ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Husbands’ Meaning Making of Their Wives’ Doctoral Process in Education: A Phenomenological Study

STUDENT: Cristina Vetor-Suits

DEGREE: Doctor of Education in Adult, Higher, and Community Education

COLLEGE: Teachers College

DATE: July 2016

PAGES: 200

As more married women are acquiring graduate level higher education degrees, perceptions and marital roles shift requiring that spouses make changes in their own careers and take on more egalitarian roles in households in order to support their spouses’ pursuits. There is inconclusive evidence in the literature on the impact that higher education experiences have on asymmetrical, marital relationships. Despite this evolving trend, evidence of the non-student spousal experience is unknown. The men experience transformational learning through this educational journey as well, but that experience has also not been explored deeply. Through phenomenological and interpretive epistemological methods, the interview team gathered the experiences of six, Midwestern husbands of female doctoral graduates to understand their meaning making and coping processes during their wives’ doctoral degrees. Findings suggested that husbands experience a labyrinth of their own and their wives’ emotions and must problem solve throughout the duration of the doctoral process. Husbands’ transformational experiences divulge problem solving skills, empathy, communication, independence, and an understanding of their wives’ personality all while making meaning with innate
“masculine ways of knowing,” which was necessary in circumnavigating their wives and the doctoral process. This evidence confirms the need for spousal awareness, availability, involvement, and supportive navigation in order to increase doctoral persistence and support professional women. Furthermore, this study provides new insights into ways men experience transformational learning.