

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Human Development and Family Studies

The Complex Business of Researching Contemporary Adult Intimate Relationships

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Who am I?

- Interdisciplinary doctoral education in Human Development and Family Studies and Demography
- Constructivist paradigm
- Employ primarily qualitative and sometimes mixed methods approaches to understand meaning
- African American intimate relationships
- Publish scholarly work under the name, Tera R. Hurt



Why study families?

- Salience of families on development and well-being
 - Relational schemas and expectations
 - Relationship socialization and history
 - Extended family and community and external factors
 - Strengths and limitations
- The meanings of family structure as well as the nature and impact of family processes are ever-changing.





What's our goal?

- Be more effective in studying increasingly varied and complex family behaviors with national survey data
- Respond to demographic change in racial and ethnic diversity
- Know a lot about stable, happy couples.
- But intimate ties are increasingly complex, varied, and fluid with cascading effects that impact family and child well-being.

What can we do?

- Get back to basics and “interrogate assumptions about families and family research:”
 - How do we know what we know?
 - Why is it measured this way?
 - Which scholars, and hence disciplines, have influenced “widely used” assessment tools?
 - Is there utility in adopting a multimethod approach to better understand process and meaning?
 - What can be gained by employing a within-group design?



End Goal



- Ecological validity
 - Though measures may be empirically adequate, are they conceptually adequate and relevant? (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987)
 - Are there other colleagues at perhaps lesser known institutions who contribute to different literatures and journals, could add value to your research team, have lived experience, and help close the social distance factor?
 - Scholarly humility. Be a humble learner.

End Goal

- Cultural variant:
 - diverse families
 - Thrive under different situational constraints
 - Family structures, processes and functions differ
 - Relational behaviors as an expected response to challenging contexts
- Strength-based



Case Example: Meaning of Marriage

- Voices absent in the literature
- *“No one has asked me about what my marriage means to me?”*
- Significance: (a) a lifelong commitment, (b) enhanced life success, (c) secure emotional support, and (d) secure attachment.
- Influences on constructions of meaning and societal changes in marriage over time



