

No Sunshine When She's Gone: The Shared Experiences of African American Men Who Have
Undergone Divorce

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Department of Community Care and Counseling, Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to chronicle the shared experiences of working-class/middle-class African American men who have gone through a divorce in Hampton Roads, Virginia. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development, which highlights the essential roles of language and culture, and Kurt Lewin's field theory, which suggests the field as a practical framework for researching divorce, guided this study. The research questions were as follows: How do working-class/middle-class African American men describe their experience with divorce? How do participants describe their initial understanding of the divorce process? How do participants describe the level of social support they received during the divorce process? How do participants describe the effect divorce had on their sense of self-actualization (motivation)? What benefits do participants describe that arose from going through their divorce? The participants were divorced African American men who were married for a minimum of two years. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and cognitive representations. Data was analyzed utilizing Moustakas' (1994) standards for transcendental phenomenology to synthesize the crux of the participants' recollections. Two major themes emanated through data analysis: (a) divorce is a multifarious emotional ordeal that is exacerbated by a lack of knowledge of the divorce process, and (b) elevated levels of diverse post-traumatic growth and self-actualization in the wake of divorce due to high levels of social support. Data analysis revealed three subthemes of the primary theme - a convolution of feelings, a painful and horrific experience, and stress compounded by a negligible understanding of the divorce process. Two subthemes emerged from theme two: the importance of multi-layered social support and self-actualization as evidenced by positive post-divorce transformations.

Keywords: divorce, African American, effects, men, racial, cultural

Dedication

To my father and mother, Roy and Hattie, my wife Angie, my daughters Mikayla, Alaiyah, Lanie, and Janie, and my grandson Tre Jaiden.

Acknowledgments

I must give glory to God and His Son Christ Jesus because of the miracles I have been blessed with since becoming a doctoral candidate at Liberty University. I met and married the woman of my dreams, I received numerous promotions on my job, I became a grandfather to a healthy baby boy, and I completed my coursework and dissertation. I was incredibly blessed by having Dr. Kristy Ford and Dr. Richard Green on my committee. I have been inspired by their incredible knowledge, skill, and experience. What I admire about Dr. Ford and Dr. Green the most are their humility and their love for Christ. I was guided, nurtured, strengthened, and encouraged throughout the entire process. I realize now that if the Lord puts a dream in our hearts we need to move in that direction because the provisions will be supplied at each level of our journey. Liberty University, all the professors I have encountered, and my dissertation committee were God's provisions that brought me to a place of significant personal achievement that glorifies and honors Christ our Lord. As I embark upon my journey as a clinician and educator, I am confident that the Lord will guide me to places where the doctoral degree He assigned to me will be utilized to help others find hope, healing, and inspiration to make Christ their Lord and Savior.

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Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

Chapter One includes the rationale of gaining a deeper understanding of the plight experienced by African American men while going through the process of divorce. This study is necessary to further understand the shared experiences of African American men going through divorce to give a voice to their predicament, which is often exacerbated by racial and cultural factors that are ever present in the lives of minority men (Motley & Banks, 2018). The background section of this chapter is supported by historical, social, and theoretical data that encourages conducting the study to generate the awareness necessary to conduct a larger, well-funded study on the topic. The Situation to Self will identify my motivation in working with the population I have chosen as stemming from my prior experience in an undergraduate internship where I conducted supervised visitation between divorced fathers and their children. The problem statement identifies the decades long gap in research related to the effect the process of divorce has on African American men. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to chronicle the shared experiences of working class/middle class African American men who have gone through a divorce. The significance of the proposed study will expound upon the fact that divorce is a traumatic experience for all involved, including men. The added benefit of using a qualitative study in identifying the common themes that would indicate key factors that promote post-divorce resiliency in the participants is that it would make a significant impact in the lives of divorced African American men. The research questions being utilized that grounded the study are designed to promote the phenomenological approach of having participants describe their experiences with different elements of the divorce process. The modest definitions section in this chapter reflects the simple purpose of this study, which is to chronicle the shared

experiences of working class/middle class African American men who have gone through a divorce.

Background

The institution of marriage represents the fairy tale ending many people dream of. Marriage is supposed to be the experience that shifts a courtship to an eternal partnership that is defined by love and commitment. Sadly today, many marriages end in divorce (Manning & Payne, 2021). Research on marital status focuses largely on the white experience or utilizes white populations as the reference group, providing a limited understanding of the relationship between marital status and health within minority populations such as African Americans (Acosta, 2020). Unfavorable post-slavery experiences for African Americans include poverty, economic inequality, racial bias, high unemployment, and fragmented familial structures (Halloran, 2019). The preceding statement highlights the fact that African American men are affected by systemic challenges that affect their relationships, families, health, and well-being (DeGruy, 2017). Historical, social, and theoretical contexts will be examined in this section that will identify the need to research how African American men describe their experiences with divorce to gain their unique perspective on the subject.

Historical

Historically, marriage has been a foundational component of society. Although current research indicates there has been a decline in U.S. marriages and divorces since 2018 (Reynolds, 2020), and about 50% of marriages in the U.S. end in divorce (Westrick-Payne et al., 2022). Statistics also point to the fact that the divorce rate among African American couples is significantly higher when compared to non-Hispanic Whites (Saunders, 2022). African Americans divorce rate exceeds 50% for first marriages, and 60% for second marriages with

rates increasing for each subsequent marriage (Long, 2010; Smith, 2022). Studies indicate that African Americans marry later and spend less time married than other racial groups (Phillips et al., 2012; Higgs et al., 2018). Further research indicates that African Americans are less likely to enter marriage and are more likely to divorce than their non-Hispanic counterparts (Saunders, 2022). Currently, African Americans have the lowest marriage rates, highest divorce rates, and have more children out of wedlock than any other ethnicity (Raley et al., 2015). Less than one third of African American children are being born to parents who are married and nearly two thirds of African American children will experience the dissolution of their parents' marriage by the time they turn sixteen years of age (White et al., 2022). The focus of current research efforts on the state of African American marital issues has led to decades of overrepresentation of African American men as unwed parents, unemployed, and incapable of shouldering familial responsibility (Broman, 2005; Cole & Lipscomb, 2022). This study proposes to accurately reflect the perspective of African American males on the effect divorce has on their lives.

Social

African American men face extenuating factors throughout the divorce process that need to be addressed to fully understand how their lived experiences differ among themselves and men of other ethnic groups. For example, the financial implications of divorce favor African American women in the U.S., who statistically have a better level of education and a higher salary than their husbands (Reeves et al., 2016). The cost of divorce is also a factor that can cause distress to African American men (Bauserman, 2012; Halloran, 2019). The dissolution of the nuclear family as well as extended family ties play a major factor in how divorce is perceived by African American men (Smith, 2022). Cross et al. (2018) referred to the significance marital status has in how often assistance is given and received by peers and family. An African

American family is not just a husband, wife, and any children the couple may have. It is a large community where all their relatives and acquaintances are connected (Williams et al., 2020).

Familial relationships play a vital role in shaping a person's well-being across the course of their lives (McGoldrick et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2016). African American men will have to acknowledge the fact that many people will influence their divorce and some significant relationships with extended family members may be lost during the process of separation and divorce.

Theoretical

Divorce necessitates tremendous psychological, social, and economic adjustments in men. There is the loss of intimate marital ties, petitioning of child custody, and the return to living alone. Divorce also has health consequences. Increases in the use of alcohol, nicotine, and illicit drugs as well as hypertension and even suicide can result following divorce (Umberson, 1987; Kabo et al., 2019). Compared with their married counterparts, divorced men are especially at risk. Divorced men have a lower life expectancy and experience a poorer prognosis following a medical diagnosis (Ellis et al., 2020; Mode et al., 2016). There has been a decades long gap in the literature of studies that have focused specifically on the health consequences of divorce among black men (Lawson & Thompson, 1996; Perry, 2013; Kogan et al., 2019). Halloran (2017) identifies cultural trauma, in the form of posttraumatic slave syndrome, as a significant barrier faced by African American males that impedes their social and psychological well-being. Although research that chronicles the plight of African American women and children affected by divorce and absentee fathers, it is a fact that men's health has remained undertheorized, particularly in terms of the gendered nature of African American men's social relations (McKenzie et al., 2018). Divorce is an experience of a traumatic nature, which necessitates a

better understanding of how it affects those who experience it. Studies examining trauma exposure among community samples of African American males indicate significant exposure rates to directly experienced trauma, witnessing trauma, and learning of a traumatic event involving a friend or family member (Kilpatrick et al., 2013). African American men are five times likely to be incarcerated than White American males (Nellis, 2016). Although Assari (2016) states African American men seem to be more resilient than White American men because African Americans are more prepared to cope with adversity, understanding the mental, emotional, and physical responses caused by the divorce process is a worthy research goal. The topic of the lived experiences shared by African American men who have undergone the process of divorce was deemed relevant because of the recent focus on men's health. Centering the focus of the study on the lived experiences of African American men who have gone through the process of divorce could shed light on the importance of conducting a larger study on the subject. Also, the study could shed light on the actual plight of African American men by challenging the overrepresentation of African American men as unfaithful partners, dependent husbands, and derelict fathers.

Situation to Self

My motivation for conducting this phenomenological study resulted from repeated observations of African American men struggling through the process of separation and divorce as they engaged in supervised visitation and anger management classes at the center where I interned to meet undergraduate degree requirements. After each supervised visitation session, counseling session, or anger management class, I realized that there was a large population of African American men who were suffering through the divorce process. With further involvement in the intake process, it became apparent that many of the African American men

who were receiving mandated anger management classes, talk therapy, and supervised visitation with their children were heart broken, angry, disappointed in themselves, and afraid of the direction their lives were headed. This view directly correlates with epistemological assumptions as they encompass people's subjective experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I experienced divorce a few years prior to my internship but retained custody of my children and had them in church and counseling through the entire process. It was as though my plight was different because I felt most African American men would feel relieved if they experienced a divorce because they would not have to shoulder any responsibility for their families any longer, but that was a mistake. As an intern and later as a behavioral health crisis clinician, I became curious about the experiences other African American men had with the divorce process and how they compared to my own. I also wanted to challenge my own bias which was formed by personal recollections of African American male friends and family members who disregarded their familial obligations and the overrepresentation of African American men gladly declining any responsibility towards themselves, their wives, and especially their children in the media. This constitutes a bias that should be acknowledged. I will make every effort to not let this bias influence the outcome of the research.

Problem Statement

To effectively apply trauma-informed post-divorce care on African American men, more peer-reviewed studies are needed to identify what that population expresses as its most significant challenges during the divorce process. Peer-reviewed studies on the effect divorce has on African American men is minimal. The divorce rate among African Americans in the United States has increased significantly in recent years, which means an increasing number of African American men confront problems associated with adjusting to divorce. Contemporary research

efforts centering on the dissolution of African American marriages and families lack insight into the plight of African American men who have experienced divorce. For example, McIntosh (2022) examines spirituality, marital satisfaction, and internalized slavery to understand African American marital relationships in general, but the affect marital dissolution has on African American men is not addressed. Saunders (2022) conducted a study that gave unique insight to effect absent African American fathers had on the marital satisfaction experienced by their adult daughters. Again, this study provided pertinent insight on factors contributing to marital discord and success experienced by the daughters of absentee African American fathers, but little information was given on how marital and family dissolution affected the fathers. It is apparent that all parties suffer when families are broken by divorce. Current studies found in peer-reviewed literature offers detail into the effect divorce and father absence has on African American children regarding their behaviors (Saunders, 2022), education (Bowman, 2014; Creekmur, 2016), and emotional well-being (Chase & Ullrich, 2022). Research detailing the experiences of African American women navigating the process of divorce abound in journals, books, magazines, movies, and scientific studies (Saunders, 2022; Williams et al., 2021). The stories of divorced African American men need to be told. The decades long gaps in literature specifically calling attention to the plight of African American men who have faced the dissolution of their marriages and families is long overdue. What divorce related stressors will emerge from a qualitative study that examines the lived and shared experiences of African American men who have gone through divorce? Providing culturally competent treatment to African American men would mean that a medical doctor, psychiatrist, therapist, and or a pastor would have access to peer-reviewed studies that would point to best practices when working with African American men who find themselves going through the process of a divorce. Divorce is a

trauma and to offer trauma-informed care implies the facilitator has access to peer-reviewed studies that can enhance the effectiveness of their procedures with their clients of a particular demographic nature.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to chronicle the shared experiences of working class/middle class African American men who have gone through a divorce in Hampton Roads, which is comprised of nine independent cities located in Southeastern Virginia. The expression African American men refers to residents of the United States who have origins in any of the black populations of Sub-Saharan Africa or the Caribbean (Merriam-Webster, 2020; Livingston et al., 2013). Divorce is defined as the formal legal dissolution of a legally constituted marriage and is listed as a crisis of family transition from a nuclear structure to a binuclear arrangement (Ahrons, 1980). This study is guided by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development, which states that learning is a social process, because learning has its basis in interacting with other people (Akpan et al., 2020). In a similar manner, Kurt Lewin's field theory augments the foundation of this study because it suggests the field approach may be utilized as a useful conceptual framework for family research in general and for divorce study (Lewin, 1998; Kuo, 1976). A social constructivist perspective in qualitative research centers on the essential role language and culture play in human intellectual development and in how humans perceive the world (Kapur, 2018). Conducting a phenomenological study on the lived experiences reported by working class/middle class African American men who have undergone divorce will aid in increasing awareness of the unique feelings and responses caused by this social trauma which plagues all communities in varying extents.

Significance of the Study

Despite the high rate of divorce among African Americans, there is a lack of research that has examined African American men's perspective of divorce. Gove and Shin (1989) found this fact alarming based on earlier findings that indicated the level of difficulty African American men have with marital and familial dissolution. The research topic was reconsidered by Lawson and Thompson (1996) when they documented specific stressors faced by African American men during and after the divorce process. More recent studies seem to only address African American men's attitudes toward marriage (Perry, 2013), marital satisfaction (Acosta, 2020), and the intricacies of their romantic relationships (Kogan et al., 2019). Divorce involves the cutting of complicated marital and familial attachments, arbitration of custody arrangements, initiating a new daily routine, and making the transition from parenting as a couple to co-parenting in separate households (Chase & Ullrich, 2022). Previous and contemporary research shows the lifestyle changes involved in divorce among African American men has stressful consequences in multiple areas of their lives (Kitson & Morgan, 1990; Halloran, 2019).

Regardless of race and previous health issues, research indicates divorced men manifest higher rates of substance abuse, vehicular accidents, heart disease, diabetes, and behavioral health concerns when contrasted with married men (Lawson & Thompson, 1996; Kabo et al., 2019). Research also indicates the fact that non-custodial fathers are more prone to poorer health outcomes due to a lack of vigilance against behaviors that promote decreased vitality has remained relatively unchanged. (Umberson, 1987; McKay et al., 2021). The decline in health status following divorce is especially significant for African American men because they experience the poorest health status among all racial and gender groups while married African Americans experience higher levels of well-being (Billingsley, 1992; Vaterlaus et al., 2016).

While many studies on African American marriages abound, there is an absence of current studies that have examined African American men's divorce experience. This research is important because if there was to be any proper understanding of how marital dissolution affects men, one could not leave out a populous such as African Americans. Divorce is an experience of a traumatic nature, which necessitates a better understanding of how it affects those who experience it. However, emerging research indicates despite significant trauma imposed by the divorce process, and the fact that African American men are overrepresented as being derelict fathers (Sumo et al., 2022), African American men are persevering in their efforts to fulfill their roles as noncustodial parents (McKay et al., 2021). A recent study examining how African American men are executing their roles as noncustodial parents highlighted the importance of human services programs acknowledging and confronting systemic racism within their organizations that influence their service models was addressed (Yanez & Selekman, 2022). Identifying the experiences of African American men from a variety of backgrounds, which could include religious denomination, gender identity, disability status, past incarceration, poverty, chronic medical conditions, and homelessness, would make it possible to tailor-fit services needed to encourage a more fulfilling experience for non-custodial African American fathers and their children alike (White et al., 2022). While the importance of social connections and strong supportive networks for improving mental health and well-being is well documented, little is known about men's social support networks or how men go about seeking or mobilizing social support (McKenzie et al., 2018).

Understanding the toll divorce has on working class/middle class African American men could provide researchers and therapists with a deeper understanding of the inner workings of the mind of African American men and assist in the creation of new models of counseling theories

that may mitigate adverse outcomes of divorce by utilizing subsequently enhanced evidence-based practices (Ward et al., 2013). Evidenced-based trauma-informed mental health treatments such as cognitive processing therapy (CPT), prolonged exposure (PE), and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) have shown to be effective in treating and reducing the rates of adverse mental and behavioral outcomes for trauma survivors (Hassija & Cloitre, 2015). This study will allow therapists better interaction with their African American male clients based on an increased awareness of the effect divorce has on the well-being of African American men and how the effect of divorce presents in their daily lives.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. How do working class/middle class African American men describe their experience with divorce?

Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology provides a detailed set of processes and procedures in deriving knowledge from a full description of the lived experiences of people in relation to the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). Since the intention of this study is to describe the lived experiences of working class/middle class African American men who have gone through a divorce in Hampton Roads, asking them to give an uncensored description of their experiences is necessary to comprehend the phenomena.

2. How do participants describe their initial understanding of the divorce process as a whole?

Regardless of the community, socioeconomic status encompasses income, educational level, financial certainty, and perceived social class and status (Braveman et al., 2010; Motley & Banks, 2018). The wealth and income disparity that exist between African Americans and White Americans often control who has access to quality medical, mental health, and law services (Kabo et al., 2019). The socioeconomic differences that exist between differing races and ethnicities that may hinder the extent minority participants understand complex legal matters requires that this study examines the participants described understanding of the divorce process.

3. How do participants describe the level of social support they received during the divorce process?

Decades old research describes the positive effects of reliance on family and friends, involvement in church-related activities, participation in social activities, and establishment of intimate heterosexual relationships in reducing the psychological impact of divorce on African American men (Lawson & Thompson, 1996). Current research acknowledges how familial relationships play a vital role in shaping a person's well-being across the course of their lives (Taylor et al, 2016, Acosta, 2020; McKenzie et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2015; Barr et al., 2013). Studies also imply that non-custodial fathers find themselves at higher risk of impaired health outcomes due to a lack of diligence against behaviors that are detrimental to their physical and emotional well-being (McKay et al., 2021). The initial findings indicate the importance of social support during the divorce process, so it is imperative that the participants explain their view of the level of support they received throughout the process.

4. How do participants describe the effect divorce had on their sense of self-actualization (motivation)?

Abraham Maslow is mostly known for his contributions to the field of humanistic through his theory of self-actualization, which is the pinnacle of his theoretical hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1993). History reveals that African Americans have been intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to survive and thrive within and outside of their communities (Jones, 2020). Based on research data that reflects the difficulty experienced by men and women of all races during the divorce process, it is important to ask the participants to describe any intrinsic or extrinsic motivations they experienced because of their divorce.

5. What benefits do participants describe that arose from going through their divorce?

Abraham Maslov developed a term called nadir-experiences to describe instances of tragedy, emotional turmoil, pain, trauma, near death experiences, or suffering that can lead to personal or spiritual growth (Maslow, 1964). Although research indicates divorced men manifest higher rates of substance abuse, vehicular accidents, heart disease, diabetes, and behavioral health concerns when contrasted with married men (Lawson & Thompson, 1996; Hassija & Cloitre, 2015), it is important to note that the phenomena of divorce may have directly or indirectly attributed to beneficial outcomes experienced by the participants (White et al., 2022), thereby making it important to chronicle the described beneficial effects experienced by the participants who are able to articulate them.

Definitions

1. *Nadir-experiences*- This term describes instances of tragedy, emotional turmoil, pain, trauma, near death experiences, or suffering that can lead to personal or spiritual growth (Maslow, 1964).
2. *African American*- This expression refers to residents of the United States who have origins in any of the black populations of Sub-Saharan Africa or the Caribbean (Merriam-Webster, 2020; Livingston et al., 2013).
3. *Sociocultural theory*- This theory suggests that interplay between individuals and society is the key determinant of human development (Vygotsky, 1962).
4. *Field theory*- This theory proposes that behavior is the consequence of the individual and their environment (Lewin, 1935).
5. *Life space*- According to Lewin (1951), life space refers to all the factors that affect an individual's decisions, including their thoughts about their experiences.
6. *Field*- This term refers to life space, the individual, and their behavioral framework or environment (Lewin, 1936).
7. *Social constructivism*- This sociological theory of knowledge focuses on the essential role language and culture play in human intellectual development and in how humans perceive the world (Kapur, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978).
8. *Divorce*- This term refers to the formal legal dissolution of a legally constituted marriage and is listed as a crisis of family transition from a nuclear structure to a binuclear arrangement (Ahrons, 1980).

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to chronicle the shared experiences of working class/middle class African American men who have gone through a divorce in Hampton Roads, which is comprised of nine independent cities located in Southeastern Virginia. The peer-reviewed studies evaluated indicate significant research has been conducted on the topic of the effects of divorce on the African American family, but there are decade-long gaps in the literature that focused primarily on the effect divorce has on African American men. This population was chosen based on the lack of peer-reviewed literature with data addressing the unique perspective of African American men and the internal and external barriers faced by African American men when it comes to assessing and addressing their concerns after experiencing divorce, which is a recognized as a significant traumatic event. By using a multi-layered system of qualitative research operations consisting of clustering, reduction, and elimination, to synthesize the crux of the participants' recollections, qualitative research studies are designed to examine probable causes for observed disparities discovered among existing groups through the emergence of common themes through the process of coding (Frey, 2018). The use of a qualitative approach is supported by the fact that it allows a more subjective look into the shared lived experiences of individual African American men who have experienced divorce. Therefore, a phenomenological study must be performed to chronicle the lived experiences of African American men who have experienced divorce to extract the common themes that represent their shared experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

The literature review will begin by examining the theoretical framework that will be utilized to guide the study. Because the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to chronicle the shared experiences of working-class/middle-class African American men who have gone through a divorce in Hampton Roads, Virginia. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development and Lewin's field theory were selected as the framework. The theoretical framework section will examine the research of the important thinkers, experts, and theorists in this field of study that aided in clarifying the style of research chosen to utilize in conducting this study. The framework is followed by a concentrated review of related research on the topic will tie together the work of notable past and contemporary researchers who have contributed to the literature on the effects of divorce on men in general, and more specifically, the internal and external challenges voiced by African American men in those studies. This study will utilize seminal studies that were published more than ten years where appropriate due to the limited number of peer-reviewed studies undertaken that strive to identify how African American men experience divorce. Challenges that emerged from reviewing peer-reviewed literature available on the topic of divorce concerning African American men include physical, social, financial, and psychological well-being. Finally, the literature review will conclude with an acknowledgement of the research that has been completed on the topic and a reference to the gaps in literature recognized while researching the topic of the proposed study. The primary goal of the literature review is to indicate how this proposed study will specifically address gaps in the existing literature, which all center around a lack of perspective that can be accomplished through a transcendental phenomenological approach. As noted above, the literature review will begin

examining the theoretical framework utilized to perform the study based on the limited literature that was found that addressed the impact divorce has on the lives of African American men from their own unique perspective.

Theoretical Framework

Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development and Kurt Lewin's field theory were utilized for the theoretical, or conceptual, framework for this study. Briefly stated, Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development highlights the essential roles language and culture play in human intellectual development and in how humans perceive the world (Kapur, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). This theory suggests the significance of capturing accurate data from participants in a study by encouraging and promoting the interweaving of language and culture into their perception of experienced phenomena. Kurt Lewin's field theory suggests the field approach may be utilized as a useful conceptual framework for family research in general and for divorce study (Kuo, 1976; Lewin, 1935). Since the current study's topic centers around divorce and its effect on African American men, combining the two theories will ensure the best results possible in accurately relaying the shared experiences of African American men who have faced the trauma of divorce and or dissolution of the family.

Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development

Social constructivism is a learning theory propounded by Lev Vygotsky in 1968 (Kapur, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). Lev Vygotsky highlighted the essential roles language and culture play in human intellectual development and in how humans perceive the world (Vygotsky, 1962). Simply stated, knowledge is constructed through interaction with others. In fact, social constructivists theorize that people create and form their society primarily through their conversations and storytelling. The concept of social constructivism has many characteristics.

Seeking knowledge on how certain phenomena affect the lives of a distinct population involves an accurate understanding of the best process for extracting the knowledge from the group.

Understanding the fact that knowledge is constructed and best conveyed by those who have lived through a certain phenomenon is key (Vygotsky, 1978). Also, accepting that knowledge will be uniquely influenced by the cultural experiences of the participants in the study. Identifying and respecting the social factors that impede or enhance the ability of the participants in the current study to share their experiences adds to the depth of knowledge gathered about the effects of the phenomenon. All aspects of the person are connected and learning communities should be inclusive and equitable.

Barr et al. (2013) aligned with Vygotsky by highlighting the need for a multidimensional assessment of relationship quality for understanding the link between relationships and health to quantify the effect divorce has on the mental health of African American men. Notably, Leopold (2018) identified gender differences in the outcomes of divorce. Early studies concluded that post-divorce adaptation favors women (Leopold, 2018). Marriage and a higher level of income and education are protective factors in the African American community for depression (Shim et al., 2012). Since men experience greater health gains from marriage, divorce puts them at a higher risk of poor mental and physical health (Leopold, 2018). Social constructivism holds fast to the concept that numerous realities and truths exist, and that people utilize language as a medium to share experiences that help make sense of their world (Vygotsky, 1978).

Understanding the importance of the effect culture, gender, and community norms have on African American men, the researchers and theorists examined thus far dictate the need to conduct qualitative research that will utilize open-ended questioning to determine the impact divorce has had on African American men. The next section will explain the rationale of utilizing

Kurt Lewin's Field Theory as the secondary framework needed to create an accurate reflection of the shared experiences of African American men who have gone through the divorce process

Kurt Lewin's Field Theory

It must be noted that Kurt Lewin was referred to as one of the leading psychologists of his generation. Edgar Schein (2015) referred to Lewin as the "intellectual father of contemporary theories of applied behavioral science, action, research, and planned change" (p.2). Lewin's field theory states that it is possible to understand, predict, and provide the basis for changing the behavior of individuals and groups by constructing a life space comprising the psychological forces influencing their behavior at any given point in time (Kuo, 1976; Lewin, 1936). Life space includes only those aspects of the environment that are perceived at some level, either consciously or unconsciously, by the individual (Lewin, 1998; Lewin, 1951). It must be noted that Wheeler (2008) identified life space as the total physical environment a person subjectively experiences. The life space concept of the field theory adds to the relevance of its use in a transcendental phenomenological study.

Kurt Lewin's field theory has been a popular conceptual framework for divorce study for over four decades (Kuo, 1976). Lewin suggested the best approach to use in analyzing a person is to study their whole environment (Lewin, 1951). Lewin's field theory argues that behavior is derived from the totality of coexisting and interdependent forces that impact a person or group (Burnes & Cooke, 2013). Myroniuk et al. (2021) harmonized with Lewin by stating that determining the complex relationship between divorce and health outcomes requires assessing the marital histories and health of individuals who have lived long enough to experience divorce and or widowhood. Lewin was greatly influenced by Gestalt psychology, which identified the importance of subjective experience, or individual perception of the phenomena encountered (Burnes & Cooke, 2013;

Lewin, 1935). Utilizing Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development, which highlights the essential roles language and culture play in human intellectual development and in how humans perceive the world, and Kurt Lewin's field theory, which suggests the field approach may be utilized as a useful conceptual framework for family research in general and for divorce study, will enhance the effectiveness of the study in ascertaining pertinent data needed to answer the research questions designed for this study. The following section contains a review of the related research on the topic will tie together the work of contemporary researchers who have contributed to the literature on the effects of divorce on working class/middle class African American men.

Related Literature

A review of literature related to the study must clarify the theoretical framework of the study and how it was formed. Epistemological assumptions led to the formation of this study during an undergraduate internship opportunity working primarily with families who needed supervised visitation so the fathers, who were more often the noncustodial parents, would be able to have time with their children. I learned a great deal from that experience and recognized the importance of studying the subjective experiences of those men as they attempted to stabilize despite the emotional turmoil they faced before, during, and after their divorces (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Muhammad (2017) listed marriage as the foundation of African American families, and even though there has been considerable research made in identifying the plight of the Black family, little research has explored the negative factors associated with marital dissolution for African American men from their own unique perspective. Embarking upon this study illuminated the minimal amount of qualitative peer-reviewed studies capturing the shared or lived experiences of African American men who have experienced a divorce. Much of the literature focuses on African American men's attitudes toward marriage (Perry, 2013), marital

satisfaction (Acosta, 2020), and the intricacies of their romantic relationships (Kogan et al., 2019). There were a handful of seminal studies published decades apart that have a profound influence in the field of qualitative studies on African American men and their experiences with marital dissolution (Gove & Shin, 1989; Lawson & Thompson, 1996; Perry, 2013; Kogan et al., 2019). One study directly addressed the struggles encountered by divorced African American men, but the study was published in 1996 (Lawson & Thompson, 1996). This was a pivotal study because it not only focused on the perceptions of African American men, but it also identified common themes of stressors and effective coping strategies through conducting a qualitative study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Related research on the topic of the impact of divorce on African American men must include a variety of topics. Researchers taking a narrow view of the plight of African American men have chosen to focus on topics generated by the media instead of focusing on the feelings and experiences of the men who have undergone a variety related trauma including family dissolution and divorce. Challenges that emerged from reviewing peer-reviewed literature available on the topic of divorce concerning African American men include physiological, social, financial, and psychological well-being (Wright and Price, 1986; McKay et al., 2021; Mowbray, 2018; McLanahan et al., 2013). The research will identify common themes found in the experiences of the African American men interviewed. The reviewed literature aided in understanding what was needed to be accomplished through my research efforts. Contemporary voices need to be added to the narrative of how divorce affects the lives of African American men. African American families, especially African American men, find themselves constantly at odds with strongly entrenched institutional stereotypes. Racism, oppression, and human rights violations persist based on the influence of social, political, and unfair economic factors. Taylor

et al. (2019) identifies the cause of the dysfunctional family units and communities African Americans are plagued by is the fact they experienced indignities that have made it incredibly difficult to overcome. The literature review will discuss the common threads that appeared through the preliminary research on the topic, which primarily focuses on the pre-divorce and post-divorce challenges faced by African American men (Andersen & Blosnich, 2013; Vogt Yuan, 2014). The literature review will also identify studies that identify resilience and recovery as being a probable outcome for a select group of African American men who have experienced divorce and what factors contributed to favorable outcomes (White et al., 2022; McKenzie et al., 2018).

Physiological Challenges Worsened by Divorce

African American men face significant health related challenges that can be worsened by divorce. African American men suffer worse health than any other racial group in the U.S. Having the lowest life expectancy combined with the highest death rate, African American men find themselves at a disadvantage when it comes to health when compared to men and women of other racial and ethnic groups (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2017). Health disparities faced by African American men can be tied to cultural barriers, poor health education, poverty, access to health insurance, racial discrimination, high rates of incarceration, unemployment, and the lack of social services and medical practices having the ability to understand the complexity of rendering services to African American men (Cushing et al., 2015).

Health Disparities

Statistical data indicates one of the reasons why past studies and contemporary studies focused on the health disparities experienced by African American men (Mode et al., 2016; Ellis et al., 2020). Research data indicate men from other racial groups in the U.S. live almost ten

years longer than African American men (Ellis et al., 2020; Sohn, 2016). Also, almost fifty percent of African American men are considered overweight, with nearly forty percent of African American men being classified as obese. African American men have higher rates of prostate cancer, diabetes, and heart disease than the males of other racial and ethnic groups (Cushing et al., 2015). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2017) lists the following as health disparities producing higher death rates experienced by African American men: heart disease (27%), cancer (20.2%), unintentional injuries (7.9%), homicide (5.0%), stroke (4.9%), diabetes (4.3%), chronic lower respiratory diseases (3.2%), kidney disease (2.6%), septicemia (1.8%), and hypertension (1.6%). The figures indicate an issue that cannot be ignored by researchers. Health disparities between African American men can affect how they experience new traumatic events, especially divorce.

Existing health disparities between African American men and men from other racial and ethnic groups commands attention from the media, which, in turn, causes research to focus on health disparities experienced by African American men rather than their own narrative of what they experienced because of the divorce process (Deaton & Lubotsky, 2003; Myers et al., 2015). Understanding that there may be physiological challenges reported to me by way of interviewing the participants of the current study, I find it important to analyze the research produced by studies indicating divorce worsens the health of this marginalized group of society. Focusing on the seminal study produced by Lawson and Thompson (1996), I will discuss the significance of acknowledging the physiological challenges faced by African American men because of divorce and family dissolution and the narrow perspective taken by some researchers in only focusing on health disparities and excluding the feelings of African American men in their reports.

Drawing from the work of Lawson and Thompson (1996) as a pivotal study in the field of the effects of divorce on African American men appears to be the best choice I have when considering research on the topic. This study addressed the topic of how African American men adjusted to divorce by utilizing data obtained from in-depth interviews and over two years of participant observations. Taking the qualitative approach in this type of study allowed the researchers to gain a depth of knowledge from the study that distinguishes it from decades of research after it (Creswell, 2018). Showing that physiological challenges were a significant factor concerning African American men experiencing divorce, twenty-seven out of the thirty participants involved in the study indicated they had significant physiological symptoms associated with their divorce including migraine headaches, hypertension, ulcers, heart attacks, and weight loss (Lawson & Thompson, 1996).

Higher Mortality Rates for Divorced Men

Supporting research indicates mortality rates are higher for unmarried individuals. This fact is relevant to the study because research also implies that marriage is more beneficial to men. Umberson (1987) conducted research on the role social integration and social control plays in mitigating the effects of improved health outcomes in married men and poorer health in unmarried and or divorced men. This quantitative studied resulted in key indicators of why divorce proves to be physiologically challenging for men in general. The study pointed to the fact that married men generally get more assistance with controlling their physical health from their wives, certain social supports outside of but associated with the marriage are in place that aid married men in controlling their health, and that the transition for men from being married to being divorced is associated with a host of negative behaviors (McKenzie et al., 2018). Although I find this information helpful in researching the topic, two aspects of what is needed to round

out the research are missing. First, the minority perspective is missing. Research identifying physiological challenges associated with divorce should include a diverse perspective, especially based upon the existing health disparities faced by African American men. Second, conducting a quantitative study satisfies the need to generate reliable statistical data in a general sense, but obtaining the depth and fullness of over two thousand participants would be highly improbable. Divorce studies focusing on gender related differences in the consequences should utilize a qualitative approach to discover intricate details missed by surveys that do not utilize open-ended questions.

Research has shown how being married and maintaining the role of being a custodial parent has positive a positive effect on the health and well-being of men in general, while divorced men have been shown to suffer significantly detrimental declines in health and well-being (Kabo et al., 2019; McKenzie et al, 2018). Research also indicates the fact that non-custodial fathers are more prone to poorer health outcomes due to a lack of vigilance against behaviors that promote decreased vitality has remained relatively unchanged. (Umberson, 1987; McKay et al., 2021). The decline in health status following divorce is especially significant for African American men because they experience the poorest health status among all racial and gender groups while married African Americans experience higher levels of well-being (Billingsley, 1992; Vaterlaus et al., 2016).

Understanding the importance of how divorce affects African American men must be gained by examining what current peer-reviewed studies state as being barriers to good health by divorced men. Knowing that feelings of loss are felt when something of immense value is lost or taken away, which in many cases can cause illicit maladaptive behaviors, directed me towards the research conducted by Perry (2013), who focused on African American's men's attitudes

towards marriage and the circumstances and experiences that influence their attitudes. Although the study took the form of a mixed-methods project, both quantitative and qualitative results showed the importance of the ideals learned from family of origin as having a major influence on how African American men view marriage. It was determined from the qualitative portion of the study that African American men whose families of origin provided them with positive examples of marriage valued marriage a great deal more than those who had negative examples of marriage. Perry (2013) acknowledged the limited amount of literature available on African American men's view of marriage. The study also revealed that the available literature on the subject produced mixed results. One result being that older, more affluent African American men placed a higher value on marriage than men of other races, while the other result stated that married African American men were less satisfied with their lives when compared to their single, separated, divorced, and widowed peers (Perry, 2013). Traits of women that were shown to be of high value were identified as honesty, strength, open-mindedness, and shared values. These traits tie into the research completed by Umberson (1987) pointing to the fact that married men generally get more assistance with controlling their physical health from their wives, and how losing a close relationship by way of marital dissolution would have significantly adverse health consequences (Kabo et al., 2019; McKenzie et al, 2018).

African American men are affected by systemic challenges that affect their relationships, families, health, and well-being (DeGruy, 2017). There has been a decades long gap in the literature of studies that have focused specifically on the impact of divorce on African American men from their perspective (Lawson & Thompson, 1996; Perry, 2013; Kogan et al., 2019). Past and recent research indicate significant detrimental health consequences such as increases in the use of alcohol, nicotine, and illicit drugs as well as hypertension and even suicide can result

following divorce (Umberson, 1987; Kabo et al., 2019). The studies considered in this section reveal that compared with their married counterparts, divorced men in general are especially at risk of having a lower life expectancy and experience a poorer prognosis following a medical diagnosis (Acosta, 2020). The following section will identify the research examining the social issues created by divorce and how important it is for this proposed study to fill in the gaps located in current literature that expounds upon the shared experiences of African American men who have experienced divorce.

Social Issues Created by Divorce

The loss of intimate marital ties, petitioning of child custody, and the return to living alone. This accurately describes the way many men in general experience divorce. African Americans have the highest percentage of single-parent homes. The dissolving of African American marriages in the United States is considerably higher than those in other Western nations (McGoldrick et al., 2015). Adding to the low marital rate and highest divorce rate in the nation are the stories of disillusioned and broken African American husbands and fathers who have altered social identities due to their divorces. It is well-known fact that marital status is one of the critical factors in self-identification and how others view men. The social issues created by divorce was another factor that has been extensively researched because of the perceived difficulty men find in establishing social networks during and after the divorce process. As I searched for peer-reviewed studies that chronicled the shared experiences of divorced African American men, I found a lack of social support popping up as a recurring theme, so I decided to examine it further.

Traumatic Effect of Divorce

Divorce is a traumatic event. One study proved that beyond mental disorders, lack of social support and stressful life events have also been shown to affect an individual's mental health and psychosocial well-being (Grace et al., 2016). Hansson et al. (2012) indicated ethnocultural minorities experience greater exposure to the negative effects of some social determinants of health, such as income insecurity and social isolation. Fischer and Beresford (2015) identified the lack of research on personal support networks changing over time due to network disruption caused by life events. This research supported the fact that women, when compared to men, usually preserve more personally supportive networks after experiencing divorce. As explained earlier, African American men are especially vulnerable to hypertension, which has been proven to be affected by levels of social support received before, during, and after a divorce (Cornwell & Waite, 2012). The social support African American men receive from their wives is eliminated once they have started the divorce process. When many men are depressed, they talk to their wives whereas many wives will seek professional help. Seeking emotional support from someone other than their wives was shown to be an arduous task for many men. Taylor et al. (2015) highlighted the impact of low levels of social support and negative social interactions as having a major influence on the level of depression experienced by African American men. Although the exchange or sharing of resources were proved to be a significant factor in marital relationships among older African American couples, social support was equally regarded as a critical factor in health contexts and outcomes (Kabo et al., 2019).

While deepening the research on the topic of social issues that African American men face when confronted with marital dissolution and how they describe it, a recent study detailing the effect internalized racism has on African American marital satisfaction came to light (McIntosh, 2022). This quantitative study addressed the effects internalized racism has on

African Americans and how spirituality and strong marriages are factors that can mitigate the effects of internalized racism (McIntosh, 2022). I found it interesting that when the researcher discussed marriage in the African American community, there were few articles listed within the last four to five years that had the data needed to support their study. I too have had that issue. Also, I found it interesting how the researcher pitted happy marriages and spirituality as weapons against internalized racism. I then understood the importance of acknowledging the debilitating effects of internalized racism on African American men who have gone through a divorce. The study stated that African American marriage serves a safeguard for emotional well-being of both husband and wife (McIntosh, 2022). Just as the statistical data indicated the health disparities that plagued African American men in general, I would like to propose that internalized racism and its effects plague the social status of African American men, and once divorced, has a significant effect on their perceived positions in society (Vaterlaus et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2019). The focus of current research efforts on the state of African American marital issues has led to decades of overrepresentation of African American men as unwed parents, unemployed, and incapable of shouldering familial responsibility (Broman, 2005; Cole & Lipscomb, 2022; Ducille, 2018).

Nuclear Family to Binuclear Family

The final review focuses on the effect the change in the family structure has on men. The study agreed that custodial arrangements are the most studied theme when considering the social outcomes of divorce (Vogt Yuan, 2014; Gauthier & Moody, 2014). Fathers, who are usually the non-custodial parent, face significant challenges in maintaining a close relationship with their children (Vogt Yuan, 2014; Creekmur, 2016). One phenomenological study focused on the perception of non-residential African American fathers in the academic progress of their male

children. I found this article relevant because of its phenomenological approach in capturing the essence of the feelings of the fathers towards their sons' educational progress, which seemed to border on getting information from the mother and monitoring their sons' progress for themselves (Creekmur, 2016). Bowman (2014) conducted a similar study addressing the role of divorced fathers in the education of their middle school or high school child. The fact that the researcher utilized qualitative methods to ascertain that fathers accepted a large responsibility for being knowledgeable about their child's education and the in-depth descriptions of their feelings toward their role as non-custodial parents exemplified the richness and depth of qualitative research that I am seeking to conduct. Research has suggested that fathers may suffer more than mothers in this domain, particularly when they lose, or fear losing, contact with children (Bauserman, 2012; Bowman, 2014). The study was important based on the role a decrease in the time spent with offspring can have on the health of a man who has gone through divorce. This research study highlights the gap in literature because of its lack of cultural relevancy and lack of knowledge it generated that could be used in minority populations.

The social aspect of the toll divorce has on men in general has been the focus of the studies researched for this section. The social stigma that comes with divorce has not been examined to the degree that satisfies the need for insight on the plight of men who experience divorce. Studies specifically addressing the social ramifications of divorce on minority men would add to the knowledge base needed to effectively address the concerns of men from all races and ethnic groups. This proposed study is further supported by the lack of current studies directly addressing the perceptions of African American men who have faced this specific trauma, and as mentioned in this section, the addition of social issues and stigma to lives that have been proven to be burdened by existing disparities in our culture and in the world. The

following section of the literature review will address an additional yet equally significant theme that emerged from my research on the topic, and that is how divorce was indicated as factor that worsens the financial hardships experienced by African American men.

Financial Hardships Worsened by Divorce

African American men face extenuating factors throughout the divorce process that need to be addressed to fully understand how their lived experiences differ among themselves and men of other ethnic groups. For example, the financial implications of divorce favor African American women in the U.S., who statistically have a better level of education and a higher salary than their husbands (Reeves et al., 2016). The cost of divorce is also a factor that can cause distress to African American men (Bauserman, 2012; Halloran, 2019). With these factors in mind, the basis for the research was the preexisting socioeconomic disparities that exist in the lives of African American men in general to get a better idea of how those forces exacerbate pre- and post-divorce hardships of the financial nature. To do so, an examination of the seminal study championed by Reeves et al. (2016), and additional studies by conducted by past and present researchers, will be examined because of its contribution to the literature informing researchers on the large race gaps in multidimensional poverty.

Economic and Educational Inequality

African Americans represent a grossly unequal amount of poverty and low education in the U.S., with the poverty rate for African Americans slightly over 26%, while only registering a little over 10% for non-Hispanic Whites (Mode et al., 2016). This quantitative study addressed the interplay between neighborhood economic status, income inequality, and mortality. Although qualitative studies are the primary basis for the current research on the topic of divorce among

African American men, I understand the value of all research in identifying themes that correlate the effect divorce has on the lives and well-being of this population. For example, the study revealed data that suggests African American men with household incomes below 125% of the federal poverty level had the highest risk of mortality compared to other race, sex, and poverty groups in the study (Mode et al., 2016). Additional factors such as the unemployment rate for African American men being twice that for non-Hispanic White men (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016) and the fact that African Americans in general still experience a higher degree of segregation in urban centers in the U.S. than any other economically challenged racial groups (Bailey, 2019) speaks volumes to the degree of financial hardships African American men face upon marital dissolution.

Common factors that contribute to economic distress among divorced men have been generalized as centering around locating and maintaining a new residence while attempting to pay court ordered alimony and child support payments (Wright & Price, 1986; Sumo et al., 2022). Peer-reviewed literature has been published containing qualitative and quantitative data that documents the challenges faced by men facing the economic aftermath of divorce (Wright & Price, 1986; Gove & Shin, 1989; Kitson & Morgan, 1990; Aughinbaugh et al., 2013; Manning et al., 2021; Westrick et al., 2022). I still find it necessary to address the role disproportionate economic disparities have in the lives of African American men by expounding on research centered on disadvantage and multidimensional poverty. The impact of multidimensional poverty on African American men can severely impede their ability to strive financially after they have gone through a divorce. Mode et al. (2016) identified poverty as a condition that goes beyond a person's income, even though that plays an integral part of the dilemma faced by many minorities. An improved model of poverty suggests that poverty has a minimum of five

dimensions that include low household income, limited education, no health insurance, low-income area, and unemployment (Mode et al., 2016). Data from the study pointed to the fact that most African Americans and Hispanics are disadvantaged on at least one dimension, while most non-Hispanic Whites are not. Additionally, African Americans were twice as likely to be disadvantaged on two or more dimensions, three times as likely to be disadvantaged on three dimensions, and more than four times as likely to be disadvantaged on four or more dimensions (Mode et al., 2016). Examining how each of the five dimensions could affect the experience African American men have with divorce is vital to understanding why financial strain was repeatedly cited as a significant hardship in the literature.

Lower Household Income

Low household income has been identified as a staple of inequality studies focusing on African American families and particularly African American men. Although the African American population continues to rise, with the latest figures reporting over 48 million African Americans in the U.S., incomes for African Americans have been not equitably reflected in those numbers. For example, as recently as 2018, the annual median income of African Americans reached \$41,361, which was significantly below the national average of \$61,937, and drastically below non-Hispanic White median income of \$70,462 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Focusing on the level of income disparity between minorities in the U.S. during that same year, it was reported that Asian Americans had an average median income of \$87,194 and Hispanics had a median income of \$51,450 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The only racial group indicated as having low median incomes comparable to African Americans in that year were Native Americans, but their median income was slightly higher, registering as \$41,882 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). African American men are more likely to have the double disadvantage of low

income and joblessness in comparison to their non-Hispanic White counterparts. Although figures from 2019 indicate a lower poverty rate of 18.8% for African Americans and a higher median income of \$45,438, all other racial U.S. groups experienced correlating decreases in poverty and increases in median income that kept African Americans at the bottom of the chart (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Additional figures from the same year identified 21% of African Americans living below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Low income was shown to be a significant fact causing strain to African American men going through a divorce and limited education ties into the plight of multidimensional poverty as well.

Limited Education

Limited education has had a significant influence on the level of poverty experienced by African Americans, even though studies indicate a rise in high school completion rates since 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). In fact, graduation rates were shown to increase from 67% to 78% in just six years. During the same six-year period, between 2010 to 2017, postsecondary educational achievement among African Americans increased from 18% to 22% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). One fact that stood out to me was that the rate of educational attainment increases did not remove the disparity that exists between African Americans and non-Hispanic Whites, who have correlating educational rates of 93% high school graduation and 36% bachelor's degree completion (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). In the lower-wage service sector, where African American men would have a better opportunity of gaining employment due to their lower educational levels, it was reported that African American men receive fewer job offers than any other race/gender group as job applicants due to discriminatory hiring practices (Reeves et al, 2016; Oka, 2015). Simply stated, the lower educational attainment of African American men, relative to both non-Hispanic White men and African American women, reduces their earnings

levels and employment relative to both groups (Mode et al., 2016; Higgs et al., 2018). The facts clearly indicate African American men experiencing divorce face unfavorable odds due to the multidimensional poverty factor of lower education, which may inhibit their earning potential before and after their divorce. Another factor listed as a part of the multidimensional construct of poverty was a lack of health insurance.

Lack of Insurance

African American and Hispanic individuals in the U.S. are more likely to be uninsured throughout adulthood than non-Hispanic Whites (Sohn, 2017). Socioeconomic factors that favor high uninsurance rates, such as lower-income and unemployment, are more prevalent among African American men. High uninsurance rates for African American men can be to data that shows this group accepts jobs with lower income and no health benefits offered. The catch is that the lower income jobs usually place African Americans beyond the allotted income requirements for public assistance but not enough income for private insurance. The fact that private health insurance is usually tied to employment and marriage places African American men and women at a disadvantage because they have higher rates of unemployment and lower rates of marriage when compared to their non-Hispanic White counterparts (Aughinbaugh et al., 2013). Triggering events, as discussed by Peters et al. (2014), were defined as job loss, changing jobs, and divorce were also connected to insurance loss. Sohn (2017) explains individuals with higher income, full-time employment, and greater educational attainment usually have shorter periods without insurance during their adult lives, which is in stark contrast to the experience of African American men according to the same study. Identifying the role lack of insurance plays as a dimension of poverty experienced by African American men highlights their vulnerability when

faced with traumatic events such as divorce. Another dimension listed as a contributor to poverty was neighborhood economic status.

Research into neighborhood economic status indicates a lull in racial segregation towards African Americans and an increase in income and residential segregation (Oka, 2015). The influence of neighborhood economic status can be direct, through violent crime or walkability, or indirect, through discrimination or social position (Mode et al., 2016). Cushing et al. (2015) identifies the impact neighborhood economic status on African American families are exacerbated by their exposure to crime and stress, limited access to health care and healthy foods, proximity to toxic materials, and the lack of consistent city services such as trash removal that may lead to dangerous levels of pest and rodent populations. The limiting nature of residing in poor urban areas places economic difficulties on African Americans as a whole. African American men going through a divorce face struggle when confronting all five dimensions of poverty, and the last of which to be discussed is unemployment.

Disproportionate Rate of Unemployment

The unemployment rate for African American men is two times the rate for non-Hispanic White men (Mode et al., 2016; White et al, 2022). Data as far back as six years indicated over a third of prime age African American men were without work (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). African American men experience less upward and more downward mobility over time than any other race/gender group in the U.S. due to their weak employment and earnings relative to other race/gender groups (Chetty et al., 2019). Factors that have been deemed as causes for lower employment and earnings of African American men include lower education, skills, work experience, discrimination, social/spatial isolation, lower marriage, child custody rates, impaired health, crime, incarceration, and child support (Wright & Price, 1986; Schmillen & Umkehrer,

2017). According to Bailey et al. (2019), recent studies show that among African Americans, those with socioeconomic stress are less likely to report psychological symptoms or remain compliant with initiated treatment. Those findings indicate the impact socioeconomic stress can have on the decision-making ability of African American men before, during, and after a divorce (Mode et al., 2016; Wright & Price, 1986; Higgs et al., 2018). As previously mentioned, during an undergraduate internship opportunity as a men's group peer specialist and coach with a local mental health agency, I witnessed African American men struggle with socioeconomic stress and watched as African American men ceased attending group sessions which enabled them to participate in supervised visitation based on the internal and external pressures related to divorce. The reason why this proposed study has its basis in social constructivism is due to the importance of interacting with divorced men in the African American community to gain in-depth knowledge of the impact of divorce has on their lives (Akpan et al., 2020; Andrews, 2012; Creswell, 2018; Neubauer et al., 2019; Teherani et al., 2015; Tuffour, 2017; Stenfors et al., 2020). In the following section, I will identify research in the field of divorce which constitutes divorce as a significant factor in exacerbating psychological duress in African American men based on their predisposition to behavioral health concerns and the persistent degree of disparity present in their acquisition of mental health services.

Psychological Challenges Exacerbated by Divorce

Divorce has been deemed as being more stressful than losing a spouse, family member, or close friend in death (Gove & Shin, 1989; Fischer & Beresford, 2015; Leopold, 2018). Divorce is a significant trauma that involves a life partner so it is natural that feelings of grief and despair would arise in men and women experiencing this unnatural phenomenon (Hankerson, 2011; Hoag, 2019; Ghafoori et al., 2014; Kitson & Morgon, 1990). What makes the

experience even worse for men is that research indicates many men attempt to skip the grieving period after a divorce, which means that they do not confront their feelings of loss, shattered plans, and altered life plan as a single man versus being a husband, and or, family man (Bauserman, 2012; Hoag, 2019; Manning & Payne, 2021). African American men face serious barriers to their emotional health even when they are not faced with divorce (Ward & Mengesha, 2013; Williams et al., 2021, Myroniuk et al., 2021). The traumatic nature of divorce only complicates the matter of attempting to skip the grieving process. A reluctance towards seeking professional help and bottling up their emotions leads many African American men into bouts of depression and anxiety.

Stigma Associated with Mental Illness

Although research focused on African Americans with mental illness has been increasing, few researchers have addressed gender and age differences in beliefs, attitudes, and coping (Ward et al., 2013; Lawson & Thompson, 1996, Kitson & Morgon, 1990; Gove & Shin, 1989; Manning & Payne, 2021). Research conducted by Conner et al. (2010) highlights the stigma associated with mental illness continues to be a significant barrier that deters men in the African American community who need mental health services from connecting with providers. I agree with the findings of this study but find issues with the lack of data reflecting the small percentage of African American men who seek and retain psychotherapeutic services pre- and post-divorce. Following the same line of reasoning supported by research into the topic of minority male participation in mental health services, Mowbray (2018) indicated African Americans and Hispanic patients are more likely to quit receiving treatment for mental health disorders at high rates than other races/ethnicities. The findings of that researcher are understandable, but a lack of information that could aid other researchers in explaining the phenomenon is also noticeable.

The importance of the proposed study lies in its implication of the internal barriers faced by African American men that must be faced to receive assistance for mental health needs (Conner et al., 2010; McIntosh, 2022; Ghafoori et al., 2014). However, Jung et al. (2014) stated that even though the Affordable Care Act made it possible, through the provision of federal subsidies to low-income families, for those in need to obtain health insurance coverage, insurance expansion itself will not account for disparities in the quality of care provided by primary care physicians versus psychiatrists (Sohn, 2016). Although the study concentrates on geriatric populations, it was deemed suitable for this study based on the age group of the men who will be allowed to participate in the study. This section can be summarized by stating stigma and race were shown to have a significant impact on the ability of mature African American men in locating and consistently participating in treatment for depression and anxiety, which have been proven to be major psychological factors encountered because of divorce (Bailey et al., 2019; Cornwell, 2012; Halloran, 2019; Jung et al., 2014). It is my hope that the findings from the current proposed research study will supplement the need to conduct larger scale research that aid in augmenting current measures in place African American men with sufficient mental health assistance to increase post-divorce resiliency.

Ghafoori et al. (2014) produced research on trauma-exposed adults and the factors commonly associated with mental health service in impoverished urban areas. The study indicated that lower incomes and lack of college education among Black males was associated with less use of mental health services (Ghafoori et al., 2014) and additional studies conducted by a variety of researchers over the past four decades substantiates their claim (Wright & Price, 1986; Gove & Shin, 1989; Kitson & Morgan, 1990; Aughinbaugh et al., 2013; Manning et al., 2021; Westrick et al., 2022). I appreciated the approach the study took by focusing on trauma-

exposed adults in urban and impoverished areas but found a deficit in data that would explain factors that led to resiliency in those areas. To counterbalance the previous findings of the previous study, I included a study conducted by Shim et al. (2012), which reported the fact that job security was found to be associated with fewer depressive symptoms in African American men than in Caucasians or Hispanic communities (Reeves, 2016; Mode et al., 2016). Both studies highlight the fact that African American males affected by trauma such as divorce are more likely to have mental disorders (Ghafoori et al., 2014; Ward et al., 2013; Lawson & Thompson, 1996, Kitson & Morgon, 1990; Gove & Shin, 1989; Manning & Payne, 2021). African American men have a high suicide rate and is noted as the third leading cause of death in fifteen- to twenty-four-year-olds. Ward and Mengesha (2013) produced research findings that suggested the prevalence of depression among African American men ranges from 5% to 10%, and even though they face several risk factors, there is much evidence indicating low use of mental health services. The findings of the study, as well as current research findings (Motley & Banks, 2018; Kogan et al., 2019; Kabo et al., 2019) highlight low use of mental health services among traumatized African American men. Ghafoori et al. (2014) also participated in a mixed methods study that examined mental health service use among traumatized adults. Barriers to mental health treatment among minorities were examined and qualitative research findings indicated that fear, decreased mental health literacy, helplessness, and psychosocial issues were shown to be serious barriers to mental health treatment (Ghafoori et al., 2014). I did not agree with choosing helplessness as a barrier to receiving assistance with mental health concerns. Feelings of helplessness could have been used to describe one of the barriers faced instead of total helplessness. The studies I selected to review so far consistently indicate the need to

produce further research on the topic of divorce and how it impacts the lives of African American men.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Mersky et al. (2013) conducted a study on the impact of adverse childhood experiences on health, mental health, and substance use in early adulthood of urban minorities. Research has proven that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) increase the risk of poor health-related outcomes in later life, including mental health. Minorities have been shown to have higher incidences of ACEs (Mersky et al., 2013; DeGruy, 2017; Billingsley, 1992). Early familial trauma has been shown to have a significant effect on the lives of children, such as educational attainment, adult mental health, and social-emotional problems (McLanahan et al., 2013; Chase & Ullrich, 2022). Retrospective accounts of ACEs such as abuse and neglect, parental divorce, and household violence were matched to health outcome data gathered from patient medical records and revealed a greater risk for mental health problems such as mood and anxiety disorders (Mersky et al., 2013; Muhammad, 2017; Myers et al., 2015). Recognizing the multiple, simultaneous health issues facing families through a lens of family comorbidity and family multimorbidity may more accurately mirror the lived experiences of many African American families and better elucidate intervention opportunities than previous approaches (Ellis et al., 2020). Greater levels of childhood adversity were associated with poorer self-rated health and life satisfaction, as well as more frequent depressive symptoms, anxiety, tobacco use, alcohol use, and marijuana use (Andersen & Blosnich, 2013; McKay et al., 2021). Past discrimination, adverse childhood family experiences, childhood sexual abuse, other childhood trauma, and chronic stresses all contribute to decreased ability to respond appropriately to dissolution of the marriage (Myers et al., 2015; Creekmur, 2016; Cole & Lipscomb, 2022). The findings indicate

the need to include a line of questioning that addresses the effect ACEs may have played in the impact of divorce on the mental health of African American men. It was made evident that the cumulative effect of lifetime stressors affects resiliency of adult African American males going through a divorce (Myers et al., 2015; Kilpatrick et al., 2013; Vogt Yuan, 2014). Examining literature related to minority men of African descent in the countries of Ontario, Canada (Grace et al., 2016; Hansson et al., 2012) and Malawi (Myroniuk et al., 2021) supports the implication of reduced access to mental health care among minorities and reinforces the need to address current evidence-based practices regarding needed mental health services for minorities and how to make these more accessible. A further examination of seminal studies on the topic of the disparity that exists among African American men with access to mental health services, including societal barriers and self-imposed barriers, will be conducted to solidify the need to conduct a qualitative study on the shared experiences of African American men who have gone through a divorce.

Focusing on the racial differences in symptoms, comorbidity, and treatment for major depressive disorder among African Americans and non-Hispanic White American adults, Hankerson et al. (2011) indicated the lower use of outpatient care for major depressive disorder and greater medical comorbidity, emergency department utilization, and in-patient hospitalization among African Americans suggests that management of major depressive disorder should be highlighted in settings where treatment is more accessible such as primary care settings. I must agree with those findings. Finding new ways to engage African American men in discussing their mental health concerns during their preventive primary care physician visits would go a long way towards enhancing appreciation for available mental health services in their communities. Additional literature states that chronic diseases were defined as conditions

lasting at least three months, requiring ongoing care, and generally not preventable by vaccine or curable by medication (Goodman et al., 2013). Additionally, Bailey et al. (2019) stated African Americans are more likely than their non-Hispanic White counterparts to suffer from prolonged, chronic, and severely debilitating depression with heavy consequences on their level of daily functioning. Including questions that consider treatment modalities utilized by the participants will be a crucial factor in obtaining what proved more effective in reducing the psychological stress caused by divorce.

Post-Divorce Resiliency and Recovery Studies

A significantly older study was reviewed based on the pertinent information it provided on the impact of divorce on the lives of African American men because the study spoke specifically to their perceptions of divorce. This study was also utilized to show a clear gap in the literature concerning the plight of African American men before, during, and after a divorce. The study shows that African American men confront post-divorce stressors of financial strain, noncustodial parenting, child-support stressors, and psychological as well as physiological distress (Lawson & Thompson, 1996). The data indicated divorced African American men experience profound post-divorce psychological distress (Lawson & Thompson, 1996). The data also highlighted the positive effects of reliance on family and friends, involvement in church-related activities, participation in social activities, and establishment of intimate heterosexual relationships in reducing the psychological impact of divorce (Barr et al., 2013; Chambers, 2021; Gregory, 2019; Taylor et al., 2016; Lawson & Thompson, 1996).

Peer Support

Additional research related to the topic indicates peer support as an effective measure to utilize for mental health support among African American men who have experienced divorce.

According to Chambers (2021), it was important for African American men to have a group where they can talk about their challenges and frustrations coping with family matters or racism, while dealing with the stress of a mental health diagnosis like depression or schizophrenia, trauma, or addiction (Cornwell, 2012; Cross et al, 2018). Blending older research and newer research indicates the persistent need to conduct a study on the topic being discussed to address the gaps in the literature. It was surprising to note the fact African American men were more likely to rely on support from family and friends than their non-Hispanic White male counterparts (Taylor et al., 2016; Kabo et al., 2019). Research pointed to guidance and support from mothers of African American men as being their primary source of emotional, physical, and financial support (Taylor et al., 2015). Some of the participants in the study emphasized the importance of forming support groups from other African American male friends who have gone through divorce themselves, which allowed a sense of respect for the advice given that they had experienced similar strain and could suggest strategies in how to cope with the pain and uncertainty caused by divorce (Fischer & Beresford, 2015). Friends were also key in material support such as a place to stay, money, and assistance with co-parenting duties (Cross et al., 2018). I also found research that implied that African American men find strength through spirituality and religious affiliation.

Religion and Spirituality

The importance of African American men expanding their participation within their prospective religious communities was also shown as a significant aid to resiliency and recovery (Coffman et al., 2020). Holland (2016) identified African American communities and places of worship as playing a vital role in the lives of many African Americans' growth and resilience in the face of cultural and social issues. Immersing themselves into the rich religious and cultural

experience of their church was reported by a sizable number of respondents in the study to help stabilize their emotional well-being (Taylor et al., 2016). Research identifies that the fact that many African Americans place a high value on religion and spirituality, and these practices serve as a psychological and social aid for managing stress, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Coffman et al., 2020). Post-divorce assistance in the form of prayer, church socials, men's groups, sermons, and involvement in outreach ministries were viewed as a major source of emotional support by African American men (Gregory, 2019). The study also pointed to African American men looking to the pastor for wisdom and understanding in times of great emotional complexity (Coffman et al., 2020; Cross et al, 2018). Thoughts of suicide and homicide were mentioned as consequences of the emotional turmoil caused by divorce, but in both cases, the insight from the pastor was able to help adjust their thinking and assist the suicidal African American male in the study to seek professional counseling and in-patient psychiatric assistance.

Socialization

Socialization was also shown as a key element of post-divorce recovery and resiliency (Cornwell, 2012). Most of the African American participants in the study were aided by increasing the time they dedicated to their employment activities and self-improvement (Coffman et al., 2020). Taking on part-time work in addition to their full-time jobs, working overtime, and even working two full-time jobs helped many in the group channel their energy into improving their emotional and financial situations (Taylor et al., 2015). African American men were also helped by going back to school to complete their secondary and post-secondary education to improve their marketability in the job force, accomplish their lifetime learning goals, and to fill their time with a meanwhile pursuit (Chambers, 2021). Getting involved in sports again was another avenue chosen by some of the participants, which was a plus because of

the improved physical health benefits and the mental health benefits that came from socialization in team activities (Jones, 2020; Gove & Shin, 1989). The study highlighted how utilizing participant observation allowed the researcher to witness three of the participants attend social events that were designed to raise community awareness on prominent issues (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Even activities such as movie going, looking through bookstores, and visiting museums were all shown to help with recovering from the plight of the stigma of divorce had on many of the participants in the study.

Forming new relationships was also shown to aid in the post-divorce recovery process of African American men (Barr et al., 2013; Kogan et al., 2019; Lawson & Thompson, 1996). Kogan et al. (2019) recognized the difficulty of starting new relationships for men who have gone through a divorce, but it was deemed as one of the most powerful ways of enhancing their resiliency and recovery. Lack of trust in women was shown as a major factor in why African American men were fearful in pursuing committed relationships with women after they went through their divorces (Barr et al., 2013). The study gave insight into the fact that on average, many of the participants were in a committed relationship within a year of their marital dissolution, even though it was in the form of cohabitation (Kogan et al., 2019). The study also identified the desire for a stable family life was the impetus for taking the chance on creating another intense emotional connection with a woman (Vaterlaus et al., 2016; Barr et al., 2013; Kogan et al., 2019). Again, racial stereotyping would propagate the belief that African American are looking for ways to get out of their marriages and familial responsibilities (Taylor et al., 2019). This seminal study, by way of its qualitative approach, was able to extract data from its participants that defy the propaganda media would have many believe.

Summary

The purpose of this literature review was to examine previous studies that specifically expounded upon the impact of divorce on the mental health of African American men. As mentioned earlier in the review, the peer-reviewed studies indicate the fact that there have been many studies conducted on the topic of divorce, and on the mental health of African American men, but there were gaps in the literature that focused primarily on the effect divorce has on the lives of African American men from their own perspective. A significant drop in research that centered on the effects of divorce on African American men over the last two decades is also apparent. Conducting the literature review aided me in formulating innovative ideas towards conducting new research that will add to the knowledge base on the topic.

Gaining a deeper understanding of the feelings experienced by African American men who have gone through divorce provides a distinct and candid glimpse into the lives of a marginalized group of men in society whose joys and ills are often misunderstood, misinterpreted, and misconstrued. It is my hope that by conducting this study I was able to add to the narrative created and expose the heartfelt expressions of men who have not been given a voice when it comes to their emotional and physical pain. By digging into their stories, I hope I made it possible to identify additional avenues towards healing, resilience, and recovery from the woes of divorce. Trauma-informed care dictates that clinicians must be informed of the sociocultural factors that mold and shape clients into the persons sitting in our offices, schools, hospitals, facilities, and precincts. To accomplish my research goals, I will utilize a qualitative approach by conducting a transcendental phenomenological study that will chronicle the shared experiences of working-class/middle-class African American men who have gone through a

divorce in Hampton Roads, which is comprised of nine independent cities located in Southeastern Virginia.

Chapter Three: Methods

Overview

This chapter commences with a concise explanation of my proposed research design choice of transcendental phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology is the framework utilized to construct and support the research questions delineated in this chapter, which are intended to elicit details regarding the shared/lived experiences of African American men who have undergone divorce. The list of research questions is followed by concise explanation of the site of the proposed site of the study and the individuals who will participate in the study. Next, procedures of the proposed study are described, as well as my role as it relates to the chosen site and the participants who will be involved in the study. Data collection and analysis methods will be elucidated. Finally, an explanation of the techniques used to ensure trustworthiness within the study will be expounded upon and ethical concerns will be addressed along with the solutions needed to address them will be provided.

Design

Meeting the research goals of any study requires an understanding of the essential nature of the chosen research design. Qualitative research was chosen as the fitting method to use, and transcendental phenomenology was elected as the preferred methodology to reach the goals of the proposed study.

Qualitative Research Design

To explore the effects of divorce on the lives of African American men, a qualitative study will be utilized. Creswell and Poth (2018) identify qualitative research as being ideal in capturing the experiences of others in detail to gain a full and rich description of the phenomena affected them on a personal level. The qualitative research design was chosen for this study

because purpose of this study is to is to chronicle the shared experiences of working-class/middle-class African American men who have gone through a divorce in Hampton Roads.

Focusing attention on the impact divorce has on the lives of African American men from their own perspective, which, in turn, could result in larger funded research efforts designed to find ways to mitigate that impact by utilizing evidence-based practices (Ward et al., 2013). This qualitative study will provide evidence that will establish the effect one variable, divorce, has on the other, the lives of African American men. Qualitative research studies are designed to examine probable causes for observed disparities discovered among existing groups (Frey, 2018). This qualitative research study will be based on a phenomenological approach, which is an approach to research that endeavors to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it (Teherani et al., 2015).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is used to obtain the essence of the experience of those who have faced a similar phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When research calls for a comprehensive description of the insight and feelings encountered by those participating in a qualitative study, a phenomenological approach is best suited to accurately record and code the data (Hepner et al., 2015). Two principal factors that are distilled from utilizing a phenomenological approach are what was experienced and how it was experienced (Teherani et al., 2015). Neubauer et al. (2019) lists phenomenology as a powerful research strategy that is specifically designed to contend with difficult research problems.

Hermeneutic, or interpretive phenomenology attempts to understand dense layers of human experience that lay beneath conscious awareness and how the individual's world directs this experience (Bynum & Varpio, 2018). Although this type of phenomenological approach

seems ideal in capturing the shared/lived experiences of African American men in detail, hermeneutic phenomenology deems the researcher's opinions as being just as important as their participants, meaning that researcher will be significantly influenced by his own experiences with the phenomenon as he interprets the data, which will lead to co-constructing of meanings (Bynum & Varpio, 2018; Tuffour, 2017). Researching the psychological effect divorce has on African American men is a topic that is certain to prove difficult for me, as a divorced male researcher of African American descent, to maintain an unbiased view of the research and its findings. That is why I have chosen to utilize a transcendental phenomenological approach instead. Utilizing a transcendental approach will allow me to obtain an unbiased description of the new data and safeguard the results by bracketing my personal bias in connection to the phenomena being researched (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Rationalization

Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology provides a detailed set of processes and procedures in deriving knowledge from a full description of the lived experiences of people in relation to the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). It will be easier to code the information gathered through in-depth interviews based on my own experience with the phenomenon. Also, based on the research design chosen, I will be able to ask further questions to probe the feelings of the participants. Since the intention of this study is to describe the lived experiences of working class/middle class African American men who have gone through a divorce in Hampton Roads, asking them to give an uncensored description of their experiences is necessary to comprehend the phenomena.

Research Questions

The following research questions framed this study:

1. How do working class/middle class African American men describe their experience with divorce?
2. How do participants describe their initial understanding of the divorce process as a whole?
3. How do participants describe the level of social support they received during the divorce process?
4. How do participants describe the effect divorce had on their sense of self-actualization (motivation)?
5. What benefits do participants describe that arose from going through their divorce?

Site

The site utilized was the primary office location of Community Complete Home Healthcare (a pseudonym), which serves a client base of over 1,200 clients utilizing home healthcare services such as companionship, routine personal care, wound care, home infusion therapy, and medication management throughout its multiple satellite office locations within a major city in the Hampton Roads. The primary office was chosen as the site of the study based on its proximity to a higher concentration of the target population of the study and its centralized location between the satellite offices located in other major cities in Hampton Roads, Virginia.

Community Complete Home Healthcare, a community-based home healthcare provider with over 1,200 clients, provides an exceptional setting for this study. The participants were divorced African American men chosen from companionship, routine personal care, wound care, home infusion therapy, and medication management clients. The owner of the agency was passionate about the topic of the study and allowed staff participation if interested. Further, interested family members of the clients and staff of Complete Home Healthcare were also allowed to participate in the study. Data was collected using several approaches including

interviewing, cognitive representations, and in-person and online focus groups for those who prefer to participate from the comfort of their own homes. Moustakas' (1994) format for data analysis was utilized which included data horizontalization, theme generation, textural descriptions, and finally structural descriptions.

Participants

The participants for this study were made up of working-class/middle-class African American men who have gone through a divorce in Hampton Roads, which is comprised of nine independent cities located in Southeastern Virginia. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), it is indicative of qualitative research to utilize a sample of an identified population for a chosen study. Keeping that in mind, purposive sampling was used in the study. Not only was purposive sampling shown to be one of the more popular methods used in qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018), but it was also shown to improve the odds of capturing enough data to produce scientifically sound results (Suri, 2011). Also, Guetterman (2015) inferred that purposive sampling maintains that the researcher stays in a reflective state which would allow me to make real-time decisions correlating to the findings and developments produced by my research activities.

The participants were recruited from the population of staff, clients receiving home healthcare services through Community Complete Home Healthcare, and their interested family members. To reduce participant bias and researcher bias in qualitative studies, it is important to be transparent and reflexive about the study, including the sampling process (Polt & Beck, 2020). Potential bias, or any influence that would distort the results of a study, must be examined through critical evaluation of the research questions, data collection, sampling, and choice of location (CASP, 2017). Acknowledging the participants of the study are being selected from a

clinical population mitigates the chances that the study may be deemed not transferable beyond the sample that was studied (Galdas, 2017).

The standards for the study were related to the participants, their marital status, and sample size. Participants only needed to identify as working-class/middle-class African American males between the ages of 20 to 72. The age range limitation ensured the study only had participants who were legally able to enter marriage of their own volition. The participants had to have been married for a minimum of two years before their marriages were terminated. The rationale for the minimum two-year marriage criterion ensured the participants in the study had sufficient experience with marriage to contribute to the data being collected on the effects of dissolving the marriage bond during the study. Finally, to get a good sample size required 10 participants for the study to maximize the odds for data saturation (Suri, 2011). Saturation is a key indicator that a sample is adequate for the phenomenon studied and that data collected has captured the diversification, depth, and subtle distinctions of the issue studied (Hannink & Kaiser, 2021). Saturation reduces redundancy of data and contributes to content validity (Francis et al., 2010). Utilizing 10 participants also allowed for a better mix of participants regarding age, time married, and income level.

Procedures

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Liberty University and approval from the Director of Behavioral Health Services at Community Complete Home Healthcare was obtained before any data collection efforts were made (Appendix A). Upon receiving IRB approval from Liberty University and from Community Complete Home Healthcare, I forwarded my recruitment letters (APPENDIX B) to the director, nurse case managers, and personal care managers at Community Complete Home Healthcare to distribute to their staff, clients, and

interested family members. The staff, clients, and family members who wanted to participate completed the Preliminary Survey Questionnaire form (APPENDIX C) to make certain they met the requirements of the proposed study before receiving consent forms (APPENDIX D).

Nusbaum (2017) highlights the importance of emailing a consent form, to those who identified they would like to participate in the study, containing a full description of the proposed research study, including procedures, risks, participant benefits and rights, and required confidentiality. The clients from Community Complete Home Healthcare who signed and returned the consent letters (APPENDIX D) were utilized as participants in the study. The study focused on chronicling the lived/shared experiences of African American men who have gone through divorce. Data analysis consisted of Moustakas' (1994) format for data analysis was utilized, which included data horizontalization of the participants' experiences with divorce, then theme generation, textural descriptions, and finally structural descriptions. I included epoche, by way of bracketing, or setting aside my beliefs and assumptions, in my data and analysis to mitigate any personal bias that may surface throughout the study.

The Researcher's Role

My motivation for conducting this phenomenological study resulted from repeated observations of African American men struggling through the process of separation and divorce as they engaged in supervised visitation and anger management classes at the center where I interned to meet my undergraduate degree requirements. After each supervised visitation session, counseling session, or anger management class, I realized that there was a large population of African American men who were suffering through the divorce process. With further involvement in the intake process, I came to understand that many of the African American men that were receiving mandated anger management classes, talk therapy, and supervised visitation

with their children were heart broken, angry, disappointed in themselves, and afraid of the direction their lives were headed (Gove & Shin, 1989; Lawson & Thompson, 1996; Perry, 2013; Kogan et al., 2019). This view directly correlates with epistemological assumptions as they encompass people's subjective experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I experienced divorce a few years prior to my internship, but I retained custody of my children and had them in church and counseling through the entire process. As an intern, and later in my current role as a Behavioral Health Crisis Clinician, I became curious about the experiences other African American men had with the divorce process and how they compared to my own (Wright and Price, 1986; McKay et al., 2021; Mowbray, 2018; McLanahan et al., 2013). I also wanted to challenge my own bias which was formed by personal recollections of African American male friends and family members who disregarded their familial obligations and the overrepresentation of African American men gladly declining any responsibility towards themselves, their wives, and especially their children in the media (Taylor et al., 2019).

This constitutes a bias that should be acknowledged. I made every effort to not let this bias influence the outcome of the research. My role as an objective observer is paramount to the success of this study. Creswell and Poth (2018) identify the need to set aside my beliefs and assumptions in my data collection and analysis processes by way of bracketing. My plan is to keep a journal in a secure location to vividly describe my experiences, including my assumptions and biases, during the data collection and analysis processes.

Data Collection

Creswell and Poth (2018) list the principal method of data collection in qualitative research as interviewing, Use of additional methods of data collection as supplemental sources has been well-documented as well (Teherani et al., 2015; Neubauer et al. 2019). I utilized semi-

structured interviews, cognitive representations, and online and in-person focus groups to capture the data necessary to complete the study. I functioned as the chief instrument used in data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Each participant was interviewed twice, and they also participated in two focus groups. If needed, I would have employed an additional data collection method, such as accessing archival records, to make certain I had enough information gathered from each participant to support the accuracy of the study findings, but the dialogue created from the focus groups along with the cognitive representations proved to be enough data.

Semi-structured Interviews

I used the research questions listed below to conduct the first semi-structured interviews with the participants in the study. I took the opportunity to include additional questions that enabled the participants to give deeper descriptions of their subjective experiences with divorce. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed later. I included a sample of an interview transcript in APPENDIX E.

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met each other.
2. How long have you been living in Hampton Roads, and how has your experience been here?
3. What would you say is the best part of utilizing services through Community Complete Home Healthcare?
4. How has your time at Community Complete Home Healthcare compared to your experience at other home healthcare providers?
5. What are some reasons why you would recommend Community Complete Home Healthcare to your friends and family?
6. How would you describe your experience with divorce?

7. How would you describe your initial understanding of the divorce process as a whole?
8. How would you describe the level of social support you received during the divorce process?
9. How would you describe the effect divorce had on your sense of self-actualization (motivation)?
10. What benefits would you describe, if any, that arose from going through your divorce?

Questions 1 through were a necessary part of the rapport building process associated with qualitative research questioning.

To build trust, I engaged the participants with a line of questioning resembling efforts of socialization through shared knowledge of brief historical data related to the participants' time in the area and their current feelings about the services they are receiving through Community Complete Home Healthcare (Moustakas, 1994). The utilization of open-ended questions, for questions 6-10 that are paramount to the research study, provided the best results by the participants being given ample time to fully answer the questions to their satisfaction (Moustakas, 1994). Kurt Lewin's Field Theory suggests the field approach may be utilized as a useful conceptual framework for family research in general and for divorce study (Kuo, 1976). I then utilized questions 6-10 to conduct the final semi-structured interview with the participants. I believed a follow-up in-person interview would add more information than I received during the first set of interviews. I also felt conducting the interviews and the focus groups at the main building of the Community Complete Home Healthcare, when possible, gave the participants a feeling of familiarity, trust, and comfort as they navigated their way through retelling significant life events such as divorce and familial dissolution.

Cognitive Representations

The participants were asked to make drawings during their first in-person and online focus groups that represent the pre-divorce and post-divorce feelings (sample in APPENDIX E). Andersen and Spencer (2002) produced stunning research on cognitive representations of AIDS patients and how nurses getting to know how AIDS patients pictured their disease in their minds could help the nurses better treat the patients. I also asked my participants to include a title for each picture they drew. During the second online and in person focus group, the participants were asked to assign a song to their pre-divorce experiences. The researcher had participants reference a song that represented their post-divorce (current) experiences. It was also deemed important to have the participants articulate how the song resonates with their lived post-divorce experiences.

Online and In Person Focus Groups

The purpose of the online and in-person focus groups was to give the participants an opportunity to have a group discussion based on the shared experiences they have had with divorce. During the first online and in-person focus group, the participants were asked to make drawings that that represent the pre-divorce and post-divorce feelings. During the second online and in person focus group, the participants were asked to assign a song to their pre-divorce experiences. The researcher had participants reference a song that represented their post-divorce (current) experiences. It was also deemed important to have the participants articulate how the song resonated with their lived post-divorce experiences. The use of cognitive representations added a richness to the depth of information I gathered from the focus groups. Also, I felt it was important for the African American men in the study to have a chance to meet and build more positive social connections, which was shown to be an important measure during and after their

divorces (Wright & Price, 1986; Gove & Shin, 1989; Kitson & Morgan, 1990; Aughinbaugh et al., 2013; Manning et al., 2021; Westrick et al., 2022). Keeping this in mind, I am willing to make a referral to the Community Complete Home Healthcare director, and lend my services, if some of the participants ever decided they would like to continue meeting in an informal men's divorce recovery group.

Data Analysis

This transcendental phenomenological study was guided by research questions that were created to gain an in-depth look into the shared experiences of African American men who went through a divorce prior to the study. This could only be accomplished by utilizing a line of thought-evoking open-ended questions that will culminate in gaining a full description of the thoughts and feelings of the participants. This study was the culmination of all the data that was produced from the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Neubauer et al. (2019) stated significant phenomenological research involves deep engagement with the data via reading, reflective writing, re-reading, and re-writing. Sumskis and Moxham (2017) highlight the Van Kaam psychophenomenological method to be the best way to synthesize information gathered from phenomenological studies. Horizontalization was utilized to elucidate important quotes, sentences, and statements that emerged from the transcribed interviews and focus groups (Andersen & Eppard, 1998; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Clusters of meanings from significant statements were divided into themes that were further developed into textural and structural descriptions of each experience (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process allowed me to identify and accurately report the essence in the findings section of this study.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the data was accomplished by utilizing a variety of methods to establish a comprehensive explanation of the shared/lived experiences of the divorced African American men who will take part in the study. Shenton (2004) highlights the importance of the frameworks in place that regulate stringent credibility, dependability, and transferability standards. Member checking, prolonged engagement, and transferability will be utilized to ensure validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) also suggests having co-researchers examine the themes that have developed for verification of data collection and revising purposes. Additional methods to ensure trustworthiness emerged as the research data was analyzed.

Credibility

Credibility makes certain the research reported accurately represents the responses of the participants and measures what it was designed to measure (Shenton, 2004). Credibility was accomplished through initial and final structured interviews utilizing the same research questions given to each participant. As mentioned in relation to trustworthiness, co-researchers, or peer reviewers in the form of dissertation committee chair members, were able to review the study as it progresses from proposal to completion.

Member Checks

The purpose of utilizing member checks was to maintain validity, or trustworthiness in the proposed study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Having the participants review transcribed interview data, emerging themes, interpretive meanings, and any conclusions drawn from the data ensured that I captured their thoughts, words, ideas, and feelings as they intended them.

Epoche

It was important for me to set aside any biases or presumptions I had towards how African American men experience divorce because I have personal experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing was utilized in phenomenological research to bracket subjective experiences away so the phenomenon can be studied without bias or preconceived perceptions of the data under consideration (Moustakas, 1994). I kept a journal throughout the study to have a place to log my thoughts and feelings to effectively separate them from the study.

Triangulation

Phenomenological research practices include considering diverse methods of data collection to ensure credibility (Shenton, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My use of interviews, focus groups, and cognitive expressions allowed for comparison of each source to make certain the same general thought or intention was being expressed by the participants (Creswell, 2007). The only goal in using triangulation was to verify my ability to accurately interpret the data collected from the participants in the study.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability implies that research findings should be consistent and reliable (Moon et al., 2016). One way to ensure consistency and reliability was the use of external auditors (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I provided detailed accounts of my study, including rich descriptions of the setting, participants, interview questions, and the procedures used to analyze the study, which makes it easier to replicate the study (Moon et. al, 2016; Shenton, 2004). This study utilized a uniform approach in evidencing and describing the shared experiences of the participants.

Confirmability suggests that the researcher will use due diligence in maintaining a neutral stance while interpreting and reporting the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the participants

in the study (Shenton, 2004). I accomplished this by having external audits completed by my dissertation committee. I also divulged details related to any biases and or feelings that may present themselves throughout the course of the study. The importance of reflexivity through extensive journaling was paramount to verifying that the interpretations of the data were clearly in concert with the thoughts and viewpoints of the participants and not my own (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Detailed interview transcriptions, focus group transcriptions, and cognitive representations of the participants in the form of drawings and songs were included in the study.

Transferability

Shenton (2004) identifies transferability as the degree to which the results of a given study can be conducted or implemented in other contexts. As an essential part of qualitative research, transferability infers that the findings realized in one study can apply in another context related to the phenomenon that was studied. Creswell & Poth (2018) identify the importance of utilizing rich and thick descriptions that would make it easier to transpose the results to a variety of applications. It is my hope that the results from my research will allow increased research into trauma-informed care directed towards African American men who have experienced divorce. The research I generated will be able to be used by therapists, social workers, and physicians as they collaborate with divorced African American men in a variety of settings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were made to address any concerns of exploitation, misrepresentation, and identification of the participants. This was accomplished by using pseudonyms for all the participants and the site of the study. I ensured the participants in the research study were not involved in any situation in which they might be harmed. This included permitting breaks during the interviews and having the ability to remove themselves from

participating in the study at any time they deemed it was necessary to do so. I also made certain participants were not coerced into participating in the study. I maintained all hard copies of research materials in a secure location, and I made certain all digital records and research data was password protected. I avoided overinterpreting or misinterpreting collected data to present a picture that was not supported by data and evidence. Finally, no identifying information about the participants was revealed and signed release forms authorizing use of information obtained in research was obtained from each participant.

Summary

Chapter Three started with an explanation of the research design and what led to its utilization in the proposed study. The qualitative study used a transcendental phenomenological approach to chronicle the shared experiences of African American men who have undergone divorce (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology was the framework utilized to construct and support the research questions delineated in this chapter.

The site was the primary office location of Community Complete Home Healthcare, which serves a client base of over 1,200 clients utilizing home healthcare services such as companionship, routine personal care, wound care, home infusion therapy, and medication management throughout its multiple satellite office locations within a major city in the Hampton Roads. The primary office was chosen as the site of the study based on its proximity to a higher concentration of the target population of the study and its centralized location between the satellite offices located in other major cities in Hampton Roads, Virginia.

The participants for this study were made up of working-class/middle-class African American men, between the ages of 20-72, who have gone through a divorce in Hampton Roads, which is comprised of nine independent cities located in Southeastern Virginia.

Data was collected once IRB approval from Liberty University and Community Complete Behavioral Health Care's director had been obtained. Research data was gathered utilizing a variety of methods which included semi-structured interviews, online and in-person focus groups, and cognitive representations. Once the data collection process had been completed, the data was analyzed using the Van Kaam psychophenomenological method, which was referenced as the best way to synthesize information gathered from phenomenological studies (Sumskis & Moxham, 2017; Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness was ensured by having frameworks in place that regulate stringent credibility, dependability, and transferability standards (Shenton, 2004). Member checking, prolonged engagement, and transferability was utilized to ensure validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) also suggests having co-researchers examine the themes that have developed for verification of data collection and revising purposes. Lastly, ethical considerations were made to address any concerns of exploitation, misrepresentation, and identification of the participants. Pseudonyms were used for all the participants and the site of the study. Participants were permitted breaks during the interviews and maintained the ability to remove themselves from participating in the study at any time. All hard copies of research materials were stored in a secure location, and I made certain all digital records and research data were password protected. No identifying information about the participants was revealed and signed release forms authorizing use of information obtained in research were obtained from each participant.

Chapter Four: Findings

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to chronicle the shared experiences of working class/middle class African American men who have gone through a divorce in Hampton Roads, which is comprised of nine independent cities located in Southeastern Virginia. Chapter Four commences with a brief description of the participants and their experiences with the divorce process. Data were collected utilizing semi structured interviews, cognitive representations of the participants' experiences, and a combination of online asynchronous and in-person focus groups. The Preliminary Survey Questionnaire was used as the primary means to verify that the men chosen to participate in the study experienced the phenomenon under consideration. A variety of men expressed interest in the study, but only those who identified as previously divorced African American men were asked to participate in the study. The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. How do working class/middle class African American men describe their experience with divorce?
2. How do participants describe their initial understanding of the divorce process as a whole?
3. How do participants describe the level of social support they received during the divorce process?
4. How do participants describe the effect divorce had on their sense of self-actualization (motivation)?
5. What benefits do participants describe that arose from going through their divorce?

Lastly, the collected data were analyzed, and a common description evolved from the participants' shared experiences.

Participants

Altogether, 10 participants joined in the study to recount their experiences with divorce as African American men. All the participants identified themselves as working-class/middle-class African American males between the ages of 20 and 72 who were married for a minimum of two years before their marriages were terminated. The participants were chosen from the employees, family members, and clients of Community Home Healthcare who were given the opportunity to participate in the study. Locating a healthcare-related agency that operates within all the major cities of Hampton Roads and gaining their assistance in recruiting participants was a significant challenge.

Four out of the 10 participants were from Portsmouth, Virginia. The six remaining participants represented the cities of Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Chesapeake, Suffolk, and Courtland, respectively. The majority (seven) of the participants were over the age of 40. The remaining participants (three) were in their thirties. The median age of the participants was 47 with a mean of 48 years old.

A list of the 10 participants can be found below in Table 1 along with a brief introduction to each contributor. Ethical considerations were made to address any concerns of exploitation, misrepresentation, and identification of the participants. This was accomplished by using pseudonyms. The pseudonyms utilized were culturally appropriate and gender specific. Each participant approved their designated pseudonym.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	City	Education	Occupation	Marriage Duration
Jermaine	51	Courtland	HS Diploma	Industrial Mechanic	10 years
Andre	67	Suffolk	HS Diploma	Truck Driver	5 years
William	33	Portsmouth	Associates	Crane Operator	4 years
Michael	48	Norfolk	Bachelors	Registered Nurse	6 years
Isaac Ray	43	Portsmouth	Associates	Furniture Sales	8 years
Sean	50	Newport News	Bachelors	English Teacher	5 years
Lawrence	54	Chesapeake	Bachelors	Science Teacher	3.5 years
Darius	39	Portsmouth	Bachelors	Deputy Sheriff	8 years
Robert	48	Portsmouth	HS Diploma	Self- Employed	8 Years
Kershawn	35	Hampton	HS Diploma	Car Salesman	10 years

Jermaine – 51 years old

Jermaine is an industrial mechanic who lives in Courtland, Virginia. Jermaine stated he was born and raised in Courtland and has no plans to leave. Jermaine was recruited into the study by his younger sister who found out about the opportunity from the Community Complete Home Healthcare nurse caring for their aging mother. Jermaine was married for 10 years before their divorce was finalized. When asked about his experience with divorce, Jermaine stated that he was hurt by the divorce because he “didn’t marry to become divorced” (Interview with Jermaine, June 2023). Jermaine has been divorced for nearly 3 years. Jermaine also mentioned the difficulty he faced in transitioning from being a married man to being a single man because he completely identified with the role of being a husband.

Andre – 67 years old

Andre is the oldest of the ten participants. Andre is a semi-retired over the road truck driver who lives in Suffolk, Virginia. Andre learned about the study through his current wife of 36 years who is receiving wound care through Community Complete Home Healthcare. Andre was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York and stated he married his first wife at the age of 18 because she was pregnant. Andre stated the marriage only lasted 6 years because of his infidelities and drug use while he was in the military. Andre has two adult children from his first marriage and states that it “wasn’t all that difficult from the legal standpoint” but he did spiral into heavier drug use because of the dissolution of his family (Interview with Andre, June 2023). Andre cites receiving clinical assistance and support from his family of origin as key elements of his overall recovery from his addiction and divorce. Andre cites learning how to let go and forgive himself and others as one of the major reasons he was able to build a successful trucking career and relationship with his current wife after experiencing his divorce.

William – 33 years old

William is the youngest participant in the study and is also one of the four participants who reside in Portsmouth, Virginia. William works as a long shoreman/crane mechanic at the marine terminals. William learned about the research study through his current spouse of 6 years who works as a registered nurse at Community Complete Home Healthcare. William was married to his first wife for 4 years and states they married early because they felt condemned for having “premarital sex” (Interview with William, June 2023). William listed shame and guilt as being emotions that led him to getting married at a young age and stated those same feelings were amplified by their divorce because of his religious background.

Michael – 48 years old

Michael, who shares the mean age of all the participants with one other contributor in the study, currently lives in Norfolk, Virginia, but grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio. Michael works as a registered nurse at Community Complete Home Healthcare part-time and has a full-time nursing position at the regional hospital. Michael was only married for 6 years and has been divorced for over 20 years. Michael has a 25-year-old son from his previous marriage and is currently in a 10-year relationship with another nurse, but states marriage is out of the cards. Michael states his marriage and divorce were “difficult” because “the level of trust was not there” because they both were seeing other people (Interview with Michael, June 2023).

Isaac Ray – 43 years old

Isaac Ray, a full-time furniture salesperson, is also one of the four participants who reside in Portsmouth, Virginia. Isaac Ray learned about the study because of his close relationship with his great aunt who is receiving hip replacement wound care from Community Complete Home Healthcare. Isaac Ray met his wife when they were working at a pizza parlor, and they remained

married for 8 years. Isaac Ray has a 17-year-old daughter with his ex-spouse and informed the researcher that he recently got engaged after being divorced for over 12 years. Isaac Ray described his experience with divorce as “devastating” and stated he felt “cycles of deep pain and numbness” (Interview with Isaac Ray, June 2023).

Sean – 50 years old

Sean, a high school English teacher and wrestling coach, is a native of Newport News, Virginia, and states he will always live on the Peninsula. Sean learned about the study through his new wife of 8 years who works as a registered nurse with Community Complete Home Healthcare. Sean related that he and his first wife were high school and college sweethearts and got married while they were in college at 19 years old. Sean was only married for 5 years and was divorced for 18 years before remarrying. Sean stated he was “half devastated and half understanding” during the divorce process because “he could see it happening in real time” as the events that led to the divorce unfolded (Interview with Sean, June 2023). Sean listed career path incompatibility as the precursor of their divorce because he was more community focused, and his ex-spouse was more commercially focused.

Lawrence – 54 years old

Lawrence, the second oldest of the participants, lives in Chesapeake, Virginia, but grew up in Suffolk, Virginia. Lawrence has been a middle school science teacher for 30 years. Lawrence learned about the research study through his father who utilized services through Community Complete Home Healthcare. Lawrence was married for 3.5 years and shares a similar experience with Sean because he dated his ex-spouse while they were in college and got married after finishing college at age 22. Lawrence was divorced for 25 years before getting remarried 4 years ago. Lawrence likened his experience with divorce as being “painful”

and feeling like he was knocked “flat on his back” (Interview with Lawrence, June 2023).

Lawrence also described his limited understanding of the divorce process through his cognitive representation (shown in Appendix H as a sample) which has the caption “A Deer in The Headlights.”

Darius – 39 years old

Darius, who works as a sheriff’s deputy and personal trainer, is also one of the four participants who reside in Portsmouth, Virginia. Darius currently has a 75-year-old mother receiving personal care services through Community Complete Home Healthcare and learned about the study from their personal care aid. Darius spent 4 years in the US Army and utilized his G.I. bill benefits to obtain a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice. Darius was married for 8 years and has been divorced for over 8 years. Darius has a 14-year-old daughter and a 10-year-old autistic son with his ex-spouse. Darius described his divorce experience as being complex because he lists “hurt, guilt, shame, and relief” as descriptors when discussing his ordeal (Interview with Darius, June 2023).

Robert – 48 years old

Robert is the last of the four participants who reside in Portsmouth, Virginia. Robert lists Portsmouth, Virginia as his hometown and left a 20-year position at Virginia Natural Gas to become an entrepreneur by starting a residential and commercial cleaning business. Robert decided to join the research study after discussing the topic with his mother who is receiving personal care services through Community Complete Home Healthcare after having back surgery. Robert was married for 8 years and has been divorced for 3 years. Robert has full custody of his 8-year-old daughter because his ex-wife admitted to lying when she stated Robert was sexually abusing their daughter to get custody and alimony. Robert simply described his

divorce as being “nightmarish” based on the lies and allegations of his ex-wife who was exposed for having an affair at the time she petitioned for divorce (Interview with Robert, June 2026).

Kershawn – 35 years old

Kershawn is a full-time car salesperson who lives in Hampton, Virginia.

Kershawn has a younger sister who works as a personal care aide at Community Complete Home Healthcare who informed Kershawn about the research study. Kershawn was married for 10 years to a licensed optometrist, and they have two children from their marriage, a 9-year-old daughter and 6-year-old son. Kershawn admitted his ex-wife was 15 years older than him and also a degreed professional who makes more money than him, but he pays child support. Kershawn stated he felt as if “the rug was literally pulled out from under” him and that his sense of self-actualization and motivation were “killed” because of his divorce (Interview with Kershawn, June 2023).

Results

The Results section is comprised of a thorough consideration of the elements utilized to generate the themes that manifested from the semi-structured interviews, cognitive representations, and nonsynchronous online and in-person focus groups. A thorough consideration of the elements will be accomplished by listing the repeated words and phrases from the collective research data and the themes that evolved from the data. The developed themes produced a setting that provided a comprehensible response to the research questions, which aided in ascertaining how African American men described their experience with divorce. The thematic description and listing will be followed by an account that presents a “textural description” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 120) of the answers to the research questions.

Theme Development

Specific words and phrases were frequently used by the participants all through the semi-structured interviews, cognitive representations, and nonsynchronous online and in-person focus groups. After making a list of the frequently used words and phrases, I arranged the data in harmony with related phrases and parallel words that were repeated throughout the process, which Moustakas (1994) refers to as “reduction and elimination” (p. 120). The frequently utilized words and phrases contributed to the evolution of distinct themes. I then utilized all the collected data to validate the themes to make certain they represented an accurate representation of the complete study (Moustakas, 1994).

Major Themes

Two major themes emerged from the data analysis process, as well as three subthemes associated with the first theme and two subthemes associated with the second theme. The results from previous research efforts were echoed by the first theme that was generated- African American men experience the phenomenon of divorce as a multifarious emotional ordeal that is exacerbated by a lack of knowledge of the divorce process. The three subthemes that emanated from the primary theme reinforce the complexity and tenuous nature of phenomenon on the chosen population being studied. The second major theme, which was unpredicted, highlights how African American men experience elevated levels of diverse post-traumatic growth and self-actualization in the wake of divorce due to high levels of social support. The two subthemes accompanying the second major theme provide clarification of the components that were identified as being integral to the post-divorce resilience experienced by 90% of the participants.

Theme number one. The first theme under consideration - African American men experience the phenomenon of divorce as a multifarious emotional ordeal that is exacerbated by

a lack of knowledge of the divorce process – relates to the diverse and or complex nature of the feelings expressed by the participants, their clear descriptions of the emotional toll the experience had on their lives during the traumatic event, and how having a negligible understanding of the divorce process compound the negative effects of the phenomena. The theme is accurately delineated by the three subthemes, which became evident by analyzing the data. They are (a) the convolution of feelings [complexity], (b) the painful and horrific experience [ordeal], and (c) stress compounded by a negligible understanding of the divorce process [lack of knowledge].

Subtheme number one. The first subtheme - the convolution of feelings – corresponds with the participants’ recollections of their experiences with divorce, which ranged from hurt, pain, and shame to guilt, disappointment, and relief. Each participant identified multiple descriptors of their experience when asked to reflect on their divorce. Careful consideration of the dialogue captured in the semi-structured interviews, cognitive representations, and the asynchronous online and in-person focus groups strongly suggests divorce elicits a complex set of emotions among African American men.

Subtheme number two. Subtheme two – the painful and horrific experience – relates to the energy conveyed by the participants when describing their feelings during the divorce process. Participants utilized expressions such as devastating, hellish, horrible, death, and nightmarish to describe the phenomenon. The feelings conveyed by the participants painted divorce as an overwhelming ordeal to most of the respondents. The data clearly reported that African American men experience divorce as being a traumatic event.

Subtheme number three. Stress compounded by a negligible understanding of the divorce process – the third subtheme – was a component that was interwoven throughout the first and

second subthemes. Ninety percent of the participants stated they did not know anything about the process. A common consensus that emerged from the semi-structured interviews was that the marriages were not undertaken with divorce as a possibility, so it was not deemed necessary to become acclimated with the divorce process until the dissolution of the marriage was set in motion. Feeling at a loss, having a lack of understanding, and embarking into unfamiliar territory emotionally charged the feelings and the emotions of the participants, who found themselves in this hapless experience.

Theme number two. The second theme - African American men experience elevated levels of diverse post-traumatic growth and self-actualization in the wake of divorce due to high levels of social support – was revealed by analyzing the data collected from research questions three and four. This theme is clarified by two subthemes that emerged from analyzing the collected data. They are (a) the importance of multi-layered social support [social support] and (b) self-actualization as evidenced by positive post-divorce transformations [resilience].

Subtheme number one. The first subtheme – the importance of multi-layered social support – refers to the significance the participants placed on the emotional, physical, and spiritual contributions they received from their existing connections during the divorce process, which included family, friends, coworkers, and church support. Research question three asked the participants to describe the level of support they received during the divorce process. Data collected from the responses of the participants clearly shows that support from their families, friends, coworkers, and the church played a significant role during the divorce process, which included the initial separation period and subsequent divorce.

Subtheme number two. Self-actualization as evidenced by positive post-divorce transformations – the second subtheme – describes the effect high levels of social support had on

African American men as expressed through their recollections of what aided them in discovering greater personal potential during the divorce process. The fourth research question asked how the participants would describe the effect divorce had on their sense of self-actualization or motivation. Interestingly, the data collected from the responses of the participants tied post-divorce resilience directly to the support and encouragement they received from their families, friends, coworkers, and church, which motivated most of the group to seek greater stability within themselves, within their families, and within the community. The pursuit of higher education, promotions on the job, entrepreneurship, and a high regard for compatible romantic partnerships were seen as direct evidence of self-actualization.

Table 2 below displays a host of repeated words and phrases that were utilized in developing the two major themes and their accompanying subthemes. The two major themes evolved directly from the clear, concise, and energetic responses of the participants, which helped me capture the essence of the phenomenon.

Table 2

Repeated Words and Phrases from Data Analysis

Recurring words and phrases	Codes created by researcher	Related themes and subthemes
Very difficult	VD	Ordeal, Complexity
Deep hurt	DH	Ordeal, Complexity
Did not want it to happen	DW	Complexity
Deep pain	DP	Ordeal
Devastating	DV	Ordeal

Easy	EZ	Complexity
Completely blindsided	CB	Ordeal
Ashamed	A	Complexity
Deer in the headlights	DH	Complexity, Ordeal
Didn't know anything	DK	Lack of knowledge
At a loss	AL	Lack of knowledge
Received guidance	RG	Lack of knowledge
Didn't learn enough	DL	Lack of knowledge
Numbness	N	Ordeal
Horrible experience	HE	Ordeal
Flat on my back	FB	Ordeal
Didn't want advice	DW	Social support
Lots of support	LS	Social support
Female family support	FF	Social support
Guys at work	GW	Social Support
Church support	CS	Social Support
Military family	MF	Social support
Deal with it myself	DWM	Social support
Better person	BP	Resiliency, Social Support
Back in church	BC	Resiliency, Social Support
More understanding	MU	Resiliency

Started a business	SB	Resiliency
Focused on goals	FG	Resiliency
Promotion on job	PJ	Resiliency
Greater reliance on God	GR	Resiliency, Social Support
Marriage not for me	MN	Resiliency
Learned what I’m made of	LO	Resiliency
More forgiving	MF	Resiliency

Research Question Narrative

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to chronicle the shared experiences of working class/middle class African American men who have gone through a divorce in Hampton Roads, which is comprised of nine independent cities located in Southeastern Virginia. The aim of the research questions was to grant the African American male participants who faced this phenomenon to recount their stories by giving an account of their experiences. Well defined themes became clearly discernible due to the candid recollections of the participants, which also satisfied the primary questions related to the research topic.

Analysis of the data revealed that theme one - African American men experience the phenomenon of divorce as a multifarious emotional ordeal that is exacerbated by a lack of knowledge of the divorce process – clearly answered the first two research questions. Theme two - African American men experience high levels of diverse post-traumatic growth and self-actualization in the wake of divorce due to high levels of social support – was revealed by analyzing the data collected from the participants’ responses to research questions three, four,

and five. The following section will elucidate the relevance of the themes in capturing the breadth of the participants experience with the phenomenon.

Theme 1 - African American men experience the phenomenon of divorce as a multifarious emotional ordeal that is exacerbated by a lack of knowledge of the divorce process

This section consists of a description of the data acquired relating to the foremost theme of the study. It is arranged by research question and refined by using the subthemes.

Research question one. *How do working class/middle class African American men describe their experience with divorce?* This is the broadest of all the research questions. The goal of posing the question was to permit the participants to openly express their personal experience with the phenomenon without being constricted to any parameters that asking a leading question would encourage. The initial questions that were asked before the research questions were covered dealt more with demographic information and inquiries about their connections to the community-based agency that assisted with procuring the participants. The primary goal of asking the initial line of questions was to help build rapport between the participants and the researcher. Once an acceptable level of rapport had been established, the first research question asked participants to describe their experiences with divorce. Some of the participants backtracked to earlier answers they gave during the rapport building portion of the interview because they felt more comfortable telling the whole story from the beginning, which often included how they were raised and how they met their ex-spouses. Then there were other participants who simply began expressing how they experienced their divorces. Many of the participants utilized the word “difficult” to describe their feelings, but as the semi-structured interviews and focus groups progressed it became apparent that each participant used multiple descriptors to convey one event. This resulted in revealing the complex nature of the feelings and

emotions experienced by the participants. To properly draw out the crux of the reported data, three subthemes emerged that would be the most relevant to the first theme – complexity, ordeal, and lack of understanding.

A convoluted of feelings. The subthemes that were brought forth from the data analysis process correlated to the previous research expounded earlier in Chapter Two. For example, the complex nature of the feelings experienced by African American men who have undergone the divorce were shown to be attributed to the difficulty they found in processing their feelings of loss, shattered plans, and altered life plans as single men versus being husbands, and or, family men (Bauserman, 2012; Hoag, 2019; Manning & Payne, 2021). Jermaine said, “At first it hurt me, you know, because I didn’t get married thinking, I was going to get divorced” (Interview with Jermaine, June 2023). Sean wrote in the online focus group, “I was hurt and disappointed in us, not overly in myself or overly in her, but disappointed in us” (Online focus group, June 2023). Darius shared, “It felt like a harsh and unwanted change because I felt like my world flipped upside down” (In-person focus group, June 2023). A great example of the complexity or multifarious nature of the personal experiences of the participants came from Darius’ interview, in which he stated, “I felt hurt, and guilt mixed with a little bit of relief too all at the same time” (Interview with Darius, June 2023).

A painful and horrific ordeal. In harmony with the first subtheme, which lists the complex nature of the feelings experienced by the participants, the second theme highlights the intense energy conveyed by the participants when describing their feelings during the divorce process. The participant’s collective responses suggests that the complexity of the feelings they were experiencing at the time of their divorce were compounded by emotional pain. Previous research lists divorce as a significant trauma that involves losing a life partner, so it is natural

that feelings of grief and despair would arise in men and women experiencing this unnatural phenomenon (Hankerson, 2011; Hoag, 2019; Ghafoori et al., 2014; Kitson & Morgon, 1990). Alluding to the great depth of emotional pain that accompanies the complex emotions being experienced, Isaac Ray stated:

I was devastated, just completely hurt within. I felt deep pain and numbness. It was just a horrible experience emotionally for me. I did not want it to happen even though we were not getting along (Interview with Isaac Ray, June 2023).

William stated, “I found my divorce to be devastating because based on my understanding the Bible says we’re supposed to stay together so I felt like a failure on top of everything else I was feeling” (Interview with William, June 2023).

Again, these examples point to the fact that prior research identifies that divorce has been deemed as being more stressful than losing a spouse, family member, or close friend in death (Gove & Shin, 1989; Fischer & Beresford, 2015; Leopold, 2018). Lawrence stated, “I felt as if I were lying flat on my back because of the despair and shame because I felt like I became the black sheep of my family because no one else in my immediate family had been divorced” (Interview with Lawrence, June 2023). Further adding to the emotional depth of the experience, Robert stated, “My divorce makes me think about the guy from Nightmare on Elm Street, Freddy Krueger, because it was a nightmare, a pure nightmare” (In-person focus group, June 2023). Robert’s sentiments were based on his ex-spouse’s accusations of child sexual abuse against him during their divorce proceedings, which were later dropped because they were proven to be false. Lastly, Andre shared, “I spiraled out of control emotionally and things got even worse with the drugs to the point I was incarcerated and then placed on parole for a few years, which made me feel worse because I had two little ones” (Interview with Andre, June 2023). Andre’s experience

harmonizes with previous research, which indicates divorced men manifest higher rates of substance abuse, vehicular accidents, heart disease, diabetes, and behavioral health concerns when contrasted with married men (Lawson & Thompson, 1996; Kabo et al., 2019).

Stress compounded by a negligible understanding of the divorce process. Added to the complexity of emotions brought on by divorce and being under duress by undergoing a traumatic experience is the emotional instability caused by having a negligible understanding of the process. Ninety percent of the participants stated they did not know anything about the process. This is a significant point because prior research indicates the financial implications of divorce favor African American women in the U.S., who statistically have a better level of education and a higher salary than their husbands (Reeves et al., 2016). Keshawn's experience highlighted the reality of plight experienced by African American men more than the rest of the participants.

Kershawn related:

I didn't understand anything that was happening. There were meetings that we had to go to with the lawyers. We talked about custody and different types of property that needed to be split up. I only had a high school education, and I went straight into the car business, but my ex-wife was a college educated optometrist. She knew exactly what was happening and she got everything. I learned along the way but obviously I did not learn enough (Interview with Kershawn, June 2023).

William stated, "I didn't know anything" (Interview with William, June 2023). Michael stated, "I was at loss because I didn't understand the process, so it felt like I was in a circus and everything was happening at once" (Interview with Michael, June 2023). I found it interesting that Sean referred to his ex-wife when he stated, "We did not understand anything, but we learned together" (Interview with Sean, June 2023). This indicates that the divorce process can be

equally daunting for both husband and wife. Lawrence stated, “I didn’t have any idea of what to expect and I felt like a deer in the headlights” (Online focus group, June 2023). The recollections of the participants mentioned clearly indicate that a lack of understanding exacerbates the divorce experience for African American men.

Research question two. *How do participants describe their initial understanding of the divorce process as a whole?* After learning a broader understanding of the way, the participants’ encountered their divorces, the objective of the second research question was to ascertain their initial understanding of the phenomenon and how that may have influenced their attitudes about the ordeal they faced. Unlike the first research question, only one subtheme emerged during the analysis process that adequately embraced the consensus of the responses of the participants—lack of knowledge.

Stress compounded by a negligible understanding of the divorce process. The collective responses of the participants indicated one main point and that it was not deemed necessary to become acclimated to the divorce process until the dissolution of the marriage was set in motion. Lawson and Thompson (1996) documented specific stressors faced by African American men during and after the divorce process. A lack of knowledge was shown to be a definitive stressor of all 10 of the participants in the study. In addition, recollections of the participants made it apparent that divorce involves the cutting of complicated marital and familial attachments, arbitration of custody arrangements, initiating a new daily routine, and making the transition from parenting as a couple to co-parenting in separate households (Chase & Ullrich, 2022).

Isaac Ray conveyed insight into the general response to dealing with having a negligible understanding of the divorce process when he stated, “You will definitely learn the process because it is what is because you want to come out on the right end of it” (Interview with Isaac

Ray, June 2023). Sean, referring to his ex-wife, stated, “We did not understand anything, but we learned together” (Interview with Sean, June 2023). Unlike the other participants, Robert faced a particularly troubling dilemma in the fact that his ex-wife was a paralegal by profession. Robert stated:

I was blindsided by the divorce, and I did not know anything about the process. I didn't know the process would be complicated by my ex making accusations of child sexual abuse and all kinds of horrible things. I didn't know where all of this was coming from. I did not have any knowledge of the process at, but I know she had more knowledge than I did because she was a paralegal (Interview with Robert, June 2023).

Feeling at a loss based on having a lack of understanding of the process while being relentlessly pushed into unfamiliar territory, the participants adapted to this hapless experience by managing to learn along the way.

General analysis of theme one. A closer examination of the three subthemes and how they evolved from the recollections of the participants indicate a high degree of difficulty in experiencing divorce among African American men because the phenomenon represents complex trauma. More precisely, African American men experience the phenomenon of divorce as a multifarious emotional ordeal that is exacerbated by a lack of knowledge of the divorce process which intensifies feelings of instability and uncertainty. The way the participants described their experience with divorce and initial understanding of the divorce process reminded me of being strapped to a seat on a roller coaster that you did not want to be on because you had never rode one and it was an incredibly large one. Once the ride starts everything is out of your control. You don't know what to expect and you can't stop the ride no matter how you feel. The responses from the participants had the connotation of situational

helplessness due to their ignorance, which, in turn, intensified their negative feelings and emotions. Ultimately, a better understanding of effect of divorce on African American men could be that the experience triggers feelings of helplessness which are incredibly uncomfortable and problematic during a traumatic event.

Theme 2 - African American men experience high levels of diverse post-traumatic growth and self-actualization in the wake of divorce due to high levels of social support

This section highlights the main points noted from the data collected that evolved into the second major theme in the study. It is arranged so that the research questions are directly followed by the subthemes that support them.

Research question three. *How do participants describe the level of social support they received during the divorce process?* This research question was crafted to be broad in nature just like the first research question listed. The objective was to allow the participants to openly express their recollections concerning all significant sources of support they received during the divorce process. Leading questions tend to lead to limited expressions by the participants and a full and rich description was needed to gauge the level of importance social support played in their experience with the phenomenon. All the participants stated they received social support from a variety of sources. Ninety percent of participants listed their families, in the form of families of origin, as their main source of support. Additionally, female family support by way of mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, and great aunts were given lots of recognition by the participants in their responses to the research question. The subtheme that emerged from the data collection and analyzation process pointed to the importance of multi-layered communal provisions - social support.

The importance of multi-layered social support. The importance of social support was identified by previous research efforts attempting to gain insight on the phenomenon of divorce and how it is experienced by African American men. Hansson et al. (2012) indicated ethnocultural minorities experience greater exposure to the negative effects of some social determinants of health, such as social isolation. Taylor et al. (2015) highlighted the impact of low levels of social support and negative social interactions as having a major influence on the level of depression experienced by African American men. This was not the case with the participants of this study because their responses to the research question indicated they all valued the support they received from multiple sources. Jermaine stated, “I did not want to get advice from other people because I wanted to deal with it myself, but my mother, sisters, my niece supported me all the way through” (Interview with Jermaine, June 2023). Andre related:

I was blessed to have my family back me up because my world had spiraled out of control due to my drug use and incarceration. My aunts, sister, and cousins made sure my children came down to stay with us every summer because I was staying with them in Virginia while I was getting my life back together. They combed my daughter’s hair and bought her pretty dresses and made sure they had fun when they were staying with me during the summer. My family backed me up and now I am in a place where I can do the same for my family (Interview with Andre, June 2023).

William stated, “My family was very supportive because they knew I was depressed so my grandmother, mother, and my uncle would have me over for dinner at their homes so I would not be alone while I was hurting, which really made a big difference” (Interview with William, June 2023).

Religious support was also noted as an important support for the participants. The importance of African American men expanding their participation within their prospective religious communities was shown as a significant aid to resiliency and recovery (Coffman et al., 2020). William stated, “I had the support of my family but what really helped was intensifying my connection to the church” (Interview with William, June 2023). Isaac Ray stated:

My dad was very understanding and would say that he knew things would work out for me, but going back to church helped me out a lot. My mom took us to church while we were growing up and she was still faithfully going so I started going back with her and then started attending a men’s group there. That’s when things really started getting better for me (Interview with Isaac Ray, June 2023).

Gregory (2019) stated post-divorce assistance in the form of prayer, church socials, men’s groups, sermons, and involvement in outreach ministries were viewed as a major source of emotional support by African American men. This can also be seen in Lawrence’s response to question three, who stated:

I am really close to my grandfather and father, and they are both pastors in the church. I was so hurt that I began reading my bible again every night looking for answers and trying to rebuild my relationship with God. I told God that I knew He knew I was hurting and that I knew He could and would take the pain away. I started going back to church and I felt my spirit rise up in me and to be honest, I cannot tell you when I recognized that I got better. I just got better and from reading my bible and going back to church where I belonged. My relationship with God is what saved me because my divorce was too painful for me to bear without the Lord’s help (Interview with Lawrence, June 2023).

As mentioned earlier, additional support in the form of friends and coworkers sustained the participants during their traumatic experience.

Prior research lists socialization as a key element of post-divorce recovery and resiliency (Cornwell, 2012). Michael stated, “My family parents live in Cincinnati, and I was living here, so my military family helped me through the brunt of all the pain and loneliness I felt as a result of the divorce” (Interview with Michael, June 2023). Sean confessed, “I’m not a big churchgoer but my family and my fraternity brothers were really there for me” (Interview with Sean, June 2023). Darius stated: “Even though I had support from my mom and my sister, the guys at work were a real help because we are a close-knit group at the sheriff’s department” (Interview with Darius, June 2023). Data collected from the responses of the participants clearly shows that support from their families, church, friends, and coworkers played an important role during the divorce process, which included the initial separation period and subsequent divorce.

Research question four. *How do participants describe the effect divorce had on their sense of self-actualization (motivation)?* The participants were asked how divorce affected their need or desire to reach their full potential. Understanding the traumatic nature of divorce, this question was posed to extract how the experience affected their sense of motivation for creating a better life for themselves post-divorce. Ninety percent of the participants’ responses were filled with positive descriptions of the lives they created for themselves after their divorce. Only one participant, Kershawn, related that he lost everything, including his motivation, due to being in a hypergamous relationship. The pursuit of higher education, promotions on the job, entrepreneurship, and a high regard for compatible romantic partnerships were seen as direct evidence of self-actualization. The data processing methods utilized attributed the crux of the responses to the second theme-resilience.

Self-actualization as evidenced by positive post-divorce transformations. Elevated levels of self-actualization, or the motivation to live up to one's potential, was noticed in most of the participants' responses to research question four. Coffman et al. (2020) referenced that most of the African American participants in his research study were aided by increasing the time they dedicated to their employment activities and self-improvement. Taylor et al. (2015) stated taking on part-time work in addition to their full-time jobs, working overtime, and even working two full-time jobs helped many divorced men channel their energy into improving their emotional and financial situations. This was found true in the current study by a few of the participants. Darius stated, "I decided to apply for a job at the sheriff's office and keep my personal training business going so I could get a job that would provide me with a way to earn more money, solid benefits, and serve the community" (Interview with Darius, June 2023). Andre stated:

Once I got myself cleaned up from the drugs and finished my time in jail and my parole period, I became a truck driver and I have been clean every sense. I have bought and paid for a home, and I have been married to my second wife for over 30 years (Interview with Andre, June 2023).

William stated, "I am in a lead supervisor's position on my job now and I feel that the divorce helped me to find something to focus on other than failure, so I focused on personal success" (Interview with William, June 2023). Isaac Ray stated, "I lost two good jobs because of my divorce but when I started to focus more on my attitude, I got a better job and I have had no issues keeping it because I have Godly wisdom guiding me" (Interview with Isaac Ray, June 2023).

Prior research also shows that African American men were also helped by going back to school to complete their secondary and post-secondary education to improve their marketability

in the job force, accomplish their lifetime learning goals, and to fill their time with a meanwhile pursuit (Chambers, 2021). Michael stated:

I wanted to be a better person after my divorce, so I used my GI Bill to get my nursing degrees and now I work as an RN. I knew I had to make things better, so I figured the best way was to start focusing on a goal. My son got to see me graduate twice and earn my license as a nurse, so I am hoping he benefited by seeing me make something better of myself after my divorce. (Interview with Michael, June 2023).

William also mentioned receiving an undergraduate degree after his divorce was finalized.

Robert related his journey of leaving Virginia natural Gas after 20 plus years of service and starting a lucrative cleaning business. Robert stated, “I had to do something to improve my life and starting a business was it for me because it gave me more time with my daughter, more money, and a greater sense of purpose because I am an employer now and I am able to give other people opportunities to succeed as well” (Interview with Robert, June 2023). The responses clearly show that most of the participants discovered greater personal potential because of their divorce.

Research question five. *What benefits do participants describe that arose from going through their divorce?* This question shifts the focus from the collective responses of the participants’ perspectives of divorce to the perceived advantages of undergoing the phenomenon. Although research indicates divorced men manifest higher rates of substance abuse, vehicular accidents, heart disease, diabetes, and behavioral health concerns when contrasted with married men (Lawson & Thompson, 1996; Hassija & Cloitre, 2015), it is important to note that the phenomena of divorce may have directly or indirectly attributed to beneficial outcomes experienced by the participants (White et al., 2022). The responses of the participants identified

distinct benefits that were attributed to their experience with divorce. The two subthemes that emerged from the collected data were social support and resilience.

The importance of multi-layered social support. Kabo lists the exchange or sharing of resources as a significant factor in marital relationships among older African American couples, social support was equally regarded as a critical factor in health contexts and outcomes (Kabo et al., 2019). The participants made it evident that a multi-layered social support system was the cause of their post-divorce successes. Jermaine stated, “I was helped to become a better communicator because my family expressed concern over how I communicated my feelings with others, which obviously was too threatening for some people” (Interview with Jermaine, June 2023). Andre listed help from different generations of women in his family of origin and his current spouse as being what was needed for him to be “the successful truck driver, homeowner, and husband” he is today (Interview with Andre, June 2023). William stated:

It was those natural supports man. I mean my family and my brothers in the church. I have a stronger sense of self and a stronger relationship with God. I was able to regain focus on my career and my health (Interview with William, June 2023).

Past and contemporary research efforts indicate the positive effects of reliance on family and friends, involvement in church-related activities, participation in social activities, and establishment of intimate heterosexual relationships in reducing the psychological impact of divorce (Barr et al., 2013; Chambers, 2021; Gregory, 2019; Taylor et al., 2016; Lawson & Thompson, 1996). Darius stated, “I am more focused on what really matters, and that is my children and my well-being because they supported me in their own way throughout the ordeal

by being happy to see me and eager to spend their weekends with me when their mother dropped them off” (Interview with Darius, June 2023).

Self-actualization as evidenced by positive post-divorce transformations. Abraham Maslov developed a term called nadir-experiences to describe instances of tragedy, emotional turmoil, pain, trauma, near death experiences, or suffering that can lead to personal or spiritual growth (Maslow, 1964). The responses from the participants prove that most of them focused on gaining tangible benefits from their trauma. Robert stated, “I knew if I made it through that I could do anything, so I set out to start a business” (Interview with Robert, June 2023). Kershawn lost a lot but also stated, “I got closer to my gym bros at the YMCA and I can say that I have solid friends who have my back and I have theirs as well” (Interview with Kershawn, June 2023). Michael stated, “I got a chance to find out what I’m really made out of and how to make better decisions” (Interview with Michael, June 2023). Lawrence also mentioned how he became “more wise, more cautious, and able to make good sound decisions” reestablishing his relationship with the Lord during his trial with divorce” (Interview with Lawrence, June 2023).

General analysis of theme two. A closer examination of the two subthemes and how they evolved from the recollections of the participants indicate elevated levels of post-divorce success due to a strong feminine presence in the form familial supports. The support reported was multifarious in nature but the most consistent of them all were the sisters, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and great aunts of the participants. Additional community supports such as friends, coworkers, and church congregants were interwoven into these natural supports supplied by the female members of their families to produce a powerfully positive effect on the lives of the participants. The results of the research study suggest that the complex trauma experienced

by African American men going through divorce can be mitigated by a multilayered support system.

Summary

Chapter Four commenced with an introduction of the participants in the study. The group is comprised of 10 African American men from Hampton Roads, Virginia. Four out of the 10 participants were from Portsmouth, Virginia. The six remaining participants represented the cities of Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Chesapeake, Suffolk, and Courtland respectively. The Preliminary Survey Questionnaire developed by the researcher was used as the primary means to verify that the men chosen to participate in the study experienced the phenomena under consideration. They all joined the study to recount their experiences with divorce as African American men. The 10 participants identified themselves as working-class/middle-class African American males between the ages of 20 to 72 who were married for a minimum of two years before their marriages were terminated. The participants were chosen from the employees, family members, and clients of Community Home Healthcare who were given the opportunity to participate in the study. The majority (seven) of the participants were over the age of 40. The remaining participants (three) were in their thirties. The median age of the participants was 47 with a mean of 48 years old.

The participants recounted their experiences with divorce through semi-structured interviews, online and in-person focus groups, and by producing cognitive representations of their lived experiences with the phenomenon. Two major themes emerged from the data analysis process, as well as three subthemes associated with the first theme and two subthemes associated with the second theme. The recurring themes were (a) African American men experience the phenomenon of divorce as a multifarious emotional ordeal that is exacerbated by a lack of

knowledge of the divorce process, and (b) African American men experience elevated levels of diverse post-traumatic growth and self-actualization in the wake of divorce due to high levels of social support. The three subthemes that emanated from the primary theme were (a) the convoluted feelings [complexity], (b) the painful and horrific experience [ordeal], and (c) stress compounded by a negligible understanding of the divorce process [lack of knowledge]. The two subthemes that emerged from theme two were (a) the importance of multi-layered social support [social support] and (b) self-actualization as evidenced by positive post-divorce transformations [resilience].

The chapter culminated with an account that expressed the participant's encounter with the phenomenon relative to the research questions. The answers to the research questions were arranged in accordance with the themes and subthemes that corresponded to each question. Theme one - African American men experience the phenomenon of divorce as a multifarious emotional ordeal that is exacerbated by a lack of knowledge of the divorce process – clearly answered the first two research questions, with the subthemes complexity and ordeal being connected to question one and the subtheme lack of knowledge being connected to question two. Theme two - African American men experience high levels of diverse post-traumatic growth and self-actualization in the wake of divorce due to high levels of social support – was revealed by analyzing the data collected from the participants' responses to research questions three, four, and five, with the subtheme social support being tied to question three, the subtheme resilience being tied to question four, and both subthemes applying to question five.

A closer examination of the three subthemes supporting theme one indicates a high degree of difficulty in experiencing divorce among African American men due to the complex traumatic nature of the phenomenon. African American men experience the phenomenon of

divorce as a multifarious emotional ordeal that is exacerbated by a lack of knowledge of the divorce process which intensifies feelings of instability and uncertainty. The responses from the participants had the connotation of situational helplessness due to their ignorance, or lack of understanding, which, in turn, intensified their negative feelings and emotions. Also, a closer examination of the two subthemes used to support the second major theme suggests elevated levels of post-divorce success are due to a strong feminine presence in the form familial supports. The support reported by the participants was multifarious in nature, but the most consistent of them all were the sisters, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and great aunts of the participants. Additional community supports such as friends, coworkers, and church congregants were interwoven into these natural supports supplied by the female members of their families to produce a powerfully positive effect on the lives of the participants.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to chronicle the shared experiences of working class/middle class African American men who have gone through a divorce in Hampton Roads, which is comprised of nine independent cities located in Southeastern Virginia. The problem was in the fact that despite the high rate of divorce among African Americans, there is a lack of research that has examined African American men's perspective of divorce. The intention of this study was to permit working class/middle class African American men who have gone through a divorce in Hampton Roads to give an uncensored description of their experiences. The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. How do working class/middle class African American men describe their experience with divorce?
2. How do participants describe their initial understanding of the divorce process as a whole?
3. How do participants describe the level of social support they received during the divorce process?
4. How do participants describe the effect divorce had on their sense of self-actualization (motivation)?
5. What benefits do participants describe that arose from going through their divorce?

The chapter commences with a brief synopsis of the findings that were evidenced through the data analysis process covered in Chapter Four. An examination of the findings and implications by considering the theoretical framework and related literature comes after the

summary. Then, an evaluation of the theoretical, empirical, and practical contexts of the study is discussed. Following the evaluation of the contexts is a brief outline of the delimitations and implications of the study. Lastly, the recommendations for future research are examined.

Summary of Findings

Two major themes emerged from the data analysis process that were decidedly relevant to the experiences of working class/middle class African American men who have gone through a divorce in Hampton Roads. The results from previous research efforts were echoed by the first theme that was generated- African American men experience the phenomenon of divorce as a multifarious emotional ordeal that is exacerbated by a lack of knowledge of the divorce process. The three subthemes that emanated from the primary theme reinforce the complexity and tenuous nature of phenomenon on the chosen population being studied. They were (a) the convolution of feelings [complexity], (b) the painful and horrific experience [ordeal], and (c) stress compounded by a negligible understanding of the divorce process [lack of knowledge]. The second major theme, which was unpredicted, highlights how African American men experience elevated levels of diverse post-traumatic growth and self-actualization in the wake of divorce due to high levels of social support. The two subthemes accompanying the second major theme provide clarification of the components that were identified as being integral to the post-divorce resilience experienced by 90% of the participants. They were (a) the importance of multi-layered social support [social support] and (b) self-actualization as evidenced by positive post-divorce transformations [resilience].

The goal of posing the first research question was to permit the participants to openly express their personal experience with the phenomenon without being constricted to any parameters that asking a leading question would encourage. The three subthemes that emerged

from the reported data that were found be the most relevant to the first research question were (a) the convolution of feelings [complexity], (b) the painful and horrific experience [ordeal], and (c) stress compounded by a negligible understanding of the divorce process [lack of knowledge]. Many of the participants utilized the word 'difficult' to describe their feelings, but as the semi-structured interviews and focus groups progressed it became apparent that each participant used multiple descriptors to convey one event, which ranged from hurt, pain, and shame to guilt, disappointment, and relief. The participants' collective responses to their experiences with divorce painted the phenomenon as an emotionally overwhelming ordeal. Participants utilized expressions such as devastating, hellish, horrible, death, and nightmarish to describe the phenomenon. Ninety percent of the participants stated they did not know anything about the divorce process. The responses given by the participants implied the majority felt at a loss during each phase of their marital dissolution due to having a lack of understanding. The combination of the subthemes related to the first research question indicate that African American men experience divorce as a complex traumatic experience due to a complex array of negative feelings being compounded by elevated stress and a lack of knowledge about the process.

The objective of the second research question was to gain an understanding of the participants' initial understanding of the phenomenon and how that may have influenced their attitudes towards the ordeal they faced. Differing from the initial research question, only one subtheme emerged during the analysis process that adequately embraced the consensus of the responses of the participants-lack of knowledge. A common consensus that emerged from the semi-structured interviews was that the marriages were not undertaken with divorce as a possibility, so it was not deemed necessary to become acclimated with the divorce process until the dissolution of the marriage was set in motion. As previously noted, the responses given by

the participants implied the majority felt at a loss during each phase of their marital dissolution due to having a lack of understanding. The responses of the participants clearly indicated that having a negligible understanding of the process added to the complexity of emotions, which were compounded by high levels of duress, experienced by African American men going through a divorce.

The purpose of the third research question was to allow the participants to openly express their recollections concerning all significant sources of support they received during the divorce process. The subtheme under theme two that emerged from the data collection and analysis process utilized to support this question – social support - pointed to the importance of multi-layered communal provisions. Data collected from the responses of the participants clearly shows that support from their families, church, friends, and coworkers played an important role during the divorce process, which included the initial separation period and subsequent divorce. All the participants stated they received social support from a variety of sources. Ninety percent of participants listed their families, in the form of families of origin, as their main source of support. Additionally, female family support by way of mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, and great aunts were given lots of recognition by the participants in their responses to the research question.

The fourth research question asked how divorce affected the participants' need or desire to reach their full potential. The second subtheme under theme two -self-actualization as evidenced by positive post-divorce transformations – evolved from the collected data to support this research question. Elevated levels of self-actualization, or the motivation to live up to one's potential, was noticed in most of the participants' responses to research question four. Ninety percent of the participants' responses were filled with positive descriptions of the lives they

created for themselves after their divorce. The pursuit of higher education, promotions on the job, entrepreneurship, and a high regard for compatible romantic partnerships were seen as direct evidence of self-actualization. The positive influence high levels of social support had on African American men, as expressed through their recollections of what aided them in discovering greater personal potential both during and after the divorce process, was clearly identified as an important subtheme to support theme two.

Research question five shifts the focus from the collective responses of the participants' perspectives of divorce to the perceived advantages of undergoing the phenomenon. Two subthemes emerged from the responses of the participants identified distinct benefits that were attributed to their experience with divorce, and they were social support and resilience. The participants made it evident that a multi-layered social support system was the cause of their post-divorce successes. The positive effects of reliance on family and friends, involvement in church-related activities, and participation in social activities coupled with a better outlook on life, being more focused, a greater appreciation of their relationship with God, and being willing to embark on new intimate relationships with an open mind. Additionally, the participants' responses indicated high levels of post-divorce success due to a strong feminine presence in the form of female familial supports. The most consistent means of support listed by African American men in the study came from their sisters, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and great aunts. Further, the responses from the participants prove that most of the participants focused on gaining tangible benefits from their ordeal.

Discussion

Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development and Kurt Lewin's field theory were utilized for the theoretical, or conceptual, framework for this study. Lev Vygotsky's

sociocultural theory of cognitive development highlights the essential roles language and culture play in human intellectual development and in how humans perceive the world (Kapur, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). Kurt Lewin's field theory suggests the field approach may be utilized as a useful conceptual framework for family research in general and for divorce study (Kuo, 1976; Lewin, 1935). The study's topic centered around divorce and its effect on African American men so combining the two theories ensured the best results possible in accurately relaying the shared experiences of African American men who have faced the complex trauma of divorce by utilizing a phenomenological approach. The literature includes a host of studies that support the findings of the study including approaches needed to mitigate the damaging effects of divorce on African American men. This section includes a discussion of the findings of the study that coincide with the theoretical framework and related literature that reference the effects of divorce on African American men from their perspective.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

Social constructivism is a learning theory propounded by Lev Vygotsky in 1968 (Kapur, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). Simply stated, knowledge is constructed through interaction with others. Social constructivists theorize that people create and form their society primarily through their conversations and storytelling. The concept of social constructivism has many characteristics. One essential factor of social constructivism is that the researcher seeking knowledge on how certain phenomena affect the lives of a distinct population chooses the best process for extracting the knowledge from the group. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized another key component of social constructivism, and it was the fact that knowledge is constructed and best conveyed by those who have lived through a certain phenomenon. The researcher must also accept that knowledge will be exclusively influenced by the cultural experiences of the participants in the study.

Notable attention must be given to identifying and respecting the social factors that restrict or enhance the ability of the participants in the study to share their experiences. Social constructivism reaffirms the fact that all aspects of the person are connected and learning communities should be inclusive and equitable.

Participants in the study confirmed Vygotsky's theory by freely expressing their experiences through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and cognitive representations. A qualitative study, in the form of transcendental phenomenological research, was the best choice for extracting knowledge from African American male participants that conveyed the essence of their experiences with divorce. Research efforts were completed in their own communities and the participants were praised for their candor. By capturing the data from the participants in their own communities, their responses came from a relaxed space where they were able to convey their collective feelings of emotional anguish exacerbated by situational helplessness due to their nescience.

The participants also confirmed the value of utilizing Vygotsky's theory by providing a complete narrative of their experiences. Most of the participants identified the importance of familial and community support not only during the divorce process but also during the notable levels of resilience reported by the group. Relational quality was deemed as an important measure of for understanding the link between relationships and health to quantify the effect divorce has on the mental health of African American men (Barr, 2013). The highest quality relationships the African American male participants referred to during their ordeal were the relationships they had with sisters, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and great aunts.

The second theory utilized to support this study was Kurt Lewin's field theory. Lewin's field theory has been a popular conceptual framework for divorce study for over four decades

(Kuo, 1976). Lewin's field theory suggests that behavior is derived from the totality of coexisting and interdependent forces that impact a person or group (Burnes & Cooke, 2013). Lewin's field theory states that it is possible to understand, predict, and provide the basis for changing the behavior of individuals and groups by constructing a life space comprising the psychological forces influencing their behavior at any given point in time (Kuo, 1976; Lewin, 1936).

The participants in the study were able to convey a variety of factors they experienced while they were going through the divorce process. The participants recalled a host of details that included thoughts, feelings, actions, and insight they experienced throughout their ordeal. As Lewin mentioned, constructing a life space includes only those aspects of the environment that are perceived at some level by the individual (Lewin, 1998; Lewin, 1951). Asking clarifying questions allowed me to gain deeper insight into their experiences and allowed the participants to sharpen their collective recollections concerning their divorces. Additionally, as the participants reflected on their shared experiences most of the group became more introspective as they progressed through the stages of the study. Again, the life space Lewin alluded to allow the group to delve deeper into developing a broader understanding of their divorce journeys. This allowed me to gain more insight into the plight faced by African American men who have undergone divorce through their own unique lens.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development, which emphasized the essential roles language and culture play in human intellectual development and in how humans perceive the world, and Kurt Lewin's field theory, which suggested the field approach could be employed as a useful conceptual framework for family research in general and for divorce study, augmented the effectiveness of this study in procuring pertinent data needed to answer the research

questions. Vygotsky's theory was tantamount in choosing the right research method to extract the data required to tell the complete story of the participants. Using the qualitative research model of transcendental phenomenology allowed the participants in the study freedom to express their experiences through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and cognitive representations. Lewin's theory was paramount in creating a space that was congruent with the participants' need for a mental and physical environment that would enhance their ability to recall, reflect, and articulate their unique experiences with the divorce process. This particular theory lends itself to further enhancing the field of trauma informed care because researchers are able to glean expressions from participants that represent the participants' total experience. These two theories fueled the participants' desire to share their introspections with me as the study progressed, which added to the richness of the data I collected.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Empirical Literature

Two major themes emerged from the data analysis process: African American men experience the phenomenon of divorce as a multifarious emotional ordeal that is exacerbated by a lack of knowledge of the divorce process and the African American men experience elevated levels of diverse post-traumatic growth and self-actualization in the wake of divorce due to high levels of social support. The three subthemes that emanated from the primary theme were a convolution of feelings, a painful and horrific experience, and stress compounded by a negligible understanding of the divorce process. Existing literature was validated and challenged by the first theme and its supporting subthemes. The second major theme, which was unpredicted, was supported by two subthemes: the importance of multi-layered social support and self-actualization as evidenced by positive post-divorce transformations. The two subthemes accompanying the second major theme provided clarification of the factors that were identified

as being critically important to the post-divorce resilience experienced by 90% of the participants. The existing literature supported the second subtheme based on its references to the importance of maintaining a myriad of social supports.

Theme One

African American men experience the phenomenon of divorce as a multifarious emotional ordeal that is exacerbated by a lack of knowledge of the divorce process. First, the complexity of the feelings experienced by African American men who have undergone the divorce were shown to be ascribed to the difficulty they found in processing their feelings of loss, shattered plans, and altered life plans as single men versus being husbands and family men (Bauserman, 2012; Hoag, 2019; Manning & Payne, 2021). Halloran (2017) identifies cultural trauma as a significant barrier faced by African American males that impedes their social and psychological well-being. Showing that physiological challenges were a significant factor concerning African American men experiencing divorce, Lawson and Thompson (1996) stated twenty-seven out of the thirty participants involved in their study indicated they had significant physiological symptoms associated with their divorce including migraine headaches, hypertension, ulcers, heart attacks, and weight loss. Stigma and race were shown to have a significant impact on the motivation of mature African American men in locating and consistently participating in treatment for depression and anxiety, which have been proven to be major psychological factors encountered because of divorce (Bailey et al., 2019; Cornwell, 2012; Halloran, 2019; Jung et al., 2014).

Second, the feelings conveyed by the participants painted divorce as an overwhelming ordeal which corresponds with previous research efforts that lists marital dissolution as a significant trauma that involves losing a life partner (Hoag, 2019). Kitson and Morgon (2019)

explained that it should be expected that feelings of grief and despair would arise in men experiencing this unnatural phenomenon. In fact, a consideration of additional research sources indicate that divorce was deemed as being more stressful than losing a spouse, family member, or close friend in death (Gove & Shin, 1989; Fischer & Beresford, 2015; Leopold, 2018). The study also supported the findings in previous research that implied divorced men manifest higher rates of substance abuse and behavioral health concerns when contrasted with married men (Lawson & Thompson, 1996; Kabo et al., 2019).

Third, participants explained that having a negligible understanding of the divorce process compounded the complexity of the ordeal and created more emotional instability. Research conducted by Chase and Ullrich (2022) harmonized with the recollections of the participants, who made it apparent that divorce involves the cutting of complicated marital and familial attachments, arbitration of custody arrangements, initiating a new daily routine, and making the transition from parenting as a couple to co-parenting in separate households. Ninety percent of the participants indicated that they did not know anything about the process, which alluded to the point Reeves et al. (2016) highlighted in his research, which explained how the financial implications of divorce favor African American women in the U.S. because they statistically have better education and higher salaries than their husbands. Research supports the reality that feelings of situational helplessness due to ignorance intensified the negative feelings and emotions experienced by African American men who have through divorce.

Theme Two

African American men experience elevated levels of diverse post-traumatic growth and self-actualization in the wake of divorce due to high levels of social support. Theme two was fully supported by previous research efforts on the topic of the experiences of African American

men had divorce. First, prior research by Hansson et al. (2012) revealed the need for multilayered social support during divorce because ethnocultural minorities experience greater exposure to social isolation. In contrast to the research conducted by Taylor et al. (2015), which highlighted the impact of low levels of social support and negative social interactions as having a major influence on the level of depression experienced by African American men, all the participants in this research study expressed that they received high levels of support from multiple sources. In addition, Coffman et al. (2020) expressed the importance of African American men expanding their participation within their prospective religious communities as being an important component of resiliency and recovery. The responses of the participants correlated with the findings of Gregory (2019), who stated post-divorce assistance in the form of prayer, men's groups, sermons, and involvement in outreach ministries were viewed as an important source of emotional support by African American men.

Second, elevated levels of self-actualization, which resulted in positive post-divorce outcomes for most of the participants, was in line with the research of Coffman et al. (2020), who referenced that most of the African American participants in his research study were aided by increasing the time they dedicated to their employment activities and self-improvement. Research conducted by Taylor et al. (2015), which inferred that taking on part-time work in addition to their full-time jobs, working overtime, and even working two full-time jobs aided many divorced men to channel their energy into improving their emotional and financial situations, was also echoed by most of the participants in the current study. The participants in the current study indicated that their ordeal, and the subsequent support they received, made them want more out of life. Maslov (1964) developed a term called nadir-experiences to describe instances of tragedy, emotional turmoil, pain, trauma, and suffering that can lead to

personal and spiritual growth. The results of the current study support the fact that nadir-experiences lead to elevated levels of self-actualization or motivation in most of the participants.

Implications

According to the findings of the research that was conducted, there are theoretical, empirical, and practical implications for African American men who have experienced divorce. The implications are pertinent because they make certain that all divorced men can benefit from the promising conclusions that can be inferred from the study's findings.

Theoretical

Vygotsky's (1978) theory championed the significance of capturing accurate data from participants in a study by encouraging and promoting the interweaving of language and culture into their perception of experienced phenomena. Also, identifying and respecting the social factors that impede or enhance the ability of the participants in the current study to share their experiences adds to the depth of knowledge gathered about the effects of the phenomenon (Vygotsky, 1978). Lewin suggested the greatest approach to use in analyzing a person is to study their whole environment (Lewin, 1951). Lewin's field theory advocates that behavior is derived from the totality of coexisting and interdependent forces that impact a person or group (Burnes & Cooke, 2013).

Discerning the importance of the effect culture, gender, and community norms have on African American men, the theorists examined thus far dictate the need to conduct qualitative research that would utilize open-ended questioning to determine the influence divorce has had on African American men. Combining Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development and Kurt Lewin's field theory enhanced the effectiveness of the study in ascertaining pertinent data needed to answer the research questions designed for this study. Most of the participants took

advantage of the open-ended questions to give a history of how they met their ex-wives and specific situations and circumstances that led to them getting married. The participants' disclosure of pertinent historical milestones with their former spouses allowed an influx of data that made it possible to capture the essence of their total experiences with divorce. Also, interviewing participants in their own homes and at the site enabled them to feel more at ease and thereby respond more freely to the questions posed during the interviews and focus groups. Therefore, researchers should focus on utilizing open-ended questions when attempting to gain a deeper understanding of how participants experience certain phenomena. Researchers should also attempt to conduct research within the homes of participants or at a trusted resource in the community to make the participants feel at ease and more willing to share vital details of their experiences.

Empirical

Much of the corresponding literature focuses on African American men's attitudes toward marriage (Perry, 2013), marital satisfaction (Acosta, 2020), and the intricacies of their romantic relationships (Kogan et al., 2019). Lawson and Thompson (1966) published a study nearly 60 years ago that directly addressed the struggles encountered by divorced African American men. A broader search for peer-reviewed literature on the phenomenon revealed African American men face significant pre- and post-divorce challenges which include physiological, social, financial, and psychological well-being (Wright & Price, 1986; McKay et al., 2021; Mowbray, 2018; McLanahan et al., 2013). Cornwell (2012) listed socialization as a crucial component of post-divorce recovery and resiliency. The recollections of the participants indicated a high degree of difficulty in experiencing divorce among African American men because the phenomenon represents complex trauma. The participants also revealed that their

elevated levels of post-divorce success were due to a strong feminine presence in the form of familial support.

The responses from the participants had the connotation of situational helplessness due to their lack of understanding of the divorce process, which, in turn, intensified their negative feelings and emotions. They added that their community supports, such as friends, coworkers, and church congregants, were blended with the support they received from the female members of their families to produce a positive effect on their lives that aided in their resiliency. Researchers and clinicians should focus on the benefits of identifying the natural supports found in the lives of men going through divorce because it has proven to be a dynamic source of strength for those participating in the study.

Practical

From a practical standpoint, researchers and clinicians have had access to research that expresses the need to gain a deeper understanding of the plight of African American men and their experience with divorce. Ward et al. (2013) highlighted that understanding the toll divorce has on African American men could provide researchers and therapists with a deeper understanding of the inner workings of the mind of African American men and assist in the creation of new models of counseling theories that may lessen adverse outcomes of divorce by utilizing subsequently enhanced evidence-based practices. This study should be used by researchers and clinicians to promote better interactions with their African American male clients based on an increased awareness of the effect divorce has on the well-being of African American men and how the effect of divorce presents in their daily lives.

Barr et al. (2013) aligned with Vygotsky by highlighting the need for a multidimensional assessment of relationship quality for understanding the link between relationships and health to

quantify the effect divorce has on the mental health of African American men. The participants identified the divorce process as being a multifarious ordeal that was compounded by a lack of understanding of the process. It would behoove researchers and clinicians to take note of the effect relational instability has on the experience of men going through a divorce and highlight the importance of aiding those men in identifying stable familial supports that could counterbalance the effect of losing a partner through marital dissolution, which was shown to be akin to losing a loved one in death (Hankerson et al., 2011).

Christian Worldview

Utilizing my Christian Worldview to interpret the findings of prior research that harmonizes with the results produced by this study would cause me to highlight the power of Christ's church in helping all those who are suffering, including African American men who are going through a divorce. Research has proven that African Americans place a high value on religion and spirituality, and these practices serve as a psychological and social aid for managing stress, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Coffman et al., 2020). Holland (2016) stated African American communities and places of worship play a vital role in the lives of many African Americans' growth and resilience in the face of cultural and social issues. Taylor et al. (2016) stated the African American men in their study stabilized their emotional well-being by immersing themselves into the rich religious and cultural experience of their church. Multiple participants in the current study attributed their recoveries to strengthening their relationships with God by reading their bibles daily, more prayer, and reconnecting with their community church homes. I know the Lord welcomes all who are in pain to come and receive healing (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Jeremiah 17:14). My Christian Worldview allows me to utilize secular sources, when necessary, especially when medical needs arise. Prior research, this

current study, and my own personal experience praises God for supplying us with the “Body of Christ” in the form of the church, which supplies everything we need to refresh our souls in times of despair (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

Delimitations and Limitations

I made specific design decisions that defined the scope of the study. The Delimitations section found below expounds upon those design decisions. Furthermore, I have identified prospective weaknesses of the study that were outside of my control based on the focus of the study. The Limitations section describes those limitations below.

Delimitations

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to chronicle the shared experiences of working class/middle class African American men who have gone through a divorce in Hampton Roads, which is comprised of nine independent cities located in Southeastern Virginia. Hence, I defined several boundaries that centered around the subject of the study. I chose to use a qualitative research design for this study because the primary purpose of the study was to have the participants describe their experiences. I used transcendental phenomenology, which consisted of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, cognitive representations, and data analysis consisting of a multi-layered system of qualitative research operations designed to synthesize the crux of the participants’ recollections (Frey, 2018). Therefore, a phenomenological study was performed to chronicle the lived experiences of African American men who have experienced divorce to extract the common themes that represented their shared experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I chose to use participants in Hampton Roads, Virginia because I live and work in the region.

I restricted participation in the study to the staff, clients, and interested family members Community Complete Home Healthcare. Participants only needed to identify as working-class/middle-class African American males between the ages of 20 to 72. The age range limitation ensured the study only had participants who were legally able to enter marriage of their own volition. The participants had to have been married for a minimum of two years before their marriages were terminated. The rationale for the minimum two-year marriage criterion ensured the participants in the study had sufficient experience with marriage to contribute to the data being collected on the effects of dissolving the marriage bond during the study.

Limitations

There is a host of possible limitations to this study based on its composition, focus, sample size, and population. The first limitation is based on the phenomenological design of the study, which may pose an issue when attempting to duplicate the results of the study or make it applicable to different phenomena. The sample size of the study being 10 satisfies the need for data saturation in a phenomenological study, but it may have limited the scope of the study by not including additional perspectives on the phenomenon by adding more participants. Another limitation is that I did not include any research questions that related to financial implications or issues with co-parenting, which presented as significant factors in previous research on the topic of divorce related woes of African American men.

A significant limitation of the study resides in the fact that I am an African American male who has experienced divorce. I made certain to bracket out my experience as a divorcee, but there may still be the possibility of bias in the description of the findings. I utilized member checking to minimize the possibility of bias occurring, but it may have transpired regardless.

Lastly, I limited participation in the study to African American men between the ages of 20-72. I am certain there are African American men who have married at the age of 18 and divorced before their twentieth birthday. Alternatively, I am certain there are African American men who are older than 72 who have been divorced as well. Excluding these participants may have enhanced the richness of the data collected due to the uniqueness of their perspectives.

Recommendations for Future Research

Hampton Roads, Virginia, with its regional population numbering well over 1.8 million residents, is the 37th largest metropolitan area in the United States. African Americans represent a little more than 30 percent of the region's population. The study focused on the experiences of African American men who have suffered marital dissolution in an area where they may be represented as well as they would have been further South like Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi. Subsequent studies should concentrate their research on regions where the population is better represented and more diverse in relation to socioeconomic and educational factors.

Participants highlighted the importance of multifaceted support in the community, including places of worship. In addition to enlisting the aid of community mental health organizations and social service organizations for assistance with locating participants for future studies, places of worship should be utilized as key partners in reaching African American men in the community to participate in divorce studies. Prior research refers to the fact that African American men look to their pastors for wisdom and understanding in times of great emotional complexity (Coffman et al., 2020; Cross et al, 2018). Having a trusted support partner such as a pastor referring African American men to participate in divorce studies would aid in getting greater participation which would have improved clinical applications.

African American men are more likely to suffer from past discrimination, adverse childhood family experiences, childhood sexual abuse, other childhood trauma, and chronic stresses that may contribute to decreased ability to respond appropriately to dissolution of the marriage (Myers et al., 2015; Creekmur, 2016; Cole & Lipscomb, 2022). According to Kilpatrick et al. (2013), the cumulative effect of lifetime stressors affects the adaptability of adult African American males going through a divorce. Future researchers should include a line of questioning that addresses the effect ACEs may have played in the impact of divorce on the mental health of African American men.

Only 90 percent of the participants stated they experienced post-divorce resilience due to the support they received from multiple sources. A closer examination of the two subthemes used to support the second major theme suggests elevated levels of post-divorce success are due to a strong feminine presence in the form familial supports. Future researchers should consider getting the perspectives of African American female family members who have helped their male family members while they were going through the trauma of divorce. The insight gathered from the women would prove invaluable in discerning the level of emotional support they perceive they are rendering compared to the level the men feel they are receiving.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to chronicle the shared experiences of working class/middle class African American men who have gone through a divorce in Hampton Roads, which is comprised of nine independent cities located in Southeastern Virginia. While many studies on African American marriages abound, there is an absence of current studies that have examined African American men's divorce experience. Prior and contemporary research efforts on the state of African American marital issues have led to

decades of overrepresentation of African American men as unwed parents, unemployed, and incapable of shouldering familial responsibility (Broman, 2005; Cole & Lipscomb, 2022). This study was undertaken to accurately reflect the perspective of African American males on the effect divorce had on their lives.

Socialization was shown to be an integral component of post-divorce recovery and resiliency (Cornwell, 2012). The current study's data clearly indicated that African American men experience the phenomenon of divorce as a multifarious emotional ordeal that is exacerbated by a lack of knowledge of the divorce process which intensifies feelings of instability and uncertainty. The responses from the participants implied that divorce process fostered a sense of helplessness which was exacerbated by a lack of understanding of the process, and, in turn, escalated their adverse reactions to the event. However, the results of the study correlated elevated levels of post-divorce success with having a multitiered support system with female familial supports having the greatest influence. It is my hope that future researchers and clinicians review this study to gain a deeper understanding of the toll divorce has on working class/middle class African American men and the evidence-based interventions available to mitigate the duress caused by the phenomenon.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 1, 2023

Richard Moore
Kristy Ford

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY22-23-1033 No Sunshine When She's Gone: The Shared Experiences of African American Men Who Have Undergone Divorce

Dear Richard Moore, Kristy Ford,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: May 1, 2023. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

June 6, 2023

Mr. Richard Moore,

Good evening, I and my staff are delighted and honored to assist you with conducting your research with us here at [REDACTED] for your dissertation. I will provide you with a list of our African American clients who have been divorced. You have my full permission, and the clients I will provide you with, to conduct your research interviews.

I want to congratulate you on your future endeavors. Please feel free to contact me or the office anytime for any additional information you may need. We are here to help.

Regards,

Shaqona Payne BS, QMHP-A

CEO

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Office: [REDACTED]

Fax: [REDACTED]

Mobile: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Richard Moore. I am a doctoral student at Liberty University in the Department of Education. I am currently conducting research that will be used in my dissertation. The purpose of my research is to understand how African American men describe their experiences with divorce. I am extremely interested in your thoughts and lived experience concerning this matter.

Participants in this study must be working-class/middle-class African American men who have experienced divorce in Hampton Roads. Participants must be between the ages of 20 to 72 years of age. Participants must also have been married for a minimum of 2 years prior to their divorce. The information that you share with me will be used to further current literature on divorced African American men and the extent marital dissolution affects their lives. The total time of your participation in the study will take approximately two months from start to finish, and will require two one-hour face-to-face audio recorded interviews and two one-hour focus group sessions. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to email me at [REDACTED] to ask them or call me at [REDACTED], or you may discuss your interest with the clinician who gave you this letter. If you think you would be interested in participating in this study, please fill out the Preliminary Survey Questionnaire form attached to this letter and return it to your clinician to get a copy of the informed consent form to read and sign to start your journey as participant in this seminal study.

A consent document will be given to you by the clinician upon turning in your Preliminary Survey Questionnaire. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Sincerely,

Richard L Moore

Doctoral Candidate

Appendix C: Preliminary Survey Questionnaire

Please answer each of the questions with one of the responses provided:

1. Are you a male?

Yes

No

2. Do you identify as African American?

Yes

No

3. Are you between the ages of 20-72?

Yes

No

4. Do you identify as working-class/middle-class?

Yes

No

5. Did your marriage last for at least 2 years?

Yes

No

6. Have you been divorced for at least 2 years?

Yes

No

7. Which range below includes your age?

20-29

30-39

40-49

50-59

60 or older

8. How long did the marriage last before dissolution?

2-6 years

6-12 years

12-20 years

20 plus years

9. Are you currently under the care of a medical doctor or mental health care professional?

Medical doctor

Mental health care professional

Both

Neither

10. Highest level of education

High school

Some college

Associate's degree

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Doctorate degree

11. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?

Employed, working 40 or more hours per week

Employed, working 1-39 hours per week

Not employed, looking for work

Not employed, NOT looking for work

Disabled, not able to work

Appendix D: Consent Form**Consent**

Title of the Project: No Sunshine When She's Gone: The Shared Experiences of African American Men Who Have Undergone Divorce

Principal Investigator: Richard L. Moore, Ms. Psy. Doctoral Candidate, Department of Community Care and Counseling, School of Behavioral Sciences, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a working-class/middle-class African American male who has experienced divorce in Hampton Roads. Participants must be between the ages of 20 years old and 72 years old. Participants must also have been married for a minimum of 2 years prior to their divorce. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to understand how African American men describe their experiences with divorce.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in two in-person, audio-recorded interviews that will take no more than 1 hour.
2. Participate in two in-person/online audio-recorded focus groups that will take no more than 1 hour.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include adding to the current literature on divorced African American men and the extent marital dissolution affects their lives. The results of this research project could help in creating trauma-informed care models that will effectively aid men transitioning through the various stages of divorce.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with people outside of the group.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and in a locked file cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then deleted. The researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty or PHAITH Home Health Agency. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address and/or phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Richard L. Moore, Ms. Psy. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED]

or at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Kristy Ford, at [REDACTED]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is [REDACTED]; our phone number is [REDACTED], and our email address is [REDACTED]

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of this document with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix E: Sample Interview Transcript*Question 6*

Interviewer: OK, now let me ask you about your feelings concerning the divorce. How would you describe your experience with divorce?

Interviewee: I think my experience was divorce was really rough.

Interviewer: How so?

Interviewee: I was shaken up, you know, like we were married for eight years, but it just seems like we fought the whole time we were married. I mean, we only dated for like 6 months before we got married and things were rushed in a sense because I was going back to church, and I was trying not to sin against God, and I said best thing for me to do is get married and she was feeling that way too.

Interviewer: So, you both went to the same church?

Interviewee: Yep. At that time, we went to the same church, and I guess when we started dating, we felt the same way and felt like it would make things better. But we really didn't know each other that well. And it seems like we fought almost from day one. But the divorce was really rough on me too because I felt ashamed by it. You know, I felt really ashamed by us not making it. And then we had children on top of everything else, so it was really difficult.

Interviewer: It sounds like you were going through a lot.

Interviewee: I was. It was very complex, you know, the hurt and the guilt combined. It was also mixed with a little bit of relief too at the same time. It's kind of weird, I guess.

Question 7

Interviewer: Well then, how would you describe your initial understanding of the divorce process as a whole?

Interviewee: I didn't know a lot at all. Like I said, I didn't think we were ever going to do that, but we fought a lot, so I should have figured it might happen.

Interviewer: I can see how you would think that you should have been able to see it coming.

Interviewee: Yep. And then when we had children. I was thinking having them would hold things together, but it seems like it got worse and then as I mentioned, my son, who is 10 years old, has autism. So that made our situation even more challenging there and we just didn't make it. But yeah, I didn't understand anything about divorce, and it seemed like a long process. And I was scared because I have buddies that said they felt like they had most of their possessions taken and a lot of their pay was taken. But I think the child support is a fair amount and I do what I must do to take care of my kids. I still work as a personal trainer on the side, and I also work for the sheriff's department, so I got a good job and a great side job so I'm doing pretty good. Really good. And I feel good about that.

Question 8

Interviewer: That's great to hear. How would you describe the level of social support you received during the divorce process?

Interviewee: Well, again, my mom was very helpful, you know, before she came down with dementia, she was my rock. And all my sisters too. We're all close. You know, one is my younger sister and the other is my older sister so we're very close. They really helped me a lot and I think them being women helped me not to just categorize women as evil or hate women

and lump them all together because I had some the greatest support I've received come from my sisters and my mother.

Interviewer: Very interesting. What about additional support?

Interviewee: And of course, the guys at work. You know, being a personal trainer means you train all different kinds of men. Different people there. Many of us men have been touched by divorce. What I've seen throughout the years from my time in the military and time at the sheriff's office, and even as a personal trainer, is that it's just part of life. But I've received a lot of my greatest support from my mother and my sisters. So again, I guess their support kept me from hating women.

Question 9

Interviewer: Wow. That was an interesting point. Now, how would you describe the effect divorce had on your sense of self-actualization or motivation?

Interviewee: Well, let me think. Before the divorce happened, I had some other milestones I was proud of. I got my bachelor's degree while I was married through ODU on the GI Bill. So that was great, but once my divorce happened, it made me think about my life and I said I had to do more than just personal training.

Interviewer: Really. Okay. Sounds like you were thinking about expanding your horizons.

Interviewee: I sure was. I was working for Gold's Gym back then as full-time staff, but I decided to get a job at the sheriff's office to have a more solid paycheck and city benefits. You know, city retirement, city pension, things like that. My degree in criminal justice is going to take me a long way in the Sheriff's Department and I think it has so far already since I'm a

sergeant. I enjoy the work because I try to help the prisoners I have to watch in jail and the other officers I work with. I try to make sure that I set an example for them and treat them like human beings and teach them respect and show them respect through how I treat them. But I just feel like I got a little bit more serious about life and I wanted to do better. I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do, but I did know that I wanted to do better for me and better for my children.

Question 10

Interviewer: So now, what benefits would you describe, if any, arose from going through the divorce?

Interviewee: Well, I'm not really dating anyone. I just have friends. I haven't gotten serious with anyone since the divorce.

Interviewer: That's interesting. How long have you been divorced?

Interviewee: Wow, that's been was eight years now, but I'd like to think that I'm just more focused. The divorce helped me become more focused and helped me to be more appreciative of what really matters in life, and that's my health and health and safety of my children. Everything else comes, takes a backseat to that. You know, my health is important because without my health, and mental health, I'd be like those guys that I'm watching over at the jail, you know, or transporting to and from the jail.

Interviewer: That's another great point.

Interviewee: The health and safety of my children is my primary importance to me, especially with my son's special needs concerning his autism. I want to make sure that he's going to have the care and attention he needs and that my daughter has the attention she needs from me as well.

So, I think if anything. It just helped me. The divorce helped me. I kind of wised up a little and became more focused in life. Now I'm just making sure that, you know, I'm doing well and they're doing well and that's enough for me for right now.

Interviewer: OK. Very well said. Well, thank you for your time and participation. I look forward to your participation in the focus group next week.

Appendix F: Interview Questions/Guide

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met each other.
2. How long have you been living in Hampton Roads, and how has your experience been here?
3. What would you say is the best part of attending services through Community Complete Home Healthcare?
4. How has your time at Community Complete Home Healthcare compared to your experience at other behavioral health providers?
5. What are some reasons why you would recommend Community Complete Home Healthcare to your friends and family?
6. How would you describe your experience with divorce?
7. How would you describe your initial understanding of the divorce process as a whole?
8. How would you describe the level of social support you received during the divorce process?
9. How would you describe the effect divorce had on your sense of self-actualization (motivation)?
10. What benefits would you describe, if any, that arose from going through your divorce?

Appendix G: Verbal Recruitment Script (In Person)

Hello Potential Participant,

My name is Richard Moore. I am a doctoral student at Liberty University in the Department of Education. I am currently conducting research that will be used in my dissertation. The purpose of my research is to understand how African American men describe their experiences with divorce. I am extremely interested in your thoughts and lived experience concerning this matter. I would like to invite you to join my study.

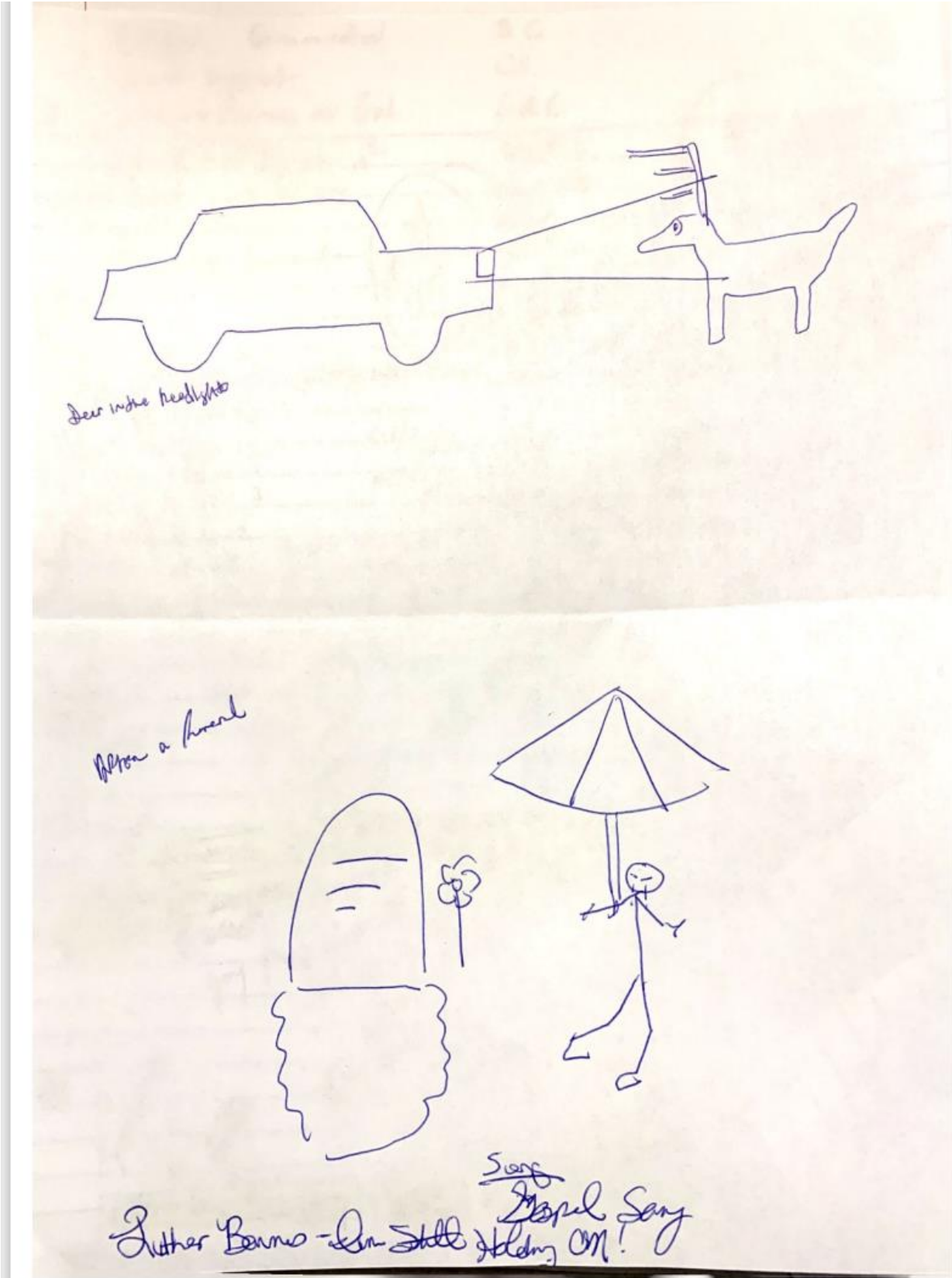
Participants must be African American men who have experienced divorce. Participants must be between the ages of 20 to 72 years of age. Participants must also have been married for a minimum of 2 years prior to their divorce. Participants, if willing, will be asked to commit to the study for approximately two months from start to finish. Participation in the study will require two one-hour face-to-face audio recorded interviews and two one-hour focus group sessions. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

Would you like to participate? Great, could I get your email address so I can send you the link to the screening survey? If you have the time to do so now, would you mind completing this survey and returning it by handing it to me? You may also place it in the provided envelope on the desk of my assistant in the conference room. Can we set up a time for an interview? If you are not interested in participating, I completely understand. Thank you for your time.

A consent document will be given to you one week before the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions?

Appendix H: Cognitive Representation



Appendix I: Permission Letter

June 6, 2023

Shaqona Payne
Clinical Director/CEO

Dear Ms. Payne

As a graduate student in the School of Behavioral Sciences Department of Community Care and Counseling at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree. The title of my research project is “No Sunshine When She’s Gone: The Shared Experiences of African American Men Who Have Gone Through Divorce” and the purpose of my research is to chronicle the shared experiences of working class/middle class African American men who have gone through a divorce in Hampton Roads, which is comprised of nine independent cities located in Southeastern Virginia.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at the main office of [REDACTED] and for your assistance in locating participants for the study by circulating my Recruitment Letter among your clients.

Interested members of your healthcare system will be asked to complete the attached preliminary screening survey to determine if they meet the criteria for the study. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. I will utilize two semi-structured interviews and two online and/or in-person focus groups to capture the data necessary to complete the study. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on an official letterhead indicating your approval.

Sincerely,

Richard L. Moore, Ms. Psy.
Doctoral Student, Liberty University

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Appendix J: Sample Transcript of In-Person Focus Group

Interviewer: OK. So, with that in mind, how would you describe your post-divorce feelings?

What does your visualization or picture look like that would describe those feelings?

Participant 1: Well, I would say freedom. The word freedom just comes to my mind. In large bold print. Freedom with an exclamation mark. I am free. I am not just free. I'm thriving and living better than I ever thought I could have or would have. Right now, and forever. It's just a great feeling.

Participant 2: Man, we are all free right now. I like that.

Participant 3: There aint nothing like it.

Interviewer: That's very good. Thank you, Participant 1. And so, when you think of a song that reminds you of your divorce experience, what song comes to mind?

Participant 1: Well, I think I had everything I mentioned. I really loved her. I loved, loved, loved her. I thought we had so much in common and I was just ready to spend my whole life with her. But then she started becoming mean and vindictive. She started acting horrible towards me and accusing me of cheating and wanting a divorce. She then accused me of touching my daughter and just all kinds of horrible things. The song by Charlie Wilson and the Gap band is the one I would have to say. You got me Going in Circles comes to mind. You got me going in circles because I thought she loved me. And then it's like she hated me. And then sometimes I could tell that she was being mean, but she really didn't want to be mean to me. I felt like she was just having a very difficult time and was taking everything out on me, but I felt compassion for her. And that's one

thing my mom taught me to feel compassion for her. But then I found out that she was seeing someone else the whole time and bragging about even before we were separated and then bragging about how she lied on me about touching my daughter on her text messages to her other man. And that's how I got her. Yeah, she had me going in circles because I thought she loved me, but she didn't. And I was trying to show compassion. I thought she was feeling bad about what she was doing, but she was not.

Participant 3: Man, I'm glad you got out of that. Whew.

Participant 2: Me too.

Participant 4: Man, me too. I thought I had it bad.

Interviewer: Right. Now okay Participant 2, what picture did you draw that reminds you of your pre- divorce feelings?

Participant 2: Well, the only thing I can think of is, I guess, it's twofold. I felt high you know, but I also felt low so I drew the sunshine and the sky but the sun with the sad face you know because it's still high in the sky but it's still sad too so that's what I would have to say. I guess that's what I drew the sun with the sad face. I was feeling high and low at the same time.

Participant 4: We are getting all the truth tonight. I think I felt like that a little too. Maybe closer towards the end.