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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, AN EXPLORATION OF THE COPING STRATEGIES IN FEMALE COUNSELING DOCTORAL STUDENTS' MARRIAGES, by JUNG HEE HYUN, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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ABSTRACT

AN EXPLORATION OF THE COPING STRATEGIES IN FEMALE COUNSELING DOCTORAL STUDENTS' MARRIAGES
by
Jung Hee Hyun

The growing literature on the impact of doctoral programs on marriages has identified four major areas of concern: financial difficulties, change of lifestyle, lack of time, and communication issues (Bergen & Bergen, 1978; Cao, 2001; Giles, 1983; Middleton, 2001; Norton, Thomas, Morgan, Tilley, & Dickins, 1998; Williams, 1977). In addition, Looney, Harding, Blotcky and Branhart (1980) found that psychotherapists were more likely to have marital discord and failure in their marriages than in the general population. Moreover, studies have shown that female doctoral students reported more stress compared to male students (Mallinckrodt, Leong, & Kralj, 1989). With the recognition that marital conflicts are a significant indicator for lower persistent rates for married graduate students, it is critical to examine how married counseling doctoral students cope with their marital conflicts during the program. Following a constructionist philosophical stance, this exploratory study examined how married female counseling doctoral students cope with marital conflicts during their program using a phenomenological method approach. Fourteen married female counseling doctoral students in the development of competence stage of their program of study (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Lovitts, 2001) were interviewed, and 13 interviews were analyzed in a recursive manner. The findings indicated that female counseling doctoral students

utilized both couple-focused coping strategies and individual-focused coping strategies to balance two distinct lives, school and marriage. In addition, the participants identified a solid marriage, their husband's support, cohort's support, and other married couples' support as coping strategies for maintaining balance between school and marriage. Factors that might influence coping strategies of married female counseling doctoral students are discussed. Implications for counselors and recommendations for future research are discussed.

AN EXPLORATION OF THE COPING STRATEGIES IN FEMALE COUNSELING DOCTORAL STUDENTS' MARRIAGES

by
Jung H. Hyun

A Dissertation

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CHAPTER 1

Coping Strategies of Married Doctoral Students

According to the most recent data (Council of Graduate Schools Ph.D. Completion Project, 2007), the overall cumulative ten-year completion rate for doctoral students is 56.6%. According to other studies, less than half of all entering Ph. D. students completed their doctoral program (Lovitts, 2001). The low completion rate is evidence of the challenging nature of doctoral programs. The primary reasons of leaving doctoral programs were academic (49%; e.g., feelings of isolation due to the lack of cohesiveness of the program, academic failure such as poor performance, and failing their qualifying exam), personal (23%; e.g., feelings of making a wrong decision, life transitions such as marriage, divorce, and children), and financial (19%; e.g., getting a great job offer and lack of financial support) (Lovitts). For doctoral students who are married, the challenging environment of the doctoral program may have an impact on their marital relationships.

The purpose of this manuscript is to explore the stressors that doctoral students experience in their doctoral programs, to examine how the challenging environment of the doctoral program impacts their marital relationships, and to raise awareness for the need to have a coping strategy model to support a healthy marriage during doctoral work. A general description of doctoral programs will first be presented with stressors found in graduate students' lives during their doctoral program. Then, the psychological symptoms that doctoral students experience during their doctoral program

and their impact on doctoral students' marriages will be discussed. In addition, a conceptual/systemic perspective about the impact of doctoral program experience on marriage will be reviewed. Finally, the implications for training and future research will be discussed.

The Doctoral Experience

Graduate studies are demanding and stressful (Harnett & Katz, 1977; Sudol & Hall, 1991), especially in doctoral programs where the academic work is more demanding and challenging than in master's program. Hawley (2003) described doctoral degree work as "not simply a bigger and better master's degree but an undertaking of an entirely different order" (p. 21). The average length of coursework in doctoral studies in the humanities is three years. In addition to coursework, doctoral programs require comprehensive examinations, professional involvement, and dissertations. Many doctoral students may experience a feeling of failure due to dissatisfactory or poor performance in each step of the doctoral program (Lovitts, 2001).

In addition to intellectual work in academia, the academic atmosphere in doctoral programs contributes to the reasons for leaving doctoral programs (Lovitts, 2001). Many doctoral students found the environment too competitive and not supportive. For example, some psychology doctoral students experienced competition for faculty resources available within their department (Zemirah, 1999). Some experienced different kinds of discrimination such as race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and marital status (Lovitts). Female doctoral students of color in a college of education reported experiencing micro-aggressions and minimization of racial/cultural issues (Shah, 2007). The most common feeling reported by doctoral students was that of isolation (Lovitts).

Many doctoral students expressed that they felt isolated even in their department due to lack of cohesiveness (Lovitts) and lack of interaction with professors (McLaughlin, 1985) and that they felt detached from outside of the department (Lovitts). Unsupportive atmospheres seem to make doctoral students' experiences in doctoral programs unpleasant and challenging.

Doctoral programs significantly influenced an individual's life (Lovitts, 2001). Some realized that they were too immature to commit themselves fully to their programs. Some experienced divorce during their programs and found it difficult to handle both the divorce and the program simultaneously. Others left their doctoral programs because of their children. Doctoral students who were also parents reported feeling guilty about not having enough time with their children and not taking care of them. Between school and children, some doctoral students chose children over their programs (Lovitts).

Some doctoral students reported financial reasons for leaving a doctoral program. In some departments, first year students were forced to compete with each other for assistantships (Harnett & Katz, 1977). Older graduate students who returned to school in their later years were faced with a decrease in their income while an increase in their expenses due to their educational costs which might put them in debt for the first time in their lives (Sudol & Hall, 1991).

In addition to the academic, personal, financial reasons discussed previously, doctoral students' attrition appears to be related to where they are in their program of study. Doctoral programs can be categorized into three stages: (1) entry and adjustment (before the second year), (2) development of competence (usually second year through completion of all requirements except the dissertation), and (3) the research stage

(completing the dissertation) (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Lovitts, 2001). The attrition rate in doctoral programs in general is high. However, doctoral students are more than twice as likely to leave the doctoral program during the entry and adjustment stage and the development of competence stage combined than the research stage (Bowen & Rudenstine). The dissertation process, focusing on the research stage, has been described as energy-dragging and time-consuming (Bowen & Rudenstine). Sternberg (1981) observed psychological symptoms similar to neurosis and even psychosis in doctoral students in the process of writing a dissertation.

Impact of the Doctoral Program on Individuals

Although the dissertation process is considered the most difficult stage in the doctoral program, it seems that doctoral students experience stress from the moment they enter the doctoral program. With uncertain knowledge of the doctoral program, many students expressed anxiety (Miller & Irby, 1999). Cushway's (1992) study of psychology graduate students found that they experienced symptoms of stress, including anxiety, insomnia, somatic symptoms, and social dysfunctions, and severe depression due to lack of preparedness. Similarly, some first year doctoral students reported that they experienced multiple stress-related emotional and physical symptoms. The symptoms included periods of intense anxiety, depression lasting three or more consecutive days, and severe sleep problems (Zemirah, 1999).

Wolniewicz (1996) found that in the second stage of engagement of the doctoral program, there were noticeable sacrifices in the students' personal lives (e.g., giving up sleep and exercise) outside of academics. While working on the degree, students reported anxiety related to responsibilities to their family and job as well as stressors related to the

doctoral program (Miller & Irby, 1999; Wolniewicz, 1996). Burdened with a variety of responsibilities, many doctoral students experienced lack of time. Students felt overwhelmed with the amount work in the assigned period. Moreover, doctoral degree work resulted in decreased time to share with their significant others, family, and friends (Giles, 1983). Given the stressors experienced by doctoral students, it is not surprising that being in a doctoral program has an impact on the doctoral students' marriages.

Impact of Doctoral Programs on Marriages

Middleton (2001) reported that 20% of the doctoral students interviewed in New Zealand experienced breakups of long-term relationships or divorce. In another study (Pedersen & Daniels, 2001), 23 couples out of 64 couples who completed the doctoral psychology training were no longer with the partner they had during the program. Although there is no official data on how many doctoral students get divorced during their program, the literature on married doctoral students provides a glimpse of how vulnerable doctoral students' marriages are during the program. Financial difficulties, change of lifestyle, lack of time, and communication issues are the major affected areas in doctoral students' marriages during their doctoral program.

Financial Stress

Financial issues play a negative role in the marital relationships of doctoral students (Bergen & Bergen, 1978). When savings or loans were a major income of the household, the couples were more likely to have arguments and disagreements (Bergen & Bergen). When the income was from the husband's parents or relatives, there were conflicts in decision-making (Bergen & Bergen). Overall, the results of Bergen and

Bergen's study indicated that couples were more satisfied with their marriages when they did not borrow money.

Change of Lifestyle

Financial difficulties during the doctoral program can lead to changes in the lifestyles of the married doctoral students. Many graduate students in Giles' (1983) study gave up entertainment outside of the home to maintain financial security. For example, many couples reported staying at home during their leisure time instead of going out with friends. Sometimes, the couples reported simply giving up leisure time even with each other due to time pressures and deciding to not spend money on leisure activities.

Lack of Time

Lack of leisure time and time with spouses can lead to challenges in doctoral students' married lives. Between classes, meetings with faculty, teaching, and research, doctoral students often had difficulty finding time for their spouses who might expect to discuss things and share interests together (Giles, 1983). The amount and quality of leisure time of the doctoral students' couples significantly decreased compared to the equivalent group (Williams, 1977). Moreover, family or marriage life was postponed until after doctoral work was completed (Middleton, 2001). In addition, the difficulty in scheduling family events or vacation due to doctoral students' irregular schedules could add additional stress to the relationship (Giles). Reduced time to share with their spouses and the tendency to prioritize things related to school and to schedule things appropriate to school seemed to make non-student spouses lonely and isolated (Giles).

Communication Issues

With the decrease of leisure time and time spent with their spouses, communication becomes an issue. A study with 40 male doctoral students and their wives found that doctoral student couples experienced significantly less quality and quantity of communication than the control group of similar age, background or educational experience, and length of marriage (Williams, 1977).

Organizational/Systemic View on Marriage

Financial stress, change of lifestyle, lack of leisure time, and communication were common themes occurring in the marital relationships of doctoral students (Bergen & Bergen, 1978; Cao, 2001; Giles, 1983; Middleton, 2001; Norton, Thomas, Morgan, Tilley, & Dickins, 1998; Williams, 1977). While these four reoccurring themes are found both in symmetric (i.e., both partners are students) and asymmetric (i.e., one partner is a student), it seemed that marital relationship satisfaction was higher in a symmetrical relationship than in an asymmetrical relationship (Bergen & Bergen, 1978; Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000; McRoy & Fisher, 1982; Soloski, 1996).

Scheinkman (1988) also suggested a systemic framework to understand graduate student marriages. A couple is an organization where two parties get together and develop their own life patterns such as financial and time management through the interaction (Scheinkman). Dissatisfaction and strain are generated when one party's needs are not met in the organization (Scheinkman). In addition, when stress and strain are not understood in the organizational view, the impact of stress becomes more problematic. When one spouse is a graduate student, another layer of stress is added, and the marriage becomes more vulnerable, because the student spouse is unable to meet their partner's needs. From an organizational view, it seems that imbalance is generated in

many aspects of marriage such as role strain, education, personal growth, salary, and support system (Norton, Thomas, Morgan, Tilley, & Dickins, 1998). The student spouse seemed to struggle with their roles. When a non-student spouse was the only source of income, the student spouse tended to take a subordinate role at home in addition to the hierarchical relationship at school. In the area of education, the non-student spouse seemed to experience loss and sacrifice while the student spouse moved towards a meaningful world (Scheinkman, 1988). Moreover, asymmetrical couples found their marriage incompatible and often felt that they were misunderstood by each other. When a student spouse experienced stress from school, the non student spouse was often left puzzled and confused in their relationship. In addition, stress was found more often in the relationship when the source of income depended on one spouse who is not a student (Bergen & Bergen, 1978).

Scheinkman (1988) explained how the asymmetrical couples could end up arriving where recovery of their marriage might be impossible. Asymmetrical couples tended to experience inequality in finances, education, and household responsibilities (Scheinkman). Sometimes, resentment was generated due to the educational gap (Wilson & Hasterok, 1975). Moreover, student spouses felt that everything should be sacrificed for their education. However, their view of what is more important is not always the same as the non-student spouses'. These two major issues in the asymmetrical relationship are exacerbated by different time schedules and lack of time shared. Furthermore, differences in interests and life goals widen gaps in the asymmetrical couples. Talking about problems and negotiating the solutions can be uncomfortable resulting in postponement of solutions until the problems are stabilized and hardened. With the problems

unresolved, the ongoing stressors from the doctoral program widen the gaps in the marriage. In addition, the different viewpoints of the spouses can lead to difficulties in handling the issues and a higher risk for divorce (Scheinkman). The intensity of difficulties can continue to increase even though the relationship appears to remain the same when there are inadequate solutions (i.e., wrong solutions or solutions at the wrong level) or no solutions (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974).

There is a vicious cycle that occurs when doctoral programs negatively affect both the individuals and the marital relationships, which in turn negatively affects doctoral students' performance in their programs. Coping strategies to deal with these stressors can interrupt this cycle. Peer support and the positive and cooperative relationship between faculty advisors and doctoral students are important for reducing stress from working on doctoral degree. However, little information is available on coping strategies for doctoral students to use in their marriages.

Coping Strategies

The limited literature on coping strategies of married doctoral students suggests the importance of partner support. In fact, partner support is one of the most important factors related to low stress level and high self-esteem in student spouses (Norton, Thomas, Morgan, Tilley, & Dickins, 1998). According to Middleton (2001), doctoral students stated that they could have not gotten through the years of doctoral program without a spouse's strong practical and emotional support. Many doctoral students appreciated their spouses' taking care of household duties (Middleton).

Pines and Aronson (1988) asserted that a marriage can survive, or even benefit from, a short dose of crisis at work. In short doses, a partner can provide loving support.

However, when crisis at work becomes a daily event, it imposes stress that erodes the marriage. Dealing with continuous stress at work has the effect of making work a higher priority than marriage.

The stress and anxiety associated with doctoral work can lead to prolonged stress and anxiety which can negatively affect both the doctoral students and their marital relationships. In a longitudinal study, the results showed that first year doctoral students reported that they received strong support from their spouses. However, a year later, they reported receiving much less support from their spouses (Norton, et al., 1998). Clearly, more than spousal support is needed to reduce the negative impact of the doctoral program on the marriages.

From an ecological perspective, stress can be considered a process of evaluating stressors such as harm, loss, threat, and challenges, and available coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Psychological stress is defined as "a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being" (Lazarus & Forkman, p. 19). The doctoral program itself and the priority it is given adds another layer of stress to the marriage. Coping is a way to mediate the person-environment relationship. Lazarus and Folkman described two types of coping: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping involves "defining the problem, generating alternative solutions, weighting the alternatives in terms of their costs and benefits, choosing among them, and acting" (p.152) whereas emotion-focused coping is "strategies such as avoidance, minimization, distancing, selective attention, positive comparisons, and wresting positive value from negative events to reduce

emotional distress" (p. 150). Problem-focused coping is more likely to try to change the problem or source of the problem while emotion-focused coping is trying to reduce or control the emotional distress.

However, other researchers insisted that dyadic coping strategies should be considered in marriages instead of individual coping strategies (Coyne & Smith, 1991). Focusing on individual coping strategies too much might miss the organizational/systemic construct of marriage; the interaction between spouses in marriage would be better understood by looking at how dyadic coping strategies are employed. Coyne and Smith (1991) identified two distinct forms of coping that emphasize the relationship: active engagement and protective buffering. In active engagement, individuals try to understand interpersonal problems and to discuss how the partner feels. In protective buffering, individuals try to avoid arguments or disagreement or to hide one's emotional distress (Coyne & Smith).

Whether coping strategies focus more on the problems, the emotions, or the relationship, literature has shown that coping behaviors moderate the effect of stress on marital satisfaction (Holahan & Moos, 1990). Graham and Conoley (2006) identified the couple's perception of the problem, the couple's coping resources, and additional adaptive process as important concepts for maintaining healthy marriage. Even though numerous studies have investigated the relationship between stress and coping strategies in marriage (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), few studies that focused on coping strategies of married doctoral students were found.

One of the few studies that focused on coping strategies with a married doctoral student population is Giles' (1983) study of sixteen full time married doctoral students

and their non-student spouses. Four themes were identified in the study: support from spouse and parents, marital stability, social relationship and interaction, and status. Giles investigated the coping strategies utilized by doctoral students and their non-student spouses within those four themes. He found that spouses helped doctoral students by taking care of household duties, children, and all other house management as well as providing financial, emotional and psychological support for their spouses. Under marital stability, the coping strategies used focused on financial problems and time pressures. Couples used problem-focused strategies such as managing the limited sources that they had in order to get by. Under social relationship and interaction, couples got involved with people in similar situations like other doctoral couples. Under the status theme, doctoral students created extra efforts to fulfill a new student role while maintaining their previous roles. Although Giles indicated what couples did to overcome difficulties, it is difficult to determine what kinds of coping strategies were used, which ones worked, and whether they were individual or dyadic.

Pederson and Daniel (2001) also studied the specific stress and strategies used in the marriages of graduate students who completed a doctoral psychology program. They found good communication skills and having support systems outside of the marital relationship were helpful for maintaining sound relationships. However, again, particular coping strategies utilized were not identified.

Implication for Counselors

There is ample literature support that indicates being in a doctoral program may have a negative impact on the marital relationship (Bergen & Bergen, 1978; Cao, 2001; Giles, 1983; Middleton, 2001; Norton, Thomas, Morgan, Tilley, & Dickins, 1998;

Pedersen & Daniel, 2001; Williams, 1977). However, both married doctoral students and their spouses seem unaware that their marriage is impacted by their changing needs, changing roles, and roles strains they might experience by one spouse's working on a doctoral program. Scheinkman (1988) pointed out that counselors who work with married doctoral students and couples need to understand these strains from a systemic/organizational perspective.

This systemic perspective makes it possible to understand the mutual impacts of the marital stress on the doctoral program and stress from the doctoral program on the marriage. With understanding of the uniqueness of the doctoral students' couples, it is imperative for couples with one spouse working on a doctoral program to utilize coping strategies in order to maintain their healthy marriage. Given the similar experiences of dual career couples (two people are involved in pursuing a separate career role in their relationship), this literature could be helpful in understanding the marriage of doctoral students (Parker, Peltier, & Wolleat, 1981). The difference between dual career couples and couples with one spouse's working on a doctoral program might be that the couple or either of the spouses may not view the student role as equivalent to a full time job. Thus, using Rapoport and Rapoport's (1971, 1976) first level of approach to management for dual career couples of increasing awareness of stressors in their marriage may apply equally well to doctoral student couples.

The second level of approach to stress management is to increase interpersonal skills in marriage (Rapoport & Rapoport). The common mistakes made by dual career couples in stressful situations, include denial, blaming and scapegoating, depression, psychosomatic reactions, withdrawal, rigidity, and going crazy also might apply to

doctoral students' marriages. These strategies relieve the situation immediately and temporarily, but do not solve the problems and lead to more stress. Another strategy that was found is to develop communication skills. Several studies (Giles, 1983; Pederson & Daniel, 2001) that explored coping in married doctoral students found that communication was an important factor in maintaining a healthy marriage. Counselors working with married doctoral students need to understand the unique experience of married doctoral students, their limited time to share, and strains coming from the doctoral program, warn those common mistakes, and emphasize the necessity of communication in their marriage. Counselors might want to encourage them to set aside time for just the two of them and teach them effective communication and listening skills to assist them in sharing thoughts and emotions with each other, understanding each other's needs, and providing emotional support.

Building or increasing external support system has been found to be important with dual career couples (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1971, 1976) and would likely be helpful for doctoral student couples. Having external support systems such as friends, other relatives outside of the nuclear or immediate family, and couples who are going through similar situations can assist doctoral students to maintain their marriage and family healthy and succeed in their work.

Furthermore, with a systemic understanding of married doctoral students, it would be helpful for counselors working with married doctoral students to have a coping strategy model. During stressful periods, spouses would employ different types of coping strategies for their goals, using problem-focused coping to manage the situation, emotion-focused coping to deal with their own emotions, and relationship-focused coping to deal

with their partner. Problem-focused strategies and focusing too much on the partner's emotions were not helpful when stress is expected to last (Gottlieb & Wagner, 1991). Wives tried to protect their husband from worries and problems in marriages, but tended to have lower self-efficacy than husbands, feel more isolated, and experience psychological distress (Coyne & Smith, 1991). This seems to decrease marital intimacy and connection (Gottlieb & Wagner). In other cases, if spouses use different (and potentially conflicting) coping strategies, (e.g., women using interpersonal and emotion-focused coping while men use interpersonal distance) from their partners, the consequences can be more likely to be negative (Coyne & Smith; Story & Bradbury, 2004).

Research on relationship-focused coping strategies such as engaged, constructive marital interaction (i.e., expressing anger as an engagement that leads to discussion; Cohan & Bradbury, 1997), protective buffering or withdrawal (disengaging during high stress and exhaustion in avoid escalating the effects of stress; Roberts & Levenson, 2001) indicated that these coping strategies are beneficial during the periods of stress (Story & Bradbury, 2004). Strategies that focus on the relationship include but not limited to (a) including the partner in one's business life (discussing problems, events, issues; inviting partner to share appropriate business related activities); (b) knowing when to exclude one's partner from activities in which you are engaged ; (c) accepting one's partner as is; (d) applauding each other (both in private and in front of others); (e) making genuine efforts to please your partner; (f) reaching out physically (both sexually and non-sexually); and (g) sharing dreams and aspirations (Shaevits & Shaevit, 1979). At the same time, it is important to note that even those relation-focused coping strategies do not

guarantee healthy marital quality in the long-term. Therefore, counselors who work with couples where one spouse is a doctoral student should look at the couples' vulnerabilities that may require different individual coping strategies (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), examine the goals of coping strategies, and explore how those coping strategies interact during stressful times. Furthermore, with the couples that use relation-focused coping strategies in their marriage, counselors might want to evaluate the long term effects of coping strategies on their marriage.

Direction for Further Research

Story and Bradbury (2004) stated that understanding the interaction of individuals and individuals' needs in the marital relationship, recognition of the problems' resources and a systemic approach to utilizing coping strategies were necessary to improve the marital relationship in a time of distress. As many researchers insisted poor coping behaviors may harm the relationship resulting in individuals stress spilling into the marriage and potentially leading to divorce (Higginbottom, Barling, & Kelloway, 1993; Scheinkman, 1988; Watzlawick, Weakland, &Fisch, 1974). Coping strategies such as escape-avoidance, distancing, and confrontive coping are negatively related to marital adjustment in other couples (Houser, Konstam, & Ham, 1990). In addition, what need to be paid attention to is that different individuals may have different vulnerabilities that require different coping strategies (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Thus, further research is needed on the coping strategies of doctoral students and their spouses and on the long term impact of these strategies on the marital relationship.

Research on coping strategies with married doctoral student spouses will facilitate counselors' understanding and enable them to utilize a coping strategies model in order to

help with married doctoral students. Having a model will raise awareness of stress that married doctoral students may encounter and will be able to help them understand that issues and concerns that they experience are neither their fault nor their partners. Understanding the struggles of the couple from a systemic view and exploring helpful coping strategies will have the couples stay in healthy relationship and prevent them from having a detrimental consequence.

Conclusion

Reviewing the attrition rate of doctoral program and the reasons for leaving doctoral program are evidence that doctoral programs are challenging and demanding. In addition, doctoral programs impact not only individuals but also their spouses. Financial issues, lack of time to share, and communication were common themes identified as impacting the marital relationship of doctoral students. Literature on marriage indicated that coping behaviors tend to help improve marital satisfaction. However, few studies were found with the population of doctoral students' coping strategies in their marriage, particularly doctoral students majoring in helping professions. Research on coping strategies of doctoral students will provide a deeper understanding of doctoral students' experience during their program. Based on that information, counselors working with married doctoral students can help them understand that their marriage is impacted by their doctoral program and help them explore coping strategies that assist them to work on their marriage and program more healthily and effectively. Furthermore, understanding unique experience of married doctoral students, faculty advisors can help doctoral students have a more positive, productive and meaningful experience in their doctoral program.

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Chapter 2

Coping Strategies of Married Counseling Doctoral Students

> "I got divorced in my second year of grad school and could not handle the stress of grad school and divorce at the same time." (Lovitts, 2001, p.178)

There is no official data on how many doctoral students get divorced during their program. However, there is sufficient anecdotal evidence that divorce may be an issue. The few published articles on married doctoral students reported a divorce and breakup rate ranging from 20% (Middleton, 2001) to 36% (Pederson & Daniels, 2001).

Growing attention on the impact of doctoral programs on marriages has indicated that doctoral programs affect marriages negatively. Literature on the impact of doctoral programs on marriage has identified four reoccurring themes: financial difficulties, change of lifestyle, lack of time, and communication issues (Bergen & Bergen, 1978; Cao, 2001; Giles, 1983; Middleton, 2001; Norton, Thomas, Morgan, Tilley, & Dickins, 1998; Williams, 1977). One spouse working on a doctoral degree may bring financial burden to the family. Although financial difficulties were planned, when savings and loans became a major source of income for the family, there were more arguments and disagreements compared to marriages where a major source of income was a spouse's full time job (Bergen & Bergen). In addition, when the couples depended on the husband's parents or relatives financially, the couples tended to disagree in making decisions in the marriage (Bergen & Bergen). Limited use of financial sources often leads to changes in the couples' lifestyle. Many graduate students gave up going out or meeting

their friends outside the home; they tried to find entertainments at home or did not have a social life (Giles). Totally giving up a social life was partially due to lack of time. To many student spouses, working on a doctoral program is the priority. Due to demands of academic work as well as professional involvement, the amount of and the quality of leisure time in couples significantly decreased (Williams, 1977). Some couples where one spouse was a doctoral student also reported inadequate and unsatisfactory sexual relationships (Pederson & Daniels, 2001). Non-student spouses felt lonely and isolated (Giles, 1983). Moreover, they felt guilty because they believed that they expected too much from their student spouses (Pederson & Daniels). Furthermore, limited shared time is one of the most critical issues, because it results in lack of communication in marriage.

With the literature indicating major negative impacts of doctoral program on marriages, several researchers have raised an awareness of the vulnerability of marriages of doctoral students. Scheinkman (1988) suggested an organizational perspective to examine doctoral students' marriage, focusing on the imbalance between spouses due to one spouse's working on a doctoral program. While student spouses take on several roles and grow while pursuing their passion and career, their non-student spouses may become lonely and isolated unaware of the impact of the doctoral program on their marriages. The imbalance seemed to be amplified when one spouse worked on a doctoral program compared to the couple where both spouses were students (Bergen & Bergen, 1978). Norton, Thomas, Morgan, Tilley, and Dickins (1998) identified the imbalance generated from one spouse's working on a doctoral program in many areas such as role strain, education, salary, personal growth, and support system.

Despite the imbalance in the marriage, many couples where one spouse works on a doctoral program survive. It seems that non-student spouses' support is important to student spouses' surviving in the doctoral program. Many doctoral students reported that they could not have succeeded in their program without their spouses' physical and emotional support (Middleton, 2001). Almost every male doctoral student also reported spouses' strong support for success in doctoral programs (Cao, 2001). However, non-student spouses' support seemed to decrease after the first year (Norton, et al., 1998). Moreover, although many doctoral students appreciate their spouses' strong support for their survival in their program, it does not necessarily mean that their marriage was intact. Many times, it seems that invisible unspoken strains generated by the imbalance lead doctoral students' marriages to fall apart at the end of the program.

Scheinkman (1988) explained that imbalance in areas such as role, financial status, interest, and growth due to one spouse's working on a doctoral degree would be polarized because the couples' priority is not on resolving stress/conflicts. Often, non-student spouses seemed to delay resolving stressful situations because they believed that they asked too much from their partners. Sometimes, both partners avoided resolving the conflicted situation immediately because the priority was for the student spouses to complete the program. Thus, problems or conflicts were stabilized until they were faced with life transitions such as graduation. Scheinkman warned that gaps generated in couples where one spouse works on a doctoral degree could be easily mishandled. Other researchers also stated that wrong solutions, solutions at the wrong level, or no solutions could intensify the difficulties in the relationship (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). Moreover, researchers in marriage of dual career couples observed that there was a

negative relationship between specific coping strategies (e.g., escape-avoidance, distancing, and confrontive coping) and marital adjustment (Houser, Konstam, & Ham, 1990). It is critical to examine how marital conflicts in couples where one spouse is in the doctoral program are resolved.

Research on Coping Strategies of Married Doctoral Students

Despite the growing attention to the impact of doctoral programs on marriages, research on coping strategies of married doctoral students is limited. Only two studies related to coping strategies with a sample of doctoral students were found (e.g., Giles, 1983; Pederson & Daniels, 2001). Giles conducted an exploratory, qualitative study that focused on how married doctoral students resolved conflicts during their program by exploring how one spouse working on a doctoral program affected their marriages. From the interviews of the couples, four themes emerged: support system, marriage stability, social relationship and interaction, and status. Non-student spouses' support was a recurring theme throughout all themes. Marital stability, which included the detailed descriptions of various aspects of marriage that were influenced by the doctoral program (e.g., differences in educational level, financial problems, time pressures, communication, and issues around raising children), included non-student spouses' sacrifice of their career and putting their life on hold. The theme of social relationship and interaction involved doctoral students' isolation from social life outside of the program as well as non-student spouses' needs to belong. The status theme included student spouses' different roles and different perspectives from non-student spouses. However, as Giles stated in his study, the kinds of coping strategies that were utilized were not identified.

Rather, Giles' study highlighted the importance of further study with this population and implications for the institutions and mental health professionals.

Pederson and Daniels (2001) interviewed 64 couples where one spouse completed a counseling psychology doctoral program in order to examine the specific stresses in their relationship and how they coped with their stresses. Pederson and Daniels discussed four topics based on the study: impact of any advanced professional training on marriages and possible strategies (e.g., change of social life following relocation, disrupted couple's shared time due to the intense academic and training, financial stress, and invisible/unspoken strains in the relationship), specific stresses in training to psychologists (e.g., unclear boundaries between professional role and partner role in the relationship, imbalance in coping styles, and non-student spouse's feeling isolated due to limited shared time in the relationship), impact of professional role on the relationship (e.g., limited time and energy even after graduation and a high level of attention and involvement with clients), and dual career couples where one or both spouses are students or one or both spouses are professionals. Discussion related to the impact of the doctoral program on the relationship showed that non-student spouses sacrificed their social lives and expressed some resentment and anger. Inadequate and unsatisfactory sexual relationships also were mentioned as an indicator of negative experiences because of academic demands and high stress from the doctoral program. Sometimes, student spouses seemed to blame their non-student spouses for unsatisfactory or unproductive work at school. Other times, non-student spouses felt confused or guilt because they thought that they expected too much from their student spouses with identifying student spouse's stress from school. Pederson and Daniels also identified the invisible and

unspoken strains in the relationship. Decreasing common interest and increasing gaps in roles and educational experience led some couples to falling apart at the end of the program. Pederson and Daniels' study also indicated that communication was an important factor in helping to maintain the health of the relationship. However, the specific kinds of communication that were utilized were not examined.

Marital discord and failure were more likely to be found among psychotherapists than the general population (Looney, Harding, Blotcky, & Branhart, 1980; Wahl, Guy, & Brown, 1993). This result is surprising given that psychotherapists may be considered experts in resolving marital discord. On the other hand, it is worthwhile to probe what happens in psychotherapists' lives and how they manage them. As training mental health practitioners, counseling doctoral students seemed to experience marital discord and failures in their marriages when faced with stressors of being in a doctoral program (Pederson & Daniels, 2001).

Leppel (2002) identified marital conflicts as a significant indicator for lower persistent rates of married graduate students. It seems that intense academic demands from doctoral programs affect marriages of doctoral students-then, in turn, unresolved marital conflicts affect graduate work negatively.

Based on the literature, it is evident that doctoral students' marriages are at risk. There were many studies on doctoral students' struggles and its impact on their marital relationship and family in different programs. However, there is little research on how doctoral students cope with marital conflicts during their doctoral program and specifically with doctoral students in counseling programs. In fact, only one study was

found that focused on coping strategies related to marital conflicts with counseling doctoral students (Pederson & Daniels, 2001).

The literature on coping strategies of married doctoral students in their marriage during their program has not shown that there is a gender difference. However, many studies with graduate students on stress in graduate school and their marriage indicated that women significantly expressed more stress and less support from the department and family compared to men in the program (Mallinckrodt, Leong, & Kralj, 1989). While male and female doctoral students had similar experiences related to academics, psychological and financial stressors, male doctoral students seemed to have strong support from their wives (Cao, 2001). To address this gap in the literature, this study focused on female doctoral students' coping strategies in their marriages.

In addition to gender, what year doctoral students are in the program of study may also affect their marriages. Review of literature on attrition of doctoral students identified three stages of doctoral program (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Lovitts, 2001). The first stage is entry and adjustment; it usually refers the period before the second year. The second stage is development and competence, which covers from the second year through completion of all requirements except the dissertation. The third stage is the research stage where doctoral students complete the dissertation. According to the data (Bowen & Rudenstine), doctoral students were more likely to leave their program during the first and the second stages than in the third stage. Although the dissertation stage has traditionally been considered the most challenging, the data on attrition of doctoral students indicate that the first and the second stages were stressful and challenging. Although there was not a significant difference in marital satisfaction of doctoral students

depending on where they were in the stage of the program (Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000), student in their first year felt supported strongly from their non-student spouses (Norton, et al., 1998). Thus, in this study, female doctoral students who passed the entry and adjustment stage and were before the research stage were selected.

The purposes of this study are to explore how married female counseling doctoral students cope with stress and conflicts in their marriage during the program and to provide preliminary information to develop a long term coping strategy model for married doctoral students. To accomplish these purposes, the following research questions were asked.

- How do married female doctoral students in a counseling program describe their marital relationship during their doctoral program?
- How do married female doctoral students in a counseling program cope with marital stress/conflicts before and during their doctoral program?
- How do married female doctoral students in a counseling program describe their coping strategies before and during their doctoral program?

Method

As an exploratory qualitative research, this study followed a constructionist philosophical stance. Blumer (1969) developed three premises of constructionism.

> The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings those things have for them…The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he [or she] encounters. (p. 2)

In this study of married doctoral students' coping strategies, these three premises were used to find the meanings that doctoral students attribute to their marital experience

and how it is affected by working on the program. As Crotty (2003, p. 43) introduced constructionism, “actual meaning emerges only when consciousness engages with them (objects).” The meanings of doctoral students’ marital relationship struggles and their coping strategies would not emerge until it is experienced or researched. Therefore, research with this population on this problem would become meaningful and raise awareness that would help build a coping strategy model for married doctoral students.

Emphasizing the construction of meaning in a social/environmental context, this study tried to have a better understanding of an individual’s behaviors and interactions toward the environment. Researchers have argued that researchers can not be objective, because researchers bring their subjective experiences to the study (Keller, 1985). According to quantum mechanics (Nelson, 1993), the process of observing could change the object. In a similar way, qualitative research cannot help but be subjective. As soon as a researcher participates in the process of the research as an instrument, the researcher impacts the results, changing them from what they would be without a researcher’s participation. Even in quantitative studies, a researcher’s analysis and interpretation may impact the meaning of the results (Crotty, 2003; Dey, 1993). Constructionism in this qualitative study does not deny the impact of the researcher but focuses more attention to the object’s environment with an awareness that multiple aspects of environment can influence the object (Crotty).

Functioning from constructionist philosophy, phenomenology that is understood in interpretivism (Crotty, 2003) served as the theoretical framework guiding this study. Interpretivists believe that meaning is inherent in human actions, and the researcher finds the meaning in human actions (Schwandt, 2000). Phenomenology is engaged in

describing the essence of "the meanings of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon" (Creswell, 1998, p. 51) that is presented through conversation and interaction in particular situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In addition, phenomenology emphasizes understanding the participants' point of view in their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen). Thus, this phenomenological qualitative study allowed the meaning of the lived experiences and coping strategies of married counseling doctoral students to be examined. Moreover, as an exploratory study, this study helped define the phenomena of married counseling doctoral students that were not clearly investigated (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Participants

Creswell (1998) suggested "criterion" sampling as a purposeful sampling strategy when all the participants experienced the phenomena for quality assurance. Participants included 14 married female graduate students in a counseling doctoral program who had passed the first year of the program and had not yet defended their dissertation prospectus. This range of sample size satisfies Creswell's number of in-depth interviews in qualitative phenomenological study. These participants were intentionally selected, because these students would all be in the development of competence (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992). When recruiting participants through mass e-mails, 46 female doctoral students responded to the invitation e-mail. However, only 14 students met the criteria of (1) being in a counseling doctoral program, (2) getting married before the program, (3) passing the first year, (4) not defending prospectus, and (5) not finishing internship. Out of 14 participants, one participant's interview was not analyzed because she did not exactly fit the criteria of status in the program. Although she was in the

second year, her program was a five year doctoral program combining the master's and doctoral program. Therefore, 13 participants' interviews were included in the data analysis. The selected participants were either in the Counseling Psychology program accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA) or in the Counselor Education program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). They were all married before they got into their doctoral program. There were no restrictions on the number of previous marriages before the current marriage and on the number of children due to the exploratory nature of this study.

Five participants were enrolled in counseling psychology programs, and eight were in counselor education programs. The mean age was 39, ranging from 28 to 60. Twelve participants identified themselves as Caucasian, and one participant identified herself as Native American. Twelve participants identified themselves as heterosexual, and one participant identified herself as bisexual. Seven participants were in the second year, two participants were in the third, the fourth, and the fifth year of their program respectively at the time of interviewing. Ten participants were in their first marriage, and three participants were in their second marriage. Years of current marriage ranged from 1.75 to 25 years with a mean of 8.96 years. Eight participants did not have children, one participant was pregnant, two had two children, one had one child, and the other had six children. Seven participants reported their annual household income was over $100,000, four participants reported $60,000 - $80,000, one reported $40,000 - $60,000, and one reported under $ 20,000. Income sources included husband's job, husband's social security, student spouse's unemployment checks, student spouses' retirement, student's

full time job, investment, student spouse's part time job (e.g., consultation, internship), university assistantships, and student spouse's loans.

Procedure

A variety of recruitment methods were employed. First, a general description of the study was e-mailed to all of the CACREP accredited Counselor Education Program directors and all the APA accredited Counseling Psychology Program directors. Program directors were encouraged to send out a mass e-mail invitation to the enrolled female doctoral students. Among female doctoral students in the development of competence stage (after the first year and before the dissertation year), those who were interested in the study contacted the primary researcher for further information. At the same time, the researcher used a snowballing strategy (i.e., existing participants recruit potential participants) (Creswell, 1998). All interested participants contacted the primary researcher directly either via the telephone or e-mail to obtain more information about the study and to set up interview times. Participants were interviewed either in person or via the telephone.

In face to face interviews, the primary researcher secured a quiet place for interviewing that was convenient for the participant and informed the participant of the location via e-mail. At the time of interview, the primary researcher read aloud the informed consent (Appendix B) to each participant before the interview and addressed any questions the participant may have related to the study. Each participant signed the informed consent and received a copy from the primary researcher. Before the interview, the participants completed the demographic information sheet (Appendix C). The primary researcher interviewed the participants following a semi-structured interview

protocol (Appendix D). At the end of the interview, the participants were asked if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview. After the individual interview, each participant received a ten dollar gift card as a token of appreciation.

In telephone interviews, the primary researcher sent the informed consent (Appendix B) to the participants via e-mail. After the participants e-mailed the signed informed consent back to the primary researcher, the primary researcher e-mailed a demographic information sheet (Appendix C) to the participants. After receiving the demographic information from the participants via e-mail, the primary researcher scheduled the time and date with the participants for the telephone interview via e-mail or phone. The participants were encouraged to choose a quiet time and place for telephone interviewing. At the time of interviewing, the primary researcher called the participants and began the interview. The telephone interviews were also audio-taped to assure preciseness in the analysis. As in face to face interviews, the participants were asked if they are willing to participate in a follow-up interview. A ten dollar gift card was mailed to the address provided by the participant. No follow-up interviews were conducted, since research team members did not have questions during data analysis nor notice that information was omitted during the interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Data Sources

Demographic information. Participants completed a demographic information sheet (Appendix C) that included questions regarding participants' age, the year of the program, gender, race/ethnicity, years of marriage, spiritual identity, sexual identity, socioeconomic level, spouses' age, spouses' job, and the number of children.

Semi-structured interview. Creswell (1998) suggested in-depth individual interviews as a primary data source in phenomenological research. The semi-structured interview was conducted by the primary researcher; the interview protocol (Appendix D) that consists of all open-ended questions guided the interview in order to keep the interview on the track of eliciting the lived experience and meanings of coping strategies utilized by female counseling doctoral students in their marriage. The interview protocol was designed to investigate female counseling doctoral students' experiences in their marriages during the program, explore their coping skills in their marriages during the program, and coping strategies utilized in their marriages. The primary researcher utilized probing questions as well. Each interview ranged from one to two hours. The order of interview questions and the questions were revised after each transcript was analyzed.

Researcher as instrument. The primary researcher's theoretical orientation in counseling is Adlerian psychology, which believes that individuals are embedded in a social system, and the individual influences the system and the system influences individuals' behaviors (Adler, 1956). Adler believed that all human behaviors have purpose and individuals strive to find their own uniqueness and for superiority while belonging to the society. Therefore, Adler believed that you succeed when you can be truly who you are. From this perspective, the primary researcher looked at both the participants and the systems to which they belong.

As a female Asian counseling doctoral student, the primary researcher has paid attention to the interactions between the individuals and the environment. She was in a committed relationship and got married during the present study and has experienced her relationship go through difficult times when she had experienced hard times in her

program. At the same time, the primary researcher also observed doctoral students go through a divorce during and after the program and observed the impact on others' marriages as they went through the program.

Truly believing that observing an object can change it (Keller, 1985), the primary researcher recognizes that she cannot be 100% objective, particularly since the participants are similar to her identity (i.e., female, married, and doctoral students in a counseling program). The primary researcher was aware of the impact of her identity on the subjectivity of the study. The primary researcher's identity also was expected to contribute positively to the interviewing process. Because of the similarities between the primary researcher and the participants, the primary researcher was expected to facilitate rapport building with the participants by allowing her to empathize and connect to the participants in the interviews and thus obtain rich, in-depth data.

Research team. The research team consisted of the primary researcher who is female, a female counselor educator, and a male doctoral student in a counselor education program. As stated previously, the primary researcher was an Asian female doctoral student in counselor education program, who got married during the data collection after a three year committed relationship. The counselor educator was a Caucasian married faculty member in a counseling department. The male doctoral student in the counselor education program identified himself as African American and was married. All the members of the research team were trained in qualitative methodologies and were experienced qualitative researchers. The assumptions of the research team included (1) financial stress and having less time with their husbands would be the primary source of stress for in their marriage, (2) the participants would not realize the systemic influence

of stress on their marriage, (3) it might be challenging to balance family and school life, (3) it would be daunting for a couple that began their marriage at the time of getting into a doctoral program, and (4) the participants who had solid marriages before the program would consider their partners as a source of support.

Data Analysis

As an exploratory phenomenological study, the data analysis process followed the four phases grounded on the six steps suggested by Creswell (1998). As emphasized in the literature on phenomenological methodology (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell; Crotty, 2003), in order not to taint the subjective meaning of the data collected and analyzed, the research team was engaged in bracketing, defined as "the analytic tactic of taking an idea, word, or phrase that informants, or the researcher, takes for granted and treating it as an object of study" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 271). Thus, in the first phase, the assumptions and the previous experiences of the research team related to married doctoral students' coping strategies were bracketed. In addition, throughout the data collection and analysis, the research team continued to examine their assumptions and biases regularly at the meetings where the data analysis and debriefing sessions were included. Moreover, the primary researcher kept a reflective journal to examine her previous knowledge, experience, and assumptions on coping strategies of married female counseling doctoral students in marriage throughout the data collection and the data analysis.

In the second phase, open coding and 'horizonalization' occurred (Creswell, 1998, p. 147). The research team independently read all the transcripts with all identifiable personal information removed. Then, the research team separately found

statements related to the descriptions of marital experience by the participants, their coping strategies in their marriage, and changes before and during the program if any. Each member of the research team developed a list of statements that were not repeated or overlapped and treated each statement as equally valuable. While finding the statements related to the topics of the study, the research team analyzed the transcripts utilizing “coding”- writing key ideas, words, phrases, and interpretations on the transcripts to derive meaning from those statements.

The data collection and analysis were recursive in nature in this study in order to reinforce verification process of the study. The research team compared and contrasted codes and reached consensus on codes after analyzing each transcript independently. The codes developed from consensus were documented and sent to the participant for member checking to confirm the accuracy. This process was repeated after each interview. In this phase, the interview protocol was revised based on the data analysis of the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In the third phase, the research team developed an initial codebook based on the first two interviews. Since the data collection and analysis occurred in a recursive manner in this study, new codes emerged in each analysis of transcript. The initial codebook that was developed based on the first two interviews was revised through the data analysis and reached its final version. All the transcripts were recoded based on the final version of the codebook.

In the fourth phase, the research team constructed a general description of the meaning and elicited the essence of the experience. The research team developed what happened, how it was experienced, and what it is, (i.e., an overall description of the essence) (Creswell, 1998).

Verification Processes.

Crotty (2003) indicated that researchers would express subjective data in an uncritical way when using phenomenological methodology. In order to maintain 'truthworthiness' and 'authenticity' of this phenomenological qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in finding the essence of the coping strategies experienced by married female counseling doctoral students, this study engaged in five more verification processes in addition to rich and thick description that is inherently employed in qualitative research: clarifying researcher biases, member check, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and external audit (Creswell, 1998).

As described earlier, utilizing phenomenological methodology, the research team engaged in bracketing by reflecting their previous experiences, assumptions, and biases regarding the coping strategies of married female counseling doctoral students in their marriage during the program (Creswell, 1998). As phenomenological research, this study found the essence of the meaningful experiences through in-depth interviews. In addition, the study established 'intersubjective validity' through the interaction of the research team and the participants (Creswell, p. 207) by sending a rough draft to the interviewees after data analysis. Presenting a rough draft to the interviewees also contributed to ensuring accuracy. During these recursive analyses, by examining negative cases, initial working hypotheses were revised and refined (Creswell). Furthermore, the primary researcher kept an audit trail and a reflective journal to monitor the researcher's assumptions and biases. A female, African American, married counselor educator who has qualitative research experience worked as an auditor. The auditor examined the process and the products and helped make sure that the products were supported by the

data and made sense (Creswell). The audit trail was sent to the auditor at the end of the interviews. The auditor did not have any questions or concerns related to the codes or to the process.

Results

The present study explored the marital experiences of married female counseling doctoral students during the program and coping skills that were utilized by them in their marriages. Individual interviews were conducted to gain married female counseling doctoral students' lived experience of utilizing coping skills in their marriage during doctoral work. Interviews covered three areas: marital experience during the doctoral program, coping strategies utilized during the doctoral program, and differences in coping strategies before and during the doctoral program. At the end of each interview, the participant was asked what would be the ideal marriage during doctoral work as a way to finish the interview on a positive note (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Marital Experience during their Doctoral Work

The main themes included negative and positive experiences in participants' marriage during their doctoral work (see Table 1). The sub themes of *negative experiences* are (1) *workload of the program*, (2) *time pressure*, (3) *financial pressure*, (4) *lack of support system*, (5) *communication issues*, (6) *health issues*, (7) *experience of transitions*, and (8) *different level of growth*. The sub themes of *positive experience* are (1) *personal growth*, (2) *greater appreciation*, and (3*) applying counseling skills to marriage*.

Negative Experiences

Negative experiences were mainly due to stress from the workload of the program, time pressure, financial pressure, communication issues, health issues, transitions, lack of support system, and experiencing different level of growth from a spouse.

Workload of the program. All 13 participants reported experiencing stress from the workload of the program. The stress included being overwhelmed by the amount of workload, having anxiety about school putting strains on their marriages, and being surprised by other challenges except for finances.

> I think I am carrying a lot of stress because there's so many things that I have to be addressed. You know, it's not just go to class, read the material, and get a good grade, I can do that. Um...there's just so much....that's going on. I feel like I'm carrying a lot, and that's exhausting. And no matter how hard I work everyday, it's just, it feels like something doesn't get done. you know, either I am not progressing far enough for my prediss. or, or I forgot to e-mail so and so, I didn't read that, there is something doesn't get done, and that's been exhausting feeling. (Participant 5)

In addition, the unstructured schedule was stressful to two participants even though another participant perceived it as a positive experience, because she could get errands done with her flexible schedule.

> Weekend ...for example, we would’ve had, he doesn't work on weekends and I didn't either, but once I was in school, work is always there, so I don't have structured work schedule as much as I used to, so I feel pressured to work all the time. (Participant 3)

Generally, tired and exhausted from the workload of the program, participants felt that their marriages became a second priority to school even though they wanted to put their marriages before school, and some students experienced even decreased sex life or intimacy.

Table 1

Major Themes Related to Research Question One

Marital Experience during Doctoral Work
Negative experiences
Workload of the program
Time Pressure
Financial Pressure
Lack of support system
Communication issues
Health issues
Experience of transitions
Different level of growth
Positive experiences
Personal growth
Greater appreciation
Applying counseling skills to marriage

I wish I could talk more but there's a paper due, or for him was I wish I can hang out, but I've got this test and then we started conversation, kids are around, and we feel good, I am giving them to bed at the end of the day we're exhausted. Again our relationship has been behind either our academic career or children and tried to parent I think it's hard…" (Participant 2)

...the other one is um....I'm usually extremely exhausted, and so, our sex life was taken, just major plight cause I'm, I'm tired all the time… (Participant 5)

I don't know if I have enough, or I don't have as much of myself to give to make sure he's okay and taking care of him,… (Participant 12)

Time pressure. Along with the workload of the program, the participants experienced an extreme time crunch in their lives. All the participants felt that they had less time with their husbands. Some of them specifically mentioned less quality time. Because of the work that they felt like they have to do all the time, an out of town internship, or living separately, the participants had less quality time with their husbands, not to mention friends and family members. Time pressure also affected their time management of breaks and family events.

> I think, you know, What's coloring me now is the fact that the baby was born on November 15th and with other, others of we have a bunch of grandchildren at this point and with this one I was pretty much unable to be there, I was there for the actual um...three days when I was really needed to be, grandma stepped in and take the toddler you know they have an older child…um...to take her and help her out, but immediately I had to go back and get things done because it was born in crunch time in the semester. And that is the most negative thing I can think about right now because it was really hard for me to not be able to be there. um…when a new grandchild was born for I worked my butt off to get some things … (Participant 1)

> Well, I think just having time together as a couple, ah....I think something's that's been difficult, like I said, there's always something that needs to be done, always something sitting in the back in my mind. (Participant 4)

> The time is, is less, and usually during the time that I'm with him, like my, my mind is kind of else where. Sort of like, okay, after we've done hangout, then I gotta go, I gotta go do my work,… (Participant 13)

Financial pressure. Financial pressure was one of the main stressors in eight participants' marriage. However, financial pressure led to increasing arguments with husband in only two participants' marriages. Financial pressure was more likely to lead the participants to feel disempowered or guilty. Participants who worked before the program and had to quit their job because of the workload of the program expressed difficulty in asking their spouses for money and consequently felt disempowered.

> Um...financial pressures…um..is considerable with me out of work force and he's still keeping our family lifestyle the way it was while I was working. It's very stressful. That's the thing that fear about making ends meet which we didn't have before for the last in my life. Now there's that feel every dollar we have to attend to and by overspend that creates that conflict,… (Participant 2)

Even though three participants did not work before, they felt guilty because their husbands had to change jobs to support the family. It seems that three participants did not feel that they were contributing to the household financially, and that led to feelings of guilt.

> okay. that's a good question. I would say, that is was..um...how long...it was at the end of my second year of the program, and his job that I was talking about, he had changed his job and that job ended. there's no more work for him at that time. he knew it's coming, um...and so he took a job, which is kind of the first thing that came to, and I felt like I kind's pushed him into that. um...because of my anxiety, finances, and save money you know but I kind of pushed him into, which is a terrible job, …he was miserable, and I never saw him and I felt like, like I said, I felt like maybe I had encouraged him to put him to take that first job that came around um...so I was feeling guilty about his misery and so, I mean he was just not himself. um...He was just burned out. So I think that was very difficult in our relationship cause he is usually very optimistic one um...really go getter, energy, he's willing to try to do things, a optimistic person, and that was totally sad, and I felt very guilty about that. Again, that same feeling like was crap, he did this because I'm in graduate school, I can't get a full time job, there's no way ** assistantship anyway, still not contributing much financially and um...it was just very difficult time, no time together, he wasn't himself, he didn't like what he was doing, and you know we never saw each other. That was probably the most difficult ...that I can think of right now. (Participant 4)

> I'm finding it hard at times not being a contributor, like I, once I used to earn more money than XXX and I, I think it's more of psychological I wish I were doing my share. (Participant 9)

Lack of support system. Another stressor was the lack of support system. Two participants perceived a lack of support, because they did not have many married doctoral students or married doctoral students with children in their cohorts.

> You know because most students aren't married, and don't have kids. So…um…since then, I find myself frustrated with the role of being a doc student,

> but yet being so much, being so different from a typical doc student. (Participant 11)

In addition, when participants needed emotional support and physical help with household chores, their spouses were tired and exhausted as well from work and had little left for the participants. Many times division of household chores was added as another stress to the couples due to reallocation of domestic labor to the husband.

> Before the program, he, well, he come home from work and I've finished with the work and it would be our time as family. We eat dinner and we go for a walk with the kids and would be leisurely time. They take the bath and have their routine, we get them in bed, we have some time to watch tv whatever it is. but, now that I came home so late because of school by the time I get home he's already got the kids in bed, and he's done that shift that after the school to bed time shift which is the challenging time by himself, he's exhausted. So there isn't that we lost that bit a time at the end of the day together. (Participant 2)

For three couples, husbands' different ideas about socializing with others for emotional support led to arguments.

> …And…um…because I had not, I haven't had, you know I haven't talked to anyone just you know as a friend in so long, and she had some problems and stuff that she couldn't talk to anybody else about and so…we just you know, we were able to de-stress and my husband, um…he made a comment, okay, I told him, you know, I told him how wonderful it was, and um…to be able to talk to somebody, and um…he made a comment, oh, it was, okay. After lunch, I went home, and started studying. The next day, um…he wanted to go, I think to look at furniture, I'm not, I forget what it was. And I told him that I couldn't. And he made a comment like, well if you, you know, you can spend all day having lunch or something, then, you've been able to get your homework done so you can save some time with me. Um…he didn't put it in those words, but it was that's, you know, that's what he meant, so…that's an example. (Participant 10)

Communication issues. Four participants experienced increased arguments and decreased communication. They reported being more irritated and less patient than before becoming involved in the doctoral programs. Additionally, some of the participants reported not initiating conversations with their spouses due to being tired. One participant attributed this change to herself, but the other participants attributed it to their husbands.

> …We never fight about anything important, it's always really stupid stuff like…and this will speak to how irritable I am because I am so exhausted… (Participant 5)

> Definitely, he was much more, he was definitely much more irritable and snappy so he's snappy, I get hurt, my feelings hurt, and then I just withdraw, and so that cut down communication. (Participant 4)

For two participants, the content of conversation has changed rather than the frequency.

> I don't think we're having maybe more discussion, but maybe we're having discussions that are centering around different things. Does that make sense? Like, like I said, how it's you know, now it's such a big part of my life, how it's affecting our lives. But we had a lot of discussions before, but they maybe didn't center around so much my phd work and stuff, if that makes sense. (Participant 14)

Health issues. Health issues were not common to all the participants, but five participants had different issues related to health during the program and reported that those times related to health issues were one of the most difficult and stressful times in their marriages. Those times included infertility, giving birth during the program, husband's health issues, and weight gain. Although some of the issues were not directly related to working on a doctoral program, it seems that difficult times around health issues impacted the participants negatively by adding more stress to their stress level from the program.

> I wasn't aware how challenging it would be to move forward once I did have my son. Um….and….you know, like I, I pretty much um….I stay at home, take care of our son full time while I'm trying to finish my degree and now you know we have another baby coming, so…it's a…that has been very challenging. (Participant 11)

In other aspects, the participants gained weights during the program and that seemed to lead to decreased sex life.

> And so, I've got to, at one point, last semester, um..at the very beginning whenever I was sitting around, I gained a lot of weight. And…(sighed)..so that made me unhappy about myself, made unhappy in relationship with my husband,

> and you know when you view myself, you know, emotionally and physically um…as far as sexually as well, and..um…and so um…it took me a while to see you know so concentrated on you know my work that I couldn't, I didn't see that you know, this, my harmony, my balance is off…(Participant 10)

Experience of transitions. Four couples moved to another place, and their husbands had to change jobs. In addition to one's changing roles and status in her marriage, getting married right before the program, giving birth to a child, moving to an unfamiliar place, changing a job, and planning for future careers brought transitions to marriage, which led to a great deal of stress in the marriages.

> We left home that we owned there. Here we rent it and walked through our house, and he changed a job. He changed his license to the state, found a job that he doesn't want *** you know, we argued constantly during that time because stress was intense. That was the hard one. Just that *******so the first three month of the program I was here with the kids and my mom, thank goodness, ahm...he come driving on the weekends when he was off on Sunday and Monday, we argued through the whole time pretty much. (Participant 2)

Different level of growth. Two participants expressed that they have grown more personally as a result of the program compared to the growth of their partners.

> I'm starting to grow in these new ways and he's not growing in the same ways and trying to reconcile that. Um….this feels like the toughest obstacle we see so far in the last you know a year and a half, almost two years. (Participant 12)

Positive Experiences

Positive experiences in the marriages that were influenced by the program were identified as growing personally, appreciating a relationship with husband, and applying counseling skills to the marriages.

Personal growth. Nine out of 13 participants expressed that they experienced personal growth during the program. The main part of the sense of growing seemed to come from increased awareness of themselves and people and things around them. They became more aware of the importance of balance in their lives.

> I'm kind of different than, a lot more introspective than I was, and self-reflective and and I've been able to have for what I need, um...that's been a good thing. I don't think that I was...I would've been as aware than beforehand (Participant 3)

Two participants stated that they thought more critically and felt more confident and experienced more happiness in what they are doing.

> I feel like, it helped me to think more critically. Um….and really question a lot of things, and to ….so…so sometimes I take that home with me, and so he'll say something, and I'll be like, what about this, and sort of in a way I feel like, some of the stuff that I've learned here, I can bring back my relationship with him, whether it's like counseling skills, or it's just um….world view type stuff. I really feel like, there's definitely been benefits than um…downfalls. I think it's been like very very helpful. I mean, it's ….my education has empowered me as a person, um….and I feel little, I mean, so blessed to be here, and having this experience that I'm having, and I feel like, it's helped raise my confidence a lot too. Um….gave me a lot of validation some ways cause it's competitive to get in, and so…um….yeah…I just feel like it's been …a really good experience. (Participant 13)

One participant actually could overcome a void in her life through the doctoral program from a medical-related depression.

> It was a lot of fun. So in that respect, he found me to be a much happier person. (Participant 1)

One participant said that she became more patient and less sarcastic.

> It's like we learn from each other, I guess through more counseling training that we still get angry and and get personal, might say something mean, but it's never, it's never hasn't extreme I don't think. and we tend to be more patient one another recognize that it's about that some other frustration and that's of course it's still relationship issue and that would be different…(Participant 3)

Another participant stated that the program helped strengthen her ethnic identity.

> I think it helps to strengthen my identity, um...I would, I would have to say of strongly say that it has. Um….not only, you know not only in my marriage and family and um….in myself, taking care of myself, in my marriage and family, but also um…it's the program (Participant 10)

One participant with kids experienced increased personal insight and growth.

> All of the transitional change it has been the most stressful period of my life. So it made me dig really deep within myself. It's made me grow up tremendously. Now I can look back and say I am grateful for the opportunity. (Participant 2)

One participant's growth also encouraged her husband to go back to school.

> I definitely think that me pursuing my doctorate kind of sparks my husband's really think about um…you know, going back to school himself and you know, what he would go back for, and…um…I don't think that he would necessarily be a phd in doctorate, but just thinking about doing his master's….I think that's something that because of our marriage and me being in the program, something that he began to consider, that he hadn't previously considered. (Participant 11)

Greater appreciation. Four participants reported greater appreciation as one of the benefits while working on a doctoral program. Working on a doctoral program brought time pressure to the participants, but at the same time, limited time with a spouse seemed to bring appreciation to the participants as well. The participants appreciated having a spouse. Moreover, the different personalities of spouses that had been perceived not to be helpful in their healthy relationship were appreciated as well.

> I do think moving here, sort of feeling like we were in this together, and that was a decision that we were making together um…help bring us closer especially initially. Um…I think it has a possibility, like because I feel like I am growing in new ways, um and you know there's a possibility that **** also start to grow in this new wave that we're gonna have even deep relationships and deeper appreciation for each other and understanding of each other um….and I think that in general… I think just for me being feeling more fulfilled in career life have carried over onto how I am in our relationship. So that's been a very positive thing too. I think for me to be passionate about something, and being dedicated to studying something uh…my husband also becomes a little contagious I guess in some ways and vice versa. (Participant 12)

> There's just a lot of acceptance and appreciation of the differences, uh…rather than any sort of uh…threatener or forbidder. (Participant 9)

Another participant stated that she became more respectful of her spouse. One participant stated that she even tried to accommodate her partner's style.

> It may have been the same as other couple because we would've been self-focused, we wouldn't have been couple focused..and being in the program then, much more

> couple focused..again that's part of the appreciation piece too, that make me appreciate everything he does for me and be aware of that, not be as self-focused. (Participant 4)

Applying counseling skills to marriage. Through the program, four participants specifically stated that they applied counseling skills to their marriage. Counseling skills that the participants applied to their marriages included, but were not limited to, understanding stressors in each other's life and using meditation and deep breathing.

> I think being in the field of counseling psychology, I think I, one of the things been studied in marriage counseling ...I think I carry a lot of them home with me too,…. I mean psychoeducational piece of program as provided, you know good communication strategies for me from my work and from being in the program. (Participant 2)

> I think our coping skills for the stress and the heavy workload are better, I mean, mine are because we were counselor before, but going through a counselor program, you learn things new and have I felt like deeper understanding what I thought I knew, and I will be able to..apply to my, you know, I can tell, oh, this is stress, I am really not angry that he didn't do dishes, he left shoes on the floor or whatever, it's just stress, you know, we can own that up a little bit…(Participant 3)

Coping Strategies for Marital Stress/Conflicts during the Doctoral Work

Coping strategies utilized by the participants could be divided into two main themes: *Individual-focused coping* and *couple-focused coping strategies*. *Individual-focused coping strategies* included (1) *time management*, (2) *secure time with husband*, (3*) self-care strategies*, and (4) *support from outside of marriage*. *Couple-focused coping strategies* included (1) *communication*, (2) *coping together*, and (3) *husband as a source of support* (see Table 2).

Individual-Focused Coping Strategies

The main strategy that the participants utilized to maintain a balance between school life and a healthy marriage was intensive time management. In addition

Table 2

Major Themes Related to Research Question Two

Coping Strategies for Marital Stress/conflicts during the Doctoral Work
Individual-focused coping strategies
Time management
Secure time with husband
Self-care strategies
Support from outside of marriage
Couple-focused coping strategies
Communication
Coping together
Husband as a source of support

to managing limited time, the participants tried hard to secure time with their husband. Moreover, the participants utilized different types of coping strategies to take care of themselves including using friends and a support group outside of marriage.

Time management. Nine participants worked hard to manage limited time to work on their doctoral program and to maintain a healthy marriage. Time management included being conscientious about using time, setting time boundaries between school and marriage, and planning in advance for break. In order to manage limited time, participants prioritized their life. Some participants cut some self-care time and skipped social engagements to focus on school. Another participant postponed childbirth until after school.

> I think we sort of took it for granted that we're gonna have all this time together. It wasn't a big deal. I think it's just the time we have now, because it is more limited just in terms of ***, um….we're little more careful about how we spend it. Um…I mean, yeah, but …yeah, I think we are just realizing too that again because, partly because of a time factor, I know how much this is a part of the program, and how much it was just I haven't been married for a while, um…but feeling like we really need to spend time doing things that we both enjoy doing them together…(Participant 12)

> I think the biggest change is just having to even more so prioritize, you know, as far as um…it's very easily, very easy to get totally um…enmeshed in the program because it's so time consuming and you know, remembering that I do have a spouse, and that even if it's giving him you know 30 minutes, but you know when I get home, before I have to do a class or project that, you know that's important, so I think it's just the prioritizing is even more important than it was before…(Participant 14)

Secure time with husband. Participants had the hardest time balancing time between school and family. In spite of the limited time for marriage, all the participants tried to secure time with their husbands. In order to save time for their husbands, the participants tended to spend less time on social friendships. Participants utilized cooking or dinner time to be with their husbands. Eight participants tried to do something together such as going to movies, playing games, taking a trip together; one participant tried to set aside one night per week for a date night. When participants were asked how doing something together helped their marriage, they said that those activities helped them stay connected.

> I think we are trying to make sure we are spending time together, we're relaxing and having fun, …I guess it's in general some way structuring and time for us to be together and doing different things that aren't related to one of our career. Um…and you know, we love to travel and so we're talking about a trip, trying to trip this summer and um…yeah, I guess little ways to try to eat dinner together at least a couple of times at night, or a couple of times a week… (Participant 12)

> Usually we will either, we usually look at what is played in the movie theater, see what movie's interesting, any movies we wanna see on the weekends, um...or we'll go to movie gallery, you know movies they have for $1.99 for one night, so we'll usually go there Friday, rent a couple of movies and then watch them on

> Friday night, and the Saturday afternoon, then we bring them back, you know, we usually rent a couple of more depending on what's out or what we haven't seen yet. um...I don't know, sometimes, we play board games, cards (Participant 8)

One participant even said that she compromised free time and vacation for him to enjoy and spend time in nature.

> I love to take um.....like, I've not been to vacations… but I like to go, you know foreign countries and...hotels…and you know there's nature involved, that's great, but I used to go *** and so I think I compromise myself, we're planning vacations now to go hiking trips and stuff like that. (Participant 4)

Another participant decided to take more time to finish the program in order to have more time with husband.

> I had originally thought, you know four years and now I am thinking four and a half to five will be much better for all of us...for the program,… (Participant 1)

When participants had to go to a conference, husbands sometimes traveled with them, and participants skipped conference sessions to spend time with husband.

> Right, trying to figure out how are we going to spend time together even though I wanted to attend some of the programs in whatever and he did rent a car and go to the Johnson Space Center during that day but you know I had to make the choice and on Friday um...not ***on Saturday not to go to any of the um..presentations because we were gonna spend Saturday all day together. And that was you know that was a big decision… (Participant 1)

Self-care strategies. Participants stated that their marriages were happy when they were happy. All 13 participants utilized different ways to take care of themselves. Exercise such as running and yoga, reading novels, and watching TV were often used as strategies to reduce tension.

> When I'm happy, the relationship tends to be better, when I'm happy, the relationship tends to be better. So…I think allowing myself the time and the space to do things …for myself, like being able to focus on myself, and not always self-focused on him, and making sure that I'm gonna keep him happy so that he doesn't leave me or something like that. So just being able to like recognize that my needs are important and sort of start there first and then, um….and then kind of go from there… (Participant 13)

> I just need to continue to take care of myself so that I have, healthy adult to be in the marriage. um....and right now, all I've done so far is I have gone to a couple of yogas since I talked to you last time, so I ...so that was a good thing that we talked...and prior to talking to you, I have worked out once or twice, so working on taking care of myself physically, but I still need to do something uh...emotionally, spiritually for myself that helps to cope with, manage...because if I feel empty, it doesn't help in our relationship. (Participant 6)

In addition, spirituality was important for many couples.

> I think another coping strategy um…..for us is….you know really keeping in the forefront you know like I said earlier, what God wants me to do, and so far he's open all the doors and so really feeling like this is the right thing to be doing, um….and praying about it, it is a big part of it as well. (Participant 14)

Six participants tried to set aside time for decompressing such as spending time in nature, looking inward, making distance from husband.

> I do mindfulness meditation everyday, which is amazing and it teaches me just about not trying to have control, that there's nothing that is meant to be, it's sort of, of a bit of Buddhist that can be leading all over the Buddhist stuff. but that's help because especially through this program, nothings make you satisfactory, nor permanent, and nothing's personal. It just did. And that, if I turned myself sometime into quite, still and meditate then there's inner peace. So that part, in addition to the nature, I love nature, so one of the things that I've always done is spend time with nature that even is more fulfilling than the meditation, the nature. That's the same stillness, quiet, peace, that's spiritual part. My own spiritual believes, and my own practice strengthened me in addition to the relationship. (Participant 2)

Three participants attended personal counseling. Three participants wrote in a journal. Recognizing the need for self-care, one participant even encouraged her husband to build his social support system.

> One thing that has come up is that my husband, JJJ really relies on me for a lot of his support whereas I have, cause you know friendships and family relationships that I go to, so I know there are coping strategies that I guess tangently related to our marriage is that he's trying to develop more friendships outside of our relationship so he doesn't just rely on me, in terms of doing things with somebody, but then also when he stresses out or has a bad day, he has other people that he can go to as well. (Participant 12)

One participant broke work up into smaller chunks to get it done and put things out there to keep promises to herself.

> So I have to really moderate it more and make sure that I'm making small efforts here and there, and if it is small to try to kind of embrace it and let it be more quality as opposed to quantity so… I put it out there, and I know I can't really renag on it, so…or that sort of how I feel it. It's almost like I made a promise or something and I don't wanna break my promise. (Participant 13)

Six participants said that they carried over counseling skills to their marriage.

> I've trained him. To say these things because he doesn't have that naturally. Doesn't get it at work, his training made him to be opposite. So, he's found, he'll do that. He'll say. I hear that you are feeling sad, and I'm you know...(laughter). That must be really hard for you. He'll say that. (Participant 2)

Support from outside of marriage. Six out of 13 participants utilized support outside of their marriages. One participant talked with another couple about marriage, spent time with friends to talk about marital relationship and joined a support group. Three participants used cohorts as a support group while they socialized with other married couples in the program.

> I talked, oh, I talked to other woman. You know, I have a, from one of a support group. I would talk to other doc students even though they are not married, but you know, they definitely understand you know be a, most of them aren't married, they understand you know the rigors of the doc program, and….how that can be stressful… (Participant 11)

Couple-Focused Coping Strategies

In addition to individual-focused coping strategies, the participants utilized many different types of couple-focused coping strategies. Communication, coping together, and husband as a source of support were identified as couple-focused coping strategies.

Communication. All the participants mentioned communication as a coping strategy. The majority of participants utilized honest and open communication.

> I think that that was the difference between us at the fact that we had always you know not that we had not had love patches, but we had always been able to communicate. Sometimes it's not been easiest communication but we always communicate… And I think that's only gotten stronger actually through the years because we both make an attempt to do that. (Participant 1)

Those who lived separately temporarily found their own ways to communicate with each other.

> Oh yeah...I really enjoyed writing letters. and I don't do as often as I used to, but last year, I dropped note here and there at home to my husband and I also sent him a package. And he did the same for me. He doesn't write letters, but he did send me a package. but we do also e-mail quite a bit to each other. Sometimes a couple of times a day, or sometimes every other day depending on what's going on. That was very helpful. (Participant 6)

Intensive discussion about expectations before marriage and how to handle things before the program were appreciated to maintain a healthy marital relationship.

> …the cooperative ideas never never change, change, like um...I call him my husband, but we really refer to each other more frequently a partner. um...because I mean, I think either we talked about it when we first, I think I wanna say we had this conversation when we was bored brand new couples ourselves, this is gonna be a partnership… (Participant 5)

Two participants had open communication about what needs to be done around the house.

> I asked him, I asked him first if it would be okay. and he said yes. and I said, here's the thing, I have all those stuff to do, I have four papers and presentations that I had to get done you know by Thursday when she got here. and so let him know ahead of time, you know I'm gonna have, you know I need your help basically. so he understood, you know about, you know, we're both gonna have to… (Participant 9)

While all the participants considered communication an important coping strategy, some participants expressed how hard it was to maintain good communication with their husbands. Three participants reported that they tried not to put conversations off. Two participants discussed things a lot and then let it go, without holding grudges. Three participants jointly decided what was important. Some participants initiated

conversations, but, in other couples, husbands communicated dissatisfaction about the time commitment required for the program. So, communication was used as a route to express negative feelings. Due to the time crunch, it seemed to be difficult to discuss important issues such as making future plans. Frustration during communication with their husbands led to ineffective coping skills, such as ignoring, criticizing, miscommunication, slamming doors, and being verbally aggressive.

> I just I don't want that kind of structural points. I do when I get….like this passive aggressive rebellious piece of me when I just wanna break the budget….So, I get just like, I don't like to attend to like that. So that was something that I was just ignoring, change the subject, every time it came out. That thing just did not go well because I just never wanna… come up with the budget. I think....that just created tension I think. (Participant 4)

> Sometimes I nag, or like could you do this when I just really need to do it. Um…or sort of I don't know, sometimes I kind of rely on him to just do a lot of cooking and stuff. And he gets sick of doing that. So…he's like become the cook um….so that's not a good one, just sort of it's like, it's an ineffective one. Yeah…just sort of thinking, assuming he'll take care of it. Yeah…so….that' not good. So making sure that I'm still sort of pulling my weight, you know, do as I can. (Participant 13)

Coping together. In addition to spending time together and maintaining communication routes with husband, 12 participants identified different types of coping strategies that were used to relieve tensions in marriage and to keep their marriage healthy. One participant valued commitment on both parts to making marriage to work.

> You know really committed to taking whatever steps when necessary to make it work. A much different perspective perhaps in someone who got married in their twenties. Certainly much different perspective than I had had in my twenty. (Participant 1)

Another participant said that her husband communicated more openly about feelings thanks to couples counseling workshop.

> …the one thing that AAA said he got out of that weekend on site, was the ability to be able to say, I am scared, rather than emotionally withdrawing. and when he said that, that helps me, that calms me down almost immediately. (Participant 6)

Shared common values and interests helped two participants to relieve their tensions in their marriage. Two participants said that it was very important and supportive to go to religious service together.

> We share so much in common in terms of the values, our values, and things we like to do, we share so many interests, we both like you know, things like camping, outdoors, and we like movies, restaurants, and…uh….you know discussing interesting things, and you know, I found him endlessly fascinating… you know it's you and me with God in our center and our family around us, which I think is uh…marvelous for the sacred marriage. (Participant 9)

> The spiritual part whenever it's out of harmony, it does affect you know our marriage and ……it affects our family. And so, I would have to say that it is the biggest, the most important thing as far as me getting through this program. (Participant 10)

Humor was also identified as a great tool.

> I think humor, is an important coping strategy for us, make funny things um...when I am taking myself way too seriously, he will crack a joke and that really kind of puts me in my place, even it, sometimes it annoys me at first, then I usually wax in it, I mean that's the big part of how we cope with things stress, you know, laugh at… kind of look at how absurd they are sometimes and you know, be willing to do things, I mean, there isn't a lot of interested in it, you know um...it's really important I mean, in terms of how we cope with, you know, I guess, that's the way I see being supportive, you know. (Participant 4)

Three participants tried to set mutual goals; it led them to balance in marriage and helped them to view marriage as partnership.

> I think, I think the biggest heart for us though is that we really keep in our eyes on the prey, you know cause the goal is I'll have a job, I think at the end of all this of course, and um...he'll be a stay at home husband. and um...he'll be the house husband, like a housewife. Um…he's working really hard now, put food on the table and in a job that he could, you know, take the leave, and and what not, and just maybe three or four more years, I'm gonna have that job and he can stay home. (Participant 5)

Four participants tried to maintain physical affection in their marriage. It seemed to help them stay connected as a couple.

> I mean, we still go on dates you know, we still do you know, movie nights um...almost every weekend, and you know, we still like you know, cuddling, hold hands, I mean, there's you know, and kiss…(Participant 8)

Husband as a source of support. All the participants considered their husbands to be a source of support and appreciated their husbands tremendously in maintaining a healthy marriage while working on a doctoral program.

> I think in many respects he had to…um…you know, um…he had to make more sacrifices than I did because of the fact that none of this was been really good for him… It was all about me, my program. (Participant 1)

Husbands helped participants to remember to relax and reframe situation positively with sometimes using humor.

> …sometimes he gets me to chill out a little bit, you know, and not take things so seriously and so intensely,… (Participant 14)

Husbands became more understanding wives' time commitment to their program and became more understanding and supportive over time.

> …he was really supportive and not getting upset about that or jealous of my time or.....I am sure he said that it was difficult for him too that he didn't like living alone, but he knew that it would help me get a jump start and feel better about my progress and that was really supportive… (Participant 3)

Husbands' emotional support such as being interested in the program and financial support of being a main breadwinner of the family helped participants to be able to focus on their work. Five participants emphasized that they felt supportive when their husbands felt a part of the students' experience.

> He likes to learn through me. He doesn't like going to school himself, but he loves, he enjoys listening to my processes and my subjects, give me ideas and very creative person. (Participant 6)

> One of the things that really help us is that we try to talk about whatever is going on and not let you know, not let our frustration be bottled up. And…uh…try to support one another as best we can even though you know, my husband isn't, I mean, he's, he's learning about this whole process through me, you know, this whole graduate thing through me, um….you know that I can still uh…cause you just don't have personal experience, it doesn't mean like I can't still talk with him about it, you know when he's, he can understand and um…you know, and then he knows how to support me. (Participant 11)

In addition to emotional support, the participants appreciated their husbands' physical support such as taking care of household duties and children. Three participants mentioned husbands' sacrifices while they worked their doctoral degree.. Some husbands had to change jobs, put their goals on hold, and deal with an unsatisfactory job to support wife financially.

> …it's been kind of fun to be…be supported. He's been supportive of me and and I really appreciate that. I mean, I realize that I don't do anything alone. Everything I've done has somebody's supporting me and this has been particular, he's been tremendously helpful to me emotionally not just that he's been willing to carry it away so that we can pay the bills and the stuff. But He's been really emotionally supportive and helped me with pursuing my dream. (Participant 3)

> My husband has always been extremely supportive because, - got my dog- um…he has um…pretty much um…he pushed me, I'll say that. I tried to find a better word, but sometimes when I wanted to quit, or whenever I felt like I couldn't do anymore, you know, he was the one that pushed me and told me that there was something, (Participant 10)

Coping Strategies Before and During the Program

The main themes that emerged regarding differences in coping strategies before and during the program were *no changes in coping strategies* and *improvement in coping strategies* (see Table 3). The sub theme under *no changes* was *communication*. Under *improvement in coping strategies*, the sub themes were *better communication, greater appreciation, time boundaries, and development of self-help strategies*.

No Changes in Coping Strategies

Communication. Five out of 13 participants reported that coping strategies in their marriage had not changed. Five participants mentioned communication as their main coping strategy in their marriage both before and during the program and they considered communication to be the key to their coping strategies.

> That hasn't because of such a long term marriage and because we weathered all kinds of other things, we developed kind of the same coping strategies through the years which is to make time to communicate um…even if it doesn't someone wants until we make time to communicate someone's designated as a whiner and say that you know this isn't going well and we're losing the track of big picture here whatever and we force set time. (Participant 1)

> …as far as how we coped with things, I think that the main thing was just the communication you know, um….and um….being open and honest with each other, but um….I don't think that the coping strategies' really changed all that much since I started the program. (Participant 14)

Improvement in Coping Strategies

Better communication. Five out of eight participants who reported improved coping strategies stated that communication had improved in their marriage since they entered their program.

> That'll be....just a kind of the way that we communicate with one another is different... That might be a new coping strategy. um...yah...and the fact that we know, he doesn't use that phrase, but managing, he use 'managing' our stress, the way that we communicate each other has been really I can think of that's been different...ah...the way that we communicate as I said, that's one…(Participant 3)

> And I think that um....the communication piece's gotten much much, I mean, we've really gotten communicating each other in terms of coping, um…well, so I think that's improved, like I said, we've always been really good about talking about things I think become much better at identifying what's going on in conversation…(Participant 4)

Greater appreciation. During the program, four participants became more appreciative of their husbands and realized that appreciation of each other is important in marriage.

Table 3

Major Themes Related to Research Question Three

Coping Strategies Before and After the Program
No changes in coping strategies
Communication
Improvement in coping strategies
Better communication
Greater appreciation
Time boundaries

> …the kind of the way that makes that easier is that we kind of both appreciative of what the other person does. But, he may not notice every time who scrubs the toilet, but he always thanks me for making him lunch, dinner and you know, he's very thankful, and I think that that is an important way to support each other like that. (Participant 4)

> I think it's made me appreciate XXX all the more for avoiding the whole boatload of the pitfalls, um…and he needs my example you know, um….in terms of our, you know, coping in our marriage, uh….how was the program coping in our marriage. Oh, he brought so much to begin with, you know to the marriage, and um…I think again, it's in general more than specifically but you know generally it more requires understanding in compassion in myself as well as others. I can live more gently with myself and with him too. And appreciate and be more forgiving when I get. (laughter) you know kind of anxious. (Participant 9)

Time boundaries. Six participants reported that they took having time with their husbands for granted before the program. However, as participants experienced time pressure because of the program, they tried hard to set the boundaries between school and marriage and use time consciously in order to manage their two distinct lives effectively.

> …in the past, I think we sort of took it for granted that we're gonna have all this time together. It wasn't a big deal.. I think it's just the time we have now, because

> it is more limited just in terms of ***, um….we're little more careful about how we spend it. (Participant 12)

> I guess the new one that we've used is planning, you know like our plan ahead of time. um....kind of what to expect for the next week or for the weekend. um...and then I think at the end of how much time I'm going to have for cleaning, or you know, how much time I'm not gonna have for cleaning, um...and then he kind of makes decide, well, if she has two three hours, do I want her to clean or I rather you know, go out to dinner with her, you know… (Participant 9)

Development of self-help strategies. One of the hardest things in the participants' lives was using self-care strategies, because self-care was usually the first thing they sacrificed in managing their time. Despite the time crunch, six participants developed some self-help strategies. Self-help strategies ranged from spiritual mediation to physical exercise.

> …I tended to look outside of mine…which is I felt that it was okay. I just got to the point where I needed more. wanting more. Now I...for me it's the balance that I know there's people there to support me but I support myself. I have strategies that were working for me too… (Participant 2)

> I feel like I do a lot more of sort of like behavioral type stuff to, like uh….like the things that you probably tell your clients to do. Like the deep breathing, and like the meditation and ..um…the exercising, to just live more sort of holistic life. So… (Participant 13)

Ideal Marriage During the Program

Although the question what would be the ideal marriage during the program was not a research question it was asked to finish the interview on a positive note (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The responses were meaningful and associated with the research questions therefore, the researchers decided to include it in this study. When asked what would be the ideal marriage during a doctoral program, the participants had different ideas (see Table 4). The main themes included (1) *having a supportive and encouraging spouse,* (2)

having good communication with a spouse, (3) *financial security*, (4) *having a solid marriage*, and (5) *balance between school and marriage*.

Supportive and Encouraging Spouse

Eight participants specifically stated supportive and encouraging spouse is a necessary component for an ideal marriage during the doctoral program. One participant stated that no marriage offers 100% of partner's support.

> It's very lonely existence because you don't have someone who is going to be there to support you through the second which is what you have when you have a spouse particularly spouse who's spent around first 9 years of spouse yes you know he's ..when I'm really upset about something which you know that happens 'cause there are a lot of things that piss you off in a doctoral program and I always know if I come home and just want someone to real about he is going to be supportive and he is gonna be behind me 100 % and so that part of it is really unique. (Participant 1)

Participants wanted their spouses to share a common spiritual and value system with them, understand going through a doctoral program, and involve themselves in the doctoral experience together.

> Someone who is uh…very uh…secure in his own, or her own skin who is able to be um…self-sufficient in terms of time and amusement, who is very flexible about schedule, who is patient and kind, and understanding when people get stressed or concerned about their school work, who is okay with the financial challenges and changes that this kind of program can bring, who um…is great with little things and big things and who um…again I think spiritual shared spiritual and the value system,… (Participant 9)

Good Communication With a Spouse

The second most frequently reported theme was having good communication with a spouse, which was addressed by three participants. Open and clear communication was considered a key to an ideal marriage. Another participant emphasized making decisions with husband jointly through conversation.

> The communication is good and …direct and clear….(Participant 12)

Table 4

Major Themes Related to the Closing Question

Ideal Marriage during the Program
Supportive and encouraging spouse
Good communication with spouse
Financial security
Solid marriage
Balance between school and marriage

> They need to have a conversation before they even apply about what this is gonna to do to you because if you are already married before you even start this process or try ot get married during, which I think it's just crazy, but if you are already in a committed relationship with someone that's long term, you just gonna sit down and say 'okay, I really wanna do this, this is how that's we change our life. Are you on board for that? or not' and if...and be willing to have, and the person says, 'wow…I'm not on board for that.' and say, 'okay what can we do to either get you on board, or how can we make this situation so that it would be something that you'd be on board about.' um...I think that's paramount. (Participant 5)

Financial Security

Three participants stated that less financial stressors would be appreciated.

> I think that ideally there would be enough financial problems that wouldn't be as a stressor, ahm…that would get in the way,… (Participant 4)

Solid Marriage

Four participants reported that having a solid marriage prior to beginning the program seemed to make marriage during the program easier, because couples did not have to spend time to adjusting each other's life due to a recent marriage. Two participants strongly recommended having a solid marriage before the program.

> I would not encourage anybody to do this if their marriage is new. You know, if they've been just married for maybe you know a year or two, because I think there's a lot of settling in and just learning each other…(Participant 14)

Balance Between School and Marriage

Balance was considered to be an important factor to maintain the two distinct lives of school and marriage. Two participants emphasized the need for balance between the marriage and the program. One participant suggested flexibility, and another participant recommended more quality time together.

> I think flexibility is the key factor for making all kinds of things work. (school or marriage?) Both!...like, I ..I...we have to *** a lot of flexibility to make it our program work because people will throw work at you, and **** you know, they have to be pretty flexible, but that's...you also have to be pretty flexible about your marital ritual. So like if you are used to normally doing such and such at a certain time, something you might have to change. and you got to be flexible about how can you take this thing that's important for you and still make it work. (Participant 5)

> I think having more time uh…..having more time to um….spend together, not feeling rushed in every single thing that I do, um….so being able to connect more through, through the time that we spend together…(Participant 13)

In summary, the participants experienced both negative and positive marital experiences during the doctoral program. To cope with stress and conflicts in their marriages, the participants utilized both individual-focused coping strategies (managing limited time, securing time with husband, developing and utilizing self-care strategies, and getting support from outside of marriage) and couple-focused coping strategies (communication, doing something together with husband, and utilizing husband as a source of support). Some participants reported that there were no changes in coping strategies before and during the doctoral program while other participants reported that they had improved coping strategies (e.g., better communication, having grater appreciation, and setting time boundaries). Finally, the participants suggested that having

a supportive and encouraging spouse, having good communication with spouse, having financial security, having a solid marriage before the program, and maintaining balance between school and marriage were the important components of an ideal marriage.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore marital experiences and coping strategies of married female counseling doctoral students during their doctoral program. Doctoral students reported experiencing both negative and positive aspects in their marriages during their program. These results were somewhat consistent with the literature (Giles, 1983; Middleton, 2001). They experienced lack of time in their lives during the program. The major struggle of the participants was that they had less time with their husbands. With the limited time, their lifestyles have been changed to maintain a healthy marriage and to succeed in school. However, two participants emphasized that it is not only the amount of time but also the quality of time. The participants often experienced that they were not 100% present with their husband in the limited time, because there was always schoolwork in the back of their minds.

In contrast to the literature (Williams, 1977), communication was not perceived as a problem. Some participants expressed difficulty in maintaining good communications with their husband because both of them were tired from school and work. However, the majority of the participants said that they tried to keep communicating with their husband as much as possible. In addition, communication was considered a key coping strategy in the marriages both before and during the program. Communication was more likely to be a coping strategy than a source of stress.

As for financial stress, the findings showed some interesting information. In contrast to existing literature (see Bergen & Bergen, 1978), participants in this study indicated that financial issues did not increase arguments or conflicts in their marriages, but stirred more internal conflicts. One explanation for this result is that the annual household income of eleven participants was over $60,000. While one participant in the interviews mentioned that she could not travel for family events because of time conflicts and funds, other participants who expressed stress because of limited finances reported that they felt guilty and disempowered due to limited financial resources. The participants felt guilty because they could not contribute to the household income. Therefore, this suggests that the participants possibly blamed themselves for the financial stress incurred during the doctoral program, instead of dealing with the financial stress with their spouses.

The participants in this study had positive marital experiences during the program in contrast to previous literature (Giles, 1983; Pederson & Daniels, 2001). The participants became more appreciative of their husbands and time with their husbands. In addition, they felt that they grew personally through the program. They became more confident and aware of the importance of taking care of themselves by utilizing coping strategies. One of the differences might be that these doctoral students were from counseling programs which provided benefits, such as learning counseling skills (e.g., meditation, reframing, decompressing, etc) that were carried over to their marriages. In addition, the maturity over time seems to work as a coping skill. Moreover, going through the stressful time seemed to help the participants build and strengthen their coping skills individually and within their marital relationship.

Reviewing the positive experiences that the participants in the study raised a curiosity about how positively the programs affect their lives. Positive experiences that the participants had were personal growth through awareness, appreciation of husband, and application of counseling skills. Growth through awareness and application of counseling skills seemed to be a byproduct of being in a counseling program. Removing the positive experiences that were a byproduct of being in a counseling program only left one positive experience, appreciation of husband, compared to eight different negative experiences. The results of this study clearly demonstrate that doctoral programs can have a negative impact on the doctoral students. This is consistent with the growing literature on the negative impact of doctoral programs on marriages (Bergen & Bergen, 1978; Cao, 2001; Giles, 1983; Middleton, 2001; Norton, Thomas, Morgan, Tilley, & Dickins, 1998; Williams, 1977). Given these results, it seems that doctoral programs are not systematically addressing how the doctoral program impact the lives of their doctoral program. It is imperative that programs pay a careful attention of their impact on the lives of their students and begin to take steps to change the systematic negative impact on individuals in the system.

The findings on the coping strategies of married female counseling doctoral students showed that participants utilized a variety of coping skills, such as individual-focused coping skills, couple-focused coping skills, and making the most of resources that they have inside and outside of their marriage (i.e., friends and other married couple). These findings are similar to what other researchers have found in dual career couples (Amatea & Cross, 1983; Haddock, Zimmerman, Ziemba, & Current, 2001; Paddock & Schwartz, 1986; Schwartz & Schwartz, 1986). The participants utilized a variety of ways

to recognize their stresses and used alternative ways to reduce them including prioritizing lifestyle in the limited time that they have for school and marriage (Amatea & Cross; Haddock & Zimmerman) and putting clear boundaries between school and marriage (Haddock & Zimmerman).

While utilizing individual-focused coping strategies to reduce stresses individually, the participants utilized couple-focused coping strategies as well. The participants were supported through open communication, husband's empathy, emotional reassurance, and support (Ametea & Cross, 1983). It seemed that husband's mental support (i.e., understanding wife's time commitment to the program), emotional support (i.e., providing humors in life, being interested in the process of the program), and physical support (i.e., shifting domestic household roles) were most appreciated by the participant (Giles, 1983, Middleton, 2001). In addition, the findings showed that the participants utilized explicit techniques to stay connected with their husbands through some rituals (Paddock &Schwartz, 1986) (i.e., having a date night, and having a parallel play) and communication to resolve tensions in their marriages (Hall & Hall, 1979; Parker, Peltier, & Wolleat, 1981).

While having to manage the limited time rigorously to maintain schoolwork and a healthy marriage, the participants felt that they grew personally and professionally through this process. This experience was consistent with the imbalance in the asymmetric couples where only one spouse is a student. Non-student spouses felt loss and sacrifice while student spouses moved forward to their meaningful world (Scheinkman, 1988). Becoming more aware of husband's needs and wants, the participants utilized many behavioral types of strategies (i.e., setting a date night, making

a conference into a mini trip, doing things together and making them meaningful) in order to stay connected with and be tuned to their husband.

As emphasized many times by the participants, communication was the key to resolving any tensions in the participants' marriages. The majority of the participants tried to keep communication going with their husbands. However, the pattern of the communication was quite different from participant to participant. For four participants, a talk, cool-off, talk pattern worked. While taking time for cool-off, the participants distracted themselves through movies, walk, walk the dog, or exercise focus on her perspective on the issues. However, for three participants, continuously being connected with their husbands was important. Having time off from their husbands did not work for some participants. These findings are consistent with the literature that different patterns of communication work for different couples (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). The participants recognized their vulnerabilities and pursued what worked for them.

In order to explore the coping strategies that were utilized, participants were asked to identify the most stressful time in their marriage during the program. Interestingly, most of the answers were unrelated to the program but were part of their personal lives that could have happened in any marriage. This led the research team to hypothesize that for this group of participants school may not be their first priority. Even though the participants had to put many hours into schoolwork, they (except for one participant) tried to put their marriage before school and maintain the quality of time with their husband.

One of the interesting themes from the study was the majority of the participants seemed to have strong marriages before they entered the doctoral program. Most

participants expressed that they had a solid marital relationship when asked how their marriage was before the program. It seemed that a solid marriage worked as an emotional buffer whenever the couples were faced with the high level of stress due to the program. Nine participants seemed to perceive stress from a program as just another life event that could produce a lot of stress such as infertility or parents' death, normalized it and went through it without reacting to it. However, to a few couples that got married right before they began the program and that did not have enough time to build a solid marriage, adjustment to a marital life seemed to add another layer of stress to working on a doctoral program. In those couples, stress from school could be exacerbated easily and it took more time to resolve it in their marital relationships. Further, it seemed to be easier for the participants who had a strong marriage to go through difficult times using coping strategies, because the participants and their husbands were on the same page mentally and emotionally about what is going on.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

One of the limitations of the study is the use of technology for interviews. Eight out of 14 interviews were phone interviews due to the distance. For one interview, the recording of the interview could not be retrieved after the interview. So, the primary researcher asked the participant to redo the interview. With the consent of the participant, the interview was redone based on the notes from the first interview and the interview protocol. The participant stated that she would try to remember as much as possible, but it would not be the same as the first one, because she had felt that she had had a therapy session during the first interview.

Due to the fact that this study used a qualitative method, subjectivity also might have affected the analysis of the results. The research team tried hard not to taint the lived experience by the participants through different types of validation processes. The research team consisting of married Caucasian woman, married African American man, and recently married Asian woman could help each other to maintain objectivity from their three different perspectives. However, it is probable that the analysis of the results is not 100% objective.

As a preliminary exploratory research, this study reflected only the student spouses' coping strategies. However, it would be more beneficial to look at both student spouses and non-student spouses' coping strategies and how the combination of different types of coping strategies works to build a strategy model for couples. Moreover, a study with not only a couple, but also children and other family members would be recommended to explore dynamics of family and their coping strategies.

This present study explored coping strategies of the enrolled doctoral students in the program at the moment of the interview. Half of the participants were in the second year of the program at the time of the interview. It would be interesting to follow up to see how their marriages and coping strategies might change as they continue through the program. Further, looking at coping strategies by not only doctoral students who maintained their marriage and finished the program, but also those who left either their marriage or their program would be helpful to understand the effectiveness of coping strategies.

One of the findings in this study was that non-student spouses' support seemed to significantly influence the relationship for student spouses worked on their doctoral

program. Further exploration of what contributes to non-student spouses' continuous support for student spouses would be recommended. Moreover, the present study looked at only heterosexual couples. Therefore, studies focusing on with same sex couples are strongly recommended.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study may help counselors and faculty advisors to understand marriage and coping strategies of female counseling doctoral students during their doctoral work. The participants in the present study could be considered to be a privileged group, but the participants' experiences have not been recognized and supported. The participants' experiences affected their marriages and their marital experiences influenced their doctoral program. Therefore, counselors and faculty advisors need to recognize their unique experiences and its impact on their marriages in order for female counseling students to work through their doctoral program more effectively.

Recognition of stress and necessity of coping strategies. Even though all the participants could state that their marriages were influenced by the program, they could not help being overwhelmed by the workload of the program and other unexpected factors after they were admitted to a doctoral program. It is imperative that beginning doctoral students and their spouses understand the stressors of completing a doctoral program and the impact of these stressors on their marriages. Doctoral programs need to inform their students and student spouses the importance of communicating throughout the doctoral program. Husband's clear understanding of what will be going on and continuous involvement in female counseling students' experience may help student spouses to feel supported. In addition, understanding the stresses associated with doctoral

work and its impact on strains in marriage will help students and non-student spouses explore coping strategies.

Individual-focused coping strategies. Individual students need to find their own coping. As many participants indicated, healthy marriages are also led by healthy individuals. However, students tended to sacrifice time for themselves in order to pay attention to their husbands and focus on schoolwork. Therefore, setting aside even a little amount of time and building their coping strategies or alternative ways to decompress stress and reduce stress are strongly suggested. At the same time, counselors and faculty advisors might want to emphasize time management to set a boundary between students' individual lives and schoolwork.

Couple-focused strategies. Many students used many different ways to stay connected and maintain a healthy relationship with their husbands whether they were aware that they used strategies or not. When asked what ineffective strategies were, many students could not answer that question. It might be because they did not have ineffective strategies. However, it is more likely that they were not intentional when they used strategies. Intentional use of strategies will help students and non-student spouses to recognize their vulnerabilities and purposes of strategies. Then, the couples could build more appropriate strategies to their situations and characteristics.

In addition, a solid marriage involving sharing common values and spirituality and open and clear communication seems to help couples go through difficult times more smoothly than for couples who had recently married and thus went through lots of transitions. Those couples who are grounded in a strong marriage could utilize coping

strategies more easily to cope with the challenges they faced. Prior to entering a doctoral program, couples should evaluate their marriage and their future goals

Not only for non-student spouses but also student spouses, good communication skills cannot be more emphasized. Some participants identified nagging, criticizing, and being verbally aggressive as ineffective strategies in communication. These coping strategies seemed to be used to resolve issues immediately. Therefore, it is imperative that couples recognize ineffective communication skills and adopt appropriate communication skills. Especially for non-student spouses, learning how to express needs and feelings appropriately will be helpful.

Further, couples need to attend to the fact that students grow personally and professionally while non-student spouses may stay the same as before the program. Recognizing this would be the first step towards being attuned to non-student spouses' needs and wants. Building up own rituals such as having a date night or parallel playing (i.e., reading together or exercising together) and continuous conversation on future as well as present are recommended in order to remain on the same path. (Paddock & Schwartz, 1986)

Support for female married counseling doctoral students. One of the interviews had to be redone due to technical difficulties. During the second interview, the participant stated that the second interview would not be the same as the first one because the first interview was therapeutic for her. It seemed that talking about what the participant experienced helped her to explore her feelings and to use coping strategies intentionally. The participant even mentioned she started self-care strategies since the first interview. Moreover, one coping resource that female married counseling doctoral students lacked

was a support system. Students could not find support easily inside of marriage, because their spouses also became tired from their work. It was difficult for them to find it outside of marriage, because there are not many married students with or without children. They had to find support by themselves. Counselors and faculty advisors could reach out to them or help them find a support group online or offline to increase their support system.

Conclusion

This study explored struggles and experiences of married female counseling doctoral students, a group that is perceived as somewhat privileged, but also marginalized. The findings contributed to making meaning out of their experiences and began to work towards building a coping strategy model for married female counseling doctoral students' marriage. It is hopeful that the information obtained will contribute to the literature of experience of counseling doctoral students and be used for better understanding of the population and building an effective coping strategy model for the population.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

E-mail to directors of APA accredited Counseling Psychology and CACREP accredited Counselor Education Programs

Hello,

My name is Jung Hyun and I am a doctoral student at Georgia State University. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation on the coping strategies of married female counseling doctoral students. This study has been approved by Georgia State University Institutional Review Board.

I am looking for married female doctoral students in counselor education or counseling psychology who would be willing to participate in a face-to-face interview or phone interview about their coping strategies in their marriage during their doctoral program. More specifically, I am looking for female counseling doctoral students who

1) got married before the admission to the doctoral program and 2) are after the first year and before dissertation and internship in the program.

The interview will last 1-2 hours and a follow-up interview will be offered. The follow-up interview will take 30 minutes. In addition, you will be asked to complete a demographic information sheet. This will take 5-10 minutes. A $10.00 gift card will be given to all the participants as a token of appreciation after all the interviews are complete.

If you meet the criteria for participation and are interested, please e-mail me directly at hurray77@gmail.com so I can forward you the official research information letter and discuss your participation in the study. My faculty advisor, Catherine Chang, may also be contacted at cychang@gsu.edu.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

APPENDIX B

Georgia State University
Department of Counseling and Psychological Services
Informed Consent Form

Title: An exploration of the coping strategies in married female counseling doctoral students' marriage

Principal Investigator: Catherine Chang, Ph.D., LPC, NCC
Student Principal Investigator: Jung Hee Hyun, MS

I. Purpose: You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore how married female counseling doctoral students cope with stress and conflicts in their marriage during the program. A total of 12-15 married female counseling doctoral students will participate in this study. Participating in this study will take about 1-2 hours of your time.

II. Procedures: If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in either a face-to-face interview or a telephone interview with Ms. Hyun. The interview will be set up at a time and place that is most convenient for you. You will be asked to fill out a demographic sheet. It will take 5-10 minutes. Then, you will be asked to share your coping strategies in your marriage during the program. The interview will take 1-2 hours. It will be audio-taped. The researchers will read the transcripts and name common themes shared by the participants. After the interview is studied by the researchers, Ms. Hyun may contact you to make sure your story was understood and to give you an opportunity to share anything else you want to add. This process will take 30 minutes. If you do not want to be contacted for follow-up, no one will contact you. You will get a ten dollar gift card as a token of my appreciation.

III. Risk: There is a chance that participating in this study may cause you emotional distress. You will be asked to share coping strategies in your marriage during the program. Sharing the situations where you used coping strategies may upset you. If you do feel emotional distress at any time during this study, please notify Jung Hyun (770-377-3322) or Dr. Catherine Chang (404-413-8196). They can give you a list of mental health resources. You will be responsible for all costs of such services.

IV. Benefits: This study was not designed to benefit you directly: However, there is a possibility that you may receive some benefit from having an opportunity to think about how you dealt with your marital conflicts during the program. In addition, your story may help counselors and faculty

supervisors better meet the needs of married female counseling doctoral students. Other married doctoral students may be helped by relating your story.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to be in this study. If you decide to be in this study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may participate at any level you feel comfortable with, and you may skip questions or discontinue participation at any time. No matter what you decide, you will not loose any benefits that you would otherwise get, including the gift card.

VI. Confidentiality: We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by the law. We will use a study number, rather than your name on study records. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The finding will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally. Only the researchers will have access to your data. All tapes will be destroyed when the study ends. A transcript of each tape with all identifiable facts removed will be kept in a locked file until the study has been published or presented. All the electronic data will be saved on a password, firewalled protected computer. Any contact data will be kept in a locked file away from other data. The contact data will be destroyed after follow-up with participants.

VII. Contact Persons: Please feel free to ask any questions about anything that seems unclear to you. If you have further questions about this study, please contact Jung Hyun at 770-377-3322, at hurray77@gmail.com or the faculty advisor Catherine Chang, Ph.D. at 404-413-8196, at cychang@gsu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject: We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep. If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded, please sign below.

_____ _____

Participant Date

_____ _____

Student Participant Investigator Date

APPENDIX C

Demographic Information Sheet

ID Number (to be completed by researcher): _____

PARTICIPATION DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

Please complete the corresponding blanks or circle the most appropriate response for each of the items below.

Age: ____

Gender: male female

Race/Ethnicity: _____

Religious/Spiritual Identity:_____

Sexual Identity:
Heterosexual Homosexual Bisexual Questioning Other_____

The Year of the Program:
1st year 2nd year 3rd year 4th year 5th year Other _____

Status of Marriage: 1st marriage 2nd marriage 3rd marriage 4th and more marriage

Years in Current Marriage: _____ years

Number of Children: ____

Annual Household Income: Under $20,000 $20,000-$40,000 $4,000-$6,000

$60,000-$80,000 $80,000-$100,000 Over $100,000

Income Sources: _____

Current Education Enrollment: Counselor Education Counseling Psychology

Spouse's Age: _____

Spouse's Education: _____

Spouse's Job: _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your marital relationship during doctoral work.
    - How was your marriage before the program?
    - How has your marital relationship changed during the program?
    - Share with me the positive marital experience influenced by the program.
    - Share with me the negative marital experience influenced by the program.
    - What areas in your marriage are most influenced by the program?

1. How do you cope with marital stress/conflicts before/during doctoral work?
    - Share with me the most difficult time in your marriage during the program.
    - What strategies did you use to resolve the situation?
    - What strategies did work?
    - What strategies did not work?
    - What did you do when coping strategies did not work?

2. How do you describe your coping strategies before and during the program?
    - Please describe the coping strategies that you used in your marriage before the program.
    - How are the coping strategies that you use in your marriage before the program different from those during the program?
    - What coping strategies were most helpful for you in what way?
    - What coping strategies were most helpful for your marriage in what way?

3. Closing
    - How does utilizing coping strategies help improve the quality of marriage?
    - What would be the ideal marriage during the program?