HUSBANDS’ MEANING MAKING OF THEIR WIVES’ DOCTORAL PROCESS IN EDUCATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

IN ADULT, HIGHER, AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

BY

CRISTINA VETOR-SUITS

DISSERTATION ADVISOR: DR. MICHELLE GLOWACKI-DUDKA

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

JULY 2016
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BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA
JULY 2016
ABSTRACT

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

STUDENT: Cristina Vetor-Suits

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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.
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To my committee members, Dr. Michelle Glowacki-Dudka, Dr. Ruby Cain, Dr. Marilyn Buck, and Dr. Denise Seabert: I have had the utmost respect and appreciation for your insights and guidance in this process. I am grateful for your time and energy shared. The power you share with me will be protected and defended.

Dr. Cain: I finish this degree with immense excitement, the way I experienced all of your courses. Your teaching methods are revolutionary and my perception of the world is different because of you. Your gentle pushes created behavior changes and are an instrumental part of my societal lens. Thank you!

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flourish in my own way and in my time. I look forward to additional writing opportunities with you.

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To our parents: We are so indebted to all your support. We could not have accomplished our dreams without your presence and belief in our abilities. We will carry on and instill this learned hard work and persistence to your heritage. We love you.
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my ingenious husband, Justin Suits, and our three rowdy boys. This mess was your idea in the first place and I can never thank you enough for encouraging me to pursue such an irrevocable, arduous task. You have taught me to be a more empathetic spouse through your guidance and support in our wondrous journey, particularly during this doctoral process. You are the ultimate Patriarch and Partner as you fulfill all my hopes, dreams, and aspirations along with the long list of marital roles, all the while exuding pride and selflessness. Our boys are going to be amazing men and husbands because of you. Thank you for evolving with me through this intellectual journey. All my Love, Crissy

To my three boys . . . If you want to be hard-core, you have to live hard-core! Love, Mom
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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

Married couples experience dramatic changes in their lives when one spouse chooses to attain a doctoral degree. The time and dedication given to the pursuit of higher education can impact the relationship. Marriages in their earlier years could potentially be more sensitive to a spouse’s decision to obtain a graduate degree (Maher, Ford, & Thompson, 2004). Rockinson-Szpakiw, Spaulding, and Knight (2015) claim that doctoral persistence comes from the quality, support, and stability of marital satisfaction. In other words, if each spouse in a marriage acknowledges the other spouse’s needs during the higher education pursuit, then the couple has the ability to positively endure the stress of the doctoral process.

In the movie, The Five-Year Engagement, Tom, actor Jason Segal, leaves his job as a five star chef in San Francisco, so that his fiancé, Violet, actress Emily Blunt, can continue her doctoral pursuits in psychology at the University of Michigan. He sacrifices his career path for her pursuit of higher education (McNulty, 2004). His hope is that it is temporary and expects that he will eventually return to his professional career. She continues with her doctoral assistantship and her career grows, except his identity becomes more and more lost as his identity loses purpose (McNulty, 2012). He attempts to acclimate to the new norms of his living environment. He gains a position making gourmet sandwiches, a step down from a five star chef, acquires new friends that are other male faculty-trailing spouses, and even becomes a hunter. She acclimates and flourishes by gaining upward mobility in her profession, while he regresses in his profession. Culturally, his profession was thriving in San Francisco, but when he moves to Michigan, he finds that his culinary arts skills are unmarketable. Due to his location, there is no longer an outlet for his career path or passion: a big city career, stuck in a small city
market. His specific skills are adapted for big city culture. When he shares that he is a chef, which is not as highly regarded in the Midwest as it is on the West Coast, the only conversational connections he can make with his fiancé’s colleagues is the children’s movie Ratatouille. This movie is a great example of the trailing spousal experiences that interfere with not only spousal identity, but also with the adjustment of shifting relationship roles.

Every marriage takes work and quality time together to form a solid relationship that can endure challenges such as obtaining a higher education degree. Marriage is a lifetime commitment that demands attention from both parties in the relationship. Each spouse has the opportunity to support the other in challenging achievements throughout a lifetime. To communicate and expose your deepest darkest desires with a spouse is a gift in itself and sharing this with another individual on a private conscious plane is transformative (Mackey, 2000). Therein, a spouse has the capacity to evolve with his/her partner, such as during a higher education experience. When transformations within a relationship do not occur, gaps may begin to form between the couple. In other words, there are areas of the relationship that begin to separate and can result in divorce (Maher et al., 2004). From another perspective, Martin (2006) found a decrease in divorce rates of married women who were obtaining a degree in higher education from 1970-1999. This study predicted that women are financially more stable and are more equipped to communicate through interpersonal conflicts.

Other studies also offer different views in regard to relationships and external situations. Waring (1981) discussed how the degree of intimacy within a relationship is dependent on the dimension of interpersonal interaction in the relationship, which can be impacted by situations, which interfere with it. Van Meter and Agronow (1982) stated that as women acquire more
education, it takes time away from traditional routines, as well as time with their spouses, which, in turn, could potentially lead to marital tension and other unforeseen issues in the relationship.

However, recent European studies agree with Martin’s (2006) prediction of fewer divorces. Matysiak, Styrc, and Vignoli (2014) found that a change in women’s educational status could reduce the possibility of divorce, speculating that more education could equip women to be more prepared in interpersonal relationships. This aligns with other recent studies that challenge the idea that female education can have a negative impact on marriage (Bernardi & Martinez-Pastor, 2011).

**Problem Statement**

The existing research related to the impact of higher education and graduate education on families and relationships focuses primarily on how the female partner is making meaning of her higher education and doctoral process. Giles (1982) expanded this area by interviewing couples simultaneously to gain input on the impact that doctoral degrees have on marriage.

Research shows that many women who pursue a doctoral degree have experienced stress within multiple aspects of their life, including their personal relationships (Bergen & Bergen, 1978; Cao, 2001; Giles, 1983; Middleton, 2001; Norton, Thomas, Morgan, Tilley, & Dickins, 1998; Williams, 1977). Much research has been conducted to explore how women in graduate school balance multiple roles during the dissertation and/or thesis process (Maher et al., 2004). Other research describes the experiences and perceptions of female doctoral students, including coping strategies (Hyun, 2009; Moyer, Salovey, & Casey-Cannon, 1999; Padula & Miller, 1999; Van Meter & Agronow, 1982). Recently, Abetz (2013) provided an updated perspective on women’s meaning making of the dissertation process in relation to their family and marriage.
The women in her study attempted to describe the spousal experience from observational perspectives of the conversations the women had with their married spouse.

Giles completed one of the few studies that included the spouse’s experience during the doctoral degree in 1982, more than 30 years ago. She interviewed both spouses together about their experiences of the doctoral process. While Giles (1982) had studied the couples’ perspectives of the doctoral process, most of the male participants had gained a doctorate prior to their female spouses obtaining their doctoral degree. This group of participants did not represent the personal perspectives of the non-student male spouses. Thirty years later, facing different economic, social, and cultural conditions, husbands may be experiencing a different meaning of the doctoral and dissertation process than their female spouse.

This study adds viewpoints from the male spouses to existing literature. It also grounds the experiences and approaches to successful support strategies that spouses used during the doctoral process. For example, strategies will be described, such as the empathetic understanding of how the husbands experienced and made meaning of their spouses’ doctoral and higher education process.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological dissertation study was to understand the spouses’ role and his marital experience, as their female spouses pursued their doctoral degrees. Male spouses were defined as the husbands of female doctoral students who have completed their doctoral study and have earned the title of Ph.D. or Ed.D. within an educational program. Qualitative inquiry methods were used to explore the non-student male spouses’ experiential meaning making of their married female spouses’ doctoral process and its impact on their marriage.
The data analysis was viewed from phenomenological and transformative lenses. This study sought to understand how the doctoral process impacted the lives and marriages of married husbands. I gained insights of husbands’ perceptions of their wives’ doctoral process in higher education. This study aimed to provide insight to both spouses about the impact the doctoral process can have on the husband/spouse and their marriage. The study provided a venue for husbands to reflect on what they perceived their wife experienced and what impact it had on them. The study also sought to bring awareness to previous, current, and future doctoral students of the impact their doctoral process has had or can have on their spouses and their perceptions of their marriage.

**Rationale and Significance of the Study**

The literature is full of studies that highlight a females’ journey within higher education and graduate school. This study described how non-student husbands experience their wives’ doctoral process in relation to their marriage. Recommendations in previous studies concluded that focus and support groups are great areas of support for female doctoral students and couples who are experiencing meaning making or change in their relationship due to doctoral attainment (Abetz, 2013; Addonizio, 2011; Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000; Fow, 1998; Gold, 2006; Hyun, 2009; Munir, & Jackson, 1997; Williams, 1977). This study provided strategies, insights, and/or ways of coping to future husbands who will experience the doctoral process as their wives obtain doctoral degrees.

As this study focuses on spousal experiences, previous literature explains how women can experience multiple loads or roles when they are accomplishing other endeavors in addition to raising their families (McClusky, 1963). These loads or roles affect the women, but research has not significantly captured how the loads can affect others in their lives, particularly the
relationships of their husbands. This study could also inform women in other related areas or careers, such as female professors on a tenure track, fast paced professional women who are trying to promote themselves within their profession, women in the medical field who are trying to build their credibility in their profession, or women who are taking time away from close relationships, seeking to improve their careers in some way.

When married women seek to increase their professional occupational status, whether at school or at work, time is taken away from relationships (Buse & Bilimoria, 2013; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011). So therein, it is possible that additional workloads affect those who are closest to them. Married, working women that operated with a flexible schedule or part time had more time for family relationships (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011). This study sheds light on how these loads affect those in relationship with these excelling women (McClusky, 1963).

Specifically, this study was an opportunity to provide a space for husbands to reflect individually on their experiences and to describe their situation and articulate their own meaning of how their wives’ higher education doctoral process has impacted them and their marriage. They reflected on the transformational moments of their marriage and made meaning of it within the context of her doctoral degree completion.

This study focused on the epistemological view that the adult education realm of transformative learning theory actually originates from social construction (Taylor, Cranton, & Associates, 2012). The husbands shared their experiences about the wives’ doctoral pursuits, in contrast to other studies that have been conducted. Most of the studies found in the literature use a counseling psychology perspective and focus on quantitative methods, female perspectives (Abetz, 2013), and couple interviews (Giles, 1982). In addition, the study aimed to bring awareness in previous, current, and future doctoral students, and professional women of the
impact their loads has or can have on their husbands and their perceptions of their marriage (McClusky, 1963).

**Research Questions**

RQ1: How do husbands experience and make meaning of their wives’ higher education and doctoral process?

RQ2: What strategies and means of support do husbands use to cope and understand their wives’ doctoral experience?

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study included phenomenology, social constructionism and transformative learning. Being the instrument and exploring the stories of men, I was very cognizant of the difference between their stories and my interpretation of them. Furthermore, there is a difference in the way I interpret information as a woman compared to the discovery and experience as a man or a “masculinist way of knowing” (Maynard, 1994 p. 11).

The interpretivism within this phenomenological research was subject to interactions with the husband participants and the male researcher, the male observer, and me. Therein, social constructionism compliments the phenomena that are shared from the participants. Crotty (1998) suggests, “constructionism and phenomenology are so intertwined” (p. 12). This approach allowed the interpretation of information from the raw data of the interviews.

Participants share their truths and beliefs of their experiences based on their behaviors and with whom they interact (Crotty, 1998). The study aimed to understand the essence of this group of husbands both individually and as a group, but at the same time I recognized that they made meaning from the world around them. Describing both individual and group essence is
considered transcendental phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990). Also, Van Manen (1990) describes his approach, which is the learning that has been experienced within the phenomena.

Furthermore, Taylor and Cranton (2012) explained transformative learning as an individualistic way to interpret the world around us and make meaning of it. Everyone’s experience can be similar or different, but it is still each individual’s constructed meaning from those experiences. “Learning occurs when an alternative perspective calls into question a previously held, perhaps uncritically assimilated perspective – rational process” (Taylor & Cranton, 2012, p. 8). When the learner critically reflects on the experience, gains new judgment, and acts on the perspective this experience is considered transformative (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). In this dissertation study, husbands were given an opportunity to examine their truths and essence of their lived experience of their wives’ doctoral process and how it impacted their marriage through this multi-faceted framework.

**Researcher’s Statement**

As a current doctoral student, I recognized many of the internal and external challenges associated with obtaining a doctoral degree while maintaining a marriage. Time management became increasingly crucial as I tried to balance the competing loads; roles and responsibilities associated with being a student, instructor, teacher, wife, and mother, as well as trying to find balance in my own personal wellness. Juggling these many ‘hats’ and managing time was a constant daily challenge.

In a previous study, I sought to understand the woman’s experience of their doctoral process in relation to their marriage. The findings from this exploratory, pilot study suggest that the women experienced transformational changes within themselves, as well as within their marriage as a result of the doctoral degree process. However, I did not anticipate that these
females had not considered the experience of their husband during their doctoral educational pursuits. I also found that they had not considered how the doctoral process was impacting their marriage (Vetor-Suits, Unpublished Document, 2013).

The main premise for this study began with my experience as a doctoral student and my relationship with my husband. As the critical thinking process began to increase, so did our conflict and understanding of how my doctoral process was affecting our marriage. I began exploring studies of only females and did so until two of my participants from a classroom project admitted that they had not considered how the doctoral process was affecting their husband or their marriage. My husband and I completed pre-marital counseling, so I believed we were better prepared to recognize when the change was occurring. Still, we have had many arguments and struggles because of the doctoral process, and so I believe that there was no better way to learn how to take care of my marriage than to write about it from an adult education perspective. The difference between the women in my study and myself was that obtaining a doctorate was my husband’s idea, but even with his full support, we discussed its challenges and impact on our relationship. We agreed to welcome the doctoral degree as a part of our family.

He wanted me to have options, and he saw the lack of fulfillment and drive in my current professional experience. My husband, an incredible motivator, was the push, therefore; I began to wonder what other relationships were experiencing. This study is qualitative in that every relationship is different, and everyone has a different perception of his or her experience. I am not a therapist, nor do I intend to write about marriage from a therapist’s perspective. This dissertation is intended for others to understand the pressures put on marriage throughout a doctoral program and to assist them through its process.
There was many times where my experience and knowledge conflicted with the authors in the literature, since I was trying to associate the reading to my situation. I began to view the doctoral experience on marriage through a different lens and as a problem around me. From my efforts to scour the literature, I found that there is a lack of research about the male spousal perspective within a marriage where the wife is attaining her doctoral degree. The focus of writing about educational experiences currently reflects an emphasis on females’ multiple roles (Abetz, 2013; Carter, Blumenstein, & Cook, 2013; Gerson, 1985; Giles, 1982; Goldberg, Cohn, & Eccles-Parsons, 1980; Kittelsrom, 2010; Lendon & Silverstein, 2012; Lite; 1985; Meheta, Keener, & Shrier, 2013); women in leadership (Buse & Bilimoria, 2013; Glowacki-Dudka, 2013); higher education (Damiano-Teixeira, 2006; Lendon & Silverstein, 2012; Martin, 2006; Ono, 1999; Satir, 1984); and other issues related to women’s ways of knowing (Taylor, 2008). Each relationship is different as different values systems between two individuals join together in marriage, making new values (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990).

**Definitions of Terms**

_Husband_ – The male spouse of a female graduate doctoral student and who was not obtaining a degree at the same time. The male spouse does not have higher than a master’s degree.

_Non-Student Male Spouse_ – Another name for the husband who is not attending school at the same time of the doctoral wife.

_Doctoral Wife_ – A doctoral graduate student of a Ph.D. or Ed.D. doctoral degree program that has completed her dissertation and obtained the honor of doctorate.

_Dissertation Process_ – The time in which the female spouse or wife was writing her doctoral dissertation research paper.
Doctoral Process – The time in which the female spouse or wife was taking coursework in a doctoral education program (Batacan, 2013).

Midwestern Four-Year University – A four-year university that is located in the Midwestern part of the United States. This university offers undergraduate, masters, and doctoral degrees.

Doctoral Student – A graduate student who was enrolled in coursework of a doctoral education program (Batacan, 2013).

Supportive Navigator – A husband who is navigating through his wife’s doctoral process while exuding supportive behaviors toward her and her challenges.

Chapter One Summary

This study focused on how husbands make meaning of their female’s higher educational pursuits specifically the doctoral process and how it impacted their marriage. The study’s purpose was to provide a place for husbands’ to discuss their constructed meaning of the impact of their wives’ doctoral process has on their experiences and marriage. Previous research has focused on the experiential meaning female doctoral students make from their doctoral pursuits. The significance of this dissertation study is that their husbands’ experiences now have a chance to be shared and written, which has been lacking in the literature. Historically, studies gathered quantitative data from female spouses of males of who were pursuing their doctoral education. This data focused on marital satisfaction and role changes within the marriage. It is believed that the doctoral process affects more than one individual and that support is the most important component for females when pursuing a doctorate. This phenomenological study used both a social constructivism viewpoint and will describe the husbands’ experiences through the lens of transformative learning theory.
This dissertation study encompassed definitions and previous literature in phenomenology, adult education, transformative learning theory, and social constructivism. Previous studies identified challenges of female doctoral students, marital satisfaction, and spousal impact of the doctoral process as a method for transformational and meaning making for women, existing female experiences during participation in doctoral programs, and transformations associated with higher education, marriage, and doctoral program participation for women.

Chapter 2 begins by explaining the purpose of the phenomenological perspective within this study. Adult education is then essential to mention because most of the Chapter 2 studies are regarding female doctoral students, role struggles, and marital impact primarily from psychology and sociology perspectives. An explanation of adult education will help the reader to view this study through a differing lens. Adult learning happens formally and informally through transformational moments (Knowles, 1975; 1980, Mezirow, 1991). The dissertation then links adult learning into the challenges of female doctoral students and how the doctoral process has impacted who they are as adult learners as well as the other associated roles. Marital satisfaction and spousal impact, both female and male perspectives, in relation to acquiring higher education, in particular doctoral degrees, is discussed. Female doctoral education and marital impact are reviewed, as these are the main two areas needed to explore and find phenomenological meaning.

The methods section, Chapter 3, was the protocol for the study as well as revealing all portions of data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 reports the analysis and findings of the data. The data is categorized based on the themes I found, and the previous literature is mentioned in support of the experiences of the husbands of wife doctoral students. Chapter 5 includes the
discussion, limitations, future research, future practices, and theoretical implications of the study. Findings are connected to previous research. Also included are different aspects of the data that were not covered in the themes but were relevant to mention in the study.
CHAPTER TWO:
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to Chapter Two

This chapter covers a vast amount of literature that spans from historical views of spousal and female doctoral student roles as well as the introduction of meaning making and transformational learning. The literature encompasses many different disciplines including but not limited to role theories, sociology, psychology, marriage and family therapy, and higher education. The literature review provides definitions and different spousal and marital explanations to assist the reader in understanding the premise of the study. Many sections begin with a historical background to understand the trend of education and spousal role in the United States and what sociological events affected the trends. Previous findings of female doctoral students and their roles, strains, stresses and marital strain are explained. Finally, transformative learning and meaning making in women is discussed in order to provide a transition into Chapter Three.

Literature of Spousal Roles

The phenomenon of role captivity or role-stress of spouses is predominantly used in caregiving literature and is defined as “situations in which people are unwilling incumbents of social roles” (Aneshensel, Pearlin, & Schuler, 1993, p. 56). In other words, one spouse forfeits their personal goals in order to care for the other spouse. Similarly, Gerson (1985) expressed in the mid 1980s that changes in marital role expectations created more dissonance, particularly for married women reentering graduate programs. However, academic men and women suggested that married households were moving toward more egalitarian roles (Goldberg et al., 1980). It is possible that a connection may exist between an unwillingness to care for the spouse, role...
captive, and dissonance of marital roles to fulfill family commitments. The intent of this literature review is to describe the different instances of marital role captivity while encompassing marital role shifts, strains, and stresses that are mentioned in theoretical literature related to spouses who must transition while the other spouse pursues a profession or graduate degree. Indefinitely, there is a shift in language across the literature, from subject matter to time period i.e. 1980s vs. 1990s vs. 2000 vs. 2010. Historically, the language of marital roles has changed. The term marital role is used in this discussion and will encompass spousal, parental, and employee roles. Other types of marital roles are defined and discussed such as, role strain, role-stress, role shifts, shared roles, reversed roles, and egalitarian roles. Marital roles in this summary encompass any traditional roles, such as men are the predominant breadwinners and women care for the children and family, or non-traditional and egalitarian roles, in which marital roles are shared, that may affect a marriage.

**Definition of Terms and Theories**

Both quantitative and qualitative studies have been used to describe the many marital roles that exist in a marriage when women choose to pursue a doctoral degree or pursue a professional degree. Quantitative studies are more predominant than qualitative studies, however qualitative studies are more prevalent than in previous decades. The predominant theories that need be explored further include: role theory, sex role theory, multiple role theory, family systems theory, social identity theory, and relational dialects theory as well as definitions for role conflict, role stress, role conflict, role salience, gender roles, egalitarian roles will be discussed. It is important to note that sociological and psychological research overlaps significantly and mentions both perspectives in their research (J. P. Moore, personal communication, 2014).
Below are different marital role terms and theories used in the existing literature. Role theory, sometimes described as role identity theory is embedded in structure and cultural norms, which parallels with how others socially construct meaning of their world (Crotty, 1998). Couples engaged in role identity or sex theory, gender (Quails, 1982), and marital adjustment (Davison & Sollie, 1987) make meaning of their experiences within many other theoretical perspectives. Role theory can be influenced by sociocultural expectancy roles that are held by normative expectations or beliefs of a society (Bee & Bjorkland, 2004). McClintock-Comeaux (2006) suggested that the women in her study who occupied multiples roles; parent, spouse, student, employee, negotiated them well by not allowing one role to interfere with another. However, Chrouser-Ahrens and Ryff (2006) defined multiple roles as invested in the following roles, “parent, spouse, employee, churchgoer, friend, volunteer, social organization member, and/or caregiver to parents” (p. 804). Role career salience encompasses the prior concepts but factors preference to financial necessity, egalitarian “family and work responsibilities, and work/role equity created from the first two variables” (McClintock-Comeaux, 2006, p. 90). Role strain theory is “an increased number of roles that lead to overload and strain and can affect physical and psychological well-being” (Chrouser-Ahrens & Ryff, 2006, p. 801; Goode, 1960; Marks, 1977).

Marital role stress is any situation that causes stress to the spouse, such as the stress that accompanies the solo parental role (Abetz, 2013). The terms role shift and role reversal will be used to discuss the shifting or reversing of traditional marital roles of one spouse fulfilling the primary financial gain, and the other fulfilling the child-rearing and household chores. Role conflict is when one role interferes with another (Goldberg et al., 1980). Egalitarian roles are shared and negotiated roles between two spouses who could be a single or dual earning couple.
(McNulty, 2004) and were viewed from a family systems theory (Satir, 1983). Also, social identity theory is suggested as a possible explanation toward spousal adjustment during a change and move in occupation of the other spouse (Cole, 2011). Female expatriate spouses were shown to adjust easier culturally and socially than males expatriate spouses. Sociocultural factors are those where roles are different than that of society (Bee & Bjorkland, 2004).

Additionally, relational dialectics theory stems from communication theory and is the interplay of the dynamic motion of emotions of a relationship. Abetz (2013) described women’s roles of career, spouse, and family and how each relationship affects the other, particularly their non-academic spouse’s negotiated marital roles (Abetz, 2013). Relational dialects theory aims for individual and relational meaning making where spouses negotiate and make sense of their lives.

**Changes to Spousal Roles**

The feminist movement of the 20th century changed traditional gendered family relationship roles (Satir, 1983). Specifically, the volume of women in the workforce, which shifted family roles, has influenced the ensuing generations. Lendon and Silverstein (2012) supported the shifts of gender egalitarianism in women born baby boomers. Perhaps, the children of these baby boomer women who were instrumental in shifting traditional roles, are now more receptive to egalitarian roles because of the parental impression their baby boomer mothers placed on their values. Both men and women of the generation following the baby boomers are experiencing the wave of egalitarian role identity. Married men and women are making different decisions about their education and career based on the economy, children, and other family roles. Women have been performing different roles than that of their mothers and grandmothers, as they are shifting roles between home and the workforce. The U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) revealed that 69% of women with
children were employed full time, compared to only 39% of women in 1975. Still, many women battle internally between traditional and 21st century working women roles (Hochschild, 2012) more so than their husbands. Women also report higher stress loads in dual-income marriages (Cook, Brashier, & Hughes, 2011). Young (1999) described mothers in the labor force as “feeling torn” (p. 44). In other words they are torn between the identity of motherhood, spouse, and a professional.

Women in the workforce with children add a different dimension to their role identity compared to other women. Yet, Abetz (2013) shared women’s perceptions of their husband’s role stress when they are primarily filling the parental role for children. Women who work must rely a great on their spouse to care for their children, but 25% of women regress to traditional motherly roles instead of sharing those roles with their spouses. Young (1999) recommended that in order for couples to perform egalitarian roles, women must allow their spouses to fulfill their role.

Dual-income couples and men are also embracing different family roles, which include home responsibilities and child rearing, called “New Fatherhood” (Young, 1999, p. 51). Most men in this new movement are not those of previous decades. Many men of the New Fatherhood movement embrace the opportunity to reverse traditional marital roles in order to support their spouses in their educational and employment pursuits, and to embrace the equal role in raising their children. Many men in traditional working roles express sadness of missing the “first happenings” of their children’s development. Men working part time were reported as more egalitarian than those working full time (Kraaykamp, 2012). Women who are working also struggle with the bond that is established between fathers and children at home. Challenges to
traditional roles cause an internal struggle for many. Still, each interpersonal relationship has a different set of perceptions and understandings about traditional and non-traditional marital roles.

The egalitarian role is becoming the norm for dual working or expatriate families, in which one spouse travels and the other either forfeits their career or travels with the family and strives to acclimate to the new culture and community. McNulty (2012) conducted extensive research on expatriate trailing spouses, who struggle with role identity as they follow their spouse internationally and adjust themselves and their family to a new society. Traditionally these situations were of families associated with the military, government, or private sector, but it has now branched out into other types of employment. Through the lens of family systems theory, professional and social support was most influential in re-creating trailing spousal identities. McNulty (2004) also suggested that when roles were reversed, men who were not as concerned with societal norms were grateful to take on the “stay at home” role in order for their wives to have educational and employment fulfillment. Perhaps men that choose not to construct meaning from societal norms are less likely to be resentful of their female spouses’ educational and employment accomplishments, challenging Pearlin and Turner (1987) and Gerson (1980).

Research has mixed findings on dual earning households and on spousal and egalitarian roles. Simon (1994) suggested that men and women experience role distress differently. He found that women who work, experience less stress than those who do not. In addition, spouses of employed wives experience more distress than those wives who do not work. Abetz (2013) also shared workingwomen’s perceptions of their spouses’ distress in parental roles.

Men are proud of their wives’ education and accomplishments (Abetz, 2013; Young, 1999), particularly those men who are caring for their infants. Based on recent gender study findings from Verhofstadt and Weytens (2013), gender identity predicted an individual’s spousal
support rather than the sex. Individuals who identified as more feminine were able to provide more support to their married spouse. Cooper, Arkkelin, and Tiebert’s (1994) findings support the insight that high femininity assists family-career balance. Men and women participants who identified more feminine valued equality over masculine identity participants who were more focused on career and self-pursuits.

Educational research looks at the influence of academics on gender. Carter, Blumenstein, and Cook, (2013) suggested that doctoral academia impacts women’s identity socially and personally. This tension interferes with their identity transition as women emulate different identities in each situation. “Unsurprisingly, gender inflects academic identity” (p. 341). Abetz (2013) supported this tension as she shared how her participants had difficulty not bringing the stress of work home. In addition, Cunningham (2008) shared that couples that had more collective college education were more likely to engage in egalitarian marital roles.

**Professional Women’s Work-Life Role Experiences**

Work-life roles have shifted over the last century in many countries including the United States. There has been a large transition of women into the workforce, an increase in dual career couples (Clarke, 2015; Perlman, Ross, & Lypson, 2015) and egalitarian roles (Kraaykamp, 2012), part-time working positions (Clarke, 2015; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011), and “nontraditional career paths” (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005, p. 120). All of these situations play a role in families balancing or negotiating (Salyer-Funk, 2012) roles when pursuing individual careers, and caring for a household and/or family. Dikkers, van Engen, and Vinkenburg (2010) have even went as far as suggesting that employers consider “flexible work-home arrangements” (p. 578) particularly for mothers because results show a positive correlation to “career success” (p. 578) in the Netherlands.
Women within the engineering field experience discrimination but are very confident which compliments their persistence. These successful female engineers were less like to have many children or be married (Buse & Bilimoria, 2013). Physician women and those in other professions who work full time and had spouses who worked full time and had children spent up to 15 more hours on domestic chores (Jolly, Griffith, DeCastro, Stewart, Ubel, & Jagsi, 2014; Wheatley, 2013). Perlman et al. (2015) also studied dual career physicians and found that a positive work-life balance for both spouses meant mutual support, the importance of individuals roles, shared values, and the benefit of sharing a profession as physicians. Physicians who had supportive spouses who either stayed at home or held a profession and reduced role conflict showed results of higher marital satisfaction (Warde, Moonesinghe, Allen, & Gelberg, 1999).

Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2011) found that professional women with children are still choosing between working and motherhood. Each woman found an advantage to being home with children and working. The guilt was less to be at home and still work and not lose the self-identity that goes along with established work relationships. It was important for these women to choose organizations that were friendly to their work-home lifestyle and provided flexible work hours. Balance was defined differently for each woman, but the authors found that it was evident that these women were looking for all roles to “fit” in their lives. Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) discussed a kaleidoscope model for companies to create for women who are opting out of higher positions in order to encourage a new way for women to work successfully and balance life with a family.

Guillaume and Pochic (2009) describe two models of work styles: a spiralist and flexible availability. Spiralists are sucked into the workforce becoming enthralled with their job and conform to the stereotypical model of working. Women in powerful positions are pushing for a
“flexible availability” approach, which views merit based on different criteria, not traditional attendance and performance measures.

Clarke (2015) explored Generation Y, individuals born between 1980 and 2000; dual career couples attempting to gain perspective on how they have it all, work-life balance. Couples show different types of roles but the focus was to balance family and lifestyle, ultimately trying to gain employment that met “their needs, values, and professional aspirations” (Clarke, 2015, p. 574). Different career types were present, including alpha-career females and beta-career males, alpha career females and beta-career males who were looking for part time work to help with childcare or child rearing, and both male and female alpha and beta career focus. The shared alpha and beta careers were those who took turns professionally depending on their career opportunities. It was evident that not only do Generation Y couples view work values differently than future generations, but they are dealing with “dual-career issues earlier in their relationship” (Clarke, 2015, p. 575).

Kraaykamp (2012) studied egalitarian family roles in the Netherlands between men and women and found that part time working men were more egalitarian than any other group.

**Female Doctoral Students’ Roles in Obtaining a Doctoral Degree**

Women have had to endure a number of challenges over the last 60 years when obtaining a doctoral degree. World War II was a driving force of women in workforce sector and ultimately pursuing higher education degrees. Because higher education was historically a male culture, women have had to learn to transition into this professional sector where the demeanor is very masculine, impersonalized, and rigorous. Dorothy Sack (2004) created an instrumental piece of research about pioneer doctoral women who ventured in doctoral sector. She gathered stories of women who predominantly graduated with their Ph.Ds. in the 1950s and 1960s. Only
one woman reported that she was accepted and valued by the other students, all men, in her doctoral pursuits.

Traditionally, the higher education sector is a male-dominated area (Lite, 1985). Because of existing power structures, female doctoral students must acclimate to the expectations of their environments. They might adapt themselves to meet the demands and desires of their professors, whether a masculine or feminine role. At times, discrimination and other role challenges exist. For example, women and minorities experience distance discrimination. When these students contacted major professors during doctoral work, they experience longer waiting periods than males. Distance discrimination is described as a longer response time that professors give to different students (Milkman, Adkinola, & Chugh, 2012). However, Mehta, Keener, and Shrier (2013) suggested gender influences women Master’s students, as they perceived an increased level of leniency of academic work and sexual harassment from male instructors.

Batacan (2010) described how wellness for all doctoral students is impacted while acquiring their doctoral degree. Many work full-time or part-time, are married and might have children, and have a full load of writing to complete. These doctoral students often fail to maintain a good balance of nutrition and wellness. Although, Nelson, Dell’Oliver, Koch, and Buckler (2001) discussed how women care better for themselves, when compared to men, during their doctoral degree.

**Women Acquiring a Higher Education**

A multitude of marriages are experiencing more dual-income and/or egalitarian marital roles, stemming from more women entering higher education from the influence of the feminist movement toward egalitarian roles (Satir, 1983; Lendon & Siliverstein, 2012).
Evidence of women in higher education across the globe reveals an inconsistent pattern of marital divorce rates in relation to women’s higher educational attainment or gains. Recent statistical research in the United States shows a decrease in divorce rates among married women in higher education from 1970-1999. These studies predict that women are financially more stable and are more equipped to deal with interpersonal conflicts (Martin, 2006). Arguably, Ono (1999) suggested that as women acquired more education, the frequency of marriage dissolution increased.

Additionally, according to recent European studies, a change in women’s educational status or higher education levels weakens the possibility of divorce (Matysiak et al., 2014; Rootalu, 2010). Rootalu (2010) factored in both spouses’ educational levels and suggested that the higher education levels of the marriage decreased the risk of divorce. However, in Taiwan, statistics of divorce are rising among women who gain more education. There is also a rise in divorce amongst women not in higher education. Chen (2013) suggests the change is due to the change in egalitarian role context. On the flipside, in the Netherlands, Kraaykamp (2012) confirmed that egalitarian family roles have increased over the last 23 years. Additionally, part time working men had more egalitarian views than men and women working full time, part time, or not at all.

Interestingly, Harkonen and Dronkers (2006) compiled a larger worldwide study that factored in not only the relationship between women’s higher education and divorce, but also the economic and social factors of divorce. They found that educated, unconventional family practices revealed a lower level of divorce rates, while welfare association revealed higher rates of divorce.
Doctoral Students’ Gender Role Identity

Academia interferes with gender role identity in women who are pursuing a doctoral degree (Carter et al., 2013), which is different from the findings that generated from the reflective stories, a stem of transformative learning, that were collected in 1980 of women geomorphologists who pursued doctoral degrees in the 1950s and 1960s. However, currently because women are juggling so many roles, it is difficult to transition from one role to the next.

Women battling with the transition of balancing multiple roles also may have issues with how much time they spend in each role. Too many roles affect female identity, particularly when one of those roles is a doctoral student, which predominantly affects their relationship roles (Carter et al., 2013; Brown & Watson, 2015). Imagine all these roles are boats and each of these boats has tiny holes in the bottom. In order to keep all the boats floating, a woman with multiple roles may constantly be jumping in and out of these multiple boats scooping out the collecting water. Somewhere in her mind, if she can just keep each boat floating, then she is successful. At times, unfortunately, some boats or roles falter because some boats are not visited as often, and this is when the role identity imbalance occurs. Brown and Watson (2015) found that women’s academic roles would suffer before motherhood or wife role due to family pressure. In addition, they added that the women in their study could not complete some of the demands of doctoral study such as attending conferences due to children. It takes critical reflection, planning, and support for these women to keep each role continuously moving. Seeking out social and family support can assist with the role loads the doctoral process places on females (Nelson et al., 2001). It is suggested that women doctoral students benefit greatly from empathy as well (Brown & Watson, 2015).
Part of this support is the emotional and psychoanalytic time women need to process and reflect on their identity, but it may not alleviate the disconnect women feel from relationships while engaging in the thought transformation that the doctoral writing process brings. As women construct new knowledge and make meaning of the new information, they begin to transform (Mezirow, 1991). This is where distance in relationships can occur as relationships around them may not transform or evolve with the women (Brown & Watson, 2015; McClintock-Comeaux, 2006). Maher, Ford, and Thompson (2004) describe such moments as areas of separation that can ultimately lead to divorce. When transformations within a relationship do not occur, gaps begin to form between the couple (Brown & Watson, 2015; Waring, 1981). Women in this situation often feel isolated and lonely. Even women who have these supports can be isolated, since others may not understand or empathize with their process. It is important for women doctoral students to communicate and include those closest to them in their educational transformative process (Rockinson-Szpakiw, Spaulding, & Knight, 2015). The communication allows doctoral students to share with their spouses, family, and friends of their transformations and newly constructed knowledge (Maher et al., 2004; Nelson et al., 2001).

Female Doctoral Students’ Roles in a Family Unit

Women who pursue a doctoral degree adjust and adept their time period in order to balance and accomplish their wants and desires from their multiple roles. Even women, who pursued doctoral degrees in the 1950s and 1960s, had to either wait or put their degree on hold because of family commitments (Sack, 2004). Mezirow (1978) developed the phases of transformative learning through the discourse of women’s meaning making of the college reentry process during the 1970s. He wanted to understand how women were experiencing this change
in lifestyle. However, Bergen and Bergen (1978) viewed the women’s doctoral pursuits phenomenon from men’s perspective of financial strain and resentment.

In the 1980s, it was presumed that women who chose to obtain doctoral degrees significantly impacted spousal roles. Waring (1981) discussed how the degree of intimacy is dependent of the dimension of interpersonal interaction in the relationship, which can be impacted by situations, such as doctoral pursuits, which interfere with the relationship. As women acquire more education, it takes time away spousal and family roles, which, in turn, could potentially lead to marital tension and other unforeseen issues in relationships (Van Meter & Agronow, 1982). Women doctoral students have more role strain, parental roles and stress, than men doctoral students, which require more coping strategies (Nelson et al., 2011).

There was also a large push in the 1980s for professors and universities to be aware of the multiple role strain that women doctoral students experience. It was thought that due to inadequate support systems, particularly within the university, these women were not finishing their doctoral work. Lite (1985) also implied that doctoral women’s roles are more conflicted then men’s and universities and professors should provide more support to these women to decrease the attrition of women doctoral candidates. She suggested that professors should reflect on their assumptions and myths that women are more concerned with their family role rather than their student role.

Transitioning into the 1990s, the literature was predominantly of quantitative form and lacked true interview, self-reflective, or transformative methods, except for Padula (1999) who re-introduced Mezirow’s study of women’s re-entry experiences. Most of the women doctoral student studies discussed marital satisfaction and women professors in higher education and the struggles faced by women doctoral students. Sokolski (1995) determined that because of role
reversal, men and women perceived more marital satisfaction when they perceived their spouses as equal contributors. When both partners were obtaining a doctoral degree, symmetrical relationship, couples also experienced more equitable roles. Women who are pursuing a doctoral degree struggle with the ability to fulfill sole household and parental roles, so there is a need for the spouses to carry some of the load or shift traditional roles (Salyer-Funk, 2012). Also, couples that did not have children experienced more marital satisfaction.

Salovey and Casey-Cannon (1999) suggested the need for diversity in higher academia faculty. Women and diverse cultures were underrepresented in higher academia positions, and those who were represented were being underpaid, which ultimately affected doctoral students, particularly those who were female and not of Euro-White American decent. Issues such as sexual discrimination or lack of emotional support were among the highest complaints toward women doctoral students.

At the beginning of 21st century, Brannock, Litten, and Smith (2000) once again confirmed that doctoral students who were in symmetrical relationships, both spouses were pursuing doctoral degrees, reported a higher level of marital satisfaction than those who were in asymmetrical relationships; only one spouse was pursuing a doctoral degree. This finding is supported by Sokolski’s (1995) quantitative findings. Co-transformation within a relationship is perhaps more sustainable than single spouse transformation (Maher et al., 2004). Furthermore, women actually used planned transformational work while dealing with stress management. Nelson et al. (2001) discussed planned coping strategies among women who were pursuing a doctoral degree and had children. Hyun (2009) further explored this concept when describing the numerous roles counseling psychology female students endure while pursuing a doctoral degree. Hyun (2009) interviewed counseling psychology students, in order to obtain reasons for
students not completing a doctoral degree and found that women take on spousal, social, family, and student roles simultaneously. The marital impact of a doctoral process produces financial stress, change in lifestyle, lack of time, and communication issues.

It is no secret that the ambitions of women in academia are high, and they also seek these desires in others roles. The gender training of women means that there is often a juggle to be good mothers, partners, daughters, employees, colleagues, church members, sportswomen, and academicians (Carter et al., 2013)

Women’s relationships can be impacted with the acquisition of a doctoral degree and possibly other professional positions of power (McClintock-Comeaux, 2006; Murphy-Graham, 2010; Waring, 1981). Also, if spouses question the women’s contribution to the relationship, hostility can arise between couples. Carter, Blumenstein, and Cook (2013) suggested that women doctoral students’ emotions, sexual interest, and social relationships decrease during their academic pursuits. A tension exists between women doctoral students’ social relationships and academic performance. It is suggested that doctoral academia impacts women’s identity socially and personally. This can interfere with their identity transition as women emulate different identities in each situation. “Unsurprisingly, gender inflects academic identity” (Carter et al., 2013, p. 341).

**Mezirow’s Stages/Phases of Transformative Learning Theory**

Mezirow’s development of transformative learning theory began after he experienced the literature from two authors: Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich. These authors challenged his existing approach toward adult education development and process. Two points of reference are necessary in Mezirow’s (2000) psycho-critical method: recognizing habits of the mind and identifying the point of reference. In order to transform, individuals must recognize their
assumptions and question the stem of their meaning making. Mezirow (1991) explained the ten phases of transformation he developed were from a national study of college women re-entering the higher education experience, which stemmed from wanting to understand his wife’s experience of re-entering college in the mid 1970s. Mezirow (1991) illuminated his excitement as he witnessed his wife’s experiences and described them as “both fascinating and enlightening” (p. xvii). This is quite fascinating considering his progressive spousal support of his wife’s education was approximately 40 years ago. Mezirow (2000) clarified that transformative learning does not have to be a shock to the individual. It can take place over a period of time. Below are Mezirow’s 10 phases of transformational learning.

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. A self examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plan
8. Provision trying of new roles
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s perspective (Mezirow, 1991, pp. 168-169).
Transformation within Female Doctoral Students

According to Carter, Blumenstein, and Cook (2013) women doctoral students encounter single or multiple forms of disorienting dilemmas such as identity roles, finances, spousal role reversal, guilt, and denial parenting, as well as gender and discrimination issues in higher education to name a few. Then there are feelings of shame or guilt for not being able to fulfill each of these roles well. The feelings of guilt lead to the critical reflections of assumptions. However, Wall (2008) shared that Canadian women did not desire more time to work on academic items but wanted academia and family time to become interchangeable or mesh at times. The duality of this workload was easier to cope with supportive families and supervisors (Carter et al., 2013).

The roles that female doctoral students take on may not only affect their own roles, but also the roles of individuals closest to them. Their educational transformation affects others such as their spouses and family, and these individuals may have to transform or adapt as well. As relationships change roles, the new transforming female doctoral students may also establish new relationships or consider new roles and actions. New plans of action are established in order to accommodate all the roles and responsibilities while pursuing a doctoral degree. In this planning process, women doctoral students acquire new transferrable skills (Carter et al., 2013). New roles and balance of these roles are explored, and it is here that the women doctoral students build a new sense of confidence or claim a new power (Glowacki-Dudka, 2013) through the assimilation to these new roles or relationships. This new perspective is integrated into other relationships and aspects of female doctoral students’ lives. Salyer-Funk (2012) suggested that the work balance, stereotypically defined as equal, when describing women with children who work in higher education, be redefined as a “negotiation between responsibilities and deadlines”
Wall (2008) also supports this notion and suggests that some women obtaining a doctoral degree claim that responsibilities of home and work are inseparable (Salyer-Funk, 2012). Damiano-Teixeira (2006) suggested that the women in her study express that flexibility is key for women who have family and work related responsibilities. As individuals may view their identity differently, the doctoral educational experience may be similar for some by impacting their personal meaning.

It is important to note that not all women doctoral students may define their experience as transformational, but all experiences do have the potential for transformation if the phases are experienced. It is arguable that the degrees of experiences for many women are different, but acknowledging the dissonance may lend to transformation. The learner must be able to critically reflect on the experience, gain new judgment, and act on the perspective (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). There must be a course of action in order for the learning to be considered transformative, whether immediate or over time. Mezirow (1991) suggested that learners can change their learning and what they know, but many will regress due to lack of action. Mezirow’s (1991) term, “act” (p. 169) is vague, but it can be understand as an assimilation, integration, or adaptation to the previous dilemma.

Belenky and Stanton (2000) have criticized Mezirow’s views, as individualized ways of knowing rather than encompassing connected knowing, meaning there are others who guide and mentor the women’s transformations. Much of the literature regarding women’s roles and higher education is not viewed from an adult transformative learning lens, yet some will mention self-reflection or critical assessment, which is a part of transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991). Therefore, this literature review will use this lens describing both female doctoral students’ roles and roles of being in a family unit.
Transformative Learning and Relationships Attempting the Educational Process

One of the arenas of transformative learning is a holistic view, which encompasses relationships, feelings, and “ways of knowing” (Taylor, 2008, p. 11). Sack (2004) suggested that early women pursuing their doctoral degrees described a determination, and a strong sense of who they were, also considered a way of knowing, that stemmed primarily from their family educational values and tenacity that built in women during World War II. In addition, even when discrimination was present gender did not seem to be a factor to these early pioneers (Sack, 2004). This seems to conflict the research of women who pursued doctoral degrees after these women. Perhaps, because these women experienced the American struggles of World War II, they viewed their accomplishments and struggles differently than those who did not experience the trials of war. However, it could simply still be the concept of socially constructed perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of women pursuing higher education degrees that perceived gender equality and sexism (Mehta et al., 2013).

Marie Morisawa, an early documented pioneer, who graduated in 1960 from Columbia claimed, “How women consider themselves influences how others think of and treat them” (Sack, 2004, p. 450). Specifically love relationships could be viewed from a transformative theoretical perspective because relationships grow, evolve, and begin to engage in new ways of learning. Perhaps women doctoral students can accomplish doctoral tasks easier if their relationships are open for them to share their new transformative experiences.

Taylor and Cranton (2012) suggested that particularly for women, emotions are a centerpiece for transformational learning. When women are able to share their life experiences, this is the heart of the transformative experience. The process of “building relationships and support conditions in which transformations might occur” (Taylor & Cranton, 2012, p. 251) is
one condition in which women succeed professionally. This aligns with Kittelstrom’s (2010) recommendations that higher education value the transformation of motherhood as merit in higher education. Females who are performing multiple roles and obtaining a doctorate degree need supportive relationships in order to make meaning of their experiences. Supportive relationships can be from spouses, children, family members, coworkers, colleagues, friends, and professors (Hine, 1985; Sack, 2004).

Many times, it is the empathetic conversations that allow women to transform and make meaning at that deeper level of transformation as well as cope with the doctoral process (Hamp, 2007; Nelson et al., 2001). Whether making sense of their educational pursuits or their identity roles, relationships are an essential component to fostering the malleability occurrences that are transforming these women doctoral students.

Giles (1982) found that spouses of women doctoral students should be supportive, empathetic and available for them, emotionally, academically, financially, or basic needs; talking, listening, or simply be present with them, in order to maintain a positive relationship. Hyun (2009) suggested that if women are supported by those that are closest to them and these individuals recognize the multiple roles the woman must juggle or better yet, negotiate between, these individuals are more prepared to assist female doctoral students with coping strategies of these role shifts of spouse, mother, friend, family member to maintain responsibilities of life between school and marriage (Salyer-Funk, 2012).

Aitchison and Mowbray (2013) confirmed that women deal with negative emotions of both their writing process and dealing with the guilt of taking time away from their family and children for their own doctoral writing needs. An emotionally sensitive time and support of others can alleviate some of the stressors and internal guilt that accompany the isolating and
enlightening time of the doctoral process. Giles (1982) found that parents of the couple, where one is a doctoral student, lends much emotional, basic need, and financial support, however this can arise some emotion conflict between the couple’s development.

**Marital Satisfaction during Doctoral Work**

Marital satisfaction encompasses many facets within a marriage, particularly when doctoral work adds levels of stress to the marriage. Brannock, Litten, and Smith (2000) explained these facets as one compiled sense of “love” (p. 128). These facets included family values, finances, friends, affection, sex, philosophy, and behavior change. Couples experienced a higher rate of marital satisfaction when both of the spouses were attending school, symmetrical relationships, rather than when only wives were obtaining their doctoral degree, asymmetrical relationships (Brannock et al., 2000). Also marital satisfaction was different for those couples that were in marital therapy during the doctoral endeavor; particularly those who had began therapy prior to the doctoral process (Brannock et al., 2000).

Consequently, female students reported more marital dissatisfaction with problem solving communication and finance in their marriage than male doctoral students. From the female perspective, it seemed “difficult to resolve problems, lack specific problem solving skills, be oversensitive toward one’s partner, and emulate an inability to discuss and resolve sensitive topics” (Leppel, 2002, p. 491). Adding the relationship difficulties of child rearing also impacted females’ marital dissatisfaction. It is suggested that doctoral students may not always share all their relationship discord, underestimating issues and unresolved conflict and arguments. Couples may underestimate the stresses and future of their marriage while partners are going through the educational process (Leppel, 2002). However, what couples may not know is that doctoral persistence is directly related to spousal support throughout the doctoral process.
(Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015). Many universities provide support for students during this process, but very few provide support for spouses (Brannock et al., 2000; Cymbal, 2004; Gold, 2006).

**Making Meaning in Transformational Learning**

Taylor and Cranton (2012) define transformative learning as “a process of examining, questioning, and revising perceptions” (p. 5). “We make meaning with different dimensions of awareness and understanding and in adulthood we may more clearly understand our experience” (Taylor & Cranton, 2012, p. 73). Many times individuals’ perceptions of the world are not accurate because they have not had experiences that have transformed their previous opinions. When an experience is examined deeper and meaning is construed from the experience, the frames of reference have the capability “to be inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (p. 76) rather than allowing “stereotypes and prejudices to guide decision making and actions” (p. 6).

Individuals learn to negotiate and act on their own rather than acting on the assimilation of others. Assimilating can be construed as social constructionism. Mezirow (1991) explains that experiences are habitual assimilated perspectives from our social world, community, and culture. Taylor and Cranton (2012) add that learning can occur from practices within culture and language. Women experience meaning making and transformation differently than men. Many experiencing transformations build relationships and conditions where support is available. It is within these conditions where women are able to share their life experiences, the heart of the transformative experience. Emotions are a centerpiece for transformational learning in women.
It is not understood whether men experience meaning making in transformational learning in the same manner.

**Conclusions From The Literature**

Role theory, social identity, multiple roles, family systems theory and gender roles were the predominant paradigms investigated for both exploring and discovering new perspectives in marital roles. Recommendations advocated for education were predominantly in psychology, gender, and sociology (Fow, 1998; Quail, 1982; Satir, 1983). Qualitative and mixed method designs were not as represented as qualitative. Also, there were minimal quantitative studies that represented both spouses as participants. Perhaps, gender theories, relational dialects theory, and transformational learning theory could be explored more to provide the literature with a more in depth, co-constructed, discovery, acknowledging both spouses meaning making about marital roles. There are many role terms to describe how spouses switch or balance roles. Spousal roles may never be balanced, reversed, or equal (egalitarian), but could possibly be negotiated. Future research could account for both partners’ perspectives (Quails, 1982) and decision-making in marital commitment (Weigel, Bennett, & Ballard-Reisch, 2006) through negotiation. A multitude of marriages are experiencing more dual-income and/or egalitarian marital roles, which perhaps stems from more women entering higher education and more concretely the influence of the feminist movement toward egalitarian roles (Lendon & Silverstein, 2012; Satir, 1983). Males and females are experiencing different and shared negotiated marital roles, with both spouses sometimes struggling intrinsically with time away from home (Young, 1999), particularly those with children (Abetz, 2013). The role captivity that was mentioned in the research in the 1980s where men experienced dissonance toward wives for pursuing higher education does not seem to be as prevalent as once thought (Gerson, 1985; Pearlin & Turner,
Indefinitely, it is speculated in the literature that relationships are different and have their own interpersonal development. People recognize role captivity when they question their role identity in stressful circumstances such as expatriate trailing spouses (McNulty, 2012), forfeiting their personal goals so spouses can pursue higher education (Abetz, 2012), and/or individual and couple struggles from role sharing or role reversal (Hochschild, 2012). Couples that have more education (Cunningham, 2008), communication skills (Abetz, 2013), and relationship education (Satir, 1983) are better equipped to negotiate their marital roles. Couples able to empathize with their spouses’ feelings and set boundaries (Fow, 1998; J. P., personal communication, 2014) could be more equipped to deal with role captivities, negotiated shared roles, or egalitarian roles.

Possibly, role reversals and egalitarian roles are more prevalent because of women baby boomers’ influence of gender role perception (Cunningham; 2008; Lendon & Silverstein, 2012). Couples where one spouse identifies as more feminine are more successful at performing dual or reversed roles. Young (1999) added that men are proud of their wives for pursuing opportunities and are embracing the fatherly-nurturing role, which suggests that gender is irrelevant in marital roles. However, each spousal experience is situational and is dependent on their relationship communication (Abetz, 2013) and education (Fow, 1998). McNulty (2004) suggests that expatriate trailing men claim that egalitarian roles are a mutual decision so their wives may excel at their professions. So it is implied that communication fosters the decision for negotiated marital roles or egalitarian roles in dual career couples (Cook et al., 2011). In addition, spouses need a space to make meaning of their role identities and experiences as their married spouses are excelling in their education or professional pursuits (Abetz, 2013).
Chapter Two Summary

Chapter Two literature review discussed female doctoral students and spousal literature that was available in a number of disciplines: psychology, sociology, higher education, transformational learning and how women experience meaning making. Literature about female doctoral students discussed how women experience their doctoral study as spouses. Females experience role adjustment and stress and strains both in their relationships at home at within higher education. Spousal adjustment literature discussed egalitarian roles but with limited representation from male spouses. What is missing from the literature is the husbands’ experience, which is the purpose and significance of this dissertation study.
CHAPTER THREE:

METHODS

Introduction to Chapter Three

The methods chapter begins with a background on qualitative research and phenomenology to assist the reader in understanding the purpose behind the reflective inquiry. Chapter Three discusses the sampling procedures, data collection, and addresses how the data was analyzed. The procedures have developed and evolved from previous qualitative research pilot studies of the researcher (Vetor-Suits, 2013).

Figure 1, below, is a depiction of the methods section guide. Following the figure will be an explanation of each section.

![Figure 1. Methods Section Guide.](image-url)
Qualitative Research

Qualitative research aims to discover meaning through the development of theories and perceptions in order to provide insight of a phenomenon (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). The researcher seeks to understand unique situations, as well as what it means for participants to be in a particular setting and what their world looks like, rather than to predict conclusions of future situations (Patton, 1985).

Gay et al. (2012) defined qualitative research as:

The collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest. All meaning is situated in a particular perspective or context, and because different people and groups often have different perspectives and contexts, the world has different meanings, none of which is necessarily more valid or true than another. Problems and methods tend to evolve as understanding of the research context and participants deepens. (p. 7)

Qualitative research is not measurable or fixed, but socially constructed within the world where individuals interact and live (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative researchers provide descriptive insights of participants’ experiences and how they make meaning of the natural understandings of their world, which can suggest relationship, causes, effects, and dynamic processes” (Hughes, 2006, n.p.). Qualitative studies attempt to capture and understand the perspectives of a small populace, providing them with voice (Hughes, 2006) during a certain instance in time (Merriam, 2002). Both the strength and the drawback of this approach is that the experiences are specific to this population at a particular moment.
Qualitative design can collect and analyze a variety of data from participants in order to better discover their subjective, constructive meaning. The researcher also serves as the instrument with which to analyze and make meaning of the experience. This role can cloud the results, if the researcher has not created a plan for delineating bias and assumptions within the writing (Creswell, 2014). Merriam (2002) adds that biases may impact the study, but the researcher can monitor their bias during interpretation of data. Hughes (2006) claimed that it is necessary for qualitative researchers to submerge themselves in the setting in order to provide critical insight into the meaning of the data.

Peshkin (1998) adds that the researcher provides a unique contribution to the data within a particular field of study that is distinctive and personal. Qualitative design takes a tremendous amount of time to collect, transcribe, analyze, and interpret data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Hughes, 2006), but does not need additional information to provide more insight like quantitative design (Flick, 2009). It is not the purpose of qualitative studies to generalize data to the greater population. However, reflection is essential to consider the feasibility of the qualitative design before deciding to collect data.

**Phenomenology Research**

Phenomenological research describes the lived experiences or essence of individuals about a particular phenomenon within the inquiry of psychology and philosophy (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology directly relates itself as consciousness or relating to a particular situation. “Consciousness is always consciousness of something” (Crotty, 1998, p. 79). Each individual experiences life from his/her own perspective, even if the experience is similar to someone else’s experience. For example, a person lives through a particular situation and might be able to relate to others who have experienced the same situation or phenomena, however the
conscious reflection or learning that occurs can be similar, but not exactly the same at the time it occurs. The world influences individuals’ learning and how they perceive and interpret the meaning (Heidegger, 1962).

The primary data from a phenomenological research study, consisting of words, feelings, facial expressions, pauses, voice influxes, etc., that is collected reflects the true stream of consciousness from participants. Crotty (1998) explains that phenomenology is the direct experience and the “phenomena in the unmediated and original manifestation to the consciousness” (p. 79). Phenomenology allows researchers to view data as the participant directly experiences it. The task of listening for the participant’s experience challenges one’s preconceived thoughts and assumptions and opens new meaning into the eyes of not only the participant but also the interviewer. It is an attempt to capture the perceptual meaning that exists at a moment. Phenomenology is an opportunity to critique current perceptions of the human world and to acknowledge an “undiscovered significance” (Sadler, 1969, p. 20).

A phenomenological approach stresses the need to capture the essence of an experience, using a variety of data collection (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) recommends that more than one interview be conducted with the possible use of multiple forms data collection. Statements from the interviews that are significant are further explored and then they are then generated into themes, which support the phenomena. Researchers also have the ability to share their own experiences as long as they are acknowledged as subjective views and separated from the interpretations or essence of the phenomena.

Within this process, assumptions need to be acknowledged by the researcher in order to provide the appropriate interpretations of the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2007). During this study, I gathered the field notes taken during each interview from my interview team and
began writing my own interpretations of their field notes. I then discussed my notes with my interview team to check my interpretations. Wolcott (2005) discussed having a balance of analysis and interpretation, yet there is no designated ratio to describe the data. Therefore, I used two separate note taking books; one categorized assumptions and biases and the other focused on interpretations of the participants’ experience. I reviewed my notes many times in order to recognize biases within the interpretive writing. Wolcott (2005) also suggested digging into data analysis and interpretation as soon as interviewing begins and to designate the structure behind it. Van Manen (2011) described phenomenological writing as a researcher’s interaction with particular phenomena of the world. Performing this style of research with the appropriate language and style is unique, insightful, and illusionistic. The writing can never be fixed or pre-determined because the researcher must gather the meaning or essence that arises from the experience even when contradictions occur.

The data collection and analysis are viewed through a social constructivist lens. Both the participant and the interviewer can influence methods and construct meaning together as well as the participant constructing meaning from their own reality (Crotty, 1998; Marx, 1956). The participant and the interviewer already had established viewpoints, but when they prepared for the interviews, prior meanings of the phenomenon shifted. The husbands were interviewed twice, which provided for more reflection and deeper consideration. Their views changed and transformed between interview sessions. Van Manen (2011) explained that interpretation and text are never perfect or complete in phenomenological inquiry-based writing. More importantly, qualitative, phenomenological researchers must be reminded that each individual experiences the world in an infinite possibility of ways, and that explanations can be discovered and described in an variety of ways. Researchers using this mode of methods will experience
“moments of seeking, entering, traversing, gazing, drawing, and touching” (Van Manen, 2011, n.p.). This exploration of thoughts and reflections of experience could be seen in the study.

**Research Questions:**

The research questions that guided the study included:

RQ1: How do husbands experience and make meaning of their wives’ higher education and doctoral process?

RQ2: What strategies and means of support do husbands use to cope and understand their wives’ doctoral experience?

**Sampling**

Purposive, snowball sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Crotty, 1998) was employed to identify and select potential participants based on a set of criteria that relates to the study’s purpose. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study and its modifications as the proposal defense was approved and accepted by my dissertation committee members and Ball State University Graduate School.

Criteria for the participants in this study included interviewing six currently married husbands who were at least 30 years or older. Phenomenological research states that the number of interview participants should be between six and ten (Creswell, 2007), and this study had six participants. The husbands were married to the women doctoral students prior and throughout the completion of the doctoral degree and were still married. The purpose was to find the results of husbands that were still married rather than divorced in an attempt to give them the opportunity of space to reflect their thoughts. The married wives completed their doctoral degrees and obtained either an Educational Doctorate (Ed.D.) or a Doctorate of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in education. This study sought out doctoral students who acquired a doctorate of
education, as their experience was more similar than if other degrees were included. The doctoral students graduated within five years from the date of the study so the essence of their experience or how the doctoral program impacted their husbands was still new and fresh in their mind. Merriam and Associates (2002) support a time frame as the “nature of research is understanding interpretations at a particular point in time” (p. 4).

The couples were asymmetrical; meaning only the wives were gaining a higher education degree (Ed.D. or Ph.D.) at the time. Brannock, Litten, and Smith (2000) found less dissonance in relationships among married couples that were simultaneously attending school, so therefore I explored the experience of those who were not obtaining a degree simultaneously. Some husbands had a degree, and some did not, but they those who had obtained it before their wives gained their doctoral degrees. None of the husband participants had obtained a doctoral degree as previous studies provided insights on both husbands and wives who gained doctoral degrees, so this area did not need to be explored (Brannock et al., 2000; Gold, 2006; Sokolski, 1995).

During the recruiting phase of the study, the first six husbands who were willing to participate and who fit the criteria were accepted to participate in the study. The data reached saturation at six participants (Bowen, 2008), so there was not a need to recruit more husband participants. The search for participants began at a local, mid-western four-year university. Colleagues and professors within the education department were asked to recommend female doctoral candidates who recently graduated, were married, and fit the criteria. As colleagues responded, recent female graduates who fit the criteria of the study were contacted by email. Recipients were also asked to forward emails to other colleagues to share the information, through a purposeful snowball sampling technique (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Crotty, 1998).
In the initial contact with potential participants, I shared information about the study and asked permission to invite their husbands to participate. I also explained that a team consisting of a male interviewer and a male observer would facilitate the interviews. I wanted to respect their privacy and their marital relationships by not being the primary interviewer. I explained that the male observer would be present to take field notes and that in no way was the interview an attempt for the husbands to share personal marital experiences that would interfere with any couple’s marital dynamics. Upon permission from the recent female doctoral graduates, I contacted the male spouses by telephone and email. I indicated my purpose for the study, the criteria, and shared the informed consent with participants through email for them to review. It was important to establish a safe and nurturing environment, displaying sensitivity for the participants, so they would be more comfortable disclosing personal information within the interviews (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Participants are more willing to disclose personal meaning of experiences if they are provided a safe environment or surrounded by same sex participants with similar experiences (Egeberg-Holmgren, 2011; Gatrell, 2006; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Maynard, 1994).

In her study, Gatrell (2006) chose not to include the father interviewees as she questioned the power relations and the behavior between her and her male participants. She also considered her feminist view toward her study. As well, I did not want to interfere with the meaning or exploration of shared information from my husband participants (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993). Also, I speculated that due to hierarchical (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), power (Gatrell, 2006) or masculine tendencies that the interpersonal communication or negotiations between two males might produce a deeper discussion than a cross-gendered discussion between a female interviewer and a male interviewees (Egeberg-Holmgren, 2011), as two males understand the
culture of masculinity (Rodriquez-Navarro, Rios-Gonzalez, Racionero, & Maias, 2014) or a “masculinist way of knowing” (Maynard, 1994, p. 11). Lee (1997) argued that cross-gendered interviewing does not always result as negative but Williams and Heikes (1993) portrayed men interviewees in cross-gendered interviews as carefully sharing their views, particularly in public places.

The chosen male interviewer had previous phenomenological, qualitative interviewing experience with his doctoral degree, recently graduating from a mid-western university with a Ph.D. in Education. He currently holds a full time assistant professor position in Communications at a local mid-western university. Amia Leigblich, interviewed by Clandinin and Murphy (2007) suggested that interviewers must have acquired an array of life experiences to be capable of interviewing emotional and sensitive topics. The male interviewer was married during the duration of his doctoral work and he and his wife have one child. Prior to the interviews, the chosen interviewer and I collaborated and discussed the many facets of the struggles that impacted he and his wife during his doctoral work in an attempt to address any assumptions for him about the study that would affect his questioning of interviewees. Also, we discussed the purpose of the study, and how we would collaborate following each interview. I shared with him the importance of reviewing the interview guide and picturing how the interview will play out. I also shared the importance of not using leading questions during the interview. We met multiple times to discuss the study, and he read and explored my proposal and interview questions to gain the insights necessary to interview the husband participants. We continually discussed the interview questions via email, phone, and Skype as each interview unfolded to make sure the wording was respectful and focused on the research questions. For this study, he
had completed CITI training, and his certification results were submitted to the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB).

I explained to the husband participants that there would also be a male collaborator included in the study, which gathered field notes and recorded backup audio. Denzin and Lincoln (2013) describe the importance of remaining close to the setting of the participants while taking field notes in order to stay immersed and gain the most understanding of the learning process within phenomenological research, supporting the presence of a male collaborator in the interviews. Providing another collaborator strengthens this study with a triangulation factor as the interview team debriefed following each interview. For this study, the male collaborator had completed CITI training and I submitted his certification results to the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB).

**Pilot Interview**

Merriam (2002) recommends rehearsing the interview before it happens in order to avoid leading questions that might create bias in the data. After meeting with the interviewer and collaborator, we decided that a pilot interview would assist in understanding the study and identifying assumptions of the interview team. The pilot study also gave the interview team a chance to practice the interview questions, see how the interviewee responded, and then adapt questions if necessary. It also provided the interview team a chance to understand the study more and suggest new questions that would help to answer the research questions. The pilot interview allowed the interviewer to adjust questions, videotape, and give insights into the interview, as well as practice debriefing with the male collaborator.

Our first lesson was to focus more of the questioning on the husband at the beginning of the interview. The pilot interviewee even suggested that asking men what they do for a living
opens the interview with a sense of trust, an example of men’s way of knowing. Focusing on the men’s professions can establish positive relationships between the interviewer and interviewees. The interviewee also suggested that asking more about his education and personal endeavors would be good to explore as maybe the focus might be on his wife and her doctoral pursuits. It would give the interviewees a sense that the study is about them rather than focused on their wives’ pursuits. Suggestions from the interviewee were essential to the development of questioning and how we organized the questioning for the two separate interviews.

With the information from the interviewee, we decided to focus the first interview on the husbands and how they felt about their wives’ doctoral process, or research question one. We decided that at the end of interview one, we would inform the husband interviewees that questioning would focus more on how they handled the doctoral process and how it affected their marriage. The purpose was to give husbands time to reflect and see what impact the doctoral process had on them and their marriage. We attempted to set the scene for transformational moments to happen between interviews and hopefully be disclosed during the second interview.

The pilot interview, while conducted only once, covered both sets of questions from interviews one and two. The questions asked in the pilot interview led us to focus questioning on coping strategies, recommendations, meaning, and learning gained from the doctoral process. We also rephrased some questions to allow for frustrations or challenges to be expressed.

Interview Process

During this dissertation study, the research team conducted two interviews per husband participant, a total of twelve (12) interviews. Phenomenological research recommends using interviews as the primary collection of data (Merriam, 2002; Van Manen, 1990). Conducting
two interviews with each participant allowed for time needed for self-reflection and the meaning individuals make following a verbal discussion (Creswell, 2007). Often times, individuals develop new thoughts or reflections following conversations, thus, in order to capture additional reflective information, I planned the second interview approximately a week after the first. After both interview sessions, I emailed the husbands thanking them for their time. At that time, I mentioned an option for them to journal or make notes of any new meaning that occurred after either interview. Then they could share these notes or thoughts with the interviewer in person at the next interview or by email (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002).

The first interviews lasted approximately 45-90 minutes and during that time the participants agreed to the informed consent and signed the documents. Some participants were out of state and so Skype was used to communicate with these individuals. I emailed informed consent forms to the participants who were out of state and forms were sent back to me as an attachment in email. Those documents were saved in a folder on a password-protected computer and the emails deleted. Prior to the first interview, I emailed the participants and explained that the purpose of the study was to provide a space for husbands to self-reflect on their experiences and gain new insights into the meaning and purpose behind their wives’ pursuits of education in relation to their marital journey. I described this dissertation study as a space of reflection and support for them to make new meaning of their experiences and the purpose for having a male interviewer and collaborator. I allowed ample time for questions through email, introduced the male interview team and explained the purpose for using a research team approach. Being a female, I did not want to interfere or cause tensions between the husbands and their wives. After I shared this information with the each interviewee and each agreed to participate in the study, I
scheduled the first interview. All of the interviewees wanted to immediately schedule the second interview, so we scheduled them a week later.

During the introduction to the study, I also provided contact information of a marital therapist, in order to assist with any emotional issues that could arise from the interview discussions. I mentioned that they can discontinue the study at any time, and that their information will remain confidential, as pseudonyms would be used in place of their names. I also asked permission for the interview team to audio-record the interviews.

Once each participant agreed to the study and signed the informed consent, the interviewees and my interview team, consisting of a male interviewer and male collaborator, met for their first interview at a mutually agreed upon location. The male interviewer followed a semi-structured interview process with prepared questions that can be found in Appendix A and B. He began each interview by asking background information of the husbands. Questions evolved into how their wives’ doctoral process affected their wives. The discussion then progressed into how the doctoral process affected their marriages. The second interview focused on deeper self-reflection or meaning-making from the first interview and how the wives’ doctoral process affected the interviewees. At an appropriate closing point for the first interviews, the second interviews were confirmed so that both parties understood the time and mutually agreed upon locations. Through email discussions, some of the participants preferred to schedule both interviews ahead of time. After agreeing on locations, and times, the husband interviewees were sent email reminders to confirm their attendance. After their first interviews were complete, I emailed and thanked them for meeting with my interviewing team and reminded them of the next interview the following week.
Three days before and the day before the second interviews were conducted, I sent out emails to participants reminding them of their interviews and confirming their attendance. During the second interviews, lasting approximately 45-90 minutes, the male interviewer asked open-ended questions pertaining to the husbands’ experiences of marriage during their wives’ doctoral process. The questions are included on the interviewing script that is located in Appendix B of this dissertation. These questions explored the meaning and insights from each husband’s personal experience. When both interviews concluded, and transcriptions were complete, each interviewee had the opportunity to review his own transcripts. They were all accepted as written to use for this dissertation study.

The interviewer and collaborator spent time together debriefing each interview and themes that they saw coming forth from each participant. I provided questions for them to ponder following each interview, see Appendix C. They also disclosed information that they speculated could be important to mention in the study regarding the answering of the research questions or other anomalies that surprised them with the interviewees’ responses. Having multiple perspectives or a triangulation of analysis assisted in strength of my data analysis (Flick, 2009).

**Consistency and Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research considers the terms consistency, trustworthiness, and authenticity in place of the traditional, positivist lens of validity and reliability that exists in quantitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Creswell (2014) describes qualitative validity as the researcher employing procedures to check for accuracy and qualitative reliability as the consistency of the researcher’s approach. Repetitive, redundant, meaningful data that reveals patterns serve as validity for a phenomenological qualitative research study (Merriam, 2002).
Validity in this dissertation research study was ensured through collecting data thoroughly and carefully. Also the analysis occurred throughout the collection and development of the data supporting follow-up questions and considerations for the second interview. Additionally, Flick (2002) describes the process of triangulation in a qualitative study as an alternative conceptualization to validation.

Flick (2009) defines and discusses triangulation as using “different sorts of data” (p. 445) within “methods, data, theories, and investigators” (p. 405) in order to improve “the quality of a qualitative research” (p. 405). Within this dissertation study, I used triangulation through transcribed, audio-recorded interviews, observational notes, more than one theoretical approach, two types of data analysis approaches, and member checking. Triangulation improves the value of the study by allowing the researcher to discover and learn about a phenomenon on different levels of understanding or multiple lenses (Flick, 2009). Flick (2002) also describes triangulation as an alternative conceptualization to validation.

Part of the consistency, trustworthiness, and triangulation of data within a qualitative study is the option of transcription member checking. I provided the option for participants to review the transcriptions of the interviews. I explained that member checking was an opportunity for interview participants to review the discussion on paper. I shared that discussions often create new meaning and can transform the way we view or perceive our own experience (Mezirow, 1997). The participants approved all passages within my transcriptions, and I am ethically bound to follow their requests. Through email, I asked husband participants if they had any last questions regarding the transcriptions of the interviews or the overall interviews conducted, and they did not have any, so I thanked them for their time in participating in this dissertation study.
Data Collection

I utilized semi-structured interview questions to guide the interviews, as the primary source of data for this dissertation study (Merriam, 2002; Van Manen, 1990). However, after the first interview, I invited the participants to make notes and share them after the interview. None of the participants provided additional notes to the interview team or to me through email. Taggard (2009) suggests “personal narratives are produced through the social dialogical context of the interview” (p. 1). I informed my interview team that each participant needed to have the power to guide the discussions of both interviews.

During the interview sessions, the interviewer began the discussions with the semi-structured questions, but allowed the participants the freedom to guide the discussions (Egeberg-Holmberg, 2011; Van Manen, 2011). The interviewer shared that if at any time they needed to interrupt to share a thought to please do so. The interviewer began with discussions about basic descriptive information: such as age, education, years of marriage, and the impact of the doctoral process that focused primarily on their wives. The interviewer then asked husband participants to tell their story and share the doctoral process’s impact on their spouse.

The beginning of the first interview was designed to focus attention away from the husbands’ experiences to establish meaningful rapport and comfort with the interviewer, in an attempt to establish trust and relax the participants during their first interview (Gatrell, 2006; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). It was an assumption that sharing personal information, even with an established prior relationship, can be invasive within Midwestern culture, which explains the design of the interview guide with open discussions about occupations, hobbies, and the reasoning behind the wives pursuing a doctoral degree. The first interview discussions focused on why their female spouses decided to pursue their doctorate and how they handled the
challenges. As each interview developed, discussions began on the impact the process had on their marriages. I anticipated that reflective thinking would occur between the sessions and that the husbands may have new insights from their first discussions. Based on my pilot studies with women doctoral student interviewees (Vetor-Suits, 2013), I expected that second interviews would be necessary to capture the meaning making of their experiences (Creswell, 2008). Many of the interviewees did have new experiences to share and build from their previous interview. The design of the first portion of the second interview was for these participants to express and share their reflections and new meanings. The interviewer and collaborator captured more experiences from the husbands as they reflected and made meaning from the two interview sessions. Each second interview was conducted in order to gather new meaning that they constructed after the first interview. The interview structure guide (See Figure 2.) transitions back to the interview guide in order to gain information on the remaining areas of the impact on marriage and the impact on the husbands.
Immediately following each session, I listened to the audio file of the interview and the debriefing session and began writing and analyzing experiences (Tjora, 2006). Transcriptions were conducted immediately following my journaling experience (Bird, 2005). Interpretive analysis happened while transcriptions were being written and during the listening portions to capture reflections, insights, and interpretations of the interviews. The transcribed interviews are the raw data. I paid attention to both what was said and how it was said when interpreting the data. I made notations of the semantics and body language, observed and written by the male collaborator, by writing the conversation topic within my field notes. Participants’ grammar, speech patterns, tone of voices, linguistics, and body language were all interpreted in the data analysis. This supports the researcher’s ability to make interpretive decisions in the moment the action takes place by the participants (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).
Observational field notes written by the male collaborator were reviewed and interpreted immediately following each interview in order to capture or support any interpretative portions of the analysis. Body language was defined as an abrupt change in facial expression, a shift in their seat, an avoidance of looking at the interviewer when answering, and any nervous behavior that was shown during the interview process. The male collaborator noted assumptions. Then I reviewed them with the male interviewer and while listening to the transcriptions to confirm their meaning. Crotty (1998) explains that we are creatures of language and we construct our meaning within language.

I constructed three types of journaling manuscripts that were suggested by Cutcliffe’s (2002) reflexivity discussion. The first journal was for identifying my biases or opinions or the Epoche (Moustakas, 1994). Also, because I am married and trying to make meaning of my doctoral experience as it impacts my marriage, I wrote about my own experiences in this first journal so that I was able to identify some of my biased interpretations. I attempted to separate my biases from the essence of the experience. Another journal was created for methodology purposes, specifically identifying the discussions within the interview and what questions were instrumental to each participant. The third journal was for connections or themes I thought would occur both between the participants, as well as to discover any individual meaning making about each of them that was evident when I reflected immediately following the interviews. I attempted to write from these different perspectives in order to make sense of the essence or truth that is to be discovered from the husband participants. Colyar (2009) describes, “sense-making” as an alternative gerund that better describes how beginning writers can learn from their thinking and that is simply through writing and rewriting what has already been written (pp. 431-432).
My interview team used both a tape recording device and a backup IPAD to record each session. The recorded discussions were immediately uploaded and shared with me through a shared Dropbox folder with the male interviewer. The audio files were transported into my personal files and saved on a password-protected home computer, where they were transcribed and analyzed using headphones, an IMac transcription application, and saved in a Microsoft Word document. After the recorded sessions were transferred from the recording devices and transported through Dropbox to my computer, my interviewing team deleted the files from their devices and the Dropbox folder was deleted that shared the files. The transcription and data analysis word documents were also saved on my password-protected home computer. After I completed my transcriptions, I sent them to each participant privately to member check. After each participant reviewed their transcriptions and approved each, I began to analyze and interpret the transcriptions.

**Data Analysis**

Basic interpretive qualitative analysis was used to analyze the data. Inductive and deductive approaches were essential to analyzing this qualitative research. Inductive qualitative researchers discover themes and patterns within data, and deductive researchers review the themes and patterns while reviewing the primary data. Qualitative researchers are then able to recognize if they need additional data gathering to support the themes and patterns (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, Merriam (2002) adds that thick, rich descriptions are necessary in order to explain the findings.

Triangulation occurred naturally within both of my analysis methods. I chose to analyze and interpret the transcriptions in two different ways. The first was inductively by identifying codes and themes and creating an Excel table document that organized the themes (Bowen,
2008). I listened carefully for themes, patterns, and meaning through the verbal sematics. After reading and simultaneously listening to transcriptions over and over and analyzing and taking notes, I began organizing and writing the themes and patterns.

For the inductive analysis, the interview questions assisted in organizing patterns and themes in the data. After listening and reading through the transcriptions twice each and taking notes and journaling meaning I constructed from the interviews, I began closely reading through transcriptions and highlighting quotes that were insightful and would compliment the experiences of the husbands through the lenses of phenomenology, social constructionism, and transformational learning. I then created an Excel document for each husband interviewee. I gave each interviewee a random pseudonym and all existing names were erased to protect the privacy of my husband participants.

I went back through the highlighted quotes from both interviews for each interviewee and chose the most meaningful and honest quotes that would answer not only the research questions, but also give meaning to this dissertation study. I placed each meaningful quote on a separate line and aligned them with the question, identified them by a code that consisted of a series of line numbers of the sentence or paragraph that is on the transcription document, and labeled the code as to whether the quote happened in the first or second interview. I then provided a brief analysis next to the quote based on my interpretation of the meaning. I then went back and read through the quotes in each section and reorganized based on what patterns I saw arise and had noted previously. The themes were renamed based on how the quotes were realigned and organized.

Then, I examined the information from a deconstructed view, different from the stereotypical means of thematic organization in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).
Agar and Hobbs (1982) describe the formality of interpreting data as dearth. They state, “It is difficult to know in interviews how much of what is said is a reflection of the culture, how much is the speaker’s personal interpretation, and how much is due to the interview situation itself” (p. 1). This mentioned, I chose to analyze with this style as well, simply listening to all recorded sessions repeatedly and writing my interpretations over and over again in an attempt to dissect the culture, interpretations, and the interviewees meaning. I listened to the recordings over ten times and chose passages from the interviewees that I felt were radical or groundbreaking to the way I viewed the data (Agar & Hobbs, 1982). After identifying the passages, I replayed it back five to ten times, writing my interpretations in between each playback. Each time, there were different nuances that appeared within each participant’s passage. Therefore, I acknowledged both social construction and transformative lenses when I described the data because there was meaning from each of their own constructed worlds and views, but there was also the social constructed view of stories from interactions with others (Crotty, 1998; Mezirow, 1997).

The organizational analysis using both methods produced an untraditional way of organizing and comprehending the findings in this dissertation study. However, within phenomenology, not only is it acceptable to mention and highlight patterns and themes, but also experiences that are unique to an individual’s personal life and situation. Even the existing patterns had a multifaceted perspective because of the deconstructive analysis. So therefore, I went back into the Excel document and created one more column next to the existing inductive analysis and labeled it deductive analysis. This organizational style served as a reminder that there was more than one perspective on the quote or within the theme. With this new insight, I began seeing the patterns and individual experiences as a weave. In order to highlight both, themes and individuals experiences, the organization had to reveal a flux of continuity from
patterns to individual experiences throughout the findings and analysis section. By analyzing data in two different ways, the process allowed me to see any similarities, differences, or new insights, bringing new thoughts and meaning to my findings and conclusions of the study.

**Chapter Three Summary**

A phenomenological approach to this qualitative inquiry aligns with the use of the theoretical perspective and the meaning that aims to be captured from husbands of female doctoral students. A purposive, snowball sampling technique was used to gain access to husbands of females who have currently graduated with a doctoral degree in education (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007). The data collections methods are explained in two ways; through descriptive writing and within a Microsoft Excel process chart in order to give the reader a differentiated approach to understanding the interviewing and collection methods. Social constructivist and transformative theories are used to gather, analyze, and interpret the data. Data was interpreted using two approaches; basic interpretive analysis using codes and themes as well as the deconstructive approach from Denzin and Lincoln (2013) and Agar and Hobbs (1982) that consists of repeatedly listening to the recorded transcriptions and writing new interpretations.
CHAPTER FOUR:
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction to Chapter Four

This chapter reporting the findings from the study begins with a description of the husband participants, both as individuals through the use of a demographic chart and then as a whole collective group. The findings are woven together throughout the chapter. As themes are presented, some of the husbands’ personal experiences are elaborated to tell more of the story and the premise behind the theme or constructed or transformative meaning. Next the perceptions of how the doctoral process affected their wives, their life, and their marriage are discussed. Themes and additional findings are described and can be seen in the reflections from the six participants, as well as how the doctoral process impacted their lives and marriages. The findings presented are through the husbands’ perceptions and evolution throughout their wives’ doctoral process. Themes that were found include wellness, persistence, frustrations and challenges, marital impact, communication, support, support by egalitarianism, intimacy, feelings of pride, jealousy, selflessness, shared activities, sacrifices, and intellectual evolvement.

Overview of Husband Participants

The husband participants ranged in age from 37-68 years old. Each husband was married for at least five years prior to his wife completing her doctoral pursuits. The range of marriage was from 9-40 years. All the husbands had established their own career prior to their wives completing their doctorates. The husband participants ranged in education from a high school diploma to a Master’s degree. Additionally, all husbands had their own hobbies apart from their wives, but each couple also had shared interests. The demographics chart below, Table 1, provides more detail on each husband. Each husband was given a pseudonym to respect his
privacy in this study. The chart describes basic demographics such as each husband’s age and years they were married. The number of children the husbands shared with their current spouse were listed and described with ages if they were under 18 years old but classified as adult if they were over 18 years. Some husbands were married prior and had children in their prior marriages. For example, Finn had three children, all adults, but only shares one with his current wife who obtained her doctoral degree. Children were also specified as a stepchild or a blended family as specifically described by one husband. I chose to keep the term “blended” for one husband, Jake, as this was his perception of how he perceived he and his wife’s children. Jake and his wife did not biologically have any children together. Husbands were also described based on their level of education, occupation, race, and Midwest location.
Table 1: Husband Participants Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years Married</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Midwest Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>(1) Adult</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Media, Advertising Sales</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>East Central Indiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stepchild</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No children shared with current wife</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>40 years</td>
<td>(1) Adult</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Music Management Production</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Central Indiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>(1) Adult</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Protocol Officer, International Affairs</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Central Indiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 ½ years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finn</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>24 years</td>
<td>(3) Adults, 1 child shared with current wife</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>English Instructor</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Central Indiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>(2) Adult</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Central Tennessee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7, 9 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>(5) Adults, Blended family</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Warehouse Management</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Central Tennessee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No children shared with current wife</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Joshua

Joshua is in his 40s who shares all marital roles with his wife and even willing to flip traditional roles from time to time and be an expatriate spouse (McNulty, 2004). He and his wife have been married for over eight years, and they currently reside in East Central Indiana. He has a stepdaughter whose mother is his current wife and who is now an adult and has a child of her
own. She was in her teenage years when his wife was pursuing her doctoral degree. He strongly encouraged his wife to pursue her doctoral degree, as he knew that she would be among an elite group of professionals. He felt that it would not only give her a terminal degree, but it would also improve their financial status as a couple. He also shared that obtaining a doctoral degree coincided with her passion for social justice issues.

He and his wife share many hobbies together such as community and cultural events and issues on social justice issues. He is willing to take on any marital role whether it is the major breadwinner or stay at home husband in order to support his wife and their marriage and its endeavors. He believes that an advantage of obtaining a doctorate is the credibility and status that is awarded with the degree.

**Daniel**

Daniel is in his 60s who is accomplished in the production area of the music industry. He and his wife live in Central Indiana and have been married for 40 years. He supported his wife’s decision to obtain a doctoral degree, as she was not happy with her current occupation and work schedule. They have one child together who is grown and has a family on his own. They have one grandchild. Their son was already out of the house before his wife began her doctoral degree. They enjoy caring for their dogs and supporting students from their college alma mater. They also have separate hobbies from one another. Daniel is proud of his wife’s accomplishments and that she was able to gain the status of an Educational Doctorate.

**Finn**

Finn is in his 60s who has been married to his wife for over 20 years and they reside in Central Indiana. He talks about how his relationship and marriage to his wife has always been very close. They have one child together who was young when his wife began the doctoral
process, adding to the complexity of their experience. He was immensely involved in his wife’s doctoral process, as his degree in English came in handy for the editorial parts of the dissertation writing process. He mentions that, at times, those edits caused “knock down drag outs” amongst he and his wife.

Finn related the doctoral process to a military deployment or pregnancy and that you lose your spouse for some time. He was supportive of his wife throughout the process and feels immensely proud of her accomplishments. He often refers to his wife as “being in the presence of greatness.”

**Marshall**

Marshall is in his late 30s and has an established career in International Affairs. He and his wife have been married for approximately ten years and reside in Central Indiana. They have one child who is three and a half years old. The doctoral process impacted their marriage and family in terms of time spent together. Marshall was very willing to support and assist his wife with different household and childcare roles, while she obtained her doctoral degree.

Marshall’s experiences with the doctoral process throughout his interview were very practical. His perception of the doctoral process was more about focusing on completing the task and spending time with family when possible. It was more about the focus. He would remind his wife to focus on what time she had with family rather than what time they did not.

**Simon**

Simon is in his 40s who has been married to his wife for approximately 15 years. He and his wife reside in Tennessee. They have two children and are a very active together as a family. He was more than willing to take on extra household roles to assist his wife during her doctoral
pursuits. He refers to his wife as a “supermom,” which describes her ability to hold two part-time jobs and take care of the family while gaining a doctoral degree.

Simon works full-time and believed that the doctoral process did not affect his work or their marriage very much because his wife is such a great communicator. Her avid communication informed him of her moods and frustrations which allowed him to navigate and support her during those times whether it was caring for the children, taking care of household chores, or simply listening and supporting her challenges.

Jake

Jake is in his 60s and describes himself as an easygoing husband and hard workingman. He and his wife live in Tennessee and enjoy spending time together, but they also are very content spending time apart, which during the doctoral process allowed his wife to get much work completed in a quiet house. They have children, but from previous marriages. They do not have biological children together. They have been married for over 20 years. He attributed much of their success in life and with one another to their faith as one of his aliases is an ordained minister.

He boasts that he is very proud of his wife’s educational accomplishments that he “walks around with a swelled chest all day.” His support for his wife was in the way he paid attention to her moods. When he noticed a shift from positive to negative whether it be in her body language or communication of her frustration level, he would step in and distract her from the computer, get her away for awhile, and help her “re-center” allowing her mind to rest before going back to doctoral tasks. He believes that having hobbies such as gardening and home improvement projects where his wife could get physical activity helped prepare her for times of intense doctoral work.
Wellness

Throughout the interviews the husbands were asked specifically about their perceptions of their wives’ doctoral experiences. They described what they observed of the doctoral process. They shared what they thought their wives experienced from the doctoral process, their perceptions of the doctoral process, why their wives chose to obtain a doctoral degree, and how they were included in that conversation. Husbands also shared personal frustrations that arose for them through the process. One of the main areas that came through amongst all the participants was the health strain placed on their wives and themselves. Both husbands and wives health were affected physically, physiologically, emotionally, and mentally.

Husbands saw some of the doctoral processes were more stressful and draining than others, such as the comprehensive exams, statistic classes, and the dissertation. All husband participants expressed observing the stress and strain of being a doctoral student, as they watched their wives spend multiple hours completing projects. Finn talked about the strain on his wife and how he had to pay attention to her moods.

*I think it had a much greater physical and psychological toll on her than it did on me. I have seen her this way a couple of times, as a matter of fact not long ago I even used the analogy through her work that she was kind of falling back into that exhaustion mode, because there is nothing that is more health draining than adverse stress, overwork, and craziness with the job. I think it wore her down. So she had to pay particular attention to that, and I really tried to pay particular attention to that too.*

Finn discussed some emotional frustration the doctoral process placed on him, which added personal stress to him and their relationship. He alluded to his jealousy of the process. He felt that he was fulfilling his end of the marital roles and taking on some of his wife’s, but he was
not getting to spend time with her. This caused him to become jealous of whatever she was doing in the process, such as meeting with a professor or being a part of a meeting in the program. His duties as a dad and husband had shifted with no pay off. He wanted to be with his wife, and she was always gone. He had no idea the process would affect him in this way. To his surprise, he shared examples of his personal and illogical feelings of jealousy.

_I think you like the teacher better than you like me. You crave more attention from your professor than you do from me. You always meet Joe for coffee after a class and it pisses me off. Your attention is over there and I’m here. You know poor suffering me. You don’t have time to feel sorry for me anymore. That kind of stuff. All the stuff we don’t want to admit to._

Finn referred to “we” as all men and not admitting when they are illogical in a situation where they are just asking for more attention from their wives. He admitted that at times he was simply jealous because she was gone, and he was left alone to complete all the home tasks and responsibilities. His demeanor did not like having to take care of all the family roles, while she went to school. He perceived her as doing nothing to help the family, which added to the stress of their situation. However, he realized later that it was his own constructed behavior and self-pride that interfered, and it did not allow him to rationally process or understand the dilemma at the time.

Daniel had a much different experience with his wife’s health effects from the doctoral process. He experienced more emotional repercussions that came in the form of moods. He talked about how the doctoral process affected his wife’s moods. His way of supporting her was as a sounding board. In the passage below he described how the stress affected her.
Do we have issues? Yeah. Did we have issues while she was getting her doctorate?

Yeah. Because she was under a lot of stress. That’s part of the deal. I guess that kind of falls into the support factor of her getting her doctorate degree when she went back to get it. You had to have someone that was in favor of you doing it because there were a lot of times where you had to listen to the griping and complaining, and I’m pissed off and this sucks and you suck and the dogs suck and the whole life sucks, and why did I ever start this stupid thing.

The griping and complaining he shared affected him as well. He showed that taking on the role as a husband supporter required husbands to share some of the emotional and mental stress. He talked about not adding to the stress because it would not have helped their situation, nor would have helped her. Additionally, he experienced her stressful feelings in other ways; such as if he made mistakes in their home, i.e. breaking a dish when he attempted to clean the dishes to alleviate a stressor for her.

She would get more irritable at certain times. It would take a little less of something to set her off. I might break a dish and you would have thought the freaking world ended or something. Because of all the stress had built up. That part you never knew when it was going to explode. That would probably have been about the only thing. Just because you couldn’t plan for it. You didn’t know it was coming up. You didn’t know you had to adapt to it.

His adaptation was staying out of her way. “You know the best thing I could do was just stay out of her way.” He did not want to create more stress for her, as there would be more stress for him to handle. Often in his interview, he talked about staying out of her way as that seemed to reduce the amount of friction amongst them.
Joshua shared experiences of his wife’s physical health issues that were escalated during the doctoral process. He watched his wife’s frustrations levels rise and affect all her physiological systems. Joshua discussed some physical troubles his wife encountered from the stress and how he was able to support her.

*It was a struggle, definitely and she’s got allergies, pretty significant allergies, myofacial syndrome, and fibromyalgia issues that she has to work through. So, for her being on a regiment and a routine of the supplements and the herbs and things like that, she’s taking and giving body care; cranial sacral therapy and massage therapy. I mean when you’re sitting there hours on end like this; you need somebody to help straighten you out. And that was crucial to being able to do that. And there were definitely times when she felt better and worse other times.*

Joshua was able to empathize with his wife’s physical issues. With his past of working in a health food store, he was educated in the herbs and supplements she needed to combat the physical issues she was having during the sedentary times of doctoral process. Even when she experienced health affects from the doctoral process, Joshua also had an experience that he recognized during his interview for the first time. Joshua had a transformational moment when talking about his wife’s graduation party after the doctoral process that he had never made a connection as a physical reaction to the stressful doctoral process and its affect on him. When he was planning for his wife’s party, he was on top of a stool, stepped off the side and fell off, hurting his arm. He said that he attributes his clumsiness to working fast, which was their lifestyle during the process. So the hurriedness of the doctoral process may have caused him to lack special awareness.
It was her graduation. But we had rented a place locally like to have the food and stuff like that. And I fell off like a higher chair, like a bar stool size kind of chair. I was trying to put up decoration and I was working with my mom and we were both talking. I was on the chair, put the congratulations banner up with a nail, and I forgot I was up on that chair and I took a step as if to, well let’s take a look at my work, and fell on the floor and broke my wrist. I didn’t have to have a cast, a soft cast, or something, but I did have to take a break from playing music a little bit. Then when we were moving it was healed, but I had to be careful, and I had to wear a brace and stuff like that. But it did slow me down a little bit. But again, I just think those things happen when you’re moving so fast and you’ve got so many things on your plate, so you have to be ok with things not being perfect, good enough to move on.

Joshua recognized that his injury was due to their rushing lifestyle of the doctoral process. He gives another example of that rushing feeling during the doctoral process. “Hey, you know, I’m going to juggle six balls at once. And all of a sudden they are hitting you in the face a little bit. You have to take some of the lumps.” His reaction was surprising to himself as the rush of the situation finally made sense in his mind. His ability to recognize how he needed to act and slow down was a transformational lesson that was originally given to him from his father. Injury will happen when life needs to slow down.

I mean, I think the thing I would probably say is something my dad used to always tell me. ‘Watch where you’re going!’ That goes back to the whole wrist thing. Be cognizant of where you are in the moment. You know, when you’re moving too fast and all of that, that’s when accidents happen, that’s when you make bad decisions. When you’re running late, that’s when you always have to give yourself plenty of time.
Husbands were available for their wives. Some husbands would watch when their wives’ moods would change and attempt to support and help their wives to deal with the stress and pressure of the doctoral process. Jake paid close attention to his wife’s moods so that he could tell when the process was getting to her emotionally and mentally. Then he would gently intervene when he saw her moods change in an attempt to alleviate some of the health issues that come along with the stress.

What I did when she started with the doctorate, because I knew that was going to be heavy on her, is every once in a while I would just get her out. You know just turn it off for a minute and let’s go ride. We would go out and ride and talk. Basically what I did was open the line of communication and give her time to express, stress, whatever, vent, whatever she needed to do. Once she got in, I just kept watching her demeanor if I see a change when it gets to her.

By paying attention to mood changes or stress levels, some husbands were able to be proactive. They would attempt to address these stressful emotions and divert their attention, in order to support their wives and make them feel better. However, Jake claimed that the process did not affect him personally or his job. He stated that by having other hobbies such as riding his motorcycle and going over to a friend’s house kept him busy and gave her the quiet time she needed when writing became intense. His awareness of her mood helped his wife by him leaving their house.

Witnessing Persistence

The husbands’ observations of the doctoral process involved seeing the intellectual growth, specialization, and respect for the field that their wives developed. Simon talked about
the admiring his wife as he thought about all the hours, perseverance, and dedication she put toward her doctoral degree.

*I see that it was a big time commitment for her and she would spend those hours and hours and hours studying and working a lot of times earlier at night. So the dedication is what I got to witness. That is probably the biggest thing I take from it is how determined she was to persevere. You know I think getting your doctoral degree is just a thing of being able to persevere and not give up. Having the mental fortitude to push on when you don’t want to and she was able to do that. So that is what I reflect when I look back, its like wow she did it I can’t believe she, it was pretty amazing.*

Simon perceived the doctoral experience as a challenge of the mind. He emulated immense admiration when he reflected on his wife’s persistence. Her strong will was his most memorable experience from the process.

Marshall reflected that his wife was an ideal candidate for a doctoral degree because she is competitive and sought a specialization in her area of expertise. Marshall knew his wife would be able to complete her doctorate because of her fine-tuned intellect, and her drive of knowing she would an expert in her area.

*I think a good horse to bet on is the one that has the great academic resume and really has been able to develop not only her academic experience, but also her work experience to create a specialization. My understanding of the doctoral program is to really find an area of specialization and she brings that unique experience to the program.*

Joshua talked about how the experience raised the level of respect that others had for his wife. He felt that having doctoral credentials was powerful for his wife and that it raised her status personally and professionally.
People take you seriously if you can defend your opinion, even if it might not be right, because of your credentials, you know? And I think that is something that I would say is really cool about this is that my wife has that ability now.

Joshua discussed sharing the stature of the degree with his wife as he basks in her intellect. He admitted his respect and admiration toward the power the doctoral degree provides to graduates. He was grateful that his wife holds this status amongst an elite group of intellects.

**Frustrations and Challenges of the Doctoral Process**

Husbands experienced other frustrations and challenges of the doctoral process. They were particularly challenged when asked if they had understood what they were getting into when they began the doctoral journey with their wives. A few compared it to the Master’s Degree, but with more stress. Others reflected that they did not know what kind of stress it would cause their wives, but were aware and involved that husbands knew they were witnessing great transformation by them even in stressful times. Approximately four of the six husbands stated that they had a clear understanding of why their wives were pursuing a doctoral degree. The other two husbands experienced a lack of communication from their wives about the purpose of pursuing a doctoral degree and how that might affect them as a couple. The frustrations and challenges discussed here are from the perception of the husband. The experiences were about both wives and husbands but some were due to the wives’ frustrations and challenges that transferred frustrations to the husbands.

Daniel admitted that he did not know what they were getting into, but all he had to compare it to was the Master’s Degree process. It was not until he watched her study more that he realized it was going to be intense.
I didn’t know what we were getting into. I just thought it was like when she got her Masters Degree, and she went back she took some classes and boom she got her Masters Degree. I didn’t realize that the [higher] level classes are a lot different than the [lower] level classes. So where she used to be able to read something once or twice and kick it right back, now she is actually having to study. She is having to work harder and that takes more time and more energy, but that is why not everybody has a doctorate degree, otherwise everybody would be a doctor and it wouldn’t mean anything.

After watching his wife spend more time reading and studying, it became clearer to him that the doctoral degree was going to be much harder on her than prior degrees. The higher-level courses proved to be more challenging for her, but when discussing his experience, he realized the uniqueness and prestige of the doctoral degree.

Simon said that while he did not know what they were getting into, he thought that his wife may have, but she did not communicate it with him. Simon acknowledged his wife’s positive behavior of looking forward. Nevertheless, he praised how she gracefully handled the situation.

I think there are a lot of unknowns going into that. If she knew of any I don’t think she shared. If she had any concerns about that she didn’t share with me. I think she went into head first and with a strong desire to complete it. If she is going to do it, she is goal driven. Yeah she we didn’t have too many concerns there. Once she got in it, I think there was like, “wow.” At times there were some tough hurdles to get through mentally, but I think once she got in there and once you invest that much time, there is just no looking back. You just always have to look forward and that’s what she did.
Simon did not seem to know how the process was going to be or how it affected his wife. He knew she had many jobs and was working many hours and wanted to transition into one job, but he seemed to make the connection during his interviews that the process was a challenge, rather than through the conversations with his wife.

Marshall claimed that he did not see what was happening until they were well into the doctoral degree program. He blamed it on his focus and the communication about the purpose of the degree for her. Now, during his interview reflection, he could clearly see that her purpose was to gain the possibility to acquire better work hours and more family time.

*I don’t think it was clear to me at the time; it could have just been my lack of focus at what she was communicating. It has really become clear as she moved through the program, and now that she has completed the program as to her goals for degree. That is the prospects of a higher income at a shorter working hours and the prospect of having a location independent working environment that give her more free time with the family and specifically with our daughter and future kids. Having the location and independence it would bring. You know living in Fishers and her working an hour away, I think 100 miles round trip a day, 2 hours a day in commute that would give her opportunities to get out of the 8-5 working environment.*

Marshall did not seem to recognize or open up about the process until later into his interview, as it seemed he had not yet reflected on the process until he met with the interview team. He talked prior about not understanding her purpose for the degree and only remembering some parts of their conversations about when she introduced the idea. However, he stated he was not involved in the decision. But he was willing to support her and her efforts to complete the degree.
It was really something she had decided that she wanted to do and I gave full support. It was a discussion it wasn’t prolonged in any way. There weren’t any questions asked on my part. As far as why would you want to do that? How long is this going to take? What is going to cost? There weren’t any pros and cons that developed at the time.

There was not much comprehensive communication between he and his wife in regard to how this process would evolve and affect them as a couple or a family. There were many unknowns throughout the process and the biggest being a large, unexpected financial expense during the dissertation process. He was not upset to spend the money and reassured his wife that they could pay off the debt. However, he was annoyed that there was not more shared communication, investment return, and complaining by her of other smaller financial expenses spent. He shared a recent conversation he and his wife had recently about unexpected stressors of the doctoral process.

One of the things that is coming to mind is, do you remember the time I took out a $6000 credit card to pay for my research program because I had to buy evaluations and I unanticipated the cost. That research in the dissertation comes to the end that, but it wasn’t something that was really built into the program. It created a financial burden from my perspective. We talked about this last. You know what is the return on investment where being nagged about a $20 purchase here or a new pair of shoes there or a new wardrobe to keep business professional where there is real return on the investment. My response is absolutely go for it, no question we can figure out how we will recover from assuming debt. In return, I expect the same support and response if I had modest expense whether planned or unanticipated.
As he reflected during his conversation, he recognized that the large investment was more of a financial burden for he and his wife, as he had not seen how the doctoral process has shown benefit to them yet. However, he expressed his support in her endeavor, not knowing if the investment would have a great return. Many times, he has mentioned the importance of a return on investment, which seems to be of personal value. What he wanted was the same respect of purchasing items for business as he had supported her large academic investment. He saw himself as treating her as an equal in their marriage but he eluded in his discussions that he was not receiving the same treatment.

When asked about his frustrations of the process, Marshall again talked about finances causing an increase in anxiety in him and his relationship. He mentioned prior that his wife took care of all the finances and he entrusted her to do so. He was not concerned with the financial purchases during the doctoral process, but he was tired of the extra stress and frustration of her complaining about their financial situation. He described his reaction towards additional financial purchases and the conversations with his wife that resulted in more frustrations and challenges for them during the doctoral process.

*Here we go. Even with smaller purchases or just even paying the tuition a semester. I hear about the financial burden. To me it’s like, alright, now I’ve got to hear about the financial burden. I would just say do it, fine, we’re still young we’ve got time to pay it down. There is the stress of one person and there is the other where there is a lot of anxiety that is shared through the process. My thought was here comes the anxiety. To have to live with the added stress and frustration. You know vocalization of some of the sacrifices that come along with it, like things you can’t do. You can’t get a lot of birthday*
presents or can’t take a vacation. To me it’s opportunity, the cost of making the decision, you know let’s just go with it.

Marshall did not enjoy the anxiety associated with the stress or frustration of the financial purchases. His frustration was listening to his wife’s remorse the purchases caused for them such as not having enough money for family leisure activities. He stated that the complaining was still stressful even when he was supportive of the purchases.

On the other hand, Jake stated that he was ready for the doctorate and knew it would be more taxing on his wife than the Master’s Degree. But he was very confident in supporting her through the doctorate, as he had already completed the task prior. He stated that there were not as many challenges at the beginning, but then later he admitted that there were troubles, and he was able to overcome those quickly.

To me, it there wasn’t any challenges because I knew what I had to do. I knew she was going to do her thing, and I knew she was going to be good at it. I mean she is very smart, very intelligent. As far as me everybody tells me I’ve got the patience of Job. I thank God for that patience. I thank God that there were troubles that I didn’t see, but able to nip it so to speak. I knew it was going to be a little bit harder, but it really wasn’t that big of a change. For her it was probably harder, but being able to step in and just up my game a little bit.

Jake’s patience assisted him during his wife’s frustrations and challenges during the doctoral process. He admitted that he was swift in tackling any issues that came about amongst he and his wife, but gave credit to the patience that seems to be the foundation of his critical reflection. Stepping up his game was his way of saying that when work was harder for his wife,
he knew stress was going to be more intense. He had to be aware and ready at all times to be available for her.

Finn understood the many reasons his wife needed to pursue this doctoral degree and much stemmed from her personal challenges while growing to be an adult. He talked about the intrinsic desire and challenge that lies within his wife to pursue goals. Finn further explained his wife’s reasons for pursuing her Educational Doctorate.

*Overall I think it is, let me say specifically for her, I think it was meant to be. I think she had to do this for all kinds of reasons. I think she needed to prove to herself she could do it. I think she needed to prove to everybody else that she could do it. I know that makes her sound like it’s all about me, it’s all about me, but I think she needed to know, she is just that kind of person. She needed to know she had the drive to finish it, to do it, and finish it and make it work.*

He explained that her need was not selfish, but it was a challenge that she needed to know if she could overcome. He explained her drive and a need to pursue the intellectual challenge of the degree. He understood that the degree was not to increase their income. He knew that her pursuit was a personal goal. Finn elaborated on his understanding of why his wife needed to pursue her doctorate.

*I say this with all due respect, she was a very rare individual. I was in the presence of something that was beyond, I think, what I even understood; and she had this drive that was pretty incredible. We looked at this partially and certainly as a curve move for Bonnie but never put in terms of actual “oh gee” if you go get this doctorate we think that will raise your income x-percent or something like that. We just knew it was*
something because she was on this really rare path at sort of breaking this new ground for her.

His respectful tone described his wife with utmost admiration, and he reveled on the appreciation to witnessing her accomplishments. The path through the doctorate was so exceptionally rare that he was enamored with her intellect and intrinsic motivation.

Four of the husbands admitted that they held conversations with their wives that included the husband in the decision of the wife pursuing a doctoral degree. Jake talked about how his wife needed to feel finished with her career knowing that she had learned all she could about it. 

*I think she just felt like that was going to be the pinnacle of her career. I feel like it was.*

*I feel like she felt that is going to be the finishing point of all of this that she started years ago as a nurse. You know some people are like I’m not going to stop until I know I’m done type thing.*

Joshua shared that his wife needed the credentials in order to secure a higher education position. She was let go from a previous position because she did not have the additional education. “*Her livelihood was threatened by not having that degree, and so this was a very empowering process, empowering move, and it was really good for both of us.*” Joshua also mentioned how he supported and pushed her to get the doctorate because he believed in her intellect. Joshua paraphrased in the interview what he said to his wife, “*There are not a lot of people that can read and write at that level and if you can, we need to figure out a way for you to keep going. And if it means we need to take on more loans then so be it. We’ll figure that out.*” He indicated that she needed to get this type of degree to stay in her profession where she finds passion, and that together, they would figure out the finances for the doctoral degree.
Daniel and Marshall had not been included in the conversations of deciding to pursue the doctoral degree. As such, they did not have as clear of an understanding of why their wives were pursuing the doctoral degree. Daniel claimed that there was never a conversation and simply put, they have different goals that they accomplish apart from one another. “Short of that we never really had conversations about it. I was doing my thing, she was doing her thing.”

Marshall stated that he did not remember being included in the conversation of his wife deciding to pursue a doctorate degree. He claimed she decided to do it, and so he just gave full support.

*I don’t think it really came up as far as this is something that we should do. It was really something she had decided that she wanted to do, and I gave full support. It was a discussion; it wasn’t prolonged in any way. There weren’t any questions asked on my part. As far as why would you want to do that? How long is this going to take? What is going to cost? There weren’t any pros and cons that developed at the time. I know in the earliest stages there was a competition that she had developed with some of her peers, so there was some peer influence of people that had gone on a similar career projectory that she was and they were pursuing a doctorate, so I think there was a little bit competition there, and she felt she needed to continue that higher education to not get behind in that.*

All of the husbands were supportive navigators in their wives’ pursuits of the doctoral degree because they saw a value in education and what their wives wanted, even if it was not totally clear to them. They did not want to be the roadblock for their wives accomplishing their goals. Finn described not wanting to be that roadblock.

*The last thing I wanted to do was be a boulder in the middle of that river for a lot of reasons. For one I wouldn’t win even if I felt that way, and secondly I didn’t want to damn that river up. I mean it was pretty incredible honestly just to watch it.*
So therefore, he did not want to impede her goal of obtaining her higher education degree. He knew it was something special for her to accomplish and that it complimented her personality. He knew his support was more important than trying to talk her out of it, as her competitive nature and personality could cause him some trouble, which he does not elaborate in his discussion.

One husband had some regressive thoughts about the purpose and pursuit from his wife. He questioned on his own how the benefits of the degree would improve their situation. He seemed almost jealous at her wanting to pursue the degree. He thought that maybe advancing his career would bring more money to the family, which might have stemmed from his constructed view of why an individual should pursue a higher education degree. However, his jealousy may have stemmed from the thought that he could complete such an arduous task as well.

*I recall then part of a conversation took place around our careers and where we’re going or what our family income would need to be. What kind of flexibility and career and location there would be. At that point, I think she was introducing the idea that she wouldn’t be interested in an upward trajectory within her current field. She would look to use the doctorate as an opportunity to work less and make the same kind of money and that would put it on me to have the career that makes more money. So from that position of being like well why aren’t we working on my career and opportunities whether through, even it means to change company, you know I could take a pay cut for a year, and take advantage of other opportunities that would send me on a better career trajectory than working for the small organization that I am now where there is just not, there is nowhere to go. No new positions above mine. Even if it were lateral in pay, it’s not nearly as impactful as the cost of this doctorate program over the past 7 years. You*
know it’s not going to lead to any long term financial benefits for the family. As she started describing it at that point in time. So a lot of frustration that comes out at that time.

He eluded that it would have been more purposeful if the degree would have a financial impact on the whole family; as he felt that she was pursing only to improve her situation. There seemed to be some animosity and frustration from this husband regarding the acquisition of her degree, and why together, they were not looking to improve their careers simultaneously or as a team. He was confused as to which career incline would be best suited for the family based on his financial viewpoint. It appeared that his social perception of a career move should mean an acquirement of more money.

There were numerous frustrations that arose amongst husbands, although every experience was unique. Some were frustrated with outside factors that affected their wives’ inability to complete processes or to interfere with her success. There were frustrations with different parts of the process, especially writing the dissertation. Simon talked about his frustration with faculty members not supporting his wife when he was witnessing all her hard work and efforts toward the degree.

I’d say when she would give me feedback that maybe a faculty member wasn’t living up to their end of the responsibility, you know, with some of the coursework, especially during the dissertation process required faculty to review, strategize, give feedback, and when she wasn’t getting that it was frustrating. You know, so I would kind of help her think of ways to strategize to get what she needed in getting it done. It may be somebody else or to word something back to them. That was the only time I think I felt frustration
in this. When she was feeling frustration, which wasn’t throughout the whole program, just at times in particular during the dissertation process.

He described his way of assisting his wife by stepping into the critical thought process with her, and together, they would troubleshoot through issues to get her to a conclusion. This type of shared transformational intellect was his means of support. He was clear in his voice that he enjoyed supporting her in this way and did not want her to be alone in the process.

Joshua also tried to listen and support his wife when she felt frustrations from instructors and through the process, but at times, he did not understand the content or have the problem solving tools. He mentioned not having enough information to assist her but the respect for her abilities to condense down the amount of information given in some courses.

When someone sits in a doctoral class for an hour, two hours, or in some cases longer and then tries to distill all that down, you know, to what they are going to tell you and then there is a frustration she’s having. And you want to fix it right, and well ‘What if you do this?’ ‘Well you really don’t have enough information. You really don’t have the expertise and that’s probably the biggest frustration is like if there was a problem you wanted to fix it or you wanted to make it right or you could see her being frustrated or struggling and you wanted to, you know. I remember there were a couple of classes that were difficult, and it seemed like, from my perspective, the instructor was being unfair. And I wanted to be able to do something to get in there. Knowing that I’m way removed from that. And I think the other thing is probably in the writing aspect of it. Just the volume and the time that it takes. The re-edits and that’s, I mean down the line after you have gone through. Ok, this is what I want to do. You go down the road. You create a lot and then you realize, ah, now you’ve got to throw it all away and start all over again.
From the outsiders point of view sometimes, it looks like, ‘can’t you just get it done? Can’t you just get out of the inning?’ I have a lot more appreciation now after having to put together larger papers and things, but not on that scale.

Joshua wanted to be involved when his wife was struggling intellectually from the demands of classes, but he felt helpless at times because he did not have enough information. As a man’s way of knowing, he saw a challenge and wanted to fix it but at times could not, so he would try to provide encouraging metaphors in an attempt to alleviate stress and frustration for her. The helplessness he felt as an observer created a greater appreciation for her persistence and perseverance when his wife finally overcame challenges throughout the process.

Both husbands talked about remaining very close to the information with their wives, even if they did not always understand the content. Sometimes being present and showing immense respect for their wives’ current tasks was a more important means of support than being able to assist with the document. At times, resolutions could not be found, but in the end, with their presence of support, their wives accomplished their goals and each acquired a doctoral degree.

Others were frustrated with how their wives would react or share issues with their husbands. Daniel, Marshall, and Finn all spoke about how their wives’ emotional moods would affect them as well. Daniel shared that he would emulate his wife’s quick mood shifts.

She would get more irritable at certain times. It would take a little less of something to set her off. I might break a dish, and you would have thought the freaking world ended or something. Because of all the stress had built up. That part you never knew when it was going to explode. That would probably have been about the only thing. Just because you couldn’t plan for it. You didn’t know it was coming up. You didn’t know you had to
adapt to it. I probably got pissed off just as fast as she did because she had all this going on one side and on my side it was like whatever I was doing, if I would have brought back John Lennon from the dead it wouldn’t have compared to finishing this dissertation.

Marshall also described his wife’s emotional complaints from the doctoral process and how it affected them as a couple and family. He did not understand the complaining and was frustrated by it. He could not tolerate her self-doubt, when to him; her concept of reality was false.

*I think one of my biggest frustrations during the process would be when she would have doubt about her academic performance and made comments like ‘I’m going to get an F on this paper or I’m not doing good work, I’m not being a good mom, I’m not doing good at school, I’m not being a good wife.’ I haven’t complained about you being a good wife I think you’re a good wife, your daughter loves you. You’re spending the time you can and you’ve never gotten less than an A in your undergraduate, Masters Degree, or your doctorate program. You know just shut up about it. For somebody that hasn’t done well academically and you’ve been able to do that throughout the process, really distinguish yourself in the process. I don’t want to hear about it, just get it done. You know your perception is not the reality of the situation.*

Marshall seemed lost in convincing his wife that she was not failing her courses and that her perception was wrong. The failed communication efforts were emotionally draining for him because he knew each time he tried; she was not going to listen to him. However, in Finn’s situation, he actually admitted that he created some of his own frustrations during the process. He admitted that he did not feel as important to his wife while she was pursuing her doctoral degree, and he felt left with all the marital responsibilities.
Those are the burs under the saddle. All of them. You’re thinking about, everyone I am saying sort of comes out as that logical one but of course they weren’t. Most of the time they were logical. I think you like the teacher better than you like me. You crave more attention from your professor than you do from me. You always meet Joe for coffee after a class and it pisses me off. All the implications here are that they are all sexual which they really weren’t. I get sick and tired of you having those damn books stacked up everywhere. You never do the dishes anymore. I don’t know. Just on and on and on.

There is like a million of them. I’m always the one now who has to pick Bryant up at daycare, and I’ve got to drive all the way from work and hit the time, and you’re on campus why can’t you go get him? It’s always because you have a class. I don’t want to paint myself as to big of a butt, (Finn laughs at the interviewer) but all those things would come about. I don’t even know if those are real ones, but its stuff like that. You always expect me to have the car filled up with gas. I don’t know just crazy crap. The real thing and half the time, if those things occurred, they didn’t really have anything to do with anything you were even talking about. It was just that general sense of frustration that we’re not the way we were or the way we want us to be, or your attention is over there and I’m here. You know poor suffering me. You don’t have time to feel sorry for me anymore. That kind of stuff. All the stuff we don’t want to admit to.

Finn is referring to ‘we’ as husbands who are experiencing the time away from their wives; while they are pursing doctoral degrees or other situations such as military deployment or pregnancy that are similar that takes spouses away from their significant others due to a demanding external situation. Nevertheless, no matter how intense the frustration may have
been or if it affected the husbands directly or indirectly, every husband admitted to some level of frustration toward the doctoral process.

**Marital Impact**

There were mixed answers from husbands as to whether the doctoral process impacted their marriages. Husbands either did not agree, were on the fence, or completely agreed that the doctoral process impacted their marriage both positively and negatively. All three areas are highlighted and discussed from each husband. It is important to mention that each marriage carried different dynamics and experiences, and so therefore provided an array of answers. Within phenomenological studies all of these findings are worth mentioning for this section, as a phenomenon can exist within each experience.

Marshall’s perspective reflected the impact of being together in a normal day and how communication would dwindle due to every day tasks. He said, “*I think you know it throws things off in terms of timing things and recognition of knowing what each other is doing.*” Additionally, the added task of the doctorate in his marriage affected the recognition of one another’s activities. He provided an example of her working and he leaving her alone to concentrate. He boasted that she did not pay him the same respect of time alone while he was engaged in an activity of his choice.

*You know then there is reverse of it, when you try to engage and she is on the laptop or at the computer or has the book. Finding something else to do and then I find myself feeling interrupted. I would say your reading your book I’m not talking to you, now I’m doing my thing, and you’re trying to talk to me. Where is the respect for my thing that I’m doing? You know the thing that I’m doing its not research or a doctorate, but what I’m reading and what I’m doing at this point in time is as important to me as to what your...*
doing. Now there is not going to be an outcome to reading an article about different brands of new running shoes that just came out, but can I read it? Can I get through it without interruption? I gave you the time to do that, and I didn’t stop you at every other paragraph trying to engage.

He wanted his time to be valued as much as he was valuing hers. Marshall’s frustration is supported by Joshua’s example as well. Joshua explains that it was difficult for him to listen to his wife, at times, when he wanted to be engaged in another activity.

You know, I think sometimes the hardest part is when there is something that you’d really rather be doing. You know if I really rather be doing something else, but knowing that, you know, right now I need to be in the moment with my wife and with what she’s working on. That might have been the hardest, because you do have to sacrifice your own time, but then again if you’re scheduling out the right way, you should be able to make most accommodations not to say that there weren’t issues with that. But, overall, I had a positive experience with that.

So even though at times it was hard for him to be in an intellectual moment with his wife, the overall experience was meaningful for them as a couple because he put his own needs aside to listen and support her through her challenges and frustrations. He said that scheduling did assist him in understanding when he needed to support her and when he could take part in his own personal hobbies or activities.

Finn shared that he and his wife have had many conversations about how the doctoral process has affected them. Intellectually, they were able to connect on a whole new level, maturing and changing together through the process, adding another layer to their marriage in a positive way.
I think the overall process really became a method to analyze for her and I both to look at our relationship in a different way. I don’t know if that makes any sense, but it’s almost, I think, we have used that as sort of an ongoing [conversation]. We often talk about how we matured, how we changed, how we saw things maybe differently or how we even looked at our relationship, and how it affected us ongoing. Because I think it allowed us to connect on an intellectual level that probably we hadn’t. I’m not saying we haven’t connected on but that we hadn’t come together on. I mean we hadn’t done it together. She sort of had her intellectual ideas and pursuits and I sort of had mine. When I helped her with the doctorate, I guess as I look back on it now I think it sort of gave us an opportunity to not necessarily have similar view points but to be able to understand the other person’s view point particularly on intellectual matters. A little bit differently than we had before. I don’t know if that is necessarily a blazing insight. That is probably one of the things that I had thought of. To some degree probably changed, I mean we always had kind of an equality, and I think she would agree with this is that we both always had kind of a quality balanced relationship. I think it did a lot to even make that stronger. Because I think we both, it really in a way forced us to reach that level. I say that those are probably good things.

So in a positive way, he admitted that the doctorate forced them to transcend their relationship by use of intellect, which was an area of their relationship that he said was not yet developed prior to the doctoral process. Simon did not go into detail about the impact the process had on his relationship, but he stated that that he recognized when she was stressed and gave her space.
There were times when she was probably more stressed than normal. So there were times I would have to pay attention to her or her body language or signs that she was stressed and give her space to even think about what she was thinking about for school or get through a deadline or get through some course work. Not in a major way. There may have been minor times when it impacted that a little bit but not in a major way.

He admitted that the process did not impact them in a major way, but he did understand when to give her space in order to not create conflict issues. Jake and Daniel also admitted that the doctoral process did not affect their relationships in a major way. Daniel discussed that the only thing impacted in their marriage from the process were family vacations. They had to postpone plans because of her deadlines, so they did not get to visit their family as much during those times.

Maybe if we were trying to plan something. Like plan a vacation or plan to go see our grandchild or something like that. She couldn’t do it because she had to get this done by this deadline. Especially the last year when like you said you got into the orals, defense, and the dissertation itself. You know that year just take it out of the equation because the finish line is here.

Daniel talked about how certain times of the doctoral process affected their travel plans more than others. He said that the last year of the process interfered more with travel plans more than any other time.

Jake was blunt in his perspective simply by stating, “Nothing out of the ordinary, nobody lost their mind, nobody got sick. Nothing changed.”

The mixed experiences of the doctoral processes impact on marriages were to be anticipated as each husband constructs different meaning from their own different worlds and
expected from a phenomenological study. Perspectives are different because each marriage and the marital dynamics within it are different. Couples experienced both positive and negative impacts on their marriages due to the doctoral process.

**Communication**

Communication was a very strong theme in this dissertation study. This pattern arose naturally rather than through the questions on the interview guide. Some couples demonstrated better communication skills than others. The ones who communicated more revealed a more positive experience toward the doctoral process. Husbands talked about being able to assist their wives better through the process when the wives communicated with them about challenges, frustrations, or issues they were experiencing. Communication was essential in keeping couples informed on due dates during the doctoral process. Joshua discussed how calendars are the biggest means of communication in their house, allowing everyone to be informed in each person’s schedule. They used calendars throughout the doctoral process and as a positive way to celebrate accomplishments. “*Calendars are big with us. And we would have our plans based around those calendars. And one cool thing about it is that it gave us a chance to celebrate.* ‘Hey let’s go out to eat! You got your questions done!’”

Simon also agreed that communication was important in their success through the doctoral process. “*Good communication. I agree with that. We were pretty good about communicating and helping one another.*” Good communication assisted with supporting one another through an added task in the relationship, particularly with the added stress of an outside factor such as a doctoral degree.

Jake added that daily communication was an agreement made by both he and his wife when they got married.
Communication. Just talking. We got this thing that we said a long time ago when we got married, we are going to at least give each other 30 minutes a day to talk about everything that is going on. That is what we do. We communicate and that is how we get through things.

So by committing to daily communication, he and his wife were able to overcome challenges experienced through the day. Daily communication gave couples an opportunity to brainstorm with one another on how to overcome a challenge or share new activities each day.

Communication was essential for those couples with children or even for sharing the stress and overwhelming feelings both spouses experience during their doctoral pursuits. Finn talked in depth about the importance of communication during the process. There was a tendency to push aside communication about common marital stresses when there is an added stress to the relationship, but his point was that couples have to communicate in order to deal with the challenges that arise.

We constantly talked to each other. I mean first and foremost I think you have to talk about it because I think the natural tendency is to not want to talk about because you think, oh it’s going to be okay. Oh this is just today, or this week, or whatever, and in reality it’s kind of for the whole deal. You kind of have to, especially given the fact that if you are both adults and you’re both working and you’ve got kids, which most people that, are doing doctorates that’s the case. We saw this with friends; we saw it with other people that were in the program. It was a challenge.

Finn shared that communication was essential for he and his wife to alleviate the stress that would arise between them. He admitted that not talking is an easy habit to create and many times a challenge. However, he recognized that couples have to communicate more when both
work and children are present. He said that he and his wife saw a lack of communication happening with their friends and other couples in the program. Time and time again, husbands brought up the importance of communication in their marriages while their wives were pursuing their doctoral degrees.

Communication did not happen well for a few of the couples, and their experiences were not as positive. One couple showed signs of not communicating through the process, however, they also did not communicate within their relationship prior to the doctoral process. The existing tension and communication issues within their marriage were not only due to the doctoral process, but also other factors that were not disclosed during the interviews. When asked about talking about an issue or discussing an argument, the husband replied that he and his wife did not talk about previous arguments or the root of their issue behind the argument. This husband eluded that there were other things that had happened in their relationship over the years that led to the decrease in communication. This couple also spent the least amount of time together. He eluded in conversation how both of them had their own hobbies. He discussed how they have some things they share together and that he respected his wife, but there has not been passion in their relationship for some time, and it has affected other parts of their marriage. He did not seem to be affected by the doctoral process as he continually described it as “her thing.” He had his things and she had hers. For example, he liked watching westerns, and she would rather read a book. He was proud of her for accomplishing a doctoral degree, but he did not really care because he knew it would not change what he wanted in their relationship. He described her feelings most of the time from his perspective. “She would get frustrated. I was the wrong person to talk to. I’ve never been there. I don’t know what she is talking about. In all fairness, I didn’t care. I wanted her to get it, but it wasn’t going to change anything for us.”
What he wanted was passion and affection. His voice was frank, but sadness was behind it. He still wanted the passion and intimacy in the relationship, but he stated that she did not. He attributed her lack of passion to menopause. Even though he did not know what she was talking about in her doctoral work, he did not admit asking her. He also discussed how they both had health problems due to their weight. So even though the doctoral process did not affect their marriage, the marital dynamics seemed to be too far distanced to have an impact on this dissertation study.

The process also affected another couple that did not have great communication during the process. The husband blamed some of the communication on himself, but there was evidence that his wife did not fully communicate on how the process would affect them as a family. The husband was very puzzled at times and frustrated because of her lack of communication and even the way she communicated, only giving bits and pieces of what was happening during the process. As both parties in the relationship lacked the communication skills, the husband perceived the doctoral process as a negative pursuit. He wished that there had been more communication throughout the process, but he also admitted that he did not ask questions to assist with understanding what was happening. The lack of communication attributed to his frustration and how he perceived the process. He admitted not liking the process, nor did he see an advantage to it for his family. He put together the pieces of her communication efforts as improving her job opportunities and spending more time with their family, but he still did not see the positive from the experience. Not once during the process did he share or admit that he was proud of his wife and her accomplishments. Lack of communication can lead to a negative perception of the doctoral process, depending on the constructed perception of the process from the husband.
Support

Husbands supported their wives in many ways while they pursued their doctoral degrees. They greatly wanted to assist and take on tasks, as their linguistics depicted a sense of excitement, which provided husbands with a sense of belonging in the process. Daniel supported his wife by getting dinner and meeting her on Friday evenings. Otherwise, he knew they would not see one another, as she had a heavy schedule with working and the doctoral program. He says, “I would take down pizza on Friday night, and we would have pizza, and Saturday morning she would have to be up at 7:00 and work from 8:00 until noon.” Dinner and physical nourishment was his means of support as well as taking care of their animals. He also knew that staying out of her way was best. However, he shared some mixed feelings that maybe he was more supportive than he thought. “I don’t know I mean maybe she thinks I was involved more than I think I was. Maybe I was. I mean all I tried to be over those 7 years was supportive, that’s it and encourage her. Those were my main jobs.” He admitted that he was unsure if he had really supported his wife during her doctoral pursuits, and there was not enough communication present between them to know. He made attempts to listen during times she needed support.

When she was frustrated after three years, and she was taking that stupid internet class with this lady that made her read twenty million articles for no reason at all other than she could. This lady was living in Cincinnati teaching a course at Ball State, and it was like why I am doing this? I didn’t say well fine just quit. I didn’t say that. I said this is want you want, this is what you’re going after, you know it’s the cost of doing business.
Daniel communicated encouraging words that made sense to him while in the music business. When other people made her life stressful, he tried to encourage and demonstrate support. He knew she wanted to succeed, and he reminded her of that desire.

Most husband participants communicated that their wives could not see how the doctoral process was affecting them, so husbands would step in at times to distract or convince the wives to take a break from the stress of the doctoral work. Being aware and attentive to their wives’ needs was the husbands’ attempt to support their wives. For example, Finn would make attempts to pull his wife away from her doctoral work when he saw it was affecting both her and their relationship. He gives an example of her response after he suggested taking a weekend break away from her studies.

_Sometimes there is maybe a short-term solution like, ‘Hey Finn you know you’re really right I have not been, I’ve had a particularly hard go here or whatever, maybe we need to get away for the weekend. Let’s see if we can make that happen.’ Or let’s just take these things and wad them up, then she would give me a kiss and we would be fine. It would depend on the severity of what it was or whatever. Quite honestly the same way with me. I would also recognize when she was in one of her irrational states because of school or a combination of all the pressures or whatever it is. She freaking out because I didn’t vacuum today or whatever it was._

By being proactive, Finn could alleviate stress on their relationship and support his wife by encouraging a break for both of them. The stress she absorbed would transfer to him and then it would affect their relationship. Taking a break mentally allowed them to refocus on the next obstacle in the process.
All of the husbands reported that their wives showed signs of doubt during the process, typically through tougher courses, comprehensive exams, or while writing the dissertation. When Jake’s wife alluded to quitting the doctoral process, he would show his support by communicating a relatable experience to his wife. He would remind her that she had accomplished more difficult tasks prior in her occupation.

_I think one thing came up at one time she had this feeling that she was about to quit. I had never seen that part of her because she is not a quitter, but I really saw that. That is when I would get her out and I would tell her hey take a break, come on, let’s go and we’ll talk about it. She would say I don’t know if I’m going to be able to do this. I would say, baby you are already done. I would just give her that encouragement. God blessed you to be able to do this and there are no ifs, ands, or buts about it. You are just tired sitting in front of the computer and do this all day long and working, still trying to be a wife and a mother. That is a whole lot. So you have just going to have to buckle up._

Giving those words of encouragement solidified a support system for his wife. His reassurance and belief in her kept her on track with her goal. Jake knew what his wife wanted to accomplish from the degree ultimately, and he was there to provide her with the supportive encouragement she needed when faced with the responsibilities of her many roles as woman.

Another husband admitted that his wife had doubts many times, but he was not empathetic to what he saw as complaints. His perception was if she could just focus on completing the task rather than complaining about the situation, she could finish much quicker. As she continued to complain and make accusations, he became more frustrated with the doctoral process.
If it is something that you want to do then just do it, don’t complain. I’m giving full support saying go for this. Then I’ll listen, but I really don’t want to hear complaints on how you want to spend more time with the family or you don’t have enough time for different activities.

He also added, “My biggest frustrations during the process would be when she would have doubt about her academic performance. He claimed that her perception of the process was false, as what was happening was not the reality of the situation. He would try to support her by reassurance of his perception of her life. “You’re spending the time you can and you’ve never gotten less than an A in your undergraduate, Masters Degree or your doctorate program. You know just shut up about it.”

He also witnessed how she doubted herself as a wife and mother, and he could not tolerate the martyr-like behavior. He expressed how he tried to support her in many ways. He expressed how his support was not burden because it was a way to assist her. However, she still continued to tell him how he was feeling about the doctoral process. So even though support was trying to be given, his wife was not willing to accept it. Their perceptions of one another, many times influenced by the social construction of relationship, caused a tension between them that interfered with the support that was being given and the perception of that support.

Other husbands experienced this type of interference, as their wives were not willing to accept the support given from them. Husbands’ wives were able to overcome many obstacles along the way and rise above these challenges presented to them with the variety of support from the husbands. This was a period where husbands were significant coaches or mentors for their wives. Simon discussed times when his wife was having a difficulty in the process, and how he mentored her by using techniques she used with her own students.
I was like listen that is just part of this process your learning and just to give her some verbal words of encouragement and she might be stubborn about taking it, but I would definitely try to keep pushing her to not give up and to keep studying or walk away and take a break and come back to it. You know I’ve seen her mentor students. I think I’m fortunate to see that in her job already she is coaching students, she is mentoring students and may be that is a little contagious, and I kind of may be gave her some of her own advice back to her and saw her get through it.

Simon shared stories of his wife’s stubbornness in accepting suggestions of support. He also described many strategies that he used to support her. Depending on their moods or the situation, female doctoral students need to be reassured of their focus, pushed to keep studying, or encouraged to take a break from the work. Simon stayed close to his wife so he could observe her disposition and formulate the appropriate supportive suggestion.

Finn talked about similar emotional supports for his wife. His most important means of support was also being present for his wife no matter what the situation. He tried to give her encouragement through verbal praise of foreseeing how they could advance the situation together. He also viewed the process as a team effort. When asked what was the most important role, he replied,

Absolutely, positively is that I was there for her. That was the one thing that I never gave up, that I was there for rain or shine, good or bad, up or down, whatever it was. This is where my bullet-proofness helped because I would always say we will figure this out, it will be okay. We will get it done. We will do it better. She is extremely competitive and very, very much a perfectionist; therefore, there were times when I had to say you know you’ve got to do the best you can and give it up because if you don’t you’re not going to
get there from here. I told you previously she recognized that even upon receiving her doctorate she recognized those things. I never faltered being there for her.

He knew his role as the coach and that his strong support would help her see her doctoral accomplishment through its finale. He attributes his bulletproof personality as an advantage to their perseverance and a strength that helped his wife overcome times of doubt.

Husbands showed support by reminding their wives why they were pursuing the degree, comparing it to another endeavor they had already accomplished, or simply reminding them how smart and capable they were. Husbands reminisced of assuring their wives in their beliefs in their intellectual abilities. They used many masculine metaphors and euphemisms through their masculine ways of knowing to make sense of their wives’ doubts and were able to understand and reciprocate those feelings, assisting in their wives’ intellectual transformation. Husbands admitted that it took immense energy to be involved in the process and provided encouragement to their wives during their doctoral pursuits.

**Egalitarian Roles**

All but one of these men described themselves as an egalitarian spouse. Egalitarian spouses are those men who are willing to take on nontraditional household role duties or switched traditional roles in order to support their wives or other spouse who may be working more and unable to spend time on household roles. Every husband expressed that they assisted with household or childcare roles both before and during their wives’ doctoral process. They claimed that by taking on these roles, they were able to alleviate extra stress on their wives and undertake yet another supportive role during the doctoral process. Even though most of the men did not assist with the doctoral work itself, they were able to feel a part of the process by
showing how they could support their wives by embracing egalitarianism or the switching of traditional roles in a relationship.

Marshall supported his wife and embraced an egalitarian role by taking on extra household and childcare chores. He was glad to be involved and alleviate his wife’s stress.

*If you see that the rations are getting low, say hey I’m going to plan on taking the kids to the grocery store to pick things up. I’ve made a list and be proactive in identifying what areas of support in the home that you can take care of. You know those things will take away the time, and if you can save some time wherever you can there is going to be more opportunity to have the intimacy and spend time with your wife.*

Making lists and identifying what he was capable of completing was a successful way Marshall could support his wife. What Marshall also realized was that if he could take on extra chores, he and his wife would also get to spend more time together.

Simon commented on his roles while his wife was busy with her doctoral degree.

*So I mean I did kind of run the house while she was gone but it was you know, that’s what we do. I didn’t consider it a burden at all. Maybe some people do. Maybe some people get a little too selfish you know or whatever.*

Even though Simon admitted that he took on more roles, he shared that he did hire a cleaning service to help clean the house and that family members assisted with the childcare roles. He also claimed that his wife was a super mom and that he probably could have performed more duties to help his wife. *“There are times I could have done more.”* He reflected that she had a huge amount on her plate and that he could have possibly taken on more roles in the home. Additionally, he was very willing to watch their children and spend time with
them while she was completing assignments. He acknowledged that she had to miss some family activities, such as attending soccer games.

Jake shared how he communicated with his wife and reassured her that their household roles would be cared for while she was working. He opened the lines of communication by allowing her to guide him with responsibilities so he could assist in a way in which she would approve.

*I tell her all the time, ‘I will do what I can to help you out and to keep you from being stressed, you tell me what I need to do.’ So that’s when I take on the role, I wash clothes, clean the house up. I would tell her, ‘don’t worry about cooking because I can come in and make a sandwich. I don’t have to have all this just concentrate on your job and school.’*

In other words, if he had not completed a task, he allowed her a communication line to talk about what chores needed to be completed around the house. He knew that taking on those responsibilities would help her focus on her more important responsibilities.

Joshua talked about always sharing roles even when they were first married and attributing his prior experiences to caring for household chores before each of them were married. This self-sufficiency assisted them as a couple through not only the doctoral process, but also as they have shifted breadwinning roles.

*We both share duties, regarding the house so it’s not such the traditional. I do laundry. We got married in 2007 and at that time, I hadn’t been married before I had my own house, you know. So I could do all that. I’m not one of those guys that doesn’t do the laundry or doesn’t clean up. I know how to do house chores. I do house chores. So that’s more of a plus when we were living apart. So it’s more of whoever’s available to
get things done when they need done. There might be times when I do a lot less or a lot more depending on my schedule with work or music. And she’s definitely the primary cook, although I do some and can fend for myself there. But because we were both married a little bit later in life in our early to mid 30s, we had already established self-sufficiency in that regard.

Having prior experiences in life assisted with how husbands negotiated chores and changed roles during the doctoral process. Joshua attributed marrying his wife later in life to being more self-sufficient, and how he perceived marital roles in a relationship. His social perception is that relationships should be egalitarian and share roles based on whatever provision the partner needs.

Finn also sustained a social egalitarian part and proclaimed that sharing roles assisted he and his wife during different adventures in their relationship. He has always been willing to take on nontraditional roles to assist the family.

She and I have really always been very good about, personally I am kind of a doer of things anyway. You know, things like going to the store or cleaning the house, whatever might be considered traditionally the wife’s role or something. I have always been involved in including taking care of the kids, making lunches, cooking, all that stuff. So we’ve really never had a separation other than the fact as far as roles, other than just sort of the trade off of saying, ‘Okay I am going to take care of this and you’re going to take care of that,’ within the timeframes that we have been able to have. I think that was one of the things that really helped us a lot in terms of our personal relationship within the whole getting her doctorate and being obviously so immersed, you know while she was working, while she was doing all these other things at the university and being so
**immersed in that was that we had already kind of had this ‘role’ if you want to call it that, flexibility.**

Having already established a flexible role taking status in their relationship allowed them to continue to persevere through their accomplishments, such as when his wife obtained her doctoral degree. Within Finn’s voice, his proclamation of having flexibility during experiences in a relationship was new and informative. Recognizing flexibility in his relationship was a new means of appreciation for his marital relationship.

Every husband shared that taking care of laundry, children, supper, groceries, and other duties were all household roles that assisted to support their wives while they were obtaining doctoral degrees. A few husbands mentioned that these norms were established early in their relationship and prior to their wives obtaining their doctoral degrees. All of the husbands in their tone and language were not burdened or put off by taking on nontraditional household or childcare roles. These men were more than willing to assist their wives with household or childcare chores because it was a way they could support and help ease stress for their wives.

**Intimacy**

It is important to note that the husbands viewed intimacy as emotional, mental, or physical closeness, or combinations of these constructed meanings. The men were not asked to describe the type of intimacy during the interviews as to respect their privacy and personal relationships. So, when the husbands talk about intimacy, discussions might encompass emotional, mental, and physical closeness or one or many forms of intimacy.

Three of the six husband participants reported that their levels of intimacy dropped during the doctoral process, but not significantly. However, two of these four expressed that children were also a factor in decreased intimacy, but that the doctoral process, work schedules,
parental roles, and household roles would exhaust the couple, particularly females’ doctoral students, which resulted in less intimacy. Joshua spoke about the importance of physical intimacy in his relationship. “Well and after you (a long pause) if you don’t do it for a while. You realize how important it is, and I think you appreciate that more later then too.” Joshua and his wife would schedule time together and make sure to give the relationship the time it needed, as he conveyed that it was the foundation for dealing with stressful situations such as the doctoral process.

Marshall discussed how both the timing of the doctoral writing and children had an effect with he and his wife’s personal intimacy cycles. The intimacy in their relationship took on less of a role when his wife was writing in the evenings and when his child was born. He shared how he adapted to the new additions in their relationship. He talked about changing his expectations at night to accommodate the new cycle of additional responsibilities of allowing his wife to complete her doctorate or for either of them to care for their new child.

Yeah that really had taken a backseat to most things, you know kind of jokingly. It’s something that it timed out in months. You know you throw a child into the mix as well. You know it really becomes, the intimacy is a physical activity and physical exhaustion comes into that. Scheduling, you know, it’s not something you schedule, but, you know, get accustomed to the reading and writing in the evening, so it’s like how do you prepare yourself. My expectation is when I’m going to bed is that I’m going to have my activity like watching a video or reading, and my expectation for her is that she is going to be doing some reading or writing. Just say that post child or pre-child that was a different schedule. Intimacy was a planned activity based on different cycles. You know you throw in the nine months of pregnancy. It is certainly different than pre-child.
He admitted that their tiredness levels would affect their intimacy cycles as well. So scheduling was a way they could experience intimacy. Furthermore, after having a child, he expressed that planning or scheduling was one way he and his wife could have personal time together.

Finn also concurred that both the doctoral program and having a child were factors in their intimacy during that time. He articulated that he and his wife share a close relationship and eluded that their physical intimacy and friendship are an instrumental element in their relationship. However, he jokingly stated that their child played a much larger factor in interfering with their intimacy, which lasted for a much longer period of time in their intimacy cycle.

*If I were going to list the two intimacy killers that probably to a large degree Bryant and the doctorate were probably on par with each other. The only difference was at least the doctorate got over with in about three years or whatever it was, Bryant just kept going. I couldn’t get rid of him if my life depended on it. I make it sound, obviously we are crazy about our kids, but anyway there is that.*

Simon did not think that he and his wife’s intimacy weakened during that time as they were always talking, and she did most of her work in their bedroom late at night. So, there were emotionally, intimate conversations happening during her doctoral work in a place of intimacy. He did not elaborate on their physical intimacy, as it seemed to be too personal of a topic. The interview team did not pry as to respect the boundary he was establishing in the conversation.

*I don’t think it made it any weaker. That we would lose some time together may be to do some fun things yes, but I don’t think it made any weaker. We didn’t have any major struggles with that along the way during the process. Yeah, she had to sacrifice and do*
some late nights, but like I was saying before a lot of times that was in our bedroom at night, and she was on the computer and I was kind of sitting nearby. So we were at least able to have some conversations about it and that may have helped. Yeah, I definitely got to be by her side the whole time.

In other words, the closeness of being together in an intimate space helped maintain their intimacy cycles whether it was emotional, mental, or physical. It was in their bedroom at night, where together, they overcame problems she was encountering with the document. Writing in a location, possibly in an intimate or private area, close to her husband could have allowed their intimacy to remain in tact. As she shared her challenges or vulnerabilities with him by her side, they could have experienced different levels of intimacy in the privacy of their bedroom at night.

Two husbands mentioned that their drop in intimacy was not due to the doctoral process. Both husbands factor the amount of time they have been together and their age as influences. They elude that their physical intimacy had dropped prior in their relationship due to age or other personal circumstances. They did not elaborate on whether the doctoral process affected their emotional or mental intimacy.

Overall, there were mixed opinions as to whether intimacy was impacted by the doctoral process. There was evidence that mental, emotional, and physical intimacy were impacted but there were other dynamics involved such as children. Others attributed personal reasons and prior existing conditions as factors to less intimacy in their relationship.

**Feelings of Pride**

Husbands expressed the utmost respect, prideful thoughts, and emotions for their wives’ accomplishments. Not one husband openly expressed jealousy or showed any conflict due to their wife having a status of doctor. Simon explained how proud he was of his wife and
acknowledged all the other friends and family who congratulated her. Hearing others compliment her only added to the pride he experienced. He admitted that he was proud when witnessing her growth throughout and at the end of the process.

*I’m super proud of her. That’s the biggest thing. I think its awesome, its exciting, it’s a lumped process and to see her get through and persevere to reach her goal, just a sense of proud. I’m proud of her. I watch and hear her friends reach out to her and give her compliments on this and support her. She had a lot of friends, faculty, old colleagues that have encouraged her along the way and its been an awesome process. To see her grow and finish it. Just a lot of pride.*

Daniel compared the glory of his proud feelings for his wife’s accomplishment that are similar to a father being proud of his children. His perspective was evident as he explained that he was with her through the whole journey.

*Like I said when she was done, and she was getting the hood put on I felt as proud as if it would have been my daughter or my son. Because I was there from the first time she took her whatever she had to take to get in to the time that everything was finished and everybody signed off.*

Daniel was proud that he was with his wife throughout the duration of her doctoral process and was able to witness her completion of her personal goal. Other husbands also felt the glory of the journey they experienced with their wives. Joshua is proud that he helped clear the path for his wife’s accomplishment and that she acknowledged him for that support.

*I know she has it but I also have it. I mean I feel like I was there helping to get, you know, other things done, to pave the way, clear the way so she could get walk through. She has said, ‘It’s just as much as your accomplishment as it is mine.’ And I laugh, well*
if I had written any of your papers or something, maybe, but it’s really not. It’s your accomplishment. But I appreciate the sentiment of what she is saying.”

Joshua was tickled when he talked about his wife sharing the document with him. He was humbled toward accepting her compliment, as he admitted how he was unable to write or comprehend information as in depth or at the length as she did. However, the pride in his voice was overwhelmingly happy that they were able to accomplish this feat together and hold strong as a couple throughout the doctoral process.

Jake also gave his wife credit for her accolades, commenting that not once has he been jealous about her having a doctoral degree as he only holds a high school education. It made him feel remarkable that his wife still had the desire to accomplish the doctoral degree at their age and after all the years they were married. Even though he knew she could accomplish the doctoral degree, he still expressed his amazement at watching her achieve such an intense goal. His feelings of pride have transformed once again for his wife. He described his pride emotionally and physically toward her accomplishment.

Oh man, my chest is sticking out, I’m proud of her, a proud husband. I thank God that she even would want to do that. All that just made me proud. I think I know what you’re trying to say did I get all upset because now she has a doctorate and all I have is a high school degree and all that? It was never that way with her. She has always made me feel like the man of the house. I’ve always been proud of her for what she has done in her career. It amazes me for her to do all that. So when she got the doctorate and all the accolades and the increase in her job, all that, you know I walked around with a swelled chest as they say. I’m good; I love it.
His wife’s respectful treatment toward him as a man throughout their marriage has always given him everything he has needed. So treating him like a man is all he has ever needed from her to feel fulfilled. So due to mutual respect, the difference in their education holds no bearing on the way Jake feels about his wife’s credentials.

**Hidden Jealousy**

Finn and Daniel joked about the fact that their wives held higher accolade statuses, and how their wives names come before their own in formal situations, such as introductions and mail. Both husbands seemed to be secretly jealous of their wives’ titles. Daniel tried to compare an educational doctoral degree to his production of record labels and Finn admitted that he could have achieved a doctoral degree with his intellect. Both their language and flux in their voices confirm that their wives having higher accolades bothered them. They both attempted to take the higher road admitting their prideful feelings toward their wives. Daniel talked about the only change the doctorate has placed in his relationship was the prefix change between he and his wife. But, he still mentioned his respect and pride for her. His pride pertained to her ability to reach self-actualization for herself.

*The only change I’ve gone through is it is now Dr. Susan and Daniel. Which is okay. It should be that way. She has top billing now. I’m not Dr. Daniel, I’m Daniel. She is Dr. Susan. So when we go some place, this is my wife Dr. Susan. It is kind of different. For 40 years, it was Daniel and Susan and now it’s Dr. Susan and Daniel. It’s okay. I don’t have a problem with it. I mean some guys would. I know some people as far as they are concerned they are the head of their household and the wife does what they tell them to do and they’re the boss. To me, my philosophy is that a person should maximize their potential.*
He gave her credit for the accomplished accolades she deserved by stating how he believed that everyone should achieve their own self-actualization. However, he spoke later about how he has accomplished a doctorate four times. He quantified that in his profession, he has accomplished his doctorate by producing popular musical bands.

*I don’t know, I think, you remember how I said I respect her the most. I think right there is the greatest respect I could give her. I mean doctor should take precedent over not doctor, in my mind. She worked harder for it than I did. Yeah, I could have gone to law school, but I didn’t. I could have gone back and tried to get a Masters; I probably would have washed out, but I didn’t. I could have tried that academic side but I didn’t. My thing was I wanted a record deal. I’ve gotten five of them. I wanted to produce the Rolling Stones and I’ve done it four times.*

He felt that he had reached self-actualization many times, and so he was glad that she got to experience it too, but in a different way. There was a sense that they could share that feeling together now. He tried to elude that their relationship was equal, but clearly his perspective was that she is simply the boss of the relationship.

Finn admitted that he questioned himself as to whether he could accomplish the same feat of a doctorate. He was involved in her doctorate to the extent that his degree in English allowed him to edit her work. Many times they had to navigate through the societal assumptions of who is the credentialed doctor in the relationship.

*You know you have to go back and look at it and say, yeah there is probably some times that I looked at it and went ‘well hell, I’m every bit as smart as she is,’ you know. Of course we would kid about that, especially when I was helping her. I don’t think it was really ever that much of a problem, but you know you have got to navigate that. Because*
there are times when you wake up and go hey wait a minute, because you get the Dr. and Mr. McGuire mail and you go, shit man what the heck is up with that? Or they assume, you want to get her pissed off it’s always the assumption that I am Dr. McGuire and she is Mrs. McGuire. Yeah, so who takes the beating for that, usually it’s me. In all seriousness, you’ve got to navigate that too. That is another one that you’ve got to be able to do, cause there is you know, especially if you are both relatively competitive. Which Bonnie is competitive to a fault, and I am only competitive to almost a fault. So, yeah we have to deal with that sometimes.

He clarified that even though society may try and attempt to cause a power struggle, it is important to remember that the outside factor is the cause of the struggle, not the spouse. In other words, he is aware of the socially constructed labels placed on men and women in a heterosexual relationship in a Midwestern culture. However, it would never take away the proud feelings he had for his wife as well as them as a couple for overcoming the doctoral process. “You know I told you how proud I am of Bonnie anyway, but I would probably go back and say how proud I am of her, and quite honestly both of us for having survived this process.”

His voice was that of surprise when describing how they, individually and their marriage, survived the process. He eluded that because they were unaware of the intensity the process would have on one another and their marriage, he is amazed at how they were able to transform over the course of the doctoral process. He was thankful they were able to experience the process together.

**Husbands’ Selflessness**

Husbands were very forthcoming with sharing what they would recommend to other husbands and wives as the female spouse begins her doctoral process. The husbands were asked
general questions about what they would have liked to know prior to the process. They also were asked how they would have approached the process differently. Finally, they were given the scenario if they could speak to a younger version of themselves, what would they share. Only patterns of these recommendations are mentioned in Chapter Four. The rest will be shared in the Recommendations section of Chapter Five.

Husbands recommended that other husbands in the spousal doctoral situation support their wives in any means necessary. Support can be defined in many ways, but they should focus on a way to reduce their wives’ stress in a multitude of situations. Additionally, all the husbands recommended being selfless and focusing on their spouse. Jake talked specifically about how to be selfless, and how he focused on his wife.

*Don’t put himself first for anything. Don’t think of him and to know that she is going to need him there all the time. I would just tell him to pay close attention to her. Notice her mood swings. Normally that is stress. This thing is not easy. You have to move yourself out of the way for the next 2 years or, however, long this takes. You have to move yourself out of the way and start thinking about her, her health, start thinking about her mind because this thing is going to get stressful. There will be times you are talking to her and it just seems like she is tired and you’ve got to notice these things.*

Jake suggested that husbands stay physically, mentally, and emotionally close to their wives in order observe mood swings, which were an immediate sign of stress for his wife. He discussed that sometimes it seemed his wife was disinterested in his conversation, but he realized that her uncharacteristic behaviors were due to her mental tiredness from work and school. Her mental exhaustion also affected her physical health. He stressed the importance of recognizing that these outside factors will affect wives and to be patient and notice when their health needs
attention as they may lose perspective on caring for themselves. Most importantly, it is a husband’s responsibility to not create additional stress and not place his own needs before his wife’s.

Marshall added to the selfless talk by reminding husbands not to add to wives’ stress of the doctoral situation. “It’s going to be stressful for your spouse and the information that you receive about the progress and the program are going to have stressful overtones to it so don’t add to the stress of it.”

When he and his wife had discussions about the process, she would share them with stress in her voice as if she was annoyed at sharing with him again. He informed husbands to be prepared for the comments from wives that may not be pleasant to hear or that may sound hurtful. Blame the harshness on the process, not the wife. Adding to the stress by addressing their voice fluctuations only caused more dissonance between couples.

Simon spoke about being selfless as well, in order to help a spouse accomplish her goals. He also shared that every marriage is different and that finances may play a role in how much selfless support one can lend a spouse.

Well, now is not the time to be selfish. You’ve got to let your wife accomplish what she wants to accomplish too in life, and it’s not all about you all the time. When you’re married it’s a 50/50 deal, same thing with this. Maybe if you were struggling financially or you had other hardships in your life that might make this a little harder for some people. Everybody is in a different situation. I think we are fortunate that we have a healthy family, kids are healthy, I’m healthy, and Marcy is healthy and you know we were able to afford it too. I think if you were struggling financially and stuff like that it might be, you know everybody is in a different situation. Definitely think about your wife. You
know its more about, there is more to life than some of those other things. You have to help people reach goals.

Simon agreed that the husband must always critically think about his wife’s physical, mental, and emotional feelings during the doctoral process. A husband must put aside his own desires during times where a spouse is trying to achieve a goal. A relationship that is considered a 50/50 partnership must sacrifice to let the one of the people involved to reach her/his objective.

Finn spoke about a similar way of being selfless and described himself as a lifeguard for his wife. She needed to be able to trust him and so he provided trust in many forms. His way of being selfless was to be present, comfort her, and reassure his trust to her.

She could trust me, and she said that. I mean she knew that she could trust me. Always.

I think that is probably the big kahuna. Because if you’re going to be a lifeguard you know the partner needs to know darn good well you know how to swim.

His ability to protect and be a selfless support for his wife filled Finn with pride. He spoke numerous times about his mental strength or bulletproof demeanor that assisted his wife during her challenges of the doctoral process.

Even though each form of selflessness mentioned by husbands was different, it was in these different conditions where husbands could be selfless for their wives to accomplish the goal of gaining a doctoral degree. The doctoral process can overtake the wife causing her to drift away or acquire more stress. Husbands admitted that they have had to give their wives space and be available at other times to evaluate or remove them from a stressful time of the doctoral process. Finn described how the process takes away a spouse from the marital relationship. He recognized during his interviews that his wife’s distance was similar to military deployment as she was mentally somewhere else, and it caused their relationship to be intellectually distant.
No matter how much you plan on it, there is a degree that you lose your friend for a while. No matter how much you’re involved, cause I really, short of being a plagiarist, I don’t think I could have been much more involved in it. But even at that, there is just a part in this that you cannot. It is sort of like. The best way I know how to do it is sort of like the situation that you would have if your spouse was on deployment in the Arm Services. You are gonna lose them for a while. They are there, and they are doing something else, and it is something else that you can only be a part of to the degree that you can be supportive, but you can’t always understand it. You can’t always be in it. You have to sort of submerge your ego a little bit and say this is something that I may or may not understand and what she is going through and kind of the pressures that she was under. I would say, yeah, it’s like a deployment.

He explained that husbands could not always be involved or understand the pressure their wives may be feeling. Finn was again astonished at his ability to relate his feeling to another time in his life as a United States soldier. His transformational connections allowed him to understand the process at a deeper level when trying to prepare other husbands for the time when they might lose their wives for a short time due to the doctoral process.

**Sharing Activities**

Husbands mentioned that there is multiple ways to assist wives when the doctoral process begins affecting them, such as removing them from the mental aspect of the situation and spending time together. Sharing activities not only gave husbands and wives the opportunity to be together, but it also gave wives a break from the mental stress of the doctoral process. Some husbands found that sharing physical activity was a positive outlet as a couple. Marshall and his wife began running together and he spoke about his support of physical activity, while she was
gaining her doctoral degree. He believed that creating a healthier person impacted all other aspects of an individual’s endeavors.

*Running activities are something that I really supported and knowing the benefits of exercise and shifting of priorities and how having family time or recreation time would reduce stress and help you to perform better in other areas, specifically in the academics.*

*If you spend time doing some running, it’s going to give you time to reflect on your work and reduce stress, reduce illness, and give you more energy. In addition to being a shared hobby, that was something I could really support. Like you’re going to be a better student, a better mother, and a better husband if you get out there and do some of that activity.*

Because he valued running prior to his wife becoming engaged in the activity, he was able to easily support her interest in the activity. He also had experienced a transformation with running as he began the hobby to quit smoking. Because he had transformed from the experience, he wanted to share the benefits and experience with his wife. He now values exercise, as he understands how the activity has made him better in every aspect of his life and in all his roles. His voice radiated much excitement as he discussed how he and his wife were experiencing this type of transformation together as she began running during her doctoral process.

Jake and his wife shared physical activity together as well. They would work outside in the garden or even on house projects, as he also saw the benefits of that physical labor for his wife’s mentally stability.
We did a lot of that, plant flowers. We would get out in the yard, and she would want to cut the yard. I would come home, and she had already cut the yard, everything else and planted flowers. I like to see that because I think that was a stress release for her as well.

He emphasized how they were very patient with one another within their relationship. They did not have disagreements over the doctorate or spending less time together, for example. The only time they had disagreements were over their home improvement projects. He laughed when he talked about it. However, he still recognized the advantages of these physical activities as a distraction for her and a way to rest mentally from the doctoral process.

Simon and his wife also shared physical activities together and with their children. They are avid mountain bikers, which was something they began when they met in college. He mentioned often about how he and his family are all very physically healthy. “I think we are fortunate that we have a healthy family, kids are healthy, I’m healthy, and she is healthy.” Having good physical health can assist individuals pursuing a doctoral degree as it gives them the stamina and mental fortitude to persevere.

**Sacrifices**

According to most husbands, spending time together and/or being in one another’s presence, whether in silence or communication, was healthy and helpful for both the wives and husbands and for their relationships during the doctoral process. Husbands also admitted that in order to have time together, they had to make sacrifices in other parts of their life. Joshua and Marshall talked about the importance of scheduling time to be together. Joshua even mentioned the idea of a calling in sick to work and having a partner day.

*Again, not necessarily physical intimacy, but just being together and present with each other at that time. I think the other thing is going back to that time is that, you know,*
sometimes you got to call in sick and have a partner day. You know, you make other sacrifices where you can.

Sometimes sacrifices are important to keep the relationship healthy during stressful times such as obtaining a doctoral degree. So Joshua and his wife solved the dilemma of not having enough time together by taking a work day and spending it with one another. They recognized that by adjusting schedules and sacrificing together, they were able to give their relationship some quality time.

Marshall shared that he and his wife scheduled time and maintained the schedule in order to experience adult time. He and his wife recognized that they did not have much time together, so they decided to share a television show on Sundays. CBS Sunday morning was a show they enjoyed watching, and it was something they could discuss and have some intellectual connection once a week.

Have a conversation and share in something together. That’s one that worked for us and something to look forward to and its something to stick with. Don’t make an exception for that hour and half each week. It wasn’t something we planned but it ended up working so we would have some adult time.

He also talked about how the television was always on children’s shows. When they were watching their favorite show, they used their time to have light and relaxing conversation about what was happening in the world. He looked forward to personal time with his wife weekly during the doctoral process. Planning for other types of intimate time with a spouse was very important to maintain during stressful times, such as when gaining a doctoral degree. Spontaneity may be lost for a short while, but reevaluating and creating time together helps show value to the relationship and value of the husband existing in the relationship and performing
helpful duties during the wife’s doctoral pursuits. It was very important to communicate and stay close during the stress of acquiring a doctoral degree, as couples recognized the importance of relationship was the foundation for their partnership.

Other sacrifices included supporting the family by taking care of child and household roles without the wife asking, so she did not have to worry about the added stress of completing chores. Simon spoke about asking grandparents to help with caring for the kids and hiring someone to clean the house. “Grandparents stepped in sometimes to help with the kids. I hired somebody to clean the house occasionally things like that to kind of pick up some of the slack but there are times I could have done more.”

Involving other family members was a positive means to assist with additional roles and alleviate the personal and relationship stress. Hiring a cleaning service was a financial sacrifice, but it can alleviate unwanted stress on the wife and within the relationship. Marshall admitted to hiring a company to mow their lawn because they had difficulty completing all household tasks during the doctoral degree. Sometimes sacrifices had to be made in order to relieve the family. Taking the kids out of the house for an activity can be a sacrifice that can be positive for both spouses. Husbands can acquire quality time with the kids and improve their relationship. This period also gave their wives quiet time to write and complete work. Marshall would take their child to grocery to get supplies and so his wife could complete work and not have to worry about getting provisions for the family.

If you see that the rations are getting low, say hey I’m going to plan on taking the kids to the grocery store to pick things up I’ve made a list, and be proactive in identifying what areas of support in the home that you can take care of.
He might not have perceived his action as a sacrifice, but it was a task that alleviated stress for his wife and within in the relationship while also allowing his wife quiet time to work on doctoral tasks.

Jake’s strategy was to tell his wife what he was going to do to keep her from feeling the stress while she was gaining her doctoral degree. He thought that communicating with her would help not only to reduce her anxiety, but also give her a chance to share what she needed accomplished. He believed this communication would help him to better understand her needs. He suggested that husbands should take on some roles that their wives currently complete such as going to the grocery, preparing meals, or doing the laundry.

*Take on some of her roles. If are used to her cooking everyday then maybe its time for you to start cooking. If does the cleaning, laundry you need to do it more. You know honey I got the laundry don’t worry about it. I’m going to clean this up. I would just tell him to be that person and take it to another level with support and all that.*

Jake recommended that husbands of doctoral wives needed to show some egalitarianism and share household roles. He also gave examples of communicating household roles he completed.

Daniel claimed that his role was to stay out of the way and support in other ways around the house.

*You know the best thing I could do was just stay out of her way. Take the dogs out, do other things and realize she didn’t need any extra stress at that point in time. So it would have pretty stupid to put something on her.*

Daniel and his wife had prior dynamics, which affected in their relationship and was his reasoning for staying out of her way. He also recognized the stress she was under during the
process and knew it was best to give her quiet time and not interrupt. His interview eluded sadness at times when he talked about the lack of closeness to his wife, but he tried to act aloof. He described the space between them, as she did her thing and he did his. Because they adore their dogs, he knew he could take care of them as a way to assist with extra duties during her doctoral tasks. He made these statements in a way that implied that not only would it have made her more stressed, but it would also create more stress for him and dissonance in their relationship.

Even though these examples of sacrifice might not have been perceived as sacrifices to the husbands and more of a means of support, they were able to reduce anxiety for their wives and feel needed and helpful toward their accomplishments by caring for their roles. The time needed to complete a doctoral degree can interfere with the wife completing her normal task roles in the relationship. By husbands sacrificing and taking on other roles, they were able to assist while wives completed doctoral tasks.

**Co-Transformation**

One of the husbands was able to understand and admit that both he and his wife transformed from the process. Not only did their intellect transform together, but also their emotional support and how they perceive one another's persistence and dedication to one another.

*I think the overall process really became a method to analyze for her and I both to look at our relationship in a different way. I don’t know if that makes any sense, but it’s almost I think we have used that as sort of an ongoing, we often talk about how we matured, how we changed, how we saw things maybe differently or how we even looked at our relationship and how it affected us ongoing. Because I think it allowed us to connect on*
an intellectual level that probably we hadn’t. I’m not saying we haven’t connected on but that we hadn’t come together on. I mean we hadn’t done it together. She sort of had her intellectual ideas and pursuits, and I sort of had mine.

One of the main reasons was because he was immersed in the document with his wife. He had the education to understand her dissertation study and what it involved as well as the capacity to critically reflect and evolve the document with her as an editor. He discussed that one of the best things that happened from the doctoral process was that they were able to grow intellectually together, which was something he never knew was missing from their relationship.

When I helped her with the doctorate, I think it sort of gave us an opportunity to not necessarily have similar viewpoints, but to be able to understand the other person’s viewpoint particularly on intellectual matters. A little bit differently than we had before. I don’t know if that is necessarily a blazing insight. That is probably one of the things that I had thought of. To some degree probably changed, I mean we always had kind of an equality, and I think she would agree with this is that we both always had kind of a quality balanced relationship. I think it did a lot to even make that stronger. Because I think we both, it really in a way forced us to reach that level.

He also had the intellect to process how the doctoral process affected him and his marriage. He was able to understand how previous challenges in his life were relatable to the challenges of the doctoral process. So therein, his higher education may have allowed him to see how the process was not only affecting them separately, but also together, proving that he and his wife were able to co-transform due to his wife’s doctoral process and his prior education.

Even though another husband participant was not able to recognize or process whether he experienced transformation from the process. Through his comments, it was evident that he
witnessed how his wife persisted throughout and would rise to challenges. During times where they experience disorienting dilemmas such as when she experienced frustrations and challenges from not receiving enough feedback from her dissertation committee, he was able to step in and be that support system where she could discuss her frustrations and together they could come to a conclusion that would rise above the challenge.

_We were just able to communicate well together and help her come up with a good solution or think it through. I would kind of help her think of ways to strategize to get what she needed in getting it done._

So again, as he was immersed in the document with her, trying to overcome her dilemma with no committee guidance, they were able to not only brainstorm, but also connect. They created a co-transformational experience and an intellectual closeness where she could experience stress relief, and he experienced nobility in assisting her with a problem. However, in these instances the wife asked for assistance, which allowed the husband to be involved. On the other hand, husbands could also ask to be involved in the problem-solving process during their wives doctoral work.

Sharing of the process allows co-transformational learning to happen. After reflecting on the doctoral process another husband participant wishes that he would have been more involved so that he could have understood the intellectual capacity and struggle or challenge that his wife was experiencing. He wished that he would have been more involved such as reading an article, reading through her paper, or asking her questions to better understand what she was experiencing as he wished he would have been closer to her during the doctoral experience.

_You do not need to know much of the academic side, but you have to know a little bit about it at least. So I think picking up some of those materials would be advice. So if_
there is a book that their reading, then just don’t read the title, read the abstract of the book, thumb a few pages along the way so some of things that come out of that conversation just aren’t coming in as blah, blah, blah but you can connect with some of the things that are important to your spouse that you can understand.

He understood during his interview discussions that this different approach might have allowed them to experience co-transformation together, such as when they shared intellectual discussions of world news. He had the intellectual capacity to recognize where he missed his transformational opportunity with his wife. Additionally, he admitted that the process might have been more enjoyable for him, if he would have been more involved. He also recommended that it would also be beneficial for wives to communicate with their husbands about their doctoral timeline schedule.

Just as your advisor is sharing it with you and telling you how this process is going to unfold, then do it the same way with your spouse, so they can anticipate what is coming up and what the time line is, as opposed to throwing it out in conversation as it comes up.

If husbands are willing to be selfless, then the wives have the chance to be selfish and take advantage of the available time their husbands have created for them to finish their doctoral work. At times, husbands need to be given different responsibilities and roles that will decrease strains of the process and on the relationship.

Chapter Four Summary

Chapter Four provided an overview of husband participants in the study and their demographics. It provided stories and examples of situations of learning that was identified across the lives of husbands who have experienced their wives doctoral process and how it had affected them and their marriage. Data was viewed using phenomenology, social
constructionism, and transformative learning lenses. Raw data was described through the use of themes and patterns first organized through an Excel worksheet and through deconstruction by the use of listening to transcriptions repeatedly (Agar & Hobbs, 1982). Quotes of husbands were shared to describe the themes presented in order to answer research questions pertaining to husbands’ experiences and coping strategies that will be reviewed in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER FIVE:
CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction to Chapter Five

As I approach the end of this study, I reflect on my voyage of this dissertation topic beginning in late 2012, which focused on women’s accolades and their marital experiences. The questions raised in this study emerged as a result of conversations with colleagues who were also in the doctoral process. These colleagues volunteered to be interviewees for a coursework project and were instrumental in developing the idea of the husbands’ perspective of the doctoral process. The time spent with me on campus to burrow and question their marital relationship is unforgettable. I am indebted to the time and information these ladies provided during my early pursuit of this topic. Both interviewees were speechless when I questioned how their higher education was affecting their husband and their marriage. In those moments, I knew I had discovered an unexplored phenomenon. Traditional and conservative Midwestern values surely effect how spouses made meaning of their wives academic pursuits (Bee & Bjorkland, 2012; Crotty, 1998). I wanted to gather evidence of husbands’ perspectives to question these generalized, societal assumptions. It was important in the development of current literature to recognize this phenomenon (Abetz, 2013). Using a phenomenological lens offered credit to all of the men by encapsulating new awareness of their experiences during their wives’ degree development. The purpose was to provide a space for husbands to share their experiences and how they navigated and negotiated through their wives’ doctoral process.

The information gathered in this study offered husbands and wives insights about the influences the doctoral process can have on the husband/spouse and subsequently the marriage.
The study brought awareness to doctoral student relationships, to those where a wives may plant themselves in a role that requires intense dedication without a great deal of flexibility, or whose occupations are demanding and require spousal support (Nelson et al., 2001). The findings displayed the essence, social constructs, and self-described transformations of husbands’ meaning making process, as well as coping mechanisms that they used during their wives’ doctoral process.

Social constructs are identified throughout Chapter Five as conclusive situations that were evident throughout the study (Bee & Bjorkland, 2012; Crotty, 1998). Mezirow (1991) elaborates that social, community, and cultural worlds produce experiences that are habitual, assimilated perspectives. Husbands’ meaning is also emphasized through a transformational learning lens.

Chapter Five explores and shares husbands’ experiences through conclusions, implications, and recommendations. This study set out to capture a rich description of a process that has for decades gone unnoticed. Some of the major findings include exuding necessary behaviors to support their wives, problem solving skills, responding to their wives personality, empathy, self-reflection on past experiences, independence, communication, remaining actively present, and being intellectually involved in the process. These characteristics and activities were necessary for husbands to navigate and ultimately survive the process.

Chapter Five presents a rich description and analysis of the study. Recommendations and potential implications of this work are suggested, along with recommendations for future research. Conclusions are presented first in the development of a matrix style behavioral chart where the salient themes were identified and reported. Additional conclusions, which answered the research questions, are then presented to enhance how the husbands made meaning and
cope with the process. Finally, I draw connections between the outcomes from this project and all of Mezirow’s phases of transformational learning to describe the ways these husbands learned from the doctoral experiences of their spouses.

The implications presented offer additional suppositions that I identified while synthesizing answers during theme identification in Chapter Four. Although some may argue that implications can be speculative in nature, I contend that these outcomes offer opportunities to develop deeper levels of empathy, intimacy, compassion, as well as passion in relationships.

Recommendations include future research and practices that may assist educational institutions and future husbands and their wives who are beginning the doctoral process. To begin with the end in mind is a popular suggestion for many who consider themselves driven for success. The outcomes from this work offers information for serving a segment of the higher education population that would be considered marginalized. Also termed “the trailing spouse” in other contexts, the husbands who are supporting on the sidelines.

Conclusions

The conclusions are presented from three different perspectives. Each approach builds on the other, creating a layered and multifaceted perspective of the conclusions. Evident in all the husbands were four behaviors that develop the basis for the conclusions. The husbands’ conclusion matrix chart, seen in Figure 2, reveals behavioral characteristics of husbands and how they experienced transformational learning in multifaceted forms during their wives’ doctoral process. As well, the matrix chart shows husbands’ behaviors that were essential for making meaning and developing coping strategies (Carter et al., 2013; Nelson et al., 2001) during their wives’ doctoral process. These behaviors, availability, supportive navigator, awareness, and involvement all display overlapping circles in the matrix as husbands simultaneously practiced
more than one behavior during their experiences. The behavior matrix guided me in answering both research questions and explaining the theoretical perspective.

Figure 3. Behavior Matrix of Husbands.

The behavior matrix, seen as Figure 3, was developed as I compared the husbands’ stories from not only the themes, but also the trends that appeared while listening and writing meaning I accrued from the transcriptions (Agar & Hobbs, 1982). When developing the themes in Chapter Four, it was evident that not all husbands would fit into every category. I wanted to acknowledge both individual perspectives and group commonalities in my conclusions. This matrix allowed me to identify all their traits, no matter the result of their perceptions of the process or their wives’ experiences. As husbands made meaning and coped with the doctoral process, they needed to operate using all these behaviors. Not all experiences required the use of all the traits simultaneously, but utilizing more than one at a time were vital to their endurance.
and preservation of their relationship course. Through the use of problem solving skills, husbands learned to navigate roles (Chrouser-Ahrens & Ruff, 2006) and negotiate (Abetz, 2013; Salyer-Funk, 2012) through their availability, awareness, involvement, and supportive navigator.

These four identifiable behaviors; availability, supportive navigator, involvement, and awareness, of the husbands were necessary for them to both make meaning of and cope with their wives’ doctoral process. These characteristics served as overlapping commonalities in the experiences of husbands. The overlapping themes were apparent in the husbands’ meaningful attempts to reassure the wives’ successes throughout the doctoral process whilst coping with the transforming dynamics in their relationships (Maher et al., 2004). Husbands made meaning and coped through the awareness of their wives’ moods and behaviors. Husbands made meaning and coped by being available for their wives to communicate (Maher et al., 2004; Nelson et al., 2001; Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015), expressing frustrations, and taking care of additional household and childcare roles (Abetz, 2013). They sacrificed their own personal time for this availability. Husbands made meaning and coped with the doctoral process by displaying supportive navigational behaviors not only toward their wives who wanted to pursue a doctoral degree, but also towards the additional demands of the degree. Husbands made meaning and coped through involvement in the doctoral process by troubleshooting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1991) and evolving intellectually (Maher et al., 2004). Below are more examples of each of the conclusions that will be discussed further when answering the research questions.

Husbands remained aware of their wives moods and behaviors in order to protect them from the harmful stress that accrued (Abetz, 2013). There was evidence in this study that the doctoral process affects all forms of an individual’s wellness (Batacan, 2002). Therefore, husbands had to remain close to the process in order to evaluate their wives’ wellness (Abetz,
2013). They admitted that they had to make decisions on behalf of their wives’ wellness, as their wives did not pay attention to how the process was affecting their health (Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015).

Husbands were available for their wives during the doctoral process. All of these husbands had the flexibility within their occupations to be available for support (Lite, 1985; Sack, 2004), household responsibilities, or childcare (Abetz, 2013; Cunningham, 2008; Kraaykamp, 2012; Lendon & Siliverstein, 2012; McNulty, 2004; Young, 1999). They were also available when their wives needed them, even if to express frustration and challenges, communicate, or to solve dilemmas of assignments. Husbands were willing to sacrifice time for intimacy (Waring, 1981), spousal time, and their own personal time. Husbands had to recognize societal constructed dilemmas (Bee & Bjorkland, 2012) and change their perceptions in order to transform (Maher et al., 2004), so their relationships could continue to prosper while the wives were under the stress of their doctoral degree.

Husbands displayed supportive navigational behaviors toward their wives’ decisions and additional demands of the doctoral process. Their supportive navigations displayed could be perceived as emasculating roles by Midwestern societal views (Bee & Bjorkland, 2004). However, it was fundamental in husbands’ persistence through the process and to support their wives (Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015). On the other hand, the positivity of their supportive navigations meant that husbands had to change and transform and display these behaviors in order to support the desires and decisions of their wives, deal with frustrations, and not cause additional stress.
Conclusions of Research Questions

Men’s learning and ways of knowing are much different than women’s learning. Throughout this study, I learned to interpret the men’s information differently than I would for my own experiences. I recognize men’s unique form of communication and their naturist tendencies to process, analyze, and solve problems. Transformational learning was developed based on women’s college reentry experiences (Mezirow, 1978), not on how men experience relationship or learning. What I have learned from this study is that men have the ability to make meaning and transform from a situation by using innate problem solving skills and through the ability to empathize (Brown & Watson, 2015; Giles, 1982) with their wives’ emotions.

Navigating women’s emotions can be tricky and mysterious, but it is possible with the four traits these husbands used during the doctoral process. Husbands circumnavigated predicaments to keep their relationship on a positive course. Husbands’ navigation and problem solving skills are valuable in their learning process, particularly when attempting to change or co-transform (Maher et al., 2004) with their wives. Furthermore, what I have grasped about men’s ways of learning in this study is their willingness to process information using existing and relatable experiences.

Husbands’ Experience and Make Meaning of Their Wives’ Doctoral Process

Problem Solving and Navigation Skills

Husbands made meaning out of the doctoral process in many ways. They saw an overwhelming task pursued by their wives that exhausted them in every way. They noticed that the doctoral process affected their wives’ moods and behaviors and for some it caused some physical, mental, emotional, and ailments (Batacan, 2010). It was hard for many of the husbands to understand, but they remained aware, available, and involved (Rockinson-Szpakiw et al.,
2015), which assisted them in problem solving solutions to make meaning. They attempted to empathize (Brown & Watson, 2015; Giles, 1982) when necessary and support their wives by attending to their needs (Hine, 1985; Nelson et al., 2001; Sack, 2004). They had to be aware of behaviors and be available to critically reflect (Mezirow, 1991) and address these needs.

Husbands provided medicinal and homeopathic interventions for physical ailments. They had personal hobbies allowing them to give their wives space when the situation arose. Husbands encouraged and engaged in physical activities with and without their wives. They were present in listening to the wives’ frustrations and self-doubts toward the doctoral process (Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015). Husbands remained available and aware of their wives, so they knew when to suggest a break from the doctoral work. All of these solutions were possible because husbands used problem-solving skills to determine their wives’ emotions and needs. Having this innate skill provided them with the navigation abilities to process meaning from their wives and for them.

Literature has not yet identified how different genders understand or identify transformational learning (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). “The category of gender has virtually disappeared from the adult education literature as a named and separate unit of analysis” (Taylor & Cranton, 2012, p. 564). In this dissertation study, husbands experienced multiple disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1991) during their wives’ doctoral process. They had to remain aware of their wives’ wellness. They dealt with their wives’ stress and their own frustrations toward their wives’ behaviors. Some changed their cycles of intimacy (Waring, 1981) in order to not cause more stress on their wives. All husbands sacrificed their time, learned new roles (Mezirow, 1991), and added new responsibilities (Abetz, 2012) to their schedule so their wives could take time to complete doctoral work. These situations called for husbands to critically think through
processes, as they were aware of their need to change, as some wives did not always communicate what they needed (Leppel, 2002). It is evident that these husbands are problem solvers, and so when a challenge would present itself, these husbands had to transform, evolve, or change behaviors and act on the challenge in order to overcome the dilemma presented (Mezirow, 1991). All of these husbands were willing to transform within the parameters their wives tolerated, such as allowing husbands to take on more roles (Lendon & Silverstein, 2012; McNulty, 2004; Young, 1999). In other words, the more aware, available, involved, and supportive navigation they conveyed while in the process whether emotionally, physically, or mentally, the more husbands were able to problem solve, navigate, transform, and evolve with their wives. However, if the wives were more willing to involve their husbands in the process (Young, 1999), those husbands experienced a greater level of meaning making and learning, in addition to the transformation in their relationship (Maher et al., 2004). The intellectual capacity of husbands played a major factor in how much husbands were involved in the doctoral process (Fow, 1998). Therefore, husbands who held a higher level of education were more apt to understand the wives’ coursework or assist them with problem solving dilemmas in the coursework (Cunningham, 2008). In this study, husbands who had more education were more willing to communicate and ask questions about the document. Higher education determined their level of involvement (Cunningham, 2008).

**Recognizing Wives’ Inner Drive**

Husbands remained supportive but took on more of a behind the scenes role as a supportive navigator to the idea of their wives accomplishing a degree with high accolades. Being married to a goal driven female can mean that the husband at times has to be willing to serve as the support role in order to assist the spouse in acquiring the goal (Rockinson-Szpakiw
The purpose of pursuing a doctoral degree was personal for each of the wives and husbands knew this because of their availability, awareness, involvement, communication, and problem solving. All of these husbands understood their wives’ personalities and how to navigate their desires and behaviors prior to the doctoral process, which assisted them in their meaning behind the purpose of pursuit. Wives were pursuing the degree for personal accomplishments, maximization of their career, or better occupational opportunities. Husbands recognized how their wives’ inner drive and personality aligned with the demands of the doctoral degree (Maher et al., 2004; Nelson et al., 2001). The meaning of the doctoral pursuit paralleled with acquiring a pinnacle of a career. Husbands were able to relate and respect this type of accomplishment, as these husbands’ personalities also valued conquering and overcoming significant tasks. The husbands’ meaning of a higher education and doctoral experience was one of overcoming a challenge. They knew that with their wives’ inner drive and their use of the four identifiable traits, Figure 2, the mission could be achieved together.

Husbands remained as a supportive navigator to the idea of their wife accomplishing a degree with high accolades. Many husbands made meaning of the purpose for obtaining the degree as simply a part of their wives’ goal-oriented personality. Most husbands wanted to support and see their wives accomplish such a highly competitive task, as they simply wanted what their wives wanted (Hine, 1985; Nelson et al., 2001; Sack, 2004). Husbands became aware that the goal was a climb of self-actualization for their wives’ career. They did not want to be the roadblock or the person that interfered with their wives’ grand accomplishment, which explained and reinforced their supportive navigational behaviors. Some husbands admitted to their supportive navigation that their questioning or disagreement toward their wives’ goal choice would not have had a bearing, as they would have still continued to pursue the degree.
Empathetic Behaviors

Husbands made meaning by being empathetic to the doctoral situation and to their wives. Empathy was a skill used to make meaning of their wives’ behaviors, which enabled husbands then to make other problem solving decisions (Brown & Watson, 2015; Giles, 1982). When frustrations or challenges affected behaviors, husbands had to remain focused on the behavior and determine the root, in order to navigate and determine how to critically reflect through the issue. Remembering that when the stress of the doctoral process came out through harsh tones of voice (Leppel, 2002), husbands were required to be present, empathetic, listen, and/or deconstruct the problem. Husbands were able to make meaning and cope by seeing the doctoral process as the problematic area in their relationship, rather than their wives. One husband knew that when his wife exhibited sharp, or cross tones in conversation with him (Leppel, 2002), he was able to exhibit empathy in order bypass the tone of the conversation (Brown & Watson, 2015; Giles, 1982). He reminded himself that it was the doctorate talking. Husbands had to make meaning in order to demonstration supportive navigation in these situations to decrease the stress level of their wives or within their relationship (Abetz, 2013). Husbands had to process the severity of the situation and determine how to act in order to make meaning.

Husbands also made meaning through empathy (Brown & Watson, 2015; Giles, 1982) when they needed to be available and sacrifice for their wives. They recognized that the whole was greater than its parts, or the husband and wife team was more valuable than individual desires. It could have been easier for husbands to have this perception, as they knew the doctorate would come to an end eventually. They also knew empathy was meaningful as there was immediate, visible relief benefits exuded by wives and within the relationship. Husbands experienced meaningful benefits of their empathetic sacrifices and valued the new experiences
that accompanied them (Brannock et al., 2000; Cymbal, 2004; Gold, 2006), such as more time with family (Kraaykamp, 2012; McNulty, 2004; Young, 1999). I venture to say that husbands’ willingness to sacrifice led them to new experiences, which ultimately attributed to their transformation and ability to change and adapt.

**Self-Reflections of Relatable Experiences**

Husbands ability to self-reflect and make meaning of relatable experiences were also strategies for their coping capabilities. They used similar experiences to make meaning and cope when their wives were unable to present, physically, mentally, or emotionally. One example of a relatable experience was being deployed in the military. Being away from family can be stressful for a military family as many times individuals view family as a support system (Nelson et al., 2001). The doctoral process is similar to this experience because it takes one spouse away from the other for a short period of time. The mental and emotional absence can sometimes be perceived as lack of presence or love toward one spouse (Abetz, 2013). The ability to make meaning to a military experience is a way for husbands to not only realize that the experience will be over soon, but also to be thankful that they at least get to be in the presence of their wives and witness their accomplishments which is much different than a deployment (Mezirow, 1991).

The doctoral experience could also be compared to pregnancy and having a child, as most of the husbands had already experienced this adventure. Adding another person to a relationship adds to the dimensional dynamics and satisfaction of the relationship (Brannock et al., 2000; Cymbal, 2004; Gold, 2006). A husband has to learn to navigate with his wife through pregnancy and in the early years with a new child, which is similar to the doctoral process. The meaning gathered through their previous directional efforts can be effective in their survival of the doctoral process (Mezirow, 1991). Sometimes women change from the experience of
motherhood, and husbands have a choice to problem solve and make meaning of the process in order to navigate and endure the accompanied challenges (Maher et al., 2004) or not (Brown & Watson, 2015; McClintock-Comeaux, 2006; Waring, 1981). Similarly, the doctoral experience may change females intellectually and affect their perceptions, values, and beliefs (Mezirow, 1991). Husbands can experience confusion as their wives change. This may cause dissonance and relationship issues (Brannock et al., 2000; Cymbal, 2004; Gerson, 1985; Gold, 2006). Husbands may perceive their wives differently if they are not willing to remain close, change, and transform as well (Brown & Watson, 2015; McClintock-Comeaux, 2006; Waring, 1981). It is important for husbands to be aware, available, be involved and supportive navigators to the changes the doctoral process may make to their wives. It may cause intellectual perceptions to change, so using relatable experiences to make meaning can assist husbands to empathize (Brown & Watson, 2015) and make meaning of their changing and evolving wives during their doctoral process. These navigational efforts can be taken from previous experiences in life and through trial and error as dilemmas arise.

**Strategies and Means of Support That Husbands Use to Cope and Understand the Doctoral Experience**

**Independent Behaviors**

Husbands were all independent of their wives. Many of them had their own occupations and hobbies. The doctoral process did not interfere with their occupations and husbands had the flexibility to be available. Engaging in extracurricular activities outside of the couple is a positive way husbands could cope (Carter et al., 2013; Hamp, 2007) with the doctoral experience. Husbands were aware of periods where wives needed time alone to complete work or deal with the stress of the doctoral process (Abetz, 2013). Many of these men enjoyed
engaging in physical activity, music, going for rides, or leisure activities that included other friends. If wives needed time alone to work, husbands had a hobby to be involved that did not include their wives. Being aware and having this time gave both spouses the space needed to cope and deal with the stress of the doctoral process.

**Communication**

Daily communication was viewed as an excellent coping mechanism for husbands and their relationships (Maher et al., 2004; Nelson, et al., 2001; Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015). Lack of communication created more dissonance and frustration between couples (Leppel, 2002). Four husbands share that good communication was established in their relationship prior to the doctoral process. This allowed for them to remain aware of their wives’ emotions and overall wellness. Communication can be easily forgotten with all the happenings in relationship particularly with added coursework of the doctorate. However, engaging in conversation was a way for husbands to remained aware of and available to their wives and gave them a way to cope and make meaning of how the process was affecting their relationship. Husbands viewed communication as a core value of their marriage, particularly during the doctoral process.

It was not mentioned that any of the wives gave time to reciprocate listening skills to their husbands. Husbands seemed to initiate more conversation than their wives (Leppel, 2002). If wives are more willing to be present and listen to husbands’ frustrations and challenges and empathize, then maybe communication efforts can improve in similar stressful situations. The interview discussions were very helpful for husbands to make meaning and recognize how they coped with the process, many having not thought about it prior to this study (Mezirow, 1991; Crotty, 1998). The communication efforts of couples during the doctoral process also allow for thankfulness and appreciation to be shared. This gratefulness toward one another during
stressful times could create another experience of co-transformation for couples (Maher et al., 2004).

**Remain Actively Present**

Husbands displayed behaviors of awareness, availability, involvement, and supportive navigation during their wives' pursuits, if the wives allowed them to assist and be involved. They emulated egalitarian behaviors (Lendon & Silverstein, 2012; McNulty, 2004; Satir, 1983) and learned to negotiate marital and household roles in an attempt to alleviate stress for their wives (Abetz, 2013). Husbands were actively present during the process whether listening, empathizing (Brown & Watson, 2015; Giles, 1982), problem solving, communicating (Carter et al., 2013; Hamp, 2007), or supporting (Nelson et al., 2001), and this allowed them to cope and make meaning of the experience. These behaviors could be considered emasculating by Midwestern culture (Bee & Bjorkland, 2004). Despite, cultural perspectives husbands supported their wives by taking over some responsibilities that typically they completed before gaining the degree. Husbands completed household and childcare roles such as grocery shopping, laundry, and dropping off and picking up from childcare (Cunningham, 2008; Kraaykamp, 2012; Lendon & Silverstein, 2012; Young, 1999). Choosing these types of support made husbands feel more satisfied (Brannock et al., 2000; Cymbal, 2004; Gerson, 1985; Gold, 2006) as if they were assisting in alleviating stress from their wives. Without hesitation, they were willing to perform these nontraditional roles (Satir, 1983), overcoming possible societal stigma if shared with their masculine peers (Bee & Bjorkland, 2004).

Their support was evident in other forms such as physical, mental, and emotional. Remaining actively present was essential in order too not only recognize these dilemmas, but also problem solve and cope with the process (Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015). Being able to
be actively present also allowed husbands to empathize with the process (Brown & Watson, 2015). These husbands paid attention and cared for their wives’ physical health such as caring for physical ailments or providing them with nourishment (Batacan, 2010). Mentally, they made themselves available as a sounding board or became involved as critical reflector to solve a problem for times of mental frustrations for their wives (Abetz, 2013). All husbands mentioned times when their wives revealed emotions of doubt. Coping with this meant that husbands had to create energy to share and transfer to wives (Carter et al., 2013; Hamp, 2007). Husbands would embrace the role of an active, emotional coach and mentor, providing words of encouragement and reminding their wives of why they wanted to accomplish this feat or how they have already accomplished harder tasks in life (Maher et al., 2004; Nelson et al., 2001). Coping with their wives’ moods meant the use of their problem solving skills. Husbands learned that taking breaks from coursework was not only good for the wives, but also a way, for them to be together. Husbands used breaks as a way to spend more time with wives (Mezirow, 1991). Even though they were not feeling the primary stress of the process, a break would alleviate that secondary stress (Abetz, 2013) and bring the wives back to them for a period of time. Breaks from the coursework were a coping mechanism for husbands.

Husbands with children had more responsibilities (Abetz, 2013) and also expressed some drop in intimacy (Waring, 1981) due to both the doctoral process and children. However, some husbands were valiant and exuded selfless behaviors toward their roles and some were not (Meter & Agronow, 1982). Nevertheless, they learned to reevaluate how they perceived their roles and value time spent with their children and step-children (Young, 1999) even more as there was more one on one time with them as wives were busy with doctoral coursework. This disproves Gerson’s (1985) speculation of marital dissonance due to women’s reentry to higher
education and supports Goldberg, Cohn, and Eccles-Parsons, (1980) who suggested that educated couples were moving toward more egalitarian roles. Couples who had higher education collectively in this study performed more egalitarian roles (Cunningham, 2008).

Husbands were able to transcend and reevaluate intimacy cycles (Mezirow, 1991; Waring, 1981). Husbands also coped by viewing intimacy in many different forms such as beyond the physical and valued more mental, and emotional intimacy. The doctoral process could be perceived as a third person in the marriage. These husbands used the intellect of the doctoral process to experience more closeness with their wives (Maher et al., 2004).

**Intellectual Involvement**

Half of the husbands were involved in the intellectual support of the doctoral process. One husband was actually an editor of his wife’s doctoral dissertation. These husbands were available as critical reflectors when their wives were experiencing frustrations or having trouble solving problems. Intellectual involvement was a way to stay close intimately and cope with their wives’ doctoral process (Abetz, 2013; Maher et al., 2004). Husbands share that together they were able to problem solve and help deconstruct problems together so wives were able to overcome issues throughout her doctoral process, inevitably co-transforming (Maher et al., 2004) on an intellectually intimate level experiencing a greater level of marital satisfaction (Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000).

Half of the husbands in these relationships took a backseat role in the intellectual aspect of their wives’ career peak. They were not involved in their wives’ intellectual development (Brown & Watson, 2015; McClintock-Comeaux, 2006; Waring, 1981) throughout the doctoral process, in terms of assisting their wives in problem solving through issues, which ultimately did not allow them the coping skills. The decision not to be involved was not necessarily a choice,
but it simply might not have been communicated (Leppel, 2002; Maher et al., 2004) or that they were intellectually not able to participate (Fow, 1998). However, wives also might not have thought their husbands had anything to offer or did not want to engage in the intellectual development of their doctoral pursuits. These husbands were aware of a need for support and provided their time through forms of communication and availability when their wives were stressed (Abetz, 2013).

Husbands that were more involved in the process transformed more with their wives (Maher et al., 2004). Therefore, those who were available, aware, involved, and supportive navigators were immersed through the struggles and witnessed their wives’ perseverance and transformation. They experienced feelings of amazement toward their wives, transforming and evolving. These prideful feelings grew exponentially during their wives’ doctoral pursuits (Abetz, 2013; Young, 1999). Being engaged in the experience together allowed them to become closer, cope, and evolve from the challenging experience (Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000), even though wives experienced most of the stress during the doctoral process.

**Mezirow’s Transformational Learning in Husbands Experiences**

Mezirow’s ten phases of transformational learning are described with examples of husbands’ experiences through phases of their meaning making and coping through their wives’ doctoral process from the findings section and through my interpretations of their findings. The purpose is to inform readers of how transformational learning was an applicable theory in this study. It also seeks to align examples with the phases so as to make the theory more understandable. I provided my interpretation of the findings as conclusions to each of these phases. The section provides explanations and examples as a foundation that will build and add dimensions to each of the conclusion sections in order to offer a more multifaceted supposition.
The husbands went through their own processes of transformation. Below, I share examples from Mezirow’s ten phases of transformational learning as experienced by the participants.

1. A disorienting dilemma. Husbands experienced disorienting dilemmas when trying to make meaning and cope with the doctoral process. Examples of dilemmas include how to deal with their wives’ moods and behaviors. Husbands had to be both aware and available and many times supportively navigate and cope with these changes in discerning moods. Some also experienced a shift in their intimacy (Meter & Agronow, 1982; Waring, 1981), and so they had to navigate the new schedule.

2. A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame. During the interviews, husbands had to reflect on how they examined their feelings toward the process. Many of them expressed feelings of guilt or shame in the form of not providing enough support or being able to understand what their wives were experiencing or trying to learn during their doctoral pursuits. Husbands admitted their guilt for not being able to help with intellectual pursuits, as they did not have enough information, or intellectual capacity to process the amount of information their wives were comprehending (Fow, 1998). Husbands also recognized how demanding they can be of their wives, particularly with their intimacy and time together (Meter & Agronow, 1982).

3. A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions. Self-reflection of this guilt assisted some husbands in their critical assumptions and shifted their perception away from themselves and more toward their wives’ needs. Husbands assessed their wives’ behaviors and their role responsibilities in the relationship prior to beginning their doctoral degree compared to during the degree. They were witnessing the accumulation of extra stress and strain on their wives (Abetz, 2013). When extra responsibilities arose due to the demands of the
doctoral process, husbands had to assess their situation and decide how to deal with the additional responsibilities whether it was household roles (Cunningham, 2008) or working around the requests of the doctoral schedule.

4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change. Husbands may not have always admitted their unhappiness but they recognized that their wives were transforming and were willing to change for the success of the doctorate process. They did acknowledge how the process was creating dissatisfaction at times for both they and their wives as emotions were transferred and shared with husbands (Abetz, 2013). Some husbands expressed discontent but all were still willing to share the loads (Kraaykamp, 2012) and supportively navigate the process.

5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions. Husbands recognized that a role change was necessary in order for the relationships to function smoothly while their wives were busy with their coursework. They explored the roles their wives completed and even asked how they could assist (Abetz, 2013). Wives who communicated (Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015) created easier transitions for their husbands to complete tasks and support them in their pursuits. Those who did not communicate (Leppel, 2002; Maher et al., 2004; Nelson et al., 2001) their needs widened a gap in their relationship, which caused some dissonance and confusion for husbands (Gerson, 1985). Husbands’ abilities to problem-solve assisted them in acquiring new ideas for action.

6. Planning a course of action. Husbands took initiative and considered how they could assist during the process. Their intuitive problem solving skills proved to be outstanding when critically planning how they could assist their wives and remain close to them. All were very willing to assist and be apart but they had to evaluate where their roles fit within the change of
their relationship (Abetz, 2013). The doctorate added another dimension and so husbands would recognize what their wives needed and would act to fulfill their requirements of maintaining roles in the relationship. Husbands’ awareness and availability allowed them to plan actions such as acquiring groceries (Cunningham, 2008), suggesting their wives rest (Batacan, 2010), or celebrating one of their wives’ accomplishments.

7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plan. Some husbands had already been willing to share responsibilities in their relationship prior to the process (Kraaykamp, 2012). Ultimately, they wanted to make their wives happy and so understanding that their pleasure and happiness was most important, husbands knew how to accomplish their plans and their roles in the doctoral pursuit. When wives allowed them to be a part of the process (Young, 1999), husbands experienced more enjoyment through being needed and useful (Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000). Some even discussed how they adjusted their intimacy cycles (Mezirow, 1991; Waring, 1981) based on the loads of the doctoral schedule.

8. Provision trying of new roles. Husbands talk about transitioning into the new roles and how it was not difficult or burdening (Abetz, 2013). They enjoyed the benefit of being needed, as it was another way to be desired by their wives. Husbands may have completed responsibilities in order to gain attention from their wives. If they could alleviate responsibilities, there was a chance to spend time with their wives. Not all husbands had this experience, particularly if their wives were stubborn at accepting the husbands’ delivery or role accomplishment (Young, 1999).

9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships. Acquiring and completing new roles not only gave husbands a sense of purpose during the doctoral pursuits, but also husbands recognized the benefits of their assistance. Husbands saw the immediate
advantages of their sacrifices when their wives acknowledged their attempts of aid (Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015) and through the doctorate achievements.

10. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s perspective (Mezirow, 1991, pp. 168-169). As men enabled problem-solving skills, they were more able to adjust their lifestyle and accept a new way to perceive their relationships. They observed how their assistance was associated with their wives’ goal achievements. Most husbands established a new sense of belonging in their relationships, problem solving and learning how to negotiate roles (Salyer-Funk, 2012) and navigate the wives’ emotions.

**Husbands’ Transformational Learning**

Taylor and Cranton (2012) identify that women experience meaning making and transformation differently than men. It is also unknown in the literature if men transform through emotional learning, life experiences, and building relationships as women do. In this dissertation study, it was clear to me that the husbands made meaning of and coped with their wives’ dissertation process in many ways and including through emotional learning. Husbands may not have expressed or shown the same types of emotions as women, but in times of frustration, pride, irritability, empathy (Brown & Watson, 2015; Giles, 1982), patience, or other dilemmas, that can be perceived as emotional times, these husbands shared insights that could be viewed as transformational, evolving, or changing (Mezirow, 1991).

It was evident that husbands in this study used their “ways of knowing” (Maynard, 1994, p. 11) to make meaning of and cope with their wives’ doctoral process through the use of problem solving skills. These problem solving skills allowed husbands to navigate the process and make decisions that allowed them to evolve or for some co-transform with their spouses (Maher et al., 2004). Husbands in this study showed characteristics of an appreciation to
conquer and overcome a goal, which was their reasoning for supporting and not arguing with the decision to pursue a doctoral degree. Transformation also occurred as husbands’ portrayed awareness, availability, involvement, and passiveness toward their wives’ doctoral process.

Even though current literature is unsure if men transform through emotional learning, I believe this study is revolutionary to changing that perception. Most husbands in this study experienced transformations through building better relationships with their wives (Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000). Also, it is possible that these women were able to transform in this situation because their husbands were a means of support (Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015).

This study recognized husbands’ transformation through emotional learning, problem solving, and through traits of awareness, availability, involvement, and supportive navigation in order to make meaning and cope with their wives’ doctoral process. Husbands may not have expressed or communicated these emotions until asked such as within this study, however their emotional feelings for their wives may have allowed them to transform, change, or adapt to the changing situation rather than assimilating to societal constructions of their surrounding worlds (Bee & Bjorkland, 2004; Crotty, 1998).

**Implications for Husbands**

**Schedules**

There were a number of other conclusions that arose during interviews. One answer was to develop a schedule together to increase communication between couples. These schedules can show due dates and other doctoral activities, as well as family dates or other important appointments. Many times when female doctoral students are involved in such a strenuous endeavor, they may forget to communicate where they are at in the process or what due date that may be critical or approaching. They may also forget other appointments that may be important
to the family. If a schedule can be shared, then husbands and wives are more aware and can be available to better support their wives during those stressful times, whether its knowing that the stress may be coming or that they need to take on more roles prior to those critical dates. They can also schedule time away to give their wives the quiet time needed to write or complete their stressful task.

**More Involvement in the Process**

Surprisingly, a few husbands expressed that they wished they could have been more involved in their partners’ research (Fow, 1998). The advantage is that not only can the wife discuss her endeavor verbally, but also it allows the husband to be another means of support for her (Abetz, 2013). Husbands felt helpful while assisting their wives during their doctoral pursuits, and so the interviewees advised future husbands to ask questions about what is happening with the process or what their wives are learning. Specifically, husbands can read an article or ask to assist in troubleshooting a problem with them (Fow, 1998). One husband actually was an editor to his wife’s dissertation and spoke of the intellectual closeness it created between he and his wife. He admitted that sharing the dissertation document was another way to be intimate with his spouse (Waring, 1981). An intellectual closeness is another experience that adds to another positive layer to a marriage and the whole doctoral process a couple can experience together (Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000; Maher et al., 2004).

**Perceiving Wives as Equals**

Men perceived their wives as equals within this study. It could be that husbands who love, value, and appreciate their wives, also evident as emotions, or see them as an equal are able to transform more easily during the process (Maher et al., 2004). On the other hand, they may have surrounded themselves with other relationships that also value equality or an appreciation
for women with high accolades or positions of power (McClintock-Comeaux, 2006; Murphy-Graham, 2010; Waring, 1981). Relationships where the husband and wife treat each other equally can help to move the wife beyond societal constructed stereotypes (Crotty, 1998), or assist in transforming the woman (Mezirow, 1991), which in turn may transform the husband with her (Maher et al., 2004).

Even when social constructs were apparent in different situations (Crotty, 1998) during the doctoral process, husbands still perceived their wives as equals. These husbands could have acclimated to these social perceptions, become immensely frustrated, and reciprocated the frustration back to their wives; but they did not (Brown & Watson, 2015; Giles, 1982). They were more focused on the goal of “the team” rather than the perception of outside influences (Bee & Bjorkland, 2012; Lendon & Silverstein, 2012; McNulty, 2004).

**Wives Need to Increase Communication**

The process may be more enjoyable and helpful for husbands if wives communicate to allow husbands to be more intellectually involved (Lite, 1985; Maher et al., 2004; Nelson et al., 2001; Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015; Sack, 2004). The lack of communication (Leppel, 2002) from both spouses adds more tension to a relationship, particularly when there is a doctoral degree that is poking its head into the relationship. The doctoral degree acts as a third body in the relationship and can many times pull the wife away from the other spouse. Less communication means less support or a feeling of being ‘out in left field’ for husbands. They are unsure of not only what to help but how to help, particularly if they are taking on more of a supportive navigational role towards the wife when she is under stress (Abetz, 2013).

It is beneficial for wives to communicate with their husbands what they need (Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015). If husbands are willing to be selfless (Abetz, 2013), then the wives have
to be selfish and create time to finish their doctoral work by giving their husbands different responsibilities and roles that will alleviate their stress, such as completing household and childcare tasks.

**What Husbands Experience**

Female doctoral students should recognize how the doctoral process can impact husbands, particularly if they are trying to support or help during the process (Cole, 2001). All the emotions that arise from the process and that are experienced by the female doctoral student are also shared with the husband whether intentional or direct (Brown & Watson, 2015; Giles, 1982). The emotions can radiate off the wife and can impact the marriage in ways such as how communication is given or received (Leppel, 2002). Husbands ask for wives to take time to communicate the process and share the intellect, (Rockinson-Szpikiw et al., 2015) so that they are able to become more aware and available to transform with their wives (Maher et al., 2004). Also, husbands may ask wives to allow them to help and assist with other roles even if they are not completed the same way (Young, 1999). Wives should appreciate husbands’ efforts to support and just be appreciative that tasks are complete.

**Masculine Communication**

Husbands showed encouragement through masculine euphemisms or metaphors when their wives needed an extra push or encouragement to overcome challenges and mental struggles during the dissertation process. Almost every quote either describing his wife’s process or how he coped with the process ended with one of these euphemisms. Some men have a way of communicating to others through simplistic catch phrases (Maynard, 1994). For example, in the Pixar movie, Cloudy with A Chance of Meatballs, Flint Lockwood is a boy who is fascinated with science and is always performing different science experiments that fail. Additionally, he
and his father cannot relate to one another as his father is a fisherman and knows nothing about science. Each time Flint is unsuccessful with a science experiment, his father tries to communicate that sometimes in life, individuals fail in their pursuits. However, his father can only communicate his experiences to his son in fishing metaphors. Many times, there are communication differences between individuals, such as men and women, who are married that may not be recognized or understood. In this dissertation study, these men were trying to communicate to their wives and provide encouragement through how they made meaning of the world (Merriam, 2002). I cannot say that these women did or did not understand this style of communication, as I did not have the opportunity to ask them. Additionally, each spousal relationship in this study had its own unique form of communication as their understandings of relationship are experienced through the societal constructions that surround them (Crotty, 1998).

Relationship communication is very complex and psychoanalytical and was not the focus of this study. Even though the purpose of this dissertation study is not to understand this relationship communication, it is worth mentioning that metaphors are a highly important means of communication for the men in this study (Maynard, 1994). They were aware and empathetic of their wives emotions and listened to their frustrations, fears, and/or doubts, etc. and attempted to make meaning and reciprocate that meaning back to their wives through masculine metaphors and euphemisms (Abetz, 2013; Brown & Watson, 2015; Giles; 1982; Maher et al., 2004; Maynard, 1994; Nelson et al., 2001; Lite, 1985).

These men resorted to masculine euphemisms, as they tried to push their wives to complete the work. When they recognized a challenge or when their wives were at a critical junction in the doctoral process, the men would use a ‘man up’ euphemism. The men repeatedly
displayed this behavior when asked to verbally respond to their wives’ conflicts. An example of this in the study was “Can’t you just get out of the inning?” The encouragement was an attempt to tell the wife to finish so the coursework would be complete and not cause her anymore stress. When trying to inspire their wives through tough situations, they used the same techniques they would use with other men. There was even evidence from one husband where this style of communication was passed between generations. He learned how to make meaning of the world from his father, which could also be the way other husbands learned these euphemisms and metaphors to communicate (Crotty, 1998). The communication is not about emotions, it is just about completing the task, which is not a form of transformational learning for women (Mezirow, 1991). It may also reflect that these husbands see their wives more equally than a typical relationship because they communicate with their wives as if they were men or an equal. Some men can relate easier as they understand their instinctual need to conquer which is what meaning they made of the doctoral process. They did not communicate the way women do but made meaning by empathizing (Brown & Watson, 2015; Giles, 1982) and using a phrase in which they thought was simple and would motivate their wives to complete the task, as this was the problem they saw that needed solved. They see transformational learning as way of conquering or controlling a situation, so they communicate in that style. They saw a transformational intellectual experience as a problem to be conquered and used their instinctual way of knowing (Maynard, 1994) to assist their wives to their goals.

**Characteristics of Supportive Navigators**

A far-fetched concept was the idea that the supportive navigating husbands may be more attracted to confident and independent, educated women such as the husbands in this study. Husbands of doctoral students in this study want to please their wives. Wives may not always
recognize the husbands attempt to please during typical relationship dynamics and particularly with the added stress of a doctoral degree (Abetz, 2013). These wives who pursue higher accolades, are more goal driven, or who seek more intellectually challenging occupations (McClintock-Comeaux, 2006; Murphy-Graham, 2010; Waring, 1981) may be more demanding of their spouses. They may expect them to rise to challenges in the relationship such as the dynamics that appear from the demands of acquiring a doctoral degree or a more involved or management style occupation. This can cause challenges, dilemmas, and affect marital satisfaction (Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000) for husbands as they navigate through the first process (Abetz, 2013).

It is important for highly driven women to be aware of their personality characteristics and how their characteristic tendencies may negatively affect their husband. Women need to consider and portray more empathy toward their husbands and be aware of their husbands’ needs and desires when there are extra stressful dynamics impacting the relationship (Abetz, 2013). Women many times forget that some men are sensitive and can acquire hurt feelings from female demands in the relationship.

**Positivity from Independent Behaviors**

Men have their lives or hobbies separate from their wives and are successful. Therefore, these more independent men have less time to be controlling of their spouses. Perhaps a relationship between two heavily codependent people would falter through the doctoral process.

**Continuing to Move Forward**

Even the men who were jealous, lacked empathy, or were frustrated with their wives still performed their share or more to support the couple and move forward as a unit. So in their
mind, the team was greater than an individual entity, also supporting their decision to sacrifice time and roles for their wives.

**Pride and Respect**

Husbands respect their wives and admit much pride from watching their wife complete such an arduous task (Abetz, 2013; Young; 1999). They were astonished at how their wives could condense vast information and read and write at such lengths. The mental and emotional fortitude they witnessed from their wives was simply amazing to these husbands.

**Limitations**

There were a few limitations to the study that were uncontrollable, but others that were recognized after the study was complete. The first limitation to this study was that the sample size of six participants was low due to the time and duration of this dissertation study. If more participants had been interviewed, then the study may have been more generalizable to the whole population, even though it was not the intent of this study to generalize the results (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative phenomenological research does not intend to support generalizable conclusions; its purpose is to understand a phenomenon richly and deeply (Van Manen, 2011).

Additionally, after analyzing the data, there is a huge difference in the husbands’ experiences depending on the age of the couple, if they shared children, and education level of husbands. Older couples seemed to have a different dynamic, so another limitation was that the age range was very large. Husbands who had to care for children during the process had to sacrifice more time and shared many different loads compared to those who did not, as well as those who were married for a longer duration. Husbands who had a higher education level also were able to share more detail about their experience. In other words, they were more capable of
critical thought and reflection when sharing during their interviews, making more connections and meaning between the doctoral process and their experiences and marriages.

Additionally, having an interview team is a difficult task because as the main investigator, there were times I wished the interviewer had asked more questions about a particular aspect of the husbands experience in order to find out more such as the meaning of the masculine metaphors. For example, when the interviewer would encounter private or problematic issues, there was a desire to move to the next question. There were marital dynamic issues that might have given a clearer picture to the theme or conclusion of this study. However, based on previous research, I understand that my presence as a female would have not generated the information gathered from my interview team (Egeberg-Holmgren, 2011; Gatrell, 2006; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Maynard, 1994).

Lastly, due to the educational gap between my interview team and the interviewees, there may have been some power issues between how much information the interviewees were willing to share. The interviewees were informed of the educational status of the interview team in the informed consent, and so some intimidation from education could have impacted what the husbands were willing to share.
Research has been limited in developing the spousal and family impact of the doctoral process, particularly from the male spousal perspective. So future research could further explore experiences and opinions from husbands using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This would increase validity and reliability of the phenomenon and give future researchers more coping strategies to share with future doctoral students and their spouses. Additionally, in the literature review, I sought out research with professional women and those with other professional degrees and how they balance or negotiate roles with their male spouses and vice versa in high stress and time consuming professions such as physicians, tenure track higher education, and engineering. Research from the Netherlands (Kraaykamp, 2012) and other countries was prevalent, but not as much could be found from the United States. More research could be conducted through qualitative and quantitative research methods about the affect of women’s professional degrees on their male spouses that would provide not only their qualitative
experiences, but also insights from a quantitative or mixed methods perspective. The spouse is
greatly impacted by the doctoral process, and is expected to take on not only additional roles but
also share the physical, emotional, and mental stress their spouse experiences as expressed in this
study (Abetz, 2013). The wives’ accomplishment may take away from their own individual
identity roles causing a mix of emotions and possibly creating some animosity in their
relationships over time (Abetz, 2013; Meter & Agronow, 1982; Waring, 1981). It also can add
stress to the relationship (Abetz, 2013).

Another area of research interest could be to compare married groups of individuals who
had external support through marital therapy during the duration of the female’s doctoral
pursuits. One of the participants in this study suggested that couples could use family therapy or
counseling to assist during the process; therapy may be a great way to compare groups (Hyun,
2009). The research could provide the control group with only therapy or both groups could
receive therapy, but at different times during the wife’s doctoral pursuits such as meeting
throughout the doctoral process verses meeting for certain durations at the beginning middle or
end for a shorter duration.

Researchers could also explore the effects of an informative education program for
spouses and their wives who are pursuing their doctorate. If the program is to be effective, there
is a need to gain information that would be helpful for educational institutions to provide to these
couples and evolve the information as times and stressors change (Carter et al., 2013; Nelson et
al., 2001). For example, there may be different stressors for couples who have children or those
who non-traditional older adults caring for elderly parents and balancing or negotiating roles
(Abetz, 2013) throughout the doctoral process.
Recommendations for Future Practice

Figure 5, below, represents the elements that will be discussed in the future practice section.

Future practices could focus on providing informative programs or some sort of information to doctoral students about how the process will affect spouses and others upon acceptance into a doctoral program. This could be in the form of a brochure, short video, or webinar that both the female doctoral student and her husband complete together. This information should provide an overview of situations or issues that may arise and coping mechanisms for husbands during their wives’ time as doctoral students (Carter et al., 2013). Suggestions could include communication (Leppel, 2002; Maher et al., 2004; Nelson et al., 2001; Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015) and support strategies (Lite, 1985; Nelson et al., 2001; Sack, 2004) for both the husband and wife and maybe other family members about the stressors that may affect the female as well as other family members during critical times of the doctoral
process. It also can give participants problem-solving tools during stressful times that were successful for other couples that are based from reliable research data.

Other future practices may include support groups for husbands of doctoral wives or couples’ support groups that provide coping strategies and a space to reflect and talk with others or meet other couples that are in the same situation (Brannock et al., 2000; Cymbal, 2004; Gold, 2006; Hyun, 2009). Higher education institutions could also provide an environment on campus where couples could have a private date night or spend time together learning about new venues or displays on campus. Spending time with a spouse can alleviate the stress and strain of the doctoral process (Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015). Flyers and email invites would need to be sent to couples to remind them of these opportunities on campus. The university could provide affordable activities or venues for doctoral candidate couples as undergraduates are typically given these opportunities on campus through student services.

**Final Thoughts**

Referring back to the movie, The Five Year Engagement, Tom, actor Jason Segal, is an expatriate, trailing spouse who left his position as an elite chef to follow his fiancé across the United States so she could pursue a doctoral fellowship. Tom was unable to find a chef position, lost his identity, and became immensely depressed as his fiancé flourished. She was gone often and did not include him in her processes. The quote below is from a disagreement that he has with Violet, his fiancé, played by Emily Blunt; about her experimental psychology study she conducted on people and stale donuts. He explains to her that her findings are incorrect and provides her with a different perspective that relates to relationships.

*These imaginary new donuts, that you offer people, they may never arrive. They are not real, and personally I am not the type of person who wants to sit around and wait for*
something that may never arrive when they know that the thing they have in front of them is . . . tasty! It’s good! And you know what? It’s not about the age of the donut; it’s about the flavor. Boom! And you know the other thing? The new donuts, they’re going to get stale someday, too (Stoller & Stoller, 2012).

This quote is a reminder to spouses to be appreciative of the things they have that are most important, such as a spouse who has sacrificed so the other spouse can pursue his or her goal or educational endeavor. A doctoral degree pursued by a female can be a life transforming experience providing insurmountable opportunities including power, status, and prestige. For a spouse, this is also an opportunity to transform and adapt in order to support a spouse’s decision to move upward in his/her education; however it does come with sacrifices for him/her. What I learned from these husbands and in my own relationship is that most spouses are willing to sacrifice anything to support their wives through their upward educational mobility. Females should show their appreciation and make an attempt to share and include their husbands all through the doctoral process. Women need to communicate what they need and inform their husbands of the time that may take away from their relationships. Furthermore, as women continue on in higher education, there are similar achievements they will need to acquire, such as merits for tenure that will take away time from the relationship. In higher education, there is never a break or time off from the occupation and spouses need to be informed of this sacrifice. If husbands are willing to forgo their own goals for a period of time, then they deserve attention and recognition from their spouses for their support efforts and marriage throughout the process before marital tension arises. Remember what is important and appreciate the foundation that is present, which can allow the marital team to accomplish goals together, encouraging co-
transformation rather than one spouse alone or focusing all the attention on imaginary, fresh donuts that may never arrive.


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APPENDIX A

HUSBANDS MEANING MAKING OF THEIR WIVES DOCTORAL PROCESS IN EDUCATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Description

The purpose of this study is to discover the essence of the experiences of six to ten husbands of female doctoral students as they share stories of their experiences and marriage while their wives were obtaining their doctoral education. This study is an opportunity for husbands to share their experiences, challenges, emotions, and growth about their journey through their wives’ doctoral process in a safe and private environment.

Female doctoral graduates who have graduated within five years of the date of this dissertation study will be contacted through a local Midwestern University. Women within educational doctorate programs who obtained a Ph.D. or Ed.D. will be contacted. The women must be at least 30 years old and still married to their husband as they completed their doctoral degree. Once I have explained the study to these women, I will ask permission to contact their husbands as possible participants. The time period for conducting these interviews will be between June 1st and July 31st.

Two interviews lasting approximately 30-60 minutes will be conducted for each participant. My research team will meet with each participant in a private, agreed upon location. A male interviewer will be facilitating the interview so as to respect the husband’s marriage and to create a more comfortable environment to share feelings about their marriage and experiences. A male observer will remain in the room to take field notes.

Interview structure

- Prior to the interview: I will contact females by email or phone that graduated from an educational doctoral program at a local Midwestern University program. I will gain permission to ask their husbands to participate in the study. Six to ten husbands who fit
the criteria and agree to participate will be contacted to discuss participation of the study and set up mutually agreed dates, times, and locations for the interviews.

- During the interview: My male interviewer will facilitate the interview with semi-structured interview questions. A male observer will be present in the room to take field notes. Bottled water and treats will be provided during both interviews with each husband. No other compensations or rewards will be offered to the participants. At the beginning of the first interview, the interview team will review the informed consent with each participant, answering any questions they have about the interview. Two informed consents will be signed at the beginning of the first interview. The husband participant will keep one copy and the other copy is for my records. If the participant does not want to participate in the study, they will be thanked for their time. If and when this issue arises, another husband participant who meets the criteria will be contacted.

The interviews will be audio recorded with the permission of the participants. The interviews will be guided by a set of semi-structured questions.

**Session 1 Questions:**

1. Could you tell us some background information to better describe who you are?
   a. What do you do for a living?
   b. How old are you?
   c. How long have you been married?
   d. Do you have children?
   e. Where were you born and grew up?
   f. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

2. Describe your values about your marriage?
   a. What does it mean to be a wife?
   b. What does it mean to be a husband?
   c. As a husband, what are your own values about marriage?
d. How would your wife describe your role as her husband in the family?

e. How would you describe your wife’s role in the family?

3. Describe why and how did your wife decide to pursue your doctoral area of study?

   a. What did you/she hope to gain?
   
   b. What challenges may have you anticipated?
   
   c. What challenges did you not anticipate?
   
   d. What role did you play in her decision to pursue a doctorate?

4. Describe how her doctoral process has impacted you?

   a. What have been the challenges? Could you share an example?
   
   b. What have been the exciting moments during this journey? Could you share an example?
   
   c. What changes have you experienced with your wife in relation to your marriage?

       Please share an example.
APPENDIX B

Session 2 questions:

5. Describe any new insights or meaning you acquired from our first discussion?
   a. What prompted this reflection?
   b. Could you share an example?

6. Describe how the doctoral process has impacted your marriage?

7. What were some challenges of the doctoral process?

8. What were some frustrations you had about the doctoral process?

9. If you could speak to your younger self before your wife started this process, what would
   you say to yourself?

10. What recommendations would you give other husbands who are about to embark with
    their wife on this process?

11. What recommendations would you give female doctoral students about what their
    husband may experience?

12. What impact have our meetings discussions had on you in regard to your experiences of
    your wife’s education and marriage?
APPENDIX C

Interview Debriefs

1. What patterns or themes did you see come forth during the interview?
2. What surprised you about the interview?
3. What was missing or what did the interviewee not disclose, what were they holding back?
4. What did you forget to cover in the interview?
5. What did you not expect to happen?
6. What are your assumptions about the interviewee?
7. What questions did the interviewee avoid and you need to revisit?
8. What are your assumptions about the next interview?
9. What should the focus be on the next interview?
10. Will you need to approach the individual differently and if so, how?
11. Will you need to adjust questions for the next interview?
   a. How?
   b. Which ones and what will you ask?