupational systems. Accordingly, the intimate relationship entity appeared as being subject to a variety of intra- and intersystem influences, from both the past and present. The external influences derive from the interconnected systems associated with the partners while the internal influences largely appear to originate from the two individual partners, their intrapersonal processes, and the interpersonal relationship dynamics.

5.3.2.1. External factors impacting the relationship entity

External factors are those influences originating from outside the relationship entity, but which impact the relationship system due to their association with the respective partners. Navigating external influences appears to be quite the minefield, as Kristin suggested: *"Well if we are on our own, and it's just me and him and the kids, we actually ... we are able to function together. We are able to live with each other. But when other people get involved, it becomes a Then the disagreements and the issues all start" M[1p61].*

External influences may, therefore, hold the potential to disrupt an otherwise harmonious relationship entity.

Based on participants' accounts, the reported external influences on the relationship entity included children and parenting, occupation, health matters, religion or spirituality, and each partner's family of origin. Bianca summarised the impact of external factors on the relationship entity saying, "*With three kids ... no way that it can't have an influence! (laughing) ... So, it's always these and then work ... and then children ... and the children must go to ballet and karate and ... always busy*" K[1p51]. Having children and meeting the demands associated with parenting were, therefore, reported as being energy-, time- and resource-expending influences on the relationship entity. Similarly, with all 12 of the participants having been employed, occupational demands were also reported to influence the relationship entity in a variety of ways. For instance, Vernon mentioned how his work duties in the field of information technology depleted his personal resources, thereby reducing his capacity to be present with his wife and attend to the needs of their relationship entity:

Because my job that I do is quite mental ... I really have to think a lot about what I do. You sit at your desk the whole day so your body rests, but your brain gets shredded. And I think, because when I walk in and she wants that communication with an adult ... it's difficult because my brain is just so tired as it's just dealt with difficult customers and colleagues. So, one thing that she wants from me is spent somewhere else, and then it comes to the point where we're supposed to interact, they've taken everything. (Vernon)
L[2p129]

Theo, in turn, stressed the associated challenge of having to navigate the work and home division when one's place of work is within the home. He elaborated, "*We work from home, so we sit next to each other a lot of the time, and that sort of thing. And I have gotten stuck into a mail, or one thing. I get focused, and then we get these questions about supper and feeding the dogs, household crap (laughing), that gets in my way. So, I would lose my cool, and that. So yes, I've realised that, and it had been an issue*" S[2p29]. In Theo's situation with his wife, effectively delineating work versus personal time became even more of a challenge as occupational and personal demands coincided within the same physical space.

Nicki and Jaime emphasised the influence of physical well-being and health on their relationship entity due to the 20-year age difference between them. Nicki explained, *"I am getting older, so, uhm, you know things like that ... that she must be aware that I'm getting older ... and that I will start getting health issues, and that"* J[2p41]. In comparison, Stephanie clearly recognised the influence of her emotional state and expression on her own health and well-being. She also noted the possible impact of her and her husband's different family norms around health.

And I have high blood [pressure]. His family are [sic] very healthy ... But unfortunately, ... we have high blood in our family, and we have sugar [insulin resistance] in our family, and we stay sick. And I think it has to do with our emotional state. And for someone that comes from such a healthy family, and now here he sits with a wife that is always sick ... when he just wants to talk, then I already have a headache. And he doesn't have that patience; he wants to talk now – he wants to resolve it. It got a bit unbearable because I had headaches for weeks. (Stephanie) O[2p45]

While her husband reportedly came from a physically healthy family with infrequent ailments, Stephanie's family was described as frequently – if not continuously – experiencing health challenges. As a result, Stephanie's physical challenges negatively impacted her relationship with her husband, as their family histories and, possibly, also expectations, regarding health differed. In particular, given his healthy family background, Qaden may, arguably, expect his wife to recover more swiftly and to experience fewer physical ailments. In the event of his expectations being unmet, it may well negatively impact the relationship entity and their respective levels of relationship satisfaction.

Four out of the six participating couples also emphasised the role of religion, faith or spirituality in their relationships. As a pastor's daughter, Nicki valued the importance of religion in her relationship with Jaime: *"I think God is very strong in our relationship"* I[1p86]. Similarly, Qaden identified the religious value system as the thread that kept him and his wife together while also offering a point of reference during times of discord between them. He elaborated, *"Yes, for me it is the value system that we have as a family to go to church together and to pray together. And that is really for me the essence of our relationship that"*

keeps us together. And when she disappoints me or I disappoint her, then there is always a middle point that we can go to" N[1p33]. Unlike the other couples who had a strong focus on institutionalised religion, specifically Christianity, Theo and Susan identified more of a need for general awareness and spirituality in their relationship entity. As Theo shared, *"I think what we are looking forward to is growing spiritually. Not in a religious way. But spiritually in our connection. I think we can definitely work on that, and I'm looking forward to it"* S[2p73]. Theo continued to explain that, for them, the spiritual connection in their relationship was achieved through activities, such as yoga and meditation, practiced individually, but also as a couple. His account appeared to suggest the spiritual journey as being a growth process of "becoming" where, perhaps similar to the relationship entity itself, the spiritual connection between partners also develops over time.

The history and norms of family of origin, as an external influence on both the individual partners and their relationship, was repeatedly alluded to by the participants. Notably, the influence of family of origin on personal and emotional expression of self was further highlighted by a number of participants. In particular, participants described their family histories as negatively impacting their emotional expression within their intimate relationships. Zed, for example, described how his family norm regarding not expressing one's emotions was carried forward into his intimate relationship: *"Which again, I also still say comes back to how it was before when I grew up: don't express yourself, just do this, don't rattle the boat. So, I grew up and I took it to my marriage as well, where I used to, with Julia, just keep quiet"* P[1p112]. Accordingly, the example set by one's family of origin offers guidelines for treating and responding to one's partner, along with expressing emotion, as Bianca reflected: *"And when it comes to affection, my grandmother, her way of loving ... Because I grew up a lot with her and my mom ... it was like, if the man is fed, the house is clean ... if he goes to work, you shouldn't bother him a lot when he's working ... then, uh, that is love. Even communication. It's weird for me to do communication now and say how I feel"* L[2p88]. Due to her family's example, Bianca found it difficult to express her own needs and feelings to her partner.

Participants also shared how family of origin appeared to impact the expectations that they held of themselves and their relationships. Vernon, for example, considered the

personal expectations created saying, *“So, for me, having a father figure ... according to the role of a man – you never get tired, you always work, you must support your family, you must provide for your family, so ... That has been engrained into me though it’s not one hundred per cent right, that’s how I’ve been living my life”* K[1p39]. Therefore, based on his earlier experiences within his family, Vernon adopted many of the same beliefs as his father. Perhaps these beliefs contributed to his expectations of himself with regard to his work ethic and providing for his family even though he also appeared to understand that some of these expectations and beliefs might be unattainable or unrealistic. The family norms described by both Bianca and Vernon, specifically around the expected behaviour of men and women within intimate relationships, appear to allude to the possible influence of existing beliefs about gender roles within their families of origin.

Apart from navigating the potential influences of their own family of origin, the participants were also confronted with the family of origin legacy of their partners. This was further complicated, not only by differences between partners’ family legacies, but also by differences between family norms. Often, the impact on the relationship entity can be challenging or even negative. Bianca reflected on the differences between her and Vernon’s family backgrounds, as well as the possible influence thereof on their relational security. She explained, *“And I think our backgrounds ... his parents are still married ... mine had been divorced. So, I have almost that caution-in-marriage-type-of-thing, where my parents were married for 13 years, and then they divorced. So, it’s almost that caution that if you are too happy then something might happen and break. And it will all stop”* K[1p32]. Hence, while Vernon’s family background possibly had prepared him for increased security within his own relationship, in comparison, Bianca’s background reportedly had laid a foundation of distrust in the security of intimate relationships.

Bearing in mind the ways in which her own family legacy had collided with her partner’s as far as emotional expression and conflict resolution were concerned, Julia shared:

I was actually ... because I think also, with my mother in her volatile situation, verbalising myself wasn't an issue. I could have an argument, and have it loud, scream or shout or whatever. It's not an issue. But that wasn't

for him. He wasn't brought up like that. His parents, everything was in a bubble. Those people, where nothing ever happens. The children are always playing nicely. Nobody fights. So, he was in that. So obviously, I brought that, and obviously it didn't work with him. Because here's this person screaming and shouting, and he's like: 'I don't understand.' So that was one thing I had to learn. It took me a looong [sic] time to learn to actually... that I don't have to ... I can have an argument, but it doesn't have to be the way I'm having it. (Julia) Q[2p69]

Julia therefore found herself having to grow and change to achieve optimal individual and couple functioning. The differences in family legacy and influence may, therefore, offer an opportunity for positive growth and change within individual partners and the relationship entity as a whole.

Apart from the external factors, the relationship entity was also demonstrated as being shaped by factors internal to it. The internal factors were found to include a combination of specific intra- and interpersonal factors that drive and influence the relationship entity and partners' experiences thereof.

5.3.2.2. Internal factors shaping partners' experiences within the relationship entity

Five internal factors, in particular, were highlighted by participants for their influence on the relationship entity. These factors, which also appear to exist in a reciprocal relationship with one another, included partners' internal dialogues, trust, patience, acceptance and appreciation.

Contemplating the ways in which he navigated any differences between himself and Julia in terms of personality or preferences, Zed's account alluded to the contribution of his internal dialogue (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015; Geurts, 2018; Puchalska-Wasył, 2017, 2018): *"Find your opposite. There will never be a down moment in your life. But you must be open. You need to be open-minded, open heart, and say: 'Just relax and enjoy it!'"* P[1p56]. Accordingly, Zed's internal dialogue led him to view their interpartner differences as a positive aspect of their relationship. Based on current participant accounts, partners' internal

dialogue may be interpreted as entailing the intrapersonal process of making sense of, and assigning meaning to, the self, one's partner and relationship entity. Internal dialogue was also suggested by participants as shaping one's view of oneself, one's partner and one's relationship in both a positive and a negative way. Bianca, for example, mentioned how her interpretation of what she observed in the relationship had negatively influenced her own view of self: *"If I feel we are moving backwards rather than forwards, then it's like I'm not doing something right"* K[1p147]. The internal dialogue may, therefore, lead to certain conclusions, whether accurate or not, regarding the self, one's partner and the relationship. Furthermore, these internal values appeared to carry over into a couple's behaviour and action, as Julia explained: *"So, we showed them, yes we're married, but that doesn't mean you're not going to be my friend anymore. Or that I can't interact with you like I used to. All that's changed is our status. And we kept at it. So, people saw that although you are married, you can still be you. You can still be yourself"* P[1p12]. The expression of these internal values in their external behaviours may explain Julia's experience of their internal values as being visible to other people.

As Susan's account showed, the internal dialogue also appeared to determine the interpretation of external influences, perhaps also in the process, navigating the extent to which these influences were allowed to negatively impact the relationship entity. She explained, *"Because it, in fact, since we came back from the bushveld, and came closer to family, I think our problems have escalated. So, I definitely think that had an impact. It kind of drove a wedge into our little unique unit that were just the two of us, sort of thing. So, which is maybe a good thing because it's brought to light stuff that we needed to be aware of. You know, about ourselves and whatever"* R[1p142]. In reflecting on the influence of living in close proximity to extended family on their relationship, Susan's internal dialogue appeared to determine her experience of the situation. Accordingly, what was initially perceived as a negative influence came to be viewed as an opportunity for growth in both themselves and their relationship entity.

Partners' internal dialogues reportedly often consisted of expectations and judgements regarding the relationship entity or partner. Furthermore, Qaden's reflection on his expectations regarding time spent with his wife and children suggested that internal

dialogue may also influence relationship satisfaction, depending on the alignment between expectation and outcome:

I tried to implement more family quality time. Even though sometimes it feels to me like the effort that I put in it's, it's maybe too much effort for the result that we, that we get out of what we put in. It's more like I'm doing something, then I hope the result is going to be good and at the end of the day, the result is not really a positive outcome. But it is not because of what I try or what I do, but there's something else jumping up in the process of trying something good and something jumps up which spoils everything. And then something else becomes an issue and then the result is exactly the same as if you do nothing. Basically. And it makes me discouraged.
(Qaden) O[2p12]

As a result, if the outcome does not match the internal expectation, it has the potential to derail the emotional and behavioural experience of the person, both internally and externally. Another example offered by Vernon illustrated how the expectations and judgements held are sometimes formed by family legacy.

I've never seen my daddy get tired. It's like ... he would go to work; six o'clock in the morning, he would rock up at work. He would get home by five ... then he'd work at home. I'd go to sleep and sometimes wake up at night, and he'd still be busy ... maybe ten o'clock, eleven o'clock, sometimes. Sleep for like two hours and be back at work. He doesn't believe in being late or sick unnecessarily. He would, to the point of coughing up blood, he'd be at work. So, even though my body's burned out and I would like to sleep for a week ... I don't believe in being tired because that one day that you are tired and you sleep is the day that something's going to go wrong. And I don't want to be unprepared. (Vernon) L[2p65]

In Vernon's case, his expectations of himself were significantly influenced by the existing norm in his family of origin. In particular, as an example to him, his father modelled never admitting or surrendering to fatigue, behaviours which Vernon, in turn, strove to also uphold in his own life. Due to his father's example, Vernon expected himself never to admit

or surrender to fatigue. According to their couple profiles, both Qaden and Vernon obtained low scores on the *Non-judgement* subscale of the Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), which indicates a likelihood of judging their experiences and the behaviours of others. Based on their accounts and scores, it could then be argued that lower levels of *Non-judgement* may contribute to increased expectations of the self, one's partner and the relationship entity.

Partners' internal dialogues may be influenced by the degree of trust, patience, acceptance and appreciation within their relationship entities. However, each of these latter four dispositions were also, in themselves, reported by participants as internally shaping the relationship entity. A number of participants described a sense of emotional security present in their relationship entity that contributed to an overall trust in the availability, intentions, and commitment of their partners. As Nicki described, having a stance of *"I don't own you; you don't own me"* [1p51], and knowing that *"somebody's not property"* [1p53], prevented any jealousy or possessiveness in their relationship. Accordingly, each partner is understood as entering the relationship entity out of his or her own volition, with free will as to whether he or she wishes to stay in or leave the relationship. The security in the partners' investment in the relationship may, perhaps, be understood as being related to the duration of the relationship. Consistent with this notion, Susan suggested that the length of her relationship with Theo had been a contributing factor to her surety in their commitment, saying *"We've been together for so long and it's just, we don't have any doubts or worries or concerns"* R[1p16]. Trust and security may, therefore, be influenced by the duration of the relationship. In a similar way, Julia mentioned how placing her trust in her husband during difficult times when she herself had felt uncertain, not only led to positive outcomes beyond expectation, but perhaps even seemed to generate more trust in the relationship entity. *"The thing is, I never, when we were apart, I never saw a future. I didn't know what my future would look like. And he had an idea of what the future would look like. So, I trusted him to lead me to where he thinks I'm going to be ok. And it's better than I ever thought it was going to be"* Q[2p148], she commented. Trust therefore appears to involve a surrendering to the partner as a place of safety and guidance during times of uncertainty.

When asked to reflect on what he most desired for his relationship with Bianca, Vernon declared: *"I think ... trust. Because our trust has been broken by us ... over the course of the 10 years due to a lot of things that has [sic] happened in our relationships. So, if we could have a clean slate ... like knowing what we know now ... and have a clean slate of trust"* L[2p170]. His response suggested a fragility in the nature of trust which, if broken, is felt deeply by the partners in the relationship entity. In Wayde and Kristin's relationship, where they had struggled to conquer the consequences of Wayde's infidelity, Wayde himself highlighted the value of his own trust in Kristin: *"And I can trust her. Because I know she won't go somewhere else. Another man, in other words. Even though I know what I did"* M[1p69]. In their situation, even though Wayde himself was the one to break the trust within their relationship, his own value for the trust he had placed in Kristin was not disregarded. Nevertheless, as described by Kristin earlier in their interview, the break in trust did impact her own experience of trust in the relationship. She shared, *"From my side, it's not that I don't want to show love and affection. It's more of not trusting that person that you're with. So, you don't want to put yourself out there. I mean, you like stay on your boundary like, you're waiting for that feeling where you feel comfortable and ... How can I say? Not happy, but everything is stable. You're waiting for that, and then you move forward, but you don't get to that. So that's why you stay on your guard"* M[1p37]. Her account not only seemed to confirm the fragility of trust identified in Vernon's account, but also added to the way in which damaged trust may negatively impact displays of love and affection between partners as the relationship entity was no longer deemed a safe space for emotional expression.

Correspondingly, trust may be facilitated by patience. Extrapolating from participants' accounts, patience may be defined as a stance absent of force, judgement or expectation. Julia, for example, described her stance of patience towards Zed's limited emotional capacity earlier in their relationship, saying, *"So, I had to be patient in having to wait on him to adapt, and catch up, on an emotional level. Because he's still growing. He's still growing emotionally, so he will get there"* P[1p61]. Therefore, patience might also lead partners to offer each other enough space to grow and change individually and within the relationship entity. In contrast, Stephanie explained how she had experienced her husband as lacking in patience with her, which she further contributed to his own expectations of himself.

And I feel that, because like he says ... he is not a social person. So, he forces himself to be social because he knows how important it is. Now he won't be able to understand; he forces himself so why don't I want to force myself? Why don't I want to do it? For example, if I'm scared of a cat. He is not going to protect me. He will only tell me: 'Overcome your fear. You will see how much better you will feel so just do it.' But it is traumatic for me. And I think he has that type of perseverance. He forces himself even if he is scared. But he does not have patience with me. (Stephanie) O[2p47]

Stephanie perceived Qaden as forcing himself to overcome his own emotional discomfort which, she felt, translated into his lack of patience with her. Judging from Stephanie's experience, a lack of patience between partners may, arguably, leave them feeling disconnected, alienated from, and unsupported by their partners.

Patience could, perhaps, be further enhanced by acceptance. Susan reflected on her stance of acceptance towards her partner, saying, *"I've also realised that sometimes I have to accept that his way of doing things, or thinking, or being is not necessarily in line with me. And I need to actually just be an individual in that, and accept our differences. You know, we are not the same person"* S[2p17]. Based on Susan's account, I have come to the conclusion that acceptance may be formulated as a stance of allowing one's partner to be a unique individual, and being prepared for differences of personality or opinion to exist between partners. In addition, Nicki emphasised acceptance as the product of knowing one's own limitations with regard to controlling and changing other people or situations, thereby offering a way of moving beyond differences between partners. She explained, *"I think accepting something you cannot change. We can try to make it better, but you cannot change certain things"* J[2p278]. In making sense of Nicki's comment, it is my view that acceptance might, therefore, not imply an absence of change or growth, but rather an ability to recognise the autonomy of one's partner, as well the limited extent of one's control over certain external events. In contemplating the degree to which her husband had met her needs, Julia shared how seeing her husband as an imperfect being in a continual process of growth allowed both acceptance and satisfaction to be cultivated.

Yes, there were things he didn't meet, but I had to look at it as in the bigger picture. As in who he is in my life, and what it means to be married. It means to have a long-term relationship. So, I took all those things into consideration. So, I had to get past that ... these little things because he's still growing. He's still growing emotionally so he will get there. I did highlight this stuff to him, what I need. But I just let it go because it was stuff that I could live with. (Julia) P[1p61]

Based on Julia's account, acceptance may allow for realistic expectations in terms of the development of one's partner and the relationship whereas applying patience may lead to giving each other the time and space to change and grow.

Apart from its possible contribution to satisfaction, acceptance was also depicted by participants as a means to overcoming the potentially negative impact of external factors on the self or the relationship. Susan, for example, held a stance of acceptance towards the intrusion of Theo's work on their relationship entity. Due to the nature of Theo's job, he often had to leave home at short notice and for extended periods of time. Susan elaborated, *"There are also times where his work can be very hectic, and I have to accept that it will infiltrate into our after-hours quiet time, and our weekend and that. And I've become much more accepting of it"* S[2p54]. Extrapolating from Susan's comment, acceptance may be construed as entailing a stance of allowing the self, one's partner, life and other external factors to be as they are in the current moment, without applying force or energy in an attempt to change them. Accordingly, acceptance seems to allow for a more relaxed and flexible dynamic within the couple's relationship.

Similar to patience and acceptance, appreciation appeared to assist in transcending the differences between partners. However, as seemed evident from the participants' accounts, it may also aid in maintaining the allure and novelty within relationship entities over time. For instance, even after 20 years together, Zed was still very much enamoured with Julia and explained how he continued to learn from her every day:

Look, it's like amazing to have someone who have a wide spectrum of things. I've learned a lot of things by just being around her. I know I'm still learning

things. Because, she's got a wide spectrum of interests. The way she sees things ... the way she picks up things ... the way she reads people ... It's just the way she analyses things as well. Which is why I say, she's not from Venus, she's from somewhere else. She sees things in a slightly different angle. Which is more and larger and extra to what is normally there. There's always an element of something interesting, something new. (Zed) P[1p98]

Similarly, Stephanie expressed appreciation for her husband: *"So that is what I loved about him. And he is a very decent person. I liked the way that he prayed. Wow. His words just come so naturally; you can hear it comes from the heart. So, he was genuine basically. And he was a gentleman, as well. And he loves me for who I am, even before we started thinking about kids"* O[2p53]. In contrast, Theo and Susan highlighted how the absence of, or lapse in, appreciation may affect a relationship. Theo explained:

I think, after a long time like that, you get used to each other. And you're sort of just, there. Not that we don't love each other and show appreciation for each other, but you just take it for granted that the next morning, Susan will be there. And she'll make me coffee, and when I get home from work, supper will be there. And ... yes ... I think in our young days, you showed your appreciation in different ways. Now you just sort of, it's there. You say thank you, but it's a thank you that just is ... (Theo) S[2p7]

"Habit" S[2p8], Susan interjected. Complacency and comfort within the daily routine of the relationship may therefore negatively impact appreciation. As such, appreciation is proposed to be a behaviour towards which couples should deliberately aspire in the relationship, and should be offered with awareness and meaning rather than simply as part of the habitual daily dynamics between partners.

In summary, the relationship entity was therefore conceptualised as functioning as a living organism, constantly changing and growing while navigating the impact of both external and internal influences on it. Moreover, it may be inferred that change and growth, as well as the successful navigation of external influences, contribute to relationship satisfaction. Family background, specifically, also appeared to contribute significantly to relationship

security. Furthermore, partners' internal dialogues, trust, patience, acceptance and appreciation for each other occur in a reciprocal relationship with one another while both individually and jointly contributing to the respective partners' levels of relationship satisfaction. Finally, it was found that both mindfulness and attachment affect participants' experiences of, and reactions to, the various external and internal influences on the relationship entity. In particular, as a component of mindfulness, presence was discovered to play a vital role within the intimate relationship entity.

5.3.3. Theme 2: The intimate relationship as sustained by relational presence

Extrapolating from the participants' experiences, the relationship entity appeared to be sustained and revitalised by presence. The greater the relational presence between partners, the more effectively external and internal influences on the relationship entity seemed to be navigated. Participants reported that presence was enhanced by certain interpartner behaviours. In addition, presence was also supported by awareness. Furthermore, enhanced interpartner presence may contribute to attachment while also benefitting the relational alignment between partners.

5.3.3.1. Relational presence as supporting relational alignment

The combined couple accounts contributed to my conceptualisation of an unseen, abstract "relational alignment" that exists between partners in an intimate relationship. This alignment appeared to be formed at the inception of the relationship and may become stronger, more nuanced and established over time. The first evocation of this alignment can be found in the participants' descriptions of their relationship bond. While Susan described her bond with Theo, saying, "*I think we have a very close bond*" R[1p2], Theo captured the bond in one word, "*Comfortable*" R[1p3]. Zed also had a compact description of his relationship, calling their bond "*Easy*" P[1p2], with Julia adding: "*Comforting. Safe-ish; it was almost like I was home*" P[1p8]. Nicki and Jaime highlighted the "*steadiness*", "*trust*" and "*freedom*" I[1p19] in their relationship, leading to a bond that is experienced as "*strong*" I[1p3]. However, not all alignments were experienced as positive. Kristin and Wayde, for example, experienced their bond as "*tense*" M[1p2], "*fragile*" and "*sensitive*" M[1p3]. Therefore, the alignment may be experienced in either a positive or a negative manner by the respective partners.

Two of the couples made a distinction between the unseen alignment and the daily interactions and expressions that constitute the relationship. Jaime was the first participant to make this distinction, saying *"Our bond is strong. Very strong. Relationship wise ... it could be better"* I[1p3]. For Vernon, this distinction was visible in their *"Teamwork"* K[1p26]. Bianca elaborated by explaining that while they were efficient at attending to the daily tasks associated with their lives, children, work and family, they were not always equally successful at managing their relationship. She explained, *"We always joke, we're good partners and friends, but when it comes to our relationship, sometimes it's a bit wonky [laughing]. So, when it comes to the kids, and finances, and business and ... we automatically just click, we go ... but when it comes to our relationship, somehow it doesn't always work"* K[1p27]. The bond experienced between partners may therefore offer some indication of their relational alignment. However, the entire alignment appeared to exceed the abstract experience of the bond. The abstract alignment was frequently sensed by participants, but appeared to be difficult to capture in words. Nicki appeared to attempt to capture it, saying, *"It's like we've got this weird connection. Without being physical"* I[1p94]. Nicki's account offered a glimpse into this unseen alignment which is abstract in nature.

Nicki's and Zed's descriptions of their relational alignment identified it as allowing a sense of "cognitive symmetry". *"Knowing that I can predict ... I mean, we're on a level like this: she'll be out of the room, and I'd be sitting in the lounge and I'm thinking 'I think we must do this tomorrow' and she'll walk in and say: 'Babe, I think we must do this tomorrow'"* I[1p88], Nicki explained. Zed had a similar experience in the context of his relational alignment with Julia. He explained, *"Sometimes she will call and say this and this ... I'm like: 'You read my mind.' 'Are we going to eat this today?' 'Yes, you read my mind.' It is interesting. Nice though. That somehow we've learned to follow the same wavelength"* P[1p4]. In this way, their relational alignment may allow partners to be in cognitive harmony with each other, almost sharing thoughts and ideas without verbalising them. As inferred from Nicki's account, cognitive symmetry may be strengthened by extensive knowledge and awareness of one's partner. She explained, *"I think we're at a stage where we think alike. I think something; she says it. Or other way around. You know. But I don't think our feelings have changed ... uhm, we know one another inside and out ... what we're thinking. Uhm, the next move"* J[2p41].

Achieving a strong relational alignment may, therefore, result from knowing each other extremely well without withholding any part of the self from one's partner.

Relational alignment further appeared to enable emotional and sensory alignment between partners which, in turn, assisted them in "reading" each other. Julia described what appeared to be sensory alignment with Zed, which had led her to take action and connect with him: *"I can sense when he's off game. When he's not so himself. Then I'll try to figure out what's going on"* P[1p103]. Likewise, Vernon expressed the ability to sense anything uncharacteristic about his wife, saying, *"But when I generally see or feel that something is wrong, I will tell her: 'Look ... something is off about you'"* K[1p114]. Both Julia and Vernon described having a sense of their partners' state of being, without any direct communication from them. Emotionally, the alignment also appeared to offer a mechanism through which partners could assist in the regulation of each other's emotions.

She's that calming point, that I could possibly ... Like I've seen it in movies and stuff where the guy's like literally covered in flames and then there's this one person that just comes and touches him and he like calms down and switches off, type of thing. And she's that person to me. So, even if I'm like so mad I want to blow up the entire world, if she just actually comes to me and tells me: 'Look, you need to now relax now' ... I think I would just switch off and calm down. (Vernon) K[1p100]

In this way, Vernon appeared to believe that Bianca's relational alignment with him had enabled her to not only sense his internal experience, but also to guide her in taking the necessary actions to assist him in navigating his emotional discord.

Susan described her relational alignment with Theo as *"very connected"* S[2p58] while Theo described it as *"very tight"* S[2p59]. In addition, Theo elaborated on their alignment, saying, *"I can't think of the right word, but we just work so well together. Whenever people come here ... My dad and his girlfriend ... she just couldn't believe how we just ran together. I've got my stuff at home. I do the washing; Susan does the dishes. We've got our parts, and we stick to it"* S[2p59]. Theo's account seems to have identified relational alignment as having the potential to also influence the behavioural alignment between partners as they

conducted their daily life and household tasks. For instance, he elaborated on the effects of communication and knowledge about one's partner on relational alignment: *"People are always surprised at how well we know each other. Yes, it's been 17 years, but we are also very open with each other. We talk about anything and everything. So, people often comment about that. Some of our friends don't talk to each other. They don't know their husbands and wives like we know each other"* S[2p59]. Communication may, therefore, increase knowledge about one's partner which may, in turn, contribute favourably to relational alignment.

Arguably, the couples' relational alignment could be seemingly effortless and fluid, as demonstrated by Theo and Susan's alignment, or potentially conflictual and uncoordinated. Bianca's description of their relationship entity during a time of disagreement suggests the potential for the alignment to be influenced by discord or conflict.

It's also small tells. And even in that period where we say 'it's fine' the whole time, you can almost feel like the gap between you is growing bigger ... uhm, I don't know how to explain it. There's a distance, there's just ... we are doing everything right in the house, like the kids and so on, but when it comes to us, it feels like, hmmm. Like we just need to connect somehow, or talk or scream it out or something, but something is not quite valid. The distance is growing bigger and bigger. (Bianca) K[1p106]

Therefore, the alignment may be described as malleable and influenced by the degree to which partners feel connected to each other at any given time. As a result, the nature of the relational alignment may become cold, foreign or tense during conflict, compared to a state of harmonious, reciprocal flow between partners when they experience a close connection with each other. In addition, relational alignment may be experienced on a spiritual level, as Nicki tried to explain, *"It's like the universe just pulled us together and we just make it work. It's, I can't explain it, it's something cosmic, it's something universal. It's like two energies towards one another, you know. I don't know"* J[2p183]. In this way, relational alignment was sensed as something palpable and resulting from a force beyond the two individual partners.

In summary, as a component of the relationship entity, relational alignment would, arguably, exist in a reciprocal relationship with all other parts of the entity. The alignment may, therefore, be influenced by the same external and internal factors impacting the relationship entity while appearing to be reflective of the health and functioning of the relationship entity as a whole. The attachment bond (Bowlby, 1958; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016) was also proposed as contributing to the nature of the alignment. Based on the participants' accounts, I inferred relational alignment to be expressed on a cognitive, emotional and behavioural level between partners. Relational alignment further appears to benefit from increased relational presence, which is achieved through presence-enhancing behaviours between partners.

5.3.3.2. Relational presence-enhancing behaviours between partners

My conceptualisation of "presence-enhancing behaviours" refers to actions taken by intimate partners to increase their relational presence. Many of the couples reported that they had used specific ways of deliberately enhancing their presence with each other. In particular, five noteworthy presence-enhancing behaviours were repeatedly alluded to, namely prioritisation of one's partner and the relationship entity, being available and accessible to one's partner, sharing activities, physical affection, and limiting technology-related distractions in the relationship.

Prioritising one's partner and relationship was suggested as offering a way of managing external distractions from relational presence by placing the focus and priority firmly on the relationship entity. Qaden explained, *"For me, as I know my time is limited because I also need to spend time with Stephanie and the kids. I won't commit to anything that will put strain on that. For example, I won't even think about playing soccer with the guys, or guitar lessons. I don't have time for that at the moment. So, I find other ways to slot in my interests"* O[2p85]. Thus, Qaden appeared to deliberately prioritise by making decisions regarding potential demands and engagements based on his relationship and children as his main priorities. Similarly, his wife, Stephanie, shared, *"I feel that this is my, this is my family and this comes first. So, if this is right, then we can share with others whatever is left of us. And not just you must involve this one and that one with whatever we do. Let's create a space for us first. And then, as a unit, we go out and we go and enjoy with others whatever we have"*

O[2p28]. Therefore, both Qaden and Stephanie had similar priorities with regard to the relationship entity, as well as their nuclear family system which includes their children. In contrast, Zed reflected on how his previous lack of prioritising his relationship with Julia became a contributing factor to the dissolution of their marriage. While the nature of his involvement in rescue work had influenced his earlier priorities, Zed realised that in order to save his own relationship, he had to make the relationship his first priority.

I want to save the world a lot. Uhm because I spend a lot of years as a volunteer in Find & Rescue, that is just an example. So, I would go out mostly on almost every call there is. 'Cause [sic] now someone's stuck on the mountain, I must go. Yes, and then that also spilled over to friends and family. When they need things, someone is in need, I must help. And, for a long while, I didn't see anything wrong with that. And I can still hear Julia saying: 'No, I must be first in your life.' I'm like: 'Some situations require to be second, so just chill ... I have to save someone.' (Zed) Q[2p27]

Zed went on to explain how he had later made very deliberate decisions to prioritise his relationship by placing clear boundaries on the focus of his attention: *"Actually, I had to make two decisions for myself. On my day off, I do not let things stress me out. I do not answer stuff from work unless I see it's very, very urgent. And if there's an issue at work, I try my best not to bring it home. So, the other decision I made for myself is that work mustn't stress me. Because when I'm gone, it will still be there. Because if it stresses me, and I come home stressed, then I'm stressing her"* Q[2p94]. Based on his account, Zed seemed to have learned to prioritise his relationship by remaining cognisant of his work-life balance, sharing his work life with his wife while not allowing it to negatively impact their relationship entity.

Based on the accounts of the participants' experiences, I would argue that prioritisation involves the creation of presence, as our focus and attention are consumed by whatever we prioritise. This was also evident from Theo's observation of the adjustments he identified as necessary to prioritise his relationship with Susan.

I'm the kind of person that will sit there from eight to five in front of my laptop. Which then obviously frustrates Susan. You can eventually pick it

up in her tone. She is leaving me alone, but you can pick up that she's got five questions now pending, and that five questions have now gone up to six questions. And, I have learned that, you need that break. You need to put the computer down, sit down and have a cup of tea under the tree outside together, and spend that time together. And then she can get all her questions out. I can get a break from the computer. And then everyone is happy. (Theo) S[2p56]

Thus, prioritising the relationship with one's partner above other personal or professional interests may contribute to presence by increasing the availability and accessibility between partners.

At least half of the couples described relational presence as being influenced by the degree to which partners are available and accessible to each other. Zed and Julia both experienced each other's presence through the knowledge that each was accessible to the other, if necessary. Zed explained, *"It's like, she's always here with me. Which is nice. It's comforting. You know when something's rattling me ... during the day ... whatever's got to do with work or ... something else ... yeah, I know she's just here. She can just hold my hand. It's going to be ok. So, then I can get past that moment quicker. Then I don't dwell on negative things"* P[1p44]. Zed seemed to draw strength from Julia's presence in times of emotional difficulty as her presence offered comfort, support, and resilience to withstand the challenges faced. Vernon gave a similar account of security drawn from his wife's availability, saying, *"In the sense that she's always there is that, I come from work, she's there. I'm having a bad day, she's there. Whether I talk to her or not, she's just there"* K[1p12]. Arguably, therefore, availability and accessibility to one's partner translates into security in the partner's continued presence and support in both the good times and the bad. Such support further appeared to originate only from the partner's presence, without the partner necessarily having to take any action.

In addition, Zed explained how both he and Julia had remained present with each other throughout the day by deliberately remaining available through continued conversation and contact. He described how *"During the day, we just keep talking to each other.*

Sometimes I will leave notes, even when I'm at work because I finish late" P[1p114]. Julia assigned great value to this continuous availability through contact and communication as described by Zed:

Just also the highlight of the person being there, being available to you. They're not closed off: 'Oh no, I'm busy, I'm in a meeting.' You know what I mean? And also, now, I don't have to tell him about my day. He asks me. So, you don't get to the part where he doesn't know. By the time it comes to the end of the day, where I have to explain everything that happened that day. Because he already knows part of it, it's already been said earlier. Which is also nice. (Julia) P[1p51]

Subsequently, availability and accessibility may allow partners to be present with each other even when they are not occupying the same physical space.

Theo also mentioned remaining present while being physically apart from Susan. He explained, *"We keep up with day-to-day stuff. If I'm away, we phone each other and WhatsApp each other ... and communication is flowing freely"* R[1p60]. Deliberately checking in with each other may then be an act of staying present with the other person in the current shared moment. This results in partners becoming attuned to each other's internal environment of thoughts, feelings and experiences. Similarly, Nicki and Jaime cultivated availability and accessibility to each other while at their respective places of work. *"I know her call centre times, when she is available and not. But I know that when I need her, she'll be there"* J[2p227], Nicki shared. Jaime added: *"Like my phone will lie in my drawer and if I hear it vibrate, I'll just open it and check. If it's a private number or number I don't know, I'll leave it. But if I see it's her then I will tell my manager: 'Listen, can I get this call?' And I will walk out"* J[2p230]. Accordingly, availability and accessibility appear to be precipitated by prioritising one's partner, as the relationship entity is deliberately made the more important priority.

Bianca reflected on the importance of availability and presence even at times when it could seem counterintuitive, for example during times of conflict. She explained, *"I just want to be around you, but don't touch me ... a lot. So, I like his presence. Even when we're arguing,*

we like being close to each other. So, we argue, but don't go away! Stay. In the area. Where we can see ... whether we were angry at each other or not. That's fine" K[1p9]. Vernon reiterated this sentiment: *"But like she says, we're always in the vicinity of each other. So even if you have like a massive fight where the house feels like it's a matchbox, we never leave each other's side"* K[1p12]. Accordingly, they both remained accessible and present with each other even when their interaction was conflictual or painful. It could, perhaps, be inferred that availability and accessibility are of particular importance during such times of negative interaction as these may communicate commitment to the relationship and partner.

Another presence-enhancing behaviour emphasised by the participants was the act of engaging in shared activities with one's partner. Shared activities appeared to be woven into the fabric of Julia's relationship with Zed. She explained, *"I don't think we even said it out loud, it's just that we became a couple that does stuff together. That helped. Because we clubbed together, we went to this together, we would go hiking together, we would do whatever activities that were done"* P[1p12]. Zed agreed. He also added: *"And, we're involved in the same thing. We practise together, we sing together. She comes to the soccer sometime. ... We make time to go and exercise together, as well. We go for walks. Sundays, we have our chill time after church. Then we have our Sunday nap. Slowly but surely we've gotten rid of stuff that distracts us from our quality time"* P[1p106]. Their identity as a couple seemed to be captured in their togetherness, and appeared to be maintained by prioritising each other and the relationship. Similarly, Theo described a preference for time spent with Susan, saying, *"There's not much I do with guy friends that I don't do with Susan. We have a couple of drinks and get drunk every now and again. We'll hit a couple of cook-ins every now and again, and all that. Yes, it's nice to get out with guys and do the whole 'man thing'. But, yes ... if we go somewhere we do stuff together. We go birding or driving around or whatever the case is. We've got those common interests, so it's nice"* R[1p36]. Susan confirmed their shared interest in nature, the outdoors and conservation. She elaborated further, *"For me, the time we feel closest is when we're going away on holiday, for example, in the bushveld, and that sort of thing. Because we have that connection, uhm and it's something we share, and we have shared ... and we studied together in nature conservation, worked together in nature conservation. So, for me, that is where I often feel closest to Theo"* R[1p12]. It may be inferred that the shared interest seemed to serve as a foundation for their shared activities.

Furthermore, their shared interests may have enhanced relational presence, connection and intimacy while contributing to the relational alignment between them.

Physical affection was another valuable presence-enhancing behaviour that the couples highlighted. Nicki reflected on the role of physical affection and contact in the creation of interpartner presence, saying, *"You know that they say you can sit next to somebody without talking. And just know that the person is there and that's enough. We're busy with our own thoughts and it's just presence. She'll just come lie on my lap and we won't talk. It's just presence. You can say a thousand words and it doesn't mean anything, hey"* I[1p147]. Presence expressed through physical affection is therefore also interpreted as a form of communication between partners. Jaime also valued physical affection in her relationship with Nicki, sharing: *"And that's enough for me. Like we will just be sitting on the couch watching ... and then I will take everything away and flop my head on her"* I[1p148]. These small acts of physical togetherness therefore seemed to contribute not only to relational presence, but also to overall relationship satisfaction. Zed and Julia also celebrated such small physical acts of interpartner presence. *"I comb your hair every morning"* P[1p52], Zed reminded Julia. *"Yes, you do"* P[1p53], she replied. *"He's so sweet"* P[1p53], she said, as they both laughed and giggled during the interview. Physical touch may also facilitate relational alignment between partners on a behavioural level, as Jaime reflected: *"If we just sit next to each other like ... just a touch of the hand ... we know each other. We know I'm there, she's there"* I[1p161]. Zed also shared, *"It's like, when she touches me, and I've told her, when she touches me, I just want to sit still and enjoy it. When she touches my hand, it's that feeling that I'm where I ought to be. I'm at the right place, with the person I'm meant to be with. I'm comfortable here, I'm happy here"* Q[2p147]. Thus, physical touch appeared to convey the existence of a relational alignment between partners in a nonverbal manner while at the same time reinforcing relational alignment.

From the participants' accounts, it may be inferred that physical presence has value both in private couple spaces and in the public domain. Zed explained how he had experienced physical affection in the public domain as an act of love. He expounded, *"A person who doesn't mind holding your hand in public. To hug you and kiss you in the middle of the shop. You don't care who is looking. This person is yours. She's mine"* P[1p35]. As a

result, physical acts of presence led to the commitment and security experienced by the partners within the relationship. Similarly, Nicki described how physical contact enhanced relational presence by communicating feelings of love while also generating mutual well-being for both partners.

I think the most important is the little things when it comes to any intimacy. Uhm, you know, not too much, in any way. You have to be balanced between the two. You know, if I'm just going to do this [stroking Jaime's hand] with her, then she's going to know she's loved. And, your skin is very sensitive. So, just by touch, it's that well-being and creating that well-being. So, it doesn't have to be the big things. You can literally settle an argument, bring down anxiety and anything like that, just by the physical connection.
(Nicki) J[2p272]

Based on Nicki's account, physical presence may also assist in managing partners' emotional experiences and expressions. While those participants who had emphasised physical affection did so by reflecting on the physical affection occurring within their relationships, one participant specifically pointed out the absence thereof. As Wayde noted regarding his relationship, *"There's no affection at the moment. In the beginning we were very close, holding hands and all that and then ... In the beginning I didn't like that. And then she liked that. Now, I don't get it, now I want it. But she doesn't do it"* M[1p33]. Wayde's account might suggest that the lack of physical presence and connection within a couple's relationship entity may not go unnoticed by the respective partners. Wayde's experience also alluded to physical presence as being reciprocal in nature, where the degree of relational presence in the relationship entity may influence individual partners' behaviours, both positively and negatively.

Navigating technology-related distractions, in particular the prevalence and influence of these distractions on the relationship entity and interpartner presence, were repeatedly mentioned by the participants. *"I think technology is actually a no-no in family life. It's a deal breaker"* J[2p28], Nicki stated. Nicki and Jaime also shared their deliberate decision to increase their mutual presence by limiting the use and prevalence of technology-based activities and devices while in each other's presence. Nicki spoke about their decision saying,

“But then we decided look, I think because technology is taking over our lives, let’s cut off at a certain time at night. Just put the phones away and we just spend time together. Just talk about your day. We talk about our day every day” I[1p38]. Qaden also had a preference regarding, specifically, the television in his relationship and life: *“Look, we don’t have like really a lot of rules, but when we moved into the house, I had this one rule. Even before we had kids. No TV allowed in the room”* N[1p67]. In order to motivate this stance, Qaden explained, *“Because, look, a radio or music is something you can listen to and still interact with each other. But a TV wants all your attention. You must look at it and listen to it. So then, I’m going to focus there, and I’m like not going to spend time”* N[1p69]. Interestingly, Nicki made a similar distinction regarding the nature of presence based on the type of activity in which couples engage.

In particular, a distinction was made by both Qaden and Nicki between the influence of a modern, technology-based activity and a more classic, nontechnology-based activity such as reading a book. Nicki explained, *“Yes, because you’ve got to remember, with technology, you’re looking at videos. So, you’ve got audio. So, you don’t focus on the person, you know, you’re listening or watching a cute little video of a cat doing this or animal doing this, or whatever. So, you’re not really in tune. You know, a partner could just stop reading and answer you back, or have a quick thought or whatever”* J[2p26]. Both Qaden and Nicki identified technology as being damaging to partner presence within their respective relationships as it absorbed and consumed partner focus and attention. In a similar manner, Julia identified her phone as consuming her attention: *“Because, I’ve got so much people I talk to, which I have chosen to offer support to, but I also have a lot of friends. And then I’ll be all over the phone. And Facebook and ... all those things. So, I do get side-tracked”* P[1p108]. The dilemma with technology-based activities therefore stems from the fact that they seem to create an opportunity for external influences to negatively impact the relationship entity and interpartner presence by monopolising both interpartner presence and attention. Navigating the possible influence of such a presence-reducing activity would, arguably, require awareness of both the self and one’s partner.

5.3.3.3. Partners' awareness as supporting relational presence

Relational presence was reinforced by awareness, notably partner-, self-, and emotional awareness. In turn, awareness is both a component and a product of mindfulness (Baer et al., 2006; Bishop et al., 2004; Kabat Zinn, 2013). Presence, itself, may also be understood as being a component of mindfulness since it arguably relates to present-centredness (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat Zinn, 2013). Therefore, it may be inferred that mindfulness both generates and supports presence in that it increases intra- and interpersonal awareness within the relationship entity.

Based on current participants' experiences, partner awareness in intimate relationships has been conceptualised as being established by "holding the partner (other) in mind" and "reading" him or her accordingly. In its simplest form, the foundation of partner awareness appeared to be built through time spent with one's partner. For example, as Stephanie shared, *"I feel the problem is that we are not close enough to one another. We don't spend enough time for us to get to know and understand each other. And how you think and how you do things"* O[2p47]. Spending more time together may then offer opportunities for increasing knowledge about one's partner, which may further assist in applying mindfulness skills to more effectively hold one's partner in mind and read him or her. The participants' experiences seem to suggest that holding one's partner in mind involves the ability to be aware of him or her, his or her history, needs, experiences, and well-being, even while one or both partners are occupied with other activities or engagements.

Notably, holding one's partner in mind reportedly operates on two levels. Firstly, one's partner can be held in mind while spending time together in the present moment. This can be achieved by observing his or her actions and behaviours in the moment, or by drawing on pre-existing knowledge of one's partner as it pertains to the current moment. Susan, for example, held her partner in mind through an awareness of his childhood history and the effects thereof on him. She shared, *"But the thing is that Theo has got a lot of hard past experiences. You know, he had a difficult childhood. The fact that he's had lots of negative experiences in the military, and things like that, that I think, subconsciously, definitely had an impact on him. And I don't know if he's very good at handling things, and not letting things get to him, but I don't know if he's necessarily dealt with everything as well as he should have"*

R[1p62]. In the same way, Stephanie held her husband's history in mind, saying, "*Qaden came into the relationship with expectations. High expectations. Because of the way he was brought up. Things that happened throughout his childhood. So, he wanted to be a better man. A better father. And it frustrates him if I do not agree with him. Because he puts in his everything*" O[2p45]. Consequently, both participants held their partners in mind through partner awareness, which further appeared to cultivate empathy and understanding towards each other's actions and motivations. Likewise, Vernon used his existing knowledge about his wife's personality to hold her needs and comfort in mind while visiting with extended family members:

So, when we go visit my family, very in your face – loving, hugging, touching, no time constraints. So, if like my mother says come for lunch, when we get there, we probably have to help you peel the potatoes. Or lunch will start at like one o'clock, and like end at five. Because, to my family, family time is something you don't always get and when you have it you must like drain it to the last. For her, it's different, so when I'm there with her, I'm always wondering like: 'Is it too much? Are we here too long? Does she want to go home?' Things like that. Like I will leave earlier, or check in with her and ask: 'Look, I'm fine to go home now, if you want to go home', type of thing.
(Vernon) K[1p125]

Vernon therefore recognised that his own experience of visiting his family would potentially be very different from Bianca's, and by holding her needs and well-being in mind, he described being able to be fully present with her. In comparison, Nicki described how holding her partner in mind in the current moment translated into their nonverbal behaviours in social settings. She shared, "*We always look at one another when we talk. Always. Like affirmation, confirmation. When we're talking to, like in a group of people, we always look at one another when we talk*" J[2p214]. Therefore, holding each other in mind seemed to lead to Nicki and Jaime connecting by means of nonverbal behaviours in social environments even when they were not directly addressing each other. Moreover, holding each other in mind appeared to contribute positively to their relational presence.

The act of holding the other in mind also occurred when partners were not occupying the same space. While occupying different physical spaces, their partners were deliberately brought to mind and into the present moment through awareness. Nicki offered a practical example: *"I think, for me, it's just the thought of somebody's well-being if they are not with you. You have a telepathy kind of thing going on. I believe that even in a day, you've got to think of that person's well-being, even though you are not there. I think also just trusting that she's in a safe space. You know, uhm, and you know that she's there. It makes, puts you at ease"* J[2p250]. Jaime concurred, *"Even if I do cut the connection during the day, I would still think: 'Is she ok?', wonder what she's doing, talk about her with my friends ..."* J[2p256]. In Nicki and Jaime's case, holding the other in mind seemed to extend the relational alignment between partners over time and distance while benefiting the well-being of both partners and the relationship.

While Zed described a comparable habit of keeping his wife, Julia, in mind even when they were apart, he shared how it was not a habit that occurred without deliberate practice and effort:

Constant thought. It's something that I had to do. It's there in my head, like a to-do list, if I can put it that way. I have to say, you know, I must check up on her. I must let her know I'm at work now, I arrived safely, I'm on the road, I'm going there ... For two reasons, if anything happens to me, if I disappear, she'll know where to look. Where to start. That's one thing. And also, when I see things, she's the first person to pop into my head. 'Hey Julia, you know what I saw?!' So, it's a constant thing. And you can easily take that for granted, that's why I use the word that it's a thought. I must also do this. Remind myself. (Zed) Q[2p110]

Zed's experience seemed to suggest that holding the other in mind might be the result of prioritising the other, deliberately keeping him or her in mind, and placing value on the presence of one's partner. Arguably, holding one's partner in mind seemed to rely strongly on the mindfulness facet of *Acting with Awareness* (Baer et al., 2006). Of the six participants who described holding their partners in mind through awareness, only three, namely Susan, Nicki and Zed, had high scores on the Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ)

subscale of *Awareness* according to their couple profiles. Therefore, at least half of those participants who were able to hold their partners in mind did so despite their low scores on the *Acting with Awareness* subscale, which would indicate a tendency towards responding without awareness. Notably, these findings indicate that *Acting with Awareness* may not be the only skill underscoring the ability to hold one's partner in mind.

The participants' experiences further suggested that "reading" one's partner also required partner awareness. In addition, neutrally observing one's partner and accurately describing what can be seen, to either oneself or one's partner, reportedly seemed to be necessary for accurately "reading" one's partner. These skills of *Observation*, *Non-judgement* and *Describing* are indicative of mindfulness (Baer et al., 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Based on the participants' experiences, a noteworthy insight gained from the present study is that the mindfulness facets of *Observation*, *Describing* and *Non-judgement* are inferred as supporting presence. Most of the participants shared their ability to read their partners based on their verbal and nonverbal behaviours (*Observing*) which, in turn, allowed them to identify their partners' needs or feelings (*Describing*). Vernon, for example, shared how he read Bianca's emotions: "*She can't contain her happiness. So, you can see it. When something is off, like I said, I get a feeling. When she gets angry, she gets like this little type of frown here on her face ... I'm very attention to detail ... and she gets this little frown that she doesn't really notice, but it's there, type of thing. So small tells that I can pick up*" K[1p105]. Wayne also identified Kristin's emotional state by carefully "reading" her nonverbal behaviour: "*Yes, I can pick up that something is wrong. I can see it in her ways ... her face. You can just pick up she's silent. She's quiet. Then I know ... something's not right*" M[1p80]. A lack of communication might, therefore, be an indicator of potential issues within the relational dynamic.

Similarly, Zed noted changes in communication behaviour as indicative of changes within one's partner's thoughts and emotions. He elaborated, "*Body language. Voice. I do check. But initially, the body language will give it away. For example, you're moving at hyper speed, you're shifting everything around the house, you're talking abruptly and short answers, there's a quiver in your voice*" P[1p133]. Nicki and Jaime also both mentioned the ability to read each other's nonverbal behaviours. Like Zed, Nicki noticed changes in her partner's communication, in particular: "*But I think we all build walls, but with her, she gets quiet. You*

know, then I know something is off. I just basically ... she's very talkative. So, when she gets quiet, she's either very tired, or a long day ..." [1p293]. Likewise, Jaime detected Nicki's nonverbal signals: *"It's just like ... her body language differs. So, I sometimes watch her ... like if I see like she's walking fast. Then I know here comes trouble"* [1p297]. All of these participants appeared to apply the necessary mindfulness skills of *Observation* and *Describing* (Baer et al., 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2013) to read and interpret their partners' nonverbal behaviours. Whereas observation would allow partners the ability to neutrally observe both the verbal and nonverbal behaviours of their partners, *Describing* would enable them to interpret and make sense of their observations. Although Vernon, Wayde, Zed, Nicki and Jaime all seemingly applied the mindfulness skills of *Observation* and *Describing* to read their partners, it is noteworthy that their couple profiles showed that they did not necessarily all obtain high scores on the *Observing* and *Describing* subscales of the Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ). Indeed, only Vernon and Zed obtained high scores for the *Observing* facet of mindfulness while only Zed and Nicki obtained high scores for the *Describing* facet of mindfulness. While "reading" one's partner may therefore be purported to be facilitated by partner awareness in collaboration with the *Observing* and *Describing* facets of mindfulness, such skills may need to be optimally developed in partners as they do not necessarily occur automatically.

Stephanie described how "reading" her husband's needs and feelings had motivated her to act in a way that was complementary to his emotional state or met his identified needs. She explained, *"So what I try to do is, when I see he's frustrated and he comes home a bit despondent then I will already put the kettle on when I see him stop [park the car] to make him some coffee. Or I will make sure that the children are maybe bathed and out of his way"* N[1p32]. Apart from identifying the needs and feelings of one's partner, and motivating complementary behaviour towards him or her, "reading" the other person therefore appeared to contribute to feelings of empathy and appreciation towards him or her. Kristin also reflected on how "reading" Wayde's behaviour had led her to contemplate his internal experiences and emotions, arguably generating increased awareness and empathy for him. She explained, *"I also think what is going on in his mind, because ... before I came, there was already issues in his life. Or whatever happened in his life. Because he was an eater before he met me. But after the affair, he started eating more. So, it's like, things that are happening*

in his life that makes him run to food or makes him angry or whatever. He doesn't know how to deal with the things that is happening" M[1p157]. It may therefore be inferred that reading one's partner enhances presence by enabling the identification of each other's needs and feelings, motivating complementary behaviour towards one's partner, and increasing both empathy and appreciation. In addition to the role of partner awareness in generating interpartner presence, awareness of oneself appeared to be crucial to the creation of relational presence within the relationship entity.

Self-awareness was suggested by participants as supporting relational presence by providing partners with the ability to identify their own contributions, whether positive or negative, to the relationship entity and partner interactions. Susan aptly illustrated the development of her own awareness in this area as follows:

Because I've realised, I've got a bit of an issue with abandonment. And I've started to put together a pattern around that. And so, whenever he's not hearing me, or he's not responding to me when I really need him to, I do, I think I feel very ... I'm almost ready to cry right now just saying that. I feel like I'm abandoned, and I'm not getting the support that I need. And I think that's, more than anything, what causes me to flare. It's because I'm reaching, and I'm reaching, and I'm reaching and he's not hearing me. And he's not responding to me, as I need him to. And then I just lose it.
(Susan) R[1p113]

Susan's comment described how her own feelings of abandonment had contributed to her reactions to what she perceived as Theo's emotional unresponsiveness to her. Theo also offered an account of his own contribution to their relationship dynamics:

I didn't have the greatest of childhoods so, I thrive on being loved, and touched, and sex, and all that kind of stuff. The closer Susan ... and hugging me ... Susan can come up and give me a random hug, and that to me, I thrive on that kind of stuff. But yes, I might even be at the point of neediness for Susan's love and attention, and that sort of thing. So, when we are

fighting, and we don't talk for two days, that hurts. It really hits home.

(Theo) R[1p137]

Both Susan's and Theo's personal contributions to the relationship were therefore influenced by their respective family legacies. Due to this influence, Theo also experienced any breakdown in communication between them as especially traumatic and emotionally distressing. The particular emotional exchange that played out between Susan and Theo in this regard is perhaps interesting to note. Accordingly, it may be inferred that both Susan and Theo have the same essential need, namely a need for connection with each other. Yet, their behavioural attempts to develop such a connection were very different in nature. Therefore, it is posited that self-awareness created the opportunity for partners to be present in the relationship by choosing future behaviours and reactions with intent and awareness. Julia shared how her self-awareness regarding her own behaviours had allowed her not only to act with greater awareness, but also to increase her personal accountability and responsibility for her emotional output and contribution to the relationship:

I suppressed a lot of things because before and while I was going through therapy, you kind of don't know. I also came from where a child is seen and not heard type of thing. So, I had to undo all those things. So, I learned that I must stand up for myself, and it doesn't matter if it's going to be negative or positive. So now, it's ok to have these feelings. I'm allowed to be angry, but the thing is that I must express it appropriately also. So, I am a bit more open at home where I will blow my gasket, but I also know that it affects him. So, I try not to be too crazy and to be verbally abusive, and those things. (Julia) P[1p126]

Thus, by extension, self-awareness appeared to have a reciprocal relationship with partner awareness. As Vernon described, his awareness of Bianca's facial expressions had served as an indicator of the nature and impact of his own emotional expression:

How I handle a situation like that is her expression. So, temper is a thing that is like, I would say, genetic in my family of the males. So, if I do reach that boiling point and I will go off on her ... uhm ... The moment I reach like ... I get like gaps in that moment, where I can actually see clearly. So, when

I see her face and how my attack, if that's the word to use, is affecting her – it will actually hit me and I'll be like: Ok, you need to actually breathe, calm down, and then reassess the situation. So, she in that sense, is my centre point. Control point. (Vernon) K[1p77]

Self-awareness was therefore also identified as enabling emotional awareness. Vernon further found himself having to navigate the knowledge regarding his own emotions and communication that came with self-awareness. He shared, *"It's just, communication on my side has not always been my strong point. I will say like: 'I'm fine' when it comes to my feelings. It's like you need to ask me a question and then give me a time to ... because I can't always put my feelings in like ... I understand my feelings, but I can't always explain it to the next person properly, 'cause [sic] I'm a very technical inclined mind. And I prefer to do things rather than feel"* K[1p6]. Therefore, while Vernon was, arguably, able to observe his own feelings and experiences, he had experienced some difficulty in verbalising them (*Describing*) to others. Given Vernon's scores on the Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), his subjective account was corroborated, as he had obtained a high score on the *Observing* facet of mindfulness, but a low score on the *Describing* facet. For Vernon, having obtained a high score on the *Observing* facet was indicative of his ability to notice and observe his internal and external experiences whereas a low score on the *Describing* facet suggested difficulties in describing his experiences to his partner in a neutral manner. Unlike Vernon, Susan described how her increased emotional awareness, resulting from self-awareness, had enabled her to engage in more effective emotional management and improved communication with her partner.

I do feel that sometimes, yes, I know myself; I haven't always been very aware of my own emotions. And I've become much more in touch with it now. So, I've never really understood issues in my own inability to express how I'm feeling. And I tend to be very quick to get angry or to shout or to get my hackles up when things aren't going quite my way. Sometimes I don't even see it coming, or know what it's about – which is something I'm working on. And it's definitely making it easier to resolve issues or arguments before they become escalated. That helps a lot. (Susan) R[1p58]

Furthermore, it is possible that Susan captured the core value of self-awareness in that it had contributed to her self-insight and emotional awareness: *"But I think it's just learning to understand your own issues so that you can discuss things in a way that makes sense to everybody involved. Rather than just going off the handle because somebody's upset you, but you don't even know why. And that sort of thing"* R[1p58]. In my interpretation, self-awareness may, therefore, afford partners the opportunity to recognise and control their own irrational cognitive and behavioural reactions through *Acting with Awareness* in a *nonreactive* way. Such recognition of their own emotional expressions and reactions may also prevent them from projecting their emotions and responsibilities onto their partners.

In the current findings, emotional awareness was described by the participants as supporting relational presence within the relationship entity by enabling them to engage with their own and their partners' emotions, as well as by increasing interpartner empathy. It is worth noting that while exploring the participants' reactions to their own or their partners' emotions, it was found that some described themselves as engaging with the respective emotions whereas others described distancing themselves from such emotions. I wish to propose the terms "emotional engagement" and "emotional distancing" to describe these two strategies of emotional management. Extrapolating from the participants' responses, these reactions appeared to relate specifically to their experiences of negative rather than positive emotions. Stephanie, for example, described distancing herself from the emotion: *"I always move ... I try ... I always move away"* N[1p93]. Kristin and Wayde also described practising emotional distancing, but added that, instead of engaging with the emotions, they then engaged with another activity, such as eating, sleeping or working. Wayde explained how he had dealt with strong emotions within himself: *"No matter what it is, for me, it's just like I need to get it off; I need to get it out. And once that's done, it's finished And the other thing is also, I turn to food also. Which is also another emotion. So, you get that enjoyment"* M[1p131]. He further added how turning to food had been helpful: *"To get rid of that feeling. That unhappiness or that whatever you're feeling in that moment"* M[1p139]. With regard to managing her own emotions, Kristin, in turn, shared, *"When I feel stressed and stuff, I clean and I work at stuff. And sometimes I sleep, a lot"* M[1p137]. Emotional distancing may, therefore, involve placing one's focus on, or directing one's energy at, another activity in order to distract oneself from the emotions in the present moment.

Instead of distancing himself from the emotions, Zed responded to Julia's strong emotions by staying present with her in the moment. He reported, *"I froze. You're shouting. You're loud. I can't talk to you. I didn't know what to do with it. Really, I didn't. But, I didn't run away"* Q[2p77]. Therefore, despite feeling overwhelmed and ill-equipped to handle his partner's emotions, Zed deliberately made the decision to practise interpartner presence. Julia also added: *"Yes, and I think that was one of the qualities that made me stay. That made me stay with him, regardless of all the stupid things his family exerted on me. That he was brave enough to deal with the stuff that he never knew because I was coming from a different place"* Q[2p79]. Based on Julia's comment, it may be inferred that Zed's decision contributed positively to his relational alignment. The fact that Zed had remained present with both the emotions and his partner in the moment may, therefore, have contributed to Julia's experience of security in their relationship. However, Zed explained that this ability to remain present with the emotions was a skill that he purposely had to develop since his default reaction to emotions was discomfort: *"Automatically, they make me uncomfortable. That's just something I've had to deal with for a long time. They make me nervous. Initially. Even if someone walking in stopped being angry, I would get nervous. Automatically"* P[1p121]. Zed also ascribed his difficulty in feeling and showing emotions – even to Julia – to the influence of his childhood experiences. Having been punished for expressing negative emotions during his childhood, Zed inferred that only positive emotions were allowed to be expressed. He explained his experience as follows:

I've actually learned how to express myself because I grew up not being allowed to express our emotions. The only thing that was allowed for us was to smile and be happy. We weren't allowed to be angry at each other as siblings. You were angry, you got a hiding. We couldn't fight as siblings. Something went wrong, you would just have to swallow it, move on, smile. So, for years and years of that, it stays with you ... and you just swallow things. So, it took me a while even to allow my emotions, even just in front of Julia. If I used to feel tears coming, I would just keep it in. (Zed)
P[1p86]

Therefore, it may be inferred that Zed's instinctual reaction was to also suppress his emotions within the context of his relationship with Julia. However, through the necessary

change and growth, he seemed to learn how to move towards the emotions in order to express them to himself and his partner.

In thinking about their management of strong emotions, Susan and Theo reflected on the differences between their approaches. While Susan made use of writing in order to process and engage with strong emotions in a comfortable manner, Theo preferred to engage with emotions through initiating a conversation. Susan explained, *“Well, I’m trying not to overreact, like I usually do. And what I tend to find helps me a lot is writing. If Theo upset me, I will go and write him a letter. Or I’ll write a poem, or journal. Or I’ll do something like that, which helps me to understand what I’m feeling, and it also helps me to express to him what I’m feeling”* R[1p87]. Theo added, *“Where we differ as well: I would rather talk about it. Susan doesn’t talk about it, and she expresses it very well in writing. But then I just want to sit and let’s get this over with, let’s talk about it, open up, get it out the way”* R[1p90]. While they both engaged with the emotions in different ways, Susan and Theo seemed to demonstrate awareness of their own preferred methods of managing emotions, as well as how their emotional management might differ from their partner’s. As the results of their couple profile indicated, Susan obtained a low score on the *Nonreactivity* subscale of the Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) while Theo obtained a high score on the same subscale. In line with her score, Susan was likely to have a tendency towards being highly reactive. Her comment above appears to show insight into her tendency towards reactivity, but also indicates that she had deliberately cultivated a behaviour, in this case, writing, to assist her in managing her *Nonreactivity*. According to their accounts, Susan and Theo both appeared to navigate their emotional differences through a combination of self- and partner awareness.

It is worth mentioning that a comparison of the couple profiles of the participants who described themselves as practising emotional engagement and those who described emotional distancing behaviours revealed certain differences with regards to attachment security. While emotional engagement was practised by participants who also presented with relatively secure attachment, those who had distanced themselves from their own or their partners’ emotions presented with insecure attachment styles, instead. Therefore, it may be inferred that emotional engagement or distancing may be related to attachment security (Allen, 2013; Bowlby, 1988; Fraley, 2019; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Extrapolating from the preceding participants' accounts, it is possible that emotional engagement seems to rely on the mindfulness facets of *Observing*, *Describing*, *Acting with Awareness* and *Nonreactivity* (Baer et al., 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Furthermore, the ability to engage emotionally with oneself and one's partner may enable presence and connection within both the relationship entity and relational alignment. These facets of mindfulness that seem to support relational presence by contributing to self- and partner awareness are further suggested as promoting emotional awareness by means of interpartner empathy. Stephanie offered an example of interpartner empathy:

There was a time when I tried to stand up for myself and say how I feel, but I feel at a point where, when he speaks, it actually hurts me to see how much pain he has. And what he puts himself through. Because he wants something a specific way. But the longer we are together now, it is like, I love him so much. So, what can I do to make him see that he is putting himself through pain? Or how can I bring him to a level where he can calm down? And I think that is why I will many times ... then I speak softer. I speak softer or I will say: 'Darling, I think we should stop now.' (Stephanie)
N[1p110]

Stephanie's comment seemed to illustrate how empathy for her partner and his emotional state had motivated her own behaviour and reactions towards him. *Observing* her husband's nonverbal communication and *Describing* it to herself is construed as having contributed to the generation of interpartner empathy. Moreover, such interpartner empathy seemingly led to her *Acting with Awareness* towards her husband.

Similarly, while reflecting on the ways in which she had expressed her need for closeness with Vernon, Bianca shared:

I do think I am still very much in my mind. So, depending on what's going on, I would like ... ok, so he's now lost his job, he has this to worry about, so I don't still want to add this. And then I will keep my need almost for closeness away until he's better. Almost like there's more space. Which I also know it's wrong to do because in that moment, I'm not allowing you to

be close with me. [Addressing Vernon] Same as when I would go through things, but if there's something, I would want him to come to me and say, you know this. And I will make space. But I don't always allow him to do the same for me. (Bianca) K[1p142]

Apart from illustrating her interpartner empathy with regard to her husband's experience, Bianca's account also revealed how self-awareness may contribute to interpartner empathy and overall emotional awareness. In addition, Bianca seemed to acknowledge an awareness of the contradiction that existed between her own emotional management and consequent inability to allow her husband to support her, and the fact that she had emotionally supported her husband during times of need.

When exploring their ability to place themselves in their partners' positions through empathy, and whether it had made a difference in terms of their feelings and reactions towards each other, Julia and Zed also appeared to illustrate the relationship between partner awareness and empathy. *"Yes, obviously it makes you be a bit more, softer, because you're thinking they're not being funny for a ... they're not being against you for anything. It's just that they are feeling this way, and then they're in this emotional space and it might affect you"* P[1p147], Julia admitted. Zed continued, *"Also, for support as well. Because, this person might be needing support. Just that the mind is so preoccupied with this thing that's going on at this time. So, maybe just 'nudge nudge, wink wink'. Always remember, we're here. I will support you. We will fight this ... I'll ask you later why we're fighting, but I will fight with you"* P[1p148]. Partner awareness is therefore interpreted as enabling a more accurate observation and description of one's partner's behavioural motivations and intentions without judgement. Subsequently, this may increase overall empathy for one's partner. Relational presence created by interpartner empathy and support also appeared to communicate a sense of loyalty and sharing in the challenges and troubles faced by one's partner which may, arguably, facilitate attachment security between partners.

5.3.3.4. Increasing partners' attachment security through relational presence

Extrapolating from the participants' experiences, it is my observation that relational presence contributes to attachment security (Allen, 2013; Bowlby, 1988; Fraley, 2019;

Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016) by communicating commitment, companionship, dependability, partnership and care. The participants described relational presence within the context of the relationship entity as significantly promoting their experiences of their partners' commitment. Bianca, for example, interpreted Vernon's consistent interpartner presence within their relationship as indicative of his commitment to her: *"I would say, because he's always there. Almost the ... because I come from a single parent household, so for me, it's also the fact of just leaving when we're angry. He doesn't do that. Even just committing to getting married and always working on the marriage. I think always trying to become better. So, I think for me, that shows a lot of commitment of he wants to be there"* K[1p14]. Based on Bianca's comment, it is clear that her own family history may not have provided her with an example of interpartner commitment worthy of aspiring to. As a result, she appeared to place great value on Vernon's choice to stay present with her in the moment. Therefore, Vernon's decision to remain present with her, even during times of conflict, and his willingness to grow both within himself and with her in the relationship, reportedly added to her sense of security in terms of his commitment to their relationship. Vernon himself added to this, saying, *"Coming from work, I can easily go to my mother or I can go to a friend or whatever, but I choose. It's a choice I make every day. A deliberate choice, that I walk through the door. No matter how the situation is at home or whatever, I choose to walk through the door"* K[1p18]. Therefore, Vernon seems to view commitment as a daily, mindful choice to remain present within the relationship entity. In her relationship with Zed, Julia described how remaining present in the moment had improved her ability to read Zed's emotions and behaviours, which further led to her starting a conversation to discuss his needs.

I can sense when he's off game. When he's not so himself. Then I'll try to figure out what's going on. Where I'm saying: 'I see that something is wrong, tell me.' Because, I think you get scared to do that ... because you might've affected the person. So now you're afraid if it's really you, and you're relieved when it's not you. So, I'm not scared anymore. I'm not scared to put myself out there for him. If it's something that I've done. And to correct myself if I have to. Whatever that I need to do for him because that's what I have to do to make him happy. (Julia) P[1p103]

Julia's relational presence with Zed appeared to have aided her awareness and observation of his nonverbal behaviours. Such interpartner presence, combined with Julia's willingness to make herself vulnerable by changing and growing to attend to Zed's needs may have therefore demonstrated her commitment to him and the relationship. The commitment described by the participating couples also seemed to suggest that a sense of companionship had contributed to interpartner commitment.

Interpreted as being the heart of the relationship entity, companionship represents the merging of two paths into one shared journey. For instance, Jaime and Nicki commented on how companionship can, seemingly, exist almost effortlessly, yet hold great value for the relationship as a contributor to security and presence. *"Like she will watch the rugby and I will just like ..."* J[2p77], Jaime started. *"She will sit and knit. Like a real old woman"* J[2p78], Nicki teasingly finished Jaime's sentence. However, Nicki quickly added: *"But at least she's sitting there"* J[2p80]. Notably, based on Nicki and Jaime's account, their experience of their companionship and togetherness appeared to re-enact salient heteronormative scripts (Lamont, 2017; Sanger & Lynch, 2018). Later, during the same interview, Jaime elaborated on the togetherness of companionship, saying, *"When we are in the same space. If we don't talk, we know each other. We know this one is there, that one. We are together"* J[2p236]. Similarly, Susan reflected on the effortless nature, as well as the familiarity of companionship: *"You can be in each other's company without having to discuss anything. Or you can discuss whatever is on your mind, you can ... I don't know, share and laugh about family, about stuff that's going on around you, whatever. It's just that familiarity, I guess, more than anything"* R[1p35]. Accordingly, companionship appears to involve relational presence. It is also my contention that companionship develops through the experiences of a shared journey and life narrative, which may, subsequently, further support attachment security by knowing that one's partner will be available and accessible when needed.

Theo and Susan were, undoubtedly, the participating couple with the most knowledge about the advantages and disadvantages of companionship. After all, as Theo described their relationship: *"We are together almost 24/7. I work from home. Susan also does her own business. And there's a lot at home, so we are together a lot. We live in a little granny flat, which is comfortable, and tight. Yes, we share everything; we are pretty open with each other"*

and very close" R[1p3]. Such close companionship may, therefore, increase the openness and transparency between partners, which Theo appeared to identify as an advantage. Despite the advantages of their physical companionship, however, Theo also offered an honest account of the potential pitfalls thereof: *"You can't run away and hide in a spare bedroom [laughing]. So, yes, with being so close, you might find that small things build up and irritate you. Whereas if you were spending hours away, going to an office and working from an office, you can get away from it. Not it, get away from your partner. Whereas here, we are ... we have to live with each other, so ..."* R[1p7]. Theo's account could, arguably, be understood as referring to the intrapersonal influence of partner differences becoming increasingly difficult to navigate when sharing both a work and personal space with one's partner. Susan concurred with Theo's experience, adding: *"And I think also, because we often work together – well, not together, but in the same space – you know, the frustrations of work sometimes can also have an impact on private relationship roles"* R[1p8]. Therefore, with such entwined work and personal spaces, work frustrations can be unduly projected onto the relationship entity. However, the entwined spaces might stimulate the necessity for developing and applying proper self- and emotional management skills so as to prevent a negative influence on relationship functioning and security.

Arguably, the experience of companionship deduced from the participants' experiences is understood as being more intricate than merely being in the same room, in close proximity to each other, or occupied with the same joint responsibilities. Stephanie shared how, as their lives became busier and filled with more responsibilities such as children, her need for companionship and connection with her husband, Qaden, was misunderstood and went unanswered. *"I was saying that I needed him. I can handle Luka [their son], Qaden. I can handle the house. I can handle all of that. I just want a little bit of me-time with you. That is what I want. He never got that. We don't even talk to each other. We live past each other. And when I say I can't take it anymore, it doesn't mean that I don't wish to have this [sic] children anymore. I'm saying that I need you"* O[2p57], Stephanie shared. While Stephanie described feeling able to manage life's stressors and demands, it was her unreciprocated need for companionship and closeness with Qaden that became unbearable to her. Furthermore, Susan identified a valuable aspect of companionship, namely sharing in

the content of each other's lives, as contributing to intimacy by means of opening up individual partner lives to the joint relational space.

I think it's about sharing. Sharing what's important to me. Sharing what's important to him. And, obviously, finding the common ground because we have a lot of that, actually. And when he's busy with his work, and I'm busy with my work, we're in our own individual thing. But as soon as he comes across something he knows I'll be interested in, we share that. And then we share that moment, which will again inspire us in some way. Bringing up our own dreams, plans and future. Which brings us together in that moment. (Susan) S[2p84]

Companionship may, therefore, present as a continuous process of oscillating between the individual partner space and the joint relational space while holding one's partner in mind and allowing him or her access to share in each other's individual partner spaces. Such companionship is further understood as being in a reciprocal exchange with relational presence. Perhaps closely related to companionship, dependability and partnership appeared as an important component of security created through relational presence. Wayde alluded to the importance of partnership, specifically communicated through acts of care such as taking care of household tasks, as contributing to his sense of security within his relationship with Kristin. He explained, *"She's there. She looks after my kids. Cooking, cleaning ... and she works and ... my kids and that. So, I'm saying it's always, she's always there. No matter what happens, she takes care of it"* M[1p65]. For Wayde, the ability to depend on Kristin's relational presence appeared to contribute to both a sense of partnership and security within their relationship.

Despite his awareness of the beneficial experience of being on the receiving end of such partnership and care, Wayde did not seem to practise these himself, as Kristin mentioned experiencing the absence of partnership in their relationship. She said, *"Like I take my daughter to classes every Wednesday night, and for years, I've been doing it. And he never does it. Which, I would say, he could think for himself and say: 'Give her a break, she comes from work and she's cooking ... I'll take my daughter.' But he doesn't do that and I feel frustrated asking because you should think for yourself"* M[1p73]. In their relationship, Kristin

felt unable to depend on Wayde's partner contribution as he did not seem to hold her experience in mind. Moreover, he did not appear to be present or cognisant of the needs and demands of their life and children. Arguably, this may have left Kristin with a feeling that she only had two choices: either repeatedly asking Wayde to be relationally present or simply taking care of the demands herself. Given Kristin's relatively avoidant attachment style based on her scores on the Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire (ECR-R), it may be inferred that her experience of Wayde's behaviour may have negatively impacted her insecure attachment style by reinforcing her self-reliance and independence. Similarly, Nicki identified partnership as one of the few things that she had found lacking in her relationship with Jaime. *"It's the support and partnership side that I really lack. The rest can fly. The rest I'm not worried about at all."* [1p36], she explained. Unlike Stephanie's need for dependability and partnership through acts of support related to the demands and tasks of their life together, Nicki's need centred around emotional support and partnership, as she later added in the interview: *"I want to sometimes sit there and I want her to tell me it's going to be ok. Things are going to be ok"* [1p128]. Dependability and partnership can, therefore, occur on both an emotional and behavioural level for partners.

Vernon highlighted the importance and role of dependability within his relationship entity: *"And as I've gotten a bit older and we've been in the relationship for a while, I've realised that if you say I will paint the house this weekend, then you actually do it. That means more than going to buy her a new car, and things like that"* [2p11]. Dependability may, therefore, not only contribute to trust within the relationship, but can even be more impactful than deliberate, seemingly grander, gestures of love and romance. While an awareness of maintaining a partnership within the relationship entity might not occur automatically for both partners, Zed mentioned how – driven by the awareness of its importance – he had learned to develop dependability and partnership in his own relationship.

Well, with the home things, I understood some of her frustrations with me not doing enough. I think we got to a point where, if I remember correctly, we had a conversation about it, and we ended up by saying, if you don't like it fix it, type of thing. Like now, if I see that the kitchen is dirty, I'll fix it, I'll

clean it. I mustn't ... it's my home too. I mustn't wait on her to do it. If there's washing to be done, I'll do it. (Zed) Q[2p91]

Holding his partner in mind, he was therefore able to practise empathy to motivate change in his own behaviour. This led him to become more present and more dependable in his own relationship.

For some participants, acts of mutual care and partnership, similar, perhaps, to what Chapman (2015) refers to as acts of service, seemed to exist as an avenue to expressing love for their partners. Susan, for example, shared, *"I think I do it just by, you know, taking care of little things. Like making sure Theo has supplements, and cooking nice healthy meals, and making sure that I buy him things that he ... especially in terms of health focus and that. Just making sure that he's on track with that sort of thing. Encouraging him to take breaks from the computer, just look after himself, a lot"* R[1p19]. As a result of holding Theo in mind, Susan therefore engaged in acts of service towards him. In comparison, Zed described holding Julia's emotional well-being in mind while practising interpartner presence and dependability supported by a belief in partnership to create an optimal environment for his wife's needs. He elaborated, *"Because now, I have more time to do these things, with the way my work is. I can do all these things. I've got time. So, let me do it. She comes home and things are gonna [sic] look spick and span. And if I need to cook, I'll cook, and dinner's ready or whatever. To create an environment where she's happy, I'm happy. I like it like that. I like it clean; I like it smelling nice"* Q[2p91]. While dependability may, therefore, enable partners to rely on each other for the sharing of tasks and maintaining joint responsibility for the relationship entity, partnership may involve an aspect of shared relationship satisfaction and well-being.

In conclusion, the function of presence within the relationship entity has been emphasised as a valuable component of understanding the dynamics of mindfulness and attachment security within the relationship entity. Moreover, it has been argued that while relational presence may be enhanced through certain behaviours, such as prioritisation, availability or accessibility, and physical affection, it is also supported by mindfulness. Presence was further understood as being a component of mindfulness, particularly with regard to present-centredness. In addition, relational presence appeared to be specifically

supported by mindfulness through an awareness of one's partner, oneself and each other's emotions. Apart from its association with mindfulness, relational presence was further conceptualised as supporting secure attachment by communicating commitment, companionship, dependability and partnership within the relationship entity. Bearing in mind the interconnectedness and reciprocal association between the respective themes identified in this study, relational presence can be viewed as a valuable precursor to the communication necessary to facilitate optimal relational functioning.

5.3.4. Theme 3: Communication as a facilitator of optimal functioning within the relationship entity

The participants in the current study strongly emphasised the importance of communication within the relationship entity. In order to achieve effective and aligned communication, however, the necessary skills for mindful and secure communication may need to be acquired first.

Wayde confirmed the importance of communication, but also pointed out that acquiring such skills might not be such an easy task:

They always tell you when you get married that communication is key. But the problem is, the other person doesn't always listen or understand what you are trying to tell them. Or you use the wrong word or term ... but that's not actually what you were trying to get across to them. They take it completely differently. So that's where it's basically, her understanding and my understanding – it won't be the same. You talk about the same thing a hundred times, but you're not understanding where I'm coming from.
(Wayde) M[1p111]

Simply being aware of the importance of communication in order to understand one's partner may therefore not be enough to facilitate effective communication as the different perceptions and understanding between partners may jeopardise the process. This may, as Kristin reflected, lead partners to feel "Like we're on a different page" M[1p112]. A lack of effective and aligned communication may, arguably, contribute to a sense of frustration and helplessness within partners.

Communication appeared to be specifically valued for its role in creating closeness and connection, as pointed out by Nicki, who stated that *“Actually, kind words are also a form of intimacy”* J[2p276]. Qaden expressed a similar sentiment in that he had credited communication for the development of his relationship with Stephanie, saying, *“When we met, we talked a lot. We talked day and night. And that was like the thing that made it happen for us”* O[2p51]. Qaden’s account seemed to present communication as crucial in the initial establishment of a relationship. In addition, communication was valued for its contribution to maintaining continued closeness and connection between partners given that the nature and frequency of communication may change over the course of the relationship. Moreover, communication appeared to be regarded as having a mediating role between partners. Kristin, for example, reflected on the necessity of communication in effective conflict resolution: *“Normally, you have to talk about it to resolve it. But if you can’t, then ... I don’t know. How do you fix it?”* M[1p231]. Julia also offered an understanding of the role of communication as she described the effects of her own ineffective communication on her relational alignment with Zed:

Definitely name calling on my part But, it’s something that we’re trying not to do. And then, the swearing as well. But it’s mostly me. I was exposed to where people were violent. So, when I have certain feelings and stuff like that, it comes out. For him – he didn’t grow up like that. So, it’s different. So, for him, when I go like that, he goes the other way. So, it feels quite pointless because I feel like I’m fighting with myself so what is the point? So, that was a point of disconnect for us. Because, I’m trying to say something and he cannot hear me because I’m being so crazy. (Julia)
P[1p79]

Due to the ineffective communication that had previously been experienced between her and Zed, Julia described experiencing an emotional disconnection with her husband at the time. Julia’s account is therefore interpreted as illustrating how ineffective communication could threaten relational alignment and interpartner connection. In their situation, this risk was further amplified by the contributing influence of their family histories on the relationship entity. Therefore, communication also appeared to present as a reciprocal exchange between partners, where the actions or inactions of one partner may affect the

actions of the other. This communication exchange was further interpreted as being associated with both mindfulness and attachment.

5.3.4.1. Improving communication through mindfulness

The different facets and skills of mindfulness (Baer et al., 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2013) are inferred as being fundamental in creating effective and aligned communication between partners. As discussed earlier, the ability to read the other person is largely facilitated by mindfulness and presence. It is my contention that an ability to read one's partner is central to effective and aligned communication. Vernon and Bianca both described using mindfulness skills, such as *Acting with Awareness*, *Observing* and *Describing* to determine each other's internal environment, including mindset, emotions and needs. Vernon explained, "So, if she's in the room and laying on the bed and I come there and I kiss her and hug her. And you get that feeling like: 'Don't touch me'. Then I'm like, 'Ok, I get it.' It's like, I'm asking questions, but you don't get a normal response. Then I'm like, 'You're tired and you don't want me to ask a lot of questions?' Then I'm like: 'Ok, give her space'" L[2p160]. Vernon therefore used his observation skills to read Bianca's body language, as well as describe it to himself and align his behaviour accordingly. While Vernon's scores on the Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) subscales of *Describing* and *Acting with Awareness* were low, he did obtain a high score on the *Observing* subscale. Therefore, his predisposition to accurately observe Bianca may not only have supported his ability to read her, but may possibly have compensated for what appears, based on his FFMQ scores, to be a decreased proficiency in describing his wife's experiences or acting with awareness towards her.

Bianca appeared to use mindfulness skills in the same way, stating:

I do think it comes with the years that you've been together. And we do have like, he knows all my skeletons. I know his. So, I do know sometimes what he's struggling with. Like maybe he came into connection with his dad and maybe the dad said something, and now he says, 'it's fine.' You can clearly hear it's not fine, but you also know this is not something I want to talk about now so just give me my space. So, when he's talking to me, I will tell him it's not fine, 'cause [sic] I can see on his body posture it's changed. I

can see, I can hear, the undertone. So, this, the physical will say it's fine, but you can clearly feel and see it's not. (Bianca) K[1p108]

Similarly, Bianca used *observation* skills to read Vernon's behaviour and body language before *describing* them to herself and then adjusting her reaction in order to *act with awareness*. In contrast to Vernon, however, Bianca obtained high scores on both the *Describing* and *Acting with Awareness* subscales of the Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) and a low score on the *Observing* subscale. Based exclusively on her scores, Bianca would be more likely to be able to describe her partner's behaviour and respond with awareness than she would be to notice and observe his behaviour to start with. Notably, however, Bianca's account also demonstrated how the ability to effectively observe and describe her partner may be related to interpartner knowledge gathered over time in the relationship. Therefore, increased knowledge of one's partner's history, personality and preferences may aid relational communication through an improvement in the ability to read one's partner. As a result, even though Bianca did not obtain a high score on the *Observing* subscale, her knowledge about her partner may, possibly, have compensated for her possible inability to easily notice and observe his behaviour.

Vernon's and Bianca's accounts also appeared to allude to the way in which mindfulness may facilitate effective timing as far as communication is concerned. This benefit of mindfulness was mentioned directly by Theo, who shared:

I'm pretty open and discuss things, I think. My problem would be to discuss it at the right time. If Susan's not in that mood, then I shouldn't be talking about my mother and her issues and lack of money, and things like that. Whereas I just blurt it out and talk about my emotions and that sort of thing. I'm not shy about talking. ... So, a lot of times, Susan is busy elsewhere, mentally or whatever, and then I will start discussing a topic. Where I should've been more sensitive about that topic, and not done it. (Theo) R[1p60]

Therefore, being mindful of one's partner and the situation at hand may lead to communication that is more effectively timed and planned which, in turn, might result in improved conflict resolution between partners.

Based on the analysis of the participants' data, the different facets and skills of mindfulness (Baer et al., 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2013) are interpreted as being particularly relevant in terms of conflict resolution between intimate partners. Mindfulness, in particular, might enable partners to be fully present with each other, to observe each other's verbal and nonverbal communication neutrally before interpreting and describing what has been observed without judgement or emotional reactivity and, finally, communicating back to one's partner in a manner that incorporates awareness of oneself, one's partner and emotions. Bianca's account, for example, demonstrated the effect of lack of presence on the ability to observe and bring awareness to potential conflict arising in partner interactions. She asserted, *"So, I think what sometimes also happens in our relationship – we're so busy with a lot of things, and so we assume that the relationship is fine. And then, something happens. ... Because there's still a lot of things happening, you don't want to add the relationship things to it. So, everything is 'fine' until it's no longer fine. And all of it comes out and now you address it"* K[1p35]. Therefore, it may be inferred that a lack of mindfulness leads to a lack of awareness of potential relationship pitfalls as they start to develop in the relationship entity. Consequently, potential issues are often only noticed once they have escalated and possibly even already negatively impacted the relationship entity. However, with awareness and observation, partners would potentially be able to identify relational issues before the relationship is negatively impacted by them.

Qaden, for example, described how being observant and aware of changes in his partner's communication had allowed him to identify changes in her emotional state or potential conflict areas: *"Normally, Stephanie is quiet. She will just give you short answers or she won't give you an answer at all. Or she will refer to something that I did wrong in the past. Then I know that something bigger than this is happening in her mind"* N[1p97]. Echoing Qaden's sentiments, Theo offered an example of how mindfulness could bring awareness, not only of potential conflict areas, but also of one's partner's reactions to conflict and defeating patterns that might have formed within interpartner communication. He elaborated, *"I had*

quite violent parents so that affects us when Susan wants to argue. Not that we want to argue, but when there's conflict, I tend to withdraw from it, which then obviously aggravates Susan because she doesn't want withdrawal; she wants answers now. But I'll rather wait until she's calmed down, and we can talk about it. Uhm, but that's obviously conflicting. We've got two different personalities here, that conflict" S[2p43]. Accordingly, Theo and Susan appeared to have very different approaches to conflict resolution, influenced by their respective personalities and family legacies. Their different reactions to conflict could, arguably, be understood as Theo distancing himself from Susan's strong emotions which, to her, might then translate as a lack of interpartner presence due to Theo's being inaccessible to her. Moreover, in contrast to Theo, Susan seemed to have a tendency towards directly engaging with the emotions. Theo and Susan's couple profile indicated that they both had a relatively secure attachment based on their respective scores on the Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire (ECR-R). However, Theo's account of their reactions during conflict indicated that Theo may have had a tendency towards avoidant attachment while Susan might have had a tendency towards anxious attachment.

Attachment avoidance has been shown to be associated with emotional disengagement behaviour whereas attachment anxiety is linked to heightened emotional engagement behaviours (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). Furthermore, existing literature has confirmed that attachment style is fluid, therefore enabling partners to momentarily move between secure and insecure attachment and behaviours, depending on context and circumstance (Arriaga, Kumashiro, Simpson, & Overall, 2018). As Theo further noted, their respective emotional reactions were not only different, but also incompatible, thereby aggravating the already existing difficulty in communication. Research also suggests that interactions activating insecure attachment behaviours may be characterised by increased discord between partners (Allen, 2013; Ricco & Sierra, 2017; Wilson et al., 2013). Given the proposed influence of relational presence on a couple's experience of attachment security, based on this study's findings, it is plausible that a repetition of this conflict pattern over time may negatively impact Theo's and Susan's attachment security.

It is purported that mindfulness may facilitate communication by enabling partners to be aware of and observe both verbal and nonverbal interactions and behaviours between

them. Vernon described such an instance where he had been aware of Bianca's nonverbal behaviour carrying a very particular message regarding her emotional state. He shared, *"But I was washing the dishes, and she hugged me from behind. And I couldn't like, I wanted to turn around, because ... uhm, we lost a baby. And it was on that day that she was feeling down and heavy. And I just wanted to turn around and hug her and things, but because of her nature, she doesn't allow you to, it's like she wants to maintain the situation, but she also wants to be vulnerable"* K[1p136]. In this situation, Vernon appeared not only to receive the primary message of Bianca's nonverbal communication, namely her feelings of sadness and pain, but also what he perceived as the secondary, tacit message regarding her ability to allow him to support her emotionally. A number of participants mentioned the value of nonverbal communication, specifically physical touch, as conveying a sense of connection and closeness. While reflecting on the ways in which his wife communicated her emotional availability to him, Zed emphasised: *"That's physically. A touch. She sits in front of me, and she looks at me. And it's a different look. She'll hold my hands, rub my back. Puts me in a comfort zone"* P[1p150]. Julia had had a similar experience, as she mirrored: *"The same. He will be there, in a touch or a hug. Because, I get hard, and then I don't necessarily want to be hugged. And then I must allow it. So, he knows that, so he will feel that I'm going a bit rigid, but he will hug me anyway"* P[1p151]. Bianca also shared how physical intimacy had formed part of the nonverbal communication between herself and Vernon. She elaborated, *"Sometimes we do, instead of talking, I don't know if it's appropriate or not, we do instead of talking we go to being sexually intimate. And then because we don't want to talk, we'll go: 'Do you want to have sex?' Almost there that connection point"* K[1p137]. Therefore, physical communication may offer an avenue for communication to occur when verbal communication might be lacking, unavailable or insufficient.

While nonverbal communication may be interpreted as being a valid alternative communication channel between intimate partners, participants' accounts of their experiences indicated that caution is advised when communicating in this manner. Qaden's experience seemed to illustrate the importance of approaching nonverbal communication with sufficient awareness (mindfulness) so as to prevent interpartner communication from becoming ineffective.

Look, I would go, for example, if it's winter, I'll try to make a fire. I'll try to set the mood for a movie, but most of the times we don't even get there. Or put music, listen to proper music as a family. I want us to do the simple things, and not be extravagant things that is too heavy on the pocket. So, I want to create the small little things, and in that sense, I try to make things happen. But it doesn't always play out like I anticipated. I think it's either I don't communicate properly to Stephanie, or she don't understand the reason why, for example, I'm taking out the Bible and I'm reading Bible to the family. It feels like it's not appreciated, the family don't really appreciate that. The fact that I do that. Or if I put on music, they don't read it as: look the music is going to play in the background and we have an opportunity to talk about, not deep issues, just normal issues. (Qaden) N[1p26]

Although Qaden's behaviour was motivated by his own internal dialogue, expectations and goals to create an environment of connection with his wife and children, a lack of verbal communication accompanying his nonverbal behaviours may have led to his intended message becoming lost or misinterpreted by his partner. In this way, nonverbal communication may still need to be supplemented with verbal communication in order to be properly received and interpreted.

In summary, effective communication between partners may be understood as being reliant on an integration of both verbal and nonverbal communication, facilitated by the different facets of mindfulness, namely *Observing, Describing, Non-judgement, Nonreactivity* and *Acting with Awareness* (Baer et al., 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). While reflecting on his communication with his partner, Zed – whose total score on the Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) in the couple profile was indicative of high levels of mindfulness, overall – offered an integrated illustration of the different mindfulness facets as they had contributed to communication:

I try to put myself on that side and I say: 'Ok, let me try to see it from that point of view. And look at the context of what has happened.' And then I try to view it from that point of view. Then I bring it back to me and I say: 'Must I raise this? And if I raise this, what is my point? What am I trying to gain

here? What is this going to do for us, if I raise this? If I don't raise this, what are the pros and cons?' Then I normally just, if I can't get to a conclusion right then, I'll let those thoughts sit for a moment. And, if it's bothering me enough, if it stays there on the bothering stage, then it's worthy to speak up. Even so, sometimes if it doesn't bother me that much, I will later bring it up. So, she knows, this happened and this is how I felt initially, and this is how I feel now. (Zed) P[1p96]

In empathising with his partner's experience, Zed appeared to observe her reality without judgement and by placing his own reactions on hold (*Nonreactivity*). He took sufficient time to describe to himself what he had been observing before finally making a decision regarding how to communicate with awareness. As a result, mindfully observing and describing one's partner's verbal and nonverbal communication, without judgement or reactivity, may enable an ability to respond or communicate with awareness. I therefore propose that mindfulness exists in a partnership with communication by enabling more effective and aligned interactions between partners.

5.3.4.2. Mindful communication as contributing to attachment security

Based on the participants' experiences, communication reportedly facilitates intimacy and connection within the relationship entity. While reflecting on the ways in which she had created closeness or intimacy in her relationship with Wayde, Kristin shared, *"I try to have conversations, to talk about it. To not just leave it. Because I don't like ... feel that you can just carry on as normal if something isn't resolved"* M[1p5]. Communication may therefore serve as a facilitator of the intimacy bond as it allows for the resolution of misalignments between partners. Stephanie also made the association between connection and communication, as she stated: *"But I mean that, for us as a couple, like I said ... when we met and were courting ... we don't have that connection anymore. We don't even talk to each other"* O[2p57]. Stephanie seemed to suggest that intimacy and connection are the products of communication. Given the influences on their relationship alignment and what had made her feel more or less aligned and connected, Bianca also identified the role of communication in her relational alignment with Vernon:

It comes back for me to communication. It's almost, I almost feel sometimes like I'm on a tennis game, and I'm always the one hitting off and he's receiving. And if I'm too tired to go fetch the ball, then there's no communication. Or he will just like, bounce a question off like, and hope it lands. It's not really listening to what I've said and having a proper conversation. It makes me feel like no one hears me, no one sees me. I'm just an island on my own. And that creates a big barrier between us.
(Bianca) L[2p123]

Based on Kristin's, Stephanie's and Bianca's experiences, I wish to propose that balanced and reciprocal communication between partners may be a crucial contributor to couples' relational alignment. Arguably, this type of communication may also contribute to a sense of trust and security within the relationship entity. It is further inferred from Bianca's comment that the absence of reciprocal communication between her and Vernon left her feeling disconnected and isolated from him. In addition, the lack of reciprocal communication subjectively created a barrier between them which, in turn, may negatively impact their relational alignment. Communication may also aid in promoting emotional support between partners which, subsequently, may support a sense of relational security and trust between them, as extrapolated from Theo's account: *"Yes, she is emotionally available to me. If I tell her, and express it, she's there for me. She'll listen or support me or, whatever. So yes, I think she's very good with that"* R[1p129]. As a result, partners may be more able to support each other emotionally when their partners take the time to effectively communicate their internal experiences. Subsequently, such emotional support may also strengthen the attachment bond by communicating availability and responsiveness between partners.

Some participants also underscored the importance of completely honest communication between partners as a way of promoting optimal attachment security. Nicki credited honesty as an important component in terms of adding to the strength of their relational alignment or connection: *"Even if the honesty is positive or negative. It's still honesty. I think just open honesty. Telling one another everything. How you feel, what you've done, where you've been, who you spoke to"* J[2p187]. Therefore, while honest communication may involve partners sometimes having to receive feedback which may be

unpleasant to process, it continues to be valued as a constructive quality due to its contribution to relational security. Susan felt equally positive about such honesty, proclaiming that: *"I think the fact that we're very honest and open with each other, is brilliant"* R[1p58]. When asked about the quality or nature of her relationship with Theo, Susan acknowledged the role that honesty and open communication had played: *"You can talk about anything, you can trust the person to, you know, be considerate of you"* R[1p26]. She later added, *"And emotionally it's, we share everything. So, we are each other's confidants. And we do discuss whatever is on our minds, generally"* R[1p31]. Based on these participant accounts, security appears to be promoted through a process of aligned sharing and communication. This approach arguably creates a secure space of acceptance where both partners can feel free and safe to share their internal experiences without fear of judgement or loss of their partner or relationship. This was evident in Zed's comment: *"Express each other without fear of anything. Just express yourself. We're here. We love each other. I think it's a commitment that we've made, that let's talk rather than hint, rather than signs, rather than notes. Speak. Let's talk to each other. It helps"* P[1p112]. Such open and honest communication may, therefore, further convey commitment to one's partner and the relationship entity, which may influence the attachment bond. Notably, Nicki, Susan and Zed, all of whom strongly emphasised the importance of open and honest communication, had been relatively securely attached according to their scores on the Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire (ECR-R) in the couple profiles. For those with a more secure attachment style, communication is often open and facilitated by self-disclosure (Allen, 2013; Levine & Heller, 2012). In contrast to these participants, Bianca described how failure to communicate honestly or to validate the experiences or feelings of one's partner may leave partners feeling unheard, subsequently leading to a breakdown in both communication and connection.

So, for me, sometimes, he doesn't acknowledge that he's heard me, but he now wants to tell me that whatever I just said, this is how he assumed it. And, for me, it's like he's just diminishing what I said, basically. So, he's not really hearing me, but he's preparing his answer in the meanwhile for this is what he really wanted to do. Acknowledge that you heard me ... and now tell me that, whatever you want to tell me. Because now I don't feel heard

and then I've shut down. Immediately. I will listen to you, but I'm not engaged. Everything after that will be: 'It's fine.' (Bianca) K[1p67]

Based on Bianca's comment, it may be inferred that communication that is supportive of the security bond within the relationship would therefore need to be validating in nature and devoid of behaviours that define the experience of one's partner based on assumed subjective conclusions.

The participants' accounts also seemed to describe an exchange that exists between partners, as mentioned earlier in this theme, in which one partner's actions influence those of the other in a reciprocal motion. Theo, for example, described this exchange:

When Susan starts getting a bit loud, and starts really getting aggressive towards the subject or a topic, I do, I would rather walk away from it. I was brought up in a household where fighting and shouting and screaming and swearing was normal, so I am against that kind of thing. Uhm, and yes, walking away from it does aggravate her, it just makes her all that more aggressive, and she'll just let go, kind of thing. And the more I say: 'Let's just take a breath and walk away from the situation', the more it pisses her off. And then, yes, it escalates, so. It seems we've got two different management styles, and they're conflicting. (Theo) R[1p76]

Therefore, their interaction may have started with Susan raising her voice and being perceived by Theo as being aggressive in response to the topic under discussion. In turn, this led to Theo, influenced by his childhood family legacy, distancing himself from the emotions and waiting for the emotional intensity of the situation to subside. Susan, however, appeared to have perceived Theo's emotional distancing as him moving away or disconnecting from her, which may further have escalated her emotions. It is likely that such an escalation in emotion would then lead to a "repetition" of the pattern as Theo would possibly distance himself from the escalating emotion once again, leading to Susan's experiencing him as being increasingly inaccessible and absent. Such a reciprocal exchange could, arguably, be seen as negatively impacting relational security.

Based on the existing literature (Allen, 2013; Fraley, 2019; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019), this type of exchange may be indicative of an activating-deactivating pattern that could ensue amongst individuals with insecure attachment styles. Susan and Theo did, however, have relatively secure attachment styles according to their scores on the Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire (ECR-R). The occurrence of this reciprocal exchange despite their secure attachment may be interpreted as related to Susan's low score on the *Nonreactivity* subscale of the Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), as discussed earlier. Based on her low score, Susan would likely be emotionally and behaviourally reactive to Theo's behaviours. Some of Susan's reactions in her interaction with Theo may further allude to the influence of both personal perception and the identified implied messages on partner communication.

When contemplating whether she had only responded to the verbal communication messages received from her wife or whether she had also reacted to what she perceived as implied messages, Nicki was quick to point out the risks associated with perceived implied messages:

I think both, but a person must draw the line where presuming that's where the person is coming from ... I think it's not ... it's like receiving a text. What you read and what you perceive is different to what the person's reaction was on the other side. 'Cause [sic] he can give you a text and you take it up incorrectly, with a tone, but I mean words don't have a tone. You see there's no tone of voice over the phone so how would you know what the other person is implying by sending that message? (Nicki) I[1p301]

Nicki's internal processing suggests that care needs to be taken not to assign too much value to the perceived implied messages that have been communicated as these may be based on the person's own subjective interpretations rather than the internal reality of one's partner. Less focus on potentially implied messages may also be more indicative of a secure relational bond (Allen, 2013; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). In comparison, Qaden shared how focusing on, and responding to, the implied message could lead to frustration with one's partner. He explained, "*For me, it's sometimes that one: I react on what I think she is referring to. And sometimes I know that, you say that this is the story, but I ... there's something bigger.*

But I can't figure out what it is. And then I get ... it's out of frustration for not telling me or not being able to get it out of her" N[1p100]. Therefore, Qaden's perception and interpretation of his partner's verbal and nonverbal communication reportedly impacted his own emotional management while also leading to a sense of separation from his partner. Arguably, this perceived division may then negatively impact the relationship security between partners. The ability to communicate openly and honestly with one's partner while focusing on the actual message sent rather than subjective interpretations thereof may, therefore, be important components of relationship security.

Participants' accounts of their experiences indicated that communication may also contribute to relational security through trust in one's partner's ability to both receive and hold safe those thoughts and feelings communicated to him or her.

I am going to be honest now and say, emotional level; it often feels to me that Stephanie don't meet my needs on an emotional level. Because there are things that I want to discuss with her, or things that I am scared of, or things that I fear. And I have started to become scared to just discuss it with her because she might use it in an argument as an advantage against me. Or maybe when we have a discussion with family or whatever, then something I do not want other people to know, then she might mention it in the discussion. And then I feel put on the spot. And, so, in other words, I have a need to communicate things. And I won't discuss it with anyone else. In anyway, I feel it will be a bit disrespectful if I discuss it with someone else, but I don't discuss it with her. (Qaden) N[1p35]

Qaden therefore seemed to experience a need to discuss his internal world with Stephanie. Notably, however, due to lack of trust in her ability to receive and safeguard his experiences, as well as perceiving it as inappropriate to share his personal matters with anyone but his wife, Qaden was left without the necessary emotional support. As a result, Qaden's experience of attachment security may have been negatively impacted by the perception of his wife as unavailable in terms of meeting his needs.

In contrast to Qaden's experience, Zed reported an openness both in terms of his communication with his partner and his ability to be emotionally available to her. He elaborated, *"In everything. You can see, this person is open to you. There's ... nothing holding back. The person says whatever they want to say. There's no like, trying to step around you to try and make you feel comfortable. They just say what they want to say and do what they want to do. So, we're free to express"* P[1p18]. Such authenticity and open exchange between partners may, arguably, be a contributing factor to the sense of commitment or security within the relationship entity. Moreover, it is my conceptualisation that reciprocal, honest and mutually validating communication would contribute to attachment security within the relationship entity. Such open exchange may, however, be dependent on the ability to communicate in a manner that will reveal the unspoken between partners.

5.3.4.3. Mindful communication as revealing the unspoken

Given that one's partner's internal world may be accessed through mindfulness skills, such as presence, awareness and observation, applying these skills would enable partners to read each other. For example, it is possible that Nicki relied on these skills to assist her in reading Jaime without much effort: *"She is transparent. You can read her very easily, you know"* I[1p178]. Arguably, however, there is much about the internal world of one's partner that is not as easily observable. For instance, partners' internal dialogues (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015; Geurts, 2018; Puchalska-Wasył, 2017, 2018), as discussed earlier in Theme 1, may be understood as forming part of these invisible internal worlds. Based on the participants' accounts, communication may be conceptualised as a mechanism through which these unspoken parts of the relationship entity and the respective partners can be made visible. I wish to propose the term "revealing the unspoken" to encapsulate this process. For instance, Susan suggested that open conversation may be the key to observing the internal world of one's partner. Regarding her relationship with Theo, she stated, *"People are always surprised at how well we know each other. Yes, it's been 17 years, but we are also very open with each other. We talk about anything and everything. So, people often comment about that. Some of our friends don't talk to each other. They don't know their husbands and wives like we know each other"* S[2p59]. However, as Susan also indicated, not all couples automatically take the approach of open communication.

In their first interview, Theo also emphasised the importance of specifically verbalising the internal dialogue and making it visible to one's partner, who might not be aware of its content. He shared, *"And my argument would be: Why don't you just tell me? I'm a male ... I didn't pick up on all those subtle little hints, and all that kind of stuff. Just tell me, and I'll react in a positive kind of way"* R[1p114]. Revealing the internal dialogue may, arguably, make use of the *Describing* facet of mindfulness (Baer et al., 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2013) in order to neutrally and factually describe one's internal experience. Theo's couple profile indicated that he had obtained a high score on the *Describing* subscale of the Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), which may explain his awareness of verbalising the internal dialogue. His comment further suggests self-awareness regarding his inability to notice his partner's nonverbal behaviours. Theo's personal insight was corroborated by his low score on the Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) *Observing* subscale, which indicated a tendency towards being unobservant of external experiences such as one's partner's behaviour. Being aware of one's partner's internal dialogue may, therefore, not only allow for more effective conflict resolution or satisfaction of needs, as mentioned by Theo, but reportedly also holds the potential for empathy to be cultivated for the partner, as suggested by Julia. *"Yes, obviously it makes you be a bit more softer because you're thinking they're not being funny for a ... they're not being against you for anything. It's just that they are feeling this way, and then they're in this emotional space and it might affect you"* P[1p147], she shared. As a consequence, revealing the unspoken and therefore being more aware of her partner's internal dialogue, subjectively made Julia kinder and more considered in her responses. At the same time, it also appeared to allow her the opportunity to create more accurate internal dialogues regarding her partner's intentions rather than erroneously taking his observable behaviours personally.

In turn, Zed described having had conversations with himself in his head that would probably have best been had with his partner. *"I internalise things, then I have a discussion in my head. A long discussion in my head. And then I get to the conclusion. Sometimes it's a conversation, you know, between me and Julia. In my head. It used to be like that. And we'd have this conversation, and I'm done with the conversation, but she's not even here. And it's done and it's finished. When she comes home or whenever I see her, then the conversation is done. I don't say anything. Because I got to the conclusion"* P[1p6], he admitted. Nicki shared

a similar tactic: *"I just shut down until I can, you know, everything is argued in my head. I argue everything out in my head. Find my solutions and what I need to do"* I[1p278]. It is worth noting that these approaches did not seem to have a beneficial effect on their relationship dynamics. For instance, Zed explained how his behaviour had been identified as problematic in his relationship with Julia and, subsequently, had to be changed to improve their relationship functioning after their reconciliation. He explained, *"That's how it used to be. And that ended up in problems before so now I've had to change that. I have to be like: No, she has to be here. I have to talk to her face-to-face, regardless what I think she will react. So that was one of the major things that have had to happen. It was a bit uncomfortable, but I see what it's doing to us. It's positive so I like that"* P[1p6]. Although the change in order to improve communication may be uncomfortable or even fear-provoking at times, it may be inferred that the advantages of revealing the unspoken through communication may outweigh the discomfort.

Communicating the unspoken therefore seemed to create an opportunity for change, growth and the elimination of hindrances to connection within a couple's relational alignment, as Zed's and Julia's accounts also illustrated. *"Before, that was part of what I used to do, like I said. I used to have these conversations and we used to talk about things and then we don't talk about things. And that led to part of the breakdown, previously. So that some of the things we now learned is not coming back in the new relationship. That is not happening. I'm opening my mouth more"* P[1p72], Zed shared. *"And I'm quieter"* P[1p73], Julia added. *"That's why she needs me to speak"* P[1p74], Zed contributed insightfully. *"And that's why I'm quieter now. Because, he's actually speaking about the stuff I wanted him to speak about 10 years ago. So now ... I'm comfortable a little bit because I'm not as vocal as I used to be. There's no need"* P[1p75], Julia concluded. Consequently, the more Zed was able to communicate regarding his internal world, thus revealing the unspoken, the more the reciprocal exchange or interaction with his partner shifted so that she no longer had to take the greater portion of responsibility for the communication between them. Similar to Zed, Qaden demonstrated how the ability to communicate effectively and share the unspoken did not occur automatically. Rather it was the result of deliberate and conscious effort. He stated, *"It feels nice to communicate with people so I've put it out there for myself, look I'm going to, I'm going to fight, fight this. I'm going to grow myself into this, to talk to people to*

communicate and to do this. That's why it's not always easy for me, but I still do it" O[2p43]. Therefore, change and growth within and between partners are proposed as being essential to the optimal development of the necessary communication skills between intimate partners.

Susan further illustrated how the invisible internal experiences of partners may lead to both a lack of relational presence as conveyed by physical affection and conflict resulting from miscommunication. She reflected on her and Theo's reciprocal exchange, saying, "*Theo will be more of a keep-quiet-walk-away-from-the-situation-and-mull-over-it, which annoys me more. Because I want to resolve the issue now. And sometimes, he was talking about not knowing when to give me a hug, sometimes I just need a hug. And then he tends to sort of duck and dive and keep a low profile because he doesn't want to ruffle my feathers. And, actually, that makes it worse"* R[1p74]. In this way, because neither party had been making their invisible internal experiences, namely their thoughts and feelings, known, both arguably ended up experiencing unmet personal needs.

Reading the other person by using mindfulness and, in particular, awareness, as a component of mindfulness (as discussed earlier) may, therefore, be a valuable foundation for communication and hold numerous possible benefits for the relationship entity. In terms of communication, reading the other person may offer a point of reference from which to initiate connection. Jaime, for example, described Nicki's awareness and observation (mindfulness) of her internal experiences, saying, "*Yes, she will see I'm sad or if I'm not well or something. And she'll ask me: 'Is there something wrong?' And then I'll say no, don't worry about it. And she'll get it out of me. So, she can, she knows exactly when there's something wrong"* I[1p326]. Thus, Nicki seemed to use mindfulness skills in combination with communication in order to extract those unspoken parts of Jaime's experiences. Vernon reiterated this notion that reading one's partner would need to be followed by effective communication in order to successfully reveal the unspoken:

We've gotten to the point where verbalising what you want works out far better than assuming. Even though we assume a lot. Like, I'm having a bad day, I assume she knows I'm having a bad day. And she assumes I get home,

food must be ready, that type of thing. So, we've come to understand that actually saying: 'I just want to go crawl into a hole and disappear for a while' is far better than being like this ... volatile substance that everybody must take ... that everybody must just stay away, type of thing. (Vernon) K[1p140]

In this way, Vernon illustrated how revealing the unspoken through direct communication may be much more effective than assuming the nature of partners' internal worlds or expecting them to instinctively perceive one's expectations and needs.

Arguably, communicating with the purpose of revealing the unspoken on the part of both partners may also hold the potential for more effective conflict management and resolution. Wayde sketched the scenario relating to his own relationship:

No, you can always talk to her. She always wants to talk. I can actually speak to her about anything. It's ... even though there are certain things I'll tell her that she doesn't agree with me, but then she will give her opinion and then I will give my opinion and we'll argue about it. But then afterwards, I will sit and I'll think: 'Ok, it does actually make sense what you said,' ... but I won't say it. But then we'll argue about it three, four times and then I'll only admit: 'Ok, you're right.' (Wayde) M[1p78]

Due to Wayde's delay in communicating his unspoken internal thoughts and feelings to his wife, their conflict reportedly continued unresolved for an extended period of time. Wayde's example, therefore, seemed to illustrate the potential importance of sharing unspoken internal experiences in order to facilitate the necessary negotiation and compromise that may enable mutual understanding and conflict resolution.

Apart from the potential benefits of conflict resolution, revealing the unspoken through communication was also indicated as promoting one's physical health. Stephanie offered an example of the interconnectedness of mind, body and emotion while reflecting on the ways in which her physical health had changed as a result of embracing communication:

Because I can say how I feel, express myself, without being afraid that I'm gonna [sic] say something wrong or hurt somebody's feelings. Ok, it might,

you might not like what I'm saying, but I feel strong about this. And this is who I am now. I am relieved because, definitely, I don't sit with headaches anymore. I don't sit with constipation anymore. And it's not even like eating right or exercising or living a healthy life. It just like that simple thing of getting what is hurting me or what is bothering me inside. Getting it out.
(Stephanie) O[2p26]

In her case, a simple change, such as the decision to express her internal experiences and to reveal her unspoken thoughts and feelings through communication, led to physical improvements in her health and functioning. Such an experience is consistent with the interpersonal neurobiological (Siegel, 2012a) notion of the interconnectedness between brain, mind and relationship in the creation of well-being. Mindful communication may, therefore, be concluded to be a valuable tool in creating optimal functioning within the relationship entity and the respective partners.

In summary, based on the participants' experiences, communication may be interpreted as a facilitator of relational alignment and attachment security between intimate partners. In addition, it has been inferred that communication facilitates general optimal functioning within the relationship entity. Moreover, it is suggested that both mindfulness and attachment security are associated with communication, to the extent that communication is said to be a mediating mechanism between mindfulness and attachment security for the participants in the current study. Finally, it may be inferred that the potential for communication to reveal the unspoken elements of both the partners and the relationship entity is a possible contributing factor to both intra- and interpartner functioning, as well as relational alignment.

5.4. Conclusion

The findings with regard to the quantitative data garnered some support for an association between mindfulness and attachment amongst couples in the present study. Out of the 12 participants, all five who appeared to have relatively secure attachment, based on their scores on the Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire (ECR-R), also obtained high overall mindfulness scores based on their full scale mean scores on the Five Facets of

Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ). This finding suggests an association between a more secure attachment style and mindfulness. An interesting observation was made regarding the association between partners' levels of satisfaction. In particular, five out of the six couples obtained similar relationship satisfaction scores. In one couple, who did not fit this pattern, the occurrence of very high levels of anxious attachment in one of the partners was noted as a possible contributor to the divergence in satisfaction scores. The unique couple profiles presented in this study further suggested a possible association between the *Describing* facet of mindfulness and secure attachment deemed worthy of further exploration in future research. The couple profiles also indicated support for positive associations between overall mindfulness and both relationship satisfaction and secure attachment, respectively.

The qualitative findings elaborated on the quantitative findings by offering a more nuanced insight into the roles of mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction within intimate relationships. In the first theme, I conceptualised the intimate relationship between partners as operating as a living entity, given its propensity for change and growth, both of which enable the transformation of its functioning, presentation and qualities. This relationship entity is influenced by external factors, such as children, occupational endeavours, health, religion, and family of origin. In addition, internal influences consisting of partners' internal dialogues, trust, patience, acceptance and appreciation may influence the relationship entity and partners' experiences thereof. Importantly, each partner's level of mindfulness has been interpreted as enabling awareness of these influences. Moreover, reciprocal relationships were shown to exist between the various internal and external influences. Individual and joint partner ability to navigate these influences were described as impacting relationship satisfaction. Therefore, it is proposed that each of these internal and external influences hold the potential to impact relationship satisfaction.

The second theme presented the relationship entity as being sustained by relational presence. Extrapolating from the participants' accounts, I wish to define relational presence as being fully engaged with one's partner and relationship entity in the present moment. Such presence can be developed by means of interpartner presence-enhancing behaviours that include prioritising each other, being available and accessible, engaging in shared activities,

being physically affectionate, and limiting technology-based intrusions. Based on the participants' accounts, relational presence has been conceptualised in the present study as supporting both relational alignment and attachment security between partners. My conceptualisation of the relational alignment, an unseen, abstract alignment between intimate partners, was emphasised as existing on cognitive, emotional and behavioural levels. This novel concept is understood as encompassing the entire relationship experience, exceeding mere attachment, and impacted by both external and internal influences on the relationship entity. The alignment therefore appears to be reflective of the health and functioning of the relationship entity. Secure attachment was also conceptualised as being supported by interpartner presence through communicating commitment, companionship, dependability, partnership and care between partners. Given that presence is a product of mindfulness, it was also argued that the intimate relationship is sustained by mindfulness. In addition, presence was reported to be supported by awareness – another component of mindfulness – through self-, partner-, and emotional awareness, in particular.

Communication was shown to aid in the optimal functioning of the relationship entity in the third theme. Inferred from the participants' experiences, communication was purported to exist in a reciprocal partnership with both mindfulness and attachment. This reciprocal partnership was further interpreted as contributing to the formation of both the relationship entity and relational alignment. Accordingly, mindfulness skills, such as *Observing, Describing, Non-judgement, Nonreactivity* and *Acting with Awareness* were used to determine the partners' internal environment, identify verbal and nonverbal messages, communicate appropriately in response, and enable improved conflict resolution. In addition, communication was equated to connection, as well as aiding in emotional support which, in turn, supported an experience of relationship security and trust. Furthermore, balanced, reciprocal, honest and mutually validating communication was conceptualised and proposed as contributing to attachment security within the relationship entity. Communication offered a way for couples to navigate the different internal and external influences on their relationship in order to achieve commitment, companionship and dependability which, in turn, aided in attachment security. It also offered an avenue for revealing unspoken individual partner and joint relationship experiences. In conclusion, communication was found to be a crucial facilitator between mindfulness and attachment

amongst participants. Consequently, mindfulness has the potential to encourage direct, reciprocal and honest communication which could, in turn, enhance attachment security as a result of increasing the strength of the connection and intimacy between partners.

Mindfulness and attachment were therefore identified as both precipitating and supporting factors in the context of intimate relationships. In addition, it can be argued that all three themes contribute to what is experienced by couples as their overall sense of relationship satisfaction. Accordingly, relationship satisfaction may be impacted by the functioning of the changing, growing relationship entity, the nature of relational presence within the relationship entity, and interpartner communication as facilitator of optimal functioning within the relationship entity. These results will be further elaborated on in the next chapter, which offers a more extensive and integrated critical discussion of the quantitative and qualitative findings within the context of existing literature.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1. Introduction

This chapter consists of a discussion of the results presented in the previous chapter while linking the study's findings to the relevant existing literature on the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples in intimate relationships. The results of the current study support existing findings indicating the importance of mindfulness and attachment, in particular, on the intimate relationship experiences of couples. Original findings and conceptualisations that significantly extend and contribute to the existing bodies of work regarding intimate relationships are provided. The first part of the chapter provides an overview of my novel conceptualisation of intimate relationships based on the identified themes and subthemes extrapolated from the qualitative data. In an attempt to align this discussion of the results with the aim of the current study, the chapter concludes with a brief discussion on mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction within the relationship organism, based on both quantitative and qualitative findings.

6.2. The Intimate Relationship Organism

My conceptualisation of the relationship entity originates from my interpretation of the intimate relationship as a living organism based on its capability and propensity for both change and growth as shown in the participants' accounts. Several internal and external influences were further found to influence the relationship entity. The identified external influences included children, occupation, health, occupation and family of origin. In addition, the internal influences consisted of partners' internal dialogues, trust, patience, acceptance and appreciation.

6.2.1. The changing and growing relationship entity

Change and growth were discovered to be essential characteristics of the relationship entity. Consequently, the relationship entity appeared to be reliant on continuous growth at individual, couple and relationship levels. The notion of relationships as capable of change and growth could, arguably, also be inferred from the various developmental theories presented by several theorists regarding the stages and phases of change within relationships.

Theories, such as Campbell's (1980) five stages of the couple's journey and Macapagal et al.'s (2015) relationship stages among, specifically, LGBT couples arguably indicate that relationships could be expected to change over time. Irrespective of the particular changes proposed by such theories, they all suggest that intimate relationships are not only able to change, but that change is inevitable. The findings of the current investigation also support earlier literature that suggested that change and growth are important for the survival of intimate relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Migerode & Hooghe, 2012). Furthermore, Soulsby and Bennett (2017) showed that marriage and cohabitation are important contributors to personal growth and identity. Based on the experiences of the participants in the present study, it may be inferred that change and growth are the life forces of the relationship entity. The ability of the relationship entity to change and grow also contributes to the conceptualisation of intimate relationships as functioning like living entities.

Both change and growth purportedly occur either organically or deliberately, with self-monitoring behaviour reportedly being an important avenue for recognising change that might be necessary for the individual partners or relationship. The self-monitoring described by the participants is posited to be dependent on an activation of the facets of mindfulness, namely *Observing, Describing, Non-judgement, Nonreactivity* and *Acting with Awareness* (Baer et al., 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Consequently, the identification of areas of potential growth occur as a result of observing and describing oneself, one's partner and the relationship, without judgement or reactivity, in order to act with awareness to initiate change and growth. Therefore, it is argued that already at the inception of the relationship, an orientation of mindfulness enters the relationship entity as a contributor to growth. Psychotherapy was another identified avenue for enabling change and growth within the relationship entity, as four of the six participating couples reported that they had engaged in either individual or couple psychotherapy in the past. Change and growth are, arguably, the inherent goal of psychotherapy, whether for individuals or couples (Jimenez-Arista, Tracey, & Levy, 2018; Knobloch-Fedders, Pinsof, & Haase, 2015; Rubel, Lutz, & Schulte, 2015; Saunders et al., 2019). For the current study's participants, growth in individual partners and joint relationship growth appeared to be interdependent and closely connected. As such, partner and relationship growth impact and benefit each other. Furthermore, an awareness of the

individual growth of one's intimate partner may also assist in maintaining the relationship entity. Such awareness would, arguably, once again be reliant on a partner's levels of mindfulness.

Based on the participants' experiences, change was interpreted as a process of development which also enables the progression of clarity within oneself, and towards one's partner and relationship. Moreover, these processes of insight and development could lead to authenticity within and between partners, as well as a more equitable balance between the individual needs of the partners and that of the relationship entity. Understood as an opportunity to transcend the mundane experiences of daily life, growth was found to infuse the relationship entity with new energy and stimuli, thereby preventing the relationship from stagnating. It was further suggested that growth supports the natural progression of life stages, encouraging partner connection and closeness while also communicating a sense of commitment to the relationship entity. Therefore, it may be argued that change and growth are contributing factors to the overall relationship satisfaction experienced by partners. These findings lend support to the results from Fowers et al.'s (2016) study which similarly identified growth as one of the domains of relationship flourishing, a construct embodying a eudaimonic relationship quality. Moreover, growth was subsequently included in their official measuring scale assessing relationship flourishing (Fowers et al., 2016). Unlike hedonic relationship quality, which simply focuses on the basic pleasure or happiness experienced by partners within their relationships, eudaimonic relationship quality transcends such satisfaction to achieve a level of thriving within the intimate relationship (Fowers et al., 2016). The current participants' experiences corroborate such personal and relational flourishing as a result of change. Moreover, continuous change and growth are said to create continuously evolving and improving relationship entities. The roles of change and growth in intimate relationship satisfaction, quality and flourishing are, therefore, strongly recognised.

6.2.2. External and internal influences on the relationship entity

For the participants in the current investigation, the living relationship entity was seen to exist both as an independent system and as interconnected with other systems. Such experiences are in accordance with systems theory and cybernetics (Becvar & Becvar, 2013).

As such, it appears to be subject to a variety of intra- and intersystem influences, brought into contact with the relationship entity by the respective intimate partners. These internal and external influences were frequently identified by the participants in the present study as operating as precipitating factors to change and growth within the relationship entity and its components.

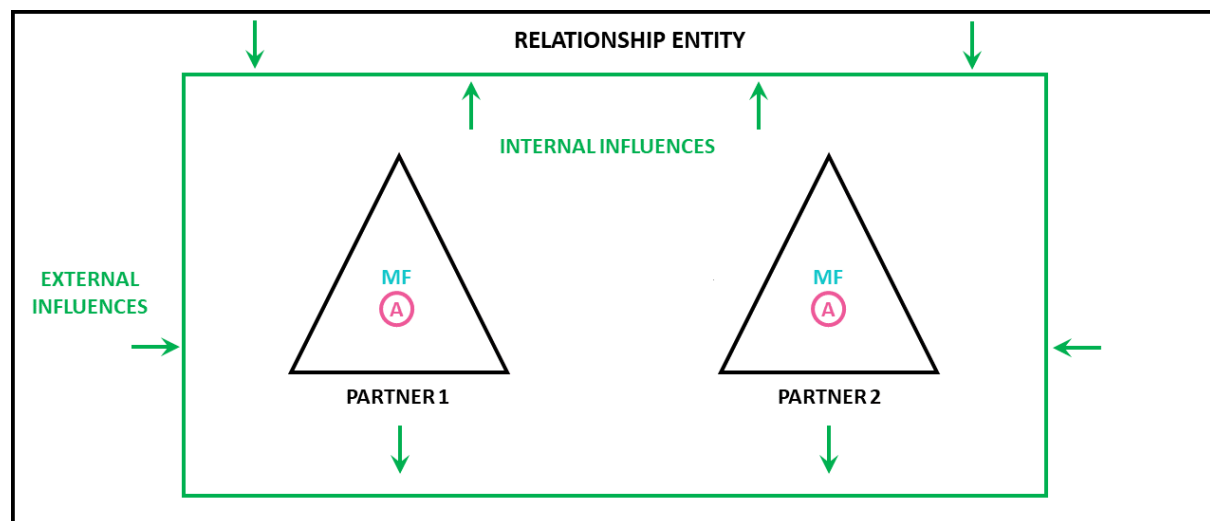


Figure 6.1. The relationship entity

Figure 6.1 provides an illustration of the way in which the relationship entity may be conceptualised at the time of its inception. Accordingly, the relationship entity consists of the two partners entering an intimate relationship with each other; their respective attachment styles and mindfulness, which exist on an intrapersonal level; and both the internal and external influences impacting the relationship from the start. While taking into account both the internal and external factors, the participants indicated that they had experienced a strong interconnectedness between the presentation of these factors, as well as the ways in which they are influenced by both mindfulness and attachment security. While the internal factors stem directly from the respective partners, the external factors are related to systems surrounding the relationship entity.

6.2.2.1. External factors impacting the relationship entity

In the current investigation, the external factors identified as impacting the relationship entity included children and parenting matters, occupational demands, religion or spirituality, and the partners' respective families of origin. Partners' experiences of

external daily stressors, such as health (own and partner's), work, parenting demands, finances, and societal influences, such as crime and environmental safety, were shown by Timmons, Arbel and Margoling (2017) to be associated with an increase in same-day marital conflict between partners. The majority of these influences have also been individually acknowledged for their role in intimate relationships (Bosch et al., 2012; Busby, Willoughby, & McDonald, 2019; Knudson-Martin & Huenergardt, 2010; Nicoleau, Kang, Choau, & Knudson-Martin, 2016; Rauer & Volling, 2015; Story, Finlayson, Creger, & Bunce, 2018). Therefore, exploring the nature and impact of these external factors on the relationship entity may provide insight into a couple's intimate relationship experiences.

As an external influence, family of origin permeated the experiences of participants in the present study. The reported influence of family of origin on the emotional and behavioural expression of the self in individual partners and, by extension, their expression within their relationship entities, arguably make one's family legacy an important factor to consider. Admittedly, the importance of family of origin in the shaping of a person, and its subsequent influence on intimate relationships is not a novel concept within the field of psychology. Attachment theory fundamentally emphasises the influence of the relationship with the primary caregiver on the relational security blueprint of the individual (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1958; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). In particular, partners' attachment styles will impact their internal working models (IWMs) which, in turn, will influence their interpretations of themselves, others and their intimate relationships (Bowlby, 1973; Fraley, 2019; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Studies from around the globe have widely explored the role of family of origin in the functioning and dynamics of partners within intimate relationships (Costa-Ramalho, Marques-Pinto, & Ribeiro, 2017; Fritz, Slep, & O'Leary, 2012; Paim & Falcke, 2018; Rivas, Bonilla, & Vazquez, 2018; Yuan, 2019). Similarly, South African research has considered the influence of family of origin in different populations (Engelbrecht & Gouws, 2017; Matamela, Bello, & Idemudia, 2014; McKenzie, 2013). When exploring the experiences of sexuality amongst individuals, McKenzie (2013), for example, found that family of origin significantly influenced the development of sexuality. More specifically, it was noted that adults with disabilities were infantilised by their families, who frequently believed them to be unable to

conceive, bear or parent children (McKenzie, 2013). Similarly, Matamela et al. (2014) observed differences in sexual and marriage attitudes and the associated sexual behaviours in young adult women who had been raised either by both parents or single mothers. In developing and evaluating a treatment plan that addressed the potential role of family of origin in addiction, Engelbrecht and Gouws (2017) saw an improvement in the self-actualisation of the addicts, as well as their relationships with themselves and others. Therefore, family opinions may, arguably, influence not only one's sexual behaviours, but also one's view of self and personal identity. Furthermore, designing intervention protocols that address the influence of family of origin on individual partners may benefit both those individual partners' growth, as well as their relationships with their intimate partners.

In their study involving married couples, Knapp, Norton and Sandberg (2015) indicated that negative family of origin experiences correspond to lower levels of relationship self-regulation strategies and effort between partners. Moreover, attachment behaviours were presented as the mechanism through which family of origin experiences affect relationship self-regulation, indicating that partners with negative family of origin experiences were less likely to display secure attachment behaviours (Knapp et al., 2015). In comparison, Paim and Falcke (2018) showed that early belief structures developed by partners in the family of origin were related to marital violence. Specifically, early beliefs formed around defectiveness/shame and mistrust/abuse were shown to predict the violence suffered and committed in intimate relationships (Paim & Falcke, 2018). In addition, while exploring the influence of family of origin triangulation, where family members become involved with the couple's relationship dynamics, Yuan (2019) observed that triangulation predicted relationship quality amongst married Chinese couples. Accordingly, it was indicated that the marital quality of wives was negatively predicted by both their own and their husbands' family of origin involvement while the marital quality of husbands was only predicted by their own family involvement (Yuan, 2019). Therefore, an individual's own family of origin, as well as that of his or her partner, may influence his or her personal and emotional expression, beliefs about him- or herself and views about his or her relationship. As such, explorations of norms and influences arising from both partners' families of origin are crucial to effective interventions with couples.

Supporting the notion of the interrelatedness of internal and external influences, in the current study, family of origin was revealed as influencing interpartner comfort with emotional expression, as well as the expectations (internal dialogue) placed on oneself, one's partner and the relationship entity. To some degree, this finding supports attachment theory's notion that the early bond with the primary caregiver leads to particular attachment styles which, in turn, leads to certain experiences around comfort with emotional expression and beliefs about the intimate relationship partner (Allen, 2013). In the present study, the participants' accounts did, however, focus on knowledge of experiences within the family of origin system that exceed the very early experiences with primary caregivers but which continue into later childhood and even adulthood. The influence of family legacy on expectations and internal dialogues created at different points in partners' lives therefore supports the propensity for attachment security to develop and change over the course of partners' lives and relationships. Furthermore, couples' relationship satisfaction is, at times, influenced by the internal dialogues and expectations held by intimate partners towards themselves and each other, originating from their families of origin. Improving relationship satisfaction may therefore be achieved by assessing partners' internal dialogues and expectations.

In this regard, the current study's findings support those of previous research as far as the influence of partners' family of origin experiences, internal dialogue, and expectations in terms of relationship satisfaction are concerned. For instance, Martinson, Holman, Larson and Jackson (2010) previously discovered higher levels of relationship satisfaction amongst intimate partners who either had healthier family of origin experiences or had come to terms with past difficulties associated with their family of origin. In addition, Gardner, Busby, Burr and Lyon's (2011) results indicated that a relationship exists between one's family of origin experience and the attributions formed regarding the self and one's partner. In a more recent study, Chen and Busby (2019) also observed that past family of origin relationships had influenced current relationship satisfaction in a sample of White, Black, Latino and Asian individuals. The authors further suggested that attending to such past relational issues may limit the effect of family of origin on current relationships (Chen & Busby, 2019). Based on the results of the present study, it is therefore posited that family of origin has a significant impact on the internal development of the individual partners, including their internal

dialogues and beliefs, the expectations placed on the partner, and the general sense of satisfaction with the relationship.

6.2.2.2. *Internal factors shaping partners' experiences within the relationship entity*

In this study, five internal factors, in particular, were identified as shaping the relationship entity, namely partners' internal dialogues, trust, patience, acceptance and appreciation. All five of these factors are understood as determining the manner in which partners approach and engage with each other. In addition, these factors are posited as being in a reciprocal relationship. Furthermore, while a partner's awareness of his or her internal dialogue may possibly be enhanced by his or her level of mindfulness, it was particularly the elements of interpartner trust, patience, acceptance and appreciation that proved to be closely related to mindfulness.

Internal dialogues

Partners' internal dialogue was shown to have an important influence on the relationship entity by either positively or negatively impacting the individual's view of him- or herself, his or her partner, and the relationship entity. The dialogue presented as interpretations, expectations and judgements of the self, one's partner and the relationship. As mentioned earlier, partners' internal dialogues are likely to be impacted in part by their internal working models (IWMs)(Bowlby, 1973; Fraley, 2019; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). stemming from their childhood experiences within their family of origin.

The relevance of internal dialogues to intimate relationships, in particular, appear to be underexplored in the existing body of research (EBSCOhost database search, 16 March 2020). However, the concept of internal dialogues, also known as inner speech, self-talk, verbal thinking and internal monologue, is not new within the field of psychology (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015; Geurts, 2018; Puchalska-Wasył, 2017, 2018). Existing research has classified internal dialogues as being either integrative or confrontational (Puchalska-Wasył, 2017, 2018). Accordingly, integrative dialogues are able to assimilate a range of viewpoints and interpretations whereas confrontational dialogues tend to value one view or interpretation over others (Puchalska-Wasył, 2017, 2018). As such, it may be posited that integrative dialogues would be especially suitable to the functioning of the relationship entity

conceptualised in the current study. Based on the participants' accounts in the present study, these internal dialogues could, arguably, be positively impacted by two of the pillars of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2013) in particular, namely non-judgement and a beginner's mind. Applying these two aspects of mindfulness would allow partners to neutrally observe events without labelling them while maintaining a receptive stance free from judgement towards the experience.

The current participants' internal dialogues were described as carrying over into their behaviours and actions within their intimate relationships. Furthermore, both partners' internal dialogues determined the interpretation and influence of both external and internal influences on the relationship entity. Awareness of one's own internal dialogue, as well as that of one's partner as it impacted the relationship entity, held the potential to contribute to more effective conflict resolution, satisfaction of needs, interpartner empathy, and mutual partner support. An accurate interpretation and understanding of the internal dialogue of one's partner is, arguably, essential in order to correctly identify his or her intentions and experience. As some of the participants observed, such an accurate interpretation would also aid in preventing a disparity between the internal expectation and the external reality which could potentially derail partners' emotional and behavioural experiences. With this in mind, partners' internal dialogues were identified as forming part of the invisible internal partner worlds that could only be revealed by communicating the unspoken.

The importance of internal partner dialogue is in line with the findings of psychological researcher and clinician, Dr John Gottman. While analysing the data from their extensive research done on couples at the 'Love Lab', their couples laboratory at the University of Washington, Gottman himself identified a positive internal interpretation or stance as the primary variable determining the success of a relationship (Gottman, Schwartz Gottman, Abrams, & Carlton Abrams, 2018). Accordingly, intimate relationships would be more likely to succeed if partners emphasised their good times together, as well as their partners' positive traits while minimising their bad times and their partners' more bothersome traits (Gottman et al., 2018). Bearing in mind the internal dialogues associated with the different attachment styles, insecure attachment styles can often be understood as having a more negative rather than positive interpretation of the behaviours and intentions of one's partner,

as well as the security and intimacy within the relationship (Allen, 2013; Hudson & Fraley, 2017; Levine & Heller, 2012; Li & Chan, 2012; Martins, Canavarro, & Moreira, 2015). These interpretations are likely to be influenced by what Bowlby (1973) referred to as “working models” (p. 158), which are representations of the individual’s world, his or her place within it, and the subjectively expected behaviours of his or her intimate relationship partner. Molero et al. (2016) correspondingly found that partners’ perceptions of themselves or their partners as avoidantly attached are likely to negatively impact their relationship satisfaction. Internal dialogues could, therefore, potentially be influenced by partners’ attachment security.

Within the South African context, the internal dialogues of intimate partners may, arguably, be further impacted by gender norms and expectations. Gender norms have been found to directly and indirectly influence intimate partners’ perceptions and behaviours within their intimate relationships (Lesch & Adams, 2016a; Lesch et al., 2019). Furthermore, the influence of gender norms proved to be applicable to couples from both higher and lower socio-economic groups (Lesch & Adams, 2016a; Lesch et al., 2019). For instance, in their study involving tertiary-educated couples, Lesch et al. (2019) observed that while partners from higher socio-economic groups may have perceived themselves as having conquered gender inequality, they still, at times, fell victim to seemingly subtle and harmless traditional gender influences. During the current study’s data analysis, the role of gender norms in internal dialogues and expectations were, at times, identified in participants’ perceptions of their own and their partners’ behaviours. This proved to be applicable to both the heterosexual couples and the same-sex couple who, notably, appeared on one occasion to describe a seemingly heteronormative script (Lamont, 2017) with regard to the display of their companionship. Given the influence of the partners’ internal dialogue on their perception and experience of the relationship entity, internal dialogue is likely to impact couples’ relationship satisfaction. Therefore, exploring and evaluating the nature and content of partners’ internal dialogue may be necessary to improve their relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, the nature of partners’ internal dialogues may be influenced by the degree of interpartner trust, patience, acceptance and appreciation within the relationship entity.

Trust, patience, acceptance and appreciation

It is worth noting that Kabat-Zinn (2013) recognised trust, patience and acceptance as attitudinal pillars of mindfulness. Notably, Kabat-Zinn's (2013) conceptualisation of trust as a pillar of mindfulness largely envisions it as a form of self-trust and responsibility. In the current investigation, however, trust was highlighted in terms of its value as an interpartner dynamic. In particular, a number of participants described the existence of a feeling of security within the relationship entity as contributing to an overall sense of trust in the availability, intentions and commitment of their partners. This security reportedly prevented jealousy or possessiveness. However, trust was described as highly fragile in nature. Therefore, if broken, the effects were felt deeply within the relationship entity.

Existing research supports the importance of trust in, for example, effectively discussing relationship transgressions, the memory of past transgressions, as well as relationship satisfaction (Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017; Khalifian & Barry, 2016; Luchies et al., 2013). High levels of trust protect against the influence of avoidant attachment and also serve to prevent disengagement during partner discussions on transgressions (Khalifian & Barry, 2016). In addition, increased levels of trust in the intimate partner lead to a more positive memory in terms of the nature and severity of past transgressions (Luchies et al., 2013). Fitzpatrick and Lafontaine (2017) also noticed that insecure attachment was a predictor of lower levels of trust which, subsequently, predicted lower relationship satisfaction. As Campbell and Stanton (2019) further pointed out, the association between attachment and trust is likely to lead to repeated cycles of either security or insecurity within the intimate relationship between partners. Results from the current study correspond strongly to these existing findings, as the participants similarly valued trust for its contribution to relationship security. Assisting couples to develop interpartner trust by means of their availability, intentions and commitment to each other and the relationship may, therefore, positively impact their relationship entity.

Based on the participants' accounts of their experiences, in this study, patience was conceptualised as a stance absent of force, judgement or expectation. Furthermore, as an influence on the relationship entity, it created a space for change and growth to occur while also paving the way to presence with one's partner. In this way, my conceptualisation of

patience resembles the notion of patience as a pillar of mindfulness. Accordingly, as a pillar of mindfulness, patience is defined as an acceptance of situations without rushing or attempting to change them even when it leads to emotional discomfort which, in turn, increases present-centredness (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Schnitker, 2012). When investigating the strategies used by women in long-term relationships to manage changes in their sexual desire, Herbenick, Mullinax and Mark (2014) identified patience towards the changes in desire as one of the strategies used by participants. However, the role of patience in intimate relationships appears to be underexplored based on the lack of available studies in this area (EBSCOhost database search, 16 March 2020). The findings of the current study suggest that, given its potential benefits with regard to the relationship entity, patience is an essential interpersonal disposition that should be developed between partners. Therefore, assisting couples in developing interpartner patience may be of particular relevance to healthcare professionals working with couples in intimate relationships.

While participants' descriptions of acceptance in this study appeared to be mostly externally focused, namely on the partner and relationship, acceptance as a pillar of mindfulness is related to both internal and external experiences (Kabat-Zinn's, 2013). In essence, however, my interpretation of acceptance, based on the participants' experiences, clearly corresponds with Kabat-Zinn's (2013) notion thereof. As such, acceptance may be interpreted as being a disposition of allowing the self, one's partner and other external factors to be as they are in the current moment, without applying force or energy in an effort to change the situation. Moreover, acceptance was proposed as offering a variety of advantages to the relationship entity. These included the ability to rise above individual partner differences, transcend external influences such as occupational demands, and obtain a more relaxed and flexible relationship dynamic between partners. In addition, the stance of acceptance created a space for partners to be unique individuals, prepared for differences of personality or opinion to occur between them. Arguably, this may enable more effective conflict resolution as disagreements of opinion will not necessarily be interpreted as a reflective commentary on the relationship entity. At the same time, acceptance makes it possible for partners to view each other as imperfect beings in a continual process of growth, which could then lead to the cultivation of satisfaction within the relationship entity. This particular conclusion is consistent with recent studies confirming the role of acceptance in

both couple and relationship satisfaction (Kappen et al., 2018; Krafft et al., 2017). The findings of the present study also support Kabat-Zinn's (2013) notion of change and growth as resulting from an acceptance of the present reality. Therefore, it is proposed that trust, patience and acceptance are valuable interpersonal dispositions to be cultivated between partners, given their impact as internal influences on the relationship entity.

Some of the participants mentioned that complacency has the potential to negatively impact the relationship entity. Contributing to the allure and novelty between partners, appreciation was identified as a possible way in which to counteract complacency. Appreciation is therefore posited to be a coveted relationship behaviour, meant to be delivered with awareness. While not specifically part of the pillars of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2013), I hereby propose that appreciation may be understood as being linked to the beginner's mind pillar of mindfulness. As such, it is reasoned that appreciation could be supported by the beginner's mind stance of maintaining an open position to all experiences, seeing them with novel vision, free from expectation and judgement, and simply experiencing the other partner for who he or she is (Hauptman, 2014; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Schram, 2014). Gordon, Impett, Kogan, Oveis and Keltner (2012) equally reflected that being appreciative of one's partner, as well as feeling appreciated by him or her, are crucial to maintaining the intimate relationship. In addition, partners who were more appreciative of their intimate partners, were also shown to be more responsive and committed to their partners (Gordon et al., 2012). Arguably closely related to appreciation, gratitude for one's partner was shown to be positively associated with relationship satisfaction (Vollmann et al., 2019). Increased levels of avoidant attachment, in particular, were indicated as being associated with lower levels of gratitude towards one's partner which, subsequently, also lowered relationship satisfaction (Vollmann et al., 2019). Appreciation may, therefore, be achieved by maintaining a beginner's mind stance while contributing to the maintenance of the relationship entity and the responsiveness, commitment and satisfaction between partners. Together with patience and acceptance, the participants in the present study used appreciation for each other as a means to overcome the differences between them.

The relationship entity is therefore maintained and developed through a continuous process of change and growth within and between partners while simultaneously being

moulded by the impact of the external and internal influences on its functioning and well-being. Moreover, presence was observed as being an important part of maintaining both this process and the relationship entity in its entirety.

6.2.3. The relationship entity as sustained by relational presence

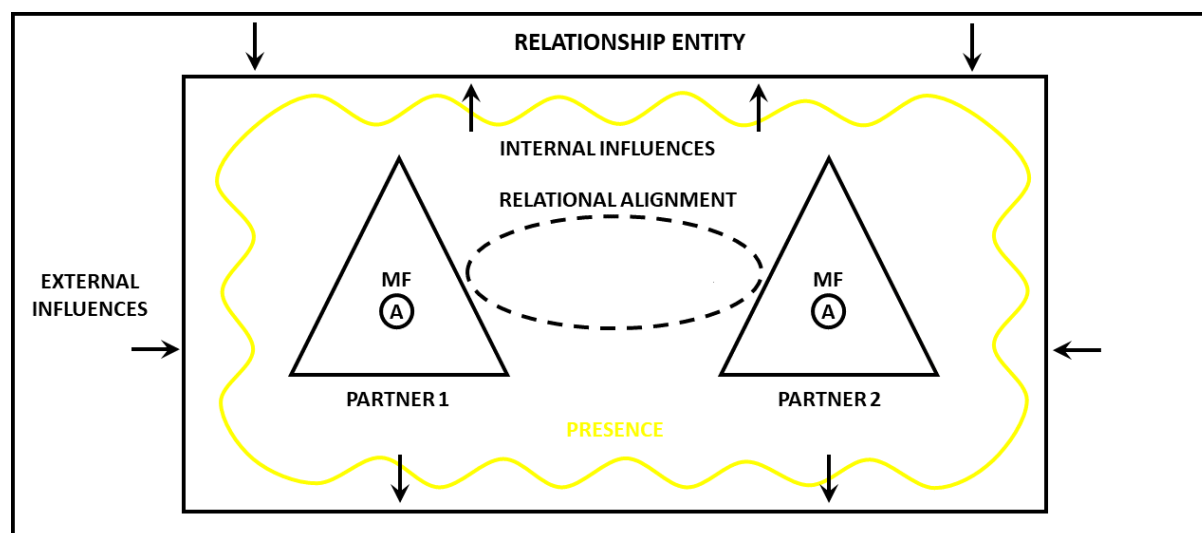


Figure 6.2. Relational presence

It is my assertion that the relationship entity may be best conceptualised as being sustained and maintained by presence as its energy source, as illustrated in Figure 6.2. In their accounts, the participants identified a variety of behaviours and habits, some deliberate and others coincidental, that contributed to “relational presence” within the relationship entity. The term “presence-enhancing behaviours” has been formulated in order to describe these behaviours. The importance and functioning of relational presence, as well as the associated presence-enhancing behaviours are just two of the range of novel findings arising from the current study.

Prioritising was presented as the primary facilitator of relational presence, as our attention and presence are consumed by that which we prioritise. Subsequently, it was suggested that interpartner prioritising of the relationship entity served as a defence against external competitors infringing on the couple’s relational presence. The role of prioritising as an interpartner behaviour within the relationship entity appears to be underexplored in the

existing literature (EBSCOhost database search, 16 March 2020). The only somewhat related existing findings on prioritising could be found in a study by Dutchie et al. (2017), investigating the priorities for family building among couples seeking infertility treatment. The results indicated that maintaining a close and satisfying intimate relationship had been a high priority for the participating couples, suggesting that even when couples deliberately seek parenthood, it is not necessarily an indication that it is their main priority, as couples hold multiple priorities (Dutchie et al., 2017). The current investigation's discovery of prioritising as the main facilitator of presence within the relationship entity is, therefore, a valuable finding for both the body of knowledge on intimate relationships, as well as clinical practice with couples. Guiding couples in practices associated with prioritising each other and the relationship would enable them to sustain their relationship entity with increased relational presence which could, in turn, assist them in navigating the impact of external influences on their relationship. Moreover, it was also inferred that prioritising contributes to relational presence by expanding interpartner availability and accessibility.

Many of the participants reflected on the importance of availability and accessibility between partners, irrespective of whether partners were occupying the same physical space or not. The participants' data corroborated Sandberg, Busby, Johnson and Yoshida's (2012) finding that accessibility contributes to the security or attachment bond. Accordingly, accessibility was identified as one of the three secure attachment behaviours forming part of Sandberg et al.'s (2012) Brief Accessibility, Responsiveness and Engagement (BARE) scale, a tool for measuring attachment behaviour in intimate relationships. The participants further emphasised the importance of availability and presence even at times when it might seem counterintuitive, for example during conflict. Remaining present and accessible to each other, also during painful interactions such as conflict, could, arguably, further support relational security between partners. Furthermore, when not occupying the same space, the participants reported remaining accessible and available through continued contact and conversation. In this way, their presence was woven into each other's daily routines and activities, while some also deliberately set up their routines in practical ways to allow for connection. These deliberate acts of touching base or checking in with the relational partner, arguably offers the opportunity for interpersonal attunement (Siegel, 2007). Therefore, remaining available and accessible through acts of checking in may cause partners to feel

more acknowledged and appreciated by their partners which, in turn, contributes to both their attachment security and relationship satisfaction.

In addition, relational presence may be further boosted by engaging in shared activities between partners. Capturing the couple identity in the presence of their togetherness, shared activities reportedly also fed into a couple's relational alignment. Existing research confirms that shared activities, such as date nights, sporting events and common interests, assist in sustaining relationships by boosting closeness, satisfaction and relationship quality (Girme, Overall, & Faingataa, 2014; Walsh, Neff, & Gleason, 2017). On a physiological level, such shared recreational activities also led to the release of oxytocin, which is considered a biomarker of attachment (Melton, Larson, & Boccia, 2019). Shared activities were, however, only shown to add to relationship quality if partners were responsive and motivated to participate in the shared relationship activities (Girme et al., 2014). For the two couples in which both partners had relatively secure attachment based on their questionnaire scores in the present study, regularly participating in shared activities seemed to be engrained in their couple identities. This could, arguably, be due to their secure attachment allowing for the optimal balance between independence and dependence (Levine & Heller, 2012), as well as shared activities allowing for engagement, which was identified as a secure attachment behaviour (Sandberg et. al., 2012). Therefore, apart from increasing relational presence, engaging in shared activities is a behaviour associated with secure attachment which, in turn, contributes to relational alignment and physiological attunement between partners. Thus, it has been proposed that shared activities that incorporate physical affection make an even greater contribution to relational presence.

Physical acts of presence, both in private couple spaces and the public domain, were described in terms of communicating feelings of love, generating mutual well-being, and contributing to commitment and security within the relationship entity. Physical touch is recognised as one of the five languages through which intimate partners experience and express love for each other, thereby forming part of the essential foundation of healthy, connected relationships (Chapman, 2015). Existing research has further confirmed the role of physical touch as a nonverbal strategy for both interpartner affective support and emotion regulation (Chatel-Goldman, Congedo, Jutten, & Schwartz, 2014; Debrot, Schoebi, Perrez, &

Horn, 2013). It was also noticed that intimate partners benefitted psychologically from physical touch in that it allowed them to experience a stronger bond with their partners as well as increased psychological well-being (Debrot et al., 2013). Finally, touch enables somatovisceral resonance, which is said to be the facilitator of both empathy and emotional contagion between partners (Chatel-Goldman et al., 2014). Therefore, it may be concluded that physical touch and affection are fundamental to the relationship entity as they pose several benefits to partners. As such, apart from enhancing relational presence, physical affection communicates love and support while also promoting well-being, empathy and emotional regulation.

In contrast to these presence-enhancing behaviours and actions, technology-based activities were identified as a threat to relational presence. These activities reportedly included the use of cellular phones, social media and television. Accordingly, enhancing relational presence by deliberately limiting the use of technology within their shared couple space was repeatedly mentioned by participants. The impact of technology on intimate relationships has increasingly been explored in recent research (Campbell & Murray, 2015; Hertlein, 2012; McDaniel & Coyne, 2016; McDaniel & Drouin, 2019; Murray & Campbell, 2015). It was concluded that technology negatively impacts intimate relationships by compromising communication, distracting from the relationship by allowing infringements on couple time, and even by providing a potential doorway to infidelity (Murray & Campbell, 2015). McDaniel and Coyne (2016) coined the term “technoferece” to describe the intrusions and disruptions on couple interactions and time due to technology. Their study with married and cohabiting women showed that the greater the technoferece in a relationship, the more conflict regarding technology was experienced, accompanied by lower relationship and life satisfaction (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). A more recent study by McDaniel and Drouin (2019) found that when couples experience technoferece as interfering in their couple interactions, their daily mood and overall assessment of their relationship was likely to be negatively affected.

In the current investigation, it was proposed that technology not only absorbs and consumes partner focus and attention, but also creates an opportunity for external influences to reach and impact both the relationship entity and relational presence. Limiting the use of

technology within the shared couple space may therefore be regarded as a fairly swift and simple way of enhancing couples' relational presence. Given the pervasive occurrence of technology within our current world and lives, this may be an especially relevant factor in improving relationship satisfaction. It was further suggested that relational presence supports the relational alignment between intimate partners.

6.2.3.1. Relational presence as supporting relational alignment

An unseen, abstract alignment existing between intimate relationship partners was extrapolated based on the couple narratives in the current study. Figure 6.3 illustrates the positioning of this "relational alignment", which I have proposed as a novel concept in the context of this study.

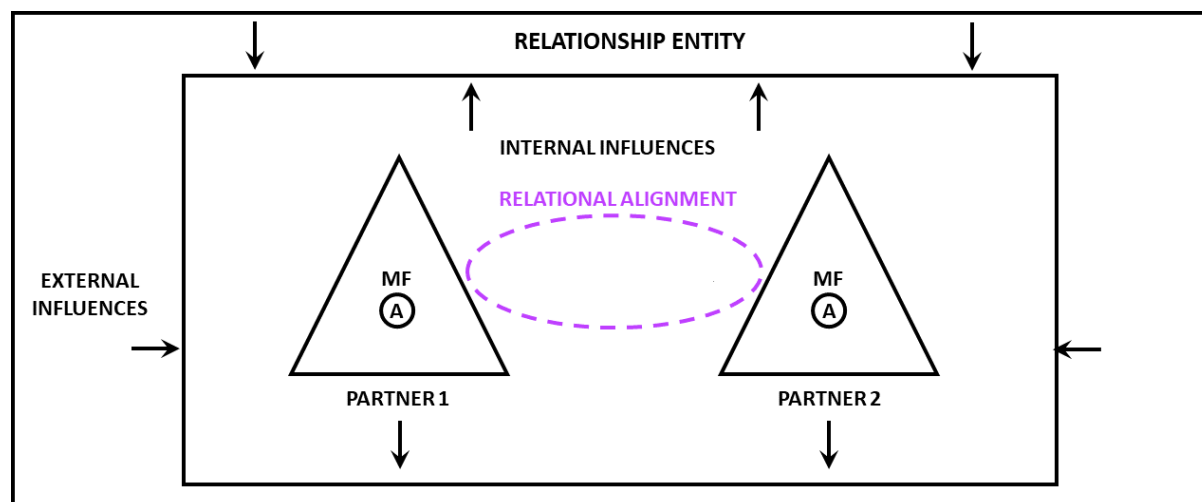


Figure 6.3. Relational alignment

Formed at the inception of the relationship, a couple's relational alignment is presented as capable of changing and developing to become stronger and more nuanced over time. The first hint of this alignment was captured in the participants' descriptions of their relationship bond, and was reminiscent, in some ways, of the attachment bond, which can also be sensed but not seen. Similar to the attachment bond between partners, which influences a person's thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Allen, 2013), this unseen alignment existed on a cognitive, emotional and behavioural level as it presented itself in the intimate partner dynamics. Unlike the attachment bond, however, the scope and presentation of this alignment went beyond the mere inclusion of aspects of security within the intimate

relationship entity. The unseen alignment could also be argued as being analogous to interpersonal attunement. Similar to interpersonal attunement, relational alignment leads to a sense of connection, where both partners feel seen and growth can occur (Siegel, 2007). While interpersonal attunement is solely the product of attachment (Siegel, 2007), attachment is merely one of many factors contributing to a couple's relational alignment.

While both attachment and interpersonal attunement can be seen as supporting a couple's unseen alignment, relational alignment (extrapolated from the current data) is not equivalent to attachment or interpersonal attunement. Instead, it is proposed that relational alignment is unique to each couple and indicative of their entire relationship and connection as a whole. In this way, relational alignment is presented as an original conceptualisation. The closest concept to relational alignment in the existing literature appears to be the "between", a relational space between individuals identified by the philosopher, Martin Buber (2002). He proposed that the between is more than the sum of two individuals or the mere psychological reality of the relationship in their minds. Unlike relational alignment, however, this space described in Buber's (2002) work is not exclusively a place for intimate relationships, but rather applies to all interpersonal relationships.

Though frequently sensed by the participants, relational alignment can be difficult to articulate. The alignment is effortless in that it exists without force or interference from either partner. The participants described the alignment as enabling them, on a cognitive level, to be attuned to each other's thoughts and ideas, often without verbalising it. This cognitive alignment is maintained by knowledge and awareness of one's partner. Furthermore, it created a foundation for both emotional and sensory alignment that allowed partners to sense when something was out of character or unusual for their partners. Emotionally, the alignment between partners enabled interpartner emotional regulation. In this way, partners were not only able to sense each other's internal experiences due to their alignment, but also to be guided in taking the necessary actions to assist each other in navigating emotional discord. It has been speculated that the emotional alignment forming part of relational alignment is the result of both the limbic brain and the mirror neuron system (Plata-Bello, 2017; Lanzoni, 2016; Lewis, Amini, & Lannon, 2007; Praszkiel, 2016). Due to its design and function, the limbic brain and its resonance between partners allow for both

individual and joint monitoring and alignment of partners' internal and external environments (Lewis et al., 2007). Moreover, it aids in the identification and transfer of emotions, the sensing of motives and intentions, and mutual exchange and adjustment, both emotionally and physiologically (Lewis et al., 2007). The limbic system could, therefore, be seen as a neurological communication and connection tool that enables relational alignment.

A couple's relational alignment is further described as malleable and influenced by the status of the connection between partners in the present moment. Consequently, during times of conflict, the alignment could, potentially, transform from a harmonious experience, with reciprocal flow between partners as indicative of the connection, to a cold, tense and foreign experience. An increased awareness of relational alignment could, therefore, exist during times of interpartner discord. Fredrickson (2014) identified a feature of connection between partners, namely positivity resonance, which consists of shared positive affect, mutual care and concern, and behavioural synchrony. Such positivity resonance may, arguably, form part of the dynamics of relational alignment identified in the current investigation. In a recent study by Otero et al. (2019), positivity resonance was identified for its role in creating relationship satisfaction. As a possible component of connection, positivity resonance may, therefore, influence relational alignment which may, in turn, influence relationship satisfaction.

Relational alignment is subject to many of the same internal and external factors impacting the relationship entity. As such, it is suggested that the alignment is reflective of the health and functioning of the relationship entity. Furthermore, interpartner behaviours and dynamics, especially communication, will either be to the benefit or detriment of the relationship entity. Communication, specifically, was also hailed by many participants as having an influence on the creation of the alignment. Described by Cozolino (2014) as the "social synapse" (2014, p xiv), the sum total of messages and interactions between partners, is, arguably, also a component of a couple's overall relational alignment, facilitated by interpartner communication. Similar to the social synapse, which was presented as contributing to the structures of each partner's brain (Cozolino, 2014), it could be reasoned that the nature, quality and functioning of relational alignment may equally influence the brain and mind. Such an argument would be in agreement with the IPNB principles associated

with the triangle of well-being (Siegel 2012a). Therefore, the healthier and more optimally functioning the relationship entity, the stronger and healthier the couple's relational alignment. In addition, a stronger relational alignment would contribute to the respective partners' inter- and intrapersonal well-being.

The degree of mindfulness, expressed in the five facets of mindfulness (Baer et al., 2006), is purported to influence the relational alignment by enabling partners to be more present and aware. Furthermore, such mindfulness facilitates more accurate observation and describing of their own and their partners' emotions and behaviours, without judgement or reactivity. Finally, mindfulness may contribute to relational alignment by increasing partners' self-, other- and emotional awareness. As mentioned earlier, attachment similarly influenced the alignment. As a system within itself, the relationship organism is presented as subject to cybernetic principles of interconnectedness or mutual influence between system parts (Becvar & Becvar, 2013). Therefore, relational alignment is also postulated to be a potential influencer of partners' attachment security. In this way, interpartner mindfulness affects relational alignment, possibly altering the individual partner attachment style which, as the literature suggests (Bowlby, 1988; Levine & Heller, 2012), can change based on interactions with one's partner. Therefore, mindfulness may indirectly impact attachment due to its influence on relational alignment. Apart from the role of mindfulness and presence within relational alignment, specifically, it was also indicated that awareness, a further component of mindfulness (Baer et al., 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2013) is associated with presence.

6.2.3.2. Relational presence as supported by mindfulness

Relational presence was shown to be intrinsically facilitated by mindfulness. This notion is supported by mindfulness theory and literature (Baldini et al., 2014; Siegel, 2007) emphasising the importance of presence as both an outcome and a defining characteristic of mindfulness. As the power source of the relationship, relational presence was further presented as reinforced specifically by awareness, particularly self-, partner-, and emotional awareness. As mentioned earlier, awareness is a behaviour and skill central to mindfulness (Baer et al., 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Mikulas, 2015). All three forms of awareness, which have been suggested as contributing to relational presence, are enabled by the different facets of

mindfulness as identified by Baer et al. (2006) namely *Observing, Describing, Nonreactivity, Non-judgement* and *Acting with Awareness*.

It has been suggested that partner (other) awareness develops through time spent with one's partner, which may further be construed as consisting of holding the partner in mind and reading one's partner. Holding the partner in mind was interpreted as occurring while partners are together in the present moment, as well as when they are not occupying the same space. When together, partners held each other in mind by observing the actions and behaviours of the other, or by drawing on pre-existing knowledge of their partners. When occupying different physical spaces, the partner was held in mind by deliberately bringing him or her into thought and awareness, thereby drawing him or her into the present moment. The participants described holding their partners in mind as a habit that demands practice and effort (arguably, mindfulness), but which has the benefit of expanding relational alignment across time and distance. It was also suggested that holding the other in mind provided a means of connection and meeting the partner's relational needs. At the same time, holding the other in mind was put forward as the result of the presence-enhancing behaviour of prioritising, as well as the internal influence of appreciation. Holding one's partner in mind could, arguably, also enable partners to achieve proximity with each other as it essentially activates a mental representation of each other (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). In this way, holding one's partner in mind could, possibly, benefit the relationship entity by enabling partners to be more aware and considerate of each other while feeling more secure in their attachment.

While holding the other in mind appeared to be achieved through the mindfulness facets of *Observation* and *Acting with Awareness* (Baer et al., 2006) amongst the current participants, reading one's partner appeared to rely on observing him or her without judgement, accurately describing what was observed, and applying awareness to subsequent reactions. Reading one's partner would, arguably, rely on observing and interpreting both the verbal and nonverbal behaviours of one's partner to ascertain his or her needs and feelings. For many participants, the interpretations arrived at by reading their partners were used to motivate complementary behaviour to match their partners' experiences or needs. Accordingly, reading the other person was shown to benefit interpartner empathy and

appreciation. It has been further argued that reading one's partner is supported by the mirror neuron and limbic systems of the brain (Lanzoni, 2016; Lewis et al., 2007; Siegel, 2007, 2012a), which would enable partners to create representations and interpretations of each other's minds, emotions, actions and experiences. As a result, effectively reading each other relies on an integrated application of partners' mirror neuron and limbic systems of the brain in conjunction with the necessary skills of mindfulness.

In addition to partner awareness, it was concluded that self-awareness increases relational presence within the relationship entity by offering partners the chance to consider their contributions to the relationship, whether positive or negative and, subsequently, choosing their future contributions with more deliberate intent and awareness. Self-awareness may, therefore, inspire personal and relational growth, accountability and responsibility. The participant accounts also suggested that self-awareness paves the way for both other awareness and emotional awareness. This interconnectedness between self-, partner- and emotional awareness is in accordance with the IPNB process of attunement (Siegel, 2007), which can be achieved through an awareness of the self and other. Accordingly, self-awareness can be seen as aiding internal attunement whereas partner awareness contributes to interpersonal attunement (Siegel, 2007). Emotional awareness and attunement would, arguably, feature in both internal and interpersonal attunement (Gottman, 2011; Siegel, 2007; Knudson-Martin, 2013). Increasing partners' individual self-awareness would then also increase relational presence within the relationship entity, as well as individual partner- and emotional awareness. Arguably, this finding further suggests that individual psychotherapy targeting individual change, growth and self-awareness may not only enrich the partner engaged in the therapy process, but also his or her intimate relationship entity.

Emotional awareness was discovered to be particularly important to the relationship entity, in that it influences both partner reactions to strong emotions and the creation of interpartner empathy. This finding reiterates the results of existing literature emphasising the role of emotional awareness and regulation in intimate relationships (Dworkin, Zimmerman, Waldinger, & Schulz, 2018; Holley, Haase, Chui, & Bloch, 2018; Parkinson, Simons, & Niven, 2016; Tani, Pascuzzi, & Raffagnino, 2015). Interpartner empathy is of

particular value to the relationship entity given its role in relationship satisfaction (Cohen, Schulz, Weiss, & Waldinger, 2012; Kimmes, Edwards, Wetchler, & Bercik, 2014; Sened et al., 2017). In reacting to strong emotions in their partners, some participants described practising “emotional distancing” while others practised “emotional engagement”. I have proposed both of these terms to encapsulate the participants’ descriptions of their emotional reactions. Emotional distancing was described as separating oneself from one’s own or one’s partner’s emotions to become either nonresponsive or focused on another activity, such as eating, sleeping or working. Such distancing reactions often resulted in physical and emotional distance between themselves and their partners. In contrast, based on the participants’ experiences, the ability to practise emotional engagement, even when feeling overwhelmed or unskilled to handle it, was understood as aiding the relationship entity. In particular, emotional engagement was construed as contributing positively to the relational alignment between partners, the connection within the relationship entity, and security in the partner bond. Therefore, finding ways for individual partners to more effectively and confidently engage with their own and their partners’ emotions holds the potential to increase both interpartner empathy and relationship satisfaction.

Several studies have shown that mindfulness is a contributing factor to couples’ ability to tolerate and regulate their own, as well as their partners’ emotions (Kimmes, Jaurequi, May, Srivastava, & Fincham, 2018; Laurent, Hertz, Nelson, & Laurent, 2016; Siegel, 2014). While specifically exploring the contribution of the five mindfulness facets in heterosexual couples, Iida and Shapiro (2018) noticed that female partners who scored higher on the *Non-judgement* facet also experienced lower levels of average negative mood. In addition, mindfulness in both men and women were shown to impact not only their own daily mood, but also that of their partners (Iida & Shapiro, 2018). Accordingly, higher levels of *Nonreactivity* and *Describing* in female partners were associated with more stable partner mood while higher levels of *Non-judgement* in male partners corresponded with a more stable mood in their partners (Iida & Shapiro, 2018). Consequently, cultivating partners’ levels of mindfulness would enable them to more easily practise emotional engagement.

In the present study, emotional engagement is also suggested to be partly influenced by mindfulness. Furthermore, mindfulness is suggested as mediating a sense of secure

attachment between partners by enabling them to tolerate each other's emotions. Notably, those participants who reportedly practised emotional engagement were also shown to have a relatively secure attachment. In contrast, the participants who described a tendency towards emotional distancing were found to have a relatively insecure attachment. This observation is in line with Mikulincer and Shaver's (2019) review of findings from a number of correlational and experimental studies on attachment and emotional regulation over the last decade. These key authors in the field of adult attachment concluded that while anxiously attached individuals had a tendency towards heightened emotional engagement, avoidantly attached individuals were likely to practise emotional disengagement (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). Similarly, given the impact of attachment on emotional regulation, Winterheld (2016) previously reported that in terms of the strategies used, highly secure partners had relied on cognitive re-appraisal rather than suppression when their partners behaved negatively towards them. In turn, avoidant and anxious partners relied more on suppression, with anxiously attached partners experiencing more negative emotions when in relationships with avoidant partners (Winterheld, 2016). The ability to tolerate partner emotions as noted in the present study might, therefore, be the result of cognitive re-appraisal which may be enhanced by mindfulness.

Therefore, mindfulness supports relational presence by facilitating partner-, self- and emotional awareness. Such awareness further enables partners to hold each other in mind, read each other, experience interpartner empathy, and engage emotionally with each other. These outcomes of awareness are also posited as supporting relational presence in creating attachment security.

6.2.3.3. Relational presence as a contributor to attachment security

Apart from sustaining the relationship entity, relational presence was inferred as contributing to secure attachment by communicating commitment, companionship, dependability and partnership. It was further observed that consistency of presence, remaining present during times of both conflict and happiness, prioritising the relationship entity, and staying in the relationship even after many challenges, were all ingredients of commitment and relationship security. Companionship between partners in a relationship seemed to exist almost effortlessly. However, despite its effortlessness and familiarity,

companionship was shown to hold great value for the relationship entity as a promoter of both relational presence and security. Companionship was also understood as being more intricate than merely engaging in the same activities or sharing the same relationship entity. Instead, it constituted opening up individual partners' lives and experiences to the joint relational space where it is shared fully by both partners. Thus, companionship could be cultivated by engaging in presence-enhancing behaviours, such as prioritising, availability and accessibility, shared activities, physical affection and limiting the use of technology. However, companionship also requires partners to openly and generously share all aspects of their lives and experiences with each other.

Dependability and partnership were understood as being the product of holding one's partner in mind. Acts of partnership and mutual dependability therefore serve to express love, trust and security within the relationship entity. These results are in alignment with Chaney's (2010) study on the relationship narratives of married African American participants, in which companionship and commitment were identified as two of the four themes underpinning participant relationship narratives. Givertz, Segrin and Woszidlo (2016) also noted that commitment was positively associated with marital satisfaction. In the current data, commitment, companionship, partnership and dependability, as brought about by relational presence, are further speculated to be related to what Sandberg et al. (2012) have described as secure attachment behaviours, namely accessibility, responsiveness and engagement. Accordingly, it has been argued that being committed to the relationship entity, engaging in acts of companionship and being in a dependable partnership with one's intimate partner, are indicative of expressions of secure attachment behaviours. These behaviours are not only supported by relational presence, but are also facilitated by communication between partners.

6.2.4. Communication as a facilitator of optimal functioning within the relationship entity

The participants' experiences described communication as the facilitator of optimal functioning within the relationship entity and between the respective partners. It has been suggested that a sustained and functioning relationship entity depends on continued communication that is both effective and aligned. The skills necessary for such aligned communication between partners do, however, often need to be acquired and nurtured.

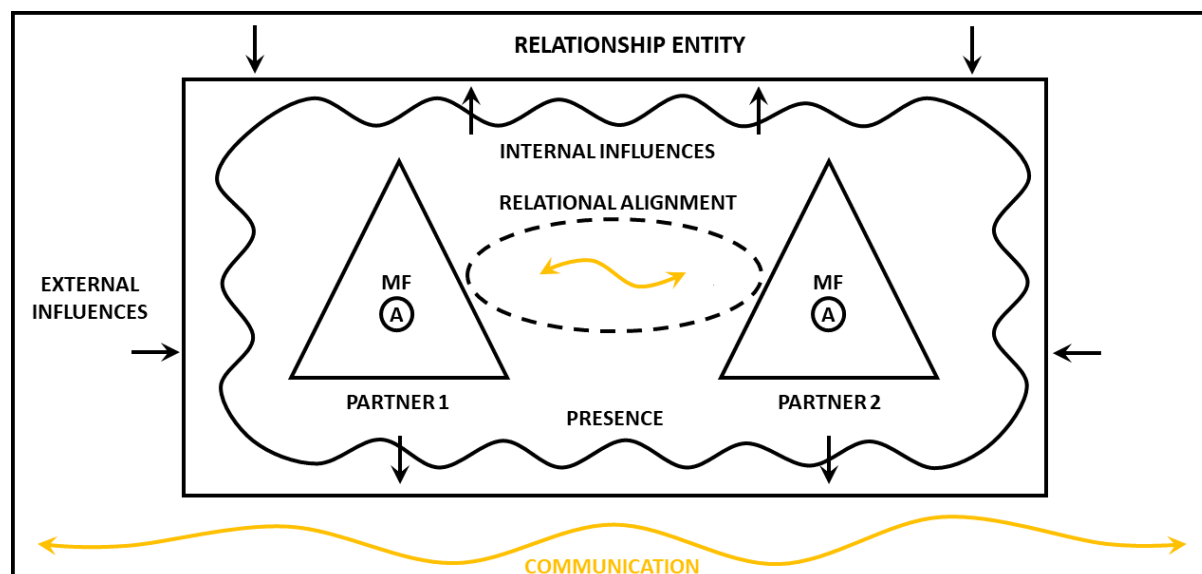


Figure 6.4. Communication within the relationship organism

Figure 6.4 provides a schematic diagram of communication as it exists within the relationship organism, based on the participant accounts. It was indicated that communication not only occurs between partners, as part of the reciprocal intra- and interpersonal processes between them, but also facilitates the entire functioning of the relationship organism. In their recent literature review, Du Plooy and De Beer (2018) confirmed the importance of quality interpartner communication for intimate relationships. Disengaged couple communication has also been shown to be associated with depressive symptoms, with male partners, in particular, experiencing a decline in relationship satisfaction as a result of the associated depressive symptoms (Barry, Barden, & Dubac, 2019). Similarly, listening attentively to one's partner's expressions of stress is related to both more effective interpartner coping behaviours and increased relationship satisfaction (Kuhn, Bradbury, Nussbeck, & Bodenmann, 2018). It is therefore my assertion that communication may be understood as a reciprocal exchange between partners that underpins the optimal functioning of the relationship organism. Thus, depending on the nature of the communication, the entire functioning of the relationship entity could be either positively or negatively impacted by it. Moreover, communication occurs in partnership with both mindfulness and attachment.

6.2.4.1. Mindfulness, attachment and communication

In the present study, mindfulness and relational presence were shown to contribute to effective communication by increasing the ability to read one's partner, facilitating optimal timing with regard to communication, and enabling more effective conflict resolution. These conclusions complement Beckman et al.'s (2012) finding that mindfulness skills improve attentive and deep listening, as well as the ability to respond more effectively to the other person. Applying the five facets of mindfulness to communication within the relationship entity would also enable partners to place themselves in their partners' experience, observing and describing their internal environment and reality while placing their own judgements and reactions aside in order to neutrally observe the other (Atkinson, 2013; Baer et al., 2006; MacDonald & Price, 2017; Trent, Park, Bercovitz, & Chapman, 2016). Furthermore, once sufficient time has been taken to absorb this information, awareness could be applied to communicate with mindfulness in response to one's partner's state of being.

Mindfulness skills such as the five facets assist not only with general communication, but also with conflict management, specifically. Three pitfalls contributing to interpartner conflict were identified based on participant accounts. The first pitfall involved partners failing to immediately notice relational issues escalating and damaging the relationship entity. The second pertained to conflict being precipitated by a lack of awareness with regard to changes in the communication behaviours of one's partner which might signal the development of potential discord. In contrast, the third pitfall involved the occurrence of conflict due to a lack of awareness regarding defeating patterns of conflict playing themselves out within interpartner communication. Higher levels of mindfulness would, potentially, assist partners in circumventing all three of these pitfalls. Mindfulness was previously shown to determine the type of conflict strategies used by partners, with mindfulness specifically associated with more positive strategies such as compromise (Harvey, Crowley, & Woszidlo, 2018; Knowles, Manusov, & Crowley, 2015). Higher levels of mindfulness in female partners were further linked with less dominance and reactivity in their partners during conflict (Harvey et al., 2018). Positive conflict strategies, such as compromise and decreased reactivity, could, arguably, circumvent the third pitfall of conflict management as noted in the present study. The use of compromise, resulting from mindfulness, also positively forecasts relationship satisfaction (Harvey et al., 2018). The mindfulness skill of *Describing*, in

particular, was found to correlate with relationship commitment and satisfaction as it enables partners to effectively express themselves (Knowles et al., 2015). It is therefore proposed that mindfulness would not only improve communication, but also contribute to preventing and navigating discord between partners. The enriched communication, resulting from the application of mindfulness skills, could further increase relationship satisfaction.

Balanced and reciprocal communication between partners was also understood as being a vital supporter of the attachment bond and security within the relationship entity. Lack of communication reportedly left partners feeling disconnected and isolated while having a compounding effect on the breakdown in communication and connection. The lack of communication also negatively impacted relational alignment. It was discovered that aligned sharing and communication had aided in establishing mutual emotional support, resolving misalignments within the relationship entity, and achieving the intimacy bond between partners. Such aligned communication is therefore proposed as being dependent, at least in part, on the activation of secure attachment behaviours, such as accessibility, responsiveness and engagement (Sandberg et al., 2012). This hypothesis is supported by the existing literature, confirming a positive relationship between these attachment behaviours and communication quality, constructive communication and relationship satisfaction (Brimhall, Jensen, Bonner, & Tyndall, 2018; Knapp et al., 2015). While integrating research on the association between attachment processes and conflict between partners, Feeney and Fitzgerald (2019) also noted that attachment insecurity had a negative impact on the perceptual, physiological and behavioural responses of partners to conflict in such a way that it negatively impacted the relationship quality. Partners' respective attachment styles may, therefore, further influence the nature of their communication and conflict management. However, as indicated by the current study's results, the communication between partners also has a reciprocal influence on attachment security.

Based on the current participants' accounts, aligned communication was further understood as being achieved by cultivating a level of honesty between partners. Accordingly, it was reported that honest communication between partners had contributed to the strength of their relational alignment and bond, as well as the subjective quality of the relationship which, arguably, also influences overall relationship satisfaction. Such an honest

approach created a secure space of acceptance and emotional availability that enabled free and safe disclosure without fear of judgment or loss of the relationship entity. However, it is suggested that such a space of acceptance would only be possible if both partners were to receive the honest experiences of the other mindfully. Arguably, this would be enabled by mindfulness skills, such as *Non-judgement*, *Nonreactivity* and *Acting with Awareness* (Baer et al., 2006). Based on the findings in the present study, I hereby propose that “mindful communication” promotes relational security and trust within the relationship entity to be honest, validating and receptive of the partner’s experience, and devoid of behaviours that define partner reality based on subjectively assumed conclusions.

Such relationally secure communication is similar to what Siegel (2012a) terms “integrative communication” (p. 34) and is, arguably, achieved by infusing communication within the relationship organism by means of the skills, qualities and behaviours offered by the five facets (Baer et al., 2006), as well as the pillars (Kabat-Zinn, 2013) of mindfulness. Accordingly, these mindfulness skills would prevent the attachment bond from being compromised by emotional reactivity and ineffective communication strategies. Communication is therefore suggested as an intermediary between mindfulness and attachment. In addition, communication is noted as being an intermediary between the internal world of the partner and the external reality of the relationship entity as it reveals the unspoken.

6.2.4.2. *Communicating the unspoken*

It could be argued that both theoretically and practically, communication personifies the act of sharing and receiving information, ideas and feelings, which might not have been previously known to the receiver, within a social setting which includes intimate relationships (Hargie, 2016). The deliberate conceptualisation of this valuable relational behaviour of communicating or revealing “the unspoken” within the relationship organism is believed to be a key contribution of the present study. As discussed, mindfulness skills, such as presence, observation and awareness, all contributed to a more accurate understanding of partners’ internal worlds as it had enabled intimate partners to read each other. Additionally, the honesty proposed by the participants as necessary for achieving communication that supports relational security, further aided in creating a space for sharing to occur. However,

even when these approaches are practised within the relationship entity, a large component of the internal world of one's partner remains unobservable.

With this in mind, the participant narratives in the current investigation indicated that while relying on mindfulness had provided a good point of reference from which to initiate a connection, it still needed to be followed by communication specifically aimed at revealing the unspoken. Honest communication is understood as being indicative of the integrity, honesty and authenticity of the information shared between partners. In comparison, communicating with the goal of revealing the unspoken was introduced as an approach that could be used to deliberately excavate those internal experiences of the individual partner that pertain to their partner and the relationship entity. As shown by the participant interview data, partners sometimes withheld information from their partners, whether deliberately or unintentionally, leading to detrimental effects, such as disconnection or conflict in the relationship entity.

For example, Zed, one of the participants, aptly described having conducted complete conversations with his partner in his mind, based on how he had expected the conversation to proceed. These internal conversations led to disconnection and miscommunication in his relationship with his partner. Therefore, in communicating the unspoken, both the mutual understanding necessary for negotiation and compromise, as well as the potential for improved conflict management and resolution, were created. By revealing the unspoken, partners do not have to rely on their own internal interpretations of each other's thoughts and feelings, which could lead to misinterpretations. Instead, through communicating the unspoken, partners are offered an accurate account of their partners' experiences.

Communicating the unspoken was further discovered to create opportunities for change and growth within the relationship entity, as well as eliminating blockages to connection and alignment between partners. The participants' experiences offered noteworthy examples of the potential effects of communicating the unspoken. One couple, Zed and Julia, found that their relationship interaction had started to shift when Zed began revealing more of his unspoken internal world to Julia. As a result, Julia ended up no longer having to assume the greater portion of responsibility for the communication within the

relationship entity. Likewise, in their second interview, Stephanie described how – since their first interview – she had made the change to embrace communication and express her internal world to Qaden. The reported result was that by essentially revealing what had previously gone unspoken, she subsequently also experienced significant improvements in her physical health, alleviating her difficulty with headaches and indigestion that previously plagued her on a regular basis. Stephanie's experience offered a practical example of the triangle of well-being as posited by IPNB principles, displaying the interconnectedness of mind, body and relationships (Siegel, 2010; Cozolino, 2014). In summary, deliberate communication focused on revealing the unspoken was therefore presented as having the potential to positively impact the relationship entity by fostering connection, relational alignment, and intimacy.

6.3. Mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction within the relationship organism

The current study aimed to explore the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of a sample of South African couples. Notably, both mindfulness and attachment were discovered to permeate the relationship organism in this study. In accordance with Cozolino's (2014) assumption, intimate relationship partners were shown to enter the intimate relationship entity as self-sustained, integrated systems resulting from the collaboration between their brains, minds and relationships. It was further indicated that these integrated individual partner systems formed part of the relationship organism which, in itself, was seen as an integrated unit consisting of reciprocal parts and dynamics. From an IPNB perspective, mindfulness and attachment are the avenues through which internal and interpersonal attunement, respectively, are achieved (Bentzen, 2015; Fogel, 2011; Siegel, 2010). The importance of mindfulness and attachment to both intra- and interpersonal functioning were reiterated in the present study's findings. The participant accounts strongly demonstrated that mindfulness and attachment are crucial components of the integrated system, that is, the individual partner entering the relationship entity, as well as the integrated relationship organism. Both of these components could also play a role in partners' overall relationship satisfaction.

6.3.1. Relationship satisfaction

In the current investigation, 58% of participants were shown to have high levels of satisfaction with their intimate relationships. Both mindfulness and secure attachment were also shown to correspond more frequently to higher levels of relationship satisfaction amongst participants. This particular observation is in line with previous research findings which have confirmed an association between relationship satisfaction and mindfulness and attachment, respectively (Atkinson, 2013; Jones et al, 2011; Kozlowski, 2013; Molero et al., 2017; Sadikaj et al., 2015). Moreover, as discussed earlier, the participants' experiences suggested that a number of internal influences and components of the relationship entity are associated with relationship satisfaction. These include change and growth, partners' internal dialogues, trust, patience, acceptance, appreciation, relational presence, as well as honest, validating and reciprocal communication (mindful communication) that reveals the unspoken. In comparison, a study among adults from Swaziland identified seven dimensions of relationship satisfaction, namely love, respect, trust, honesty, effective communication, and sexual satisfaction and faithfulness (Ruark et al., 2019). Similarly, Adeagbo (2018) reported that relationship satisfaction was associated with communication, trust and interpartner equity. The potential influences on relationship satisfaction identified in the current investigation serve as promising indicators to clinicians working with couples regarding areas of interpartner functioning that may improve partners' satisfaction. Moreover, these potential influences on relationship satisfaction may guide future researchers in the field to further investigate the association between these influences and relationship satisfaction.

Based on the quantitative data, specifically the respective couple profiles, a similarity in relationship satisfaction scores was observed between partners. Accordingly, for all but one participating couple, partners' relationship satisfaction scores were found to be in a similar range. Therefore, it could be speculated that, for the most part, regardless of individual mindfulness, presence or awareness levels, partners may have had a similar relationship satisfaction experience. Therefore, whatever one partner's relationship satisfaction score, whether high or low, the other partner could, arguably, be predicted to report a similar level of relationship satisfaction. Similarly, a recent study on relationship satisfaction among infertile couples noted that specifically men's relationship satisfaction was

strongly related to their partners' satisfaction (Greil et al., 2018). Relational alignment could, perhaps, explain the corresponding satisfaction scores in the present study. As a couple's relational alignment is held to be symptomatic of their relationship entity's health and functioning, consisting of the entire relationship and connection between partners, the degree of partner relationship satisfaction could be argued to be reflective of the nature of the alignment. Hence, relationship satisfaction could be understood as being similar between partners since both partners' scores could be a reflection of the same alignment experienced.

In reviewing the profile of the couple (Bianca and Vernon) who appeared to be an exception to the finding, it was noted that Vernon, who had obtained a very low satisfaction score compared to Bianca's very high score on satisfaction, had also obtained a very high score on the anxious attachment subscale of the ECR-R. These findings raise the question as to whether the misalignment in relationship satisfaction could, perhaps, be explained by the influence of his high levels of anxious attachment security. Accordingly, given the influence of such high levels of anxious attachment (Allen, 2013; Li & Chan, 2012; Martins et al., 2015), his relationship satisfaction could, possibly, have been negatively affected by a lack of confidence in the responsiveness of his partner, sensitivity to partner rejection and criticism, fear of separation from his partner, distrust, and a negative self-image and value. Further research may provide greater clarity on the similarity between partners' relationship satisfaction experiences.

Apart from the role that mindfulness and attachment played in couples' relationship satisfaction, the nature of the association between mindfulness and attachment was also of interest in the present study.

6.3.2. Mindfulness and attachment

As discussed in the previous sections, mindfulness and attachment permeated the intimate relationship entity, as reflected in the findings of the present study. These findings complement some of the existing studies investigating the role of mindfulness, in particular, in South African populations. Nell (2016), for example, showed that mindfulness was significantly related to psychological well-being in a sample of Black South African students and their family members. Higher levels of mindfulness were also observed as being

associated with increased life satisfaction, hope, and positive affect while predicting lower levels of negative affect (Nell, 2016). Accordingly, mindfulness training was proposed as an appropriate intervention to assist individuals within the South African context (Nell, 2016). Bearing in mind the proposed relevance of mindfulness skills for the South African population, it could be deduced that mindfulness would be equally relevant to South African couples.

It could be argued that without some degree of awareness, leading to observation and description, none of the participants would have been able to relay any information about their relationships in response to my questions in the current investigation. In fact, 58% of participants were observed as having high levels of overall mindfulness. As already discussed, mindfulness was shown to influence partner awareness of the various external and internal influences on the relationship entity, as well as the ability to mindfully navigate those influences. Mindfulness further supported both the relational presence and awareness shown to sustain the relationship entity, as well as balanced and reciprocal communication. The ability to engage emotionally with both one's own and one's partner's emotions was further discovered to be supported by mindfulness.

In the current investigation, the relationship between mindfulness and attachment was of particular interest. While 42% of participants were noted as having relatively secure attachment, the remaining 58% presented with a more insecure attachment. The current results from the couple profiles suggested that a relatively secure attachment was associated with a higher degree of mindfulness. This is not a novel result as far as the existing literature is concerned (Pepping & Duvenage, 2016; Pepping, O'Donovan, & Davis, 2014; Mohamadirizi, Shaygannejad, & Mohamadirizi, 2017). Dispositional mindfulness was observed to originate in early childhood experiences, specifically with regard to attachment processes (Pepping & Duvenage, 2016). Mindfulness and attachment were also significantly related, both in individuals who regularly practised meditation and those who did not meditate at all (Pepping, O'Donovan, & Davis, 2014). However, mindfulness meditation was shown to mediate the relationship between attachment anxiety and mindfulness, leading Pepping et al. (2014) to suggest that mindfulness training was potentially beneficial to alleviating attachment anxiety.

While the existing literature confirms an association between mindfulness and attachment, a direct relationship has not been supported (Caldwell & Shaver, 2013; Pepping et al., 2015; Saavedra et al., 2010). Based on the participants' experiences, the association between mindfulness and attachment has been found to be facilitated by relational presence and communication. Accordingly, mindfulness supported relational presence and contributed to balanced, validating and reciprocal communication while relational presence and communication infused by mindfulness facilitated secure attachment. Therefore, these results offer promising insight into the indirect association between mindfulness and secure attachment. Moreover, the results suggest that assisting partners in using mindfulness skills in order to increase their relational presence and mindful communication could, in turn, increase their levels of attachment security.

All five of the securely attached participants in the present study were shown to have high scores on the *Describing* subscale of mindfulness. Accordingly, it is posited that the ability to objectively describe one's partner's behaviour or the dynamics within the relationship entity may be related to secure attachment. These findings support the existing literature with regard to the relationship between the *Describing* facet of mindfulness and attachment (Knowles et al., 2015; Stevenson et al., 2017). Notably, a more recent study on maternal-infant interaction showed that the *Describing* facet of mindfulness was one of two facets, in particular, which had allowed for greater attunement between mother and infant (Pickard, Townsend, Caputi, & Grenyer, 2018). Accordingly, it may be speculated that the *Describing* facet might offer a similar benefit as far as intimate adult relationships are concerned. In addition, neutrally describing each other's behaviour and emotions without assigning subjective interpretations to them may, arguably, enhance partners' perceptions of the level of relational presence within their relationship entities. Moreover, as previously discussed, relational presence may then contribute to increased attachment security by conveying commitment, companionship and dependability. Therefore, assisting couples in developing their abilities to neutrally describe their relationship dynamics and partners' behavioural and emotional output may contribute to the development of a more secure attachment bond, as well as higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Such increased levels of attachment security and relationship satisfaction will, arguably, promote interpartner flourishing within the relationship entity.

In summary, mindfulness and attachment were therefore shown to be valuable contributors to the intimate relationship organism, as well as to the satisfaction experiences of the respective intimate partners in the current investigation. The findings confirmed that both mindfulness and secure attachment were related to increased relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, similar relationship satisfaction scores were observed between the majority of participating couples. In addition, a number of internal influences and components of the relationship entity were identified as having the potential to influence relationship satisfaction. It was further established that a relatively secure attachment was related to increased levels of mindfulness while it was also discovered that relational presence and communication indirectly facilitated the relationship between the two constructs. Given these findings, assisting South African couples in increasing their levels of mindfulness appears to hold great potential benefits in terms of improving partners' attachment security and relationship satisfaction. Moreover, aiding couples in aligning their intimate relationships to the optimal functioning of relationship entities as posited in this study will, arguably, further enhance their attachment security and overall relationship satisfaction.

6.4. Conclusion

The proposed dynamics and functioning of my unique and noteworthy conceptualisation of the "intimate relationship organism", based on the current study's quantitative and qualitative data, are summarised in Figure 6.5. This key formulation makes a significant contribution to the existing bodies of work exploring intimate relationship functioning. Furthermore, in line with the principles of positive psychology (Compton & Hoffman, 2020; Rosenfeld & Gogineni, 2019; Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), this conceptualisation presents both a conceptual and practical map for achieving optimal relationship functioning, well-being and satisfaction.

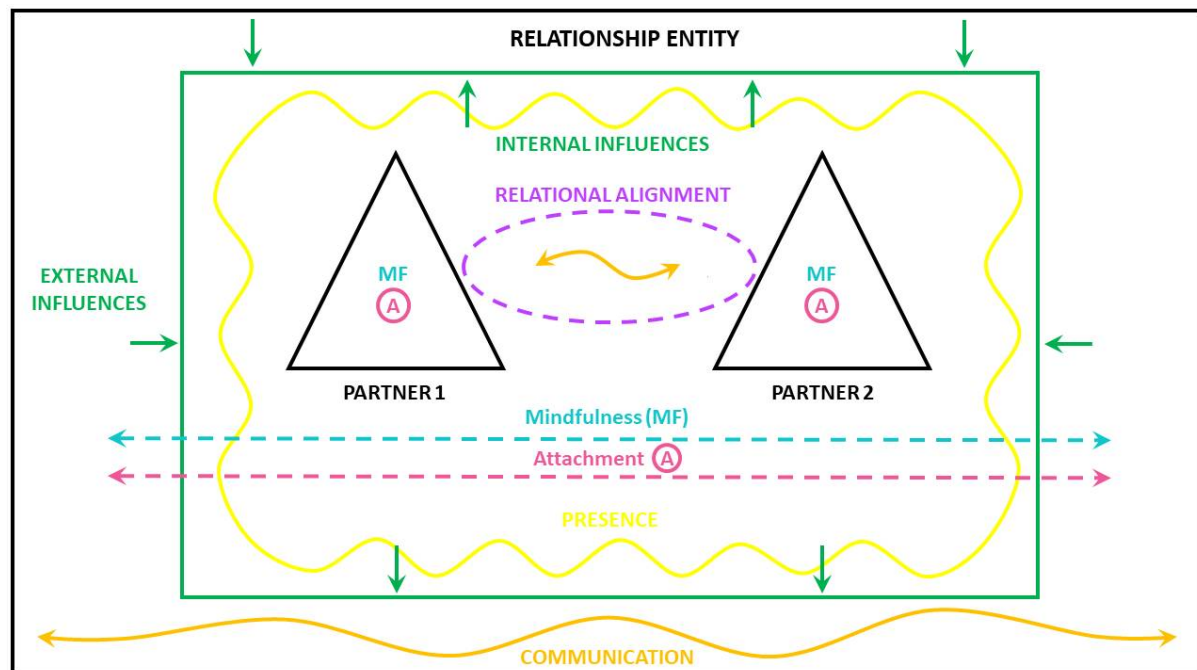


Figure 6.5. The intimate relationship organism

The relationship entity, one of the key concepts in the current study, is first created when two individual partners jointly make the decision to enter into an intimate relationship with each other. Throughout their relationship, the living relationship entity changes and grows, whether organically or deliberately, based on factors internal and external to it and which exert an influence on the relationship entity. These influences on the relationship entity originate from the two individual partners, their individual histories, as well as their internal qualities and external behaviours, both as individuals and as a couple. The relationship entity may, therefore, be influenced by the partners' respective families of origin, their children and parenting, health, occupations, and religious or spiritual orientations. On an internal level, the relationship entity appears to be shaped by the partners' internal dialogues, trust, patience, acceptance and appreciation. Many of these elements are also proposed as being beneficial to the relationship entity. Each partner further enters into the relationship entity with a certain ability for mindfulness and either a secure or insecure attachment style. Arguably, a higher degree of mindfulness will enable partners to more accurately identify and more effectively navigate the external and internal influences on their relationship. There also appears to be a particularly strong intersection between the pillars of mindfulness and the internal influences on the relationship entity as identified in the current study data. In turn, it may be suggested that attachment style is precipitated by some

of the external influences while simultaneously influencing the presentation of many of the internal influences. Thus, it is posited that relationship satisfaction results from both the change and growth of the relationship entity and partners, as well as the degree to which internal and external influences are successfully navigated.

Furthermore, it may be reasoned that the relationship entity is sustained by relational presence. Relational presence is achieved by certain presence-enhancing behaviours, including prioritising one's partner, being available and accessible, engaging in shared activities, physical affection, and limiting technology-based activities within the relational space. Both the roles of relational presence and presence-enhancing behaviours within the relationship entity are believed to be new discoveries arising from the present study. Mindfulness is presented as the facilitator of relational presence, specifically by enabling awareness of the self, one's partner and emotions. It is proposed that increased self-awareness in partners assists in the navigation of the internal and external influences impacting the relationship entity. Partner awareness, which is crucial to the functioning of the relationship entity, is said to be the result of holding the partner in mind and reading one's partner. It has been inferred that both self- and partner awareness are accompanied by emotional awareness, which is important to the relationship entity as it influences interpartner empathy and the ability to remain present with the emotions of one's partner.

Apart from its general contribution to the relationship entity, presence is indicated as aiding in secure attachment by conveying commitment, companionship, dependability and partnership. In addition, relational presence supports relational alignment, an abstract, invisible alignment between partners, formed at the inception of the relationship entity. The discovery and interpretation of relational alignment is one of the unique contributions of this study. Described as existing on a cognitive, emotional and behavioural level, a couple's relational alignment has the potential to grow and evolve throughout the relationship, becoming more defined over time. Relational alignment is also unique to each couple and encompasses their entire abstract relationship and connection, therefore providing an indication as to the health and functioning of the relationship entity. While both attachment and interpersonal attunement may be understood as contributing to the alignment in some

way, the alignment is also believed to be the result of every interaction between the two partners, including their behaviours of connection, such as communication.

It is proposed that communication facilitates optimal functioning both between intimate partners, and within the relationship entity as a whole. Accordingly, the entire relationship entity is purported to be sustained by communication. Presented as a reciprocal exchange between partners, communication also appears to have its own reciprocal exchange with mindfulness and attachment, respectively. Mindfulness and relational presence contribute to effective communication by accentuating both verbal and nonverbal observations, enabling partners to accurately observe and describe (read) each other's internal environment and experiences, communicate at the most opportune times, react neutrally without judgement, communicate with awareness, and resolve conflict. Honest, reciprocal and aligned communication is also presented as promoting the intimacy bond, connection, a strong relational alignment, mutual emotional support, and the resolution of misalignments. Such mindful communication is another key contribution arising from this study. Therefore, attachment security is set to be influenced by the nature of communication underscoring the relationship entity.

Furthermore, it may be argued that communication aimed specifically at revealing the unspoken is vital to the relationship entity. Revealing the unspoken is introduced as a practice of deliberately expressing individual, internal partner experiences, including thoughts and feelings pertaining to the relationship entity. Partners' internal dialogues, which was also identified as an internal influence on the relationship entity, often forms part of partners' unspoken internal experiences. The deliberate conceptualisation of the practice of revealing the unspoken is proposed as another noteworthy finding of this study. Apart from contributing to change and growth within the relationship entity and increasing the potential for improved conflict management, revealing the unspoken is presented as developing an interpartner connection, relational alignment and intimacy. Argued to be both the creator and transformer of the relationship entity, communication is also impacted by the same internal and external factors that influence the relational entity. Communication is, however, simultaneously introduced as being equally able to influence these internal and external factors. Furthermore, communication is claimed to be the method by which the positive

internal relational influences, as well as the presence-enhancing behaviours between partners, are introduced into the relationship entity.

Mindfulness and attachment are central to the creation, growth, functioning and maintenance of the relationship organism. Notably, relational presence and communication were found to function as intermediaries between mindfulness and attachment within the relationship organism. In addition, relational alignment appeared to be significantly affected by both mindfulness and attachment. Perhaps, due to the role of relational alignment, the relationship satisfaction of partners within the relationship organism tended to be equally aligned. This alignment in satisfaction can, however, potentially be impacted by the respective partners' attachment security. Mindfulness also influences both relationship satisfaction and attachment security. Based on the couple profiles of the five participants with relatively secure attachment, similarly high scores on the *Describing* facet of mindfulness were noted for all five participants. This finding may allude to the *Describing* facet of mindfulness being of particular importance with regards to achieving attachment security in intimate relationships. However, further research would need to be done in this regard.

In summary, the living, growing, changing being that is the relationship entity is therefore presented as a dynamic system that interacts with its environment, but which also exists in a constant reciprocal relationship with its own internal components. These components further exist in a continuous relationship with one another. Notably, mindfulness and attachment security are identified as closely related and vital components within the intimate relationship entity. As a result, partners' relationship satisfaction is dependent on the health, well-being and optimal functioning of the relationship entity and all of its components. However, in the same way, the health, well-being and functioning of the relationship entity are supported by the partners' intrapersonal processes, including both mindfulness and attachment security.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1. Introduction

This chapter commences with a discussion of the contributions of the current investigation, followed by suggestions of the possible clinical implications for practice based on the current findings. Thereafter, the limitations of the study will be considered before concluding with recommendations for future research. A popular belief exists that it is the researcher's responsibility to prove the value of his or her research output (Tuval-Mashiach, 2017). With this in mind, the concluding chapter accompanies the preceding chapters of this thesis on the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples by reviewing the strengths and limits of the study.

7.2. Contributions of this study

Choosing a research topic that is relevant, timely, significant and interesting is considered a criterion of quality and excellence, particularly in relation to qualitative research (Tracy, 2010). In the present study, the choice of research topic was influenced by my professional interest as a psychologist, the practical relevance thereof in terms of working with patients in clinical practice, unexplored areas in the existing literature, and the greater societal significance of the topic. As a result, the functioning and dynamics of the couple system in intimate relationships were identified as the current topic of study. In particular, I was interested in whether, and how, mindfulness and attachment experiences alter a couple's relationship satisfaction.

Interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB) was considered the most appropriate integrated framework within which to understand couple dynamics in relation to mindfulness and attachment. The IPNB approach, which was used as a theoretical framework for this study, also allowed for the flexible and adaptable integration of knowledge to facilitate a wide application and understanding of the study's findings (Baldini et al., 2014; Codrington, 2010; Frank, 2013). This allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of intimate relationship dynamics as part of the synthesised, interpersonal and neurobiological development of the mind (Siegel, 2012a). As no local studies could be found, specifically using an IPNB framework

(EBSCOhost database search, 16 March 2020), it may be concluded that this study is the first of its kind in terms of the South African context.

North American and Western European research continues to dominate the field of research that investigates mindfulness, attachment and relationship satisfaction amongst both individuals and couples. While some of the findings from studies conducted abroad might be universally applicable to couples from all across the globe, this study focused specifically on what the data from South African couples can add to the existing body of knowledge regarding intimate relationships. Many South African couples may, for example, find themselves faced with particular psychosocial challenges impacting their relationships, including intimate partner violence, substance abuse, and gender inequity (Lesch et al., 2019; Mthembu et al., 2016; Woolf-King et al., 2019). Despite the abundance of international research (Adair et al., 2018; Davila et al., 2017; Kappen et al., 2018; Molero et al., 2017; Novak et al., 2016; Vollmann et al., 2019), very few local studies (Adeagbo, 2018; Lesch & Engelbrecht, 2011; Lowe et al., 2011; Ruark et al., 2019) were found exploring either relationship satisfaction or the association between relationship satisfaction and both mindfulness and attachment, respectively.

Given the important role of intimate relationships within the foundations of society and the family system (Berscheid, 2010; Dunkel Schetter, 2017), as well as the contribution of intimate relationships to individual psychological and physical health (Chopik & O'Brien, 2017; Kiecolt-Glaser, 2018; Woods et al., 2019), this study contributes to an understanding of the well-being of South African family systems as a whole. The study notably adds to the existing body of research exploring mindfulness, attachment and relationship satisfaction amongst couples in intimate relationships. Furthermore, the present study offers insight into some of the precipitating and mediating factors explaining the indirect association, as suggested by Pepping et al. (2015), between mindfulness and attachment.

While conducting the present study, adherence to the criteria of trustworthiness and rigour (Cope, 2014; Kornbluh, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), as well as ethical conduct as defined by the bodies governing psychologists in practice and research (Department of Health, 2015; Health Professions Act, 2006; Health Professions Council of South Africa, 2016)

was important to me. Considering the importance of treating both the methodology and participants ethically (Khumalo & De Klerk, 2018), the adherence to trustworthiness, rigour and ethical research conduct, discussed extensively in Chapter 4, is believed to have strengthened the current investigation. Accordingly, ethical research conduct, the confidentiality and security of participants' data, and my own reflexivity as the researcher were paramount.

In addition, reciprocity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Rhodes & Carlsen, 2018) was practised by creating a data collection environment in which the participants and I were recognised as being in an equal position as collaborators within the research process. As such, the participants were welcome to ask questions regarding other psychology or relationship-related matters that may have been of relevance to them. They were also provided with additional information and resources that could benefit their own relationship and psychological functioning. The warm environment of unconditional positive regard and authenticity that I had created during the interviews with the participating couples is believed to have contributed to the rich and honest participant experiences in this study. In addition, practising ethical vulnerability (Rhodes & Carlsen, 2018), sharing relevant information about myself in an open and honest manner in response to the participants' questions, is believed to have positively contributed to the relationship between myself and participants. This, in turn, arguably also contributed to the rich, thick descriptions of their experiences shared by the participants, thereby enhancing the study's credibility (Tracy, 2010).

A convergent mixed methods research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) blending qualitative and quantitative research methods was used in the present study. This approach was well-suited to addressing the aim of this study. More specifically, the approach enabled the convergence of different avenues of data into one integrated unit in order to more clearly understand the nuanced associations between the respective constructs as they presented in the unique participants' experiences. In this investigation, a mixed methods design allowed for a comprehensive and integrated understanding of the intimate relationship experiences of couples. Importantly, such integrated findings provided a psychosocial context for the constructs and population being studied (Bartholomew & Brown, 2012). Additionally, an integrated approach was particularly appropriate given the preference for integration

subscribed to and promoted by the IPNB framework (Siegel, 2012a) which informed the current study.

Within the convergent mixed methods approach, a multiple case study design (Yin, 2018) was followed. This design enabled the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples to be investigated in an unbiased manner while relaying the findings in a way that offers clear guidance for their practical application (Dattilio et al., 2010; Yin, 2018). Moreover, a multiple case study design allowed for analysis within and across case studies, thereby enabling me to identify differences and similarities between participant experiences (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2018). Furthermore, while a smaller research sample was deliberately selected to allow for a more detailed exploration within and between case studies, the sample was strengthened by its racial diversity. With Black, Coloured and White couples as participants, the constructs could be explored within the intimate relationships of couples from different sociocultural backgrounds.

The integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings suggested an association between relationship satisfaction and mindfulness. These findings confirm existing research findings which indicate a relationship between mindfulness and relationship satisfaction amongst both couples and individual participants involved in intimate relationships, regardless of whether they were enrolled in mindfulness-based programmes (Atkinson, 2013; Kappen et al., 2018; Khaddouma et al., 2017; Lenger et al., 2017). Moreover, attachment security was identified as a potential influence on relationship satisfaction. It is also noteworthy that the current findings support the existing literature (Caldwell & Shaver, 2013; Pepping & Duvenage, 2016; Mohamadirizi et al., 2017; Stevenson et al., 2017) regarding the association between mindfulness and secure attachment.

Furthermore, several novel findings and conceptualisations regarding the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples in intimate relationships are emphasised as noteworthy. These findings are encapsulated within the first key finding, namely my novel conceptualisation of the intimate relationship organism (see Figure 7.1).

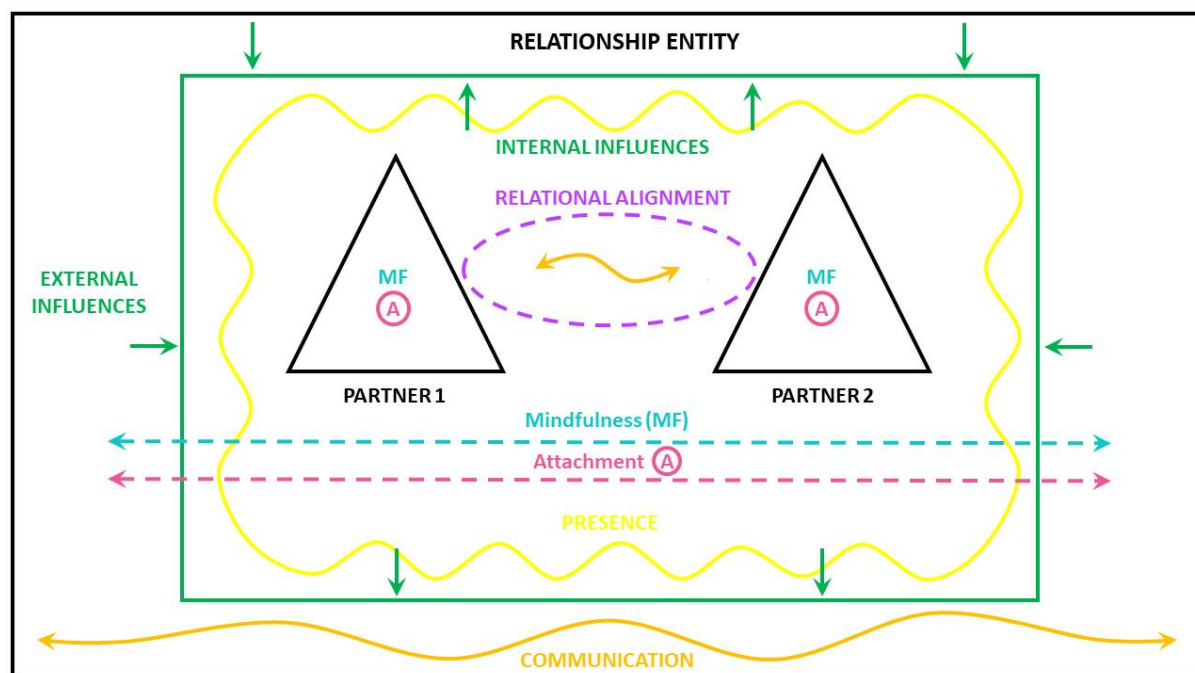


Figure 7.1. The intimate relationship organism

It is hereby proposed that the changing and growing, living relationship entity is created when two individual partners enter into an intimate relationship, with their respective intrapersonal processes. Their relationship entity is then impacted, both positively and negatively, by external and internal influences, which have the potential to affect partner relationship satisfaction. External influences include children, occupation, religious orientations and family of origin whereas internal influences consist of partners' internal dialogues, trust, patience, acceptance and appreciation. Relationship satisfaction is further impacted by any changes and growth that affect the relationship entity and the respective partners.

Existing research has made due mention of the notion of change and growth within intimate relationships, as well as external influences impacting change and growth (Bosch et al., 2012; Busby et al., 2019; Fowers et al., 2016; Knudson-Martin & Huenergardt, 2010; Nicoleau et al., 2016; Rauer & Volling, 2015; Story et al., 2018; Soulsby & Bennett, 2017; Timmons et al., 2017). Similarly, the internal influences mentioned by the participants in the present study have previously been discovered to be relevant in the context of intimate relationships (Feeney & Thrush, 2010; Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017; Givertz et al., 2016; Gordon et al., 2012; Gottman, et al., 2018; Harvey et al., 2018; Herbenick et al., 2014; Kappen

et al., 2018; Wickham, 2013). Arising from the current investigation, my conceptualisation of the intimate relationship organism is proposed as a key contribution to existing bodies of work. The framework presented by the intimate relationship organism identifies the different parts thereof while capturing the reciprocal relationships that exist between them, as well as their respective associations with mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction.

The relationship entity is sustained by a process which may be interpreted as relational presence. Relational presence is partly enhanced by interpartner prioritisation, availability and accessibility, shared activities, physical affection, and limiting the use of technology in the relational space. These behaviours, which may be proposed as entailing presence-enhancing abilities, are another innovative finding alongside the role of relational presence in the relationship entity. Furthermore, while availability and accessibility, shared activities, physical affection and limited use of technology have all been independently observed as impacting intimate relationships (Chapman, 2015; McDaniel & Drouin, 2019; Sandberg et al., 2012; Walsh et al., 2017), the importance of prioritisation in intimate relationships appears to be an original discovery of this study. In addition, relational presence sustains another novel conceptualisation, namely relational alignment.

In terms of my proposed formulation, relational alignment may be understood as an abstract alignment that exists on a cognitive, emotional and behavioural level between partners. Unique to each couple and comprising their entire abstract relationship and connection, relational alignment is subject to change and growth, as well as the internal and external influences impacting the relationship entity. The conceptualisation of relational alignment incorporates and further develops Martin Buber's (2002) idea of the relational space or "between" and Cozolino's (2014) "social synapse" as the totality of interactions and communications between partners. Moreover, it has been proposed that relational alignment is also influenced by the satisfaction experienced between partners. Based on the quantitative couple profiles of the current participants, a noteworthy pattern of similarity in relationship satisfaction scores between partners was observed. Greil et al. (2018) previously found a similar relationship between partner satisfaction scores among infertile women and their male partners. The corresponding satisfaction scores are interpreted as the result of the couple's relational alignment. In view of the fact that partners experience a shared relational

alignment, their satisfaction scores are likely to be reflective of the state of their alignment and, therefore, similar.

All of the individual components of the intimate relationship organism have been shown to exist in a continuous, reciprocal relationship with one another. Moreover, mindfulness and attachment have been shown to be indispensable contributors to, as well as components of, the relationship organism. Each partner enters the relationship entity with a certain capacity for mindfulness and either a secure or insecure attachment style. It is of particular interest that the present investigation expands on existing studies identifying the role of mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction in intimate relationships (Adeagbo, 2018; Kappen et al., 2018; Lenger et al., 2017; Novak et al., 2016; Ruark et al., 2019; Vollmann et al., 2019). A higher degree of mindfulness is posited as mediating relationship dynamics and satisfaction by enabling more effective navigation of internal and external influences on the relationship. It was also discovered that mindfulness is closely related to the internal influences identified in this study in that it aids in the development of partners' interpersonal dialogues, as well as interpartner trust, patience, acceptance, and appreciation. Mindfulness may therefore assist in developing influences, such as trust, patience, acceptance, internal dialogues and appreciation.

Attachment style, in turn, may be impacted by the external influences on the relationship entity while also influencing the internal influences. Both mindfulness and attachment can impact relational alignment whereas mindfulness, in particular, contributes to an increased interpartner understanding due to an ability to read one's partner more effectively. The current participants' experiences supported a positive association between overall mindfulness and a relatively secure attachment, corresponding with existing research findings (Pepping & Duvenage, 2016; Pepping, O'Donovan, & Davis, 2014; Mohamadirizi et al., 2017). The *Describing* facet of mindfulness was noted as possibly being of particular relevance to secure attachment given that all of the securely attached participants in the current study were observed to have high scores for this specific facet. While this observation is aligned with existing literature (Knowles et al., 2015; Stevenson et al., 2017), further research is indicated to offer more insight into the association between the *Describing* facet and attachment security. In general, the current study's findings support mindfulness and

attachment as integral to the intimate relationship entity's functioning and dynamics, in addition to being closely related psychological constructs.

Importantly, the current study contributes to the body of knowledge related to the association between mindfulness and attachment by offering specific suggestions with respect to the possible mechanisms and intermediaries supporting the relationship (Pepping & Duvenhage, 2016; Pepping et al., 2014; Pepping et al., 2015). Firstly, mindfulness facilitates a more secure attachment between partners by allowing them to engage with each other's emotions by practising emotional engagement rather than emotional distancing. Secondly, awareness of the self, emotions and one's partner, as well as relational presence, are all supported by mindfulness. Furthermore, such awareness and presence have been found to contribute to secure attachment by enabling commitment, companionship, reliability and partnership. Therefore, relational presence may be a promising intermediary of the relationship between mindfulness and attachment. Lastly, communication was understood as being an intermediary between mindfulness and attachment.

As such, the optimal functioning of the relationship entity as a whole, as well as relational alignment, were shown to be facilitated by communication. Mindfulness and relational presence, in particular, enable more effective communication as a result of reading and holding the partner in mind. Such communication promotes a more balanced, reciprocal exchange, as well as a decrease in interpartner judgment and reactivity. This results in honest, validating communication, which has been conceptualised in the context of the present study as mindful communication. Based on the participants' experiences, mindful communication has been shown to be a vital promoter of the attachment bond and security within the relationship entity. Moreover, as the mechanism of connection between partners, mindful communication was further said to involve partners' deliberately revealing their unspoken internal worlds to each other. Partners' internal dialogues, which was also identified as an internal influence on the relationship entity, was found to form part of what may be unspoken. It is my position that the communicative act of what I have conceptualised as revealing the unspoken holds the potential to further assist in developing connection, intimacy and relational alignment. These contributions also develop the existing ideas around the importance of effective, quality communication between intimate partners (Du Plooy &

De Beer, 2018; Kuhn et al., 2018; Sandberg et al., 2012) by offering practical guidance regarding the achievement of such optimal communication. To summarise, based on the current findings, it is therefore indicated that the relationship between mindfulness and attachment is facilitated by emotional engagement, relational presence and communication.

The present study has contributed to the understanding of intimate relationships by placing them within a conceptual framework illustrating the different components involved in creating not only satisfying relationships, but relationships that are flourishing and functioning optimally (Fowers et al., 2016). Mindfulness and attachment have notably been emphasised as integral parts of the creation, growth, functioning and maintenance of intimate relationships. Given the interpersonal neurobiological framework within which this study was contextualised, the psychological and physiological linkage between partners (Chopik & O'Brien, 2017; Goldstein et al., 2017; Kiecolt-Glaser, 2018; Laws et al., 2015; Papp et al., 2013; Timmons et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2018) are kept in mind when reviewing the potential contributions of this study. As such, apart from the various findings of this study suggesting avenues for achieving optimal intimate relationship functioning, the same findings are also recognised for their potential contribution to the triangle of well-being (Siegel, 2012a) that exists for each partner. Moreover, bearing in mind the cybernetic principles of reciprocal causality and interconnectedness (Becvar & Becvar, 2013), the intimate relationship organism of the couple will impact the family and community systems around it.

The current investigation is therefore also seen as contributing to the body of knowledge regarding community health and functioning, as healthier relationship entities between intimate partners contribute to healthier family systems, which may further develop healthier community systems. This particular contribution is especially important given the South African context within which couples' intimate relationship entities exist. Accordingly, South African couples are often faced with environments that include psychosocial stressors such as intimate partner violence, infidelity, substance abuse, HIV, gender inequities and dual-career challenges (Bosch et al., 2012; Darbes et al., 2014; Groves et al., 2014; Khunou, 2012; Lesch & Adams, 2016a; Lesch et al., 2019; Madiba & Ngwenya, 2017; Mohamed, 2019; Mthembu et al., 2016; Onoya et al., 2014; Parker et al., 2014; Pettifor et al., 2014; Wechsberg et al., 2013; Woolf-King et al., 2019). Therefore, assisting South African couples in obtaining

healthy functioning will, arguably, be invaluable to both the couples and their associated community systems.

7.3. Implications for clinical practice

The findings in the present study have valuable implications for understanding intimate relationships and working with couples in practice. In light of the interrelatedness of systems (Becvar & Becvar, 2013), these implications may not only inform practice with regard to promoting satisfaction within intimate relationships, but possibly also address the well-being of South African family systems as a whole. Given the value of positive institutions such as the family in the field of positive psychology (Compton & Hoffman, 2020; Rosenfeld & Gogineni, 2019; Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), the findings from this study may, therefore, inform future positive interventions for both couples and families. Such a focus on promoting well-being, as opposed to mere academic output, also aligns with Khumalo and De Klerk's (2018) criteria for ethical conduct.

To begin with, the conceptualisation of the intimate relationship organism offers potential practical applications for both clinicians in practice and couples themselves. For clinicians, this conceptualisation provides a potential framework for viewing intimate relationship functioning. Moreover, it may aid in identifying areas that need psychotherapeutic intervention in order to assist the couple to improve their relationship functioning and satisfaction. Based on the conceptualisation of the relationship organism that emanated from the results of the present study, several potential areas of psychotherapeutic work are identified. Such work includes both individual and joint work for partners, focused on supporting change and growth within the self and intimate relationship entity. In addition, assistance in effectively navigating the impact of external influences on the relationship entity while developing interpartner trust, patience, acceptance and appreciation could further benefit partners and the relationship entity. In addition, enhancing partners' awareness and management of their internal dialogues may further assist in raising their levels of relationship satisfaction. Supporting couples in cultivating the identified presence-enhancing behaviours of prioritisation, availability and accessibility, shared activities, physical affection and limited use of technology within the relational space could

also aid in enhancing relational presence. In turn, such relational presence could impact their attachment security.

Similarly, assisting couples to improve their interpartner communication by practising mindful communication may further increase their attachment security. Practising mindful communication would involve partners deliberately revealing the unspoken and communicating in an honest, validating and reciprocal manner. Finally, it is proposed that developing personal and relational mindfulness constitutes a valuable area of psychotherapeutic work for intimate partners. Psychotherapy could also facilitate awareness and enhancement of relational alignment between partners by attending to these identified areas. For couples, themselves, knowledge of the intimate relationship organism framework could assist in developing a clearer understanding of their own relationship dynamics, functioning, and individual partners' roles and contributions. Such an understanding could, potentially, also offer couples a practical map for creating and enhancing their own relationships by highlighting areas of their relationship which may be explored and developed further.

The findings of this study indicate that generally assisting both individuals and couples in expanding their mindfulness practices and increasing their attachment security is likely to improve the health and functioning of the relationship entity and all of its components. Furthermore, it is posited that teaching individual and relational mindfulness to couples in psychotherapy offers several advantages with regard to intimate relationships. These advantages could include increased interpartner understanding through an improved ability to read one's partner more effectively, higher levels of relationship satisfaction, and improvement in relational alignment between partners. In addition, partners may experience greater self-, partner- and emotional awareness, enhanced relational presence, as well as the ability to engage more effectively with their partners' emotions. Moreover, all three of these advantages could contribute to attachment security between partners.

Reflecting specifically on the implications of the findings related to the association between mindfulness and communication, it seems clear that mindfulness should be introduced as a communication strategy for couples in psychotherapy. Mindful

communication skills would allow interpartner validation and understanding, which would prevent the need to resort to ineffective communication strategies or behaviours. In a similar manner, it would be advantageous to teach couples how to deliberately reveal their unspoken internal worlds and experiences to their partners by means of mindful communication. Such honest, validating and reciprocal communication will likely encourage attachment security between partners.

Furthermore, with regard to conflict management, increased levels of mindfulness would assist in preventing the pitfalls precipitating conflict identified in the current findings. Accordingly, integrating mindfulness skills, such as *Observing*, *Describing*, *Non-judgement*, *Nonreactivity* and *Acting with Awareness* with communication skills will enable partners to more easily note the escalation of relational issues before they negatively impact the relationship entity. An associated increase in awareness with regard to changes in the communication behaviours of one's partner, which may signal the development of discord, could also be achieved. Finally, such increased awareness, facilitated by mindfulness, would allow partners to identify and, subsequently, attend to, defeating patterns of conflict within their interpartner communication. As a result, partners would be able to attend to discord and disagreements before they become detrimental to the relationship entity. Alternatively, discord could be circumvented altogether, instead achieving mindful communication that is honest, validating, reciprocal and which reveals the psychologically significant unspoken between partners.

While generally aiding couples in finding ways to increase the optimal functioning of their relationship entities and the different components thereof will benefit partners' relationship satisfaction, this study's findings also offer specific areas of focus that may promote relationship satisfaction. In particular, it is my assertion that assisting couples in cultivating change and growth, trust, patience, acceptance, appreciation, relational presence, and mindful communication will contribute to their overall levels of relationship satisfaction.

A last implication for clinical practice relates to the relationship entity's propensity for change and growth, as well as relational alignment that may exist between partners. With this in mind, it is argued that both joint and individual psychotherapy could be beneficial to

the relationship entity. Any change or growth occurring in one partner is expected to impact both the other partner and the relationship entity due to the influence exerted on relational alignment, as well as the reciprocal nature of the relationships between different parts of the relationship entity system. Therefore, both individual and couple psychotherapy could be considered beneficial to the intimate relationship organism.

7.4. Limitations of this study

While care was taken to design and execute this study with trustworthiness, rigour and ethical conduct in mind, it still has a number of limitations that should be taken into consideration when reading this report. The limitations that will be discussed relate, specifically, to the theory, methodology and research design, as well as practical considerations regarding the process of recruiting participants.

A thorough search of the literature yielded no formal critique against an interpersonal neurobiological framework (IPNB) (EBSCOhost database search, 16 March 2020). However, integrated, pluralistic approaches such as IPNB are often criticised due to the fact that their integrated results may be viewed as richer and more valuable than the individual parts of the integrated whole (Cooper & McLeod, 2012). Accordingly, while IPNB offered a structured framework within which the different constructs of the current investigation could be conceptualised, especially with regard to understanding intimate relationship functioning, the value of each individual construct was not discarded. Instead, in the context of the present study, due precedence was accorded to each individual construct for independently making a valuable contribution to the complete understanding of couples' intimate relationship experiences.

As mentioned in Section 7.2, a convergent mixed methods research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) was used. Although this particular design was deliberately chosen for its blending of quantitative and qualitative methodology to obtain integrated data and findings, the quantitative component of this study was somewhat limited by the size of the sample recruited. Due to the case study design used for the qualitative component of the study, a smaller sample was deliberately used in order to allow for a comprehensive exploration of the detailed experiences of the participants. In keeping with the aim of integration associated

with a mixed methods research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), the quantitative data were largely intended to be complementary to the qualitative data. In particular, unique quantitative couple profiles were created to be converged with the qualitative data. While this small sample was therefore appropriate for the qualitative data, it does limit the extent to which the data from the unique couple profiles may be reflective of the broader population of South African couples. This limitation should be kept in mind when reviewing the data from the couple profiles.

A multiple case study design (Yin, 2018) was deemed appropriate in order to address the research questions and purposes of this study. However, two limitations, in particular, are mentioned frequently in terms of case study designs (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Cope, 2015; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Houghton et al., 2013). Firstly, case study designs are often criticised for lacking a well-defined protocol. Secondly, it is suggested that the findings emerging from case studies are unsuitable for generalising to the larger population. However, strategies were intentionally utilised to preclude the potential influence of such limitations on the present study. In my role as the researcher, I followed a clear protocol, used a research auditor to ensure that interpretations drawn from case studies were accurate, strove to write a clear and critical report, and applied general trustworthiness and rigour throughout the research process.

In addition, the study's use of multiple case studies is considered a more rigorous and dependable approach to case study research (Baxter & Jack, 2008, Yin, 2018) as it allowed for comparisons and contrasts to be drawn between participants' experiences. However, while multiple case studies were used in order to confirm findings across cases, care should still be taken when applying these findings to the larger population. These findings might not be applicable to other populations of couples that are very different from the current sample with regard to demographic characteristics or other variables that may influence their experiences. Furthermore, reworking the rich and complex data obtained through multiple case studies into a nuanced and concise presentation can be considered a challenging task for any researcher. As such, certain limitations may have resulted from performing my tasks as the researcher.

A significant portion of this study relied on a qualitative approach to methodology. As a result, I served as an instrument of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2014) in that I was responsible for analysing and interpreting the data, identifying themes and pointing out similarities and differences between participant experiences. Bearing in mind the subjective aspect of my analysis as researcher, steps were taken to meet the necessary criteria for trustworthiness (Cope, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Kornbluh, 2015; Petty et al., 2012). These steps included creating an audit trail, keeping a research journal in addition to reflexive journaling, and having one of my research supervisors act as a second coder to confirm my identified themes. Furthermore, member checking of the themes was done with the participants while rich participant data were included in the final report to support my interpretations. Finally, an independent research auditor verified my analysis to ensure that it was accurately representative of the participant accounts. Applying these steps not only served to meet the criteria for trustworthiness, but also protected against over-subjectivity on my part, thereby ensuring that my subjective input as the researcher remained an essential part of good practice.

Therefore, while the possibility that alternative interpretations, themes or patterns could also have been identified or formulated is recognised, it does not invalidate the themes and interpretations which I have produced. Instead, the possibility of various themes or patterns perhaps points to the richness and infinite potential of working with complex human experiences and relationships. In a similar way, compiling such complex data into a concise and comprehensive report for the reader may have led to some data, which may otherwise have been deemed valuable, being excluded from, or not mentioned in, the final report. The potential limitations associated with my subjective experiences and perceptions with regard to the study data and findings are therefore acknowledged.

Certain limitations related to the process of recruiting participants for the study are important to note. In recruiting participants, the call for participation was distributed exclusively by means of electronic mail, social media advertisements, and postings to psychology practices and community organisations. As a result, only persons with access to these technologies and communication avenues would have been informed of the study. This is also likely to have impacted the diversity of the sample, perhaps making results applicable

only to couples who are demographically similar to the sample. Given that the existing research on intimate relationships tends to focus largely on heterosexual and married couples (Darbes et al., 2014; Falconier, 2015; Hagemeyer et al., 2015; Hilpert et al., 2018; Horne & Johnson, 2019; Khunou, 2012; Wechsberg et al., 2013; Woolf-King et al., 2019), a concerted effort was made to recruit a diverse sample, particularly in terms of relationship status and sexual orientation. The final sample, however, still presented as primarily heterosexual and married couples. Arguably, a larger sample size might have added greater diversity to the sample, which may have made the study's findings more representative of the experiences of couples with different relationship statuses and sexual orientations. The study is therefore limited by not having included a higher number of same-sex participants or participants who are exclusively cohabiting, which would have reflected the demographics of South African couples more accurately.

Acknowledging the limitations of this study does not negate its value or contributions. Instead, the limitations are seen as a natural component of any research action to be completed. Moreover, giving consideration to the study's limitations offers opportunities for growth and improvement regarding associated future research.

7.5. Recommendations for future research

In view of the contributions and limitations of the present study, a number of recommendations for future research are made. The scarcity of local studies suggests a need for South African research exploring mindfulness, attachment, and relationship satisfaction within intimate relationships. In particular, few local studies have explored the associations between relationship satisfaction and both mindfulness and attachment, respectively. The paucity of research in these areas indicates a need for quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research studies exploring these constructs amongst the South African population. Further studies in this area would allow for comparisons to be made regarding different patterns and themes identified in local couples' experiences.

Studies using larger samples than the current investigation might also offer increased diversity in terms of participants' experiences. Moreover, duplicating the present study amongst different populations of couples may offer further insights into the presentation of,

and association between, mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction. In particular, exploring the experiences of same-sex couples, couples who are in cohabiting rather than married relationships, couples in different stages of life, as well as couples in second or third marriages, may offer novel findings regarding their mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences. Longitudinal studies of this kind may also offer insight into the possible progression of mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples over the course of longer-term relationships.

In the present study, couples in psychotherapy or using psychiatric medication at the time of this research were excluded from the sample in order to prevent the possible influence of such treatment on the couple's experience. It may, however, also be of value to explore the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of these couples to determine the impact of psychotherapy and/or medication in this regard. Similarly, exploring specific vulnerable couple populations, such as those affected by infidelity, substance abuse or intimate partner violence, may also offer new insights.

The pattern of similarity between partners' satisfaction scores observed in this study also warrants further research exploring the degree to which partners have similar satisfaction experiences in terms of their relationships. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches to methodology may be informative in this regard.

Bearing in mind the range of internal and external factors identified as influencing the relationship entity, research exploring each of these factors may be of value. For instance, with respect to partners' internal dialogue as an intrapersonal attribute within the intimate relationship entity, further studies exploring the nature of partners' internal dialogues may be valuable as far as identifying additional ways to assist couples in obtaining optimal relationship functioning and flourishing are concerned. Furthermore, based on the experiences of the current study's participants, the role of gender norms, in particular, in participants' internal dialogues was recognised. Therefore, future studies exploring the role of gender norms, both in partners' internal dialogues and the presentation of the various components of the relationship entity, are recommended. The results from such studies may

inform both theory and practice with regard to gender inequality within intimate relationships.

Moreover, given the importance of presence, not only within the relationship entity, but also as an identified facilitator of the relationship between mindfulness and attachment, further research into presence in relationships, as well as other possible relational presence-enhancing mechanisms is indicated. In general, further research exploring all the different components of the relationship entity, as well as the various reciprocal relationships between them, may provide further insight into the experiences of partners in intimate relationships. These components, which operate by means of a reciprocal exchange, include change and growth, internal and external influences, relational presence, presence-enhancing behaviours, relational alignment, communication, mindfulness, and attachment.

Furthermore, given that the current investigation is the first South African study to be contextualised within an interpersonal neurobiology framework (IPNB), the existing body of knowledge on intimate relationships, especially in South Africa, would be likely to benefit from further studies using this integrative framework. Bearing in mind the centrality of both mindfulness and attachment to the IPNB framework, it is, arguably, a suitable structure within which to frame future studies investigating both constructs. Moreover, such an integrated approach to intimate relationship functioning as offered by IPNB may enable more nuanced insights regarding intimate relationship health and functioning, as well as individual partner health and functioning.

Finally, given the proposed key contribution of my novel conceptualisation of the intimate relationship organism to existing bodies of work, future research applying this conceptualisation is recommended. In particular, such further investigations of the applicability of this conceptualisation to different South African and international populations will arguably contribute to a better understanding of the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples in intimate relationships, while continuing to inform practice with regards to optimal relational functioning.

7.6. Conclusion

The current research is therefore viewed as contributing to the overall body of knowledge on the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples, specifically South African couples. Furthermore, the findings contribute to the broader psychological understanding of the constructs of mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction. The data gathered also led to several novel findings and insights regarding the presentation of intimate relationships and, particularly, the role of mindfulness and attachment within couple relationships. Notably, this study may be seen as contributing to the understanding of the relationship between mindfulness and attachment by identifying some of the previously unidentified constructs facilitating this relationship. Apart from the contributions made to the literature on mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction, findings from this study also offered some valuable suggestions for clinical practice with couples within the field of psychology and psychotherapy. In particular, the findings of this study indicate ways in which couples can flourish within their intimate relationships.

Both the participants and I are believed to have benefitted from the study. As a researcher, the knowledge that I have gained from analysing participant experiences has further enhanced my own understanding and work with couples in private practice. Therefore, the knowledge gained by conducting this research may have also benefitted couples who were unrelated to the study. In addition, judging from the participants' reported experiences following their participation in the first round of interviews, it may be concluded that the opportunity to think about and discuss their relationships with me, consequently also led to opportunities for insight, change and growth within the participants and their relationships. Finally, it is my hope that the findings presented in this study will contribute to both practice and further research in such a way that the lives of couples in intimate relationships will continue to be enhanced by the legacy thereof.

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Note regarding appendices

Please note, since commencing the study in 2016, a change in the researcher's surname, as well as a change in supervisors has occurred.

For that reason, some of the appendices include documentation that reflects the researcher's old surname (Wolmarans) and refer to the previous supervisor (Dr Anja Botha).

APPENDIX A: Ethical clearance**Faculty of the Humanities**

31-Jan-2017

Dear **Mrs Wolmarans**Ethics Clearance: **The mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples**Principal Investigator: **Mrs Bridget Wolmarans**Department: **Psychology (Bloemfontein Campus)****APPLICATION APPROVED**

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of the Humanities. I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Research Ethics Committee of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: **UFS-HSD2016/1458**

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted for one year from issuance. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours Sincerely

Prof. Robert Peacock

Chair: Research Ethics Committee

Faculty of the Humanities



Faculty of the Humanites

10-Nov-2017

Dear **Mrs Wolmarans**

Ethics Clearance: **The mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples**

Principal Investigator: **Mrs Bridget Wolmarans**

Department: **Psychology (Bloemfontein Campus)**

APPLICATION FOR EXTENSION APPROVED

With reference to your application for extension for ethical clearance with the Faculty of the Humanities, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Research Ethics Committee of the faculty that you have been granted extension from **10-Nov-2017 to 10-Nov-2018** with the assumption that there are no major changes with regards to the study.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: **UFS-HSD2016/1458**

Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension again.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting the application for extension. We wish you every success with your research.

Yours Sincerely



Prof. Robert Peacock

Chair: Research Ethics Committee

Faculty of the Humanities



Faculty of the Humanities

23-Mar-2018

Dear Mrs Wolmarans

Ethics Clearance: **The mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples**

Principal Investigator: Mrs Bridget Wolmarans

Department: **Psychology (Bloemfontein Campus)**

APPLICATION APPROVED

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of the Humanities. I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Research Ethics Committee of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: **UFS-HSD2016/1458**

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted from 23-Mar-2018 to 23-Mar-2019. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours Sincerely



Dr. Asta Rau
Chair: Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of the Humanities





APPENDIX B: Call for participants

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

Research study on the Mindfulness, Attachment and Satisfaction Experiences of Couples

WHAT IS RESEARCH?

Research is something we do to find new knowledge about the way things and people work. We use research projects or studies to help us find out more about people and the things that affect their lives, families and wellbeing. Research also helps us to find better ways of helping, or treating, people who are experiencing intra- or inter- personal difficulty. We do this to try and make the world a better place!

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The aim of the current study is to explore the experiences of mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction within intimate relationships of South African couples. The findings may inform practice with regard to increasing not only relationship satisfaction, but also addressing the well-being of South African family systems as a whole.

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

The research study is being done by **Bridget O'Neill Wolmarans** (Researcher) under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Anja Botha from the Department of Psychology at the University of the Free State. Bridget O'Neill Wolmarans is a HPCSA registered Clinical Psychologist in private practice in Cape Town, South Africa.

REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION:

In order to participate, you must be:

- A couple in a romantic/intimate relationship (heterosexual/homosexual)
- Married or cohabiting for at least 12 months, and
- Neither partner should currently be in psychotherapy or treatment for any mental disorder

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF PARTICIPATION?

The total expected duration of participation per couple will be around 3 to 4 hours, spread over two days, a few months apart during 2018. Participation will involve participants completing three paper questionnaires, as well two semi-structured interviews conducted with each couple. Semi-structured interviews provide a deeper exploration and understanding of a person's experience and context. The

interviews will be recorded with a voice recorder and saved as an audio file. All information provided by couples during the course of their participation in this study will be handled with confidentiality in mind. Only the researcher will have access to the names and personal contact information of participants.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS & ANTICIPATED INCONVENIENCE OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

No monetary compensation will be provided to couples or individuals who participate in this study. Any costs related to participation in this study incurred by the participants, will be for their own account. Apart from the time commitment and travel costs incurred by participants, no immediate level of inconvenience and/or discomfort is expected. However, any process of introspection for a couple and/or individual, always carries with it a potential risk of some intra- or inter- personal consequences. To compensate couples for their time invested to participate in the study, a free feedback session will be given to each couple following the data analysis. The feedback session will include information on their couple profile, information on mindfulness, and suggestions to improve relationship satisfaction.

CONTACT

To be considered for participation in the study, or to request more detailed information on the research, please contact **Bridget O'Neill Wolmarans** (Researcher) on 021 595 0097 or bridget@tranquilmind.co.za or www.tranquilmind.co.za.

Department of Psychology / Departement Sielkunde

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APPENDIX C: Submission to participate

March 2018

SUBMISSION TO PARTICIPATE

STUDY: Mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples

By completing and signing this form, identified parties indicate their willingness to participate in the above-mentioned study. Final confirmation of participant selection for the study will be provided by the researcher following receipt of completed form. Only participants who meet the research selection criteria can be considered for the study.

We, the undersigned, hereby confirm our willingness and availability to participate in the study.

PARTICIPANT A	PARTICIPANT B
Name:	Name:
Surname:	Surname:
Contact no: (h/w)	Contact no: (h/w)
Cell:	Cell:
Email:	Email:
Home language:	Home language:
Male / Female	Male / Female
<p><i>I confirm that: (please tick appropriate box)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I am South African <input type="checkbox"/> I have been married to and/or cohabiting with Participant B for more than a year <input type="checkbox"/> I am <u>not</u> currently in treatment for a mental disorder <input type="checkbox"/> We are <u>not</u> currently in psychotherapy <input type="checkbox"/> I have read both the <i>Call for Participation & the Participant Consent Form</i> 	<p><i>I confirm that: (please tick appropriate box)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I am South African <input type="checkbox"/> I have been married to and/or cohabiting with Participant A for more than a year <input type="checkbox"/> I am <u>not</u> currently in treatment for a mental disorder <input type="checkbox"/> We are <u>not</u> currently in psychotherapy <input type="checkbox"/> I have read both the <i>Call for Participation & the Participant Consent Form</i>
Signature: _____	Signature: _____
Date: _____	Date: _____

Availability

The following dates will suit us best for participation in the respective phases of the research study:
(*Please select all dates that you would be able to participate. Final dates will be confirmed.*)

PHASE 1 (approx. 2.5 hours incl. interview & questionnaires)	<i>Tick please</i>	PHASE 2 (approx. 1.5 hours)	<i>Tick please</i>
20 August 2018 (9:00 – 20:00)		Dates to be confirmed	
21 August 2018 (18:00 – 20:00)		Estimated period: Sept-Nov 2018	
27 August 2018 (9:00 – 13:00)			
28 August 2018 (17:30 – 20:00)			
29 August 2018 (15:00 – 18:00)			
1 September 2018 (9:00 – 17:00)			
2 September 2018 (9:00 – 17:00)			
3 September 2018 (9:00 – 20:00)			

** If you are participating at the venue, it will take approximately 2.5 hours for phase 1. This will include both the questionnaires and the interview. The above time slots are applicable.*

** If you are participating via Skype/online, it will take approximately 1.5 hours for the interview. The questionnaires can then be completed electronically and returned to me. The interview can be scheduled in one of the above time blocks.*

At the venue:

Room 304
Westport Square
Sandown Road
West Beach
(Bloubergstrand)

Alternatively:

Questionnaires via email
Interviews via Skype

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. The researcher will be in contact with you upon receipt of this form.

Department of Psychology / Departement Sielkunde

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**APPENDIX D: Participant consent form****RESEARCH STUDY INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM****DATE**

August 2016 to December 2019

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples

PRINCIPLE RESEARCHER NAME AND CONTACT NUMBERS(S):

Bridget O'Neill Wolmarans 2011163090 021 595 0097 or 076 360 3667

FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT:

*The Humanities
Department of Psychology*

STUDYLEADER NAME AND CONTACT NUMBER:

*Dr. Anja Botha
051 401 2188*

WHAT IS RESEARCH?

Research is something we do to find new knowledge about the way things and people work. We use research projects or studies to help us find out more about people and the things that affect their lives, families and well-being. Research also helps us to find better ways of helping, or treating, people who are experiencing intra- or inter- personal difficulty. We do this to try and make the world a better place!

WHAT IS THE AIM/PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The aim of the current study is to explore the experiences of mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction within intimate relationships of South African couples. The primary research question is: What are the mindfulness, attachment and satisfaction experiences of couples in their intimate relationships? The data obtained to answer this question will be complemented by a secondary research question, namely: Is there a significant relationship between mindfulness and attachment; and mindfulness and relationship satisfaction?

This study will provide a better understanding of the intimate relationship experiences of South African couples. The findings may inform practice with regards to increasing not only relationship satisfaction, but also addressing the well-being of South African family systems as a whole. The current study further aims to meet a gap in existing research by adding to the body of research exploring mindfulness, attachment, and relationship satisfaction.

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

The research study is being done by Bridget O'Neill Wolmarans (Researcher) under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Anja Botha from the Department of Psychology at the University of the Free State.

Bridget O'Neill Wolmarans is a HPCSA registered Clinical Psychologist in private practice in Cape Town, South Africa. Following an Integrative Approach, she is passionate about the field of psychology both academically and in practice. She has a special interest in contemplative practices (Mindfulness) and Intimate Relationships, which also forms a big part of her practice with patients.

Bridget firmly believes that intimate relationships are the foundation on which our society and the families in it are built. Practicing from an ecosystemic framework, she recognises the interconnectedness of systems and its members. Accordingly, unhealthy intimate relationships create unhealthy family systems which in turn leads to unhealthy societies. This is especially important in the South African context considering the psychosocial stressors facing couples and families in our country. Results from this study will guide treatment and psychotherapy with couples and families in practice.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?

This study has received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the UFS. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher.

Approval number: *UFS-HSD2016/1458*

WHY ARE YOU INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

A call for participants were sent to several psychology practices and community organisations and/or posted on their social media platforms. The goal is to recruit 10 to 12 couples in intimate relationships through a process of purposive sampling. In order to participate, couples must be married or cohabiting for at least 12 months and neither partner should currently be in treatment for any mental disorder, or in a couple psychotherapy process. Couples who have been married or cohabiting for 12 months or longer are more likely to have reached a bonding stage of relationship development where relationships become more consolidated, stable and committed.

The goal is also to recruit a participant sample that reflects the diversity of sexual orientations found within intimate relationships. A review of the literature has shown that the majority of research focused on intimate relationships, both locally and internationally, continue to include only heterosexual couples. Accordingly, the current research project aims to include an equal number of heterosexual and homosexual couples.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The first stage of participation in the study involves an in-depth semi-structured interview conducted with each couple, as well as three questionnaires to be completed by each partner. Semi-structured interviews provide a deeper exploration and understanding of a person's experience and context. Examples of some of the questions that may be asked include "How do you know when your partner is stressed?", "What makes you believe your partner is committed to you?" and "What contributes to the quality of your relationship?" Each couple will be interviewed as a unit. Partners will be asked to complete the three questionnaires individually and will not be allowed to see or discuss each other's answers during the first phase of participation.

The second stage of participation involves another in-depth semi-structured interview. The questions for this interview will be based on the information collected from the couples during the first stage of participation. The second interview will take place on a different day than the first interview and questionnaires, approximately 3 months after the first interview.

The expected duration for each interview is between 60 and 90 minutes. Completion of the three questionnaires is estimated to take around 40-50 minutes. The total expected duration of participation per couple will therefore be around 3 to 4 hours, split over two days, a few months apart.

Both interviews conducted with the couple will be recorded and saved as an audio file to enable the researcher to perform the necessary data analysis. Confidentiality will be maintained on these files at all times. Only the researcher will have the means to identify the respective participants.

CAN THE PARTICIPANT WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

Participation in this study is voluntary and couples are under no obligation to consent to participation. No individual or couple will be disadvantaged in any way should they choose not to participate in the

study. Couples who do decide to take part will be given this information sheet to keep and will also be asked to sign a written consent form. Couples are free to withdraw at any time during stage one or two of participation without giving a reason. However, once both stages of the information gathering phases (interviews and questionnaires) are completed, and the information integrated into the information analysis and interpretation phase of the study, withdrawal will no longer be possible.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

Information gathered during the course of this study will provide a better understanding of the intimate relationship experiences of South African couples. The findings may inform practice with regards to increasing not only relationship satisfaction, but also addressing the well-being of South African family systems as a whole. The data gathered during the course of this study may also be presented at academic/scientific conferences and/or published in academic journals. However, the highest levels of confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study and no personal information of participants will be given/sold to third parties.

Couples will not be advantaged or compensated in any way should they decide to participate in the study. However, the information gathering process (interviews and questionnaires) may lead to some personal insights and growth related to their own relationships.

WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED INCONVENIENCE OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

Couples participating in the study will be expected to make themselves available for participation on the days and at the venue as identified by the researcher. While every attempt will be made to accommodate couples and timeously inform them of the venue, dates and times, the overall schedule of the study cannot be adjusted to suit individual participants. The financial costs incurred by a couple/individual due to their participation in the study, for e.g. travel costs and time away from employment, will not be compensated by the researcher.

Apart from the time commitment and travel costs incurred by participants, no immediate level of inconvenience and/or discomfort is expected. However, any process of introspection for a couple and/or individual, always carries with it a potential risk of some intra- or inter- personal consequences. For this reason, couples and/or individuals experiencing any emotional or psychological discord during the study, will be referred for psychotherapy to Clinical Psychologist, Dr. Ilze van der Merwe (Tel. 021 557 7547 or drilze@mweb.co.za). Alternatively, participants will have the option to select a psychologist of their choice. In both cases, a referral letter will be sent by the researcher to the relevant psychologist. Psychotherapy services rendered will be for the participants' own account for as long as is deemed necessary. Should participants not be able to make financial provision for psychotherapy, they will be referred to establishments where there are limited or no charge services offered, for example Welgevallen Community Psychology Clinic (021 808 2696), Tygerberg Hospital Psychology Services (021 938 5120) and FAMSA (021 447 0170).

WILL WHAT I SAY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

All information provided by couples during their participation in this study will be handled with confidentiality in mind. Only the researcher will have access to the names and personal contact information of participants. Accordingly, no one else will be able to connect participants to the information they provided. The information provided by couples will be given a fictitious code number and/or pseudonym according to which they will be referred to in the data, any publications or other research activities such as conferences. In the event that a transcriber must be used to process couple interviews, the identified party will be required to maintain confidentiality. In such a case, a contract stipulating the boundaries of confidentiality will be signed.

While the identity of participating couples will be protected, their answers to the questionnaires and during the interviews may be reviewed by individuals responsible for ensuring that research is done properly, for e.g. an external coder, the researcher's supervisor, and members of the Research Ethics Committee. This anonymous data may also be used in academic publications, journal articles,

conference presentations, etc. As stated, couples and individual participants will not be identifiable in these instances.

The same limitations to confidentiality will apply as in clinical practice. Therefore, during the course of data collection and contact with participants the researcher will be legally expected to disclose information to other parties or authorities if:

- Participants are found to be a danger to themselves, for example planning to seriously harm themselves. In such an event, the researcher will also make the necessary arrangements to help ensure the participants' safety.
- Participants are found to be a danger to others. Therefore, if their past/present actions or their planned actions for the future indicate the threat of serious harm to another person/s.
- During data collection, the researcher is informed of any form of abuse, be it emotional, physical or sexual in nature.
- The researcher is ordered by a court of law, for whatever reason, to provide information regarding the content of data collected.

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?

The hard copies of the questionnaires completed by participants, as well as transcripts of the interviews conducted with them, will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked filing cabinet at her clinical practice for future research and/or academic purposes. The information will also be stored electronically on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable.

The researcher holds the same professional and ethical attitude towards the information obtained from research participants as she does towards the information of patients in her clinical practice. The emotional, mental and psychological distress that could result from others identifying a couple's participation in the research are therefore given serious consideration.

Once the five-year period expires, all hard copies of participant information will be destroyed through a process of shredding. All electronic copies of the information will be deleted from the researcher's computer, as well as all backup systems, after a period of 8 years.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

No monetary compensation will be provided to couples or individuals who participate in this study. Any costs related to participation in this study incurred by the participants, will be for their own account. To compensate couples for their time invested to participate in the study, a free feedback session will be given to each couple following the data analysis. The feedback session will include information on their couple profile, information on mindfulness, and suggestions to improve relationship satisfaction.

HOW WILL THE PARTICIPANT BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS / RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

Should participants wish to be informed of the final research findings, they can contact **Bridget O'Neill Wolmarans** (*Researcher*) on 021 595 0097 or bridget@tranquilmind.co.za or www.tranquilmind.co.za. The findings are accessible for 1 year.

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, you can also do so at the abovementioned contact details.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Dr. Anja Botha on 051 401 2188 or BothaA@ufs.ac.za.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (*participant name*), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had it explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable). I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings.

I agree to the audio recording of the interviews.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Full name of participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Full name of Researcher: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

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APPENDIX E: Questionnaires



Participant code: _____ **DATE:** _____ 2018
(*For official use only)

QUESTIONNAIRES for participants to complete individually

PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS

Section A:

Please enter answer or place a tick in the appropriate box.

1. **Date of birth** _____ (dd/mm/yyyy)

2. **Gender**

Male

Female

3. **Relationship status**

Married

Cohabiting
(but not married)

4. **Partner's Gender**

Male

Female

5. **Number of years
married and/or
cohabiting**

1 – 5

5 – 10

10 – 15

15 – 20

20 – 25

25 +

6. **Highest Qualification**

Std 8 / Gr. 10

Matric

Diploma

Undergraduate Degree

Postgraduate Degree

7. **Race**

Asian

Black

Coloured

Indian

White

Other

8. **Occupation** _____

The rest of the questionnaire (Section B – D) consists of a series of statements. There is no right or wrong answer to these statements. The only requirement is that you give your honest opinion in relation to your own thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

Read the instructions to all sections carefully before answering. Please complete all sections of the questionnaire. **Please don't show or discuss your answers to these questions with your partner until the research process is completed.**

Section B:

The questions in this section relates specifically to your CURRENT relationship. Please be honest. There is no right or wrong answer.

1. Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship. (Tick the appropriate box)

Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A Little Unhappy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy	Perfect
0	1	2	3	4	5

Most people have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

	Always Agree	Almost Always Agree	Occasionally Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree
2. Amount of time spent together	0	1	2	3	4	5
3. Making major decisions	0	1	2	3	4	5
4. Demonstrations of affection	0	1	2	3	4	5

Indicate to what degree the following statements apply for you.

	All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
5. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?	0	1	2	3	4	5
6. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?	0	1	2	3	4	5

Indicate the degree to which the following statements are true for you personally in terms of your current relationship.

	Not at all true	A little true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Almost completely true	Completely true
7. I still feel a strong connection with my partner	0	1	2	3	4	5
8. If I had my life to live over, I would marry or live with the same person	0	1	2	3	4	5
9. Our relationship is strong	0	1	2	3	4	5
10. I sometimes wonder if there is someone else out there for me	0	1	2	3	4	5
11. My relationship with my partner makes me happy	0	1	2	3	4	5

	Not at all true	A little true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Almost completely true	Completely true
12. I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner	0	1	2	3	4	5
13. I can't imagine ending my relationship with my partner	0	1	2	3	4	5
14. I feel that I can confide in my partner about virtually anything	0	1	2	3	4	5
15. I have had second thoughts about this relationship recently	0	1	2	3	4	5
16. For me, my partner is the perfect romantic partner	0	1	2	3	4	5
17. I really feel like part of a team with my partner	0	1	2	3	4	5
18. I cannot imagine another person making me as happy as my partner does	0	1	2	3	4	5

For the following items, select the answer that best describes your feelings/experience.

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Mostly	Almost completely	Completely
19. How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?	0	1	2	3	4	5
20. How well does your partner meet your needs?	0	1	2	3	4	5
21. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?	0	1	2	3	4	5
22. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?	0	1	2	3	4	5

	Worse than all others (extremely bad)					Better than all others (extremely good)
23. How good is your relationship compared to most?	0	1	2	3	4	5

	Never	Less than once a month	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Once a day	More often
24. Do you enjoy your partner's company?	0	1	2	3	4	5
25. How often do you and your partner have fun together?	0	1	2	3	4	5

For each of the following items, select the answer that best describes *how you feel about your relationship*. Base your responses on your first impressions and immediate feelings about the item.

26.	INTERESTING	0	1	2	3	4	5	BORING
27.	BAD	0	1	2	3	4	5	GOOD
28.	FULL	0	1	2	3	4	5	EMPTY
29.	LONELY	0	1	2	3	4	5	FRIENDLY
30.	STURDY	0	1	2	3	4	5	FRAGILE
31.	DISCOURAGING	0	1	2	3	4	5	HOPEFUL
32.	ENJOYABLE	0	1	2	3	4	5	MISERABLE

Section C:

Below is a collection of statements about your everyday experience. Using the 1-5 scale below, please indicate how true these statements are for you personally. Please answer according to what really reflects your experience rather than what you think your experience should be. Please treat each item separately from every other item. Indicate the number that best represents your experiences.

1	2	3	4	5
Never or very rarely true	Rarely true	Sometimes true	Often true	Very often or always true

	Never or very rarely true	Rarely true	Sometimes true	Often true	Very often or always true
1. When I'm walking, I deliberately notice the sensations of my body moving.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I'm good at finding words to describe my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I criticise myself for having irrational or inappropriate emotions.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I perceive my feelings and emotions without having to react to them.	1	2	3	4	5
5. When I do things, my mind wanders off and I'm easily distracted.	1	2	3	4	5
6. When I take a shower or bath, I stay alert to the sensations of water on my body.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I can easily put my beliefs, opinions and expectations into words.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I don't pay attention to what I'm doing because I'm daydreaming, worrying or otherwise distracted.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I watch my feelings without getting lost in them.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I tell myself I shouldn't be feeling the way I'm feeling.	1	2	3	4	5

	Never or very rarely true	Rarely true	Sometimes true	Often true	Very often or always true
11. I notice how food and drinks affect my thoughts, bodily sensations and emotions.	1	2	3	4	5
12. It's hard for me to find the words to describe what I'm thinking.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I am easily distracted.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I believe some of my thoughts are abnormal or bad and I shouldn't think that way.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I pay attention to sensations such as the wind in my hair or the sun on my face.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I have trouble thinking of the right words to express how I feel about things.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I make judgements about whether my thoughts are good or bad.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.	1	2	3	4	5
19. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I "step back" and am aware of the thought or image without getting taken over by it.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I pay attention to sounds such as clocks ticking, birds chirping or cars passing by.	1	2	3	4	5
21. In difficult situations, I can pause without immediately reacting.	1	2	3	4	5
22. When I have a sensation in my body, it's difficult for me to describe it because I can't find the right words.	1	2	3	4	5
23. It seems I am "running on automatic" without much awareness of what I'm doing.	1	2	3	4	5
24. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I feel calm soon after.	1	2	3	4	5
25. I tell myself I shouldn't be thinking the way I'm thinking.	1	2	3	4	5
26. I notice the smells and aromas of things.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Even when I'm feeling terribly upset, I can find a way to put it into words.	1	2	3	4	5
28. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.	1	2	3	4	5
29. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I am able to notice them without reacting.	1	2	3	4	5

	Never or very rarely true	Rarely true	Sometimes true	Often true	Very often or always true
30. I think some of my emotions are bad or inappropriate and I shouldn't feel them.	1	2	3	4	5
31. I notice visual elements in art or nature, such as colours, shapes, textures or patterns of light & shadow.	1	2	3	4	5
32. My natural tendency is to put my experiences into words.	1	2	3	4	5
33. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I just notice them and let them go.	1	2	3	4	5
34. I do jobs or tasks automatically without being aware of what I'm doing.	1	2	3	4	5
35. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I judge myself as good or bad, depending what the thought/image is about.	1	2	3	4	5
36. I pay attention to how my emotions affect my thoughts and behaviour.	1	2	3	4	5
37. I can usually describe how I feel at the moment in considerable detail.	1	2	3	4	5
38. I find myself doing things without paying attention.	1	2	3	4	5
39. I disapprove of myself when I have irrational ideas.	1	2	3	4	5

Section D:

The statements below concern how you feel in emotionally intimate relationships. We are interested in how you GENERALLY experience relationships, not just in terms of what is happening in your current relationship. Using the 1-7 scale below, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement. Please answer according to what really reflects your experience rather than what you think your experience should be. Please treat each item separately from every other item.

1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Slightly Disagree 4 Neither Agree or Disagree 5 Slightly Agree 6 Agree 7 Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
2. I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him or her.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I worry a lot about my relationships.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. When my partner is out of sight, I worry that he or she might become interested in someone else.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. When I show my feelings for romantic partners, I'm afraid they will not feel the same about me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I rarely worry about my partner leaving me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. My romantic partner makes me doubt myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. I do often worry about being abandoned.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Sometimes romantic partners change their feelings about me for no apparent reason.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. I'm afraid that once a romantic partner gets to know me, he or she won't like who I really am.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. It makes me mad that I don't get the affection and support I need from my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. I worry that I won't measure up to other people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. My partner only seems to notice me when I'm angry.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
21. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. It's not difficult for me to get close to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30. I tell my partner just about everything.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
31. I talk things over with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32. I am nervous when my partner get too close to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
33. I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
34. I find it easy to depend on romantic partners.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
35. It's easy for me to be affectionate with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
36. My partner really understands me and my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Thank you.

APPENDIX F: Semi-structured interview 1

Rapport building questions used at the start of the first interview:

1. Is this the first time that you've participated in a research study of this kind?
2. Have you ever had any contact with a psychologist before?
3. Have you had any counselling together as a couple or participated in couple/relationship workshops before?

These questions were used to build rapport with the couple, but also served as an introduction to providing participants with an overview of the interview process to follow.

Overview of interview process discussed with participants:

- a. What will be happening during the interview, including time frame and number of questions.
- b. Reminder that interview will be recorded. The purpose, use and storage of the recording was discussed.
- c. Direct instructions to participants: Many of the questions included in this interview might be personal in nature and even require you to think about your relationship in ways that you have not done before or that you have not spoken to one another about. It is important to remember that each of you might have different thoughts, experiences or perceptions of these questions. The goal of these questions and the study is to understand relationships better. There are no right or wrong answers, and your relationship is not being judged or scored as right/wrong, or good/bad. With these questions, I am merely trying to gain understanding and learn from real-life relationship like your own. If you do, however, feel a bit emotionally unsettled at the end of the interview, or even once you get home in the days that follow, please contact me so that I can put you into contact with a professional person that can assist you. On the positive side, in hearing one another's answers to these questions today, you are also busy learning more about each other and your relationship and building intimacy in the process. So you might even leave here with some food for thought that could spark some interesting conversations once you get home.

- d. Any questions from participants addressed.

Semi-structured interview questions:

1. How would you describe your relationship or bond with your partner? (*Attachment*)
2. How do you create intimacy (closeness) in your relationship with your partner? (*Attachment*)
3. What makes you believe that your partner is committed to you? (*Attachment*)
4. What are the ways in which you express and demonstrate your love and affection for your partner? (*Attachment*)
5. What contributes to the quality or nature of your relationship? (*Satisfaction*)
6. In what ways does your partner meet your needs? (*Satisfaction*)
7. What is it that you enjoy or value about your partner's company? (*Satisfaction*)
8. How do you know what your partner's needs are in different situations? (*Mindfulness*)
9. Do you exclusively schedule quality time together as a couple? Or is your time together part of your usual daily activities & tasks? (*Mindfulness/Attachment*)
10. Is your time spend together shared with children/pets/TV/cell phones or other demands? (*Mindfulness*)
11. What is your communication like? What is good or bad about it? (*Attachment*)
12. How do you handle conflict in your relationship? (*Attachment/Mindfulness/Satisfaction*)
13. When you are experiencing a disagreement or when your partner has done something deemed "wrong", what does your internal sense-making or reaction look like? What do you tell yourself about the disagreement or their intentions etc.? (*Attachment/Mindfulness*)
14. How do you handle/respond to strong emotions in yourself and your partner? (*Attachment/Mindfulness*)
15. How do you know when your partner is happy/sad/angry...can you identify their feelings? (*Mindfulness*)
16. When reacting to one another, do you feel as if you respond only to what the other person has explicitly said or done or also to what you feel is implied in their behaviour/words? (*Attachment/Mindfulness*)
17. Do you ever think about the internal world (thoughts/feelings/experiences) of your partner? Imagine what is going on in their head? (*Attunement*)

18. Do you ever place yourself in your partner's shoes, so to speak, thinking about what their experience of a joined situation might be? (*Attunement*)
19. If so, does it change how you think/feel about or react to them?
20. In what ways does your partner express their emotional availability to you when you are feeling emotionally distressed? (*Attachment*)
21. Do you ever express your needs for closeness to your partner? And if so, how do you experience their response? (*Attachment*)
22. In what ways do you think your relationship is similar and different to that of other couples? (*Mindfulness*)

* *Follow-up questions were asked as necessary based on participants' responses.*

APPENDIX G: Semi-structured interview 2

Overview of interview process discussed with participants:

- a. Interview process the same as first interview.
- b. Again, there are no right or wrong answers to the questions. Simply answer as to what is true for them.
- c. Questions for this interview are based on some of the themes that came out of initial analysis of the first interview question answers.
- d. Some questions asked might seem similar to questions from the first interview, as I am trying to get into the nuances of their previous answers and the themes that were revealed.

Semi-structured interview questions:

1. I know it is a few months ago already, so memory might not be that great, but can you tell me a bit about your experiences during and after the first interview and the questionnaires you filled out? Any new realisations or thoughts about your relationship or partner, or even conversations started between you as a result of some of what was discussed in the interview and questionnaires?
2. Looking back at your (number of) years together, what are the ways in which your relationship has changed over these years?
3. And in what ways have the changes improved and/or damaged your relationship?
4. How much do you feel you have individually changed or grown in your own life and being over these years together?
5. In which ways has your individual experiences/growth/change/lives affected or influenced your relationship?
6. What are some of the external factors that have impacted your relationship over the last (number of) years together? Both positively and negatively.
7. And what are some of the events/situations that have occurred within your relationship over the years that has affected and impacted it – whether positively or negatively.
8. How did you navigate these internal/external influences? Were you able to limit their impact or was it more of an after-the-fact-damage-control approach?

9. If we imagine that each of you came into this relationship with a suitcase packed full of experiences and lessons from your respective families in which you grew up...what are some of the experiences and lessons you think you brought in with you from your family about intimate relationships?
10. How has these experiences/lessons influenced or impacted your relationship and its dynamics?
11. In your experience and opinion, what influences the alignment or connection between the two of you as a couple? What makes you feel more or less aligned/connected?
12. In what ways does your daily interactions (as a couple) and life demands influence your bond as a couple?
13. If other people were to look at you as a couple, what do you imagine they would see or notice about the connection/alignment/space between you?
14. Is being available and accessible to each other important in your relationship? How do you practically maintain availability and accessibility with one another?
15. How do you practically remain engaged with one another – even when you are not occupying the same space/activity?
16. How important is growth in the relationship? What does “growing” in your relationship mean for you? How do you stimulate or generate growth in your own relationship?
17. What are the practical ways in which you remain present or “plugged in” with each other?
18. As couples, we have to find a balance between our life as individuals (including our goals, dreams, occupations) and our relationship with our partners. How do you each manage that balance between relationship intimacy and individual independence?
19. How do you generally navigate differences between the two of you – in personality, levels of affection, communication, age, race etc? (as applicable to each couple)
20. To each individual: What is your deepest wish or desire for your relationship with your partner?

APPENDIX H: Reflexive journaling excerpts

Sitting down to write my first official reflection of my PhD research process, I am somewhat amused to realise the synchronicity of it all. The 7th of May, 2015. The date on the first page of my ring-bound notebook. Exactly a year, minus two days, since I first sat down to start thinking, writing notes, reading and planning what was ultimately to become this PhD study. And today, a year later, the proposal has passed through the initial sub-committee and is on its way to be tabled at the Departmental Research Committee.

That ring-bound Piccadilly-elephant-and-butterflies-notebook has become my trusted companion and confidant through this process. Its first few pages captured my free-floating thoughts and ideas on what personally and professionally interests me from a psychological point of view, while drawing on my own life experiences, as well as what I've learned working with patients in practice. The practical application of research and theory has always been important to me, and has perhaps been one of the driving requirements behind the shaping of my PhD study. Slowly but surely, the personal musings, free-floating ideas and brain-storming made way for the more factual notes and record keeping related to this study.

Once I identified the variables I was most interested in, I spend a month searching EBSCOhost for relevant articles. Once I've downloaded all the relevant articles, I spend the subsequent few months reading through these articles, making notes and indexing them for future use. This process provided me with a helpful overview of the current research, but also helped to further shape my conceptualisation of my own study.

By October 2015, I had a fair idea of what it was that I was hoping to do and achieve with a potential PhD research study. Following a telephonic meeting with my prospective research supervisor, the study not only became better defined, but swiftly moved from an idea in my mind of "I think I'm doing a PhD study" to "I am doing a PhD study!"

As far as learning and growth is concerned, this study has already given me an opportunity to expand my knowledge in terms of qualitative research methodology. Both at honours and master's level, my research had been quantitatively focused. Working qualitatively is therefore a completely new experience for me, but one that I suspect I might actually enjoy a lot more.

Qualitative inquiry seems to be much more in line with the natural line of inquiry of a psychologist in practice.

My husband and I also participated in a couples workshop based on attachment theory recently. I have found it to be an interesting practical experience of much of the theory I've been working through. It has also stimulated my own thinking as I continue to write the literature chapters. In particular, the idea presented during the workshop of securely attached partners as being accessible, responsive and engaged has proved helpful in my practical work with patients in couple therapy, but also in stimulating my thinking around the role of mindfulness in mediating these qualities. This integration between research and practice have again emphasised the importance I attach to theory being practically applicable in practice.

I have had to adjust my projected work timeline, as it quickly became clear that the writing of the literature was going to take a lot longer than I initially anticipated. My supervisor confirmed that this part was indeed the most time consuming, but her continued encouragement regarding my progress with first draft literature sections send in for her review, has kept me motivated to keep going.

My reading of the literature on intimate relationships continues to influence my practice and thinking with couples. For example, Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) orientation to communication emphasised for me the way in which we think about conflict and communication in relationships. According to them, opposing forces are a given in relationships, and should not necessarily be resolved. Instead, the dialogue between them is the force that governs change and growth in relationships. Working with couples, I often notice the tendency on the side of couples themselves to want to "do away with" any conflict, holding it as the ultimate goal and indication of a healthy and successful relationship. While the psychologists who work with them, myself included, may help them to challenge this notion of conflict as something to be avoided, seeing it as a natural part of human relationships, I think even we fall prey to the idea that it's simply about the effective "resolution" of conflict. I really appreciate the notion put forth by Baxter and Montgomery, or at least my understanding of it, that perhaps conflict between opposing forces are not only natural for a relationship, but even necessary.

Reading the literature also piqued my curiosity regarding the 9 prefrontal functions of the brain and its possible application in relationship dynamics. The functions include bodily regulation, attuned communication, emotional balance, response flexibility, empathy, insight/self-knowing awareness, fear modulation, intuition, and morality (Siegel, 2007). I am also interested to see in what way these functions are reflected in the accounts of my research participants. Lastly, immersing myself in the theory and writings underlying my research study has also allowed me to mould and structure my interview questions for the next phase of my research: data collection.

In listening to the answers of participants while transcribing their interviews, I have already started noting possible directions for further investigation during the second interviews. Some reoccurring themes also seem to be presenting across participant interviews. In addition, I have received some very positive feedback from participants following their interviews, stating how they found the experience to be an “eye opener” for themselves.

In doing the interviews, I have been having some concerns regarding respondent verification. I initially brought the idea of respondent verification up with my supervisor, thinking it might be a good way of increasing our level of informed consent within the study. This would then entail sending the transcripts of interviews to the participants in order for them to give final consent to use their accounts as transcribed. However, I’ve been rethinking whether this is in fact a good idea, considering first and foremost the well-being of the couples.

In transcribing the first interview, I suddenly found myself aware of how different the interview felt when simply reading the transcript versus listening to the audio file. Naturally, much of the subtext offered by the non-verbal’s such as emotion, tone and expression were missing in the transcripts. While this is not an issue for the purpose of the study and exploring the identified variables in it, it might be problematic for couples simply reading the transcripts of their own words.

Experience from working with couples and witnessing the functioning and also discord/conflict that can ensue first-hand, I find myself questioning the potential damage and discord that could follow giving couples a written account of what they and their partners have said in the interview. As such, I believe the initial process of informed consent gained from participants

will be sufficient, without risking unnecessary harm by providing them with so-called “evidence” of what was said by a partner in the interview.

The difficulty with recruiting enough couples for the study continued. What really left an impression on me is the personal observation that a great number of interested couples could not be included in the study due to them being on psychotropic medication or in therapy. It was striking to me to consider the reality of how many people were in fact either seeing a psychologist or psychiatrist. Even as a practicing psychologist, this caught me by surprise.

I found the data analysis process to be quite enjoyable and stimulating. Searching for meaning and connections felt quite easy to me as it’s similar to what I do on a daily basis with couples and individuals in psychotherapy. The analysis of the existing data also offered inspiration for compiling the second interview’s list of questions. My goal with these questions was to use the identified themes as a guiding factor to hopefully obtain more in-depth and nuanced information on these themes.

Completing my PhD thesis increasingly presents as an exercise in flexibility, recalibration, mental management and conversations-with-self. Focused on the subject matter and the experiences of participants, I expected the personal learning curve to be academic, rather than personal. I find myself surprised, however, to note my own resilience, self-management and self-reliance excavated and growing to new heights as I navigate the various stressors and challenges associated with completing this PhD journey.

APPENDIX I: Nicki and Jaime – Interview 1 Transcript

1. **RESEARCHER (R): (1) How would you describe your relationship/bond with your partner?**
2. NICKI (N): Would you like to go first?
3. JAIME (J): I think so, yes. I think our bond...or ok ja, our bond is strong. Very strong. Relationship wise...it could be better.
4. **R: Ok...what's interesting to me already there, Jaime is that you make a difference between the relationship and the bond? Can you clarify that for me a bit?**
5. J: Look sometimes, here and there, there's smacks. Like...I don't know how to put it...like uhm...ja, it's just like it's difficult to...
6. **R: You can give an example if that would help?**
7. J: I'm more like an open person and all that, and sometimes she keeps it back.
8. **R: Ok, so it's kind of in the interaction is what I'm understanding? So the bond for you meaning the connection, the love, what has brought you together is strong, but then sometimes...what I'm hearing...you're kind of defining the relationship as saying the dynamics or the interaction sometimes is very different between the two of you. That maybe because of personality differences or the way that you operate you will be a little bit more giving in your openness of sharing perhaps in a way? So, I'm hearing that Nicki might be a bit more reserved in terms of that?**
9. N & J: (nodding) Yes.
10. **R: Ok...Is that something that is needing attention in a sense for you or that you would like to be a bit different at times?**
11. J: Ja, sometimes I would like her to be more open with me, to share more stuff with me...And just, ja, be more intimate, as well, romantically.
12. **R: Because intimacy isn't always just physical stuff...**
13. J: Ja ja...
14. **R: Ok...Nicki?**
15. N: I think the same, I think uhm...yes I am reserved, I am reserved...I'm a libra...
16. **R: (laughing) Now we're bringing star signs into it!**
17. N: But all this information goes in...I did a PPA uhm, in the early nineties for a company Thomas International...so all this data, they asked the same questions just in different ways and then all the data gets fed in and it's quite interesting how accurate the results are...
18. **R: Ok, so that has kind of given you some knowledge about yourself as I understand?**
19. N: Yes, it really has. So yes I am a very...uhm closed person, but I do say what's on my mind. Uhm, we have a very very strong bond...I think sometimes I wish...if I observe other couples

and their relationships, and the problems that there are in their relationships, and the trust issues – which we don't have – uhm, I feel sorry for other people, because I wish so that they could have our relationship. And the steadiness. And the trust that we have. So...and the freedom. The freedom that we have. So...to me, yes I am a closed person, but I do say what's on my mind, very strongly...uhm...but...I'm not a romantic person at all.

20. R: Ok, in terms of actions?

21. N: Yes, so...but when I do something, I've said to her from the beginning, as ek iets doen dan kom dit uit my hart uit. Ek gaan nie 'n duisend keer sê ek is lief vir jou nie, maar as ek dit eenkeer vir jou sê, dan bedoel ek dit.

22. R: Dis genuine...

23. N: Ja, if I buy something for you or I do something for you, then it's genuine for me.

24. R: And you use the word 'freedom' there, Nicki, that really fell on my ear. What do you mean with you've got freedom, perhaps, in your relationship?

25. N: To be yourself...

26. R: Ok...?

27. N: To be yourself. She doesn't have to ask my permission if she's going from work to Bayside with a colleague. She will say: Angel ek gaan gou Bayside toe. Nie: mag ek hou Bayside toe gaan nie? I don't have to explain to her, she doesn't have to explain to me.

28. R: So, independence, as well?

29. N: It's independence, yes. And I want her to be independent. Because uhm...she has a knack of being on my hip...So I think it's a bit of a mother figure in a way...

30. R: Being on my hip, meaning quite reliant or quite dependent?

31. N: O ja, nogal.

32. J:(laughing and gesturing) Moet ek wegskuif?

33. N: Nee...(laughing)

34. N: But you know, we discuss a lot of stuff, hey...we really discuss all the issues, you know...

35. R: Quite open with each other?

36. N: Yeah, but our relationship is actually strong, but I think the smaller issues are: I'm a very...I'm not a perfectionist, but I have things that I do in a certain way...even at the house. And I always say she's got a 'lazy brain'...she doesn't like to do the housework, so it means I have to do it...and keep telling her 'do this, please help me, please do this' and that, out of everything, is my only frustration. Enige iets anders kan gaan. I'm not even worried about anything except, I think it comes back to partnership. It's the support and partnership side that I really lack. The rest can fly. The rest I'm not worried about at all. Except the intimacy issues. I think I'm actually asexual.

37. R: Ok...well that's our second question there in a sense, so that actually links quite well is: in terms of the intimacy and closeness in the relationship, which as we've said is sometimes

physical of course in nature, but it's also emotional and psychological and mental in that space...How do you create that with each other? (2) How do you create closeness or intimacy in the relationship?

38. N: I think we've actually started the other day...uhh...the weekend...we have a routine...I'm not one of those if she's on her phone I'll say, 'oh who are you talking to?' That's the freedom we have. But none of us are cheating on one another. That's what's the beauty of it. So, I'm doing my research...I do a lot of research. I work for a pharmaceutical company so I speak to some clients on Facebook and that, because I have to...I'm the media manager also on the Facebook side...then she's maybe speaking to her mom or whatever a friend...and we don't bug one another with things like that, that's petty. You know. But then we decided look, I think because technology is taking over our lives, let's cut off at a certain time at night. Just put the phones away and we just spend time together. Just talk about your day. We talk about our day every day.
39. J: Ja, and even when we go to bed I said almost, (to Nicki) from Monday...?
40. N: Yes, no phones in bed.
41. J: I said no phones in bed. Not even next to us, nothing.
42. N: Sit dit op charge in die sitkamer and that's it. You know...uhm...the eighties we didn't have phones and we were fine.
43. J: It's been working so far.
44. N: Ja, it has been working, so...uhm...we need to draw the line there. Intimacy issues...hmm...I'm a giver and I'm not a receiver...I think that's my issue.
- 45. R: And Jaime anything you want to add as Nicki is saying in terms of creating that intimacy or closeness in the relationship?**
46. J: I think she said it actually all...
- 47. R: Ok....and...you mentioned trust earlier Nicki... (3) What makes you guys feel or believe that the other one is committed to you? That kind of security...**
48. N: I think actions...
49. J: Hmmm.
- 50. R: What kind of actions, Nicki?**
51. N: You know when you meet somebody you test somebody...I've always said: test somebody. Put them in a situation, see how they react...So...if they react, and because I've had people in my past that've cheated on me and so on, I think the last relationship that I had was also with a woman. I was married for nearly ten years....and she also cheated on me and there was a lot of alcohol abuse and that involved...so I learned my lesson. I was one of those that would go on the phone and see who you are phoning and who you are texting...And I decided I'm gonna cut that out of my life, I'm not doing that anymore. And we've actually spoken, I've said 'Doll if you leave me, I won't do anything. If I find you in bed with somebody, I'll walk in and I'll walk out.

- It is what it is'. I don't own you, you don't own me. And that is what we've decided from day one.
52. J: Hmm, from day one.
53. N: We don't own, and we don't...somebody's not property. As soon as it becomes property then the jealousy...and I'm not jealous of her at all.
54. J: And I do get jealous.
55. N: She gets jealous!
(everyone laughing)
56. N: I just don't care. You know a relationship...it either works or it doesn't. You can't hook feelings. If she chooses somebody else then she goes for somebody else. That's it. It's just one of those things. I'm not going to get emotionally involved in all the drama of breaking up again.
- 57. R: And you Jaime, ways in which you believe that she's committed to you?**
58. J: No I know she will be committed to me. Like uhm...ja our trust is very big, like.... there's just that feeling that I know like she's that person for me. So...ja.
- 59. R: And Nicki was now saying she's not a very romantic person, but (4) In what ways do you express or demonstrate that love and affection for one another? Jaime?**
60. J: Ok...what I like...
61. N: She irritates the shit out of me.
(everyone laughing)
- 62. R: O gosh that's not a good start!**
63. N: She'll literally come up to me and bend over me and start kissing me in my neck, so...
- 64. R: Oh but that's playful...**
(Jaime laughing)
65. N: No but I mean verstaan jy...so ek het nie 'n keuse nie!
66. J: I just do it like in the moment...
67. N: She's very playful. Ja nee jissie.
68. J: Like, if I see she's grumpy...and she's sitting there...I will just immediately: 'ag give me a kiss...no!... give me kiss...' and then I'll start kissing her.
69. N: And then at the end of the day we just start laughing and then it's over.
- 70. R: Ok, so what I'm hearing there Jaime is that you're quite physical in your demonstration of your love and affection...**
71. J: Ja...
72. N: Very much so.
- 73. R: And you Nicki? Not being a romantic and all, how do you express it?**
74. N: I go a lot on my instinct, uhm, I'm not a person that gives a lot of hugs. But uhm...
75. J: You'll rather buy me stuff.

76. N: Ja, for some reason. Ja...for some reason I'll see shame she needs a food processor and I'll go buy one for her or you know she's struggling with this in the kitchen...she needs that gadget and then I'll buy her one, you know. But I'm not buying her love, you see, or her affection. Because I don't think I need it from her. But I suppose in a way I'm compensating for not being...but I do give her hugs now and then but sometimes I'll lie in bed and I'll say, 'come lie in my arm' and then I'll just hold her, you know. I'm just wired totally differently.
77. **R: And (5) What contributes to the quality or nature of your relationship? The kind of – what makes you feel satisfied with it?**
78. N: I think just knowing each other very well and just accepting one another.
79. J: Hmmm.
80. N: For whatever reason, you know uhm...I remember my mom telling me that when she and my dad met, I think they were together for ten years before she took her clothes off and undressed in front of him...you know...so I think it's just been comfortable. You know and trust is a big issue, you know. And not being judged by the other person for the way you look or...the way you are and....
81. J: Yes.
82. N: That's very important to me.
83. **R: I'm going to ask you the same question now Jaime...I just want to elaborate a little Nicki because I keep hearing you use that word 'trust' as well...why do you think, and you were saying earlier compared to other couples perhaps you don't, you feel as if you have more when you compare yourselves...why do you think that is? Where is the source of that trust coming from? Can you pinpoint why you guys have generated that, why you have such a good level of trust?**
84. N: I think as I said coming back to the action side, we've tried and tested a lot of uhm...things, you know when we go out...or whatever. We see the person's behaviour towards other people...
85. J: Hmmm.
86. N: ...And in situations. And then you sort of make your mind up. You know there's a saying that you've tried and tested something. And that is where it comes down to, so I think...I don't know, it's so weird. I don't know if it's a chemical thing or a brain thing or something, but I think God is very strong in our relationship.
87. **R: So, there's a spiritual, religious aspect as well...**
88. N: Our faith also. You know. We're all sinners, but...my dad was a pastor...ja...so you know I've got a very good foundation...so a lot of my stuff in my mind is on a spiritual level...uhm, but I think that kind of trust you know, ja, is very important. Knowing that I can predict...I mean we're on a level like this: she'll be out of the room, and I'd be sitting in the lounge and I'm thinking 'I think we must do this tomorrow' and she'll walk in and say: 'Babe, I think we must do this tomorrow'.

89. R: So, it's very aligned...wow...

90. N: But I don't tell her that I just thought that. She just kinds of...

91. J: But you're always weird in that way.

92. N: Ja. Hulle sê mos ek is met die helmet gebore.

93. J: Yes, weird in that way.

(laughing)

94. N: But that I wouldn't tell her that I've just decided let's do that. When she...it's like we've got this weird connection. Without being physical.

95. R: And Jaime for you, that question we were busy with of saying what contributes to the nature or quality of the relationship. Anything you want to add there?

96. J: Like...what contributes to us is like she said, the trust is a big factor. I remember in the beginning stages when we were just dating, hey?...

97. N: Hmmm.

98. J: I went away for a week or two?

99. N: Ja, you went to your mom in Worcester.

100. J: I went to my mom and I met up with old friends and we went to party. She didn't like it and I said to her well, just trust me on this. I'm not that type of girl. I'm not like your ex wife. And, I think I've been...I proved it over and over to her.

101. N: Ja, I think since then...it was the next hurdle for me, you know. And then I got over that.

102. J: Like everything, I made a decision that day, like everything I do, at that stage...

103. N: I think I was more afraid of her...I wasn't...cause she's a very vulnerable person. Sy is baie beïnvloedbaar. So, that I saw from the get-go. And uhm...I was worried that she'd be in a situation and be drinking and dancing at Stones there in Worcester and then...or Steps or wherever you guys went, and then a guy, specifically a male, would come and hit on her and she'd go for that. And that was my...I've always said to her, you can cheat on me with a woman but never with a guy.

104. R: That is a no go...

105. N: That was a strong thing for me.

106. J: Because when you met me I was straight.

107. N: Yes.

108. R: Ok. Alright.

109. N: Ja, so ek was bang sy gaan terug val op dit. Where I wanted to commit. You know.

110. R: And needs...as we've been mentioning as couples we have needs on different levels so physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, sexual...it continues, security needs... (6) In what ways perhaps does your partner meet your needs?

111. J: I think for me 50/50...Like all the other...ja...like spiritual, I know from my side my spiritual level is not where hers is. Mine is much lower, but I think for emotional we're 100% ...uuhhmm.... what was the other ones?

112. R: There's physical, emotional, mental, spiritual...

113. J: I think for all the others we're more or less....

114. N: I think, look I know I'm emotionally stronger than her.

115. J: Yes, you are.

116. N: So, I tend to, that's why we're not a fighting couple.

117. J: We'll rather debate than fight.

118. N: Ja, we debate we don't fight. And I'm the one that will sit down with her and I'll sit down and I'll tell her listen, this and this and this and this...I'm unhappy because this and this, and let's just fix it.

119. J: And then we'll talk it out.

120. N: She keeps quiet.

121. J: I listen.

122. N: And I miss the interaction. To me you've got to tell me what you're feeling, because now she's just taking in...and two three days from now she'll do the same thing. That we've just spoken about. You know: please help me here, please support me here...then she doesn't do it, and then it's... then I get...so basically we're not...it's a frustration, I think from my side, but it's got nothing to do with my love for her...or my commitment to her, or anything.

123. J: I think it was just, what – two or three weeks ago -

124. N: Ja, it was just a frustration because, look we run a commune in Table View...so it's a big house, it's got like 13 people.

125. R: That's a lot of management...

126. N: It's a lot of management. I work a full-time job...she does...so when we get home, it's discuss this, do this...who's not paying rent...it's a lot of frustration. So, you know, and you...people come to us with their problems and then it's added stuff. Uhm...so my daughter is staying there, as well. I have a daughter...People say: 'what, how can you have a daughter?', but anyway. (giggling)

127. R: That's a whole different session....

128. N: (laughing) That's a whole different session! Another programme as they say on television...So I think it's just basically...that kind of emotional support...I want to sometimes sit there and I want her to tell me it's going to be ok. Things are going to be ok. Because let's say we have a financial wobble like a couple of months ago she...her company closed down, so for 6 months she wasn't working...and I knew from the get-go...I said to her, 'Angel, kom sit hier so. Ek wil jou iets sê...Jy gaan kak voel...you're going to be depressed...this is what you're going to go

through: you're going to cry, you're going to feel down, you're going to go into the pit...Stop right now. Before that happens. Don't do this.'

129. J: Hmm.

130. N: 'You're going to put added pressure on me, you know. Because I'm working.'

131. J: And I tried not to do it.

132. N: She tried and then she went there. See. But then I told her, 'this is what's going to happen, be prepared.' So, eventually after 6 months she got a job and she's back on her feet. But that's the kind of strong person I am. But I feel I can't always be strong. I need somebody as well...next to me to pick me up...when I...

133. J: You know I try my best, babe.

134. N: When I'm not, you know...so maybe a little bit of sensitivity to my needs on that side...to see when I'm down as well, to pick me up.

135. R: And in what ways does Jaime actually meet your needs?

136. N: She cooks well. (laughing)

137. N: She thinks if I fight with her she can cook and then it's fine.

138. J: I bake for you. Don't forget that part.

139. N: She likes to bake. She'll knit. No, I think those are superficial needs. I think, uhm.... if I'm ill, she'll help me here and there. But I need something stronger. I need to get...I need her to open her eyes, I think, in a way to see wow listen, this is really what is going on with my wife...she's not well...uhm, you know let me take the attention away from myself and my needs and then focus a little bit on her. Cause I'm a very serving person, so I serve a lot of people...I go around: are you ok? Here, hier's pilletjies.... hier's dit...I've got a medical background as well, so they always come to me and I'm always helping, you know...

140. R: It kicks in quite easily for you...that role...

141. N: It does, yes. It does. So, I feel like guys jeez like, can I just at least put my feet up a little bit...and stop draining me...I feel drained sometimes I really do.

142. J: There I also draw the line with the tenants.

143. N: But I think even with you, I think in a sense you need to see that I can't anymore, you know, that you need to step in...

144. J: Hmm.

145. N: You know, and just lift the burden a little bit for me.

146. R: In what ways, or (7) What is it perhaps about the company of one another that you enjoy or value? What makes the company with Jaime and the company with Nicki different than with another friend or family member?

147. N: Uhm...You know that they say you can sit next to somebody without talking. And just know that the person is there and that's enough.

148. J: And that's enough for me.

149. N: Ja, it is literally enough. We're busy with our own thoughts and it's just presence.
- 150. R: I was about to say it sounds like the word 'presence' is coming to mind.**
151. N: Just her presence. That's all.
152. J: Like we will just be sitting on the couch watching...and then I will take everything away and flop my head on her.
153. N: She'll just come lie on my lap and we won't talk. It's just presence.
154. J: Hmmm.
155. N: You can say a thousand words and it doesn't mean anything, hey.
- 156. R: It's the actions...**
157. N: Yes
- 158. R: Because I think that's what I keep hearing with you, that actions for both parties are quite prominent.**
159. N: It's just a touch of the hand and that's it. You know that for me, dit spreek vir my boekdele. Uhm, ja.
- 160. R: Jaime what do you want to add for us there in terms of enjoying or valuing Nicki's company?**
161. J: Ja, like...if we just sit next to each other like...just a touch of the hand...we know each other. We know I'm there, she's there.
162. N: The only thing I do miss there, on that topic, I think is...we've always spoken about: sal jy my verneuk met 'n vrou...ek sê nee, I will never go through getting to know someone from scratch...all the habits...dis vir my werk hoor....is I'm more attracted to uhm...intelligent conversation and intelligence...that's my attraction to people.
- 163. R: A challenge mentally...**
164. N: Challenge...conversation...whether it's on the phone or whatever....
165. J: Oh no, I'm not on that level.
166. N: She's not on that level. You see. So, there's only certain things she talks about...like we've got a lot of cats at home and stuff like that, so I need something that's a little bit more elevated. We have spoken about it, but I've just accepted that that is who she is.
- 167. R: How do you manage that difference in needs at times and maybe the fact that we can't always give each other exactly what we need in all places? How do you manage that?**
168. N: I tend to shut down a bit. And I think that's the one thing that makes her a little bit unhappy.
169. J: Hmmm.
170. N: You know, to not be able to have a conversation with somebody about anything. From engineering right through to mechanical to politics. I love politics. I used to work for the DA, so I love politics. You know I don't love them so much anymore, but...(laughing)
- 171. R: Again...different session Nicki! (laughing)**

172. N: So ja, no, that's why I think I find my intelligence in reading a lot...and doing research. So, just to make up, you know...and I speak to my boss a lot, you know. She's the founder of Super Oxygen and a...so we talk a lot of intelligent stuff, you know. And then at home I just relax and then I revert onto her level...and then we talk about her stuff that she wants to, you know. So, it's compensating basically. Ja, I've learned over the years to compensate.

173. R: (8) How do you know what your partner's needs are in different situations?

174. N: She's more expressive than I am.

175. J: Ja...so I will tell you listen, give me some love.

176. N: Ja.

177. R: Ok...so you don't have to guess with Jaime is what we're saying?

178. N: No, no she's very transparent, you know. That's one thing. She is transparent. You can read her very easily, you know. Uhm....

179. R: She's straight-forward in her communication, is what I hear. You just say it as it is, Jaime, you ask for what you need in that space.

180. N & J: Ja, ja.

181. R: How do you know then, Jaime, what Nicki needs? Especially as she's mentioning the withdrawal at times....

182. J: Ja, it's difficult, it's difficult. Like I will ask her: 'Are you ok? Is there something you need? Do you want a hug? Do you want a cuddle? What do you want?'

183. R: Ok, so you will ask. Again sort of using the communication to drag it out a little bit...

184. J: Like I will have to physically, or not physically, ja physically?...

185. N: No not physically really, but...

186. J:(laughing) But I would have to drag it out of her to get the information.

187. N: Sy moet, sy weet nie...sy lees my, maar sy weet nie hoe sy my lees partykeer nie. See that's the thing. She doesn't know whether she should approach me or not.

188. R: Ok...because you're not always so forthcoming perhaps with the expression of needs as she is in that space...

189. N: Yes, ja...

190. J: Like, let's say I walk into the door and I can see: uh-uh, she's grumpy...and then I immediately get grumpy as well. Then we will like sort of have a small...

191. N: No, it...ah...I think it's...

192. J: A tiff?

193. N: Boils back to irritation. Ja...I think it's the irritation. Ek dink dit is meer omstandighede, jy weet...in die huis miskien...

194. R: A full house as you guys say...

195. N & J: Hmmm...ja....

196. R: And as we talk about the full house and quality time perhaps...(9) Do you make deliberate quality time together to spend time, like a date night or quality time or does it just sort of have to fit in between your daily schedule...?

197. N: No, we don't go out actually. We don't do date nights...uhm...if we do go out we basically go out with my daughter. She'll...she works at the beach front at Thirsty Turtle, so then she'll say: come mom...We have a very good relationship...

198. J: Ja...

199. N: Come mom, uhm...let's go...I'll stick you guys on my tab or something. And that's maybe once in every three months, you know. Then we'll go out and have a good time.

200. R: So does it have to fit in then between the daily activities...spending quality time...even if you don't go out, do you make some time to have one on one time...watching TV programmes...films....or something...?

201. N: Well, ja, we usually sit and watch series together. So, but, we don't really go for...if I think of I have to set up a table with candles and...dit lyk vir my soos werk...

202. J: And it will shock me if you do that!

203. N: Exactly my point.

204. J: Not like me...(laughing)

205. N: I must tell you this, hey.... we stayed in Fairie Glen....

206. J:(laughing) I was going to....

207. N: We stayed in Fairie Glen in Pretoria years ago, and my work was across the road, my office...and I came home and...from the gate – for our anniversary, hey love?

208. J: I can't remember, it was something... (laughing)

209. N: From the gate she threw rose petals...it was rose petals?

210. J: Ja...

211. N: Van die hek af né, van die driveway...deur die huis...af in die gang op die matte...tot in die slaapkamer....

212. J: En in die badkamer...

213. N: En in die badkamer, everything full of rose petals. So anyway I get home...anyway the next morning...

214. J: I regretted it....

215. N: I said you are going to regret this.... toe moes sy al daai goed opvee...so...she'll never do that again.

(laughing)

216. R: So what I'm gathering then with quality time...it's kind of shared with your already full house and all the other people that's in it, and maybe also you mention your cats...so pets also, it's not just exclusive one on one focusing on each other, it's kind of shared in between daily tasks...

217. N: We've never gone for honeymoon. I'd love to take her away just for a weekend away.

218. J: Like the other day we got a photoshoot, and I said to her let's just do it.

219. N: Yes, we were rewarded a photoshoot by a photographer...

220. R: Did you do it?

221. N: Yes, it was so much fun. So no, we don't go out.

222. R: And (10) Communication...what is your communication like – I can hear there are some differences – but what's good, what's bad about it?

223. N: It's good. We talk. We do talk. We explain a lot of things...what happened for the day...uhm, and you know, it's funny enough, the one thing that really keeps us grounded is our humour. Ons lag vir mekaar.

224. J: Ja...

225. N: Nê? Ons lag vir mekaar...ons lag vir mekaar se foute...uhm, ja, we're just a crazy family sometimes.

226. J: Like if I something simple now, she'll crack herself and be like: no I need to tell this to my daughter...

227. N: Yes.

228. J: And then we'll...

229. N: Ek en my dogter hou daarvan om haar te spot, you know...we rag her. And she gets so cross, but anyway.

230. J:(laughing) Ja!

231. N: No, no we're a good family.

232. R: So, communication is good despite the differences? Do you feel as if you are still able to hear each other despite the different modes of communication where the one is maybe a bit more expressive than the other one?

233. N & J: Yes, ja...

234. N: Our message comes across.

235. R: And with (12) conflict, I know you've mentioned you debate rather than fight when you are having conflict...uhm, so what is the difference for you? So, debating would be arguing it out intellectually, almost?

236. N: Ja, and it's very one sided, because it's only me. I don't get a response from Jaime with uhm...'but angel this makes me unhappy'...although I've asked her: 'sê vir my wat ek verkeerd doen dat ek kan leer', verstaan jy? And then she just closes off.

237. J: Ja, I do...

238. N: She closes off...she's actually a very soft-hearted person. But in the past couple of years I've really taught her to stand on her morals and if she's not happy about something moet sy vir mens sê...

239. R: Speak up a little bit more for herself....

240. N: She has to, yes.
241. J: And I've been trying to do it lately...
242. N: Ja no she's been good, hey. She's really stepped it up.
- 243. R: But what I'm then hearing, as you say debate not fight, I'm hearing that as fight meaning that maybe you don't yell at each other, raise your voices, you don't verbally attack with any name calling...or does that happen?**
244. N: No...and throw around stuff...ja...the only thing I get frustrated with is if I'm cleaning...and then as I'm cleaning I see things aren't where they're supposed to be...you know and it feels like I'm the only one cleaning and – which is true – and then the burden on me...and all the time and all the time...and...miskien voel ek nie lekker nie, want ek is in die pre-stages van fibromyalgia so, like my mom is, so it's difficult. Sometimes I can't walk properly, but I still have to do things things...and then she's not joining in and supporting me. Then I would literally flip my lid. So, it's best for her to go outside...or maybe visit somebody...let me clean the house on my own...
245. J: Or do the washing...
246. N: Then I feel better like that. You know, that's how I am. Otherwise there's no issues with money, there's no issues with anything else.
- 247. R: So, if she is around and you 'flip your lid', as you say. What does that look like?**
248. N: Just, I think, just raise my voice. Ja...and then just swear a lot...
- 249. R: It gets a bit more heated...**
250. N: Ja, just...I don't know. I just feel that she should just step up a little bit for me, you know. And help me. If she sees something, I've always said to her: 'As jy sien daai asbakkie is vol (want ons is rokers), gooi dit net uit.' Ek sê mos dis klein goedjies. Nê...nou kook ek, nou sê ek vir haar: 'Sien jy nou as ek gekook het, sien jy hoe skoon is die kombuis terwyl ek kook?' 'Ja my engel...' Ek sê nou wat de fok? Jy weet. (laughing)
251. N: Excuse my French. Maar as jy nou gaan kook...kyk hoe lyk die fokken potte!? Ek kan dit...you know like, it's not that I'm angry, I'm frustrated. It's just frustration. But otherwise...
252. J: But I'll leave the pots for you to clean...
253. N: Ja no always...so...
- 254. R: What can you add for us there, Jaime on conflict and handling it in your relationship? Anything you want to add?**
255. J: I think, we handle it quite well...like, ja, we do have our differences and I know I do have the lazy bone in me...but I also sometimes try where I can... Like ja, if she told me: 'I had it with the dishes, will you do it?' I will say, 'Ok. I'll do it.' But I try.
- 256. R: And (13) when there is a disagreement, and the other party has done something you now feel is wrong, what does your internal sense-making then look like? The internal dialogue or narrative? So, how do you make sense of the other party's intentions or actions?**
257. N: The question was for you, né...

258. R: (laughing) Well for both of you...

259. N: Sy't haar ma se streep, hoor.

260. J: Ja.

261. N: Sy't haar ma se streep. Ja. Sy sal basically...when she huffs and puffs I actually laugh at her, want sy lyk te oulik as sy kwaad is. Because I'm not used to her being like that. You know. It's hilarious for me, then I just burst out laughing.

262. J: I don't think it's funny.

263. N: She can't be cross.

264. J: I can't.

265. N: She can't be cross. She's like a child...she'll throw something on the floor. It's that kind of reaction. You know how adults are sometimes.

266. J: I did throw something on the floor...it was a kettle.

267. N: Ja...so I mean it's out of frustration...but it never ever happens that she gets to that point.

268. J: Like I can be literally so angry that I would just start crying.

269. R: And then when you are that angry, Jaime, if we just go into that...(13) If you are then in disagreement with Nicki about something, and she's done something you now feel is wrong, internally, what do you say to yourself about what she's done? Her intentions...do you kind of have a dialogue or a narrative about saying she did it on purpose or is being spiteful, or she's trying her best...what is the internal message?

270. J: I think I would just generally feel like what she did was a no go. And, I think sometimes I tell her, like...I don't agree...but mostly I keep it to myself.

271. R: And for you, Nicki?

272. N: I think at one stage I've...many times, I'm just done...I'm over this. I just want to walk out, I'm....

273. R: That's where your shut down kind of comes, and the withdrawal?

274. N: Yes, ja. I'm just done. I'm so over this I want to pack my bags and go. You know, I just don't want to be here anymore.

275. R: And often with conflict is strong emotions... (14) Just in general, how do you guys handle strong emotions both in yourself and in your partner? Do you deal with it easily...do you have coping skills for it?

(participants thinking)

276. N: Hmm.... it's difficult if you really talk about strong emotions. You mean like traumatic emotions, maybe?

277. R: Strong being kind of the intensity of the emotion, Nicki. So, any emotions whether it be angry, sad, happy...but a really strong intensity of emotion kind of being experienced, either in yourself or in your partner. How do deal with that, how do you respond to it? Is it

comfortable or uncomfortable...do you move away from it...can you deal with it...what happens for you?

278. N: I think I tend to move away from it...in a sense ja...try to focus on something else...which is more positive...uhm, I actually got a very small heart, because the stronger things don't bug me as much, but the smaller stuff does. Like I will see an animal being abused...or a child that's neglected...that will, dit sal my ruk. But the strong...it's like being in the medical industry...the big operations and the brains laying there and the guts doesn't bug me. But if you prick a finger or a klein snytjie...then I cringe. You see, so those are two narratives...the bigger stuff don't bug me as much, but it's the smaller stuff for me. So, the big emotional stuff is fine. You know...I can cope with that. I just shut down until I can, you know, everything is in my kop geredeneer. Ek redeneer alles in my kop uit. Find my solutions and what I need to do. Ja.

279. R: And for you Jaime? Any strong emotions either in yourself or from Nicki's side...can you deal with it? Does it make you uncomfortable?

280. J: Yes, especially when she shuts down. But at the end, where she's had enough and she opens...then, I withdraw and I will listen.

281. R: Ok, so you listen in that moment, but withdraw being do you keep quiet?

282. J: I keep quiet completely.

283. R: But you do take in... you listen, it's not that you withdraw to the point of now running almost from that, it's just that you refrain from responding? So, what's more difficult for you is kind of the no emotion and the withdrawal?

284. J: Ja...

285. N: Hmmm.

286. R: Ok, interesting...

287. R: Talking about feelings still... (15) How do you know what your partner is feeling? How do you identify that? Can you identify that? If they are not telling you, for example then, just by looking at them or experiencing them?

288. J: It's difficult with Nicki to actually see what she's feeling.

289. N: I'm very even tempered. Because, there's always this thing that says: 'How do you see yourself and how do other people see you?' Which is a very important question. Cause when you see other people seeing you, then you start to discover yourself.

290. J: You're a soft person. But when other people see you, you come forward...

291. N: As a hard person.

292. J: Ja, as a hard person.

293. N: But I think we all build walls, but with her, she gets quiet. You know, then I know something is off. I just basically...she's very talkative. So, when she gets quiet she's either very tired, or a long day...

294. **R: And with you Jaime, you were actually saying before...I made a note here of you can see when Nicki is grumpy...**
295. J: Hmmm.
296. **R: So that kind of tells me that with this question of seeing what the other one is feeling that there's something...that you can read her in some way? How do you know when she's grumpy, how do you know when she's happy?**
297. J: It's just like...her body language differs. So, I sometimes watch her...like if I see like she's walking fast. Then I know here comes trouble.
298. **R: Ok. So, it's even just in the speed of her walking. That's impressive.**
(laughing)
299. **R: And (16) when you are responding to one another...Do you feel as if you just respond to what you can see and what the person is giving you, or do you also respond to kind of what is implied in their behaviours, and in their words in a way?**
(pause from participants)
300. **R: So, do you just kind of at face value take what they are giving you and run with that, or do you sometimes – one or both of you – also go for the implied things. So, you say this, but underneath I feel as if you're also saying this...the kind of sub text.... Nicki you are nodding already...**
301. N: Yes...I think both, but a person must draw the line where presuming that's where the person is coming from...I think it's not...it's like receiving a text. What you read and what you perceive is different to what the person's reaction was on the other side. Cause he can give you a text and you take it up incorrectly, with a tone, but I mean words don't have a tone. You see there's no tone of voice over the phone, so how would you know what the other person is implying by sending that message. So, to me I think it's just both.
302. **R: Jaime for you?**
303. J: Sometimes when she tells me like something, I would say: 'But are you really...isn't there like an underlying...or something.'
304. N: Hmmm.
305. **R: Ok, so something in what she says makes you wonder if there's more to it, but then I also hear you that you kind of clarify that in a sense then...**
306. J: Ja.
307. **R: Sticking with our partner's internal world... (17) The thoughts, and the feelings and experiences of one another...do you ever think about that? Do you ever imagine in a way...Jaime for Nicki for example, do you find that sometimes you'll imagine what her internal world is like in terms of her thoughts or feelings or experiences?**
308. J: Uhhmm...like how more or less?

- 309. R: Like we all have an internal world...you know as well. Which is kind of a very subjective thing and it's difficult to put ourselves outside of sometimes. And it's a tricky question, in that sense. We kind of feel, as we experience a situation, with our thoughts and feelings...do you ever kind of put yourself in the mind and in the body of Nicki in that space, to go oh I wonder in that situation she might have experienced it in that way...or maybe this is what her internal world is looking like...**
310. J: It's like sometimes I would put myself in her shoes like that...like what would my wife do, how will she handle it...so yes, sometimes I...especially when it comes to the house situation...I try to take that stress off her and I will tell her, 'Doll let me handle it', so...
311. N: She would react like I would react, basically.
- 312. R: That's what I'm hearing as well, that there's some using maybe in tough situations, the guidance of "what would my partner do?..."**
313. N: Her observation of what I have, how I have reacted, yes.
- 314. R: And for yourself Nicki? Do you ever imagine her internal world?**
315. N: I wouldn't like to be in her world. She's had a very traumatic past. Which I've helped her through quite a bit. I think that's made our bond very strong. So, uhm...ja, I think I would... I don't think of it often, what she would do in that sense. I think it's a very lonely world. You know, so I wouldn't uhm...I don't know it's difficult to say. But I don't really think of how she would react. Cause I just leave her to react and do her own thing, ja.
- 316. R: And in joint situations, along the same train of thought that we're on...(18) In a joint situation that you are in, would you ever kind of place yourselves in each other's shoes and think I wonder how they are experiencing this...?**
317. N: Not really.
- 318. R: So, you won't be at a dinner for example and wonder what is internally going on for this person...they might be feeling this...whether with other people or not...?**
319. N: For other people sitting at the other table kind of thing? Or just your partner?
- 320. R: Either way, but it kind of sounds like either way it doesn't really happen.**
321. N: No, not really.
322. J:(shaking head)
- 323. R: For you as well, Jaime, not really?**
324. J: No
- 325. R: (20) When you are feeling emotionally distressed, in what ways does your partner express their emotional availability to you?**
326. J: Ja, she will see I'm sad or if I'm not well or something. And she'll ask me: 'Is there something wrong?' And then I'll say no, don't worry about it. And she'll get it out of me. So, she can, she knows exactly when there's something wrong.

- 327. R: She knows and then she starts communication, is what I hear. She doesn't just always leave you, she'll start a conversation.**
328. J: Well sometimes she'll like, if I tell her listen I don't want to talk, she'll say no it's fine she respects my wishes...and then after a while: no but this is actually bothering me...
- 329. R: So it's a good balance that I'm hearing from Nicki's side for you Jaime, that she will reach out when she spots something as being not ok, but then if you kind of put the boundary down and say just give me some space, then she steps back and gives you that space until you're ready...**
330. J: And the same with her...Like I will ask if I feel she's like...'Is there something wrong, is there something bothering you?' 'No I'm fine.' And I'll say, ok. Then I just leave it as is.
331. N: But it will usually come out when you least expect it.
332. J: Ja...
333. N: You know, that emotion...and usually there's a trigger to that. Because there might be a small trigger and then all those feelings come out that you bottled up. I am a bottler.
334. J: Ja, you bottle stuff.
335. N: Yes, I am a bottler. I mean a small little trigger will just bring everything out.
- 336. R: So, anything you want to add there, Nicki. To how you feel Jaime's emotional availability when you are distressed?**
337. N: I'm really not distressed much, uhh...stressed yes, but not distressed. Uhm, the passing of my dad was distressful... (pt. emotional) ...but it's done. Took a while, but it's done. Took me months...before I just broke down.
- 338. R: Just keeping it in again, as you say, just holding on for so long...doing what you need to do...**
339. N: Ja...I had to be strong for my sister...just the two of us...did the funeral and everything on our own. So that was quite distressful, but ja, it's done. Ja....
- 340. R: But she was there for you is what I'm hearing then, from Jaime's side...Do you feel as if she was present for you during that time as well?**
341. N: Ja she couldn't be with me, I was in Kroonstad. So, we came back...
342. J: But I phoned you often.
343. N: Ja...
- 344. R: I was about to ask: over that distance...how do we even then support each other...**
345. N: Ja no, we communicated quite a bit, and so on...
346. J: Same with my grandfather when he passed...
347. N: Ja...so we weren't there, you know...physically...but, no it was good. So ja, I'm a bit of a bottler. Trying to be strong for everybody else. Until...just feeling vulnerable, I suppose. But she's there. Jaime's there for me. When I need it.

348. R: And Jaime you were mentioning earlier about maybe being just a bit better at just expressing your needs and asking for what it is that you want...but (21) asking specifically about needing closeness with one another...do you guys express that?

349. J: She always tells me: 'You're so predictable.' (laughing)

350. N: I can see it coming a mile away...ja...she's more physical than I am. If she wants me to make love to her she'll tell me.

351. R: Jaime, how do you experience Nicki's response to your reach out for closeness?

352. J: I just don't bother much...and you know what...just...let's do it.

353. R: So, it's not off-putting to you...the way that she responds...that she teases you...

354. J: Oh no...

355. N: Hmm-hmm – we have a lot of humour in our relationship...that's what makes it...yes

356. R: And with you Nicki, how do you express that closeness...being the one that bottles and maybe don't always express needs as well...

357. N: I just...to me...I just...to me it's the small things that count, I think. If I just put my head on her...on her shoulder or something and she'll just hold me...that's enough for me.

358. R: So, it sounds like you express your need for closeness not with words, but with actions?

359. N: I won't say: 'Ag won't you just hold me now or I need you'...no. I don't use those.

360. R: Ok, so last question. (22) In terms of looking at other couples around you...and then comparing your relationship to theirs...in what ways are your relationship similar to other couples and in what ways do you feel it's different?

361. N: Sjoe...similar...

362. J: Similar. I think you can see sometimes like other couples really love each other...they're very affectionate...like let's say we're walking down the street...holding hands or I'm sitting with my hand on her leg...

363. N: Ja...

364. J: But sometimes you'll walk in the mall and see that couple is just fighting...

365. N: Why would you go to dinner if you don't even talk to one another...?

366. J: And you're sitting on your phone. And that's why...also one of our rules, if we go out...let's say we do go out...phones must stay in the bag.

367. N: Ja...so there's...I think uhh...we are different...we'll always be affectionate, you know, and we'll always be respectful. Nothing worse than a couple going to a braai and having an argument in front of other people.

368. J: Oh no.

369. N: If you have a beef...before the braai or after the braai. And even if we have a couple of drinks which is...every six months or so...our personalities are the same.

370. J: You just become a big flirt.

371. N: I do...

372. J: And loveable...
373. N: It's the libra in me...
374. J: And then I just leave you...(laughing)
375. N: But I'm so loveable. I'm not aggressive...she's giggly...you know, we're just a perfect match when it comes to...there we can trust one another to behave ourselves. When we go out.
376. J: And I look after you when you're drunk.
377. N: Ja...if I get a little bit tipsy then she looks after me.
- 378. R: And then as you guys said earlier...the trust and the freedom that you've got is also what you feel is different to other couples?**
379. N: Yes, definitely. I've seen so much rage issues, and it's ridiculous.
- 380. R: I'm curious now, that situation you describe of Nicki becoming a big flirt...how do you, you've mentioned jealousy Jaime, how does your jealousy feature in that and how do you manage it?**
381. J: Like...I know when she's with me, I'm not bothered. I will tell her: 'Babe look there, look how sexy is that'...I'll make fun, but it's like...uhm...I don't know...like previous...
382. N: I think her attention...if somebody else gives me the attention, it's because we're very joined at the hip. We do everything together. I think that's maybe one of the things that we need to...I would literally go to Pick and Pay then she'll be phoning me, you know, and then I'd say: 'Why you phoning me? You know, I just walked to PnP and I told you I'm there'...so she's very joined to the hip....so, sy kan nie sonder my function nie.
- 383. R: Is that a good or a bad thing, Nicki?**
384. N: I think it's a bad thing. Because I think if I had to fall away.... Then...she wants to follow me.
385. J: And I've always...past nine, ten years making that joke.
386. N: Because she doesn't want to, she can't cope without me. You know. So, I'm trying to wean her off...just to...to sort of be functional.
- 387. R: How do you wean her off?**
388. N: By putting her in situations where she needs to make decisions. Stepping back and saying 'Nee jy moet dit hanteer. Hanteer jy dit.' Jy weet.
389. J: And I'm doing well so far.
390. N: She is doing brilliantly. So, I don't want to be worried that she can't cope. You know, so, ja...she needs to just...just emotionally just step up. A little bit. That's all.... We were thinking of having children as well, for her.... but she's already...she's turning 30 now the end of May...
391. J: I still got 5 years to go...
392. N: Ja, but maybe she's not emotionally ready for children...uhm...you know, so...it's always been a debate. I don't want any more kids. I've had one and I'm done.
393. J: You love your sleep.
394. N: I love my sleep.

395. R: How do you manage the blended family there...having a daughter...how's the relationship with Jaime?

396. J: Oh wonderful.

397. N: Fantastic .

398. J: Ja, we're 6 years apart.

399. N: The thing is, they speak a lot...personal issues...

400. J: She'll come to me rather than to her mother.

401. N: Ja and not to me...which is nice. I give them that space.

402. N: Anything I need to know...

403. J: Then you'll ask me.

404. N: Ja, then Jaime will tell me: 'Listen...'

405. J: Yes, but then I'll tell her: 'Don't tell her I told you. Just keep it to yourself.'

406. N: Because we're very...honesty is the best thing in our relationship. Openness. Ons lieg nie vir mekaar nie. Not a chance.

407. R: Anything you would lie about.... (laughing)

408. N & J: Only when Nicki arranged a surprise wedding for Jaime on her birthday... (participants sharing story)

409. R: Ok thank you...

Recorders off. Interview closed.

APPENDIX J: Nicki and Jaime – Interview 2 Transcript

1. **RESEARCHER (R): (1) I know it's a few months ago already, so memory might not be that great, but tell me a bit about your experience during and after the first interview and the questionnaires you filled out...Any new realisations or thoughts about your relationship/partner...or even conversations started between you as a result of some of what was discussed in the interview/questionnaires?**
2. **R: Nicki you are nodding...**
3. NICKI (N): Yes, I think we did speak about it afterwards, uhm, and sometimes I think when you feel too comfortable, and you think everything is hunky dory, then you realise ok but there's a little more to your relationship you know, and so on. So ja, we touched on it briefly, and uhm...she's a little bit more shy, you know. So, she won't ask a lot of questions, and stuff like that. But I think my words to you were 'quite an eye opener'...
4. **R: I remember, when I emailed you to say thank you and you responded to say that it was an eye opener...**
5. N: Ja...so it makes you very aware that there might be other issues, you know not really big issues, but niggly stuff maybe...you know, that you can debate about. So, I think it was good.
6. **R: I actually wanted to ask, Nicki, as you say it's been an eye opener, whether that's been a good or a bad thing? Because I would imagine it could go either way...**
7. N: I think we're very complacent in our relationships, in general...you know...we just accept things as they are. But we need to broaden our scope a little bit, you know...and uhm, start pondering, listen, you know look...this doesn't look very kosher...maybe we could do it this way...and then start working on yourself. I became very self-aware, I think. In myself.
8. **R: And for you, Jaime?**
9. JAIME (J): No it was, like, I've been - since I've turned 30 actually...
10. **R: Since I've last seen you?**
11. J: Yes
12. **R: Oh wow!**
13. J: Yes, 2nd of June. So since then, I said to her as well, when I was in my twenties and now I'm in my thirties...it's like something changed. Something. I don't know what changed, but something changed. Like I'm not...I can feel I'm not the person that I used to be. And remember I told you that?
14. N: Hmmm.
15. J: I said for my last really big thing, I said I wanted to go big! On my birthday. And that's what I did. We had a party, and since then I'm chilled.
16. **R: I hear you say you can't quite put your finger on the change...do you think it's a behaviour that has changed or is it just a feeling internally...**

17. J: I think it's just a feeling internally. Like I've realised now, I need to lose my weight, I need to do this. I need to do that.
18. R: Working on self?
19. J: Ja...
20. N: It's like a switch that goes on. It's quite interesting ja, how just a number...psychologically a number...ja.
- 21. R: (2) Looking back at your (number of) years together, what are the ways in which your relationship has changed over the years?**
22. N: Uhm, we're still very much in love. I think that hasn't changed. Our trust levels are still the same. I think maybe become a little more complacent.... I think technology has taken over quite a bit in our lives. I was actually thinking we have a routine in the house where we get into bed...after we showered, and we just go on our phones for half an hour, just catch up, you know...on Facebook and I'm a Twitter fan. So, very much involved in politics and that. I go through my stuff, and so on. And then, you know we decided we're not going to do that anymore, because you need to shut down your brain. You need to have quality time...lie there, chat, just catch up on the day...because once you're at home you're cooking, you're cleaning whatever, you're sitting there watching your series, so you know, you don't really talk. But in the old days, before phones, people would sit and read in bed. People would...he'd have his newspaper or whatever he's reading, she'd have a nice book, so they were together even though they weren't talking. They were aware of one another. You know.
- 23. R: Still sharing a space, almost...**
24. N: Yes, so today technology's just changed, but I think we need to cut a lot of technology out of our lives.
- 25. R: I hear you making the distinction between our connection being different depending on whether we're on technology specifically or doing something else like reading a book. That maybe there's something in your experience that says that technology disconnects us even though we're sitting right next to each other?**
26. N: Yes, because you've got to remember with technology you're looking at videos. So, you've got audio.
- 27. R: It absorbs you...**
28. N: Yes. So, you don't focus on the person, you know, you're listening or watching a cute little video of a cat doing this or animal doing this, or whatever. So, you're not really in tune. You know a partner could just stop reading and answer you back, or have a quick thought or whatever. Or actually tell you. But now you'll share something on video, you know. But I think technology is actually a no-no in family life. It's a deal breaker.
- 29. R: It doesn't go together well with good relationships...**
30. N: No

31. J: The thing is, we can't leave the phones in our living room anymore, because our living room is now downstairs.
32. N: Yes, but still, you know you've got to cut off. But a lot of things have made us aware, you know.
- 33. R: And for you, Jaime? (repeat question (2))**
34. J: Well, in the beginning she wasn't very trustworthy of me. And I had to prove my...but now, we trust each other and...ja, the love is still there.
35. N: We're very much joined at the hip.
- 36. R: I remember you mentioning that last time. And I remember you saying, Nicki, that it's not always a good thing...**
37. J: But I think we're getting better.
38. N: Ja, I think so.
- 39. R: More comfortable with it, Jaime?**
40. J: Ja...
41. N: I think we're at a stage where we think alike. I think something, she says it. Or other way around. You know. But I don't think our feelings have changed...uhm, we know one other inside and out...what we're thinking. Uhm, the next move...but ja, trust has always been there. There's been no change, I think. Except maybe a stale mate with, you know uhm, maybe my health issues maybe, in a way. Stuff like that. I am getting older, so uhm, you know things like that...that she must be aware that I'm getting older...and that I will start getting health issues, and that. You know so...
42. J: Like the conversation we had last night...
43. N: Ja, that she doesn't have to worry about it so much, you know. That I can be on medication or whatever if I need it. There's always an option.
- 44. R: So, it sounds like for you there's been a lot of improvements that came with these changes rather than negatives?**
- 45. ((3) And in what ways have the changes improved and/or damaged your relationship?)**
46. N: It has, in a good way, because it's made us more stable...for the future, which is very important - our forecast for the future. Uhh, we're actually thinking of having a baby.
- 47. R: Oh really!?**
48. J: But only in the next two years or so.
49. N: Ja...I've actually wanted to...I don't want any more children...
- 50. R: I remember you talking about your adult daughter last time...I didn't think a new baby would come up for you guys...**
(participants laughing)
51. N: I've been putting on the breaks, because I didn't want to be the grandmother type of thing. Older and so on. And it takes...it's a lot of responsibility.

52. J: A few weeks ago you just said to me...
53. N: I don't know, it just clicked. And I just said to her, you know, 'You still want a baby?' I don't want to take it away from her. Cause I see she watch something where babies are being born or women in labour, I can see it affects her. So, I think: 'Why should I be selfish?' I don't want to be selfish and that person. So, if she wants her baby... So, we've discussed it, and said if the finances are in place...my child has to go to private school, I'm sorry. I don't believe in the educational system of this country anymore. Uhm, so, if you have all those checks and balances then go for it.
- 54. R: If the stability is in place...**
55. N: Yes, and if I fall away, there's something that she can base my legacy on and she can go forward, you know. Without being brought down with depression and anxiety and all these things that go with loss.
- 56. R: And Jaime for you? (repeat question (3))**
57. J: I think it improved a lot, not so much damaged. It made us stronger than where we were in the beginning. So, improved a lot, but I don't think any damages.
- 58. R: (4) How much do you feel you have individually changed or grown in your own life and being over these years together? ((5) In which ways has your individual experiences/growth/change/lives affected or influenced your relationship?)**
59. J: I think I changed a lot, because in the beginning I was...shy and everything. Even in my work. I was also shy and everything. And now...since I've been - let's say growing up - I've become more self-aware, standing up for myself and coming more out in my personality. And I've just got this thing of I don't care what other people think of me anymore.
- 60. R: How has that influenced your relationship with Nicki?**
61. J: She's actually supported it. Because she always said to me you need to stand up for yourself. And that's what I've been doing.
- 62. R: So, it's been encouraged?**
63. J: Yes. Like we don't fight at all. We debate. So, she always tells me: 'Challenge me.' And I've been doing it. Till she gets irritable with me. (laughing)
64. N: But when she does challenge me, and she stands up, then I back off. You see. Because I'm the more strict one. I've got my set of rules. And I've been teaching her that: never lower your standards for anybody. You know, set the bar for yourself...if you need to do something, don't ask me for validation. Do what you think...
65. J: But I still do it sometimes.
66. N: Ja she will. 'So, what do you think?' I said, 'Don't ask me. You need to make that decision.' Because I'm preparing her for the day that I'm not there. That she can stand on her own two feet. And she's come a hell of a long way. I'm really proud of her.

67. J: Like even this morning, I said: 'Do you think I need to leave my hair like this?', because I only made the front part in little streaks. 'No, I don't know you decide' So I said, 'Ok bugger this. I'm doing my whole head.'
- 68. R: And for you, Nicki? (repeating questions (4) & (5))**
69. N: I think uhm...I think I would've liked to, in myself maybe not as a couple as you say, in myself I would have liked to have done more. I would have liked to...ok, financially it hasn't been great, but I would've liked to have studied more. I think there's a lot of things that I want to do that I'm not getting myself to doing. I can't...I'm basically on the edge, but I can't get myself to go over into what I want to achieve, you know. That's the one thing that's keeping me back a little bit.
- 70. R: Has it had an impact on the relationship at all?**
71. N: No... it's stayed the same. I think it's my own internal issues that I need to deal with. You know, my own ambition, my own things. There's so much I want to do that I don't know where to start. And nobody gives me the opportunity to actually go for it and say... One stupid thing: I want to do drums. I come out of a musical family. So, I need to, I want to play drums.
- 72. R: Your creativity needs stimulation...**
73. N: But I can't get there because I haven't had an opportunity to actually go. And I've got a very wild side to me! I do have. You know, but it's like you stifle yourself.
- 74. R: I was just about to say, it sounds like you then maybe need to create that opportunity for yourself and not stifle yourself...**
75. N: Yes. Because we are two totally different personalities. You know, my interests are not her interests. Now somehow we just make it work. They say you have to have the same interests, which can be very boring.
- 76. R: They also say opposites attract...**
77. J: Like she will watch the rugby and I will just like...
78. N: She will sit and knit. Like a 'regte, ou vrou'.
- 79. R: (laughing) Ja, some people will say that's a very traditional dynamic to have!**
80. N: But at least she's sitting there.
- 81. R: Exactly, again that togetherness.**
82. N: Yes.
- 83. R: (6) What are some of the external factors that have impacted your relationship over the last (number of) years together? Both positively and negatively.**
84. N: Ok, friends is a big thing.
85. J: Hmmm.
86. N: We don't have friends. I think that's one of the things that we have discussed it before, uhm...there is a bit of a jealousy issue, I think.
87. J: Especially from my side.
88. N: From her side. She's very protective.

89. J: I have to.
90. N: So, I don't have friends. I disengage from people, because I don't want to put her in a position where she has to feel jealous, or anything. Because I mean, I am a libra...I'm a bit of a flirt so...If I come over as very friendly, then she might see it as something else.
91. J: Yeeaaah....but some of the girls that you do make friends with tend to want to take that flirty-ness somewhere else.
92. N: Probably.
93. J: That's why I get jealous.
94. N: So, that's why I don't interact with anybody. You know, uhm, even my colleagues...even at work or whatever. I won't invite them home or...I'm not like that, because I don't believe in fraternisation of staff. When I finish up work I go home and spend time with family. So, I don't have friends. So, I don't have somebody where I can, if I feel a little bit down today then I can't talk to anybody. So, you know I think that's on the negative side, I think.
95. J: Hmmm.
96. N: That's the only thing. Because it's just the two of us. Which is not always a healthy thing, either. I don't see that as a healthy thing. The only interaction we have is with my daughter. We'll go out. That's the only interaction we do.
- 97. R: So then maybe not so much external impact, specifically because you've been so isolated as a couple?**
98. N: Yes.
- 99. R: And Jaime? (repeat question (6))**
100. J: I think mostly that. Because we don't go out at all. We don't have friends. I'm now trying to make new friends with some of my work colleagues. There is a girl that we both know. You (to Nicki) worked with her mother. So, I'm actually trying to organise something. So basically, the friends thing. Because we're so isolated.
- 101. R: And family, I'm wondering. Are you equally isolated from family?**
102. N & J: No.
103. J: We've got a group chat on our WhatsApp and it's just going crazy.
104. N: I get on very well with her mom and her gran in Mossel Bay, and so on. And she gets on well with my family, so there's absolutely no issues. So, we do engage with them. Because I don't believe in isolation. Especially from family. You can still weed out your bad friends and negativity, but family is family.
- 105. R: And then I also remember you guys sharing during the first interview the impact of the household within which you live with your tenants?**
106. J: We actually moved!
107. N: Because eventually after nearly four and a half years...
108. J: That end of May, they sold the house...

109. R: So, no more navigating the living arrangements...

110. N: Yes.

111. J: So, we're only living with our daughter.

112. N: Yes, my daughter has moved in with us. So, it worked out really well. That was quite a rush, though. They gave us a months' notice. The owner. Actually it was a good thing that we were kind of forced.

113. R: (7) And what are some of the events/situations that have occurred within your relationship over the years that has affected/impacted it – whether positively or negatively.

114. J: The only thing that really happened was losing Biscuit.

115. N: Ja. We lost our cat on the day we moved. We moved on the Saturday...it was raining so badly it was a horrible move...then...a week before, she started having breathing problems... took her to VetClin and this vet said she had asthma, but then she never had asthma. She had feline leukaemia. So, she died a week later. It was horrific.

116. R: I'm so sorry to hear that. Was she an old kitty?

117. N & J: No. She was 2 years old.

118. J: I had to take her to Epping that Sunday. My mom and I rushed through to Epping. They had to put her out in my arms.

119. N: So that was a bit traumatic. So, it's one of those things with pets you have to live with.

120. N: Other than that I don't think there was something traumatic. Except her (Jaime) abuse right at the beginning of the relationship.

121. R: So, coming into the relationship, the legacy of your previous relationships, then?

122. J: Hmmm.

123. N: Ja, which worked out pretty well, I think. She never had therapy for it, but I tried to help her as much I could. You know, through that. Her mother was there to support her and all that. So that turned out ok. Uhm...I can't think of any drastic...no... it's been pretty solid.

124. J: Hmmm.

125. N: As I say I don't think we've exposed ourselves much.

126. R: (8) How did you navigate these internal/external influences? Were you able to limit their impact or was it more of an after-the-fact-damage-control approach?

127. N: I think we've taken it in our stride, and I tend to be, uhh, somebody who's a glass-half-full...so, uhm, because I don't like negativity in the workplace. I shut myself off. So, but it doesn't mean that I don't feel down a lot of the times. You know, it's just that I don't show. So, I'll be inspiring other people, but then I don't maybe feel great about my situation or my feelings. But, uhm, it's also menopausal, because I'm in menopause. But I think having a positive attitude has done a lot. And then my faith, obviously.

128. R: I remember you last time saying it's one of your pillars.

129. N: Yes, it's very important. And uhm, I think we just took it in our stride. Day for day. I mean we don't fight about money. It's one of our no-no's that I said right from the beginning.
130. J: And if a discussion goes that way, I would pull back and say let's rather not.
131. N: Because that's when accusations flies... 'Jy't nie dit gedoen nie, en jy't dit gedoen!' So, uhm, we don't talk about things...we talk about money, but we don't talk about it in a negative form. Because as soon as you say: 'Ek het nie geld nie', you're being negative. 'I'm just temporarily out of funds'. (everyone laughing)
132. **R: Anything you would add, Jaime? (repeat question (8))**
133. J: No. We've been handling everything quite well.
134. N: It sounds very idyllic.
135. **R: Dit klink lekker!**
136. N: Nê. It sounds like...I mean we're not the perfect couple, you know. I think in a way, I was thinking now as she was saying it, sometimes your mind blocks things out. Cause the more you think about your situation, the worse it becomes. So, instead of dealing with it, I think you block it.
137. J: Hmmm.
138. N: And then I'm somebody that, ek krop op, you see. I seem to just load, load, load all the time.
139. **R: It's interesting you bring that up, Nicki, because even as you guys were now thinking about internal stressors on the relationship and you brought up Biscuit, I was thinking how you seemed to bring up current issues rather than older issues over the last 10 years....And I was wondering to myself whether that meant that in your relationship, once stuff has passed it's past?**
140. N: I think it depends on the trauma. I think it's like in Biscuit, you should always remember her. That's a different kind of trauma. The loss, but then the acceptance, but then the memory comes in. You know. We've got her photo in a frame, so every time we look we think back. You know, so it depends on the kind of trauma.
141. J: Like for a few weeks after that she was still emotional and everything. With me, I was there, she (Biscuit) was there, and I can't carry more of that.
142. **R: Different ways of dealing with things.**
143. N: Hmmm, yes.
(Nicki got very emotional talking about loss of Biscuit. A moment was taken to just therapeutically normalise her grief and contain her emotions before carrying on with interview.)
144. **R: (9) If we imagine that each of you came into this relationship with a suitcase packed full of experiences and lessons from your respective families in which you grew up...what are some of the experiences and lessons you think you brought in with you from your family about intimate relationships? (10) How has these experiences/lessons influenced or impacted your relationship and its dynamics?**

145. N: My dad used to say I'm the non-emotional one. And they were wrong, hey.
146. J: I think with mine, when we started the relationship, I was shy and everything. And I had the abuse behind me...and... ja, uhm, just throughout she was helping me with it...and I've become more comfortable in the relationship, trustworthy as well into the relationship. And just settling.
- 147. R: And thinking to your own parents' example of having a relationship?**
148. J: That's where my abuse came from, so...
- 149. R: Abuse from the family system...**
150. J: Yes.
- 151. R: Ok, so then I understand that what you're saying is that the stability and safety that you found with Nicki is actually completely different to your family legacy.**
152. J: Yes.
- 153. R: And has the content of your suitcase impacted your relationship with Nicki, at all?**
154. J: I think a lot. In the beginning yes, with the sexual side of it. Cause I was sexually abused by my stepfather. So, from there, I really didn't trust men. Yes, I did sleep with a guy. But I didn't trust them. And then when I met her I was like: 'Do I go for it? Don't I go for it?' She is my first...And then from there we just took it one step at a time.
- 155. R: I would imagine Nicki that Jaime's experience could have made her a little hard to reach emotionally at times?**
156. N: And actually, it was the weirdest thing, I mean - we're speaking very honestly - that our first intimate encounter is when she broke down. And funny enough, I had this sense when we were just dating that she had been sexually abused. And I had asked her...
157. J: I just denied it.
158. N: So, I left it. And then our first intimate experience she broke down. And then she told me everything. And she felt so much better after that.
- 159. R: The weight lifted.**
160. N: Ja. Because she couldn't tell anybody. So, ja, and then, even sexually it hasn't impacted our lives. But I've been very aware, you know, that you don't do anything that's going to bring back her memories and stuff like that.
- 161. R: You've been very aware to create a safe space for her, Nicki?**
162. N: Ja, even the body spray... He used to wear a certain spray...so I'm aware not to buy it, and things like that. But she's come a long way.
- 163. R: And with you, Nicki? (repeat question (9) and (10)) You're a preacher's daughter if I remember correctly?**
164. N: Ja, pastoor s'n. I think I was very fortunate. I don't have any abusive background. With regards to my parents, verbally or anything. I have a non-emotional background, maybe. You know, not showing emotions, not hugging...no Christmas...no gifts...my mom did everything. So very cold parenting in a way. Uhm, and maybe in a sense I've carried that over a little bit. You know, that

non-emotional side, I think. There was a woman I met, a friend of mine that passed away a couple of years ago, uhm, her sister in law was supposed to be some kind of prophet or something. But anyway, they came over to our old house, they had a braai there, and she just sat there and then called me one side to say 'Die Here sê jy moet leer om lief te hê'. You know, and I though, sometimes she talks a whole lot of nonsense you know...

165. J: Oh ja...

166. N: Veral as sy 'n paar doppe in het! (laughing)

167. N: But I thought to myself ek weet sy praat die waarheid. I know that. So, I haven't really improved on that in myself. I've carried that over. That is my suitcase, I think.

168. R: And it's been impacting...

169. N: It has, yes. Maybe my relationships towards other people. Not that I don't help other people or are friendly, but I think I get stuck in showing emotions, maybe, to people. That's why I'm - in interviews, people ask: 'How do you see yourself or how do other people see you?' - and I say, 'Other people see me as serious'.

170. J: Yes.

171. N: As a serious person. You know. But I'm actually not. So, I think I probably need to take my mask off. A little bit.

172. R: And the mask and non-emotionality, does it also affect your relationship with Jaime?

173. N: I think a little bit. I'm not somebody that's 'huggy' and whatever. Ek is baie skuldig daar. (Jaime laughing)

174. N: You know, she will literally climb all over me...and I'll say, 'Spasie asb engel'... So, I know I need to work on that. I think I'm too old to work on that, still.

175. R: Old dog new tricks...

176. J: I force you to do it.

177. N: But you can't help it. She's just like that. Totally different to me. But in the other sense, I'm more emotional, and very in touch with people's suffering, than what she is, again.

178. R: Even though your dad called you unemotional...

179. N: Yes. People suffering, kids suffering, you know, stuff like that. Very small heart.

180. R: (11) In your experience and opinion, what influences the alignment or connection between the two of you as a couple? What makes you feel more or less aligned/connected?

181. N: I don't know...I think we have a very solid foundation. It's...I can't really describe in words, but uhm,...it might be a cosmic something.

182. J: Like in a way, we were just meant to be.

183. N: Yes, it's like the universe just pulled us together and we just make it work. I just wish a lot of people - if I look at how the other people behave towards one another - I just think, 'jis dol, it's a bit harsh', you know. I mean, they should have done it this way and this way. So, it's just...

184. J: Even Sandy said she wish she could have the relationship we have.

185. N: Ja, I mean everybody thinks we're such a great couple. And it's not a front we put on. It's, I can't explain it, it's something cosmic, it's something universal. It's like two energies towards one another, you know. I don't know.
- 186. R: So, there's this weird alignment or connection as you describe it...what are the things that makes it feel even stronger?**
187. N: Even if the honesty is positive or negative. It's still honesty.
188. J: She told me a few weeks ago what she would like. I would think about it, taking everything into consideration. And I told her last night: 'Listen, I know you don't want a child, but why did you bring it up? Don't just do it for me. I know your age. I just know you.' And then that's what we spoke about.
189. N: And I said to her, uhm, I said, 'Are you doing it for me? Tell me now, what is the real reason?' And she said: 'I'm scared.' I think we're scared of the unknown.
- 190. R: Once you've opened a box or choice you can't take it back, necessarily.**
191. N: Yes. So, I think that was about it. But I can't really explain it. I think just open honesty. Telling one another everything. How you feel, what you've done, where you've been, who you spoke to.
- 192. R: So, openness and honesty increase the alignment?**
193. N: You're an open book. Yes. There's no mystery.
- 194. R: (12) In what ways does your daily interactions (as a couple) and life demands influence your bond as a couple?**
195. N: Uhm, I think sometimes challenging...But uhm, if people had to ask how does your relationship last or work, I think - I was actually preaching to my daughter about this the other day - about having to have a sense of humour. Laughing at each other's mistakes.
196. J: We do that a lot.
197. N: Ja, we do that quite a bit. It's, I don't know, just showing up.
- 198. R: Being present?**
199. N: Yes. Yes.
- 200. R: So, between keeping a sense of humour and just showing up and not moving away from the other person, that helps to navigate these daily challenges?**
201. N: And I think knowing what the other person's reaction is going to be. In a difficult situation. Dit stel jou gerus. So, if she knows I'm going to be very unhappy, then she knows how to deal with it.
202. J: Rather than tell you.
203. N: Yes. But then sometimes, I might even surprise her. I think it depends on your mood at the time. Lots of external factors.
204. J: If I see she's in a grumpy mood and I need to tell her something then: Ok, check the mood...No, let's do it at a later stage.
- 205. R: So being tuned in enough to know how to navigate difficult situations.**

206. N & J: Yes.

207. R: So, what would you add, Jaime? (repeat question (12))

208. J: No, pretty much what Nicki has said.

209. R: (13) If other people were to look at you as a couple, what do you imagine they would see or notice about the connection/alignment/space between you?

210. N: I think the first thing they see is our age difference.

211. J: Hmmm, ja.

212. N: Uhm, lot of people say...

213. N & J: 'Oh, is it your daughter?'

214. N: I have that all the time. It doesn't even make you cross anymore. I think the perception of...human nature. That you have a stereotype. And, as you say, you have to box things in. You have to have a black couple, a white couple. You know, as soon as you mix things around, it becomes 'odd'. You know...and people get inquisitive. They will sit and stare and start wondering. And that's what I love the most. Cause I'll say to her: 'Ek wonder, hulle sit nou en kyk en wonder is dit nou haar dogter of...hulle hou dan hande vas...very cosy family or what is it?', you know. But I like surprising them. But I think if they look at us they see that we are genuine. You know, that's very important. Uhm...and... we always look at one another when we talk.

215. J: Ja.

216. N: Always. Like affirmation, confirmation. So...

217. R: You make contact in that way.

218. N: Always. Hmmm. When we're talking to, like in a group of people, we always look at one another when we talk.

219. R: And you, Jaime? (repeat question (13))

220. J: Also mostly the age difference. Because I'm much younger than she is. And ja, basically, like most of the people, when they do find out that we're a couple, they'll say that, 'You guys have such a positive energy around you.'

221. N: We've had no negative feedback from any straight people. Never been called derogatory names...ja.

222. R: (14) Is being available and accessible to each other important in your relationship? How do you practically maintain availability and accessibility with one another?

223. J: I've been cutting it down, now. Of speaking to her constantly. I will tell her in the mornings: 'I'm at work, I love you.' And then that's it. Then now and again I will just tell her, when I'm on lunch, I'll just pop her a message to say: 'I'm on lunch, love you.' Or if she doesn't have data, I'll give her a quick call. But sometimes I don't even WhatsApp her or call her to say I'm on lunch or on my way home. Just if there's something she needs from the shop, then I'll tell her: 'I'm on

lunch, do you want me to go to the shop, yes or no?' And then that's it. Then I don't talk to her until I get home.

224. R: So less checking in on your side, which I understand is deliberate due to previous dynamics as you shared in the first interview. But with that, do you still feel as if you are both available and accessible to each other?

225. J: Yes.

226. R: And Nicki on your side? (repeat question (14))

227. N: Yes. I know her call centre times, when she is available and not. But I know that when I need her she'll be there.

228. R: So, you work around each other's schedules.

229. N: Yes.

230. J: Like my phone will lie in my drawer and if I hear it vibrate, I'll just open it and check. If it's a private number or number I don't know, I'll leave it. But if I see it's her, then I will tell my manager: 'Listen, can I get this call?' And I will walk out.

231. R: (15) How do you practically remain engaged with one another – even when you are not occupying the same space/activity?

232. N: I think that's something I think we need to work on. Like I said, with technology and that. My intellectual levels are maybe not hers....so, my interests are different. So, I sometimes find it difficult to communicate certain passions of mine and certain topics that I would like to talk about, that she doesn't engage in.

233. J: Like the politics.

234. N: Ja, but anything else...philosophical stuff, an article that I've read...I'm more the one engaging and talking about stuff. So, I miss the rebuttal from her side and the feedback. She's very closed off when it comes to things like that. So, that's the only think that I miss, I think. That intellectual stimulation.

235. R: And for you, Jaime? (repeat question (15))

236. J: Look, it's basically...when we are in the same space. If we don't talk, we know each other. We know this one is there, that one. We are together. Uhm, I try to - when we are not together - not to like I was in the past like: 'I'm here now, I'm there now.' I've stopped doing that. I will just tell her I'm going there, and I'll see you when I see you. So, I think from my side that telling her where I am stopped.

237. R: (16) How important is growth in the relationship? What does "growing" in your relationship mean for you? How do you stimulate or generate growth in your own relationship?

238. N: It means quite a bit, I think.... uhm...because I don't think you can actually reach the level you want to.

239. R: It's not a finite arrival point...

240. N: No, it's a daily process. I think you have to reinvent yourself all the time...because things can get stale, you know. I appreciate people that have been married 60, 70 years. Uhm, like Bishop Tutu. One of my favourites. There's definitely somethings that's there. And don't think they don't make mistakes...So, uhm, you just need to work at it. You need to get out on things that make your life interesting. Go out on dates, or go away...

241. R: Jaime you've been nodding there as well that growth is important...How do you generate the growth?

242. J: I think with that, to generate it, we're more playful with each other in that sort of way.

243. N: Ja, I think growth is important. You need to open yourself up to a lot of things. And there's a lot of things that factor into growth...your financial situation...we'd love to go to London. So, we've been planning on a trip, maybe God willing, in a year or so. To London a bit.

244. R: Depends how big the baby is...(laughing)

(Participants laughing)

245. N: I said to her last night, 'Remember when you've got a baby you can go nowhere, hey.'

246. J: Yeah, but we can do it before the baby.

247. R: But then you also point out that growth is sometimes dependent on other factors for you, such as finances. What else could influence it?

248. N: Uhm, I think family dynamics as well. Very important. Uhm, setting goals for yourself. Further studying, whatever you want to do. For personal growth as well. Because then the one can support the other in their growth as well. So, if she wants to study further I can motivate her and help her...ja.

249. R: (17) What are the practical ways in which you remain present or "plugged in" with each other?

250. N: I think for me it's just the thought of somebody's well-being if they are not with you. You have a telepathy kind of thing going on.

251. R: An unseen connection, almost?

252. N: Yes. You know, you would...I believe that even in a day, you've got to think of that person's wellbeing, even though you are not there.

253. R: Holding them in mind...thinking about them...keeping them in a positive light...

254. N: Yes.

255. R: Jaime? (repeat question (17))

256. J: Even if I do cut the connection during the day, I would still think: 'Is she ok?', wonder what she's doing, talk about her with my friends...

257. N: I think also just trusting that she's in a safe space.

258. J: Ja.

259. N: You know, uhm, and you know that she's there. It makes, puts you at ease.

- 260. R: So, your “plugged in” is not something practical that involves the other person, but rather something that you do on your side that still keeps that person connected to you. Which I would imagine would feed positively into when you are then actually back together.**
261. J: Ja.
262. N: Yes.
- 263. R: (18) As couples, we have to find a balance between our life as individuals (incl. goals, dreams, occupations) and our relationship with our partners.... How do you each manage that balance between relationship intimacy and individual independence?**
264. J: I think the intimacy part has changed...a lot. From where we were to where we are now. Uhm...it's been improving, as well, for me and for her. But we've handling it quite well with the daily stuff going on, and coming to where we need to be. Like we set a goal for today, we want to achieve this and this and this. Like for the past week I've been trying to sort out our clothing cupboard.
265. N: Remember intimacy is not just a sexual thing.
- 266. R: Yes. So, to repeat the question and what I mean with intimacy... (question (18) elaborated)**
267. J: And I've also been trying to...I've always said to her I love you like a million times. I started scaling that down.
268. N: She'll validate and say: 'Do you still love me?' And I'll say: 'Why should I say I love you? You know I love you.' But then, I'd have to say it so she can validate that. It's like she has to have her fill of that every day. It's becoming better now.
269. J: I used to ask you that a few times a day...
270. N: Yes. I mean love is an act, you know. It's not just words, you've got to show.
- 271. R: So, Nicki how do you balance the intimacy vs. independence?**
272. N: I think the most important is the little things when it comes to any intimacy. Uhm, you know, not too much, in any way. You have to be balanced, between the two. You know, if I'm just going to do this (stroking Jaime's hand) with her, then she's going to know she's loved. And, your skin is very sensitive. So, just by touch, it's that well-being and creating that well-being. So, it doesn't have to be the big things. You can literally settle an argument, bring down anxiety and anything like that, just by the physical connection.
273. J: Like this past week, I was still sitting in the living room and as I got into the bedroom, my whole mood swing was different. When I was in the living room I was happy, chatty...when I got into the room I was irritated, grumpy...irritated with myself, the toothbrush, the shower, everything. And she said just come sit between my legs, let me give you a massage.
- 274. R: A reset button, almost.**
275. N: Yes, just loosen up your shoulders a little bit and...ja.
276. N: Actually kind words are also a form of intimacy.

277. R: (19) How do you generally navigate difference between the two of you – in personality, levels of affection, communication, age, etc?

278. N: I think accepting something you cannot change. That things won't change, certain things you cannot change.

279. J: Ja like, I can't change her age group...

280. N: Ja, I just cannot. We can try to make it better, but you cannot change certain things.

281. R: And things like personality or behaviours?

282. J: Look, I know my personality has changed a lot from when I met her.

283. N: I think couples therapy is very important. That's where you get to know yourself and your own faults and face your own demons. And be brutally honest. You know...having a third person referee and not taking sides.

284. R: And starting to have conversations that we maybe usually don't have...

285. N: Yes exactly.

286. J: And then just speaking about it again afterwards to each other...

287. R: Not letting the conversation stop...

288. N & J: Yes.

289. R: (20) To each individual: What is your deepest wish or desire for your relationship with _____?

290. N: My desire is to provide the best for my wife. To be...for her to be comfortable. In all aspects. Financially, everything. To really be comfortable and achieve the best that she can be. You know. That is my desire. Not to fail her. Because I'm scared, you know, when you get older you're scared of failure. Scared you're not going to provide for your family. That's my ultimate goal for my relationship.

291. J: Mine is to actually love her as much as I can. And to prepare for one day when she's not going to be there. And also to make it comfortable...to do things for her.

292. N: To give me morphine one day.

293. J: No I won't do that.

294. N: You see that's how we roll...

(laughing)

Recorders off. Interview closed.

APPENDIX K: Bianca and Vernon – Interview 1 Transcript

1. **RESEARCHER (R): (1) How would you describe your relationship/bond with your partner?**
2. BIANCA (B): Uhm, I'm fairly happy. Uhhmm...there is a lot of...we're obviously on a constant-always-monitoring our relationship: how it is for me and how it is for him. And so yes, we can always better on communication...spending time together...cause of the 3 kids... (laughing) So obviously because of that, and sometimes work schedule...So for me, that's it.
3. **R: You mention that you monitor your relationship...what do you mean with that?**
4. B: Yeah, we'll always do like a check-in after months or two, just to see: 'How are you doing? Am I still doing everything...how can I improve the relationship? Communication skills...how am I doing for you? Are you saying stuff that I maybe don't like, or the tone or stuff like that?' So, check in.
5. **R: Vernon, how would you describe the bond/relationship?**
6. VERNON (V): My answer is basically the same. It's just, communication on my side has not always been my strong point. I will say like: 'I'm fine', when it comes to my feelings. It's like you need to ask me a question and then give me a time to...because I can't always put my feelings in like...I understand my feelings, but I can't always explain it to the next person properly, cause I'm a very technical inclined mind. And I prefer to do things rather than feel.
7. **R: (2) How do you create intimacy (closeness) in your relationship with your partner?**
8. V: I'm a very physically affectionate person...lots of hugs, kisses...and she's like the opposite. (Big sigh from Bianca, laughing) And then cause she's the opposite, she thinks that if I just like hang on her, or something like that, I actually want something in the bedroom. But I just actually like hugging and....
9. B: There's nothing to add to that. (laughing) I'm more of a...I just want to be around you, but don't touch me...a lot. So, I like his presence, even when we're arguing we like being close to each other. So, we argue, but don't go away! Stay. In the area. Where we can see...whether we were angry at each other or not. That's fine. So, we like that closeness of each other. But where he will come and lay and touch and kiss, I'm not that kind of person. So, in 10 years together, that's kind of always been the problem. But I think it's somehow improved...I'm only talking of myself here, giving myself points here (laughing). Somehow improved to touching...but I'm not...I'm again...I would rather express my feelings with talking...where he's bad at it...and I'm a bit better. And where I'm bad at touching, he's good.
10. **R: So, you complement each other?**
(Participants concur)
11. **R: (3) What makes you believe that your partner is committed to you?**

12. V: She's always there. I have what they call a... (resting bitch face) ...so uhm...I'm not always easy to approach. But like she says, we're always in the vicinity of each other. So even if you have like a massive fight where the house feels like it's a matchbox, we never leave each other's side. We never get in the car and really drive off, because I think subconsciously we...well for me...if you leave the premises, in that state, you can do the wrong things. You can indulge in drinking...meet the wrong person...things can lead from there to x y and z. In the sense that she's always there is that, I come from work, she's there. I'm having a bad day, she's there. Whether I talk to her or not, she's just there. So, if I need, like that emergency button, if you need to push it, she's there. Also, very understanding with the fact that I'm not very expressive where it comes with my feelings, so she will kind of like...If she can see the flames emanating from me, she will kind of like create that barrier around me to keep the kids at a certain distance, just so that I can kind of calm down...so that. Because sometimes...I don't mean it, but my way that I speak can be abrasive. So, she tries to...not keep the kids away, but kind of like...uhm shield them...so they don't get a bad image of me type of thing. So that's why I mean like she's always there, when I need her or don't need her. She's always there.
- 13. R: And for you Bianca?**
14. B: It's a weird question (laughing) I would say, because he's always there. Almost the...because I come from a single parent household, so for me, it's also the fact of just leaving when we're angry. He doesn't do that. Even just committing to getting married and always working on the marriage. I think always trying to become better. So, I think for me, that shows a lot of commitment of he wants to be there.
15. V: And I come home every day. (whispering)
16. B: (laughing) He's giving himself points here.
- 17. R: What does that mean, what's the joke with that?**
18. V: Uhm. We've had an argument before where she's actually asked me: Do I want to be here? And my point was that every day, I choose to walk through the door. Coming from work, I can easily go to my mother or I can go to a friend or whatever, but I choose. It's a choice I make every day. A deliberate choice, that I walk through the door. No matter how the situation is at home or whatever, I choose to walk through the door.
- 19. R: (4) What are the ways in which you express/demonstrate your love and affection for your partner?**
20. B: (laughing) Uhm, I think being patient... (both participants giggling). I think for me it's always trying to improve on things that fill his love pot, even though I maybe don't want it. Like intimacy for him – physical touch and that. I'm not big on it, but trying to at least give him a hug now and then. When it comes to kissing then I will be like 'Ok let's do this once every thirty minutes, not every five minutes', you know. Like ok that's enough now. I'm like, that's my barrier. And then I will try, ok in the next hour maybe, like I will try, because that's what his love language is.

Even though it's not for me. I try to show him that I do care. With communication, it is big for me, but I won't try and always push him to do it, because then I might push him away. So, I do push him to go past his boundaries, but not too much at one point.

21. R: You mention love languages...is that a concept you got from previous therapy or from reading the book?

22. B: We always go to like marriage seminars or stuff like that...couples...where you just talk about couples and what do you feel. We've never done like the research, but we always just like...something new you can introduce into your relationship. Whether it's about intimacy, sex, whatever.

23. R: And for you, Vernon?

24. V: Doing things. So uhm...she is, like she said earlier, in a lot of NPO's and she's a photographer, boudoir photography, so uhm...props and things I will make if she asks me...Instead of buy a bed for the girls, I make the beds...uhm, I try to keep the kitchen clean (Bianca laughing)...uhm, I clean the house, make up the bed, things like that. And when it comes to a couch like this...uhm, she usually sits in the one corner and then I will sit in my corner, so that I'm here. Even though I would actually prefer to like lay on her and...I just sit there to accompany how she...To me, like if you're cuddling, then you sit like close and you like...arms in and...for her, cuddling is like: 'You sit there and I'll sit here...and maybe my foot will be on you.'

25. R: (5) What contributes to the quality or nature of your relationship?

26. V: Teamwork...

27. B: We always joke, we're good partners and friends, but when it comes to our relationship sometimes it's a bit wonky (laughing). So, when it comes to the kids, and finances, and business and...we automatically just click, we go...but when it comes to our relationship, somehow it doesn't always work.

28. R: Where are the hiccups?

29. B: Again, I think it's that we're too different. Like his definition of intimacy is not mine, and what I maybe want with quality time is talking and connecting that way, cause now I want a bit of depth into what he's thinking... 'Am I still on the right track?'...cause we're both kind of a...uhm, how do you say...we like monitoring where we are. Almost a bit of an OCD (laughs)...we like to know where and what we must do and, you know, with his technical thing it comes into play there...so we always like knowing are we on track. How far we must go. But with the relationship it doesn't always work that way, and so that's where we kind of clash. Sometimes. Most times.

30. R: Vernon?

31. V: It is as she says. We can make life work, very well....but marriage, there's a lot of hiccups due to the difference of how we are...communication and things like that, so...team work, house

work, kids – it runs like a well-oiled machine, but our relationship now and then takes a dip, and a high and a low...type of thing.

32. B: And I think our backgrounds...his parents are still married...mine had been divorced. So, I have almost that caution-in-marriage-type-of-thing where my parents were married for thirteen years, and then they divorced. So, for me, childhood, it was always happy and then suddenly end of primary school it was like: And then? So, it's almost that caution that if you are too happy, then something might happen and break. And it will all stop. And I've also encountered in my life, like I've been raped, so all of that stuff have played a huge role in our relationship. I think only now it's basically dipping off in a way where I'm almost more aware of myself and how I let my past influence my relationship with him. Where for him, he always had a mom and a dad sometimes, I think...and the way the father figure was in the house also plays a role in our relationship.

33. R: (6) In what ways does your partner meet your needs?

34. V: Sort of like a question and answer type of thing. If I need, like she said with the love pot, she will basically check in to see if it's full or not. If it's running low. And what she needs to do to fill it up and address it in that situation.

35. B: I would say the same, almost, ja. So, I think what sometimes also happens in our relationship – we're so busy with a lot of things, and so we assume that the relationship is fine. And then, something happens. There's an argument and now we check in. Because with the kids as well, sometimes you don't get time to do those check-ins on a regular basis and then we now go: 'Ok what was your needs, where did I fall flat? Cause I thought it was fine and then it wasn't.' And because I do sometimes go through a bit of a rift where...more me, I think, I'll talk about myself...where uhm you kind of don't...Because there's still a lot of things happening you don't want to add the relationship things to it. So, everything is 'fine' until it's no longer fine. And all of it comes out and now you address it. Because there's kids, I don't want to add more relationship stuff. So, everything is 'fine'. And then afterwards when you really have time to talk, you find out it wasn't fine the whole time. Someone was suffering and now you need to almost fix it.

36. V: Attend to it...

37. R: (7) What is it that you enjoy or value about your partner's company?

38. B: For me, it would be that he brings out the parts that I'm afraid of. Before I met Vernon, I was really afraid of being myself...uhm...I would always tell him I was a chameleon a bit...so when I'm with friends, I'm that colour because you want me that colour. So when I got to know him, I really didn't know myself, but I knew the image of what I wanted in a man from a young...so I kind of portrayed that on him, and so when I got to know him he almost forced me to be myself. So, if I like to eat chocolate the whole day it's like: Do it because you want to. So, he brings out a lot of that in me... if I want to do – it's like, Why don't you do it? What's the excuse?...Ok, so

let's address that. Don't because you're afraid of being you, now you don't want to do it. Leave it. Let's fix the other issues around what's not you. If people don't like that it's fine.

39. V: I can switch off...cause my brain is always working...Like I'm sitting here, there's a mark on the ceiling...I've noticed there's a crack in the wall...the colour of the tiles...how to build that (pointing to cupboard) – I like working with wood, so that's a new idea that I've put into mind...wondering how the clock is kept up, if it's attached to the sponges or a nail knocked into the wall...uhm, how dead quiet it is in here, and how the sound is actually bouncing off the walls...So my mind is always like that. Constantly working. To the point that last night I was actually up to like two o'clock working, because my mind...Oh, I recently lost my job, end of April. So, for me, having a father figure...according to the role of a man – you never get tired, you always work, you must support your family, you must provide for your family, so...That has been engrained into me, though it's not one hundred percent right, that's how I've been living my life. So, the first few weeks has been fine, but now it's actually dawning on me that I don't have a job. So last night I was up till like two o'clock...my mind was just running, crazy, so uhm, the good and the bad thing about being in her company, is that I switch off. So, when I walk in the door, I'm calm. I switch off, but it's also bad because then she needs me to be switched on, because she needs things from me. So, I'd say the best quality about being in her company is that fact that I can actually just switch off. Like I can be calm.

40. R: (8) How do you know what your partner's needs are in different situations?

41. V: I ask. Before, when we started dating, you're in this kind of love bubble, so you assumed you knew everything that the partner needed, and things like that. But as she said, we were finding ourselves, so that was like...fake...if you want to put it that way. But now, it's better to just ask. Like I can tell when something is off, but I can't exactly know what is off. So, then I would actually: 'Are you ok, can I do something for you?'...I ask her. You see cause when I know something is wrong, I will actually keep asking and that irritates her to the point that she actually wants to throw me out the door. Uhm, but then again it comes to my brain working overtime, so if I like don't have a conclusion to something, and even if she says it's fine, the way that she says it's fine is like: 'You're not actually being honest, there is still something there', and I would leave it for a while and then come back and...so asking is the best way I know her needs.

42. B: I'll also say you ask, but I think because we've...and I think my mommy senses kicks in there, but you almost like know that he's not fine. Or...like he says, the way he says certain things, you know it's not...he's not normal. Or he will say that he's normal, but his behaviour changes in such a way that you can feel there's almost like a distance, or things like that...uhm, and then normally after few talking to this one and that one, it's like, 'Ok, you were right.' (laughing)

43. R: (9) Do you exclusively schedule quality time together as a couple, or is your time together part of your usual daily activities & tasks?

44. V: Fitting in between.

45. B: It's like a mixture of both of them. Fit in, and then sometimes we do make time where we send the kids away, just like rest and sleep. Just be. Which is what we do need at times – for us to be quiet, cause we always running around, we're always doing things. And it's just like, not answering phones, just being. We want to just sit and watch TV, then we have time to do that...and not watch cartoons. (laughing) It's just time to like be.
46. V: And do nothing.
47. B: And I do think for us at this moment, when it comes to quality time, it's not about going out to a restaurant and spending that time...it's more about just...relaxing...
48. V: Being in my corner.
49. B: Because we don't get time to just breathe. We're always busy.
- 50. R: (10) Is the time spend together shared with children/pets/TV/cell phones or other demands?**
51. B: With three kids...no way that it can't have an influence! (laughing) And also, we're also...I'm the eldest, and of course my mom was a single mom, so there's a lot of influence playing there...with me always having to check up on her, see that she's ok. My brother and his lifestyle... And then we have his [pointing to Vernon]. On his side he has his eldest brother, that also sometimes.... So, we're almost constantly in the middle of...there's always a joke like we must just move away, somewhere. Because it was always a thing of either he must just go and be by the parents, because there's no one there, and they miss that, as everyone is out the house. Just so they can feel not too alone...like the kids have abandoned them...and the same goes for my parents. Or there's something happening with like my grandma, because my mommy's the only child...It's almost like I then need to, not need to, but I always feel like I need to want to help there. So, it's always these....and then work...and then children...and the children must go to ballet and karate and...always busy.
- 52. R: Lots of external things and people...how do you manage the demand and stay a unit?**
53. V: Games. RPG's, action adventure, shooting, superpowers...computer games. Mainly for me, to manage everything...mindless tasks, if I can put it that way. Things I don't really need to think about. So, I've played games all my life, so it's become like second nature. So, I can actually sit in front of a PC and play games, and my brain kind of like switches off to everything, so that kind of like resets my clock and then I can go on. Or building things, even though I'm very meticulous about how I'm building...it's simple tasks...measure, cut, screw together...things like that. So that type of thing helps me cope with every day. A good scream every now and then also helps.
- 54. R: Like what kind of scream?**
55. V: Like into a pillow or...
56. B: I do think, sometimes we do have a thing, but then you must actually like tell the other one that this is going to happen...When you have a moment of just, whatever is on your mind, you

can say it. Whether it comes out with curse words, whatever, that's how it must come out. But you must just warn the other one that you're in that bubble now.

57. R: Set the perimeter...

58. B: Ja, cause else you will take it personally and then...everything goes haywire. But I do think we manage ok. But most times, we don't allow the things to interfere with our relationship, but there are times where it affects us.

59. R: (11) What is your communication like? What is good/bad about it?

60. B: Again, daily tasks, we can hit that off like in record time. It just goes...but then when it comes to us, you do sometimes pause in a way of, you don't want this to become an argument...And there is sometimes that mishap of how the other person is going to interpret what you're saying...uhm, I do think from my side sometimes our past, how our relationship was in the past, still plays a huge role in what we are doing now. So, I would say something or bring up something of this is what you did last week, so then he would take it as I'm bringing up his past again. Which I'm not doing, I'm just...because he's very technical driven, I know that...so I'm bringing up a physical experience so he can understand where and what I'm feeling. So, he will take that as something else...and I do the same thing. So he will explain something to me and I will see it as...and it also depends on what mood you're in...that plays...because when you're in a calm mood and you explain something, somehow you understand that person, but if there's something inside 'krapping' that you haven't sorted out, then all of a sudden it's... 'You're bringing up the past, you're doing this...and why are you bringing up that'...and there's silence for a few days, and it's like, ok it can't continue this way.

61. R: Silent treatment....

62. V: On the relationship front, where the normal things still runs well...the kids and things like that. The children never know that there's anything wrong, type of thing.

63. R: How do you do that?

64. B: I'm sure they know. I know there's a feeling, like they know it's not...like when a woman knows...But we do try to not argue in front of them. Keep it separate for after we've put them to sleep and now, we talk...things like that. Or, if things really get bad at times, because you're tired, you're drained, whatever, and now this argument...we send the kids so that we can talk. Because you tend to feel now the energy is just like haywire and it's going to affect the kids, so rather send them away for a day or two to grandma... explain to them we just needed a day or two...and....

65. R: And for you Vernon?

66. V: My technical mind is what causes a lot of problems when it comes to communication. So, I will explain something...uhm...in laymen's terms because of the way I think...and then, because I explain why I did something, she assumes that I'm trying to prove that I'm right. Which is not the case. I'm just trying to get you to see it from my point of view...of how...and that sometimes

ends in an argument because...I don't know...it's the way I explain it? That seems like I want to be right...but it's not the case. It's like I put the bin in that corner because there's like a specific reason why. And then I explain that is why I did it, but then it's almost like I'm trying to explain that what I did was right....

67. **B:** I think the other thing that we always struggle with is...or that I find a problem is...I would ask, Vernon, 'How do you feel?', then he would say, 'Everything is fine.' So now for me, that chapter is done. You had your moment to say how you felt. Now I would say: 'I feel this way.' So, for me sometimes, he doesn't acknowledge that he's heard me, but he now wants to tell me that whatever I just said, this is how he assumed it. And for me it's like he's just diminishing what I said, basically. So, he's not really hearing me, but he's preparing his answer in the meanwhile for this is what he really wanted to do. Which I know there's different perceptions of...you can watch the same TV and get a different message, but for me it's like: Acknowledge that you heard me...and now tell me that, whatever you want to tell me. Because now I don't feel heard and then I've shut down. Immediately. I will listen to you, but I'm not engaged. Everything after that will be: 'It's fine.' Because now I feel like I've given you a time to say what you wanted to say – you could've said then whatever you didn't – then I'm telling you how I felt...it's my feelings...acknowledge what I've said...and then, ok so but this is what I did...and then we can have a....So that's where we go wrong most of the time.

68. R: Vernon you looked like you wanted to add something?

69. **V:** That is true. I think it's more the fact that, because I have difficulty expressing...my mother's the very loving one...for most of the years. My daddy's now become quite...my father's changed quite a bit in the years that I've known her (referring to wife). So, she's actually getting the best part of knowing my daddy. My daddy, growing up, a very hard person. Straight to the point. You get a task to do you must do it. Things like that. Respect, that type of things is a big role. So, my mother was the soft one and my father was the hard one, so my father never really expressed emotions...uhm...'I love you' wasn't a constant word he would say, but you would know he loved you because of how he took care of you, taught you things – things like that. So, a different way of expressing his love. Uhm, so for me it is difficult to express how I feel. So, at that point when you ask me, like if you ask me, 'How do you feel now?', I'd say, 'I'm fine.' But then you would say like...uhm, 'I actually don't like the... new iPhone', for instance. Then I'd be like: 'You know, actually I also don't like the iPhone due to the fact that...' So, when she says I feel this way about that situation, then it would actually trigger like: 'Oh, you know, talking about that, I actually feel this way about that same situation', type of thing. So, at that point when you asked the question, I am fine. I am honestly fine, I'm ok. It's just...nothing has occurred. But the moment she says something, then it kind of like triggers something like 'oh yes, actually that is actually how I felt at that point, and...' I understand what she says, that I don't acknowledge her

feelings...It's not that I don't, it's more she just wants to hear me say: 'Ok, I hear you.' And I know I slip up there. Like, I'm working on it. But ja, that's where I'm at.

70. R: (12) How do you handle conflict in your relationship?

71. B: Most times it's good. Where you like, 'Ok, just choose your battles, this is not worth fighting for', so...either we agree to disagree or...Look, like I think most times when we lose it, it's that where...I'm talking for myself...I kept on saying 'it's fine, it's fine, it's fine'. And it's really not fine and I'm suffering in myself because I have all these other pressures going on, and then...this comes – everything comes out, you don't care about how it...And it's normally those times where you haven't said like, you know, 'It's coming!' (laughing) So, then it's that backlash of 'ok, so what did I do now?', it's like... 'What is happening?' So, I think most times we...55% we do it ok, and then the other times...and I think that times we are like seriously emotionally drained of everything that's happening, and then you're just gone. There's no defence anymore. And it just comes out. One or two times the kids were actually there...and then you actually like see their faces and it's like... 'ok, let's just step back and do this later.'

72. R: You talk about the instances where you 'lose it'...What does that look like?

73. B: Volume, eyes...like I will look straight through, like I will kill you now...(laughing). No, I'm not a person that will really look into someone else's eyes, because...How can I explain it...after my rape and all that, for me, people looking into my eyes is seeing me. And I don't really want to expose myself to other people that way. If I don't know you. This is something different (laughing). So I won't look into the eyes the whole time, because...uhm...that's almost protecting me...But if I'm angry at you, I will look into your eyes the whole time like, I'm really disappointed in you, type of thing. And you will see it, because I hide a lot of my emotions in my eyes. So, my whole body language will sometimes fool you into thinking that I'm fine, but my eyes will give it away. So...that's why I'm saying my eyes. You will...

74. V: Feel it.

75. B: (laughing) Yeah you will. So that is what...posture, everything. And you will just...yeah.

76. R: Vernon, what can you add regarding conflict?

77. V: How I handle a situation like that is her expression. So, temper is a thing that is like, I would say, genetic in my family of the males. So, if I do reach that boiling point and I will go off on her...uhm...The moment I reach like...I get like gaps in that moment, where I can actually see clearly. So, when I see her face and how my attack, if that's the word to use, is affecting her – it will actually hit me and I'll be like: Ok, you need to actually breathe, calm down, and then reassess the situation. So, she in that sense is my centre point. Control point. So, depending on how she reacts to the situation, that's how the situation will go. So, if she actually turned out to end up fighting back at me, shouting, things like that, then I think the argument would continue going endlessly. But because she knows that she needs to like go calm when I reach that point, that actually automatically like calms me down.

78. **R: (13) When you are experiencing a disagreement or when your partner has done something deemed ‘wrong’, what does your internal sense-making/reaction look like? What do you tell yourself about it/their intentions etc.?**
79. B: I normally first shut down. And I think it’s a coping mechanism that I’ve used since after the divorce...because there was a lot of stuff between me and my dad and how he spoke to me so, because he was...uhm...He’s almost like a mirror image of my mommy...how he deals with things...so, uhm, because he couldn’t get to her, and talk to her, then he would talk to me. And then I would look at you, but inside I would just go to my happy place. So, that has been a coping mechanism for me, where I would just shut down. So, I would look at you, I would still...but I’m just not there. So, immediately after that, it’s almost to – whatever else still is coming through – you block it. So, the doors are still open of your heart until, but then because you can’t take more attacks or you don’t want to, you just close, shut down everything. It just goes into shut down mode. For a while. Just to, until everything is done, we’re all done talking, and then I would almost go like into a first blaming – like, ‘Was this me? Did I do something?’ Like reassess. Maybe it’s a tone that I used. Maybe I did unconsciously want to hurt him. You say you don’t want to, but I know what’s his buttons. So, I know maybe I said something and then...because in the heat of the moment you just say... And that ok there, maybe that was your fault. At first I would just blame myself a lot and almost like tear myself inside apart, because - and it goes back to the rape and my father - where I just like ‘this is all me. I shouldn’t be in relationships. Shouldn’t talk, shouldn’t talk about my feelings, this is just all me’. I’m in the process of: ‘Ok, this is my fault, this is his. Uhm, there I should do better...and that’s his. I can’t control that. That’s his, he needs to work on that.’ I do...he’s at a point where after an argument he will come and apologise and he wants to talk about it. At first I was like very much silent treatment and don’t talk back. And silent treatment can go on sometimes for a week...
80. V: A month...
81. B: A month. That was like in the beginning of our relationship so like it would just go on. And I’m at a point now where, ‘Ok, I don’t want to talk to you now...just leave me alone. When I’m ready I will come and talk to you.’ And then I will tell him, ‘Look, this is where you went wrong, this is where I went wrong. So, I’m apologising for my part of it, and I can’t apologise for yours.’
82. **R: So, to summarise, your internal dialogue is: shut down, pull back to self, evaluate your own responsibility and then evaluate his...**
83. B: Because at the beginning of our relationship, I did blame him a lot, for a lot of things. A lot of things. Stuff my daddy didn’t do...stuff I wanted...all those things, I blamed him a lot for that. And I think our relationship was a lot of back and forth...one step forward one step back, because of that. I do think that I broke him down...in a sense of how he wanted to love me. And to what extent I allowed him to love me. Even like while we were engaged...first year of marriage...uhm, so because of that I blamed him a lot, because of stuff that happened with men, and I just didn’t

trust men, and I didn't want men really close to me, which is weird cause I married him (laughing). Cause, we were good friends and still are good friends. And I think that's the bond that keeps us together. That we are friends. So, from learning from that and therapy and almal daai, you do kind of learn that you do place a lot of stuff on your partner, because you just said it, and now you bring all your past stuff in there, so you kind of do learn how to take – 'Ok, this is my part...you're stuck there...apologised for that...other stuff you can't apologise for.'

84. R: Vernon? (repeat question (13))

85. V: First I go quiet. I don't shut down. In a sense, I just go quiet. I'm still there, I'm just quiet. And then, I'll maybe take on a mindless task, like cleaning the kitchen, playing games. It gives my mind actually more time to calculate from every angle, so uhm, I will replay the scenario over and over in my head from different angles, different points of view. Her point of view, my point of view, maybe someone outside of the relationship's point of view, like an objective type of view. And then, list the things that added to it going wrong. And on that list, who is responsible for that action, how it all came together to reach this point. And then I will say, 'Ok, I'm sorry that the situation had gone this way. Uhm, I understand now that I did this, this and this, that's why it led to that, and I apologise.' And, like she said, that is what you did too, because you said it that way and whatever, that is how I reacted. But even though I reacted that way, or like I always say, even though I'm upset, it's no excuse for me to be rude, type of thing. So that's basically nowadays how we, how I, handle the situation. Even though I'm upset, even though uhm, I'm angry or whatever, I don't have the right...there's no excuse, anyway, to be rude to someone or disrespectful. And that is always what I would like apologise for...because like I said, growing up, respect, discipline, that type of thing, was pillars in my father's life, and has been transferred to me. So, if someone is disrespectful to me it's actually very intrusive to my safe space, type of thing. Something I don't condone...because I would like to be respected, I would respect other people and things like that.

86. B: And I do think it's sometimes now because...I think because we so, with the therapy, we know what we're doing wrong, that sometimes with the 'sorry's', I'm sorry's, it's almost become a thing of...you don't care about it anymore...because now you're always just saying sorry, but...we've been through all this counselling together so you should know a bit better. And then it's almost like you don't accept the 'sorry's' anymore...as much as you would have...because you should be aware of where you are...

87. R: So, it's almost like a higher standard...expectations...

88. B: Something like that.

89. R: (14) How do you handle/respond to strong emotions in yourself and your partner?

90. B: Strong emotions of happiness: I want to know: 'What's wrong?' (laughing) 'What happened...did you meet someone...why are you so happy?' Uhm, that just scares the living daylights out of me.

91. R: And is that because it's out of character for Vernon or because it's unnatural and suspicious for you?

92. B: I don't know...It's just something with me and too much happiness...I think again it plays back to 'Why are you so happy?'...and I think it's that break-off point where you...before my parents divorced we were happy. It was like our happiest moments, and then...so I'm almost afraid like, too happy...

93. R: You don't trust it...

94. B: Nee, too happy...no, I don't do well with too happy. It's like something is going to happen. So, like...anger, I'm fine with anger, but then he does go to that temper stage...one or two times...where it actually scares me. Well to a point where, I know he won't hit me, but it's like, that is...it scares me. And again, then it goes back to the bad parts of my daddy...where he, how he used to treat me...uhm...What other emotion? From me...that's him...from me, I'm...I think everyone will tell you that I'm very organised...so if I'm just like happy I'll do...and everyone will be like...and even if I do stuff just like so...it's like 'What is wrong with this child?'...because I normally think about stuff before I do it...very calculated in my feelings...If I do have feelings, I will first calculate the vibe...can I...like when I passed my license, for an example, he wasn't in a good space...and I think we weren't in a good space?

95. V: No I wasn't.

96. B: He wasn't in a good space. And for two days I walked around not telling him that I've got my license. The reason why he found out that I had my license is...we were busy doing insurance and then we had to put that on and they asked do you have a license...and I'm like: 'yes'...and then he found out that two days before I had actually passed my license. So, I'm very considering all, not just our relationship, friends...where, how...I express.

97. R: On your side Vernon, strong emotions? (question (14))

98. V: My anger, I think I've gotten better at it. Uhm, if I am upset or whatever I tend to go one side to just breathe. It doesn't necessarily get rid of the anger, but it makes me more approachable, in a sense. Especially where the kids and she's concerned. Other emotions like being super excited, super happy...I'm very cautious of that feelings because of the type of reciprocation I get from her. Uhm, so...I'm cautious in that sense.

99. R: Reciprocation?

100. V: 'Why are you so happy?' Things like that. That kind of makes me think like: 'Am I not allowed to be that happy?' Because sometimes you just, you wake up like super happy...it's a nice day, type of thing. And then, I calculate the right tone of happiness I'm supposed to be. Like especially when I lost my job, the first couple of days I was like super happy...because I was at home, there was no stress about anything. It was weird though, but ja. So cautious with that. Where her feelings are concerned, especially like that incident that she explained...I was actually very upset, because even though I was down, I felt that if she had told me that it would actually have wiped

away all that. Because something good had happened to US in that sense. So, I was actually quite upset in finding out two days later that she passed her license. Because it was something we were working hard at...trying to get her license, my license type of thing, so...in that sense...Oh and where my feelings is concerned, I always tell her that even though I am upset, she must still come to me, because she is that...even though she doesn't always believe it...she's that calming point, that I could possibly...Like I've seen it in movies and stuff where the guy's like literally covered in flames and then there's this one person that just comes and touches him and he like calms down and switches off, type of thing. And she's that person to me. So, even if I'm like so mad I want to blow up the entire world, if she just actually comes to me and tells me: 'Look, you need to now relax now'...I think I would just switch off and calm down. So, ja.

101. R: I also hear you celebrating each other's victories as if it's your own...

102. B & V: Yes

103. V: Because, it's sacrifice from both sides. Because when she had to go for lessons and things, I looked after the kids, and studying and things...when I have to study, she keeps the kids that side, she helps me and things like that. And, ja...

104. R: (15) How do you know when your partner is happy/sad/angry...can you identify their feelings?

105. V: She can't contain her happiness. So, you can see it. When something is off, like I said, I get a feeling. When she gets angry, she gets like this little type of frown here on her face...I'm very attention to detail...and she gets this little frown that she doesn't really notice, but it's there, type of thing. So small tells that I can pick up.

106. B: It's also small tells. And even in that period where we say 'it's fine' the whole time, you can almost feel like the gap between you is growing bigger...uhm, I don't know how to explain it. There's a distance, there's just...we are doing everything right in the house, like the kids and so on, but when it comes to us, it feels like hmmm. Like we just need to connect somehow, or talk or scream it out or something, but something is not quite valid. The distance is growing bigger and bigger.

107. R: (16) When reacting to one another, do you feel as if you respond only to what the other person has explicitly said or done, or also to what is implied in their behaviour/words?

108. B: Yes, that's it. You do. I do think it comes with the years that you've been together. And we do have like, he knows all my skeletons. I know his. So, I do know sometimes what he's struggling with. Like maybe he came into connection with his dad and maybe the dad said something, and now he says, 'it's fine.' You can clearly hear it's not fine, but you also know this is not something I want to talk about now, so just give me my space. So, when he's talking to me I will tell him it's not fine, cause I can see on his body posture it's changed. I can see, I can hear, the undertone. So, this, the physical will say it's fine, but you can clearly feel and see it's not.

109. R: So, both the verbal and the non-verbal?

110. B: I think sometimes that's a good thing and a bad thing. Because sometimes he will tell me I'm good, and maybe I'm going through something where I'm not good, but now I'm portraying that onto him...that's not good. And then there the misunderstanding or the conflict also starts.

111. R: Vernon? (repeat question (16))

112. V: It depends on the situation. Uhm, but, I analyse everything. So, when she says something, and I'm not 100% sure if it's...then I'll say: 'So you say you are fine, so I'm going to take it as you're fine'...to like place it in her court, as you say. So, you say it's fine, so I'm going to go on as normal, and if something is wrong, you were the one that said it was fine, type of thing.

113. B: And...are you done?

114. V: No. (both laughing) But when I generally see or feel that something is wrong, I will tell her: 'Look...something is off about you', then I leave it there, because a lot of times she's feeling down or she's just tired or overwhelmed. Then she doesn't want to talk about it at that point...So I'll say ok, something's off, but ok ja, and then just carry on. And she will actually come to me afterwards and say: 'Ok, this is the problem or you did that', or ja.

115. B: Ok, I just want to add. I think I'm the only one who does it, where he will say that he's very attentive...ok...Now we talk the whole day, we will always check up on WhatsApp if he's working...like how's he doing, how's work...so that when he comes into the door I can have a feeling if work has been crap, travelling has been crap...so just give him his space first...and the he can like integrate into the family...Now...telling him a whole bunch of things of what went wrong during the day, and now he gets home, and now he's not doing stuff that I would think he would do, because he's so attentive, in brackets (laughing), and listening...and then I will take that as: 'You know, maybe you are not as attentive as you say you are, because I've been telling you all this stuff, now you're asking me if I'm fine, clearly I'm not fine. You know, just give me some space or something. Don't now come and ask me 200 questions about...just...'

116. R: Do you have the same thing Vernon? That same expectation that she must kind of read between the lines of your behaviours and words?

117. V: Not necessarily. If I tell her that I'm tired, that's it. I'm tired. The reason why I will ask questions again, when I get home, is to get a sense of her actual body language. Cause you can say you're tired, but then you're not really tired in the sense that you just want to go sleep, you're just tired because the kids are working on your nerves, type of thing. That's why I ask: 'Are you fine?', to get a better understanding of it. Because I can say I'm tired, but then mainly my brain is like tired, but physically I can clean the entire house, do the kids bath...stuff like that. But my brain itself is like switched off, type of thing. But that's why I will sometimes repeat the question when I get home. But she doesn't like 20 questions, type of thing. But it's like this morning, I ask because I wanted to ask, not because...like, because she can drive, and I used to like driving, uhm, and I would just get into the car and drive...now she said that I must ask...so this morning we had a bit of a side-track, (Bianca giggling) and I was going to make me coffee, so I asked,

'Did you want tea?' So, she's like: 'You got dressed in silence, now I want to get dressed in silence' ...So I'm like: 'Ok.' So, we're about to leave and I ask, 'Are you going to drive or must I drive?' So she gave me this answer....so I asked in the car: 'You seemed a bit irritable when I asked if you were going to drive?'...She's like: 'We had this argument and you ask me 20 questions'...but it's just the normal questions that I would ask, because she doesn't like when I just ask do want tea...so what I do when I'm going to make me coffee, 'I will say I'm going to make me coffee would you like tea?' That's what I did this morning...Because you like it when I'm specific. So, I give you the options. And again, I asked before we left: 'Do you want to drive?' And then it ja...

118. R: (17) Do you ever think about the internal world (thoughts/feelings/experiences) of your partner? Imagine what is going on in their head?

119. V: (shaking his head) Too organised. When we started going out, uhm super OCD organised...

120. B: No I'm not...

121. V: Yes, to a 't', the very time...If I said I'm going to be there at 12:45 and 50 seconds, then I need to be there at 12:45 and 50 seconds...preferably 49 or 48...you know...but, me I'm like relaxed, I'm calm...like when I don't have to work, I'm calm...because it's my time my space, I'm calm, things like that. So, it's fun in my world, in my brain...I do have some dark corners and things like that, but...in her world I think it's just a bit too organised. I think in a working environment I would like to be more like that world, but on a normal, personal time thing, I prefer my world.

122. R: Bianca for you?

123. B: I think there's just like, I think his world is split into two: one is a beach where he just slums it out, and the other one is like part game where there's just zombies popping out and he's like shooting at them, and like mechanic car there and his driving through the mud. (laughing) Like Vernon will tell you: 'I'm five minutes away', then he still has to drive from Bellville to Mitchell's Plain...that is 'I'm almost there'. So, I don't trust his almost there. His almost there and my almost there is like way different. I'm very specific, like driving from Bellville...three robots now...(laughing)

124. R: (18) Do you ever place yourself in your partner's shoes, so to speak, thinking about what their experience of a joined situation might be?

125. V: Yes. Like our families is very different. So, when we go visit my family, very in your face – loving, hugging, touching, no time constraints. So, if like my mother says come for lunch, when we get there we probably have to help you peel the potatoes. Or lunch will start at like one o'clock, and like end at five. Because, to my family, family time is something you don't always get and when you have it you must like drain it to the last. So even if you just come there and just sit, because my daddy never sits still, he's always working on the house or something, it's just how he is. So, when I visit him, I'm just there, I just sit there...I make him coffee, things like

that, chat to him now and again. But to him, it's like...more than gold. Because I'm just there. So, for my family, just being there, they're happy. You don't have to do anything, you don't – if you want to help you can help – but just...For her, it's different, so when I'm there with her, I'm always wondering like: 'Is it too much? Are we here too long? Does she want to go home?' Things like that. So that's why...

126. R: And does it influence your reaction or behaviour, then? (question (19))

127. V: Yes, it does. Like I will leave earlier, or check in with her and ask: 'Look, I'm fine to go home now, if you want to go home', type of thing. Or, 'What time do you want to leave?' It doesn't always happen, because sometimes I haven't been by my family in a while, so I do kind of lose sense of time and thing, so but other times I will be like...or when say now she needs to go to a meeting, then I'll actually kind of announce it saying: 'Look, we can't stay long, because she needs to be at this place at 4, so we need to leave by like 3 because she still needs to...'

128. R: And for you Bianca? (questions (18) and (19))

129. B: Ja, always...even when we need to like go out somewhere. It's always like: 'How you doing, how you feeling? Do you need to go? (laughing) Because I need to go soon'...Uhm, and our families are also very opposite, so like he says...With his family I do sometimes feel like I have to escape more, because of that touchy lovey feelings, uhm, and then when I'm with my parents I feel...cause I, sometimes I do feel more of a protective role or almost like, for my mom, so just to be there and to see everything is fine and taking some of the strain off her...So I'm more there for that role. And I do need, I do think sometimes she just also needs to offload sometimes, so I play that role there and it makes me sometimes want to stay longer, because I feel like...of use. Where with his family, they don't want you to do anything...you must just sit there and enjoy...and for me it's like I don't know what to do...so I feel out of place. And all the love and touch and stuff also.

130. R: (20) In what ways does your partner express their emotional availability to you when you are feeling emotionally distressed?

131. V: That's a tough one.

132. B: It's mostly talking. But there are times where, now recently, where I don't want to talk, but I feel very heavy...and so then I will be the one that come hug you. I don't necessarily want him to hug me...cause that's not what I'm there for...It's almost like I don't want him to take control, because this is my vulnerable moment and I want to feel like I'm giving myself to him. So, I would go to him and say, or I would just sit there by him and I'll maybe be the one to physically...Even if it comes to talking. I will tell you how I feel, but I don't necessarily want you to talk. Because he does that at times, where he almost like is...when you tell him something, he's looking for the solution already...and that's not always necessarily what I want...I just want someone to listen to me and help me think that I'm not crazy in a way. So, because while I'm talking to you I'm figuring out for myself, and it's almost like a clarity...but what I found recently

where I sometimes feel like, almost like alone?...is where I can't get the feelings out...I know what I'm feeling, but it just needs to come out. Whether it's right or wrong, it just needs to come out. I don't necessarily want an answer for it. Inside, once I'm done talking, it feels calm. But when everything's inside and I'm just all alone inside, then I feel like alone – no one is hearing me. I'm crying, and no one is seeing that I need help. Because normally people come to me for help...and then I'm like, I'm giving all of these people help and nobody is seeing I'm dying here...drowning...but then I just need to talk, and when it's out I'm good.

133. R: And for you Vernon?

134. V: On what she just said, before we go to us...it's very difficult to give her emotional support, because even though she's drowning, she doesn't always put out her hand to be lifted up. So that, where she hugs you and she doesn't want you to hug back. That was weird, because she actually came to hug me, for like 10 minutes...

135. B: Oh you counted it.... (laughing surprised)

136. V: Because it doesn't normally happen. But I was washing the dishes, and she hugged me from behind. And I couldn't like, I wanted to turn around, because...uhm, we lost a baby. And it was on that day that she was feeling down and heavy. And I just wanted to turn around and hug her and things, but because of her nature, she doesn't allow you to, it's like she wants to maintain the situation, but she also wants to be vulnerable. So, at times it's rather difficult to support her. Where my point is concerned, I will let her know. Cause as I said I'm very physically affectionate...so in days where I'm like super down, I will just go up to her and hug her and tell her like, 'Look, I just need this for a couple of seconds'...and then she would actually hug me back and just stand there...say nothing...and when I'm done, I'm fine. It's almost like all that overwhelming energy were just swept away...and I'm fine I can go on.

137. B: Sometimes we do, instead of talking, I don't know if it's appropriate or not, we do instead of talking we go to being sexually intimate. And then because we don't want to talk, we'll go: 'Do you want to have sex?' Almost there that connection point. Sometimes we would cry and whatever, but then that would almost be of we've said everything we needed to say, it's done.

138. R: (21) Do you ever express your needs for closeness to your partner? And if so, how do you experience their response?

139. B: O, this is becoming higher grade now...

140. V: I do say, being a physically emotional person, I tell her: 'Look, I need x-amount of kisses for the week', type of thing. Or x-amount of hugs, type of thing. So, uhm, she tries to accommodate as best she could without going insane (giggling)...uhm, and I appreciate it. We've gotten to the point where verbalising what you want, works out far better than assuming. Even though we assume a lot. Like, I'm having a bad day, I assume she knows I'm having a bad day. And she assumes I get home food must be ready, that type of thing. So, we've come to understand that actually saying: 'I just want to go crawl into a hole and disappear for a while' is far better than

being like this...volatile substance, that everybody must take...that everybody must just stay away, type of thing.

141. R: And you Bianca?

142. B: I do think I am still very much in my mind. So, depending on what's going on I would like...ok, so he's now lost his job, he has this to worry about, so I don't still want to add this. And then I will keep my need almost for closeness away until he's better. Almost like there's more space. Which I also know it's wrong to do, because in that moment, I'm not allowing you to be close with me. Same as when I would go through things, but if there's something, I would want him to come to me and say, you know this. And I will make space. But I don't always allow him to do the same for me. Because for me, sometimes, because I've gone through more things, I think I'm almost emotionally more capable of, than what he is. Because, I do feel sometimes like I'm a lot to handle. Like just, I'm a lot with my OCD and not hugging and all that other stuff. I'm a lot to handle. And he's come from this cute cuddly family and I'm this, not terrible. Wrong word. But I'm like this harsh person. And I've like experienced life, and I'm like almost wanting to be soft around him more. So that he doesn't leave, because I'm so hard. Which I also know is wrong, but like, I'm working through that still. I know that's what I do a lot, where it comes to emotional stuff. I know I need a lot from him – sometimes more than other people. I expect a lot. And because, once you reach that expectation, it goes up. So, it's never like: 'Ok, I'm happy with just...' Like if you take me to Spur twice, like, by the fourth time I'm not going to be happy about going to Spur. It's like: 'Do something different.' So, I'm always like, my mommy also says, I try to find difficulty with Vernon, because I'm so difficult...because he's so calm, I always want to almost make him difficult, because I'm difficult. And I get frustrated because he's not that complicated. It's almost like I need to tell myself we're on the same complicated level. Which we are not. And it almost frustrates me, that I'm being the difficult one...and he's being the calm one. So, then I almost like, hold back of what I need sometimes...and then I blame him for not giving it to me...Again, I'm very difficult (laughing). So, I blame him for lots of stuff he doesn't do, but I also don't want him to do it.

143. V: On that...she's not a lot...honestly. I'm not trying to be the perfect partner. She's not a lot to handle. Because it's a benefit that I came from the type of family that I have. I've got a lot of patience...I've got an enormous amount of love...And due to my technical mind, I can understand a lot. The only reason why she thinks she's a lot, is because she keeps telling herself that. But her needs are far more simple than mine. I know it's difficult to understand, but she just wants to be loved. She just wants things done when she needs it done. She needs her time and she needs your time. That's it. She's far more simple than me...she makes herself difficult. I'm in a sense more complicated because I'm not always emotionally available. Sometimes I just...I can actually disappear into games for days...like when I was growing up like 15/16, I could actually hire a game like on a Friday evening and then play the game till Monday morning, when

I need to take it back...barely sleeping, type of thing. Like I said, I'm the complicated one, she just keeps saying that she's a lot to handle, and she puts it in her mind that...but she's actually not. Otherwise I wouldn't be here. She thinks I'm like giving her an ultimatum, but I am like that: if I don't like something I'll let you know I don't like it. If I don't want to be here, I won't be here. If I don't want to come home, I won't come home. If you were too much to handle, I would have to leave, or upgrade my handling capabilities.

144. R: (22) In what ways do you think your relationship is similar and different respectively to that of other couples?

145. V: I am sometimes envious...because I got a good friend, Mitchell, same age, same school...I caught on nonsense in college, never finished...he went through to study up until his Masters. He's got like the dream life. More than enough money in the bank, he has his own house, married, no kids as yet. Very stable. Envious in that sense, but also, when I look at other people's relationships it's more like I'm not there yet...So it's not that I want to be exactly the same, it's just that I want what my family needs, type of thing. I've read this post that even if you buy a house at age 40, it's still a great achievement – so I have that mindset...even if I get my house at that time, I got it. Not many people can. Not looking down on them, but I try to better myself for my family. So, besides Mitchell, I don't really look at other couples in that sense. Because you see someone happy, perfect and all that...and then when they go home he sleeps in that bedroom and she sleeps in that bedroom, it's just they put up that façade.

146. R: And for you Bianca?

147. B: Uh-uh, no not really. Because it's more about where we want to see ourselves and are we moving closer to that? I think that's more my irritation...if I feel we are moving backwards rather than forwards, then it's like I'm not doing something right.

148. R: Thank you.

Recorders off. Interview closed.

APPENDIX L: Bianca and Vernon – Interview 2 Transcript

1. **RESEARCHER (R): (1) I know it's a few months ago already, so memory might not be that great, but tell me a bit about your experience during and after the first interview and the questionnaires you filled out...Any new realisations or thoughts about your relationship/partner...or even conversations started between you as a result of some of what was discussed in the interview/questionnaires?**
2. **BIANCA (B):** Ok, so...ever since then, I think it's been going a little bit better...with our communication...Not communication as much...how do you say it...it's uhm, where we kind of make more time for each other. We've become more centred around us, and not so much family. We have realised that's the one thing we realised a lot in the last conversation, that keeps coming up. We tend to uhm, put our lives aside for family. Or their issues become our issues. So, we kind of, I guess, shifted more to a place of thinking about us more, thinking about us...uhm, what's our plans, what do we want in life. Even away from the kids. Which is big, because we've always included the kids. So, it's kind of shifted more toward...but I also think it's in this period where, we're married almost seven years now, in January. And then, we've been together for almost ten years. So, I guess it's also that...with the fact that we had seen you in May....and then we also in that period started going into our next chapter.
3. **VERNON (V):** I agree. Because when it comes to uhm, ok my shifts are weird because I work UK time...so my shift is from twelve in the afternoon to twelve at night...so when I do get home, it's more in that function mode where we get everything sorted and that. And then once the girls have gone to bed, take two seconds to just calm down and check 'How was your day? What's on the agenda?' So, we do carve out, it might not be a whole day, not even an hour meeting. But just to find out: 'Are you ok? Is there anything I must do for you?', things like that. 'Issues you are struggling with? Projects you are busy with? Is there anything I can do to help?'
4. **R: So just a check in with each other every day?**
5. **V:** Yes.
6. **B:** But I think we always used to do it. I think it's a quality now. Before it was kids, kids, kids. Now it's like 'How are YOU doing?'
7. **V:** Yes, actually stopping to check in.
8. **R: (2) Looking back at your (number of) years together, what are the ways in which your relationship has changed over the years? (3) And in what ways have the changes improved and/or damaged your relationship?**
9. **V:** We know what we want. Before, when we had started dating, it was just about pleasing the next person. So, if I said let's do this, she'd be like: 'Yes, let's go.' But now it's like: 'I don't really like bungy jumping...I don't like going to your friends...it's fine you can go on your own, because I know you like that. Uhm, this is important to you, but it's not so important to me. So, take the

day, I will look after the kids', type of thing. So, it's more about, finding us. We've jotted our path down in pencil, because it changes a lot. And now it's more about what I really want. You know when we started dating, it's like I want to give you the world, and things like that. But now, I actually realise that you shouldn't promise a woman the world if you don't own it.

10. R: Some flowery words there!

11. V: Actually, it's like, what I've learned is that when we started dating, you do everything to try and impress the person, because you want the person in your life. And as I've gotten a bit older and we've been in the relationship for a while, I've realised that if you say I will paint the house this weekend, then you actually do it. That means more than going to buy her a new car, and things like that. I don't always get it right - on a side note. About two out of ten...but then I knock it out of the ball park! (everyone laughing)

12. R: Bianca you? (repeat question (2))

13. B: I think it's...sjoie, these are difficult questions. Can we go back to the first session? (laughing) Uhm...it's more a fact of, you knew who you were, or you were still in that period where you were trying to figure out who you were. And like along the way, where you figured out who you are, but too afraid to say it. But now you're in the period where: hey, this is me. It's here. (laughing) Take it or leave it. So, it's like also, for me as a woman, there was a period of you know...like the N1, there are different lanes...so should you just stay in the slow lane? Should you go over? Do you like stay in this picture that your mommy created for you? Are you now this married woman - whatever that is called? Or do you remain the same, type of thing? Where's your place in this whole thing? Are you just a mother? So, we're kind of like in that period where...we know where we want to be.

14. R: I also hear you talking about what is essentially my next questions:

(4) How much do you feel you have individually changed or grown in your own life and being over these years together?

15. B: (big sigh) A lot. But it's not that you're in action yet. It's more the mindset change...Uhm, with the action part, you're kind of transitioning into it. Like I'm now becoming the businesswoman I want to be. I'm not there yet. But my mind shift has changed as to, I know what I want to do. Where before it was like...Vernon wants me to be this, my mommy wants me to be this, I'm supposed to be this, this is what the church says about being married...So there are all these voices and then, there's a certain...I don't know what happens that you just like click. This is who I'm going to be. This is. I am not the mommy type. I keep saying it and people find it weird. But I'm not the mommy 24/7 with the kids. I love them... to a certain extent.... (laughing) Can you erase that?

16. R: Off the record like they say in journalism! (laughing)

17. B: No, I do love them. To a point that I want them to be strong individuals. They need to know, or get to know, themselves faster and quicker than what I'm taking. I'm doing it now in my thirties,

but if they could do it in their twenties, it would be awesome. I don't need them to know their life path whatever, I just need them to know this is who I am. I accept who I am. Faster than what I did. But then, that's where my mommy duties end.

18. R: And you maybe also feel that there's more to you than just your role as a mom?

19. B: Yeah, and I get bored quick. I don't like to stay with projects that doesn't evolve a lot. Then I get bored. So, I'm not like the doing-washing-every-day-type. I'm actually at the point now...it's probably the end of the year, also. It's like your soul is tired. Of like, you've been in this battle this year, so you just...any small thing will just like really ja...

20. R: It has the potential to create the apocalypse...

21. B: Yeah, (laughing) you could end up in jail, so...Your soul is like tired. It's almost November. You're just tired now. But mentally you need to continue. You're at this point where: this is what I'm going to do with my personal life. This is my health. This is what I'm going to do with my health. This is where I am. In marriage...this is what I want in you. This is what I want in us. So, it's not necessarily that we are there action wise, as yet. But we are more...now the mindset has changed.

22. B: And you, Vernon? (repeat question (4))

23. V: It's like she says, I mentalise a lot of things, but I don't verbalise it as much. But I can find myself, telling myself like, 'Ok, that is something you don't like.' But because of it being done for a certain amount of time...I'm not just going to cut it off. I'll be like: 'Ok, I'm letting you know that it's not ok...but it's ok for now. But tomorrow it's going to be less ok...' So, the transition phase essentially. I'm becoming a little bit more confident in where...I was used to the safe space: get up, go to work, do what I need to, come home. The husband role. But I actually found out that I don't have an issue providing. I love looking after my family. It's a part of who I am. It's not something that was...because people can be taught to be supporters and providers, but then it's not something that they want to do. So, I want to be the provider. But I also feel I have a lot more that I want to do. The job that I got, I'm grateful for it. It puts food on the table. But I feel that if I had the opportunity to do what I love, which is wood making, I would leave it in a heartbeat. But if my family is provided for. And I'm also fighting with the fact that I'm not letting fear control me that much. Like a friend phoned me this morning regarding a company looking for an IT guy. It's not a major project, but it's something small. The old me would've said: 'No, it's fine I have a job.' But now I said: 'Send me the details I'll have a look and decide.' I feel that the person I am and want to be is there, but it's just layers that needs to fall off.

24. R: (5) In which ways has your individual experiences/growth/change/lives affected or influenced your relationship?

25. B: What's the right answer there?

26. V: It's like where you take Eno and you throw it into the water and it looks fine...but then all of a sudden it goes pffff!

27. R: Like the waters are fine, but then it boils over?

28. V: Every time a new change clashes with the old change, it's kind of like that reaction. Because it's not something that's a norm...so like, let's say every day I get up at six o'clock and then today I get up at ten o'clock. She would be looking at me having expectations. That type of clashes.

29. R: And also the expectations that underlie our clashes...

30. B: Ja, the expectation is a big thing. But it's also, what I found with our relationship now: like you kind of knew who you were when you were dating. But it's almost like, let me not expose everything. So, you do like a little bit and then, like you go into the sea and it's cold so you move out. So, you want to be in the water, you want to dive in, but then you go: 'No it's fine, I'll just stay here.' But what we've kind of done, I haven't exposed myself to him. My full me. So, when we do it's like a shock to the person. And when he reacts, you react to his reaction. And then it kind of stops. But I think now we're at the point of, instead of giving that bad reaction, you just continue with being the real you. So, he can get used to it and you can get used to the real him. And I think our children helps us a lot. You can't teach a child to respect and to be ok with who you are, if you're not doing the same thing. So, in a way it's been a good...

31. V: Beneficial.

32. B: It's been beneficial. Because you can't teach them what you are not doing. Because they pick it up. I think that also helped a lot of times. But I think he has exposed me to a lot of things that I knew was inside me, but I was too afraid to let it out. Because self-esteem stuff, your past, what people said...So the same way with him, I'm hoping, would be the case. Where I've told him: 'You're a good businessperson, you are good with wood etc.' Now it's coming up. And it's almost like a shift almost, because of our kids. You're letting go of the...I think a lot of the mistakes we made was because of our parents. Because we wanted the good relationship. We wanted to have the relationship they have now, but we don't know what they've gone through. So now we understand that they probably had to go through all of this to get to that understanding they have at...36 some odd years. And we must still get there. So, we kind of let go of all that expectation of we want to be this couple, we want to be that couple, and just do...us.

33. R: (6) What are some of the external factors that have impacted your relationship over the last (number of) years together? Both positively and negatively.

34. B: Sjoe, it's like a higher-grade question.

(Pause, thinking)

35. B: For me, it is always something that plays a big part, is that I have daughters now. Which is a major big thing for me of why I didn't want children - because I could have girls. And the fact that I have gone through abuse - molestation and rape etc. - so, what plays a big role for me is the society out there and how I need to prepare them for that. But, it's weird sometimes that, when you do prepare them for that, it's like you take their childhood away. So, you have to find this balance where, you have to be cautious, but you also have to be a child. And a major thing that

always plays a role in our relationship that I don't think he gets the gravity of...is how he interacts with the girls. For me. Where he would play with them to a point that they would scream and shout, because they said no the first time. And for me it would be: I think further than that. As in they need to step into a relationship, and are you now teaching them the fact that if they say no...we are telling them, your no is your no and you have a right and stuff like that, but...my daddy used to play with me till I can't anymore...So, in a relationship, will they see it as an abuse then? Or will they just see it as this is what I did with my daddy, so it's ok? It's ok to push past my boundaries and values if it's someone I love? So, that is always a thing for me when it comes to my girls. Getting that right by them. You have values, you have boundaries, and the world out there is always going to try and penetrate that. So, stand firm. And already with them, you will see, she will tell the truth until she figures out her sister's going to get into trouble, then she's like: 'No, it's fine.' Then I'm like: 'No, just because it's your sister...keep telling the truth.' So, they in that stage where brain development and stuff...where you almost just want to...and I guess it's bigger for me, because my molestation started at five...and I didn't even know I was there, because it was a simple touch here, touch there...

36. R: You didn't have the context to always understand what was going on...

37. B: Now, after twenty years it's like, hmmm, that's what happened. And it almost ended up in sexual...well luckily we moved away...So that's a big thing that always comes up in our relationship: be careful how you play with the girls. If it's no, it's no. For instance, if he comes from work and they're playing doll, if you want to be with them, then play doll with them. Don't take them away from that thing that they are playing because you now want quality time. Teach them that boundaries are ok. I mean, my daughter is five, and we already have to teach them, if you're in an attack hold, how do you get out of it. So, he will do stuff like, grab her, push her down, and instead of crying, she needs to get out of it. Which is weird for a daughter to do, but I mean you have to...

38. R: It's sad to think we live in a world where we have to show little kids that...

39. B: But you must also do it in a playful manner so that you don't scare them. Like daddy's playing with you, but try to get out.

40. R: I want to ask you, Vernon, I get why Bianca is so aware around this issue, also as a woman...but for you, in a house full of women, but not having grown up in a female body with the awareness of what that means...how do you navigate this issue with her...raising little girls?

41. V: Well, I try and avoid it. Because it's very difficult. Growing up with just me and my brother...And a man is hard. You need to protect, fight for what you want...not cry...My mom managed to soften my shell a bit. Because my brother is like rock hard. I sometimes see the way he deals with his kids...I'm like, to me it's like, maybe you should've just first asked some questions before just going off on the kid like that. But it is difficult. I've got my one blood

brother, that is Carl, but then I have 3 adopted brothers, you know, those friends that, like they're more in the house and say 'hi, mommy' and then start making bread...

42. R: Your tribe...your chosen family...

43. V: Ja. Also boys, just rough housing, you do the hard kind of things...pushing yourself beyond...if you run, you fall, it's fine. You get hurt, but you will get strong. You get up. You push beyond. So, there's not a 'no, I can't do it.' In my mind, I'm trying to teach them to push beyond, but also in the other perspective, it's seen as wrong. Because, like she says, the next guy is going to do it for the wrong intention. I learned in life that the one guy creates the computer to help the world, but then the next guy uses it to break down the world. So, it's very difficult in challenging to, even in our relationship where I'm very affectionate. And I've got a bit of a forceful nature. So, if I want to kiss, I want to kiss now. But due to her past, I'm still learning that there is a point of stop, and things like that. Stuff that she's said now, it does hurt, because I feel I push past my point of accommodating their ways, and stuff. But it's difficult to go from hard to soft.

44. R: Also your own family legacy influencing you...

45. V: Ja.

46. R: And for you? (repeat question (6))

47. V: Having daughters, I want to build a fort around my house. Because the world is...Look, I've always said it...She doesn't agree with the term, but all men are dogs. That's how I see it. Some are just more well trained than others. So, as a guy, I know what men think when they look at a woman. It's not to say that I do the same, but I always pride myself to know...if you know how a thief thinks, you can protect your house from a thief, you know. In the area that we live, we've got low walls and we've got nice neighbours, instead of one...So for me, I want to build massive walls around my house. And it might seem like a prison, but when I'm at work, I know for a fact that they are safe. Cause that's my one...when I'm at work, I don't want to worry about them being in trouble. That being the environment that I live in. And then from friends' point of view...I got a friend Mitchell, same age, we each took a different career path. He studied until a year or two ago. He got his Masters...lives in a very nice big house...has a job that pays well. So, to me it's like, I want that, but I'm at a different point of the race. But I want it now. My mother and father understand each other so, my dad comes in looking a certain way...my mother knows, 'Ok, just give him some food, he's had like a bad day. Just give him some time to cool down, he'll come in.' I want that now. But instead, they've been together for 32 years...

48. R: They've paid their dues to get their relationship to that point?

49. V: Yes. So, I keep forgetting the fact that, in order to become a master at something, you need to do it for a set amount of time. You need to do it over and over before you actually understand how to master that particular skill.

50. R: (7) And what are some of the events/situations that have occurred within your relationship over the years that has affected/impacted it – whether positively or negatively.

(8) How did you navigate these internal/external influences? Were you able to limit their impact or was it more of an after-the-fact-damage-control approach?

51. B: It's always been health for us. Because I have a leg that...it was hurt during my rape. When I told the doctors that my leg was hurt, they just did x-rays and stuff. So, nothing is physically wrong, but we know now that muscle has tensed up during something...so whenever I pick up too much weight or I get too stressed, anything tense, then my leg pains. So, I need to manage that a lot. Uhm, so now it's been a struggle that I was diagnosed with PCOS in middle November last year...So shifting weight, especially around my tummy, I need to work on that a lot. But this year, I've told myself I'll work on my weight next year. This year there's just been too much stuff. So that's always been a problem. High tense situations, pregnancies, always... We always had a health scare. Following my rape stuff, they diagnosed me with Hepatitis B, so that's been a scare with me for my pregnancies and for my girls. So yes, it's always been health. And then the miscarriage. With the miscarriage, a lot of our relationship stuff changed.
- 52. R: How long ago was that, if I may ask?**
53. B: Almost two years.
54. V: Two and a half years.
55. B: So..and that was close to Mother's Day...So we had just found out we were pregnant, and then the next week we lost the baby. And then a month after that we found out we were pregnant with Edith. I don't even know when that happened. (laughing) So it was always the health stuff. With me, but also with my mom and his parents. My grandma the beginning of this year. Dementia. So, it's like a back and forth to Knysna...and I'm the eldest, so I have to...I'm always with my mom, trying to keep her calm. Ja...it's always other people's problems, I think. Besides the rape, it's a lot of stuff we had to deal with regarding who we are besides our parents. Because we are very attached...we are those people in the family who's always worrying about if the parents are fine. So, you kind of won't...You are the...
56. V: Responsible ones
57. B: The kids that step out of bound, but not too much. Because you...which is also...it's influenced our relationship in a way. Because you are almost, should I... It took me a long while after marriage to step away mentally from my family. Because I've always been that one, since the age of like eight...I had my mom's bank card and I knew the pin...almal daai goete...So, I'm the responsible one. And also, it affects a lot how you think of yourself...should I go into business? What if the family sort of...will they be fine? Should I do this with Vernon...maybe not...should we move away? Even that has become, the last two years, a problem. We want to move to a bigger place, but they almost like want to come with us. But everything can't be family. I've been the constant one that must just, where, if something breaks...
- 58. R: You're the go-to.**

59. B: Yeah. Which is very difficult, because sometimes you do find yourself in this...almost like a sound-proof box where you're screaming and screaming and no one is hearing you. Uhm, and as soon as something major happens for you, something else happens to someone else, and then the focus is gone again to someone else. I do think, not just in our external families, but also between the two of us, I sometimes do feel like I'm always there. I'm always seeing that everything is in place for everyone else. But as soon as something happens to me, a child gets sick. So now you can't go to meetings. Which kind of puts a little bit of resentment there. Like I didn't really want children...that like came with you (said to husband). Because I knew I wasn't going to be this...mommy bubble. I wasn't going to be that. I wanted to do stuff and try stuff, that is always going to be me. So, my ideal story in a way, now that you mention it, would be to work, have a baby somewhere - just to see if I could - and then, that was it. Further, I would study and travel. Do whatever. And now, sometimes I do almost feel stuck. Because it's always the mommy. It's the mommy if the children get sick, it's the mommy must see if he works late. So, I think, that's the one story that like almost always pops up the whole time. I feel stuck sometimes. I've missed out on business deals where I could've been way further in my business, but you're the mommy. If the child has lice, you need to be there. If there's measles, you have to be there. So, I think besides my health stuff, it's always that story of I didn't want to do this alone, and sometimes I do feel like I'm doing it alone. And I do understand from his point that the man has to go out and work, protect, financially see that we are stable. I get that. But there's also this voice that's like...I also have a right to feel this way.
60. **R: And for you, Vernon? (repeat question (7) and (8))**
61. V: Uhm...I lost my one...add-on brother. About four years...
62. B: It's been seven years, because we had just gotten married.
63. V: He was the sensible one out of us all. He was the responsible one that would phone everyone to find out if everyone was ok. But the day that uhm... (Vernon emotional). The day that he needed us, we weren't there. And uhm, he tried to kill himself. So, he drank pool acid and car oil. He kind of wanted to kill himself, but he didn't want to...so he survived. (*Participant reflecting on recovery process and friend finally passing away. Details not included out of respect for participant's loss. Details not relevant to current study*). That is why I don't like to get tired...because... (Vernon getting tearful and emotional), I might just not be able to fight.
64. **R: That's quite a heavy toll on you...not being allowed to get tired out of fear of not having the resources to fight if necessary...we all sometimes get tired...and all that responsibility, you're going to get tired...**
65. V: I know. I've never seen my daddy get tired. It's like...he would go to work, six o'clock in the morning he would rock up at work. He would get home by five...then he'd work at home. I'd go to sleep and sometimes wake up at night, and he'd still be busy...maybe ten o'clock, eleven o'clock sometimes. Sleep for like two hours and be back at work. He's never...I think in his entire career

of working at Pick n Pay...for like 37 years...he's been late once. He doesn't believe in being late or sick unnecessarily. He would, to the point of coughing up blood, he'd be at work. And he'd just look after himself. So, even though my body's burned out and I would like to sleep for a week...I don't believe in being tired, because that one day that you are tired and you sleep, is the day that something's going to go wrong. And I don't want to be unprepared. And so, I'm the youngest of the five of us...but my job was always to make sure that nobody got in trouble. So, if we were going to jump into the school and get into the pool...

66. R: You would be the look out?

67. V: No, my mind is designed in such a way that I figure out problems and solutions way before the problem has even arrived...

68. B: He will figure out the lie if they got caught!

(everyone laughing)

69. V: Three to four different lies and ways out! So, if we were going to get out and run, exits would be there. That's why when I get somewhere, I always check how things look. I always was the one to take care of everyone, make sure everyone is fine.... Like with my parents...my brother was in an accident when I was 7 years old - 23 years back - heavy accident. He was declared dead on site. Car hit him at 160km/hour. He was standing dead still. He bent to pick up a ball...we were playing soccer that day...the ball went over the fence...into the road...That day, the car, him running into the road...it's like it happened in slow motion. The car was red...and all you saw was this red streak and my brother disappearing... (*Participant sharing details of accident and brother's injuries*) I kind of still blame myself, because I was close to the road...I should've protected him...(Vernon emotional). So, since that day, he's never been quite the same. He can't really control his temper...his got a very bad temper...

70. R: He survived?!

71. V: Yeah, he's still alive. He forgot everything. How to use a toilet...even forgot us as his family (Vernon emotional). My mom never stopped praying, and he's alive so... My parents always believed in 50/50...uhm, but ever since that day it's almost been like 80/20...I got the 20 percent, he got the 80. Which is like understandable, because he needed more attention and things like that. But it's like, because you are the responsible one, it's like: 'you're still ok, right?' It's not 'how are you doing?' You try not to mess up, because they look at you far worse than, because he's already messed up so much...So I try my best not to ask for help. Always pushing myself to the next limit to provide, to protect. So ja, that's internally... I always want to give everyone everything that they want. Especially when it comes to her. And when...my idea of my life was a nice reasonable.... I didn't want a big house. I wanted a house where everyone had their own space, uhm, there was a nice yard where I could have a dog or two. Because I love animals. Kids...I told her when we met that I wanted fifteen, because she loves rugby, and I wanted to start my own rugby team. And she agreed! (laughing)

72. B: I think that's why my womb just went....
(everyone laughing)
73. V: But uhm, it does really affect me internally when...because it's come up quite a bit over the ten years that 'you wanted kids...I gave you kids because you wanted it'. I can understand people get frustrated and tired...you have outbursts and things like that. But something like that that comes up repeatedly...I internalise a lot of things...so it's at the point where I kind of resent my life. Like I trapped this amazing person in this bubble of mine...where she could've probably been the boss of some company or a CEO. All because I decided to fall in love with her. And I promised her the world...even though I don't own it yet...so, uhm, internally I think I'm very unhappy and sad. Frustrated. That is why I am pushing beyond my boundaries to find a lot of money...and have the house...and things like that. So, they can be fine.
74. B: But I think the thing that we're constantly struggling with is...Vernon keeps, he has this picture in his mind of what he wants, for me. You keep on hearing he wants to give me the world. He wants to give me everything. And the one thing I fell in love with, and I keep on telling him this...It was not the fact that he was going to be a good dad, I could see that by looking at his father. I knew he was going to provide. So, I knew we were going to one day be in a house. We're not there yet. But it's fine for me. But the one thing I fell in love with him for, was the fact that we could communicate. We could. One stupid thing would turn into another stupid thing, and you could actually hear him, how he was thinking about certain things. So, I knew like, and I think I said it the last session as well. I didn't get married for wealth. I got married for...I knew what marriage is. I saw it with my parents. I knew how quickly it can go from all roses to like all thorns. Like for me, when he said he wanted to marry me, I put myself literally into every situation like death, cancer, house burning down etc....With every situation it was like: 'No, we'll be fine.' Because we're both dedicated so we'll make a plan. If we have to live on the street and make a house out of boxes. Be creative like that. Boxes and still have Wi-Fi for the girls...Because we'll be fine. We'll be able to talk about it. We're able to make fun out of life. We see humour in bad stuff. So that's what I like about him. What I like about him was also the fact that he saw me, even before I saw myself. And I was like broken. I looked very all together. I looked the part. I knew where my life was going. But inside I was very insecure. I was very broken down. I was still dealing with a lot of my rape stuff. But what he saw, was something different. And that's what I liked about him. That's why I got married to him. So, it wasn't because of the house. It wasn't because he could provide. I could see all those things. But those are the stuff...that we could talk...even where we are now...we still sometimes act like stupid children. That makes it fun. We can have fun with the girls. Uhm, and that's...I knew he was a go-getter. I knew he was going to get to his...but for now, let's stay focused here. And I think that's where we've always kind of battled. It's...I also have dreams and aspirations. When I pray, I call my house to me. I see my house. I see the girls, whatever they're going to be. But for now I'm focused here. My

emotional state here. It's pointless being all up in the clouds ten years down the line and we're missing out on everything here. We're not going to get back the fact that our girls...be focused and present here. If we had a fight, be here. Don't roll down the road there. Maybe some of the stuff I still bring up because you're still doing that thing. I'm not bringing up the whole ten years of whatever, but we're not getting that thing right. So that's why I'm bringing it up again. It's not to say you're a bad parent. So, if I mention it again, it's that thing. So be present now. Uhm, but I do think we're at a place of almost shedding all those shadows of our parents and what we thought we had to be...and what we thought they wanted us to be.

75. R: I actually want to jump in there as you talk about the parents, because that's my next question. (9) If we imagine that each of you came into this relationship with a suitcase packed full of experiences and lessons from your respective families in which you grew up...what are some of the experiences and lessons you think you brought in with you from your family about intimate relationships? (10) How has these experiences/lessons influenced or impacted your relationship and its dynamics?

76. B: A lot of daddy issues. (laughing) For me it's a lot of daddy issues, but I think it's the fact that it was taken away from me. Not the divorce. That he just like after the divorce decided he's done. Like: 'I'm done!' (making snapping noise with fingers). Uhm, he used to be...he taught us about periods...he taught us about sex - maybe too much too soon, but...every year he...it was sex. Which is why I was never interested in a boy, because I knew what was going to happen. My question always to the boys was: 'So, besides sex, why should we be in a relationship?', type of thing. And they could never answer that question. So, I think, just to say that I had a boyfriend once, I said yes to a guy. But then the next day I'm like, 'I'm done.' It's a tick off my list - I could say I had a boyfriend (laughing). So, for me that was my father to me. Always present, always playing with us. We could talk to him...so, he wasn't like soft soft, but you could talk to him about boyfriends where you could never go to mommy about that. She was the strict one. She was the one you always found behind the pots, and cleaning and... I actually now the other day told her, and it's weird that you are mentioning this, that we are in a different relationship. I was always tight with my mom. Because I had to be. I had to be. Because my dad was always working. He was a brick layer...he was working, she was working. I was the eldest and I had to. And even with my relationship with my sister, it's different. Because I was always their mommy, not their sister. So, with her, I told her that, 'You know what, I am now learning how to be weak. Because you always taught me how to be strong. So, it's weird for me.' And so sometimes she will like, try out...almost like...because we do a lot of facilitating with the youth. And so, she will like, 'You know what, it's bad how we always motivate others to look into themselves and get out, or whatever. And then when something happens to us it's like, we're almost like dead.' And I'm like, 'I'm ok with it for now.' Because it's almost like that pendulum stuff where like you hit it and it

first goes way over there and then way over there, and you kind of find your balance. So, I was always taught to be strong. I can do that very well. But being weak...

77. R: Not so much...

78. B: Uh-uh. I'm not a fan. But I'm like kind of finding my balance between what points are...from her...Because like I said, I saw her and my daddy touch five times? If it was that much. But we were a very happy family. I knew that. So, like, when the divorce came, you were like: 'This is weird.' Because you always saw them talking.

79. R: So, it came out of the blue for you. Which I imagine might've really influenced your view of relationships...

80. B: Exactly. It actually affected our relationship that much that we had a two months' 'renewal'...So he asked me out, I was like, 'Ok it's fine - let's do this for two months. And then after the two months....'

81. V: It was two years.

82. B: And then it's two years. And then when he asked...we got married after a year. And then I was like, 'Ok, let's see. Let's see.' And then two years came. And then, he still wanted to get married. And then oh! The thing happened where we set a date. He moved it to the front, because he was now...

83. V: To the back.

84. B: No, he first moved it to the front, because now he wanted to get married. And then a month prior to that date, he just phoned me one day and like said...

85. V: No I came to the house. I'm not the type to talk about that over the phone. No there's a difference.

86. B: He's was like... 'if you don't want to get married, don't get married.' Because he was uncertain about certain stuff. He had just spoken to his dad, or something like that. So, he was like, 'Ok, let's cancel.' And then we cancelled the wedding. So, the next day we went to his parents and told them, and it was like.... So, we set another date and so I said, the day before my birthday. So, we actually got married the day before my birthday. So, there was also that almost...when it comes to, if something is too good...I'm just waiting for the...

87. R: Waiting for the shoe to drop...the bad stuff to happen...

88. B: Yeah. It's going to come. It's coming anyway. So, it affected us more with my...with my lastborn. Because we had the miscarriage before. And so, if I count my pregnancies...I always didn't celebrate my last pregnancy. I like hid it. Like people literally thought I was pregnant, and I was like going to give birth...that's how well I hid my pregnancy. With the way I dressed. Because I was like, you know what...so I got one of each (miscarriage, normal birth, caesarean), so probably a stillborn or something is going to happen. Just to like cover everything, probably. So that is the thinking. And when it comes to affection, my grandmother, her way of loving...Because I grew up a lot with her and my mom...it was like, if the man is fed, the house

is clean...if he goes to work, you shouldn't bother him a lot when he's working...then uh, that is love. Even communication. It's weird for me to do communication now and say how I feel. Because with my parents it was always like...like my grandma, she would always mumble with my mom, afterwards. About 'Die Man'...It starts with 'Die man' and you know nothing good is going to come after that! (laughing) And so for me, I didn't want to put that on my children, so now I tell 'Die man'... (laughing)...

89. R: Directly...

90. B: It took a while, but now I tell 'Die man' wat hy doen...and I leave my children alone. And so, I try.

91. R: And you, Vernon? (repeat question (9) and (10))

92. V: I just want to add to what she said.... It still affects our relationship, to the fact that she doesn't fully want to love me, because she's scared I'm going to leave. You said it over and over.

93. B: It's not the leaving part. It's the fact that, after I was raped, a few years after that, I spoke to one of my friends or something...a boy...and for some reason I told him about my rape. So, there were very little people at that time who knew I was raped. And then he turned around and wanted to use my rape as an advantage for him. So, my thing is always, if I don't know you and you want to know...I would talk to you, but in my head I would be: 'Why do you want to know this? What, why...' So, I will almost try and find out stuff about you just to protect myself...if you throw a bomb I throw a bomb...

94. R: It sounds as if there's a part of you that don't trust that Vernon loves you and wants to be with you?

95. B: There is that, still. My mommy was there for thirteen years...so yes, we still have three years to go...

96. V: It was...none of your relationships lasted more than two months.

97. B: Yes.

98. V: So, I said ok, ok let's...I'll prove you wrong. So, when it was our two months' anniversary, I said: 'And now?' It's like, 'Ok. My lease gets extended.' (everyone laughing) So the longest relationship she knew of was her best friend which was two years...so she said: 'Let's see if we'll survive till two years.' And then on the second I told her, you know, tomorrow is two years...So we went out to eat, and... I said: 'Ok, now we're here.' The agreement was that at the two years, we would decide what was going to happen...whether she wanted me to leave or whether she wanted me to stay. And then...we spoke, and she said no, I can stay.... And somehow I lived up to the standards...

99. B: Daar was versagte omstandighede! (laughing)

100. V: I think the main reason why...it's not that, I maybe worded it wrong that she doesn't love me fully...It's the fact that, when you become dependent on someone...when you truly become one person, as they stated when you get married...it hits you way harder when that person leaves.

101. R: When you've invested...you stand to lose more...

102. V: Yes. So, I think that is the issue that she has. As with the two months to the two years to the thirteen years that her parents...I know that, uhm...once I've gone past that point of the thirteen years, it's actually going to get worse. Because, uhm, then it's that point where it's too good... 'We've been here for so long, what is going to happen? What is happening in the background? Who is it...what's her name...how many are there...?' This is the story that plays in my mind. That I understand, that that is how she is because of the luggage she brought with.... And DESPITE of all that (said to his wife), I'm going to be here until you're like old and grey...I don't plan to leave. As I've told her. For some or odd reason, which is weird to me, I worked at the company...my company supported the company she worked for. So, we were the IT support. That's where I met her. So, on that particular day that I met her, I met this other girl...stunning girl.... And I'm good at reading a situation, and this girl was making conversation...but for some reason it just went over my head. And later that day, I met her. (To wife) I told you this story. And when I met her - she didn't even give me the time of day. She's like: 'There's my PC. Do what you need to. I will be over here.' And I'm like: 'Jo, this child is just so rude!' (laughing)

103. B: She didn't ask you about this, she asked you about your luggage...

(Researcher laughing)

104. V: This is part of the luggage. And I went home, because my parents are my safety net. I went home that day and said, I met this girl that I can't put into words. And I think I'm going to marry this girl, if she gives me the time of day. And when I told her that, she's like: 'Ja, it never happened.' Uhm, after a month of being with her, with all of her flaws...because I knew, she was - for some or other odd reason - she was very open with me when it came to all the flaws that she had...and she wanted to...

105. R: It was a test maybe...

106. B: (laughing) It was a test!

107. V: It was...she...she tested me till today. Because we even...she was the first, and the last, and the only. We had sex, because she thought after she gave me sex, I would leave. But then the next day, I came back again: 'So, are we going to get a coffee again?'

108. B: Too much information... (sighing)

109. V: (smiling proudly) You can use it in court.

110. V: After a month I told her: 'Look, I'm going to marry you, but you're probably not going to get married to me, yet...' But uhm, ja. My relationship with my family was overly affectionate. My parents hug and kiss every day, and even more so than...

111. B: And walk naked!

112. V: It's their house...and they don't walk naked...my mom has underwear on...

113. B: That is naked.

114. V: And my dad don't walk naked.

115. B: You're not talking about your daddy here...That would be a different story! That would be trauma counselling!
(everyone laughing)
116. V: Yeah...so, very affectionate. Until today. My daddy would be like, he will stand in front of my mommy and go (cooly): 'Gaan jy my nie groet nie?' And he's standing there the whole time until she kiss him. So...and over the years I've seen it just grow stronger. I know for a fact there's been things...even though I never physically knew...Because they always believed their relationship is their problems, it's between them. They need to discuss it. So, it's nothing...I mustn't come and put my two cents in about their relationship, type of thing. So, I knew there was times, because you can see around the house that mommy and daddy is not talking...it seems a bit tense around the house...but through all that, their relationship has only grown stronger. And I was showered with hugs and kisses growing up. Loved. Even though my dad was hard, the way he showed his love and affection was that he taught me. Everything I know to date. I always tell people that, although my dad is not very technically inclined, he taught me how to think about a problem and how to find a solution. So that concept I would apply to everything in life. Work as well. What is the problem? How do you fix it? How do we get across the bridge, type of thing? And it's the same with my grandma, and everyone else...they are overly affectionate. 'Love you' ...when you come in...like I went to pick up my grandma last week at my great grandma's house - she's passed away, but her daughter inherited the house. So, when I came in they are like: 'Hi, Vernon - haven't seen you in a long time!' Hugs and...like...you walk through the whole house and everyone greets and engages...it's affection, physical affection, love, all through the house. Uhm, and to me it's the same. So that where she says I don't know where to stop...it's me actually hugging the girls and kissing the girls so much like, 'Jo, I missed you today', and things like that. And I think because they are half and half of us...it's...they are affectionate, but not as affectionate as I am.
117. B: They will come to you.
- 118. R: (11) In your experience and opinion, what influences the alignment or connection between the two of you as a couple? What makes you feel more or less aligned/connected?**
119. V: The task at hand.
- 120. R: Explain that to me.**
121. V: So, if something around the house needs to be done, we are very well aligned. Because we know what needs to be done. The house is small, so you do the kitchen, I do the bathroom. And vice versa. You go and handle the washing, I'll vacuum. So, when it comes to things like that we are the perfect team. Where it comes to: 'I am super tired and not lus for anything, stay away from me' ...then that's the time that I will actually hang on her and try to kiss her, type of thing. Because in my family, when you were feeling down, you were embraced. People would come and sit with you and be: 'How are you?' With her it's like, 'Sit there!' But, sit there. Give the

space. Play with your phone or watch TV, but just be there. So that's where the misalignment comes in.

122. R: And for you, Bianca? (repeat question (11))

123. B: It comes back for me to communication. But I think it's more just like a woman thing, where we need to talk about stuff. If you don't, even if you've solved the situation, you feel like you are going nuts. And I also think it's the way he communicates, because with...I'm always with the kids. So, you almost like: 'Don't do that!' That kind of talk. And when he walks in you almost have that expectation of here's another adult present so we're going to have...and I feel sometimes that his brain is also mushy...so I don't really get through to him. So, I will ask a question...say I will ask, 'How was your day?'...and then I'll ask another question, but you will always bring it back to me. It's almost, I almost feel sometimes like I'm on a tennis game, and I'm always the one hitting off and he's receiving. And if I'm too tired to go fetch the ball, then there's no communication. Or he will just like, bounce a question off like, and hope it lands. It's not really listening to what I've said and having a proper conversation. It's just like I'm talking to the kids again. 'Mommy where's this? Mommy where's that? Mommy do this'... It's like...and I think that frustrates me. It makes me feel like no one hears me, no one sees me. I'm just, an island on my own. And that creates a big barrier between us.

124. R: (12) In what ways does your daily interactions (as a couple) and life demands influence your bond as a couple?

125. B: For me, if it's mentally there...like now, I'm at a place where mentally, spiritually, I'm just drained. It's that time of the year where basically in the morning, you just want to cry thinking it's another day. Where all the days are just mushing into one another. But I feel, when I'm there when I'm getting up, it's another day, let's-do-this-type-of-thing...then it's fine. But, like as I am now, where I'm super drained...I really don't have, I don't give my children the attention they should get. I basically just...if they can come from creche and sleep, I would be happy. Basically. Because...I'm too tired to deal with...I know when they ask certain stuff...it's not because they want it, but because attention is part of...they're trying to tell me something...but I'm even too drained to see that. But not see it...I do see it. But attend to it. So, I'm like you know what, I think you need alone time. Go play in your room. I'll actually now tell them I'm tired. Give me a moment to breathe, then we'll see what we can do. So I don't think that he always understands...dealing with the kids...it's not the...picking up and doing...it's that where you see them doing things, and you know there's another problem you've got to deal with...but because I'm so tired, I don't want to touch that problem, because I'm too tired. So, I know with one of my daughters, she's in this discovery phase of her body...so she's always touching herself...I know I have to deal with that, but I'm just too tired now to do it. So, it's not the daily stuff that tires me out...it's the fact that I see all these things. I know it's linked to something else - like a mother

knows - but I am too tired to deal with it now. This year has been really hectic. We've been chipping off a lot of our insecurities...as individuals. That is tiring.

126. R: And how does all of this influence your bond with Vernon?

127. B: You kind of get to a point...I'm just going to be honest, where you get a little bit more resentful. Because you get time to go out to work and not deal with this. You kind of feel that he gets an escape out of the house and you don't. Because now stuff has changed, with him taking the car to work. Whereas before, I could just take them and a change of scenery would also help me help them. Now I don't have that. I'm just stuck in the house. So, I know my frustrations is not with anything else but myself, and I'm tired. I know that. But we're human. You're not going to blame yourself first. I know it's not his fault for being out and whatever. But I'm there stuck, 24/7.

128. B: And for you, Vernon? (repeat question (12))

129. V: Uhm, it affects it quite a bit, because my job that I do is quite mental...I really have to think a lot about what I do. You sit at your desk the whole day so your body rests, but your brain gets shredded. So mentally, my brain is like super tired. Physically...if she were to say go rebuild the house, I could possibly do it. And I think, because when I walk in and she wants that communication with an adult...it's difficult, because my brain is just so tired as it's just dealt with difficult customers and colleagues. So, one thing that she wants from me is spent somewhere else, and then it comes to the point where we're supposed to interact, they've taken everything. When we started dating I was also working in IT, but my work was about seventy percent physical and about thirty percent mental, so we could talk a lot then, because I was mainly physically tired. There was more left in the mental capacity tank.

130. B: But then for me sometimes, sorry, it does feel like...I know he likes being physical, where with me, when I'm stressed, everything would just go into shut down. So I would then also go and ask him: 'Are you still ok sexually?'...and then, I will like, 'Ok, I'm not in this mood , but let me go bath, whatever, to be that for him.' Where I feel that sometimes, I push myself beyond to get his needs, because I'm tired now...where he almost doesn't put that structures in place when he knows I'm going to require this from him. Take a breather somewhere...and then come back for five minutes and be this type of thing.

131. V: And I do agree. I do lack in that point. Uhm, I think that's, because...and I'm not making an excuse, it might come across like that...due to the weird hours I work, and with those fabulous neighbours that we have, I rush home to get home, without switching off from work. When I travelled home with the bus, like in my previous work, it was a little easier...I would put my music in, switch my brain off, take that five minutes...and then I would get home and try and be more interactive. But now it's: get home as quickly as I possibly can. And I don't give myself that time. And I do believe I'm lacking in that way. She's right, she does that extra effort attending to my needs, but I don't put the same amount of effort in.

132. R: (13) If other people were to look at you as a couple, what do you imagine they would see or notice about the connection/alignment/space between you?

133. B: Ah, they love us.

134. V: We're the perfect couple.

135. B: They want to walk into our footprints en almal daai goete.

136. R: So, you do get a lot of feedback from people?

137. B: Yes...

138. V: People assume that we have everything together. That...she was...one thing that I've always admired of her...we can have like a massive fight, I mean to the point where tomorrow she wants to divorce me. And then we'll walk into this door and it will be like nothing happened.

139. B: All praise to my mommy! (laughing)

140. V: Like it never happened! Like she can literally...like I've seen women compartmentalise things, but she's on a different level.

141. B: All praise to my mommy...

142. V: And I've tried to learn that, because there are certain points like, in life where, you're having a fight and, then your daughter walks in, and you've got to be able to put it aside. So, with me it's difficult because I don't smile a lot...I've inherited my father's face...I've got that walk-five-feet-around-me-that-side-thing. Even though I, if you were to come to me, I'd try to talk to you and help, I've got that resting face...Because I've tried to adapt that so that our problems are our problems, and we've got to deal with that. So, if you bring someone else in that doesn't fully understand the story, they might say she's wrong, but then they didn't catch the whole back end of the story of why she did that. So, when we leave the house and go somewhere else, I -from my side - try to keep it at home. Between us. So people assume that we are this perfect couple...the kids are well-mannered...(laughing) But that's the other thing, the kids are well-mannered outside of the house! So polite, saying 'thank you' and everything! But then at home!

143. R: (14) Is being available and accessible to each other important in your relationship? How do you practically maintain availability and accessibility with one another?

144. B: Ja no, we do. We always just check in. We have those days where I have girls' days, so I'll be like, 'I'm here now, let you know if anything change'...but we do have, even at work, 'Are you still ok? How's work?' etc. Also, for me it's important, because then I know how he's going to come into the room. What to expect. How to treat him etc. So, it also prepares me. And then sometimes, we also tend to just say stuff. Now we're a little bit more cautious. And if an argument comes up, we're more able to see you're not really angry about this, you're angry about everything else. So, we're kind of like before, you added up everything, and then now it becomes our fight. Like now, you see it as this is ours, and that is the work stuff, and we're not going to go and pile it together. Uhm, but we always stay in contact. My mommy says we're annoying, because we're always just texting to see: 'Are you ok?'...So constantly through the day we just check in.

145. R: Anything to add, Vernon? (repeat question (14))

146. V: No, it's the same.

147. R: (15) How do you practically remain engaged with one another – even when you are not occupying the same space/activity?

148. See participants' answer to question (14).

149. R: (16) How important is growth in the relationship? What does “growing” in your relationship mean for you? How do you stimulate or generate growth in your own relationship?

150. V: Improving ourselves. I think that is why we're such a good match, because it's a constant competition. We have lost track of it along the way, but we're getting back there. We always used to push each other, friendly competition way. I've done this now, I've faced my fear where I didn't want to start a business, and today I've signed a contract with this guy...so then she's like, 'Ok, I also have this fear where I didn't want to start this new project, so let me try and do that.' Or it's like, she will always encourage me...it's like, 'Look, why don't you go into that course so you can improve yourself?' And I try to do the same for her. Like I said, we have lost track of it along the way, because of everything in our life. But it's like we improve upon ourselves and influence the girls and always push to be better.

151. B: Ja, I'm big on personal growth. I get annoyed with...if I look at...I'm that kind of person who at night, I will check: What have I done through the day? How could I have improved? And then you kind of do that over three months, six months....and then you check: 'How have I done mentally? How have I done communication wise? How have I done?'...so I'm big on that. So, I'm also big on going to workshops, just to check: 'Am I still on the right track? Is there something out there that I can apply to myself?' Before, I used to do it a lot for my girls...I kind of now...at a thing of doing it for myself first. But I always get bored if I feel that I don't improve. I'm very hard on myself.

152. R: (17) What are the practical ways in which you remain present or “plugged in” with each other?

See participants' answers to question (14) and (15).

153. R: (18) As couples, we have to find a balance between our life as individuals (incl. goals, dreams, occupations) and our relationship with our partners.... How do you each manage that balance between relationship intimacy and individual independence?

154. B: For me, I don't feel there's a balance. Because if I do good at motherhood, I suck as a wife. If I do good with my business, I'm good at that, but then I feel my children are lacking. So, I think what we kind of do at the end is just weigh up: what is important and stuff? So, my children asking me for something is important. But then I'll also put boundaries in place of...before I was just strong...whereas now, I'm like: 'You know what, mommy's tired. Give me a moment, when I'm ready I will come to you.' So instead of trying to do everything for everyone, I'm actually

carving out time for myself. I'm like, I don't want to deal with now. You might want to...I'll come back later. And that's where we are growing with ourselves individually, and with keeping the balance between values and boundaries. It's like: that is you, I can't now, just give me a moment and then we'll see how we can work around this.

155. R: Vernon? (repeat question (18))

156. V: Uhm...for me it's also unbalanced, because it's...as of late, up until recent it's been everything about the family. I've put all my stuff on the back burner. Like, I've been driving for seven years, but I've only had my license for about a year. But when it came to the point where she said she was going to go for her license, I kept pushing her to go, but then I didn't. And then it became a competition again, because she got it, and then shortly after that I got mine. It's to a fault where I will...and it causes a lot of fights sometimes, where it's like uhm, I try to do everything. To a point where I'm going to clean the kitchen, fold up the washing and clean the bathroom, and then I forget to drain out the water when I'm done with the kitchen...

157. B: Is there trauma counselling for this? (everyone laughing)

158. V: So, I think that's where I fault. But it's because I feel she does a lot, I mean. People underestimate the job that a mother has. They actually, if you put a money value to it, mothers should actually be earning what a top CEO does. So, besides that, it's a heavy job. So when I get home, I do end up taking things away from her which irritates her a lot...and I try to do everything, but then I fault on it...and because she's such a perfectionist...it makes it worse.

159. R: (19) How do you generally navigate the differences between the two of you – in personality, levels of affection, communication etc?

160. V: Test the water. So, if she's in the room and laying on the bed and I come there and I kiss her and hug her. And you get that feeling like: 'Don't touch me'. Then I'm like, 'Ok, I get it.' It's like, I'm asking questions, but you don't get a normal response. Then I'm like, 'You're tired and you don't want me to ask a lot of questions?' Then I'm like: 'Ok, give her space.'

161. B: I do think we kind of, with every incident that happens, if something worked or didn't work, we almost like save that under like 'this worked last time'...

162. R: Note to self...

163. B: Yeah. And so you kind of use that for the next time. So, if he comes in and looks the way he looks, I will first ask: 'Are you tired?' Because, at first I would assume you must stay out of...sommer keep the children away...stay out of the way. But now I'm like, 'Ok, are you tired or is something wrong?' So, you kind of know how to pose different questions. Or sometimes you just know by some of the things he does, that he needs to go play games to cleanse his mind, or something. Kind of let him go. So, things don't irritate you as much.

164. R: (20) To each individual: What is your deepest wish or desire for your relationship with _____?

165. B: Do we get a fail if we don't answer this one? (laughing)

(Participants considering the question)

166. V: I think for me as a person, uhm...I don't want anything. Because, look, the reason why I'm saying that is, I study things a lot. And in grade 8, I studied women for a year. And it's probably just like a needle point of the entire iceberg, but...because, growing up with just boys, and it's always like the women this and that...I wanted to understand women. How they think and things like that and...what's the right thing to say when a woman looks like that? So, I literally went to go sit...I had like female friends, and I would just sit in their conversations. I wouldn't partake...I would ask questions, but sit there and listen to how they talk, how they act...what women actually like...So the reason why she's been my first and only is because...I've had offers before, but it was too easy. You could snap your fingers and then it happens. There was no achievement? You didn't work... So, if I get this wish to have this one thing added to make this relationship perfect, we'd break up tomorrow, because then the relationship would be boring.
- 167. R: Because there would be no challenge, nothing to work towards?**
168. V: Yeah, I wouldn't learn that: 'Ok, I've been touching her arm like that for 20 years, but she doesn't actually like that, she would prefer if I touched her arm that way.'
- 169. R: Ok, so let me adjust the question for you. Let's say it's not necessarily something that you get without doing any work, maybe the wish or dream would still require a lot of effort...would that change your answer?**
170. V: I think...trust. Because our trust has been broken by us...over the course of the ten years due to a lot of things that has happened in our relationships. So if we could have a clean slate...like knowing what we know now...and have a clean slate of trust, where like if I say I'm going to the shop...even if it takes me like ten hours to go to the shop, you trust that I go to the shop. And if I come home and say, 'Look, the car broke down and they forgot to charge my phone'...so, you actually trust what I'm saying. I think that would actually be the one thing.
171. B: Hmmm, like I'm around the corner, but I'm coming two hours late... (laughing)
- 172. R: Bianca you? (repeat question (20))**
173. B: Uhm, I think for me it would be for us to...find ourselves in our relationship. Which is a big thing for us, because we are constantly...Because of the roles we played in our family, you should almost always push away what you want or need to grow...uhm..So, if it is that we almost like grow...I heard the other day, in a marriage you almost grow like a seed and the soil. They both need each other to grow, but they are separate. But then you can't have the seed without the soil. And vice versa. But the seed has its own stuff, and the soil has its own nutrients that help the seed. But they grow separately, together.
- 174. R: I like that.**
175. B: So, I think that is my way then, for us to grow like that in our relationship. We kind of really, and what is good already in our relationship is the fact that we balance well off each other. But

the bad of us...because we're from similar backgrounds...you almost want the other one to be happier, or happy, in your despair. So, if we can get that right, it will be good.

176. R: Thank you.

Recorders off. Interview closed.

APPENDIX M: Kristin and Wayde – Interview 1 Transcript

1. **RESEARCHER (R): (1) How would you describe your relationship/bond with your partner?**
2. WAYDE (W): I'd describe it as tense. It's ok, but there's certain things that you say, and it blows it...so that's why I say it's tense. It can be something small, but then it's blown out of proportion.
3. KRISTIN (K): I would say fragile. Very sensitive.
4. **R: (2) How do you create intimacy (closeness) in your relationship with your partner?**
5. K: I try to have conversations, to talk about it. To not just leave it. Because I don't like...feel that you can just carry on as normal if something isn't resolved. So, I like speaking about it. And he on the other hand, thinks that the problem will just go away.
6. **R: So, for you the closeness, but also the attendance to issues comes from communication, in a way, Kristin?**
7. K: Ja...
8. **R: And for you Wayde? (repeat question (2))**
9. W: I don't have a problem with intimacy. It's just that with me, I'm just that type of guy that if something happens, I lose my temper, I swear and whatever. Done. We go through the door – I forgot about it. It's the past. And I'll carry on like normal. That's what she's referring to. Where she, if something happens, it doesn't. It sits with her. Now we don't talk about it, so I leave it for a day, because I know she's cross. So, I just carry on.
10. **R: And what would happen to the issue that came up?**
11. W: No, but that's where it becomes a problem now. Because now when I try to be close to her then, and it's gone for two days, then it's like: 'Are you still cross for that?!' It's that type of thing.
12. **R: So, what I'm hearing as well is that there are different processing speeds in a way, that how you deal with things...the time frame...will be different.**
13. W: Hmmm.
14. **R: And when you do find out that there's stuff that's unresolved, Wayde, what do you then do with it?**
15. W: We normally talk about it. And most of the time, it's me saying sorry.
16. K: I just don't feel like you can...there can be a problem and then you can just carry on. I feel that you need to speak about it and resolve the problem, that everybody feels happy about it. And then carry on.
17. **R: And what qualifies as resolution? What is necessary for it to happen?**
18. K: If you did something wrong, I would want you to apologise. Not to just carry on. Or discuss why this or that happened.

19. W: Most of the time it is just to apologise, but the thing is...it's just that for me it's not a big thing to me, but it's a big thing for her. So, there's that miscommunication also, you understand. Like we fight over something then to me it's like: 'Why are you cross over that? How can you get cross about that?' And that's where...
- 20. R: (3) What makes you believe that your partner is committed to you?**
21. W: We're still together...after all of the rubbish we've been through.
22. K: He doesn't worry about anybody else. He's just us in that bubble. He prefers just us being in a bubble, and nobody else. He doesn't really care about going to friends or going here or going with that one. It's just us.
- 23. R: So, if I understand correctly, it's the focus on you as couple that makes you feel that Wayde is committed?**
24. K: Hmmm.
- 25. R: And sometimes even, as you're saying, making you feel as if it excludes other factors or people in your life....**
26. W: Family.
- 27. R: Is that a negative thing?**
28. K: Ja...
29. W: It's...I can't say. It's not a negative thing, it's just that...the reason I do it is because I don't want the arguments. That just brings...if family comes with or goes with us, there's always other issues involved and then me and her lands up fighting.
- 30. R: So, it's a protection mechanism?**
31. W: That's correct.
- 32. R: (4) What are the ways in which you express/demonstrate your love and affection for your partner?**
33. W: There's no affection at the moment. In the beginning we were very close, holding hands and all that and then...In the beginning I didn't like that. And then she liked that. Now, I don't get it, now I want it. But she doesn't do it. It's that type of...
- 34. R: A change in behaviour and almost a swop around?**
35. W: That's correct.
- 36. R: Kristin, what would you add? (repeat question (4))**
37. K: Well, I do agree, but it's not that...from my side, it's not that I don't want to show love and affection. It's more of not trusting that person that you're with. So, you don't want to put yourself out there. I mean, you like stay on your boundary like, you're waiting for that feeling where you feel comfortable and... How can I say? Not happy, but everything is stable. You're waiting for that, and then you move forward, but you don't get to that. So that's why you stay on your guard.

38. W: I think what she's trying to say is...to the way she used to feel about me. I think that's what she's trying to say. Cause the way she used to feel and now...it's different. Because of what happened.
39. **R: Because of what happened? So, I take it there's something big that has then influenced the relationship?**
40. W: That's it.
41. **R: Is it something that you would like to share or would you rather not share it...?**
42. W: I can share, I don't know if she wants to share it.
43. K: It's not about that really...that's years back...
44. W: But that's when it changed.
45. **R: Ok...so there was something that impacted the relationship and Kristin you're saying it's years back. So, does that mean that you feel that it's not influencing the relationship anymore?**
46. K: It was a changing factor, yes. It was an affair. But that was like...way back...years ago. How many years?
47. W: I don't know. It was before Taryn...
48. **R: The eldest?**
49. W: The youngest one.
50. **R: Ok, so it's about 12 years ago...**
51. W: Plus minus, yes.
52. K: But it isn't...the factor isn't that it is about that. It's actually about the fact that the people uhm...the in-laws that contributed to it...and was never told about it, so they...They didn't know that they were causing the conflict...(participant emotional)...So that's why it's gone on for all the years. Because it's only between me and him. He has never told them, which I felt was...
53. **R: So, while this issue has happened 12 plus years ago, it seems it's still impacting the relationship and hasn't maybe quite been resolved yet...?**
54. K: Hmmm.
55. **R: (5) What contributes to the quality or nature of your relationship?**
56. W: How do you mean? Like...?
57. **R: Almost your satisfaction level...**
58. W: Kind of why are we still in the relationship?
59. **R: Yes, almost like you've said before, what adds to the fact that you're still around?**
60. W: Yes...
61. K: Well if we are on our own, and it's just me and him and the kids, we actually...we are able to function together. We are able to live with each other. But when other people get involved, it becomes a...
62. **R: Difficult to manage?**

63. K: Ja, hmmm. Then the disagreements and the issues all start.
- 64. R: (6) In what ways does your partner meet your needs?**
65. W: For me it's about...she, as I said now, she looks after us. She's there. She looks after my kids.
- 66. R: And if we maybe think practically, what are the ways in which she does that?**
67. W: Cooking, cleaning...and she works and...my kids and that. So, I'm saying it's always, she's always there. No matter what happens, she takes care of it.
- 68. R: And that is part of your needs...**
69. W: Yes. And I can trust her. Because I know she won't go somewhere else. Another man, in other words. Even though I know what I did.
- 70. R: And for you, Kristin? (repeat question (6))**
71. K: He's just always buying things...I don't know if he thinks material things can buy love (laughing), I should say. Because always when he does something wrong he buys something. Which I feel...it shouldn't be about buying, it should be a thing about showing.
- 72. R: And showing in what ways, Kristin?**
73. K: By doing small little things. Like I take my daughter to classes every Wednesday night, and for years I've been doing it. And he never does it. Which I would say, he could think for himself and say: 'Give her a break, she comes from work and she's cooking...I'll take my daughter.' But he doesn't do that and I feel frustrated asking, because you should think for yourself.
- 74. R: (7) What is it that you enjoy or value about your partner's company?**
75. K: Wayde is a nice person to be around. He's funny. But just sometimes he has his moods (laughing). He has his good days and his bad days, I suppose.
76. W: Also, just in general, I am a happy-go-lucky person. But don't tramp wrong, because then you're going to see the ugly person of me and...I know it's not nice...because it's anger man. Even though I'm happy-go-lucky and we're enjoying it...something can trigger it and it's.....
- 77. R: And for you, Wayde... (repeat question (7))**
78. W: No, you can always talk to her. She always wants to talk. I can actually speak to her about anything. It's...even though there are certain things I'll tell her that she doesn't agree with me, but then she will give her opinion and then I will give my opinion and we'll argue about it. But then afterwards, I will sit and I'll think: 'Ok, it does actually make sense what you said', ...but I won't say it. But then we'll argue about it three, four times and then I'll only admit: 'Ok, you're right.'
- 79. R: (8) How do you know what your partner's needs are in different situations?**
80. W: Yes, I can pick up that something is wrong. I can see it in her ways...her face. You can just pick up she's silent. She's quiet. Then I know...something's not right. I either did something or...which is most of the time, but...
- 81. R: And for you Kristin? (repeat question (8))**
82. K: Oh, yes. When Wayde is angry and moody then I know there's something up. Which is a lot.

83. R: And how do you know when he's angry or moody?

84. (Kirstin hesitant and laughing)

85. W: Say, you can say.... (laughing) You'll see it.

86. K: He's rude. He's very rude. He's always...he gets angry for the smallest thing. He's touchy. If the kids just do a small little thing, and then he explodes. That's why I know when he's...angry or irritated.

87. R: 9. Do you exclusively schedule quality time together as a couple, or is your time together part of your usual daily activities & tasks?

88. W: It's a busy schedule. We try...

89. K: Only at night when the children goes to sleep, yeah.

90. W: It's...

91. K: Where we talk or...have our time.

92. R: And what would you spend your time together on? Would you for example switch off the TV and put the telephones away and just have a conversation, or would it also be watching TV together?

93. K: Watching a movie or something together. Or if we do need to discuss something, we'll talk about it that time of the night.

94. R: Something to add Wayne?

95. W: So that the kids don't hear whatever we're talking about.

96. R: And if there is something to be spoken about, would both of you be equally open and able to raise the issue or is usually one of you?

97. W: It's normally Kristin.

98. K: Ja, he normally just carries on with life as if nothing is going on (laughing).

99. R: And for you, Wayne, if something is going on internally – how does it usually come out?

100. W: It's anger. I demonstrate it with anger. I know it's wrong, but I do it. Because it gets to that point where I don't know what to do with it.

101. R: So, it doesn't matter what is going on for you inside – by default it comes out as anger?

102. W: That's it.

103. R: (10) Is the time spend together shared with children/pets/TV/cell phones or other demands?

104. K: Not always.

105. W: It is...it's busy. I mean it is busy - we both work...the children...you've got to juggle it, but I mean we do try.

106. R: And how do you juggle it?

107. W: We've got to prioritise man. What is more important? That is basically what you do. So, whatever is priority for me, for example, that must be done. It has to get done, so I do it.

108. R: And for you, Kristin? Does it work in a similar way?

109. K: Uhhh, if I have something to discuss or say, I'll just decide that: Ok, I'm going to speak about it tonight, or whatever...

110. R: (11) What is your communication like? What is good/bad about it?

111. W: Ok for me, I...they always tell you when you get married that communication is key. But the problem is, the other person doesn't always listen or understand what you are trying to tell them. Or you use the wrong word or term...but that's not actually what you were trying to get across to them. They take it completely differently. So that's where it's basically, her understanding and my understanding – it won't be the same. You talk about the same thing a hundred times, but you're not understanding where I'm coming from.

112. K: Like we're on a different page.

113. R: And so, do you find that the same conflicts or same topics of conflict keeps coming up?

114. K: Hmm.

115. R: So, for you, Kristin? (repeat question (11))

116. K: Sometimes when I talk to him, it's like I'm talking to a brick wall. He doesn't really get what I'm saying. Or I think it's more as in...he doesn't want to be wrong. Because he's been wrong for all the times...or he feels that I'm saying that he's wrong all the time...So, he just feels why bother? So that's why I think he doesn't even want to communicate or talk anymore about the same thing over and over, because it's not being resolved. And I'm also coming to a point where...I don't even bother saying anything, because I feel like you're not listening to me. And I can't have a conversation with him, when the kids are in the house or around, because he goes louder than everybody else, and I don't want everybody to hear my conversation.

117. R: (12) How do you handle conflict in your relationship?

118. W: With me you will know.

119. K: You hear! (laughing)

120. W: With me you will know, but with her you won't.

121. K: I prefer to have a conversation, like you're having a conversation with another person. I don't think one should be louder than the other. I think, so that kids think it's fine, the neighbours think it's fine...it's like we're having a conversation. It shouldn't be...out there! And if I see that it is going too loud, then I will keep quiet and I won't say anything further. Then I just shut off. You can carry on speaking, screaming or whatever, I'm not going to say anything more.

122. R: (13) When you are experiencing a disagreement or when your partner has done something deemed 'wrong', what does your internal sense-making/reaction look like? What do you tell yourself about it/their intentions etc.?

123. W: You see the thing is...when I notice something is wrong, or when she does something wrong and it irritates me, believe me you're going to hear it. I don't keep it in.

124. K: In a company or not in a company.

125. W: I vent it. That's just...I don't know...I'm just that way. I call a spade a spade. That's it.

126. R: So, there's not much internal dialogue you feel, Wayde, because you feel as if you bring it out anyway?

127. W: Yes.

128. R: And for you, Kristin? (repeat question (13))

129. K: Sometimes I feel as if he was inappropriate in something he said or did...but, I wouldn't say anything while everyone is around. But I'll...when me and him are alone, I will explain to him that I don't think that that was nice, or I didn't agree with what you did. So, he knows how I feel.

130. R: (14) How do you handle/respond to strong emotions in yourself and your partner?

131. W: I don't know...when it happens and that...like I say...there's only two things that affect me. No matter what it is, for me it's just like I need to get it off, I need to get it out. And once that's done, it's finished.

132. R: Is it almost a relief when that emotion is then finally gone and out?

133. W: Yes it is. And the other thing is also, I turn to food also. Which is also another emotion. So, you get that enjoyment. So that's why I'm overweight (giggling).

134. R: So, is the food about helping you cope with your emotions?

135. W: It's like...how can I say? When you're not getting that happiness...just to shut everything off, I've shouted and did whatever I want to. Now everybody is quiet and whatever is gone...then I'll turn to food. Cause that...I don't know how to explain...it's almost like a drug. That taste. That affection makes you enjoy. It gives you that pleasure.

136. R: And for you, Kristin? (repeat question (14))

137. K: When I feel stressed and stuff, I clean and I work at stuff. And sometimes I sleep, a lot.

138. R: So, what I'm hearing is that perhaps for both of you there are at times a bit of a moving away from the emotion towards something else, such as eating or sleeping or cleaning...

139. W: To get rid of that feeling. That unhappiness or that whatever you're feeling in that moment.

140. R: (15) How do you know when your partner is happy/sad/angry...can you identify their feelings?

141. K: I see it in Wayde when, like at night-time, he's always in the kitchen. He's always busy eating, then I know something is eating at him. And he's not happy. Because there was a time when Wayde used to say to me: I eat because you're making me angry. Which I started thinking that: If I tried to make Wayde happy, Wayde won't eat. But then there were times when we used to be happy, and then he still used to eat. And then it was like: No man, it can't be because of that. It's something else that's eating at you that you're doing this, because it's like...He wakes up and he just goes and eats. And it's just not normal.

142. R: And for you, Wayde? (repeat question (15))

143. W: Yes, you can. You can see when she's quiet, you know something's wrong or...she's busy and she doesn't say anything. Then you know. Or she'll...you know when you come home and they're sleeping already, then you know: they're upset about something. Or, most of the time, it

could even like...You can tell, because you've been so long together. It's just...you'll know there's something triggered it now...so....

144. R: (16) When reacting to one another, do you feel as if you respond only to what the other person has explicitly said or done, or also to what is implied in their behaviour/words?

145. W: You respond to what you hear, you understand? You hear what she's saying, but uhm...for me, like, what I say is...There's many times I say stuff or I use that word, but it's not actually what I meant. You understand? And then it triggers something and it's an argument. But then if you sit, and I listen and I think: 'But, that is not what I was telling you, that's not what I meant...'

146. R: And how do you make sense of that miscommunication, Wayne?

147. W: You understand with me it is...because I feel it's me. I blame myself. When I say something to her, she's always got something to say, man...and whatever...and then at the end of the day, it's me. So, I'm always the one that's feeling guilty. So, when I say something wrong, it is still me. And that's what it is.

148. R: And Kristin for you? (repeat question (16))

149. K: I think sometimes it is both. Things that he's doing...yet I do read between the lines, I would say.

150. R: And is it then your interpretation of what you think?

151. K: Ja, my interpretation.

152. R: (17) Do you ever think about the internal world (thoughts/feelings/experiences) of your partner? Imagine what is going on in their head?

153. W: It's yes and no. The reason I say yes and no is because you're too busy sometimes man. Your work, you this...it's.... a lot of pressure and you've got a 110 other things you're thinking of. And there are days where you see something is wrong, and you're wondering why? So, you tend to... 'What can I do to make her happy or...?', like that.

154. R: So sometimes, when you're not too busy with other factors, you do sometimes think about what is happening internally for Kristin, and thinking also about how you can make things better for her at the same time...

155. W: That's correct.

156. R: And for you, Kristin? (repeat question (17))

157. K: I also think what is going on in his mind, because...before I came, there was already issues in his life. Or whatever happened in his life. Because he was an eater before he met me. But after the affair, he started eating more. So, it's like, things that are happening in his life that makes him run to food or makes him angry or whatever. He doesn't know how to deal with the things that is happening. And speaking about it also would help, but he's not much of a talker (laughing).

158. R: (18) Do you ever place yourself in your partner's shoes, so to speak, thinking about what their experience of a joined situation might be?

159. W: I don't know...What I see between us, you can see. We go out somewhere and she doesn't like what we're doing or where we are going, you can see it in her face. So, I'll ask her: 'You don't like this place or you don't like these people?' I'll ask her, because I can see it in her face.
- 160. R: So, what I hear is you will then start a conversation the moment you pick up that something is happening in her shoes...**
161. W: I ask her what is wrong, and then if she don't like it, it changes...we'll probably have to go somewhere else or...
- 162. R: You adjust?**
163. W: Hmmm.
- 164. R: And for you, Kristin? (repeat question (18))**
165. K: Well I decide where I'm going to and if I know that Wayde is not going...I won't take Wayde with, because I know he won't enjoy it. Cause Wayde is a very funny person to go anywhere with...He sometimes makes an outing miserable, because the children become miserable and we all become miserable, because he wants to control the outing. It's like we want to eat here, and he wants to eat there. And you want to do this, and we want to do that. And then they all start getting edgy and upset, and then he starts growling at everyone...
166. W: Because it's 3 women and one man...
167. K: (laughing) So he starts growling at everybody because they're not happy with what he wants to do.
168. W: And whatever mother says they agree with.
- 169. R: So, what I'm hearing Kristin is that you even think about his internal experience before the situation has presented itself...**
170. K: Hmmm.
171. W: And she knows like, if they know they're going to this person and she knows I don't like that people, and those people know I don't like them...then she'll tell me: 'We're going here so you're not going to go with, hey?'
172. K: I've lost a lot of friends being with Wayde, because most of my friends don't like Wayde's ways. Because he just says what he wants to say, and he doesn't think that some people might not like it...
173. W: They get offended.
174. K: That's why I also wouldn't take Wayde to some of my friends, because I don't want to lose anymore (laughing).
175. W: I'm not that bad as she's making me out to be...
- 176. R: And Wayde how do you make sense of the fact that people get offended? Do you think they are just over sensitive or do you think there's something about the delivery?**
177. W: You see, I'll be honest with you. I'm straightforward like I'll tell you...I know I'm rude. I am rude. But if something, if I see something and it's not right, I say it there and then. Whether

your mother is standing there, whether your father whoever...it's there. It's wrong what they're doing and I say it there and then. If you get upset about it, because I'm saying that thing, that's not my fault.

178. K: But I don't think it's really people being sensitive. I think it's the manner in which you say it. If you say it in an appropriate manner. But if you say it in an ugly way...people are going to get upset about it.

179. R: So not what you say, but how...

180. K: Yes, because you can say something if you have a right to say how you feel...But say it in an appropriate manner. And I mean, you're in a company so, other people are going to be embarrassed, because there's other people around, too.

181. R: And you're saying, Wayde that you can't do it?

182. W: I don't know what it is man...if something happens I just vent it...I do know it's wrong...the manner in which I'm doing it...I do know.

183. R: And do you know it while it's happening?

184. W: No, only afterwards. It's like a trigger. And then afterwards I feel guilty about it. That I shouldn't have did that, but then I just leave it and keep quiet about it.

185. R: (19) If so, does it change how you think/feel about or react to them?

186. See answers to question (18).

187. R: (20). In what ways does your partner express their emotional availability to you when you are feeling emotionally distressed?

188. K: Wayde doesn't know how to deal with people. He doesn't know how...He's not a comforter or a...how can I say? A person that I can go to in my despair. Even if something is bothering you.

189. R: And Wayde for you? (repeat question (20))

190. W: The thing is, Kristin just keeps quiet and she sleeps. Not to cause anymore conflict or arguments, in other words. So, she's not really...If I've got a problem with it or whatever, it's not because...It happens that it's the same thing we're fighting over again, so it's almost like they switch off. So, they don't want to listen about it. So, in that sense, it's like: you can't really communicate, if you put it that way. Because they know already what is going to happen, so they switch themselves off.

191. R: So, when you are emotionally distressed, you feel that Kristin already knows what will happen, so she kind of moves away...

192. W: Because she knows when I'm angry and that, then she knows something is wrong. So, then she already starts keeping quiet and sleeping and...because she knows what's going to come next, if you put it like that.

193. R: And what's coming next is the explosion and the anger?

194. W: That's correct.

195. R: (21) Do you ever express your needs for closeness to your partner? And if so, how do you experience their response?

196. K: Yes, I will express it to Wayde. I do say...I do tell him, but...I don't know, I don't know if Wayde...Ok, I also never grew up with touchy huggy feely...I also never grew up with that. But I am able to do it. Or I was able to do it, I should say. But Wayde, I don't know if he knows how, because he knows what I want, but he won't give it. He knows that...I don't know how to say it... He knows that I need his love and affection and...feel that I am important to him, but he doesn't know how to do it.

197. R: And how does he know that you need those things?

198. K: Because I've said it. I tell him what I need and what I'm not feeling. And how I'm feeling. So, he does know...it's not like he doesn't know how I feel.

199. R: And how do you experience the response from him?

200. K: I don't know, he just carries on as normal. He doesn't really...I don't think he knows how to show it. Or maybe he doesn't feel...he's not doing it. I don't know.

201. W: She's trying to...the thing is, I tell her this: For a woman it's emotional. You've got to feel the love, the hugness, the holding, the stuff like that. For a man, it tends to develop into having sex, in other words.

202. R: So, if I understand correctly, you feel Wayde that for women the physical closeness can be enough and non-sexual, but in the case of men, it could start like that, but the end result would then always be more of a sexual interaction?

203. W: Yes. Because now the thing is, in our case to put it that way, because of what happened...the situation...there's always...That affection has been broken already, even though it's happened long time ago, it's still there. So, the reaction to it, if I must hold her or something...now I'm doing this on purpose (Wayde putting his hand on Kristin's leg) to see if she's gonna touch my hand...so I'm doing it with the intention of seeing if there's a reaction...

204. R: A response of sort...

205. W: Yeah...but now she doesn't respond. She just leaves it. So, then I know, something is wrong.

206. R: So, for you Wayde... (repeat question (21))

207. W: I do express it, but I express it as like I told you.

208. R: In a physical manner?

209. W: Touching her breast or something when we are laying...and that's what she doesn't like again. She first wants the other part, type of thing, and to me that is my closeness. That is where it comes from. She is saying that I don't know how to express it or...

210. R: So different languages of closeness?

211. W: That's it.

212. R: (22) In what ways do you think your relationship is similar and different respectively to that of other couples?

213. K: I think similar. Some people...

214. W: Hide things.

215. K: Hide things...they don't uhm, you wouldn't see...in a company you wouldn't see that they are having issues, but behind doors you would know that they are having problems. With ours, you will see it because Wayde vents when he wants to.

216. R: So different in the way that other couples may show less than you do?

217. K: Hmmm.

218. W: Because Wayde doesn't keep his mouth...

219. R: And Wayde how would you add to that? (repeat question (22))

220. W: To me...it's...If I see couples and they are over holding hands and very intimate...it's almost like they're putting on a show. That's how I read it.

221. R: It doesn't seem real to you?

222. W: That's correct. It's...because most of the time, it's not all the time, but most of the time, that same couple that's so lovey dovey...those are the ones that are hitting each other at home. That's...of what I've heard...experiences of the past...

223. R: What you've heard? So, heard where? Because you're now both saying....

(everyone laughing)

224. W: No, but I mean from friends or whatever that I know, man. Then they...like: 'Jo, you're going on like that, but then you don't see your wife at home?' You know what I'm saying? And she's showing everybody...you understand? And it's not once that I heard it, it's not one friend. Which is why I'm saying...it could be right or it could be wrong, but majority of the time...it's what I hear.

225. R: And in what ways are your relationship maybe similar to other couples?

226. W: Similar...what's similar? You're married and you're together and you take one another's nonsense.... (everyone laughing)

227. R: We all put up with each other without killing each other?!

228. R: Kristin what would you add regarding similarities?

229. K: All couples have arguments, I think. We have good days and bad days...it's just part of it, but sometimes it just becomes too much.

230. R: And what happens when it becomes too much?

231. K: Normally you have to talk about it to resolve it. But if you can't, then...I don't know. How do you fix it?

232. W: That's the time you're supposed to go for help...

233. R: Yes. Usually...

234. K: No, but you see, he doesn't talk to other people about his problems. So... We've spoken to a priest years ago...and then Wayde just said no he's not going anymore....

235. R: It wasn't for you, Wayde?

236. W: It's not that...the thing is I can. I want to talk to someone, because I know there's problems. It's just the thing is, if I'm going to talk to that one and it doesn't help...I wasted that money...I wasted...you understand...so that's also what sits there. Not that I don't want to talk about it or...it's like what's the point of me talking to you if you're not going to help me?

237. R: I hear you.

Recorders off. Interview closed.

APPENDIX N: Stephanie and Qaden – Interview 1 Transcript

1. **RESEARCHER (R): (1) How would you describe your relationship/bond with your partner?**
2. QADEN (Q): For me I would say it's secure, in the sense that we are still in it. But uhm...and we're not thinking of...ja, I'm not thinking of getting out and I don't get the sense that she's trying to get out. But uh ja, when it comes to the intimacy part and to the trying to understand each other, then there's a whole lot of work that still needs to be done.
3. STEPHANIE (S): I think that we are secure in the sense that he said. There isn't any talks or feelings of there should be a next partner or I'm unhappy or anything like that. It's just more that...uhm...we don't always agree...or agree to disagree, we're both strong-willed. And that's a bit of a challenge, yes. And our work life is demanding as well, so I think that is...we don't know how to come to an agreement on that.
4. **R: And the stuff that you don't always agree on?**
5. S: Household stuff...
6. Q: It's almost everything
7. S: It's everything...it is, yes.
8. **R: And you're saying the strong wills...**
9. S: I think it's the strong wills, because it was before marriage, as well.
10. **R: How do you navigate strong wills?**
11. S: With the kids in the whole pattern...for me it just distracts me of...Normally before we would have one on ones. We would argue and argue the whole time about who's right and who's wrong and which decision to take. But now with the kids, my mind is more: life goes on. I still need to go cook. Ok, time out, we still need to go clean. So, for me, it's more like: Ok, I need to do this. And when he feels I'm not done with the conversation then it upsets him. And then he asks me, 'Can we make time to discuss it further?' But then at the end of the day, we just go to bed and we never resolve the issue. With the kids, and the cooking and the cleaning and all of that. I'm not good at explaining my feelings.
12. **R: So, the conversation just dies? Or goes to the 'shelf' with old issues...to come back with the next issue?**
13. S & Q: It comes back...
14. **R: (2) How do you create intimacy (closeness) in your relationship with your partner?**
15. Q: To be honest it's fading away...that working on it...from my side I would say. Normally I would try doing it, but it was always not...like things that she will appreciate. And ja, I always said I will buy my wife flowers whenever...at least once a month. And in the beginning I've done that. So, she was obviously frustrated about other stuff, or more than one...and she would say: 'Ek wil nie net blomme hê nie' So I read it as that was wrong...it was wrong to give her flowers.

And then I stopped giving her flowers. And when we have an argument - normally I try to open a door for her - and she walks to the car fast and opens the door herself so that I won't do it, or stuff like that. And when we have arguments I would always...and things happen...I take that. The negative. And maybe that is... I feel the rejection of what is happening and then I stop doing it just to guard myself. So now, and it shouldn't really be an excuse, but for now, to be honest, I'm doing very little to work on intimacy.

16. S: Uhm, ek dink ek moet oorgaan na Afrikaans toe.... Ek dink...ek weet nie, ek voel dat ek probeer met al die chaos met die kinders en werk en so aan...probeer ek om 'n date night te reël of so. Of net te praat met hom. Maar Qaden is 'n baie diep mens...hy is baie...uhm...gefokus. Hy het die mind frame: Dit is hoe ek my familie wil hê. En dit is die structure van die familie. So vir hom is...as daar goeters is wat uit daai picture uit is wat nie deel is van daai picture nie, is dit vir hom baie swaar om dit te aanvaar. It's almost like, if you make a plan you go: 'We're going on a date Tuesday'...and whatever falls in that changes that whole scenario...hy vind dit verskriklik swaar om te aanvaar. Maak nie saak watter verskoning jy gee nie. Soos met die sjokolade en die rose en die goeters...Ek sê vir hom byvoorbeeld: 'Ek hou van lelies'. Dan gaan jy nogsteeds vir my rose koop want jy voel rose is mooi. So ek voel dat hy hoor nie na wat ek vra nie. Hy voel net: vir 'n man om 'n vrou te spoil en die beste vir haar te gee, hy doen dit. Of byvoorbeeld hy sal vir my sjokolade koop, but ek hou van dark chocolate, so ek sal vir hom sê: 'But I don't like that type of chocolate'. En dan dink hy maar ek hou glad nie van chocolate nie. Of ek hou glad nie van blomme nie. En dit is nie die geval nie. Uhm, ons probeer nou werklik, ek dink ons probeer...because ons het nou 'n full time nanny aangestel, sodat ons beginne kan tyd spend met mekaar en daaraan werk. Daar is geen gevoel dat ons nie lief is vir mekaar en dat ons nie by mekaar wil wees nie. Is net dat ons is twee total different individuals. En ons altwee is strong willed. Ons kan net nie kom tot 'n conclusion of compromise nie.

17. R: (3) What makes you believe that your partner is committed to you?

18. Q: If I look at Stephanie's life and the way she lives her life, it's uhm...basically, the things she does is stuff that she does for her family. If it is stuff that she does selfishly, uhm, if I should say selfishly...then it's not stuff that uhm, will make me insecure. In the sense that, she feels she want to have a girls night and she goes out to a club or whatever...she doesn't do stuff like that. She's always around her family and she don't...she doesn't make me feel insecure, but uhm, I don't think...the thing is the way she...just that we don't understand, I would say, each other's love languages...or we don't make effort to try to figure it out...

19. R: And you, Stephanie? (repeat question (3))

20. S: Sjoe, ek dink alles wat hy doen. Soos wat ek sê, even die blomme en goeters wat hy doen. Jy kan regtig sien hy try om dit te doen. Uhm, die tyd wat hy spend met die familie...die dinge wat hy praat, is like: alles is gestructure rondom familie. Sommige tye dan voel dit vir my te veel, because sy fokus is so gesit op die toekoms, en sy familie, en hoe ons dinge saam moet doen, dat

ek dink hy sommige tye is hy... Even in sy werk in ook is hy as hy in die oggend opstaan is hy gemotiveer om te gaan werk. Alles wat hy doen is rondom die familie.... En ek voel somtyds dat hy moet net bietjie relax. Want ek dink dit is ook waar...hy het baie kere frustrasies wat hy uithaal...But ek dink dit is omdat hy wil hê dit moet perfect wees. Vir sy familie, vir ons structure. En hy vind dit sometimes moeilik dat ek 'n bietjie...ek is weer 'n bietjies té relax. Waar hy is like: 'Dit is ons toekoms planne! Ons het gesê ons moet in 5 jaar daar wees...nou as ons so aangaan dan gaan ons nie daar wees nie!' So hy is baie gefocus en hy is ook baie family orientated as dit kom by die kinders en hoe hy praat en hoe hy dinge doen. Hy bad die kinders. Alles van hom is familie.

21. **R: Which is kind of what he just said about you...so I hear there's maybe a shared value even around family and security...**
22. S: Hmmm, ok.
23. **R: (4) What are the ways in which you express/demonstrate your love and affection for your partner?**
24. Q: Look I always try to...uhm...make coffee...and uhm...For me it's basically to look after the kids, to love the kids and to...I try to create an environment in the house so that we as a family can be crazy and happy together. I try to do that.
25. **R: And in what way do you do that?**
26. Q: Look, I would go for example, if it's winter, I'll try to make a fire. I'll try to set the mood for a movie, but most of the times we don't even get there. Or put music, listen to proper music as a family. I want us to do the simple things, and not be extravagant things that is too heavy on the pocket. So, I want to create the small little things, and in that sense I try to make things happen. But it doesn't always play out like I anticipated.
27. **R: And why do you think that is?**
28. Q: I think it's either I don't communicate properly to Stephanie, or she don't understand the reason why, for example, I'm taking out the Bible and I'm reading Bible to the family. It feels like it's not appreciated, the family don't really appreciate that. The fact that I do that. Or if I put on music, they don't read it as: look the music is going to play in the background and we have an opportunity to talk about, not deep issues, just normal issues. And it never plays out that way that we can have a conversation that is just...something that we can laugh about or something we can learn about what you did today and stuff like that. It doesn't always play out the way that I anticipated for and then I get disappointed.
29. **R: And for you Stephanie? (repeat question (4))**
30. S: Uhm...(laughing), ek weet nie. Ek dink dis soos hy sê. Sometimes is ek, die meeste van die tyd is ek baie moeg. Met die kinders en al die goeters in die huis in en so. But uhm...ek probeer om tyd te maak dat ons...Wat werk vir ons eintlik is wanneer ons twee op ons eie net gaan koffie drink of net uitgaan. Daai is die enigste tyd wat ons connect en dit gebeur maar baie wynig. En

ek dink ek is direk met die dinge wat ek vir hom sê wat ek nodig het. So, daar is 'n tyd terug wat ek vir hom gesê het: 'I need us to be together. Not the children now anymore.' And that is the reason we got a nanny. To look after the kids. But still we don't make a lot of time. Or there's always something that... Ons verstaan net nie mekaar as dit kom by dit nie. Ek weet nie. As ek vir hom sê ek het tyd nodig...hoe verduidelik ek dit nou? 'I'm tired, I need YOU' En dan vir hom is dit almost like ek kan nie cope nie, ek kan nie cope met die dinge nie. So he needs to make a way to get the nanny or his mom or someone to come help with the household, but wat ek eintlik vir hom probeer sê: 'I need you, I need us, not just the children all the time.' So ek verbalise dit vir hom, maar ons verstaan mekaar totally different as dit kom by daai. En omdat Qaden my eerste is, en ons altwee was basically nie in relationships gewees nie, is dit difficult om so open te wees oor alles. To just release and say this is what I want. So miskien verbalise ek dit of ek sê nie net: 'This is what I want, I want you nie.' Ek is miskien bietjies te skaam om dit te sê...interpret hy dit heeltemal verkeerd. Uhm, hy probeer om movie nights te create by die huis. Maar dan is ek like: ek is nooit tevrede daarmee nie. I'm like 'I've watched that man, it's an old movie!' Ek het altyd 'n problem. Of hy val heel eerste aan die slaap en dan sit ek net daar. So vir my, soos my ma sê dat we need time for ourselves and we are – both of us are guilty – in not even trying to do that.

31. R: (5) What contributes to the quality or nature of your relationship?

32. S: Wanneer ons in 'n goeie gemoed is met mekaar. Dink ek. Want die meeste van die tyd is dit een of ander argument oor een silly ding. So, as ons in 'n goeie mood is dan set dit sommer die mood ook right. As alles perfect is. So, wat ek probeer doen is as ek sien hy's frustreerd en hy kom by die huis en hy's bietjie despondent, en dan sal ek al die ketel aansit as ek sien hy stop en vir hom koffie maak. Of ek sorg dat die kinders miskien gebad is en uit sy pad is. Sy werk is baie demanding. Myne ook. But hy is baie openlik as hy in die mood in is. Hy sal sommer beginner dans of...the craziness. Hy is baie in touch met sy emotions. He will show me sommer direk dat hy is nou in daai mood in.
33. Q: Wel, dit help dat ons dieselfde waardes basies het. Die feit dat ons voel dat dit belangrik is om as 'n familie saam kerk toe te gaan, en uhm, dat mense wat ons mee kuier...dat ons on par beweeg. So die een groei nie te ver uit die anner ene uit nie, sodat ons nou nie...ek is met mense wat motivated is en hardloop daarvoor, en sy kyk na die kinders...en dan sien ek na 5 jaar wel dit werk nie, want jy wil net hier by die huis wees...maar dan bou sy die struktuur...sy hou alles bymekaar by die huis en dit is hoekom....dit is die sacrifice. Ja vir my is dit die waardestelsel wat ons het om as 'n familie saam kerk te kan gaan en saam te kan bid. En daai is rêrig vir my die ding wat die essence van ons verhouding wat ons bymekaar hou. En as sy vir my disappoint of ek disappoint vir haar, dan is daar altyd 'n middel punt waarna toe ons kan gaan. Amper soos 'n reset place in die sin van dat jy weet: as ons die Bybel gebruik as 'n constitution dan kan die interpretasies nie te ver weg gaan van hoe dinge moet wees nie. En ek is bly dat ons hoef nie te

argue oor dit nie. Dat sy vir my sê: 'Kyk ek glo nie in daai wat jy glo nie. Ek glo aan dit.' En dit maak dit vir my, dit is 'n groot eerste wat ons het in ons huwelik. En sy het ook tye wat sy lekker crazy kan wees. En dit is vir my baie nice as dit so kan wees. As ons op goeie voet is. En ek trek die krag daaruit as ek hoor Stephanie lag of die kinders lag. Of as sy ligsinnige goed praat. Dan trek ek krag daaruit. Dit dra vir my as ek weet my familie is happy. En dit laat vir my laat wil goed doen wat ek nie noodwendig vir myself sal sou gedoen het nie. So daai is vir my die krag.

34. R: (6) In what ways does your partner meet your needs?

35. Q: Ek gaan nou eerlik wees en dan gaan ek sê, emotional level, voel dit vir my baie keer dat Stephanie meet nie my needs op 'n emotional level nie. Want daar is goed wat ek saam met haar wil discuss, of goed waaroor ek bang is, of goed wat ek fear. En ek het begin bang raak om dit sommer saam met haar te discuss, want sy sal dit miskien gebruik in 'n argument vir haar advantage teen my. Of sy sal miskien as ons 'n discussion het met familie of whatever, dan sal iets wat ek nie graag wil hê ander mense moet weet nie, dan sal sy dit miskien noem in die discussion. En dan voel ek on the spot. En so met ander woorde, ek het 'n need om goed te communicate. En ek sal nie saam met enige een enige iets praat nie. Ek voel in elkgeval dit sal bietjie disrespectful wees as ek saam met iemand anders gaan praat en ek praat dit nie met haar nie. Dan sal dit vir haar disrespect. So, in so way voel ek dat, uhm, my emotional needs word nie altyd fulfil nie. Sommige keer...sy is nie baie affectionate, so ek sal vir haar vra my rug jeuk, krap gou bietjie my rug 'n bietjie. En dan wil sy dit nie doen nie. En dan voel ek, 'Ja, hoekom het ek getrou?' Maar ja, things like that in that way. If I would say sexually, I would think no I don't feel that she fulfils my needs when it comes to that. And...for me, there's...I would like to stop there.

36. R: That's fine. And for you Stephanie? (repeat question (6))

37. S: I do feel hundred percent secure with him by my side. But ook emotionally, voel ek dat hy drain my sometimes. Because he's so...hy is baie, he's almost like a perfectionist. He wants stuff a certain way all the time. But hy is nie so nie. He wants something a certain way all the time and...dit maak my...ek weet nie hoe om dit te explain nie (giggling)...

38. R: It gets a lot...doing things the way he wants to?

39. S: Yes, yes...en in dieselfde tyd dan sal hy nou vir my miskien nou sê: 'Jo, you don't do it in that way or you don't get it', but in my heart then I know, ek is so op my nerves, because then I want it perfect, for him, to please him. But in dieselfde tyd dan kom hy en sê vir my: 'Jo, you did nothing to even try to meet my needs like that.' Dan voel dit vir my: how do I explain dat alles wat ek gedoen het is actually focused on you? So, daai is basically die main cause van ons frustrasies. Hy voel hy doen alles en ek voel ek doen alles, but in the meantime we're not listening to each other. We're not meeting each other on the emotional level. Want hy sal exactly vir my sê: 'Jo, Stephanie, ek sit baie in in daai spesifieke area in, but I don't feel that you appreciate it.' But dan sal ek sê op daai selfde punt, 'But I feel exactly the same way.' And it's always

where...where he says he puts in and I feel the same. So ek dink nie ons verstaan mekaar in daai sense in nie. Want dan ek voel like so gedrain, like: didn't you see....?

40. Q: I normally feel that, and I keep on telling her: I think it's the conversation that we have. Because when we communicate, and I say something, then you say that you understand what I'm saying. But at the end of the day you don't really understand what I'm saying. Because when I tell her: 'Look, this is the story', and then at the end of the day I...because we have so much arguments...then I ask her: 'Now what do you think I am saying?' Then she gets cross with me because she feels I'm treating her as a child now. She doesn't understand what I'm saying, but basically what...it's just a technique for me to make sure that we're on the same page, and if we're not on the same page, then I can explain to her in a different way, maybe. But she doesn't see it that way, and that is...because that...It's not that I don't see what she's doing. I see what she's doing. But my thing is, you do what you want to do. Because I've asked you this, we've agreed on this, and you're not doing what we've talked about. You're doing what you think is the best for me. And it's not really the best for me. And that's the arguments that we have. We don't, we argue, but we don't argue about the same thing in one argument.

41. R: So, you miss each other's points?

42. Q: Yes. That is what is happening.

43. S: But alles met 'n tegniek...so al wat ek hoor: 'Is 'n tegniek, is 'n tegniek.' Dit moet point, point, point vir hom wees. Hy sal vir my iets direk vra, dan antwoord ek vir hom. It's almost like 'n wiskunde vraag wat jy vra. En nou werk jy dit uit: Dit is die antwoord, maar dit moet net in daai way in gedoen word. Jy kan op dieselfde antwoord uitkom, maar....

44. R: As jou stappe anders lyk...

45. S: Dit is so, ja. Hy, as ek vir hom 'n antwoord gee en dit is nie wat hy wil hoor nie, of dit is nie in daai sense wat hy dit wil hoor nie, dan vind hy dit swaar om te aanvaar, en dan in sy mind in is dit: ek het nie vir hom geantwoord nie. So dit maak my frustreerd dan, en dan probeer ek nou een, twee, drie, vier, vyf keer different ways, but it's not what he wants to hear. En dit is waarop dit uitkom. Maar ek dink nie dit is die vraag wat jy gevra het nie (laughing).

46. R: (7) What is it that you enjoy or value about your partner's company?

47. Q: Ek is nie iemand wat baie, I don't really like to talk a lot. But the thing with Stephanie is, she likes to talk...

48. S: Babel.

49. Q: No, she likes to talk, but then she can explain things to you in detail and it's like listening to a...you can visualise basically what she's telling you. And I enjoy that in the sense that she can explain to me in detail what happened. And then sometimes she puts on her own piece, but I know, look this is her opinion, but then she tells the story, and uhm...If we talk, she always tells me, tries to encourage me in saying, especially when I make food and she says, 'Oe, Qaden, die

kos was lekker'. Then I know this is not the way it should taste (laughing), but I like the way she talks to me.

50. S: Dis die eerste keer dat ek dit hoor.

51. R: Which part is new for you, Stephanie?

52. S: Dat jy aanvaar hoe ek praat en dinge doen. Sometimes dan voel ek so insecure, asof ek nie...asof ek iemand different moet wees om hom te please. And not myself. En nou wat hy sê dat hy enjoy the way that I'm telling something, in depth and all of that, uhm, dit is vir my iets nuut.

53. R: And on your side, Stephanie? (repeat question (7))

54. S: Qaden is iemand wat detail onthou van dinge. Hy kan dinge onthou van, sjo, wat ek nie eens kan nie. Jy kan dinge onthou van drie, vier jaar oud af, nê? Hy kan al sy primary school teachers onthou. Dan dink ek like: Jo Qaden, how? En die way wat jy die goeters verduidelik like, how can you still remember stuff like that? En hy value family verskriklik baie. He can talk about his grandma...hy's baie passionate wanneer hy praat van sy familie, en hy's baie passionate as hy praat van sy drome. Hy't baie groot drome. En dan dink ek vir myself: Wag. Ok vyf jaar. Nou hoe nou? Hoe gaan ons daar uit kom? Vir die visie wat hy daar sit. Want jy kan sien hy praat met so baie in depth en positivity. As hy besluit hy gaan 'n ding so doen en hy gaan dit doen, then he does it. Hy sit sy alles in om dit te kan doen. Hy het kassies in ons eerste huis gedoen. En hy het dit nog nooit gedoen nie...hy't alles uitgewerk. Die mates alles van self. Hy't die kassies persoonlik, die hele huis se kaste het hy self gebou. If he puts his mind to something.... Waar ek is weer iemand...ek is iemand wat op druk...as ek gedruk word om iets te doen, op die laaste minuut...en dan werk dit uit vir my. Ek is weer daardie tipe mens. Ons is totally opposite as dit kom by dit. Hy sal dinge 'n jaar voor die tyd beplan: volgende jaar gaan ons try op 'n holiday vir dit. So dan verstaan hy nie hoekom vat ek so lank om...hoekom verstaan ek dit nie. Waar ek is last minute planning en dan val alles net so inmekaar in, gou-gou. Dit is wat vir my werk.

55. R: (8) How do you know what your partner's needs are in different situations?

56. S: Ek dink ek weet nou al taamlik hoe, omtrent hoe hy dink. En hoe hy dinge wil hê. Dit vat baie energie, en ek kry dit nooit honderd persent reg nie, want ek weet al. So, as ons gaste kry en dan, hy hou daarvan mens moet nie net tee aanbied nie – dit moet in 'n pieringkie, dit moet in 'n skinkbord...die lepeltjie, die suiker...hy is baie in detail hoe hy goed gedoen wil hê. Waar ek sal nou net alles daar neersit. Help jouself. Maar hy is baie presies. As hy nou weet daar kom mense, dan sal hy ekstra moeite doen om dinge lekker uit te werk sodat die planne lekker uit kan werk sodat almal vir hulle kan geniet.

57. R: And Qaden for you? (repeat question (8))

58. Q: She don't really...I don't think she really needs a lot. I know when she is, and most of the time, she needs sleep. And sometimes I can't give that to her (laughing). Because, I...ja, she likes to sleep...en sy kan self sê, en sy sê dit baie. Maar vir my is dit...ek voel sy slaap haar lewe weg.

And you're not really needing so much sleep, too much sleep...And then I can pick up when she's tired or when she can't...And then I try. Look, to clean a house is not my ministry. But sometimes I try to maybe do dishes or whatever and, and then I always feel like this is not enough...

59. S: You don't always...you don't finish the dishes...

60. Q: No, because it takes me maybe an hour. She comes in and she does the dishes in 5 minutes! And I do it in an hour or so, the same thing she's doing. But it really takes of me to do it, but ja. When I pick up that she needs to see I'm also hands on, then I can pick that up. Or maybe, I don't bath the kids every day, but when I see look I can make it easier, then I will. But look, I've learned over the years maybe I think she needs this...and then I think wrong.

61. S: Which is most of the time.

62. R: (9) Do you exclusively schedule quality time together as a couple, or is your time together part of your usual daily activities & tasks?

63. Q: At this point in time we are still trying to work something out. But we know it's on the cards to work towards something that is a standing date at least once a month. But for now we're not there yet.

64. S: We're not there yet.

65. Q: So, in the interim we go for coffee. We've been to a production this week...on Tuesday night, eh? So ja, we're trying to work on it.

66. R: (10) Is the time spend together shared with children/pets/TV/cell phones or other demands?

67. Q: Look we don't have like really a lot of rules, but when we moved into the house, I had this one rule. Even before we had kids. No TV allowed in the room. And my wife is still giving me some beef for that. More subtle these days, but I still feel it. That is something I don't like.

68. R: What is your motivation for it?

69. Q: Because look, a radio or music is something you can listen to and still interact with each other. But a TV wants all your attention. You must look at it and listen to it. So then, I'm going to focus there, and I'm like not going to spend time. The only thing, if we maybe watch rugby or something together, then we can just comment. But it's not going to be something we can...stuff that can come out, or we could get intimate...and that is why I think. Look I also don't like cell phones, but at this point in time I don't think the cell phones...We had problems with cell phones and Facebook and stuff, but when she had a problem with me, spending time on Facebook, I minimised the time. I'm trying not to communicate with people on Facebook if I don't have to anymore. But I don't think at this point it's too much of a problem...the cell phones and stuff...

70. R: Stephanie anything to add? (repeat question (10))

71. S: I just try to get the kids bathed and in bed, and food and all of that. To get them into bed early basically so we can spend quality time, but it's a bit difficult at this stage, because they are rascals...strong-willed...
72. Q: I think that is the main point of destruction at this point: the kids.
73. S: But we also, we don't work together on that. That is why. There isn't like a fixed time that they should be in bed.
- 74. R: So, they're not in a particular bath/bed/sleep routine?**
75. S: No there's nothing. Because I do work shifts. So, ja...
- 76. R: And when you are working shifts, do you then take over the home routine Qaden?**
77. Q: Yes. I had to make a choice - work or family. I can't, so work must come second. But now with the girl helping us - she's taking weight off. So, for example, if I need to go in the evening and see someone, she can look after the kids.
- 78. R: (11) What is your communication like? What is good/bad about it?**
79. Q: For me, if I can say for me in general, communication is one of my challenges, to communicate. It doesn't make it better to communicate with Stephanie. It's not because...I don't think she...I don't have the skills, but I don't think she have the skills to... not that I want to say she must help me, but ja, it's difficult for me to communicate. But to communicate with Stephanie, it's even more challenging in the sense that sometimes it feels that before I say something, she already has an answer for me. Then it defeats the whole thing. And the fact that, when it comes to difference, to differ, then in conflict my natural reaction is normally to draw back. And if I don't do that, I will rather lash out to express myself, but it's not a healthy way that I handle the conflict. And she feels that I have to go for anger management, but for me, I get frustrated. And it's not all the time, but when I'm in that space of that. When I'm feeling anxious and stuff...maybe it goes for a week where I feel like that...and for arguments, I will lash out. But I feel bad about it and I know it's not right. But that is my reaction then. And uhm, but sometimes it feels like I can make a point, she will hear what I'm saying only if I do that. Because when I talk normally she don't hear what I'm saying. But even when I lash out, I feel that I've defeated the point that I've made in...I've done something wrong to say something right.
- 80. R: And for you, Stephanie? Communication?**
81. S: Ek weet nie, ek is so op en af. In the beginning, sometimes, dan voel ek dat uhm...as hy 'n probleem het dan wil hy hê ons moet praat daaroor. En soos ek voor dit gesê het...as ek nie vir hom 'n antwoord gee wat vir hom geskik is nie...dan is dit asof ek nie vir hom geantwoord het nie. En dan moet ek die heeltyd explain explain...dan kom dit op die punt wat ek my frustrasies...ek begin al hoe harder...Dan sal hy vir my sê: 'But hoor hoe praat jy met my', nê. En dan is daar weer tye wat ek nou, ok, dan vat ek in hy't nou gesê ek praat nou hard, dan is daar weer tye wat ek passive is, en 'n bietjie rustiger praat, en dan sê hy weer vir my ek praat nie, ek wil nie communicate nie. So, dis confusing, I don't know how to please him in that sense. En

ook, hy voel dat as hy uit lash op my, dan is dit ‘n build up, en ek is responsible om hom te kalm. Almost like I need to tame his anger. Which I told him before: ‘I’m not responsible for controlling your anger...doesn’t matter if I was the cause of it. Only you can control your anger.’ En dit is wat hy nie verstaan nie. Hy sal vir my sê dat – ‘n simple ding wat ons discuss – en dan sê ek: ‘But Qaden, this is a simple thing, you don’t need to go on like that...speak properly with me.’ Maar hy verstaan nie dit nie en dan sê hy vir my maar ek is die because of it. And I don’t know how to bring him to a level where he can calm down. So ek voel dat...die goeters wat jy uit lash op...is nie iets wat, dit gaan nie oor daardie subject nie. It’s something that was building up the whole time. And for that, I feel that he needs anger management for that. En dit is nie net iets wat - hy’t gemention dat hy was by sielkundiges - hy’t ook self gesê dat hy het neigings van ‘n perfeksionis. En dit kan ‘n mens frustreer. En ek is op die punt wat ek...ek was by ‘n sielkundige gewees met Luka (son)...want vir my was dit: ek het nog nooit ‘n boyfriend gehad nie, so miskien beweeg ek bietjies te stadig vir hom met alles. Met huishouding, met kinders..., want ons het ook bietjie gesukkel om swanger te word. Ek was op medikasie gewees om swanger te word. Ek was baie emotional gewees...toe het die sielkundige gevoel ek was gedrain, oormoeg en alles, en ek moet tyd maak dat ek weer bietjie kan refresh. Die therapy wat ek gekry het vir my gehelp met die mindset dat toe Chloe (daughter) kom...met Luka was dit gewees: You’re not helping me enough, you’re not giving me enough. En met Chloe was dit vir my gewees dat: I need to set my mind...not expecting too much, and rather just do. En dit is wat ek begin doen het. Ek vra vir hom iets, as dit nie vining genoeg gebeur nie or he don’t attend to it, then I do it. En hy voel weer dat, uhm, dat ek micromanage jou, hey? Hy voel weer dit is wat ek doen...ek wil die man wees in die huis in...want ek wil net dit en dit doen. Net orders gee en so aan. En ek dink dit is waar die lashing out begin het, wat hy beginne so uitgelash het. It’s almost like you wanna be the man, so I’m gonna show you who is the man. En dan hou hy nie op totdat daar ‘n traan is nie, en dan kan ek sien op sy gesig: he’s feeling satisfied now. And I told him that – that is not the way to do things...you’re feeling good about that now, because there’s tears in my eyes...En daar was een tyd wat hy geadmit het: that is the satisfaction that he’s getting out of it. En die slaap storie is: I am working 13 hour shifts when I work night shifts. Day shifts is eleven hours. Om night shifts te werk is, jy kry nie genoeg slaap in nie. And if I don’t sleep it out, then I get headaches. So ek voel net dat, as ek langsaan hom lê en hy snork, and then I toss and turn and I can’t fall asleep...en dan val ek hier in die oggend ure aan die slap. Hulle al twee drink nou bottle. He does help me at times, but ek voel nie ek kry genoeg slaap in nie. So sometimes dan voel dit asof ek langsaan hom lê...ons altwee het in die nag in geslaap, but basically I didn’t sleep the whole night.

82. R: Geen kwaliteit slaap...

83. S: Yes. En dit is die rede hoekom ek baie kere voel ek is moeg. En dan voel hy ook, soos wat ek optel, dat you have a motherly instinct in you. As die kind huil, dan moet ek weet hoe om die

kind te tame. As die kind gediscipline word, I should know that because I'm a mother. But he doesn't understand that I'm a human being. Ek kan ook frustreerd raak as die baby die healtyd huil. As sy die healtyd huil en ek gee die baba oor vir hom: 'Ok, you try now.' Then he can't understand: 'But hoekom wil jy nou net die gee...you're then the mother...you should know how to tame the child.' So hy verstaan nie die feit dat dit kom...dit gaan nie net daaroor nie. That is how I feel.

84. R: (12) How do you handle conflict in your relationship?

85. Question answered in previous questions already.

86. R: (13) When you are experiencing a disagreement or when your partner has done something deemed 'wrong', what does your internal sense-making/reaction look like? What do you tell yourself about it/their intentions etc.?

87. Q: For me, if I can just use this example now, as she said about me wanting her to have her motherly instinct. For example, if Chloe is crying and I try to take her from Stephanie...and she don't, there's times she just wants to be with her mother. Then I can see it. Then I know it's pointless me trying to keep her and she wants to get off and be with Stephanie. So now for me, it is: 'Can't you see the kid wants to be with her mother now?'...it's, ja...

88. R: And how do you internally make sense of that Qaden...the interpretations or motivations...

89. Q: I think she's just thinking of...I won't even say she's just thinking of herself, but ja...her own thinking pattern is consuming her now, because she sees what she must do. Maybe, for example, she wants me to keep Chloe because she now needs to make a bottle. Where I could make the bottle and she could keep Chloe...So I think you want to cut me out now, because you think everything I do is wrong...and you're going to sort this out. But at the end of the day you're creating an environment that is not peaceful.

90. R: And for you Stephanie? (repeat question (13))

91. S: Sjoe, daar is baie kere wat ek myself dan net uit cut en my eie ding doen...Not involving him. As ek moet terug kom op die Chloe storie...Chloe is extremely aan my. Sy is verskriklik aan my. Daar is tye wat ek absoluut niks kan doen nie, en dan is hy by die huis. Daar is een scenario wat sy vir my sal trek aan die been...sy sal hang aan my been. Sy sal alles doen. She will take my cheeks: I need to look at her, ek moet vir haar vashou die healtyd. Dan is dit skottelgoed, kos, alles van dit moet gemaak word...He's moody, because hy het opgetel as hy nie eet nie, en dan kry hy kopsere of hy begin bietjie geirriteerd te word...Nou in plaas van: ok finish the food off or kry vir jou iets om te eet. Dan gaan hy ook nog op my...en dan verstaan hy nie, but hierdie kind wil nou by haar ma wees nie. En dit is die frustrasies wat ek het: can't you see what's going on here? I don't have a problem holding her, maar soos hy nou gesê het, nou gaan maak dan die bottel sodat ons mekaar halfway kan meet...mekaar kan help.

92. R: (14) How do you handle/respond to strong emotions in yourself and your partner?

93. S: Ek beweeg altyd...ek probeer...ek beweeg altyd weg. As Qaden homself express, hy gaan in soveel diepte. Hy basically, hy punish himself. As ek vir hom nou dit wat ek nou gesê het, as ek nou vir hom so iets moet sê, dan sal hy vir my sê: 'So ek is die scum of the earth? So ek is 'n slegte pa?' En in my mind in soos ek vir hom ken, weet ek hy voel daai pyn...hy voel nou – ek het dit nou nie in soveel woorde gesê nie – maar hy vat dit tot die extreme toe. Uhm, soos ek sê, hy is iemand wat sy alles gee as hy dit gee. En dan byvoorbeeld, jy sit by die huis, hy doen alles want sy broer gaan oorkom. Nou phone die broer: no, we can't make it. En ek weet in my binneste hoe disappointed hy is. Ek kan verstaan miskien dat dit 'n noodgeval is, but he really feels that pain. En dit maak eintlik vir my seer hoe hy met sy emotions deal. Hy vat alles wat hy honderd persent. En sommige tye dink ek dit is bietjie onnodig om so...Jy punish jouself.
- 94. R: And for you Qaden? Strong emotions?**
95. Q: I don't react to strong emotions always the same. It all depends on my frame of mind at that point in time. Sometimes I can handle it, but if I had a tough day or if I'm going through challenges, saying it's work or whatever, then I'm not in a position to handle strong emotions. It's either I have to block her out of my mind, or otherwise we'll go in a head on fight. So, it's one of the two.
- 96. R: (15) How do you know when your partner is happy/sad/angry...can you identify their feelings?**
97. Q: Normally Stephanie is quiet. Or she don't really, if I try to make, like talk to her, then she just gives me short answers. She normally makes it impossible or difficult to have a conversation with her without getting frustrated, basically. She will just give you short answers or she won't give you an answer at all. Or she will refer to something that I did wrong in the past. Then I know that something bigger that this is happening in her mind.
98. S: Hy is...hy sal...hy express sy anger, like: 'Stephanie nie nou nie!' Of sy gesig uitdrukking wys anders, sy body language...
- 99. R: (16) When reacting to one another, do you feel as if you respond only to what the other person has explicitly said or done, or also to what is implied in their behaviour/words?**
100. Q: For me, it's sometimes that one: I react on what I think she is referring to. And sometimes I know that, you say that this is the story, but I...there's something bigger. But I can't figure out what it is. And then I get...it's out of frustration for not telling me or not being able to get it out of her. Ja.
- 101. R: Stephanie? (repeat question (16))**
102. S: (pause) Ek dink the implied message. Ek weet nie baie kere dan, die meeste gevalle, dan gaan dit nie so much oor wat hy sê of hoe hy voel nie, uhm, want die meeste van die tye is dit like: I'm insecure, I'm not sure how to...If I now should say what I'm feeling? Of moet ek nou net iets sê om die air te clear? Net om vir hom te kalmeeer of so iets. Of ek kan sien ok dit gaan nou verder as dit of waarnatoe dit gaan escalate. En baie kere dan probeer ek om nie te sê hoe ek voel nie,

en dit gebeur baie kere wat ek maar either net...I don't know...En dit is die kere wat, ek dink dit is die tye wat vir hom upset because I'm giving him 'yes, no' or 'not now' or that type of answers.

103. R: (17) Do you ever think about the internal world (thoughts/feelings/experiences) of your partner? Imagine what is going on in their head?

104. Q: I think about what Stephanie, about how did she come up to that conclusion? And then I come to the conclusion that she's maybe thinking of something. And when it gets to a point where it's too hot for her, she blocks it out or she think of something else and now, because of that, she can't get to conclusions. And it escalates...I won't say escalates, it's something is not resolved and then next time it happens again it gets to the same scenario, and she use the same technique. Maybe uhm I think she's feeling anxious when things are not...when she don't understand situations in the sense of how people react or how people comment or stuff and she's maybe anxious. But she, I think she's always just trying to dodge it, but not facing it one time and deal with it. Or getting to a point where she would maybe have just one way of dealing with it, while it's coming her way. She's dodging it...causes frustration obviously. And it happens frequently or more often than almost never. And for me it's, I think she has that fear of things that she doesn't know how to deal with, but at the other side she doesn't work towards a place where she would be able to manage or deal with it. To really deal with things. Which is important for her. And for us.

105. S: (pause) Hy maak dit altyd baie clear van hoe hy dinge sien. En dan sommige tye dan dink ek net: But, jo...En die reality is like baie kere punish hy himself. He would still sit with issues regarding his father. My father said he's gonna take us to the beach, and that specific day he came back the next morning...sulke goed. En dan bring hy dit in die marriage in. He wants the marriage to be perfect, because he doesn't want to be like that. En ek dink baie kere dan verloor ek myself...ek verloor myself because uhm, ek weet soortgelyk hoe sy mindset is en hoe hy dinge perfect wil hê. And I'm trying to move towards that, but it's not good enough, because in his mind, he also want me to be honest with myself and he wants to get to know me and what I like and what I don't like. But I never get to the point where I can be fully about me... (participant emotional) ...because like there's so baie uhm...ek voel daar is baie dinge wat hy mee deal. Daar is sekere goeters wat ons almal mee gedeel het wat ons almal nog mee deal, regarding our upbringing. But it's so easy for me to say, to feel that this is where I am now. This is my marriage, this is my structure. Never mind what happened in the past. But I know a lot of the things that he does in the marriage, it's because of stuff that in his childhood...that he doesn't want to be like. And he needs to let go of stuff like that. Like he will sit with Luka (son) and he will want to build a cabinet or something the whole time with Luka. And then he will get frustrated because Luka is not doing it that way or so. Because he maybe didn't get the chance to do that with his father. Stuff like that. En dan voel ek net: I need to do damage control now. So ek voel dat, even with the sleeping pattern as well. Ek voel net sometimes I just need time for myself, but dit voel asof

dit te swaar is of te veel gevra is. En ek kan verstaan...sorry ek het nou vergeet wat die question was.

- 106. R: That's fine. I'm hearing a lot of thinking about Qaden's internal world...trying to make sense of his experiences and influences...sometimes to the extent where it's hurtful to think about his heavy load...**

(Stephanie nodding)

- 107. R: (18) Do you ever place yourself in your partner's shoes, so to speak, thinking about what their experience of a joined situation might be?**

Answered in question (17).

- 108. R: (19) If so, does it change how you think/feel about or react to them?**

Answered in previous questions. Participants energy resources and concentration waning, so moving forward.

- 109. R: (20) In what ways does your partner express their emotional availability to you when you are feeling emotionally distressed?**

110. S: I feel that...I don't know if he knows it – I've never verbalised it to him. But ek is op 'n point... Daar was 'n time when I tried to stand up for myself and say how I feel, but ek voel op die punt dat, when he speaks, it actually, dit maak my seer om te sien hoe baie pyn hy het. En waardeur hy homself sit met alles. Because he wants something a specific way. Jy kan nie 'n pienk bordjie saam met 'n wit koppie sit of so nie. Dan is dit waarom ons stry. Because he can't just accept it should be like that. How can you do it like that? En op die einde van die dag is ons soos kwaad vir so iets. But as hy so aangaan dan voel dit vir my: I love this guy so much...aan die begin van ons relationship...it was nothing for me to just walk away from this whole relationship. Maar hoe langer ons nou bymekaar is, is dit vir my like, ek is so lief vir hom. So, wat kan ek doen om vir hom te laat sien dat hy sit vir homself deur pyn? Of hoe kan ek vir hom ook net op 'n level bring waar hy kan kalmeer? En ek dink dit is hoekom ek baie kere...dan praat ek sagter. Ek praat sagter of ek sal sê: 'Skat, ek dink ons moet nou ophou.' Dan voel hy asof ek challenge vir hom. Ek challenge vir hom because I don't want to finish this conversation. En dan maak dit vir hom nog meer briesend.

111. Q: (pause) Stephanie supports me in trying to make it, just to do the...to make life easier for me in the sense of seeing that everything is running smooth at what I need to do. She's uhm, trying to keep the kids away from me when the kids are too demanding. That is how I feel that she's supporting me. And she does stuff that I should've done. I mean chores. Which is my responsibility. Then she'll take over and do it.

- 112. R: (21) Do you ever express your needs for closeness to your partner? And if so, how do you experience their response?**

113. Q: I do feel I do express it, but ja maybe it's like she says. I'm too emotional, but I'll normally...I won't say: 'Stephanie I need intimacy tonight.' I would come with something, or a topic or

whatever just to get into it. But before we get there, then we already....I want to make a point, but before I make a point I set the ground before...but then she questions the things that I'm setting the ground for before I make the point. But before I make the point then we have an argument about the nitty gritty. And then I don't get to that. And that is what it is. And sometimes I try other angles as well and ja.

114. S: Ek dink ek wag maar op hom, ja. Because, soos ek gesê het, die communication is nie ten volle nie. Dit het nie in die verlede gewerk nie, so nou kyk ek maar nou wat sy mood is of wat hy sê of so. Uhm, (to Qaden) what was that I wanted to ask her to...hoe't jy vir my verduidelik om vir jou te verstaan? What should I do?
115. Q: If, say for example, the two of us have a topic, and then I say something. Then I talk to her about it. Then she addresses something else that is not what my heart is saying, but she addresses something else. So I tell her, I gave her the analogy, I said: 'Stephanie look, I'm going to talk to you about this thing...now if I tell you: look right, look at THIS of what I'm saying, then you look at it. And if I talk to you and I say: don't worry about that, look at THAT, then you pay attention to that which I'm saying. In that way, you can basically see what I'm saying. If I finish my whole story and then...you pick up on the things I want you to pick up, then you will understand exactly what I'm saying to you at the end of my story.' And uhm, we're having this argument that, I don't know what did you say? (to Stephanie) ...about that...I don't know if you understand what I'm saying? (to researcher)
116. **R: It almost sounds, as we've said previously, that when you guys communicate, you're both communicating and talking, but that you still miss each other's points. That the crux of what you're trying to communicate...you will pinpoint Qaden one area in the story that you zone in on, but Stephanie might zone in on another area. En dan mis julle mekaar.**
117. Q: That's it. That is basically what I'm trying to say. But she doesn't get what I'm saying. She doesn't get that point.
118. S: I don't. Hy sê so baie kere: 'But I challenge him'...
119. Q: Sorry...(interrupting Stephanie)...I told her that: If I tell you the story and I say look to the left and you look to the left, and we go and you see something nice there...I'll say forget about that, but look to something on your right and whatever. Then at the end of my story, then you tell me I agree or don't agree, then I'm not going to argue with you if you agree or not agree, but at least you know what I am saying. Then I will feel peace in my heart that you're understanding what I'm understanding, and you differ from me – and I can live with that. But I can't deal with it if you're saying: I know what you're saying, but you're expressing something else and you're missing...For example, I say: 'Stephanie I don't like eating pasta, because pasta is making me feel fat.' Then she says: 'Oh no, Qaden don't eat pasta at all.' But it's not that I don't eat pasta, it's that I don't like eating too much pasta. And it's for me, when we're having conversations and we're sitting in companies and Stephanie talks to people about me, for example. Then I hear she's

telling them stuff that I'm saying, that's really not...then she's misrepresenting what I'm feeling or saying to people, and it's creating a different picture of who I am. And it's not that I'm worried about my image out there, but it's alarming that I do something wrong in communicating with her or she's listening wrong. That is something that is a problem for me. And you can see it every day in the arguments that we have. I can see it. And that is my frustration.

120. R: (22) In what ways do you think your relationship is similar and different respectively to that of other couples?

121. S: Ek het nog nooit enige ander couple gesien wat so baie stry nie. Wat so baie disagreements het nie. It's like we can't even agree to disagree. Jy moet maar either stil bly en aangaan, or soos ek probeer nou om meer op my te sit en minder te vra. Ek het nog nooit 'n ander couple teegekom wat so baie disagree nie.

122. Q: I won't say that we are very different from other couples. In the sense of I know that, as I speak to...Look, I've been in conversations where people brag how good they get along, but if you really talk to people who is really honest, then uhm, we've talked to people and we've thought like look, is it really worth it to be married still? And just two days after that we find out that people are going through stuff that, our issues is a walk in the park. So, for me, I've come to the conclusion that it's big for us, but it's not normally that we are going through the toughest things in life. But what is a thing for us is, we can always maybe if we take time out, we can always come back and we can again be civil and love each other and talk to each other. We can forgive each other at the end of the day. And that is what works for us. Or what is very helpful for us. Anders sou ons al lankal uitmekaar gewees het. And I don't think it's different to other couples, because if you're married then you should have that forgiveness in your heart for other people. Because no one is perfect. And maybe it's a big thing for her. Or for me, what she's doing is a big thing...then I get to someone else and I see: jis, this man's wife is a thousand time worse than mine and he still loves his wife...So it's the way you look at how things are.

123. R: And similarities with other couples?

124. S: (pause) I don't know how to answer.

125. R: Nothing that comes up?

126. S: No.

127. R: And for you Qaden? Anything to add regarding similarities?

128. Q: Yes, we have a family, and I think we look after our family and we try to be independent as a whole, so in the sense of not trying to drain other people with our issues...And like other people also have battles sometimes to make ends meet, and other people also have good times enjoying their life...we do the same. We do our stuff legal (laughing)...and in that sense I feel that we are like most other couples.

129. S: Ek en Qaden is baie old school. In sy waardes wat hy het. Hy is the head of the house...yes...but he has that mindset of: just follow me and everything will be fine. Whenever I

say something, it's like I'm challenging him. Whenever I say something...is dit om jou op te bou of is dit om jou af te breek? Dit is sy vraag. You don't hear me through. Ek dink wat vir ons different maak van ander couples, ek dink dit is dit. Ek voel nog nie dat ek is...it's like...ander couples wat – baie mense wat ek al gehoor het – dan sê hulle: nee, as ek 'n bord kos neersit dan moet my man nie vrae vra nie, hy moet net eet. Of ek gaan nou huis toe, ek gaan nou niks worry met die kinders nie, ek gaan nou slaap. Sulke goed. For me it's like, ek wil die vrede bewaar so dit is wat ek moet doen. So, in daai sense in voel ek dat ons is taamlik different van ander couples. Ek dink ons lewe nog in die ou era. That's how I feel. Alles is te structured. That's my opinie. Follow me and everything will be fine.

130. Q: Look it's not that I say follow me and everything will be fine. It's because I have a belief system that I have, and I refer to my belief system to guide me and guide us. So, if I say follow me it doesn't mean that I would say: 'Kyk ek is die man, ek werk met die geld, bring daai geld hier.' I'm going to say that look, let's look at this and, Stephanie, jy's sterk in finance...you do that. Or let's work together in the sense of doing things. But when I question Stephanie or when I ask her, I don't need to tell her, but look this is against....What you are saying is not in line with our belief system...and that is where my boundaries are in moving left or right. Now I keep it in our boundaries. I feel it is my duty as the man in the house to pull us here and yes, I'm also moving out of the boundaries, and then it's her responsibility to pull me back. And we should allow each other to do that. To pull you in line with what our boundaries are. We are Christians, so let's walk in the boundaries as a Christian couple, as a Christian family. So, if we decide to do something out of line, we should pull each other back. And sometimes I feel that shouldn't be considered as old school. These days, it isn't always the only way, but for me, we chose the lifestyle. And that is the lifestyle that we will live. If we decide otherwise, but for now we've chosen the lifestyle, we've agreed on it...so let's live the lifestyle.
131. S: Yes, he will tell me this is Biblically. Like meaning I don't have a foot to stand on.
132. Q: No it's not like you don't have a foot to stand on. Look it's like, if we say this is our constitution as a family, then we stick to that constitution. Then you come with your case and you argue like proper...you come with a...It's not like I said look this is it. That is the constitution...and this is my interpretation...you come with your interpretation. And then we look at it and then we see. And if I come with my interpretation, it's not as if it's cast in stone...I put my interpretation there, and how she challenges it is now how she challenge it. If you don't want to challenge it then what does it mean?
- 133. R: And if there's something about our rule structure as a couple that we wanted to change, how would that process work?**
134. Q: Look yes, we would need to talk. But we must decide, we must decide together. And we obviously have to see...we have to consult then. It all depends what it is. I mean, it's not normally necessary big big big issues, but I mean for me, I don't like watching uhm, movies where

it...horror movies for example. Because it doesn't make me feel...if it makes me feel scared or anxious, then I don't like it. And things like that. That is not a big issue. I won't take that as this is our...the Bible say we mustn't watch...I'm not that freak...

135. S: But that was one of the arguments we had Qaden, regarding action movies or horror movies. Where he feels that it does have an effect on your emotions and how you see stuff. And what I'm trying to explain to him: there's still a storyline. It's not just about that...there's a storyline through the whole movie, where he feels it can affect you as well. As jy te veel van dit kyk of so iets. Spiritually. So, it's almost like it's a no-no to watch that.

136. R: Ok good, thank you for the example. It also helps me better understand.

Recorders off. Interview closed.

APPENDIX O: Stephanie and Qaden – Interview 2 Transcript

1. **RESEARCHER (R): (1) I know it's a few months ago already, so memory might not be that great, but tell me a bit about your experience during and after the first interview and the questionnaires you filled out...Any new realisations or thoughts about your relationship/partner...or even conversations started between you as a result of some of what was discussed in the interview/questionnaires?**
2. **STEPHANIE (S):** Ek dink van my kant af het ek meer begin voel...I need to start thinking about me. Just try to focus on my needs a bit as well. And I think that, that changed a bit.
3. **R: Ok. And since this kind of realisation struck, how has it influenced your behaviour or the way that you do things in the relationship.**
4. **S:** I think I was running around a lot, doing a lot of stuff without thinking. Just doing. And now I'm just...I became much quieter but, with that as well, I took some me-time as well. And I just take time out for myself. Whether I'm just lazing at home or sleeping.
5. **R: And the changes that you have been trying to make, has it had a good influence on you or on the relationship or has it brought some challenges?**
6. **S:** It's...it has been a good thing for my health yes. For health, because I used to get migraines a lot. And my blood pressure was high all the time. And my health is much, much better. Relationship wise, I'm not sure. I think we need to spend some time together as well, quality time as a family. And we haven't reached that, as yet.
7. **R: Have you picked up some of these changes Qaden, that Stephanie mentioned she kind of tried to make since the last time?**
8. **QADEN (Q):** At times yes, at times. At times I can pick it up, but ja.
9. **R: And what has been the effect of these changes on the relationship do you feel, Qaden?**
10. **Q:** I think, if it affects her positively, then it must be a good thing. And hopefully it will, that good thing will spill down to the rest of us. Myself and the kids.
11. **R: A ripple effect. And for you? (repeat question (1))**
12. **Q:** Yes, I uhm...for me, on a practical side, I tried to implement more family quality time. And so far I wasn't too, I wasn't consistent in doing it, even though I have tried but I wasn't consistent in doing it. Even though sometimes it feels to me like the effort that I put in it's, it's maybe too much effort for the result that we, that we get out of what we put in.
13. **R: Is it almost not making a big enough of a difference or increasing the closeness in a way that you would want?**
14. **Q:** I must put you on the right track now if I answer. It's more like I'm doing something, then I hope the result is going to be good and at the end of the day the result is not really a positive outcome. I don't really get a positive outcome. But it is not because of what I try or what I do,

but there's something else jumping up in the process of trying something good and something jumps up which spoils everything.

15. R: Something unexpected that one didn't expect to happen in that moment...

16. Q: Yes, yes and then something else becomes an issue and then the result is exactly the same as if you do nothing. Basically. And it makes me discouraged. It discourages me to put in effort, because now I feel look, I need to do something and then something might pop up again and then it's going to boil down to the same thing again. Ja, for me that is...

17. R: (2) Looking back at your (number of) years together, what are the ways in which your relationship has changed over the years? (3) And in what ways have the changes improved and/or damaged your relationship?

18. Q: If I can talk for myself, or talk for both of us.

19. R: Maybe just for you...

20. Q: Ok, for myself I would say that uhm...I came into the marriage with a preconceived structure of how I want a marriage to be and I quickly realised it's not going to happen that way. Because Stephanie have her own ideas and she have her way of doing things. In the beginning it was tough for us to come to conclusions of look, let's do it this way. For me, I would fight for my opinion to the end. But now I have realised it is not always necessary to fight. If you win the argument you don't really have to say you have won the war. So ja, I just try to understand her point and then we can work through this together. Sometimes I do things that I don't like, because I know she likes...she wants to do it. But there's certain things that I, which I'm not going to agree with ever.

21. R: And how have you learned to live with it or manage the stuff that you don't agree with?

22. Q: I try to uhm...withdraw myself from it. Even though, when it effects the kids I try not to expose the kids, but then it...Then I just try to explain. For example, if it comes to...and it is not a real-life example. For example, if I feel that this cartoon is not good for kids to watch, and Stephanie don't see a problem with it. Then I would say: 'Look, die kinders mag nie dit kyk nie.' If she disagrees, and then I would rather let them watch it and then I will explain to the kids why that is bad. I will tell him that is bad and I will explain to them why it is bad.

23. R: So, compromising rather than fighting about the different opinions...

24. Q: Ja, that's what I try to do.

25. R: And you, Stephanie? (repeat question (2))

26. S: In the beginning, like Qaden says, there was a lot of stuff that we fought about. Don't want to give in to certain stuff, this is my ways, and this is your ways. Qaden had a fixed mind then, but I must say, he did change a lot. It changed a lot in a way that uhm...That he let me whatever. He just, he will explain to me ok, and he's relaxed with a lot of stuff nowadays. But for myself...I was very emotional at the beginning of our relationship. Not even a year or two. Like a few years. Marriage came, and then baby came in the house, and all of that. And I felt that I need to be in

charge, I need to set things my way. This is my children, and there was too many people and stuff involved in all of this. It wasn't just us. It was, basically, you can say the whole community. And I was literally sick each and every day to the point where he got frustrated because it drained you, like mentally and physically. Whenever he says something, I can't express myself, I just cry. And if I try to express myself, then it doesn't come out right, because then I, it sounds to him like I'm screaming. Then he would say: 'Lower your voice.' Because I can't open and just say how I feel. I felt like I'm being judged for each and everything that I do. Now, I, after all of this, I realise that I need to...I can't be like soft and give into anything. I also need to look after myself. I also have needs. At the end of the day, it is not just about me, it's about my kids. I need to stand up for my kids as well. Not that I want things my way, I just think that I came out a bit of a stronger woman now. Because I can say how I feel, express myself, without being afraid that I'm gonna say something wrong or hurt somebody's feelings. Ok it might, you might not like what I'm saying, but I feel strong about this. And this is who I am now. I am relieved because definitely, I don't sit with headaches anymore. I don't sit with constipation anymore. And it's not even like eating right or exercising or living a healthy life. It just like that simple thing of getting what is hurting me or what is bothering me inside. Getting it out. Not to break him down, but just to say, 'Listen, respect this is how I feel.' En uhm...in the beginning I must say, he didn't take it well. Because how can I now go, that I never spoke with him like that, and now I'm like. Jo!, where does that come from?

27. **R: It's a new behaviour...**

28. S: Yes. Yes. And there was a lot of people that didn't like it. If I say I don't like you give my child chocolate or you do this, or this is the child's bedtime, or stuff like that. So, it wasn't hunky-dory...the journey. But I'm not feeling bad about it. I'm honestly not. Uhm... Qaden is more of a people's person. I think he also realise now that I'm a family person. And I feel that this is my, this is my family and this comes first. So, if this is right, then we can share with others whatever is left of us. And not just you must involve this one and that one with whatever we do. Let's create a space for us first. And then, as a unit, we go out and we go and enjoy with others whatever we have. At this moment, me and Qaden still, I feel we are not spending enough time together. But, because Qaden is a kind person, he will do...he will lose out because he doesn't want to hurt the next person's feeling. He is that type of person. He doesn't do it intentionally, but I feel sometimes he does put me aside because he doesn't want to hurt the next person. He rather tells me: just leave it. In order not to spoil the relationship with anyone outside our relationship. (Sigh). So, I think we did grow a lot. And we actually do spend more time as a family together now. What do you think? We do spend more time because, when it becomes weekends, we will always plan: What are you doing? What are you doing with the family outside? Before we plan our, what we going to do. But now, we just like, we know Friday night is braai day. Just us. Saturday mornings, we will take the kids for a ride in the park or we will just go to a park or just go

somewhere. Sundays are church. Whoever comes around after we don't plan our life around other people.

29. **R: You've settled into a routine that works for you?**

30. S: Yes, yes. We are not there hundred percent, but that is what I see. How we are now.

31. **R: (4) How much do you feel you have individually changed or grown in your own life and being over these years together? (5) In which ways has your individual experiences/growth/change/lives affected or influenced your relationship? (own growth leading to change of behaviour/approach in relationship?)**

32. S: I think I answered that.

33. **R: I also heard that...I just wanted to confirm. So, for you Qaden? (repeat question (4) and (5))**

34. Q: I was never really big in friend circles. So, basically for me,...the people I used to braai every now and then with, or if should do social, it has changed. Uhm...we have decided to get more involved in church life, so of the people that I build relationships with, were guys in the church. But it's not like, it's not like relationships that people come over and we go to them, and that type of relationship. But the things, the structure of this church is so that I'm involved in a lot of things where I meet up with them. At least once a week, and that is how my relationship with, with men grow. I think in that way...my fellowship has changed...I think in the spiritual, our spiritual lives, we got a bit deeper into the spiritual side of life. If we compare to the seven-year journey where we are married now, I guess we are more grounded in that sense. And then what else are there? Look, I know that there's things in myself that surfaced that I need to work on. My self-confidence is something. I don't know if people work on it ever, constantly, but for me it's something that I need to work on. And then the other thing is the anger issues that I have. It's something that I also need to work on.

35. **R: (6) What are some of the external factors that have impacted your relationship over the last (number of) years together? Both positively and negatively.**

36. Q: The main thing for me is the family. Our families, her family, my family. And then the church environment. That is the three, uhm...if I should put it in three groups that influence or that is a fact that feature the most in our relationship.

37. **R: And what has been the effects of these three areas on the relationship?**

38. Q: I would say sometimes mostly positive. But there's sometimes negative also.

39. S: Uhm...ja,...uhm I think we...we more settled in church as well. And uhm...we have a lot of responsibility at church, but it's positive and it's a good change. It brought us closer to each other. Family wise...uhm family will always be there, but to please everyone, that is a bit of a struggle. And also we come from different backgrounds. We come from different backgrounds and uhm...the way I feel now...it's...I need to, I want to create my own family, and I want to be positive in the stuff that I do. I want to feel secure in the choices that I make, for my family. But

he's coming from a different background as my family. So sometimes it clashes. Sometimes it clashes, especially now that the children are there, because you want better for your children or their...the opportunities it's so broad now. Like technology and education. We are thinking about: Do you want home school? Do you want the child in a private school? What do you want for the child? So, it is totally different to what we had, when we were growing up. And the input from the family isn't always, isn't always positive. When it comes to the kids, it can create conflict as well. And that is one of our challenges that we have.

- 40. R: (7) And what are some of the events/situations that have occurred within your relationship over the years that has affected/impacted it – whether positively or negatively? (8) How did you navigate these internal/external influences? Were you able to limit their impact or was it more of an after-the-fact-damage-control approach?**

41. Q: Yes. We were married for three years before Luka came, and...ja, it was a bumpy ride, because uhm...Stephanie wanted this kid, because of our age also she, she was thinking: 'Oh maybe I'm too old', and stuff like that. And she tried medication, hormone tablets and stuff, which was uhm, it made life very difficult for all of us. Because her mood swings were very...if I can say, severe in a sense. We didn't talk for maybe two weeks in the house and it was only the two of us in the house. She was so focused on having a baby, for example, the one day she blamed me. It happened like this: we didn't talk for like three days or four days and she came to me and said, 'Look...ok this is it...I'm ovulating now...So...' So, I said: 'No, this is crazy, because in what mood are we now?' So, she blamed me for, if she was not having, she was not ever going to have a baby...Then it's because of me. But for me it was again something else. It's called making love and we are not in that mood now. And that was, that was part of our journey and even when Luka came...we were very happy and everything. But to...when our life, when we had to adapt to that...He came and we have a kid now. It was, because we were free people. For example, I know my me-time was normally when she works night shift, two days night shift. Then it's my me-time and I can do whatever I want. If I want to watch a movie, then I can watch a movie. If I want to go and sit at my mom till nine o'clock, then I can do that, whatever. And...uhm...here was Luka, and we had to struggle who's going to look after him. It was...It was difficult for us to get someone to look after him. And that was traumatising. And even the attention that he needs. We didn't expect it would be so much attention and it would be more about the kid than about us. So that was also strain on us. Uhm, which we didn't really think through. Thought it would be like this...The change was overwhelming for me personally.

- 42. R: You underestimated the amount of change...**

43. Q: Uhm, ja. It is that, and uhm...Look, our relationship with our families is also...the strain about that also...Because if you say it's family, then I would take it as family is family. I automatically took Stephanie's family as my family when we got married, and I expected her to do the same. My family must be her family...and it is so that when she grew up, her family they know her

better than I know her then. Or even now also, there's things that they know about her that I still need to understand. And for that, we need to spend time together. And for me it is, I told her mom and her elder sister that: 'Look, if you have something with me, talk to me like you talk to each other. Like you talk to Stephanie. Don't treat me like I'm an incomer in the family. Because I would like, if I have a problem with you, I'll do the same.' And I think our relationship, for me what was a problem for me I felt. That I've...Stephanie always say I'm a people's person, but actually I'm also more like an introvert type of person. And what I do is...the results of being an introvert is not always nice when it comes to certain events and stuff. It feels nice to communicate with people, so I've put it out there for myself, look I'm going to, I'm going to fight, fight this. I'm going to grow myself into this, to talk to people to communicate and to do this. That's why it's not always easy for me, but I still do it. Now Stephanie says it is easy. I just naturally do it. But I, it's tough. But it's easier than when I started. Now it's easier to do it. And uhm...this is what I expect from Stephanie. I know it is tough also for her to communicate, but when it comes to my family I would expect her to respect my family in the way I do. And to basically go into the existing culture. To adopt the culture in my family. Not to say that it must change her or whatever. To adopt the culture and not take offence in things that you don't like in the family. Look, in my family, for example, my mother can be sometimes very negative in saying: 'Hoekom laat julle hierdie kind se hare so lank groei!?!' And things like that. She's really very conservative and old school. But that's how I know her. And, we've been through - especially this year - it was tough on us in a sense. Where it was almost like a breakdown in the relationship between us and my mom. Because of what happened. And for me, that was something very sore for me. And it's still very sore for me, at this point in time. To know that our relationship is like that now.

44. R: Stephanie, what can you add? (repeat question (7) and (8))

45. S: Uhm...Ek dink ek en Qaden is nog nie op 'n punt wat oor ons twee gaan nie. En nie oor ons family gaan nie. Ons is nog nie daar nie. Qaden het in die verhouding ingekom met expectations. High expectations. Because of the way he was brought up. Things that happened throughout his childhood. So, he wanted to be a better man. A better father. En dit maak hom frustreerd as ek nie saam met hom stem nie. Want hy sit sy alles in. Hy sit sy alles in. En ek dink dit is hoekom...Ek was vir 'n tyd lank seer gewees want, I'm giving in, but it's not actually what I want. En dan stel ek hom teleur, because, as ek net vir hom sê: 'This is not what I want. Ek is maar net eerlik. I don't like roses, I actually like lilies.' Dit het eintlik een keer gebeur en hy het opgehou blomme koop. Want sy mind het vir hom gesê ek hou nie van blomme nie. Sy mind het vir hom gesê ek hou nie van chocolate nie. Omdat ek gesê het ek is nie eintlik 'n lover van chocolate nie, maar as jy dit koop hou ek eintlik van dark chocolate. Vir hom was dit gewees dat, hy is so teleurgesteld daarin... Hy het baie gechange in die tyd in. But ek dink ons spend te min tyd met mekaar om mekaar beter te verstaan. En wat die persoon werklik voel en wat sy sê as sy iets sê. Because I would say something, but dit kom nie dieselfde uit nie. Dit word nie dieselfde oorgedra

nie en versa vice. So ek sal sê ons altwee kry saam seer om die next persoon seer te sien. Qaden het ook die understanding dat: as jy met my trou dan trou jy met my familie, en versa vice. Hy sê altyd as my broers of my susters of my ma iets te sê het, dan kan hulle dit sê. Because hulle is familie en het die reg om iets te sê. You don't have to take it up positively or negatively. Jy hoef dit ook nie te vat as dit nie vir jou van toepassing is nie. En versa vice met my susters en familie. Hy glo hulle kan praat in ons huwelik. Which I was fine with that, maar...ek meen like...daar is sekere goeters wat hulle kan sê, maar sekere goeters wat nie van toepassing is nie. Die scenario met sy ma...hy glo my tot vandag toe nie. Want soos ek sê, die dinge word oorgedra, maar hoe jy dit interpret is totally wrong. My understanding was dat ek het 'n goeie relationship met sy ma gehad, totdat daar 'n onderonsie gewees het. En dit is ook hoe dit oorgedra is en jy het dit different opgevat. Byvoorbeeld, my ma en sy ma het eenkeer in die voorkamer gesit en ek en hy staan in die kombuis in. En ek kan hoor hoe praat hulle van ons, en ek sê vir hom - in 'n grap - 'Kyk hoe kyk daai twee vir ons! Hulle hou nou vir ons dop, nou praat hulle van ons.' Maar ek het 'n grap gemaak. Like, 'Kyk nou hoe konkel daai twee ou mense daar.' Hy het dit opgevat: 'So my ma...jy dink nou my ma kom nou hiernatoe om op jou te spy?' En dit is mos nou 'n lelike scenario om dit te kan sien. Ek het nie op daardie stadium gedink hy het dit so opgevat nie, want hy't ook niks gesê nie. Maar as dit in sy mind gewees het, moes dit vir hom bitter seer gemaak het. Om te dink... En dit maak vir my ook seer, want ek voel hy moet mos weet watter tipe mens ek is. Om te kan dink dat ek nou sulke neigings sal hê om so iets te kan sê. Hy en sy ma is verskriklik na aan mekaar. Omdat, sy ma het uit 'n swaar huwelik gekom en sy pa is nie meer met ons nie, hy is afgesterf. En, hy sien sy ma nog gelukkig. Hy sien sy ma smile, sy ma is happy en dit maak vir hom bly. Toe sy ma nog by ons...dit het vir hom bly gemaak, want sy ma was daar gewees. Die probleem het begin toe ek vir hom gesê het ek voel Luka, die kleintjie, word geboelie. En dit is waar dit begin het. Omdat ek nou iets direk sê van sy familie. Toe was dit nie gekyk oor die scenario self nie...dit was gewees: 'Oh, MY familie!' En toe gaan dit nou oor jou familie en my familie. En dit is waar die konflik begin het. En ek vermoed dat hy het ook openhartlik met sy ma gepraat, want hy kan gemaklik praat met sy ma daaroor. Ek het 'n baie goeie relationship met sy ma gehad, ek het baie goed gepraat.... Qaden het 'n temper. Hy het 'n switch wat net afgaan sommige tye. En ek het al baie keer met sy ma gesit en gevra: 'Maar ma, hoekom? Hoekom is hy so vinnig op sy perdjie?' En dan sal sy vir my sê: 'Stephanie, sy pa was so gewees', of so. Ons het daai relationship gehad waar ek vir haar kon gesê het daarvan. Dit het onbaarlik geword toe sy daar was en ek en hy was in 'n argument die heelyd met mekaar...katterig met mekaar... En sy is in daai scenario en sy hoor wat gaan aan. En ek bedoel, dit is mos nou haar seun wat in die huis in is. Tot op die dag wat ek vir haar die oggend onverskoning gevra het dat die mood in die huis bietjie ondraaglik is. En ek het vir haar gesê ook waaroor dit gaan: dat ek vermoed het dat die een kind het vir Luka geboelie, omdat ek dit gesien het. En hy (Qaden) het nie geglo...In sy mind is dit net boys. Hy dink nou nog ek het oordryf. Maar ok, ek het dit uit 'n motherly point

uit gesien, en dit is wat ek glo. Sy ma het weggegaan. En toe die aand toe kom hy in, briesend kwaad, en hy sê vir my: 'My ma sê sy gaan nie van die een kind vis maak en van die een kind vleis maak nie.' En toe voel ek maar net maar, so with my apologies...because it is family en dis haar klein kinders...het sy dit nie opgevat soos ek dit gesê het en geapologise het nie. En gesê waarom dit gegaan het nie. Hulle het weereens nie na die scenario gekyk nie, is net like: 'Oh, dis ons familie!' En dit is hoe hy dit ook gesien het, voel ek. En dit is waar als versuur het. Want na dit, sou sy weer gekom het... En toe...En ek het hoë bloed. Sy familie is verskriklik gesond. Sy ma is soos 'n machine, as sy werk. Sy is die gesondste mens. En sy is altyd prim en proper. Sy's 'n beautiful person, a beautiful spirit. But unfortunately...ons het hoë bloed is ons familie en ons het suiker in ons familie en ons bly siek. And I think dit het te doen met ons emotional state in. En vir iemand wat uit so 'n gesonde familie uit kom en hier sit hy met 'n vrou wat, elke keer dan is sy siek of...as hy net wil praat met my dan het ek al klaar kopseer. Dan sê ek vir hom: 'Just give me a break.' And he doesn't have that patience, want hy wil nou praat - hy wil dit uit praat. Dit het bietjie ondraaglik geword, want ek het vir weke het ek kopsere gehad. Ek het shifts gewerk, en dan kom ek by die huis en dan slaap ek. Sy ma is daar. Miskien het sy gevoel ek avoid vir haar. Which wasn't the case, because ek was constantly op pille gewees, want ek en hy het constantly gestry ook. Eventually, het sy vir my een aand gevra toe hy upstairs is: 'Het jy 'n probleem met my?' Toe sê ek nee, ek is net moeg. Toe sê sy vir my my gesig hang gedurig en sy kan sien hy probeer. En net daar het ek gevoel, dis sy ma. Sy neem sy beste kant, want dit is haar seun. En dit is waar alles begin het. (Sigh) En sy deny dat sy dit gesê het. Ek kan dit nie prove nie, want hy was nie daar gewees nie. En ek en hy het voor haar gestry en sy geintervene, en dit is waar alles versuur het. Ek voel dat hy het iets diep met sy ma gepraat. Ek dink hy het iets uit die huwelik uit gepraat met sy ma, en dit is hoekom sy die plek gehad het om vir my te kan sê soos sy wil. Met dit, is ek so as ek nie wil probeer met sy familie nie, en as ek nie wil 'n relationship hê met sy familie nie, hoekom het ek nog vir haar verskoning gevra? Ek het nie vir hom gesê: 'Ok, ek gaan vir jou ma verskoning vra nie.' Ek het verskoning gevra om ons huwelik te red. Want ek weet wat sy ma en sy familie beteken. En ek weet ook dat dit nie is asof hulle gaan verdwyn nie. Dit is my kinders se ouma, dit is my kinders se familie. Nou is dit op die punt wat alles is oor my familie, jou familie. Ek glo nie dat sy ma of familie avoid vir ons nie. En ek weet verseker sy vertel van haar familie van dit, want ek kan die wrywing voel. Maar met dit voel ek sterk. Ek voel dat dit is my familie, ek moet opstaan en dit is wat ek wil doen. Ek gaan sit nie daar met 'n suur gesig nie. Ek is happy die tye wat ek daar was. But they are never available. Hy sê ek is nie available nie, maar ek het al moeite gedoen: 'Kom ons gaan die Sondag soontoe, kom ons neem die kinders.' They aren't available. Hy wil dit nie aanvaar nie, maar hy weet hoeveel keer het ons by die deur gekom. Of hulle is nie available nie, en dan moet ons net daar omdraai en na die parkie gaan. Dit is wat al gebeur het, reg? (To Qaden) (Big sigh). En ek voel ook dit was winter gewees. Mense het nie kans gehad om te kuier nie. Die scenario wat gebeur

het, het gebeur net na ons die laaste keer hier was...dit was 'n winter periode...en almal het laag gelê... Mense begin nou uit te kom en te mingle en te braai. So dit wil nie sê dat ons mekaar ook ignoreer nie. Ek dink die tyd sal kom dat ons sal saam kuier. But ek en hy het nie gedeel daarmee nie. Hy het glad nie gedeel daarmee nie, en hy het dit swaar gevat. Want ek en sy ma, ek weet nie of dit pretend is of wat nie, maar ek voel ons het nogsteeds 'n goeie relationship. Ons chat, ek stuur vir haar foto's, ons praat...So, ek voel iets positief. Maar ek dink hy voel ek het sy ma gedisrespect. Ek voel dat ek en hy het 'n argument gehad daai dag...die ergste argument wat ons al ooit gehad het, het ons daai spesifieke dag gehad wat sy daar was. En na dit het ek opgegaan, en sy het opgestorm, en sy het op my afgegaan. So ek voel: ek het dit van jou af gehad, ek het dit van jou ma af gehad, en nou is ek die verkeerde een. En ek het apologise! En ek wou dit uitgepraat het. Hy het gaan opcheck op sy ma of sy orraait is...hy het nog tot op vandag toe nog nie vir my gevra of ek orraait is daaroor nie. Hy het nog nooit na my toe gekom en gevra, of daaroor gepraat nie... (Stephanie getting emotional). Ek het vir hom gesê: 'I need to go to your mom, and I need to speak to her. I don't want to talk about what happened, because it is haar woord teen myne, en dit is jou woord teen myne of hare...so die regte storie gaan nie uitkom nie, en dit is nie wat belangrik is nie. Belangrik is dat we need to unite. Ek is onder haar, so I need to go and apologise.' He didn't give me that chance. He didn't give me that opportunity. He told me, his brother said we must just move on as if nothing happened, and everything will sort itself out. Meaning dat hy het gaan seker maak dat sy ma ok is. Hy weet exactly hoe sy ma voel, maar dit is net iets wat agter bly by my...So wie is belangrik in sy oë? (emotional) En ek het dit nogsteeds. Ek het dit nog nooit teen hom gehou nie. Tot vandag toe as ons sry, dan sê ek vir hom: 'Jy het vir my die worse-ste goed gesê wat ooit kon gewees het. So daar is niks erger wat jy vir my kan sê wat vir my nog swakker of nog dieper in die grond in sal kan dryf nie. So, whatever must come must come. Dis ook nie asof jy agter my rug gaan staan en my kant kies nie. So, let's just do what we have to do.' But nou elke keer dan kom pop dit op, dan word dit different in opgevat en uit proporsie geruk. En dis net goeters wat ek kan assume, but it's not facts. So ek voel dat ons is nie een nie. Ek kan nie vir hom vra hoe gaan dit met sy ma nie. Want sodra ek vra, dan is dit sarkastiese goed wat gegooi word. So ek voel nie ons werk as 'n unit saam nie. Ek voel dit het ons geruk.

46. R: Ek kan hoor dat dit julle beide geruk het en dat dit ook nog huidiglik die dinamieka beïnvloed. Julle praat baie van familie, en dit is ook my volgende vraag...

(9) If we imagine that each of you came into this relationship with a suitcase packed full of experiences and lessons from your respective families in which you grew up...what are some of the experiences and lessons you think you brought in with you from your family about intimate relationships?

(10) How has these experiences/lessons influenced or impacted your relationship and its dynamics?

47. S: My ma het altyd vir my gesê, maak nie saak hoe julle stry, of wat aangaan in julle huwelik nie, jy moet nooit jou bed verlaat om in 'n ander kamer te gaan slaap nie. Of jy moet nooit weghardloop van jou probleem af nie. Ek weet nie of hy dit intentionally doen nie, maar hy het nie 'n probleem om enige ander plek aan die slaap te raak, but in ons kamer nie. En ek het ook geleer dat jy moet jou elders respect. En ek voel nou dat ek die heelyd vir myself moet bewys. En wat vir my meer kwaad maak is dat: sien jy nie waar die probleem lê nie? Ek voel dat die probleem is dat ons is nie na genoeg aan mekaar nie. Ons spend nie genoeg tyd dat ons mekaar kan leer ken en verstaan nie. En hoe jy dink en hoe jy dinge doen nie. En ek voel dat omdat hy dinge, soos wat hy sê...hy is nie 'n social mens nie. So hy forseer homself om social te wees omdat hy weet hoe belangrik dit is. Nou gaan hy nie kan verstaan, hy forseer homself, so hoekom wil ek nie myself forseer nie? Hoekom wil ek nou nie dit doen nie? Byvoorbeeld as ek bang is vir 'n kat. Hy gaan nie vir my protect nie. Hy gaan net vir my sê: 'Overcome your fear. Jy gaan sien hoe beter jy gaan voel, so just do it.' Maar vir my is dit traumatic. En ek dink hy het daai tipe perseverance. Hy forseer homself al is hy in 'n plek waar hy bang is. But hy het nie patience met my nie.

48. R: And for you, Qaden? (repeat question (9) and (10))

49. Q: For me it's uhm...my father and my mother were married since I was born, until my dad passed. That being said, it doesn't mean it was a perfect marriage. And in my opinion it wasn't a good, healthy marriage. I saw what happened, and I made a decision that I don't want to be like that. But I took from, what is good from my father. He was very hardworking. He was a man that worked with his hands. And I liked that from him. So, I decided to work like my dad worked. He was someone who provided whenever my mom needed something. If he could, he would do it. If it comes to spending time with the family, he didn't do that. But when I looked at my uncles, and how they do things with their families...My uncle and aunty go out together, maybe once a year on holiday. And even the way that they uhm, the father takes the family to church...that was something good for me. And when I was a teenager, I decided that when I married, I wanted to be like that. So, things like that. My family is a very plain and simple family. They are not people that connect easily with other people. They're with each other and can have a ball with each other, but they're not really people that will try new things. For me, I try to be like that in the sense that, I don't want to jump from one thing to the other, but life isn't always like that. When we moved into our house for the first time, it wasn't the house that we want. So, for us, we have to make jumps and steps. So that is something that we incorporate. But for me, what I take from my family is, that one thing. I would say we are content sometimes with what we have and what we are. I'm like that. My family is very generous. And I think I am also a generous person. And I think they are honest people in the sense that, look, that's debatable if I say you're honest. But the reason why I say they are honest, is because they won't, they're not people who will tell you something

just to make themselves look great. And that is the type of person...what I think I bring in my suitcase.

50. R: (11) In your experience and opinion, what influences the alignment or connection between the two of you as a couple? What makes you feel more or less aligned/connected?

51. Q: When we met, we talked a lot. We talked day and night. And that was like the thing that made it happen for us. For me, I started a business when I met Stephanie, and she always encouraged me to do it. Even when I told her I was going to give it up, she would say no you didn't try everything. She encouraged me. One other thing was: the way that she laughed at the nonsense I talked was also something that connects...that makes me feel good. Like this is where I want to be. And the fact that she's a hardworking person. She's working shifts since we met, and she's still doing it.

52. R: And for you, Stephanie? (repeat question (11))

53. S: (very emotional) Ek dink die feit...family is baie baie belangrik vir my. Ek was nog nooit iemand wat vrinne gehad het nie. We're like four sisters and one brother. And I grew up without a dad. He passed when I was a few months old of diabetes. I've always been an indoor person. I also knew what I wanted to do and what I wanted to be like. Qaden and I met on a chat, and we chatted for 2 years before we met. So, like he said, we communicated a lot. That was our life. I knew that he didn't have to go. He didn't have a problem where he couldn't chat because he had to go to friends. So, he was also a family person and an indoor person. And he wasn't easily influenced by anything. That I liked about him. I loved the fact that he talked about his mother, he talked about his sister, he talked about his brother. He's very fond of his brother. And that he was a hard worker. At that time, every time that we chatted he was busy working. He was cutting grass, doing maintenance and stuff like that. He worked with his hands and he wasn't afraid to say it. And that is what I wanted. I wanted a family guy who loves his family. Who loves God and who loves what he's doing, no matter what it was. And that is what I prayed for. And hier kry ek nou 'n ou wat op 'n chat is en hy praat oor al die goeters. And I didn't encourage him or tell him what my points were. So that is what I loved about him. En hy is 'n baie ordentlike mens. Ek het gehou van die manier wat hy bid. Sjoe. Sy woorde kom net so natuurlik, jy kan hoor dit kom van sy hart af. So, he was genuine basically. And he was a gentleman, as well. Hy het nooit gekom na my huis toe sonder 'n drink of iets saam, of chocolates. Hy is altyd soos 'n gentleman moet wees. En dit is die goed wat my aangetrek het na hom toe. En hy is ook nie iemand wat vir jou gaan forseer om iets te doen wat teen jou wil is nie. And we could just sit in my flat and chat. Ek kon gesien het van die begin af: this guy is serious. Hy is besig om toekomsplanne te maak terwyl ons hier sit soos vrinne. En hy is lief vir my vir wie ek is, nog voordat ons gedink het aan kinders en als dit. Uhm, en sy planne het altyd rondom my gegaan. Sometimes I didn't like it, because I was very independent. But his intentions were always good and pure regarding me.

54. R: (12) In what ways does your daily interactions (as a couple) and life demands influence your bond as a couple?

55. Q: Yes it does, quite a bit. Our children...I think we're lacking as parents to have the system where we keep our kids in a routine. Meaning...we don't...the boundaries...it's not like eight o'clock the kids will sleep, and then from eight o'clock we'll have our time where we can spend time together. It's not like that in our household, and that is something that we're lacking which is not good. And the fact that Stephanie works shifts, that is also something that puts strain on our time together. And another thing is the kids...we're having this terrible pattern these days where the kids are sleeping with us. And the bed is getting too small for all of us. So, most of the time I go and sleep with Luka in his bed, and Chloe sleeps with Stephanie in our bed. And what I try to do, and I don't do it all the time, because often I'm asleep before Luka...but if it gets to times where he's sleeping, I'll move to our bed and I'll put Chloe next to him. Because he likes to feel the human touch. That is what I try to do. But that's how things are now. And we know it's not good, it's not right. It's not healthy, and that's putting strain on us. Not putting boundaries, structure and routines in place. And the sleeping arrangements.

56. R: Stephanie, what can you add? (repeat question (12))

57. S: Van die begin af...ek weet nie...ons vat die lewe so ernstig op dat ons mekaar mis. Because uhm, we're not making enough time for ourselves, and there is time to make time for ourselves. Uhm...ek gaan nou weer terugkom na Qaden toe. Qaden is baie ernstig. En as hy pyn voel, dan voel hy daai pyn dubbelder as wat ek voel. Dit is die tipe persoon wat hy is. Toe ons vir Luka gehad het...Luka is 'n kind wat baie aandag nodig gehad het. En na 9 maande se swangerskap, I just wanted to be out of the house, out to do something. His interpretation is: I need to get my mom. Dan kom sy ma om oor te vat. Die kind, die huis oor te vat. And what I meant is, and I told him this, but sy understanding is I can't handle Luka, the cooking and the cleaning... But that isn't what I was saying as a woman. I was saying that I needed him. I can handle Luka, Qaden. I can handle the house. I can handle all of that. I just want a little bit of me-time with you. That is what I want. He never got that. Luka is three years old now. Chloe's turning two in December. Most of the conflict with Qaden and me is that we're growing apart. He's sleeping with Luka, I'm sleeping with Chloe. We're never ever together. And then he comes with: 'When are you going to start being involved in the church?' I'm used to that now, I enjoy it. Because it's actually the only time that we do something together. But I mean that, vir ons as 'n couple soos ek gesê het...toe ons geontmoet het en gecourt het...we don't have that connection anymore. We don't even talk to each other. We live past each other. And when I say I can't take it anymore, it doesn't mean that I don't wish to have this children anymore. I'm saying that I need you. En dit is waar die dinge verkeerd gaan in ons huwelik in. The times where I ask Qaden I need time out, het dit nie bedoel: 'Kom save my ek kan nie cope nie.' Because I also want to feel. I'm a wife, I'm a mother, I'm a working parent...I deserve to have my space, my me-time as well.

58. **R: So, something I keep hearing about is the lack of quality time...**
59. **(14) Is being available and accessible to each other important in your relationship? How do you practically maintain availability and accessibility with one another?**
60. **(15) How do you practically remain engaged with one another – even when you are not occupying the same space/activity?**
61. **(17) What are the practical ways in which you remain present or “plugged in” with each other?**
62. Q: I think this is for me, if I can say something, it's not that I'm there and I don't make time. I try. And it's true that I try not to engage sometimes, because just to protect myself. The way I feel I need to protect myself. Because when we go into a conversation, or into a...or when we need to make a decision, for example, what colour to paint the door...it's almost hundred percent that the two of us are going to end up in an argument. Because now, Stephanie say: 'What colour do you want?' Then I say: 'yellow', because I know yellow is an ugly colour...just to get conversation out of her. Then she says: 'Make it yellow.' Then I try other angles, then we start to fight about: you keep on nagging. But I'm trying to make or open conversation. Or sometimes when I'm trying to set a platform for a conversation, then she's questioning me about things that are not relevant to where I'm leading. Then she questions me, then I'm off guard. Then at the end of the day I need to defend myself. And then I find myself that I need to attack her while I'm defending myself, and then we're in an argument. And that is something that I see is a problem with us. And I try to explain to her, but I don't know if she understands what I'm saying. And for some reason, when I see where it's leading I just keep quiet.
63. S: Can I answer you on that?
64. Q: And I, for me, that is one of the reasons why we're not always talking like we used to talk.
65. S: Uhm...dit kom weer terug na, as hy iets doen, dan wil hy dit perfect doen. Hy sit sy alles in dit in. Vir my is dit like, as hy vir my gaan vra wat moet ons doen, byvoorbeeld met die cutlery...Vir my is dit genuinely nie so belangrik nie. Maar ek weet hoe belangrik is dit vir hom. Maar nou gaan dit vir my dinkwerk kos om nou die perfect antwoord te gee. Maar nou het hy dit so diep uitgedink, en sê ek: 'Kies jy maar', want dis genuinely nie so belangrik vir my nie...but he is fighting a battle in his mind, because he wants to make it perfect. En nou begin ek slack, dan voel hy ek het kwaad geraak, so dan vat hy weer 'n ander rigting om vir my nou weer te verduidelik. So hy aanvaar nie wat ek sê nie. En dan lash hy op my.
66. **R: (13) If other people were to look at you as a couple. What do you imagine they would see or notice about the connection/alignment/space between you?**
67. S: The perfect couple. The perfect family. Because we're always together. Whatever we do. Die kinders is altyd by ons. And we're always available. And we're always...we have a giving heart as well. We always contribute where we should. Our door is always open. So, in die life daar buite is ons die perfect couple, I think.

68. R: Qaden?

69. Q: Bridget, to be honest, I don't know what to say on that one.

70. R: That's ok. We can move on.

71. R: (16) How important is growth in the relationship? What does "growing" in your relationship mean for you? How do you stimulate or generate growth in your own relationship?

72. Q: For me, the growth is...individual growth is important, first of all. But then, at the end of the day, when you are married - how I see it - you can't work on your individual growth if your partner's pace is very slow, slower than yours. You must also look at that. Because at the end of the day, there will be nothing left anymore.

73. R: You will grow apart.

74. Q: Yes. So, for me, it's something that you need to look at when you grow yourself. When you want to grow yourself, your partner must be in tune or must be aware of the growth that you are wanting to achieve. And I think it will be nice if you have one goal, and you work towards it. And then you identify what you need in yourself for that, then you work towards it. Then each one brings something to the party. But uhm, for me it's always something that I look at when it comes to growth and things. I'm the type of person that, if I put my mind to it for a certain time...I have a problem with consistency, but if I can put my mind to it for three months, six months, or whatever, then I can achieve a lot in that time, and then I slack again. So, for me, the result will be that I'm intense. That's why Stephanie say I'm so serious. Then I need to be intense, because I know myself. I struggle to be consistent. So, for me to take steps to grow, is I need to be intense.

75. R: Intense meaning that you need to be focused?

76. Q: Focused, yes. Because I can lose my focus very quickly. And if I lose my focus then it can take some time to almost, regain it. That's one of my, flaws I will say, in my life. But look, I know it's there. And I'm trying to work with it and overcome it. But I don't think that we are yet in agreement about the growth. I think we know that we need to grow. But how we need to grow is the thing that we're not in agreement about at the moment. We know that we need to make plans...and some of us think that it's ok to change plans, and some of us think that plans mustn't change. And that is what it is now.

77. R: Stephanie? (repeat question (16))

78. S: Growth is vir my important. Wat vir my baie belangrik is, is happiness, family, en my relationship met Qaden is baie belangrik vir my. En wat vir my belangrik is, is wisdom. Growing in wisdom. Uhm...soos byvoorbeeld, Qaden glo daaraan dat you need to go study something to further and better yourself. Ek voel weer, dat waar ek nou is in my lewe, is daar soveel dinge wat my aandag nodig het nou in die tyd. En ek voel ook dat ek het gegroei. Ek het dalk nou nie watse degree en watse education nie, but I have grown so much. As my ma vir my sien, dan sê sy vir my: 'Jo, Stephanie. If I look at you. The child and the person that you were, you couldn't express

yourself. You were an emotional child.' Ek was skaam gewees. I didn't have a lot of friends. I would spend time colouring in, Lego, sleeping and dreaming. But I had a dream. I had a vision for myself, as well. En sy sê vir my: 'Jo Stephanie, jy het altyd so geslaap toe jy nog 'n kind was. En nou, jy maak sommer gou-gou kos. Of as ek weer sien dan is die huis alweer skoon. Of die way wat jy met jou kinders is. You've really grown.' En ek voel dat ek het gegroei. Ek kan my mond oopmaak nou. I can say how I feel. I'm not just there to please whoever. I've lost so much, omdat ek te bang is om te sê nee, of I can't. And I was just giving and giving of myself. En ek voel vir my op daai oomblik is dit growing. En my visie vir my is, individual goal vir my is: ek wil hê my kinders moet gemaklik wees met my. They need to see that I'm happy all the time. I want to spend as much time with them as I can. I want to cook. I want to do stuff for my husband. Wat ek sien in die future in... I've been working for the same company for 10 years and I love what I'm doing. Vir my, daar is nie nog baie dink werk in wat ek doen nie. As ek my werk verlaat, dan is ek straight by my huis. Ek wil graag hê dat ek die punt bereik dat as ek my werk los, dan kan ek in 'n property gaan. Then I can maybe buy a property that will be equivalent to my income, so that I can focus on the simple things. Like my family. En ek wil groei met Qaden saam. Ek wil groei, want ek voel dat ons is verskriklik ver van mekaar af. En die arguments en die goeters wat ons het is omdat ons sien dinge differently. I want to have his back and he needs to have my back. And we need to understand. That is growth for me. I don't need...ek het nie 'n masters in this en this nodig nie. Wat gaan ek daarmee doen? En Qaden voel dat you need to go back and...jy moet vir jou kind kan wys jy het 'n degree hierin. I'll do that, yes. But I'll do that for them to show them I can do this. But my main focus is nou. This is my life. Dit is waar ek is nou en ek wil groei daarin. Ek het 'n visie vir as ons klaar en oud is: I want to go into property and live the simple life. Dit gaan nie gebeur dat ek op 'n stage gaan staan en praat nie, my bakkie.

79. R: Is that what Qaden wants for you?

80. S: He wants to see me and him on the stage.

81. Q: Excuse me?

82. S: Staen en voor die kerk praat. And that is not me.

(Qaden seems caught by surprise)

83. S: So, daar is so baie goeters wat Qaden wil hê en hy druk homself daarvoor.

84. R: (18) As couples, we have to find a balance between our life as individuals (incl. goals, dreams, occupations) and our relationship with our partners.... How do you each manage that balance between relationship intimacy and individual independence?

85. Q: For me, as I know my time is limited, because I also need to spend time with Stephanie and the kids. And there are times where I can say: 'Stephanie I'm going there.' But there's times where I can't, because she's working night shift and I have to be there with the kids. So, thinking of things like that and our responsibilities around the house. I won't commit to anything that will put strain on that. For example, I won't even think about playing soccer with the guys, or guitar

lessons. I don't have time for that at the moment. So, I find other ways to slot in my interests. I try to put the family in the frontline for now, because the kids are small.

86. R: Stephanie? (repeat question (18))

87. S: Ons het op 'n tyd absoluut niks tyd vir onself gehad nie. Alles was chaos gewees. Chaos met die kinders. As ek vir Luka hou met 'n bottle, dan is Qaden met Chloe en die bottel. But I do believe we need to go out, and we need to have fun. And just relax. I'm tired of this, everything must be...Be silly man and laugh about silly stuff. And we have a nanny now, a stay in. She looks after the kids and cleans. En dit het ek ook gedruk voor, omdat ons tyd nodig het vir mekaar. And we do have time. Ek sê ook vir hom, dit hoef nie oor geld te gaan nie. Ons kan saam gaan stap. Ok, ek weet ek is 'n lui mens, maar jy moet net stadig saam met my stap. En met dit het ek my me-time gevat. And we are planning to have a get-away next weekend. It will be the first one since Chloe was born. So vir my was dit belangrik om tyd te maak.

88. R: (19) How do you generally navigate difference between the two of you – in personality, levels of affection, communication, age etc?

89. Q: In my point of view, I think that is a lack. And that is something that I think of a lot. I think...I don't know how to manage it. And I don't even know how to take it from one place to another at this point.

90. S: Only recently, I discovered that...vir Qaden is respek verskriklik belangrik. En my emotional well-being is baie belangrik vir my. And actually, I don't know how to manage it. Uhm, ek het nou probeer van Sondag af...Hy het net begin stil raak Sondag. En toe het ek net probeer, I wasn't going to say anything, I was just going to be quiet and observe. En in die tyd in het ek nie much met hom gepraat nie, vir die heel week al. And not once did he come to me to give me a hug. Nie een keer het hy gekom om my 'n soen te gee of werklik die bed met my te deel nie. En vanoggend, in die oggend ure, het hy in die kamer ingekom en in die bed ingeklim het. Baie keer as ons stry ook, wat gebeur is, all that I actually want is: I want to feel like a woman. Ek wil voel ek hoef nie eens te stry as hy net vir my vashou of sê bokkie dit gaan ok wees. Of ons sal saam daardeur werk nie. So vir my is daai verskriklik belangrik. En wanneer ek emotional voel, dan is dit amper ons staan bors en bors teenmekaar. Jy is mos nou stil, jy gaan nie praat nie. So ek gaan ook nou vir jou die silent treatment gee. And that is like the total opposite. Dit gaan nie vir my beter maak nie. Dit gaan my eintlik net nog meer in myself in laat gaan. En wat ek sien met hom is, respek is vir hom baie belangrik. So ek kan nie net vir hom 'n random antwoord gee nie. Ek moet in detail vir hom iets explain. Ek moet sometimes net laat gaan, dat hy oorvat en hy in charge in is van dinge. As hy vir my question oor sekere goed, then I must just be obedient. Because I know, dit doen iets aan sy ego. So ek dink dis iets wat ons twee aan moet begin werk. Van myself af lack ek dit totally, because I'm also so used to...Want ek dink my ego is ook nou 'n bietjies te hoog. Dat ek voel: 'Ok, ek's in charge nou, so I'm running with it.' I'm taking my me-time en ek

vergeet dit dat dit is eintlik die ding wat vir hom laat drive - as ek vir hom laat respekteer. And I think that we need to work on that.

91. R: Qaden I have to ask, what made you giggle now at what Stephanie was saying?

92. Q: My ego...(laughing). It is true what she is saying. But it's the way that she's saying it. It's right what she's saying, but for me, I don't see a problem with it. And she sees a problem. So now, what is right and what is wrong and where do you draw the line? That's the problem.

93. R: (20) To each individual: What is your deepest wish or desire for your relationship with _____?

94. S: My deepest desire, I would say, is I would like me and Qaden to have that type of relationship where he can sense me. As hy kyk na my, dan weet hy klaar wat ek voel of wat ek dink of wat ek vir hom wil probeer sê. Ek wil graag voel dat ek weet hy staan agter my. En dieselfde vir my vir hom ook. En...ons rub mekaar verkeerd op. So, I would love for us to spend more time with each other, because there's many times where I, waar ek wys vir hom (met my oë) en dan is dit like: Yo! Sense my, verstaan my, leer vir my ken. En laat ons mooi dinge van mekaar praat. I just want to be happy. I want things to be easy. Ek wil vir hom gelukkig maak en ek wil hê dat dit versa vice moet wees. Not putting other people's needs...put our needs before anyone else. So, let us work on us.

95. Q: For me, it's that we would really understand each other. And that we would have a way to communicate with each other. Properly. And not listen to the words only, but know what it means when I say no or yes. And understanding of one another. And I want us to build that relationship, with our kids also, that we will be a solid family that at the end of the day, will be able to enjoy each other. That is for me what I want for our family.

96. R: Thank you.

Recorders off. Interview closed.

APPENDIX P: Julia and Zed – Interview 1 Transcript

1. **RESEARCHER (R): (1) How would you describe your relationship/bond with your partner?**
2. ZED (Z): Easy. It's got to a point that it's easy. I don't have to be figuring too much stuff like in the beginning. But like, in the beginning, it was also not like more difficult, but it was a case of, we're so different. So, it was always a case of discovering something. Discovering what's happening...what's new... 'Oh! she's reacting to this like this...'
3. **R: Almost learning to read the person...**
4. Z: Ja, it was like we'd go to a music shop. She goes that way, I go that way. We meet at the till: 'What have you got? What is that?!' (laughing) Ok fine, we get in the car, listen to yours...ok, take it out...mine...That kind of stuff. So now we...so many years it's...you know...we just know: 'Ok this is happening, that is what's happening.' Ja, sometimes she will call and say this and this...I'm like: 'You read my mind.' 'Are we going to eat this today?' 'Yes, you read my mind.' It is interesting. Nice though. That somehow we've learned to follow the same wavelength.
5. **R: And how has the wavelengths changed over the years...20 years together before & after divorce...**
6. Z: Well the separation has done something, especially for me. Also I think for Julia, but more for me. I've had to learn other things to...you know some stuff you take for granted. And then some ways I believed that I should be like this, and now with that gap I sat and spend a lot of time thinking...And while we did speak a lot of things, we spoke more often about serious things when we were separated, than before. And then I had to learn I had to change this, I had to change that. Now that we're back together, there's still a bit of adjusting. But it's an adjusting out of the comfort zone for me, to a zone that's...not unfamiliar, but I'm not...I'm happy with it, but it's just that I have to learn to do things more, like for example, speaking. I internalise things, then I have a discussion in my head. A long discussion in my head. And then I get to the conclusion. Sometimes it's a conversation, you know, between me and Julia. In my head. It used to be like that. And we'd have this conversation, and I'm done with the conversation, but she's not even here. And it's done and it's finished. When she comes home or whenever I see her, then the conversation is done. I don't say anything. Because I got to the conclusion. That's how it used to be. And that ended up in problems before, so now I've had to change that. I have to be like: No, she has to be here. I have to talk to her face to face, regardless what I think she will react. So that was one of the major things that have had to happen. It was a bit uncomfortable, but I see what it's doing to us. It's positive, so I like that.
7. **R: And for you Julia (repeat question (1))**

8. JULIA (J): Comforting. For me. Safe-ish. It was almost like I was home. That's what I got from him. It was that aura I got when I met him. It was like somebody that will take care of...Because of my background, where I have abandonment issues...with my mom leaving me and my brother with my grandparents. And you know, she lived her life with my stepfather. I found somebody that I could be home with. It was like my emotional home - I found in him. I think it is with who the person is or how they are...I think they have a wholeness to them, because obviously we grew up in a certain environment. He had both parents, he had a family, he had all that. And I had a bit of scattered, here and there. So, uhm, I didn't...it wasn't scary, it wasn't anything like that. So that was nice. And also I think I saw him for more than he was... more than he knew himself he was...so I saw the good, I saw the...

9. R: Potential?

10. J: Yes, ja! So, I saw all the good in him. And what he could be. I think his core character. I could see who he was inside. And that's the stuff that actually got me through a lot of the stuff I had to go through. And shame, he had to deal with all the stuff obviously I had, or these big things I had to tell him about what happened to me in my life. And it was shock-horror-horror for him, but he wasn't scared. And he didn't run away from it. Like he did feel like he wanted to run away, but he didn't. Also the values that he had...I mean we're both from spiritual backgrounds. We're from the same church, but based in different provinces. So those values, our core values, are the same. Which had also helped a lot. So, I didn't have to like, remind him, of anything in that regard. So, it was very 'in' him. So, like he says - it was easier for us in that way. Where you don't have to highlight things for a person. It was just our backgrounds in which we grew up and we've just had to watch out for things that I was maybe afraid of, or that brought out negative feelings in me or...and the stuff that I had to deal with because of the stuff that I went through. And he was there in that.

11. R: (2) How do you create intimacy (closeness) in your relationship with your partner?

12. J: I think the thing is with us, we always...There's something about black couples. Or I don't know, it's a certain kind of couple...Where they do the - I think it's a macho...macho guys and typical girly girls...they do the separate thing. They will go off the guys to one...and then the girls...So we were not that kind of...I don't think we even said it out loud, it's just that we became a couple that does stuff together. That helped. Because we clubbed together, we went to this together, we would go hiking together, we would do whatever activities that were done. We would never separate unless I wanted my girl time. And he would have his boy time. There wasn't: 'Oh this weekend I'm going with the boys.' You can't do that every weekend. So, and that's what we have with our friends. And in the black culture as such, black men will say: 'Ja no, it's my time.' So, they're off, they go from Friday to Sunday. Gone! Here you are with the kids, whoever the woman is, with kids and here he comes Sunday and you're like: 'Oh ok. That was lovely.' So, it's that disconnect that we didn't...I think we saw...I think we didn't have that,

as we didn't see it in our elders. Because our elders didn't do that. So those who did have elders who did that, they go in that direction where the guy will go drinking with the men Saturdays, and the woman must now find something to do. And she's like: 'Actually, I wanted to spend time with you.' So, with us, we made...we spend quality time. And the other thing I think also was, when we got married – I was 23 and he was twenty something – we were the first to get married. Ever. In our group. So, we showed them, yes we're married, but that doesn't mean you're not going to be my friend anymore. Or that I can't interact with you like I used to. All that's changed, is our status. And we kept at it. So, people saw that although you are married, you can still be you. You can still be yourself. So that's also what happened. They could see these two are married, but we're not kicked to the curb. Because we were just the single friends. They are still your friends. What is supposed to happen to them when you get married?! (laughing) So we've kept that. We still have our friends, most of them from then. They have grown with us, and they've gotten married along the way. They've looked to us as well for support, and because we did it first. And we've been together the longest.

13. R: Zed (repeat question (2))

14. Z: From the beginning, we've decided time with each other was important. It was one of the big things, major things we've decided. Time with each other. Hence the fact that, even in the beginning, we said: let's not have kids now, because time...we need to do things together. We have things that we must do together. The moment that we're gonna have a child, we're not going to have enough time with just each other. Because, I felt there's still more to discover between us. People look at the person and they judge: 'Ok, person is like this.' And I always felt she was more...there was a lot of her. So, I've always let her be. So, I can sit and... 'Ahhh, something new today.' I'm a curious guy. (laughing) And now I have something to be curious about in my own house. It's awesome. So that thing of saying we want to have time together, all the time with each other. That has helped a lot of things. And we talk about a lot of things. And we get naughty over the phone during the day sometimes. And compliments. We always make a point to compliment each other.

15. R: (3) What makes you believe that your partner is committed to you?

16. Z: How do you explain a feeling?

17. J: I think for me, as someone who shows up. They're there. First of all. You're there with me. You are making an effort to change things that need to be changed.

18. Z: I'll say also, openness. In everything. You can see, this person is open to you. There's...nothing holding back. The person says whatever they want to say. There's no like, trying to step around you to try and make you feel comfortable. They just say what they want to say, and do what they want to do.

19. R: So, it kind of leaves you always knowing where you stand with them?

20. Z: Exactly. So, we're free to express.

21. J: I think before, we did a bit of a dance. There were things with...I remember I said something and he was very shocked that I thought that of him. Because it was something quite negative. And he didn't see it that way, and that was how I felt at that moment: because this has been happening, and because I've told you this is an issue for me, but you still disregard it. Then this means that you have intent of hurting me. So, I felt it was emotional abuse. So, I told him up front: 'Because I asked you this and this and that, you said to me...' Because men always tell us we shouldn't hint at things...so I said: 'I didn't hint, I'm telling you: for me to be happy I need x, y, z...And here you are.' And it was a point where he felt he doesn't need to do it...and I said: 'Well, well because so much time has passed, and I asked you to do x, y, and z...and you were blatant you don't want to do it, I felt it's emotional abuse.' And he was: big eyes. Because he didn't realise what he was doing. And it was a huge shock. Because we don't realise what we do to people.
22. **R: We have different interpretations...**
23. J: Yes, exactly. So, for me, when I feel that you are...and especially when the person is going out...it's almost like they want...you want to hurt them, you want them to feel pain. Because you feel pain. So then...I wondered what was happening and I decided to call it. And that was shocking.
24. **R: (4) What are the ways in which you express/demonstrate your love and affection for your partner?**
25. Z: Should we show you?
26. **R: Zed! Nee!** (everyone laughing)
27. J: We'll have a fifty shades of grey moment here! Poor Bridget.
28. **R: (to Zed) Cheeky cheeky!**
29. Z: I was talking about Facebook!
(everyone laughing more)
30. **R: I was about to say, what I'm taking from that, is that one of the ways was physical intimacy...**
31. Z: (laughing and teasing) I was joking about let's open the phone and show you on Facebook...
(laughter continues)
32. **R: (laughing) Too, too clever and too quick there!**
33. Z: (containing himself a bit more seriously) Ja, there is, what is it called? Public...I want that word...
34. R & J: Public displays of affection...PDA'S...
35. Z: No man. I want that word. Admonishment. That...ag leave the word. I like big words. That's one thing. A person who doesn't mind holding your hand in public. To hug you and kiss you in the middle of the shop. You don't care who is looking. This person is yours. She's mine. Look. Learn. Copy. Picked in your own life. This is how it's done. (everyone laughing) And when I

feel like I need to see her...then if I have 5 minutes I will drive over to her office...give her a hug and kiss and then I leave again.

36. R: So, you're quite spontaneous...going with your feelings in the moment...

37. Z: Yeah. She's like that too.

38. J: It's quite romantic. Which is also nice. It's a good asset he's always had.

39. R: And from your side, Julia? (repeat question (4))

40. J: Yes, I'm also very affectionate. So...huggy and kissy, and all that. And then I have a thing where I like to encourage in word. So, I will write messages. On WhatsApp, messenger, Facebook or sms...that I like to do. Not only with him. I do that with my friends and my family, that kind of thing. I like to wish them well. Wish someone well for the day or, 'Hang in there', if they're going through something. Those kind of things. So, for me it's been something I subconsciously do. Because it's something I've always felt I needed. So, I can see it in other people. If this helps me, it can help someone else. And I do see the difference in that. They will say: 'You know what, I actually needed that today. Thanks for sending the message I send that day.' So, every day we like to say something...just say to each other, 'Have a good day' or... 'I love you'... all those kinds of things.

41. R: So, kind of staying in contact throughout the day?

42. J: Yes! There's still that contact.

43. R: (5) What contributes to the quality or nature of your relationship?

44. Z: It's like, she's always here with me. Which is nice. It's comforting. You know when something's rattling me...during the day...whatever's got to do with work or...something else...yeah, I know she's just here. She can just hold my hand. It's going to be ok. So, then I can get past that moment quicker. Then I don't dwell on negative things. So, yeah, positive is always good. It's like I know when I need something positive, that's where to go to. Even sometimes when I need a hug, then I must drive that way first to get my dose.

45. R: So, you'll just present yourself: I'm here for my hug?

46. Z: No I'll tell her...she will know. It's no secret. I need this. Or I'll just pitch up, with like: 'Are you coming over for lunch?'

47. R: Do you frequently have lunch together?

48. J: Yes, cause he's out on the road, he can work his time in with my lunch time. So, he can work out his errands and then meet me for lunch.

49. Z: My hours are quite flexible. I manage myself.

50. R: Anything you would add, Julia? (repeat question (5))

51. J: Just also the highlight of the person being there, being available to you. They're not closed off: 'Oh no, I'm busy, I'm in a meeting.' You know what I mean? 'Oh ok, what did you need?' So, it's in that where the person is caring and thoughtful about your needs. And also now, I don't have to tell him about my day. He asks me. Before it was me: 'How was your day?' And it didn't

get reciprocated. So now I don't even have to say anything, cause he already, he will ask me first and say: 'How was your day?' Or 'How is your day going?' So, you don't get to the part where he doesn't know. By the time it comes to the end of the day, where I have to explain everything that happened that day. Because he already knows part of it, it's already been said earlier. Which is also nice.

52. Z: I comb your hair every morning.

53. J: Yes you do. He's so sweet. (both participants laughing and giggling)

54. R: For people 20 years together, you're quite fresh still...

55. J: That's what people always think! They will think we're married for 2 or 3 years!

56. Z: Find your opposite. There will never be a down moment in your life.

57. R: So, you adhere to opposites attract and making it work?

58. J: Yes. It's more effort...

59. Z: But you must be open. You need to be open minded, open heart, and say: 'Just relax and enjoy it!'

60. R: (6) In what ways does your partner meet your needs?

61. J: I mean, that took time, I think. The needs. Because of how different we are. Because I was, I think, on a different level in which...because I went through my therapy already, so I was really in touch with myself. So, I had...I really knew how to handle certain things. So, you kind of, when you speak, you speak in that kind of way. And Zed wouldn't understand where I'm at, because he's not there yet. Emotionally. Or he's not at that capacity. He can't give me that kind of capacity. So, I had to be patient in having to wait on him to adapt, and catch up, on an emotional level. So, I had to learn that he's not gonna be able to be there for me in the emotional capacity as I would love to, but what I do have, is enough. Was enough at that point. Enough overall, as in the relationship. Yes, there were things he didn't meet, but I had to look at it as in the bigger picture. As in who he is in my life, and what it means to be married. It means to have a long-term relationship. So, I took all those things into consideration. So, I had to get past that...these little things, because he's still growing. He's still growing emotionally, so he will get there. I did highlight this stuff to him, what I need. But I just let it go, because it was stuff that I could live with.

62. R: Zed, in terms of Julia meeting your needs?

63. Z: She's a force of nature...outstanding, always outstanding like, that kind of person that always gets noticed, regardless whether she just wants to be by herself. Well, she's mostly herself, that's the thing. It's the character that she is. That is outstanding and just a strong person. And to come home to that, it's like: 'Ok, how do I speak to this person?' (laughing) Then it became a process. So, I had to learn on how to...I don't want to come across as always the time that I want to control her, when I'm saying ok, when I ask for something. But it mustn't be a case of, I don't want her to feel like I'm demanding or I'm telling her how to do this or how to do that. So, I had to kind

of like make suggestions. I suggest this and I suggest that. And eventually, we got the point where I'm like: 'Oh ok, I see you don't like that. You like this, you like it this way.... Let's see where we can meet each other.' Because, I never really wanted her to feel like I want to rule her. If she's wearing a certain type of dress...well I'm a bit uncomfortable, but she loves it. And she – you can see she's turning in the mirror like: 'Damn, I look good!' Now how do I express my concern about it, without making her feel bad or that I don't like her dress? So, it became a process. But now, we kind of easier that way. That she understands that and there will be times where she just asks me: 'So, what do you think? Are you ok with it?'

64. R: And would you ask straight up from her what you need?

65. Z: Ja, I think now we are at that point. Where we are just straight. And if I say something straight and she don't like it, then we talk about it. Sometimes we have...what can I say...a bit of a miscommunication? And she will maybe misunderstand me, and then I'll say to her: 'No, stop.' This difference between the two people...I'm the slow one...she goes (clap clap with hands) ... I'm like: 'No no no, you've gone too far. I'm still here...I'm talking about here...Come, my darling. Listen to me.' And then she's like: 'Ok, speak!' (Julia laughing) You see, and then we're sorted. And we hug and we kiss and we move onto the next thing. So, patience. She walks fast, she talks fast, she reads fast. I'm always like: 'Aahh, wait for me!' (laughing) I used to resort to writing notes to her sometimes, because I'm afraid she won't hear me. But she didn't like that.

66. R: A note to express your feeling in that moment?

67. Z: Ja...and sometimes I write poems. Which she must read afterwards.

68. R: But you're saying the note writing didn't always go down as well?

69. Z: Yes... 'Why didn't you tell me or speak to me?!' But now, I'm also at the point where I must speak my mind as is. That's an agreement we have. And we're working on that. And it's actually much better. I'm much more comfortable just speaking my mind. And we have a conversation. And if it raises our energy and our volume...then so let it be. But the point is we're going to get to the end of it. We're going to talk and we're going to come to an agreement.

70. R: It's not left lingering...

71. J: Yes!

72. Z: Before, that was part of what I used to do, like I said. I used to have these conversations and we used to talk about things and then we don't talk about things. And that led to part of the breakdown, previously. So that some of the things we now learned is not coming back in the new relationship. That is not happening. I'm opening my mouth more.

73. J: And I'm quieter.

74. Z: That's why she needs me to speak.

75. J: And that's why I'm quieter now. Because, he's actually speaking about the stuff I wanted him to speak about 10 years ago. So now...I'm comfortable a little bit, because I'm not as vocal as I used to be. There's no need. I said: 'I cannot be saying the same things I said ten years ago. You

must get it.' So, with the time apart, he's now finally got. He replayed the conversations, and the stuff I used to say about this is what will make us work. If you would only do x, y, z, this would work. If you only did, because I also felt that I was playing the therapist in the relationship, as well. Because then I'm constantly looking around: 'What's going on?' And I'm the one bringing up the: 'We have a problem in this regard...', and then he always feels like: But he's not going to bring it up. But he always felt like he...I was talking down to him or talking whatever, but I was like: 'Whose gonna bring it up if you don't bring it up?'

76. R: Jumping a bit with the questions as I hear you talk about conflict... (12) How do you handle conflict in your relationship? As I hear Zed talk about letting it get loud if it needs to...High volumes?

77. J: Yes...

78. R: Name calling...verbal abuse...

79. J: Yes, definitely name calling on my part, because I get so...ups...I want to call things. I want to call things as they are. So, I want...it's almost like, to make you understand how bad this thing that you're doing is....

80. R: The gravity...

81. J: Yes, so this is the extent of it. But I know now I don't need to, but it makes me feel good! (laughing) But, it's something that we're trying not to do. That is something that we as, our values as being Christians, we try to keep the name calling to a minimum. It's like 'emergencies', which I normally have. And then, the swearing as well. But it's mostly me. When I get angry and I'm like...that's when you know I'm angry, is when I start swearing. Then you must know, something's very wrong. My friends will also pick up on that. So, if I'm in a bad place, then I don't have other words. But we don't swear every day.

82. J: But talking about the conflict thing...I was in a...I was exposed to where people were violent. My mom was beaten, and all those type of things. So, I...everything was in the open for me. So, when I have certain feelings and stuff like that, it comes out. I will say: 'This is where I'm at.' And it goes. The anger, it goes. For him – he didn't grow up like that. So, it's different. So, for him, when I go like that, he goes the other way. So, it feels quite pointless, because I feel like I'm fighting with myself, so what is the point? So, that was a point of disconnect for us. Because, I'm trying to say something and he cannot hear me, because I'm being so crazy.

83. R: And I would imagine the more he would move away the crazier you would become?

84. J: Exactly. So that didn't work. So, I knew what the story was. So, obviously we tried to have conversations, although it was arguments, before. But, obviously I was hurt about the stuff he was saying to me, and he was hurt for the stuff I'm saying. So, we didn't talk about it. We never used to verbalise it beyond like: 'I actually I feel this way about what you just said.' So, we just let it go. But the stuff was still hanging there, over our heads. The stuff used to just pile up there, hanging over us. So, I think we also needed to know how to speak to each other, how to

communicate. I needed to know that I need, to have my blow out by myself. Go crazy, and then calm down. And maybe, when I'm calm I can have the conversation with him and say: 'Listen here, I'm not happy about x, y, and z. What are we going to do about it?' So, I had to learn to change in that way, so that I could communicate with him. He, again, had to learn that I am like this. I'm going to blow a gasket. I'm going to shout and scream, because this is where I'm at right now. This is what is happening right now, but it doesn't have to endanger him. You can just be there and know: 'Ok, Julia's having a moment and it will be over soon. And I will talk to her when it's over.' So, we had to learn that you must take the person for who they are. I can't change him to shout more. He can't change me to be quiet like him. You can't do that. It's the person's make-up, they must learn to change themselves as to how they want to...so ja.

85. R: Anything you want to add regarding conflict, Zed?

86. Z: It's more of what she said, but it's one of those fundamental differences between us. That calmness...and the volcano erupting one side.... And I'm just like: 'Ok, it's erupting. Keep my voice low, not shouting.' So ja, it's like I said...these differences between us, have always kept us interested. Even in times of conflict, we still have these differences, but then the differences still make us more interested again to each other. Now, I believe we're still working on it. On just, getting the right balance. And, because she will say something, and I know that she's upset, and then she asks questions... Now I must figure out: Does she want an answer or not? Does she want an answer now or later? Then I keep quiet, then she says: 'Why you not saying something?!' Sometimes, I just decide I'm going to answer it, then she don't want to listen. Then I keep quiet. Then she asks, why am I quiet. Then I know we're going to have to do it again later, once she's blown the steam. Then I will break it down with her. I've actually learned how to express myself, because I grew up not being allowed to express our emotions. The only thing that was allowed for us, was to smile and be happy. We weren't allowed to be angry at each other as siblings. You were angry, you got a hiding. We couldn't fight as siblings. Something went wrong, you would just have to swallow it, move on, smile. So, for years and years of that, it stays with you...and you just swallow things. You can't cry: 'Why you crying?' (Zed making slapping sound).

87. R: I'll give you something to cry about...

88. Z: Exactly. So, it took me a while even to allow my emotions, even just in front of Julia. If I used to feel tears coming, I would just keep it in. So, I think we're much better in resolving conflict. It's always a work in progress. She's not from Venus – she's from another planet. The Venus people are too obvious.

(Julia stepping out to go to bathroom)

89. Z: I'm practically trying to educate people now, about her. She's always expressly said that people like to box her. People like to put her in a box. So, I'm in a process of educating people about her...on Facebook, every week I'm putting up statements about her. For example, a poem I wrote saying 'I am who I am'. 'I change the colour of my hair every time because normal is

boring'. And that's who she is. And then I'll put pictures of her with different statements...So, it's an ongoing thing about who I am.

(Julia returning)

90. Z: So, I am, who I am. People mustn't always just expect her to smile all the time, because she's always a happy person. So, they just box her in that. So, that's why I'm saying, I'm educating people.
91. **R: (13) When you are experiencing a disagreement or when your partner has done something deemed 'wrong', what does your internal sense-making/reaction look like? What do you tell yourself about it/their intentions etc.? The internal narrative...**
92. J: Ja no, definitely. That is the stuff that goes through my mind, where it's like: can't they see that they are being horrible? Or, can't they see that they are being insensitive? For me, it's more like: how could they?! They say they love me so much...how can they do this?
93. **R: So, your head is saying they can't love me if they're doing this?**
94. J: Yes, it's like how can you love me and you still do something like this? So, then I have to bring myself back from there.
95. **R: And for you Zed (repeat question (13))**
96. Z: I try to put myself on that side and I say: ok, let me try to see it from that point of view. And look at the context of what has happened. And then I try to view it from that point of view. Then I bring it back to me and I say: must I raise this? And if I raise this, what is my point? What am I trying to gain here? What is this going to do for us, if I raise this? If I don't raise this, what are the pros and cons? Then I normally just, if I can't get to a conclusion right then, I'll let those thoughts sit for a moment. And, if it's bothering me enough, if it stays there on the bothering stage, then it's worthy to speak up. Even so, sometimes if it doesn't bother me that much, I will later bring it up. So, she knows, this happened and this is how I felt initially, and this is how I feel now.
97. **R: (7) What is it that you enjoy or value about your partner's company?**
98. Z: Look, it's like amazing to have someone who have a wide spectrum of things. I've learned a lot of things, by just being around her. I know I'm still learning things. Because, she's got a wide spectrum of interests. The way she sees things...the way she picks up things...the way she reads people...It's just the way she analyses things as well. It could be a movie, it could be a song...it could be clothes... You know, you find me, I'm looking at shoes...and we're discussing ladies' shoes and handbags. It's not normally what people say. Which is why I say, she's not from Venus, she's from somewhere else. She sees things in a slightly different angle. Which is more and larger and extra to what is normally there. There's always an element of something interesting, something new. And when she's quiet, I'm like: what is happening? Where's my Wikipedia gone? I need my 'what's new, what is happening in the world.' And also, she deals with people

a lot. That ability for her to be able to take in...for people to be able to call her and...they can actually relate. That's why sometimes I feel she's actually quite large.

99. R: And for you Julia? (repeat question (7))

100. J: The depth of what I can speak to him about. The emotional intelligence...I can speak to him about anything. It's not boring. I know we're not just going to talk about shallow stuff all the time. Because, we do go from shallow to deep, because then it's nice. When you can go from talking total crap, to talking about serious things. So, we've got a nice spectrum in which, his mind can adapt to that. Where he will also give me a different perspective on certain...you know, 'Why don't you look at something this way?', instead of something I was looking at like that. He'll open my thinking in the way that he does. Because, I mean his character, how he sees things. And obviously the warmth, and the romantic part of him, is what I like. And which is nice, because I mean any...when you are dealing with someone who is so creative in his way, in which – they're a writer – so it's nice, because he can write anything from a book to a poem, and he can write something totally abstract or whatever. They have a different capacity of where they see things from. And that's where the romanticism comes from. Which is amazing. So that's a big plus on my side.

101. R: (8) How do you know what your partner's needs are in different situations?

102. Z: We've had discussions about certain things...and our needs and stuff...I think Julia has put it out there, and actually got to a point where she's simplified it into 3 things, and then everything just boils out from there.

103. J: For me, it's a bit similar ja...because of the reading of people that I have an affinity to. I can sense when he's off game. When he's not so himself. Then I'll try to figure out what's going on. Then I will engage in that part where, I'll be like: 'What's happening and why are you like this? Because as far as I know, it's got nothing to do with me, so what external stuff are contributing to this? And what do you need me to do? Do you want a hug, do you want to do something, do you want to go somewhere quiet...whatever?' So, in that respect, we're more vocal about those things where, before I used to do it quietly, and now I'm doing it in a loud way. Where I'm saying: 'I see that something is wrong, tell me.' Because, I think you get scared to do that...because you might've affected the person. So now you're afraid if it's really you, and you're relieved when it's not you. So, I'm not scared anymore. I'm not scared to put myself out there for him. If it's something that I've done. And to correct myself if I have to. Whatever that I need to do for him, because that's what I have to do to make him happy.

104. R: (9) Do you exclusively schedule quality time together as a couple, or is your time together part of your usual daily activities & tasks?

105. J: Most of the time, it comes up with the daily living. And sometimes, we obviously need to make effort to make time for it. But the bulk of it, comes naturally. But there are times where it gets crazy and we actually have to put time into it.

106. Z: I've got a slightly different view. I think we...it might look like it just happens, but we've set it up in a way that we spend more time. For example, I take her to work, even though I don't have to go to work that time. I start midday, but I get up at six, I drive her to work. We always share a cup of tea in the car, and we converse. We get to work before time, then we sit in the car and we talk. It's like our time. And even with supper, we usually just discuss during the day and we make sure that when we go out and we eat together. So, we wait for each other. Then we sit together and we eat together. That's why I'm saying, it might look like it's just part of daily work, but we've set it up like that. And, we're involved in the same thing. We practice together, we sing together. She comes to the soccer sometimes. More than she used to.
- 107. R: (10) Is the time spend together shared with children/pets/TV/cell phones or other demands?**
108. J: Ja, the phone is definitely an issue. Because, I've got so much people I talk to, which I have chosen to offer support to, but I also have a lot of friends. So, I might have friends that I haven't been in touch with for a while, but all of a sudden they'll be in touch. And then I'll be all over the phone. And Facebook and...all those things. So, I do get side-tracked. So, because we're now in this different space of getting back together, now we're sensitive to a lot of things. So, for me I'm still being me, and he's now brought up the issue of: I think you're a bit too much on there...when I have to talk to you. Now I have to compete with this phone. So, we're at that stage now where it's been brought up, and I must do the necessary. Which I see as valid.
- 109. R: Anything to add Zed? (repeat question (10))**
110. Z: No, not really. We hardly even watch TV. We forget we have a TV in the house. Besides the phone, we've done a lot to minimise stuff. There was a time we would come home and just watch movies, like we can't wait – we're eating and we're watching. And that has also kind of died down. We make time to go and exercise together, as well. We go for walks. Sundays, we have our chill time after church. Then we have our Sunday nap. Slowly but surely we've gotten rid of stuff that distracts us from our quality time.
- 111. R: (11) What is your communication like? What is good/bad about it?**
112. Z: What's bad about it, is that sometimes I still feel uncomfortable. Because I have to speak a whole lot more than I used to, which again, I also still say comes back to how it was before when I grew up: don't express yourself, just do this, don't rattle the boat. So, I grew up and I took it to my marriage as well, where I used to, with Julia, just keep quiet. So, we got to the point where we speak, and we take it from there. Rather than keeping stuff. So, that's the good part. Express each other without fear of anything. Just express yourself. We're here. We love each other. So, I'm not going to say something and she pulls out a gun and shoots me.
113. J: He hopes so. I don't have a gun yet. (laughing)
114. Z: I keep the knives hidden. (laughing) But we're just at that point where we're more comfortable at expressing...I think it's a commitment that we've made, that let's talk rather than hint, rather

than signs, rather than notes. Speak. Let's talk to each other. It helps. During the day, we just keep talking to each other. Sometimes I will leave notes, even when I'm at work, because I finish late. Then I'll leave a note: 'I'm leaving work now, I'm at this place.' But that's more, she doesn't have to reply to that, it's more to say look: this is where I'm at, this is what's going on. If I'm getting delayed, and she knows I'm coming back later, then she knows where I'm at.

115. R: What would you add Julia? (repeat question (11))

116. J: I would agree with what he said. But on the negative side, we definitely...you know when you make decisions by yourself, and then you're thinking: I'm gonna tell him. Gats, then you forget! The issue comes up, and you're like: 'But, I thought I told you?' So, it's something to be worked on. Where it's something to do with both of us, but then we make decisions individually on behalf of the other person, but then you don't tell them that you've done, whatever.

117. R: And you say 'we', so is that a problem for both yourself and Zed?

118. J: Yes, he also has stuff that he's done on his own and he needs to tell me. Or things that he has told me, but it was like a cross contamination thing, where you're talking about something else and he says something else in between, and then it gets lost. And I'm like, I don't remember the conversation. So those kind of things where, you have to be clear, like this thing now. I printed out all the stuff, because first, I had actually already contacted you and then I told him afterwards. Thank God he said yes! And he's like: 'I think you already said yes.' And I'm like: 'Yes, I told the lady we're fine.' (laughing) And he's like: 'I know it!'

119. Z: You know I can tell when...the tone...when she says things. So, we agreed we're going to this...and now you tell me...

120. R: (14) How do you handle/respond to strong emotions in yourself, and your partner?

121. Z: Automatically, they make me uncomfortable. That's just something I've had to deal with, for a long time. They make me nervous. Initially. Even if someone walking in stopped being angry, I would get nervous. Automatically. Then I process it and I deal with it. But the initial reaction is always...

122. J: And you can see...I always say that reaction is like a deer in headlights. You can see when he's like freaking out: 'What do I do, what is happening now?'

123. R: And when you yourself have strong emotions, Zed?

124. Z: It's also similar to that. But, it's like I tried to let it hail inside until it stops, and then I express it. Because, I do not want to have regrets of anything. Let it just boil and simmer...and then I must like: ok, what's going on? Why am I feeling like this? Is it alright for me to express this emotion right now, or not? Especially when it comes to irritation and anger stuff. I do not want to be irritated and angry about something that's not even there. Or it's just a figment of my imagination. I imagine if I lose my mind about something and I just imagined it. Then it creates other problems. Fortunately, when I was younger I did karate. I did taekwondo. So, it kind of teaches you well, how to contain things. Especially when it comes to anger. On very very few

occasions, when I got really really angry...you've seen it once? (to Julia) Because it doesn't happen. And even at that point, I still was jumping up and down to keep it in, and it was just pouring out and coming out. But if it's happy stuff...let's dance!

125. R: For you Julia? (repeat question (14))

126. J: It also depends, where I'm at. I'm very appropriate. I'm talking about in my work environment, and things. I've had to learn. I was also one who suppressed. I suppressed a lot of things, because before and while I was going through therapy, you kind of don't know. I also came from where, a child is seen and not heard type of thing. So, I had to undo all those things. So, I had to learn, there's a forum where you can deal with colleague issues. And I actually got opportunities where I had to do that, which was also cool. And it sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. (Julia elaborating on previous work situation.) So, I learned that I must stand up for myself, and it doesn't matter if it's going to be negative, or positive. So now, it's ok to have these feelings. I'm allowed to be angry, but the thing is that I must express it appropriately also. Especially in that regard. I think in your personal capacity you can go a little bit wider, because it's at home. You're a little bit more relaxed. It's a different relationship. So, I am a bit more open at home where I will blow my gasket, but I also know that it affects him. So, I try not to be too crazy and to be verbally abusive, and those things.

127. R: (15) How do you know when your partner is happy/sad/angry...can you identify their feelings?

128. Z: Ja

129. J: I got better at it. Because, I had to do it more often for myself.

130. R: So how do you know what he's feeling?

131. J: It will be...in his demeanour. His demeanour sometimes shows. And then obviously, in asking, I will find out exactly. But I will have my guess, and then I just affirm. I confirm: 'Is this what you're feeling?'

132. R: And for you, Zed? You immediately said you can identify what's going on Julia's side...

133. Z: Body language. Voice. I do check. But initially, the body language will give it away. For example, you're moving at hyper speed, you're shifting everything around the house, you're talking abruptly and short answers, there's a quiver in your voice. What's going on?

134. R: (16) When reacting to one another, do you feel as if you respond only to what the other person has explicitly said or done, or also to what is implied in their behaviour/words?

135. Z: I usually like to listen to what she says, and then I'll tell her what I think. And then I'll say: 'Ok, I hear you. And I think this...' And it's almost a question: 'This is what I think, what do you say to that?'

136. R: So, you kind of don't respond to it, even though it might be there, you check it first before you respond?

137. Z: Yes. Because I've always been like that. I'll take your word and what you tell me. I'll tell you what I see and think, and if it's incorrect, it's fine. If I'm correct, then we deal with it. It's ok.
- 138. R: And you Julia? (repeat question (16))**
139. J: For me, I'm the seeing-it-for-what-it-is, and then seeing the subtext. That's my first reaction. And then, sometimes it will be like that, and sometimes it won't. Then he will actually say: 'No, we are dealing with this issue. Only. Don't go make "spoke", like "dij jaag spoke".' So basically, he'll always say I'm looking for things. Because my mind is always that way.
- 140. R: So, you actually place a lot of focus on the subtext, is what we're saying?**
141. J: Yes, I do. I like to...I see, I observe...I'll see people for who they are. While they are still looking so nice, I'm thinking: 'Hmmm, wait for it.' And when the bomb bursts: 'Oh, you said this...'
- 142. R: (17) Do you ever think about the internal world (thoughts/feelings/experiences) of your partner? Imagine what is going on in their head?**
143. Z: I do. I try. And because she'll put things like, she'll post something or messages and stuff like that, then I'm trying to see: ok, what's going on? Where is this going? She likes a lot of art and stuff as well. And she posts things. But most of the time, I end up asking. I've taking myself out of that space of guessing. I'll rather ask. So, I'm always curious.
- 144. R: And for you Julia? (repeat question (17))**
145. J: I do. I think the emotional. Because, sometimes I can see the fight in him, where he's fighting the good and the bad. And I think, over the years, because I've stood up for myself emotionally, I've been supporting him to stand up for himself emotionally, in certain situations. And when to fight and when not to fight. When you know there are situations where a fight is futile, and then sometimes it's worth it. So, that's the stuff I've been supporting him on. I'll say: 'Do this more, or be more outspoken about this, or show them that you're angry. Don't smile when you're angry.' Because, it's stuff that I used to do. Because people were saying: well you're angry, but now why you smiling? Don't keep putting the mask on, because then people don't know. They can't...your mask and your words don't match...so that's the other things that I do help to support him in. That I can see that he wants to do or say something, but he's not also...it's not something you do, also...when you have to get angry with a parent, or you have to get angry with a sibling, with your boss, whatever. For you to show: this is not right for me, right now. And you treating me this way, is not right. And I'm angry about it. Those kind of things.
- 146. R: So I hear you both have a habit of placing yourselves in your partners shoes...((18) Do you ever place yourself in your partner's shoes, so to speak, thinking about what their experience of a joined situation might be?) and (19) Does it change how you think/feel about or react to them?**

147. J: Yes, obviously it makes you be a bit more, softer, because you're thinking they're not being funny for a...they're not being against you for anything. It's just that they are feeling this way, and then they're in this emotional space and it might affect you. So...
148. Z: Also, for support as well. Because, this person might be needing support. Just that the mind is so preoccupied with this thing that's going on at this time. So, maybe just 'nudge nudge, wink wink'. Always remember, we're here. I will support you. We will fight this...I'll ask you later why we're fighting, but I will fight with you.
- 149. R: (20) In what ways does your partner express their emotional availability to you, when you are feeling emotionally distressed?**
150. Z: That's physically. A touch. She sits in front of me, and she looks at me. And it's a different look. She'll hold my hands, rub my back. Puts me in a comfort zone.
151. J: The same. He will be there, in a touch or a hug. Because, I get hard, and then I don't necessarily want to be hugged. And then I must allow it. So, he knows that, so he will feel that I'm going a bit rigid, but he will hug me anyway.
- 152. R: (21) Do you ever express your needs for closeness to your partner? And if so, how do you experience their response?**
153. J: More now, ja. I don't think we did this before, but we're doing it more now, because we feel it's necessary.
- 154. R: And you're also nodding there, Zed. Same for you? You guys will ask?**
155. Z: Yeah.
- 156. R: (22) In what ways do you think your relationship is similar and different respectively, to that of other couples?**
157. Z: That's rather rough right now, for the other couples in our lives. It's rough from all sides. I'm trying to think of...
158. J: Well, let's just think of the guys that are solid. The being, the faith, for us was one of the non-negotiables. And, if I didn't get married to him, I would've wanted someone in the faith to do this journey with. And in these couples, it's the same thing. We're all...God is the base...and whatever difficulties they might have with each other or externally, it always comes back to that. And that's how they've managed to stay in the long run. And then obviously, recommitting themselves to each other every day. That's the other thing which I mean, is very similar. But in the more emotionally intelligent parts...very different. That is the difference between us and them. It's that we...they...there's a lot of people – even my close friends – who feels that he gives me too much freedom. Which is crazy for me. It's almost like, they don't really understand me. They don't actually understand how I work. I think people, since I was young, everybody's always wanted to box me somehow. Every time. If I'm in a group, nobody wants to do anything if Julia is not there. So, everybody's always wanted something from me. And that for me sucks me dry. (Julia elaborating on her relationship with friends, colleagues etc.) But this came out

now, recently, when we got remarried, and this friend of mine said to Z: ‘You must get her right.’ And he said to her, ‘There’s nothing to get right, this woman is the way she is and I will not contain her. This is how it works. And this is how we’ve always worked. So, I don’t understand as to what you mean that she must come right and in what way.’ I think for her, me going out, the clubbing, even when I’m not with him, I will go out with my friends and I’ll wear, you know, maybe short that she wouldn’t wear...

159. R: The dress that Zed was talking about...

160. J: Yes, so something that she wouldn’t wear, because I mean, I would wear jumpsuits, but they sit like mid-thigh, because I’ve got legs to...my legs aren’t wrinkly yet, so why not? So, for her, it’s uncomfortable, but then she projects it on me. Because ‘you’re a married woman so why are you wearing...’. She wouldn’t wear it, so then she thinks for me that I shouldn’t. So, I am aware of those things, and I’m not irresponsible, and I’m not, and I think it’s something I’ve had all the years. Because, when I was younger, my grandparents...because I was a raver – so my hair colour changed a lot. For them, you know when you’re young, you can wear anything. Because people are not supposed to be imposing anything on you, because you are this young child, men are not supposed to be ogling on you. You can wear what you want, because you’re a child. So, in that, my grandparents had to get that in their head that I am a child, and I can wear short shorts. But, it was a different world that we were in thirty years ago. (Julia reflecting on people generally misunderstanding her).

161. R: And for you Zed? (repeat question (22))

162. Z: I think one of the major differences, is that other couples, they tend to limit themselves. In saying that this perception that you’re married now, so you don’t do that and that, you do this and this. But I’m like, we’re like: do what you want to do. Don’t let other people’s perception limit you on what you can do. Because people get surprised when: you guys went out?! You went to a club or you went dancing? You know it’s like, we want to. But, we go and do it as a couple. You can always do it as a couple. If you have a child, get a babysitter. Go out and have some fun. So, those things. The other couples limit themselves, and which I think is one of the differences that we have. But as mentioned, the religion part, the faith part, is the positive thing, where it’s similar. We know other couples who are going through a rough time. They are close to us. It is really rough. We are doing our best to help where we can...

163. J: But, it’s up to individuals. The thing is, we give, but...Like this one friend I’m close to. She’s so envious of where I’m at, emotionally, and I said: It’s all nice, but I didn’t get here, it wasn’t magic. I went to therapy, it was...I wasn’t one of those where it was uncomfortable. I knew I needed to speak to somebody that wasn’t family and it wasn’t a friend. That’s all I did, I needed to speak to somebody about stuff that was rattling here now....and I can’t push it down anymore. And my grandparents didn’t want me to go to counselling. And I was at the age where I said: I’m sorry, but I’m going. That’s another thing you have to force, is when you go against your parent.

And people find that very hard. If your parent said: I don't think you should, then they listen. So, it's very hard to go against it, because your parent might not speak to you for a year. And they don't want that.

164. Z: Couples do that as well.

165. R: I was thinking the same thing now, Zed. As couples, we can also get stuck in what we're supposed to be doing as a couple within our confines of our traditions, cultures...and we limit as you say, ourselves.

166. Recorders off. Interview closed.

APPENDIX Q: Julia and Zed – Interview 2 Transcript

1. **RESEARCHER (R): (1) I know it's a few months ago already, so memory might not be that great, but tell me a bit about your experience during and after the first interview and the questionnaires you filled out...Any new realisations or thoughts about your relationship/partner...or even conversations started between you as a result of some of what was discussed in the interview/questionnaires?**
2. JULIA (J): There was something, I think...we had different answers on something... (unsure trying to remember) ...There was something he didn't expect, a certain answer, something like that. That he just wanted to clear up. Because I think we assume a lot of things.
3. ZED (Z): I know I raised that, but now I can't remember what the thing was that we spoke about. But uhm, as far as she's concerned, I know it's going to take me a lifetime to completely know her. (laughing)
4. **R: (2) Looking back at your (number of) years together, what are the ways in which your relationship has changed over the years? (3) And in what ways have the changes improved and/or damaged your relationship?**
5. J: I think for me, I'm not as high strung as I used to be. Because, I think I wanted to manage a lot of things. I was always thinking about how things were going...as in like, I was managing the relationship. Control. Is everything ok? Is it exciting enough? Are there any cracks we need to solve? I was very neurotic I think, before. But now, I'm a bit more relaxed. I trust. It's like, almost like I'm not looking for stuff anymore. I'm not looking for things that could go wrong. I'm actually enjoying being with him.
6. **R: And what has been the effects of these changes?**
7. J: The breakup.
8. **R: So, a negative effect...**
9. J: The fall actually. Even though, I thought I was everything that he wanted me to be. Actually, I was. I was what I thought I was. I did put in as much as I thought I did, and it wasn't enough for the bottom to fall out. I actually accepted that. I accepted that it doesn't matter how perfect I am, everything's going to...If something's going to happen, it's going to happen.
10. **R: And since getting back together and doing it differently - what has been the effects?**
11. J: Uhm....I think...he's been...he's felt that I actually, I'm not leading, I think, like I used to. I think I was the one that was leading the story, so now I'm actually letting him be himself. I'm actually letting him be my husband. Someone to lean on. I don't think I did that before.
12. **R: And for you, Zed? (repeat question (2) and (3))**
13. Z: Uhm, as Julia said, I think that break made a switch on things. And I think now, for me, there's two significant things. Which is, she's quieter. She's really much quieter. She was really very bubbly and talking. And action. We're doing this, we're going there now. Which I have to get

used to. I'm not hundred percent used to it still. Because that was 14 years of a person being like that. And now it's a different person. Not different person. In that aspect that she's not loud, she's not as talkative.

14. R: It seems that you're quite unsure of the new status quo...

15. Z: Ja...it's most of the time, it's been like I'm not sure if I'm now right or wrong. Because she like, or sometimes she will take time to answer. Which it was not like that. She used to answer (snapping fingers). She was quick. Now I'm like: 'Am I talking to myself?' And she's like: 'No, I'm thinking about it.' So that one part, has taken getting used to. Then on my side, I had to express myself more. Because, I think I mentioned in our session before, that I used to have all these discussion by myself with her, but by myself.

16. R: Yes, in your own head.

17. Z: Yes. And then by the time she's around, the conversation is over and I've moved on. So now that was a thing that I know. I have to do this. I have to speak up, whether it makes me feel uncomfortable or not. Whether I'm thinking the outcome might be something undesirable. Because, I've almost been like that. I'm like a chess player. I sit and I watch every move. And then I try and play all the scenarios in my head. Like your project plans, you do that as well. So, I kind of did the same thing to my life, and now I'm like: no actually I shouldn't. So...when stuff is...I still think about it sometimes, but I try not to speak in the moment as well, because sometimes when you're upset, you might say things not in the way you want to put it. So, I don't want to be in the position where I have to say: 'Oh no, sorry. I didn't actually mean to say that.' If I've already said something, it can't be taken back. It's already had an effect. So that's the only thing I do: let me just pause and, ok fine.... Sometimes I look at situations and think: Should I speak up about it? Should I not? Is it bothering me enough? When things don't really bother me, it might be minor. But if something keeps bothering me, then I'll talk to you about it. It might be a situation where, I just want you to listen: 'Look, this has happened, I didn't like it. I'm letting you know because it bothered me.' Where previously, I didn't used to do that. I would just deal with it, and move on. So, to me, that has been the major changes from my side of things and how we do things.

18. R: And has these changes been mostly for the positive or has it been difficult or negative?

19. Z: It's not difficult. It's just been uncomfortable, in the sense that it's not how I've been doing things for the past twenty or thirty years of my life. But, I felt this is what I should've done anyway. This is what I should be doing. So, I feel...I'm comfortable with that to a certain degree. Because anytime you step into cold water, it's still cold water. (laughing) But, I feel it should be done. Otherwise we're going to go backwards. So, I'm ok with it.

20. R: (4) How much do you feel you have individually changed, or grown, in your own life and being over these years together? (5) In which ways has your individual experiences/growth/change/lives affected or influenced your relationship?

21. J: Uhm. I think for me...being more confident about the stuff that people don't feel comfortable about me. Or that don't make them feel comfortable. The stuff that I don't agree with them. Those kind of things. I think I've been able to, that's it, I've told them: this is it. I think with friends as well, it's been that way. Where it's either this is it, or make up your mind.
- 22. R: Take it or leave it?**
23. J: Take it or leave it, type of thing. I think I'm in that space where...there's a lot of people who are not in my life, because of certain things, changes. Especially of this big change, where I was alone. I think people also don't...uhh...you also realise why people were in your life. Because, I mean some people were fine with me being married, but they were not fine when I wasn't married. So that was crazy. So ja, I don't feed into people being comfortable anymore. I don't make them comfortable anymore.
- 24. R: So, it's more of a focus on you?**
25. J: Ja!! I think it's...I've got to be me also. I think I've been coddling people a lot. I always try and make people comfortable. But then I just got tired. Like enough. So, for me it's been a big role. It's actually being me. And some people don't like it, because it's obviously bold. It's not necessarily all nice and giggly, and smushy and nice and cuddly. And I say what I want to say now. What I need to say. I'm not actually being rude or anything, I'm actually saying what I should have said. And now I say the stuff, and it's either you're ok with it or not.
- 26. R: And for you, Zed? (repeat question (4) and (5))**
27. Z: Well, it's mostly been...the me that tried to save the world. I want to save the world a lot. Uhm....because I spend a lot of years as a volunteer in Find & Rescue, that is just an example. So, I would go out mostly on almost every call there is. Cause now someone's stuck on the mountain, I must go...
- 28. R: Literally saving people...**
29. Z: Ja, and then that also spilled over to friends and family. When they need things, someone is in need, I must help. My brother's in need, I must help. My sister's in need, I must help. And, for a long while, I didn't see anything wrong with that. And I can still hear Julia saying: 'No, I must be first in your life.' I'm like: 'Some situations require to be second, so just chill...I have to save someone.'
- 30. R: When superman must save the city, the wife has to wait at home...**
31. Z: Even that, friends would sometimes call. I'm on the phone and they want to talk about this or that...and I'm like: 'Eh, wait I'm going to help you. Or I must go out and talk to this guy', like that. So, it went a broad spectrum of that, and for a while I didn't realise the impact that it had. Again, that time we had the break, and I had to play all these things in my head. I realised I was actually wrong. The world will go on. Even if I'm not there. There will be someone to step over. And with my family, then I'm not helping them grow in their own lives, because when something

has to happen, they call me. I must see to it. Then they don't do anything. I must do everything. And I took that to myself, as well. When something has to be done at home: Zed's here.

32. R: What's interesting to me is that you both actually have the same issue...just slightly different presentations of how it plays out...but essentially both of you are struggling with some people pleasing...

33. J: It is. Just slightly differently.

34. R: How has the changes you've both made in this aspect impacted the relationship?

35. Z: It's positive.

36. Z: Because now, we're at the point where she would say: 'You haven't seen your friends, go see them.' But even that, is not an issue for me. Because the other thing that has happened, the friends also, there was a point where you started to see who your real friends are. All this also happened during the break...where people...now you're struggling, I don't want to be with you...type of thing. So, you start to see who your real friends are. So, I'm like ok, I've done my part in your life. If you don't want to talk to me anymore, it's alright. But my family starts here. (gesturing to Julia)

37. R: (6) What are some of the external factors that have impacted your relationship over the last (number of) years together? Both positively and negatively.

38. R: I hear friends is one of those factors. What else?

39. Z: Family.

40. J: Church. Playing an active part in church.

41. R: And which of those influences have been good...or challenging...even difficult?

42. Z: Family. It's been challenging. It's very different, from Julia's family side and my family side. I come from a large family, and she comes from a very small family. And...is estranged the right word?

43. J: Hmmmm.

44. Z: Julia's been estranged from her family, like the mother, and the uncle and the father. Which is different for me. My brothers and sisters were always around us. Before, while we were dating, and after we were married, they were staying with us now and again. They were always around us. And when we used to travel, we would go to my family a lot. And that also had its own negatives. Mostly how my family received Julia. So, it had, especially the sisters and my mother...my mother's still another issue.

45. R: So, it's still not improved....

46. Z: Ja, my mother is my mother. She's even for me, sometimes, it's difficult. Even when we grew up, we still had our issues that come up. But there's been a bit of positive, and there's quite a lot of negative as well, from our side of the family. And now, we're slowly getting to know Julia's side of the family. So, it's almost like we are shifting from one side to the other side. So, I've....for many years I've wanted this to happen. For Julia and her mother to have a reconciliation. And

now it's happening, and I'm happy with that. And we still have these challenges on my side, but I think more and more, I'm pushing my family away. Part of that, is just to let them do their own things. Even though something's happened that involves the whole family, I just keep quiet. Let them decide. I've been doing this for many years. Many years. So, they can actually step up. They are adults. They got families. So, from the family part there's been negatives...some positives...but ja, it's been challenging, though. It's still challenging, getting to know her family. Let's just put it that way. I must still meet the family...

47. J: I must still meet them!

48. R: And you, Julia? (repeat question (6))

49. J: The family part of things...it affects how you deal with things. And, I think that's why I was so...wanted to keep things in control. Because it was my thing. It was my family, so I wanted to make it the way I wanted it to be, and not what I used to have. So, I think that's what I was doing all this time. And then obviously, after I accepted that I can't make my family what I want them to be...that's also in this part where, for the new me, it's all basically about acceptance. Accepting the people for who they are and...loving them for the way they are. I can't make them better.

50. R: Their limitations...

51. J: Ja...so I had to learn that. Uhm...which took years to get there. So that also helped. I think...after all of that...you obviously have to look at things different. I couldn't look at things the same way anymore. So, as much as it still...But I've decided what my triggers are, and stuff like that. So, when they do manipulate, it's nothing for me anymore. You know some people feel it's so cruel, but I know...

52. R: You don't feed into it anymore?

53. J: I don't respond to it anymore. So, I will do my duty, but there are times I do enjoy...and there's good and there's bad. But it's better, much better, than when I didn't have anything...I never used to not have any contact at all. It was crazy. And I mean I was half in tears every time I spoke to my mother. So, it's not like that anymore. Which is nice. I'm not feeling so, uhm, emotionally wrought over it anymore. Which is much better. And the church part, is funny...in which, that's always been the constant. From where I was small to my adulthood. Whatever I've went through, they were there. It's almost like, that's my constant family. They're the family. Instead of....

54. R: The chosen family, not the assigned family.

55. J: Yes!

56. R: (7) And what are some of the events/situations that have occurred within your relationship over the years, that has affected/impacted it – whether positively or negatively. (8) How did you navigate these internal/external influences? Were you able to limit their impact or was it more of an after-the-fact-damage-control approach?

57. J: I don't know. Maybe the infidelity that lead to the breakup. That was huge. Uhm...I think for me, how do you say? You hope, I think, you always hope that you're not going to have to go

through something like that. But it's not like a Cinderella type of thing, you know. But, it's always there. But, when it actually does happen, I was like...I thought I was one of the special ones. you actually felt that...I was hoping that I was one of the special ones. But I wasn't. And that sucked.

58. R: So special in the sense of being spared this kind of thing.

59. J: Yes. That's it. So that sucked.

60. R: And how did you navigate the effect of that on the narrative of your relationship? Did it become part of the story of your relationship?

61. J: Maybe in the beginning. Obviously, when we tried to get back to each other, so to say. Definitely, I then always brought it up. I was angry, so I would bring it up. But obviously, I had to get a grip, because there's always a part where you want the person to suffer. So, that's what I used it for. I used it in the beginning, but after I realised...going through the forgiveness part...fully forgiving not just partly...so then, that had to stop. I had to decide what I wanted. And what I wanted, was a full restart. And you can't bring that stuff with you. So, I made peace with it, and did what I had to do with it. It didn't mean that it just went away when things got better. But it didn't define me anymore. Or the relationship. Because I was happy that I was confident and strong enough not to make it about me. As I told you, I knew what I put in. So, I knew it wasn't because I...and it was good. I liked that about me.

62. R: So, you didn't take it on you in a personal way.

63. J: No. And we had a thorough discussion. I think people always, there's some people who, don't want to know the details. I was one that wanted to know the details. And that is what made me get to where I am now. Get to that point where I'm like: flippen hell, it wasn't about me. It actually wasn't about me. So that was cool. So, I didn't take it on in that way.

64. R: Zed? (repeat question (7) and (8))

65. Z: Uhm...just the one thing that.... Initially, when we were getting back together, my initial concern was that this, the infidelity part, that it doesn't form part of any arguments going forward. That it doesn't become, how do I put it? Doesn't become part of us. Like it's gonna be her and me, and then this story for the rest of our lives. That if I do something wrong, it goes back to this. That if I come home thirty minutes late, it goes back to this story. And she said what she needed to say. And I knew that she had to say it, and that it was going to take a while. It's going to keep coming up, till she's satisfied. And that was it. So, I listened. Cause I thought, she needs to say it, I need to hear it. And I wasn't going to argue with it. And if it's making her feel better, and it's a process for her to get past it, then I'll sit and I'll listen. And I'll take it. And I'm glad that it's not become, it's not forming part of us. You know. Although I must say, a lesson learned. And somehow, I don't know if I can say a good thing came out of it? It feels like a good thing came out of that, where we broke up. Then I saw a lot of other things that came into light. So, I said: ok, that I did wrong. I actually should be here, not here. You know, when you think you are going that way, but you are on this road, the parallel road. But this parallel road, actually, at the end it's

going, it's making a turn. So, I was not where I ought to be. Like all the things that I just mentioned, and how I behaved myself. I thought I'm alright. So, what's your problem? Which had nothing to do with this, but it was the bigger part of our relationship. Communication was not proper. The way that I treated her, most of the time was.... I felt I wanted to play soccer. Leave me alone. I'm always here with you. I want to go play soccer. I'm only gone for five hours, what's your problem? But not paying attention that, she needs that time with me now. Even though it's just sitting watching TV, it's important to her. So that story, created something else. To open my eyes about other things.

66. R: So as much as it was a dark time, it became a growth opportunity.

67. Z: It's also, the thing is like...I think one of the light bulb moments for me, was when she said: 'Me first.' You know. And there were times I was just chasing careers, chasing money. Then also, those things have come to light for me, when I realised what she actually meant by that. Which is actually something I now enjoy doing: putting her first. If you're going to give me a job that pays me a lot of money, but I'm at work 7 days a week, sorry. I need time with my wife. I need time to go to church with her.

68. R: (9) If we imagine that each of you came into this relationship with a suitcase packed full of experiences and lessons from your respective families in which you grew up...what are some of the experiences and lessons you think you brought in with you from your family about intimate relationships? (10) How has these experiences/lessons influenced or impacted your relationship and its dynamics?

69. J: Ag, I think for me it's just not being...Because I have two families, so the thing is, my mother, who I had a temp relationship with, I only saw her now and then. Where I didn't want to become her. She made a relationship with a man more important than us. So, whatever, everything else was sacrificed for that person. So, that was one thing I knew I wasn't going to be. And that I learned when I was ten. When I realised, I didn't want to be that. And then, uhm, lifestyle, surroundings, that type of thing. And I was like: that's not going to be me! I'm not going to walk down that path, thank you very much. So, it's already there. I think I protected myself a lot from that. Because I could pick up...I mean she also had a lot of violence in the relationships. So, for me, any guy that looked like they were going to go in that direction...it was an immediate no for me. I didn't think: 'oh he would be better tomorrow.' Because I knew, he wouldn't. So, I protected myself from a lot of stupid boyfriends because of that. So that, I thought, was a positive. That she actually helped me to find better things, because I saw her in that state. And then I had my grandparents, who were completely different. I mean, they were married until uhm...forty years or something like that, before they passed away. And they showed me the positive of, somewhat. Because I mean, as old school as they were. They had their old school ways, like children not seeing them arguing, and things like that. But I knew it was happening. Which was fine. I was actually...because I think also, with my mother in her volatile situation, verbalising myself wasn't

an issue. I could have an argument, and have it loud, scream or shout or whatever. It's not an issue. But that wasn't for him. He wasn't brought up like that. His parents, everything was in a bubble. And they lived...what do they always call it? That perfect family?

70. R: The Brady Bunch?

71. J: Brady Bunch! Those people, where nothing ever happens. The children are always playing nicely. Nobody fights. So, he was in that. So obviously, I brought that, and obviously it didn't work with him. Because here's this person screaming and shouting, and he's like: 'I don't understand.' So that was one thing I had to learn. It took me a looong time to learn to actually...that I don't have to...I can have an argument, but it doesn't have to be the way I'm having it.

72. R: And in your suitcase, Zed?

73. Z: The Brady Bunch...(laughing) If you had asked me this question maybe ten years ago, I would've answered it differently. Slightly differently, because like she said, we grew up in an environment where you are not allowed to be angry. You can't sulk, you'll get a klap. You cannot fight. You just have to go: 'Ok, take my juice...I'm not going to fight with you, I mustn't fight with you.' But also, you're also going to be in trouble. So, if we argue, we were both in trouble. So, we couldn't really express all our emotions. We had one emotion to express: smile, be happy. And show love, even if it's pretend love, to the other person. End of story. That's how it was. So only when we are older, did we actually start telling each other off. For example, I had an issue with my youngest sister, and it took almost a year, when we grew up, that was unheard of. So only when we were older, did we become ourselves and express ourselves. I know my younger brother and sisters, they are still like that. They don't really say what they want to say, especially towards me. I don't know, they...what is the right English word? They don't really want to speak to me direct, they will beat about the bush when they want to say something. And then I'm like: why do you do that? I've never punched anyone. Why don't you want to talk to me directly when there's an issue? But, I realise it's from how it was. And also, it also took me many years to eventually say and tell them what I felt. Exactly as it was. straight, without sugar coating anything. And they were shocked, because that's not how we were. When we meet, we're a laugh-a-minute family. We hug, we laugh, and then we leave again. But then we don't speak, you know. 'No issues'. If there's issues, you tip toe around it.

74. R: So, this 'perfect family' picture was actually kept in place by not showing or expressing your own feelings. Which probably also left you unsure of how to deal with or resolve conflict?

75. Z: Exactly. Because, I was thinking at that point (with my sister) I was upset, but didn't have the right words to say to her. So, I didn't talk to her. I think also to add, just quickly, the positive was, my parents kept their issues to themselves. So, I don't even remember once seeing them arguing. I remember my dad passed away a day before their 50th anniversary. Not even once. If they had

an argument, they would go to their room and they would sit there and, if they argued, we wouldn't hear it. And also my father was, as much as he was old school, you know in the rural areas, it's men one side, females other side. Even with your wife, you can't really be seen showing affection. My father broke those rules. People were shocked. He would walk from there and call his wife, and they would stand there and hug and kiss, and then the people would be shocked! 'In public?!' And my father would be like: So? She's my wife! And my mother would call my father her boyfriend... 'Your boyfriend?! He's a man, how can you call him your boyfriend?!' So that's how they were. Which was nice. They were not afraid to show affection. So, everyone knew, when they saw my mother and father, they always showed affection. So yes, in hindsight, they could've had their own issues, but we never saw it. We never saw anything.

76. R: And how did this influence your own conflict situations with Julia?

77. Z: I froze. You're shouting. You're loud. I can't talk to you. I didn't know what to do with it. Really, I didn't. But, I didn't run away.

78. R: So, it was clearly very overwhelming for you in that moment, not knowing what to do, but nonetheless you stayed in the moment with her...

79. J: Ja, and I think that was one of the qualities that made me stay. That made me stay with him, regardless of all the stupid things his family exerted on me. That he was brave enough to deal with the stuff that he never knew, because I was coming from a different place.

80. R: (11) In your experience and opinion, what influences the alignment or connection between the two of you as a couple? What makes you feel more or less aligned/connected?

81. Z: Church has a big influence on that. More, should I say, our religious beliefs. That has always been aligned. We are very much different, in a lot of things. A lot of people look for things they have in common. But to me, it's been the other way.

82. R: More opposites attract.

83. Z: Yes, and she's always been herself. She's fully loaded. So as much as years have gone by, there's always some surprises that pop out. There's a lot of things that I would never have learned or come across, if I didn't meet Julia. I know it wasn't love at first sight, but it's been awesome. No, she gave me a hate look! (everyone laughing)

84. R: And you, Julia? (repeat question (11))

85. J: Uhm, I think because of uhm...not having the stable family that I would've liked, he grounded me in that respect. That we can create something, that had potential. I think I saw the potential of his grounding spirit. And I was all over the place. So that helped. I think I always looked for that in people. I didn't know who I was, and also, in the personality levels, I never went for people who were like me. Because then it was too much of a mirror. Like talking to myself. I need someone that's more different to me. A different outlook on life. And definitely the spiritual aspect is a big thing.

86. R: (12) In what ways does your daily interactions (as a couple) and life demands influence your bond as a couple?

87. J: Uhm, I think that is almost like a 360 for us. With work, I'm very much...work almost defined me. And as a control type of character, you're the model colleague. I'm one of those. So then, things happened over the years that don't get you anywhere, and you learn you can actually calm down and chill. I don't have to be...because it stresses you out, and people take advantage. So, I learned I don't need to be the go-to person when the world goes pear shaped. People also need to be there for me. So, then I had to change the way I dealt with it, as well. So, I think I've become more relaxed in that work is not the be all and end all of my life. Which also made me more relaxed at home.

88. R: It almost sounds like a process of prioritising?

89. J: Yeah...

90. R: And for you Zed? (repeat question (12))

91. Z: Well, with the home things, I understood some of her frustrations with me not doing enough. I think we got to a point where, if I remember correctly, we had a conversation about it, and we ended up by saying, if you don't like it fix it, type of thing. Like now, if I see that the kitchen is dirty, I'll fix it, I'll clean it. I mustn't...it's my home too. I mustn't wait on her to do it. If there's washing to be done, I'll do it. Anyway, I grew up like that. I used to do it. Even when I lived by myself. It wasn't a foreign thing. And also then, looking at the frustrations she was having from that...let me relieve that, because I prefer a nicer, quieter, calm space. So, let me make the environment in a way that she will be happy, she will be chilled. She can come home to a clean house when I'm there. Because now, I have more time to do these things, with the way my work is. I can do all these things. I've got time. So, let me do it. She comes home and things are gonna look spick and span. And if I need to cook, I'll cook, and dinner's ready or whatever. To create an environment where she's happy, I'm happy. I like it like that. I like it clean, I like it smelling nice.

92. J: OCD...

93. Z: Let's talk about work! (everyone laughing)

94. Z: Uhm ja, with work wise, I try not to let it influence me. Actually, I had to make two decisions for myself. On my day off, I do not let things stress me out. I do not answer stuff from work, unless I see it's very, very urgent. Something's not going to happen if I don't answer. Then I answer it, but otherwise I don't. My manager can message me in the middle of the night or early morning, I don't answer until it's time for work. And if there's an issue at work, I try my best not to bring it home. So, the other decision I made for myself is that work mustn't stress me. Because when I'm gone, it will still be there. Because if it stresses me, and I come home stressed, then I'm stressing her. So, she must be the only one that stresses me, not work. So, issues happen at work.... I stop the stress. Make my life easy so that I come home a happy person. Yes, we will talk about

it, that I tell her stories about what happened about work. But I'm not offloading on her, I'm just relating stories. It's just a decision not to bring that stuff here.

95. R: (13) If other people were to look at you as a couple, what do you imagine they would see or notice about the connection/alignment/space between you?

96. Z: No, they mustn't look.

(everyone laughing)

97. Z: Unfortunately, they do. It's scary.

98. J: I think people see it as real. Something to look up to.

99. R: So, the relationship is seen as quite positive by other people.

100. Z: It's a lot of people. Why I'm saying it's scary, is the sense that quite a lot of people actually put us here (gesturing with hand a high pedestal).

101. R: On a pedestal?

102. Z: Yes...and we don't want that. We're just being ourselves. And we get comments, people will say: 'You're the first couple we've ever known to look up to.' That kind of thing. People that have known us since 1998, 1999....those years. And we get the sense that, when they talk to us and about us, that they're kind of modelling themselves on the way we are. And that's the scary part.

103. R: Does it cause pressure?

104. Z: Not really, but, it's...it crosses my mind every now and again, when we are doing things. People are always watching. We don't want them to watch. It's our thing. Leave us alone. We can do what we want. If we trip and we fall on the way, you know, we're human. But that's the thing, you hope that people won't then get disappointed, but that's the thing. We're not doing it for them, we're doing it for ourselves. We carry out, and we carry on, the way we want to be. I think we put our happiness first. Before other people. As much as we get those comments, I don't think we...

105. J: Internalise it.

106. Z: Yeah, that's the right word. We look at it as nice comments.

107. J: 'That's very nice', but life happens.

108. Z: A typical example is, we post a picture of ourselves on Facebook. There will be a hundred comments. We're not even doing anything fabulous...

109. R: (14) Is being available and accessible to each other important in your relationship? How do you practically maintain availability and accessibility with one another? (15) How do you practically remain engaged with one another – even when you are not occupying the same space/activity?

110. Z: Constant thought. It's something that I had to do. It's there in my head, like a to do list, if I can put it that way. I have to say: you know, I must check up on her. I must let her know I'm at work now, I arrived safely, I'm on the road, I'm going there... For two reasons, if anything happens to me, if I disappear, she'll know where to look. Where to start. That's one thing. And also, when I

see things, she's the first person to pop into my head. 'Hey Julia, you know what I saw?!' So, it's a constant thing. She's the first person I want to talk to when there's something. Because, I think we've been friends for as long as we've been together. So that element is still there. So, the things you want to share with your friends, it's the same thing I do with her. So, I think to me, that's how we stay relevant. And you can easily take that for granted, that's why, I use the word that it's a thought. I must also do this. Remind myself.

111. R: So, it's not just a habit, but that you do it for a conscious, very particular reason.

112. Z: Yes, and I think she does the same. She will send me a message: 'Hey, I haven't seen you in three hours. How are you? How you holding up?'

113. R: So, it's kind of pulling one another into your life, wherever you are...

114. J: Yes.

115. Z: And we'll have a discussion about dinner...when are we having a date.... I mean those things we can have at home, but we do it during the day...Keep in touch with each other all the time.

116. R: So, there's not compartments in your life where you don't have access to each other?

117. J & Z: No.

118. J: Unless it's asked. Knowing that you're going to be in a space where you can't get to your phone.

119. R: What can you add, Julia? (repeat question (14) And (15))

120. J: No, I think that's something I've always wanted. It wasn't necessarily like that before.

121. R: So that's also one of the pre- and post- breakup differences...

122. J: I used to make fun of him, saying he's got two personas. There's the work persona and the personal. And I said it kind of needs to mesh, even with the spiritual. So, for me, it's like we should be the same person, wherever we are.

123. R: Consistency of self.

124. J: That's it. So, we must be the same wherever. The person at work cannot...there are people who are completely different at work and completely different at home. It freaks me out. Try to merge. And I think that's what he's tried to do. And for me, that's always been something that I've done.

125. R: (16) How important is growth in the relationship? What does "growing" in your relationship mean for you? How do you stimulate or generate growth in your own relationship?

126. R: From the previous interview, I already know that growth is quite important in your relationship. But how do you go about stimulating it?

127. Z: There is a physical plan...which uhm, I drew up. Of things we kind of have to do. Like a monthly and yearly thing. And then every now and then, we'll look at it, and see what we haven't yet done.

128. R: What kind of things go on this list?

129. Z: Places that we need to go and visit. Holidays to Spain or dinner at that place. And then monthly things. We have to have a date, at least one date every month. But so far it's been every week.

And so, then there's things like exercise routines and things that must happen - and how often...and hikes...So those kinds of things. And then if we have places to go overseas, that obviously means money. So, then we need to start planning for this and for that. And this allow also for long-term things. So, it's practically those kinds of things.

130. R: So, it's a combination of things that are growing yourselves as individuals, your relationship, but also the mundane daily things we all have to do.

131. J & Z: Yes.

132. Z: Also, just to add, but this is not on the list. The things we do at church. Our involvement in church. We often discuss how far we want to go with certain things. Because every now and then, people have their own ideas where they want us to be, where they see us at. And they keep hinting, but then we talk and decide whether we want to do those things. So, we have those discussions. And also discussions of her doing her own business...yes, no, how...

133. R: Anything to add, Julia? (repeat question (16))

134. J: Ja...he's very nice with lists and things, but, it's almost spontaneous as well. Because we're involved in stuff. Because even in work, we're always those colleagues that will do stuff (take on occupational roles). So, there's always something. You try to cover your head, but then nobody else puts their hand up. It's almost like we can't run away from it, both of us, and we can't not help. If there's no one else, then we're like, ok. So, there's always spontaneous stuff too. It's become normal. Change and growth. Change and growth for me is like breathing. So, if it's not there, you might be feeling a bit stagnant.

135. R: (17) What are the practical ways in which you remain present or “plugged in” with each other?

136. See answers to questions (14) And (15).

137. R: (18) As couples, we have to find a balance between our life as individuals (incl. goals, dreams, occupations) and our relationship with our partners.... How do you each manage that balance between relationship intimacy and individual independence?

138. J: I don't know. I think, because we've never been competitive with each other. We're more of a team, type of thing. Maybe slightly, every now and again. We have competitive natures, that's the funny part. But never competition with each other. Because I think we both have a sense of self. Where we don't need to intrude, overpower, compete.... I think because we're both comfortable in our own skins. I'm comfortable in my skin, so I don't project anything. So, if he...he's had ideas for businesses before, he needs to do it. I can't hold him back. And for myself, I have something I want to do, and I'm planning it. And he supports it. So, we support each other's...it doesn't matter how crazy it might seem. We let each other be. I think that was also one of the biggest positive things that other couples sometimes feel they can't do. Where they can't be themselves, and have the other person accept them fully for who they are. That's something

that other people see in us and aspire to. That we're fully ourselves and don't hold each other back.

139. R: Zed? (repeat question (18))

140. Z: Uhm, I think we just talk about what we like to do. And we always encourage each other. Like ok, you want to do this, what do you need me to do? And if I say, ok I can do this, then we have a discussion and we see how it might work and how it might feel. We don't stop each other from exploring the things we want. On a scale, one could say that her personality overpowers my personality due to the person she is. But there's never been an issue. I actually enjoy it. She creates a whole lot of spotlight. Wherever I go, people are like: where's Julia?? That to me, I love it. So, we haven't really had a thought about how to balance it.

141. R: (19) How do you generally navigate difference between the two of you – in personality, levels of affection, communication?

142. Z: My turn. Now it's your turn. Well, I think so, with other things, take like music. There's music she likes that I don't really like, music I like she doesn't. But we take turns. Like watching TV. So, with some things, you just take turns. It almost happens automatically. I think this question takes me back to when we started dating...buying music...we would listen to our different CD's in the car.... I think that also goes to a lot of other things we do in our different lives. And when it got to conflict, and how we resolve things, that has been the biggest difference. Again, it goes back to my turn, your turn...

143. R: Julia what would you add? (repeat question (19))

144. J: Uhm, I think we more...try to listen and communicate a bit better. That communication is definitely a lot better this time. We don't feel like...like you...you don't take it personally, anymore. It's about whatever we need to do, it's not about me. We just don't take it personal. Because it makes you more sensitive, and then you get more personal. I used to read between the lines, even when there weren't any lines to read.

145. Z: I think it's also the fact that, communication is very important. You know, I always ask for clarification if I'm not understanding something. Or if she's reacting to something in a different way that I wasn't expecting. I would say: 'Ok, explain to me. Give it to me in detail, step by step', because I'm slow like that sometimes. So, help me out so that I understand you. So that we can be on the same place. Because obviously I'm looking at this and it's black, and you look at it and it's white. So, help me see your side, then I can help you see this side. Then we can move on. Not me enforcing my views or her enforcing hers. That's also kind of helped a lot. The discussion. And like she said, it's getting better. And you can't take it for granted. Because the moment you take it for granted, then we're going to have problems.

146. R: (20) To each individual: What is your deepest wish or desire for your relationship with _____?

147. Z: I think we are, and I believe, we are on a right path now. And the way we are with each other, I don't even have to ask how she feels about me. It's like, when she touches me, and I've told her, when she touches me, I just want to sit still and enjoy it. When she touches my hand, it's that feeling that I'm where I ought to be. I'm at the right place, with the person I'm meant to be with. I'm comfortable here, I'm happy here. I can sit here 24/7. There's no other way to explain it. So, if we can continue to have this, if it grows, if there's a way for this to continue growing. The way we love each other, the way we treat each other. And don't fall into the potholes we fell into before.
148. J: Similar to what he's saying. I don't know where it can go to. The thing is, I never, when we were apart, I never saw a future. I didn't know what my future would look like. And he had an idea of what the future would look like. So, I trusted him to lead me to where he thinks I'm going to be ok. And it's better than I ever thought it was going to be. So, if there's better than this. Then fantastic.
- 149. R: Thank you.**
Recorders off. Interview closed.

APPENDIX R: Susan and Theo – Interview 1 Transcript

1. **RESEARCHER (R): (1) How would you describe your relationship/bond with your partner?**
2. SUSAN (S): I think we have a very close bond. We've been together forever, and I mean, I think we work together as best friends. We confide in each other, we discuss everything. Share everything pretty much, as far as I know, so ja, we're good.
3. THEO (T): Uhm...comfortable. We are together almost twenty-four seven. I work from home. Susan also does her own business. And there's a lot at home, so we are together a lot. We live in a little granny flat, which is comfortable, and tight. Ja, we share everything, we are pretty open with each other and very close.
4. **R: A close companion bond...**
5. T: Yes.
6. **R: What's the downside to spending so much time together? Is there a downside? Where does it get tough at times?**
7. T: You can't run away and hide in a spare bedroom. (laughing) So ja, with being so close, you might find that small things build up and irritate you. Whereas if you were spending hours away, going to an office and working from an office, you can get away from it. Not it, get away from your partner. Whereas here, we are...we have to live with each other, so...
8. S: And I think also, because we often work together – well not together, but in the same space – you know the frustrations of work sometimes can also have an impact on private relationship roles.
9. **R: (2) How do you create intimacy (closeness) in your relationship with your partner?**
10. S: Hmm....
11. T: You can answer that one!
12. S: (laughing) For me, the time we feel closest, is when we're going away on holiday, for example, in the bushveld, and that sort of thing. Because we have that connection, uhm....and it's something we share, and we have shared...and we studied together in nature conservation, worked together in nature conservation. So, for me, that is where I often feel closest to Theo. And like this weekend (while Theo was away for work), for example, we met up and we had a little impromptu date, because he was away and I went to meet up with him. Like that, we don't do it very often, but we do. I feel it's a very nice way of building intimacy and a bit of romance, and what not.
13. **R: Anything to add Theo?**
14. T: It's also nice to get away, because we live very close to family. The granny flat is on Susan's mother's property. So, she's here. My mother lives across the road, so she's there. Susan's sister is next to my mother's place. So...We dominate church street in our town, ja. (laughing) So to

get away and not worry about one of the mother's or mother in law walking in, and all that kind of stuff, does a good thing.

15. R: (3) What makes you believe that your partner is committed to you?

16. S: I have to think, we've been together for so long and it's just, we don't have any doubts or worries or concerns. Well I don't, certainly, about that sort of thing.

17. T: And I think we're so close, it would be very difficult to keep a secret. Ja, like I say, we're together twenty-four seven so if Susan is having an affair, she's doing a shit good job at keeping it a secret, hey! (laughing)

18. R: (4) What are the ways in which you express/demonstrate your love and affection for your partner?

19. S: I think I do it just by, you know, taking care of little things. Like making sure Theo has supplements, and cooking nice healthy meals, and making sure that I buy him things that he...especially in terms of health focus and that. Just making sure that he's on track with that sort of thing. Encouraging him to take breaks from the computer, just look after himself, a lot. Maybe that's my mothering instinct, but...(laughing).

20. R: And for you Theo? (repeat question (4))

21. T: Uhm...we do say we love each other. We phone each other. We WhatsApp each other. Occasionally, when I remember, I buy her flowers. Sometimes.... (laughing). Uhm, ja, and we just do things together and, help each other out, and things like that. So, a lot of it is hidden love, but it's still there.

22. R: (5) What contributes to the quality or nature of your relationship?

23. T: Hmmm...

24. S: Interesting question...uhm....

25. T: Hmmm

26. S: I don't know, I just see again that closeness, that comfortableness. You can talk about anything, you can trust the person to, you know, be considerate of you...uhm...

27. T: Security. Knowing that Susan is here for me, and I'm here for her...ja.

28. S: Ja. We do share a lot of common interests, you know, and like that, so...ja.

29. R: (6) In what ways does your partner meet your needs?

30. T: Uhm...I really enjoy that Susan does, like she mentioned, she does do the cooking. Most of the cooking. And small things like getting my supplements ready, and I don't have to worry about small little stuff. Because she's got her own business, her times are more flexible, whereas I'm away this time of the year and I don't need to worry about those kinds of things. So that I really appreciate, uhm...ja.

31. S: Ja, I think from my side it's...Theo's always been very supportive. I'm a little bit of a study-holic, and I always got new ideas and plans, projects and whatever. And he's generally very supportive of all of that. Uhm, and he does...he's not the kind of guy that will just sit around and

do absolutely nothing. If he's home, he will help with stuff, and that sort of thing. So, he supports me in that sense. And emotionally it's, we share everything. So, we are each other's confidants. And we do discuss whatever is on our minds, generally.

32. R: (7) What is it that you enjoy or value about your partner's company?

33. S: I just think, it's again that familiarity.

34. T: Hmmm.

35. S: That, you know, we just have so much in common, we just...you can be in each other's company without having to discuss anything. Or you can discuss whatever is on your mind, you can...I don't know, share and laugh about family, about stuff that's going on around you, whatever. It's just that familiarity, I guess, more than anything.

36. T: Hmmm. There's not much I do with guy friends, that I don't do with Susan. We have a couple of drinks and get drunk every now and again. We'll klap a couple of cook-ins every now and again, and all that. Yes, it's nice to get out with guys and do the whole 'man thing'. But, ja...if we go somewhere we do stuff together. We go birding or driving around or whatever the case is. We've got those common interests, so it's nice.

37. R: (8) How do you know what your partner's needs are in different situations?

38. S: That's something I think we might have lost a little bit of touch with. And I do think that this book that we are reading at the moment, 'Hold Me Tight'...that's talking very much about lost connection, and being stuck in ruts of arguments, and things like that. And I think that's something we're starting to explore again. And also learning about our own needs, more than anything else, so that we are able to express that to our partner. Which I think we haven't really done, in a very deep way, for a long time. And I think maybe that's where we're going wrong essentially... That definitely seems to be resonating with us both as we read through the book.

39. T: Hmmm.

40. R: Anything you would add, Theo? (repeat question (8))

41. T: Ja...uhm...not really. It's just carrying on with what Susan said. We both need to work on when to leave the other person alone. So when to back off, and when to walk away and...like work is stressful and it's getting to me, and I'm trying to focus on whatever the task is, but then she'll be wanting to talk about her next study project, and it's just: 'Shut up and leave me alone' kind of thing, and that escalates into something nasty. But...uhm...ja, what was the question again?

42. R: repeating question (8)

43. T: Uhm, ja...I can read her a bit better lately. Uhm...being a male, when she needs a hug and shit like that, I'm not really that good at, and I get reprimanded for that...(laughing), so I am working on that side...my feminine side...and that has helped a lot.

44. R: (9) Do you exclusively schedule quality time together as a couple, or is your time together part of your usual daily activities & tasks?

45. S: Hmm, I don't think we make enough time to...
46. T: Ja, I think we don't.
47. S: And we also, you know....at the end of the day you're tired. Just have supper in front of a movie, whatever. And we've said, so many times, we shouldn't do that every night, we should you know, make that a movie night. I think once a week or twice a week, or so. But it becomes your routine. And it becomes...ja. Uhm, so ja we probably don't make enough time for that sort of thing.
48. T: Agreed.
- 49. R: (10) Is the time spend together shared with pets/TV/cell phones or other demands?**
50. T: Yes.
(Both participants nodding in agreement.)
- 51. R: And has that been something that you guys have identified for yourself as a problem?**
52. S: I wouldn't say it's a big thing...
53. T: No, I don't think so.
54. S: But I'm aware that it might ease whatever friction there is, if we were to do that.
55. T: We both enjoy watching movies. So, it just comes, sit down and eat: 'Do you want to watch a movie?' 'Yes.' Ok, we watch a movie, kind of thing. Whereas the one night, we did a candlelit dinner, rather than watch a movie. We sat down and did a candlelit dinner, which was nice. It was different. But ja, routine is every night movie and chill.
56. S: But I think it's also that we're not like people who don't see much of each other during the day, then they need to catch up. We kind of keep on top of each other's day as we go along. So, it's not like we're not having that connection or that. But I guess, focused romance time is probably more what's missing than anything else.
- 57. R: (11) What is your communication like? What is good/bad about it?**
58. S: I think the fact that we're very honest and open with each other, is brilliant. I do feel that sometimes, ja, I know myself, I haven't always been very aware of my own emotions. And I've become much more in touch with it now. So, I've never really understood issues, in my own inability to express how I'm feeling. And I tend to be very quick to get angry or to shout or to get my hackles up when things aren't going quite my way. Sometimes I don't even see it coming, or know what it's about – which is something I'm working on. And it's definitely making it easier to resolve issues or arguments, before they become escalated. That helps a lot. But I think it's just learning to understand your own issues so that you can discuss things in a way that makes sense to everybody involved. Rather than just going off the handle, because somebody's upset you, but you don't even know why. And that sort of thing.
- 59. R: Theo what would you add regarding communication?**
60. T: I'm pretty open and discuss things, I think. My problem would be to discuss it at the right time. If Susan's not in that mood, then I shouldn't be talking about my mother and her issues and

lack of money, and things like that. Whereas I just blurt it out, and talk about my emotions and that sort of thing. I'm not shy about talking. I've got certain secrets, but ja, I'm pretty open with discussing things. So, a lot of times, Susan is busy elsewhere, mentally or whatever, and then I will start discussing a topic. Where I should've been more sensitive about that topic, and not done it. But otherwise we, ja...we keep up with day to day stuff. If I'm away, we phone each other and WhatsApp each other...and communication is flowing freely.

61. R: And I hear you mention, Susan, regarding working on your own issues as a way of making the relationship dynamics flow better...has that been an important task for both of you in your relationship?

62. S: Uhm, I think for me it's quite...it's relatively recent. I'd say in the last, sort of max five years. That I'm definitely more in the line of spiritual growth, and things like that, than I ever used to be. So, as part of my studies, but also just personal growth...I've learned a lot more, and so for me it's quite a relatively recent thing. And it's actually been quite an eye opener, which is good. I don't know if it's so much for Theo, but the thing is that Theo has got a lot of hard past experiences. You know, he had a difficult childhood. The fact that he's had lots of negative experiences in the military, and things like that, that. I think, subconsciously, definitely had an impact on him. And I don't know if he's very good at handling things, and not letting things get to him, but I don't know if he's necessarily dealt with everything as well as he should have. Or if he's just sort of subdued it. So that maybe more of an issue than either of us realises. I don't know.

63. R: Anything you would add, Theo?

64. T: No, we've discussed this before, and there's nothing new, so...no comment on that. She hit the nail on the head.

65. R: (12) How do you handle conflict in your relationship?

66. S: Recently not that well. Although we're getting better, I think...

67. T: Sometimes...sometimes things get thrown...

(participants giggling)

68. S: Once or twice...not generally.

69. T: (laughing) No, it's not every time.

70. S: As I say, I tend to get very...(laughing)...quite aggro...and fly off the handle. Especially, and I do think hormones, I'm allowed to blame them every now and then...

71. T: You blame them all the time!

(everyone laughing)

72. S: But again...

73. T: It's like the third person in the house: it's either Theo or The Hormone!

(everyone laughing)

74. S: So ja, I think that tends to be my worst...Theo will be more of a keep-quiet-walk-away-from-the-situation-and-mull-over-it, which annoys me more. Because I want to resolve the issue now. And sometimes, he was talking about not knowing when to give me a hug, sometimes I just need a hug. And then he tends to sort of duck and dive and keep a low profile, because he doesn't want to ruffle my feathers. And actually that makes it worse. So...ja, that's the kind of thing we need to understand about ourselves, and about how you personally handle conflict, and how we should respond to each other in a situation like that. So, we don't make things worse for the person, and it then just causes conflict between us, sort of thing. So yes, I think we definitely need to work a lot more on that...but we have started, as I say. And that book is definitely helping us a lot, as well. It's giving us a lot of insight into ourselves.
75. **R: Anything you can add regarding conflict, Theo?**
76. T: Ja. When Susan starts getting a bit loud, and starts really getting aggressive towards the subject or a topic, I do, I would rather walk away from it. I was brought up in a household where fighting and shouting and screaming and swearing was normal, so I am against that kind of thing. Uhm, and yes, walking away from it does aggravate her, it just makes her all that more aggressive, and she'll just let go, kind of thing. And the more I say: 'Let's just take a breath and walk away from the situation', the more it pisses her off. And then ja, it escalates, so. It seems we've got two different management styles, and they're conflicting. And I think that might be a big thing that we need to work on. On how to handle that.
77. **R: And I hear you talking about the family legacy of conflict management...**
78. T: Yes, and what I know from Susan's family is, there weren't emotions discussed. Susan's father was also a warrant officer in the navy, and it was his way or no way, and that sort of thing. And it wasn't, what I experienced, there wasn't a very open love kind of relationship. It was all hidden love. And yes, I'm sure he loved them and all the rest, but it wasn't expressed. So ja, we've got those two different histories that are colliding. [Theo himself was warrant officer in the military for 13 years, as well.]
79. **R: (13) When you are experiencing a disagreement, or when your partner has done something deemed 'wrong', what does your internal sense-making/reaction look like? What do you tell yourself about it/their intentions etc.?**
80. **R: Susan you're shaking your head...**
81. S: No, that's my biggest thing. I'm not aware of that sort of thing. And I never have been very conscious of that sort of thing, at all. So, I need to try and understand what is going on emotionally when these things are happening.
82. **R: So, for you, you just react in the moment, and only afterwards are you aware of some internal processing?**
83. S: That's it.
84. **R: And for you, Theo? (repeat question (13))**

85. T: No...I'm just confused and wants to go to my workshop (laughing). To my cave. Get away from it. Hide in the cave. Close the garage door (laughing). Many men have tried to understand women, we've given up. They write books, but it doesn't help. (laughing) Uhm...but from my side, if I'm aggressive towards Susan, no...I don't really think about it and analyse it. It's just: 'She's pissing me off. Get over it', kind of thing.
- 86. R: (14) How do you handle/respond to strong emotions in yourself and your partner?**
87. S: Well I'm trying not to overreact, like I usually do. And what I tend to find helps me a lot is writing. If Theo upset me, I will go and write him a letter. Or I'll write a poem, or journal. Or I'll do something like that, which helps me to understand what I'm feeling, and it also helps me to express to him what I'm feeling. Because I don't express myself very well in a heated moment, at all. But I can express myself very well through writing.
- 88. R: And for yourself, Theo? (repeat question (14))**
89. T: I've got a whole side table full of papers that Susan's written...
(Susan laughing)
90. T: It's like a whole catalogue of books...(laughing). Where we differ as well: I would rather talk about it. Susan doesn't talk about it, and she expresses it very well in writing. But then I just want to sit and let's get this over with, let's talk about it, open up, get it out the way. Whereas she would then eventually walk away in tears crying, and all that kind of stuff. Write a note. And there it is all there on a piece of paper.
- 91. R: And when you receive a letter from her, Theo, what is the follow up to that? Would you just read it or would there be a follow up conversation?**
92. T: Uhm, usually we would discuss it. A few of them we haven't agreed on...they were set issues that we both didn't agree on, and then it just gets filed. But ja, most of the time we do discuss it...and not necessarily agree, but express how we feel.
- 93. R: So, finding resolution, even though that might not mean being in agreement? Or is it not resolution either?**
94. T: Sometimes...ja...I feel Susan...I don't know, our relationship, I don't know how to express this. We have a good relationship, and it goes well for days on end. And then it will sort of build-up, and peak, and then it doesn't get resolved. And then the next day Susan's fine, and we're back to normal. So, we start from the ground level again on this happy plane...and it goes, and then it peaks again, and then we fight. And we don't talk for two days, and then smack bam, we're on happy level again. And we sort of have this thing, but we always end up on that happy level. But certain things, certain items – maybe key items - are not getting resolved. So, the general day to day things, are getting resolved. But I feel there's something bigger that's just not being resolved...not getting an answer...
- 95. R: And can you pinpoint what that something bigger is – you don't necessarily have to share it with me – I'm just wondering if you can pinpoint what it is?**

96. S: We haven't, up until now. Personally, I feel this book that we're reading that's pointing out these patterns and raw spots and stuff like that, is shedding a lot of light on the underlying stuff. So, I mean the arguments go around the same silly things like, I don't know, we don't have enough sex, for example, at one point was a big issue. And almost on that, you know, it was the loss of connection, there was obviously an issue that was playing a role in not making us feel close enough so that I didn't want to have sex, because I wasn't feeling the love, so to speak. Which makes perfect sense for me now, but at the time when we had the arguments, I couldn't understand, or I didn't understand what the problem was...you, know, interfering with that. So, now this is starting to make me more aware, and I think Theo is finding the same. And I'm trusting that this process that we're working through, is going to help us uncover the real issues. This other stuff is just, you know, it's just something to argue about. But it's not really the issue.
- 97. R: (15) How do you know when your partner is happy/sad/angry...can you identify their feelings?**
98. S: Hmmm, I don't know....
99. T: No, women have a short fuse, so...(laughing)
100. S: I think the obvious ones, you know. Like when he's feeling frustrated, and whatever with work, and he's just in a foul mood or whatever, as a result. I mean those are pretty easy to pick up on. But...ja, I don't know. Theo is a very cool, calm, collected kind of character, so...it's not very easy to read him emotionally, I have to say.
- 101. R: And under that calm, controlled exterior...can you read into the micro-expressions that give you insight into what is going on internally for Theo? Or is he, even after all these years, quite a poker face to you?**
102. S: It's a good question. Uhm...I think there's times I can probably read him better, but I would say generally, not actually. Because he's so...disguised, and because I'm so...cold, to emotional...ja, picking up on emotions. I think between the two of them, it kind of makes it almost impossible. So maybe I'll get better at it, now that I'm learning to explore and express emotions better. And hopefully, he'll start to be a little bit more expressive, to make it bit easier (laughing). But ja, it's not an easy one.
- 103. R: And for you, Theo? (repeat question (15))**
104. T: Well, when things start getting thrown around, then I realise she's pissed off, you know. (giggling)
105. S: But, I don't always do...(laughing)
106. T: Uhm, no...not really. I think the biggest, one of the challenges is, uhm, it flares. Susan will flare into and argument kind of thing. So, we'll be chatting along, and I'll obviously rub a raw spot or mention a raw spot, and all of a sudden she goes from this level to...drowned, kind of thing. So yes, she's also difficult to read. Minor things, not a problem if she's a bit upset, but, being a male, I don't know when she just wants the hug and when she needs resolution kind of

thing. So, it is a bit tricky. And that might be why she flares is, because I don't pick up on those small little signs leading up to the big flare.

107. R: (16) When reacting to one another, do you feel as if you respond only to what the other person has explicitly said or done, or also to what is implied in their behaviour/words?

108. S: I think...hmmm, ja...not responding very well to the subtext. I don't think we, again, picking up as well, or I'm not picking up as well as I could be. And I think that relates to the previous question as well, so same sort of...ja.

109. T: Hmmm.

110. S: I think Theo's also a very open and kind of direct character, so whatever he's meaning, he's saying, generally. So, I don't think there's usually much hidden stuff, if it makes sense. And I pretty much feel I'm the same, unless I'm saying stuff without being aware of what's going on emotionally, sometimes. I don't think I kind of say stuff with a different meaning behind it. Intentionally anyway.

111. R: Theo on your side? (repeat question (16))

112. T: Hmmm...ja...What Susan said. (laughing)

113. S: I actually think Theo is a little bit more intuitive than I am. Generally. Sometimes he surprises me with some of his comments about, you know, what I've said, or whatever, and what he's picking up on. So, I think he's more intuitive than he realises. But not necessarily always. Sometimes he does miss the cues, and that's probably when it causes me to get upset. Because I've realised, I've got a bit of an issue with abandonment. And I've started to put together a pattern around that. And so, whenever he's not hearing me, or he's not responding to me when I really need him to, I do, I think I feel very...I'm almost ready to cry right now just saying that. I feel like I'm abandoned, and I'm not getting the support that I need. And I think that's, more than anything, what causes me to flare. It's because I'm reaching, and I'm reaching, and I'm reaching...and he's not hearing me. And he's not responding to me, as I need him to. And then I just lose it.

114. T: And my argument would be: why don't you just tell me? I'm a male...I didn't pick up on all those subtle little hints, and all that kind of stuff. Just tell me, and I'll react in a positive kind of way...so...

115. R: And I would imagine what would then happen on your side Susan, is this internal feeling or belief that: well, if you really loved me...if you really knew me...I wouldn't have to explain to you or give you the instructions....? Which granted might not be the right approach, but still...that might be the dance that starts to happen...

(both participants laughing)

116. S: Ja, for sure.

117. T: Yes. That's one of the dances we're stuck in.

118. R: (17) Do you ever think about the internal world (thoughts/feelings/experiences) of your partner? Imagine what is going on in their head?

119. T: No...no...I don't think so.

120. S: No...I can't say I have, either.

121. T: No, (laughing) I've never tried to breach that world.

122. R: So, I then imagine you wouldn't ever... (18) Do you ever place yourself in your partner's shoes, so to speak, thinking about what their experience of a joined situation might be?

123. S: No, not really.

124. T: No...Susan's got enough shit going on in her head to worry about my head, as well.

(everyone laughing)

125. R: (19) If so, does it change how you think/feel about or react to them?

Not applicable – see previous two questions.

126. R: (20) In what ways does your partner express their emotional availability to you when you are feeling emotionally distressed?

127. S: Uh...hmmm...sjo...I think when Theo does pick up that I'm a little bit upset, and he's in a frame of mind where he can actually focus on that, and he's not preoccupied with work, and that sort of thing... As I say, he can be quite intuitive sometimes. He can pick up on that, and he will come and give me a hug or whatever. But, it's kind of like, that's enough, you know. He's maybe too hesitant to explore further, I would say...uhm...ja...so...that's what I would say.

128. R: And for you, Theo? (repeat question (20))

129. T: Yes, she is emotionally available to me. If I tell her, and express it, she's there for me. She'll listen or support me or, whatever. So ja, I think she's very good with that.

130. R: (21) Do you ever express your needs for closeness to your partner? And if so, how do you experience their response?

131. S: No, I've never really done that much. As I've said, I'm not very in touch with emotions, and my family's never been emotionally expressive. So, for me, it's been quite a challenge. And actually, that last interview we did have with a psychologist, when she asked us to come into each other's space...I was surprised at how uncomfortable I felt with that. Even as close as I am to Theo. So, there's obviously some sort of...ja...

132. T: The exercise was sitting opposite each other, closer than like 30 cm, and...Susan had to pull out.

133. R: Just sitting looking into each other's eyes...

134. T: Ja, just looking, that's it. And Susan had to move back for a while.

135. S: So that was very interesting. Uhm...there's definitely something there. But as I say...with learning to...I mean...we've had a couple of discussions recently. Based on the book. These little exercises you do, and whatever, and as I explore and understand more about myself, I'm feeling easier at opening up and expressing it, because now I know what I'm dealing with. So, I wouldn't

say it's always one hundred percent comfortable. Not that I'm not comfortable with Theo, it's more that I'm not comfortable with what I'm learning about myself. But I'm happy to share that with him, because I understand that's gonna help me and it's gonna help us. So...ja. And he's very receptive when I do that, so that makes it a little easier to...endure (laughing).

136. R: And for you, Theo? (repeat question (21))

137. T: Uhm...I think so. I didn't have the greatest of childhoods so, I thrive on being loved, and touched, and sex, and all that kind of stuff. The closer Susan...and hugging me...Susan can come up and give me a random hug, and that to me, I thrive on that kind of stuff. So, yes, when she is distant, and one of the challenges we have had is: my mother is now dependent on me. She's divorced long time ago, and now, financially, she's living off us, kind of thing. Where Susan, and because we've always been in the bush and away from family, we've always lived as far as possible away from family. Now we're all in the same street, kind of thing. And I've got my mother, which is dependent on me, and Susan not being that big into family. It's been, it was quite a bit of a challenge. So now I've got to look after my mother and still be loving and caring and, so that was a big issue in our relationship. But yes, I might even be at the point of neediness for Susan's love and attention, and that sort of thing. So, when we are fighting, and we don't talk for two days, that hurts. It really hits home.

138. R: (22) In what ways do you think your relationship is similar, and different, respectively to that of other couples?

139. T: No. We're unique. Special. There's no one like us. (Theo and Susan laughing) No, all our friends have followed the normal life: have kids, bought a house, settled down, in a rut. And we've always done: lived in the bush in the farthest of places, and been together. And all that kind of stuff. So, can't really compare to any of our friends, I don't think...are anywhere near what our lifestyle is...

140. S: Ja, I also think...unique does definitely come to mind with us. And you know, obviously it's just our perception, which is great...uhm, ja, I think we've got a very close and interesting and, unconventional in a lot of ways, relationship. We didn't get married in the conventional way, we eloped. So, we've done everything differently, and actually, we're quite proud of that. (laughing)

141. R: It's been a badge of honour for you. Which I suppose makes me wonder even more: how have you navigated this shift to a situation that's a lot more conventional than what you are used to? Bringing more conventional responsibilities with it...How has it impacted your unique unit?

142. S: Ja, I think it has had an impact on us. I really do. Because it, in fact, since we came back from the bushveld, and came closer to family, I think our problems have escalated. And that was about, what? Six, seven years ago now. So, I definitely think that had an impact. It kind of drove a wedge into our little unique unit that were just the two of us, sort of thing. So, which is maybe a good thing, because it's brought to light stuff that we needed to be aware of. You know, about

ourselves and whatever, so...uhm, but I think our next step is, we want to take early retirement and go buy a skipper. And kind of just live on holiday around the bushveld. So, we're kind of heading off again, is our intention. I don't know if that's an escape, or if we want to get back onto that niche, and that's what we enjoy and what we love, and that's what we want to be doing. Uhm, but yeah certainly, there's been some effect.

143. R: Anything you would add there, Theo, to what Susan is saying?

144. T: No...I think Susan hit it on the head. She answered that pretty well. I agree with her.

145. R: Ok, then.

Recorders off. Interview closed.

APPENDIX S: Susan and Theo – Interview 2 Transcript

1. **RESEARCHER (R): (1) I know it's a few months ago already, so memory might not be that great, but tell me a bit about your experience during and after the first interview and the questionnaires you filled out...Any new realisations or thoughts about your relationship/partner...or even conversations started between you as a result of some of what was discussed in the interview/questionnaires?**
2. SUSAN (S): Hmm...sjo nothing specific. We obviously did chat a bit about the interview, but I don't remember there being anything hectically significant.
3. THEO (T): Nothing too serious. Sjo, it was a long time ago. I just remember, Susan saying one thing that I had said, that she didn't know that about me. Which was good. Because, we're pretty open, and speak to each other about anything and everything. Can't remember what the thing was, though.
4. S: It is interesting. It rings a vague bell. It might come to me just now, then I'll shout it out.
5. **R: (2) Looking back at your (number of) years together, what are the ways in which your relationship has changed over the years? (3) And in what ways have the changes improved and/or damaged your relationship?**
6. S: Hmmm. (pausing and considering question)
7. T: I think, after a long time like that, you get used to each other. And you're sort of just, there. Not that we don't love each other and show appreciation for each other, but you just take it for granted that the next morning, Susan will be there. And she'll make me coffee, and when I get home from work, supper will be there. And...ja...I think in our young days, you showed your appreciation in different ways. Now you just sort of, it's there. You say thank you, but it's a thank you that just is...
8. S: Habit.
9. T: Habit. Or routine. Rather than actually meaning it, and things like that. So...ja. We do realise that. And I do buy her flowers every now and again, just to bring back those sort of things. But, we should actually be doing those in any case. Not just give it on special occasions.
10. **R: So, in other words, what I'm hearing is almost a complacency that comes with it in our relationship...and maybe not always the best of changes to our relationship...something that requires more work, is what I'm hearing?**
11. T: Yes.
12. S: Ja. I agree with that.
13. **R: And Susan from your side? (repeat question (2))**
14. S: I would say exactly that. I agree completely.
15. **R: (laughing) And you two are always very much in sync...I remember that from your last interview. When the one answers the other often just goes: 'Ditto!'**

(Susan & Theo laughing) Yes.

16. R: (4) How much do you feel you have individually changed or grown in your own life and being over these years together?

17. S: Hmm, ja. I think, in myself, I've become less uhm...I'm still very focused on Theo's needs and his wants, and whatever, but I've also realised that sometimes I have to accept that his way of doing things, or thinking, or being is not necessarily in line with me. And I need to actually just be an individual in that, and accept our differences. You know, we are not the same person. So, I think I've come to realise that. Uhm...and I mean I've had my own personal spiritual growth and all that, which I think has contributed largely to the whole perspective and thinking about things along that line.

18. R: And for you Theo? (repeat question (4))

19. T: Ditto!

(everyone laughing)

20. R: No, you don't get away that easily! (laughing)

21. T: Uhm, very, very similar to what Susan has said. I have also, in the last couple of years and that, sort of gone into my feminine side and actually looked at what Susan's needs are, and that sort of thing. From a woman's perspective. Cause I'm the male hunter, kind of thing, and all that kind of stuff. But yes, I have become more sensitive towards women, ladies, Susan, and my sensitive side. It might be an age thing, but that's what's happened over the last couple of years.

22. R: (5) In which ways has your individual experiences/growth/change/lives affected or influenced your relationship?

23. T: From my side, it's definitely gone with the relationship growth. Because Susan will do something, or say something, and my automatic male response is: 'Whatever.' And then I think about it, and I'm like: 'No, I can't actually do that. Because of this, or whatever.' So, I think it has had a positive effect on me.

24. R: Susan something you want to add? (repeat question (5))

25. S: Uhm, I think it's a bit of both, really. I've probably become a little bit selfish, because I'm so focused on my individual growth. But, I've also realised that it's made me more uhm, accepting and tolerant and compassionate, towards people in general. Which would obviously then include my husband. So, there's a bit of a yin yang story going on there. But overall, you know, it's been more positive. I've become more aware of my imbalances, and my faults and my hang-ups, and all that. Which helps me to keep the focus on me, instead of putting it on him every time something goes wrong. It's not about him, it's about me going: 'Ok, I have to deal with this myself.' So yes, it's been more positive.

26. R: (6) What are some of the external factors that have impacted your relationship over the last (number of) years together? Both positively and negatively.

27. S: Sure. Again, last time I think we mentioned that initially, when we had started having issues, it was when we had moved close to family. And that had quite an impact on us. And I think, we've both actually become more tolerant and less stressed out about that, you know. We don't allow it to influence us to the degree that it did. We certainly don't seem to be fighting about family as much, anymore. So that certainly seems to have improved. Uhm, and I think from my side - because I've become more tolerant and understanding of others - it makes it more acceptable to be close to family, without it having a negative impact on me or us.
- 28. R: Theo from you? (repeat question (6))**
29. T: Family was a big thing. I think work, as well. Uhm, we work from home, so we sit next to each other a lot of the time, and that sort of thing. And I have gotten stuck into a mail, or one thing. I get focused, and then we get these questions about supper and feeding the dogs, household crap (laughing), that gets in my way. So, I would lose my cool, and that. So yes, I've realised that, and it had been an issue. And now, I realise that I must take a deep breath or Susan must just put her hand up and wait for the right moment to get her question in, and that sort of thing.
- 30. R: So, it's almost a bit of communication skills that helps you guys navigate that?**
31. T: Yes, I agree.
- 32. R: (7) And has there been any events/situations that have occurred within your relationship over the years that has affected/impacted it – whether positively or negatively.**
33. S: No.
34. T: No.
- 35. R: Sometimes we see these kinds of internal narratives show up in our conflict situations...where they kind of repeat themselves or get mentioned. So, I take it there's no events that repetitively make their way into your relationship story, then?**
36. S: I don't think there's something specific. But for me, there's definitely still that element of abandonment that I'm dealing with, that still, every now and then, rears its head. Like when Theo ignores me, for example, or something like that. Then I get very quickly irritated. So, there's that little elements going on. But I think that's about all.
- 37. R: Theo nothing for you to add?**
38. T: I don't think so.
- 39. R: (8) How did you navigate these internal/external influences? Were you able to limit their impact or was it more of an after-the-fact-damage-control approach?**
- See answers to above questions.
- 40. R: (9) If we imagine that each of you came into this relationship with a suitcase, packed full of experiences and lessons from your respective families in which you grew up...what are some of the experiences and lessons you think you brought in with you from your family about intimate relationships? (10) How has these experiences/lessons influenced or impacted your relationship and its dynamics?**

41. S: Hmm. Sjo. I think, what comes to mind for me, is control issues. Controlling my environment, my world. Everything should fit into place, everybody should react as I want them to. That's definitely something I inherited from my dad. Uhm, the abandonment issues are definitely stemming from childhood, I'm sure. I can't identify the specific factors, but I can just remember my dad was away a lot, and it used to affect me a lot. So obviously, that had an impact. Uhm, so, ja I'm not too sure how that would affect our dynamic, per se. Perhaps when I'm being ignored, or not being responded to, or you know. When my needs aren't met. That kind of thing.
- 42. R: Theo for you, in your suitcase?**
43. T: Uhm...sjo...I don't know. I had quite violent parents, so that affects us when Susan wants to argue. Not that we want to argue, but when there's conflict, I tend to withdraw from it, which then obviously aggravates Susan, because she doesn't want withdrawal, she wants answers now. But I'll rather wait until she's calmed down, and we can talk about it. Uhm, but that's obviously conflicting. We've got two different personalities here, that conflict. And that is a bit of an issue that we've identified.
- 44. R: (11) In your experience and opinion, what influences the alignment or connection between the two of you as a couple? What makes you feel more or less aligned/connected?**
45. S: Uhm. I still think being out in nature is one of our big things. That's just our thing. Whenever we've had time in nature, we just have a calmer energy - both of us. It's something that we have in common, and it definitely brings us closer. Uhm...and one little thing we do is just daily WhatsApp's...if I'm travelling somewhere I'll just keep him informed, so we have that ongoing communication which is just the two of us.
46. T: I'm going to ditto that one. (laughing)
- 47. R: I had a feeling you might. (laughing)**
- 48. R: (12) In what ways does your daily interactions (as a couple) and life demands influence your bond as a couple?**
49. S: Hmm. I think the work stress that Theo have, in particular. I mean, I don't have a lot of work stress. Uhm, it can definitely cause us some frustration and segregation, almost. Uhm...so...ja, but other than that I don't think there's a lot that gets in between our stuff.
- 50. R: I know you've previously shared that there's not always a clear distinction between home and work, and that you guys spend a lot of time together in the same environment. How do you navigate that? What's your secret to making it work?**
51. S: Hmm.
52. T: Drugs. (laughing).
53. T: I'm joking. Sjo, I don't know.
54. S: Possibly, also having to learn our individual roles within the daily way of doing things within the household. If he's busy, then I can find something to do that doesn't involve him. Like cooking, or whatever. So that I'm occupied, and can then give him the time that he needs. There

are also times where his work can be very hectic, and I have to accept that it will infiltrate into our after-hours quiet time, and our weekend and that. And I've become much more accepting of it. So, I've just learned how to be myself, which then also relieves the pressure between us. I think, what we also need to try, is to have more cut-off times, where it's possible, you know. Don't get up first thing in the morning and go straight to work. Maybe spend ten minutes chatting, or whatever. Or take a walk down into the garden before we start our day. Things like that. So we can keep our connection. We've got those set aside times that we can actually just focus on each other. That's probably the best thing in my mind.

55. R: Theo? (repeat question (12))

56. T: Ja...giving Susan time. If I'm doing admin in the day, I'm not talking about my practical work going out and fires and that, but admin... I'm the kind of person that will sit there from eight to five in front of my laptop. If Susan's not here, I will have my coffee next to the laptop. I will have my lunch next to the laptop and keep working. Which then obviously frustrates Susan. You can eventually pick it up in her tone. She is leaving me alone, but you can pick up that she's got five questions now pending, and that five questions have now gone up to six questions. And, I have learned that, you need that break. You need to put the computer down, sit down and have a cup of tea under the tree outside together, and spend that time together. And then she can get all her questions out. I can get a break from the computer. And then everyone is happy.

57. R: (13) If other people were to look at you as a couple, what do you imagine they would see or notice about the connection/alignment/space between you?

58. S: Uhm, I think people see us as very connected to each other, and very apart from the general run of the mill. You know, all our friends are doing city life and all that. We have always done our own thing. So, I do think that people see us as very connected, and very individualised from the rest of society in a lot of ways.

59. T: I think it's generally perceived as very tight. I can't think of the right word, but we just work so well together. Whenever people come here...My dad and his girlfriend...she just couldn't believe how we just ran together. I've got my stuff at home. I do the washing, Susan does the dishes. We've got our parts, and we stick to it. People are always surprised at how well we know each other. Yes it's been seventeen years, but we are also very open with each other. We talk about anything and everything. So, people often comment about that. Some of our friends don't talk to each other. They don't know their husbands and wives like we know each other.

60. R: (14) Is being available and accessible to each other important in your relationship? How do you practically maintain availability and accessibility with one another? (Applied specifically to their situation combined with next question: (15) How do you practically remain engaged with one another – even when you are not occupying the same space/activity?

61. T: Even though we are together during the day working here, Susan is stuck in her stuff, and I'm stuck in my stuff. But then, what is also nice about our relationship, is that we have a lot in common. We both enjoy gardening, so we started the veggie garden. I try to shut the computer down at four o'clock and we both go and do gardening together. Or, going on holiday...
62. S: Are you recording this?!
- 63. R: (laughing) Do you need evidence?**
(Everyone laughing)
64. S: Yes! (laughing)
65. T: Going on holiday, we both enjoy camping and we both enjoy the outdoors. So, our interests are alike, which helps a lot. If Susan was a normal make-up, shopping kind of lady, my interests in nature would be completely foreign. But we have that common denominator, which is our likes and hobbies, and that sort of thing.
- 66. R: Susan anything to add? (repeat question (14) and (15))**
67. S: No look, I definitely think that is an ongoing challenge for us, for sure. And like I say, there are times where it's easier and times where it's less of an issue. It's easier said than done though, in carving out that time. You do get into that rut. And yes, I should put up my hand and wave for his attention. But there are times that I don't really think about that, and I'll interrupt him and he gets irritated. That is an issue that flares up every now and then, and we are working at it. We are getting better, but it's not as easy as it sounds.
- 68. R: (16) How important is growth in the relationship? What does "growing" in your relationship mean for you? How do you stimulate or generate growth in your own relationship?**
69. S & T: Hmmm (both thinking about it).
70. S: Interesting question.
71. S: Hmmm. I think...what comes to mind is that, it's not so much about.... Maybe expansion or variation. Trying to expand our focus a little bit. Getting out of the kind of rut that we can be in sometimes. Also, we are getting closer to the retirement age, or the age at which we would want to retire anyway. We've got to plan for retirement, so we've got to shift our focus into that, and how we can take that forward together. Doing what we both love, and whatever. And that in itself, brings us closer together. The planning aspect. So, I think that is a form of growth. Just shifting direction a little bit, as our phases of life changes.
- 72. R: Theo? (repeat question (16))**
73. T: Uhm, I think that is something we can definitely work on. I think, uhm, obviously after seventeen years, physically and that sort of stuff, we are pretty good at that. Uhm, physically and mentally. I think what we are looking forward to, is growing spiritually. Not in a religious way. But spiritually in our connection. I think we can definitely work on that, and I'm looking forward to it.

74. R: What does spiritually mean for you? Is it something to do with the nature aspect or is it internal qualities?

75. T: Ja, it's just.... Can't think of anything now. But meditating together and doing yoga together. All that kind of stuff. Currently, we can't really do that, because I'm not a morning person, while Susan's a bright and sparky jump out of bed kind. So, she would want to go and do her yoga then, but I would rather do it at 9:00 kind of thing. But then, she doesn't want to do it at 9:00. So, things like that. Like she said, we hope to retire early and that would be a lovely journey if we can get that kind of spiritual thing together.

76. R: (17) What are the practical ways in which you remain present or “plugged in” with each other?

77. S: I think we do feel the presence without doing anything. But if I happen to stand up and walk past Theo and give him a kiss on the neck, for example. Or vice versa. So little things like that. And then basically, just connecting at lunch times or tea times, and that.

78. R: Theo? You are nodding...

79. T: Ditto.

80. R: (18) As couples, we have to find a balance between our life as individuals (incl. goals, dreams, occupations) and our relationship with our partners.... How do you each manage that balance between relationship intimacy and individual independence?

81. S: Do you want to go first, so you can't use the ditto thing?

82. T: (laughing) No you can go!

83. T: How do we balance it...hmmm...

84. S: I think it's about sharing. Sharing what's important to me. Sharing what's important to him. And obviously, finding the common ground, because we have a lot of that, actually. Sometimes timing isn't right, but we also...I don't think we have a big problem with that. Because, we have so much in common. And when he's busy with his work, and I'm busy with my work, we're in our own individual thing. But as soon as he comes across something he knows I'll be interested in, we share that. And then we share that moment, which will again inspire us in some way. Bringing up our own dreams, plans and future. Which brings us together in that moment.

85. T: Hmmm. I'm going to agree with that one.

86. R: (19) How do you generally navigate difference between the two of you – in personality, levels of affection, communication etc?

87. T: I like to talk about things. We discuss things. Uhm, I kind of point things out. If Susan is doing something that is kind of pissing me off, I will tell her.

88. S: Which then pisses me off.

(Everyone laughing)

89. R: So, honesty and conversation. And for you Susan?

90. S: Ja, I think I said to you last time, I don't always communicate effectively and well in the moment. I do go to writing things down, which helps me to sort things out, and which I can then share with Theo. And I think that he's learned to appreciate that that's what I need to process. And once I've written things down, he's like: 'Ok, let's hear it.' And then we can discuss it. Which I actually appreciate that he's open to listening, and not just ignoring me and saying: Well, you've got it off your chest, now. But he's willing to actually discuss it from that point. Which is very helpful.
91. **R: (20) To each individual: What is your deepest wish or desire for your relationship with _____?**
92. S: For me, it's honestly just to reconnect and rekindle the relationship dynamic we had when we lived our individual life, away from everybody. We're getting back to that. But, I really feel like our future plans are really going to be a boost to that. But we are definitely becoming more reconnected. I believe we've made really good progress. But just getting back to that sense of oneness, that we used to have, before life got so mundane.
93. T: I think...we've mentioned it already, but going the spiritual way. Reconnect, but on a different level. That's where I'd love to go.
94. **R: Thank you.**
Recorders off. Interview closed.