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Wisdom from Experience: Understanding Men's Experience of Marriage and Poverty

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Wisdom from Experience: Understanding Men's Experience of Marriage and
Poverty

by

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MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. The project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

Abstract

The current study looked to understand the relationship between marriage and poverty from a male perspective. Previous research identified a number of barriers to marriage of those in poverty, with an emphasis on a female perspective. Previous research also found that there is a desire to marry amongst women who have experienced poverty, however many do not because of the lack of quality, marriage-ready candidates. The current research sought to fill this gap through better understanding men's experience of marriage and poverty. Data was collected through a qualitative design by interviewing 13 men who had experienced poverty and had been married. The data was analyzed through open coding and organized around grounded categories.

Findings included factors that led to the decision to get married, characteristics of the positive and negative qualities of the marriage, and how poverty affected the marriage relationship. The current study examined internal processes of what led to the decision to get married and found the most identified reason was feelings of love, like, and adoration. The positive attribute mentioned by most participants was companionship and a good quality of marriage. The negative attributes mentioned by most participants was a breakdown in relational dynamics and differences between husband and wife. Participants reported both a positive impact of poverty on marriage and a negative impact of poverty on marriage. Participants discussed how poverty brought them closer together, but also how poverty caused strain on the relationship and created arguments. Strengths, limitations, and implications of the current study were also explored.

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The debates swirling about marriage in America primarily deal with contemporary matters, namely who in society is allowed to engage in marriage, what role, if any, should political and legal institutions play in the marriage dance, and how individual marriages should relate to the greater society. While each of these matters is important, it is vital to explore the history of marriage in order to more fully engage in these matters. Coontz (2005) suggested that marriage in American society was shaped by Greek and Roman philosophies, merged with early Christian teachings, was carried through Western European contexts and blossomed into a revolutionary American ideal lasting centuries. We begin by exploring marriage through each of these transitions and shifts throughout time.

History of Marriage

Ancient Greece and Rome

Most ancient civilizations were dominated by family rule, with rights, land, and power transferred through family relationships, thereby allowing families to rule for generations. Coontz (2005) discussed how the city-state of Athens, Greece looked to equalize this power monopoly of the wealthy by creating a democracy that allowed its citizens to take more control of the ruling powers; through distributing power to all its citizens, the wealthy aristocrats were put on a level playing field with middle-class citizens. “Athenian reformers promoted civil laws, abstract principles of justice, and norms of patriotism that could supplant the narrow obligations of blood ties and personal alliances” (Coontz, 2005, p. 72). Even Athens’ public buildings and coins shifted from powerful family crests to images of the Greek goddess Athena Nike; she symbolized the allegiance to the state rather than familial ties. “Legend said she had sprung full grown from the head of Zeus and therefore lacked any maternal in-laws to compete with her loyalty to the state” (Coontz, 2005, p. 73). In Athens, an individual’s allegiance to the city-state

was paramount, familial ties were secondary; an ideal was born that included the desire to make marriage a coming together of two individuals, not necessarily two families (Coontz, 2005). The political and legal realm of Athens were shaped by groups of individual citizens, not powerful families.

The Greek influence on marriage sought to bring together two individuals; however, these individuals were not necessarily equally yoked. Coontz (2005) noted that at any time in life, a woman was subject to the formal guardianship of a man, first her father then her husband. The man was always considered the full citizen, a woman only interacted with the public sphere through her father or her husband. While Athens faded through the debilitating Peloponnesian Wars, Rome picked up the torch in touting a patriarchal society. As in Athens, a woman was viewed as property passed from her father to her husband through marriage. Along with the woman, a man might gain a dowry from her father and any possessions she had. Athens and Rome differed in some ways though; in Athenian society, a wife was essentially expected to stay within the inner courts of her house and vacate all connections with the outer world, except through her husband. The Roman way of life gave a woman a bit more freedom within a marriage to manage property and gain some political influences (Coontz, 2005). These ancient societies gave a philosophical underpinning throughout history and shaped our own modern viewpoint for how a woman is to interact with the greater society, namely it would be through her husband.

Christian teachings

The Roman Empire's rule dwindled in the fourth century A.D., but while this occurred, emperors Constantine and Theodosius undertook measures that made Christianity the official church of the empire (Coontz, 2005). The Roman Catholic Church would carry marriage beyond

the fall of Rome into the rise of European nations. In order to more fully examine the Christian teaching of marriage, the Biblical record of ancient Jewish texts predating Roman and Greek influence will be examined. In Genesis (New International Version), chapters 1-2, the narrative spoke of Yahweh (God) creating the world, and lastly creating male and female. In Genesis 2:24, after creating all things the narrative explained, "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh." This statement included only one man and one woman, thereby creating the marital context as a union of two into one. Later in the New Testament, Jesus' commentary on divorce repeated this verse as the basis for marriage and reiterated, "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Mark 10:8-9). Whether Biblical laws that outlined specific sexual behavior to avoid while married (Leviticus 18), or Biblical poetry that included a rich, vivid pursuit of a love between a husband and wife (book of Song of Songs), or a Biblical prophetic picture of marriage symbolizing the relationship between Yahweh and his people (book of Hosea), marriage is embedded in the narrative of the Old Testament. Yet even this ancient people did not fully embody the ideal union of one man and one woman. The story of David, perhaps the greatest king of Israel, included an account of adultery; David slept with another man's wife while he himself was married and God punished David for his wrongdoing (2 Samuel 11-12). The Old Testament commented on both the positives of marriage lived within the boundaries set out by Yahweh and the negatives of behaviors that transgressed these same boundaries.

Christian teaching holds the Jewish Old Testament as Holy Scripture, but also includes the New Testament teachings as Holy Scripture. Included in the New Testament, along with the narrative of Jesus' days on earth, is the apostles' letters to other believers in the early church after Jesus left the apostles to continue the ministry he began. Jesus' teaching of what it takes to

be a disciple included putting familial ties, even marriage, second to a relationship with God (Luke 14:26). The apostle Paul later furthered this idea when discussing marriage relationships directly, “Since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband ... I say this as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all of you were as I am [unmarried]” (1 Corinthians 7:2, 6-7). However, when Paul speaks directly to those who decide to marry, a theme of self-sacrifice and sacrificial love take precedence over selfish ambitions and familial power plays, “The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife” (1 Corinthians 7:4). A tone of submission to one another is relayed time and time again (Ephesians 5:21; Colossians 3:18-19). The carryover of marriage ideals from the Old Testament continued into the New Testament, namely that of displaying God’s example of sacrificial love among both husband and wife.

The Middle Ages

The Pope held the highest office in the Roman Catholic Church, and as the Roman Empire began to crumble under the pressure of invading Germanic tribes, this position proved to be one of the most influential offices in Western Europe. According to Coontz (2005), as the Germanic invaders usurped land and power from the Roman Empire, there was no unifying leader to rally around. Instead gains were won by multiple leaders who could not completely defeat one another. Marriage became a way to expand one’s own domain through gaining powerful in-laws and drawing up peace treaties through marital union; although the Greek ideal of having the option to choose one’s partner prevailed. The papal office, through coronation, was used to legitimize these marriages and secure a grip on the seat of kingly power, which in turn would offer military strength to defend the church’s expeditions. This dependency upon one

another between the church and rulers made for a “tug of war” as the church’s ideals and the escapades of heir-hungry rulers clashed. As the centuries progressed, a certain picture of marriage was agreed upon (for the most part) by both sides. Marriage in the middle ages amongst nobility and the wealthy was marked by a union between one man and one woman (no polygamy) from different families (no incest) until death (no divorce).

Marriage in the middle ages for the commoners and peasants lagged behind the nobility and wealthy in developing norms and rules. Coontz (2005) pointed out that “for the first eight centuries of its existence, the church itself showed little concern about what made for a valid marriage or divorce among the lower classes of society” (p. 104). Consent was upheld as a supreme value, the ability to respond positively or negatively to a marriage proposal became a cornerstone for marriage. By the thirteenth century, the church had established a framework for any marriage to be considered valid. The woman’s parents would have to give a dowry (thereby disallowing secret marriages), the community was informed of the pending marriage weeks before the wedding date, and the wedding had to occur in a church (Coontz, 2005). While this did not provide any major hurdles for much of those looking to get married, it did present a template which would exist for centuries. Marriage continued to exist as an economic boon for both husband and wife, where the infusion of the dowry added to the couples’ base and the work of the couple and the family could sustain daily living.

The Modern Era

The option to choose a marriage partner that began within the Athenian rise of democracy, infused by the doctrine of consent in the middle ages, took full effect in the modern era. The eighteenth century, with the rise of industrialization and political revolutions, created an atmosphere where those engaging in marriage looked to set up family systems that had little use

for extended family relations. In Western Europe, a sense of independence prevailed. Instead of working within a “larger family collective,” married couples in Western Europe “were expected to work their own land or establish their own trade” (Coontz, 2005, p. 125). This brought about a need to be somewhat established financially before engaging in marriage, simply because the married couple could not rely on the extended family connections. According to Coontz (2005), the median age of marriage for women in England from 1500-1700 was twenty-six, higher than at any point during the twentieth century in America. The seeds of independence that had been growing since Ancient Greece continued to grow throughout Western Europe and ultimately reached into Colonial America.

Colonial America was rife with marital and familial language concerning politics and the revolution. According to Cott (2000), “American spokesmen portrayed the colonies as the abused offspring of a cruel and unfeeling imperial parent, who left the child no alternative but to disobey” (p. 15). The revolution was cloaked in language that pulled at the heart strings of those who would one day be called citizens. As the citizenry joined together, commentators began using language marked with marital connotations. Cott (2000) explained that in order to rally the fledgling nation, a union between the nation’s government and its citizens was necessary. The ancient ways of “subordination” and “obedience” were replaced with “reciprocal rights” and “responsibilities” (Cott, 2000, p. 16). This language led to the ideality of marriage as a way to shape citizens. Coontz (2005) also noted a seventeenth-century theologian that spoke of marriage as “the ordinary means to turn men and women into masters and mistresses” (p. 124). Cott (2000) highlighted the political thought of the revolution, “The conviction that the most reasonable and humane qualities of mankind arose in sociability rather than in isolation set the stage for American republicans to see marriage as a training ground for citizenly virtue” (p. 18).

Marriage quickly became a tool for the new leaders to wield in shaping the kind of society it believed would most readily adhere to the new government.

The language surrounding marriage began to change during the early years of the Modern Era. Love and companionship were spoken of as reasons to marry, a far cry from the thousands of years previously. Equality within marriage was being put on a pedestal throughout Western Europe and the newly established United States of America. The absolute rights of husbands and kings were traded in for reason, love, and loyalty to one another (Coontz, 2005). The prevailing idea from this era that forever changed how people engage in marriage and what constitutes grounds for exiting a marriage was essentially wrapped up in the ideal union characterized by love, equality, and companionship. Blankenhorn (2007) characterized this shift by offering a “which came first ...?” dichotomy; he noted two differing views about marriage, one posited that the institution of marriage existed well before any couple engaged in it, the other view posited that the couple existed before their marriage and their union created the marriage.

These two views reflect strikingly divergent conceptions of marriage. One view seeks to make the couple fit the marriage. The other seeks to make marriage fit the couple. In one view, society presents a socially composed norm to the couple. In the other, the couple presents a privately composed norm to society. In the former view, marriage defines me.

In the latter view, I define marriage. (Blankenhorn, 2007, p. 19)

This ideal of creating a union of two individuals in marriage and maintaining marriages and families that meet emotional needs and allowing individuals to define marriage continued and exists today. However, even amongst those who wish to engage in marriage, barriers exist. We will explore some of these barriers next.

Barriers to Marriage in Poverty

The current review of research incorporated views of why women do not marry. This research can be helpful in understanding the experience of women in poverty who consider marriage. However, a gap including the experience of men in poverty who consider marriage was created. Bowie, Dias-Bowie, Fields, & Bryant (2009) examined attitudes toward intimate relationships with men amongst women who had been on welfare through qualitative interviews over three years. Amongst responses that were given as to the main barriers of marriage, Bowie et al. (2009) identified “dubious views of men” (24%) as the most mentioned; “finance” (20%), and “aspirations to marry” (12%) were identified as the next exclusive barriers (p. 290). Some of the least mentioned responses were “skepticism about marriage” (7%) and “opposed to marriage” (4%) (p. 290). These results indicated that there is not necessarily a low view of marriage or an unwillingness to get married, rather there is a hesitancy to engage in marriage with men who are not willing to commit and provide for the family, as noted by one participant, “men only want ... sex and they don't wanna work” (Bowie et al., 2009, p. 289). Financial reasons were also identified, as noted by one participant, “I'm not financially stable enough, so I kinda put that on the back burner” (Bowie et al., 2009, p. 290). One participant mentioned her “traditional view” of marriage as a barrier, “Marriage in general ... I never done it before. But I think that's sacred, you know? I think that's something real serious, you know?” (Bowie et al., 2009, p. 290).

Edin (2000) interviewed mothers in poverty in Philadelphia, and throughout her 130 interviews she noted, “Although mothers still aspire to marriage, they feel that it entails far more risks than rewards--at least marriage to the kind of men who fathered their children and live in their neighborhoods” (p. 28). She noted that affordability, respectability, trust, and control act as

“motives for nonmarriage” (Edin, 2000, p. 28). As Edin and Reed (2005) later reviewed recent research to identify barriers to marriage amongst those in poverty, social barriers and economic barriers were discussed. Within social barriers, Edin and Reed (2005) identified aspirations to get married were present, however the expectations did not always match the aspirations, invariably the high standards did not seem attainable. An aversion to divorce and a desire for a quality relationship were identified as other social barriers (see also Lichter, Batson, & Brown, 2004). An economic barrier identified was that of women’s higher wages as making marriage less necessary amongst those in poverty; low male earnings were also identified as a barrier to marriage (Edin & Reed, 2005).

Gibson-Davis, Edin, and McLanahan (2005) interviewed unmarried parents shortly after the birth of their child to gauge their expectation to marry. Three barriers to marriage were identified by the couples: financial concerns (74.5%), relationship quality (57.4%), and fear of divorce (42.6%). Some *financial concerns* that were raised by the participants were, “How do I look telling everybody I’m married, but I’m broke?” (Gibson-Davis et al., 2005, p. 1308). In many cases the prerequisite for marriage is the desire to have at least some financial security. Within the discussion, Gibson-Davis et al. (2005) identified that the “bar for marriage has grown higher for all Americans, making it increasingly difficult for those in the lower portion of the income distribution to meet the standards associated with marriage”; there is “echoes of a middle-class lifestyle” that must come to fruition before marriage is considered (p. 1311). *Relationship quality* was cited as another barrier to marriage among those interviewed, namely there was a sense that each person had to really know the other person before getting married, cohabitation was frequently mentioned as a way to get to “know what the person is really about” (Gibson-Davis et al. 2005, p. 1309). The final barrier to marriage identified by Gibson-Davis et

al. (2005) was *divorce*, namely that it was not an option, therefore any marriage commitment was lifelong; marriage was viewed as “sacred” by most of the couples (p. 1309). As we keep in mind the barriers many people in poverty face before engaging in marriage, we turn our attention to the current study and begin to understand the dynamics of the decision-making processes in the marriage relationship.

Literature Review and Research Question

The Decision to Marry

Economic factors in the decision to marry. Although a shift in the decision to marry swayed from an economic emphasis to an emotional emphasis, research showed that currently both still exist in some form. We may hear more about marrying for love and emotional security; however previous research showed that, more quietly, economics is still a major factor in determining a marriage decision. In a study that observed unmarried parental relationships at the time of a child’s birth and at a one-year follow-up, Carlson, McLanahan, and England (2004) identified economic variables that contributed to the relationship patterns of the participants. Carlson et al. (2004) identified a number of categories that participants were sorted into: “married, cohabitating, ‘visiting’ (romantically involved but living apart), and not in a romantic relationship (friends, separated, or no contact)” (p. 243). The results suggested that men’s annual income was related to a higher likelihood of marriage, however men’s education level seemed to deter cohabitation; a woman’s hourly wage also increased the likelihood of marriage, and her education level encouraged the formation of any type of union. These external indicators begin to illuminate the economic situation of those looking to engage in marriage.

Fram, Miller-Cribbs, and Farber (2006) looked to make sense of marriage for women in poverty in South Carolina, “Because it is at the economic margins that marriage tends to become

both more dangerous and increasingly more necessary” (p. 257). This study used both a qualitative interview method and a quantitative questionnaire method, and found that the life story of many women who were in poverty revolved around difficult relationships with men. In a case provided by Fram et al. (2006), a young woman’s abusive dad lost his job and couldn’t provide for the family when she was younger, she eventually ran away from home at 16 and dropped out of high school. She married and became a mother in her teens, after which she had to leave her abusive husband. After being homeless, she finally got her grade equivalency degree (GED) and began a track to become a registered nurse. However, she dropped out of college after she and her boyfriend couldn’t sustain their income level (Fram et al., 2006). The abuse towards herself and mother as well as the economics in her life had an effect on her decision to marry or begin a relationship with another man, “I got married ... I thought he was my ticket out” (Fram et al., 2006, p. 259). While this hope persists in many women, a “ticket out” of poverty may be more difficult to come by than simply using marriage as an economic tool in the journey out of poverty.

Cultural and interpersonal factors in the decision to marry. Carlson et al. (2004) identified cultural and interpersonal factors that related to union formation as well. Both men’s and women’s “pro-marriage attitudes” made marriage more likely amongst couples; women’s church attendance also increased the likelihood of marriage (p. 255). Carlson et al. (2004) also found that women’s distrust in partners reduced the likelihood of both marriage and cohabitation. In a study that gathered data about marital and fertility histories of men, Lichter and Graefe (2007) found that men who fathered children out of wedlock “are only about 50 percent as likely as other men to have ever married” (p. 412). The study also found that teen fathers are “nearly four times more likely to marry than other men” (Lichter & Graefe, 2007, p. 413). Lichter and

Graefe (2007) also identified, “Men who were ... born outside of marriage were statistically significantly less likely to marry than men who were born to a married-couple family” (p. 413).

The decision-making process that informs whether to marry or not marry can be complex and affected by multiple factors, we now turn to factors that gauge the quality of a marriage.

Factors in Relational Dynamics of Marriage

Factors in the decision to stay married. Bachand and Caron (2001) conducted a qualitative interview study that sought to understand what made long-term marriages last; they interviewed 15 heterosexual couples who had been married for at least 35 years and reported being in a happy marriage. When asked “why do you think that you have been married as long as you have?” a number of responses were elicited, however the top three responses were “love, similar backgrounds/interests, and friendship” (p. 112). When asked about the effect religion had on the longevity of marriage, just over one-third of participants reported that “agreement on religious values, and level of religiosity was a positive factor in the longevity of their marriage”; another one-third reported that “religion had very little or nothing to do with the longevity of their marriage” (p. 115). All couples reported that having children produced a “cohesive” effect on the marriage (p. 114). An overwhelming majority of couples (80%) reported that their parents’ marriage had a positive effect on his or her own marriage.

Marks et al. (2008) interviewed 30 African American couples in order to understand “How do some African American couples build strong, happy, enduring marriages in the face of challenges and barriers” (p. 174)? Those who participated in the study had an economic outlook that transcended many of those in inner-city settings; with an average income among participants of about \$58,000, and many participants with some education. Marks et al. (2008) found four positive themes that stood out as factors that contributed to a successful marriage: (1)

Challenges in African American Marriages, (2) Overcoming External Challenges to Marriage, (3) Resolving Intramarital Conflict, and (4) Unity and the Importance of Being “Equally Yoked” (p. 176). The discussion of “stories of struggle [and] ... strength” involved areas of *individual-level resources and barriers*, *interpersonal resources and barriers*, and *social and economic resources and barriers* (p. 182). Amongst the *individual-level resources* identified, emotional and mental health and education level were highlighted; whereas an *individual-level barrier* that was identified was a past where many had “come a *long way*” looking at the difficult changes many of the participants had to make (p. 183). The main *interpersonal resource* identified was “each other”, while the main *interpersonal barrier* found was to be “mistrust” (Marks et al., 2008, p. 183). Being “on the same page” regarding religious involvement was identified as a *social resource* whether the couple participated in religious activities together (27 couples) or did not participate at all together (3 couples), there was cohesion amongst the decision of involvement (Marks et al., 2008, p. 184). Whereas a variety of *social barriers* were discussed, namely employment, neighborhood stressors, and education. Although both a number of resources and barriers exist for any couple, the decision to stay married usually incorporated more resources than barriers.

Factors in the decision to separate and/or divorce. An examination of factors that contributed to a couple’s decision to separate and/or divorce is far more likely to include barriers and difficulties that the couple faced in the marriage relationship. Lowenstein (2005) discussed a list of factors from relevant research that are usually involved in the decision to separate or divorce. The list included: “Women’s independence, too early marriage and arranged marriages, economic factors, poor intellectual and educational and social skills, liberal divorce laws, sexual factors leading to incompatibility, role conflicts, alcoholism and substance abuse or risk-taking

behavior, differences between the partners leading to acrimony, religious factors, attitudes to divorce, and various other factors” (Lowenstein, 2005, p. 155). The discussion around these factors usually include a stress or a strain on the relationship itself or on one or both involved in the marriage.

As Rokach, Cohen, and Dreman (2004) examined divorce in people over the age of 45, many of these factors were illuminated. A more common thread was revealed to include causes that related less to major acute problems, but rather more underlying issues. There is a sense that in marriages that have lasted over decades that end in divorce, there is a build-up effect from a continued pattern that eventually wears a person or persons down. Because of the subtlety of the causes in an older adult age group, Rokach et al. (2004) gathered data from personal stories in their study. The quality of the beginning stages of marriage spanned from “excellent” to “disastrous” (Rokach et al., 2004, p. 46). In reviewing the relational dynamics, a common theme noted by many participants was a “growing apart” where those in the marriage seemed to slowly become segregated within their own relationship (Rokach et al., 2004, p. 48). Lack of communication was also found to be a common cause of divorce. Other influences on the decision to separate were included: adulterous relationships, physical and emotional abuse, and economic issues (Rokach et al., 2004). The lack of an ability to cope with and adapt to change together seems to highlight the road headed towards divorce.

Generational Poverty

Poverty can be a significant experience for children growing up. A way of life is established on the most basic of levels. The ability to pay for essentials is compromised; shelter, food, and clothing may not be consistent which may lead to a lack of trust that needs will be met. This lack of trust may continue into adulthood. A continuance of lifestyle is passed from one

generation to the next. Musick and Mare (2006) identified that children who grew up poor are 3.5 times more likely to experience poverty in adulthood, more so than the family structure of single motherhood (only 1.5 times more likely to become single mothers). A person's experience of poverty in childhood can carry over into adulthood, however the ability to break free from the cycle of generational poverty can also take shape. Through the use of resources within a society, a person may be able to shape a new way of life for oneself.

In the struggle to grow beyond poverty, resources from both families and society will most likely become an integral part in the struggle. In a review of pertinent literature on generational poverty, Harper, Marcus, and Moore (2003) highlighted the use of a number of resources that can affect the transference of poverty from one generation to the next, centered on *survival and protection* and *participation and development* (p. 542). Within *survival and protection*, an emphasis on nutrition and childcare support and guidance is presented as the essentials a child must have to develop healthily. Amongst *participation and development*, the ability to engage in education, child work, and development of attitudes and aspirations can equip a child to break the cycle of poverty. A solid base of health and wellbeing can be utilized with education and work to develop aspirations that reach beyond a person's experience of poverty. A glimpse of generational poverty coupled with a view of factors related to the dynamics of the marriage relationship can give direction for the current study.

Research Questions

The current research looks to answer three questions. First, what are the reasons for engaging in marriage amongst men who have experienced poverty? Second, what factors contribute to the decision to stay married or separate and/or divorce amongst those men have experienced poverty? And finally, how did economics and poverty affect the marriage

relationship amongst men who have experienced poverty? These questions were designed to add to relevant research and give a more complete picture of men's experience of marriage and poverty.

Conceptual Framework

The external and internal drives to decide to marry and stay married or get divorced can be influenced by a number of factors. We will explore two theories that speak to relationships that are external to an individual, ecological systems theory and critical theory; as well as two theories that speak to the inner workings of an individual, gender schema theory and religious communication theory. This expedition of theories will build a foundation for the current research proposal.

Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological systems theory was developed using methods of observation in natural science, namely the observation of the impact an environment has upon a living organism. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977) discussed utilizing this method when observing human development. He expanded on the observation of the impact of an environment upon a living organism to include the impact of the organism on the environment. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), there was a dynamic and active relationship between both environment and organism, "A" affects "B", and "B" affects "A". Bronfenbrenner (1977) suggested that the "ecological environment" was situated in a "nested" pattern, where each subsystem of the larger system was contained within the next higher subsystem (p. 514). He noted the four systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1977) defined the microsystem as the relationship between the individual and the environment in the "immediate setting" (i.e. family and peer groups at home or school); whereas "setting" was defined as "a place with particular

physical features in which the participants engage in particular activities in particular roles” (p. 514). He described the mesosystem as “a system of microsystems”; or a place where the relationship is extended beyond the immediate setting, including the greater systems of school or work (p. 515). Bronfenbrenner (1977) continued on to describe the exosystem as “an extension of the mesosystem”; where the particular “social structure” does not contain the developing person, but will affect the settings that the person belongs to (i.e. the world of work, the neighborhood, and agencies of local government) (p. 515). Finally, the macrosystem was defined by Bronfenbrenner (1977) as not necessarily the specific settings a person is in, but rather the “general prototypes” that exist within a culture or subculture; including ideologies and norms that can be both explicit and/or implicit (p. 515). Each of these systems will affect the others through establishing boundaries, while also pushing and pulling on these boundaries.

In regards to marriage, any individual who engages in marriage will ultimately be affected by each ecological system. Throughout the microsystem, an individual might be affected by the spouse, other family members, and friends. Within the mesosystem, an individual might be affected by benefits an employer offers for those who are married or what a church believes about marriage. Amongst the exosystem, an individual might be affected by economic forces or different policies related to marriage. The macrosystem might affect an individual through cues as to what roles a person should encompass or what is considered grounds for divorce amongst the greater societal norms. No matter the level, an individual who is engaged in marriage will feel the effects of the relationship between systems.

Critical Theory

Critical theory is derived from Karl Marx’s theory of political and social upheaval, namely that those in power apply political and social rules using their own morals which further

their grip on power; capitalism was his most marked target. Marx called for an upheaval from the working class, and furthered technological advance to do away with human morality in political and social decision making. Although this theory is the basis for communism and was utilized in major revolutions during the early and middle twentieth century, its harsh dictators and idealistic utopian societies never materialized as a lasting form of government as some had hoped.

According to West (2011), Hungarian communist George Lukacs worked to preserve the “critical *method*” of Marx’s mostly failed political and social ideologies (p. 155). The Frankfurt School of philosophers in Germany furthered the critical theoretical approach through identifying the dominating effect of those in power, as well as identifying the use of their philosophy and morals to create and shape objective truth. Jurgen Habermas from the Frankfurt School sought to systematize critical theory. West (2011) described Habermas’s influence on critical theory as developing the concept within critical theory that points out that technological advancement, described as the utopian concept of original Marxism, is devoid of morality.

According to Habermas, human interaction and the social sciences cannot be devoid of morality (unlike the natural sciences which benefited greatly from an amoralistic approach), but instead must include a morality that can be universally agreed upon. However even this contribution was critiqued by Jean-Francois Lyotard as being devoid of diversity within the striving for universality. Nonetheless, Habermas held that our morals and beliefs were more than likely influenced by the powerful and wealthy (West, 2011).

Critical theory posits any political, social, and human interaction is never carried out devoid of philosophy and morality, but rather all have a moral underpinning that affects these interactions. Because of this, uncovering and critiquing the links between the moral framework and the policy that is carried out is the goal of critical theory. As described in the historical

overview, marriage values and morals were established initially through the Jewish Laws of Moses, later shaped by Greek and Roman philosophies, and ultimately carried on through the Roman Catholic Church which held power and wealth. According to critical theory, marriage norms can be linked to the morals of those who are in power and have the capacity to be critiqued.

Gender Schema Theory

Gender schema theory was first identified by Sandra Bem (1981) as a way to explain the “phenomenon of sex-typing” (p. 354). Bem (1981) identified a schema as “a cognitive structure, a network of associations that organizes and guides an individual’s perception” (p. 355). Bem (1981) described individuals that exhibited behavior in line with her or his culture's definitions of what constitutes female or male as sex-typed individuals, whereas those who switched the roles would be considered cross sex-typed, and those who did not fit either gender were considered androgynous. Bem’s (1981) study found that those who were sex-typed demonstrated an ability “to process information about the self in terms of the gender schema” (p. 359). According to Bem (1981), self-identity was constructed at least in some way through an individual’s gender schema. Johnson (2009) identified “five propositions from Bem’s work [that] are central to gender schema theory” (p. 437). The fifth proposition holds the most influence on the current study, “Gender schemas are regulative for judgments of what is natural or unnatural, right or wrong, valued or nonvalued” (p. 437). Essentially a person will use her or his gender schema to identify what is valued and act according to these values; this can be carried over into a person’s decision to marry, stay married, or get divorced.

Religious Communication Theory

Those who have been exposed to a community of faith will have undoubtedly experienced an atmosphere rich in religious traditions, religious teachings, and religious communication. Schuetz (2009) described religious communication theories as “assum[ing] that the meaning and purpose of life derive from a faith tradition grounded in scriptures (holy books), doctrines (collective teaching and beliefs), and communal religious experiences” (p. 847). As marriage has been traced throughout history, there is certainly a religious component that impacts many who decide to marry. An individual's individual's view of when to marry, what marriage consists of, and the decision to stay together or split are topics that have been touched upon within many religious settings. Within religious communication theory, Schuetz (2009) identified a “homiletic ancestry” as groundwork for current religious communication theory (p. 847). Within this homiletic ancestry, religious leaders plumbed religious holy books in order to inform an audience and extrapolate truths that were relatable to those listening. During a religious speaker’s message, Schuetz (2009) identified a concentration on “pathos, appeal to emotions; ethos, religious knowledge and moral character of communicators; and elocutio, stylistic uses of metaphor, allegory, and irony” (pp. 847-848). There was an expectation that through these homilies delivered by religious leaders, there would be a moral incline in the audience’s thoughts, actions, and words. As marriage norms and values were delivered through the use of religious communication, those from the audience who would participate in marriage would have been shaped by the morals and views of those delivering the message.

Methods

Research Design

Since the experience of marriage can be so varied and complex, the participant's language and individual experience is highly valued. This lends the current study to use a qualitative method for conducting research. Berg (2009) described qualitative research as "refer[ing] to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things" (p. 3). The current study is looking to examine what factors affected the decision to get married, the factors that inform the decision to stay married or separate and/or divorce, and the effect of economics and poverty on marriage amongst men who have experienced poverty. This study will inform the world of clinical social work through giving a thicker description of what marriage in poverty is like from those who have lived it.

Sample and Recruitment

The sampling method used for this study was purposive sampling, a nonprobability method of gathering participants that is often utilized because of the unique experience a participant has gone through (Berg, 2009). Because this study set out to understand men's experience of marriage and poverty, a purposive sampling method would best be able to locate these individuals. The unique exclusion criteria included men over the age of 18, who have been married at some point, and who have experienced poverty at some point. No other criteria were set forth for participation.

To recruit participants, flyers were posted in local homeless shelters and food shelves (see appendix A). This method did not garner any responses. The researcher then set out to connect individually with an identified staff member at local agencies that serve those who are in poverty. These agency staff members helped in recruiting participants through the use of

previous relationships with participants. Agency staff members personally introduced those who were willing to participate with the researcher, after which eight interviews were scheduled. One agency staff member set up a time during a group meeting to allow the researcher to make an announcement to those in attendance, after which five interview appointments were set up with those who were interested in participating. One participant heard of the research study because of a former relationship with the researcher and asked to participate. Each participant was offered \$15 cash as a sign of gratitude and thanks from the researcher.

Protection of Human Participants

Before any interviews were conducted, an expedited review was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. Catherine University. Local agency support was gathered through verbal agreements with staff members. Informed consent was obtained directly prior to each interview through the review of a consent form that explained the research study, confidentiality, and the risks and benefits of the study (see appendix B). After the participants signed a copy, an unsigned copy of the consent form was offered to keep. Participants were also informed that a list of resources would be available upon request if any intense emotional reactions occurred due to the interview. Most interviews were held in a private space in a public setting, 10 interviews took place in a private office in an agency, three took place in an unoccupied meeting room at an agency, and one took place in the home of the participant, at the request of the participant. The participants were informed of the right to end the interview at any time or ask to be removed from the study at any time, after which the individual's information would have been destroyed and would not have been used for the study. Participants were informed that they did not need to answer any question that made them feel uncomfortable. To ensure confidentiality, no identifying information was included in the results or the

dissemination of results of the study; and any personal or identifying references were taken out of the transcripts by the researcher. All recordings and transcripts were kept on a password protected computer and subsequently destroyed on or before May 30, 2015. The informed consent also included contact information for the researcher, the research chair overseeing the study, and the chair of the St. Catherine IRB.

Data Collection

Data was gathered through the use of a *semi-standardized* interview design (Berg, 2009). The interview itself was structured with an initial interview guide containing open-ended questions; ~~however.~~ However, due to the nature of the discussion, there was room for spontaneous questions to probe further about a participant's response. Questions were asked to elicit information about the person's age, his family, current marriage status, the reasoning behind a person's marriage decision, the quality of marriage, and a person's experience of poverty (see appendix C). The interviews lasted anywhere from nine to 49 minutes. Interviews were conducted face-to-face by the researcher, a graduate student. A transcript was then created by the interviewer from the audio-recorded interviews. For the purpose of the current study, poverty will be operationally defined as a subjective report from each participant by the response to the question, "Have you experienced poverty?"

Data Analysis

Berg (2009) offered a "stage model of qualitative analysis" which included: *analytic* and *grounded categories* (p. 362). *Analytic categories* were constructed based off of prior research. After reading through the transcripts, *grounded categories* were constructed based off of the research questions and the data gathered; the process of open coding (determining codes present within the data) and axial coding (organizing codes around one category) was utilized in

determining *grounded categories* (Berg, 2009, p. 362). Next, a determination of systematic criteria of selection for sorting data into *analytic* and *grounded categories* was established. After determining the criteria, data was sorted into categories, which was revised as necessary. After data had been sorted, the entries were counted to demonstrate the magnitude, and text was sorted to establish patterns. After entries were counted and text sorted, a consideration of patterns was compared and discussed with relevant research and/or theory.

Findings

Demographics

The initial sample included 14 participants, however one participant's data did not qualify for the current study. Of the 13 remaining participants, all were males with ages ranging from 27 to 61, with an average age of 48. Eleven participants were African-American, the other two were Caucasian. Seven participants reported being currently married, six reported being currently divorced. Of the seven that were currently married, four were currently still together and the other three were separated. All 13 participants had married a woman. The average amount of years of marriage was 10, ranging from one year of marriage to 35 years. Ten participants were married once, and three were married twice. The family makeup consisted of participants who had no kids to participants who had five kids, with an average of two kids.

Participant's experiences of poverty and marriage varied widely. Three participants noted that they did not experience poverty while married, but had experienced it at some point in their life. Despite the differences in responses from participants, common themes and categories surfaced when analyzing the data. The categories that were addressed were related to the three research questions mentioned earlier: (1) Factors in the decision to marry, (2) positive characteristics of the marriage relationship that contributed to staying married and difficulties in

the marriage relationship that added strain and contributed to separation and/or divorce, and (3) the effect of economics and poverty on the marriage relationship. Pseudonyms will be used to maintain confidentiality of the participants.

Factors in the Decision to Marry

When asked about what led to the decision to marry, participants gave a range of responses that included both internal qualities and external factors in the decision to marry. Participants reported: feelings of love, like, attraction, and/or friendship; external pressures from other people; external pressures from circumstances; a connection to a child's mother; and other miscellaneous factors.

Love, like, attraction, and/or friendship. Eleven participants discussed feelings of love, like, attraction, and friendship as a factor in deciding to marry their wife. Joe discussed the beginning of his nearly 30 year relationship: *"When we met as teenagers and it was just head over heels, crazy, crazy, you know?"* he later added: *"we just really, had strong feelings for each other for a very long time."* Rasheed reminisced about his initial friendship as kids that developed into a loving marriage: *"Oh, man, I loved her, me and her we've been together ever since kids, you know what I'm sayin'?"* he also discussed the companionship he felt with his wife, *"the reason why I married her because she's like my sister, my brother, my home boy, she be takin' it seriously, even now."*

Michael, who had been married about 10 years, identified building up feelings for his wife:

"And then it builds up, you know eventually you go through your rocks and roads but eventually you know when you like somebody you know you like them, and

you get together. I mean I don't think you can really explain that, that's just human, that's just human."

Kevin talked about his quickly developing relationship filled with a deep love for each other:

"But then within two weeks, she was like, I went to her house to visit and we talked until like three in the morning. When I got ready to leave, she just hug me and kiss me and like, 'baby I love you so much'"

Kevin continued on to discuss the intensity of their initial relationship that led to marriage:

"So, you know, we kept seeing each other, we just started falling deeper; a lot of sex, like the first three months ... It didn't make it no better, we just fell deeper, deeper, deeper. I just asked her like, 'baby I love you, you love me,' ... I was like, 'baby, do you want to marry me?'"

External pressure from others. Four participants identified feeling pressure from other people to get married. Philip discussed the church community he and his wife were attending before marriage and noted the pressure to follow other couple's examples of getting married:

"Since we were so tight knit, um, we were kind of like, um, lemmings, you know, one of, one couple got married and then another couple got, it became kind of an epidemic; so we were very strongly influenced by our friends getting married. Yeah, there was peer pressure I guess is what you'd call it."

Devin discussed the influence of his church community as well: *"We went to church every Sunday ... he looked at us and said, 'why y'all ain't married?'"* Devin and his first wife got married after 19 years of dating.

External pressure from circumstances. Four participants examined different situations

where a circumstance outside of their control exerted pressure on them to get married. Fred and his wife met at a Bible college and decided to go and do mission work together, but realized their best chance to go together would be as a married couple.

“So we decided to uh, go and do mission work at that time ... We had decided we should get married at that time because we wanted to go together wherever we ended up going. So we decided to, uh, make that decision to get married.”

Unfortunately, Fred ended up going by himself for missionary training, but the pull to get married was influenced by the decision to go do mission work together.

Terence’s mom passed away just before he met his would be wife. He noted his close relationship with his mom as an only child, but discussed losing her and finding his wife:

“I don’t know, that might have played a lot into why I got married too. It’s like I met my wife about two days after my mom was killed ... I don’t know, I might have kind of drawn towards her. Like I said all I had was my mother at the time, and that was gone so, I don’t know I think that might have played a key role, not wanting to lose her to, you know what I’m saying? I met her and tried to keep her by marrying her, I don’t know.”

Connection to child’s mom. Three participants reported that a woman was either pregnant or had given birth previously to his child. These participants noted that this affected their decision to marry. Terence spoke about the effect of learning his partner was pregnant:

“When I found out she was pregnant, I asked her to marry me, I wanted to do the right thing.”

Teddy echoed his desire to do the “right thing”:

“The main reason we decided to get married is I had no intentions on leaving my wife and now she is pregnant with a child. So I’d say we might as well make it, you know, the way it’s supposed to be, so.”

Rudy discussed coming a long way and turned away from a dangerous lifestyle to trust in God, eventually Rudy rekindled a relationship with his child’s mother.

“So, um I, I got with my first mother’s, my first kid’s mother after thirty years. When I went back to her we got married. We seen each other and we started talking ... and after thirty years, uh, and about five months later we got married.”

Miscellaneous factors. Each of the following factors were reported once by three different participants: jealousy, an internal awareness of change, and it sounded like fun. Andrew got married in his early twenties and subsequently divorced within the first year of marriage, however he described his feelings of jealousy in making his decision to marry: *“Ah, I mean, shit, I didn’t want nobody else to get her.”*

Rudy discussed the changes he and his wife noticed in each other before they got married, he spoke to the readiness to be married: *“Well it was a commitment actually, I was seeing things in her that she was seeing something in me for the first time.”* He added that certain inner qualities had to be present before marriage: *“I know you’re a good man, I trust you, and I love you’, and all that in one sentence then that means you ready to get married to that one person now.”* Steve noted that his decision was not as much affected by love, but rather he viewed marriage as an enjoyable activity to engage in: *“Getting married sounded like a fun thing to do.”*

A wide array of factors can inform a person's decision to engage in marriage, however after that marriage relationship has begun, the experience of an intimate relationship can begin to take the married couple for a ride of ups and downs.

Attributes and Problems in the Decision to Stay Together or Separate

Participants discussed the quality of the marriage relationship, both positively and negatively and what led to the decision to stay together or to separate. There was a great deal of overlap amongst these questions, usually those who stayed together discussed many of the positive attributes of the relationship as the reasons why they stayed together. Whereas those who discussed reasons why they separated usually included relational difficulties. Many participants discussed both positive attributes and relational difficulties when discussing the decision to stay together or separate. One participant who had separated did not list any positive attributes, and three other participants who had stayed together did not list any relational difficulties other than poverty (a separate category itself).

Positive attributes and the decision to stay together. A number of positive attributes about the marriage relationship were reported by the participants. These attributes included: companionship and good quality of marriage, problem-solving skills, value of the marriage commitment, kids and family, ~~kids and family~~, church community and religious beliefs, ~~kids and family~~, helpers, ~~similar background~~, internal desire to stay and grow together, and similar background~~the traits of significant other~~.

Companionship and good quality of marriage. Ten participants reported feeling a strong sense of companionship, feeling cared for and provided for, good times and having fun together. After the divorce, Teddy reminisced about missing out on feeling cared for: “*Man I miss that one, man. Man, she was sweet to me, she gave me everything I wanted man.*” After having been

married previously and then recently being married again, Devin was asked about what was so important about marriage, he responded, "*Companionship*". Andrew discussed feelings of being taken care of:

"She had my back like when I needed money she was there. She was like a support system, um, you know you are, you know sometimes you wanna be alone and sometimes you want somebody to kind of cuddle with ... Cook for you. Just all types of perks from being married ... You know, like I said, if I was out of money you know somebody, I ain't got my license you know what I'm sayin' she would drive me around, it's all kind of stuff."

Philip discussed his struggles while being married that centered on financial struggles and dealing with his own diagnosis of depression, however he noted the effect that a turnaround had on the quality of his 35-year marriage: "*And now that things have, um, improved financially and stress-wise, our marriage is great, we're having a really good time together.*"

Problem-solving skills. Five participants noted the use of problem-solving skills in discussing the positive attributes of their marriage. Rudy discussed utilizing the practical skill of budgeting: "*You gotta know how to budget monies and don't get what you want all the time, get what ya need.*" Rasheed also spoke about the importance of managing money as a positive attribute of the marriage: "*she knew how to manage it [money] and that kind of brought us closer together.*" Philip discussed his initial lack of skills, but noted the importance of developing skills over time:

"You know, um nobody ever taught me, um like how to balance a checkbook or how to manage my money or how to you know, not buy things that I can't afford ... I guess just knowing how to how to do it, having the skills, you know, people

will say that, 'oh well that sounds so unromantic, if you go into marriage, you know, with good financial skills, and good psychological, emotional, relationship skills, that just sounds unromantic. Love and marriage should just be spontaneous and free.' ... Um, we need, we need to be taught the right thing, we need to be taught skills and common sense in order for a marriage to work."

Value of the marriage commitment. Four participants identified their personal value that a marriage was meant to last forever and that divorce was not an option. George discussed his own personal belief that marriage was intended to last forever. He even noted his parent's long-term marriage, however his wife did not share this value:

"My parents still together, been together sixty-some years and where I'm from, my parents, when people got married they stayed married, no matter what they stayed married. So when she filed for divorce it caught me by surprise, didn't handle it very well. You know I was expecting it to be forever, and it wasn't all of a sudden"

Philip echoed this sentiment of the previous generation's view on marriage impacting his own view of the longevity of marriage:

"And of course my mom and dad were married and never divorced, I always held marriage, even though it might have been subconsciously, I always held marriage as a very solid value system for myself. I never felt like divorce was a good option."

Kids and family. Four participants discussed the impact of kids or extended family on staying together. Steve noted the importance of being in agreement when raising kids, even though the two kids were not his own, he took on a parenting role:

“My wife and I learned that um, we both got to wear the same hat, you can’t wear a white hat and I wear a black hat when it comes to a situation, you both gotta wear the same hat or we fight, that’s what’s gonna happen.”

As Joe discussed the factors that led to the longevity in his marriage, he discussed both his own kids as well as being the primary caregiver of some of his grandkids: *“Um, the kids. Um, there was also, and her and I talk about this a lot, especially with my grandsons.”* Rasheed opened up about his extended family in encouraging him in his marriage:

“My Grandmama got a big family and everyone always used to pay me to rake they leaves, and stuff like that. ... And that’s, that’s another reason, my family.”

Church community and religious beliefs. Three participants identified their faith as a characteristic that positively impacted their marriage. Rudy, pointed to his relationship with God in a matter-of-fact way, *“You gotta believe in God to make it work. That’s the bottom line.”* Rasheed talked about the importance of prayer to get through difficult times: *“We pray together, even on the phone, I’d call her right now and we pray over the phone and stuff like that.”* Philip also noted the importance of God’s way of life when discussing his change over the years: *“And um, God is just central to healthy living, the things of God, the law of God, the traditions that God has given the human race, and marriage is one of those things.”*

Helpers. Three participants revealed the helpfulness of a role model or an advocate. Philip identified others from his church community as people that he looked up to: *“You need some skills and you need good role models too. We met some good role models in our church, um, that gave us the inspiration”.* Joe discussed how an advocate could be helpful in strengthening relationships: *“even homeless people need some sort of advocate to try to, you know, strengthen the family unit.”*

Internal desire to stay and grow together. Two participants spoke about an internal desire or even a personal choice that staying together and looking to grow together was a characteristic they noticed helped keep the marriage and family intact. Joe discussed how his desire to keep his family intact was what drove him and his wife to stay together through the difficulties they endured:

“I’ve never even known my dad, so I had to do a lot of growing up on my own ... After the kids left and then the grandkids came, it just became that much more important to set an example on structure and just how important it is to have a complete family unit. You know, my wife has always had a mom and dad and I’ve always had a mom, you know, so that was really important to me and that really just kept strengthening that bond between us.”

As Rudy discussed reconnecting with his child’s mother after 30 years apart and beginning a new marriage relationship, he noted his own inner growth that had taken place, but emphasized what he viewed as necessary to keep the marriage intact, namely the ability to grow together:

“I didn’t feel like I loved her one hundred percent. That grew and that person doesn’t know real love until you love a person as they grow. You might think you in love with them, but how do you know you’re in love? How do you know you’re in love? But through time, if you stick with that person through thick and thin, you got to love something about them. That’s real love.”

Similar background. One participant noted that the ability to stay together came from having similar expectations about married life and a similar background economically. Philip identified similar lower-middle to lower class upbringings for both he and his wife, but noted the

good and bad of this reality:

“When we got married we didn’t expect a lot of, and this is a double edged sword, we didn’t expect a lot of nice things. In other words ... small, simple things were things that we were content with. So our relationship has always been good for the most part, because we never really had great expectations or demands of each other ... You know, it didn’t take much to satisfy us, so we didn’t need to go on, here’s the double edged sword, we didn’t need to go on trips all the time and we didn’t need to buy fancy things, but the flip side of that was when we could have used something like that to boost our morale, we couldn’t buy it either.”

Marriage difficulties and the decision to separate and/or divorce. Participants noted the difficulties they had faced throughout their marriages, some stayed together despite the hard times, while others found that these difficulties led to separation and/or divorce. These difficulties included: breakdown in relational dynamics, differences, ~~infidelities~~, destructive behaviors, infidelities, lack of role models, mental health concerns, and emotional abuse.

Breakdown in relational dynamics. Seven participants described a breakdown in relational dynamics through feelings of jealousy, mistrust, and/or relational strain. George even discussed how his upbringing in a military family informed his view of relationships with others, ultimately affecting his marriage relationship:

“I never stayed anywhere more than a couple years before I was off to another place. I didn’t learn how to have a meaningful relationship ‘cause I was so used to meeting somebody, befriending somebody, then have to get up, pack up and leave that person, and it’d start over again. So it’s, it’s, I guess you’d say I don’t relish relationships like a normal person would, from being a military dependent

... Not knowing how to have a relationship with somebody [wife], it's like anybody get close to you, they can be replaced, because I been used to it all growing up, being replaced."

Andrew identified feelings of jealousy and possessiveness in his marriage:

"You know, she started acting kinda like, over it, and all possessive and stuff like that, you know what I'm saying so I couldn't do it anymore ... Yeah, actually, I was a little bit I was a little bit jealous too. You know what I'm saying? 'Cause she was real attractive, you know what I'm saying? And I used to be kinda like where you going, where you at? And she ain't like that so we was just butting heads a lot, and it was over after that."

Fred noticed the strain on his relationship from issues of mistrust and anger towards one another:

"So, that was it got strained, that was really, and it just got to the point where you know I just couldn't take it anymore at the time, so I just like, breaking down, I just needed an outlet, you know."

Steve discussed the downfall of the relationship after trust was broken: *"Oh yeah, there will always be [a place for her in my heart], she maybe feel the same way about me, but no trust."*

Differences. Six participants discussed differences between their significant other and themselves. Philip described his difficulty in adjusting to the demands of married and family life, he noted that he felt his wife was prepared, but he did not feel prepared:

"We got married and I, my wife was ready for it, but I rushed into it and went into it with a, with a bad, with an incomplete understanding of what the demands of

marriage and family were ... So I basically got into marriage and raising a family underestimating the amount of sacrifice I'd have to make, and freedom I'd have to give up. That was, that was hard, but that kind of exacerbated the poverty."

George discussed how the different cultures and backgrounds he and his second wife came from pulled them apart:

"Being in the car you want to hear the music, certain type of music loud, she wants to turn it down and listen to a different type of music. What she wanted to do when we was off work, doing nothing, was different then what I wanted to be doing ... Then once you venture past that doing different things then what each one of us would like to do, there was different cultures and we never got it back together."

Michael discussed different growth patterns he and his wife exhibited. He noted the desire to get out of poverty was innate in both he and his wife, but he felt his ideas on how to get out of poverty differed from his wife's:

"Everybody moves, everybody's brains move at they own pace, that's why marriage was hard because everybody don't grow at the same point, everybody don't grow at the same point, and I was growing a little bit faster as far as what I was, even though I knew she knew what I said, I was like it's not happening fast enough."

Kevin noted the difference in familial interactions he and his wife experienced: *"Both families, she didn't care for my family, I didn't care for her family."*

Destructive behaviors. Four participants identified destructive behaviors that consisted of: Drug abuse, alcohol abuse, street lifestyle, and being jailed. Many of these factors coincided

with one another. Joe helped his wife watch the grandkids that had been abandoned by his son who was abusing drugs, however, he was himself using drugs and engaged in destructive behaviors:

“I kinda led like a double life kind of thing, where in the daylight, I was, you know, I was functional grandpa ... Then at night, you know, I was, you know, um, hustling to get my money, you know doing whatever I needed to do because I was having a hard time finding a job that I could stay at and then of course too I was nursing, um, a drug habit, you know, that nobody knew about but me, apparently.”

As Teddy discussed his first relationship with his kid’s mother, he noted the choice in lifestyle he was present with:

“I started using the product, and you know uh, my baby momma, uh, go back to her, this is what I’m going through at this time, I’m selling drugs, my son’s straight, she straight, and uh, my baby momma was the type, she was older woman, so she was like you know, ‘don’t you think it’s time for you to leave that alone?’ But you get addicted man. You get addicted to money, man. And I tried, I tried, I tried, but I always fell back to selling drugs. So she said, ‘it’s either me or the drugs.’”

Terence discussed how being in jail affected his marriage relationship:

“We initially separated because I went to jail and when I got out, I had no idea where she was or what she wanted. I was in jail for about three months, and when I got out she was just gone, she didn’t leave anything, she was just gone.”

In addition to extramarital relationships Fred identified his drinking behaviors as a difficulty in the relationship:

“Like I came home drunk that one night and I was kind of like really loud, you know, belligerent and all that, and I don’t know I guess I scared her. So I guess, she’s like, she felt threatened, she felt like that I tried to force myself on her, which I didn’t. So that was pivotal, so she had this like order of protection.”

Infidelities. Three participants discussed cheating on their spouse, their spouse cheating on them, or both cheating on each other. Teddy discussed his own infidelity:

“One day, I stayed out, I was messing around on her, she caught me with like three, four women, in the house, just caught me cheating on her. I did a lot of stuff to her, man, I hurt her a lot man. And one day, I came home and the house was empty. I cried like a baby.”

Teddy went on to discuss how he was later cheated on by his other wife: *“So she was still messing around with this guy and come to find out she was messing around with him since day one me and her got together, and I found that out man, so I fell back again.”*

Fred identified his escape from the difficulties of the marriage relationship through his engaging in an extramarital affair:

“It was really strained, we each started drifting away relationally, and so like I was sleeping with other women at the time ... And just like with these other relationships, I know that it was wrong, I just kind of started focusing on that. But I kind of needed that at that time.” ~~*Destructive behaviors. “Like I came home drunk that one night and I was kind of like really loud, you know, belligerent and all that, and I don’t know I guess I scared her. So I guess, she’s like, she felt*~~

~~threatened, she felt like that I tried to force myself on her, which I didn't. So that was pivotal, so she had this like order of protection."~~

Lack of role models. Two participants identified the presence of role models as a healthy effect on the marriage relationship, but also noted that when these were lacking, difficulties within the relationship arose. As noted earlier, Philip identified role models in his church as having a healthy influence on his relationship, he also noted that in his estimation, these role models could only affect him on a shallow level:

"We met some good role models in our church, um that gave us the inspiration, but because, um they were not family, they never had a chance to you know intimately teach us life skills or the time to teach us skills, like a father or mother would, so that's how we ended up not having a good, or a functional marriage."

In his second marriage, George identified becoming distanced from good role models in his support group setting as a factor that led to his eventual divorce:

"Once we got married, we started venturing away from our AA meetings where we met at and used to spend a lot of time at, and AA activities, and it was time to deal with life and life turns, she handled life turns differently than I did."

Mental health concerns. Two participants identified mental health concerns as struggles within the marriage relationship. One experienced mental health difficulties through his wife, the other experienced his own battle with mental health. Kevin discussed his wife's behaviors as having a powerful effect on his decision to get divorced:

"One night, we was at the casino, having a few drinks, and she was like, 'you looking at every woman in here.' Which I wasn't, but you know, so I was like, 'you know what, I'm going to just bring you by your sister's before anything get

out of hand.' Because she don't care if we out in public, she just want to clown and want to fight in public. And I was like, 'no baby, let me bring you.' So we get on the interstate and I guess she was just, the alcohol had messed with her or something, she like, 'where are we going?' Like she had blacked out, I was like, 'baby, I'm bringing you by your sister's.' And she was like, 'I don't want to go by my sister's!' I said, 'Well that's where I'm bringing you, because you done pissed me off!' you know; and I'm going like 70, speed limit is 70, I'm probably going like 75, so she was like, 'If you bring me there, I'm not going!' and she opened the car door. She was trying to jump, I had to really wrestle to keep her in the car while I slow down, you know what I'm saying? And I was like, you know I had to grab her by the seat of her pants, and this, she put her feet down and it took her shoes off, and she wasn't trying to bring them back in man, she was trying to jump out, you know what I'm saying? And when I stop, I told her, I said, she wanted to go back to the casino, I'm like, 'Baby get back in this car; you trying to commit suicide on me!' And that wasn't the first time, she jumped out the car before, police harassed me, thought I threw her out of the car, somebody on the interstate told them I threw her out the car, and I was like, 'no I didn't.' But that night, when she tried to jump out, I didn't let her back in the car, I left her on the freeway, you know."

Philip identified his own struggle with clinical depression:

"I was having some really intense spiritual struggles, and the thing is this is all inter-related. The money was exacerbating the spiritual troubles, the spiritual troubles were making the money troubles worse, everything was like a big

network of activities that were all tied, influencing each other ... A number of times, I was in the psychiatric ward for depression.”

Emotional abuse. One participant mentioned emotional abuse on his end. Fred qualified his statement of emotional abuse toward his wife: *“Like I said there was no physical abuse, but you know maybe some emotional abuse.”*

The Effect of Economics and Poverty on Marriage

Participants discussed the effects of economics and poverty on the marriage relationship. In order to more fully understand the interplay between poverty and marriage, there must be some insight into the experience of poverty for the participants. Every participant noted at least some experience of poverty, however, the experiences were varied. The current study is not focused on the experience of poverty itself, but rather the effect poverty has on the marriage relationship. This section will briefly touch on the generational effect of poverty, but will be dedicated to painting a picture of the effects of poverty on marriage. Three participants reported that poverty had little to no effect on their marriage. The remaining 10 participants who did notice an effect discussed the following categories: bringing each other together, relationship strain and arguments, lack of quality time together, difficulty providing or doing things for each other, and societal and systemic failures.

Generational poverty. This was not an initial consideration in the study material, so participants were not directly asked if they had experienced poverty growing up and to what extent, however, seven participants disclosed an experience of poverty while in childhood.

Rasheed discussed his experience of poverty in childhood:

“Yep, all my family, we grew up poor, real poor, street poor. My dad was in prison, for like for life ... My mom she did the best she could though, she always

worked. She had a job, and then when she would get off work and come home and make sure we okay, she used to have other jobs like cleaning up houses and stuff.”

Teddy’s dad also was absent and his family experienced a shift from wealth to poverty which ultimately led to his involvement in drug use and selling drugs to help his mom pay for the bills and take care of his brothers:

“We got a big house, my daddy got a Cadillac, my momma got a little car getting to work, we doing good. But then when all that stuff is snatched from you and you move to the projects from a house to the projects, it kind of messed with me psychologically, and I was like wait a minute hold on, then I’m not seeing my dad in the home, so I start rebelling really I did, I start rebelling. Then I seen my mom, she you know on welfare, I’m like mom, you ain’t working no more? Man, we got to wait for a check every month to take care of us, I’m like no, I’m not gonna be like this.”

Michael discussed his internal struggle with understanding the impoverished environment he was in:

“You know when you’re young, it’s normal, normal, normal, and then you get to a certain age where you see it, you be like, ‘hold up, something is not right!’ ... And then it gets in your head, it gets in your head, well people don’t understand that ... Then you start talking to your mother or your parents and they can’t even explain it because they grew up in poverty, but eventually like I said you see it.”

Kevin characterized his childhood experience of poverty as rough:

“When I was growing up, we didn’t have food every day, my dad was working his butt off, I didn’t have my dad and my mom in the same house, three kids, I’m the youngest, but my parents had just purchased a house, you know, and like I said some nights we didn’t eat, but we always had water and lights, you know what I’m saying, but you know hand-me-down clothes, you know all the time, and with me being a big guy, man I had to wear tight clothes all the time, somebody give me they clothes, you know and they fit tight as hell. And basically we kept a roof over our heads, but you know we had to walk to places, we had no car. And man, it was rough, it was real rough.”

Bringing each other together. Despite all the negative impacts poverty and economic difficulties can bring upon a marriage, seven participants discussed the unique experience of bringing each other closer and grounding them deeper together. Rasheed discussed a friend who had played Division 1 college football and became wealthy, yet had a difficult relationship with his wife. Rasheed reflected on his own experience of poverty and came to this conclusion:

“Honestly, probably this, if I really think about it, probably, probably, you know, not having things. I believe that’s what’s kept us close together.”

Kevin recounted the difficult times he and his wife endured when they could not pay the gas bill in the winter time of South Carolina, however their attitude consisted of being content with simply being with each other: *“Like I said no gas, had to wrap up in them blankets, hold each other tight, but she used to always tell me, ‘baby we ain’t got much, but I’m happy.’”*

As Philip narrated his story of poverty he found that being with his wife was more important than having possessions: *“We didn’t feel like we were getting jipped out of life if we didn’t have something, and that having each other was more important than having things.”*

When Rudy discussed the economic impact on his marriage, he noted the importance of being together and being committed to one another: *“And that’s exactly, we work together we can make it work.”*

Relationship strain and arguments. Seven participants discussed how poverty or economic difficulties brought about arguments between one another as well as strain on the relationship. Fred found it difficult to understand why his wife was not aware of the economic struggles they faced as a family and began to build up resentment towards his wife:

“My job I worked, I didn’t, you know I got laid off. And got laid off and I couldn’t find another job, so that was, that was a strain on the relationship, economically ... The other thing is that she didn’t want to work, so I would, I was kind of, it was almost like she never really, you know, she never asked me you know, ‘can I help you out?’ ... So that was kind of hard, that really, that showed me, I don’t know, it kind of pissed me off to be honest. Because it’s like, you know, ‘don’t you care?’”

Terence also discussed the tension of being the only wage earner and how it affected the relationship:

“I was the only one working, it was one of my times where I had an attitude, she wasn’t working. Not having enough, period, I think that’s, that brings tension, I think that’s probably was the biggest problem we had. Finances, that’s what we got into arguments about, finances. Yeah, it put a real, a real strain on the relationship, in the end that’s what split us up, me and my wife, that’s what, she went her way and I went mine.”

Rasheed and his wife discussed how to provide for their children which brought about arguments over what was needed: *“Um, saying you know like we get into arguments about, ‘we*

gotta get them the coats, we gotta get them shoes' they get them in the bags. 'We gotta start buying pad's for them, they growing up.'"

Philip discussed the stress from having to work multiple jobs: *"Well, we were constantly stressed, we worked a lot."*

Lack of quality time together. Four participants examined situations that led to less time being spent together. The economic difficulties led each of these participants to work at multiple jobs (or attend school and work) which in turn took time away from the couple to deepen their relationship. Although George expressed little effect of poverty on his marriage, he discussed his upward mobility in the job market and how his economic standing affected his relationship with his wife:

"You know things and surroundings and the people you deal with, and different jobs and promotions, you got more responsibility job, and you know trying to balance the home and married life with a job it's just, a lot of conflict."

Philip recounted his early days of marriage and noted the frantic pace which he and his wife operated at:

"And so we didn't have a lot of, we couldn't spend quality time with each other or quantity time. We were always fighting fires, always rushing around, always running urgently; there was always something nipping at our heels so we didn't have time to establish a healthy relationship."

Rasheed began working a hectic work schedule because of the economic strain, however his schedule did not allow for much time with his family:

"But, you know, sometimes that wear and tear on you and it was like I go to work at eight o'clock in the morning and get off at four and then I have to be at White

Castle at six. So I go across the street, you know, take a shower, put on the white castle uniform, and lay on the couch and look at the TV for like a minute and then my home boy, he's like 'it's five thirty.' And then I say, 'oh, okay.'"

Difficulty providing or doing things for each other. Showing love to someone can come in the form of gift giving or providing material things, however four participants noted the economic hardships effect on giving gifts or providing material things for their spouse. Three of the participants noted the fine line of not having much, but being content. Terence mentioned feeling happy, but looked back at the economically difficult time and pointed out the lack of things:

"Um but as far as our marriage, I was barely making it, we were, I mean I was, I was working at a hotel, and I would basically eat what the hotel had, and we didn't, we was scrapping. I look back and, I see that we were barely making it, but it didn't seem that bad at the time, I was happy so, but we didn't have too much."

Philip identified his desire to buy gifts for his wife, but noted the lack of money to do this: *"And even then because we didn't have enough money, we didn't go out on dates or go to the movies or I couldn't, we couldn't buy nice gifts for each other on Valentine's Day. So yeah the relationship really suffered."*

Societal and systemic failures. Three participants brought up current societal effects on poverty in marriage. Two participants noted the need for two incomes for many families to just survive. George noted: *"It used to be that one income could support a family, nowadays it takes two incomes in most cases."* And Fred commented: *"Today, it's just like, you need two people to work in a relationship."* One participant described the lack of advocates to work with those in

poverty on improving healthy relationship skills. Joe recounted that services used to be geared towards unifying a couple and a family, but in his estimation that has changed:

“The responsibility isn’t completely just the couples’ or the unit’s, the family unit’s. It’s society as well, society you know, DHS, and the police department and just all the community resources that we have, used to be about re-unifying the family ... Even homeless people need some sort of advocate to try to, you know, strengthen the family unit.”

Discussion

Many of the results coincided with previous research. In understanding the decision to get married, the results were somewhat similar to previous research findings in identifying marriage attitudes as a contributing factor in the decision to marry. Although previous research identified economic barriers to marriage, the current study consisted of men who had engaged in marriage and experienced economic hardships. The current study offered an in-depth look at the internal decision-making process, whereas previous research identified external indicators like, church attendance, education level, economic status levels, and job earnings (Carlson et al., 2004; Fram et al., 2006). The current study found the feelings of love, attraction, and enjoying the other person as the most mentioned reason to marry. Because of the qualitative nature of the study, there was room to allow the participants to offer an introspective insight which may have allowed for more internal processing and fewer external indicators.

An examination into the attributes that factor into the decision to stay married or separate revealed that much of the previous research aligns with the current study’s findings. The most prolific response in both the previous research and this study was a form of love and companionship (Bachand & Caron, 2001). The emphasis on events and hardships that served to

unify or strengthen the marriage relationship also was consistent with prior research (Marks et al., 2008). Relational difficulties were also mostly consistent with prior research. The differences between one another within marriage were highlighted by many participants as one of the main factors in leading to separation which coincides with previous research (Rokach et al., 2004). The breakdown of relational dynamics was seen in previous research as well (Lowenstein, 2005). These factors, both positive and negative, were highlighted in the current research.

No previous research was found on examining the relationship between marriage and poverty in men. Recall that marriage as an economic tool was entrenched in the early American Revolution and has been carried throughout the centuries into today's political realm (Cott, ~~2000~~²⁰⁰; Fram et al., 2006). Often the wielding of this economic tool is to the detriment of those in poverty. While the results of the current study illuminated many negative impacts that poverty can have upon a marriage, perhaps the result that gave the most pause was the strong sense of being brought closer together and unified through the trials of poverty. Even still the negative impacts of poverty on marriage outweighed the positive effect of being brought closer together. There remains a space for future research to consider how to most effectively support marriages facing economic trials to arise together from the difficult experience of poverty.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths. The current study sought to gain a thicker description of the experience of men who have experienced poverty and have engaged in marriage. This thicker description came through the use of the face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions that allowed participants to tell their own story. In considering the methods of this study, the researcher considered interviewing professionals who work with those in poverty, however it was decided that those who have first-hand experience of poverty and marriage would be the most

knowledgeable about the research topics. The research regarding men's experience of marriage and poverty is still thin, but this study will add to the literature and may allow for an expanded understanding of those who have experienced poverty and look to engage in marriage. As previously discussed, much research has been dedicated to understanding why women do not engage in marriage and results indicate that a desire to marry is present, however, marriage-quality partners do not seem to be readily available. This research set out to understand men's internal processes and experiences related to marriage and poverty so that future research might be able to explore how men might more actively engage in healthy marriage relationships with women who aspire to marry.

Limitations. The current research is exploratory in nature and included only 13 participants, therefore it is not generalizable to any greater population. The current research also is dependent upon recall of past events and cognitive processes, the actual course of events or cognitive processes may be skewed by the passage of time. Idealization or forgetting with the passage of time may occur and may skew the remembrance of past events and cognitive process may not be accurately described.

The exclusion of women from the study does not allow for the thickest description of the experience of poverty and marriage. Previous research, however, is rife with studies on women's experience of marriage and poverty, yet very little research observing men's experience was found. This study set out to give a thicker description of the experience of men who have experienced poverty and look to engage in marriage. However, the most comprehensive understanding of marriage in poverty must include both men's and women's perspectives.

Implications for Social Work

Implications for practice. Clinical social workers have a great opportunity to bring

clinical skills to those experiencing poverty and economic strain. This study can give clinical social workers at least a glimpse into the experience of those who live in impoverished conditions. While the negative effects of poverty can seem difficult to overcome, a strengths-based, empathy-driven, validating experience can be offered to those in poverty through a single clinical social worker.

Implications for policy. Policy makers can utilize this study to examine and critique policies and laws that guide people in poverty into marriage. The very debate about the definition of marriage is ongoing, this research can give a voice to those that are usually left out of the discussion, namely the lower class. The use of marriage as an economic tool can be damaging to those who are on the margins of society. This study highlighted the need for continued discussion about what marriage is and who should be allowed to engage in it.

Implications for research. Future research can draw from the experience of the participants of this study. As previously noted, the small sample size of the current research cannot make the results generalizable to a wider array of society. Because of the exploratory nature of the study, more defined categories might now be developed. To better understand the nuances of the marriage relationship amongst those in poverty, a focus on certain elements of the greater experience of marriage in poverty could be utilized in future research.

Conclusion

This study set out to understand more fully what the experience is of men who have experienced poverty and are looking to engage in marriage. A number of factors were illuminated as 13 participants recounted their own stories about what led them to get married, stay married or get separated, and how poverty affected the marriage relationship.

Factors that contributed to the decision to get married included: feelings of love, like, attraction, and friendship; external pressures from other people; external pressures from circumstances; a connection to his mother's child; and other miscellaneous factors. Reasons given that informed the decision to stay married included: companionship/good quality of marriage, problem-solving skills, value of the marriage commitment, church community and religious beliefs, kids and family, helpers, similar background, internal desire to stay and grow together, and the traits of the significant other. Reasons attributed to the difficulties in marriage and often led to separation: breakdown in relational dynamics, differences, infidelities, destructive behaviors, lack of role models, mental health concerns, and emotional abuse. These factors and reasons all contributed to a thicker description of the experience of men in poverty who have been married, however the most unique aspect of the current study was the attempt to ascertain what effect poverty had on marriage. A number of effects were discussed by the participants: bringing each other together, relationship strain and arguments, lack of quality time together, difficulty providing or doing things for each other, societal and systemic failures, and the end of a relationship.

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Appendix A**PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR GRADUATE RESEARCH ON
MARRIAGE & POVERTY!**

Are you a man over 18? Are you married or have you ever been married? Have you ever had a hard time paying your bills? Have you gone hungry because you weren't able to put food on the table? Have you experienced being homeless? Haven't had a place to sleep some nights? I would like to hear your story. I am conducting a research study about the experience of marriage and poverty. Your input will greatly help the field of social work understand what your experience has been. We will meet at a mutually agreed upon location. Your identifying information will be kept confidential.

Research will be conducted by a graduate student from the St. Catherine University and University of St. Thomas Social Work program. Aaron Rusnak can be reached at 612-702-2560 or by email at: rusn6965@stthomas.edu. Please consider calling me, emailing me, or pass along the information to someone you think might want to participate. I would love to hear from you.

Appendix B

MARRIAGE AND POVERTY INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating marriage in poverty. This study is being conducted by Aaron Rusnak, a graduate student at St. Catherine University under the supervision of Dr. Pa Vang, PhD., MSW, LICSW, a faculty member in the Department of Social Work. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you responded to the recruitment flyer. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to be in the study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to what factors are relevant in the decision to marry amongst those who have experienced poverty. Approximately 8-10 people are expected to participate in this research.

Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer questions related to your experience of marriage and poverty during one interview that will last about 1 hour.

Risks and Benefits of being in the study:

The study has minimal risks. The main risk is that recalling past memories may bring up an uncomfortable and negative emotional response. Because of this risk, you are able to stop the interview at any time. A list of resources to process your feelings with a professional will also be available. There will be no penalty if you decide to stop the interview.

There are no direct benefits to the study other than the compensation you will receive at the end of the interview.

Compensation:

If you participate, you will receive \$10 cash at the end of the interview.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained in connection with this research study that can be identified with you will be disclosed only with your permission; your results will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only group data will be presented.

I will keep the research results in a password protected computer and only I and my advisor will have access to the records while I work on this project. In order to improve reliability of the data analysis, I will recruit a peer to read through the transcript of the interview, there will be no

identifying information on the transcript. I will finish analyzing the data by May 30, 2015. I will then destroy all original reports and any identifying information that can be linked back to you.

Voluntary nature of the study:

Participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with St. Catherine University in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without affecting these relationships.

Contacts and questions:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Aaron Rusnak, at 612-702-2560 or rusn6965@stthomas.edu. You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, the faculty advisor, (Dr. Pa Vang, 651-690-8647 or pdvang@stkate.edu), will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739 or jsschmitt@stkate.edu.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study.

I consent to participate in the study. I agree to be audio-taped.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Survey

How old are you?

Are you currently married?

How long have you been married? Or how long were you married?

Tell me about your family? How many kids do you have?

Have you ever experienced poverty? Did you grow up in a family that experienced poverty?

What was your experience of poverty?

Do you feel like you are currently experiencing poverty?

How, if at all, has poverty affected your marriage?

What led you to get married? What influenced your decision to get married?

What would you say is your quality of marriage? What do you feel contributes to your quality of marriage?

What led you to stay married? Or what led you to get divorced or separated?