

## Exploring Perceptions of Personhood of a Spouse in the Early Stage of Dementia

(Abstract)

It is estimated that by the year 2050, one in three Americans 65 years and older will be living with some form of dementia, a group of symptoms that includes over 50 known types of diseases and conditions that currently affect over 6.7 million people in the United States. Because psychological and physical decline associated with dementia impairs memory, judgment, communication and other abilities that make independent daily functioning possible, it is important to care for the afflicted individuals in a way that not only takes care of their basic needs, but also preserves their sense of self, or their personhood. Many individuals in the Early Stage of Dementia (ESD) live at home and many are cared for by their spouses. How caregiving spouses perceive their partner with dementia and what meaning they give to the psychological and cognitive decline may be extremely important to how they provide care to their partners with dementia. Knowing how caregiving spouses perceive their partner in the early stage of dementia can provide insight in how to better support couples living with dementia.

To learn how spouses perceive their partners in the ESD, a 3-phase interview process will be employed in this qualitative, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study, so that caregiving spouses can narrate their experiences in their own words. This interview process affords the exploration of the participant's experience under study in the broader context of his or her life (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> interviews), and invites the participant to reflect more deeply on the meaning of the experience (3<sup>rd</sup> interview). To analyze my data, I will follow Smith & Osborn, and work closely with the text to identify the initial codes, which I will subsequently group into emerging themes, and later into superordinate concepts, while referring back to data to ensure the connection with what the participants said in the text (2008).