

UNDERSTANDING THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE SPOUSES OF BLACK
DOCTORAL STUDENTS

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DEDICATION

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths.” - Proverbs 3:5-6

God,

Without You none of this would have been possible. During this process of completing my dissertation You have been my rock... my stone. With that rock You were able to beat me down to a place where I questioned my own existence, but down there in that low place I was able to find who you wanted me to be. From there, that low place, the only way I could go was up and that journey up, is happening now. I can feel Your presence surrounding me every step of the way, and it is an indescribable feeling. You are my light, and I will continue to follow You to higher dimensions. No words on paper can express my gratitude to You. I love You beyond words.

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion.” - Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Dallas,

This dissertation was inspired by our journey this last six years. I wanted to be a better wife as I was completing my program, and I saw that we... our love... our story could be the inspiration for one of the most important documents of my life. You have been that little voice in my head when I wanted to quit. For so long you have voiced the potential you saw in me. I did not see this “person” you saw in me, but with your love, encouragement, drive, and leadership, I have finally come to a place where I can see myself. So take a bow... you have done what no one else has done, and that is unintentionally help me find myself. Thank you... I love you... I’m forever yours.

“God is within her, she will not fall” - Proverbs 46:5

Zoe,

I could have never imagined how such a small yet powerful human being could have such an impact on me. When I began my doctoral program, I started with only myself in mind. Thinking of all the things I would do, but then you came along and you changed my perspective on life. I may have started with me in mind, but I am ending this journey with you at the forefront of my thoughts. My dear Zoe, you can do and be whatever you set your mind to, and I wanted to make sure that you saw a mother that embodied the characteristics I know you will possess: strength, resilience, intelligence, kindness, integrity, and most of all love. God flows through you, and with His love you will see the world. You are my greatest masterpiece, you are my muse, you are my motivation, you are my heart.... You are the epitome of what love is. I love you my dear Zoe... Mommy loves you.

“Strength and honor are her clothing; She shall rejoice in time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness. She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed.” - Proverbs 31:25-28

Mom,

First, know that your place on this dedication page does not determine your place in my life. For as long as I can remember, you have always told me, “you’re going to be a doctor. You will go all the way.” Well mom... I did it. I promise you that I will not disappoint you. I am here because of your constant prayers, your sacrifices, your acknowledgments and punishments, your seven-day week work schedules, your lectures, your discipline, your laughs, your tears, and your love. You have raised a strong woman

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“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” - I

Corinthians 13:13

Brenda & Toney,

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives of spouses of Black doctoral students during the completion of their program, and to understand how being in a marriage with a doctoral student influences future relational decisions. After an in-depth review of literature, this study assisted in gathering the experiences of the participants by utilizing a transcendental phenomenological qualitative method. This method was implemented by utilizing interviews, focus groups, and photographic documentation. Using Moustakas's (1994) method for conducting a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study, interview data was prepared for analyzing data and reporting results. Four meta-themes were derived after carefully coding transcriptions, and chunking common themes to describe the phenomenon: (a) marital roles, (b) the potential of more money, (c) support/coping strategies, and (d) time spent together. The first meta-theme represents the marital roles that were identified by spouses and include the subthemes of (a) lack of time and (b) financial difficulties. The second theme described how the participants' spouse's education might help by making more money for the household. The third meta-theme described how the participants supported their spouses in school and coped with the changes in their marriages. Finally, the last meta-theme included categorized how the participants experienced the changes in time spent with their spouse now that was enrolled in a doctoral program, and included the subthemes of: (a) intimacy issues and (b) more quality time.

KEY WORDS: Black marriages, Black doctoral students, Individual interviews, Focus group, Photographic documentation, African American, Spouse of Black doctoral students

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sister has been my hearts joy. I want to acknowledge you, thank you, commend you for being my ride or die. I love you sissy.

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Hey Cohort 9, we made one promise to each other and that was “leave no one behind.” Well I am finally crossing that bridge, and I thank you all for your encouragement during this long process.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Completing a graduate degree program has stressors and demands that can be more challenging than an undergraduate program. Labosier and Labosier (2011) noted that many universities place a heavy burden upon their graduate students to complete large amounts of coursework, teach classes, present at conferences, perform research for faculty, as well as many other responsibilities. However, obtaining a doctorate is that it is the highest level of education one can obtain, which most people consider highly positive, but obtaining a doctorate comes with obstacles (Corneau, 2007; Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011). Doctoral completion rates over a cumulative ten-year period were 56.6% in the United States (Council of Graduate Schools Ph.D. Completion Project, 2008). According to Lovitts (2001), the main reasons for leaving doctoral programs included academic, personal, and financial reasons. Personal issues accounted for 23% and consisted of challenges stemming from marriage, divorce, children, and feeling as though pursuing a doctoral degree was the wrong decision, suggesting that three of the four personal reasons for leaving a doctoral program are connected to marriage.

When a student decides to enter into a doctoral program, that decision not only affects her or his life, but might also influence her or his support systems. However, one perspective that is consistently missing from the literature is the voice of those who are married to doctoral students. Doctoral student spouses, who vicariously see, feel, and hear the demands of a doctoral program, may peripherally experience the stress that married doctoral students' experience, and this changes the relational dynamics of the marriage. This in turn may be a primary support system for a doctoral student.

Consequently, the vicarious experience of the spouse may greatly influence a married doctoral student's successful completion of a doctoral program.

There are several researchers who have attempted to understand the perspectives of the actual doctoral student (e.g., Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000; Giles, 1983; Hyun, 2009; Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2004), but within these studies there is no mention of the experiences of the spouse nor do they concentrate on one racial subgroup. A support system can possibly be essential to completing a graduate program successfully; therefore, students and faculty should not only try to not only understand but also appreciate doctoral students' perspectives and the perspectives their loved ones. Yet, the literature is scarce regarding experiences and perceptions from the spouses of doctoral students.

The purpose of this study was to understand through the lens of social support theory the perspectives of *spouses* of Black doctoral students during the completion of their spouse's doctoral program, and to understand how being in a marriage with a doctoral student influences future relational decisions, such as: parenting, children, intimacy, and time spent together as a couple. The goal of this study was also: to explore spouses' experience experiences of satisfaction within the marriage while the student spouse was completing a doctoral program, explore if any goals (family and/or career) previously made by the couple changed once engaged in a mental health doctoral program, and explore how being in a marriage with a doctoral student affected future plans, such as parenting, having children, intimacy, and time spent together as a couple. Doctoral programs that were included in this study were: counseling, psychology, or other subjects closely related.

Importance of Support

The most important source of support a student can receive is the support from a spouse. Spouses can provide the financial and emotional support that will assist the student in meeting basic needs (Giles, 1983). According to Legako and Sorenson (2000), a social support network can be created inside the marriage between the spouses in order to obtain and provide support from each other. When marriage is working for that couple, marriage itself can become a powerful resource of support, a great place for growth, a comfortable place for conflict resolution, and a help for ongoing assessments of beliefs, values, and shared dreams. In order for students to obtain proper support from their significant others, members of the faculty in doctoral programs need to inform their incoming students and their spouses about the importance of communication throughout the doctoral program (Hyun, 2009).

There is an implication that faulty communication is a central feature in what can create marital discord, and behavioral theorists emphasize a deficit in communication skills as a major causal factor in marital distress (Legako, 1995). With the decrease of time spent with spouses, often the result of less leisure time, communication between a married doctoral student and the spouse can become an issue. A popular assumption has been that the cause of many marital communication problems is deficient communication skills (Crook, 2004). Strong and DeVault (1997) stated that communication is not always easy or accepted and may cause short-lived dissatisfaction with the relationship. Marital theorists have shown that one partner's emotions, thoughts, or behavior can affect the other partner's functioning (Christensen, Jacobson, & Babcock, 1995) and that partners are expected to influence each other. Therefore, incorporating support from the students'

spouses as a process of program completion can potentially influence successful student outcomes.

Attending graduate school is also a major life event that may result in marital and other romantic relationship problems (Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000). From a study of doctoral students at Midwestern University graduate school, all of whom were married, Brannock et al. (2000), indicated that the experience of graduate school can produce stress in the family. Additionally, an unsupportive atmosphere seems to make doctoral students' experiences in doctoral programs unpleasant and challenging (Hyun, 2009). Given these findings, it is not surprising that graduate students' school status may have a negative impact on their marriage.

Cultural Stress

In 2006, the U.S was made up of 13 percent Blacks who were between the ages of 25-29, and 11 percent of Blacks who were aged 30 and up (American Federation of Teachers, 2010). American Federation of Teachers reported the percentage of Blacks enrolled in higher education in 2005 was 12 percent; however, in 2007 there was a total of 5.4 percent Black full-time tenured and contingent faculty in universities. Of the 5.4 percent of faculty positions held by Blacks in 2007, four percent are contingent positions, which means that 74 percent of the Black faculty hold positions that do not give them adequate wages or benefits, job security, or meaningful academic freedom (American Federation of Teachers, 2010). Moreover, the overall cumulative ten-year completion rate for all doctoral students is 56.6%, but even lower for Black doctoral students at 47% (Council of Graduate Schools Ph.D. Completion Project, 2008). Lower rates of completion could be influenced by a lack of experience with Black faculty.

Being a doctoral student is already a challenging and stressful task, and some students in married relationships may experience stress in their romantic relationships as a result of their doctoral student status, but may also deal with issues of racial discrimination. For instance, Gildersleeve, Croom, and Vasquez (2011) stated that Black and Hispanic students' experiences in doctoral programs are complicated by race, racialization, and racism that are inherent in the social practice of higher education. A qualitative study conducted by Lewis et al. (2004) included four Ph.D. graduates and four current Ph.D. students. They explored the experiences of African-American doctoral students at a predominately white institution and found that the students were dealing with perceived individual and institutionalized racism in addition to the aforementioned issues that most doctoral students experience. Pinderhughes (2002), stated that the conditions of the unique arrival of African-Americans to this country and their treatment thereafter continues to profoundly influence every aspect of life, especially marriage. In the continued absence of social support, the struggles of African-Americans have contributed to relational stress and thus left some vulnerable to societal shifts and changes (Pinderhughes, 2002). Based on the results of these studies, not only are some institutions possibly not preparing graduate students for the trials and tribulations that lie before them, but may also be ignoring or dismissing issues external to the program that influence student success.

The experiences of being in a doctoral program not only affect the students that are in a program, but may also affect their spouses. The graduation rate of doctoral students and reasons for students leaving doctoral programs serve as indicators that a doctoral program can be challenging and demanding for all parties involved. Researchers

indicate that there can be many personal problems that are faced in a doctoral program, and suggest that the actual program is not organized in a way that adequately prepares students and their loved ones for the journey ahead (Giles, 1983; Legako & Sorenson, 2000). Given the influence of doctoral study on an intimate partnership, it may be important to evaluate relational experience from both the perspective of the student and her or his spouse. However, only one study was found regarding the experiences of the students' intimate partners. Legako and Sorenson (2000) used qualitative methodology to understand the viewpoint of 12 spouses of students in a graduate program at Rosemead School of Psychology. The researchers found that one of their hypotheses was supported, which was that graduate training would have a detrimental effect on the student marriages (Legako & Sorenson, 2000). Legako & Sorenson (2000), stated this hypothesis was supported because of the overwhelming amount of theoretical study, clinical practice, and required introspection through personal therapy was predicted to be the kind of chronic stress that has been shown to have a greater impact on a person's well being.

As Labosier and Labosier (2011) stated, the support system in a doctoral student's life can help lead to more student participation and success, which in turn could lead to increased diversity. With an increase in diversity, a graduate program may need to increase the diversity in staff in order to create more support for a doctoral student. Having diversity in the faculty in a doctoral program allows for a more diverse student body, a more insightful, and supportive instruction that models the counseling relationship. Looking at the U.S. adult population by race and ethnicity members of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups will comprise an increasing share of the population. In order to create an environment that is nurturing and supportive for doctoral

students changes must be made. These changes can begin in the home or in the school environment, but one thing that is for certain is that there is something missing. By understanding the unique experiences of the spouses of Black doctoral students, doctoral programs can help create a more positive, productive, supportive experience for students as they complete their programs.

Statement of the Problem

After an extensive review of literature, limited information was found related to Black marriages within doctoral study. The literature review included research on marriages and Black marriages, divorce, and doctoral program stressors and statistics (African Americans and Black Community, 2011; Copen, Daniels, Vespa, & Mosher, 2012; Mullen, Goyette, & Soares, 2003; Sobolewski, 2013), as well as studies that researched graduate school and its effects on marriage and relationships (Hyun, 2009; Middleton, 2001, Pederson & Daniels, 2001). However, this researcher discovered a total absence of literature that focused on the spouses of the students in doctoral programs.

One perspective that is consistently missing from the literature is the voice of those individuals who are married to doctoral students. The voices of the people who see, feel, and hear the demands from a doctoral student may peripherally experience the stress of a doctoral program. Doctoral program participation can change relational dynamics due to the time and attention required to successfully complete a terminal degree.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to understand the perspectives of spouses of Black doctoral students while enrolled in a counseling or other related mental health doctoral program. These perspectives may offer insight and help

gain a greater understanding on how being in a marriage with a doctoral student influences future plans with each other, children, intimacy, and their time spent together. By giving a voice to the spouses of graduate students, doctoral level staff and faculty may gain necessary insight into the processes that have hindered some of their Black students in the programs in which they are currently educators. This insight can lead to the creation of programs and support resources within the doctoral program for students that are married and of Black decent, which may help alleviate perceived individual and institutionalized racism. Given the prevalence of Blacks not completing their doctoral programs, it is necessary to identify themes amongst their closest support system, their spouse, that have contributed to the success or downfall of the student.

Significance of the Study

Currently, the Black community in the United States is experiencing an increase in divorce, separation, and non-marital cohabitation (African Americans and Black Community, 2011). These changes are leading to a decline in the marriage rates within the Black community. Sixty four percent of adult African Americans were married in 1970 (Dixon, 2009) compared to 45.2% in 2010, as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (2013).

In the proposed phenomenological qualitative research, I intend to contribute to the literature regarding the lived experiences of the spouses of Black doctoral students. More importantly, I intend to help future doctoral students and their spouses cope with the demands of graduate study together. Literature related to the experiences of doctoral students' spouses may help students cope with the challenging environments they might

face in a doctoral program and provide data that doctoral programs might utilize to create strategies to orient the spouses to the coming change their continued education will bring.

Giving Black doctoral students a supportive learning environment will help strengthen the counseling and psychology field, but in order to produce doctors and educators it may be imperative to provide an example of what it means to be a counselor. Hyun, (2009) mentioned that in order to have members of the faculty in doctoral programs become knowledgeable of what type of support that students need, they first need to first learn about the support and environment the students have at home. Hyun's discovery demonstrated that support does not begin or end in a particular place. It is an ever-flowing process. Therefore, being able to incorporate support from the students' relationships could possibly lead to a more successful and enthusiastic doctoral student, reduce dropout rates (Lovitts, 2001), and increase diversity (Labosier & Labosier, 2011).

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided to ease the reader's understanding of how terms were used in the present study. Definitions of concepts related to the purpose of the study will be presented, as well as those terms that will influence the interpretation of results.

Marriage

For the purposes of this study, marriage is the state of being united to a person of the opposite sex as a husband or wife in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by state law (Marriage, n.d.).

Doctorate

The research doctorate, or the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) and its equivalent titles, Doctorate of Education (Ed.D.), Psychology Doctorate (Psy.D.), and Medical Doctorate (M.D.), represents the highest academic qualification in the U.S. education system (Hunt, 2008).

Mental Health Related Field

Mental health related field consists of students that are studying in the following subjects at a doctoral level: counseling and psychology.

Black

The Black culture is diverse and can be quite complicated to define. Blacks have their own unique, special qualities and experiences. *Black* is often used synonymously with African American, and at the present time has a very similar definition. An African American is an American of African, particularly Black African, descent. They can be made up of different ethnic backgrounds that consist of: Caribbean Culture, African Culture, and American Black Experience (What is the definition of African American? n.d.).

Graduate Students

Graduate students consist of those students that are enrolled to obtain a master's or doctoral level degree in a counseling or mental health related field at a university.

Student

This term was used to refer to students who are currently enrolled either part-time or full-time in a graduate or professional program at a university (Gonzalez, 2011).

Support System

A support system is the people in a student's life that helps the student financially, emotionally, and physically in order to support the student with schoolwork. The support system comprises, but is not limited to spouses, friends, family, fellow students, professors, and mentors.

Spouse

For the purposes of this study, a spouse is someone who is married and considered to be a husband or wife in relation to his or her partner (Spouse, n.d.).

Social Support Theory

Social support theory is a theory that categorizes how people experience stress in various levels and various support perspectives. The perspectives are divided into three theoretical perspectives: (1) the stress and coping perspective, (2) the social constructionist perspective, and (3) the relationship perspective (Lakey & Cohen, 2000).

Theoretical Framework

Social support theory provides the theoretical framework for this dissertation. Social support theory is a broad theory that categorizes how people experience stress in levels and in various support perspectives (Lakey & Cohen, 2000). Cohen is a leader in social support and has divided this theory into three perspectives: (1) the stress and coping perspective, (2) the social constructionist perspective, and (3) the relationship perspective (Lakey & Cohen, 2000). These three perspectives directly relate to the topic of this research. The stress and coping perspective helps with understanding how the stress of a doctoral program affects your support system and the coping strategies that can be used. The social constructivist perspective conceptualizes the participants' viewpoints.

Lastly, the relationship perspective is important because marriage is the relationship that is being researched.

Through the use of social support theory, this research explored the experiences of the spouses of Black doctoral students while enrolled in a doctoral level mental health program. In a review of the literature on social support, factors such as stress and coping, relationships, and support systems are influences in an individual's support system in order to reduce or help with stressors in their environment (Cohen, 2004; Lakey & Cohen, 2000; Cohen, Underwood, & Gottlieb, 2000).

Research Questions

This qualitative phenomenological study seeks to understand perspectives of the spouses of African-American students during completion of a doctoral program in a mental health field. The following research questions informed this process of this study:

1. What are perspectives of the spouses of Black students pursuing doctoral degrees in a mental health field?
2. In what ways does being married to a doctoral student change the dynamics within the marriage?

Limitations

My research is limited to the spouses who meet the selection criteria and consent to participate by completing the demographic form to ensure they meet the standards of study. A sampling bias exists because the perceptions of the spouses who participate may differ from the perceptions of spouses who do not participate. Age, gender, and socio-economic status cannot be controlled in the population. Another limitation to the study will be the sampling methods used. The researcher is familiar with some of the

department chairs and students in some universities in the surrounding Houston area, and there is a possibility that the researcher will be familiar with the participants' spouses. If this is the case, than this might create an environment that could make participants weary of sharing more detail during the data collection process.

Delimitations

My study is delimited to those who are the opposite-sex spouses of doctoral students that are in a program that is in the mental health related field and where both spouse and student are Black or of Black decent. Thus, spouses who have been or are currently enrolled in a doctoral program in the mental health field are excluded from the sample population. Therefore, the findings may not be transferable to those who are not Black or of Black decent, those who are not married, and to doctoral students in mental health programs, but only to the spouses. Those students that are in a homosexual marriage or union are also excluded from this sample population. By focusing on heterosexual marriages, themes emerged that might not be transferable to a homosexual union. Same-sex unions may have their own set of stressors and themes that may not be applicable to heterosexual marriages or present intersectional issues of oppression that may heighten experiences of stress.

Assumptions

The following assumptions have been undertaken in this research study:

1. Participants who complete the interviews are giving consent for participation in the study, and those individuals who do not complete the interviews decline participation in the study.

2. Participants will understand the scope of the study, the language of the instruments, will be competent in self-reporting, and will be honest and forthcoming in answering questions.
3. Interpretations of the data collected will accurately reflect the intent of the participants.
4. The methodology proposed offers a logical and appropriate design.

Organization of Study

This dissertation is divided into five parts that will be labeled as chapters. It is organized in the following manner. Chapter I contains the introduction to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms, research questions, theoretical framework, limitations, delimitations, and assumptions. In Chapter II, there is a review of the literature relevant to marriage, doctoral programs, culture, and a combination of all these factors in relation to marriage and school. Chapter III consists of a description of the research design, participants, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis of the study. Chapter IV contains a description of the demographic data and the results of qualitative analyses. Lastly, Chapter V includes a summary of the research, discussion of the results with implications for doctoral programs, doctoral students and spouses, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

In this review of literature, background information related to the Black student experience will be provided and connected to the experiences of spouses of students who are not enrolled in doctoral programs. The effects of student experiences will be examined with regard to marital relationships, in particular heterosexual marriages. Specifically, Chapter II is organized into four sections followed by a summary: (a) marriage, (b) relationships and education, (c) marriage in a doctoral program, (d) Blacks and resiliency, and (e) Social Support Theory.

Ethnic Minorities in Higher Education Settings

Ethnic minorities in higher education make up 4% - 5% of the national total (Cockrell, 2007). African Americans comprise nearly 13% of the population in the United States (U.S.), but the U.S. is a long way from racial equality with regard to the number of African Americans awarded doctoral degrees (“Doctoral”, 2006). In 2012, there were a total of 51,008 doctoral recipients in all disciplines in the U.S. (National Science Foundation [NSF], 2012). Of this figure, only 5% were Black; 53% were White, 25.5% were Asian, 5.9% were Hispanic, and 0.21% were American Indian. There has been an upward trend of African Americans attaining doctoral degrees in the last 20 years (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004); however, African Americans continue to be underrepresented at colleges and universities (Bhat, Pillay, & Hudson, 2012). In addition, historically, doctoral students of color have lower graduation rates, have more reports of academic difficulty when compared to their societally privileged counterparts, and are subject to high attrition rates (Sloan, 1994).

Research studies exploring the experiences of Blacks in doctoral programs are important to academia because findings have emerged identifying factors that predict or relate to the academic success of Black doctoral students. Significant details about these issues and the overall experience of being a Black doctoral student are not well understood (Lewis, Ginsberg, & Davies, 2004). The importance can reside within the graduate school experience and the relationships that are built with the university faculty and students. Without some knowledge of the Black experience, there is a probability that faculty and students are missing out on opportunities that could build better relationships amongst staff, faculty, and students, and also increase the diversity in higher education departments. The opportunities are not only about building better relationships, but potentially helping faculty and staff understand the differences in the Black experiences and support systems. Numerous studies (Bhat, Pillay, & Hudson, 2012; Cockrell, 2007; Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; Sloan, 1994; Starks, 2010) detail the experience of being Black in graduate school and discuss how some Blacks have been ostracized, humiliated, and isolated during the pursuit of a doctorate. For example, Gildersleeve, Croom, and Vasquez (2011) conducted a critical race analysis of the everyday experiences of Latina/o and Black doctoral students. One of the participants described how he felt while conducting research with a supervisor in his department. The participant shared the following insight regarding his supervisor:

Well she probably just doesn't understand me, so I can do the work, I might be doing it [assistantship work/research] a bit differently, but it doesn't mean it's any less valuable or can't be just as good. It's just not what she wants, and at the same time, I sometimes feel like . . . It's sort of empowering myself behind that, even if

she doesn't regard it the same way. (p. 101)

Further he stated:

I don't really feel like they do anything that's geared toward minority graduate students, nothing that I am aware of anyways, maybe the different, like BGSA [Black Graduate Student Association] or LGSA [Latino Graduate Student Association]. But I don't know if that's necessarily a university thing or just grad students who decided to get together. (p. 102).

Contemporaneous experiences convey a narrative of exclusion, lack of support on the university level, and isolation. Research addresses information relevant this generation regarding Blacks obtaining their doctorate (Bhat, Pillay, & Hudson, 2012 and Reddick, 2011).

Black Resiliency

Benard (1991) stated that resiliency is the capacity of an individual to recover from or adapt to difficult and challenging life circumstances. According to Fraser, Kirby, and Smokowski (2004), resilience is not just one personal trait or attribute in an individual. Resilience is a result of complex, ongoing interactions between a person's attributes (i.e., coping styles, sense of worth, and intelligence) and the resources in a person's environment (i.e., presence of support groups, supportive marriages and relationships, and services offered) and can be content specific (i.e., educational, relational, social, and emotional) (Williams & Portman, 2014).

Few studies have explored culture-specific coping strategies used by African Americans in everyday stressful situations (Lewis-Coles & Constantine, 2006). Lewis-Coles and Constantine reported that African American adolescents believe that their

cultural group is an important part of their self-concept and that they used spiritual coping to deal with stressful situations. Hoggard, Byrd, and Sellers (2012) suggested that African Americans report more frequent experiences with covert or subtle acts of mistreatment, specifically racial hassles or microaggressions, which are small acts that are automatic, ambiguous, and unintentional (Sue et al., 2007). These microaggressions may become a stressor that Black doctoral students experience in their respective programs.

Gildersleeve, Croom, and Vasquez (2011) stated that Black students' experiences in doctoral programs are complicated by issues associated with race inherent in the social practice of higher education. These issues may not be as subtle as microaggressions or could be a build up of several microaggressions.

Not only are institutions not preparing students for the trials and tribulations that lie before them, but doctoral programs are ignoring and/or dismissing the issues external to the program that students are facing while fulfilling their educational dreams. A qualitative study conducted by Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies and Smith (2004) included four Ph.D. graduates and four current Ph.D. students. They explored the experiences of Black Ph.D. students at a predominately White institution and found that the students were dealing with perceived individual and institutionalized racism, in addition to the aforementioned possible issues that most doctoral students experience.

Being a doctoral student belonging to the majority is already a stressful situation, but it appears that being a minority, particularly Black, could increase that stress level. Blacks have to have high resiliency in their day-to-day lives, and those who choose to attend a doctorate program appear to be adding more stressors to their lives voluntarily. Positive relationships with family and the community (teachers, role models, and

mentors) are invaluable and "can compensate for a difficult family situation" (Luther & Zelazo, 2003). According to Yates et al. (2003) resilience is a process of utilizing resources over time in order to provide a foundation for overcoming challenges. In brief, a strong support system can be an imperative support in helping Black doctoral students develop resilience and thrive regardless of any adverse circumstances.

Marriage

Since the 1970s, the marriage rate in the U.S. has reduced by nearly 60% (Sobolewski, 2013). Currently, the U.S. marriage rate is 31.1%, the lowest it has been in over a century. This figure equates to roughly 31 marriages per 1,000 women (Sobolewski, 2013). Compared to the rate in 1920, which was 92.3%, the difference is staggering (Sobolewski, 2013). On average, people in the U.S are also getting married at an older age. According to Copen et al. (2012), the median age at first marriage was 25.8 for women and 28.3 for men. When comparing the median age for first marriages in 2012 to the 1960s, when the median age for men was 23 and for women 20, there is a change occurring, and cohabitation might be contributing to the increased age for first marriages, and according to Copen et al. (2012), premarital cohabitation contributes to the delay in first marriage for both women and men. These numbers indicate that both men and women are taking longer to decide on marriage, and although Copen et al. (2012) indicated that cohabitation contributed to this delay, a variety of cultural factors may be contributing to marital timing.

As generations change their views, the definition of marriage has changed as well. Most couples likely enter into a marriage expecting to succeed and remain married for the duration of their lives. They may look at divorce rates, but believe those figures do not

apply to them (Lee, 2013). However, the divorce rate is consistently somewhere between 40 to 50% in the U.S. (Lee, 2013), suggesting an incongruence between expectations of marriage success and actual motivation to remain married.

There are two competing views that define marriage: the conjugal view and the revisionist view. The conjugal and revisionist views make clear that there are two people that make a commitment to one another, and that this commitment requires sacrifice and compromise on both ends of the marriage, yet there are key differences between the two views. The conjugal view emphasizes that marriage is the union of a man and a woman who make a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other of the type that is naturally (inherently) fulfilled by bearing and rearing children together (Girgis, George, & Anderson, 2011). In the conjugal view, the spouses seal and renew their union by conjugal acts. These acts constitute the behavioral part (consummate) of the process of reproduction, which unites them as a reproductive unit. The revisionist view emphasizes that marriage is the union of two people, whether of the same sex or of opposite sex, who commit to romantically loving and caring for each other and commit to sharing burdens and benefits of domestic life (Girgis, George, & Anderson, 2011). It is a union of hearts and minds, enhanced by whatever forms of sexual intimacy both partners find agreeable. Conjugal and revisionist views are clear in regards to what is required and the basis of each type of union. As Girgis, George, and Anderson (2011) report, the conjugal view is about procreation and revisionist view is about the union of hearts. One is not more important than the other and both views can co-exist.

Black People and Marriage

Black married couples face unique challenges and stresses that are exacerbated when there is a lack of education (Orbuch et al., 2002). Black marriages are vulnerable because they are susceptible to blocks to resources that couples maintain a commitment to marriage, such as low education, low income, low occupational status, less wealth, and more premarital pregnancies.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2013), Black people make up 43.9 million of the individuals in the U.S., which is 18.4 percent of the total U.S. population as of 2010. Of the 43.9 million Blacks in the U.S., 45.2% were married couples and 18.4% of Black people 25 and older had a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

The U.S. statistics for Blacks and marriage are declining and lower than the general population. In 1970, 64 percent of adult African Americans were married (Dixon, 2009) compared to the 45.2 percent reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (2013). During the last few decades, the rates of marriage in the Black community in the U.S. have declined while the rates of divorce, separation, cohabitation, out-of-wedlock births, and children residing in female-headed households have increased (African Americans and Black Community, 2011). Moore and Stief (1991), reported that 63 percent of females and 69 percent of Black males agreed or strongly agreed that unless a couple is prepared to stay together for life, they should not get married. Eighty eight percent of Black teens view marriage as important, yet only 72 percent felt prepared for marriage (African Americans and Black Community, 2011). Forty-seven percent of Black women's first marriages will end in divorce, and of the 10 million people polled in a survey conducted by the Census Bureau, 11.5 percent of African-Americans reported to be divorced,

compared to 10 percent for Whites, 7.8 percent for Latinos and 4.9 percent for Asians (Anna, 2012).

Divorce

Since the 1980s, the divorce rate has been stabilized, showing slight signs of decline (NICHD, 2003). However, according to Helpert-Meehan (2009) half of all marriages are dissolved (Halpern-Meehan, 2009). Among those who are obtaining divorces, Blacks are less likely to get married and more likely to get divorced (Moore, n.d). Moore (n.d), reported that the biggest indicators for marriage success or failure are age, poverty and education levels. He also reported that 70 percent of Black women's first marriages will end in divorce. Age, education and income are major factors in the stability of all marriages, regardless of race or ethnicity, but these factors effect Black couples more than others (Moore, n.d).

To date, there is limited data indicating the divorce rates for couples when one or both partners are students. Price (2013) reported that 7.4% of men and 12.1% of women divorce during graduate school, but this sample included master and doctoral level students. A sample only including doctoral level students and divorce rates was not found.

Ford (2012) noted that as divorce rates in the U.S. increase, some researchers focused more on the social and economic elements related to marital stability and quality, and in particular, changes in family responsibilities. The issues that lead to divorce may be reflective of the stressors that occur during the marriage. It has been indicated that African Americans had the highest divorce rate of any other culture due primarily to

insufficient education, unemployment or underemployment, and the impact of racism, discrimination, and economic stress (Ford, 2012).

The literature review by LaTaillade (2006) revealed that the unique challenges that African Americans face have intensified the incidence of relationship instability and distress. LaTaillade (2006) reported that researchers had attributed higher divorce rates and marriage issues to various stressors that have affected African Americans, including economic instability, joblessness, exposure to poverty, violence, and continued experiences of racism and discrimination. It was also found that economic difficulties added to spousal tension, and economic difficulty was a problem that is often echoed in all marriages regardless of race. LaTaillade's research supports the idea of economic strain caused by unemployment and underemployment as a major contributing factor to marital instability among African American couples during the early years of marriage (Ford, 2012).

Adding the stressors of being a Black married couple, economic instability, joblessness, exposure to poverty, violence, and continued experiences of racism and discrimination, with one or both spouses enrolled in a doctoral program may lead to a higher rate of failure. In conclusion, Price (2013) made it clear that about 10% of men and women divorce during graduate school. In his study, Price did not specify race or cultural issues. However, Brooks (1988) reported that therapists stated that conflict and dissolution of the marriage are less likely when couples understand that many of their difficulties emanate from the nature of the circumstances (e.g. graduate school) in which they find themselves rather than from a fundamental mismatch of personalities and goals. Yet, no research has emerged exploring the support system of Black graduate students, in

particular the experiences of spouses of Black doctoral students, and how the support provided within the relationship changes as doctoral education pressures the marriage to shift roles, responsibilities, and nurturance that may be expected by one or both parties.

Doctoral Education

A doctorate degree represents the highest academia qualification in the U.S. education system (Hunt, 2008), and it qualifies the holder to teach at the university level in a specific field (Forni, 1989). Obtaining a doctorate also comes with additional obstacles. Doctoral completion rates over a cumulative ten-year period were 56.6% in the U.S. (Council of Graduate Schools Ph.D. Completion Project, 2008). Thus, almost half of all those who enter into a doctoral program do not graduate.

It was found that undergraduate college performance was related to a student's decision to enroll in graduate school (Mullen, Goyette, & Soares, 2003) suggest a direct link with school enrollment and parent education level, but researchers have been surprised to find no parental effects on education enrollments beyond undergraduate level (Mullen, Goyette, & Soares, 2003). Three percent of the U.S. population over the age of 25 has attained a doctorate or professional degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). However, the percentage of the U.S Black population enrolled in a doctoral program is not available, so a comparison of the enrollment and completion rates can be researched for Black doctoral students as well.

Attrition Rates

Attrition occurs when students drop out of their education program prior to completing their program or degree. Attrition rates also include students that complete their coursework but do not complete their dissertation (Ali & Kohun, 2006). The

problem of attrition in doctoral programs has received little attention at various universities and colleges. Some have termed the problem of doctoral student attrition as the “invisible problem,” which is due to students leaving programs without making much “noise” (Ali & Kohun, 2006). Ali & Kohun (2006) stated not making “noise” is simply when a student drops out of the program silently. They also mentioned that students leaving without making “noise” might contribute to the perception that the students departed due to factors related to the students themselves.

According to Lovitts (2001), the primary reasons for leaving a doctoral program include academic, personal, and financial reasons. Personal issues accounted for 23% of the attrition and consisted of challenges stemming from marriage, divorce, having and raising children, and feelings of doubt about making the wrong decision to pursue a doctoral degree (Lovitts, 2001). While three of the four personal reasons for leaving a doctoral program can be connected to marriage or a romantic relationship, Lovitts study did not report race or cultural issues.

Sudol and Hall, (1991), noted that graduate studies are stressful and demanding, especially doctoral programs where work is more demanding and challenging. As Labosier and Labosier, (2011) mentioned, stress is synonymous with graduate school and achieving balance between graduate school and marriage is not something that happens overnight. It takes a significant amount of effort and a deep commitment to make school and marriage work. In sum, it would appear that there are many difficulties that effect completing a terminal degree.

Relationships and Education Support System

Graduate student stress level and social support has been researched by Goplerud (1980), where he examined the quality and level of faculty and peer social support of new graduate students. He concluded that support was a significant facilitator of students' assessment of stressful events within their first six months of graduate study. Goplerud (1980) was able to obtain information demonstrating that students with more social support indicated less intense stress and shorter periods of stress. Interestingly, Goplerud (1980) concluded that students who were single reported twice as much stress, as well as significant life changes, health, and emotional disturbances than their non-single peers. Goplerud showed that friends or cohort members may not be enough to support students' stressors while completing a graduate school program. The most important source of support a student can possess is the support from a spouse, who can provide financial, emotional, and assist in meeting basic needs (Giles, 1983). According to Legako and Sorenson (2000), the importance of a good social support network can work within a marriage. This social support occurs when a marriage is a powerful resource for growth, conflict resolution, and ongoing assessment of beliefs values and shared dreams.

Stressors that Can Occur

Graduate school is a major life event that could result in marital and romantic relationship problems (Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000). For instance, Brannock et al., (2000), found that the experience of graduate school can produce stress in the family. Given these issues, it is not surprising that graduate students' school status can have a negative impact on marriages, especially on marriages that were not prepped to deal with the issues that arise from the new venture of a doctoral program.

According to Hyun (2009), students in a doctoral program found the environment too competitive and not supportive, and that some students experienced different kinds of discrimination, such as race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and marital status. The most common feeling reported by doctoral students was that of isolation (Lovitts, (2001). Gonzales (2011) reported that previous researchers have demonstrated that increased academic stress can have a negative impact on students' academic performance. This impact can lead to depression, anxiety, sleep problems, psychosomatic illnesses, aggravations of previously existing illnesses, and overall decreased wellbeing. However, students who use effective coping techniques and have support systems reported having lower levels of stress and greater success in graduate school (Gonzales, 2011).

Graduate students also experience financial constraints during graduate school. A study by Maclean and Peters (1995) concluded that financial status of students might be an important predictor of marital happiness during graduate school. With the typically limited finances of graduate students, it is likely that finances may negatively affect romantic relationships of graduate students (Gonzales 2011).

One Spouse in a Graduate Program

There can be many sources of stress that exist for married students entering graduate school. In fact, graduate school seems synonymous with stress (Sori, Wetchler, & Ray, 1996). One area that may be influenced by the experience of graduate school is that of gender role expectations. If one partner in the marriage is expected to fulfill a certain role, not accomplishing these expected roles might also affect the marriage and the home dynamics. Sori, Wetchler, & Ray, (1996), noted that spouses might be forced to not pursue personal goals. If one partner is forced to not pursue personal goals, then this

sacrifice can lead to resentment by one spouse and lead to couples “growing apart” because of changing values, interests, and opinions that create an emotional shift between spouses. According to Brannock, Litten, and Smith (2000), graduate student marriages were susceptible to high divorce rates, and graduate school has a negative impact on the state of marriage because of high levels of stress. Scheinkman (1988) noted that graduate students experience difficulty with combining the student role with that of a spouse. However, very little research addresses the views of a marriage when only one partner is enrolled in graduate school, more specifically doctoral programs

Maclean and Peters (1995) noted that when both spouses were students, each partner experienced the added stress of relationship responsibilities as well as attending school. In contrast, Bergen and Bergen (1978) reported that marriages where both spouses were in school were significantly happier than marriages when one spouse was in school. Maclean and Peters (1995) reported that marriages where both were in school spent more time in shared activities than their counterparts, which resulted in greater relationship satisfaction. These studies are consistent with the view that more similar life styles promote happier marriages.

Impact of a Doctoral Program on Marriage

Unfortunately, there is no official data on how many doctoral students get divorced during their program, but there is sufficient evidence that divorce may be an issue (Hyun, 2009). Middleton (2001) and Pederson and Daniels (2001) published articles on married doctoral students reporting that the divorce and breakup rate can range from 20 percent to 36 percent. More attention is now being directed to the impact of

doctoral programs on marriage, and so far indicate that doctoral programs affect marriages in a negative manner (Hyun, 2009).

Being a doctoral student may be an already challenging and stressful task, and adding a romantic relationship can heighten that stress level. Social support theory addresses stress and coping, and how having adequate support contributes to health by protecting people from the adverse effects of stress (Lakey & Cohen, 2000). Having the support from a spouse can help them protect their spouse from some stress as stated in social support theory. Hyun (2010) reported that the impact of doctoral programs on marriage has identified four reoccurring themes: financial difficulties, lack of time, change of lifestyle, and communication issues. These four themes can be devastating to a marriage and can either strengthen or diminish it.

Financial Difficulties

If one spouse is working on a doctoral degree full time, this may bring financial burden to the family, and financial burdens can lead to negative outcomes such as resentment and frustration. Limited use of financial sources often leads to changes in the couples' lifestyle even if only one spouse is in school. Giles (1983) noted that being financially strained could lead to many graduate students giving up, going out more often, or socializing with their peers outside the home setting. This research also found that financially strained graduate students could also do the opposite and have no social life for the fear of spending money (Giles, 1983).

Lack of Time

Lack of time was partially due to students making the work in the doctoral program a priority. Social support theory emphasizes that being in a relationship is a

bonded, connected, and close feeling one has for another, and involves shared leisure and other activities that are undertaken primarily for the inherent goal of enjoyment (Lahey & Cohen, 2000). For those that are in marriages where one spouse was a doctoral student, it was reported that they experienced inadequate and unsatisfactory relationships (Pederson & Daniels, 2001). It appears that there is an invisible, unspoken strain generated by the demands of a doctoral program, which can become more unbalanced when one spouse is in a doctoral program. It is critical to examine how marital conflicts are managed in Black married couples where one spouse is in a doctoral program and how time is managed.

Change of Lifestyle and Stress

If stress is a common factor to doctoral programs, then support is another factor that is needed. However, when one's support system is not stable or reliable, the relationships can filter into one's ability to complete a doctoral program. Jairam and Kahl (2012) stated that social support is largely beneficial, but when your support system engages in behaviors that hinder doctoral students, it affects academic progress. Spouses who provide love, encouragement, and practical support, can also hinder doctoral students' progress through communicative behaviors associated with a lack of understanding of doctoral education (Jairam and Kahl, 2012). In essence, marriage coupled with enrollment in a doctoral program appears to either strengthen the support system or weaken it.

Social Support Theory

As a spouse to a doctoral student, supporting oneself while maintaining and giving support to a spouse who is a doctoral student may be difficult, but appears to be

essential. Social support theory fits appropriately with this study because it is assumed those doctoral students and their spouses might experience many different levels of stress, and are all facing significant amounts of distress.

Having social support refers to obtaining a social network that encompasses psychological and material resources intended to benefit an individual's ability to cope with stress (Cohen, 2004). Cohen stated that support and resource could be obtained in an instrumental, informational, or emotional way. Instrumental support entails the provision of material aid (i.e. financial assistance to complete task), and refers to the having information that is intended to help the individual cope with current difficulties (i.e. advice or guidance to help with one's problems). Emotional support comprises the expression of empathy, caring, reassurance, and trust, and also provides a chance to express and vent emotions (Cohen, 2004). Lakey and Cohen (2000) summarize this by stating that the social support theory is basically emphasizing that support reduces the effects of stressful life events on health through either the supportive actions of others, or by possessing the belief that help is available.

There are three important theoretical perspectives within the social support theory that are essential to this study: (1) the stress and coping perspective, (2) the social constructionist perspective, and (3) the relationship perspective (Lakey & Cohen, 2000).

The Stress and Coping Perspective

The stress and coping perspective proposes that support contributes to health by protecting people from the adverse effects of stress (Lakey & Cohen, 2000, p. 29). For one to have a perception that there is available support means possibly making threatening situations appear less stressful; therefore, supportive actions are thought to

enhance coping performance (Lakey & Cohen, 2000), and a variety of measures of coping are available. For example, Lakey and Cohen (2000) reported that a social problem solving skill has been developed in which respondents indicate how they would solve a social problem.

The Social Constructionist Perspective

The social constructionist perspective proposes that support directly influences health by promoting self-esteem and self-regulation, regardless of the presence of stress (Lakey & Cohen, 2000). Social constructionist theories support that the character of emotional experiences and processes will be highly variable across social groups and cultures (Cohen, 2004). In particular, as Lakey and Cohen (2000) observed, the social constructionist perspective “suggests that there may be no clear consensus across individuals or groups as to what constitutes supportive behaviors” (pg. 36).

Social constructionist perspective views reality, including social support, and the self, as social constructions. Social constructions refer to the assumption that people’s perceptions about the world do not reflect ultimate reality, but instead that people construct theories and concepts about the world that reflect their social context (Lakey & Cohen, 2000). This perspective is about how a person is dealing with stressors on their own, so for the purposes of this study it is about not only about depending on outside support, but also constructing support from within.

The Relationships Perspective

The relationship perspective supports that the health effects of social support cannot be separated from relationship processes that often co-occur with support, such as companionship, intimacy, and low social conflict (Lakey & Cohen, 2000).

Companionship is a bonded, connected, and close feeling one has for another, and involves shared leisure and other activities that are undertaken primarily for the inherent goal of enjoyment (Lahey & Cohen, 2000). Social conflict can include criticism, breaking of promises, and fighting for limited resources. The relationship emphasizes that having a companion can produce positive affect, allows for release and recuperation from demands, and provides positive distraction from rumination about problems (Cohen, Underwood, & Gottlieb, 2000).

Summary

The graduation rates for students of color continues to have lower graduation rates when compared to their counterparts (Sloan, 1994). Although there is a rise in Blacks obtaining their doctoral degrees (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004), Blacks continue to have low enrollment numbers at colleges and universities (Bhat, Pillay, & Hudson, 2012). Regardless of the rates of Blacks increasing in doctoral programs, they are facing stressors such as added family stressors (LaTaillade, 2006) and racial microaggressions (Hoggard, Byrd, & Seller, 2012) that their other counterparts are not experiencing.

Although there has been research conducted in relation to the success of doctoral students completing their program successfully (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Lovitts, 2001; Sudol & Hall, 1991), being married in a graduate program (Goplerud, 1980; Giles, 1980; Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Hyun, 2009), and being Black in a graduate program (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2001; Bhat, Pillay, & Hudson, 2012; Cockrell, 2007; Sloan, 1994; Starks, 2010), there has been no study to date that combines the three themes and looks at this experience from the spouses perspective. In other words, social support, stress, education and financial stability have all been explored when describing

the experience of Black students completing a doctoral program, but now we must look how these all relate to the spouses who are often forgotten.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to understand perspectives of spouses of Black doctoral students during the completion of their program, and to understand how being in a marriage with a doctoral student influences future relational decisions: parenting, children, intimacy, and time spent together as a couple. The methods used in this study assisted in gathering the experiences of the participants by utilizing a transcendental phenomenological qualitative method. This method was implemented by utilizing interviews, focus groups, and photographic documentation. Paired with the interviews, focus groups, and photographic documentation, the demographic questionnaire was utilized as another method of data collection in order to provide a context for results. Research was completed using the social constructivist philosophical paradigm, which sought to understand the world in which participants live and work. Social support theory provides the theoretical framework for this dissertation. Social support theory categorizes how people experience stress on different levels and how these people obtain support in order to deal with stressful events (Lakey & Cohen, 2000). In this chapter, I describe the methodology of this qualitative study. The components of this chapter are: (a) participants and sampling, (b) research design, (c) instrumentation, (d) data collection, (e) data analysis, and (f) summary.

Qualitative Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted utilizing an in-depth phenomenological investigation to understand perspectives of the spouses of Black doctoral students during the completion of a doctoral program. I chose a transcendental phenomenological

qualitative methodology (Moustakas, 1994) in order to explore the lived experiences of the spouses of Black doctoral students. According to Moustakas (1994), a transcendental phenomenological approach focuses on the lived experiences of participants and also aids to give voice to marginalized cultures (Giorgi, 2008 Moustakas, 1994). According to Creswell (2007), a phenomenological approach helps describe what all the participants have in common as they experience their phenomenon, which gives a voice to an unknown culture. For this study, the unknown culture encompasses the lived experiences of Black doctoral student spouses.

This study followed a social constructivist philosophical paradigm. According to Creswell (2007) this paradigm seeks to understand the world in which participants live and work. Guba and Lincoln (2004) are credited with the development of constructivism as it applies to qualitative research. A constructivist considers reality based on social interaction and experiences that are local to the setting and participants, specific in nature, and dependent on persons or groups (Guba & Lincoln, 2004). I attempted to obtain the lived experiences of spouses of Black doctoral students in order to better understand the complexity of their views rather than simply narrowing their experiences to a few categories. The goal is to rely as much as possible on the participants' perspectives. Creswell (2007) stated that in order to practice a social constructivist view, one must ask broad questions so participants can create meaning related to the situation presented by the researcher. By doing this, participants are better able to communicate a meaning that has been shaped over time through their discussions with other people (the phenomenon). I am attempted to gain and understand the processes and the interactions the participants experienced in relation to their partner's education. Using a social

constructivist perspective, I was able to recognize how my personal experience may influence my interpretation of the data through reflective journaling, debriefing, or other means. The purpose of this study is to understand the perspectives of spouses of Black doctoral students while enrolled in a mental health related doctoral program.

Additionally, I sought to understand how being in a marriage with a doctoral student affects future planning with regard to the relationship, children, intimacy, and time spent together.

Researcher Disclosure

I chose this topic because, as a married Black doctoral student, I was reminded to find how the experiences of the spouses of doctoral students, regardless of race, have been overlooked in literature. Although researchers can make assumptions regarding marriages and the effects of graduate school on these unions, I was unable to locate a study that was solely dedicated to this topic. A qualitative approach was found to be the best way to study this overlooked phenomenon; therefore, I studied this issue by conducting individual interviews, focus groups, and photographic documentation with only the spouses of Black doctoral students. It was my hope that by exploring this phenomenon from a qualitative approach I could be afforded an opportunity to uncover the lived experiences of participants in order to more accurately describe this seemingly unknown phenomenon. Exploring and interviewing the spouses of Black doctoral students from a transcendental phenomenological perspective (Moustakas, 1994) allowed for new information to surface pertaining to individual experiences and provide a platform for future researchers to explore the perspectives of this population.

This topic is not only important for those that are in programs, but important for me to understand my spouse while I am completing my doctoral program. I was able to experience the differences, in comparison to other cohort members, how having a family affected my productivity in the program. As a married couple, all our decisions were surrounded based on what I was doing in my program and when I would graduate. As a Black student, I struggled at times to relate to my professors and staff members when discussing problems that were culturally specific, and noticed that I would withdraw from interpersonal relationships within the program and leaned to my spouse. To my dismay, I was only left to find out that my spouse was not equipped emotionally nor mentally to deal with the unique challenges I approached him with. I want to ensure that other students are able to obtain support, not only on an individual basis, but as a family unit as well.

Research Design

A qualitative research design (Creswell, 2007) was implemented utilizing interviews, focus groups, and photographic documentation. Paired with the interviews, focus groups, and photographic documentation, a demographic questionnaire was used as another method of data collection in order to describe the participant sample. In the interviews, focus groups, and photographic documentation, open-ended semi structured interview questions were used in order to obtain data that was rich and appropriate for this phenomenological qualitative study. In this study the question that began the interviews was: Tell me about your life since your spouse began her/his doctoral work. Open-ended interview questions are questions that cannot be answered with a “yes” or a “no,” and are used in qualitative research to understand peoples lived experiences. Semi

structured interviewing has features of both structured and unstructured interviews and thus utilize both closed and open questions. In order to be consistent with all participants, the researcher has a set of structured questions that served as a guide during the interview in order to cover all core areas with each participant. As the interview progresses, the interviewee was given an opportunity to elaborate or provide more relevant information if he/she opted to do so. A small number of participants were appropriate for my study because this is a qualitative study and thus the focus is not on generalizability (Giorgi, 2008). Specifically, this study was structured as a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological design was selected in order to gain rich, descriptive insight into the personal life experiences of each participant. Qualitative analysis provides richer data, which can facilitate the development of detailed results.

Participants and Sampling

When selecting participants for this study, criterion sampling was utilized. Criterion sampling is essential for phenomenological research as it was important for all participants to have experienced the same phenomenon from similar cultural backgrounds in order to reach saturation of themes related to the overall *grand tour* question (Creswell, 2007). According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013), criterion sampling involves choosing participants because they represent one or more selected criteria. The target population in this study included participants who were currently married to a student in a doctoral program, in a heterosexual marriage, male or female, and identify as a member of the Black racial group. There was no restriction on age. The participants' spouses that are attending a doctoral program completing their doctorate in a mental health related field, which included subjects such as counseling, psychology,

social work, and family studies. Participants were intentionally selected using criterion sampling because they all were experiencing the phenomenon that was being researched.

Recruitment

In order to find participants, I posted bulletins via social media, on campuses of local universities located in Harris County (i.e. Texas Southern University, Houston Baptist University, & Sam Houston State University), sent emails to local university departments that are located within Harris County, cold calling, in person directly by me, and announcements in professional meetings. Eligible participants must meet the following criteria: (a) first, they must be married to a Black doctoral student that is currently enrolled in a mental health related doctorate program, and (b) second, they must be Black or of Black decent themselves. There were no restrictions on age or the length of time each participant has been married to their spouse.

Instrumentation

For this study, information was gathered using a brief demographic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, a focus group process, and photographs. These data collection methods were used to help determine and understand the participants' experience of the phenomenon. As Creswell (2007) stated, using interviews in a phenomenological study allows for description of the meaning of a phenomenon as it relates to a small number of individuals who experience it. Incorporating an audiovisual data collection method, photographic documentation, is a new innovative way to actually view the phenomenon as the participant sees it rather than only hearing her or his interpretation of the event.

Demographic information

Participants completed a demographic information sheet that included questions regarding participants' age, gender, race/ethnicity, religious/spiritual identity, sexual identity, length of marriage, education level, number of children, household income, occupation, and current living arrangement (See Appendix A). The demographic information was used to help create a context for the data following analysis and coding. An amalgamated case display was provided in order to create a context through which the data can be understood while protecting the individual identities of participants.

Interview and focus group protocol

Creswell (2007) suggested in-depth individual interviews as a primary data source in a phenomenological research. I conducted a semi-structured interview (Moustakas, 1994) which consisted of open-ended questions to help keep the interview unrestricted so that the participants were able to discuss their marital experiences freely. The same interview structure was also completed during a focus group. A focus group allowed participants to freely discuss their experiences with individuals who are also experiencing the same phenomenon. Focus group participants were able to not only share their input but feed off of each other in order to provide richer data. A primary advantage to focus groups is being able to observe the amount of interaction from a small number of participants in an informal discussion (Morgan, 1997). In most cases, a focus group environment is socially oriented and typically nonthreatening, which allows participants to discuss their perceptions, feelings, opinions, and ideas openly (Harris, 2012; Krueger & Casey, 2000). The interview protocol (see Appendix B) was created to explore the lived experiences of the non-student spouses to get a further understanding of the

dynamics of the marriages. Each interview and focus group ranged from 30 minutes to an hour, and was audio recorded to ensure accuracy of data analysis.

Some examples of interview questions include: (a) Describe your relationship since your partner has been attending a doctoral program? (b) What life plans have been changed during the time your partner has been in school, if any? (c) If you could wave a magic wand and things could be better than they are right now, what would you see? (d) Describe a typical day. These questions allowed the participant to share information and possibly expound upon their statements. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to probe for more information, if need be, depending on participant response. As a basis for the interview conversations, studies pertaining to being married in a graduate program and studies that addressed being Black in a doctoral program (Bhat, Pillay, & Hudson, 2012, Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000; Brooks, 1988; Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; Hyun, 2009; Labosier, 2011; Reddick, 2011; Scheickman, 1988; and Starks, 2010) were reviewed in order to construct the following semi-structured questions (see Appendix B).

1. Tell me about your life since your spouse began her/his doctoral work.
2. Describe your relationship with your spouse since he/she has been in a doctoral program.
3. What things have changed for the better in your marriage since your partner has been in a doctoral program, if any?
 - a. What things have changed for the worse, if any?
4. What life plans have changed during the time your spouse has been in school, if any?

5. Describe your role as a spouse since your partner's enrollment in the doctoral program.
6. How do you and your spouse spend time together?
7. Describe a typical day.
8. If you could wave a magic wand and things could be better than they are right now, how would your life be different?

Photographic documentation

A participant was given a disposable camera that carries approximately 27 exposures on the camera. The participant was instructed to take pictures that depict their "typical day" experience of being the spouse of a doctoral student. They were instructed not to take pictures of people's faces or any identifying information to protect the identities of respondents. The participant was informed that photos may be published in order to illustrate thematic results. The researcher instructed all participants to use the complete roll of 27 exposures during the study. All stipulations and instructions were provided in writing when they obtain their camera (see Appendix E). Once completed, the researcher met the participant who took photographs. They were asked to title the photos with one sentence that described what each image represented in order to facilitate participant guided meaning. The developed photographs and titles were used to explore the lived experiences of the intimate partner to get a further understanding of the dynamics of the marriage.

Using individual and focus group interviews and photographic documentation as collection methods helped me explore general topics that are relative to my topic and help uncover the participants' views. Interviewing is a method that is based on the assumption

that is fundamental to qualitative research and that is the participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it (emic perspective), not the way I view it (etic perspective) (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The social constructivist paradigm sought to understand the world in which the participants lived in. This was done in order to fully get their viewpoints, understand their voices, and perspectives. Social constructivist paradigm approaches to research have the intention of understanding the world of the human experience, suggesting the reality is socially constructed (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). The constructivist tends to rely upon the participants' views of the situation being studied, in this case the spouse, and recognizes the impact on the research of their own background and experiences (Creswell, 2007).

Data Collection

After obtaining approval to conduct the study from the Institutional Review Board of Sam Houston State University, I sent an email to potential participants encouraging them to participate in the study. Included in recruitment documents was an explanation of the purpose of the study. A second email was sent after two weeks to increase the response return rate. The participants that did respond to the email received a phone call from me within a week from the second email. Upon receiving return emails from the participants, I responded via e-mail to begin the process of scheduling their involvement. All interested participants were contacted via telephone to obtain information about their schedules and to set up times to conduct a face-to-face interview, focus group session, or to arrange a time for them to pick-up a camera with instructions for documentation.

Prior to interviews, the researcher obtained informed consent from all participants (see Appendix G). Informed consent included the name of the researcher, contact

information for the IRB at SHSU, and detailed information explaining how the researcher would uphold confidentiality. During the face-to-face interviews, the researcher secured a convenient, quiet, and private environment to conduct interviews. Before the interview, the participants completed the demographic information sheet. When completing the demographic form, participants selected a pseudonym that will be used to confidentially code their data. Following this, I interviewed the participants utilizing the semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix B). The participants who were involved in individual interviews did not engage in the focus group nor were among those who did complete the photographic documentation. The same interview questions were utilized during the focus group session. During the interviews and focus group, I maintained a journal so that could briefly write down observations that were noticed by the participants in order to keep accurate field notes throughout the study. Each method of data collection occurred concurrently. Participants were not able to use multiple methods and the researcher chose which method they completed. The participants were assigned to a collection method dependent on their availability. Using more than one type of data collection method helps to ensure triangulation of data. Triangulation refers to the use of more than one approach to collect data in order to enhance confidence when ensuring findings (Creswell, 2007). The use of the same question structure between the interviews and focus group is thought to help with the consistency of coding and analysis. In other words, the semi-structured interviews served to answer the following research question: What are the lived experiences of the spouses of Black students pursuing doctoral degrees in counseling and other mental health related fields.

The remaining participant was involved in the photographic documentation process. The participant was given a disposable camera with approximately 27 exposures. They were informed of what the disposable camera was intended for and what they were to capture. They were then informed that they are not allowed to take pictures of people's faces or themselves. Shortly after, the participant got a print out of the stipulations and "dos and don'ts" when capturing images (see Appendix E). The participant had approximately seven days (one calendar week) to take photographs that accurately depicted their typical day experience as a spouse of a doctoral student.

Follow-up interviews were not conducted for the participants that completed an individual face-to-face interview or focus group; however, transcripts were sent to participants following data collection to allow for member checking. All interviews and follow up interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The participant that completed the photographic documentation process had the camera picked up by researcher after one week, and the researcher developed all photographs. Once photographs were developed, the researcher set up a date, location, and time with the participant to follow-up in order to discuss the meaning of photographs. The researcher then inquired what each picture "meant" to the participant and have them write it briefly behind each photograph in one sentence (see Appendix F).

Bracketing

Moustakas (1994) reported that transcendental phenomenology focuses on describing the experiences that participants are living through in spoken words. I engaged in bracketing by reflecting on my own previous experiences, biases, and assumptions regarding the experiences of the life of a doctoral student, being that I identify myself as

Black and in a martial relationship as well. I recognized how my personal experience may have influenced my interpretation of the data through reflective journaling, debriefing, or other means. This process helped me to set my own experiences aside in order to gain a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon studied. The researcher was able to obtain the experiences of the participants through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and by photograph descriptions.

Data Analysis

The following research questions informed this process of this study: (a) What are perspectives of the spouses of Black students pursuing doctoral degrees in a mental health field? (b) In what ways does being married to a doctoral student change the dynamics within the marriage?

Prior to the data being analyzed, I transcribed all interviews, observations, documents, and field notes. I created and maintained a Microsoft Word file for the interviews, observations, documents, and field notes which all were protected by setting a private password that only I had. All files were saved in my laptop computer for which I only have access to, and emailed all documentation to a private email inbox for backup storage, which was only accessible by me.

The researcher employed a research team that consisted of two other doctoral students. These students were attending Sam Houston State University Counselor Education department and Texas Southern University Counseling department. These team members were chosen due to their knowledge in phenomenological research, education level, and availability to help with the research data analysis. The research team and I examined all interviews, observations, documents, and field notes collected

from participants using Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method to explore themes. This approach helped the team identify meanings as they cluster the data into themes allowing for the presentation of an exhaustive description of the phenomenon. Moustakas's (1994) adaptation of Modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method for analyzing phenomenological data is utilized by following seven set steps: horizontalization, reduction and elimination, clustering and thematizing, individual textural description, individual structural description, and construct for each participant textural-structural description.

The first step, horizontalization, is a method of understanding the collected data by placing all participants' answers on one level and then eliminating redundant sections (Moustaka, 1994). In the second step, reduction and elimination, I determined if the participants' answers emerge into a theme or an overall horizon of the phenomenon being research (Moustaka, 1994). The third step, clustering and thematizing, involved clustering and identifying themes from the previous steps of the phenomenological experience, and the fourth step validates the themes that were labeled in step three (Moustakas, 1994). The fifth step, "Individual Textural Description" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121), provides samples from the transcribed interviews. These samples included verbal and nonverbal communication. The sixth step which involves the researcher to construct "Individual Structural Descriptions" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121), this is to describe the participants' words and phrases and how the themes fit together. Lastly, the last step requires creating a "Textural-Structural Description" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121) by integrating the descriptions from steps five and six that basically capture the essence of the phenomenon.

The team consisted of individuals who are currently in a doctoral program or those who have obtained a Ph.D. in Counselor Education. I designated one group session with the team in order to code all the data together. This allowed the team members to ask questions amongst each other and be in an environment that was solely focused on coding data. The team and I analyzed the data collected by coding transcripts from the individual interviews, the focus group, and descriptions of photographs collected from the participants by categorizing text or keywords that were similar to one another.

This research focused on the experience of the phenomenology of the spouses, and was analyzed using a holistic cultural portrait to incorporate the views of the participants (emic) as well as the views of the researcher (etic) (Creswell, 2007). The research team developed a list of themes during the coding process that are identified during the interviews, focus groups, and photograph descriptions. Once the list of themes was created, the researcher associated the words and phrases that support each theme (as identified by the team member) and organize data results into overarching themes in order to tie together coder responses. The analysis of data concentrated on connecting the themes to help gain more understanding of the experiences of the participants.

Trustworthiness

I utilized Guba's (1981), model of trustworthiness to improve reliability and validity of the study with four components: (a) truth value, (b) applicability, (c) consistency, and (d) neutrality (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Lincoln and Guba (1982) stressed the importance of developing trustworthiness and credibility within qualitative research. They defined trustworthiness as the researcher's ability to "persuade" the readers of the research study and the researcher, himself or herself, that the research

findings and analyses are important and significant (p. 290). Completing a qualitative research study, I ensured that the research I completed was credible and trustworthy. Trustworthiness, or validation, is a concern in which Creswell (2007) emphasized the importance of validation strategies and techniques when conducting qualitative research. In qualitative research, trustworthiness or credibility is analogous to the concept of validity (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003), and by using a wide array of terms and perspectives helps with design validity (Creswell, 2007).

There are several core areas of focus that are discussed by Guba and Lincoln to use for research in order to determine the trustworthiness and credibility of a qualitative study. First is *truth-value*, which involves developing strategies to establish confidence that findings are truthful to stated participant experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). In order to *establish truth-value*, the strategy of peer examination was used by discussing data with experienced colleagues throughout the coding process. *Applicability* was established by ensuring that the context inherent in this study could be applied to other groups and individuals that are relevant to the study's subject matter (Guba & Lincoln). Future researchers will be able to apply this study's methods to the experiential exploration of different groups (cultures and peoples) encountering this phenomenon. *Consistency* can be established by identifying whether the particular findings of a study occur in other contexts or with other groups (Guba & Lincoln). Lastly, *neutrality* was established by use of transcripts, and having the same interview questions for individual interviews and focus groups (Guba & Lincoln). In the discussion portion of this dissertation, I discussed any problems that arose and bias that may have been brought into the research. Neutrality was established by triangulating data, sources and

researcher's interpretation of data or as Guba (1981) called conformability (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

Credibility

In phenomenological research the credibility or truth-value is when participants recognize the reported research findings as their own experiences, and is the truth of how the participants know and experience the phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The interpretations, meanings, and descriptions that were obtained from the research data are expected to be genuine representations of the experiences of the spouses that are participating. Recording equipment was utilized during interviews, focus groups, and the discussions of the photographs in order to elicit recorded personal accounts of experiences; the primary method for obtaining information about the phenomenon.

In qualitative research, rich and thick data are important in addressing credibility (Johnson, 1997). Thick descriptions should be thorough enough to provide detailed and clear meanings to the phenomenon being explored (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Therefore, my research process is clearly described so that the reader can apply the information to other settings.

Conformability

In order to free my research from bias I developed research procedures that helped mitigate any personal bias I may introduce to the research process. To provide evidence of conformability, I intend to keep a reflective journal to record the decisions I make as well as my personal feelings during the data analysis process. According to Lincoln and Guba, journaling will develop an audit trail that will help others understand what was done and why. This audit trail will reflect subjective influences that may affect

the study process. Audit trails are seen as a method to ensure what Lincoln and Guba consider dependability of the study.

Summary

In this chapter, I described the methodology and design of my proposed research. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the lived experiences of the spouses of Black students pursuing doctoral degrees in a mental health related fields. This study was completed in order to understand how being in a marriage with a doctoral student influences the development of the intimate partnership, decisions regarding children, intimacy, and relational quality time. I designed interview questions that are open-ended in order to obtain a better picture of the lived experiences of the participants. Participants were recruited through the use of email with information about the study and the researcher's email address. The Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method were used to explore themes. In addition, issues concerning trustworthiness were addressed by describing reliability, member checking, credibility, validity, and peer examination were detailed.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The purpose of my transcendental phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994) was to understand perspectives of the spouses of Black doctoral students during the completion their program. The following research questions informed this process of this study: (a) What are perspectives of the spouses of Black students pursuing doctoral degrees in a mental health field? and (b) In what ways does being married to a doctoral student change the dynamics within the marriage? Through an in-depth examination of the spouses of Black doctoral students, insight into the experiences and events that affected their marriages are offered. Chapter IV presents the results of eight spouses, three of which participated in a focus group interview, one in photographic documentation, and four in individual interviews. All were methods were conducted to answer the research questions by exploring and examining each participant's experiences in their marriages.

I employed a semi-structured interview protocol for the collection of qualitative data in which interviews, a focus group, and photographic documentation were conducted at participants' homes, offices, or restaurants in a large metropolitan area. Contact was initiated through letters sent via email, in person directly by me, and by cold calling. All contact methods summarized the study to the potential participants and requested participants who voluntarily agreed to take part in the research to contact me.

Upon completion of the interviews, I transcribed all interviews, observations, documents, and field notes, and analyzed the transcriptions on a line-by-line basis using no qualitative software. I recruited a research team that consisted of two other doctoral

students that color-coded the transcriptions by hand to organize and categorize the data into groups or themes. Data was analyzed utilizing Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method during the interview analysis in order to account for an overall understanding of each phenomenon. I also created a matrix that allowed for further analysis of the themes that emerged. Finally, I examined the responses to each question, which provided a basis for discussing the qualitative data. In this chapter, the participants' profiles and resulting themes are explored.

Participants' Profile

To begin the first part of the interview, I asked participants to complete a demographic information form (i.e. age, gender, race/ethnicity, religious/spiritual identity, length of marriage, highest education level, number of children, household income, occupation, and living arrangements) (see Appendix A). All participant's names and identifying information from the demographic sheets and interviews were changed in order to protect their identity and confidentiality.

Demographic Information

In total, eight individuals contacted me regarding participating in the study, and all eight individuals participated in this study. As shown in Table 1, the participants ranged in age from 31 to 50. Regarding the sex of the participants, five were males and three were female. Of the five male participants, one had some college, three had bachelor's degrees, and one had a master's degree. Of the female participants all three had master degrees. As depicted in table 1, the household income of the spouses ranged from \$40,001 to over \$100,000. Out of the eight participants, all were gainfully employed full time and contributed financially to their household. In addition, at the time of data

collection, the participants' spouses were all employed full time and were attending school full time as well. All participants described themselves as practicing Christians, but varied in denominations (i.e. Catholic, AME Christian, Baptist, and Non-Denominational), and some willingly discussed their viewpoints related to faith and religion in relation to their marriage. In regards to number of children in each household, two participants reported having no children, while the remaining participants reported having from one to four children. The participants who did not have children reported in their interviews planning to start a family in the near future. The number of years that participants were married ranged from 6 months to up to 10 years, and two of the participants were married for 2.5 years.

Table 1

Summary of Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Sex	Education Level	Household Income	No. of Children	Years of Marriage	Religious Affiliation
Jasmine	31	F	Master's	\$40,001-\$60,000	0	2.5 Years	Christian
Cherry	32	F	Master's	Over \$100,000	2	1.5 Years	Christian
Christina	33	F	Master's	Over \$100,000	0	4.5 Years	Catholic
James	35	M	Bachelor's	Over \$100,000	1	3 Years	Christian – A.M.E
John	36	M	Bachelor's	Over \$100,000	4	10 Years	Baptist
Joe	45	M	Some College	\$80,001-\$100,000	3	8 Years	Catholic
Smith	45	M	Bachelor's	Over \$100,000	3	2 Years	Baptist
Bradley	50	M	Bachelor's	Over \$100,000	3	6 Months	Baptist

Participant #1: Jasmine

Jasmine is a 31-year-old married Black female with no children. She has been married for two and a half years. She completed graduate school and currently has a Master's degree. Jasmine began dating her husband shortly after her Bachelor's degree, and was married approximately six years later. Jasmine expressed that her husband attending a doctoral program was unexpected and it has been a difficult adjustment for her. Jasmine describes herself a Christian who currently attends a non-denominational church, and believes that her faith in God is what is holding her marriage together. She grew up in a two-parent home, and believes that her parents are an ideal example of what marriage should look like. When asked about being a wife to a doctoral student, Jasmine replied, "I always say that his program, the doctoral program, is his wife." When asked to describe her thoughts on marriage, she stated "I know it's not going to be easy with him being in school, just one of those things that's just not easy, but it doesn't last forever, trouble doesn't last always."

Participant #2: John

John is a 36-year-old married Black male with four children. He has been married for a total of 10 years. He reported that was raised in a single parent home, and had little communication with his father growing up. He described his parental interactions by stating, "(M)y mother was the only one who was there. I saw my dad, but he was neither here or there." He described his mother as having some middle school education and his father as only completing ninth grade. He is the first person in his family to go and complete a college education. He reported that he was not in an environment where marriages were successful. John met his wife in high school, and reported that they went

to undergraduate schools in different states. He stated that being in different states helped and hurt his relationship. However, they were married and living in the same household when she attended graduate school, and stated, “She was here and it was stressful. It requires more time and her being even more stressed out.” John described himself as still trying to figure out who he is as a husband, and has had several infidelity issues in the past. He stated that the lack of time his wife devotes to him has led him to find comfort in another woman physically and emotionally. He shared that his wife found out about one of his indiscretions, and this helped him realize that he was being “selfish.” He went on to say, “I mean, I had to see this is not only about me.” He enjoys working out at the gym and playing sports during his free time.

Participant #3: Cherry

Cherry is a 32-year-old married Black female with one child. She has been married for one and a half years. She has completed her Master’s degree and is currently employed as an accountant manager. Combined with her spouse’s income, her household income is over \$100,001. Cherry began dating her husband shortly after he was divorced from his first wife. She stated that he has a child with his first wife and reported that they are successfully co-parenting. Cherry reported that her spouse “has a lot of people behind him trying to help him” in relation to his career and education. She discussed that her husband’s procrastination with finishing his doctoral program has altered her view on her husband, but she did not specify if her view was altered positively or negatively.

She reported that she was raised in a household where her parents remained married, and that she has an extended family with many long-term marriages. She describes herself as a Christian and believes that growing up with strong marriages

around her has helped her remain strong during this stressful time with her husband.

Cherry stated that her husband being in a doctoral program is not a stressor anymore. Due to her spouse not actively trying to complete his program, she stated, “(I)t’s the fact that he’s lacking the motivation to finish that’s affecting the marriage.”

Participant #4: Christina

Christina is a 33-year-old married Black female that has been married for four and a half years with no children. She has completed her Master’s degree in Business, and currently works in healthcare administration. Her annual household income is over \$100,001 a year between her and her spouse’s income. Christina stated that being in healthcare helps with her marriage dynamic because she is interested in his schoolwork and they are able to share stories about work and school. She reported that her husband being in school has taken away from their quality time together and reported, “I missed like, just the hanging out.” Time with her husband was her primary concern at present, and she stated discussions about having children will be revisited once he finishes with school. She stated that not having children has made her question herself, stating, “Is my uterus giving up? Are my ovaries getting old? Are my eggs, I am just you know, I was just wondering, you know, when do I have kids so that my kids can play with my best friends’ kids. I know it is kind of like shallow thinking like that. It’s just, but we are saving more.” Christina emphasized the importance of being married first and then having children, and reported that her Catholic beliefs primarily guide her on to how to handle her marriage. She believes that having her affairs in order first will help once a child is introduced into their lives. She reported that she was understanding of his lack of

time, and often compared his schoolwork and time away with her time in graduate school.

Participant #5: James

James is a 35-year-old married Black male who has been married for three years, and currently has one child with his current wife. He reported obtaining a Master's degree in Business Administration and currently works in politics. Although he is well established in his career, he has enlisted in the military as an Army Reserve Officer. He explained that his primary reason for enlisting in the army is due to wanting to provide his family "with more." James explained that his wife being enrolled in a doctoral program has led to him helping with household needs more often, stating "I have to chip in where needed. The results might not be the same." He appears to understand that his wife being enrolled in school can be stressful, but reported that "studying can be stressful, so I try to brighten her day with flowers." He reported that he tries to see the "silver lining" of every trial they are currently experiencing. When asked about positive and negative changes in his marriage since his wife entered the doctoral program, he stated:

"It was a bit of a betrayal that I found myself washing dishes every night no matter what time I came home. But I've come to actually enjoy washing the dishes because the majority of the dishes are our baby's things. And so I take at my role my responsibility to kind of help with the feeding process that is -- because my wife breastfeeds. It's 99% hers."

James reported that he has made it a point to create positive situations from negative ones, and has made an extra effort to show support while his spouse completes her doctoral program.

Participant #6: Joe

Joe is a 45-year-old married Black male who has been married a total of eight years, but explained that he has been with his wife for over 20 years. He has a total of four children, three of which are with his current spouse. He completed high school with his GED and obtained some professional training after high school for career advancement. Joe met his wife when he was 24 years old and she was 15 years old. He describes his life as being “lived,” and explained that he has been through many heart breaking and difficult times. He admitted that he has been to prison three times due to selling and distributing narcotics, and when he left prison the last time he was able to go to school to obtain professional training. He explained that his wife has been by his side through it all, and that her involvement in a doctoral program is a “walk in the park” in comparison to other trials they have experienced. However, Joe admitted that “I had no idea what was going to be to that magnitude, you know? No dinner, no sex.” He explained that he appreciates a wife “that can take care of business” and further explained that he knows education is key in creating that mindset.

Joe and his wife have a combined household income between \$80,001-\$100,000 and they both work full time. He stated that they both are equally invested in their children, and ensuring that homework, chores, and other household duties are successfully managed. Joe mentioned that he became more “domesticated” and cooks and cleans the house more often, but stated that he “wants a traditional wife that does traditional things.” When asked about his religious beliefs, he reported that he is Catholic, but does not attend church regularly. Upon further questioning, Joe did not elaborate on

his religious beliefs in regards to his marriage. Joe made clear that he admires his spouse for going to school and completing her doctorate, and stated:

It is has been many nights, my man, I have went to sleep at ten o'clock and rolled over and woke up at 4:30 in the morning and she is still at it ... and sometimes I can look at that and admire it, but sometimes I can look at it and be like damn babe, really?

Participant #7: Bradley

Bradley is a 50-year-old married Black male with three children. He has been married to his current wife for six months. Combined with her spouse's income, her household income is over \$100,001. He reported that this is his second marriage and that he has no children with his current spouse. Bradley has a Bachelor's degree and works full time in sales. He explained that since his wife began her doctoral program "there's really very little family time and very little social time." He explained that he tries to help with children and household duties and volunteering his time by taking his children to piano practice and cooking. He explained that he was raised in a single parent home with his mother, and that he learned at an early age that you have to "chip in to help." He stated that when growing up with his mother, "Saturdays is what we call Cleaning Saturdays, and we picked a room or two and that is what you were supposed to do."

Participant #8: Smith

Smith is a 45-year-old Black male who has been married for 2.5 years to his current spouse. He has a total of three children, all of whom are from previous relationships and marriage. Smith is a widower and met his current wife shortly after his previous wife passed away from cancer. Smith has a Master's degree in Criminal Justice

and currently works as a deputy constable. He and his current wife live together with his son, and he stated his other two daughters live out of state with their mother. Together they have a combined household income of over \$100,001 a year, and he stated that they both work full time.

Smith currently is thinking about going back to school to obtain his doctorate, but reported that he is unsure if that is his “calling” after seeing what his current wife is dealing with. He stated that the family “felt kind of isolated for a while” and that time was “so limited” due to his wife’s enrollment in school. He expressed his frustrations with his wife “killing herself” because she would unnecessarily “put more on her plate”. He stated that he believes that a wife should be “domestic, and they have the role of being a mother”, and that he is an “old fashioned guy” and that his role is to “work nonstop, so she don’t have to do that.” However, he reported that he wants to be a “power couple” and that it he will enjoy saying that his wife is a doctor.

Emerged Themes

In my quantitative research, several themes were identified with the results organized around the individual interviews, a focus group, and a photographic documentation process. Each participant was involved in one method of data collection as depicted in table 2. These methods were conducted to gain insight into the intimate partners’ actual experiences. The interview questions that were used during both individual sessions and the focus group covered relational changes, intimacy, and lived experienced during the time their partner was in school.

Table 2

Participants Methods

Participant	Method
Jasmine	Individual Interview
Cherry	Individual Interview
Christina	Individual Interview
James	Photographic Documentation
John	Individual Interview
Joe	Focus Group
Smith	Focus Group
Bradley	Focus Group

Four etic themes were derived after carefully coding transcriptions, and chunking common themes in order to describe the phenomenon: marital roles, the potential of more money, support/coping strategies, and time spent together (Figure 1). The research team examined all interviews, observations, documents, and field notes collected from participants using Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method to explore themes. This approach helped the team identify meanings as they clustered the data into themes allowing for the presentation of an exhaustive description of the phenomenon. Moustakas's (1994) adaptation of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method for analyzing phenomenological data is utilized by following seven set steps: horizontalization, reduction and elimination, clustering and thematizing, individual textural description, individual structural description, and construct for each participant textural-structural description. I presented details of each of the seven steps in Chapter

three. Using comparative pattern analysis, the themes that were developed were: marital roles, the potential of more money, support/coping strategies, and time spent together.

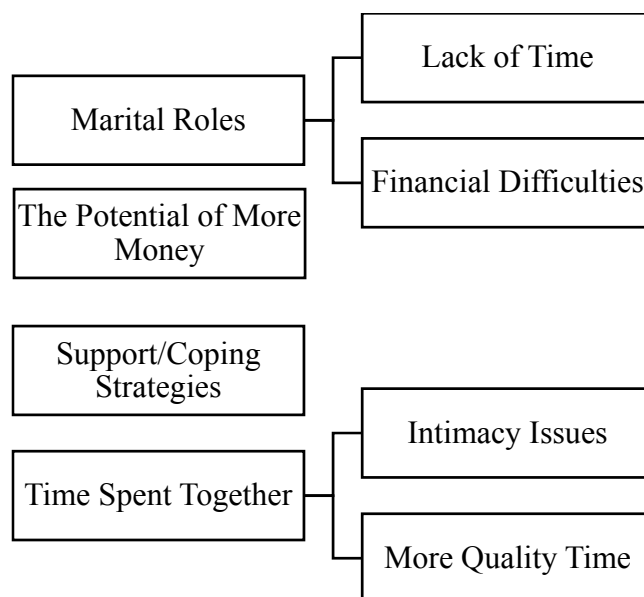


Figure 1. Emerged themes.

Marital Roles

The following themes represent the marital roles that were identified and discussed by the spouses: (a) lack of time and (b) financial difficulties.

Lack of time. All eight of the spouses involved in this study were able to clearly identify how time has become a factor in their marriage once their spouse started their doctoral work. The commonality amongst the participants was that they contributed to the lack of time with their spouse that is currently enrolled in school full time by not taking initiative. Several participants explained that they realized that extra effort was necessary on their part in order to spend time with their spouse. James wrote behind one of his photographs “(M)y spouse has an amazing ability to multitask these two things, our child and her dissertation. I am not certain she has time for me.” He explained further

what he does to spend time with his spouse by explaining that “that picture was taken a day I returned from a long trip so I hadn’t seen her in a very long time, and I prepare like romantic dinner and things.” Bradley shared his experiences with his wife and that he appreciates her more due to not having much time together detailing: “We have a greater appreciation for each other in term of quality time, you value it, you cherish it because it is not plentiful. I mean when it comes time to sort out finances, she’ll ask me for my input on certain things that she is doing, and I like that. I mean, if anything involves me in it, you know, this is where we can sit there and at least spend 15, 20, 30 minutes together. I feel she is doing so much, just like I said, yeah, and in those instances when you really get a chance to sit down and get involved in what she’s doing and understand, you know. You got to better understand what she’s doing, so yeah, you all could.”

Jasmine stated, “(A) lot of time in bed, like, just no TV, no sex necessarily, just time in bed talking and laughing, we laugh a lot,” when explaining what she does in order to spend time with her spouse. John mentioned several times during his interview about his frustrations with not having time with his spouse due to school, work, and children. He explained that lack of time was partially to blame for his infidelity. John explained, “(B)ecause of her lack of not spending time, I kind of found myself talking to outsiders just as, you know let them know the starting thing. It was occupying my time because she wasn’t giving me time.” He later explained his thoughts about his infidelity in hindsight. “I had to control myself. I allowed myself to almost allow those values to go out the way because I got distracted. I allowed distraction to come in and not look at the bigger picture. It’s not that she’s doing anything wrong, you know, she’s trying to better herself and be better for us. But I was being selfish and I was aware of that. I know most people

do not, they don't see it, but I was able to recognize it." For other participants, their marriages were experiencing hard times, but most participants understood that the lack of time was only a temporary issue. Joe explained, "I have to compromise, I have to accept it for what it is. I think it's a bigger picture for it all because I mean, I been with my wife for 22 years and you know, we started from the bottom, now we here, you know what I'm saying?"

Bradley stated, "(F)or us, we have retirement discussions, futuristic in terms of, you know, putting in a lot of work now," and stated this when describing his long-term goals once his spouse completes her doctoral program. Smith shared his thoughts about how his time management will have to change in order to make the marriage, household, and school work:

"Well, I realized that there was, that it was going to be very tight. And so, my first thing I noticed -- well, when I took the initiative to say hey, you know, let's map out some things, we share everything but maybe I need to do more of the cooking, I need to take Jay to piano practice instead of you, how about this, I'll just free up your cleaning schedule and I'll, you know, make sure I support that. So, immediately, that was one change, but the biggest change was also to our personal life as in reference to, you know, attainment, you know, what do you do for hour and hour and that pretty much there is no hour and hour, you know, it's -- the wife that went to school. And that's the biggest change was that, you know, there's really very little family time and very little social time."

Smith shared his frustration regarding the lack of time he spends with his spouse and discussed how it is affecting the family unit. He briefly summarized how the lack of time made him feel as though he was not a part of her world:

When she was in there we had a lot of controversy and just normal things that need to be taken care of was talked about. We got her job and the doctoral program, her time was limited to anything and I felt kind of isolated and I felt that not only myself but our son was, you know, kind of isolated because she would just be in the kitchen, well, at the dining table and you have to stay away from her, you know. And this was almost on a daily basis. So, we felt kind of isolated for a while.”

Joe described a sense of rejection when asked about how he his life has changed since his spouse entered into a doctoral program stating: Personal time, you know, this between she and I, if we had the opportunity to get a babysitter, you know, focus on that, plus on top is when she was free, she’s on the phone and talking to her classmates, you know, and getting stuff. And we’ve had arguments like really about her thinking I am trying to control her, no, I’m not trying to control, but there’s got to be a time that you got to have time for me.” Cherry explained that the real challenge is just finding time, detailing, “It’s actually because probably because he was working 8 hours a day and drives like an hour to school and the same coming back. Like, I probably see him like at 10 o’clock at night you know what I mean?”



Figure 2. Photograph taken by Smith

My spouse has an amazing ability to multi-task these two things: our child and her dissertation. I am not certain she has time for me.

Figure 3. Back of photograph taken by participant Smith. Shown is the participant's description of the photograph shown in Figure 2.

Financial Difficulties. With regards to finances in the household, participants shared information about current financial difficulties or how they were waiting for their spouses to finish school in order to improve their current financial situations. Jasmine shared how she has to remind herself about what is to come, and stated: "What I try to tell myself is, you know, you are a part of what he does because I really am. And, you know, this won't last forever and then, you know, a lot of things will be better, they'll be

more of him, they'll be more money, they'll be, you know. So, yeah, talking about that you feel like his mistress, like, he sneaks away to me when he finds time, yeah." Cherry shared, "(S)o it's kind of hard to say like something has been changed for the better. Um maybe he has more confidence about himself because I think he knows he's getting close and he's going to be able to make a lot more money once he graduates." Jasmine discussed how financially her spouse will be better in the future, "I can't really say that things have changed rather better financially, I guess maybe my hope that financially things will change for the better after he graduate. I think just both of us aren't financially where we want to be."

The male participants involved in the group often mentioned that they did not understand why their spouse would "take on" so much when they are the providers of the household. Smith shared his insight about working and providing financially: "I'm an old-fashioned guy, I believe I go out and work nonstop, I have three jobs that I work so she doesn't have to do that. So, I could tell her she don't have to take more responsibility which then we got into an argument because she has more of a conservative style, you know it's 50/50, you know. I can pull my weight just as I well as you can and I'm old fashioned. That became a problem because, you know, in her head we had this argument, you know, I thought you wanted to be this power couple, yeah, so I do, I love that my wife will be a doctor but when you're home you miss my wife." Joe mentioned, "I'm here to make the money. I told her to quit, don't take on another job, don't. I take on another job, I need you in a whole different mindset" when discussing wanting his spouse to only focus on school and matter of the house. Bradley shared his ideals on marriage and who should provide:

Marriage is sacred, it's everything, there is no substitution for happiness and my wife is my everything. And then for marriage I want to make sure that whatever I can do as a man so she can lean on me. I am supposed to provide, if there is someone who should have a 'fall boy' it should be her. You know, because I'm the one, I have to be the man, you know, I should be the one that provides. And so, I think I learned much from my parents but just because of, you know, how we grew up I just -- I didn't want my mom to ache to provide for my education and she worked at a laundry mat. I did not really know what to do with money. I had a basketball scholarship, but people around me was getting money to put in the bank. I just apply what I was taught, and I later found out that my mom made \$4.75 cent an hour and my dad made \$5.25 an hour.

Smith also explained further about his discussions with his spouse regarding her paid work, "(R)ight now she teaches for her university and she started teaching this thing online which was really killing her and, you know, I have to tell you, we're not desperate for any money or whatsoever why are you taking on put more in your plate?"

The Potential of More Money

The second theme shows how participants' saw how their spouse's education could potentially increase the finances in their household. Most participants complained about finances and the lack of finances. However, many discussed money in terms of their spouse making more in the future, and what they plan on doing with the extra income once their spouse is a Ph.D. Bradley's future financial goals were geared towards having a more relaxed and convenient life with his spouse. He explained:

For us, retirement discussions, futuristic in terms of, you know, putting in a lot of work now. I think which is why you're saying she wants to do everything. I think it's like you sacrificed so much and you have finally arrived there you want us.

Okay, this is why it hit hard on this, so, you know, see for us, that has changed over the course of time. Now we're looking at what states are senior friendly for retirees because you'd be surprised the difference, and it's amazing. You would think Nevada, South Carolina, Colorado are the three top. And believe it or not New York isn't bad at all, but New York is friendly to the seniors, has great benefits that very few states offer. And so, you know, we talk about things like that now which in the past you know, we're talking about, you know, what are we going to do. Now the discussions have just changed in terms of that.

Joe shared how his spouse being in school will help with his career and future goals stating:

I mean, as far as the future is concerned it will probably help me because right now I am truck driving and it has me with bad knees, bad back, high blood pressure, you know, the whole nine. You know, that it's the cheerleader in the back of my head because of, you know, what I do. So, I'm interested, I'm definitely, you know, trying to find something where I can do school and go to work at the same just like her, so the roles are all about to change financially, you know what I'm saying?

Joe later explained when discussing what he would want if he was able to wave a magic wand on his life, "I wish I could just I mean, just make everything easy, alright. She and I do nothing unless she chooses to, you know, well, whatever, build a business of our own, do our own work, and work at home."

Smith shared his ideal home life in terms of the future stating what he would want his finances to go towards stating:

I want her, I hope that I have enough money or make enough money where she didn't have to leave the house, and that's our part of the future. She studies from home, and she studies in our bed with the computer online, and she's with that, she's with that, she would love to stay at the house. And that's my perfect. If I made enough money to where she didn't have to go out and do it. I mean, I don't want to stop her passing right now, her goal is she wants to really teach at a university, she wants to retire teaching at a university even if it's online, that's her retirement plan. And if I can retire her early that would be fine.

In general, participants discussed how they saw their lives improving once their spouses completed their doctoral programs. Some discussed how it benefited them personally, and others appeared to want a different quality of life.

Support/Coping Strategies

The third theme is consistent with the participant and spouse relationship, and includes helping and supporting their spouse and themselves.

Most participants shared their experiences in regards to how they help their spouse while they complete their doctoral programs. James wrote behind one of his photos that showed shoes lined up on a staircase, "When cleaning is left to me, this is the result. It's funny" He further explains:

I definitely think it's a positive change in our marriage. I think I've accepted well I think her being in school added balance. It made me appreciate that my wife is as busy or more busy than I am, and so I have to chip in where needed. The

results might not be the same. So now, I pick up after her and help organize her life in any way I can.

James explained during most of the interview how he has been able to contribute to the household in various areas and stated that it has made him a “better husband” and his spouse a “better wife.” He stated, “(A)gain, just appreciating the little things, I think it helped both of us. She actually appreciates it. It makes her appreciate me that I’m not -- I don’t bother her about those type of things.” Behind another photograph of flowers, James wrote, “Studying can be stressful so I try to brighten her day with flowers. However, I don’t think she saw them.” He follows with, “(W)hen my wife and I initially married, I made her promise me a couple of things. With love, honor and commitment, right up and just below is washing dishes. Now, I have to do it.” John stated he has to give himself pep talks in order to push himself to support his wife and stated:

So, it's just now me just making a conscious effort and being aware, hey you know something, she's doing something to better herself and it's going to better for us overall. So give her that support, give her that space, give her that time, give her the things that want and don't worry about me right now, worry about her. Put her first instead of myself first.

Jasmine stated she is personally frustrated with her spouse being in school, but tried to remain positive and explained, “I always tell him, you know, keep it, you’re almost done, you’ve come too close to turnaround, all that good stuff and which I do believe as well. Yeah, so, I feel like more of a support, more of a support for him.” Cherry stated how she supports her spouse and involves her family to support him as well when she stated:

I mean even my mom is the one that found like a place to find his participants. She was even like getting her church, like called the pastor and was like, 'Hey my son-in-law needs to find...' like you know like she like everybody's been trying to be on his team. I mean everybody's been there for him and trying to help him, push him to graduate. I mean my mom has been very supportive, yeah so. Finding locations with my dad and he uses his office to interview his participants.

During the group interview, Bradley stated, "(W)hen I took the initiative to say hey, you know, let's map out some things, we share everything but maybe I need to do more of the cooking. I need to take Jay to piano practice instead of you, how about this, I'll just free up your cleaning schedule and I'll, you know, make sure I support that." He later stated:

There are times where, you know, she needed my expertise like on a case study. Studying the actual law part of it and she asked me my opinion. I was helping her with this case study thing. Then when she put projects together that has anything to do with power point or anything like that, she asked me my opinion because power point is my thing, so I helped her with it and showed different ways to do it.

Following Bradley's comments, Smith stated, "I don't mind helping cook, I cook all the time. I don't mind helping cleaning, but my thing was washing clothes and going out there, work, paying for whatever. You need something done, I actually got it and I make some more money."

Only a few participants shared how they help themselves, and explained their coping mechanisms in relation to helping their spouse. John briefly stated he does one thing to ease his mind and stated, "After everything is done. I go back with the kids and I will

put them to sleep, and I just play my videos games.” He stated that due to the lack of time with his wife, “I kind of found myself talking to outsiders just as, you know let them know the starting thing. It was occupying my time because she wasn’t giving me time.”

Jasmine mentioned that since her husband has been in a doctoral program she has been able to do things she likes and explained:

I don’t know, I can’t really say that things have changed rather better financially, I guess maybe my hope that financially things will change for the better after he graduates... I have been able to do things alone and find out what I like. Like...I like to do makeup, so I have been able to focus on building a side business doing make up. I think it helps occupy my mind and time.

She then states how her new hobby helps financially by stating, “I think that my side thing, you know make up, will help me with ‘fun time’ expenses.”

Time Spent Together

The fourth and final theme represents how the spouses viewed the time or lack of time they spent with their spouse who is currently enrolled in a doctoral program. Time spent together was identified by the participants in two ways: (a) intimacy issues and (b) more quality time.

Intimacy Issues. Most participants expressed the desire to have a more sufficient intimate relationship with their spouse. Some expressed the idea of stepping out of their marriage in order to obtain the intimacy they desire, and others simply wanted their spouse to initiate intimate time themselves. Joe shared his frustration with his intimacy issues with the group stating:

Me, myself when it's time to have sex I like my woman to be involved this way, I don't like to be, you know, like this is not just for me. If it can't be both of us involved, then it's going to be an issue. It's going to be a problem whether it's me or whether it's you, some time we both need to be satisfied when it comes to intimacy, you know what I'm saying?

Bradley shared that the lack of sexual intimacy was a surprise when his spouse entered a doctoral program explaining, "(T)hroughout the years she had to do the same for my career. So, I was pretty accepting, you know, to what was going on. I had no idea what was going to be to that magnitude, you know, no dinner, no sex." John shared Bradley's thoughts about the lack of sexual intimacy and mentioned, "I mean, because I have a high sex drive, you put more sex in the equation and where there's more of it night every day, I'd be cool. It's been like that there's no saying sex has been reduced. It's just like that like after ten years of being married I guess." John later discussed how he sought physical and emotional intimacy outside of his marriage, but did not indicate if the outside relationships were more than just emotionally intimate relationship. He stated, "(B)ecause of her lack of not spending time, I kind of found myself talking to outsiders just as, you know let them know the starting thing. It was occupying my time because she wasn't giving me time." In this study, sexual activity appeared to be the primary source of intimacy for most of the male participants. However, Christina, a female participant, shared how sexual activity is no longer spontaneous since her husband entered the doctoral program and has to be planned: "When we first got married, we never had a scheduled sex. Now, it's kind of like we need to make sure we schedule sex."

More quality time. All participants spoke about the lack of time they spend with their spouses due to school. Several discussed their current battles with obtaining the quality time they want. For example, Jasmine stated, “We have a lot less time together than I expected but we make it work as best we can. Of course, you know, I have my job but then we don’t have any children yet because I imagine that we won’t have any time together. But I always say like his school is his wife right now.” James wrote behind one of the photographs taken, “My spouse has an amazing ability multitask these two things, our child and her dissertation. I am not certain -- I am not certain she has time for me.” He further explained, “(A)nd so, my life as a spouse is just being understanding and trying to be supportive and knowing that sometimes in our relationship, I’m going to come third or fourth and accepting that and being an understanding and supportive spouse. Likewise, Jasmine expressed her feelings about having less time with her spouse:

I get less of him, less of his time, sometimes I get tired of hearing about school life, like I want to be supportive and I am very proud of what he does, but sometimes I just get annoyed that everything is about a professor or an upcoming assignment and all that good stuff, I just get tired of hearing about it sometimes. I just, I don’t know, I feel like maybe I don’t want to be selfish but I just want more of him, that’s one thing that has decreased. I’m just not seeing more of him physically but just like mentally he’s not there a lot of times, he just, you know, he’s all wrapped up in school and then if it’s not school it’s his nine to five. I wish that he was more available to me emotionally, mentally, physically, all that good stuff.

She continued to speak of her spouse in the following way:

Kind of just like what I said like, I feel like school gets all of his attention, all of his money, all of his time. I don't know how many times like there has been weekends where I maybe want to get dolled up and he has to study or he has to keep writing a paper. And after a while that becomes frustrating because I feel like I'm not a priority right now and I'm very spiritual. So, I feel like your wife or your spouse should always be your priority, you know, after God or whatever. So again, what I try to tell myself is, you know, you are a part of what he does because I really am.

Christina discussed lack of time, but how she also has less time to give as well specifying:

He is a full-time student in his doctoral program, so he's always reading, writing, and then on top of that, he wants to make sure he's keeping up at work, you know. He wants to make sure he's excelling. Right now, he works so it's a lot going on there and it's been quite different. So as far as change, I think the most is change is lack of time. Also, because he's spending time studying, I'm doing my work as well. I work fulltime and I go to school part time trying to take my prerequisites to get accepted in the nursing school.

It is important to note that the female participants were more likely to acknowledge the lack of time spent with their spouse as showed above. In general, the male and female participants appeared to view time spent together in different terms. Females focused on quality time and wanting attention, and male participants discussed physical intimacy and household responsibilities, like dinner.

Summary

The interviews, group interview, and processing of photographic documentation with the spouses of Black doctoral students were conducted utilizing semi-structured interview protocol. This protocol allowed for me to obtain the data necessary for exploring the participants' experiences that led to an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon. I employed Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method for analyzing qualitative interview data. Each participant's voice was included by analyzing verbatim transcription of their statements regarding the phenomenon. As a result of the data analysis process three categories of themes were reported. The themes of my research attempted to capture the essence of what it means to be the spouse of a Black doctoral student.

In Chapter V, a discussion of the findings is presented. Implications and recommendations for practice when working with the spouses of Black doctoral students are reported. Interventions for counselors, doctoral programs, and suggestions for future researchers are presented.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

In Chapter IV, the presentation and analysis of data resulting from the interviews, focus group interviews, and photographic documentation was reported. Chapter V consists of a summary, discussion of the findings, limitations, implications, recommendations for future research, and conclusion. The phenomenon of understanding the perspectives of the spouses of Black doctoral students is presented in order to provide information and resources to individuals completing a doctoral program that focuses on mental health, and for individuals who are currently or will be married to someone completing a doctoral program.

Summary

Numerous researchers (Bergen & Bergen, 1978; Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000; Brooks, 1988; Giles, 1983; Gonzalez, 2011; Hyun, 2009; Labosier, & Labosier, 2011; Legako, 1995; Legako, & Sorenson, 2000; MacLean, & Peters, 1995; Pedersen, & Daniels, 2001; Sori, Wetchler, & Ray, 1996) have conducted studies to assess the influence of doctoral programs on relationships and marriages. For instance, Goplerud (1980) concluded that support was a significant facilitator of students' assessment of stressful events within their first six months of graduate study. In addition, Giles (1983) stated that the most important source of support a student can possess is the support from a spouse. Additionally, researchers have explored the experiences of being Black in a graduate program (American Federation of Teachers, 2010; Bhat, Pillay, & Hudson, 2012; Cockrell, 2007; Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; Hoggard, Byrd, & Sellers, 2012; Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2004; Reddick, 2011; Sloan, 1994; Starks,

2010). Nevertheless, there is a gap in the literature regarding the experiences of the spouses of those in a doctoral program experience, and a gap in exploring this viewpoint in relation to Black marriages.

The purpose of my transcendental phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994) was to understand the perspectives of the spouses of Black doctoral students through a transcendental phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994) in order to gain insight into the lived experiences of the participants. My study was conducted to provide insight into the lived experiences of spouses of Black doctoral students, and give a voice to a population that has been ignored in regards to studies relating to marriage and graduate school. Four sets of meta-themes emerged as a result of the data obtained during individual interviews, group interviews, and photographic documentation.

The foundation of my study stemmed from research literature related to the importance of marriage, doctoral education, and relationships in relation to education, marriage during a doctoral program, Black resiliency, and social support theory. My study was inspired by my own personal lived experiences, and from the findings in a dissertation written by Hyun (2010). In the study by Hyun, graduate school played an integral role in the success of some of the participants. Findings from this study prompted me to search for studies that incorporated Black married couples where one spouse was actively in a doctoral program. After extensive search; however, I was unable to locate any such studies explained the perspectives of the spouse that was not in school. This failed search exposed a gap in the literature that my study will help to address.

The research questions used in my study were influenced by the summary of literature in Chapter II and served as a basis to my study. Set in a transcendental

phenomenological approach, the primary research questions included (a) What are perspectives of the spouses of Black students pursuing doctoral degrees in a mental health field? and (b) In what ways does being married to a doctoral student changed the dynamics within the marriage? In order to answer these questions, I conducted four individual interviews, one focus group interview consisting of three participants, and one photographic documentation that included an interview. Through interviews with all participants, which used the same semi-structured interview questionnaire, I was able to gather information about their shared life experiences regarding how being married to a Black doctoral student impacted their lives. I used resiliency theory (Bernard, 1991) as the conceptual framework from which to understand the participants' resilient qualities, and used transcendental phenomenological perspective (Moustakas, 1994) in order to identify themes, which were detailed in Chapter IV.

Using Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method for data analysis, I, along with a team of two additional doctoral students, analyzed each participant's verbatim transcript in order to identify themes. The responses provided a basis for my discussion of the qualitative data and to the research questions, as well as additional understanding and information pertaining to the phenomenon of being married to a Black doctoral student. While the results will not generalizable to other spouses of Black doctoral students due to population validity, they may be transferable to other spouses of Black doctoral students studying in a mental health field. I anticipate that by providing insight and information into the Black marital unit while one is pursuing a doctoral degree, the lived experiences provided here will benefit spouses enrolled in a

doctoral program, spouses that are not enrolled in school, and doctoral programs that enroll married Black doctoral students.

Discussion of Findings

Not being able to locate a study with a similar methodology or purpose as my study, my goal was to fill a gap in the literature by conducting individual interviews, a group interview, and a photographic documentation with the spouses of Black doctoral students. Four major themes emerged from the present study, which included: (a) marital roles, (b) the potential of more money, (c) support/coping strategies, and (d) time spent together. The themes that emerged addressed the two research questions listed in the following section.

Research Question One

What are perspectives of the spouses of Black students pursuing doctoral degrees in a mental health field?

The following meta-themes captured the perspectives of the spouses of Black doctoral students studying in a mental health field: (a) *lack of time*, (b) *more quality time*, (c) *support/coping strategies*, and (d) *the potential of more money*.

All participants made comments about the *lack of time* they now have with their spouses due to their enrollment and commitment to a doctoral program. *Lack of time* is consistent with Hyun (2010) who found that lack of leisure time and time with spouses can lead to challenges in marriages. As the literature suggested in Hyun, (2010) the amount of quality and leisure time of doctoral students' couples significantly decrease compared to the non-doctoral student marriages. In addition, the difficulty in scheduling family events or vacation due to doctoral students' irregular schedules could add

additional stress to a relationship (Giles, 1983). In my study, each participant wanted to have more time with his or her spouse, and this led to the development of an appreciation of the small moments they were able to obtain from him or her. One participant explained his newfound appreciation, stating:

We have a greater appreciation for each other in term of quality time, you value it, you cherish it because it is not plentiful. I mean when it comes time to sort out finances, she'll ask me for my input on certain things that she is doing, and I like that. I mean, if anything involves me in it, you know, this is where we can sit there and at least spend 15, 20, 30 minutes together. I feel she is doing so much, just like I said, yeah, and in those instances when you really get a chance to sit down and get involved in what she's doing and understand, you know. You got to better understand what she's doing, so yeah, you all could.

While the interview typically would start with the participants discussing the lack of time with their spouse, it would later lead to a discussion of *more quality time* with their spouse. Though these themes are similar, *lack of time* addressed the current problems with time, and *more quality time* showed their hope for more time. One participant shared, "I want her, I hope that I have enough money or make enough money where she didn't have to leave the house, and that's our part of the future. She studies from home, and she studies in our bed with the computer online, and she's with that, she's with that, she would love to stay at the house. And that's my perfect."

Every participant in my study spoke about the importance of support and coping with their spouse being in a doctoral program, and it has been documented in the literature the importance of a support system while in school (Goplerud, 1980; Giles,

1981; Legako, & Sorenson, 2000; Hyun, 2009; and Gonzales, 2011). Social support theory emphasizes that being in a relationship is a bonded, connected, and close feeling one has for another, and involves shared leisure and other activities that are undertaken primarily for the inherent goal of enjoyment (Lahey & Cohen, 2000). For those participants that were in marriages in which one spouse was a doctoral student, it was reported that they experienced inadequate and unsatisfactory relationships (Pederson & Daniels, 2001). In my study, *support/coping strategies* were often mentioned when describing participants' marriage now. One participant stated:

So, it's just now me just making a conscious effort and being aware, hey you know something, she's doing something to better herself and it's going to better for us overall. So give her that support, give her that space, give her that time, give her the things that want and don't worry about me right now, worry about her. Put her first instead of myself first.

Not only did these spouses comment on how they support, a few mentioned briefly how they cope with the change, and one participant explained, "After everything is done. I go back with the kids and I will put them to sleep, and I just play my video games." When describing the lack of time with his wife, he stated, "I kind of found myself talking to outsiders just as, you know let them know the starting thing. It was occupying my time because she wasn't giving me time." In the literature, social support theory emphasizes three perspectives, one being the stress and coping perspective which proposes that support contributes to health by protecting people from the adverse effects of stress (Lackey & Cohen, 2000), and for a person to have a perception that there is available support means possibly making stressful situations appear less stressful. This

way of coping can be done by utilizing coping techniques for one's self by being their own support at times.

Finally, a finding related to the perspectives of their spouses being in a doctoral program was their belief that once their spouse completed the program there will be an increase in *the potential of more money* into the household. While a couple appeared realistic with their ideas of how much money would be made, others appeared to bank on the idea that money would increase significantly shortly after completion of their doctoral program. Fortunately, it is said that doctoral graduates earn more than those with a bachelor's degree. However, the earnings premium for a doctorate degree is 26%. This compared to the premium for a master's degree, which can be accomplished in as little as one year, is almost as high, at 23% ("The disposable", 2010). One participant noted, "I wish I could just I mean, just make everything easy, alright. She and I do nothing unless she chooses to, you know, well, whatever, build a business of our own, do our own work, and work at home." This participant appears to think that once his spouse completes her doctoral program she will be able to "do nothing unless she chooses to" and build her own business. Both thoughts may be accurate, and his expectation of more money appears to have him believing there will be more freedom.

In summary, all participants were able to describe their perspectives of being married to a Black doctoral student in the mental health program. However, discussion of the observations of issues or incidences that were related directly to the fact that participants or their spouses being Black did not arise. It has been argued in the literature that race plays a significant role in the experiences of Black graduate students (Turner & Myers, 2000). Some graduate experiences have adversely affected these students'

learning outcomes, and as a result, have led many Black students throughout the country to seek ways to experience a more pleasant and supportive learning experience and environment (Bingham, 2003). This environment could possibly be the students' family, spouse, and community. Black people believe that their cultural group is an important part of their self-concept, but even with this support Black people report more covert or subtle acts of mistreatment (Lewis-Coles & Constantine, 2006) which could be an explanation as to why microaggressions did not come up during interviews. The interview questions did not inquire directly about the Black experience or culture, and therefore was not discussed due to lack of directness in the questions about Black microaggressions, support, and the Black experience. More information regarding this will be discussed in the limitations section of this chapter.

Research Question Two

In what ways does being married to a doctoral student changed the dynamics within the marriage?

The following meta-themes captured the essence if being married to a doctoral student changed the dynamics within the marriage: *(a) intimacy issues, (b) financial difficulties, and (c) support/coping strategies.*

Several participants discussed having intimacy issues with their spouses. Many spoke about their desire to have more physical intimacy and expressed what they do to help with the lack of intimacy. The importance of intimacy with both partners, and that both partners have to make a commitment to one another to remain intimate, was consistent with the literature (Girgis, George, & Anderson, 2011), as is this commitment requiring sacrificing and compromising on both sides of the marriage (Girgis, George, &

Anderson, 2011). “Committed relationships” (n.d.) stated affection requires some degree of spontaneity, but that the demands of graduate study can leave a spouse waiting for “a good time”, so it may require some planning in order for the other spouse to be emotionally available, and with enough energy, to express how they feel in terms of affection or intimacy. One participant spoke of his thoughts and frustrations with his spouse about their current intimacy issues:

Me, myself when it's time to have sex I like my woman to be involved this way, I don't like to be, you know, like this is not just for me. If it can't be both of us involved, then it's going to be an issue. It's going to be a problem whether it's me or whether it's you, some time we both need to be satisfied when it comes to intimacy, you know what I'm saying? I don't feel like you're doing me a favor, I got a problem with that, you know what I'm saying?

This statement supported that of Sori, Wetchler, and Ray (1996), in that graduate school and marriage may influence the gender role expectations. If one partner in the marriage is expected to fulfill certain roles, not accomplishing these expected roles might also affect the marriage and home dynamics, which might include intimacy expectations.

Financial difficulties is a theme that captured the participants' struggles with finances because their spouse has been in a doctoral program. Many participants made statements that conveyed the following sentiment: “I guess maybe my hope that financially things will change for the better after he graduate. I think just both of us aren't financially where we want to be.” According to Giles (1983), the most important source of support a student can possess is the support from a spouse, who can provide financial and emotional support, and assist in meeting basic needs. The participants appeared to

understand the reasons why finances were not where they imagined they would be, which is a theme that has been addressed in current literature (Cohen, 2004; Giles, 1983; Hyun, 2009; Lovitts, 2001; and Maclean, & Peters, 1995). Also, Hakala (2015) mentioned that graduate programs can cost students anywhere from about \$71,000 to \$98,000 a year, a burden usually accompanied by the sudden loss of income. With money being cited as one of the most common reasons that conflict occurs between couples (Hakala, 2015), being with someone in a graduate program requires constant reminders that their tightening financial situation is temporary. For instance, one participant in my study pointed out that her spouse was not able to provide as much as he will be able to once he completes his program, and noted that:

What I try to tell myself is, you know, you are a part of what he does because I really am. And, you know, this won't last forever and then, you know, a lot of things will be better, they'll be more of him, they'll be more money, they'll be, you know. So, yeah, talking about that you feel like his mistress, like, he sneaks away to me when he finds time, yeah.

Another theme that emerged *support/coping strategies*, in which they discussed and provided examples of how they support and cope with the change in their marriage.

One participant explained:

I definitely think it's a positive change in our marriage. I think I've accepted well I think her being in school added balance. It made me appreciate that my wife is as busy or more busy than I am, and so I have to chip in where needed. The results might not be the same. So now, I pick up after her and help organize her life in any way I can.

It appears that the participants provided help in areas that also benefited themselves, which can be looked as a coping mechanism as well. Having the feeling of helping, even if it is self-fulfilling, gave them a sense of accomplishment within their marriage.

Resilience was utilized as a conceptual framework for my study as well as the perceptions, which helped them communicate their resilience. Resilience is a result of complex, ongoing interactions between a person's attributes (i.e., coping styles, sense of worth, and intelligence) and the resources in a person's environment (i.e., presence of support groups, supportive marriages and relationships, and services offered) and can be content specific (i.e., educational, relational, social, and emotional) (Williams & Portman, 2014).

Limitations

Two limitations were associated with the interpretation of the results of this research study. First, the participants in this study were recruited from universities from which the researcher was already familiar, which led to the researcher being familiar with participant spouses. Of the eight participants, seven of the spouses were married to a doctoral student that the researcher was familiar with academically or professionally. There may also have been biased due to the prior relationship with the participants and spouses. Given that there was a prior relationship, some questions regarding the stability or instability of their marriages and issues regarding the Black experience may have caused for some uncomfortable moments. This lead to feelings of not wanting to strain either the personal relationship with the participants or not to strain the participants' relationships. There was some hesitation by the researcher due to the emotional ties with

some of the participants, and simply not wanting to be the responsible party that may cause tension in one of their marriages. Therefore, participants of this study were likely not as comfortable to discuss intimate details with the researcher, and vice versa.

Second, the findings of this study were limited due to the fact that the researcher did not ask questions about the Black experience during interviews. The researcher made the false assumption that since all participants were Black, that experiences of being the spouse of a Black doctoral student would organically develop and come through during the interview process. The interview questions were semi-structured, and all additional questions asked were typically geared towards either the topic the participant was discussing at the time or an elaboration of the initial interview question. In the interview protocol, none of the questions directly asked the spouses about their experience of being Black or being married to someone that is Black. For example, question two which stated, "Describe your marriage since your spouse has been in a doctoral program?" limited the responses of the participants to only discuss their marriage in terms of how it has been with their spouse in a doctoral program. All additional questions asked by the researcher were in relation to marriage and to elaborate on what the participant may have stated. This question could have been expanded to have participants address possible experiences they have observed or lived with that is directly correlated to being a Black married couple. This modification would have provided more detailed information that could have answered the research question regarding the perspectives of the spouses of Black students pursuing doctoral degrees in a mental health field. More specific questions or additional questions may have provided more information on the types of microaggressions experienced, and provided rich information for future research.

Therefore, the interview protocol may not be transferable to spouses of Black doctoral students, but can be salvaged by adding interview questions that are specifically targeted at obtaining information about the being married to a Black doctoral student or just about the Black experience.

Implications

This study has implications for counselors who encounter clients that are spouses of Black doctoral students in a mental health doctoral program. Although some of my findings were similar to studies that were related in nature, these findings are different in that they were obtained from the spouse and rather than the student currently enrolled in a doctoral program. As previously mentioned, I was unable to locate any published research that focused on the non-student spouse. However, the impact of having one spouse enrolled in a mental health doctoral program was revealed through this study.

Implications for Counselors

The results of my transcendental phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994) revealed implications for counselors working with students in a doctoral program focused on mental health or their spouses. First, incorporating activities to strengthen the relationships between the spouses may be helpful prior to enrollment into a program. Therapy sessions can be geared towards challenging misconceptions by trying to understand more by working through hypothetical situations could be beneficial in assisting them in gaining new self-concepts. Helping spouses to understand and address fears and doubts with their spouses prior to starting a doctoral program may be beneficial in addressing preconceived assumptions of the challenges ahead that the non-student spouse's may be thinking, thus affecting their current feeling and future behaviors.

Similarly, being able to utilize the counseling services at the university may assist them with establishing a relationship with a counselor at the school in order to maintain easy accessible treatment. For example, some universities offer couples counseling when one of the clients is a current student at the university.

Implications for Doctoral Programs

It is no secret that professors or administrators, regardless of their race or ethnicity, play a vital role in the academic success of Black students. College professors or administrators often help students by providing them with academic and/or emotional support (Bingham, 2003). A psychoeducational seminar prior to students starting a program that is led by professors or administrators may assist married couples in understanding the importance of both of their roles in the journey of completing a doctoral program. Spouses that are not enrolled in the program can see how important their presence is to the success of their spouse's education. In addition, spouses will be able to fellowship with other spouses at the seminar, possibly encouraging them to create their own support network. Bingham (2003) stated that when students, and in particular Black students, meet and interact, they can provide one another with social and academic support and perspectives related to academic achievement. Bingham (2003) found that these types of interactions enhanced students' learning experiences when they met and interacted with their Black student-peers. These types of social interactions when in the presence of their spouses could make the graduate school program more enjoyable for all parties (Bingham, 2003). My study informs doctoral programs that students would likely benefit if doctoral programs lent their support to the household rather than only the student. This type of support from a mental health doctoral program might support the

student so that he or she could provide more of their time, self, and energy to the work that is needed for the program.

The information obtained from my study may not only assist doctoral programs in integrating more than just the student into the program, but also contribute to understanding what needs to be offered to bolster students' support system. Programs could possibly offer free counseling to families, set them up with the accounting department to have someone help with family financial issues, or have professors work within the family to help the family unit create cohesive future goals together.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several issues are left to be explored in future research. As previously stated, when searching I was only able to locate studies that examined the phenomenon from the perspective of the actual student. More research on the non-student spouses will give a voice to a population that has been marginalized and forgotten to fill a void in the literature. It is further recommended that the participant pool be expanded in order to gain more of the essence of what it means to be the spouse of a Black doctoral student. Conducting studies aimed to those spouses that have been married for a short period time may yield different results, as their time being married will have a different experience. The same goes for isolating the study to spouses that have been married to a doctoral student and have been married for over 10 years. Future researchers could extend the research by aiming to only same sex couples and examine their lived experiences. Doing so may advance the understanding of what it means to be a spouse to a Black doctoral student from both a heterosexual and homosexual perspective. This line of research may allow comparative studies between the two perspectives.

Secondly, Gildersleeve, Croom, and Vasquez (2011) stated that Black students' experiences in doctoral programs are complicated by issues associated with race inherent in the social practice of higher education. Some issues may not be as subtle as microaggressions or could be a build of up of several microaggressions. Future researchers could focus their studies on solely the microaggressions that are experienced, from the Black doctoral student experience and how that affects the marriage. As stated earlier, one of the limitations of this study was that the interview questions in the protocol did not directly ask the participants about their experiences of being Black or about being married to a Black doctoral student. Therefore, future researchers can use the interview protocol in this study as a starting point and then add additional questions in order to obtain the Black experience. These questions can be done with only the spouse or with both spouses. Conducting interviews with both partners in the marriage may help provide research that creates a foundation for comparative studies and theoretical approaches in working with marriages that are experiencing issues that are specific to Black people.

Lastly, I was unable to locate a study that explored the spouses married to Black doctoral students. In fact, I did not locate a study that addressed the spouses at all, and only the students were studied and researched. However, I was able to locate a qualitative study pertaining to the coping strategies in female counseling doctoral students' marriages (Hyun, 2009). In Hyun's study, the participants' experiences of being a married female in a doctoral program affected their marriages and their marital experiences influenced their doctoral program. Hyun (2010) concluded that counselors and faculty advisors need to recognize their unique experiences and its impact on their marriages in order for female counseling students to work through their doctoral program

more effectively (Hyun, 2009). Therefore, it is recommended that a study focusing on the strained marriage and how gender roles in a marriage may provide more of a stressor on the spouse or student.

Conclusion

From the findings of my study, spouses of Black doctoral students in mental health programs clearly have the ability to be resilient and remain in a successful marriage. However, upon completion of this dissertation, three of the eight spouses interviewed have gone through a divorce. A follow-up study of this dissertation may be helpful examining both parties in the marriage in order to determine if being in a doctoral program was the determining factor in their decision of getting a divorce. Brooks (1998) stated that the nonstudent spouses become increasingly resentful due to carrying most of the financial and household burden, but it is the student who is often the one to move for the divorce because obtaining a degree can make the student “arrogant”. When further explaining how the degree can make a student “arrogant,” Brooks (1998) explained that the student has already started to move in other circles with friends who are in similar fields, and the spouse no longer fits the “new image.” This may or may not be accurate, but it is worth considering. To address these findings, the nonstudent and student spouse must be the center of a follow up discussion and research.

Conducting this form of qualitative research had a significant impact on me as a married Black female doctoral student in a mental health focused program. I was able to gain an understanding of factors and experiences that have impeded on my marriage and how my husband may be experiencing my journey while obtaining my doctorate. I have more insight into how nonstudent spouses view the student, and how certain actions made

by the doctoral students can have long term effects in the marriage. This information gave the wife in me some sense of empathy and understanding of the worries my husband have expressed to me. I may never truly understand his perspective, but as a wife I know the important role I play in the creation of a successful and happy marriage. As a practitioner, I hope to inspire married couples who are thinking about embarking on the journey of one spouse being in a doctoral program to seek counsel and establish common expectations prior to enrollment in a program.

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APPENDIX A
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEET
UNDERSTANDING THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE SPOUSES OF BLACK
DOCTORAL STUDENTS

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____

Religious/Spiritual Identity: _____

Affectional/sexual identity: _____

How long have you been married: _____

Highest Education Level:

- Diploma/GED
- Some College, not conferred
- Associate
- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Doctorate

Number of Children: _____

Household Income:

- Under \$20,000
- \$20,000-\$40,000
- \$40,001-\$60,000
- \$60,001-\$80,000
- \$80,001-\$100,000
- Over \$100,001

Occupation: _____

What are your current living arrangements: _____

APPENDIX B

**UNDERSTANDING THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE SPOUSES OF BLACK
DOCTORAL STUDENTS**

Semi-structured interview Questions

Semi-structured interview questions may have additional questions following an answer to get clarification.

1. Tell me about your life since your spouse began her/his doctoral work.
2. Describe your marriage since your spouse has been in a doctoral program?
3. What things have changed for the better in your marriage since your partner has been in a doctoral program, if any?
 - a. What things have changed for the worse, if any?
4. What life plans have changed during the time your spouse has been in school, if any?
5. How has your role as spouse changed since your partner's enrollment in the doctoral program?
6. How do you and your spouse spend time together?
7. If you could wave a magic wand and things could be better than they are right now, how would your life be different?

APPENDIX C

**UNDERSTANDING THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE SPOUSES OF BLACK
DOCTORAL STUDENTS**

Email Sent to University Departments

Hello,

My name is Angela Jones, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education Program at Sam Houston State University. I am currently working on my dissertation under the advisement of my dissertation chair, Dr. Amanda LaGuardia. My research is aimed to understand the perspectives of the spouses of Black doctoral students that are studying in a mental health field. I have selected your university due to parallel in doctoral study programs that you currently offer.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. In order for you to have your spouse participate, you and your spouse must be Black or of Black decent, currently married, and you must be currently enrolled in a doctoral program that specializes in mental health. Any information that is provided in this study that could help identify the participant will be kept confidential. You will be chosen to participant in an individual interview, one focus group, or photographic documentation. Your availability will determine which method you will participate in.

Please send your interest to the email below or by calling. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you,
Angela Jones, M.A., LPC-I

APPENDIX D

**UNDERSTANDING THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE SPOUSES OF BLACK
DOCTORAL STUDENTS**

Email Sent to Associates

Dear Friend,

As you may know, I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education Program at Sam Houston State University working on my Ph.D. I am conducting a research study aimed to understand the perspectives of the spouses of Black doctoral students that are studying in a mental health field.

I would be pleased to have your spouse participate in this study. If you would be willing to pass this study information on to your spouse that would be greatly appreciated. Please email or call me at the below information stating your interest in participating and include your best contact information.

Thank you for your time,

Angela Jones, M.A., LPC-I

APPENDIX E

UNDERSTANDING THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE SPOUSES OF BLACK DOCTORAL STUDENTS

Introduction for Photographic Documentation

Hello Participant,

Thank you for participation in the photographic documentation for my study. I wanted to give you brief instructions to ensure you complete this process correct.

1. Please take pictures that depict your “typical day” as a spouse of a doctoral student.
 - a. For example: You wake up and take a picture of your bed, because your spouse no longer makes the bed since they have been in the program.
2. Do not take any pictures that show any identifying information or pictures of people.
 - a. Pictures should not have names or anything that shows exactly who you are.
3. You are not limited to taking pictures inside your home.
4. Please use all the film in your disposable camera.
5. Once you are complete, please contact Angela Jones at 281-4**-1*** or at a.jones5238@gmail.com stating you are complete, so she can pick up your camera and develop it. Once photographs are developed, Angela Jones will contact you to set up a face-to-face meeting.

APPENDIX F**UNDERSTANDING THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE SPOUSES OF BLACK
DOCTORAL STUDENTS****Questions for Face-to-Face Meeting with Photograph Participants**

1. Please write in one to two sentences behind each picture what it represents to you.
2. Does this picture represent a positive or negative change in your marriage since your partner has been in a doctoral program?
 - a. How so?
3. Tell me how this photograph represents your life as a spouse?

APPENDIX G**Sam Houston State University****Cover Letter and Consent for Participation in Research****UNDERSTANDING THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE SPOUSES OF BLACK DOCTORAL STUDENTS****Why am I being asked?**

You are being asked to be a participant in a research study about the perspectives of the spouses of doctoral students conducted by Angela L. Jones; College of Education; Department of Counseling and Educational Research at Sam Houston State University. You have been asked to participate in the research because you are currently married with a black doctoral student and may be eligible to participate. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the research.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Sam Houston State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

Why is this research being done?

The researcher's goal is to increase awareness to the needs of the spouses of students in doctoral programs. The research will conduct interviews, focus groups, and photographic document analysis; the researcher will analyze the common threads, thoughts, and emotions that are expressed from the participants. By collecting data from the participants, doctoral student's spouses will be more conscious of their situations and able to use new coping techniques to help themselves and their partners during this time of transition.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this study is to conduct an in-depth investigation to understand perspectives of the spouses of Black doctoral students during the completion their program, and to understand how being with a doctoral student effects future plans with each other, children, intimacy, and time spent together.

What procedures are involved?

If you agree to be in this research, we would ask you to do the following things:

- A) Meet with researcher, Angela Jones, and fill out a short demographic form giving basic information.

B) Participant will be selected to complete an interview, focus group, or to do photographic documentation. Researcher will set up a date, time and location for participant. Focus group and interviews will last about 30-45 minutes, and those selected to take pictures will use the disposable camera that will be provided for a week.

C) If the participant will be completing the photographic documentation process, the researcher will pick up the camera after a week's time and have the film developed. Once developed pictures will be delivered back to participant and researcher will go through each picture with participant so they can write a short description about what the pictures means for them.

D) Upon completion of the transcription of the interview and focus groups and the analysis of photographs, the participants will be offered to review the findings that were discovered by the researcher. This is optional to the participant.

Approximately ten participants may be involved in this research at Sam Houston State University.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

A potential risk in participating in this research study would include the following:

- A) Emotional distress after speaking about personal information about your marriage.
- B) Discomfort in sharing any private experiences suffered through the current relationship that is being explored in the research.

The participant should inform the researcher if they are unable to complete the study and if they are currently involved with any other research study.

Are there benefits to taking part in the research?

The participants will benefit from this research more than any other population since this study is directed to improving their lives with their spouses. The results hope to be able to help guide participants and their partners on better coping techniques to help during the process of school.

What other options are there?

There are no other options or alternative procedures.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

The only people who will know that you are a research participant are members of the research team. No information about you, or provided by you during the research will be disclosed to others without your written permission, except:

- if necessary to protect your rights or welfare (for example, if you are injured and need emergency care or when the SHSU Protection of Human Subjects monitors the research or consent process); or
- if required by law.

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. If photographs, videos, or audiotape recordings of you will be used for educational purposes, your identity will be protected or disguised.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

The participants completing an interview and focus groups will be audio recorded. Audio recordings will be transcribed by the researcher or a third party that will abide by the confidentiality agreement as stated in this consent, and will be available to the participant(s) involved in that particular recording. All recordings will be used for educational purposes only. All recordings will be destroyed and erased upon completion of the study. Access to the audio recordings will be granted to the researcher, Angela Jones, and dissertation chair Amanda LaGuardia, Ph.D.

The participants completing the photographic documentation process will only have actual prints of photos as a source of information. Photographs will be developed at a CVS store and will be processed by a third party professional in the photography department at CVS. All photographs will be used for educational purposes only. All photographs will be destroyed and shredded upon completion of the study. Access to photographs will be granted to the researcher, Angela Jones, and dissertation chair, Amanda LaGuardia, Ph.D.

Once audio recordings have been transcribed and photographs developed, the participants cannot edit recordings or add or take away any photographs. However if the participant no longer wants to have photographs or recordings used in the research, the participant will need to notify the researcher, Angela Jones in writing and email it to a.jones5238@gmail.com.

Each participant will be randomly given a number during the study and participants name will not be used.

What if I am injured as a result of my participation?

In the event of injury related to this research study, you should contact your physician or the University Health Center. However, you or your third party payer, if any, will be responsible for payment of this treatment. There is no compensation and/or payment for medical treatment from Sam Houston State University for any injury you have from participating in this research, except as may be required of the University by law. If you

feel you have been injured, you may contact the researcher, Angela Jones at 281-467-1475.

What are the costs for participating in this research?

Participants will not have any cost during the research.

Will I be reimbursed for any of my expenses or paid for my participation in this research?

Participation in this study will not require any expenses from the participant. All participants are only asked to give the time required to complete the study with no compensation.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The researchers conducting this study are Angela Jones and Dr. Amanda LaGuardia. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact the researchers at: Phone: Angela Jones 281-467-1475 or Dr. Amanda LaGuardia at 936-294-4823.

What are my rights as a research subject?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Office of Research and Special Programs – Sharla Miles at 936-294-3621 or e-mail ORSP at sgf002@shsu.edu

You may choose not to participate or to stop your participation in this research at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University.

If you are a student, this will not affect your class standing or grades at SHSU. The investigator may also end your participation in the research. If this happens, your class standing or grades will not be affected.

If you are a staff person at SHSU, your participation in this research is in no way a part of your university duties, and your refusal to participate will not in any way affect your employment with the university, or the benefits, privileges, or opportunities associated with your employment at SHSU.

You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you participate in this research.

Agreement to Participate

I have read the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I have been given a copy of this form.

Consent Statement

By signing this document you consent to participating in: Understanding the Perspectives of the Spouses of Black Doctoral Students. This study will be conducted by: Angela L. Jones, Doctoral Candidate in the College of Education (Counseling Department) at Sam Houston State University.

This statement certifies the following: that you are 18 years of age or older and you have read the consent and all your questions have been answered. You understand that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

All of the answers you provide to Angela L. Jones will be kept confidential in that your personal information will not be linked to your responses. You have been informed that your name will not be used, and that no other identifying characteristics will be revealed. You have been informed that the audiotapes are for the purposes of compiling research results and educational purposes only, and then, all the tapes will be destroyed. You should know that you have the right to see the results prior to their being published. A copy of the informed consent will be given to you.

Signature of Participant

Typed/Printed Name

Date

APPENDIX H

Institutional Review Board Acceptance Letter



Institutional Review Board
 Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
 903 Bowers Blvd, Huntsville, TX 77341-2448
 Phone: 936.294.4875
 Fax: 936.294.3622
irb@shsu.edu
www.shsu.edu/~rgs_www/irb/

DATE: February 10, 2015

TO: Angela Jones [Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Amanda
 FROM: Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: Understanding the Perspectives of the Spouses of Black
 Doctoral Students [T/D]

PROTOCOL #: 2014-11-20882

SUBMISSION TYPE: INITIAL REVIEW—RESPONSE TO
 MODIFICATIONS

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: February 10, 2015

EXPIRATION DATE: February 10, 2016

REVIEW TYPE: EXPEDITED

REVIEW CATEGORIES: 7

Thank you for your submission of your **Response to Modifications** for this project. The Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received **Expedited** Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Sam Houston State University IRB's records



Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
903 Bowers Blvd, Huntsville, TX 77341-2448
Phone: 936.294.4875
Fax: 936.294.3622
irb@shsu.edu
www.shsu.edu/~rgs_www/irb/

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure which are found on the Application Page to the SHSU IRB website.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All Department of Health and Human Services and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. **Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of February 10, 2016. When you have completed the project, a Final Report must be submitted to ORSP in order to close the project file.**

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 936-294-4875 or irb@shsu.edu. Please include your project title and protocol number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,

Donna Desforges
IRB Chair, PHSC
PHSC-IRB

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Sam Houston State University IRB's records

VITA

Angela L. Jones

EDUCATION

Sam Houston State University – Huntsville, Texas
 Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education (CACREP): Expected in May 2017
Dissertation: Understanding the Perspectives of the Spouses of Black Doctoral Students

Texas Southern University – Houston, Texas
 Masters of Arts in Community Clinical Psychology: December 2008

Sam Houston State University – Huntsville, Texas
 Bachelor of Science in Psychology: August 2005
Minor Studies in Criminal Justice

LICENSURE

Licensed Professional Counselor #72650
Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD, Houston, Texas (formerly Mental Health and Mental Retardation Authority of Harris County)
 Rehabilitation Clinician & Employment Specialist, Outpatient Unit, Adult Mental Health, April 2008 to August 2014
 Licensed Practitioner of the Healing Arts-Intern (LPHA-Intern), Specialty Unit, Forensic Division, Jail Based Unit, August 2014 to June 2016
 Licensed Practitioner of the Healing Arts (LPHA), Inpatient Unit, Forensic Division, Jail Based Unit, June 2016 to August 2016
 Interim Utilization Review/Quality Assurance Manager, Quality Improvement, Forensic Division, Jail Based Unit, August 2016 to March 2017
 Quality Improvement Analyst II, Quality Improvement Division, March 2017 to Current

Behavioral Hospital of Bellaire, Houston, Texas
 Psychological Intern, November 2007 to December 2008

Officer of the Attorney General of Texas, Houston, Texas
 Child Support Officer II, November 2005 to January 2006
 Child Support Representative III, January 2006 to April 2008

Yoakum Psychological Associates, Houston, Texas
 Psychological Statistician, December 2006 to December 2007

INTERNSHIPS AND PRACTICUM

Counseling Practicum, Sam Houston State University, Jack Staggs Clinic, 2011
Worked in a counseling clinic, provided counseling services to children and families in the community. Provided group counseling to adolescent males in a group facility.

International Internship, Sam Houston State University, San Jose, Costa Rica, 2012
Traveled to San Jose, Costa Rica for a multi-cultural awareness experience of the Latin American culture. Conducted interviews of counseling educators, counselors, and political figures in San Jose, Costa Rica to gain a better understanding of the mental health and school counseling issues in Costa Rica.

ACADEMIC & PROFESSIONAL AWARDS, SCHOLARSHIPS, & HONORS

The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD, Houston, Texas
 Performance Award for 2009, Amount Awarded: \$982.00
 Performance Award for 2010, Amount Awarded: \$883.00
 Performance Award for 2013, Amount Awarded: \$845.00
 Performance Award for 2014, Amount Awarded: \$784.00
 Performance Award for 2015, Amount Awarded: \$620.00
 Performance Award for 2016, Amount Awarded: \$841.00

Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas
 Emerging Scholars Honors Program for 2011, Amount Awarded: \$2471.00
 International Study Abroad Scholarship for 2012, Amount Awarded: \$1600.00
 Counselor Education Special Scholarship for 2014, Amount Awarded: \$325.00

Chi Sigma Iota, Counseling Academic & Professional Honor Society International
 Member, 2013 – Current

National Who's Who Amongst American College Students for 2004

District D Next Generation Advisory Council – Class I, 2014 - 2016

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Invited Guest Lecturer, Texas Southern University, Department of Counseling, Summer 2012

“Existential Therapy Theories in Counseling”
Delivered a face-to-face lecture to master level counseling students in order to demonstrate how to utilize techniques of Existential Therapy in a counseling session with clients within a private practice environment.

Invited Guest Lecturer, Texas Southern University, Department of Counseling, Spring 2013

“Setting Up Therapy Practicum”

Delivered a face-to-face lecture to assist students facilitate and collaborate with various local agencies in order to fulfill required practicum hours. Collaborated with students during the lecture in order to assist students with obtaining practicum that aligned with their future careers goals.

Invited Guest Lecturer, Texas Southern University, Department of Counseling, Spring 2013

“Using Reflections in Therapy”

Delivered a face-to-face lecture to master level counseling students in collaboration with the full-time professor addressing the importance and implementing “reflections” in individual counseling sessions.

Teaching Intern, Sam Houston State University, Department of Counselor Education, Summer 2013

“Understanding Dysfunctions and Effective Human Behavior”

Facilitated student growth through engaging curricula and non-traditional teaching methods. Delivered online lectures, Tegrity online learning lectures, and engaged in online discuss forums. Collaborated effectively with supervising professor regarding creation and implementation of course syllabus, grading practicing, and teaching strategies.

CLINICAL SUPERVISION EXPERIENCE

Counseling Practicum Supervisor, Sam Houston State University, Jack Staggs Clinic, 2012

Provided supervision to graduate students on the Licensed Professional Counselor graduation track and School Counseling to assist in the growth and development of a future counseling professional.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

National:

Bluth, S. J., **Jones, A. L.**, Simon, T. W. (September, 2013) *Jazzing Up the Perceptions of Student Mental Health Services to Meet the Needs of the Millennial Student*. Presented at the American College Counseling Association National Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana.

State/Local:

Woods, T., & **Jones, A. L.** (February, 2011) *Dating in the new millennium*. Presented at the Texas School Counseling Association, Galveston, Texas.

McLain, J., & Jones, A.L. (July, 2012) *Centered on character education*. Presented at the Region 4 Access to the General Curriculum Institute, Houston, Texas.

Simon, T. T., Jones, A. L. (November, 2012). *Dating Awareness Campaigns in Schools*. Texas School Counseling Association, Galveston, TX

Bluth, S. J., & Jones, A.L. (February, 2013) *The Prevalence of Sexual Assault and Drug Rates at Two and Four-Year Colleges as Reported By The Department of Education*. Presented at the Southwest Educational Research Association, San Antonio, Texas.

McLain, J., & Jones, A.L. (July, 2013) *Centered on Character Education*. Presented at the Region 4 Access to the General Curriculum Institute, Houston, Texas.

Jones, A. L., Woods, T., Bluth, S., McLain, J. (November, 2013) *A Relationship During a Doctoral Program, is it Worth the Risk?* Presented at Texas Counseling Association Conference, San Antonio, Texas.

PUBLICATIONS IN PROGRESS

Jones, A.L. (in progress). *Understanding the perspectives of intimate partners of African-American and/or Hispanic-American doctoral students*. Intended for the *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*

Bluth, S. J., & Jones, A. L. (in progress). *A Causal Comparative Study of Sexual Assault and Drug Rates at Two and Four-Year Colleges as Reported by The Department of Education*. Intended for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

LOCAL, REGIONAL, STATE LEVEL TECHNICAL REPORTS AND STUDIES

Jones, A.L. (2011). *Counseling services after Hurricane Katrina and its impact on victims regaining independence*.

Jones, A.L. (2012). *Understanding and comparing the stigmas of mental illness between Costa Rica and the United States*.

Jones, A. L., & Carr, J. L. (2016). *Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) study: Step-down unit transfers and medications report*. Prepared for the U.S. Department of Justice.

**PROFESSIONAL, CLINICAL, ACADEMIC, & COMMUNITY SERVICE
ACTIVITIES**

Professional and Clinical Service Activities:

Harris County Sherriff's Office (HCSO), the HCSO Health Services Division, and The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD, Houston, Texas

Member, Suicide Prevention Committee, August 2016 to March 2017

Member, Quality Improvement Committee, August 2016 to March 2017

Member, Department of Justice Enhancement Committee, August 2016 to March 2017

Academic Service Activities:

Sam Houston State University, Academic Affairs, Huntsville, Texas

Academic Affairs Council, 2003 - 2005

Parking Appeals Committee, 2004 - 2005

Student Disciplinary Hearing Committee, 2003 - 2005

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

Chair, Committee of Social Justice, 2003

Chair, Committee of Fine Arts, 2003

Chapter Vice President, 2004

Member, 2014 - Current

Alpha Kappa Alpha Association, Incorporated

Chapter Secretary, 2004 - 2005

Member, 2004 – Present

Student Government Association

Secretary, 2003 – 2004

Community and Volunteer Service:

Hermann Park Conservatory Urban Green, Houston, Texas

Member, 2010-2012

The Parris Foundation, Houston, Texas

Volunteer Counselor, 2013

Montgomery County Women's Center, Conroe, Texas

Volunteer Counselor, 2013

Community Art's Collective, Houston, Texas

Board Member, 2013 - 2014

District D Second Change Job Fair, Houston, Texas
Volunteer, 2016

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Texas Counseling Association
Member, 2011 – Current

American Counseling Association
Member, 2012 - Current