


5-2018

A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Shared Lived Experience of Married Male Doctoral Students in Counselor Education and Their Non-Student Spouses

Anthony Suarez
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Counselor Education Commons](#), [Marriage and Family Therapy and Counseling Commons](#), and the [Psychiatric and Mental Health Commons](#)

Citation

Suarez, A. (2018). A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Shared Lived Experience of Married Male Doctoral Students in Counselor Education and Their Non-Student Spouses. *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd/2631>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UARK. For more information, please contact uarepos@uark.edu.

A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Shared Lived Experience of Married Male Doctoral
Students in Counselor Education and Their Non-Student Spouses

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education

by

Anthony Suarez
Florida State University
Bachelor of Science in Sport Management, 2004
University of Central Florida
Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology, 2011

May 2018
University of Arkansas

This dissertation is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

Kristi Perryman, Ph.D
Dissertation Director

Ed Bengtson, Ph.D
Committee Member

Erin Kern-Popejoy, Ph.D
Committee Member

David Christian, Ph.D
Committee Member

ABSTRACT

Research involving married doctoral students has suggested that they face a unique set of circumstances that include benefits, challenges, and changes. Additional research has highlighted the culture within Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) programs. While there are some studies that explore the experiences of married graduate students in counseling-related fields, very little literature exists that explores married students in CES programs. No such studies focus on the experiences of married male students in CES.

The purpose of this study was to explore the shared lived experiences of married male doctoral students in Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) programs and their non-student spouses. Eight participants (four doctoral students and their non-student spouses) took part in this study. Using a phenomenological research design, the findings of this study were grouped by doctoral students, non-student spouses, and couples. Individual thematic labels for doctoral students and their spouses included general impressions, personal and professional changes, program-related benefits and challenges, and roles and responsibilities. Thematic labels for couples were program-related changes to marriage, marital friendship, marital conflict, traditions and rituals, and goals. The findings reveal implications for potential and current doctoral students and their non-student spouses, as well as for counselor educators. Coping strategies for students and recommendations for CES programs are also included.

©2018 by Anthony Suarez
All Rights Reserved

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to start by thanking my committee members. To Dr. Ed Bengtson, thank you for the research guidance, especially early on when I had more questions than answers when it came to qualitative research. (Maybe I still do!) To Dr. David Christian, thank you for your professional guidance, the opportunities to teach and collaborate with you, and the comic relief. I have enjoyed learning from you, and I will look back fondly at our time we spent across the hall from each other – even that infamous day when I almost spilled a smoothie on you. To Dr. Erin Kern-Popejoy, thank you for the opportunities to write, publish, and present with you, and especially for the guidance as I begin the next phase of my career as a counselor educator. Your insight and resources through the interview process have been invaluable to me. To my dissertation chair, Dr. Kristi Perryman, thank you for caring about me both personally and professionally, despite being the busiest person I know. This process has challenged me mentally, emotionally, and physically, and your presence has made it all a little more comforting. There is not one area of my professional development not impacted by you, and I appreciate knowing I can lean on you moving forward. By the way, it seems like yesterday when we were both adjusting to our new homes in Arkansas!

I also want to express my appreciation to the other faculty members in the University of Arkansas counseling program. To Dr. Kristin Higgins, thank you for going to bat for me professionally, and for your genuine concern over making sure I had access to what I needed to succeed in the program. To Dr. Paul Blisard, the real “Most Interesting Man in the World,” thank you for the opportunities to teach with you time and time again. I have learned so much from observing your style and demeanor as an educator and clinician, and I will always consider

you to be a mentor. Also, a special thank you to Dr. Mary Ramey. Your infectious enthusiasm and support early on gave me the confidence I needed to begin this journey.

To my participants, thank you for allowing me into your homes and into your worlds. Obviously without your willingness and commitment, none of this would have been possible.

To my partners in crime in the graduate assistant office over the years, thank you for your friendship and for making it fun to come to work. I know we have formed bonds that will last a lifetime, and I look forward to seeing you at each and every conference, and several times in between.

To my parents, Daniel and Ana Suarez, and to my stepmother, Maggie Suarez, thank you for your love and support, and for the phone calls to check in on my progress. The dissertation journey is a lonely one in that not many people care about how things are going, so I appreciate you all for asking often. Enjoy your copies, and please do read every word. There will be a quiz. To my in-laws, Dave and Terrie Tolliver, thank you for your support and for allowing me take advantage of my time at the Tolliver Farm to get so much of my writing done, and of course, thank you for raising a supportive, loving, and patient daughter who has stayed by my side despite my crazy idea to go back to school.

Lastly, to my wife, Emily, my love and appreciation for you would require a second dissertation to sufficiently express. Thank you for agreeing to go on this journey with me over the past few years and into the future, whatever that may bring. I could not have done this without you, and even in my grumpy moods, I need you by my side. I have seen you grow so much in this time, professionally and personally, and I am incredibly proud of all your accomplishments. Let it be known to one and all, that you are the greatest thing that has ever happened to me. (The Cubs' World Series win is a distant second.)

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all those students, married or not, in their pursuit of a doctorate. Continue to persevere and stay disciplined, even when the task seems daunting.

Mostly, I dedicate this to my wife, Emily, who inspired this topic while I was away at my very first conference as a doctoral student, while on a phone call with her from a Birmingham hotel room.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Chapter I: Introduction..... | 1 |
| Background and Context..... | 1 |
| Statement of the Problem..... | 3 |
| Purpose of the Study..... | 5 |
| Research Questions..... | 6 |
| Rationale and Significance..... | 6 |
| Researcher’s Relationship to the Problem..... | 7 |
| Personal Experience..... | 7 |
| Professional Experience..... | 8 |
| Definition of Terms..... | 9 |
| Chapter II: Review of the Literature..... | 10 |
| Introduction..... | 11 |
| The Impact of Doctoral Study on the Individual..... | 12 |
| The Impact of Doctoral Student on the Non-Student Spouse..... | 14 |
| The Impact of Doctoral Study on Marriages..... | 16 |
| Positive Effects of Doctoral Study on Marriages..... | 16 |
| Emotional/psychological support..... | 17 |
| Financial support..... | 17 |
| Academic support..... | 18 |
| Basic needs/task-oriented support..... | 18 |
| Negative Effects of Doctoral Study on Marriages..... | 19 |
| Financial problems..... | 20 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Time pressures | 20 |
| Children..... | 21 |
| Sexual concerns | 21 |
| Role conflict..... | 22 |
| Physical and emotional separation..... | 23 |
| Communication..... | 23 |
| Other factors..... | 24 |
| The Married Male Doctoral Student | 26 |
| Doctoral Students in CES Programs | 28 |
| Male Doctoral Students in CES Programs | 29 |
| Married Doctoral Students in CES Programs..... | 29 |
| Coping Strategies for Married Doctoral Students..... | 31 |
| Support Services for Doctoral Students and Their Non-Student Spouses..... | 33 |
| Summary and Need for Further Research..... | 35 |
| Chapter III: Research Methods | 36 |
| Rationale for Qualitative Research Design..... | 36 |
| Rationale for Phenomenology..... | 37 |
| Conceptual Framework..... | 37 |
| The Sound Marital House | 40 |
| Foundation (Floors 1-3) | 40 |
| Positive Sentiment Override (Floor 4)..... | 41 |
| Managing conflict (Floor 5)..... | 41 |
| Making dreams and aspirations come true (Floor 6) | 41 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Creating shared meaning (Floor 7) | 42 |
| Theoretical Sensitivity and its Role in the Conceptual Framework | 43 |
| Assumptions within the Conceptual Framework | 44 |
| Participants..... | 47 |
| Selection Procedures and Recruitment | 47 |
| Recruitment Strategies | 48 |
| Demographics and Eligibility | 48 |
| Site Selection | 48 |
| Research Design..... | 49 |
| Literature Review..... | 50 |
| IRB Approval..... | 50 |
| Data Collection | 51 |
| Phase I: Demographic information | 51 |
| Phase II: Interviews..... | 52 |
| Phase III: Critical incident reporting..... | 53 |
| Phase IV: Focus groups | 54 |
| Data Analysis | 56 |
| Issues of Trustworthiness..... | 59 |
| Credibility | 60 |
| Prolonged engagement..... | 60 |
| Persistent observation | 61 |
| Triangulation..... | 61 |
| Peer debriefing..... | 61 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Negative case analysis | 62 |
| Referential adequacy..... | 62 |
| Member checks | 62 |
| Transferability..... | 63 |
| Dependability | 63 |
| Reciprocity | 64 |
| Conclusion | 65 |
| Chapter IV: Results..... | 67 |
| Research Questions..... | 68 |
| Participant Data..... | 68 |
| Couple 1 | 69 |
| Couple 2 | 69 |
| Couple 3 | 70 |
| Couple 4..... | 70 |
| Thematic Labels for Individuals | 71 |
| Textural Descriptions..... | 71 |
| Individual Textural Descriptions | 72 |
| Couple 1: Student 1..... | 73 |
| General impressions..... | 73 |
| Personal and professional changes..... | 73 |
| Program-related benefits of marriage | 74 |
| Program-related challenges of marriage | 74 |
| Roles and responsibilities | 75 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Couple 1: Spouse 1 | 77 |
| General impressions..... | 77 |
| Personal and professional changes..... | 78 |
| Program-related benefits of marriage | 79 |
| Program-related challenges of marriage | 80 |
| Roles and responsibilities | 80 |
| Couple 2: Student 2..... | 82 |
| General impressions..... | 82 |
| Personal and professional changes..... | 83 |
| Program-related benefits of marriage | 83 |
| Program-related challenges of marriage | 83 |
| Roles and responsibilities | 84 |
| Couple 2: Spouse 2 | 86 |
| General impressions..... | 87 |
| Personal and professional changes..... | 87 |
| Program-related benefits of marriage | 88 |
| Program-related challenges of marriage | 88 |
| Roles and responsibilities | 88 |
| Couple 3: Student 3..... | 90 |
| General impressions..... | 91 |
| Personal and professional changes..... | 91 |
| Program-related benefits of marriage | 92 |
| Program-related challenges of marriage | 92 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Roles and responsibilities | 92 |
| Couple 3: Spouse 3 | 94 |
| General impressions..... | 95 |
| Personal and professional changes..... | 95 |
| Program-related benefits of marriage | 96 |
| Program-related challenges of marriage | 96 |
| Roles and responsibilities | 97 |
| Couple 4: Student 4..... | 99 |
| General impressions..... | 100 |
| Personal and professional changes..... | 101 |
| Program-related benefits of marriage | 101 |
| Program-related challenges of marriage | 102 |
| Roles and responsibilities | 102 |
| Couple 4: Spouse 4 | 104 |
| General impressions..... | 105 |
| Personal and professional changes..... | 105 |
| Program-related benefits of marriage | 106 |
| Program-related challenges of marriage | 107 |
| Roles and responsibilities | 107 |
| Thematic Labels for Couples | 109 |
| Textural Descriptions for Couples | 110 |
| Couple 1 | 110 |
| Program-related changes to marriage | 111 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Marital friendship..... | 113 |
| Marital conflict..... | 115 |
| Traditions and rituals | 116 |
| Marital goals | 117 |
| Couple 2 | 118 |
| Program-related changes to marriage | 118 |
| Marital friendship..... | 120 |
| Marital conflict..... | 122 |
| Traditions and rituals | 123 |
| Marital goals | 123 |
| Couple 3 | 125 |
| Program-related changes to marriage | 125 |
| Marital friendship..... | 128 |
| Marital conflict..... | 130 |
| Traditions and rituals | 131 |
| Marital goals | 132 |
| Couple 4 | 134 |
| Program-related changes to marriage | 134 |
| Marital friendship..... | 136 |
| Marital conflict..... | 138 |
| Traditions and rituals | 139 |
| Marital goals | 140 |
| Composite Textural Description for Doctoral Students..... | 142 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| General Impressions..... | 142 |
| Positive sentiments..... | 143 |
| Negative sentiments | 143 |
| Personal and Professional Changes | 143 |
| Personal changes..... | 143 |
| Professional changes..... | 144 |
| Program-Related Benefits of Marriage..... | 145 |
| Emotional support..... | 145 |
| Financial support..... | 145 |
| Academic support | 145 |
| Logistical support..... | 146 |
| Program-Related Challenges of Marriage | 146 |
| Time management..... | 146 |
| Role balance..... | 147 |
| Roles and Responsibilities | 147 |
| Roles | 148 |
| Responsibilities..... | 148 |
| Composite Textural Description for Non-Student Spouses..... | 149 |
| General Impressions..... | 149 |
| Positive sentiments..... | 149 |
| Negative sentiments | 150 |
| Personal and Professional Changes | 150 |
| Personal changes..... | 151 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Professional changes | 151 |
| Program-Related Benefits of Marriage | 152 |
| Schedule flexibility | 152 |
| Improved communication | 152 |
| Pride | 153 |
| Program-Related Challenges of Marriage | 153 |
| Financial strain | 153 |
| Role expansion | 154 |
| Social disconnection | 154 |
| Family sacrifices | 155 |
| Roles and Responsibilities | 155 |
| Roles | 155 |
| Responsibilities | 156 |
| Composite Textural Description for Couples | 156 |
| Program-Related Changes to Marriage | 157 |
| Communication | 157 |
| Finances | 157 |
| Social interaction | 157 |
| Physical intimacy | 157 |
| Marital Friendship | 159 |
| Marital Conflict | 160 |
| Areas of conflict | 160 |
| Conflict management | 160 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Traditions and Rituals | 161 |
| Marital Goals | 161 |
| Conclusion | 162 |
| Chapter V: Analysis, Synthesis, Implications, and Recommendations | 164 |
| Structural Descriptions..... | 165 |
| Couple 1: Student 1..... | 165 |
| Couple 1: Spouse 1 | 167 |
| Couple 1 | 169 |
| SMH application..... | 171 |
| Couple 2: Student 2..... | 173 |
| Couple 2: Spouse 2 | 174 |
| Couple 2 | 175 |
| SMH application | 178 |
| Couple 3: Student 3..... | 179 |
| Couple 3: Spouse 3 | 180 |
| Couple 3 | 181 |
| SMH application | 184 |
| Couple 4: Student 4..... | 185 |
| Couple 4: Spouse 4 | 187 |
| Couple 4 | 188 |
| SMH application | 191 |
| Composite Structural Description for Doctoral Students | 191 |
| General Impressions..... | 191 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Personal and Professional Changes | 192 |
| Program-Related Benefits of Marriage..... | 193 |
| Program-Related Challenges of Marriage | 193 |
| Roles and Responsibilities | 194 |
| Gender considerations..... | 195 |
| Composite Structural Description for Non-Student Spouses..... | 195 |
| General Impressions..... | 196 |
| Personal and Professional Changes | 196 |
| Program-Related Benefits of Marriage..... | 197 |
| Program-Related Challenges of Marriage | 197 |
| Roles and Responsibilities | 199 |
| Gender considerations..... | 199 |
| Composite Structural Description for Couples | 200 |
| Program-Related Changes to Marriage..... | 200 |
| Marital Friendship..... | 203 |
| Marital Conflict..... | 204 |
| Traditions and Rituals | 205 |
| Marital Goals | 205 |
| Synthesis | 206 |
| Lived Experience of Married Male Doctoral Students | 206 |
| Lived Experience of Non-Student Spouses | 210 |
| Shared Lived Experience of Doctoral Students and Their Non-Student Spouses | 213 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Implications for Prospective Doctoral Students and Non-Student Spouses | 219 |
| Implications for Current Doctoral Students and Non-Student Spouses..... | 221 |
| Implications for Counselor Education Programs | 223 |
| Limitations | 226 |
| Recommendations for Future Research | 227 |
| Conclusion | 229 |
| References..... | 231 |
| Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter | 241 |
| Appendix B: Recruitment Letter..... | 242 |
| Appendix C: Informed Consent | 243 |
| Appendix D: Structured Interview Questions..... | 244 |
| Appendix E: Critical Incident Journal | 247 |
| Appendix F: Structured Focus Group Questions | 248 |
| Appendix G: Example of Researcher Memo | 249 |
| Appendix H: Example of Invariant Constituents..... | 250 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | |
|--|-----|
| Table 1: Data Management Plan..... | 64 |
| Table 2: Participant Demographic Matrix | 69 |
| Table 3: Thematic Labels for Individuals..... | 71 |
| Table 4: Data Summary Table: Student 1..... | 76 |
| Table 5: Data Summary Table: Spouse 1 | 81 |
| Table 6: Data Summary Table: Student 2..... | 86 |
| Table 7: Data Summary Table: Spouse 2 | 90 |
| Table 8: Data Summary Table: Student 3..... | 94 |
| Table 9: Data Summary Table: Spouse 3 | 99 |
| Table 10: Data Summary Table: Student 4..... | 104 |
| Table 11: Data Summary Table: Spouse 4 | 109 |
| Table 12: Thematic Labels for Couples..... | 110 |
| Table 13: Data Summary Table: Couple 1 | 117 |
| Table 14: Data Summary Table: Couple 2 | 124 |
| Table 15: Data Summary Table: Couple 3 | 133 |
| Table 16: Data Summary Table: Couple 4 | 140 |
| Table 17: Composite Individual Themes for Students | 142 |
| Table 18: Composite Individual Themes for Non-Student Spouses..... | 149 |
| Table 19: Composite Themes for Couples..... | 157 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|--|-----|
| Figure 1: The Sound Marital House theory | 43 |
| Figure 2: Conceptual framework | 46 |
| Figure 3: Data collection plan..... | 56 |
| Figure 4: Adaptation of Moustakas' phenomenological analysis..... | 59 |
| Figure 5: The balancing act for married male doctoral students in CES programs | 210 |

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students in Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) programs and their non-student spouses. This was explored through a detailed phenomenological analysis of both the perceptions of a select group of CES doctoral students and their non-student spouses. The findings of this study provide current and prospective doctoral students and their non-student spouses with insight and skills they can use to adjust to the changes brought upon by doctoral study. Additionally, the findings illuminate steps CES programs may take to support married doctoral students.

This chapter begins with an overview of the topic that inspired this study. Following this is the statement of the problem, the purpose statement, the research questions, the researcher's relationship to the problem, and the rationale and significance of the study. The chapter concludes with the definitions of some key terms that will be used throughout the study.

Background and Context

Entering a doctoral program is a major life event that can take a personal toll on students (Lovitts, 2001; Pederson & Daniels, 2001). Many sources of stress exist for doctoral students entering their programs (Sori, Wetchler, Ray, & Niedner, 1996). In addition to being stressful, some doctoral students have described their programs as being competitive and unsupportive (Harnett & Katz, 1977; Lovitts, 2001). Doctoral programs can even have an effect on students' physical and psychological well-being (Lovitts, 2001; Mason & Paul, 1982; Wolniewicz, 1996). This includes increasing anxiety and lowering self-esteem (Mason & Paul, 1982). Students enter a period of disequilibrium and must make adjustments in order to succeed.

For married doctoral students, their spouses are also affected by this process. Non-student spouses can be left feeling lonely, isolated, and even resentful as a result of their student spouses' attention to academic work (Giles, 1983; Mason & Paul, 1982; Scheinkman, 1988). Non-student spouses often assume new roles within the marriage, such as the primary earner, and take on additional household responsibilities (Rockinson-Szpakiw, Spaulding, & Knight, 2015). If relocation is involved, non-student spouses may have to make sacrifices like leaving their jobs and existing social supports, and becoming acclimated to new towns (Giles, 1983; Pederson & Daniels, 2001).

Non-student spouses may also feel as if they are being outgrown by their student spouses. If an educational gap is created within the marriage, non-student spouses can feel confused, jealous, inferior, and left behind (De, n.d.; Giles, 1983; Pederson & Daniels, 2001; Perlow & Mullins, 1976; Scheinkman, 1988). They may not be able to relate to their student spouses' peers and professors during social interactions, adding to their feelings of isolation and resentment (Giles, 1983; Mason & Paul, 1982).

When the plight of non-student spouses is combined with the individual challenges faced by doctoral students, it is very likely to have a negative effect on marital relationships. Maintaining the marital relationship itself can be the greatest challenge faced by doctoral students (Nedleman, 1991). Certainly, there are some benefits to being a married doctoral student, such as receiving support in various forms, but there are considerably more challenges and issues involved.

Without awareness of these issues and the proper coping strategies in place, many doctoral student marriages may end in divorce (Brooks, 1988). Divorce occurs most frequently after graduation because this reflects a time when doctoral students may no longer need to rely

on their non-student spouses' financial support (Brooks, 1988), and their established roles change.

Another aspect to the phenomenon in this study was that of male students. Married male doctoral students outperform single male doctoral students, as well as married or single female doctoral students in terms of graduation rates, time to degree, publication success while in school, and initial job placement (Price, 2006). Despite the success of this demographic, married male doctoral students may struggle with the notion of needing to rely on their wives' financial support (in heterosexual marriages) because it goes against traditional sex roles they were exposed to while growing up (Scheinkman, 1988).

Lastly, CES is a unique area of study that may result in personal growth for its students more so than other fields. Students in CES programs increase their awareness of personal and relational patterns (Murray & Kleist, 2011). While this can result in positive changes in their relationships, it may also lead CES students to idealize their relationships, and therefore, see their spouses as falling short. Non-student spouses are also left with having to adapt to students' growth and changes in attitudes, often before students even understand the changes themselves (Pederson & Daniels, 2001). When students are unable to separate the roles of therapist-in-training and intimate partner, their non-student spouses may become frustrated (Pederson & Daniels, 2001). Ultimately, this may lead to resentment, emotional separation, or divorce.

Statement of the Problem

Studying at the doctoral level can lead to periods of prolonged stress and anxiety for students, affecting their mental and physical health (Lovitts, 2001; Mason & Paul, 1982; McLaughlin, 1985; Wolniewicz, 1996). The academic work, along with the added pressures that come with the expectations of publishing and conference presentations, can create an

environment that challenges even the best students. The non-student spouses of married students can also feel the burden of doctoral study. Non-student spouses may have to take on additional roles and responsibilities within a marriage, ranging from household chores to assuming the financial responsibility of becoming the primary earner in the home (Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015). In addition to the feelings of isolation and loneliness as a result of student spouses' focusing on the academic role, the addition of roles and responsibilities for non-student spouses can cause them to feel resentment toward their student spouses (Brooks, 1988).

The stress of doctoral programs for both students and their non-student spouses often creates problems for the marital relationship (Labosier & Labosier, 2011). Married doctoral students and their non-student spouses may face issues regarding finances, time management, role conflict, communication, physical and emotional separation, sexual concerns, and perhaps even children (April-Davis, 2014; Dyk, 1987; Gilbert, 1982; Giles, 1983; Gruver & Labadie, 1975; Hyun, 2009; McLaughlin, 1985; Pederson & Daniels, 2001; Polson & Piercy, 1993; Scheinkman, 1988; Smith, Maroney, Nelson, Abel, & Abel, 2006; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Sori et al., 1996; Wolniewicz, 1996). Married doctoral students may be more susceptible to extramarital affairs than married non-students as well, due to the amount of time they spend with like-minded peers who have similar interests (Brooks, 1998; De, n.d.; Norton, Thomas, Morgan, & Tilley, 1998). The likelihood of an affair may increase even more if doctoral students believe that they are outgrowing their spouses. If doctoral students and their non-student spouses do not address these issues, their marital relationships become vulnerable, and can, ultimately, lead to divorce. This is especially true during times of transition, such as competency exams or graduation (Scheinkman, 1988). Because of these potential issues, it is important to continue to study the phenomenon of married doctoral students and their non-

student spouses so that current and prospective doctoral students, their non-student spouses, and educators can gain a better understanding of the issues involved in the process.

The experience of male doctoral students is another area that requires further study. Many researchers have addressed the experience of female students (e.g., Gerson, 1985; Norton, Thomas, & Morgan, 1996; Scott, Burns, & Cooney, 1998; Van Meter & Agranow, 1982), but, comparatively speaking, very few studies discuss male students (e.g., Hepker & Cloyd, 1974; Huston-Hoburg & Strange, 1986; Ibsen, 1967; Maynard & Pearsall, 1994; Price, 2006). Of those, only Hepker and Cloyd (1974) focused exclusively on male students. While married male doctoral students may be the most successful demographic of doctoral students (Price, 2006), the reasons for their success are not fully understood.

Lastly, since the nature of CES programs can result in personal growth for its students, it is important that the effects of CES programs on marital relationships are explored. CES students may become more aware of the potential of personal relationships during their programs, causing them to idealize romantic relationships. This may lead some students to question their levels of marital stability and satisfaction (Murray & Kleist, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students in Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) programs and their non-student spouses. Through this exploration, specific benefits of being a married male doctoral student in CES were identified. Specific challenges are discussed, as well as coping strategies current and prospective doctoral students and their non-student spouses may utilize to manage these challenges. Lastly, the results of this study provide CES programs with the information they

may use to attract and retain married doctoral students, and support them as they move toward graduation.

Research Questions

The following research question will be addressed:

1. What is the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students in CES programs and their non-student spouses?

In order to answer the research question, the following research sub-questions were also addressed:

1. What is the individual lived experience of married male doctoral students in CES programs?
2. What is the individual lived experience of the non-student spouses of married male doctoral students in CES programs?

Rationale and Significance

The rationale for this study comes from a desire to better understand the lived experience of married males in CES programs and the lived experience of their non-student spouses. Married male doctoral students are an underrepresented population in the literature. This is also the case for non-student spouses. While a portion of the literature does address non-student spouses, they arguably play such an important role in the outcome of their student spouses' educational pursuits that further exploration into their experiences is warranted.

Gaining a better understanding of the experiences of married male doctoral students and their non-student spouses helped to illuminate common issues and concerns among couples, along with the ways in which these couples cope. This knowledge may benefit current and prospective married doctoral students and their non-student spouses by giving them resources to

address issues and potentially make better decisions moving forward. It may also help CES programs by identifying ways in which they can address the needs of married doctoral students.

Researcher's Relationship to the Problem

The combination of my personal and professional experiences made me qualified to review and interpret existing literature on married doctoral students, as well as give meaning to the data that I collected. My personal experience that led me to become a married male doctoral student in a CES program is described below. This is followed by a description of related professional experience.

Personal Experience

As a married, heterosexual male in a CES program, this topic is of particular interest to me. I met my wife during the first year of my master's program in the spring of 2010. We were married in August 2011, three weeks to the day after I graduated. We were together during the time that we both thought would be the end of my academic career, and we got married at a time when I was transitioning from student to professional.

After 2 years of working professionally, however, I began contemplating the idea of returning to school to pursue a doctoral degree. As a result, I experienced the early conversation of broaching the subject with my wife of leaving work to go back to school. As a married couple, we experienced leaving our home and a strong social support system in North Carolina to relocate to Arkansas, a place where we knew no one.

The transition was not easy. Acquaintances of mine warned me of the academic rigor that comes with doctoral study, and I did my best to relay this to my spouse. We discussed the anticipated adjustments we thought we would experience, which focused mostly around time management and finances. We even went as far as to draft a contract stating that I would spend

as much quality time with my spouse as possible – a document that hangs on our refrigerator to this day. What we did not expect, though, was my difficulty in acclimating to the student role once more after being part of the professional workforce the past 3 years. We did not expect the challenges that would come about in terms of dividing household responsibilities, nor did I expect the frustration of trying to convey what I do on a daily basis that requires so much time and energy.

Professional Experience

I received a Master's degree in Clinical Psychology from the University of Central Florida in 2011. Immediately after this, I began pursuing a professional license in the state of North Carolina, and earned my Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) designation in the spring of 2014. I worked in several mental health settings and earned experience with individuals, couples, and families, until I chose to leave the workforce and return to school to pursue a doctorate.

Since beginning the doctoral program in CES at the University of Arkansas in August 2014, I have supervised a total of 30 master's-level students in counseling programs at 2 universities and received an LPC in Arkansas as well. Among the 30 that I have supervised, 13 are male, and six of those 13 are married.

Shortly after I began my doctoral studies, I presented a poster at the Arkansas Counseling Association conference entitled *From the Ground Up: A Review of Dr. John Gottman's Sound Marital House Theory* (Suarez, 2014). This marked the beginning of my research interests on the topic of marriage.

Later, I was lead researcher for a qualitative study that explored the challenges and benefits of being a married doctoral student in CES (Suarez, Carver, & Higgins, 2015). My

colleagues and I presented this material during a 50-minute educational session entitled *'Til Death or Doc Do Us Part: A Look at Unique Challenges That Face Married/Partnered Doctoral Students in Counselor Education* at the Association of Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) conference in October 2015. The format of the session allowed for group discussion, which in turn, gave me the opportunity to listen to the experiences of several married doctoral students in CES, both male and female.

In October 2016, I was again lead researcher on a qualitative study that explored the benefits and challenges of the same topic, but instead, from the perspective of the non-student spouse (Suarez, Yam, & Carver, 2016). This research was presented during a 50-minute educational session at the Southern Association of Counselor Education and Supervision (SACES) conference. The format of the presentation allowed for group discussion as well. Lastly, at the most recent ACES conference in October 2017, I was lead presenter on a 50-minute educational session that discussed the common benefits and challenges of married doctoral students in CES programs through a *Sound Marital House* (Gottman, 1999) lens (Suarez & Carver, 2017)

Definitions of Terms

Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) – a doctoral program that provides education and training to students in the areas of mental health counseling and clinical supervision

Doctoral student – a student enrolled in a doctoral program at any point in the process from first year to the dissertation defense

Non-student spouse – the husband or wife in a marital relationship who is not enrolled in school

Student spouse – the husband or wife in a marital relationship who is enrolled in a doctoral program

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students in Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) programs and their non-student spouses. In order to do this thoroughly, it was necessary to complete a critical review of current literature. Several information sources were used to complete this review of the literature. The search strategy involved seeking out professional journals, periodicals, dissertations, books, and internet sources. Most sources were accessed through ERIC, ProQuest, PsycINFO, and PsycARTICLES. The keyword search terms included: *counselor education, doctoral students, married doctoral students, married graduate students, married students, and non-student spouses.*

The literature is not consistent in terms of the description of the population studied. Some literature clearly identifies “doctoral students” as its participants, but others reference “graduate students,” even when the content of the literature makes it apparent that doctoral students were the focus of the research. This is the reason for any inconsistencies in terminology as part of this literature review. It should also be noted that several of the major sources found in the review of the literature are several years old. This gap in the literature suggests a need to revisit the topic of married doctoral students, especially in Western, modern society where the dynamics of marriages have evolved.

The chapter begins with an introduction to the challenges of doctoral programs, then progresses into discussions about the impact of doctoral study on individual students, non-student spouses, and marital relationships. Literature is reviewed that pertains to married male doctoral students and students in CES programs. Additionally, coping strategies for marital

couples and what supports and services are in place to aid married doctoral students and non-student spouses are discussed.

Introduction

Beginning a graduate program is a major event that influences students both professionally and personally (Pederson & Daniels, 2001). As such, doctoral education has become the focus of many researchers in recent years (Lott, Gardner, & Powers, 2009). Perhaps the impetus for this begins when considering the attrition rate of doctoral students, which across disciplines, is approximately 50% (Lovitts, 2001; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Golde (2000) observed that, ironically, the most academically capable students in higher education are the least likely to complete their academic goals. Willis and Carmichael (2011) summarized the barriers that lead to doctoral student attrition across disciplines, including procrastination, low researcher self-efficacy, finances, poor advisor relationship, low integration level with faculty, low integration level with peers, and incongruence between student goals and program focus. Other reasons for non-completion include a change of career goals, transferring schools, health-related reasons, financial issues, being counseled out due to poor performance or academic dishonesty, and family demands or conflicts (Haynes, 2008).

Doctoral programs can take a personal toll on students (Lovitts, 2001). Doctoral students have described their programs as being anxiety-provoking, stressful, competitive, and unsupportive (Harnett & Katz, 1977; Lovitts, 2001). According to Hadjioannou, Shelton, Fu, and Dhanarattigannon (2007), the demands of doctoral work require a strong support system. This may exist early on in the form of a cohort, but as students enter the dissertation phase, the community that comes with taking classes with others is left behind.

Regarding support systems, marriage and marital satisfaction are other areas that have seen an increase in focus in terms of the literature, as well. Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach (2000) noted an increase in the number of publications on topics pertaining to marital satisfaction starting in the 1990s. A meta-analysis of 93 studies shows positive links between marital quality and individual well-being (Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007). South and Krueger (2013) found that marital satisfaction is connected to better physical health. This increase in interest suggests a “continued importance placed on understanding the quality of marriage, as an end in itself and as a means to understanding its effect on numerous other processes inside and outside the family” (Bradbury et al., 2000, p. 964). Pursuing a doctoral degree can easily be identified as one such process influenced by marital satisfaction.

The responsibilities of marriage and graduate school combined, present the potential for issues in any marriage (Labosier & Labosier, 2011). Married students often feel as if their lives are “on hold” (Giles, 1983, p. 48) as they attempt to conform to their programs’ expectations. For this reason, programs must pay more attention to the impact they have on the lives of their students and their spouses (Hyun, 2009), and prospective students need to carefully consider the demands required by such a degree as a part of their decision-making process. While the process of doctoral study is temporary, its effects on marriage can be long-lasting (Gold, 2006). As a result, the population of married doctoral students is one worthy of continued exploration.

The Impact of Doctoral Study on the Individual

The process of pursuing a doctoral degree can have positive effects on students. For example, students experience a considerable amount of personal growth while in school (Sori, Wetchler, Ray, & Niedner, 1996). There is also the stimulation that comes with learning new

material and developing personally and professionally (Polson & Piercy, 1993). Despite this, students' experiences do not come without challenges.

Hartnett (1976) stated that a lack of interaction with professors can lead to a barrier for academic success for graduate students. Hyun (2009) had similar findings, stating that unsupportive atmospheres make the doctoral experience unpleasant and challenging. Faculty may be “out-of-touch with the burdens that their expectations place on families or marriage” (Polson & Piercy, 1993, p. 83), adding to the stress of the student. Polson and Piercy (1993) alluded to the “shoulds” that faculty place on doctoral students, such as publishing and giving presentations, and mentioned the financial burden placed on students to pay for conferences and workshops. Additionally, anxiety about success in graduate school can have a negative impact on students' self-esteem (Mason & Paul, 1982) and students' physical health (Wolniewicz, 1996). The dissertation process in itself can be a process of “prolonged emotional instability” (Scheinkman, 1988, p. 353).

For some, beginning a doctoral program involves leaving the workforce, becoming a student, and then transitioning back to becoming a professional (Giles, 1983). For older students, there can be a strain associated with adjusting back to the role of a student, including a loss of social and economic status (Scheinkman, 1988). Adding the role of student to a role structure that may already include work, spouse, parental, and community responsibilities creates a set of circumstances in which there may be unfulfilled role expectations (Dyk, 1987). Managing these roles, coupled with the uncertainties of a doctoral program, is a major source of anxiety (Miller & Irby, 1999).

The Impact of Doctoral Study on the Non-Student Spouse

There is a paucity of literature that addresses the experience of doctoral student marriages through the perspective of the non-student spouse (Muller, 2016). Non-student spouses, however, are a unique population with distinct needs. While students become consumed by graduate work, non-student spouses may be left in lonely situations, living separate lives (Scheinkman, 1988). Legako and Sorenson (2000) stated that non-student spouses experience detrimental effects due to their student spouses going to bed at different times, and generally feeling pushed aside. During these times of loneliness, their student spouses may be unavailable to them to provide emotional support (Pederson & Daniels, 2001). They may feel as if they are in a different world, and as a result, their satisfaction within the marriage can decrease (Mason & Paul, 1982).

Non-student spouses may sense separation from their student partners, as if they are being outgrown (Hawley, 2010). Because of the difference in educational levels, they may feel less relatable and feel inferior to their student spouses (De, n.d; Pederson & Daniels, 2001; Perlow & Mullins, 1976). The educational gap may negatively impact non-student spouses' self-esteem, especially when interacting with their student spouses' peers or professors (Giles, 1983). It can also be the source of confusion and jealousy (Scheinkman, 1988). Most couples' friends are developed through the students, so non-student spouses may have few friends of their own (Giles, 1983). However, any negative feelings that result from the perceived educational gap may cause non-student spouses to seek friendships away from the university setting (Giles, 1983).

Non-student spouses may make several sacrifices as well. Career advancement may be placed on hold for the students' sake (Pederson & Daniels, 2001). Less risks may be taken

professionally if they potentially jeopardize job security (Giles, 1983). Non-student spouses often pick up additional household responsibilities (Scheinkman, 1988). If relocation is required, non-student spouses may also give up their friendships and other social ties (Pederson & Daniels, 2001).

Because of the sacrifices and adjustments non-student spouses often make, they can also experience negative feelings toward their student spouses, most often feelings of frustration and resentment. Frustration can occur due to student spouses' preoccupation with school, limited finances for non-essentials, and loneliness due to students' unavailability (Perlow & Mullins, 1976). Non-student spouses can become increasingly resentful if tasked with carrying more of the household responsibilities and financial burden in the relationship (Brooks, 1988). If additional household duties are not desired, it can result in a decrease in marital satisfaction, particularly if they are accompanied by a reduction of time together as a couple (Mason & Paul, 1982). These feelings of dissatisfaction and resentment can intensify if couples were experiencing difficulties in other areas of the relationship as well prior to the start of school (Pederson & Daniels, 2001). Resentment can also occur if students' dissertations take too long to complete in the eyes of non-student spouses (Brooks, 1988).

Additionally, non-student spouses may feel guilty over expressing their own needs. They may realize that the amount of time and attention they desire from their student spouses is taking away from the students' academic time, and their own worry about this may become a relationship stressor in itself (Pederson & Daniels, 2001).

Non-student spouses may also experience positive feelings about their spouses' pursuit of a doctorate. They may feel a sense of pride associated with their spouses' enrollment (Giles, 1983). Non-student spouses may recognize the long-term benefit of their student spouses'

doctoral study in terms of more professional opportunities, higher salary, and future mobility (Suarez, Yam, & Carver, 2016). These are major contributors to the positive feelings experienced by non-student spouses. While they may initially feel that their student spouses are outgrowing them, this feeling reduces once they recognize their importance in their spouses' degree completion (Giles, 1983). Laboiser and Laboiser (2011) suggested that non-student spouses change their mindset and become involved instead of being "just along for the ride" (p. 90). For example, they could make efforts to meet other spouses, and show interest and offer feedback regarding the student spouses' classes and research. Students' enrollment may also lead to clarification of non-student spouses' career goals, which may lead them to go back to school themselves or seek out specialized training (Giles, 1983).

The Impact of Doctoral Study on Marriages

Several researchers have compared the positive and negative effects of doctoral studies on marriages (e.g., April-Davis, 2014; Giles, 1983; Gold, 2006; Guy, 1987; Hyun, 2009; Lott et al., 2009; Murray & Kleist, 2011; Polson & Piercy, 1993; Sori et al., 1996). Many recurring themes are present in the literature for the benefits and challenges of being a married doctoral student. The themes below relate to positive effects of doctoral study on marriages. Each will be addressed individually.

Positive Effects of Doctoral Study on Marriages

Stress in graduate school cannot be predicted by any individual variables, but students who are married may experience less stress than single students (Hudson & O'Regan, 1994). Married doctoral students also have lower attrition rates than their single counterparts (Lott et al., 2009). In addition to success with program completion, married students and their non-student spouses may find graduate school to be more enhancing than stressing (Sori et al., 1996).

The benefits of being a married doctoral student involve having support from a spouse. In her ethnographic analysis, Giles (1983) identified four categories of support: emotional/psychological, financial, academic, and basic needs. Support, she stated, is the “primary stabilizer” (p. 7) for married doctoral students. Murray and Kleist (2011) found similar results, as they identified financial, emotional, and task-oriented as three types of support doctoral students receive from their spouses.

Emotional/psychological support. Doctoral students receive emotional/psychological support from spouses who offer encouragement, listen to problems, share in frustrations, and make homes more conducive for studying (Giles, 1983). Guy (1987) concluded that married doctoral students experience better overall functioning and more emotional stability than single students. According to Hyun (2009), a solid marriage can serve as an emotional buffer when facing the program-related stress. Spouses also provide support and safety by being safe to vent to after a difficult day and by providing a sense of understanding and companionship (Suarez, Carver, & Higgins, 2015). Graduate students who report high partner supportiveness are more satisfied with their marriages, experience lower stress, and have higher self-esteem compared to students whose partners are less supportive (Norton, Thomas, Morgan, Tilley, & Dickins, 1998).

Financial support. While doctoral students are in their programs, their spouses typically maintain employment. Non-student spouses may also be the primary earners in their relationships (Scheinkman, 1988). Couples may also accept a period of delayed gratification when it comes to making larger purchases during this time (Giles, 1983). This acceptance of potential financial hardship is due to the anticipation of future financial security (Perlow & Mullins, 1976; Suarez, Yam, & Carver, 2016).

Academic support. Spouses can show support by reading and proofreading papers and discussing ideas learned in class (Giles, 1983). They may also offer academic support by brainstorming research ideas. The likelihood of these types of academic support increases when spouses have respect for the pursuit of higher education (April-Davis, 2014).

Basic needs/task-oriented support. This category includes items such as increasing domestic duties and handling family finances (Giles, 1983). Increased childcare duties may also be included in this category (Giles, 1983). The increase in this type of support can create additional stress for non-student spouses, but most are willing to accommodate their student spouses as long as they feel appreciated in doing so (Hawley, 2010).

The themes identified by Giles (1983) focus on benefiting the doctoral student on an individual level, but other researchers have noted that the process of pursuing a doctorate can have benefits for the couple as well. Sori et al. (1996) found that increased self-confidence experienced by students can lead to improved interpersonal relationships. Going through a stressful period may also help doctoral students and their non-student spouses strengthen their coping skills individually and within their relationships (Hyun, 2009). Doctoral students may become more aware of the roles they play in the manifestation of problems within their relationships (Sori et al., 1996). This increased awareness, and the personal growth that accompanies it, can lead to a sense of gratitude toward their spouses due to their spouses' sacrifices and contributions to their success (Murray & Kleist, 2011). In turn, doctoral students may experience greater appreciation of their spouses, and the time they spend together (Hyun, 2009).

Negative Effects of Doctoral Study on Marriages

While benefits to being a married doctoral student exist, researchers have identified considerably more challenges for married students. According to Nedleman (1991), the greatest stress faced by married graduate students is maintaining their marital relationships. Challenges come in many forms, from the academic struggles of student spouses bleeding into the relationship, to interpersonal issues brought upon by changes to the couples' lifestyles.

Going to graduate school can jeopardize the well-being of a marriage (McLaughlin, 1985). Both doctoral students and non-student spouses face a period of disequilibrium and must adjust in order to maintain marital stability (Hawley, 2010; Mason & Paul, 1982). There is a high risk of divorce for graduate students, especially around times of transition such as oral and preliminary exams, graduation, or when finding employment (Scheinkman, 1988). Giles (1983) warned of "degree-followed-by-divorce syndrome" (pp. 8-9), indicating that marriages are vulnerable post-doctorate because student spouses no longer require support from their non-student spouses. Brooks (1988) suggested that graduation can be an especially vulnerable time for doctoral student marriages because students become more confident, may no longer see their spouses as fitting with their image, and no longer rely on their spouses for financial support. In a survey conducted by Pederson and Daniels (2001) of 64 couples in which at least one partner had completed doctoral psychology training, 23 of the couples were no longer together.

Giles (1983) identified seven factors that can have a negative impact on doctoral students' marriages: 1) financial problems; 2) time pressures; 3) children; 4) communication; 5) sexual concerns; 6) role conflict; and 7) physical and emotional separation. As with the positive effects of doctoral study on marriage, these negative factors are addressed individually.

Financial problems. Financial difficulties are a reality for many doctoral students and their spouses (Giles, 1983; Hyun, 2009). Financial stress can be “one of the most pervasive and limiting problems” (p. 174) couples can face (Pederson & Daniels, 2001). Expenses such as tuition, books, membership fees for professional organizations, conference attendance, moving costs, and other living expenses can take their toll on couples’ budgets (Pederson & Daniels, 2001). Large financial purchases are often delayed or not made at all (Giles, 1983). Students and their spouses may also need to quit their jobs as part of relocating in a new town (Pederson & Daniels, 2001).

Scheinkman (1988) discussed *contextual stressors* and *organizational stressors*. Among contextual stressors are the financial burdens doctoral student couples may face, and organizational stressors are pressures generated by how couples adjust to their new situation (Scheinkman, 1988). Some scenarios have elements of both contextual and organizational stressors. For example, non-student spouses returning to work to become the major wage earners in marital relationships may be done due to the financial burden placed on the couple (contextual stressor), and may force couples to adjust to their new roles (organizational stressor).

Time pressures. It is difficult for doctoral students to maintain quality marital relationships due to the demands of their programs (Polson & Piercy, 1993). Doctoral students’ schedules are irregular and cyclical, and are defined by deadlines and exams (Scheinkman, 1988). Balancing the responsibilities of school, family, and possibly work, is a challenge for doctoral students across disciplines (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). McLaughlin (1985) referred to this as “serving too many masters” (p. 489). Feelings of guilt, worry, and anxiety can result from the time doctoral students spend away from their families addressing other responsibilities (April-Davis, 2014; Smith, Maroney, Nelson, Abel, & Abel, 2006;

Wolniewicz, 1996). This can be caused by inflexible school or home schedules, or the compulsion of the student to focus more on school (Dyk, 1987).

Children. Most couples with one partner in graduate school do not have children (Gilbert, 1982). For those who do, however, their challenges may be exacerbated. There are additional household and childcare responsibilities that would not exist otherwise (Giles, 1983). Children make it more difficult for graduate students to accomplish what is asked of them (Sori et al., 1996) and limit flexibility of time (Polson & Piercy, 1993). Also of consequence, are the findings from Polson and Piercy (1993), which suggest spouses are more reactive to students' school-related stress levels if children are involved. In other words, the non-student spouses in graduate school couples with children feel more closely tied to the program and are more susceptible to the stress felt by students (Polson & Piercy, 1993). Doctoral students without children can find stress to be a motivating factor, but those with children may not see stress in a positive light (Polson & Piercy, 1993).

It should be noted that while children can complicate and intensify school-related issues, the presence of children does not impact the marital stability of doctoral students (Giles, 1983). Brannon, Litten, and Smith (2000) found no difference in marital satisfaction between doctoral students with children and those without. Furthermore, non-student spouses reported that having children allowed them to make new friends more quickly in the cases where they had to relocate (Polson & Piercy, 1993).

Sexual concerns. Dissatisfaction with the sexual relationship can occur for married doctoral students and their non-student spouses (Hartshorn, 1979). Dissatisfaction can involve both frequency and time of day of sexual activity (Gruver & Labadie, 1975). Sexual problems with married doctoral students can result from conflicts with time schedules or simply

exhaustion (Giles, 1983). According to Perlow and Mullins (1976), 38% of non-student spouses felt their marriages could have benefited from counseling during their spouses' time in school, citing sex and affection as the main areas that needed attention. Another potential issue for married doctoral students is the risk of extramarital affairs (Norton et al., 1998). Doctoral students spend more time with their classmates of like minds and similar interest, which can have a seductive quality for some students (Brooks, 1998; De, n.d.).

Role conflict. Many researchers mention challenges regarding roles within the marriage (e.g., Dyk, 1987; Hepker & Cloyd, 1974; Ibsen, 1967). Many of the problems within doctoral student marriages can be traced back to the inability to navigate the changes in roles going back to school can create (Ibsen, 1967). The commitment to the pursuit of a doctoral degree gives the student role high priority; therefore, other roles within the marriage can be neglected (Giles, 1983). Dyk (1987) explored this by defining *interrole conflict* as the condition when expectations from each given role within a relationship are incompatible, and then separating these conflicts into two categories: *time-based conflicts* and *strain-based conflicts*. A time-based conflict occurs when it becomes physically impossible to attend to the duties of one role due to participation in another role (Dyk, 1987). A strain-based conflict takes place when the mental or emotional toll of the aspects of one role interfere with students' ability to fully engage in the responsibilities of their other roles (Dyk, 1987).

While the importance is given to the student role early on, role prioritization must ultimately occur on an ongoing basis (Giles, 1983). Doctoral students are particularly prone to neglecting other roles within their marriage during times of transition. This includes when they first start their programs and near the end, when students are working on their dissertations (Giles, 1983).

Physical and emotional separation. Doctoral students can become engrossed in their academic work and can view time spent as a couple as an interruption of what needs to be done (Mason & Paul, 1982). Additionally, doctoral students may feel pressure to socialize with their peers more frequently and focus on career advancement instead of focusing on their relationships (Polson & Piercy, 1993). Students may begin to seek advice from faculty or peers instead of their spouses (Rockinson-Szpakiw, Spaulding, & Knight, 2015).

Furthermore, some doctoral students do not live where they go to school, and therefore, must maintain a separate residence during the week (Pederson & Daniels, 2001). Although maintaining a separate residence can have its advantages in terms of uninterrupted academic work, it can be difficult for couples to adjust to this type of arrangement (Pederson & Daniels, 2001). These types of separation, whether physical or emotional, can lead to other issues, such as the aforementioned sexual concerns and problems with communication (Giles, 1983). When doctoral students are aware of this separation, it leads to additional stress and guilt (April-Davis, 2014).

Communication. Individual adaptation and adjustment to new roles on the part of doctoral students and their non-student spouses make it critical that communication be a strength in marital relationships (Mason & Paul, 1982). While the literature recognizes communication issues as a problem for married doctoral students (e.g., Giles, 1983; Hyun, 2009), poor communication can be seen as more of a byproduct of the other negative effects previously discussed (e.g., time pressures), or as a catalyst in perpetuating other types of problems (e.g., role conflict, sexual concerns, etc.), as opposed to a primary issue facing married doctoral students and their spouses. For example, if doctoral students succumb to time pressures and are late

turning in an assignment, they may deny their own part in managing time, and instead, blame their partners for asking too much of them (Pederson & Daniels, 2001).

Other factors. There are additional factors that may pose challenges to married doctoral students and their spouses. Whether both spouses are students, length of marriage, and whether a couple relocated for a doctoral program are other factors addressed in the literature in terms of their effects on the marital stability of doctoral students. These factors are described below.

Symmetrical versus non-symmetrical student couples. *Symmetrical couples* refer to when both spouses are enrolled in school at the same time, while conversely, *asymmetrical couples* exist when only one spouse is a student (Bergen & Bergen, 1978; Price-Bonham, 1973; Scheinkman, 1988). Between 21-27% of students are part of symmetrical couples (Price, 2006). Symmetrical couples have the added stress of both partners being in school. They may face more challenges with the division of household chores and child care, and could fall back on traditional sex roles in these instances (Deutsch, 1999; Pederson & Daniels, 2001). This could result in *hierarchal confusion*, in which the couple is unsure about the hierarchal status within the relationship (Scheinkman, 1988).

There are, however, findings in the literature that suggest symmetrical couples are at a greater advantage than their asymmetrical counterparts. For example, symmetrical couples may be more stable and satisfied with their relationships (Brannock et al., 2000; Scheinkman, 1988). Bergen and Bergen (1978) also found that symmetrical couples were significantly happier than asymmetrical couples. This may be because symmetrical couples have shared priorities, interests, and lifestyles (MacLean & Peters, 1995; Scheinkman, 1988). Symmetrical couples spend more time in shared activities, resulting in greater marital satisfaction (MacLean & Peters, 1995).

In asymmetrical marriages, students rely on non-student spouses financially in many cases. While this may benefit the couple due to less dependence on loans compared to symmetrical couples (MacLean & Peters, 1995), it also results in a hierarchal relationship similar to a relationship with parents (Scheinkman, 1988). Asymmetrical couples can be more volatile, conflictual, and dissatisfied overall with their marriages. They also may have a greater likelihood of feeling mismatched, incompatible, and misunderstood by their spouses (Scheinkman, 1988). These feelings may be made worse by different time schedules and a lack of time spent together (Hyun, 2009).

Length of marriage. A review of the literature on the effect of length of marriage results in inconsistent findings. Giles (1983) found that the length of time doctoral students were married seemed to be positively correlated with marital satisfaction. Brannock et al. (2000) showed no such correlation. Similarly, Muller (2016) stated that the length of a relationship is not a predictor of relationship satisfaction.

Relocation. Relocation does appear to have more of an effect on doctoral student marriages, however. The disequilibrium couples face in adjusting to new roles may be even greater in couples who must relocate for a doctoral program (Mason & Paul, 1982). Doctoral students and their non-student spouses may also have lower self-esteem and role satisfaction as a result of relocating (Mason & Paul, 1982).

Moving may involve putting non-student spouses' career goals on hold. If non-student spouses become unemployed because of relocation, they may feel unprepared for the frustration of a job search in a new town (Mason & Paul, 1982). Non-student spouses may feel a sense of loss, social dislocation, and disorientation after relocating (Scheinkman, 1988). Relocating and disrupting a previous lifestyle may result in additional stress for non-student spouses due to a

lack of structure in their lives (Polson & Piercy, 1993). Non-student spouses may feel isolated, especially during the first year of their spouses' programs (Polson & Piercy, 1993). For many couples, relocation only becomes a viable option if it will not jeopardize non-student spouses' careers, will not require an extensive job search, or is viewed as a temporary move before moving again once student spouses' programs are complete (Giles, 1983).

The Married Male Doctoral Student

Price (2006) conducted a study on 11,000 graduate students from 100 departments over the course of 20 years and looked at graduation rates, time to degree, publication success, and initial job placement based on students' gender and marital status. He found that married graduate students are more successful across outcomes than single students. Price's results also suggest that married male graduate students are the most successful demographic grouping when compared to single male students, married female students, or single female students. This contrasts with previous findings (Hepker & Cloyd, 1974), which indicated no difference between married male students and their single counterparts.

In terms of graduation rates, married male graduate students are 75% more likely to complete their degrees by the fourth year of their programs compared to single male students (Price, 2006). Married male students are 9% more likely to graduate than single male students, and they complete their degrees .32 years, or 5% faster, than single male students (Price, 2006). Married male students also have .17 more publications during their graduate programs, and are 8.4% more likely to obtain a tenure-track position within six months of graduation compared to single male students (Price, 2006).

The reason for males' success has not been adequately determined, nor explored, but researchers have addressed some additional key differences between married male and female

students. Several authors have stated that males receive more support from their spouses than females do (Huston-Hoburg & Strange, 1986; Maynard & Pearsall, 1994; Norton et al., 1998). Perhaps this is because males returning to school are seen as being more in line with traditional roles, as they go back to school for career enhancement (Huston-Hoburg & Strange, 1986). Norton et al. (1998) referred to this as *role stereotyping*, where women saw their husbands' return to school as a way of improving career prospects, when that is not always the case in reverse situations.

Traditional sex roles can be problematic as well, however. Because men's socialization of taking on additional burdens, they may not express themselves as openly to their spouses regarding program demands (Polson & Piercy, 1993). Additionally, marital satisfaction, in general, is greater when the husband is the primary earner (Bergen & Bergen, 1978; McRoy & Fisher, 1982). When male students go back to school, their non-student spouses frequently take over the role of the primary earner, and some male students have difficulties adjusting to being financially supported by their wives. The reason for this may be because it goes against the traditional roles they have been exposed to while growing up (Scheinkman, 1988). Male students can express discomfort in this scenario, and may become protective of their studies, while minimizing their spouses' contributions (Scheinkman, 1988).

Ibsen (1967) noted that much of the difficulty with married graduate students and their families stems from problems with role congruence, such as meeting the expectations of other family members and of the school, and this is especially the case with male students. Williams (1977) reported that non-student spouses devalued their student spouses while in the student role. When male students' roles of student and spouse were integrated, however, meaning that non-student spouses were willing to accept their husbands' student role and factored that into their

overall expectations of them, their husbands performed better academically (Hepker & Cloyd, 1974).

Doctoral Students in CES Programs

Only a limited amount of literature exists that focuses on the CES doctoral student experience (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Nevertheless, it is known that doctoral students in CES programs engage in a variety of tasks. These tasks include supervising master's-level students, attending doctoral classes and departmental meetings, and going to conferences (Hughes & Kleist, 2005). They may also help teach master's-level classes and facilitate experiential groups for master's students (Hughes & Kleist, 2005).

Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) determined the attrition and retention of CES doctoral students were due to components of student-program match, including: a) student expectations of program requirements; b) student experience of learning about the life of a doctoral student; c) academic match of student goals with the curriculum and program focus; and d) social-personal match between students and faculty or their peers. Willis and Carmichael (2011) added that contributing factors to the attrition rate of CES doctoral students are having a problematic relationship with their dissertation chair, or students choosing to use their existing career as a refuge. Personal issues, according to Burkholder (2013), can also play a role in CES doctoral students departing their programs.

Male Doctoral Students in CES Programs

Most graduate students in mental health fields are females (Crothers et al., 2010; Healey & Hays, 2012), thus, researchers who study the experience of graduate students in counseling tend to focus on the perspectives of female students. Ray, Huffman, Christian, and Wilson (2016) authored a study exploring the experiences of male counselor educators, but few have

addressed the males' experiences while in pursuit of a doctorate. In the 1980s, approximately 80% of CES faculty were male (Anderson & Rawlins, 1985). Presently, males make up only 25% of doctoral students matriculating or graduating from CES programs (Schweiger, Henderson, McCaskill, Clawson, & Collins, 2012).

Married Doctoral Students in CES Programs

Protivnak and Foss (2009) identified factors that can influence the experience of doctoral students in counselor education. One factor was support systems, including the support of spouses. Difficulties with support systems were also addressed. One participant stated that her doctoral program had "taken a toll on [her] intimate relationships" (Protivnak & Foss, 2009, p. 249). The desire for a more supportive spouse and a spouse who was more understanding were mentioned. Many students, however, seemed to express guilt over placing doctoral work above other life obligations such as family (Protivnak & Foss, 2009).

There is a minimal amount of literature that exclusively addresses the phenomenon of married doctoral students in CES programs, but some researchers have looked at married students in other counseling and counseling-related fields. Sori et al. (1996) studied the impact marriage and family graduate training programs had on married students and their families. They found that students and their spouses found the graduate experience to be "significantly more enhancing than stressing" (p. 265). Legako and Sorenson (2000) interviewed non-student spouses from a Christian psychology graduate school. Non-student spouses reported that the student spouses had become more emotionally expressive due to their training.

Fuenfhausen and Cashwell (2013) examined attachment, dyadic coping, and marital satisfaction among counseling graduate students. They found that the way counseling students and their non-student spouses cope with stress is an important factor in their level of marital

satisfaction. Individuals with anxious or avoidant attachment types engaged in maladaptive coping strategies, and not dyadic coping; therefore, they experienced a lower level of marital satisfaction.

Polson and Piercy (1993) studied married doctoral students in a marriage and family counseling program using a focus group. They found that marital relationships of students in the program were benefited by the clinical skills the students had acquired. Hyun (2009), who explored the lived experiences of female doctoral students in counselor education, found similar results. She stated that the benefits of being a married doctoral student in counselor education include learning counseling skills such as meditation, decompression, and reframing, which can be used during conflict with a spouse.

The research findings for graduate students in the counseling areas demonstrate benefits to being married; however, the literature also suggests areas of concern. The acquisition of counseling skills by the student can lead to a new distribution of power within the relationship (April-Davis, 2014; Pederson & Daniels, 2001). Because non-student spouses have no knowledge of these skills, they may be left feeling at a disadvantage in conflict, “especially if the student uses new skills as a weapon” (Pederson & Daniels, 2001, p. 175).

Counseling programs encourage growth and change among their students, but depending of faculty awareness and experience, may have little knowledge of the impact counselor training can have on students’ relationships (Murray & Kleist, 2011). Due to the demands of counseling programs, students are asked to allocate much of their personal resources to their own development, often leaving them with not enough emotional energy to deal with marital conflict (Sori et al., 1996). While much of this personal development occurs during the students’

master's programs, reflection and self-awareness is an ongoing process that can carry over into a doctoral program as well.

Non-student spouses must adapt to their student spouses' emotional shifts and attitudinal changes, even before students fully understand the changes themselves (Pederson & Daniels, 2001). These changes in attitudes, along with evolving values, interests, and opinions can lead to emotional separation within the marriage (Guy, 1987). This may lead to a reduction of intimacy, and ultimately, estrangement (Guy, 1987). Non-student spouses may also experience frustration over students' inability to differentiate between the roles of intimate partner and emerging therapist (Pederson & Daniels, 2001).

Student spouses, on the other hand, may learn about the potential satisfaction that comes from relationships as part of their counseling programs, and consequently, develop idealized expectations of their own relationships (Pederson & Daniels, 2001). The potential complications that are associated with married doctoral students in CES programs, combined with the near absence of literature that directly addresses it, creates an opportunity for further exploration of the subject. Del Rio and Mieling (2012) introduced a guide for navigating a doctoral program in counselor education, including a review of comprehensive exams, clinical internships, licensure and supervision issues, forming a dissertation committee, and the dissertation process; but even this comprehensive guide ignores relationship factors.

Coping Strategies for Married Doctoral Students

Dyk (1987) referenced several types of coping strategies that married graduate students can implement, including *structural* and *personal role redefinition* strategies and time management strategies. Structural role redefinition strategies may involve giving up on an aspect of the role as opposed to the role itself, such as choosing to reduce one's course load.

Within the personal, or family role, this can include coordinating child care and getting help with chores around the house (Dyk, 1987).

While a lack of communication can share a role in contributing to negative effects of being a married doctoral student, good communication between spouses can be an effective coping strategy (Hyun, 2009; Murray & Kleist, 2011). There is a high degree of association between good communication and marital satisfaction (Perlow & Mullins, 1976), and good communication may be the biggest predictor of marital adjustment (Dean & Carlson, 1984). This is because as communication improves, couples' roles within the relationship sync up with the role expectations they have for each other (Perlow & Mullins, 1976).

Managing stress through developing routines is another strategy married doctoral students can implement (Giles, 1983; Polson & Piercy, 1993). The increased routine of students' academic lives can encourage them to incorporate more routines in their personal lives as well (Giles, 1983). Polson and Piercy (1993) also recommended taking time off when possible to manage stress even if just for an evening. Lastly, they emphasized the importance of couples spending time together, even at the expense of networking with classmates and colleagues. Quality of time should be enhanced, considering the quantity of time spent together is generally diminished (Hawley, 2010). De (n.d.) even suggested scheduling date nights and physical intimacy built around the students' schedules. While apart, April-Davis (2014) suggested remaining in contact throughout the day through phone calls or text messages.

Labosier and Labosier (2011) suggested that there should be no fixed roles in doctoral student marriages. Murray and Kleist (2011) also proposed altering roles within the marriage as part of a series of interpersonal changes they recommended for doctoral student marriages. In aggregate, they recommended: 1) making sacrifices by making shifts in livelihood and having

less time available for tasks and relationships; 2) communication of concerns, secrets, and emotions; 3) stating needs and expectations of the relationship; and 4) seeking out experiences to enhance the connection in the relationship.

Support Services for Doctoral Students and Their Non-Student Spouses

Universities and programs need to equip married graduate students with tools to cope with stress and prevent burnout from the academic demands placed on them (Zemirah, 2000). Norton et al. (1998) argued that not only should students be prepared by their programs for the demands of doctoral study, but so should their families. Several researchers have made recommendations for programs and universities for how to better support married graduate students and their spouses, with the most frequent recommendations summarized as follows:

- Family orientation: Spouses and other family members should be invited to a short program discussing the challenges associated with doctoral study for married couples and coping strategies to be successful through the process (Brooks, 1988; Gold, 2006; Muller, 2016; Murray & Kleist, 2011). Programs can invite current married students and their families to share their stories and offer coping strategies (Gold, 2006).
- Family friendly events: Programs should host functions open to students and their family members (McLaughlin, 1985; Norton et al., 1998; Polson & Piercy, 1993).
- Buddy system: Incoming doctoral students should be matched up with existing students based on marital status (Brannock et al., 2000).
- Marriage enrichment seminars/workshops: Universities or counseling programs should offer weekend marital workshops to discuss anticipated problems and concerns of being a married student and provide coping techniques (April-Davis, 2014; Brannock et al., 2000).

- Support groups: Programs should offer voluntary support groups for doctoral students and a separate support group for spouses to address concerns (April-Davis, 2014; Brannock et al., 2000; Muller, 2016; Murray & Kleist, 2011; Norton et al., 1998).
- Individual or marital counseling: On-campus counseling centers should provide individual, marital, or crisis counseling to students and their spouses as needed (April-Davis, 2014; Berkove, 1979; Brannock et al., 2000; Gruver & Labadie, 1975; Jenks, 1980; Norton et al., 1998).
- Cohort model: Programs should move toward a cohort model due to the added benefit of peer support (April-Davis, 2014; Miller & Irby, 1999). Cohort groups increase the likelihood doctoral student will establish their own support groups of peers and their spouses to discuss experiences and strategies (Pederson & Daniels, 2001).

Additional measures and recommendations at the departmental level can also be taken.

Polson and Piercy (1993) observed that programs can lose sight on their impact on stressors they cause families, so they should periodically evaluate these effects. This also includes stressors involving child care (McLaughlin, 1985). April-Davis (2014) suggested that programs develop an informed consent form to advise prospective students on the ways in which their relationships might be impacted.

Counselor educators, specifically, can use supervision time as an opportunity to address personal relationship concerns with students (Murray & Kleist, 2011). Counseling programs can also have students write reflection papers on their experiences in terms of their own relationships, having them highlight new awareness, change, support, and gratitude toward their partners (Murray & Kleist, 2011). This would allow students an outlet to explore their personal changes, as well as their feelings about their spouses and relationships.

Summary and Need for Further Research

The pursuit of a doctoral degree is a difficult undertaking that can take its toll on individuals. Academic stress, expectations placed on doctoral students by faculty, and the dissertation process can be too much to handle for some students, resulting in attrition. When doctoral students are married, it creates a set of circumstances that may lead to unique benefits and challenges compared to single students. Non-student spouses can offer support in the forms emotional, academic, financial and basic needs, but negative aspects to being a married doctoral student likely exist as well. Married doctoral students may face challenges with finances, time management, role conflicts, sexual concerns, children, physical or emotional separation, and communication. Non-student spouses also have distinct needs that must be addressed. While the literature suggests coping strategies for married doctoral students and their spouses and offers recommendations for program or departmental changes, additional research is needed to gain a more thorough understanding of the experience of married doctoral students, and especially the experience of their non-student spouses.

Married male students appear to have more success than single male students, but the literature does not provide a sufficient explanation as to why this is the case. This is an area that requires further examination as well. Lastly, the phenomenon of being a married doctoral student in a CES program is hardly addressed in the literature at all, so ongoing investigation as to the experiences specific to CES doctoral students is warranted. The gaps in the literature, in terms of both recent contributions and content, create a need for further exploration on this topic. The preliminary research (Suarez & Carver, 2017; Suarez et al., 2015; Suarez et al., 2016) serves as a beginning point for this researcher to investigate this phenomenon in greater detail and give it the attention it deserves.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students in Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) programs and their non-student spouses. The researcher believes that having a better understanding of the phenomenon may benefit current and prospective doctoral students in CES programs, as well as benefit CES programs to better serve their students. In the process of working toward an understanding, one main research question was asked: What is the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students in CES programs and their non-student spouses? In order to address this question, two research sub-questions were also addressed: 1) What is the individual lived experience of married male doctoral students in CES programs? 2) What is the individual lived experience of the non-student spouses of married male doctoral students in CES programs?

This chapter describes the current study's research methodology in detail. It includes discussions on the rationale for qualitative inquiry and a phenomenological approach, a conceptual framework that guided the formation of interview questions and the analysis of the data, a description of the participants, research design, and data collection, and issues of trustworthiness for this study. The chapter ends with a summary.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research involves the study of things “in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). A qualitative approach is appropriate when problems or issues need to be explored (Creswell, 2013). The current study aimed to explore and interpret the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students in CES programs and their non-student spouses through the participants' perceptions. This study used interviews, document collection, and

focus groups as means of gathering data, so a qualitative approach was fitting. Qualitative methods foster a considerable amount of information about a small group of people and encourage great depth and detail in data collection (Patton, 2015). This researcher believes that the depth of the emergent data that resulted from the current study accurately reflects the lived experience of the participants.

Rationale for Phenomenology

Phenomenology as a philosophy can be traced back to the writings of the German mathematician Edmund Husserl prior to World War I (Creswell, 2013; Dowling, 2007). Husserl aimed to study things as they appeared in order to truly understand them. As a research method, phenomenology is the study of lived experience (van Manen, 1990). Its purpose is to gain “a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (van Manen, 1990, p. 9).

There are multiple interpretations of phenomenological research, but researchers must choose one methodologist instead of pulling from multiple methods (Giorgi, 2006). The specific approach used in this study was transcendental phenomenology and Moustakas’ (1994) adaptation of the van Kaam method, modified by this researcher to address the research questions and design. Creswell (2013) referred to Moustakas’ approach as the most practical and useful. A detailed description of how data is analyzed in a phenomenological study is included later in this chapter.

Conceptual Framework

Chapter II consisted of a detailed review of the literature that forms a portion of the conceptual framework that guided the current study. The purpose of a conceptual framework is to help organize and focus a study by serving as a lens through which to sort through the data,

allowing the researcher to process and make sense of the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

While the conceptual framework does not incorporate every element of the literature, it does include the major components that served as a guide for the direction for the study.

The most salient sections of the literature review addressed the experiences of married doctoral students and the experiences of their non-student spouses, the effect on the marital relationship in general, and issues specific to doctoral students in CES programs. For doctoral students, the process often involves adjusting from a professional role back to the role of student (Scheinkman, 1988). Pressure to succeed with coursework, and to take on additional responsibilities such as publishing and conference presentations can also take a toll on doctoral students (Polson & Piercy, 1993).

Considerably less literature exists on the experiences of non-student spouses (Muller, 2016); although, there are some researchers who attempt to shed light on the phenomenon of non-student spouses (Brooks, 1988; Giles, 1983; Hawley, 2010; Laboiser & Laboiser, 2011; Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Mason & Paul, 1982; Pederson & Daniels, 2001; Perlow & Mullins, 1976; Scheinkman, 1988). Among the findings, non-student spouses can feel lonely, isolated, and physically or emotionally separated from their student spouses (Hawley, 2010; Pederson & Daniels, 2001). They may even feel inferior to their student spouses (De, n.d; Pederson & Daniels, 2001; Perlow & Mullins, 1976), or over time, come to resent them (Brooks, 1988).

In terms of the marital relationship itself, Giles (1983) identified four types of support (i.e., emotional/psychological, financial, academic, and basic needs/task-oriented) as benefits to being a married doctoral student. She also identified seven factors that can have a negative effect on married doctoral students: 1) financial problems; 2) time pressures; 3) children; 4) communication; 5) sexual concerns; 6) role conflict; and 7) physical and emotional separation.

Specific to counseling programs, the literature suggests that married students experience unique benefits and challenges compared to students in other fields. Married counseling students can utilize the skills they learn in their programs to help with conflict resolution and to build upon their relationships (Hyun, 2009; Polson & Piercy, 1993). These newly-acquired skills, however, can make non-student spouses feel at a disadvantage because they have not acquired those skills themselves (Pederson & Daniels, 2001). Additionally, the personal growth consistent with counseling programs may cause students to idealize relationships and lead to confusion and frustration among their non-student spouses (Pederson & Daniels, 2001).

Lastly, because the focus of this study involved the experiences of those who are married, also included in the conceptual framework is the work of Dr. John Gottman and his *Sound Marital House* (SMH) theory (Gottman, 1999). The precedent for using the SMH with a conceptual framework in research has been established (e.g., Hicks, McWey, Benson, & West, 2004; Rockinson-Szpakiw, Spaulding, & Knight, 2015; Tell, Pavkov, Hecker, & Fontaine, 2006). Rockinson-Szpakiw et al. (2015) laid the groundwork for using the SMH model with doctoral students, citing that concepts from the SMH model can provide proactive strategies for doctoral students and their spouses to maintain marital stability during difficult times. They reviewed literature on marital satisfaction, quality, and stability in order to provide doctoral students and their non-student spouses with strategies to manage the challenges of being married through the doctoral process. The authors then framed their recommendations using four concepts of the SMH model. Below is an overview of the SMH model (See Figure 1) followed by a more detailed discussion.

The Sound Marital House

Gottman (1999) posited the two necessary components of marriage are “an overall level of positive affect and an ability to reduce negative affect during conflict resolution” (p. 105). His research into identifying the particulars of these components led to the development of the SMH model consisting of seven floors or levels (Gottman, 1999). The theory starts with the foundation (the first three floors), which is composed of marital friendship and its ability to generate positive affect in the marriage. The next level consists of sentiment override, either positive or negative, felt within the relationship. Conflict regulation forms the next level of the SMH. The top levels are comprised of spouses honoring each other’s dreams and creating a system of shared meaning between each other. In further detail, the levels of the SMH are as follows:

Foundation (Floors 1-3). The foundation of the SMH creates an atmosphere of positive affect in non-conflict situations and determines the nature of the marital friendship. This is accomplished with three components: 1) *cognitive room*; 2) the *Fondness and Admiration System*; and 3) turning toward versus turning away (the *emotional bank account*). Cognitive room refers to the amount of mental space partners give to each other (e.g., how much partners know about the other’s workplace). The Fondness and Admiration System consists of how frequently couples express fondness and admiration to each other (e.g., complimenting each other in public; the presence of “we-ness” in conversations). The size of the emotional bank account is characterized by the warmth and positivity partners feel toward each other, and the frequency of couples “turning toward” or “turning away” from each other during non-conflict situations. In part, this speaks to how couples recharge themselves in the relationship. Couples who turn toward each other will look to their partner to find personal rejuvenation and

connection. Couples who turn away will seek out individual activities, especially when highly stressed.

Positive Sentiment Override (Floor 4). The fourth level of the SMH model, known as *Positive Sentiment Override*, refers to couples' reactions during marital exchanges. Marital exchanges are met with a level of affection or disaffection by couples based on underlying levels of positive or negative emotions within the relationship, and not necessarily the content of the exchanges (Gottman, 1999). For example, in Positive Sentiment Override, a spouse may make a comment viewed by observers as negative, but it is received as a neutral message. Conversely, couples in Negative Sentiment Override receive positive messages as neutral, and neutral messages as negative.

Managing conflict (Floor 5). Positive Sentiment Override “is the basis of successful repair attempts that de-escalate negative affect during conflict discussions” (Gottman, 1999, p. 107). This repair and regulation of conflict makes up the fifth level of the SMH model. The term *regulation* is key here, as Gottman has stated in his research that most marital problems are considered perpetual in nature, and the most successful couples have learned to negotiate through problems which are resolvable and unresolvable (Gottman, 1999). Part of this process also includes couples learning how to physiologically soothe their partners and themselves. This includes reducing couples' heart rates back to baseline (Gottman, 1999).

Making dreams and aspirations come true (Floor 6). Gottman (1999) posited the reason couples experience perpetual problems is due to unfulfilled dreams they have in terms of how they envision their lives unfolding. When dealing with perpetual issues in marital relationships, couples tend to enter a state of gridlock in which both spouses shut down, or they continue to have dialogue

using Positive Sentiment Override. The latter is what helps couples move toward honoring each other's dreams and making them reality (Hicks et al., 2004).

Creating shared meaning (Floor 7). The top level of the SMH model captures the symbols, metaphors, and narratives unique to marital couples (Gottman, 1999). Four areas are explored in this level:

- **Rituals:** This includes a broad range of shared activities, from daily routines such as dinnertimes and running errands, to annual events such as religious holidays and family vacations.
- **Roles:** Wife, husband, son, daughter, doctor, homemaker, student, dancer, etc.
- **Goals:** These tangible markers involve both short- and long-term aspirations from working out four times a week to owning a home, to getting an advanced degree or raise in salary, to becoming a grandparent.
- **Symbols:** These involve the intangible existential ponderings around the fundamental question, What is the *meaning* of...home, family, love, trust, autonomy, dependence... (pp. 108-109).

Given the abundance of literature on married doctoral students that addresses concepts from Floor 7 (e.g., shared activities, spouse and student roles, getting an advanced degree), exploring the experience of CES doctoral students and their non-student spouses lends itself to using SMH as part of the framework used in the development of interview questions and in the data analysis. Other floors of the SMH are certainly applicable as well. Doctoral programs can interfere with couples' progress toward building and maintaining their own sound marital house (Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015). Therefore, the SMH does more than play a complimentary part in the exploration of the experience of doctoral students and their non-student spouses, but rather, it can

serve an integral role in understanding of how the pursuit of a doctorate can undermine marital stability (Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015). If doctoral students can grasp the concepts and strategies of the SMH model, they are more likely to be satisfied in their marriages, and may be more likely to continue in their programs (Rockinson-Szpakiw et al., 2015).

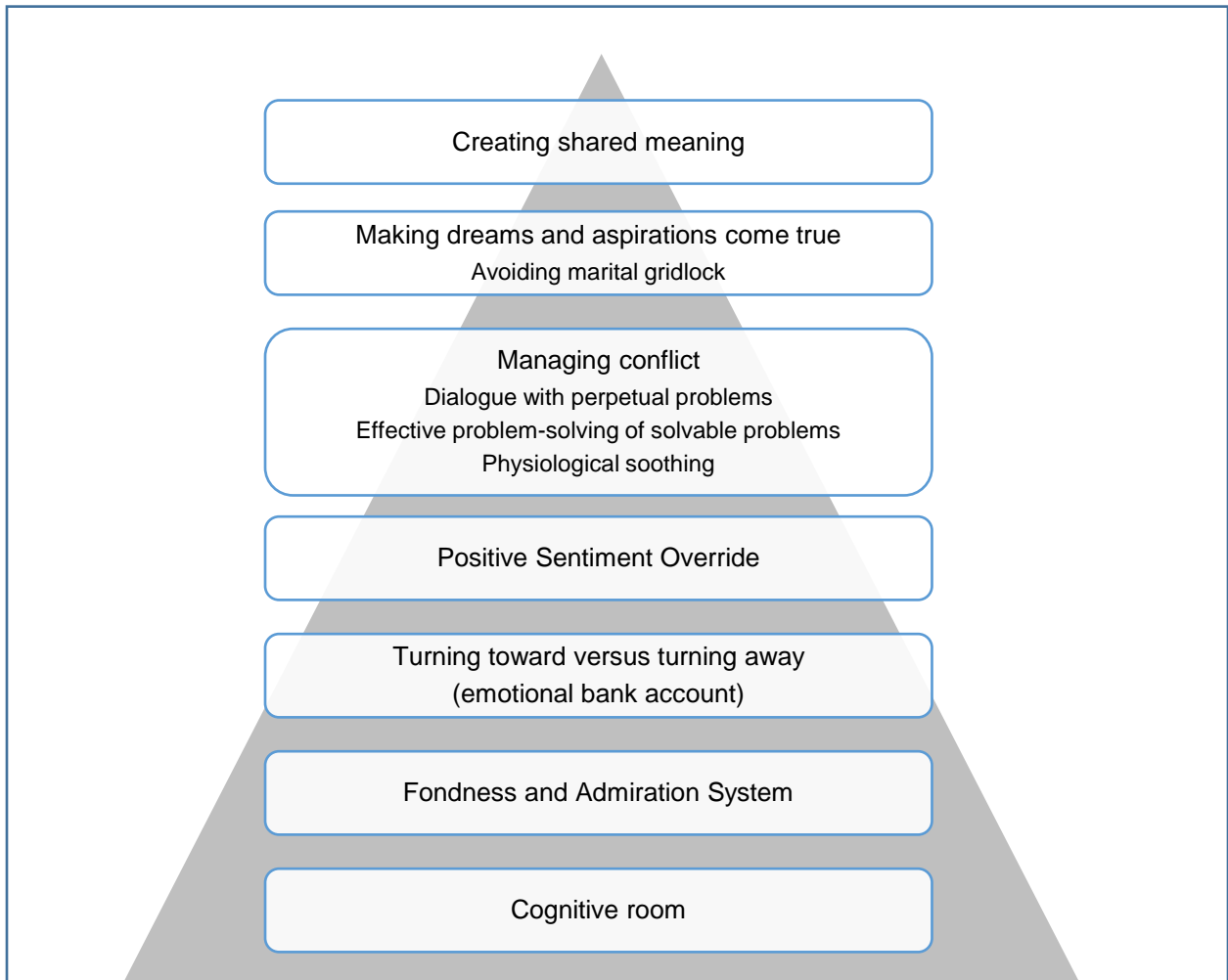


Figure 1. The Sound Marital House theory (Gottman, 1999).

Theoretical Sensitivity and its Role in the Conceptual Framework

Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined theoretical sensitivity as the ability to give meaning to the data through one's experience and insight. In addition to my knowledge of the existing literature, as a married male doctoral student in a CES program, I have the personal experience

needed to research this topic and make sense of the data. Furthermore, I was the lead researcher on two exploratory studies (Suarez, Carver, & Higgins, 2015; Suarez et al., 2016) that focused on the benefits and challenges of being a married doctoral student in a CES programs from both the students' and the non-student spouses' perspectives, respectively. I was also lead presenter on an educational session that integrated SMH concepts with the shared experiences of married doctoral students and their non-student spouses (Suarez & Carver, 2017).

Maxwell (2013) stated that the researcher's experiential knowledge and any pilot or exploratory research conducted by the researcher are two main sources for conceptual frameworks. Therefore, in addition to the existing literature and SMH theory included as part of the conceptual framework, my own experiences, both personal and research-based, make up the remainder of the framework. While traditionally seen as biased to include personal experience in qualitative inquiry, others have argued that it is unavoidable, and perhaps, necessary (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Strauss, 1987). According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), "subjectivity is something to capitalize on rather than exorcise" (p. 104). This does not mean that I have allowed my own subjectivity to interfere with how I analyze the data, however, especially considering the *Epoche* component of phenomenological research, defined later. Through my own experiences as a married doctoral student in CES, though, certain assumptions about the phenomenon are unavoidable. Later in this chapter, I will discuss what measures I took to avoid bias and ensure the essence of the phenomenon explored was true to the experiences of the participants.

Assumptions within the Conceptual Framework

Based on my knowledge of the literature, the exploratory studies conducted, and my personal experience as a married male doctoral student, I had certain assumptions of the

phenomenon involved in the current study. First, I believe that the individual effects of doctoral study on both the students and the non-student spouses can affect the marital relationship. Secondly, along those same lines, issues within the marital relationship can take their toll on students and their spouses individually. Third, effects felt on the individual level by both spouses can interfere with the maintenance involved in keeping stability in couples' SMH, which in turn, can compromise the marital relationship and exacerbate issues related to doctoral study. Conversely, a strongly constructed SMH will highlight the benefits of marriage for doctoral students. (See Figure 2.)

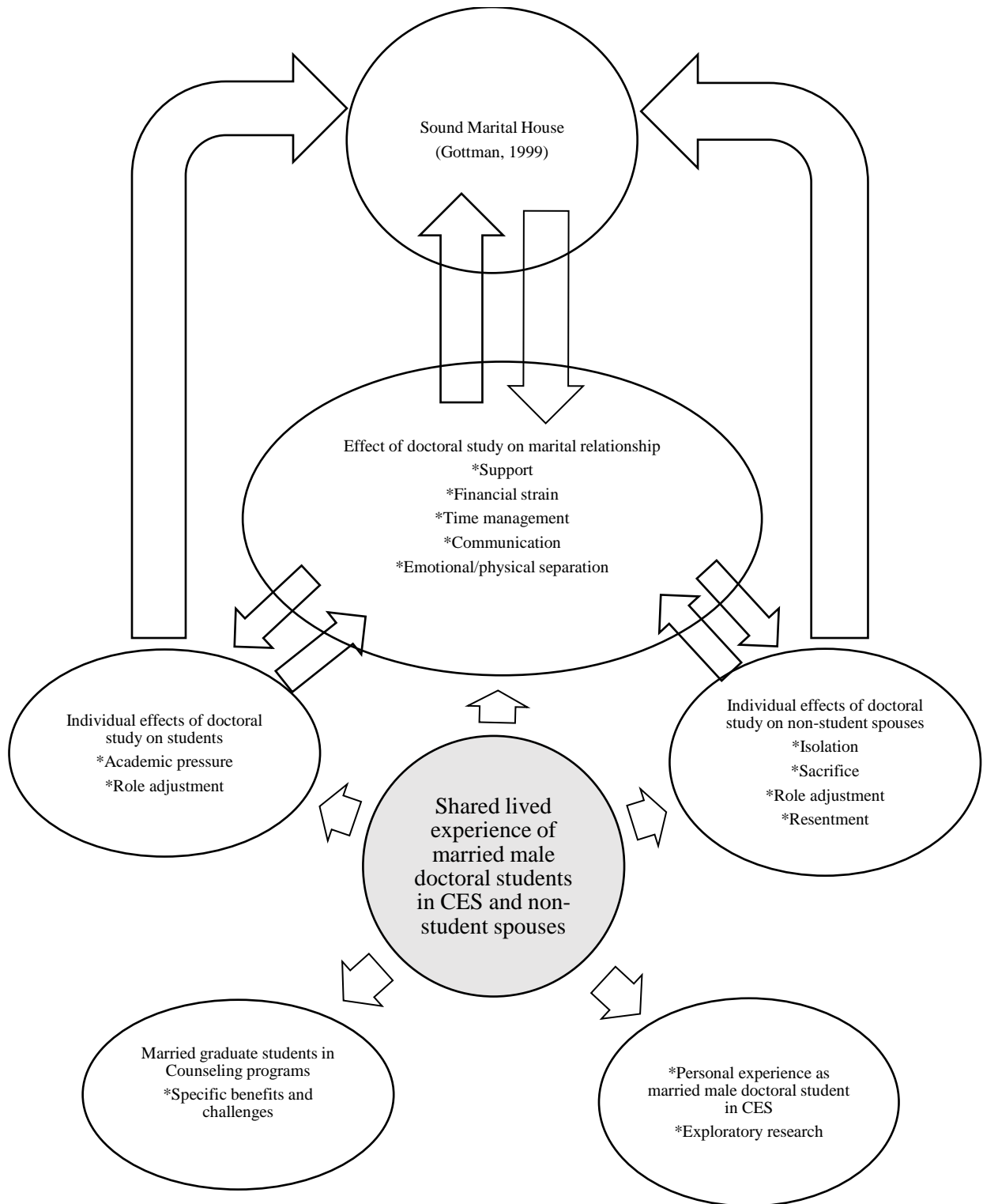


Figure 2. Conceptual framework.

Participants

Maxwell (2013) stated that the term “sampling” is problematic in qualitative research because it suggests the intentions of the study are to draw wider conclusions about the population being studied. This is the desired outcome of quantitative research. In a qualitative study, however, purposeful sampling, or, “strategically selecting information-rich cases to study...that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated” (Patton, 2015, p. 264), is the more conducive approach. Maxwell (2013) suggested “purposeful selection” as the term to describe selecting participants for a qualitative study.

Polkinghorne (1989) recommended between five and 25 participants for a phenomenological study. Dukes (1984) suggested between three and 10 participants. However, the ideal number of participants “can only be answered properly by considering the nature of the research problem and the potential yield of findings” (Wertz, 2005, p. 171). In the current study, the participants consisted of four couples (four married male doctoral students in CES programs and their non-student spouses), for eight participants in total. In their study on the impact of counselor training on students’ couple relationships, Murray and Kleist (2011), also limited the participants to four couples.

Selection Procedures and Recruitment

The purposeful selection strategy that was used in the current study was criterion-based selection. Criterion-based selection studies cases that meet the criterion studied (Patton, 2015). Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) stated that criterion-based selection works well when the individuals studied have experienced the same phenomenon. In the case of the current study, the phenomenon being explored is the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students in CES programs and their non-student spouses.

Recruitment Strategies

After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, this researcher recruited participants through a letter sent to the CES listserv at the university requesting participants. As a current student within the same program as the participants, this researcher also utilized personal contacts within the program to help identify those who met the criteria for inclusion in the study.

Demographics and Eligibility

The participants in the current study were four married male doctoral students in a CES program at a large university in the Mid-South and their non-student spouses. Full or part-time status as a student was not a consideration, nor was age, the number of years married, or number of children; however, these characteristics were considered in the data analysis and may lead to future research. Though not a requirement for inclusion in the study, all four couples were in heterosexual relationships.

Site Selection

Light, Singer, and Willet (1990) stated that when considering site selection, it is better to use purposeful selection “rather than relying on the idiosyncrasies of chance” (p. 53). The site of the data collection for the current study was the CES doctoral program at the University of Arkansas. The intention of the study was not to generalize findings to married male doctoral students and their non-student spouses at other institutions, but rather, gain an accurate representation of the specific setting at the University of Arkansas. In doing so, the findings of the current study can help establish a framework for comparison with other programs (Maxwell, 2013).

The CES doctoral program at the University of Arkansas has six full-time faculty members and is accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) (<http://www.cacrep.org/>). At the time of data collection, the doctoral program contained 26 students, including 15 female and 11 male students (University of Arkansas, 2017). Since the Fall 2014 semester, five male doctoral students have matriculated into the CES program at the University of Arkansas, four of whom are married. Additionally, four married male students have had their degrees conferred during this time.

Research Design

When putting together a research design, it is important to first consider the goals, or purpose, of the study (Maxwell, 2013). For the current study, the purpose was to explore the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students in CES programs and their non-student spouses. A better understanding of this can assist current and prospective doctoral students and their spouses in navigating the challenges associated with doctoral study, as well as serve as a tool for CES programs to attract and retain students.

The following is a list that summarizes the research design, which will be followed by a more detailed explanation of each step.

1. A literature review was conducted focusing on the individual effects of doctoral study on students and their non-student spouses, the effects on the marital relationship, and considerations specific to male doctoral students and CES students.
2. After the dissertation proposal was defended successfully, the researcher gained approval from the IRB to proceed with the research. The IRB protocol outlined all methods of data collection and reviewed confidentiality, informed consent, and potential risks involved for participants.

3. A recruitment email was sent to the CES listserv at the University of Arkansas requesting participation. After participants were identified, informed consent and demographic forms were completed and signed.
4. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews took place with the doctoral students and their non-student spouses. The doctoral students and their non-student spouses were interviewed separately.
5. Participants completed weekly journal entries for a 6-week period to address critical incidents over the span of the study.
6. Data from the interviews and critical incident journals were analyzed using a phenomenological approach to identify emerging themes and labels.
7. Separate focus groups (one for doctoral students and one for non-student spouses) took place to check data and themes and to allow participants to add to the data.

Literature Review

Prior to planning the research design, a thorough review of the literature was completed. This review addressed the effects of doctoral study on students, their non-student spouses, and the marital relationship. Additional sections of the literature review covered the topics of married male doctoral students, male students in counseling, and married students in CES programs.

IRB Approval

Following the literature review, the researcher developed a proposal for the current study that included content from Chapters I, II, and III, including background and context information, statement of the problem, the purpose statement, the research questions, the literature review, and the methodological approach. After receiving committee approval, the researcher submitted

for IRB approval prior to recruiting participants. The IRB approval process ensured that ethical considerations were taken into account in the design and execution of this study. This included recruiting voluntary participants, reviewing informed consent, and discussing any potential risk involved to those who participated. The IRB approval letter, as well as all pertinent forms related to recruitment and ethical considerations, are included as Appendices A-C.

Data Collection

Multiple methods are used to gather data when using qualitative inquiry such as interviews, observations and fieldwork, and document collection (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Interviews consist of open-ended questions that produce insight into participants' "experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge" (Patton, 2015, p. 14). Observation results in detailed descriptions of human behaviors, actions, and interpersonal interactions (Patton, 2015). Documents collected as part of qualitative inquiry can range from organizational or program records to personal diaries, photographs, and written responses to survey questions (Patton, 2015).

Qualitative findings are more valid when researchers can find evidence of their themes from multiple sources (Creswell, 2013). Thus, one of the ways for qualitative researchers to lend credibility to their work is by seeking out multiple methods of data collection, or data triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the current study, this researcher adhered to the practice of data triangulation by incorporating different data collection methods, including demographic information, in-depth interviews, critical incident reporting, and focus groups. (See Figure 3.)

Phase I: Demographic information. Participants were asked to complete an information form that captured demographic information about themselves and their

relationships. The data included gender, age, race, length of marriage, length of relationship (years dating and married, combined), number of children, household income, relocation status, and year in CES program. This was the basis for the participants' profile data, as well as created avenues for recommendations and potential future research.

Phase II: Interviews. Interviews provide the deep, rich data that is important in qualitative research, so it is often at the core of qualitative data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Therefore, the interview was chosen as the primary method of data collection for the current study. "The primary goals of qualitative interviews are to gain focused insight into individuals' lived experiences [and] understand how participants make sense of and construct reality in relation to the phenomenon" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 146).

Seeking an understanding of participants' experience of a phenomenon is even more important in a phenomenological approach. Moustakas (1994) posited the focus of a phenomenological interview is to evoke a comprehensive account of the person's experience of the phenomenon. This allows the researcher to describe the phenomenon "as much as possible in concrete and lived-through terms" (Adams & Van Manen, 2008, p. 618).

Interviews are not without their limitations and challenges, however. Patton (2015) warned that interviews are not unlike interventions in that they have an effect on people. But it is impossible to determine the impact of the interview until after the interview is over, and possibly, not even then. Interviews can open wounds, but they can also be healing (Patton, 2015). Because the current study asked participants to discuss what are potentially their most intimate, interpersonal relationships, this researcher took precaution by not only explaining the purpose of the interview to the participants, but also reviewing the potential risks involved. Limitations to interviews include issues such as participants responding in a way they think the

researcher would want them to, or researcher incompetency, such as the researcher not developing rapport with the participants, leading to participants not being as open with the researcher, or the researcher not asking the appropriate questions to guide the exploration of the phenomenon (Fontana & Frey, 2003).

Interview questions. The interviews followed a semi-structured format. Semi-structured interviews allow for a more focused exploration of specific topics (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The format uses specific questions as a guide, but allows for unique and customized paths in terms of follow-up questions with each participant (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This allows for the exploration of the experiencing of the phenomenon that is unique to each participant. The structured questions were constructed using the components of the conceptual framework (e.g., existing literature, the SMH model, and the researcher's theoretical sensitivity) as a guide. The first question was, "What has your experience of the doctoral program been so far?" This general inquiry allowed for a wide range of responses and helped the researcher hone in on the important aspects of each participant's experience, which influenced the line of questioning throughout the rest of the interview. Refer to Appendix D for the list of the structured questions used in the interviews.

Phase III: Critical incident reporting. Document collection and review is another primary source of data collection in qualitative research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Documents consist of written records (e.g., program records, written correspondence, responses to open-ended surveys) (Patton, 2015). Documents created by the participants such as letters, emails, and reflective writing are known as personal documents (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). While a majority of documents, personal or otherwise, exist

independently of the research, some may be developed at the researcher's request (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

In the current study, participants were asked to complete one reflective writing task, or critical incident journal, per week for 6 weeks highlighting a critical incident for the week between the doctoral students and their spouses. Critical incident reporting, a data collection method introduced by Flanagan (1954), is useful in qualitative research because it helps corroborate interview data. Additionally, it allows participants to share perceptions they may not have revealed during their interview (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). If used as a sole method of data collection, critical incident reporting is ineffective because the content may be too brief to provide the ideal depth of data in qualitative inquiry, but it is effective as a supplemental method of data collection (Brookfield, 2005). In this study, the critical incident journals were used as supporting documents to enrich the data collected during the interview process.

Critical incident instrument. The critical incident journal consisted of 3 writing prompts developed by the researcher. Specifically, participants were asked to respond to the following questions pertaining to doctoral program-related interactions between them and their spouses: 1) What occurred? 2) What were your thoughts and feelings as a result of the interaction? 3) What was the outcome of the interaction? (What was the resolution?) These prompts allowed participants to capture their perceptions on interactions with their spouses over a 6-week period. The critical incident instrument is included as Appendix E of this study.

Phase IV: Focus groups. Focus groups are another source of data collection in qualitative research. Focus groups possess elements of both participant observation and individual interviews (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016), and they provide opportunities to collect data that may not have arisen during the individual interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). One reason

for this may be due to the social nature of focus groups, which may allow participants to be more relaxed than in the one-on-one setting of an interview (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Focus groups also allow participants to comment in relation to others' experiences, therefore, creating the potential for new topics and themes to emerge (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Focus groups have disadvantages as well, including groupthink (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This occurs when participants in the group all agree with each other instead of sharing their unique interpretations. Additionally, the researcher must have strong facilitation skills due to the need to balance conversation and data extraction (Fontana & Frey, 2003).

In the current study, two separate focus groups (one for the doctoral students and one for the non-student spouses) were conducted after the data from the individual interviews and the critical incident journals were collected and analyzed. In addition to generating a deeper understanding of the participants' phenomenon, the focus groups aided the researcher in adding credibility to the study. Patton (2015) stated that the social nature of focus groups increases the "meaningfulness and validity of findings" (p. 475). Additionally, the focus groups served as the member check component of establishing trustworthiness, explained in further detail in the next section.

Focus group questions. A question with the goal of checking the researcher's interpretations of the data was included, but because focus groups are considered group interviews (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016), the format of the focus groups were still semi-structured. Questions such as, "What, if any, changes did you notice about yourself during the process of completing the journals?" and, "How, if at all, did your feelings about your spouse change during the process?" allowed for a deeper exploration of the phenomenon. Additional

follow-up questions based on the participants' responses were also asked. The structured focus group questions are included as Appendix F of this study.

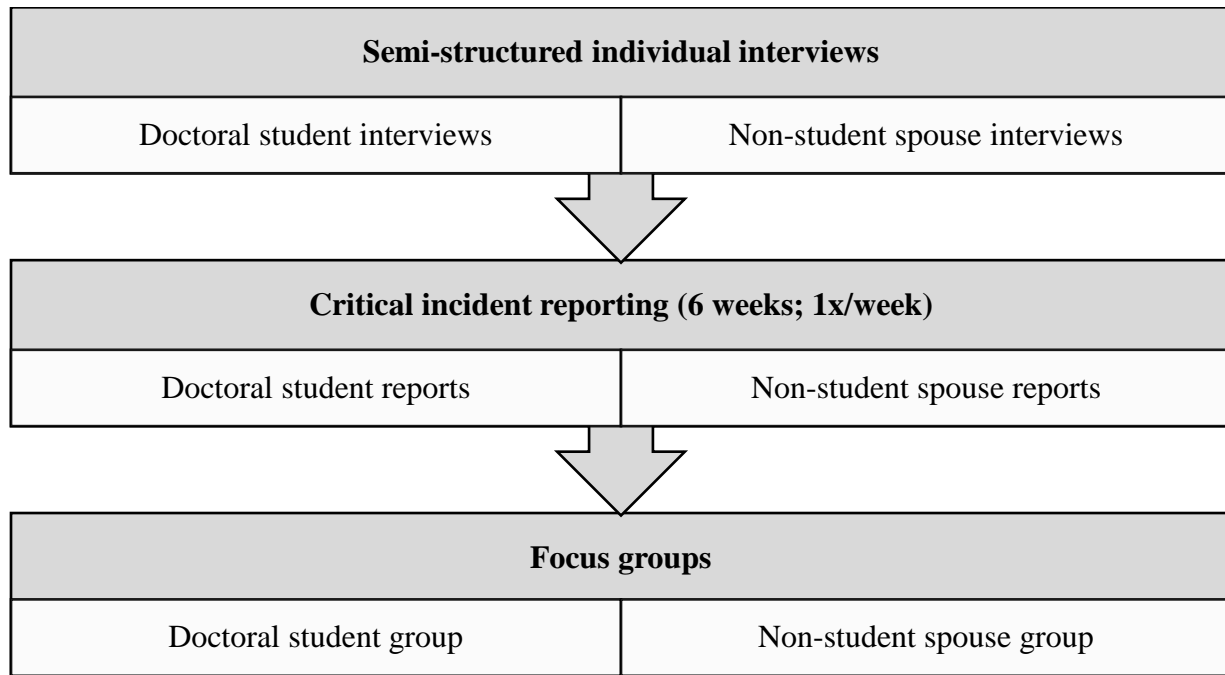


Figure 3. Data collection plan.

Data Analysis

There are several concepts that make phenomenology as a research method unique from, and often more involved than, other types of qualitative inquiry. First, is the concept of *Epoche*, a Greek word meaning to stay away from or abstain (Moustakas, 1994). In terms of a phenomenological approach to research, *Epoche* is the setting aside of biases and preconceived ideas about a situation, and rather, seeing things as they appear (Moustakas, 1994). It is impossible, however, to disregard completely a researcher's assumptions when engaged in qualitative inquiry, and the role of assumptions will be discussed later in this chapter. But from a purely phenomenological perspective, researchers should be self-aware of their assumptions, and these should be bracketed, and therefore, should not influence how researchers interpret the experience of others.

Epoche is the first step in the process of *Phenomenological Reduction* (Moustakas, 1994). The objective of Phenomenological Reduction is to describe in textural language what is seen. It is not simply a description; it is a process that consists of the researcher looking inward to understand the nuances of the phenomenon. It involves repeated reflection on the data and the emergence of new awareness that can become intertwined. Clarity comes from reflecting on the data multiple times (Moustakas, 1994).

Another element of Phenomenological Reduction is the process of horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). Horizontalization implies that every statement from participants has equal value to start (Moustakas, 1994). During the analytic process, irrelevant or repetitive statements are deleted, and the remaining statements known as horizons, or invariant constituents, are considered the themes of the data. These horizons are then clustered using thematic labels before being organized into a coherent textural description (Moustakas, 1994).

Following Phenomenological Reduction, the next step of the research process involves *Imaginative Variation* (Moustakas, 1994). The objective of Imaginative Variation is to reach the structural description of an experience, or the underlying factors that account for the “how” of an experience that explains the “what” (textural description). The final steps in the process of phenomenological research is the integration of the textural and structural descriptions into statements that capture the meaning and essence of the experience for each participant, and lastly, composite descriptions that condense the experiences of all participants involved. This final step is known as *Synthesis* (Moustakas, 1994).

Due to the nature of the research design and to better address the research questions, the analytical process used in the current study is an adaptation of Moustakas’ approach described above. There were eight participants in the study, but because the main research question sought

to find the essence of the shared lived experience of married couples, the researcher approached the data in terms of each couple, in addition to on an individual basis. With the research sub-questions in mind, composite data was also organized through student and non-student spouse perspectives.

One strategy used by this researcher to aide in the process of reflecting on the data, as well as minimize influence of personal biases (Epoche), was to write a memo at the conclusion of each interview. Memos may include observations and reflections about a study, as well as ways in which the researcher believes he or she may be influencing the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The memos contained elements of analytical and personal reflection, and they helped this researcher maintain an awareness of issues related to subjectivity and possible bias. Refer to Appendix G for an example of a memo created by this researcher.

The invariant constituents were determined through the process of horizontalization. The invariant constituents, or horizons, from each participant were then combined by couple under the thematic labels that were established. To see a sample of original horizons for Couple 1 of the current study, prior to consultation with the peer debriefer, refer to Appendix H.

This researcher organized the presentation and analysis of the data by couples as opposed to by students followed by their non-student spouses. This method of organization allows for the data presentation to progress from the individual experiences of the participants (the research sub-questions) to analysis of the couples (the main research question). Lastly, this researcher included a textural-structural synthesis to combine all facets of the study to accurately portray through rich description the phenomenon that is the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students in CES and their non-student spouses at the University of Arkansas. Figure 4 (below) depicts the analytical process included in this phenomenological study.

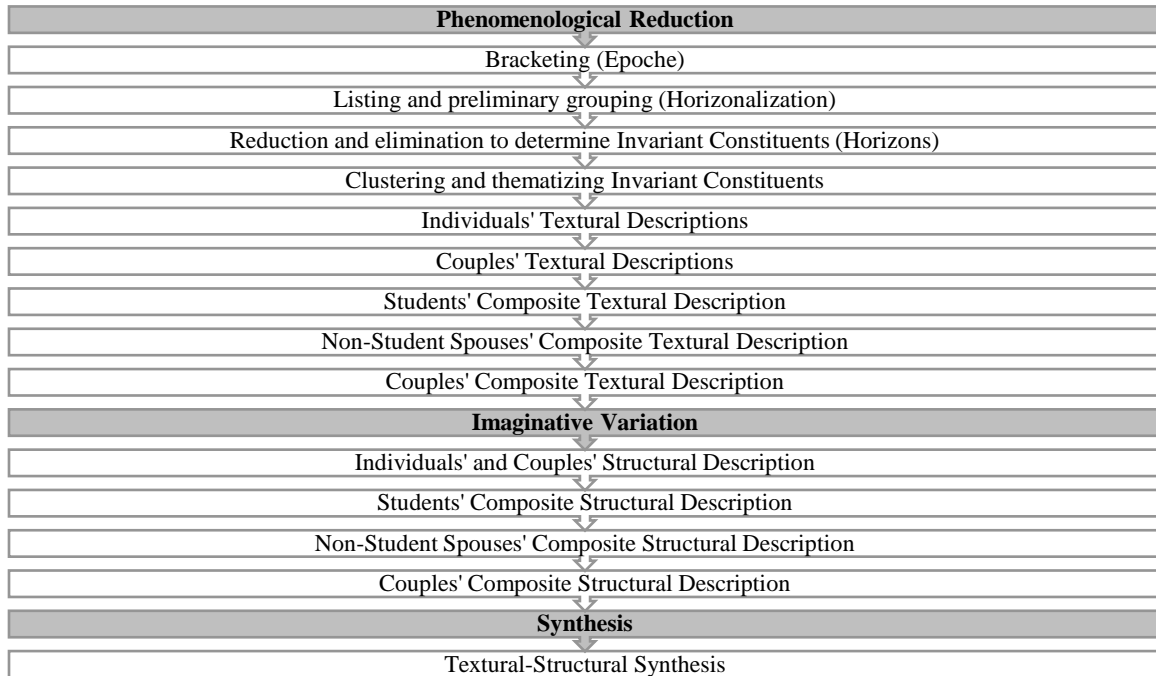


Figure 4. Adaptation of Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological analysis.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In quantitative research, the standards most frequently used for assessing good and convincing research are validity and reliability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). In qualitative research, however, the researcher must provide evidence that the interpretations resulting from data analysis accurately represent the reality of the participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Creswell (2013) outlined several researchers' perspectives for ensuring validity in qualitative research, or validation strategies. Among these, was the argument by Lincoln and Guba (1985) that stressed the importance of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (p. 290) posed the question, "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?" This is at the essence of trustworthiness. This is best achieved through the measures of credibility, transferability, and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These three criteria are how this researcher maintained trustworthiness throughout the current study.

Credibility

Credibility “refers to whether the participants’ perceptions match up with the researcher’s portrayal of them” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 162). This criterion is the parallel of validity in quantitative research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested five means of increasing the likelihood of credibility in qualitative research: 1) the activities of prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation; 2) peer debriefing; 3) negative case analysis; 4) referential adequacy; and 5) member checks.

Prolonged engagement. Prolonged engagement “is the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the ‘culture,’ testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents, and building trust” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). As a fellow student in the program that the students in the current study are a part of, this researcher has an understanding of the culture of the CES doctoral program at the University of Arkansas. The implementation of the critical incident journal for a 6-week period also adds to the study’s credibility by eliminating any distortions in data collection during the individual interviews, such as any misunderstanding of questions being asked, or participants not being willing or able to answer questions fully at the time of their interviews.

The challenge in establishing prolonged engagement was with developing trust. This was not necessarily the case with the doctoral student participants, as the researcher has developed trust and rapport with them during time spent together in the program, but instead, with the non-student spouses. With phenomenological interviewing, however, interviews begin with casual conversation, or even a meditative activity, to foster a relaxed and trusting atmosphere (Moustakas, 1994). This researcher engaged the non-student spouses in casual conversation prior to beginning the interviews, as well as made extra efforts to explain the process and ensure

confidentiality before the data collection began. This protected against participants giving desired responses, and instead, allowed them to answer each question honestly.

Persistent observation. “The purpose of persistent observation is to identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304). This was accomplished in the current study through in-depth, semi-structured interviewing. This format allowed the researcher to sort through participants’ responses and follow-up with questions to achieve more depth in the areas that were relevant to the inquiry.

Triangulation. Triangulation is another means of improving the likelihood of credibility in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Denzin (as cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 305), stated four types of triangulation exist, including the use of multiple sources, methods, investigators, and theories. For the current study, this researcher used multiple data collection methods (e.g., individual interviews, critical incident journals, and focus group interviews).

Peer debriefing. “Peer debriefing is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer...for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). It serves four purposes, including exposing the researcher’s findings to another’s honest point of view, testing a working hypothesis, developing the next step in an emerging methodological design, and providing the researcher with an opportunity for clearing one’s mind from emotions that may be interfering with the appropriate next step (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ravitch and Carl (2016) simplified its purpose by stating that peer debriefing enhances the accuracy of the researcher’s account by asking a colleague to examine the researcher’s notes and asking questions to challenge the researcher’s assumptions.

The peer debriefer should be familiar with the research area and the research methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For the current study, the peer debriefer was a co-researcher who took part in the exploratory research on this topic (Suarez et al., 2015; Suarez et al., 2016), who is a married male, and who graduated from the CES doctoral program at the University of Arkansas in 2015. The peer debriefer was given access to data from two of the four couples and asked to review the invariant constituents and thematic labels for those couples. The peer debriefer suggested the consolidation of some of the thematic labels that were initially established by this researcher. The thematic labels introduced in the next chapter reflect these suggestions.

Negative case analysis. “Searching for variation in the understanding of the phenomenon entails seeking instances that might disconfirm or challenge the researcher’s expectations or emergent findings” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 163). This is the basis of negative case analysis. All findings from the current study, regardless of alignment with the emergent themes, were reported and discussed.

Referential adequacy. Referential adequacy refers to recording the data collection so that others may use it to critique at a later date. This researcher audio recorded all interviews to satisfy this concept of credibility. All records related to this study will be stored by this researcher in a secure location indefinitely.

Member checks. Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to member checking as “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). During this process, participants are encouraged to review transcribed interviews and the researcher’s interpretations of the data. During the focus group interviews, the thematic labels identified by the researcher based on the invariant constituents were shared with, and discussed, among the focus group participants. This

prevented researcher bias from influencing the findings of the study. The participants corroborated this researcher's identified thematic labels.

Unfortunately, Couple 3 could not attend their focus groups, and the researcher was not notified ahead of time, and therefore, was unable to reschedule the event. However, to satisfy the requirement of member checking with this couple, this researcher provided copies of their interview transcripts through email for their review. This option was offered to the other participants as well, but all declined.

Transferability

Transferability refers to “how well the study has made it possible for readers to decide whether similar processes will be at work in their own settings” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 164). In other words, it refers to the likelihood that the essence of the phenomenon being explored will be similar across settings. This is done through detailing the phenomenon through a thick description of the participants' experiences that might allow others to research for similarities in other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the subsequent chapter, this researcher elaborates and uses detailed descriptions in describing the essence of the phenomenon from the current study.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research is the equivalent of reliability in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Dependability measures how well the processes and procedures used in data collection can be tracked (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In the current study, this was accomplished with inclusion of a management plan table (See Table 1) that tracks the collection of the data, and by maintaining all raw data, analysis information, and process notes as part of an audit trail.

| Table 1 <i>Data Management Plan</i> | |
|--|--|
| Date | Event |
| 3/10/2017 | Received IRB approval |
| 3/10/2017 | Emailed participant request letter |
| 3/10/2017 – 3/13/2017 | Identified participants, scheduled interview dates/times |
| 3/26/2017 | Interviewed Student 1, Spouse 1 |
| 3/28/2017 | Interviewed Student 2 |
| 3/31/2017 | Interviewed Student 3, Spouse 3 |
| 4/1/2017 | Interviewed Spouse 2 |
| 4/8/2017 | Interviewed Student 4, Spouse 4 |
| 5/15/2017 – 5/31/2017 | Collected participants' critical incident journals |
| 6/9/2017 | Conducted focus groups for students, non-student spouses |

Reciprocity

The concept of reciprocity refers to the give and take of social interactions (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001). In qualitative research, both the researcher and the participants contribute something to the relationship that the other desires (Trainor & Bouchard, 2013). While research relationships may not be completely reciprocal, it is the ethical duty of the

qualitative researcher to consider what they take from the research participants, as well as what they can give in return (Given, 2008).

This researcher was aware that, in the current study, participants would be asked to divulge feelings about the CES program, their spouses, and the status of their marital relationships. While some risk was potentially involved through the exploration of personal subject matter, these opportunities may have allowed the participants to put thought into these topics in ways they may not have done previously, therefore, benefitting them through the development of new insight and self-awareness. This researcher also sought additional means to contribute to the reciprocity of the relationships with the participants. Harrison, MacGibbon and Morton (2001) connected reciprocity with the tenants of trustworthiness and suggested allowing participants to examine the researcher's notes as a way of reciprocating within the relationships. This researcher practiced this by, as previously mentioned, offering transcriptions of their respective interviews to the participants. Furthermore, this researcher chose to provide compensation for the participants through food and gift cards. During the evening of the focus groups, this researcher purchased pizza for the participants and their children, and allowed time for socialization between the families involved. Each couple also received a \$25 gift card to a restaurant for their participation.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the research methodology for the current study. It included a justification for using a qualitative methodology, and more specifically, provided the rationale for choosing a phenomenological approach. After a brief description of the phenomenological research method, the chapter introduced the conceptual framework that, in part, guided the formation of interview questions and the interpretation of the data. The chapter also provided

details of the research design, including a description of the participants, data collection methods, issues related to trustworthiness, and reciprocity considerations.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students in Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) programs and their non-student spouses. This researcher believed that gaining a better understanding of this phenomenon would assist prospective students and their spouses in the decision-making process for choosing doctoral study, help guide current students and their spouses as they navigate their programs, and provide counselor education programs with information to better support their married students.

This chapter presents the findings of this study obtained through semi-structured individual interviews of the eight participants, 6 weeks of critical incident journals, and separate focus groups for the students and their non-student spouses. All individual interviews, as well as the focus group interviews, were recorded and transcribed by this researcher. The research question, along with the two sub-questions, are reviewed below. In order to begin the process of addressing the research questions, the findings from this study are presented initially from an individual perspective of students and non-student spouses, then progress to a conceptualization of the participants in terms of married couples rather than individuals. Composite descriptions also group the participants as students and non-student spouses.

Moustakas (1994) suggested that the themes identified through the process of Phenomenological Reduction (known as horizons or invariant constituents) be clustered into thematic labels. Through this process, the thematic labels of the current study were established. These labels for both individual participants and couples are introduced in this chapter. Detailed demographic participant data is also included. The remainder of the chapter contains individual textural descriptions for each participant and each couple, as well as composite textural descriptions that describe and summarize the experience for the doctoral students, their non-

student spouses, and the couples, respectively. The composite textural descriptions for all three groups include additional thematic labels as well. While the establishment of additional labels in composite textural descriptions is not an element of Moustakas' approach, this researcher believed these supplemental thematic labels helped organize the data in a more effective manner and steer the data toward answering the study's research question and sub-questions. The chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

Research Questions

The following research question was addressed:

1. What is the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students in CES programs and their non-student spouses?

In order to answer the research question, the following research sub-questions were also addressed:

1. What is the individual lived experience of married male doctoral students in CES programs?
2. What is the individual lived experience of the non-student spouses of married male doctoral students in CES programs?

Participant Data

All student participants were at least in their second year of the program. All participants identified as White/Caucasian. The shortest length of marriage for the couples involved in the study was 3 years, while the longest was between 10-11 years. All four couples in the study had at least one child, with two couples having their first child while in the doctoral program. The income among the four couples ranged from \$20,000 – \$35,000 to over \$100,000 annually. Lastly, two couples relocated for the doctoral program, while the other two were already

established locally. Table 2 below summarizes the participants' demographic information based on the demographic information forms they completed.

Table 2

Participant Demographic Matrix

| | Participant Code | Gender | Age | Years in Program | Ethnicity/Race | Years Married | Length of Relationship (Years married & dating combined) | Number of Children | Household Income | Relocation for the Program |
|----------|------------------|--------|-------|------------------|-----------------|---------------|--|--------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| Couple 1 | Student 1 | M | 36-40 | 2 | White/Caucasian | 8.5 | 10.5 | 2 | 50-75k | Yes |
| | Spouse 1 | F | 31-35 | n/a | White/Caucasian | 8.5 | 10 | 2 | 50-75k | Yes |
| Couple 2 | Student 2 | M | 36-40 | 1.5 | White/Caucasian | 11 | 14 | 1 | 20-35k | Yes |
| | Spouse 2 | F | 31-35 | n/a | White/Caucasian | 10 | 14 | 1 | 20-35k | Yes |
| Couple 3 | Student 3 | M | 25-30 | 1.5 | White/Caucasian | 3 | 4 | 1 | 35-50k | No |
| | Spouse 3 | F | 25-30 | n/a | White/Caucasian | 3.5 | 4 | 1 | 35-50k | No |
| Couple 4 | Student 4 | M | 36-40 | 4 | White/Caucasian | 6 | 7 | 1 | 100k+ | No |
| | Spouse 4 | F | 41-45 | n/a | White/Caucasian | 6 | 7 | 1 | 100k+ | No |

Couple 1

Couple 1 has been married for over 8 years and has been together over 10 years. At the time of data collection, Student 1 was finishing his second year of the CES doctoral program. In addition to being a full-time student, Student 1 holds a counseling graduate assistantship position on campus. This position requires a 20-hour commitment per week. In order for Student 1 to enroll in the doctoral program, the couple had to relocate from a neighboring state. This led to the need for Spouse 1 to find new employment. After initially working at a medical office after the transition, Spouse 1 is currently employed as a teacher's aide at an elementary school. The couple have a daughter and son, ages 5 and 2, respectively.

Couple 2

Couple 2 has been married over 10 years and dated for approximately 4 years prior to that. At the time of data collection, Student 2 was in his second year as part of the CES doctoral program. The couple relocated to Arkansas for the program, which caused Spouse 2 to find new

employment. Before moving, Spouse 2 owned and operated a mobile dog grooming business. She currently works in a medical office full-time. Student 2 is unemployed and focuses all his attention on school. The couple has a 3-year old daughter and has decided to have another baby in the near future.

Couple 3

At the time of data collection, Couple 3 had been married for approximately 3 years and dated for 1 year prior to marrying. Both Student 3 and Spouse 3 are from the region, and therefore, did not have to relocate for the program. The couple met while enrolled in the same graduate program at another university, where they received Master's degrees in Marriage and Family Therapy. Student 3 works part-time as a marriage and family therapist and teaches in an adjunct role at another university, in addition to being a full-time student. Spouse 3 also works part-time as a therapist. The couple welcomed a son, their first child, a little more than 1 year ago, after Student 3 matriculated into the program.

Couple 4

Couple 4 had been married for 6 years, at the time of data collection, and together for 7 years in total. While not native to the area, the couple has lived locally for several years, so they did not have to relocate for the program. Student 4 is finishing his fourth year in the CES doctoral program, and recently completed his coursework and comprehensive exam, making him a doctoral candidate. Student 4 has a full-time position as a clinical director with a private practice and also has a full caseload of clients.

The couple met in graduate school while enrolled in the same graduate program in Marriage and Family Therapy. Spouse 4 works as an administrator for the same private practice

and maintains a small life coaching practice as well. The couple has one daughter who recently turned 1-year old.

Thematic Labels for Individuals

During the process of Phenomenological Reduction, this researcher identified five thematic labels under which the participants' invariant constituents were organized. Using the conceptual framework as a reference point, the labels vary in focus, ranging from each participant's general impression of the doctoral program to specific perceived program-related benefits and challenges they encounter in their marriages.

Table 3 below includes the complete list of thematic labels for individual participants. The labels will be discussed in detail in this chapter.

Table 3

Thematic Labels for Individual Participants

-
- | | |
|--|--|
| • General impressions | • Program-related challenges of marriage |
| • Personal and professional changes | • Roles and responsibilities |
| • Program-related benefits of marriage | ○ Gender considerations |

Textural Descriptions

After Epoche, through which researcher bias is minimized by bracketing the phenomenon in question, and horizontalization, that produces the invariant constituents organized by thematic labels, the final step of Phenomenological Reduction is the construction of a textural description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Narrowed down from the invariant constituents, or horizons, taken from the data, textural descriptions aim to capture the “what” behind the phenomenon itself. Textural descriptions “include verbatim examples from the transcribed interview” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

Individual Textural Descriptions

Through the process of Phenomenological Reduction, invariant constituents are established and considered themes in their own rite, and for the sake of organization, are clustered under thematic labels. Textural descriptions are then composed using the invariant constituents and thematic labels as a guide. The following textural descriptions are arranged individually by student and spouse for each couple, and they are organized by the thematic labels. In addition to excerpts taken from the individual interviews, the textural descriptions also include participants' quotes from their critical incident journals and respective focus group. The descriptions begin with a discussion of their general impressions of the doctoral program. Asking generally about their experience of the program allowed the researcher to increase his awareness of the aspects of doctoral study while married that each participant found to be relevant. This introductory question also played a role in dictating the line of questioning for the duration of the interviews. The items discussed by the individuals when discussing their general impressions of the program were met with follow-up and more in-depth questioning.

Lastly, a general inquiry into the participants' experience of the program at the University of Arkansas aided the researcher in determining transferability of the phenomenon, or what aspects of the shared lived experience of doctoral students and their non-student spouses can be generalized to other CES programs, as opposed to being a function of the CES program at the University of Arkansas. Statements made by the participants that suggested specific factors related to the University of Arkansas CES program were influential in their feelings may not apply to the experiences of those at other institutions. However, some statements are broader in nature, thus, appearing to reflect participants' viewpoints that may be more transferable to doctoral students and their non-student spouses in other programs.

Couple 1: Student 1

Student 1's general impressions of the program is followed by descriptions of program-related benefits and challenges of marriage, including benefits and challenges unique to being students in the counseling field, as seen from the individual perspective. Next, is a discussion of personal and professional changes and individual roles, including any gender-specific considerations that may be a factor. A data summary table (Table 4) is included to correspond with Student 1's data.

General impressions. The general impressions of the doctoral program for Student 1 has been positive. "So far, I've really enjoyed the program...I enjoy the people I'm in the program with, which is really nice." Student 1 has a graduate assistantship which has helped him network with others, but more importantly, is what makes a pursuit of a doctoral degree possible from a financial standpoint. Student 1 believes the academic workload of the program has been "doable." His favorite aspects of the program, though, lay elsewhere. "I'm a clinical guy, so the best parts of the program are when I get to do supervision or teach class, or see clients. Things like that. I'm really enjoying the research side of things too – the qualitative side." Despite the overall positive experience, Student 1 also has frustration when it comes to his own standing within the program compared to his peers. "I get frustrated with some of the level of the people in the program sometimes," meaning some of his peers lack the qualifications to be a successful doctoral student in his opinion.

Personal and professional changes. Because Student 1 entered the doctoral program directly after receiving his master's degree, he has difficulty attributing personal changes to the doctoral program versus his master's program. "It's been more of a continual growth pattern." Student 1 does admit, however, to becoming a more well-rounded person as a consequence of

the doctoral program, and as a result, his “self-esteem continues to grow.” Professionally-speaking, Student 1 credits the doctoral program for gains in his research, supervision, and clinical skills. He stated:

Definitely my ability to do research, my ability to think in that manner, to do qualitative research. That’s something that’s grown exponentially. Supervision as well. That’s not something you touch on in a master’s program. I think even my ability to work within theory...is just continuing to grow because the more you do it – I’m seeing 10 to 12 clients a week – the better you get at it. (Student 1, individual interview)

Program-related benefits of marriage. Student 1 points to the support he receives from his wife as the main benefit of being married while in the CES doctoral program. This support comes in many forms, including financial and emotional. Student 1 refers to his wife as “a partner in crime,” and in times when he experiences program-related frustrations, she is able to validate his feelings and makes him feel “supported and heard.” In regards to financial support, Student 1’s wife is employed full-time and also manages the family’s budget.

Program-related challenges of marriage. The reported challenges for Student 1 mostly involve issues with time management. While at home, he does not do homework while his children are awake, nor does he do any school-related work on the weekends. He also does his best to carve out time for just him and his wife, once the children are asleep, at least 1 week night per week. He shared that, “Balancing all of that is very, very difficult.” As an avid runner, Student 1 must also find time to incorporate exercise and other wellness practices into his routine. With all his responsibilities, Student 1 has limited time for socialization. This alienation was reflected when he stated, “I don’t spend time with anyone. I don’t get time with friends. It just doesn’t happen. So that’s a difficult thing.” On the rare occasion when he does socialize, Student 1 feels guilty as a result, and it can even cause some strain between him and his wife if she has to put the children to bed on her own.

Roles and responsibilities. Between school work, teaching assignments, supervision, and clinical work as part of his graduate assistantship, Student 1 has several roles he must manage. These have to be balanced with his roles at home of father and husband, which is not an easy task. Student 1 stated, “It’s a giant juggling act.” It is important for Student 1 to make his family his first priority, so he makes the effort to schedule his time accordingly. In addition to not doing homework during the weekends or in the evenings prior to his children going to sleep, Student 1 also makes sure he attends important events that his children or wife have scheduled. He reported, “At every function they have, every party or anything, I carve it out and make sure I’m there. It’s important that I’m there. I try to carve out as much time as I can with them.”

Student 1 works toward mindfulness and being focused on the present, which helps him adjust to whatever role he is in at the time. “Wherever I’m at, that’s where I’m at. I’m a very present-minded person. Most of the time that works out really well for me, because I’m able to focus on where I’m at.” The downside to this, according to Student 1, is that he can be forgetful of his other responsibilities, especially during periods of high stress. Student 1 mentioned:

Sometimes I forget about things that are coming up, or things I need to be aware of or prepare for, and things like that. I’m generally a pretty low stress person, but when stress does hit, it makes it a little tougher to be present-minded. Things start to get a little foggy, and I have to go back and wonder if I’ve missed something. (Student 1, individual interview)

While it may be challenging to find a balance between his roles and the responsibilities that come with them, Student 1 believes the resulting structure is a contributing factor to his success as a student. He stated:

In a way, having kids has made this whole process a lot easier, but in a way it made it more difficult. Because I don’t have the same challenges I had, even in my bachelor’s, where I’d be out with friends three or four nights a week, and now I’m home and I’m with them. So it’s almost been easier because I have a schedule and boundaries now. So

it's kind of a weird balance of it is difficult, but I don't know if I would've even gotten my PhD if I didn't have kids. (Student 1, focus group)

Gender considerations. Student 1 strives to avoid a stereotypical male role in terms of household roles and responsibilities. He reported, "I don't want to be a stereotypical male; that's just not what I want to do." As a result, he takes on several household tasks that are seen more traditionally as female chores. Student 1 added, "I make sure I'm doing the dishes, the laundry, and cleaning the house." The kitchen is especially an area of focus for Student 1. "I'm a stickler about the kitchen. I don't like when my kitchen is dirty, so I'm usually the one who details the kitchen a couple times a week," he reported.

While the domestic chores may be somewhat balanced in terms of cooking and cleaning, Student 1 is still responsible for the traditional male responsibilities as well. He stated, "I have all the male responsibilities and extra on top! When it comes to outside or anything gross, if it includes trash or toilets, or anything that's cars – that falls under my, 'You do it.'"

Table 4

Data Summary Table: Student 1

| Thematic Label | Data |
|--|--|
| General impressions | <p>"So far, I've really enjoyed the program."</p> <p>"I'm a clinical guy, so the best parts of the program are when I get to do supervision or teach class, or see clients."</p> |
| Personal and professional changes | <p>"It's hard for me to tease out completely how much I grew during my master's program until now, because I went back to back, so it's been more of a continual growth pattern." (personal)</p> <p>"Definitely my ability to do research, my ability to think in that manner, to understand qualitative research. To understand how to do that, that's grown exponentially." (professional)</p> |
| Program-related benefits of marriage | <p>"I have a partner in crime. I have someone to...lean on a little bit."</p> |
| Program-related challenges of marriage | <p>"For me, it's always a time management thing."</p> <p>"Balancing all of that is very, very difficult."</p> |

Table 4 (Cont.)

| Thematic Label | Data |
|---|--|
| Roles and responsibilities Gender considerations | <p>“It’s just a giant juggling act.”</p> <p>“I really don’t like doing homework on the weekends. I actually don’t do this very often.”</p> <p>“It’s almost been easier because I have a schedule and boundaries now.”</p> <p>“I don’t want to be a stereotypical male; that’s just not what I want to do.” (gender considerations)</p> |

Couple 1: Spouse 1

Spouse 1’s general impressions of the program is followed by descriptions of program-related benefits and challenges of marriage, including benefits and challenges unique to being students in the counseling field, as seen from the individual perspective. Next, is a discussion of personal and professional changes and individual roles, including any gender-specific considerations that may be a factor. A data summary table (Table 5) is included to correspond with Spouse 1’s data.

General impressions. Spouse 1 shared in her husband’s sentiment that the doctoral program has been a good experience, but felt “it’s had its hiccups, for sure.” The positive aspects have to do with Student 1’s willingness to structure his time in a way that does not result in disruption in their family functioning. Spouse 1 stated:

I’d say for the most part it’s because of how he manages his time. That makes a big difference for our family. He’s made it a big priority to do homework and study in what I would say ‘his time,’ I guess, his office, or he’ll wait until the kids are in bed. He’ll make sure he’s not missing church, or soccer, or school plays. He’s very cognizant of that. It makes a big difference. (Spouse 1, individual interview)

The frustration for Spouse 1 comes in the form of feeling overworked due to added household responsibilities, feeling isolated, and on occasion, less important. Spouse 1 is employed, but feels the additional burden of managing the house often falls on her. She

reported, “I feel like everything else is on me...to keep the waters smooth.” This especially relates to the couple’s two children. “...as the spouse, you have got to be the most consistent thing in that entire house, because you can’t expect [children] to be consistent with anything they do in life, and that can be really tiring,” she added.

Spouse 1 feels isolated from the program due to very limited interaction between her and her husband’s classmates, colleagues, or professors. Despite her expressed desire to be more involved, doing so on a regular basis appears unfeasible due to time and childcare restraints.

Spouse 1 stated:

He’s talked about a few times getting together with people, which has been great, but we have kids, and that’s really hard. So historically how it goes is, we get together with people and it’s super fun for about three minutes, and then I’m taking care of my son who’s running outside...and my daughter, and then somebody hits somebody, and then I’m alone anyway. (Spouse 1, individual interview)

Not being able to afford a babysitter on a regular basis makes socializing without their children present a rare occurrence, so despite her claiming, “I don’t know people here, I really don’t,” Spouse 1 chooses to stay home and allow her husband to socialize on his own. She reported, “I want him to have that time to bond with those people that I want to get to know too, but it’s really hard to take that mom hat off.”

Spouse 1 attempted to connect with resources for spouses at the University of Arkansas when the couple first moved here, but her attempts were unsuccessful. She reported:

When we moved down here, I looked into the university spouse relocation program, or something. I remember I emailed them. What a great opportunity! We are relocating for my husband’s position, I don’t know a soul in Northwest Arkansas, I’ve got children, I’m taking a new job. I’d love to get a tour of campus or meet some people. I didn’t hear a word back. I emailed them about a month later because I was getting a little frustrated. I never heard back. (Spouse 1, focus group)

Personal and professional changes. Spouse 1 has experienced personal and professional changes since her husband began the doctoral program. On a personal level, Spouse

1 has found ways to become more supportive toward her husband. She stated, “I think for me, it’s made me a more supportive spouse in ways I didn’t realize I need to be.” The couple relocated for the doctoral program, resulting in Spouse 1 leaving her challenging, yet rewarding career as a support specialist for children at a hospital. She reported that leaving her career was “really, really, really difficult.” She found work as a medical assistant at a clinic, a position she had “no experience in whatsoever.” Spouse 1 struggled with her new job, as it had an effect on how she interacted with her family. She reported, “I wasn’t home enough, and I couldn’t be as supportive for [my husband] and the kids because I would come home dog tired, and really wasn’t here.”

Ultimately, Spouse 1 left the medical profession and took a position as a teacher’s aide at an elementary school. Despite a pay cut, Spouse 1 is happier in her new role due to a better work-life balance. She reported, “I do really love it! I’m home after school with my kids, and our family has completely changed since when I started.” More recently, Spouse 1 has begun an online master’s program to provide her with more career options. The interim changes, however, required selflessness and sacrifice. Spouse 1 stated:

It was hard for me sometimes to take a step back from myself and say I really need to support my husband in furthering his education and his career, which is a very good thing, because it will fulfill his life more, and it will help better our family, but it kind of meant putting my heartbeat on the back burner for a little while. (Spouse 1, individual interview)

Program-related benefits of marriage. Spouse 1 can sense her husband’s happiness resulting from being part of the doctoral program, which she sees as a benefit. She stated, “He’s so fulfilled, and it rolls over into your family when you’re loving that part of your life.” Spouse 1 also feels good when she can share in her husband’s proud moments, such as when he receives positive feedback from a professor. When compared to his master’s program, Spouse 1 also sees

a benefit in the fact that the doctoral program mostly takes place during the day. “Our family time is awesome,” she added.

Program-related challenges of marriage. For Spouse 1, the challenges include feeling left out from her husband’s program and not having the social support while he is in school. She reported:

I feel isolated from the school sometimes. Not that I need to be included. That’s not where I go, that’s not what I do. But it would be nice to have someone to have lunch with, or someone who just gets it, so we could just say, ‘This is driving me crazy!’
(Spouse 1, individual interview)

Spouse 1 also sees managing their family’s budget during times of financial uncertainty as a challenge. Spouse 1 stated:

At the beginning of each semester, my husband’s fellowship paycheck is considerably less due to course fees. He never knows until the last minute. I always feel like there has got to be some way for him to better anticipate this, but he insists there is not. I get so frustrated by this as I do all our family budgeting. I sometimes feel as though he doesn’t get the big impact this has on our family. (Spouse 1, critical incident journal)

She is also frustrated by her husband’s lack of attention when it comes to her needs, which she blames on the doctoral program. “I understand he’s stressed...and I try to be patient,” she reported, “but his forgetfulness regarding our conversations has been a running theme lately.”

Roles and responsibilities. Spouse 1’s main roles are mother and primary caretaker, wife, and employee. She is in charge of budgeting in the household and plans the family activities. Spouse 1 reported, “I keep a schedule for the entire family.”

Because Spouse 1 has her afternoons free due to her new job at a school, she normally will do all the grocery shopping and make dinner. She reported:

I make sure I have dinner ready for when he comes home, but that also helps me as a wife. I like having him come home and not be stressed, and say, we are ready to have a nice sit-down dinner together with a minimal amount of a 2-year old screaming. That feels good to me as a wife. (Spouse 1, individual interview)

Since her husband began the doctoral program, Spouse 1 has worked toward being more patient and understanding with her husband in terms of chores she would like him to do. She stated:

I try really hard not to be as nagging, because there are some things he used to do, and I just need to just let go because he is so busy, or I just need to learn how to do it. (Spouse 1, individual interview)

Gender considerations. In terms of household responsibilities, the couple chooses, in part, to divide chores based on strengths and preferences, rather than adhere to traditional sex roles for the majority of, but not all, tasks. There are some responsibilities, though, that Spouse 1 insists that her husband completes. Spouse 1 reported:

I really don't want to mow, and I don't take out the trash, and he gets on me because he says, 'This is not a guy's chore!' So yeah, there are some things I call 'dude stuff,' and I just won't do, which I'm sure is obnoxious to him. (Spouse 1, individual interview)

Table 5

Data Summary Table: Spouse 1

| Thematic Label | Data |
|--|--|
| General impressions | <p>"Overall, it's been a good experience honestly."</p> <p>"But it's had its hiccups, for sure."</p> |
| Personal and professional changes | <p>"I think for me it's made me a more supportive spouse in ways I didn't realize I needed to be." (personal)</p> <p>"I've had a lot of professional changes. That's been a big one for our family." (professional)</p> |
| Program-related benefits of marriage | <p>"He's so happy! He loves what he does...He's so fulfilled, and it rolls over into your family when you're loving that part of your life."</p> <p>"Since [the program] is in the daytime, our family time is awesome."</p> |
| Program-related challenges of marriage | <p>"You can kind of feel isolated. I feel isolated from the school sometimes."</p> <p>"I understand he's stressed...and I try to be patient, but his forgetfulness regarding our conversations has been a running theme lately."</p> |

Table 5 (Cont.)

| Thematic Label | Data |
|---|--|
| Roles and responsibilities Gender considerations | “I keep a schedule for the entire family.” “I don’t think anything has changed too much except for I try really hard not to be as naggy...because there are some things he used to do, and I just need to just let go because he is so busy, or I just need to learn how to do it.” “...there are some things I call ‘dude stuff,’ and I just won’t do, which I’m sure is obnoxious to him.” (gender considerations) |

Couple 2: Student 2

Student 2’s general impressions of the program is followed by descriptions of program-related benefits and challenges of marriage, including benefits and challenges unique to being students in the counseling field, as seen from the individual perspective. Next, is a discussion of personal and professional changes and individual roles, including any gender-specific considerations that may be a factor. A data summary table (Table 6) is included to correspond with Student 2’s data.

General impressions. Student 2 reported his individual experience of the doctoral program has been challenging. This is due to his perception of the faculty being intolerant of some of his personal views and how those might affect him as a future counselor educator. Student 2 reported, “I haven’t really felt like it’s a safe program for me.” Student 2 is currently on a remediation plan. In terms of his experience with his classmates, Student 2 has also found it difficult to mesh, and he sees them as simply having different opinions on things. Student 2 relocated for the doctoral program, and feels lonely much of the time. “I left all my friends and family to come here,” he added. “I don’t have anybody.” Student 2 has struggled to find acceptance among his professors and peers. This, in addition to the stress caused by being under

remediation, has taken its toll on Student 2. “On one hand I feel like I’ve just started, but on the other hand, I feel like I’m pretty burned out,” he stated.

Personal and professional changes. Student 2 has grown personally by addressing the impressions he gives off to others, which is a directive from his remediation plan. “I’ve been working on that growth stuff,” reported Student 2. “Just like, how I come across to people...and just realizing that some of the things I say might get taken in a way that I haven’t intended.” He’s also working on being more concise with his statements, which he feels can help him professionally as well. Other areas of professional growth include receiving the opportunities to co-instruct master’s-level courses. He stated, “One of the things that I’ve learned is how to prepare for a class and different ways to do a lecture.”

Program-related benefits of marriage. Student 2 recognizes that his wife’s support is paramount to his progress. He reported, “Emotional support, definitely. I don’t think I would’ve made it if it wasn’t for her support.” Emotional support is a main component, but it goes beyond that as well. “Financial support too,” he added. “She has a full-time job.” Student 2 has also seen benefits in terms of how he communicates at home as a result of some of the new concepts he has learned through his coursework, although he admits this applies more to how he communicates with his daughter than with his wife.

Program-related challenges of marriage. The main reported challenge of being married while in a doctoral program for Student 2 is a lack of time, for which he partially blames himself. He stated, “I think a portion of that has to do with my time management skills, so I can’t really blame school completely on that. I don’t manage my time as near as good as I could.” Student 2 recognized the time commitment required, however, to be successful in the program, and how much it pulls him away from his family. He reported:

This is PhD school, so it takes time. So when I go to school during the day, and then in the evening, I have to study or do work or whatever, so I'll go up to the Union maybe, or a couple other places, and I just get in the corner somewhere and just do work. And we have a 3-year old, so it's just difficult managing my school work, and even now with my internship, it's just a lot crazier. (Student 2, individual interview)

Student 2 acknowledged that his schedule places more of a burden on his wife. Recently, he has begun contemplating the toll his educational pursuits is taking on his family, and admitted purposely missing class as a result. Student 2 stated:

I was thinking, 'Hey, you know, I'm making straight A's in school, I can miss a day in class.' I didn't miss every class! So I just sent my professor an email saying I can't make it today, and I apologize. (Student 2, individual interview)

Roles and responsibilities. Student 2 spends a great deal of his extra time in class, studying, or at his internship site. When he is spending time with his family, he admitted to his mind being on school matters more often than not, which he finds troublesome. "I think about school a God-awful lot," he reported. "I'm hardly ever not thinking about school...I think I think about school more than I do my family. There's really rarely ever a moment when my thoughts aren't about school."

Around the home, Student 2 takes on very little in terms of household chores. He does take out the trash and will occasionally help clean the kitchen, but completes very few chores in comparison to his wife. If he does engage in household responsibilities, it is on the weekend, but he claimed that is his "prime time for studying too." Student 2 admitted to not having a set schedule to complete chores. He stated, "I don't really have a time slot cut out for housework. That's probably part of the problem!" He also attributed some of this imbalance of household tasks between him and his wife to his schedule and having to make a choice between one role and another. Student 2 reported:

I have a small window of time between whenever I get done with my internship and whenever I pick up my family, because on my internship days, I have the car. And I can

study during that gap, or I can conceivably go home and spend 45 minutes cleaning, but that's just not going to happen. (Student 2, individual interview)

Student 2 also has a limited role in caring for the couple's 3-year old daughter. He does aide in disciplining, but the day-to-day childcare duties fall primarily on his wife. He admitted, however, to wanting to spend more time with his daughter, which factored into the reason of him compromising his role as a student by choosing to skip class. "I've barely got time to spend with the baby a lot of times, and that really sucks," he stated. He also sees the presence of his daughter as a source of motivation to complete the program. "Without my daughter, I wouldn't have cared as much. I wouldn't be stressed out about the program, about me passing, about me graduating," added Student 2.

Gender considerations. Student 2 identified himself as being "real traditional." As a result, he subscribes to traditional gender roles within the household. In addition to his school schedule and his admitted mismanagement of time, his traditional views on the distribution of chores between him and his wife may play the most significant role in what chores he completes. Due to their current living situation, taxed schedules, and his wife's skill set, Student 2 has attempted to make adjustments to his way of thinking and behaviors. He stated:

I'm trying to get over my dislike of cleaning the dishes, and that's partly because I'm the man, she's the woman, that kind of thing. I mean, if the kitchen is nasty, it's got to be freaking cleaned. And the other thing is, we don't have a yard, so it's not like I can say I'm cutting the grass, because all we have to do is inside. So that's really screwing up my man universe! And she's really screwing up my man universe because she's very mechanically inclined. So really, that whole line between the man and the woman in a lot of ways is just shot to hell. (Student 2, individual interview)

As a male student, Student 2 feels one of his main functions in the marriage is to provide for his family, financially-speaking. Because he is currently a full-time student, and his wife serves in the primary earner role, he admitted to feeling shame. He is hopeful that once he graduates and is employed, that things will change. Student 2 reported:

One of the most important things is to provide for my family, whenever I get my career going. I want to be able to provide for my family so she won't have to work. I mean we might not have a lot of money if she doesn't work, but she doesn't have to. So I will feel a lot better then. It doesn't sit right with me at all...It's not that I have a problem with her working. If she wants to work, that's great. But I have a problem with me not providing for my family. (Student 2, individual interview)

Table 6

Data Summary Table: Student 2

| Thematic Label | Data |
|--|--|
| General impressions | <p>"I haven't really felt like it's a safe program for me."</p> <p>"I feel like every week a piece of my soul dies because of this program."</p> |
| Personal and professional changes | <p>"I've actually been working with [a professor] on a lot of that growth stuff, just like how I come across to people." (personal)</p> <p>"Teaching classes, I'm growing in that area." (professional)</p> |
| Program-related benefits of marriage | <p>"Emotional support, definitely. I don't think...I would've made it if it wasn't for [my wife] and having her support."</p> <p>"Really, financial support too."</p> |
| Program-related challenges of marriage | <p>"Time. Not as much time with my family as I could have otherwise."</p> <p>"And we have a 3-year old, and it's just difficult managing my school work, and even now with my internship, it's a lot crazier."</p> |
| Roles and responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender considerations | <p>"I think a God-awful lot about school. I'm hardly ever not thinking about school."</p> <p>"I do house stuff, if house stuff gets done, it's after the baby goes to sleep or on the weekends. The weekend is my prime time for studying too."</p> <p>"One of the most important things is to provide for my family, whenever I get my career going. I want to be able to provide for my family so she won't have to work." (gender considerations)</p> |

Couple 2: Spouse 2

Spouse 2's general impressions of the program is followed by descriptions of program-related benefits and challenges of marriage, including benefits and challenges unique to being students in the counseling field, as seen from the individual perspective. Next, is a discussion of personal and professional changes and individual roles, including any gender-specific

considerations that may be a factor. A data summary table (Table 7) is included to correspond with Spouse 2's data.

General impressions. Like her husband, Spouse 2 reported having a negative view of the doctoral program thus far. The program lacks the personal feel she was accustomed to at the school where her husband received his master's degree. "It's just a big monolith of a building," she stated. "In this place, I know where the first floor is!" Spouse 2 shares in her husband's frustrations regarding perceived intolerance on the part of faculty, but she also is frustrated with her husband's actions and is concerned about whether he will finish the program as a result of his remediation. She is also ashamed of compromising her own values for the sake of his advancement. She reported:

My feelings are fear and frustration, and a bit of resentment, that he would throw away our future rather than just say he doesn't believe something. I feel ashamed that I've been pressuring him to just conform, even though that goes against both our values and beliefs. I hate the program for putting us in this position...I feel like they are our enemy, threatening to kick him out of the program, leaving us with a tremendous amount of debt that we would probably not be able to pay back without the increase in income his degree will provide. (Spouse 2, critical incident journal)

Spouse 2 reported feeling helpless in her position, as well as very uncertain about their future.

"It's a very horrifying experience," she added. "It's very horrifying."

Personal and professional changes. Spouses 2 could not identify any personal changes as a result of the program, but she can quickly point out professional changes in terms of her own career. Spouse 2 is a former small business owner and is "an entrepreneur at heart." Since their daughter was born, and even more so since they relocated for the doctoral program, her career has been on hold. She has full-time employment at a medical office, but she does not see any opportunities for advancement. Spouse 2 reported, "I'm just kind of in a holding pattern because I know he's going to graduate sooner rather than later, and I feel it would be kind of pointless to

climb the ladder and then have to move.” She also does not see it as feasible to start her own company again. Spouse 2 stated:

I just feel the amount of time we’re guaranteed to be here, and the limited amount of time I have to put toward anything, I know there’s a way, but I guess I’m just not super motivated to try to grow anything in a place that I might not stay but for a short time period. (Spouse 2, individual interview)

Program-related benefits of marriage. Spouse 2 struggles to see the benefits of being married to someone in a CES doctoral program, other than perhaps when her husband’s classes are scheduled. “Him being in school gives him at least a little bit of a flexible schedule,” she stated. She also acknowledged that with her husband being in the mental health field, it can help with their communication, and how they communicate with their child.

Program-related challenges of marriage. Spouse 2 sees the biggest challenges as being related to finances, as well the pressure she feels to earn money for the family. She reported, “[It has been] financially challenging, for sure. We’ve acquired a lot of debt!” The fact that she is the main caretaker for their daughter and responsible for most household duties, in addition to working full-time, is also a challenge. She stated:

The program is pretty demanding, so I’m the only one working, which you know, means that I have to spend a lot of time away from home, which complicates the problem that I’m the only one really dealing with the house. (Spouse 2, individual interview)

Additionally, Couple 2 has expressed their desire to expand their family by having more children, but Spouse 2 feels conflicted over the timing of when to try to conceive. She reported:

I’m nervous about getting pregnant again right now when I’m the only one working. It’s also a fearful thing to me that I’ll be caring for an infant and a preschooler at the same time, and I’m afraid I’ll still be the one doing most of the housework and childcare activities. (Spouse 2, individual interview)

Roles and responsibilities. As stated, around the house, Spouse 2 takes on most of the responsibility. “I think pretty much everything having to do with the household is kind of on

me,” she reported. “He doesn’t know how to cook, and he doesn’t do pretty much any cleaning at all.” Spouse 2 also assumes most of the responsibility when it comes to the couple’s daughter. She stated, “This is going to sound really bad, but sometimes I feel like I’m a single mom, even though I’m married.” She also reported lacking faith in her husband to take care of their daughter or the house in her absence. Spouse 2 stated:

I feel like I can’t trust him to take care of things if I’m not around...Any time he’s been alone with her, or even just by himself, and I return, I always feel like I’m walking into a situation where I’m going to have to fix a bunch of stuff or clean up a big mess. So I guess I am always in a bad mood when I’m coming home to him and I do feel bad about that. I also feel like it’s a little justified. (Spouse 2, critical incident journal)

Gender considerations. Spouse 2 realizes that her marriage consists of traditional gender roles, which is something she accepts; however, working full-time makes this arrangement more challenging. She stated:

I think that, you know, gender roles, being the wife, in a lot of ways I’m expected to take care of the house and expected to handle most of the child rearing, and I don’t mind that, except that I’m also having to do the other side of it too with the breadwinning. And I know he has expressed to me that it upsets him that I’m in that situation, and he feels bad about it. And I kind of feel that way too because I don’t mind being in the traditional female role, but I can’t handle both of them at the same time. (Spouse 2, individual interview)

Spouse 2 acknowledged that her husband is busy due to school, but she wishes he could find time to help around the house a little more consistently. She reported, “I know he can’t do a whole lot in that area, but I do feel like it would be less challenging for me on a daily basis if there was a little more crossover and sharing of responsibilities.” She also questions if school is truly behind his inability to be more helpful. She stated, “I also think he sometimes uses school work as an excuse for not taking part in daily responsibilities.”

Table 7

Data Summary Table: Spouse 2

| Thematic Label | Data |
|--|---|
| General impressions | “I hate the program for putting us in this position...I feel like they are our enemy, threatening to kick him out of the program, leaving us with a tremendous amount of debt that we would probably not be able to pay back without the increase in income his degree will provide.” |
| Personal and professional changes | “Professionally, my life has kind of been on hold some, specifically since our child was born.” (professional) |
| Program-related benefits of marriage | <p>“I don’t know I’d necessarily say there are benefits to being married to a student!”</p> <p>“Him being in school gives him at least a little bit of a flexible schedule so he can be involved in the pregnancy and around more when the baby is small.”</p> |
| Program-related challenges of marriage | <p>“Financially, for sure. We’ve acquired quite a bit of debt!”</p> <p>“The program is pretty demanding, so I’m the only one working...which means that I have to spend a lot of time away from home, which complicates the problem that I’m the only one really dealing with home.”</p> |
| Roles and responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender considerations | <p>“I think a lot of pretty much everything having to do with the household is kind of on me.”</p> <p>“I feel like I can’t trust him to take care of things when I’m not around.”</p> <p>“...sometimes I feel like I’m a single mom, even though I’m married.”</p> <p>“...being the wife, in a lot of ways I’m expected to take care of the house and expected to handle most of the child rearing, and I don’t mind that, except that I’m also having to do the other side of it too with the breadwinning.” (gender considerations)</p> |

Couple 3: Student 3

Student 3’s general impressions of the program is followed by descriptions of program-related benefits and challenges of marriage, including benefits and challenges unique to being students in the counseling field, as seen from the individual perspective. Next, is a discussion of personal and professional changes and individual roles, including any gender-specific considerations that may be a factor. A data summary table (Table 8) is included to correspond with Student 3’s data.

General impressions. Student 3 described his individual experience of the doctoral program as being “different” than what he was used to during his master’s program. This is because the curriculum in his master’s program was faith-based. He also comes from a Marriage and Family program that emphasized family systems. He reported, “Graduate school was very systemic oriented, and this is very linear oriented.” This has frustrated Student 3 because he feels that going from a systemic to linear way of thinking is “going back a step.” He is motivated to move through the program quickly, so he is also frustrated by when classes are offered. Student 3 stated:

It’s kind of limited. So it’s like, I can’t take this, so that means I have to wait to take this, and I’m taking a heavy course load overall because of the stats certificate. It’s difficult to say if something should be offered every semester, but it’d be nice if classes were offered at least once a year. (Student 3, individual interview)

Conversely, Student 3 enjoys being able to challenge himself in the program by pursuing a certificate in statistics, which goes beyond the program’s requirements. He reported also enjoys the writing and research components of the program. As a first-generation college student, Student 3 is pleased with his accomplishments thus far. “I’m the first one in my family to go to college, and I already have a master’s degree, so I’m setting the bar kind of high,” he stated. “I’m setting a good example.”

Personal and professional changes. Student 3 believes the doctoral program has helped him become a more patient person. This includes being more patient with the process of the program, as well as patience with himself and others. He also is aware of improvements he has made with his supervision and teaching skills, and he feels he is “honing in” and “fine tuning” where he would like to be in terms of his professional skills development, especially as it pertains to his teaching abilities.

Program-related benefits of marriage. Student 3 reported feeling grateful for the support from his wife. He reported seeing that as a benefit of being married while in the doctoral program. He appreciates “always having someone to encourage you throughout the process.”

Program-related challenges of marriage. Student 3 cited time as the biggest challenge to being married while in the program. He reported:

If you’re single, your time commitment changes, and when you’re dating it changes, and when you’re married it changes, and when you have a kid it definitely changes. And now being in the program, it’s like having a second spouse because it is a very big-time commitment too. (Student 3, individual interview)

Student 3 also notices a breakdown of communication at times between him and his wife that is caused by the doctoral program and their schedules. He stated:

I needed to leave for a supervision session, and my wife was upset at the time I needed to go. She herself was about to go see a client, and we were trying to figure out who was going to watch our son during the hour. We had a classic case of double booked because of our lack of communication the day before. It was frustrating that we had not communicated the day prior about our schedules, but I was thankful for the help from my in-laws. I think there were more contributing factors that deviated us from communicating, such as stress. It was a good reality check that we needed to communicate more about our schedules. (Student 3, critical incident journal)

Lastly, Student 3 admitted to self-care being an issue during times of program-related stress. He stated:

Finals were approaching, and my stress level was pretty high. Throughout the week, I was more short in my comments, and it clearly impacted our conversations and interactions. I was not able to have time for self-care, or really be intentional with our time together given the stress I was carrying. Looking back, I wish I would’ve allowed time for self-care and to spend more time with my spouse, but at the same time, finals took every bit of that week that I was not at work or in class. It was a tough situation to manage. My spouse felt more guarded throughout the week. (Student 3, critical incident journal)

Roles and responsibilities. Student 3 uses a “very detailed calendar” to manage his responsibilities and divides his task by days of the week. He stated, “...like this day, I’m committing to just do this, this, and this. And homework, I do a little bit each day.” This is a

process that takes time for him and his wife to adjust to, and changes each semester. “Really, it’s each semester where we have to figure out what my new routine is, and then a couple weeks in we say, ‘Okay, we got it,’” he added.

Despite his roles as student, doctoral supervisor, and adjunct instructor at another university, Student 3 also makes sure he has time to devote to his wife and their child. “...also making sure there is time for just she and I to spend together,” he stated. “Perhaps just watching Netflix...above all, her and my son are my first priority.” Student 3 chooses to sacrifice, or delay, his student-related tasks to ensure he can accomplish this. He reported:

So knowing that my time with [my wife] is very important, I need to be able to mark out some time for her, and be like, ‘Okay, this is the time for homework or studying, this is the time I reserve just for us, even if I’m not done.’ And then whenever she goes to bed, then I’ll stay up until 1 or 2 and finish what I’m doing. (Student 3, individual interview)

This arrangement of Student 3 doing his homework late at night has its benefits, especially in terms of meeting the needs of the couple’s son. He stated:

So she’ll feed him, and then when he’s done burping, I’ll go in and rock him to sleep and let her rest. And when he goes to sleep, I’ll do what I need to while they’re asleep, and he has a monitor, so if he wakes up, I’ll go change him, and then hand him over to her so she can feed him. It’s a process. (Student 3, individual interview)

It is a process that works for the couple, with few exceptions. For Student 3, “The only time it becomes more consuming,” he stated, “is when it comes time for a midterm or a test.

Papers, not so much, projects aren’t so much an issue.”

Gender considerations. Student 3 attempts to split household responsibilities as best as possible, although the couple has few set chores. Student 3 reported:

We don’t have a checklist or anything, it’s more like we just do it. I’ll sweep or do the dishes, clean the bathrooms. She cooks more now, whereas, I had been the cook, and she the baker. But she’s starting to take on more of the cooking role, slowly but surely. I do the laundry too, which is stereotypical of a female to do. I’m not allowed to fold the clothes, though. I’m terrible at folding. I’ll clean the counters, the floors. (Student 3, individual interview)

He does not subscribe to traditional gender roles within their marriage, though as a male, he understands “that there is a privilege.” While his spouse was completing her master’s degree, Student 3 worked more hours, despite also being in school. As a doctoral student, Student 3’s work hours have significantly declined. He views it as a fluid situation. “For me and my family system, there’s an opportunity for both to provide if we want or stay at home.”

Table 8

Data Summary Table: Student 3

| Thematic Label | Data |
|--|---|
| General impressions | <p>“It’s different, mostly just coming from a faith-integrated background in undergrad, same for grad.”</p> <p>“Getting to write. I like to write. I like to research. I like math. I like to challenge myself.”</p> |
| Personal and professional changes | <p>“For me personally, the personal growth comes back to professional development, which is kind of a given.” (personal and professional)</p> |
| Program-related benefits of marriage | <p>“I guess the benefits are probably just always having someone to encourage you throughout the process.”</p> |
| Program-related challenges of marriage | <p>“The immediate thing that comes to mind is time.”</p> <p>“Being in the program, it’s like having a second spouse, because it is a very big time commitment too.”</p> |
| Roles and responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender considerations | <p>“[I use] a very detailed calendar. So taking class, doing supervision for master’s students, teaching...and then counseling for work. So really, just balancing.”</p> <p>“And then, above all, her and [my son], making sure they are my first priority.”</p> <p>“We don’t have a checklist or anything, it’s more like we just do it. Like I’ll sweep or do the dishes, clean the bathrooms...” (gender considerations)</p> |

Couple 3: Spouse 3

Spouse 3’s general impressions of the program is followed by descriptions of program-related benefits and challenges of marriage, including benefits and challenges unique to being students in the counseling field, as seen from the individual perspective. Next, is a discussion of

personal and professional changes and individual roles, including any gender-specific considerations that may be a factor. A data summary table (Table 9) is included to correspond with Spouse 3's data.

General impressions. Spouse 3 classified her individual experience of the program as positive, in the sense that she is witnessing her husband pursue his goals, but she admitted to struggling initially with his transition into the program. In the nearly 2-year period since her husband began the doctoral program, she has moved from a place of “bitterness and frustration” to one of understanding and acceptance. While aspects of the doctoral program are difficult to adjust to, Spouse 3 has made changes to her mindset in how she views the situation overall. She reported, “I guess I don’t anticipate any longer that there will be a time without challenges. I think at the beginning I was frustrated because it was challenging, and now, I know it’s part of it.” In the beginning, “[the doctoral program] was such an easy target” where she could lay blame.

Couple 3 met while in the same master’s program, and Spouse 3 felt she had some sense of what the doctoral program would be like because of that, although she acknowledged she was mistaken. “I think I anticipated the same pace with school, and it’s a radically different pace of life, she stated.” She also had difficulty with admitting to others that she was struggling with the transition. Spouse 3 added:

For some reason, I didn’t want to admit during the first year that this is hard for us, and we’re struggling. I don’t know if it was pride, or what it was for me, but I wouldn’t look at people that I love [and ask] for support. (Spouse 3, individual interview)

Personal and professional changes. Spouse 3 has experienced both personal and professional changes since her husband began the doctoral program. She has learned to be more flexible and anticipate changes. She reported, “I’ve become more flexible in just that every day,

nothing is going to look the same for us.” This mostly has to do with her husband’s school schedule, which not only changes each semester, but often, in the middle of the semesters as well. “Stuff can change with his supervisees and their schedules, stuff can change with how much time he needs to commit to a certain course, she stated.” Along with this flexibility comes an increased ability “to focus on supporting and encouraging him” instead of being more ambitious in the pursuit of her own professional aspirations. Spouse 3 reported she has also needed to adjust her work hours and the number of clients whom she sees, although she stated this is more a function of having a child than anything else.

Program-related benefits of marriage. Spouse 3 sees the fact that her husband is pursuing a goal as a benefit. She reported:

Him getting to pursue something that he very much feels called to, that he’s very passionate about. That’s a benefit for me because it’s exciting for me to get to see him kind of do what he’s always wanted to do. I like thinking that our son will know that dad had a dream, and dad accomplished it. I love that. (Spouse 3, individual interview)

From a practical standpoint, Spouse 3 also appreciates the benefits of the academic calendar.

She reported:

As stressful as his schedule can be, he got a spring break, which isn’t normal. He got a full week. He got to hang out with our son for a week. And if he were in a normal 8 to 5 working full time, he wouldn’t have been able to do that. (Spouse 3, individual interview)

Spouse 3 also recognized the benefits of her husband being in the counseling field. She added, “He’s an incredible listener. I think having a therapeutic environment in our home is helpful always.”

Program-related challenges of marriage. For Spouse 3, the reported challenges involve the process of accepting change into their lives, both school and family-related, and personally, putting her own goals and career on hold to support her husband’s. She stated:

I would say that was really hard at the beginning, having to push pause on some things I was really passionate about for the next 3 to 5 years. I've had to do a lot of work on that. That's been the biggest challenge for me, selfishly, kind of agreeing to change my vision to 'this is our journey.' I'm still letting go of some selfish pieces, but I would say I'm in a better place than I was. (Spouse 3, individual interview)

The timing of Student 3's desire to pursue his doctorate was also a challenge for Spouse 3. She stated:

He came to me right after grad school and said, 'I'm ready to start. I'm filling out applications.' In my brain, I thought it was for him, maybe 4 or 5 years down the road, and he felt really strongly in that, 'I need to start now, I want to be teaching, and I want to be in the classroom.' And I was like, 'Hold on, when did we decide this?' So that was hard, and I remember one time when he said to me, 'I've always wanted to do this. This goal was before you, and I'm just trying to continue into this.' And in my brain, I was like, 'Okay, but then I happened! And we're together now, so how does that change things?' (Spouse 3, individual interview)

Because Couple 3 both have careers in mental health, Spouse 3 has also struggled with the notion that they are competing for professional advancement and sometimes feels "left behind," professionally-speaking. Spouse 3 reported:

I think because we work in the same field, I have to really remind myself that I never really wanted to do exactly the same thing as him, so that's hard when you're both counselors and you have similar letters by your name. People will naturally assume that I will want to do the same thing, so people will ask, 'When are you getting your PhD?' And I have to tell myself it was never a competition, and I never really wanted a PhD. (Spouse 3, individual interview)

During the first year of Student 3's program, the couple also welcomed their first child, which has added to the challenges, especially for Spouse 3. "It's been difficult, I would say broadly, in that we're young, and we're starting our careers, starting our family – I got pregnant within the first year," she stated. That's been, I would say, stressful."

Roles and responsibilities. Spouse 3 agrees that her husband is "very good around the house," but also feels like she takes "the brunt of more of the daily stuff," and also mentions the

floors and laundry as chores she completes. Spouse 3 is accepting of her responsibilities, though, especially considering their situation. She reported:

It makes more sense to me because he's gone all the time, but I would say that because he's working on his PhD, he doesn't do as much. He does what he can, but when he can is far less often than if he was in a real, structured, normal job. When we were in grad school, we'd split 50-50 because our lives looked similar. I would say that when I was working a job and a half and was pregnant, and he still couldn't do as much because he was in his PhD, I probably wasn't always the happiest pregnant woman. (Spouse 3, individual interview)

She also reported becoming frustrated with her husband's other responsibilities when it conflicts with getting the needs of their family met. She stated, "He'll tell me he's in class or at a coffee shop studying, and I'll be like, 'Hey, we need diapers!' I'm at work, and this is what our baby needs.

Gender considerations. Despite her general acceptance of the state of household chores, Spouse 3 can still struggle with her perceived lack of equity, partially which she feels may be related to traditional gender roles at times. What is most important to her, though, is her husband's effort to contribute. Spouse 3 reported:

I would say there have been times because of him doing his PhD, where I'm like, 'I'm doing all the housework,' and it feels like at times I am doing this all because I'm the wife and mom, and that doesn't feel fair. But I think as long as the effort is there. I think if he didn't show the effort, that would really be hard for me. But he shows effort. He's always been that way, PhD or not. He's really great, other than the folding laundry thing! (Spouse 3, individual interview)

Table 9

Data Summary Table: Spouse 3

| Thematic Label | Data |
|---|--|
| General impressions | <p>“It’s been difficult I would say broadly, in that we’re young, we’re starting our careers, starting our family. I got pregnant within the first year and a half. That’s been, I would say, stressful.”</p> |
| Personal and professional changes | <p>“I think by the Lord’s grace, I’ve become more flexible at just in every day that nothing is going to look the same for us.” (personal)</p> <p>“So I think I’ve grown in that space, and just being able to focus on supporting and encouraging him.” (personal)</p> |
| Program-related benefits of marriage | <p>“...him getting to pursue something that he very much feels called to...that’s a benefit for me because it’s exciting for me to get to see him kind of do what he’s always wanted to do.”</p> <p>“I like thinking that our son will know that dad had a dream and dad accomplished it. I love that.”</p> |
| Program-related challenges of marriage | <p>“I would say it’s been tricky at first in that I kind of feel like I’m put on hold, like a lot of my goals professionally and personally, because we – I feel like we are pursuing this for him.”</p> <p>“So that’s been the biggest challenge for me, selfishly, kind of agreeing to change my vision to, ‘This is our journey,’ and it’s not just his.”</p> |
| <p>Roles and responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender considerations | <p>“I would say, and I preface this by saying he’s very good around the house...I feel like he does probably more than some people do, he just doesn’t have as much time.”</p> <p>“Household wise, I take the brunt of more of the daily stuff...and just logistical things around the home fall more on me.”</p> <p>“But that makes sense to me because he’s gone all the time...he does what he can.”</p> <p>“...it feels like at times I am doing this all because I’m the wife and mom, and that doesn’t feel fair.” (gender considerations)</p> |

Couple 4: Student 4

Student 4’s general impressions of the program is followed by descriptions of program-related benefits and challenges of marriage, including benefits and challenges unique to being students in the counseling field, as seen from the individual perspective. Next, is a discussion of personal and professional changes and individual roles, including any gender-specific

considerations that may be a factor. A data summary table (Table 10) is included to correspond with Student 4's data.

General impressions. Student 4 reported he feels his overall experience of the doctoral program has been positive. He stated, "It's been a good experience...It hasn't been that bad. I've enjoyed it." However, because he is not on campus as much as other students in the program due to a full-time job and other professional commitments, and is not "immersed in the culture" of school, he can also feel disconnected at times, which has resulted in feelings of frustration due a perceived lack of direction. Student 4 reported:

There's no direction if you're not there all the time. If you're not there full-time, if you're not a graduate assistant or engaged with something on campus, you really have to ask and ask and ask, and you have to make time when professors are available. (Student 4, individual interview)

This was especially the case when Student 4 began the program, due in part to a change in faculty. He added:

I felt like it was pretty ambiguous when I got here, maybe because people were coming and going...My advisor switched three times, so that's been hard too. I don't know, it's the nature of it though, and maybe that's part of them saying, 'Okay, you go do this thing,' which is fine with me too. (Student 4, individual interview)

While Student 4 reported he does not find the rigor of the coursework to be overwhelming, he stated he does feel the quantity of the work is catching up to him at this point as he begins to focus on his dissertation. "This is a lot of work," he reported. "I really want to be done. I'm done with coursework and internship, so I'm feeling some relief about the process, but I'm also feeling dissertation pressure."

Student 4 believes he has benefitted from the program through developing his academic writing skills, including paying more attention to the clarity of his work. He stated, "I find myself rereading things now and saying, 'Okay, wait. What is the thought I'm trying to give

somebody, and how do I do it best?’ So that’s been useful. I’ve enjoyed that.” Student 4 believes the best part of the doctoral program, though, has been “continuing to be challenged and continuing to have new thoughts” about counseling, teaching, and supervision.

Personal and professional changes. When Student 4 graduated with his master’s degree, he was already employed at a community mental health agency. He made the transition from agency to private practice while in the doctoral program. Student 4 reported:

I was really lucky. I graduated and got a job that was a parent company of the company I was working for already in my master’s. So I got a job that made really good money, and then I did that for about a year and a half or 2 years, and then I quit that job slowly and went into private practice, where I continue to make good money. (Student 4, individual interview)

Student 4 reported having difficulty allocating personal or professional growth to his experience in the doctoral program versus his clinical training he received outside the program, with few exceptions. He stated:

It’s funny because I’ve had these parallel processes going on with other trainings and jobs, and so, I think the program has challenged me some from a supervision standpoint...If I was going to say something, that would be the area – supervision. This isn’t an area where I think being a PhD student did a ton for me. Even my supervision – okay, the supervision class did give me the Discrimination Model, which is kind of what I’ve used as a loose format for what I do in supervision with [the theory I train others in], but actually, [that] model of supervision is really close to the Discrimination Model, except with a little more on where you focus. But it hasn’t affected my professional side as much, and I’m not teaching, so that’s another thing. (Student 4, individual interview)

Program-related benefits of marriage. Student 4 is aware of specific benefits that come with being married while in the doctoral program, and categorizes the benefits as “emotional support, logistical support, and intellectual support.” He reported:

[My wife] can take care of stuff when I’m busy. If I have to write a paper, she can take care of our daughter. If I have to be gone for the day, she can help with whatever the house stuff is. (Student 4, individual interview)

Because Spouse 4 also has a Master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy, Student 4 relies on her as a resource to help with his assignments. "She knows all the concepts, and that challenges me to grow," he stated. This also applies to the logistical aspects of an assignment.

Student 4 added:

If I'm writing or making a poster presentation, she can show me what colors would work well because I'm not good at that. She can be a set of eyes, she can proofread. She's a good writer. She's a better writer than me. (Student 4, individual interview)

In terms of emotional support, Student 4 reported finding comfort in feeling like the couple is together through this process. "I like that she's on my team," he stated. "We have a plan moving forward. She's supportive and has the ability to encourage."

Program-related challenges of marriage. Because Student 4 is employed full-time and is well-established in the community, his challenges as it relates to the doctoral program may be less stressful compared to other doctoral students. However, Student 4 is beginning to find difficulty, especially since the birth of their first child approximately a year ago, with finding time to complete his work. This is even more the case now as he is crafting his dissertation proposal. Student 4 reported:

There's tension because if I come downstairs and start to work, that leaves my wife and the baby upstairs. And they're still asleep, but as soon as they wake up, I have to stop, and I want to stop. I have to go meet with them. I would say that's a challenge though because it's like, how do I carve out time without taking more time from people I care about? I don't want to make them feel less important than the PhD, but at the same time, it has to get done, so that's a challenge. (Student 4, individual interview)

As Student 4 transitions to working on his dissertation, he has tried to find a time in his schedule that he can devote to the process. "We decided that Monday would be the day that I just need to make it happen," he stated.

Roles and responsibilities. As someone who holds several positions both professionally and in the community, and is a doctoral candidate, Student 4 must work toward managing

several roles. This is in addition to roles within the household of being a husband and father.

Student 4 does his best to allocate certain days and times to each role. He reported:

I block out times in my week, so like Monday morning from around 8:00 to Monday night at 7:00, I'm busy. And some of that is school, but some of it is work. So I go to class from 9:40 to 12:30, but then right after that I go to work from about 1:00 to 7:00. And then, Tuesday and Wednesday are work, then Thursday morning, I give myself like a 4-hour block of school time, which is supervision and internship stuff, and the rest of that I work...But I don't go up to campus at all, other than the class I have and then I leave. (Student 4, individual interview)

With the semester ending, Student 4 now devotes Monday mornings to working on his dissertation proposal. He also does some writing on the weekends when possible. "The writing piece, I sometimes do it on Saturday mornings," he stated. "Do a 7:00 to 10:00, or something like that." Through carefully scheduling his time, and prioritizing when needed, Student 4 feels he has been successful in managing his roles effectively. He reported:

I'm trying to stay out of crisis mode and trying to stay on top of it. Like, 'Okay, what are the big things I need to stay on top of?' That's something I've taken out of this too. With big projects, just start. Just go, especially with a baby too. (Student 4, individual interview)

In terms of responsibilities within the home, Couple 4 divides up tasks based on their preferences and availability. Given Student 4's busy work and school schedule, he does "as much as [he] can" when it comes to chores around the house. Student 4 reported he cleans the kitchen and does most of the cooking and is also responsible for taking out the trash. Neither Student 4 nor Spouse 4 see the division of chores as an issue in their relationship. "I'd say we're both laid back, but she and I are both on top of it too. We're not stressed about the mess, but at the same time, we both take care of it," he added.

Gender considerations. Student 4 does not see himself in the stereotypical male role within the household when it comes to the division of responsibilities. "We're pretty balanced," he stated. However, he reported feeling a sense of obligation to provide financially for his

family, a task he currently undertakes despite his student status. Student 4 stated, “Maybe the pressure to earn the money, you know? To make that money, and since I do make most of our money, there’s this tension there.”

Table 10

Data Summary Table: Student 4

| Thematic Label | Data |
|--|--|
| General impressions | <p>“For me, I’ve been a little distant. I’ve been kind of outside the program, so it’s been a good experience, but I don’t feel like – I’m not immersed in that culture because I’m only there part-time, and I work full-time.”</p> <p>“There’s no direction if you’re not there all the time.”</p> |
| Personal and professional changes | <p>“I think the program has challenged me from a supervision standpoint.”</p> <p>“It hasn’t affected my professional side as much.” (professional)</p> |
| Program-related benefits of marriage | <p>“She can take care of stuff when I’m busy.”</p> <p>“Emotional support, logistical support, intellectual support – I mean, I think she does a lot of things for me on multiple levels.”</p> <p>“I like that she’s on my team.”</p> |
| Program-related challenges of marriage | <p>“There is pressure for me to get papers and work done, and research, that kind of doesn’t make sense to just a normal life.”</p> <p>“I would say that’s a challenge, though, because it’s like, how do I carve out time without taking more time from people I care about?”</p> |
| Roles and responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender considerations | <p>“I’ve found a way to work my PhD into everyday life, instead of my everyday life into my PhD.”</p> <p>“I block out times in my week.”</p> <p>“Adding a kid to your marriage is harder than adding a PhD.”</p> <p>“Maybe the pressure to earn extra money, you know? To make that money, and since I do make most of our money, there’s this tension there.” (gender considerations)</p> |

Couple 4: Spouse 4

Spouse 4’s general impressions of the program is followed by descriptions of program-related benefits and challenges of marriage, including benefits and challenges unique to being students in the counseling field, as seen from the individual perspective. Next, is a discussion of personal and professional changes and individual roles, including any gender-specific

considerations that may be a factor. A data summary table (Table 11) is included to correspond with Spouse 4's data.

General impressions. Spouse 4 reported her individual experience of the doctoral program has been similar to her husband's in the sense that it has not been overwhelming, but she has felt frustration over what she perceives is a lack of clarity and ambiguity on the part of the program. She reported, "I would've been more confident in what he was actually doing had I felt he understood what it was going to look like more."

Because the couple met while in the same master's program, and Student 4 continued straight into the doctoral program, their relationship has always included the student role as part of it. This helped ease the transition period for Spouse 4 when her husband began his doctoral program. She stated:

We met in school, and so honestly, the only way we know our relationship is with one of us in school. So it hasn't been different. I have nothing else to compare it to because he's been in school the whole time we've been together. So we just kind of adjust. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Personal and professional changes. Spouse 4 reported feeling she has matured as a person over the years with her husband in the doctoral program, and since she completed her master's degree, she has found means of self-care that allow her to continue to grow. Spouse 4 stated:

The things I like to do – like I write, I do blogging and journaling, and I have clients on the side I do life coaching stuff with. So my stuff looks a little different, but it's a creative outlet for me. I feel like I do better when I have a creative outlet. And when I was in school, I didn't feel like I had any time for a creative outlet. I was very rigid and structured. But for me, now that I have more free time, he can stay more in that rigid stricture, and I'm like sanding wood and redecorating my house, and that's more fulfilling for me. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

In terms of their marriage, Spouse 4 believes any changes are just a function of time spent in their relationship. She stated:

When he started the program, we had only been married a year and a half, maybe 2 years. So I think program or not, our relationship has been maturing. I think the longer we're married, the more it matures. So I don't think I can put my finger on it and say it's the program that's changed it, but the further we get in our relationship, I feel like the more secure, the more healthy we are. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Spouse 4 reported feeling fulfilled in her career, and therefore, is comfortable with where she is professionally, as well as being in the supportive role for her husband. She reported:

We're going in different directions in our careers. I feel like I've achieved what I was hoping for. I'm an administrative manager of a mental health facility, and I'm running a ministry where I'm helping people. That's what I wanted to do, and that's what I got to do. For him, there are still things he wants to do. So for him, it makes sense to get his PhD. It doesn't make sense for me to go that route. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Spouse 4 has cut back on hours since Student 4 started the program, but she stated this was the result of starting a family, and not an outcome of the doctoral program itself.

Program-related benefits of marriage. Spouse 4 reported being proud of her husband's accomplishments. She stated, "I feel like there's always this little brag, like my husband's getting his PhD at the U of A." She believes by virtue of Student 4 pursuing his doctorate, it has earned him a reputation in the community and given him professional opportunities that he might not have received otherwise. "They respected what he was doing...I think it earned him a reputation of being a hard worker," she added. "He's got a good work ethic, and I think that's what got him bumped up."

The long-term benefits of the doctoral program, such as potential business opportunities, are more of Spouse 4's focus. Spouse 4 reported:

I think we have our minds set on the long-term benefits. Like even if he graduates, and in the next 5 years we don't see a big change, I feel like down the road...especially because we're very uniquely in a faith-based community, and [another university] is just pumping out master's students that are faith-based, I think it's a benefit that he is certified in a specific therapy model, and that he is getting his PhD. I think it just kind of puts him a little bit ahead of most of the people who are coming out of the same master's program that he did. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Program-related challenges of marriage. Spouse 4 identified the lack of time as the biggest challenge of the program as well. She stated:

Time is something I feel we never have enough of, so that has been – and prior to having a baby it wasn't as bad because he was in a school, and I would be in my own profession or doing my own thing like run a group the nights he had class – that is how we would arrange our schedule... We sacrifice leisure time and fun activities because he's got a paper or a project due, or he's got to do research or that kind of stuff. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Spouse 4 also sees managing their finances as a challenge, especially when Student 4 first started the doctoral program. Despite being a dual career couple in which both were employed full-time, they discussed whether it would be more beneficial for Student 4 to leave work and pursue other means of paying for school. She stated:

He has on multiple times thought, 'Should I have applied for an assistantship?' He sees other people in the program, but they're giving all their time to the program. So if that was a choice, he couldn't go and see as many client as he has. We had this continual conversation about was this the right choice, or was it not. And somewhere in the middle of his first year, he applied for loans. But by the second year, his income had increased where it was like, 'Okay, we can pay for this, but it's just a little tighter.' So we've had to kind of juggle. Are we making the right choice? Should we just take loans and pay it off later? (Spouse 4, individual interview)

When the couple has to make sacrifices, either financially or in terms of their leisure time, Spouse 4 reported she finds herself feeling frustrated and blaming the doctoral program. She stated, "There's like an eye roll and I'm like, 'Oh, the PhD program again!'"

Roles and responsibilities. Spouse 4 takes pride in being able to handle most things around the house herself, and with some chores, prefers it that way. She reported:

There are some things I always ask him to do. Like if you feed the dogs and bring down the laundry, those two things are a huge help. He takes out the trash; he helps load the dishes. But for the most part...I feel like the house is mine. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Some responsibilities, however, have been outsourced by the couple. The couple hires a cleaning lady that comes to the house every other week. They also have hired a company to

mow the lawn, which Spouse 4 sees as equitable. She stated, “It’s not fair for my work to get taken off my plate if he doesn’t get a little leverage too, so we have a guy come mow our yard.”

She sees this, and the housekeeper, as part of the solution to their issue of not having enough time to spend as a family. Spouse 4 added:

So those things gain us back 4 to 6 hours a week. Time is the thing we lack the most. He can see one extra client a week, and that saves us 4 hours. The one extra hour pays the guy that comes to do the yard. So we have balanced what we do and how we do, and in a way that I don’t feel like I’m doing it all. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Gender considerations. Spouse 4 considers herself to be self-sufficient around the house, but admits she does need her husband’s help with some tasks. She reported:

There are times when – I like to do projects – and there are projects that I need help on. Like if he sets the saws up for me, and if he sets up some of the stuff, I can do the project myself. But there are things around the house, or things around the property – like I wanted to clear trees. So there’s no way on God’s green Earth that he’s going to sit in here and do research while I’m running a chainsaw by myself in the woods. So there are things I wanted to get on with that I need him for that I have to...set aside and wait, or change what I want to do with the time because I need him, which makes me mad! I’m like, ‘Why do I need him? I can run a chainsaw!’ No, I can’t really. So clearly, there are things I need a man for. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

In terms of professional advancement, Spouse 4 acknowledged that when discussing if pursuing a doctorate was the right option for her husband, herself, or both of them, gender was a factor. She stated:

We started talking about having a family, and I knew if I had a baby, whatever I was doing would probably have to slow down or halt, and it’s not the same for him. So that’s the choice we made. He just had more earning potential, which sounds unfair, but that’s our culture, you know? And so, I had the more stable job at the time than he did, and so, I stayed at my job, and he was like, ‘I’m going to continue.’ (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Table 11

Data Summary Table: Spouse 4

| Thematic Label | Data |
|---|---|
| General impressions | <p>“We met in school, and so honestly, the only way we know our relationship is with one of us in school.”</p> <p>“I would’ve felt more confident in what he was actually doing had I felt he understood what it was going to look like more.”</p> |
| Personal and professional changes | <p>“So when he started the [doctoral] program, we had only been married a year and a half, maybe 2 years. So I think program or not, our relationship has been maturing.” (personal)</p> <p>“For me, my jobs have stayed the same. After I had a baby, they changed.” (professional)</p> |
| Program-related benefits of marriage | <p>“I feel like there’s always this little brag, like my husband’s getting his PhD at the U of A.”</p> <p>“I think it’s a benefit for him that he is certified in a specific therapy model, and that he is getting his PhD. I think it just kind of puts him a little bit ahead of most of the people that are coming out of the same [master’s] program he did.”</p> |
| Program-related challenges of marriage | <p>“It has been financially; that’s the hard one.”</p> <p>“Time is another thing I feel we never have enough of.”</p> <p>“Now in his PhD, we just sacrifice leisure time...or extracurricular, fun activities because he’s got a paper or a project due, or he’s got to do research or that kind of stuff.”</p> |
| <p>Roles and responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gender considerations | <p>“There are some things that I always ask him to do. Like if you feed the dogs and bring down the laundry, those two things are a huge help. He takes out the trash, he helps load the dishes. But for the most part...I feel like the house is mine.”</p> <p>“...So that’s the choice we made. He just had more earning potential, which sounds unfair, but that’s our culture, you know?” (gender considerations)</p> |

Thematic Labels for Couples

In addition to categorizing the current study’s participants individually, to best address the research question, the participants were conceptualized as couples as well. During this process, with the study’s conceptual framework in mind, five additional thematic labels were identified. The labels range from program-related changes within each couple’s relationship to

the couples' traditions, rituals, and goals for their marriages. The complete list of thematic labels for couples is listed below in Table 12.

Table 12

Thematic Labels for Couples

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program-related changes of marriage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Communication changes ○ Financial changes ○ Social changes ○ Physical intimacy changes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marital friendship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cognitive room and stressors ○ Fondness and admiration • Marital conflict • Traditions and rituals • Marital goals |
|--|--|

Textural Descriptions for Couples

The following textural descriptions are grouped by couple and organized by thematic labels. The descriptions begin by addressing program-related changes within each couple, including communication, financial, and social changes, as well as changes related to physical intimacy. Next, is a description of each couple's marital friendship, which includes the concepts of cognitive room and fondness and admiration, two areas paramount in the quality of a marital friendship (Gottman, 1999). The conflict within each marriage is described, including the couples' most common areas of conflict and their strategies to manage conflict. Lastly, this section addresses each couple's traditions and goals within their marriages, as well as the goals for each couple.

Couple 1

Couple 1's textural description is below. It includes a description of program-related changes to their marriage, as well as a description of the couple's friendship, marital conflict, traditions, and marital goals. Table 13 that follows shows a summary of the couple's description.

Program-related changes to marriage. Couple 1 identified changes in their marriage that they can attribute to the doctoral program. These include changes to their communication, financial situation, social life, and physical intimacy. These changes are described below.

Communication changes. Spouse 1 has recognized changes in the way Student 1 interacts with their children, which she attributes to “some of the things he’s learning” as a doctoral student in a CES program. While Spouse 1 sees some benefit in her husband’s continued development of his clinical skills as it pertains to their children, it is something she struggles with when Student 1 tries to implement counseling skills with her. Spouse 1 stated:

We have this funny phrase in the house. There is no therapizing in the house! We should have a big sign! I want his head and his conversation to be there with me as his wife, and not be there with me as a client. (Spouse 1, individual interview)

The couple reported making strides with this recently. Spouse 1 stated:

We’ve really worked through that in the last year. When we’ve had an argument in the last year, or something stressful comes up, he’s been really great to say, ‘Here’s something I learned, and I thought we could try it.’ Sort of front load it a little bit, instead of trying to slip it in there, because for whatever reason that makes me really angry. I don’t like it. (Spouse 1, individual interview)

Student 1 reported having also made strides in the past year with expressing negative emotions, including anger, with his wife instead of suppressing how he feels. “In the past year, I’ve been able to show that when I’m angry, I’m angry,” he stated.

Financial changes. Since the outset of the doctoral program, the financial situation for Couple 1 has improved. While in his master’s program, Student 1 worked two jobs for a low salary, and now with his graduate assistantship in place since enrolling in the doctoral program, and the additional funding of a fellowship, Student 1’s income is higher than it was prior to matriculating. Spouse 1 receives less income from her current job as a teacher’s aide; however, this is offset by reduced childcare costs now that their oldest child is enrolled in kindergarten.

The couple's improved financial picture is not an indication that they are thriving, however.

"Things are tight," Spouse 1 stated, and therefore, Couple 1 is conscious about budgeting. Led by Spouse 1, the couple reported having adopted an envelope budgeting system to more effectively manage their finances.

Social changes. Since Couple 1 relocated for Student 1 to begin the doctoral program, the most drastic changes may come in the form of their lack of social support. The couple used to live close to Student 1's parents, which was helpful in terms of receiving emotional support from family, as well as child care, so Couple 1 could spend time alone or socialize with friends. Now as a result of living nearly 2 hours from Student 1's parents, Couple 1 reported having limited interaction with other adults due to the complications involved with bringing their children along or finding child care, and they rarely have time to themselves. Neither Student 1 nor Spouse 1 have developed much of a social network since relocating for the doctoral program, with the cost of child care being the main reason. Student 1 reported:

We've been able to get a babysitter for four hours. That's \$20 an hour, that's \$80 right there. And after we've added it all in, that was going to be \$150, \$170 to go to a football game, and that's just not doable. (Student 1, individual interview)

The majority of their social time is spent as a family unit with their two children. On Friday night, the family watches a movie together. On the weekend, it is soccer, baseball, or other family activities. The couple reported they would like to interact with Student 1's peers from his program or assistantship more frequently, but often have to turn down invites. In some cases, Student 1 attends an event by himself. Spouse 1 stated:

When he says, 'Hey, there's a trivia night or a volleyball game,' it sounds really great. But the reality is, we've got these really great kids, but I'm not sure how they fit. But on the flip side, I know that drives him crazy because he wants me to go with him as his spouse, and he's told me that before. Well, let's go meet some people, and God, I would love to meet some people because I don't know people here, I really don't. He wants to go as a team. 'I want to show you off, and I want to be there with my spouse.' And

that's excellent. It sounds really great in theory, but the reality side of it, that's not how it's going to go. It sounds really nice though. (Spouse 1, individual interview)

Spouse 1 wondered about whether any support exists within the doctoral program for a variety of issues, among them, social connection. She reported:

I had asked him, 'Is there a support group for spouses of people in counseling? How do they do this?' Because we need to figure out how to make this work. I would honestly say you'd have people participate because it would give you a community – not to get together to bash things. You know, people in the same profession who have spouses, when they get to know each other and stuff, a lot of times their spouses can get together and do these kinds of things...So anyway, I think a support group is a phenomenal idea. (Spouse 1, individual interview)

Physical intimacy changes. Student 1 reported being worried about the couple's lack of physical intimacy at times, although that has been an ongoing concern, and not exclusively a function of the doctoral program. "We're two friends living in a house raising two kids," he stated. "The dating, the romance, that kind of thing [is missing]." Spouse 1 has noticed the changes as well. She stated, "That's changed too because some nights he needs to go back to the office to study, and I'm tired, because not really work, but because kids. So that's changed since he started the program."

Marital friendship. At the core of Couple 1's relationship is their friendship, but since Student 1 began the doctoral program, the activities the couple used to engage in to strengthen their friendship have diminished in frequency. Spouse 1 reported she would like the couple's friendship to be more of a focus in the relationship. "I feel like our friendship is a little bit on the backburner some days, because it just kind of is what it is right now," she stated. Spouse 1 is hoping that their shared activities return. She added, "We don't get to do the things together that built friendship sometimes like going for an awesome hike, or going climbing, and things that aren't super romantic, but are just jovial. I'm ready for that to come back."

Student 1, on the contrary, is concerned that they are “too good of friends,” referring to the notion that due to their hectic lives, “...it’s easier to see her as just a friend than as a lover and a spouse.” The couple shares similar Christian values, and both value each other and their children. They are strong in their faith and see that as the basis of their friendship, their marriage, and how they interact with others.

Cognitive room and current stressors. Intertwined with the quality of a marital friendship is how much cognitive room, or mental space, couples allow each other (Gottman, 1999). A component of this is an awareness of each other’s day-to-day activities, including current stressors. Student 1 appears to be aware of his wife’s current stressors, which include work, money, the children, and her lack of friends. Spouse 1 can also see what her husband’s stressors are, such as school, making sure he spends time with his family, and his exercise routine. She can also sense that he feels pressure to succeed academically because of the changes he brought upon his family. Spouse 1 reported:

He never talks about it, but I can see he feels a lot of pressure. I don’t think we put that on him, but I know he feels like, ‘Okay, my family sacrificed a lot for me to do this to have a better life.’ The reason we’re in Fayetteville, Arkansas is because of him. (Spouse 1, individual interview)

Despite this awareness, Spouse 1 may not be fully attuned to her husband’s world, or even the pressures he feels. Student 1 reported, “I still don’t know for sure how much she gets how taxing this is for me.” She appears to have an understanding of Student 1’s timeline in terms of when he’ll finish his coursework and when his target graduation is, but she may struggle with the aspects of his daily routine. Spouse 1 stated:

Sometimes he’ll come home and he’ll start talking about people and things and conferences like I know what they are, and I have to slow him down and say, ‘Hey, I’m not there. I don’t know what we’re talking about. I’ve got nothing.’ (Spouse 1, individual interview)

Fondness and admiration. Also affecting the quality of a couple's marital friendship is the level of fondness and admiration they have for each other (Gottman, 1999). Student 1 admires his wife's tenacity and stubbornness, and her ability to keep him on track. Her realist perspective, though admittedly "drives [him] insane at times," helps him take things into consideration. Student 1 also admires his wife's ability to care for their children. "She's a wonderful mother," he reported. "I've very blessed to have a wife that's such a good mom to my kids."

Spouse 1 reported admiring her husband's determination, passion, and drive. She admires how committed he is to his education and to his running regimen. Spouse 1 appreciates her husband's ability to stay calm because it helps "even [her] out." She also stated being appreciative of the way he treats the kids, as well as his leadership abilities. She stated, "He's a good leader for our house, and that's a big deal in our faith. So that's something I'm really thankful for."

Marital conflict. Couple 1 reported that the conflict they experience often has to do with finances, time management, children, or communication. Student 1 believes that his wife becomes upset when he manages his time poorly, resulting in her feeling like less of a priority to him. Due to Student 1's busy schedule, she sometimes does not feel "appreciated or loved." Student 1 stated he can become upset when he does not feel respected as the man of the house. He reported their sporadic physical intimacy is also an area of contention at times.

Spouse 1 claimed Couple 1 is not a "screaming and yelling couple." They attempt to handle conflict through discussion and by "honor[ing] each other's opinion," although the path to conflict resolution, or conflict management, according to Spouse 1, is not always straightforward. She reported:

He wants to talk about it right away, and I tell him not to talk to me for a while. Typically that's how it goes. That's how we initially handle things. I need a little bit of space sometimes before I'm ready to talk. (Spouse 1, individual interview)

As mentioned, Student 1 has also made progress in terms of speaking up when he is upset. "For a long time, I would shy away from the conflict," he stated. "I would get angry on the inside, and I would comply, I would just do, which would make me even more angry, and I couldn't let it go."

Couple 1 also tries to put things in perspective when managing conflict. Student 1 asks himself, "Is it worth it?" when contemplating whether to voice his displeasure. Spouse 1 has learned to adjust her expectations of him while in doctoral program with the understanding many of her frustrations are temporary and part of "a season."

Traditions and rituals. As parents of two young children, Couple 1's traditions and rituals typically involve the entire family. One such tradition is a weekend breakfast prepared by Student 1. He reported, "Saturday morning breakfasts are always a big deal around here. Whether it's making a big thing of pancakes, or homemade gravy with biscuits, and sausages and eggs." Friday night movies with the kids, a family handshake, and walks around the block are other activities Couple 1 does as a family.

The couple also reported sharing their own private traditions and rituals. Spouse 1 stated:

At Christmas, we wrap each other's gifts in food boxes, like cereal boxes. It goes back to when we first got married. We had no money, and I thought it'd be funny to wrap his gifts in food boxes, and he did the same thing! So every year we wrap our gifts in food boxes. It's just funny! (Spouse 1, individual interview)

When Student 1 has an important event, Spouse 1 has a ritual that she adheres to, which is now spreading within the family. She added:

When he goes to conferences or races – and I've done this since we were dating – I write him a letter or devotional for every day he's gone, and I hide them in his luggage. And our daughter, when he went to take his exam a few weeks ago, she did one and stuck it in

his bag, which I thought was really cool because she is catching on! ‘This is what mom and dad do for each other!’ (Spouse 1, individual interview)

Marital goals. Couple 1 have some short- and long-term goals in common, but there are several details on which they do not agree. Student 1 reported:

I think we both know I’m headed toward professorship somewhere, so I know both of us would ideally like me to have a position somewhere in the fall of 2018, and then just kind of be where we set roots in until at least the kids are out of high school. I know we both want that...Where that place is definitely is a point of contention. (Student 1, individual interview)

Spouse 1 reported a desire to move to a specific area in the Midwest, but Student 1 sees that as greatly limiting his job opportunities. He is concerned about having to settle for a position with an online university, which is something he does not want. Student 1, until recently, also reported feeling frustrated with his wife’s career path. In taking her new position as a teacher’s aide, Spouse 1’s income was greatly reduced, but she enjoys working with the children and the work schedule that be employed at an elementary school can provide. Now that she is pursuing her master’s degree, she reported hoping that it will open up new opportunities, including teaching at the collegiate level.

Table 13

Data Summary Table: Couple 1

| Thematic Label | Student 1 | Spouse 1 |
|---|--|--|
| Program-related changes to marriage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Financial • Social • Physical intimacy | <p>“In the past year, I’ve been able to show then when I’m angry, I’m angry.” (communication)</p> <p>“We’ve been able to get a babysitter for four hours. That’s \$20 an hour, that’s \$80 right there. And after we’ve added it all in, that was going to be \$150, \$170 to go to a football game, and that’s just not doable.” (financial)</p> <p>“We’re two friends living in a house raising two kids. The dating, the romance, that kind of thing [is missing].” (physical intimacy)</p> | <p>“We have this kind of a funny phrase in the house...there is no therapizing in the house!” (communication)</p> <p>“I would love to meet some people because I don’t know people here, I really don’t. He wants to go as a team. ‘I want to show you off, and I want to be there with my spouse.’ And that’s excellent. It sounds really great in theory, but the reality side of it, that’s not how it’s going to go.” (social)</p> <p>“That’s changed too because some nights he needs to go back to the office to study, and I’m tired, because not really work, but because kids.” (physical intimacy)</p> |

Table 13 (Cont.)

| Thematic Label | Student 1 | Spouse 1 |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Marital friendship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cognitive room and current stressors <p>Fondness and admiration</p> | <p>“Sometimes because of how busy we are, and how limited the time we spend together is, it’s easier to see her as just a friend than as a lover and a spouse.”</p> <p>“Work stuff. That’s probably her biggest thing she’s dealing with right now.” (cognitive room)</p> <p>“She’s a wonderful mother. I’m very blessed to have a wife that’s such a good mom to my kids.” (admiration)</p> | <p>“I feel like our friendship is a little bit on the backburner some days, because it just kind of is what it is right now.”</p> <p>“He never talks about it, but I can see he feels a lot of pressure.” (cognitive room)</p> <p>“He is so determined and so passionate, and not just about school. I love how driven he is.” (admiration)</p> |
| <p>Marital conflict</p> | <p>“I think for a long time I would shy away from the conflict. I would get angry on the inside, and just comply.”</p> <p>“Just honor each other’s opinions and talk things through.”</p> <p>“Finances, that’s always something...Time management, probably. When she doesn’t feel like she’s a priority.”</p> | <p>Marital conflict</p> |
| <p>Traditions and rituals</p> | <p>“Saturday morning breakfasts are always a big deal around here.”</p> | <p>Traditions and rituals</p> |
| <p>Marital goals</p> | <p>“There are some similarities, and then there are some differences, then there are some giant question marks.”</p> <p>“I still want to be a professor, but maybe I can take a position at an online school if needed. I don’t want that, but I’m willing to vary.”</p> | <p>“It was hard for me sometimes to take a step back from myself and say I really need to support my husband in furthering his education and his career, which is a very good thing...but it kind of meant putting my heartbeat on the back burner for a little while.”</p> |

Couple 2

Couple 2’s textural description is below. It includes a description of program-related changes to their marriage, as well as a description of the couple’s friendship, marital conflict, traditions, and marital goals. Table 14 that follows shows a summary of the couple’s description.

Program-related changes to marriage. Couple 2 identified changes in their marriage that they can attribute to the doctoral program. These include changes to their communication, financial situation, social life, and physical intimacy. These changes are described below.

Communication changes. Spouse 2 reported noticing changes in the couple's interactions. She stated, "Being in the mental health world, I guess, kind of affects the way we speak to each other and interact with each other." This also applies to how Student 2 interacts with their daughter. Despite this, Spouse 2 reported also finding it burdensome when her husband talks about counseling, and counseling research, as often as he does. She added, "I'd really just want to watch this stupid television show and not talk about counseling research today!" Student 2 lamented the limited time the couple has to sit and talk the way they used to prior to him beginning the doctoral program. He reported:

We used to, whenever I was in my master's program, we'd just go outside and sit on the stairs for hours just talking, and we've done that like three times since I've been here. And those were some of the best times. (Student 2, individual interview)

Financial changes. Despite Spouse 2's full-time job, Couple 2 must rely on student loans to pay for, not only tuition, but living expenses. She reported:

We've gone from being fairly stable in the amount of debt that we had to borrowing a great amount of debt simply to live because I don't even make enough money to cover our bills, let alone school. We have to take even more in summers because...he has to go through school in the summer too. (Spouse 2, individual interview)

Spouse 2 reporting having concerns about seeing the long-term benefits of her husband's schooling. She stated, "I hope we can make enough money when he's done to eventually pay this off!" It is important for them to budget in the meantime, but they do not always do so, according to Student 2, especially when it comes to meals. "We eat out a lot," he reported. "We don't cook as much as we should."

Social changes. Since relocating for the doctoral program, Couple 2 reported having struggled to make social connections. Student 2 has befriended a couple of his classmates recently, which has "made things bearable" for him, but generally speaking, has few social interactions. Spouse 2 admitted to having no social life at all since relocating. She reported:

It doesn't exist. I never really had a lot of friends. I usually have like one or two at a time, but yeah, since we moved here, nothing. I have the people I work with, and I've gone out with them once. (Spouse 2, individual interview)

Physical intimacy changes. Couple 2 agreed that they have sex less often since Student 2 began the doctoral program. Student 2 believes much of it has to do with expending more energy elsewhere. "I feel like we have sex less because she is so exhausted," he stated. "Hell, sometimes I'm freaking tired too!" Spouse 2 agreed with his perception. She reported:

I'm always so tired. I'm so tired all the time. So our sex life is not that great. I think part of it is that I spend so much energy working, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the child. And his biological clock is a lot different than mine. He's way more active in the middle of the night, and I'm passing out by 8:00 in the evening. (Spouse 2, individual interview)

Marital friendship. The friendship between Couple 2 is strong from Student 2's perspective. He reported, "I would say she is my best friend, and I would say I am her best friend too. We're pretty good friends. We like pretty much all the same stuff." Any free time they have is spent together, although with Student 2's school and internship schedule, that time is limited. "We watch anime every Saturday night," he added. "If we had more time, we would play video games, but we don't have time for that kind of thing anymore." They reported sharing similar values as well, but the extent they are willing to take those values differ. Spouse 2 reported:

I would say the major difference between the two of us with our values would be, I guess to the degree. Like we believe in the same things, but he takes some of them a little further than I do. Maybe not in the level of belief, but just in the expression of the belief. (Spouse 2, individual interview)

Cognitive room and current stressors. Student 2 reported having some awareness of his wife's day-to-day activities and current stressors. He feels her two biggest stressors are "bill money" and "whether or not [he's] going to graduate." Student 2 also believes potty-training their daughter is a current stressor for his wife. Through recent conversation, Student 2 appears

to have increased his awareness of his wife's future aspirations regarding possible career options. He reported, "I've learned some things that she has considered doing, and it wasn't even on my radar that that was something she'd want to do."

Spouse 2 reported having an understanding of her husband's stressors, which revolve around a pressure to succeed in his program. She stated, "He's under remediation right now, so that's kind of hard." She also believes he's affected by the financial burden the program is putting on their family, as is she, though he tries to disconnect from it at times. Spouse 2 stated:

I think he worries about whether or not, especially with the financial thing, whether or not it's going to pay off at the end. We both have this idea that someday when he graduates, and he's got a position, that I'll stay at home, or at least be at home more and be with our kids and raise them...and you know, the more debt we acquire, the more it's like, yeah, I don't know if that's going to happen...I think he feels stressed out about that sometimes too. But me, I'm down here in the ditches paying the bills and dealing with the taxes and dealing with the job, and the numbers just aren't adding up. So I think whenever he does – he sort of distances himself mentally so he can do what he's doing, but every now and then we have this discussion, and it comes crashing down on him, and he gets pretty bummed about it for a few days. (Spouse 2, individual interview)

As far as the components of her Student 2's doctoral program, Spouse 2 has a "vague understanding." She stated:

I know that his coursework will hopefully, barring any disaster, be done by the end of next fall, and then he'll be working on his dissertation for – I can't remember the minimum number of semesters, but I feel like he'll probably take longer than that. He doesn't think so, but I feel like he will! I know he'll take his comps in the fall. (Spouse 2, individual interview)

Her attempts to stay up to date with his schedule is sometimes met with confrontation. She added:

I'll ask him, 'All right, what do you have this week? Where do you have to be, and at what time? And what's going on?' And sometimes he'll get short with me, and say, 'You know I have this on Thursday!' Well, I forget, because sometimes things move around. (Spouse 2, individual interview)

Fondness and admiration. Couple 2 seem to have admiration for each other. Student 2 sees his wife as being wise and as a good-hearted person. He also appreciates her love for animals. “She just loves animals,” he reported. “She’s not a tree hugger or anything like that, but she’s got a big heart for people and for animals.” Spouse 2 admires her husband’s dedication. She stated:

He is extremely dedicated to his studies. I was never dedicated to my studies! He’s working really hard for something that he’s actually on fire for, and I really don’t have that. He has very strong convictions. What he believes, he really believes, and he stands up for it in any situation. (Spouse 2, individual interview)

She also admires how he treats others. “The way he treats people – even if he doesn’t agree with what they’re doing – he really consciously puts forth effort to treat people like he really loves them,” she added.

Marital conflict. Most of Couple 2’s disagreements have to do with child rearing.

Student 2 reported:

One of the big tensions she and I have arguments on is how to raise our baby. Raising a child, it’s a big one. It’s in the situations that neither one of us know what the hell we’re doing – or only have an idea of what we’re doing – that arguments occur the most. I stepped in when my wife was dealing with a situation. She was very displeased that I did something to her authority. (Student 2, individual interview)

Spouse 2 has a similar view, but believes the bulk of the blame falls on her husband. She stated:

With disciplining our daughter, sometimes I feel like he’s a little too erratic with his expectations of her. Sometimes I feel like he’ll let her get away with something until he has enough, and then it’s like, here comes the hammer! (Spouse 2, individual interview)

Student 2 also felt many of their disagreements have to do with misunderstandings or being overly sensitive due to stress. He reported:

I think we just fight over misunderstandings. I think that one day, one of us might just be easily offended or something. I think there are more days now where more easily offended or get our feelings hurt a little easier or something, because we’re just so busy and so stressed. It’s just easier for that to happen. (Student 2, individual interview)

Couple 2 reported having measures in place to help them manage conflict, however. Student 2 will “walk outside and cool off and chill out” so he can have a better approach when resuming dialogue with his wife. He added, “I will be like, ‘Okay, let me get my thoughts together and think about how the argument went and how it’s just an absolutely stupid thing to argue about.’” Spouse 2 agreed with that approach. She stated, “If one of us needs to take a break, we take one, and come back five minutes later.” She also spoke of the rules they have set up during conflict. Spouse 2 added:

We do not call each other names. If we call each other a name, the conversation is over immediately. We try to take turns speaking without interrupting the other person, so it’s like a back and forth. One person says their thing, and then the other person can respond and say something else. And we just do that until it’s resolved, or until we just give up! (Spouse 2, individual interview)

Traditions and rituals. Couple 2 reported having established some traditions and rituals in their family, and are hopeful of new ones as well. Each Saturday night once their daughter is asleep, they watch anime cartoons together. Other traditions involve meals and holidays. Student 2 reported they try to have breakfast together “at least once a week” at a bakery. They also celebrate two anniversaries each year, the day they met and their wedding day.

Marital goals. Couple 2 reported sharing some long-term goals that include owning their own home in the country. “We want our own place with enough land to have a little garden or something,” Student 2 stated. “Maybe a little pond with some fish in it, maybe a couple of sheep.” They also recently decided to expand their family, although Spouse 2 is apprehensive. She stated:

We do want to have a baby. I don’t know how we’re going to do it, but he wants to do it sometime this year. And I say, ‘How? We can’t afford daycare!’ But I’m getting older, and my body is not really doing a lot of the stuff it used to do, so we’re kind of like, if we’re going to have more kids, we got to have them now. So, that’s scary! (Spouse 2, individual interview)

Where they seemingly lack clarity is with Spouse 2’s career. Spouse 2 spoke of staying at home with their children and home schooling them, but she may also want to resume a professional career. She stated, “Right now, the primary goal is [for my husband] to get through graduate school. And I think that might be why my goals are put on hold.” Student 2 admitted to feeling badly about the situation. He stated:

I’m sad to be holding her back. I want to be able to support her in what she wants to do. I’m happy she has things she wants to do, but I think she has some inner conflicts about it, because she wants to do something career-wise, but she also really wants to raise the children from home and even do home schooling. (Student 2, critical incident journal)

Table 14

Data Summary Table: Couple 2

| Thematic Label | Student 2 | Spouse 2 |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Program-related changes to marriage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Financial • Social • Physical intimacy | <p>“We eat out a lot. We don’t cook as much as we should.” (financial)</p> <p>“I did last spring start to be friends with a couple of people in the program, which was nice...It made things bearable.” (social)</p> <p>“I feel like we have sex less because she is so exhausted...but then hell, sometimes I’m freaking tired.” (physical intimacy)</p> | <p>“Being in the mental health world, I guess, kind of affects the way we speak to each other and interact with each other.” (communication)</p> <p>“We’ve gone from being fairly stable in the amount of debt that we had to borrowing a great amount of debt simply to live...” (financial)</p> <p>“...I usually have like one or two friends, but yeah, since we moved here, nothing.” (social)</p> <p>“I’m always so tired...So our sex life is not that great...part of it is that I spend so much energy working, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the child...” (physical intimacy)</p> |
| <p>Marital friendship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive room and current stressors • Fondness and admiration | <p>“I would say she is my best friend, and I would say I am her best friend.”</p> <p>[She’s stressed about] whether or not I’m going to graduate.” (cognitive room)</p> <p>“She’s very intelligent. I admire her ability to fix things, put things together.” (admiration)</p> | <p>“I mean, our friendship? We watch anime every Saturday night, and if we had time, we would play video games, but we don’t have time for that kind of thing anymore.”</p> <p>“I think he feels the time crunch of everything too. So much to do, and he really wants to be a family kind of guy.” (cognitive room)</p> <p>“He has strong convictions, like what he believes, he really believes, and he stands up for it in any situation.” (admiration)</p> |

Table 14 (Cont.)

| Thematic Label | Student 1 | Spouse 1 |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Marital conflict | <p>“We raise our voices sometimes and get in arguments. Sometimes a door might be slammed. Then we make up, and that’s about it.”</p> <p>“I think we just fight over misunderstandings.”</p> | <p>“We still get in heated arguments sometimes and yell a little bit, but for the most part that doesn’t happen anymore.”</p> <p>“We try to take turns speaking without interrupting the other person.”</p> |
| Traditions and rituals | <p>“We pray before meals.”</p> <p>“Every Saturday night we watch anime on The Cartoon Network.”</p> | <p>“We celebrate birth weeks instead of birthdays.”</p> |
| Marital goals | <p>“We want our own place, our own house, with enough land to have a little garden.”</p> <p>“I’m sad to be holding her back. I want to be able to support her in what she wants to do.”</p> | <p>“Right now, the primary goal is to get through graduate school, and I think that might be why my goals are put on hold.”</p> |

Couple 3

Couple 3’s textural description is below. It includes a description of program-related changes to their marriage, as well as a description of the couple’s friendship, marital conflict, traditions, and marital goals. Table 15 that follows shows a summary of the couple’s description.

Program-related changes to marriage. Couple 3 identified changes in their marriage that they can attribute to the doctoral program. These include changes to their communication, financial situation, social life, and physical intimacy. These changes are described below.

Communication changes. Student 3 admitted that as a result of the doctoral program, there will be “more times of conflict, and less intentionality” in the couple’s communication. There are “more times for conflict to occur.” Spouse 3 agreed with this. Additionally, while Spouse 3 acknowledged communication benefits resulting from the couple working in mental health, such as her husband being a “great listener,” she reported becoming frustrated in the nature of the couple’s conversations in the sense that things are “over processed” due to him

being in a counseling program. She stated, “We’re processing all the time, but I think life can also be really fun, and really joyful, and not so serious.” She also reported noticing undesirable changes to her husband’s communication style, which she attributes to the doctoral program.

She reported:

I feel like his PhD has made him more argumentative, and so, he’s almost always practicing for his dissertation defense. I’ll make a comment about something, and it could be counseling-related or something different, and he’ll tweak it, or seek to correct, or teach. And I’m always like, ‘Ugh, your PhD!’ Because I didn’t see that much in his language or his communication style before his PhD, and it makes me feel – I don’t know if it’s less smart or dumbed down, or just left behind. We’ll have these conversations where I just make a statement, and I wish he would leave it at that. It doesn’t need to be critiqued. But I feel like his doctoral work, like when he wrote part of his dissertation last semester, everything was being consistently critiqued, and that’s a healthy framework for his PhD and his dissertation, but it doesn’t work well in general communication I think. So that was really hard for me, and I would eventually get resentful. (Spouse 3, individual interview)

Financial changes. Student 3 reported drawing less of an income since he began the doctoral program due to not being able to see as many clients as he had previously. He does, however, have a fellowship that helps cover his tuition. Spouse 3 initially had concerns over the costs of his continuing education, and it is only due to securing financial assistance through the university that made Student 3’s pursuit of a doctorate possible. She stated:

We made a commitment that he’d get his PhD if it was paid for. When we finished our master’s, thinking about a PhD felt terrifying for me financially. A PhD felt like, ‘Let’s go spend more money!’ And I believe if you’re going to spend money somewhere, education is the place to do it. But it’s just hard. (Spouse 3, individual interview)

While Couple 3 reported seeing their finances as “steady,” their mindset regarding money has changed since Student 3 started the program. Student 3 reported:

We’ve gone from having a little more freedom to a place where we think about saving money, being more consistent, and just staying there. So things like traveling, we don’t see that as an option at this point. I mean, a good Branson weekend is okay, but we’re not going to do much. (Student 3, individual interview)

Social changes. Compared to their time in their master's program, Couple 3 reported having less social involvement with Student 3's peers. Spouse 3 stated:

I'll hear your names – the guys he's friends with or talks to in class. I will know your names generally, which I like, and I'll know a little bit about your lives. He'll give me tidbits that he knows I'll appreciate. So I've had interactions like that, but I don't know anyone well, and we haven't interacted with anyone a ton. We have way less interaction than we did in grad school. This has been a super different experience for us. I don't know. I would probably like a little bit more, but I don't see that as anybody's fault. (Spouse 3, individual interview)

The couple believes that one of the main factors to this is the birth of their son, and not necessarily anything related to the doctoral program.

Spouse 3 wondered about any existing interaction among families within the program, and she would like scheduled social events to occur. She stated:

Maybe there is a community already, and I just don't know about it. But having an opportunity for families to engage and get to know each other, even if it was like a dinner once a year, something super casual – I like stuff like that. (Spouse 3, focus group)

Physical intimacy changes. Couple 3 admitted to a reduction of physical intimacy since Student 3 began the doctoral program; however, Student 3 felt the most likely cause for this has more to do with the birth of their child, and not the program itself. He reported, "If I were to think about just the program, I'd say there are no differences. Just differences from the baby." Spouse 3 saw some connection to the program, though. She also recognized the importance of physical intimacy for her husband, though, and believes they are working toward an improvement. She stated:

He's a physical touch kind of guy. So he needs that in his life to be most helpful. That's a place where I'm hopeful and expect that in the future things will change. So yeah, I feel like it made a dent, but we're making improvements in a good way...I know he needs that to be healthy, and I need to figure out how to make that work, even when my heart is really frustrated, and I haven't seen him in 3 days. (Spouse 3, individual interview)

Marital friendship. Student 3 claimed that the couple has a strong friendship. “She’s my best friend,” he reported. “If I had to rank it on a scale of 1 to 10, it’s a 10. She’s just always been someone I can go to. She’s a safe attachment.” Student 3 reported enjoying that they share similar interests, such as watching college sports, although they support rival schools. He added, “She’s a Jayhawk fan; I’m an Oklahoma fan. So the agreement is OU football, KU basketball, as far as who we cheer for. But we can tease each other.”

Student 3 also reported believing the couple’s values are well-aligned. He stated, “I feel we’re differentiated, but our values do match up. We have our authentic drives or passions, our own goals in our lives, but we do have the same values in a lot of ways.”

Spouse 3 stated benefitting from falling back on their friendship, especially during times of stress brought upon the doctoral program or other life events. “It’s really healthy when I remember how much he is my friend,” she reported. “I love remembering how much he is my friend. That’s really helpful for me.” She does believe, however, that their friendship initially suffered as a result of Student 3 entering the doctoral program. Spouse 3 stated:

I would say our friendship probably suffered when he first started in the first 6 months to a year. I would say our friendship was the first thing that suffered. He significantly lost time to do the things we love doing. We love playing golf, we love going to shoot baskets. So the things we loved to do in our friendship went out the window. So I, of course, blamed the PhD, which was easy to do. Like, the PhD takes up all his time, and we can’t do anything fun. I think our friendship suffered for sure in that part of our marriage. (Spouse 3, individual interview)

Ultimately, Spouse 3 sees the doctoral program as something that will enhance their friendship. She reported, “I feel like in the season we’re in now, we’re turning a corner. I think it will deepen our friendship, just because we really have to be in this thing together to make it through.”

Cognitive room and current stressors. Student 3 identified the couple's son as the biggest source of stress for his wife at this time. He stated, "It's draining on her to be such a high extrovert and having to spend so much time with the baby. Him being dependent on her is a very stressful thing."

Spouse 3 believes her husband's stressors revolve around him not being able to provide for his family in the manner in which he would like, especially since Spouse 3 continues to be employed despite recently having their child. She reported:

I think after I had our son, knowing his heart, he would've liked for me to go figure out motherhood and take as much time as needed, so if I wanted to stay home all the time, I could do that, and he'd take care of everything else. So it's been really stressful for him to think about how to navigate this. I don't think he has enough hours in the day to do what he wants to do. He wants to take care of his family and get this PhD done and do it well, and then move on to teaching. (Spouse 3, individual interview)

Spouse 3 recognized that so little downtime also prevents her husband from engaging in activities that he enjoys, and in general, maintaining a healthy lifestyle. She stated:

I know he'd be on the golf course intentionally spending time with his grandpa a lot more if he didn't have to spend as much time on campus supervising, or being supervised, or seeing clients. It just stresses him out, and he just doesn't have the time to give to the variety that he wants to. Also, it's stressful for him to just try to live a healthy lifestyle and stay healthy. He's 4 and a half years in remission [from cancer], which we are so thankful for, but he's still got to take care of himself. I would say PhD's don't really set themselves up for maintaining good habits and practicing self-care, so it's not an ideal situation as far as that. (Spouse 3, individual interview)

In terms of her knowledge of the doctoral program itself, Spouse 3 recalls initially having unanswered questions. She stated:

I remember asking him, 'Can you show me your required coursework? Can you show me exactly how many hours you're going to have to take? And whether those courses are going to be on campus or online? Are they in the summer? What semester?' Just very practical questions, and at first, he was like, 'I don't know.' We went from our master's program where from the day you started, you had a program built for you, so you knew exactly what every semester looked like, and you knew how much time you'd be committing. But now, the logistical structure is starting to make sense to me, but also sometimes still feels chaotic. I feel like because we're closer to him being done with

things, it's easier to figure out. But good night! At the beginning, I was like, 'Where are we?' (Spouse 3, individual interview)

Fondness and admiration. Student 3 is able to identify characteristics such as dedication, perseverance, initiative, drive, passion, authenticity, and grace as some of the traits that he admires about his wife. Spouse 3 pinpointed her husband's work ethic as a main source of admiration. She reported:

He's one of the hardest workers I've ever met in my life, and not necessarily because he's trying to prove anything to anyone. He's just continuously wanting to work and do the things he cares about. It's not just with school, but with family, and in other relationships. He's just really dedicated." (Spouse 3, individual interview)

She also admires that he pursues his dreams since for her, "it's harder to connect the dots and get places." Spouse 3 also appreciates her husband's old fashioned sensibilities, in that he is "very much about a good handshake and eye contact."

Marital conflict. Couple 3 both labeled themselves as "strong communicators" when it comes to conflict within the relationship, although their initial approach to conflict can vary based on the situation. Student 3 admitted to being a "pursuer or withdrawer," depending on the specifics of the conflict. He reported:

Initially, we'll both start with pursuing, but then it might turn into a time for self-reflection, at least for me. But it's time to think about what just happened, where I can understand what I did, and we'll talk about it again where I can help her understand too. I'll go back and check in with her. (Student 3, individual interview)

Spouse 3 acknowledged her penchant for withdrawing from conflict at first. She stated:

I withdraw, so I'm pretty hardcore with shutting down because I'm surrounded by counselors, essentially. I'm surrounded by my husband who wants to process and talk about our conflict, which sometimes make me want to run away. But we're both strong communicators, so eventually we'll sit down and talk, and be able to work something through eye to eye. I think we both respond really well in conflict. We'll be like, 'I heard you, I understand you, and this is me acting in what is best for us.' (Spouse 3, individual interview)

Couple 3 has different opinions on what they feel is the area of their lives that produces the most conflict. Student 3 reported:

It's hard to narrow it down to one thing. What comes to mind is probably meeting her deeper emotional needs in her seasons of stress, which is carried over from feeding our son and other things, and it just kind of builds up. (Student 3, individual interview)

Spouse 3 believes the doctoral program has been the biggest source of conflict between them, at least until recently. She stated:

There's not a day in our lives that is not impacted by his PhD. So that was a point of conflict. I was like, 'Does it ever go away?' And it doesn't, and now I'm like, 'Okay, we can make space for that.' I felt like somebody moved into your house that you really didn't want to live with you, that's the best I can describe it. But they weren't just in your house, they were sitting on your lap! It got heavy! (Spouse 3, individual interview)

Student 3 suggested that the program-related conflict can actually be a long-term benefit as it encourages discussion and emotional intimacy. Recalling one particular disagreement the couple had, Student 3 noted, "The outcome resulted in us connecting and having a good discussion about her emotions regarding personal stress. She was open and able to verbalize what she needed from me to feel more secure in these busy weeks."

Traditions and rituals. Couple 3 reported sharing holiday traditions around Christmas and Easter. Of equal importance to them, though, is the men's college basketball tournament that takes place each March, as well as other sporting events. Spouse 3 stated:

We passionately watch – a very big part of our schedules revolve around March Madness. We watch every game together. My family makes a bracket, he and I make a bracket together. He's the same way about the Masters [golf tournament]. It's huge for him. We love going to sporting events together. So I think our long-term goal is that we'll be at every Jayhawk game at Allen Fieldhouse. (Spouse 3, individual interview)

The couple also takes the time to recreate the same night for their wedding anniversary each year. Spouse 3 reported:

We usually get away for our anniversary. We like doing the exact same thing for our anniversary. He recreates the day every year. So we do the exact same thing we did the

first day of our honeymoon. We stay in the same room, go to the same place, eat at the same places. That's every year. (Spouse 3, individual interview)

Marital goals. The couple has agreed to put Spouse 3's career goals temporarily on hold while Student 3 pursues his own. Student 3 stated, "It looks like right now pursuing my goals first, and then slowly pursuing hers is how we're looking at it." At first, this arrangement appears to have been difficult for Spouse 3. "It felt like he was going to pursue a dream, and I was going to wait, and that felt emotionally out of sync," she reported. "It doesn't as much now, though."

Student 3 reported feeling hopeful of obtaining full-time employment as a professor at school where he currently works as an adjunct instructor, as well as adding other professional roles. "So it'd be teach, research, counsel, and supervise," he stated. Spouse 3's professional goals are to continue to work as a counselor, but also increase opportunities to engage in public-speaking, which she enjoys. Student 3 reported:

This year she was the keynote speaker at a women's adoption conference that happens every year in Missouri. She loves to do things like that. She's got her early childhood education degree, so she can teach if she wants to. She's kind of a jack of all trades, but ultimately, some form of discipleship or speaking. (Student 3, individual interview)

The couple appears to be in agreement in terms of how they want to raise their son, and how they plan on growing their family. Student 3 stated:

A shared goal is to have an intact family, for our son to be exposed to new experiences, submerged in different cultures, to not be stuck in a cookie cutter class. We could move to the inner-city and he would be exposed to a lot. We want to adopt, that's another shared goal. (Student 3, individual interview)

Where Couple 3 seems to differ is in their view of their retirement years. Spouse 3 reported:

Long, long-term, we're a little different. He would love to retire to Florida and golf all the time, and I'm kind of like you pursue your passions and give your life away until the day you die, so I really oppose the Florida idea. I just like the idea of planning our lives out until it's over. So I think that's a little bit different for us. We joke about it now, but I think if we got to our 70s, and he was like, 'It's time to move to the beach,' there'd be

some resistance in me because I'd be like, 'I'm still going strong; I'm not done yet.'
(Spouse 3, individual interview)

Table 15

Data Summary Table: Couple 3

| Thematic Label | Student 3 | Spouse 3 |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Program-related changes to marriage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Financial • Social • Physical intimacy | <p>We've gone from having a little more freedom to a place where we think about saving money, being more consistent, and just staying there. So things like traveling, we don't see that as an option at this point. I mean, a good Branson weekend is okay, but we're not going to do much. (financial)</p> <p>"If I were to think about just the program, I'd say there are no differences. Just differences from the baby." (physical intimacy)</p> | <p>"...I don't know anyone well, and we haven't interacted with anyone a ton." (social)</p> <p>"The PhD definitely impacted the first year because when I was so frustrated, I was like, 'I don't want to be physically close and connected because I'm so frustrated,'...with what he was putting us through." (physical intimacy)</p> |
| <p>Marital friendship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive room and current stressors • Fondness and admiration | <p>"She's my best friend. If I had to rank it on a scale of 1 to 10, it's a 10."</p> <p>"It's draining on her to be such a high extrovert...where she has to spend so much time with the baby." (cognitive room)</p> <p>"She's one that genuinely puts others before herself, sometimes to a fault." (admiration)</p> | <p>"I love remembering how much he is my friend. That is really helpful for me."</p> <p>"I would say our friendship probably suffered too, when he first started [the program]."</p> <p>"I feel the season we're in now, we're turning a corner. I think it will deepen our friendship just because we really need to be in this together to make it through."</p> <p>"It just stresses him out, and he just doesn't have the time to give to the variety that he wants to." (cognitive room)</p> <p>"He's one of the hardest workers I've ever met in my life." (admiration)</p> |
| <p>Marital conflict</p> | <p>"Initially, we'll both start with pursuing, but then it might turn into a time for self-reflection, at least for me."</p> <p>"It's hard to narrow down to one thing. What comes to mind is probably meeting her deeper emotional needs in her seasons of stress."</p> | <p>"I think we both respond really well in conflict, and we engage in tangible action. We'll be like, 'I heard you, I understood you, and this is me acting in what is best for us.'"</p> |
| <p>Traditions and rituals</p> | <p>"So we have our anniversaries, and stuff like that."</p> <p>"We've got our March Madness bracket."</p> | <p>"We usually get away for every anniversary. We like doing the exact same thing for our anniversary. He recreates the day every year."</p> |

Table 15 (Cont.)

| Thematic Label | Student 3 | Spouse 3 |
|----------------|---|--|
| Marital goals | <p>“My goal would be to get this...position [at another university] that’s opening up...So it’d be teach, research, counsel, and supervise.”</p> <p>“Well it looks like right now, pursuing my goals first, and then slowly pursuing hers, is how we’re looking at it.”</p> <p>“Long term, I feel like we very much line up.”</p> | <p>“For us individually, once you get passed the PhD, they’re pretty much synced.”</p> <p>“I think once he graduates and gets to pursue teaching, and we’re both working in the fields we’re passionate about and raising our family, and being in ministry, that looks the same.”</p> |

Couple 4

Couple 3’s textural description is below. It includes a description of program-related changes to their marriage, as well as a description of the couple’s friendship, marital conflict, traditions, and marital goals. Table 16 that follows shows a summary of the couple’s description.

Program-related changes to marriage. Couple 4 has undergone some changes since Student 4 began the doctoral program, including changes to their communication style, financial situation, social interactions, and patterns of physical intimacy. However, the couple does not attribute all changes to the doctoral program itself, but rather, to the natural progression of their relationship. These changes are described below.

Communication changes. Student 4 believes him and his wife “have changed as people” during his time in the program, but he reported he does not believe those changes are a product of the doctoral program itself. The couple reported having matured as individuals during their time together, which in turn, has influenced their communication with each other. Additionally, because Couple 4 are leaders of a community that trains local counselors in a couples counseling method, they reported seeing much of the positive changes to their marriage as stemming from their connection to their clinical experience. Spouse 4 cited their involvement with this training

as key to the couple developing a stronger attachment, as well as being able to discuss issues pertaining to Student 4's doctoral program in a more constructive manner. She stated:

There is some very specific theory where we've learned about our emotions, and it's an attachment based theory, so your attachment got stronger. I think that [the training] has helped us get stronger, and we're able to have conversations about his PhD program in a healthier way. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Financial changes. While he does not have the same number of hours to devote to private practice than if he was not enrolled as student, Student 4 believes as a result of being in the doctoral program, he has benefited from being able to charge a higher fee for his services. He reported, "I don't work as much, but I think being in the PhD kind of gives me more credibility to ask for a little more money in my private practice." The time commitment to the doctoral program appears to prevent him from earning money in other ways, however. He added, "The other thing I think I would normally do is go speak or talk, or be engaged other places, which I would say would probably guide my clientele and get my referrals up, and therefore, make me more money."

Social changes. Couple 4 has lived locally for several years and both have full-time jobs and are heavily involved in leadership positions with their church. Because of this, their experience has been different in terms of seeking of social connections through the program, especially for Spouse 4. She reported:

I feel like because of how involved we are with our faith community and our ministry, it doesn't lend itself – we are not in the market for tons of extra friends. We have a very grounded and already solid community because this is where we've lived. I know a lot of the people in the program have relocated here, and that is their circle of friends. It's not ours. This is like a sidebar to [Student 4's] life. So we're not as involved. I don't feel like there's a sense of urgency to be connected to those people. Most of them are going back from whence they came, and we're still going to be here in our community. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Couple 4 does make an effort to socialize with Student 4's peers, although even then, there are some barriers in place, according to Spouse 4. She added:

When there have been going away parties, we've gone to those. We're not huge drinkers. I run a program where we feel it's important for us to set an example to not drink heavily. So that's a lifestyle change that we've made that I think sometimes hinders our ability to make connections with people in the program. But I feel like we've pushed through that and have developed some good friendships with a few. He's better at it than me because he sees them on a regular basis. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Physical intimacy changes. According to Student 4, any changes to the couple's physical intimacy since he started the doctoral program is mainly related to having a baby. He stated, "I don't think the program has really changed anything to that respect. Having a baby changed some of that! But yeah, I would not blame the program for anything." Spouse 4 agreed, but does see the doctoral program having at least a minimal effect. She stated:

The areas that would kill our intimacy more is that he has a paper to write, or he's going to be really late or tired. Our sleep – I'm an 8 to 10 hour sleeper; he can sleep six hours and be fine. So there'll be times when it's 9:00, and I want to go to sleep, and he's not tired. So he's got to come to bed with me and then get back up, you know? (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Marital friendship. Student 4 classified his friendship with his wife as "great." Spouse 4 agreed. She reported:

Part of our dating relationship I think was more of developing friendship more than it was developing a romance. I had just been burned multiple times, and he had been burned by his ex. We both had this painful past experience, so it was like, 'Do we like each other, not love each other?' at first. I feel like our relationship was founded in good friendship, and the other stuff kind of naturally fell into place. Like, hands down, he is my best friend. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

The couple's values align well from Spouse 4's perspective. She stated:

I think meeting at [another university], we were like, 'Oh, we're at a bible college, so there must be something there.' And then as it turns out, his family grew up with a missions organization, which was very similar values to how I grew up. We both grew up in church. And we've both been hurt...by the church, both been hurt by spouses, and in a weird way our values have adjusted in a similar fashion because of that hurt. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Cognitive room and current stressors. Couple 4 appears to have a solid understanding of the major components of each other's days, as well as being aware of the stressors in their lives. For Student 4, he recognized that the adjustments that come with recently having a baby are the main stressors for his wife. Spouse 4 saw her husband's many roles as a source of his stress. She reported:

Clearly, working a full-time job. We constantly have this conversation. How many? What is the right number of clients for him to have where he's making enough money and feels like he's supporting the family, and he has enough time for the family, and has enough time for his PhD. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Given their demanding schedules, Spouse 4 worries about their own health. With a child now, especially, Couple 4 reported working toward finding a more of a balance to make sure they take care of their responsibilities and themselves. Spouse 4 stated:

It's always a question of how do we juggle it all? How do we accomplish the things we want to accomplish and help the people we want to help, and stay healthy? Because now there's a little extra piece. We have to live to be 70 or 80 years old, and we're not on the path to do that. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Fondness and admiration. Student 4 admires his wife for being smart, strong, fun, and organized. He stated, "Even in my dissertation process...she's already said that she'll help organize some of what I'm doing and be my assistant, so to speak, as far as keeping track of stuff." He also appreciates willingness to speak her mind. He added, "She will tell you what's going on. There's never a time when I wonder if she's okay. I know where she's at, and she tells me exactly where she's at and what she needs, which makes the relationship easy."

Spouse 4 admires "lots of things" about her husband, especially when it comes to his work ethic. She reported:

He is a hard worker. In my family of origin, you work hard and you play hard. My family just doesn't stop. Even in dating, even with my ex-husband, I have never seen anybody keep up with my family...So both of us have this drive and work ethic, and

we're highly motivated, and we're both creative and intellectual. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Spouse 4 also admires her husband's kind and gentle nature, as well as his strength and "ability to stay calm in the chaos." She also appreciates the way he has always treated her with respect.

She stated:

He was just respectful of me from the very moment we started dating, to the point where I didn't trust it because I had never been treated well before, so I thought it was manipulative. But then I realized that's just who he is. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Marital conflict. Couple 4 reporting handling conflict by slowing down and talking things through, although Student 4 admitted that they "get a little loud now and then." The couple uses their counseling backgrounds, as well as their spiritual influences, to resolve conflict.

Student 4 reported:

If we have something that's a big issue between us, we stop and we both regroup and go pray about it, and we say, 'God, what do you have for our family?' Then we try to realign and see if there's something in my heart or in my life that's impacting this more than it should. But we never push over each other. If she says 'no' to something, and it's important to me, then we wait. We figure it out. We take time, and if we don't figure it out, we don't do it. (Student 4, individual interview)

Using his couples counseling expertise as a reference point, Student 4 tries to understand his wife's position as best as he can. He stated:

I really try to get what her struggle is, and try to put myself in her shoes and do that whole empathetic thing, and really just be there for her...I see us from a [couples counseling] perspective – the way I cope. I slow down, I breathe, I step back. The best way to get her to help me is for me to be able to respond to her, because I can also help her. Because when we're in a bad place, we're both in a bad place. So it's my responsiveness to her that actually unlocks her responsiveness to me. If I'm not responsive, then I'm setting myself up to fail. (Student 4, individual interview)

Spouse 4 believes the couple resolves conflict "better than most." Early in their relationship, Student 4 reported complying with her for the sake of ending the disagreement.

“But that wasn’t really healthy because then he’d have resentment,” he stated. Over time, the couple has made adjustments. Spouse 4 reported:

As we got healthier, he had a voice, and he would really stand up if he needed to say something. So I’ve learned to back off and be more gentle. We have learned a rhythm...I have learned that winning doesn’t mean anything if he doesn’t have a voice. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Student 4 claimed that the couple has few disagreements these days. He stated, “I don’t know if we disagree; we’re just tired. Big disagreements? There’s just not a bunch of them right now.” Spouse 4 agreed that feeling tired is an issue, which in turn, leads to emotional disconnection. She reported:

So most of our arguments are just about being in tune with each other. Where is he? Where am I? Are we connecting? When he comes home after a long day, it’s unfair for me to just dump the kid on him. He’s tired too, and so, just kind of like navigating how we connect with each other...He’ll come home and want to watch an episode of *The Office* or go upstairs on his bike and exercise, or something, and he’ll not yet be ready to engage. And if my daughter has napped, and my house is clean, and I’ve had some healthy time, I’m totally like, ‘Take all the time you need.’ If I’m exhausted, and she hasn’t napped, and I don’t have the laundry done or whatever, I’m like a dragon. I’m like, ‘You don’t get free time if I don’t get free time! I need a break!’ Then I have to go back and apologize for that because I know he’s had a long day too. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Traditions and rituals. Many of Couple 4’s traditions revolve around holidays. Student 4 reported, “Birthdays are a big deal, holidays are a big deal. Christmas is a big deal.” They also reported wanting to plan the same trips each year including to Key West or to visit family in Louisiana. The couple likes to eat meals together, although depending on schedules, that can be challenging. “We have breakfast together,” Spouse 4 reported. “That’s kind of a ritual. We try to do that at dinner time too, but he sometimes works until 8:00 or 8:30, so 9:00 dinner is hard.” Both Student 4 and Spouse 4 both claimed to be handy, and they reported enjoying working on projects for their home together. They also watch certain TV shows together, despite Spouse 4’s

reservations. “We watch TV,” she stated. “We’re trying to do less of that, but there’s always something that sucks us in!”

Marital goals. Couple 4’s goals appear to be in line with each other. Student 4 reported, “I’d say we’re pretty unified...short term, just get done. Get done with the PhD. That’s for me, and I think that’s hers too.” Student 4 reported the desire to teach after he completes his degree, but he plans on mainly focusing on clinical work.

More long-term, Spouse 4 saw her husband’s education and clinical experience and her mental health administration experience as a good match to eventually start their own endeavor.

She stated:

If you combine our experience, I think we make a pretty powerful couple to run a center or develop maybe even a community, something where...if we left Northwest Arkansas, we could potentially reproduce what we have...I could run the administrative side, and he’d be really good at the clinical side...Or maybe a retreat center, maybe a cabin or two where people can come to do an intensive. Long-term, we feel like that’s something we’re going to do. (Spouse 4, individual interview)

Table 16

Data Summary Table: Couple 4

| Thematic Label | Student 4 | Spouse 4 |
|---|--|--|
| Program-related changes to marriage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Financial • Social • Physical intimacy | <p>“I don’t work as much, but I think being in the PhD kind of gives me more credibility to ask for a little more money in my private practice.” (financial)</p> <p>“Having a baby changed some of that. But yeah, the program, I would not blame the program for anything.” (physical intimacy)</p> | <p>“...I think that [EFT] training has helped us get stronger, and we’re able to have conversations about his PhD program in a healthier way.” (communication)</p> <p>“I know a lot of the people in the program have relocated here, and that is their circle of friends. It’s not ours. This is like a sidebar to [Student 4’s] life. So we’re not as involved. I don’t feel like there’s a sense of urgency to be connected to those people...” (social)</p> <p>“The areas that would kill our intimacy more is that he has a paper to write, or he’s going to be really late or tired... So he’s got to come to bed with me and then get back up, you know?” (physical intimacy)</p> |

Table 16 (Cont.)

| Thematic Label | Student 4 | Spouse 4 |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Marital friendship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive room and current stressors <p>Fondness and admiration</p> | <p>“The baby [is her biggest stressor]. And she just had her appendix out, and the baby has had some blood stuff going on that’s not so great.” (cognitive room)</p> <p>“I now realize that she realizes the load that I have, where the PhD is concerned. Sometimes I felt like because it is like a side thing that I’m doing – she knows my work schedule and she knows the trainings I’m doing – but she doesn’t know a whole lot of PhD things.” (cognitive room)</p> <p>“She’s smart, she’s strong, she’s fun, she’s organized... In a lot of ways, she’s smarter than me!” (admiration)</p> | <p>“I feel like our relationship was kind of founded on good friendship, and the other stuff just kind of naturally fell into place. Like hands down, he is my best friend.”</p> <p>“He’s a hard worker...I admire that about him.” (admiration)</p> <p>“I admire his ability to stay calm in the chaos.” (admiration)</p> |
| <p>Marital conflict</p> | <p>“We get a little bit loud now and then, but for the most part we just talk through stuff.”</p> <p>“If we have something that’s a big issue between us, we stop and we both regroup and go pray about it...”</p> <p>“The rubs in our relationship are like if I come home and I’m tired, and she’s tired, and we have the baby, it’s like, do I take the baby? Does she keep the baby? She’s had the baby for 10 hours. Why do I not have the baby?”</p> <p>“I really try to get what her struggle is, and try to put myself in her shoes, and do that empathetic thing, and really just be there for her.”</p> | <p>“I feel like we resolve conflict better than most. So early on, he would be the one to comply for the sake of getting over the argument, but that’s not a healthy thing, because then he’d have resentment.”</p> <p>“So in our relationship, we’ve learned a rhythm. I have been able to say, ‘Hey, I didn’t get much sleep, I’m really tired, this is what’s going on right now, and therefore, I might be more reactive.’”</p> <p>“So our biggest argument is time.”</p> <p>“Most of our arguments are just about being in tune with each other. Where is he? Where am I? Are we connecting?”</p> |
| <p>Traditions and rituals</p> | <p>“We go to Florida, actually, Key West. We’ve been doing that every year for the last few years.”</p> <p>“Birthdays are a big deal, holidays are a big deal.”</p> <p>“We have breakfast together. That’s kind of a ritual.”</p> | <p>“Projects. I say projects, but I mean woodworking stuff, making stuff, house projects.”</p> <p>“One we’ve tried to do is breakfast. We get up and [he] will make breakfast, and we eat together.”</p> <p>“We try to make some kind of tradition, but then I feel like life gets in the way.”</p> |

Table 16 (Cont.)

| Thematic Label | Student 4 | Spouse 4 |
|----------------|--|---|
| Marital goals | <p>“I think we’re pretty unified on our goals.”</p> <p>“Short-term, just get done. Get done with the PhD. That’s for me, and I think that’s hers too.”</p> <p>“We feel good and are headed in a good direction.”</p> | <p>“Short-term, get him through the program and take a breath.”</p> <p>“If you combine our experience, I think we make a pretty powerful couple to run a center or develop maybe even a community, something where...if we left Northwest Arkansas, we could potentially reproduce what we have.”</p> |

Composite Textural Description for Doctoral Students

The doctoral students’ individual textural descriptions are summarized as a composite textural description below. Organized by thematic labels, the composite description that follows highlights additional common themes among the doctoral students that capture the essence of their experience as a whole. The labels and themes for doctoral students are listed in Table 17.

Table 17

Composite Individual Themes for Students

-
- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General impressions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Positive sentiments ○ Negative sentiments • Personal and professional changes • Program-related benefits of marriage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Support: emotional, financial, academic, logistical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program-related challenges of marriage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Time management ○ Role balance • Roles and responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Roles ○ Responsibilities (Gender considerations) |
|---|--|

General Impressions

The married male doctoral students in the CES program at the University of Arkansas experience a blend of feelings toward the program. These feelings are categorized as positive and negative sentiments. The composite positive and negative sentiments for the doctoral students in this study are described below.

Positive sentiments. The program provides a space for professional development in the counselor education competencies of teaching, supervision, research, and academic writing. All four doctoral student participants acknowledged growth in at least one of these areas, if not all. The academic rigor of the program does not appear to be overwhelming for the students. The consistent achievement of passing grades, along with improvement in the areas of teaching, supervision, research, and writing, seemingly promotes an increase in self-efficacy and self-esteem.

Negative sentiments. The doctoral students from this study also reported feeling frustration over a number of aspects of the CES program. These aspects range from a perceived ambiguity of the program to when courses are offered. Student 2 went as far as to question the safety of the program for students who hold less popular beliefs among counselors and counselor educators.

Personal and Professional Changes

The student participants from the current study described both personal and professional changes while enrolled in the doctoral program. Some components of personal growth are specifically related to the doctoral program, while other aspects of personal growth, for students who matriculated directly from their master's program, may be the continuation of a growth process that began previously. Specific professional changes vary among the students, but they seem to include growth related to teaching, supervision, research, academic writing, and enhanced clinical skills.

Personal changes. Because all student participants entered the CES program immediately after completing their master's degrees, it was difficult for them to identify concrete areas of changes, personally-speaking, with few exceptions. Student 1 referred to "continued

personal growth” from the outset of his master’s program until present day, but he admitted to improved self-esteem triggered by the doctoral program. Student 2 reported making strides on making better first impressions and being more tactful with the words he chooses, while Student 3 admitted to being a more patient person as a result of the doctoral program.

Professional changes. In terms of professional changes, the students pointed to improvements in teaching, supervision, research, and academic writing as areas of improvement. Due to co-instructing courses with professors in the program, students have been given opportunities to develop their own teaching style in the classroom. Student 2 appreciated “learning different ways to do a lecture,” while Student 3 felt like he is “fine tuning.”

Three of the doctoral students in the study have been given the opportunity to serve as the doctoral supervisors for master’s-level practicum and internship students. They were exposed to different models of supervision which they implemented with their supervisees under faculty supervision. Even Student 4, who has extensive experience as a supervisor as part of his professional work, admitted to benefiting from learning the Discrimination Model of supervision.

There is a link between the development of research and writing skills. Students reported having grown in these areas through the execution of their own research ideas, as well as teaming up with professors to assist with other research projects. The students reported having experienced other professional changes as well since beginning the doctoral program. Only Student 1 transitioned employment when entering the doctoral program, going from a case worker in his home state to holding a counseling graduate assistantship at the University of Arkansas. Student 3 has maintained his employment as a part-time marriage and family therapist and adjunct instructor, but he has decreased the number of clients whom he sees, while Student 4

has increased his professional workload since the doctoral program began by starting a private practice and accepting the role of clinical director. Only Student 2 was unemployed prior to matriculation and was still unemployed at the time of data collection.

Program-Related Benefits of Marriage

All four doctoral students from the completed study acknowledged the support they receive from their wives as instrumental in their success in the program. Qualitatively different, the support can be emotional, financial, academic, or logistical in nature. These types of support are described below.

Emotional support. Emotional support comes in the form of encouragement, and the sense that their wives are on their sides as they pursue their doctorates. Doctoral students complete academically-challenging coursework and research projects, as well as engage in other roles such as supervisor and instructor. The challenges that come with these means of professional development are less daunting with an emotionally supportive spouse. Students appreciate their wives support during times when they feel frustration over school-related matters as well. Spouses allow the students to vent in a safe environment and hear a different perspective on the issue.

Financial support. The students' spouses also provide financial support. In many cases, non-student spouses may adopt the role of primary earner in the household if necessary. Those students who are employed, thus, not looking to their spouses as the primary earners, may still rely on their wives for financial support by means of managing the budget for the family.

Academic support. In the case of Student 4, his wife provides academic support. Types of academic support include proofreading assignments, designing poster presentations, and even

brainstorming ideas for his dissertation. Students who look to their spouses for academic assistance may encourage their wives to become more involved and interested in the program.

Logistical support. Logistical support from the doctoral students' spouses can be observed through increasing household-related responsibilities, such as completing more chores in the home. Non-student spouses may also support their husbands by attending to errands that students may not have time to complete themselves. Among others, this includes tasks such as grocery shopping and scheduling repairs for in the home.

Program-Related Challenges of Marriage

Doctoral students may also face challenges to their marriages that are program-related. From the students' perspectives, the common challenges of being married while in the CES doctoral program pertain to time and the balancing of roles. These challenges are described below.

Time management. The biggest challenge faced by the married doctoral students who took part in this study was the issue of time, or lack thereof. All four student participants referenced the challenge of being able to complete their school-related tasks, while still allocating time to spend with their families. Due to the time commitment required, Student 3 referred to the doctoral program as "like having a second spouse."

The students engage in various strategies to help them manage their time accordingly. Student 1, for example, reported refraining from doing any school-related work on the weekends or on weeknights before his children go to bed. Student 3 reported choosing to do much of his work late at night as well, once his wife and child are asleep. Student 4 reported blocking off time on Monday and Saturday mornings to write. Only Student 2 admitted to lacking a plan of how to best manage his time.

Also, common among the students, is a lack of time to engage in self-care. Student 1 is an avid runner and reported struggling to carve out time to run on the weekends, which is the best time for him to do so. Student 3 enjoys golfing, but stated he is limited in the time he can spend on the course. Student 2 and Student 4 reporting having to choose between spending time with their daughters after a long day away from home, or engaging in an individual activity, such as riding an exercise bike or playing video games.

Role balance. Not far removed from the issue of time, and time management, is the challenge of balancing roles. The student participants identified with several roles including student, husband, father, counselor, trainer, and community member. The students must often choose on what role to focus throughout their days. For example, Student 2 discussed having a 45-minute window to either tend to household chores or study, and he chooses to study. There appears to be a degree of intentionality behind how the students shift between roles. Setting boundaries around study times, blocking time specifically to spend with family, and sacrificing sleep and other means of self-care are among the implemented strategies.

All four couples in the current study have young children, with Couples 3 and 4 having their first children after the students matriculated. Balancing the roles between student and father appears challenging, and seemingly more difficult than the transitions between student and spouse.

Roles and Responsibilities

As alluded to, the function of maintaining and managing roles is one of the principal challenges of the married doctoral students identified during the current study. Balancing roles can be daunting when considering the responsibilities that come with each role. The roles and responsibilities of the students are described below.

Roles. All four students reported making family a priority over all other roles. Student 2 admitted to having missed class on one occasion because he had not spent enough time with his daughter recently. Student 1 referred to moving from one role to another as “a giant juggling act,” but claimed to be fully present regardless of his role at the time. This can be a struggle for some. Student 2 reporting believing he thinks about school too often, even during times when he is with his family. Student 4 stated he is “all over the place” when it comes to where he focuses his thoughts.

In most cases, the doctoral students manage their roles by setting aside specific times to attend to school-related tasks or spend time with family. Designated TV and movie nights are common practice, as is tending to schoolwork while their families are asleep. On occasions when school-related functions interfere with scheduled family times, students may feel guilty about their choices.

Responsibilities. Household-related tasks and chores are, for the most part, distributed as equally as possible between the doctoral students and their spouses. With the exception of Student 2, who considered himself to be “real traditional” in terms of gender-specific roles in the home, the students reported disregarding stereotypical male roles in their homes. All take part in, or are fully responsible, for cooking, cleaning, vacuuming, and doing laundry. They also reportedly engage in childcare duties such as changing diapers and night time routines. As males, however, there also seems to be a sense of pressure to provide for their families. Student 4 felt “pressure to continue to make money,” while Student 2 admitted to feeling shame about the fact that his wife is the primary earner, while he is unemployed.

Composite Textural Description for Non-Student Spouses

The individual textural descriptions for the non-student spouses from this completed study are summarized in Table 18 below. Organized by thematic labels, the composite textural description that follows highlights common themes among the non-student spouses that capture the essence of their combined experience.

Table 18

Composite Individual Themes for Non-Student Spouses

| | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General impressions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Positive sentiments ○ Negative sentiments • Personal and professional changes • Program-related benefits of marriage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Schedule flexibility ○ Improved communication ○ Pride | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program-related challenges of marriage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Financial strain ○ Role expansion ○ Social disconnection ○ Family sacrifices • Roles and responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Roles ○ Responsibilities (Gender considerations) |
|---|--|

General Impressions

The overall feelings of the non-student spouses from this study toward the CES doctoral program at the University of Arkansas seem to complement those of their husbands. Aspects or effects of the doctoral program seen as positive by the doctoral students are often seen in a similar fashion by their spouses, while more unpleasant effects experienced by their husbands are seen in a negative light by the non-student spouses as well. The non-student spouses may not be familiar enough with the basics of the doctoral program to form strong opinions, and thus, rely on the attitudes of their husbands in forming their own, or at best, have an outsider’s perspective. There are, however, certain program-related consequences that they react to independently from their husbands.

Positive sentiments. All four students from the current study matriculated into the CES program directly, or shortly after, completing their master’s degree. As a result, the non-student

spouses were accustomed to their husbands being in the student role. The program is “not overwhelming” according to Spouse 4. As long as the students are able to generally fulfill their responsibilities in their roles of husband and father, and communicate any schedule changes in advance, the experience is seen as positive.

Negative sentiments. Both Spouse 1 and Spouse 2 relocated with their husbands for the doctoral program. Both reported attempting to connect with a campus resource designed for spouses, but their emails were never returned. This reportedly led to feelings of isolation and loneliness. The University of Arkansas can be perceived as large, especially for Spouse 2, who grew accustomed to a smaller school when her husband was in his master’s program. She referred to the location of his classes as “a big monolith of a building.”

Non-student spouses may feel less important when their husbands are focused on their program-related tasks, or if the program keeps them away from home for several hours. It is common for the non-student spouses, when feeling isolated or frustrated with certain aspects of the program, to engage in program blaming. Student 3 called the doctoral program “such an easy target.”

Personal and Professional Changes

The non-student spouses of this study have experienced personal and professional changes since their husbands began the CES doctoral programs through actions such as switching careers and becoming more supportive of their spouses. While each non-student spouse experienced changes that were individually unique, the common theme among them is an increased capacity to be supportive. Professionally changes also varied, ranging from switching careers to merely a reduction in hours to better attend to other roles. The non-student spouses’ personal and professional changes are described below.

Personal changes. The non-student spouses expressed an improved ability to be in an emotionally supportive role as an area in which they have grown from a personal standpoint. For Spouse 3, this transition took her from a place of frustration to one of acceptance, where she is now able to “focus on supporting and encouraging” her husband. She reported struggling with this transition early on because her husband entered the doctoral program earlier than she expected. Spouse 1 indicated that she is now “...a more supportive spouse in ways [she] didn’t realize [she] needed to be.” Spouse 4 alluded to becoming more mature as a person over the course of their marriage, therefore, allowing her to be more supportive of her husband than she may have been at an earlier point.

Professional changes. Professionally, the non-students seem to have also experienced change characterized by a slowing down, complete interruption, or shifting of their own professional aspirations. Spouse 1 and Spouse 2 have both drastically changed their career paths since their husbands began the doctoral program. Spouse 1 reported having gone through two job changes, starting as a child support specialist, before the relocation, to currently being a teacher’s aide. Spouse 2 was a small business owner prior to the move, but starting a similar business in Arkansas during the time her husband is in the doctoral program does not seem like a worthwhile endeavor in her eyes.

While Spouse 3 reported maintaining a small caseload as a marriage and family therapist, current circumstances prevent her from increasing the number of clients with whom she works. As someone who enjoys public speaking, she is also not able to accept as many speaking engagements as she would prefer. Only Spouse 4 is completely satisfied in her professional role as an administrator for a mental health private practice and part-time life coach, although she reported thinking ahead of professional possibilities for her and her husband once he earns his

doctorate. Even Spouse 1, who admittedly enjoys her current job as a teacher's aide, has recently began an online graduate program in education to open the door to future career opportunities.

Program-Related Benefits of Marriage

The non-student spouse participants in this study identified program-related benefits of marriage. These benefits include flexible scheduling, improved communication, and witnessing their husbands pursue their goals. The program-related benefits from the non-student spouses' perspectives are described below.

Schedule flexibility. The CES program at the University of Arkansas is primarily a day program, meaning the last scheduled class ends by 5:00 pm. The only exceptions to this are statistics courses which are typically scheduled in the evening. Supervision or internship responsibilities may also cause students' days to extend somewhat, but it is more often the case that students are home each evening. Additionally, doctoral classes are held on Monday and Wednesday only, freeing up students the other days of the week to study, work, or take care of household duties.

Improved communication. All four non-student spouses acknowledged that their husbands are better communicators since the time they began the doctoral program. The skills the students learn in the program, while problematic in communication between spouses at times, can also be beneficial as evidenced by good listening skills and the application of theoretical techniques. The latter, can be helpful as long as they are introduced gently, rather than being implemented by the students without warning. Improved communication can also be seen when the students interact with their children.

Pride. The non-student spouses are proud that their husbands are pursuing their dreams. Spouse 4 mentioned there is “a little brag” when she talks to someone about her husband. Spouse 3 felt excited that she gets to see her husband “do what he’s always wanted.” Spouse 1 reporting seeing how happy the program makes her husband, and how his happiness is infectious with their home.

Program-Related Challenges of Marriage

Several program-related challenges exist for non-student spouses. The spouses in this study identified financial worries, added household responsibilities, minimal social connections, and a suspension of normal family plans as their main areas of concern. These challenges are described below.

Financial strain. A reliance on loans or the need to maintain a strict budget are among the money-related challenges of having a spouse in a doctoral program. Spouse 2, for example, expressed concern about the amount of debt the couple is accruing in the form of student loans. While she works full-time, she reported that her wages are barely enough to cover the bills, let alone day-to-day living expenses. She stated feeling concerned about whether their decision for her husband to pursue his doctorate will pay off in the long run.

Those couples who do not rely on student loans still must maintain a budget that limits their expenditures. This can be especially challenging for Spouse 1 when her husband’s fellowship payments are delayed at the beginning of each semester. Large purchases are often delayed, vacations rarely occur, and even date nights for the couples are contingent on finding affordable child care. For the non-student spouses and students who work in mental health, there appears to be an ongoing conversation about the appropriate sizes for their caseloads to allow

them flexibility to commit to other obligations when needed, yet still ensure enough income to support the family.

Role expansion. While a willingness and a degree of understanding certainly exist, non-student spouses appear challenged by the increased role they must play with household-related responsibilities. Despite an effort on the part of the students to maintain balance in household chores, errands, and child care, their spouses ultimately adopt the burden of household management. Grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning, and child care often fall on the non-student spouses, especially on occasions when their husbands' program-related responsibilities are more urgent, such as when they are preparing for an exam or facing a deadline for a written assignment. In some cases, non-student spouses not only expand their roles, but take on new roles. Student 2, for example, is now the sole primary earner for the family.

Social disconnection. For Spouse 1 and Spouse 2, who relocated to Arkansas for their husbands' doctoral program, feeling connected as part of a community has also reportedly been a challenge. Spouse 1 admitted to "not knowing a soul" when the couple moved, and has made limited connections since, primarily through work or the couple's church. Aside from one dinner out with co-workers, Spouse 2 stated she has not socialized with anyone in the nearly 2 years since the couple has lived here other than her husband.

The non-student spouses in this study all expressed some degree of disconnection from their husbands' programs. They reported having a general awareness of their husbands' peers and professors, in that they know names and basic descriptions. In some cases, they have met their husbands' classmates or professors at school functions or in the community, but the occurrences are too rare for them to feel a true sense of belonging. They expressed interest in increasing social involvement with others in the doctoral program, or even with other spouses,

through a range of activities. Spouse 3 suggested an annual program dinner, while Spouse 1 reportedly would appreciate more frequent gatherings, such as spousal support groups. The exception to this is Spouse 4. While she stated being open to the idea of connecting with other spouses, it is more for their benefit than her own. Due to her being well-established in the community, she admitted to not being invested in forging new relationships.

Family sacrifices. Another reported challenge for non-student spouses takes the form of family sacrifices. Individual professional goals are put on hold. Spouse 3 referenced “pausing [her] career” in order for her husband to pursue his goals which causes her to feel “left behind.” Student 1 left a rewarding position for her husband’s academic pursuits. Spouse 2’s career is “in a holding pattern.”

Family expansion becomes more complicated as well. Spouse 3 and Spouse 4 wondered whether having their first children while their husbands were in the doctoral program was the right choice. Spouse 2 has stated reservations about the couple’s recent decision to try for a second child. Other things, such as leisure, vacations, and large purchases are also delayed.

Roles and Responsibilities

The non-student spouses in this study have roles that have been altered in part due their husbands’ doctoral program. These expanded roles often come with new responsibilities as well. These roles and responsibilities are described below.

Roles. The non-student spouses fall into roles such as wife, mother, employee, and group facilitator, among others. While the occurrence is rare in which they must fully take on a new role, it is common for them to increase the responsibilities within one of their existing roles. The exception to this is with Spouse 2. Because Student 2’s schedule prohibits him from seeking employment, Spouse 2 has reportedly taken on the role of primary earner in addition to being

nearly solely responsible for household chores and child care. She admitted feeling “like a single mom” at times. This is compounded by the fact that when she has left her husband in charge of their daughter, or when she has asked him to complete a chore, she reported being often disappointed when she returns.

Responsibilities. Since their husbands began the doctoral program, the responsibilities involved in household management have seemingly increased. Three of the couples reported believing in an equal division of household responsibilities, and attempt to operate as such, but the students’ program-related tasks lead to a redistribution within the home. Non-student spouses appear to have picked up the slack in terms of cooking and cleaning in most cases, even when gender roles are a non-factor. They are generally understanding of their husbands’ time limitations, and thus, have fewer expectations of their husbands, coupled with a resignation of their increased responsibilities. For example, Spouse 1 admitted to being “less nagging” when it comes to asking her husband to complete tasks around the house. Spouse 4 stated a need to delay certain projects because she needs her husband’s help or expertise, and he is not always available.

Composite Textural Description for Couples

The textural descriptions for the four couples from this completed study are summarized below. The composite description is organized by thematic labels. It aims to describe common themes shared among the couple as it relates to the changes the couples have experienced, the quality of their friendship, conflict within the marriage, and traditions, rituals, and goals. Table 19 below introduces the couples’ themes.

Table 19

Composite Themes for Couples

-
- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Program-related changes to marriage<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Communication○ Finances○ Social interaction○ Physical intimacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Marital friendship• Marital conflict<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Areas of conflict○ Conflict management• Traditions and rituals• Marital goals |
|--|---|

Program-Related Changes to Marriage

The couples in this completed study experienced changes to their marriage that fall under four categories: communication, finances, social interaction, and physical intimacy. While not all changes acknowledged by the couples are solely related to the doctoral program, many attribute at least a portion of these changes to the student spouses' program. These changes are described below.

Communication. All four couples referenced changes in the way they communicate with each other, in part, influenced by the doctoral program. Both Student 1 and Student 4 reported being better able to express displeasure with their spouses as opposed to complying for the sake of keeping the peace. Counseling techniques learned by the students in the doctoral program, or perhaps dating back to their master's training, are incorporated into communication as well. This can be useful at times if introduced appropriately, but it can also be received negatively by the non-student spouses if caught off guard. Both student and spouse in Couple 3 and Couple 4 work in mental health, so in their households especially, there is a tendency for counseling skills to be utilized. While beneficial in times of stress and conflict, it can also result in things becoming "over processed."

Couples have less time to spend together, which can lead to less meaningful communication. For example, prior to beginning the doctoral program, Couple 2 reportedly

would sit on their front porch and talk several times a week. Student 2 stated they have done this only three times in the 2 years Student 2 has been enrolled in the program.

Finances. As discussed previously, changes in couples' financial picture can be an area of concern. In some cases, debt is accumulated through seeking out student loans. For those students who maintain an income through a graduate assistantship or work in the community, couples must ensure they budget and stay within their means. Couples 3 and 4 reported that they regularly discuss what the right number of clients to have on their caseload should be in order to balance school responsibilities and earning the money they need.

Social interaction. Since the students began their doctoral program, the couples have experienced social changes. For couples who relocated, their friends and family support system have been left behind. The couples have made few new connections, either among students' peers or in the community. For Couple 4, they are established in the community and are not seeking new connections, but the other three couples expressed a desire to be more social. The reality, however, is that couples choose to spend much of their free time they could potentially share with others as a family unit instead.

Physical intimacy. All four couples in this study reported a reduction of physical intimacy since the students began the program. This is, in part, an outcome of the program itself. In an attempt to balance the responsibilities of the program and home, students often tend to their program-related tasks in the evenings after their children go to sleep, disrupting what otherwise could be quality time for the couples. Non-student spouse also increase their responsibilities around the home as a result of the doctoral program demanding attention from their spouses. The presence of children likely exacerbates this, as time and energy must be devoted to them as

well. With “energy spent elsewhere” by non-student spouses and students alike, the couples’ sex lives are affected.

Marital Friendship

The quality of the marital friendships among the couples in this study is reportedly strong. The students appear to have a great deal of admiration for their wives, and the non-student spouses feel the same about their husbands. Work ethic and determination are among the more commonly admired characteristics.

The friendship is the “core of the relationship,” and the couples seemed to have developed strong friendships before embarking on romantic relationships. Doctoral study has seemingly influenced the couples’ friendships to an extent. Spouse 1 suggested that her friendship with her husband has been “a little bit on the backburner.” Spouse 3 indicated that when her husband first started the program, their friendship suffered. She is, however, able to navigate the program-related changes in their lives by reminding herself how good of friends they have become over the years.

An awareness of each other’s day-to-day lives is an important aspect of measuring friendship (Gottman, 1999). The doctoral students in this study appear to have a working knowledge of their wives’ daily activities, including their stressors and areas of concern. The non-student spouses acknowledged their husbands’ stressors, but notably, they struggle with gaining a firm understanding of the components of their husbands’ programs. This is not due to lack of effort, however. They appear to have made attempts to learn about things such as program requirements, course content, and dates and deadlines, for example, but due to an ever-changing schedule and a lack of clarity on the students’ part, they are often left with as many questions as answers.

Marital Conflict

The couples from this study identified their common areas of disagreement. In addition, couples also discussed methods they use to manage conflict in their relationships. These areas of conflict and conflict management strategies are described below.

Areas of conflict. Time management, communication, finances, and child rearing were mentioned as the main topics on which the couples disagree. Conflict over time management can occur when the doctoral students neglect their at-home responsibilities due to the demands of school. For example, a student may need to forgo a planned family activity in order to study for an exam. Busier schedules can also lead to a breakdown of communication between the couple. Students may forget to inform their wives about a change in their schedule, which could lead to the need for the non-student spouses to compromise or alter their own plans.

Conflict over couples' finances can occur over delaying large purchases or vacations, or simply, in budgeting on a monthly basis. Child-related conflict may take place over matters of discipline, but more commonly, this occurs with more simple situations, such as basic child supervision. The non-student spouses, who are chiefly responsible for their children's well-being, seek their husbands' assistance with the children once they return home from school or work. If the students or non-student spouses are experiencing stress or are not well-rested, conflict in the exchange of childcare responsibility can occur.

Conflict management. While the non-student spouses expressed mixed emotions regarding their husband's use of counseling skills within their own marriages, the couples from this study appear to manage conflict "better than most." Couples reportedly engage in respectful discussion, empathy, and self-soothing during times of disagreement, which are common strategies recommended by counselors. Couples may also rely on specific rules they have set in

place. For example, Couple 2 reported they do not allow name-calling during a disagreement. Couple 4 stated they utilize prayer in times of conflict caused by potential change, and if they cannot reach an agreement, no change is made.

Traditions and Rituals

Common traditions and rituals among the couples of this study involve birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays. Couple 2 admitted to celebrating a birthday week instead of just a day. Couple 3 stated they recreate a night from their honeymoon each year on their anniversary, including stay in the same hotel room. Couple 4, while not an anniversary, reported they vacation in Key West every summer. Having breakfast together is a preferred ritual of many, whether that involves a weekly stop at a bakery or a Saturday morning breakfast of eggs and pancakes for the family. Couples also engage in TV nights in which they watch particular shows together.

Marital Goals

All four couples in this study listed graduation from the CES doctoral program as their number one short-term goal. Beyond that, some differences exist within most couples. Couple 1 agreed that a career in academia is in Student 1's future; however, they differed on preferred geographic location. Spouse 1 stated she would like to stay centrally located in the United States, while Student 1 is open to positions nationally. Couple 2 shared a vision of owning a home in the country where they can be self-sustainable. Student 2 prefers that his wife not have to work, but Spouse 2 sees this as unlikely given the debt they are accruing and their desire to grow their family. Couple 3 differed in how they view their retirement years. While Student 3 dreams of retiring in Florida, Spouse 3 would like to continue working as long as possible. Only Couple 4 share similar goals, both short and long-term.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of this phenomenological study that consisted of semi-structured interviews with four couples, 6 weeks of critical incident journals, and separate focus groups for the male doctoral students and their non-student spouses. The following research question was reviewed:

1. What is the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students in CES programs and their non-student spouses?

In order to answer the research question, the following research sub-questions were also addressed:

1. What is the individual lived experience of married male doctoral students in CES programs?
2. What is the individual lived experience of the non-student spouses of married male doctoral students in CES programs?

The thematic labels for each individual participant were introduced, as were thematic labels for the participants organized as couples. The thematic labels that were established for individuals were general impressions of their experience, program-related benefits of marriage, program-related challenges of marriage, personal and professional changes, and roles and responsibilities, with the latter placing an emphasis on gender considerations. The thematic labels for the couples were program-related changes of marriage (including changes in their communication, finances, social interaction, and physical intimacy), marital friendship, marital conflict, traditions and rituals, and lastly, marital goals.

Textural descriptions for each participant and each couple were included. Lastly, the data was summarized through composite textural descriptions for the doctoral student participants, the

non-student spouse participants, and couples. During the process of formulating composite textural descriptions, additional themes came to the surface that corresponded to the thematic labels. For doctoral students, these themes included positive and negative sentiments of their experience of the program, emotional, financial, academic, and logistical support from their spouses, and time management and role balance as the most pressing challenges of the program. Personal and professional changes, as well as roles and responsibilities within their marriages were also discussed from a collective perspective.

For non-student spouses, the themes established through the composite textural description included positive and negative sentiments of the program, schedule flexibility, improved communication, and pride, as the main benefits, while financial strain, role expansion, social disconnection, and family sacrifices as the most significant program-related challenges. Similar to the composite description for the students, the personal and professional changes for the non-student spouses, as well as their roles and responsibilities, were also summarized.

In the composite textural description for the couples, collective changes to communication, finances, social interaction, and physical intimacy were described, followed by a summary of marital friendship, marital conflict (including areas of conflict and methods for conflict management), traditions and rituals, and marital goals.

CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS, SYNTHESIS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students in Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) programs and their non-student spouses. The researcher believed that gaining a better understanding of the phenomenon of the shared lived experience of male doctoral students in CES programs and their non-student spouses would assist prospective students and their spouses in the decision-making process for choosing doctoral study, help guide current students and their spouses as they navigate their programs, and provide counselor education programs with information to better support their married students.

This chapter includes analyses of the textural descriptions for the individual participants, as well as analyses for the participants grouped as couples. This form of analysis is known as structural description (Moustakas, 1994). A discussion of each couple's relationships through the lens of the *Sound Marital House* (SMH) theory (Gottman, 1999) is also included. These individual and couples' structural descriptions are followed by composite structural descriptions for the current study's participants arranged as doctoral students, non-student spouses, and couples. Completing the data analysis is a statement of synthesis that captures the essence of the shared lived experience for all participants. The chapter concludes with a discussion of implications for prospective and current doctoral students in CES programs and their spouses, as well as for counselor education programs. Lastly, recommendations for future research are included, as well as a statement of conclusion.

Structural Descriptions

“Structural description involves conscious acts of thinking and judging, imaging, and recollecting, in order to arrive at core structural meanings” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 79). While textural description addresses the “what” of a phenomenon, structural description answers the “why” and “how.” To arrive at a sound structural description, one must engage in the process of *Imaginative Variation*. This process seeks possible meanings through the use of the researcher’s imagination and approaching the data from different frames of reference and perspectives, including those of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994).

Below are the structural descriptions for the participants in this current study. The structural descriptions are arranged by student and spouse initially. This is by structural descriptions by couple as a unit, before progressing to the next couple.

Couple 1: Student 1

Student 1’s experience of the doctoral program thus far can be characterized as having both positive and negative qualities. Overall, he enjoys the program for the opportunities for him to experience both personal and professional growth. He has seen increases in his self-esteem as a result of the program, as well as improvements in his clinical, supervision, and research skills.

When Student 1 relocated for the program, he left a position as a case worker. So while he had experience working with families, he had yet to engage in individual counseling. With his counseling graduate assistantship on campus, he now works with students weekly on a one-on-one basis. This exposure, and the positive feedback he has received from his supervisors, are at the core of his improvement in self-efficacy.

Student 1 now sees himself in a certain light, poised to move forward and enter the world of academia as a counselor educator. His wife provides him emotional support that helps him

manage any frustrations he may have along the way. She validates his feelings and makes him feel as if someone is on his side. She also provides financial support for the family. While Student 1 does receive a stipend in his graduate assistant role, as well as fellowship awarded from the graduate school, Spouse 1 contributes more to the family income. Just as importantly, she manages the household finances, including keeping the family on a budget. Given his other responsibilities, budgeting would be too burdensome of a role for Student 1 to maintain at this point.

Managing his time and toggling between roles is Student 1's biggest challenge as it relates to being a married student in the doctoral program. His family is his top priority, and therefore, he will delay his program-related responsibilities until after his two children are asleep. He also refrains from doing any schoolwork over the weekends. It is important for Student 1 to attend family functions, such as father-daughter dances or sporting events. He values his family above all and demonstrates that through his undivided attention.

Around the house, it appears Student 1 does more than his fair share of the work. He refuses the traditional male role in the home and will routinely do the laundry, vacuum, and clean the kitchen. He takes this stance despite his report of his wife's insistence that he also take care of anything that involves bugs, the garage, or the yard. So to that extent, he is forced into the stereotypical male role, but takes on additional responsibilities as well.

His self-discipline in terms of balancing roles is of benefit to him. Prior to getting married and having children, Student 1 socialized frequently. Since starting a family, his commitment to family values helps keep him on track, both personally and academically. He did admit, though, to his need for socialization with others and will do so when possible, often, while his wife stays home with their children. He battles between the part of him that enjoys this time

he spends socializing away from his family, and the part that wants his wife to be at his side. Student 1 feels guilty when school obligations and social functions keep him away from his family, but not to the extent to which he would regularly opt out of networking opportunities.

Couple 1: Spouse 1

Spouse 1 struggled initially when her family moved to Arkansas for her husband's doctoral program. She reported feeling forced to leave a job that she enjoyed and left her friends behind as well. Upon arriving at her new home, she knew no one, and her attempts to connect with resources for spouses through the university were unsuccessful. This left her feeling isolated, frustrated, and resentful toward her husband for initiating the move. Spouse 1 accepted a job at a medical practice that took its toll on her, leaving her physically and emotionally exhausted, and not the wife or mother she expected of herself. It was when she left that position, and went to work for an elementary school as a teacher's aide, that her outlook began to change.

She reported that her new work hours are more manageable, and therefore, she has willingly taken on additional responsibilities in the home. She takes pride in having dinner ready each night for her husband, something she could not do with her previous employment. While she still counts on Student 1 to tackle certain chores around the home, specifically ones that involve the outdoors or messier chores like taking out the trash, she has learned to temper her expectations of him because of all the time he spends away from home. This acceptance of more responsibilities on her part, along with her diminished expectations of his, is the result of her husband's clear devotion to his role as a father. Spouse 1 acknowledged her husband only has so much time each day, and her preference is that he channel his time and energy into quality family time when not at school, and not be focused on chores around the home.

Simultaneously, Spouse 1 has accepted the role of the supportive spouse, and voluntarily is delaying her own professional development so that her husband can achieve his professional goals. His enrollment in the program, however, has sparked her interest in pursuing higher education herself, and she has begun taking courses in pursuit of a master's degree.

While Spouse 1 feels more at ease with the circumstances of life, which she refers to as "a season," she continues to feel isolated from her husband's program. She has had very limited interactions with her husband's peers and colleagues. She would like to interact with them more and join her husband for school functions, but she sees their two children as a hindrance. The cost of regular child care is an obstacle, and bringing the children along is draining for her, as well as embarrassing, if her children misbehave. In an effort to keep her informed, Student 1 will often speak to her about his peers and professors. She appreciates this, but she also becomes frustrated when he makes references to people as if she knows them. This serves as a reminder of her separation from the program, and that her husband has a life of which she is not a part.

This isolation, and the lack of social support locally, are Spouse 1's biggest challenges as it relates to the doctoral program. Because she does not receive emotional support elsewhere, Spouse 1 looks to her husband more frequently to get her needs met. When he falls short of this obligation due to his attention being scattered, Spouse 1 becomes upset, which can deepen her feelings of isolation if not addressed.

Spouse 1 also recognizes the positive consequences of her husband's program. She sees how his zest for the profession carries over into his communication at home, both with her and their children. She also shares in her husband's pride when he receives positive feedback from a professor or supervisor, or when he reaches a milestone on his way toward completing the program.

Couple 1

Couple 1 acknowledged several changes in their marriage since Student 1 began the doctoral program. Student 1 appears to have improved his communication skills. This is evidenced by the fact that he can express his negative emotions more openly with his spouse, as opposed to burying them for the sake of keeping the peace within the relationship. As a student in the mental health field, Student 1 has learned a variety of techniques for effective communication. His attempts to introduce these techniques into his own relationship have been met with a mixed response from Spouse 1. With a gentle introduction, Spouse 1 is willing to engage in a technique. However, the use of counseling skills without warning is not something Spouse 1 appreciates. It intimidates her in the sense that her husband has an unfair advantage during discussions, primarily conflict. She feels manipulated, and she responds with anger.

Other changes to their marriage involve their finances, social interaction, and sex life. Their financial picture is better than it was before they moved to Arkansas. Student 1 makes more money than he did previously. Spouse 1 makes less as a teacher's aide, but this is offset by the fact that their daughter is now in school instead of preschool, so the couple's childcare expenses have now been cut in half. They employ an envelope system for budgeting, but the couple can tolerate this knowing that any financial sacrifices they make are temporary until Student 1 completes his doctorate and finds employment.

The social changes are more challenging for the couple, especially for Spouse 1. While Student 1 interacts with his classmates and colleagues on a daily basis, forging new relationships, Spouse 1 is limited in her social interactions. She has made few connections with her co-workers thus far compared to her husband. Partially responsible for this contrast is the fact that she has switched jobs once since relocating, and as a teacher's aide, spends much of her day

interacting with elementary school-aged children. Student 1, on the other hand, is able to network with like-minded classmates who are looking to do the same.

Away from campus is a different story for Student 1. Because of his commitment to family time, Student 1 socializes less frequently with others. When the couple has an opportunity to spend time with others, they are hamstrung by the cost of babysitting, or the impracticality of bringing their young children along. The circumstances often result in Student 1 socializing on his own while his wife stays at home with the kids, an arrangement she has agreed upon with reservation.

In terms of physical intimacy, Couple 1 has also seen changes. While the quality of their sex life has fluctuated throughout the duration of their marriage, the doctoral program has been an added detriment. The couple, with their collective focus on adjusting to their new roles after the program started, may have emotionally disconnected in the process. Student 1 put his energy toward establishing himself as a student and making a good impression with professors, classmates, and assistantship supervisors, leaving him little time to focus on enhancing intimacy with his wife. Spouse 1, frustrated with the move, unfulfilled by her job at a medical office, and preoccupied with settling their children into their new environment, did not see sex as a priority. Although they have reached a point of Student 1's program where they have acclimated to their lifestyle, Student 1's schedule, and time and energy the couple allocates toward their children, makes the maintenance of their sex life an ongoing challenge.

The couple's friendship, it seems, is what has allowed them to weather the period of disequilibrium caused by Student 1's matriculation into the CES doctoral program at the University of Arkansas. Even during times when they are not connecting emotionally due to

schedules, responsibilities, or stress, their friendship remains in good standing. They share an admiration for each other. They have similar worldviews and value family above all else.

The couple share a sense of togetherness as they move through this season and beyond. They are aware of each other's stressors and challenges, and they navigate conflict effectively, if not better than most, through calm discussion and the honoring of each other's opinions. They envision a life in which they are fulfilled in their careers, and they have the work-life balance to spend quality time as a family and close friends. While they have some differences in terms of where they settle down geographically, both realize that this is out of their control to an extent. Ultimately, how they live their lives, and the home environment they create for their family, is more important than where they live.

SMH application. The foundation of a strong marriage lay in the quality of the marital friendship, which includes the amount of cognitive room partners have for each other, the amount of fondness or admiration they carry, and their willingness to turn toward each other during bids for attention (Gottman, 1999). Despite obstacles, Couple 1 has seemingly done well in maintaining these objectives, therefore, possibly contributing to maintaining a solid marital friendship. Spouse 1 becomes frustrated when her husband talks about his program as if she should know, but the frustration may be a result of her desire to be better informed. The attempt to make cognitive room for her husband and his program is evident, as is his attempts to include her. Despite the occasional gaps in communication, an indication that they are working to strengthen their bond exists. The couple also admire each other and seek each other out when needing attention and validation. These bids for attention are mostly received, and not rejected. Thus, the markers for a strong SMH foundation are present.

On occasions when the couple's demands from their respective roles occupy too much of their time and attention, communication between them may break down. These periods of stress may lead to Couple 1 focusing on their own individual needs at the time, instead of staying attuned through actions such as turning toward each other during bids for attention. Since Student 1 began the doctoral program, the couple has made strides in how they communicate regarding feeling frustrated, unimportant, or not validated; so as time progresses, communication breakdowns are becoming less frequent.

Thus, because of improved communication, Couple 1 is better equipped to handle conflict than perhaps they once were in the past. Gottman (1999) stated that 69% of problems that arise in marriages are perpetual, so the goal becomes conflict regulation in these circumstances as opposed to conflict resolution. Their issues relating to the frustrations they may have with each other, then, are addressed through dialogue, in which each other's thoughts and feelings are honored. Honoring each other's feelings, and the dreams they represent, is helping Couple 1 reach a point where they can truly create a shared experience between them and set goals as a family (Gottman, 1999).

Creating a shared meaning, the top floor of the SMH, consists of aforementioned goals, but also involves developing rituals, roles, and symbols within a marriage (Gottman, 1999). Couple 1 has excelled in this area. As a couple, and as a family of four, they have developed traditions such as giving gifts in food boxes, Friday night movies, and Saturday morning breakfasts. After a period of acclimation, they have grown into their current roles and have an understanding for each other's strengths and limitations. They see time spent as a family as a symbol of love and trust.

Because Couple 1 has made it a priority to create a culture within their home that breeds connection, conflict and uncertainty about their future are less worrisome. Questions remain regarding what their lives will look like in the coming years, such as where they will move to after Student 1 graduates; however, they seem to have all the resources they need to navigate the challenges ahead.

Couple 2: Student 2

Student 2's experience of the doctoral program at the University of Arkansas has been negative to this point. His beliefs are conservative, and therefore, compared to many of his peers and professors, he often finds himself in the minority. Because of this, Student 2 has had difficulty making connections, and thus, his experience has been characterized by feelings of isolation. Student 2 is also on a remediation plan. He dismisses the reasons behind his remediation as intolerance on the part of the CES faculty when it comes to his conservative views. He feels rejected and unwelcome, and as a result, questions his place in the program.

Given his struggles with finding acceptance, Student 2 relies on his wife almost exclusively for emotional support. He sees his family as a source of motivation, and without them, it is possible he would withdraw from the program. Student 2's wife also provides the financial support needed for him to focus on school. This is something that bothers him because of his traditional way of thinking that he, as the male in the relationship, should be the one providing financially for the family. Because of the discomfort it causes, Student 2 chooses not to think about the current arrangement in his relationship, particularly related to the increased role his wife plays in providing for, and maintaining the household. Keeping it out of mind also precludes any attempts on his part to balance the responsibilities between him and his wife, such as seeking out part-time work to contribute income to the family. He also admitted to having

poor time management skills, a deficit that makes finding employment or increasing his responsibilities within the home, a challenging proposition.

Student 2 lacks a system to toggle between his school and home responsibilities. Perhaps at the center of his inaction, however, beyond poor time management skills, are his traditional views of household responsibilities based on gender. He feels inadequate for not providing for his family, but not to the extent that he tries to make up for it in other ways, such as regularly crossing over to complete household chores that he sees as his wife's responsibilities.

Couple 2: Spouse 2

Spouse 2 has struggled since she and her husband relocated for his doctoral program. She is accustomed to her husband being a student, but the size and impersonal nature of the University of Arkansas bothers her. Her husband's remediation, and overall struggles within the program is a source of frustration for her. Spouse 2 has anger toward the program over her perceptions of what the program has put her husband through. Conversely, she is frustrated with her husband for not demonstrating more growth and flexibility to expedite the remediation process. Doubts whether encouraging her husband to pursue a doctorate was the right move for their family are starting to materialize.

Spouse 2 sees very little advantage to being married to a doctoral student. The fact that her husband's class schedule can be flexible provides some benefit, but even this is minimal since she carries the brunt of responsibilities in the home. Spouse 2 feels a tremendous amount of stress related to the couple's finances. She works a job she does not like, putting her career goals on hold, but the income she makes does not cover their bills and living expenses. They continue to accrue debt through their reliance on student loans to make ends meet.

Despite their financial struggles, the couple has made a decision to have another child while Student 2 is still in the program. Faced with her husband's adamancy to grow their family, Spouse 2 is caught between wanting to have another child and the reality that a larger family on one income, and with an uncertain future, will present challenges the couple may not be equipped to handle. Spouse 2 already is the primary caregiver for their daughter. She worries the responsibilities for a second child would fall on her as well.

Spouse 2 is also responsible for the bulk of the cleaning duties in the couple's home. This arrangement comes from a traditional division of household duties based on gender roles. Historically, Spouse 2 has been willing to maintain this way of operating; however, her patience for a one-sided distribution of responsibilities is wearing thin. Should her husband be able to contribute financially, thereby relieving some of the financial pressure off her, perhaps she would more freely accept the notion of growing their family. But given the circumstances, in which her husband's priorities preclude him from working, and where he cannot contribute to household duties in a more traditional male way because they live in an apartment, Spouse 2's willingness to tolerate the status quo in their relationship is likely to decrease. She would gladly welcome a reorganization of his views, so that he would be more involved in cleaning and child rearing.

Couple 2

Couple 2 has undergone changes since they relocated to Arkansas for Student 2's doctoral program. One such change is how the couple communicates. Spouse 2 acknowledged that continuing to study mental health counseling has an influence in how the couple speaks to each other and how her husband interacts with their child. On the contrary, though, she is easily

frustrated by the frequency in which Student 2 wants to discuss counseling-related topics. She appreciates those moments when they have small talk or sit and watch TV together.

The couple has also gone through other types of changes, including financial, social, and intimacy-related. The debt they have taken on is a source of stress for the couple. They often avoid talking about their finances because of the mental burden it creates for them both. It creates an unspoken awareness of the financial challenges that lay ahead. Socially, the couple has made few connections since Student 2 began the doctoral program. He cites a couple of friends he has made among his peers in the program, but they are not close enough friends to socialize with outside of the classroom on a regular basis. Spouse 2 claims to have no interaction with others away from her workplace. They are interested in making friends, but their time is limited, and more importantly, fatigue after long days takes its toll. Fatigue is also a factor in the couple's diminished sex life.

The couple does appear to have a solid friendship, however. Part of this stems from the similar values that they share. Because their collective views are less popular among the people with whom they associate on campus or at work, they have a sense that they are in this together, and that they have to lean on each other because no one else could understand or support them. This feeling intensified after Student 2 was placed on remediation by the CES faculty. To go along with their friendship, Couple 2 admires certain things about each other. Spouse 2 appreciates her husband's kindness toward others and his dedication toward school. Student 2 believes his wife is a good-hearted person.

They are aware of each other's stressors and concerns that have to do with school, work, money, and children. Student 2 believes his wife worries about whether he will successfully complete the program, which appears to be a genuine concern she holds. Spouse 2 tries to keep

up with his changing school schedule and the expectations placed upon him. This helps her anticipate his involvement in the home, but also serves as a means of monitoring his progress in the program, which can either calm or exacerbate her concerns over his progress.

Couple 2 admitted to arguing frequently, and mostly disagree over issues related to disciplining their daughter. Student 2 has a tendency to attempt discipline when he becomes impatient with his daughter's behavior; therefore, his decisions are swift, erratic, and based on impulse. This frustrates his wife, who is steadier in her interaction with their daughter.

Although she would appreciate more of her husband's help with child rearing, she has a sense of ownership over the disciplinary actions toward their daughter since she is the primary caregiver. She becomes frustrated when her husband seemingly delves into disciplinary matters when his involvement with their daughter is otherwise inconsistent.

Additionally, the couple admitted that the stress caused by their schedules has also increased the amount of conflict in their marriage. They are more reactive to perceived slights on each other's parts, which causes them to aggressively react, instead of calmly respond. Often times, these scenarios stem from misunderstandings. The couple manages these situations through self-soothing techniques, such as going for a walk, and then reconvenes for discussion, in which they allow for each person to speak without interrupting or name-calling.

Looking forward, Couple 2 plans to expand their family by having another child in the imminent future. They have dreams having a large family and living in the country. Raising a family, and the family traditions that arise through that process, are important to Couple 2. Current challenges may make their long-term plans more difficult to attain, but they remain steadfast in their desire.

SMH application. Couple 2 appears to have a solid friendship based on a shared belief system. The hours they spent talking on the porch early in their relationship likely contribute to their familiarity with each other's thoughts, values, and hopes for the future. They envision a similar type of life for their family and see family rituals as a big part of what they will do. Each of their long-term dreams feel supported through the creation of a shared culture within their relationship (Gottman, 1999).

Their issues lay, however, in the short-term. Their hectic schedules, and the stress they produce, make it more difficult for the couple to engage in conversation the way they once did. The consequence, thus, is a level of cognitive room for each other that is decreasing and being replaced by each partner taking an intrapersonal focus. Their communication is superficial or focuses on the mundanities of life. They avoid discussing deeper issues on a regular basis, such as their financial concerns, because it involves tapping into emotions. Without an ongoing dialogue to discuss each other's concerns, and how they might be changing as people in the face of their stressors, their friendship is in jeopardy. Compounding this is the breakdown of household chores in their home. Gottman (1999) stated that most problems within a relationship are perpetual, and a dialogue revolving around these problems are important to work toward a place where both parties feel as if they are being heard. In Couple 2's case, it appears that the problem associated with the distribution of responsibilities seems to be worsening while Student 2 is in the doctoral program. The couple does discuss this topic occasionally, as well as utilizes conflict management techniques that Gottman (1999) suggested are effective (e.g., self-soothing). So it may be possible that despite the changes within the household, the couple's dialogue fosters acceptance and increased effort on the part of Spouse 2 and Student 2,

respectively. Open communication, and Student 2's willingness to contribute more regularly around the home would benefit Couple 2 over the short- and long-term.

Couple 3: Student 3

Student 3's experience of the CES doctoral program at the University of Arkansas thus far has both positive and negative elements. He is driven to push himself academically, and he appreciates the opportunities the program affords him to do so. Student 3 is pursuing a certificate in statistics, which go beyond the requirements of the program. Student 3 also enjoys the aspects of the program that allow him to supervise master's-level students and co-instruct classes. His frustration with the program involves the timing of the coursework. Courses are not offered as frequently as necessary, in his opinion, to maintain the accelerated track to doctoral candidacy that he prefers. Despite his claims of improvement, his impatience is evident, and unknowingly, he may be sacrificing personal and professional growth in the name of academic achievement.

In order to make steady progress as a doctoral student, Student 3 relies on the emotional support of his spouse. But the challenges of being married outweigh the benefits in his case. His schedule leads to stress, which in turn, results in a breakdown of communication between him and his wife. This breakdown is a crucial misstep, since the couple welcomed their first child while in the doctoral program, and this requires effective communication to ensure they manage their responsibilities and ensure the baby's needs are met.

To manage his obligations, Student 3 uses a calendar and blocks off time accordingly. While climbing the ladder of academic success is important to him – especially given that he is the first in his family to pursue higher education – his first priority is meeting the needs of his family. This creates a double bind for Student 3, as family obligations force him to step away

from program-related responsibilities at times, but in times of high academic stress (e.g., preparing for a statistics exam), he will sacrifice family time to feel more prepared academically. As a new father, and as someone who seeks out intentional interactions with his spouse, any compromise in his role of a husband and father creates internal conflict. Student 3 does not prescribe to traditional gender roles in the home. He is diligent in his efforts to balance household and childcare responsibilities with his spouse, and he tries to stay attuned to what his spouse requires.

Couple 3: Spouse 3

Over time, Spouse 3 has moved from a place of frustration in terms of the program, to one of acceptance and support. Therefore, she now sees the CES doctoral program at the University of Arkansas as an overall positive experience because she is able to support her husband as he works toward his goal of earning a doctorate. Spouse 3 was taken off guard at the news that her husband wanted to return to school as suddenly as he did. She knew it was an interest of his, but initially, she anticipated this next step after several years of working professionally as a licensed marriage and family therapist. His abrupt return led to early resistance on her part, as she was put in a position in which the sacrifice of her own professional goals was necessary in order to support those of her husband. At this point, however, the role of supportive spouse is fulfilling for her. Along with some flexibility that the academic schedule provides, watching her husband work toward an advanced degree is something in which she takes pride.

In addition to the negative feelings and struggles induced by the suddenness of her husband's return to school, Spouse 3 has also been challenged by the changes to their lives since the couple had their first child last year. Her husband does help with child care, but due to their

schedules, their son's well-being ultimately is her responsibility. This has caused her to cut back on her work hours in order to care for their child, as well as delay certain professional goals, such as increasing public speaking opportunities.

Spouse 3 understands the reason behind the sacrifices she makes. She accepts her responsibilities, especially considering the effort her husband makes to do his part to fulfill his non-student roles. Though she has experienced growth and acceptance through making the conscious choice to be more supportive, the personal trials that stem from putting her own desires on the backburner are something that she will contend with for the rest of her husband's doctoral program, and possibly beyond. If her husband is able to find a position in academia locally as he hopes, then she can pursue her goals. Balance in the relationship should be restored, and any negative feelings should subside. However, if her husband does not successfully find local employment, forcing the couple to relocate, Spouse 3 may once again harbor negative feelings such as resistance and resentment.

Couple 3

Couple 3 has experienced change in their communication, finances, social interaction, and sex life since Student 3 began the doctoral program. Working in mental health has made Couple 3 good listeners, generally speaking, but the pressure of the doctoral program has created instances in which the couple's communication has suffered. Small disagreements are over-processed, which frustrates Spouse 3. Student 3, perhaps seeing himself in an expert role due to his academic status, critiques his wife's comments more frequently than before. This is a source of tension within the couple. Lastly, with Student 3's fluctuating schedule, mostly as a result of his supervision responsibilities, the couple must ensure they are communicating regarding

schedule changes to ensure child care for their son. Prior to having a child, the impact of these changes, even at the last minute, were minimal.

When Student 3 began the doctoral program in CES, he was working full-time as a marriage and family therapist. The couple agreed that he would cut back his hours seeing clients in order to make room for the program and its requirements. This was feasible because Student 3 was awarded a fellowship to offset tuition costs. Without the fellowship, Student 3 may not have embarked on the pursuit of his doctorate, or at best, may have attended on a part-time basis. Given his hastened mindset, a part-time program of study would have been a difficult proposition for Student 3 to accept. The couple is financially steady, but they must refrain from spending frivolously in order to take care of household expenses. The addition of a child to their family has made budgeting an even bigger priority.

From a social perspective, Couple 3 has gone through changes as well. They admitted to not socializing as much with others compared to when they were in their master's program. The reasons for this can be traced back to three sources. Certainly, having a newborn in the house has forced the couple to reduce their social interactions due to childcare concerns and fatigue brought about by caring for a baby. Secondly, with a more demanding schedule, Student 3 chooses to spend any free time he has with his wife and child, as opposed to interacting with others. He focuses on the intentionality behind how he allocates his time, so it is important to him to not only be around his family, but to create quality moments with them. This takes the priority away from socializing with others. Lastly, as a couple with strong Christian values, it appears Student 3 has made limited connections with his peers at school who share the same lifestyle. As a result, there is less motivation to socially engage. In the couple's faith-based master's program, this was not an issue.

In terms of their sex life, Couple 3 attributed much of the changes to the presence of their child. Spouse 3, however, does see some effects from the doctoral program. Her husband's absence caused by his school-related responsibilities results in Spouse 3 feeling disconnected at times, and therefore, less interested in physical intimacy.

The couple's friendship, though, seems to be on solid footing. They share similar values and interests, but at the same time, make room for each other to differentiate and become their own person. They have created a culture in their household that includes holiday traditions, special anniversary dates, and sporting events. They are aware of each other's stressors and have a cognitive understanding of each other's day-to-day activities. This, no doubt, is linked to the quality time they spend together, where the emphasis is on strengthening the connection between them. It is clear Couple 3 admires each other immensely for their perseverance and work ethic. This is especially true for Spouse 3, who watched her husband battle cancer into remission while in their master's program.

Couple 3 considered themselves to be strong communicators when faced with conflict in their relationship, although they admitted to over-pursuing a resolution to a conflict or withdrawing, depending on the issue at hand. Ultimately, however, the couple relies on the counseling skills they have learned to validate each other's feelings and move toward a place of understanding. While unpleasant in the moment, the couple also feels that conflict breeds intimacy, therefore, strengthening their relationship and bringing them closer together.

Long term, the couple hopes to grow professionally in a way that each of their career paths will complement the other. Student 3 wishes to work in academia while maintaining a private practice, while Spouse 3 wants to expand her practice and engage in more public speaking opportunities. They are a couple who desire opportunities to be influential to others

regardless of the setting – from individual counseling to a classroom, from a keynote address to discipling college students in their home. They also desire for their son to grow up in a multicultural environment in which his world views can be shaped by the things he sees. While they share a vision for their son’s life and their lives as well, they disagree with some aspects of their long-term goals. Student 4 wants to retire to Florida, while his wife wants to continue working as long as she can. Although they are keenly aware of their differences, it is so distant in their minds that it is not something they worry about at this time.

SMH application. The standards of the SMH theory (Gottman, 1999) suggest that the foundation of Couple 3’s marriage is solid. They have made a collective effort to be in tune with each other’s day-to-day, thereby, increasing the amount of cognitive room they have for each other. They have tremendous admiration for each other for who they are as people to what they strive to be personally and professionally. Despite disruptions in their schedule due to school or child care, they make sure to be intentional with their time together, staying attuned to the needs of their partner. These are all indications of a strong marital friendship.

While Couple 3 may disagree at times, especially during times of stress, their friendship allows for these moments to be met with positive sentiment, meaning that conflict is approached neutrally, as opposed to negatively, due to the quantity of positive interactions they experience during non-conflict situations (Gottman, 1999). This allows the couple to maintain a positive perspective in their lives even during difficult periods. Despite some differences, the couple is mostly unified in terms of how they see their future. Creating shared meanings and goals gives Couple 3 the ability to navigate the challenges brought upon by the doctoral program as they come.

Couple 4: Student 4

Student 4's experience of the CES doctoral program at the University of Arkansas has been positive, although at times he has felt distant from the program. Student 4 has experienced success as a marriage and family therapist, clinical director, supervisor, and trainer, and thus, views the doctoral program as a supplemental component to his career, as opposed to a necessary cog toward achieving his professional goals. Therefore, Student 4's attention is often on other aspects of his work and life. Now that he has completed all the required coursework, he spends very little time on campus, which makes him feel disconnected from the faculty and his peers alike. This sense of disconnection is especially palpable when he compares himself to students who work within the program in a graduate assistant capacity. To complicate matters, due to personnel changes within the department, Student 4 has been assigned to three different advisors during his time in the doctoral program. This has left him feeling alone in the process and unclear as to who to go to for guidance at times.

Because of his outside commitments, Student 4 has progressed through the program slower than many of his contemporaries. This has made the workload manageable, and positive overall, but it has also left him feeling as though the process is never-ending. Now that he has successfully defended his comprehensive exam, and is a doctoral candidate, graduation seems more realistic. Despite this, he is aware the dissertation process is long and arduous, and the pressure to write is beginning to mount.

Student 4 appreciates the support he receives from his spouse, who provides emotional and academic support, among other types. When Student 4 becomes discouraged when comparing his progress to his peers in the program, his wife reminds him to stay the course and to focus on his own journey. In terms of academic support, Student 4 relies on his wife to

proofread his work since writing is not one of his strengths. She also assists him with poster presentation designs.

Prior to the couple having their first child, the challenges associated with being a married doctoral student in the CES program were minimal. In many ways, since the couple met when they were both students, the transition to just Student 4 being in school while his wife joined the workforce made the couple's lives less hectic. Once the couple had a child, however, the program-related challenges became more apparent. Student 4 must be more diligent about finding time to work on his dissertation proposal, typically carving out time during the day one day per week. He also devotes Saturday mornings to writing as well, taking advantage of when his wife and daughter are still asleep. When his family is awake, however, he chooses to spend time with them instead of focusing on his writing. This creates an internal tension for him, as his mind may be on the writing he needs to do during time spent with his family.

The presence of a child also makes time management, in general, more of a priority. In addition to finding time to satisfy his school responsibilities and honor his commitment to his family, Student 4 must also find a balance among his other roles in the community and address issues related to household management. Although his wife oversees many of the household chores, such as laundry, this is a function of personal preference and not assigned based on traditional gender roles. Student 4 completes household chores as he can.

Given a successful career and the slow progress he is making, Student 4 has questioned whether moving forward in the pursuit of his doctorate is a worthy endeavor. Ultimately though, he makes the decision to stay because he feels the long-term benefits are worthwhile. While he is already established in the community, he believes a doctoral degree will give him additional credibility as a clinician and clinical director. Furthermore, although he is not seeking a full-time

career in academia, he is aware that a doctorate will open up opportunities to teach in the future if he so chooses.

Couple 4: Spouse 4

Spouse 4 described her experience of the doctoral program similarly to her husband, in the sense that things have not be overwhelming, yet she has observed a lack of clarity and direction. As a result, she has lacked confidence in the process at times, and has questioned whether the ambiguity she has felt was truly a byproduct of the program, or if her husband was to blame. She feels at ease with the state of things in the present, though, now that Student 4 is in the dissertation phase.

Spouse 4 takes pride in her husband's accomplishments and admires him for his work ethic. She sees the benefit of her husband ultimately completing his doctorate because of new business opportunities it may create for the couple. In the meantime, his status as a doctoral student, and now candidate, has given him opportunities for professional advancement that she is not sure he would have received otherwise.

Spouse 4 cited a lack of family time as an issue related to her husband being in a doctoral program, as well as some sacrifices when it comes to leisure activities. However, because Spouse 4 was accustomed to her husband in the student role, the impact of the challenges appears to be minimal compared to other non-student spouses. Similar to her husband, though, Spouse 4 is eager to move on to the next phase in their lives, in which her husband is no longer in the student role. Until that time comes, she is able to manage their daily routine with little interruption or frustration, aside from occasionally placing blame on the doctoral program for any sacrifices they are forced to make.

In general, Spouse 4 appears satisfied both personally and professionally. The birth of their daughter in the past 18 months has brought on new challenges – far more significant than anything the doctoral program presents – but Spouse 4 has a support system in place to help her with child care. This allows her to stay relevant professionally and pursue personal interests as well. Despite graduating with the same master’s degree as her husband, Spouse 4 feels no pressure to continue on to pursue a doctorate. She has carved out a professional niche that includes counseling, ministry, and administrative duties at a private practice, and she balances that with creative pursuits such as crafts and furniture restoration projects. Spouse 4 is also responsible for many other duties around the house. She does not see this as a burden, but rather, a role in which she takes pride. Just as she serves in an administrative capacity at work, she sees herself as a home administrator, managing chores and family finances.

Couple 4

As a couple, Student 4 and Spouse 4 have gone through some changes since Student 4 began the doctoral program, although they do not see many of them being a result of the doctoral program itself. The couple believes they communicate differently, but this may be a product of the maturity of their marriage more than anything else. When Student 4 began the doctoral program, the couple had been married less than 2 years. Additionally, as leaders in a local community of therapists trained in a specific couples counseling model, many of the positive changes to their communication over time may be related to this association, rather than the doctoral program. The couple certainly still disagrees on issues, but their communication regarding these issues, and in general, appears strong. The doctoral program does not seem to be causing any breakdowns in this area.

From a financial standpoint, Couple 4 has also experienced change. Early in the program, the couple discussed if Student 4 should drastically reduce his professional hours working with clients and focus on pursuing a graduate assistantship to cover tuition. Ultimately, the couple decided that the best decision for their family was for Student 4 to continue to work, at the expense of a quick progression through his coursework. Consequently, Student 4 has experienced a steady increase in his income, as well as professional advancement. He believes that being in the doctoral program provides him with more credibility, and therefore, he can charge a higher fee for his services. Thus, the financial burden of academic expenses has been manageable for the couple.

Because Couple 4 was established locally before Student 4 began the doctoral program, they have not been as invested in making new social connections as couples who relocated. They attend program-related functions on occasion and have made friends with at least one other couple from the program, but typically, they seek social interaction through other avenues. Because the couple is involved in facilitating a weekly process group for those in recovery from alcohol and substance abuse, they choose not to drink alcohol themselves. In turn, they feel disconnected from Student 4's peers, who often consume alcohol when socializing. Furthermore, due to the couple's schedule, they simply do not have any additional time to increase their socialization. This position has become even more solidified since the birth of their daughter.

The couple's child also appears to be the main reason for their diminished sex lives. The couple sleeps less, and their responsibilities have increased since their daughter's birth; therefore, they have less time and energy to devote to physical intimacy. Any program-related effects may

be due to school responsibilities encroaching on any free time the couple may have together in which physical intimacy might otherwise be an option.

Despite these changes, the couple's friendship appears to be on solid footing and strengthening over time. Their relationship was forged through friendship early on, as they each had similar experiences and have similar values that brought them closer together. They admire each other for their work ethic, strength, intelligence, and kindness, among other traits. Given how many roles each play in their day-to-day lives, it is important for the couple to have an awareness of each other's schedules, as well as the stressors they face. Through constant conversation, they are able to maintain an understanding of each other's challenges and areas of focus.

Also through conversation, among other practices, Couple 4 seems able to manage conflict in their relationship effectively. They rely on skills they have learned through their clinical training, along with their faith when presented with a conflict between them. More so than most couples, Couple 4 makes an effort to empathize with each other in an attempt to truly understand what is at the heart of each other's position. Perhaps a product of being truly in touch with each other, their busy lifestyles, or a combination of both, Couple 4 rarely disagrees on present matters. During times of fatigue, the couple may struggle with emotional attunement, but they address it immediately instead of allowing it to linger. This minimizes the amount of time the couple feels emotionally disconnected.

Couple 4 also strengthens their bond through specific traditions and rituals within their marriage. They make an effort to have breakfast together in the morning to start their day, and seemingly have a steady stream of renovation or restoration projects they work on together. Long term, they share a similar vision for their future, especially as it relates to utilizing Student

4's doctoral degree. They are interested in opening their own treatment center or couple's retreat where they can work in tandem to provide marital counseling. The combination of their professional experience lends itself well to this type of arrangement.

SMH application. Based on the cognitive room and admiration the couple has for each other, along with their quick responses to maximize emotional attunement, Couple 4 appears to have a strong marital friendship; therefore, the foundation of their marriage is solid (Gottman, 1999). This allows them to treat each other respectfully during times of conflict, and focus on understanding each other's feelings on an issue, including what dreams their emotions may represent (Gottman, 1999). Through the integration of rituals, traditions, and goals within their relationship, the couple has created a shared meaning unique to their marriage which bodes well in terms of their long-term marital satisfaction (Gottman, 1999).

Composite Structural Description for Doctoral Students

The experiences of the male doctoral students who participated in this study share similarities. However, these students also have unique differences in terms of their experiences. The composite structural description for the doctoral students, that explains the "why" behind the phenomenon, is expressed below.

General Impressions

There are several factors that seem to influence students' overall perceptions of the doctoral program. These included students' expectations of coursework, their perceived organization of the program, and the level of support they feel they receive from the faculty and their peers. The rigor of the coursework has been manageable for the students, which has been a positive experience. The complications come when classes are not offered as frequently as desired, or when students' advisors change, with the latter resulting in a perceived lack of

direction within the program. Perceived faculty intolerance also exists, but this interpretation is based on the faculty's gatekeeping actions, and is likely not indicative of their characteristics.

Personal and Professional Changes

Doctoral student experience both personal and professional change while enrolled in the program. CES programs challenge students to explore their own beliefs and biases that may influence how they work with clients and future students. Students who adapt are rewarded with increased self-esteem and self-awareness, while those who struggle may see the program as having components which are unfair or unreasonable.

All four student participants stated that they have benefited from the program in some ways in the development of their clinical, supervision, teaching, or research skills. For the doctoral students with more professional experience coming into the program, clinical skills development may not be as evident. Since these students have had the opportunity to apply their counseling skills in a professional setting, thereby cementing their approaches, they are less inclined to be influenced by exposure to different counseling theories or new schools of thought. They are more established in their chosen theory, and consequently, seek professional development to enhance what they already know. The students who matriculate into a doctoral program directly from completing their master's degrees are more receptive to the doctoral program as a means of developing their clinical skills. The doctoral students who are pursuing careers in academia are particularly appreciative of the experience they have accumulated through co-facilitation of master's-level courses, as these are the only opportunities they have to hone their teaching skills and receive feedback prior to seeking employment. Regardless of clinical experience, however, all doctoral students should develop professionally in terms of their teaching, supervision, and research skills.

Program-Related Benefits of Marriage

All four doctoral students stated that the emotional support they receive from their wives is a benefit of being married while in the doctoral program. Emotional support takes many shapes, from encouragement amid the stress of studying for a statistics exam to having a partner to whom to voice their program-related frustrations. Financial support from non-student spouses also appears to fill students' need. Non-student spouses provide financial support through a variety of ways. This ranges from being the primary earner of the family to simply managing the family budget. Regardless, their contributions are necessary in ensuring that the household runs smoothly from a financial perspective. Doctoral students do not have time to maintain employment in many cases. Those who do, compromise how quickly they can move through the program. At minimum, non-student spouses typically handle budgeting and bill-paying responsibilities, allowing their husbands to focus on other roles and responsibilities. Logistical support, such as non-student spouses doing the grocery shopping or scheduling a repairman, and academic support (e.g., proofreading) are other ways students experience the benefit of being married while in the doctoral program.

Program-Related Challenges of Marriage

Other than financial concerns, time and role management appear to be the biggest challenges facing married doctoral students. Especially early in the program, doctoral students struggle to find the necessary amount of time to allocate to each of their roles. The desire to do well academically can cause some doctoral students to focus too intently on their student responsibilities, thus, leading them to neglect their responsibilities elsewhere. Breakdowns in communication and conflict can occur as adjustments to roles and expectations are made within the relationship. Some students adjust to the new demands on their time better than others.

Roles and Responsibilities

Those doctoral students who are naturally more inclined to be organized tend to handle the integration of the student role more easily. As doctoral students grow accustomed to the student role and its expectations, they may return their focus to their family role, and then teeter back and forth accordingly depending on what role requires the most urgent attention. In times leading up to tests, comprehensive exams, or dissertation proposals, for example, doctoral students will sacrifice family commitments to focus on their academic responsibilities. Without the urgency of a deadline, however, students will delay academic work to spend time with their families.

Regardless of time spent in the program, number of years married, or number of children, family is the number one priority for the doctoral students in this study. While they will turn their attention to academic matters when needed, as mentioned, family is ultimately more important. So while they may separate themselves from their roles of husband and father to attend to academic responsibilities, consequently, this can result in feelings of guilt and frustration for doctoral students.

These feelings are not as prevalent for married doctoral students without children. Without child-related responsibilities to attend to, students fare much better in meeting the expectations of their roles as student and husband, among others. In childless couples, non-student spouses are not reliant on their husbands to assist with child care; therefore, students have more time throughout the day to assure all their responsibilities are met. The presence of children, especially if a child is born while the student is enrolled in a doctoral program, can be more problematic and challenging for students than the program itself.

Gender considerations. As heterosexual males, the doctoral students in this study are aware of traditional gender roles in relationships. However, apart from Student 2, the doctoral students in this study appear to make conscious efforts to neglect adhering to traditional responsibilities in the home. Instead, time permitting, they attempt to strike a balance with their wives when it comes to household duties. Washing dishes, cleaning the floors, and changing diapers are all part of the daily routine for the doctoral students in this study. This, perhaps, is a function of the male students being in the counseling field, which suggests they may be more likely to exhibit empathic traits, and therefore, be more willing to divide chores evenly. Additionally, it may speak to a trend among Western marriages in general, in which traditional gender roles are being replaced by a more egalitarian way of operation.

Any benefits they receive for being male students appear to be minimal. The exception to this relates to childcare issues. Despite the students' intentions, the non-student spouses in this study are notably the main caretakers for their children. Seldom having to respond to their children's immediate needs, the male doctoral students have more freedom to focus on other responsibilities. It is likely that female students, on the contrary, would still be tasked with the majority of the childcare duties – especially with young children – creating an additional challenge for them as they moved through the program.

Composite Structural Description for Non-Student Spouses

The experiences of the non-student spouses who participated in this study share similarities, but also have unique differences. Additionally, in many aspects of overall experience, the non-student spouses seem to share similar views to those of their husbands. The composite structural description for non-student spouses, that explains the “why” behind the phenomenon, is depicted below.

General Impressions

Without the privilege of access to firsthand knowledge, non-student spouses are reliant on their husbands to relay information related to the program such as class schedules, credit hour and internship requirements, and the dissertation process. When students are not as forthcoming with information about the program, either due to poor communication, or a lack of clarity themselves, their non-student spouses can experience frustration. They see themselves as making a commitment to the program, not unlike their husbands, and they require information to feel confident in their decision moving forward. Furthermore, non-student spouses pick up cues from their husbands in terms of how to feel regarding the program. Their overall impressions tend to mimic those of their husbands when it comes to perceived academic rigor, time constraints, and the approachability of the faculty. Those students who are better organized, and who feel are handling the academic requirements well, have spouses who see the program as manageable. Organized students are also more likely to spend quality time with their families, another positive outcome for non-student spouses, and certainly, one of the benefits in their eyes.

Personal and Professional Changes

From a personal standpoint, the non-student spouses in this study have grown to become more supportive of their husbands during their academic pursuits. Selfish tendencies and some individual goals have been delayed. Non-student spouses learn early in the process that they must adopt a supportive role and make personal sacrifices to put their husbands in the best possible position to succeed. They are more willing to do this if they share in similar long-term goals as their husbands that require a successful completion of a doctoral degree.

Along with personal sacrifices come professional changes as well. Primarily if couples relocate for the doctoral program, non-student spouses must find new employment, perhaps, in a

different line of work. The pressure may shift to them to provide financially for the family if their husbands have to cut back on their own work schedule or not work at all. Business ventures are seen as too risky while their husbands remain professional unstable while in school. When children are involved, the non-student spouses' schedules are the ones that are typically affected, as doctoral students are not able to change class times, and may not be able to relieve themselves from academic responsibilities.

Program-Related Benefits of Marriage

The remaining benefits non-student spouses identify with when it comes to being married to a doctoral student in a CES program have to do with schedule flexibility, improved communication, and pride. Because the classes in the doctoral program at the University of Arkansas take place primarily during the day, non-student spouses can benefit from their husbands being home in the evening. Classes are also not held daily, which can free up students during what would be considered tradition work hours to tend to other household matters. While it is not always appreciated by the spouses, being in a marriage with someone in a counseling program can have its benefits in terms of improved communication skills. Spouse 3 and Spouse 4 also have their Master's degrees in Marriage and Family Therapy, so the atmosphere in their homes can be especially therapeutic compared to other relationships. Lastly, it is evident that the non-student spouses in this study are proud of their husbands for getting to where they are in the program. Seeing their husbands work hard toward their goals is something they admire, and they enjoy talking to others about their husbands' accomplishments.

Program-Related Challenges of Marriage

The non-student spouses in this study also experience challenges as it relates to being married while connected to the doctoral program. More so than their husbands, non-student

spouses worry about the state of their finances. This is likely due to non-student spouses being more responsible for the day-to-day financial operations in their families, ranging from providing the majority of the family's income to paying bills and managing the monthly budget.

For couples who relocated for the doctoral program, non-student spouses must also acclimate to new surroundings, without the benefit shared by their husbands, who tap in to their program and find a purpose from the beginning. Relocating non-student spouses may have to find new employment and are without social connections in their new town. Attempts to connect to resources for spouses advertised at the University of Arkansas may go unreturned. Lacking a social outlet, while their husbands form relationships at school, can lead to frustration and resentment on the part of non-student spouses. While doctoral students prefer that their spouses accompany them to school-related social functions, this is not always feasible due to scheduling conflicts, and other obstacles, such as the cost of babysitting. Non-student spouses may try to form their own relationships through other avenues, such as through church or work, but similar issues with scheduling and child care arise. Additionally, since non-student spouses must increase their responsibilities while their husbands are in school, they often lack the time and energy to pursue socialization. Thus, they find themselves in a predicament where they wish to socialize more and get to know their husbands' peers, but prefer to spend any additional time they may have on their own or with their family.

For couples without children, it would seem that the struggles related to social engagement would be less prevalent. Without the added responsibilities and cost related to child care, non-student spouses could attend social functions with their husbands on a more regular basis. Other aspects of their husbands' doctoral programs would also become more accessible, such as the notion of traveling with their husbands to conferences. Because all four couples in

this study have at least one child, these options are typically not available for the non-student spouses.

Roles and Responsibilities

Non-student spouses must also increase their responsibilities across the roles that they fill, and perhaps take on new roles, to compensate for their husbands' diminished returns in the number of tasks they can fulfill while in school. This can include becoming the primary earner of the family or increased household and childcare responsibilities. Despite doctoral students' intentions and effort, it is unlikely that the division of responsibilities in the marriage prior to the students' matriculation can maintain itself once they are enrolled. Therefore, the non-student spouses' functions in their marriages increase, regardless of intentionality.

The expansion in roles and responsibilities for non-student spouses, consequently, may result in a suspension of their own agendas in terms of personal and professional goals. Non-student spouses may go through an adjustment period in which they must set personal and professional aspirations aside and assume a more supportive role for their husbands to succeed academically. This may result in feeling left behind, as if they are no longer a priority in their husbands' eyes. For some, this adjustment period is difficult and can result in conflict.

Gender considerations. Three of the four couples in this study do not prescribe to traditional gender roles when it comes to household-related tasks. But with increased responsibilities for the non-student spouses while their husbands are in the doctoral program, they may perceive that they are handling the chores they do because they are the females in the relationship. Coupled with also having the brunt of childcare responsibilities, it can certainly appear that the inequity is related to gender; however, this is likely not the case because most

doctoral students in this study make attempts to share household chores. Any inequality is, then, likely the result of doctoral students' inability to fulfill household responsibilities.

Composite Structural Description for Couples

The couples in the current study reported experiencing changes to their marriage across several areas. The composite structural description, that explains the "why" behind the phenomenon, is portrayed below. The composite structural description also includes explanations of the couples' marital friendships and marital conflict, as well as their traditions, rituals, and goals.

Program-Related Changes to Marriage

The couples in this study have experienced changes across multiple facets of their relationships, including changes in their communication, social and sex lives, and their financial pictures. Some changes are improvements compared to prior to the beginning of the doctoral program, while others are seen by the participants as negative developments. The participants have also accepted and adjusted to these changes at different rates, making the transition to the doctoral program easier for some couples than others.

In terms of communication, the doctoral students in this study tend to utilize counseling skills and techniques. This applies not only in interaction with their non-student spouses, but also with their children. The non-student spouses see benefit in their husbands' counseling backgrounds in terms of how they communicate; however, it can also be a source of frustration or intimidation. All participants from two of the couples, Couple 3 and Couple 4, have a background in mental health. Even then, topics may be over-processed, and the non-student spouses may yearn for a conversation that does not involve therapeutic jargon. Without an education in mental health, non-student spouses can feel at a disadvantage if their husbands

attempt to tie in counseling techniques into their interactions. Doctoral students may find it useful to implement what they know during times of conflict, especially, but in these volatile moments, non-student spouses want their husbands, and not counselors. It is possible for the therapeutic tone of couples' communication to be the result of the students' master's-level training as well, but certainly, it is reinforced by the doctoral program curriculum.

Budgeting, and financial issues in general, is another area of concern for married doctoral students and their non-student spouses. All couples in this study discussed the need to maintain a budget, or at minimum, delay specific purchases, due to the financial strain associated with the doctoral program. While the doctoral students are aware that finances are a concern, it appears that the non-student spouses see this as a more pressing issue. Likely, this is due to their expanded role in money management within the household since their husbands returned to school. As a way to accept their current financial situation, non-student spouses look ahead to a time when their husbands are gainfully employed. This helps them look beyond the stress caused by the constraints on their budget and focus on a time when they will experience more financial freedom.

Social interaction for the couples involved in this study has mainly decreased since the student participants began their doctoral program. The reasons for this are varied. Relocation seems to be a major factor in reduced socialization. Couples who relocate for doctoral programs may not have any social supports in their new town. While doctoral students may connect with their peers, this process can be gradual, and at times, may not happen at all. Non-student spouses may be left without any social connections. They may eventually socialize with people whom their husbands meet, but conversation is often program-centric in nature unless a conscious effort is made to change the topic. If non-student spouses must look to other sources for social

interaction and support, their place of employment is one location they may tap into. If they are unemployed after relocating, however, this is obviously not an option.

Another deterrent to socialization is the presence of children. All couples in this study have young children and referenced child-related factors, such as the desire to spend more time with their children or the cost of child care, as reasons for diminished socialization on their parts. Non-student spouses who divide their time between work, child care, and other household responsibilities have limited time for social engagement with others outside their family. Additionally, while socialization and networking are integral parts of the doctoral program experience, students place their families first, and therefore, will generally sacrifice opportunities to socialize to make sure their families' needs are met.

Couples do desire increased social interaction, however, to various degrees. With the exception of those who are more well-established and connected within the community, doctoral students and their non-student spouses look to the doctoral program as a primary source for socialization, despite the aforementioned challenges. Doctoral students may be more satisfied with their current arrangements in which they socialize with their peers on campus and spend time with their families away from campus, with occasional social interactions away from school. Non-student spouses, however, appear to require something additional. Spouse 1 and Spouse 2 both reached out to the university in an attempt to access resources for non-student spouses, but were unsuccessful. All non-student spouses expressed interest program-sponsored social events, such as annual dinners and other small gatherings. Spouse 1 wished for a support group for non-student spouses. It is important for non-student spouses to feel linked to the doctoral program in some way to help them acclimate and accept the changes that come with

their husbands' matriculation. Social engagement, especially if they can associate with other spouses going through similar experiences, is one way to achieve this connection.

Physical intimacy is another aspect of the couples' relationships where changes were reported. All couples in this study admitted to a reduction in their sex lives, where at least part of the blame is attributed to the doctoral program. Doctoral students see children and general fatigue as the culprits, but may not be as quick to lay blame on their program. Non-student spouses, however, can point to the doctoral program as a root cause for emotional disconnection which results in reduced physical intimacy in some cases. The presence of children, especially for those couples who welcomed their first children during the program, certainly is a factor as well for non-student spouses. Childcare responsibilities lead to fatigue. When added to the schedule changes brought about by the doctoral program, less sex is a likely outcome.

Marital Friendship

Despite a reduction in physical intimacy, the couples in this study generally maintain strong friendships. When adjusting to the changes in their lives brought upon by the program, the luxury of being able to fall back on their friendships is essential. Strong friendships allow couples to navigate the stressors in their lives and sustain healthy marriages in spite of the obstacles and challenges caused by the doctoral program, such as changes in roles, relocation, and social isolation.

When doctoral students first start the program, however, it is common for their marital friendships to suffer. Perhaps preoccupied by their new student roles, doctoral students may neglect their partners' needs, in turn, harming their friendships. Non-student spouses seek information about their husbands' programs in order to maintain connection and feel a part of their lives, but their attempts to connect are often unsuccessful due to poor communication or a

lack of clarity on program components by the students themselves. This can contribute to the non-student spouses' frustrations and result in cognitive and emotional separation, likely leading to conflict. Through marital conflict and discussion, however, couples are able to find their footing and engage in activities that strengthen their friendship, especially if they are able to focus on their similar interests and admiration they have for each other.

Marital Conflict

The couples in the current study tend to manage marital conflict better than most. Although non-student spouses often balk at the use of counseling techniques during marital communication and conflict, the couples' ability to manage conflict effectively is no doubt due in part to their husbands' education and training. This suggests that the techniques themselves are not the issue, but rather, the timing and delivery of the techniques. When students introduce and explain techniques ahead of time, while being sure to point out the benefits, non-student spouses are more receptive, instead of feeling taken advantage of or intimidated.

Areas of conflicts for the couples in this study can involve time management, finances and child care. Mainly, though, it seems that most marital conflict for doctoral students and their non-student spouses occurs over misunderstandings due to a breakdown of communication, or in times when partners' emotional needs are not being met. Both scenarios can manifest from program-related stressors. Doctoral students, strained from meeting academic demands, may be less attentive to their wives, resulting in non-student spouses expressing their desire for attention. If doctoral students do not respond in a way that affirms these bids for attention, conflict can occur. Furthermore, fatigue from role expansion can lead to ineffective communication between spouses, creating misunderstandings and increasing volatility. Intentionality within communication suffers, causing important information to not be relayed between spouses. This

leads to frustration, and thus, potential conflict. Couples' strategies for managing conflict include validating their partners' feelings and taking turns communicating calmly. On occasion, self-soothing through temporarily leaving the conflict is utilized. These strategies are consistent with sound couples' counseling techniques for conflict management, therefore, adding credence to the belief that counseling students benefit from their education within their own relationships.

Traditions and Rituals

It is evident that the couples in this study attempt to connect with their partners through various rituals and traditions unique to their families. Several of these rituals and traditions revolve around meals, such as sharing breakfast together as a family, eating the same foods each holiday, or planning the same anniversary dinner every year. Other rituals involve having designated TV nights or expressing affection and appreciation toward each other in unique ways. These types of rituals and traditions are important elements in maintaining unity within each couple. These activities create shared meaning and provide a sense of togetherness that allow couples to persevere in the presence of challenges they face in their marriages, both program-related and otherwise.

Marital Goals

Another aspect of creating bonds within couples is related to short- and long-term goals (Gottman, 1999). The couples in this study share a portion of their goals, but differ with others. At this juncture in the couples' lives, goals mostly involve graduation for the doctoral students, followed by new or continued employment. All participants in this study had that goal in common. Employment is seen as a payoff for the hard work and commitment put into the doctoral program by both the students and the spouses who support them. Without the lure of career advancement opportunities, the disruptions to the couples' lives that come with

matriculation would not be worthwhile. This is especially true for non-student spouses, who rarely benefit from the doctoral program in other ways. The geographic location of the students' jobs can be a point of contention, however. Preferences may vary which may lead to conflict. Couples are aware of these differences, and engage in dialogue regarding their desired locations, but realize there are factors beyond their control, which may influence where they ultimately live.

Synthesis

The conceptual framework of this study, illustrated in Chapter III, serves as a guide to the synthesis that follows. The conceptual framework addresses the effects of doctoral study on students, non-student spouses, and their marital relationships found in the literature. The framework also considers the benefits and challenges of marriage specific to the counseling field, as well as the researcher's own interpretation of the phenomenon as a married male doctoral student in a CES program based on the data collected during this study. Tying the framework together is the SMH theory (Gottman, 1999) that consists of levels, or floors, that address couples' friendships, conflict resolution skills, traditions and rituals, and dreams. The synthesis of the data will address the phenomenon comprised of the lived experience of married male doctoral students in CES programs, the lived experience of their non-student spouses, and lastly, the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students in CES and their non-student spouses.

Lived Experience of Married Male Doctoral Students

Doctoral study can have a significant impact on individuals in both positive and negative ways. Sori, Wetchler, Ray, and Niedner (1996) suggested that doctoral programs can be an opportunity for personal growth. They can also provide stimulation for learning (Polson &

Piercy, 1993). The doctoral students in the current study described the atmosphere of the CES doctoral program at the University of Arkansas as one in which they have been able to grow personally, such as by increasing their ability to be patient, and professionally, through the development of their clinical, supervision, teaching, and research skills. The coursework has been manageable, and the relationships within the program tend to be positive. On the contrary, doctoral programs can also be difficult to navigate if students feel a perceived lack of support (Hyun, 2009). One student in the current study described the environment as unsupportive due to differences in his values and worldview.

When students in doctoral programs are married, the benefits and challenges of doctoral study go beyond what happens within the program. The main benefits of being married while in a doctoral program revolve around the concept of support, which comes in many forms.

Doctoral students in this study reported feeling supported emotionally, financially, logistically, and academically. These themes coincide with those outlined by Giles (1983), who categorized support as emotional/psychological, financial, academic, and basic needs/task-oriented, as well as Murray and Kleist (2011), who identified emotional, financial, and task-oriented as support types. While all types of support are important, emotional support appears to stand alone as the most beneficial. Married doctoral students rely on their spouses for praise and validation in response to accomplishments, along with encouragement and a listening ear during periods of frustration. Unwed students may find emotional support through interpersonal relationships as well; however, this support likely lacks consistency compared to emotional support received by married doctoral students.

Financial support is a close second in terms of importance. Doctoral students may hold jobs or graduate assistantships during their time in the program, but the academic demands

typically prevent students from working full-time jobs. The exception to this is Student 4, who does work full-time, but the consequences of this result in a prolonged progression through the program. Thus, it is more common for students to work part-time, or not at all, while their spouses are responsible for the majority of the income.

As male students, the adjustment process to this type of arrangement may prove to be difficult. While men receive more support from their spouses than their female counterparts (Huston-Hoburg & Strange, 1986), male doctoral students still feel pressure to succeed in the program as quickly as possible so that they may provide for their families. Men pursuing higher education is more in line with a traditional way of thinking (Huston & Hoburg, 1986), as it can aid in career advancement (Norton, Thomas, Morgan, Tilley, & Dickins, 1998). Males do not always communicate this pressure, however (Polson & Piercy, 1993). This may be an attempt to protect their spouses from the true emotional impact doctoral study can have on students.

While the pressure to provide exists, and is based on traditional gender roles, it appears male doctoral students and their spouses have shifted to a more egalitarian way of living within their households. Men contribute more to tasks at home such as cooking, cleaning, and child care than in previous generations (Aumann, Galinsky, & Matos, 2014; Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006; Parker & Livingston, 2016). This arrangement is helpful for non-student spouses in terms of developing a more even distribution of chores in the home, but it can also add pressure to male students to fulfill not only school responsibilities, but those within their households as well. The expectations of increased household responsibilities does not come with a reprieve in other areas (Graham & Dixon, 2017). Aumann et al. (2014) coined this *the new male mystique*, in which men feel the pressure to be the financial provider while also being more involved as a husband and father.

Thus, married male doctoral students are challenged in meeting the demands across several roles, which often results in failure in one role, or falling short across all roles. Dyk (1987) referenced *interrole conflict* as a condition when the responsibilities between one role and another are incompatible. Whether it be a component of time, or mental strain – in which the students' in doctoral programs are too worn down by one role to effectively handle another – role management appears to be the most pressing challenge facing married male doctoral students. Even the notion of time management can be related to roles, in the sense that doctoral students require more time to fulfill their duties from one role to the next, whether it be preparing for a statistics exam or spending time with their families. In CES programs, supervision requirements add an additional strain on students' time, as they must meet individually with master's-level students on a weekly basis.

Children make it more difficult for doctoral students to accomplish what is asked of them (Sori et al., 1996). Consequently, when children are part of the equation, role management becomes yet a more harrowing task. All couples involved in this study had young children, which contradicts Gilbert (1982) who stated that most couples with a partner in graduate school do not have children. All students admitted that while the demands of the CES doctoral program are challenging, the presence of children is the factor that truly makes balancing roles problematic.

Naturally, when doctoral students begin in their programs, they aim to do well. Therefore, much of their time and energy is spent on the student role as they grow accustomed to the rigor and expectations of the doctoral program. As such, the other roles they find themselves in are initially neglected. The result of this can be imagined as a plane balanced on a single fulcrum, in which beginning doctoral students teeter in all directions between roles with the hope

of finding a balance that works for them and their families. (See Figure 5.) As part of this process, doctoral students may take part in *role negotiation*, in which they try to find compromise with their role partners' (i.e., spouses, supervisors) and what is expected of them (Goode, 1960).

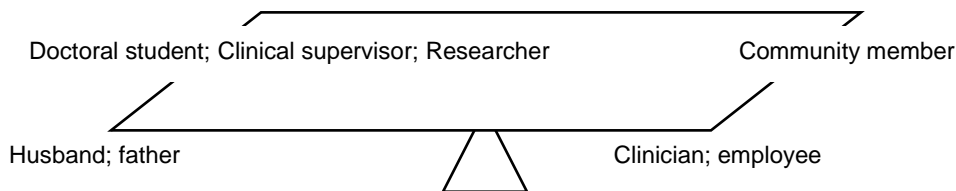


Figure 5. The balancing act for married male doctoral students in CES programs.

Lived Experience of Non-Student Spouses

The perceptions of the non-student spouses in this study of the CES program at the University of Arkansas appear to align with their husbands' views. Those students who see the doctoral program as generally favorable have non-student spouses who feel the same. Without input from their husbands about the program, however, non-student spouses would have little on which to base their opinions, with few exceptions.

The non-student spouses in this study see some benefit from their husbands' programs when it comes to schedule flexibility. The courses in the CES doctoral program at the University of Arkansas are offered primarily during the days, which makes the students generally accessible in the evening hours. Students in mental health programs also tend to be more emotionally expressive (Legako & Sorenson, 2000); thus, creating a home atmosphere with improved communication. Lastly, non-student spouses may feel a sense of pride over their husbands' academic pursuits.

Non-student spouses seek connection with the program in an attempt to feel involved in their husbands' education, as well as a way to contribute to the pride they feel. The pursuit of a doctorate is an investment in a couple's future which requires potentially burdensome commitments (Giles, 1983). Therefore, educating themselves on the doctoral curriculum and graduation requirements also allows non-student spouses to feel better about the commitment they have made to the process and gives them a sense of the road ahead. Unfortunately, non-student spouses are often left feeling frustrated over incomplete information from their husbands about the program and can feel uneasy about the process until they finally receive the information they seek. In many cases, this may not happen until the second year of the program, when the students themselves feel as if they have a better grasp of what to expect. Consequently, the first year of a doctoral program is often the most stressful for non-student spouses (Polson & Piercy, 1993).

When students matriculate into a doctoral program, their non-student spouses face social and financial adjustment, as well as the need to assume new roles and responsibilities from what they are accustomed (Rockinson-Szpakiw, Spaulding, & Knight, 2015). This is supported by the findings of this study, that point to financial strain, role expansion, social disconnection, and family sacrifices as the main challenges for non-student spouses. The non-student spouses' day-to-day responsibilities of managing the budget are what drive the financial worry. Financial concerns may lead to the family making sacrifices in terms of large purchases or vacations.

Socially, non-student spouses may be forced to leave behind close friends or family members in the case of relocating couples. They may rely on their husbands' school friends to form their own social connections. This could be problematic if non-student spouses feel they have little in common with their husbands' school acquaintances or feel uncomfortable around a

group of doctoral students (Giles, 1983; Mason & Paul, 1982). Non-student spouses may also feel threatened by their husbands' female classmates in some cases (Giles, 1983).

With any major life change within a family system, roles are reassigned and status positions are shuffled (LeMasters, 1979). The same can be said about a partner in a married couple returning to school in pursuit of a doctorate. In recent decades, the amount of women in the workforce continues to increase (Bauman & Ryan, 2015; Galinsky, Aumann, & Bond, 2011). Therefore, the concept of women taking on additional roles in the household – or increasing the responsibilities in their existing roles – is not uncommon. The non-student spouses have reached a place of acceptance in terms of their additional roles, although that has come easier for some than others. While selfish tendencies continue to exist, as long as their husbands work hard and make an effort to do their parts in contributing to their roles away from campus, non-student spouses generally are accepting of their new responsibilities, as they know changes are temporary. In the absence of perceived effort from their husbands, non-student spouses may become resentful (Brooks, 1988).

Additional responsibilities prevent non-student spouses from focusing on their own professional development as much as they may have under different circumstances. In cases where relocation is involved, non-student spouses may be forced to leave their careers and take less satisfying positions elsewhere to make ends meet for the family. Risky professional endeavors are pushed aside, and career advancement is placed on hold (Pederson & Daniels, 2001). Personally, non-student spouses may feel as if they are being outgrown (Hawley, 2010). To combat these feelings, it is not uncommon for non-student spouses to engage in pursuits to better themselves on a personal level which can be something that is solely theirs. Some non-student spouses will take this time to gain clarity on their next professional steps as well, and

they may take additional academic classes themselves if necessary (Giles, 1983). However, the presence of children certainly complicates, and at times, prevents non-student spouses from pursuing such activities because their time and energy are expended elsewhere.

Shared Lived Experience of Doctoral Students and Their Non-Student Spouses

The outset of a doctoral program is an event that causes disequilibrium within a couple's relationship, and they must find ways to adjust to changes brought about by the program in order to succeed as a couple (Hawley, 2010; Mason & Paul, 1982). This is an objective that many couples struggle with, and as a result, many doctoral student marriages end in divorce (Brooks, 1988; Giles, 1983; Scheinkman, 1988). In addition to time management, role balance, and child-related issues discussed in the previous sections, the male married students and their non-student spouses in this study also have seen changes related to their communication, finances, social lives, and physical intimacy since the students began the doctoral program. These outcomes support Giles' (1983) results that listed financial problems, time pressures, children, communication, sexual concerns, role conflict, and physical and emotional separation as the biggest challenges facing doctoral student marriages.

Students in CES programs tend to use the clinical skills they learn in class with their partners at home. Non-student spouses do not always welcome this, as it can lead to a perceived disadvantage and a new distribution of power within their relationships (April-Davis, 2014; Pederson & Daniels, 2001). Non-student spouses can be confused by communication tactics they do not yet understand, and can be frustrated if the use of counseling techniques within conflict is recognized as out of character from what they are used to from their husbands. Despite this, with proper introduction, counseling techniques used at home can be beneficial in

promoting improved communication within the relationship (Hyun, 2009; Polson & Piercy, 1993). This is especially true in times of conflict.

For students considering a doctoral program, personal finances play an important element in determining whether it is a feasible option. Single students have the luxury of making this decision based on their personal needs, and they may be willing to sacrifice amenities in order to make a doctoral program a reality. They may live in a studio apartment, or merely rent a room, as well as cut back on unnecessary expenses. For married doctoral students, however, the decision to pursue a doctorate must be made with both spouses' interests in mind. This may limit some options in terms of what expenses can be eliminated. When married doctoral students have children, additional budgetary implications must be considered. It is often the case that for married students, especially with children, that matriculation into a doctoral program is not possible unless students receive funding that covers tuition and provides a stipend, through a graduate assistantship or fellowship. In some circumstances, doctoral students will rely on other types of financial aid, such as student loans. If they choose to work, their progress through the program may be compromised. On the contrary, being married while in a doctoral program can be beneficial. As previously noted, non-student spouses' incomes may be the financial support doctoral students need in order to focus on their doctoral studies and move efficiently through the program.

Changes to couples' social lives is another outcome of a doctoral program. Families are the priority for the doctoral students in this study, and therefore, will generally choose to spend time with their spouses and children instead of socializing with their peers. This causes them to sacrifice networking opportunities compared to their unmarried classmates (Polson & Piercy, 1993). Relocation seems to be another factor in changes to couples' social lives. Those couples

who relocate for a doctoral program lose access to their social network and must seek out new social connections. For doctoral students, they have peers within their program with whom they can socialize, but on-campus acquaintances may not necessarily equate to friendships. Non-student spouses may socialize with peers at their place of employment or within their community, but finding strong social connections can be time-consuming and guided by good fortune. Non-student spouses may also socialize with their husbands and their peers, but topics of conversation often revolve around program-related content, which may alienate non-student spouses if a conscious effort is not made by the group to include them. Children may preclude these types of socialization, as new issues arise, such as the cost and availability of a babysitter.

The final identified area for change for married doctoral students in CES and their non-student spouses involves their level of physical intimacy. Concerns over sex can arise based on frequency or time of day (Gruver & Labadie, 1975). Schedule changes or exhaustion due to the couples' other responsibilities can influence intimacy (Giles, 1983). Initially, doctoral students may become overly focused on performing well as a student, therefore, neglecting their spouses' needs for attention and intimacy. As they progress through the program, stress caused by additional responsibilities, or simply allocating extra time to program-related tasks, may limit times when couples can connect emotionally and physically. Similar to with other changes that come with entering a doctoral program after being married, children create additional obstacles. Doctoral students and their spouses without children are more able to create opportunities for intimacy, especially if they act with intentionality and make it a priority. Couples with children have fewer opportunities for this, as they choose to spend much of their down time as a family unit.

Gottman (1999) suggested that the quality of the marital friendship plays a significant factor on how couples address issues in their relationships, such as managing conflict through influence and compromise. The lower three levels, or the foundation, of the SMH are the levels that define couples' friendships. The bottom level, cognitive room, refers to the amount of mental space partners give to each other. For example, a husband who knows the names of his wife's co-workers and knows the most important items on her agenda for the day would be demonstrating cognitive room. This level also includes an awareness of concerns and stressors that may be present. Non-student spouses do their best to understand the components of their husbands' program and the stressors that go along with it, but the husbands' stressors are not always articulated, perhaps as a means of protecting non-student spouses from carrying the burden of their husbands' stress.

The second component to friendship is termed the *Fondness and Admiration System* (Gottman, 1999). This consists of couples' genuine appreciation and admiration for each other, and may be demonstrated through actions such as daily compliments and expressing appreciation. The third floor of the foundation is represented by turning toward versus turning away, or the emotional bank account (Gottman, 1999). When partners turn toward each other, they recognize the other's bids for attention and show an interest in being part of their partner's world. They look to their partner to for connection and personal rejuvenation. Spouses who turn away in these moments seek out individual activities and shut out their partners, especially during times of stress, as they see details shared by their partners as unnecessary and an additional burden on their minds.

Despite changes to their marriages over time – some the direct result of the doctoral program – the couples involved in this study are generally thriving due in part to strong

friendships between partners. However, when doctoral students begin their programs, the strength of the marital friendship is likely to suffer. With their attention shifted toward their role as a student, they may have difficulty providing the same level of attentiveness toward their spouses that they may have in the past. Knowledge of their wives' day-to-day activities become an afterthought, and their stressors and feelings become less of a focus. If non-student spouses focus on how their own needs are no longer being met, they too may neglect their husbands' state of mind, which may be problematic since male doctoral students are less likely to express themselves, especially in terms of the emotional toll the doctoral program can take on them. Without a conscious effort by the couple to address the other's needs, provide attention, and show interest in each other's world, the friendship will likely continue to deteriorate. Fortunately, for the couples in this study, they have all acted deliberately to maintain their friendships, especially after the initial adjustment period at the outset of the doctoral program. Considering that six of the eight participants in this study have a background in mental health or marriage and family therapy, it is likely that the emphasis on their relationships is due in part to their education and training.

The strength of the marital friendship is an important consideration with how couples manage conflict in their relationships. When couples have strong friendships, they are generally in a state of *Positive Sentiment Override* (Gottman, 1999). The fourth floor of the SMH, Positive Sentiment Override implies that couples receive negative interactions with more of a neutral perspective, as opposed to taking a negative stance. This allows couples to manage conflict more effectively.

The most common areas of conflict for the couples in this study fall under the categories of time management, finances, and child rearing, with the most prevalent being time

management. As previously stated, time management is closely related to students' attempts to find a balance across roles and fulfill their responsibilities. Dyk (1987) labeled these challenges as *time-based* or *strain-based conflicts*. Under these circumstances, doctoral students physically do not have the time to fulfill all their responsibilities, or in the case of the latter, they may be so mentally consumed by one role that they struggle with being present in another role. As a result, interactions between spouses may become superficial or reactive in nature, or in some cases, communication may decline or not occur at all. If not remediated, these types of interactions can increase the frequency of conflict in doctoral student marriages.

Marital conflict can at times be productive, however. It is during conflict that role negotiation takes place, which leads to spouses adjusting their expectations of each other and finding a compromise that allows the couple to function effectively. Strong communication, especially during times of conflict, is an important part of making sure expectations are aligned (Perlow & Mullins, 1976). Additionally, to minimize the frequency of marital conflict, doctoral students and their non-student spouses must work toward an understanding that many of the issues they face during the doctoral program are due to the nature of the circumstances of the program itself, and not a sign of a mismatch in personalities (Brooks, 1988). Perhaps due to their training in mental health and relationships, it seems the couples in this study tend to manage conflict better than most.

The top levels of the SMH consist of making dreams and aspirations come true and creating a shared meaning. When couples disagree over the same issues, these problems tend to be perpetual in nature, as opposed to ones that are solvable. Often, these perpetual problems stem from each partner's individual dreams as to how they envisioned their lives (Gottman, 1999). One partner may prefer the comforts and security of home, while the other may want to

travel the world. Conflict can occur from this, and it is important that couples maintain an ongoing dialogue on these types of issues to avoid marital gridlock (Gottman, 1999).

The pursuit of a doctorate begins as an individual dream, but for couples to be most successful, this must turn into a dream that is shared by both partners. At the very least, it must become one in which non-student spouses reach acceptance and are in full support of their husbands' dreams. If the topic of doctoral study is broached unexpectedly by potential students, it may lead to resistance on the part of their spouses. If the students persist, and begin the program without the full support of their spouse, conflict is likely to occur due to pent up frustration and resentment.

Couples must fantasize about a future together (April-Davis, 2014). They must see the challenges and adjustments that lie ahead and mutually decide that the pursuit of a doctorate is worth the combined efforts because it aligns with their long-term goals of how they want to live their lives together. They must share in the meaning that a doctoral program is a necessary means to a desired end. If they can reach this point, then doctoral students and their non-student spouses are able to navigate the obstacles unique to doctoral study and turn their shared lived experience into one that is not only manageable, but also beneficial, during the program and beyond.

Implications for Prospective Doctoral Students and Non-Student Spouses

Stress associated with doctoral programs can have a negative impact on both doctoral students and their marital relationships (Hyun, 2009). Therefore, it is important that those considering the pursuit of a doctoral program, along with their spouses, are aware of the unique challenges and risks that doctoral study can cause within their marriages. Prospective students should take time to carefully research different types of doctoral programs and the expectations

that accompany them. For example, CACREP programs will require doctoral students to show mastery over a set of objectives to successfully complete the program. Doctoral students who matriculate at institutions whose faculty are heavily involved in research may have a significantly different experience than those who attend universities where research is not the focus.

Couples should take time to discuss individual and shared goals before committing to a doctoral program. A doctoral degree may be something prospective students have always aspired to achieve, but the sacrifices necessary to achieve this may not align with non-student spouses' goals. Therefore, couples should ensure that they share similar long-term goals that are best achieved by the attainment of a doctorate.

Couples must be aware that when one partner begins a doctoral program, both the student and the non-student spouse will face a period of disequilibrium in which they will make individual adjustments to their new roles and responsibilities (Mason & Paul, 1982). This adjustment period is likely to result in conflict, making it important for couples to maintain lines of communication as they work toward finding an arrangement that works for both partners.

Prospective students and their non-student spouses should also be aware that if they relocate for the doctoral program, they would face challenges that stem from this, such as financial constraints, the loss of their social connections, and changes within the family. Relocation may force non-student spouses to seek new employment. Couples should be aware of the challenges inherent in this and be prepared to make financial sacrifices and budget accordingly. Couples' social networks are also impacted, and the importance of this may not be evident until couples feel the strain caused by the move and the role changes that follow. This may be especially true for non-student spouses, who cannot look to their peers in the doctoral

program for socialization. Non-student spouses must be prepared to seek other means of social connection in the community and be patient to allow friendships to materialize. Lastly, relocation may require couples to locate new services such as medical providers, churches, and mechanics. If couples have children, they may also need to tend to changes in schools and extracurricular activities for their kids. Couples who do not relocate for a doctoral program will likely face similar challenges, especially regarding financial constraints and changes to their roles and responsibilities.

Implications for Current Doctoral Students and Non-Student Spouses

Current doctoral students and their non-student spouses must be aware of the challenges and changes associated with doctoral programs. Couples must recognize the demands on their time due to increased roles and responsibilities, and develop a structure that work for them both. The literature offers several coping strategies for married doctoral students and their non-student spouses to manage the challenges brought upon by program-related issues. Dyk (1987) suggested doctoral students engage in role redefinition, in which they give up on an aspect of a role, such as reducing their course load or seeking outside help with chores around the house. Labosier and Labosier (2011) posited that there should be no fixed roles while in the household, and that couples simply do what they can around the house as time permits. It may be necessary for doctoral students to compromise their student roles on occasion and focus on the needs of their relationships; likewise, non-student spouses may need to sacrifice their own needs and become more supportive of their spouses when school responsibilities are at the forefront.

Good communication between spouses is also an essential coping strategy (Hyun, 2009; Murray & Kleist, 2011), and may be the biggest predictor of marital adjustment for students and their non-student spouses (Dean & Carlson, 1984). This includes the communication of

concerns, needs, and expectations of the relationship (Murray & Kleist, 2011). Couples must take the time to actively listen to their partners by being emotionally present and receptive to their partners' needs. Couples should work toward increasing cognitive room for their spouses as well, through actions such as asking about their partners' days both at the beginning and end. Additionally, April-Davis (2014) recommended that couples stay in contact throughout the day through phone calls or text messages. Couples may also consider scheduling date nights or finding other ways to enhance their quality time together (De, n.d.; Hawley, 2010; Polson & Piercy, 1993).

Current doctoral students should also make it a point to discuss program-related information with their spouses on a regular basis, and include their spouses in school functions when possible. When non-student spouses are familiar with the requirements of the program, as well as other students and faculty, it helps them feel more connected. School functions and other social events should be attended as a couple whenever possible. If couples are not able to attend due to childcare issues, they may consider hosting other students and their families in their own homes. They may also consider teaming up with other families to arrange shared child care. For organized functions, student organizations within CES programs could consider paying master's-level students in counseling or child development to cover child care needs. In contrast, doctoral students who choose to keep home and school separate will find themselves more connected to their like-minded peers over time, and may feel a sense that they are outgrowing their spouses. Non-student spouses, with no connection to the program, may be left feeling lonely, resentful, pushed aside, or outgrown (Hawley, 2010; Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Scheinkman, 1988).

For those doctoral students and non-student spouses who find themselves growing apart, separation and divorce are common outcomes during or immediately after doctoral study

(Brooks, 1988; Giles, 1983; Scheinkman, 1988). Married couples during this time are also at risk for extramarital affairs (Brooks, 1988; Norton et al., 1998). Marital satisfaction may reduce, while frustration and resentment within relationships may increase. With these risks, it is imperative that doctoral students and their non-student spouses intentionally work at maintaining, or strengthening, their relationships while involved with the program. Effective communication and being aware of each partner's needs are necessary elements for couples' growth. Expressing appreciation and admiration are paramount in sustaining strong friendships. Maintaining rituals and traditions that were present prior to beginning a doctoral program, such as date nights and holiday customs, are important in upholding a sense of normalcy in marriages despite the changes brought upon by the program. Engaging in these practices will sustain couples' marital satisfaction and allow them to navigate the challenges and changes of doctoral study, while focusing on their long-term shared goals and dreams.

Implications for Counselor Education Programs

Students in CES programs engage in a variety of tasks, including teaching, supervising master's-level students, attending doctoral classes and departmental meetings, and going to conferences (Hughes & Kleist, 2005). They are challenged by unfamiliar roles, and thus, must expend time and energy to grow personally and professionally to fulfill the expectations from these roles. While the pressure to succeed academically may come intrinsically for CES students, external pressure may also come from their programs. Counselor educators may encourage – even expect – students to co-facilitate courses, engage in research, travel to conferences, or pursue certifications. These demands, voluntary or not, can take their toll on doctoral students and their families. Focusing on academic responsibilities can lead doctoral students to neglect personal relationships and other responsibilities within the household. This

can cause distress within the family, therefore, potentially affecting doctoral students in all their roles, including as a student.

Counselor educators should pay close attention to the effects personal issues have on students' ability to succeed in their program (Burkholder, 2012). If students are distracted due to personal or family matters, they are less able to devote the necessary attention to fulfilling the demands of the program. Perhaps more so than faculty from other disciplines, counselor educators should make a concerted effort to engage with doctoral students and discuss the implications of the program on their families. Due to the nature of their field, counselor educators should exhibit empathy toward doctoral students and provide appropriate support to maximize students' ability to succeed.

Norton et al. (1998) spoke to the importance of making sure that programs not only prepare their students, but their families as well. Several authors have made recommendations of ways for programs to be more inclusive of students' families. Among these are family orientations in which spouses are invited on campus to meet the faculty, the new cohort of students, and their families (Brooks, 1988; Gold, 2006; Muller, 2016; Murray & Kleist, 2011). Family-friendly events, such as parties or weekend cookouts, are another recommendation (McLaughlin, 1985; Norton et al., 1998; Polson & Piercy, 1993). Other suggestions include support groups for non-student spouses (April-Davis, 2014; Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000; Muller, 2016; Murray & Kleist, 2011; Norton et al., 1998) and the introduction of a buddy system in which incoming doctoral students are matched up with existing students based on marital status (Brannock et al., 2000). Faculty could also advocate for their students by working with their university counseling centers to provide marital counseling and individual counseling for non-student spouses. Specific to CES programs, counselor educators may use clinical

supervision as a time to address personal relationships and their impact on students, or have reflection papers as assignments in which students address their own relationships and any new awareness they may encounter (Murray & Kleist, 2011).

Lastly, programs should consider moving toward a cohort model due to the added benefit of peer support (April-Davis, 2014; Miller & Irby, 1999; Pederson & Daniels, 2001). Cohort models may provide a sense of extended family or community for doctoral students (Nimer, 2009). In a study on the lived experience of a cohort model in a CES program, (Devine, 2012) identified a theme of accompaniment, along with the appreciation cohort members had for having “co-travelers on the journey through the program” (p. 294). This type of support would likely benefit married doctoral students, and by extension, their spouses as well.

At the university level, other authors have suggested marriage enrichment seminars (April-Davis, 2014; Brannock et al., 2000) and on-campus individual or marital counseling to those students or couples in need (April-Davis, 2014; Berkove, 1979; Brannock et al., 2000; Gruver & Labadie, 1975; Jenks, 1980; Norton et al., 1998). Providing counseling services and opportunities for marital enrichment would help universities create a more supportive environment for students, and potentially, promote academic success. These measures could potentially decrease student attrition as well.

This researcher agrees with the aforementioned recommendations. Additionally, programs should consider inviting program applicants’ spouses to interview day, and perhaps, have a social gathering the evening of the interview. This would benefit non-student spouses as they would have a better understanding of the program, and it would allow applicants and their spouses to have informed conversations about the merits of the program and whether it would be a good choice for them, granted an acceptance. This would also benefit programs, as they would

have an opportunity to observe the applicants in a social setting, which could aide in their decision-making process.

Providing daytime classes for doctoral students would also offer clear benefits for couples and families. The courses offered at the university where this study was conducted are primarily during the day, but many other CES programs advertise as having evening courses geared toward working professionals. This arrangement is not beneficial for students with families. If both students and their non-student spouses work during the day, and students are in class in the evenings, time spent as couples is severely compromised. For couples with children, evening classes also limits quality time students can spend with their kids as well. Daytime classes allow ample time in the evenings for families to spend together, and they are still spread out enough throughout the week where students may work if needed.

Limitations

The research design used in this study was not without its limitations. First, as discussed in Chapter III, there are inherent limitations to the means that were chosen for data collection. With individual interviews, the risk exists that participants will respond in the way they believe the researcher would prefer, or that the researcher may not have taken enough time to develop rapport with the participants (Fontana & Frey, 2003). With focus groups, the possibility for groupthink exists (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016), and the researcher must be skilled in balancing collecting data with facilitating conversation (Fontana & Frey, 2003).

Qualitative data collection contains an element of subjectivity; therefore, it is important that qualitative researchers do their part to ensure that personal biases do not interfere with their results. While the researcher's personal and professional experiences helped guide the structural descriptions and analysis of the data, every effort was made to minimize bias, and thus,

bracketing the participants' experiences as their own. These steps included peer debriefing and member checks.

Another limitation is the length of the data collection period. While the process took 3 months from IRB approval to the completion of the focus groups, studying this phenomenon longitudinally over the course of the students' program would have likely produced richer results. Another consideration is the number of participants in the study. An increased number of participant couples may have enriched the findings as well. However, because the current study aimed to capture the essence of the phenomenon of the married male doctoral students and their non-student spouses at a specific university, increasing the number of participants in this case was not feasible. There were only five married male doctoral students in the CES doctoral program at the time of the study, only four of whom were able to participate.

Additionally, in the opinion of this researcher, the data collected from the participants in this study reached the point of saturation. While individual differences among the participants were present, this researcher observed that the data collected throughout the process generally had strong similarities. The similarities resulted in the development of thematic labels during the data analysis process that were clear and straightforward.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study have highlighted several areas that would benefit from additional research. In terms of the success of married male students, it would be beneficial to compare married male students to other groups, such as single male doctoral students, and married and single female doctoral students as well. Couples who are in long-term relationships, but not married, should also be considered, as should couples in same-sex marriages or long-term relationships.

Because relocation appears to be a major factor influencing the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students and their non-student spouses, studying the specific effects of relocation on students and their families is warranted. Children also can greatly impact couples' experiences, therefore, doing a comparison of couples with children against couples without children would help to illuminate specific differences between the groups. Additionally, because limited research on the experience of non-student spouses exists (Muller, 2016), going into greater depth on the experience of non-student spouses would bring more attention to the unique challenges they face in terms of adjusting to their increased roles.

Other variables to consider are students' and spouses' ages, length of marriage, and financial picture. It is possible that older couples who have been married longer would be more mature, and have more mature relationships; therefore, they would be better equipped to handle the challenges and changes associated with doctoral programs. Furthermore, couples with a higher household income may be in better positions to outsource responsibilities that would allow them to focus more on academic work and spending time together, alleviating some of the stressors that doctoral study can create.

It would also be beneficial to compare couples where both spouses are enrolled in school, known as *symmetrical couples*, with those where only one spouse is enrolled, or *asymmetrical couples*, would be beneficial. Several authors have highlighted the differences between, these groups (Bergen & Bergen, 1978; MacLean & Peters, 1995; Price-Bonham, 1973; Scheinkman, 1988). However, these studies are outdated and likely based on traditional sex roles within marriages. With younger couples trending toward egalitarian principles, revisiting this topic would be useful in understanding the nuances of how symmetrical couples operate using a more modern approach.

Lastly, because the current study addresses the lived experience of doctoral students, many of whom have an interest in pursuing a career in academia, exploring the lived experience of students as they transition into the professoriate ranks may be beneficial. This would allow for exploration of areas including socialization, professional identity development, and career span of the doctoral student through the lens of developmental theories. This research would also allow for collaboration with other areas of focus, such as gender studies in higher education.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students in CES programs and their non-student spouses. Using a phenomenological approach adapted from Moustakas (1994), textural descriptions of the individual participants were included and organized by couple, as well as composite textural descriptions describing the experience of doctoral students and their non-student spouses, respectively. Individual, couple, and composite structural descriptions sought to explain the reasoning behind the phenomenon, followed by an analysis that incorporated existing research and marital theory. This researcher believes the findings from this study effectively capture the essence of the individual lived experience of married male doctoral students, as well as the experience of their non-student spouses, culminating in an understanding of their shared lived experience.

Though faced with obstacles, married doctoral students and their non-student spouses can successfully navigate doctoral study through awareness of the challenges and changes they face, focusing on the benefits, and acting intentionally to keep their marriages on solid footing during a time of adjustment. Taking time to maintain and strengthen their marital friendships and sharing long-term goals are instrumental in couples' marital satisfaction during the years of doctoral study. Those couples who can accomplish this can learn to move beyond the day-to-day

challenges, manage conflict effectively, and realize the benefits that this shared lived experience can provide both now and in the future.

REFERENCES

- Adams, C., & Van Manen, M. (2008). Phenomenology. In L. M. Given (ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (Vol. 2, pp. 614-619). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Anderson, J. A., & Rawlins, M. (1985). Availability and representation of women in counselor education with strategies for recruitment, selection, and advancement. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 25*(1), 56-65.
- April-Davis, T. (2014). *The spillover effect?: A qualitative analysis of doctoral students in intimate relationships* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (Order No. 3680654).
- Aumann, K., Galinsky, E., & Matos, K. (2014). *The new male mystique*. New York: Families and Work Institute.
- Bartolome, F., & Evans, P. A. (1980). Must success cost so much? *Harvard Business Review, 58*(2), 137-148.
- Bauman, K., & Ryan, C. (2015). Women now at the head of the class, lead men in college attainment. United States Census Bureau. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2015/10/women-now-at-the-head-of-the-class-lead-men-in-college-attainment.html>
- Bergen, G. R., & Bergen, M. B. (1978). Quality of marriage of university students in relation to sources of financial support and demographic characteristics. *The Family Coordinator, 27*(3), 245-250.
- Berkove, G. F. (1979). Perceptions of husband support by returning women students. *Family Coordinator, 28*, 429-432.
- Bianchi, S. M., Robinson, J. P., & Milkie, M. A. (2006). *Changing rhythms of American family life*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2016). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2006). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.) Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Bradbury, T. N., Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. H. (2000) Research on the nature and determinants of marital satisfaction: A decade in review. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 62*(4), 964-980.

- Brannock, R. G., Litten, M. J., & Smith, J. (2000). The impact of doctoral study on marital satisfaction. *Journal of College Counseling, 3*(2), 123-130.
- Brookfield, S. D. (2005). *The power of critical theory: Liberating adult learning and teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Brooks, A. (1988, November 3). For graduate students, marriage presents a special problem. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/11/03/us/health-for-graduate-students-marriage-presents-a-special-problem.html>
- Burkholder, D. (2013). Returning counselor education doctoral students: Issues of retention, attrition, and perceived experiences. *Journal for Counselor Preparation and Supervision, 4*(2), 6-23.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Crothers, L. M., Hughes, T. L., Schmitt, A. J., Theodore, L. A., Lipinski, J., Bloomquist, A. J., & Altman, C. L. (2010). Has equity been achieved? Salary and promotion negotiation practices of a national sample of school psychology university faculty. *The Psychologist-Manager Journal, 13*(1), 40-59.
- De, M. (n.d.) Marriage and grad school: Tips to help make it through. *Hitched*. Retrieved from <http://www.hitchedmag.com/article.php?id=1260>
- Dean, D. G., & Carlson, R. S. (1984). Definitions of life situations and marital adjustment. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 15*(3), 441-448.
- Del Rio, C. M., & Mieling, G. G. (2012). What you need to know: PhDs in Counselor Education and Supervision. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families, 20*(1), 18-28.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Deutsch, F. M. (1999). *Halving it all: How equally shared parenting works*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Devine, S. (2012). *The lived experience of counselor education doctoral students in the cohort model at Duquesne University* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (Order No. 3546794).
- Dowling, M. (2007). From Husserl to van Manen. A review of different phenomenological approaches. *International Journal of Nursing Studies, 44*(1), 131-142.

- Dukes, S. (1984). Phenomenological methodology in the human sciences. *Journal of Religion and Health, 23*(3), 197-203.
- Dyk, P. A. (1987). Graduate student management of family and academic roles. *Family Relations, 36*(3), 329-332.
- Flanagan, J. C. (1954). The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin, 51*(4), 327-358.
- Fontana, A., & Frey, J. (2003). The interview: From structured questions to negotiated text. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (pp. 61-106). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fuenfhausen, K. K., & Cashwell, C. S. (2013). Attachment, stress, dyadic coping, and marital satisfaction of counseling graduate students. *The Family Journal, 21*(4), 364-370.
- Galinsky, E., Aumann, K., & Bond, J. T. (2011). *Times are changing: Gender and generation at work and at home*. New York: Families and Work Institute.
- Gerson, K. (1985). *Hard choices: How women decide about work, career, and motherhood*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Gilbert, M. G. (1982). The impact of graduate school on the family: A systems view. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 12*, 128-135.
- Giles, F. (1983). *The effects of doctoral study on marriage and family: an ethnographic study*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American College Personnel Association. Houston, TX.
- Given, L. M. (2008) *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Giorgi, A. (2006). Difficulties encountered in the application of the phenomenological method in the social sciences. *Analise Psicologica, 24*(3), 353-361.
- Glesne, C., & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Gold, J. M. (2006). Profiling marital satisfaction among graduate students: An analysis of the perceptions of masters and doctoral-students. *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal, 28*(4), 485-495.
- Golde, C. M. (2000). Should I stay or should I go? Student descriptions of the doctoral attrition process. *The Review of Higher Education, 23*(2), 199-227.
- Goode, W. J. (1960). A theory of role strain. *American Sociological Review, 25*(4), 483-496.

- Gottman, J. M. (1999). *The marriage clinic: A scientifically-based marital therapy*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Graham, J. A., & Dixon, M. A. (2017). Work-family balance among coach-fathers: A qualitative examination of enrichment, conflict, and role management strategies. *Journal of Sport Management, 31*(3), 288-305.
- Gruver, G. G., & Labadie, S. K. (1975). Marital dissatisfaction among college students. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 16*, 454-458.
- Guy, J. (1987). *The personal life of the psychotherapist*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Hadjoannou, X., Shelton, N. R., Fu, D., & Dhanarattigannon, J. (2007). The road to a doctoral degree: Co-travelers through a perilous passage. *College Student Journal, 41*(1), 160-177.
- Harnett, R. T., & Katz, J. (1977). The education of graduate students. *The Journal of Higher Education, 48*(6), 646-664.
- Harrison, J., MacGibbon, L., & Morton, M. (2001). Regimes of trustworthiness in qualitative research: The rigors of reciprocity. *Qualitative inquiry, 7*(3), 323-345.
- Hartnett, R. T. (1976). Environments of advanced learning. In J. Katz & R. T. Hartnett (Eds.) *Scholars in the making: The development of graduate and professional students* (pp. 49-84). Cambridge, MA: Ballinger.
- Hartshorn, K. (1976). A day in the life of a graduate student. In J. Katz & R. T. Hartnett (Eds.) *Scholars in the making: The development of graduate and professional students*. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger.
- Hawley, P. (2010). *Being bright is not enough: The unwritten rules of doctoral study (3rd ed.)* Springfield, IL: Thomas Books.
- Haynes, K. N. (2008). Reasons for doctoral attrition. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ce18/e5cb8a2aa90cdd6503ace1dc6c087e189843.pdf>
- Healey, A. C., & Hays, D. G. (2012). A discriminant analysis of gender and counselor professional identity development. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 90*(1), 55-62.
- Hepker, W., & Cloyd, J. S. (1974). Role relationships and role performance: The male married student. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 36*(4), 688-696.
- Hicks, M. W., McWey, L. M., Benson, K. E., & West, S. H. (2004). Using what premarital couples already know to inform marriage education: Integration of a Gottman model perspective. *Contemporary Family Therapy, 26*(1), 97-113.

- Hoskins, C. M., & Goldberg, A. D. (2005). Doctoral student persistence in counselor education programs: Student-program match. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 44*(3), 175-188.
- Hudson, S. A., & O'Regan, J. (1994). Stress and the graduate psychology student. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 50*(6), 973-977.
- Hughes, F. R., & Kleist, D. M. (2005). First-semester experiences of counselor education doctoral students. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 45*(2), 97-108.
- Huston-Hoburg, L., & Strange, C. (1986). Spouse support among male and female returning adult students. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 27*(5), 388-394.
- Hyun, J. H. (2009). *An exploration of the coping strategies in female counseling doctoral students' marriages*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (Order No. 304892737).
- Ibsen, C. A. (1967). The married college student: A problem of role congruence. *The Family Life Coordinator, 16*(1/2), 21-27.
- Jenks, W. (1980). Treatment of students in graduate school (summary). *Proceedings of the 29th Annual National Conference Association of the University and College Counseling Center Directors, 53*.
- Labosier, C., & Labosier, A. (2011). Who are you married to: Balancing graduate school and marriage. *The Geographical Bulletin, 52*, 87-91.
- Legako, M. A., & Sorenson, R. L. (2000). Christian psychology graduate school's impact on marriage: Nonstudent spouses speak. *Journal of Psychology and Theology, 28*(3), 212-220.
- LeMasters, E. E. (1979). Problems of the divorced father. *Contemporary Psychology, 24*(12), 1020.
- Light, R. J., Singer, J., & Willett, J. (1990). *By design: Conducting research on higher education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Lott, J. L., Gardner, S., & Powers, D. A. (2009). Doctoral student attrition in the STEM fields: An exploratory event history analysis. *Journal of College Student Retention, 11*(2), 247-266.
- Lovitts, B. (2001). *Leaving the ivory tower: The causes and consequences of departure from doctoral study*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.

- Maynard, E. M., & Pearsall, S. J. (1994). What about male mature students? A comparison of the experiences of men and women students. *Journal of Access Studies*, 9, 229-240.
- MacLean, A. P., & Peters, R. D. (1995). Graduate student couples: Dyadic satisfaction in relation to type of partnership and demographic characteristics. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 27(1), 120-124.
- Mason, L., & Paul, J. (1982, August). Influences of transition on role satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and self-esteem. In *Couples in transition: Relocation and graduate school influences on development*. Symposium conducted at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, Washington, D. C.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Maynard, E. M., & Pearsall, S. J. (1994). What about male mature students? A comparison of the experiences of men and women students. *Journal of Access Studies*, 9, 229.
- McLaughlin, M. C. (1985). Graduate school and families: Issues for academic departments and university mental health professionals. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 26(6), 488-491.
- McRoy, S., & Fisher, V. L. (1982). Marital adjustment of graduate student couples. *Family Relations*, 31, 37-41.
- Miller, W. D., & Irby, B. J. (1999). An inquiry into the exigency of a beginning doctoral cohort in educational leadership. *College Student Journal*, 33(3), 358.
- Morse, J. M. (2009). Tussles, tensions, and resolutions. In J. M. Morse, P. N. Stern, J. Corbin, B. Bowers, K. Charmaz, & A. E. Clarke (Eds.) *Developing grounded theory: The second generation* (pp. 13-19). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Muller, J. C. (2016). *The impact of doctoral study on the relationship satisfaction and commitment level of doctoral students and doctoral student partners* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (Order No. 10127125).
- Murray, K. W., & Kleist, D. M. (2011). The impact of counselor training on students' couple relationships: A qualitative inquiry. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 19(2), 122-131.

- Nedleman, M. D. (1991). *A survey of married graduate students on sources of stress and their needs for intervention*. (Unpublished master's thesis). California State University, Northridge, CA.
- Norton, L. S., Thomas, S., & Morgan, K. (1996, March). *Separate words?: The pressures of married women students in higher education*. Paper presented at the Women in Higher Education Annual Conference, University of Lancashire.
- Nimer, M. (2009). The doctoral student cohort model: Increasing opportunities for success. *College Student Journal*, 43(4), 1373-1379.
- Norton, L. S., Thomas, S., Morgan, K., Tilley, A. & Dickins, T. (1998). Full-time studying and long-term relationships: Make or break for mature students? *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling*, 26(1), 75-88.
- Parker, K., & Livingston, G. (2016). 6 facts about American fathers. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/16/fathers-day-facts/>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Pederson, D. J., & Daniels, M. H. (2001). Stresses and strategies for graduate student couples. In S. Walfish & A. K. Hess (Eds.), *Succeeding in graduate school: The career guide for psychology students* (pp. 171-185). Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Perlow, A. D., & Mullins, S. C. (1976). Marital satisfaction as perceived by the medical student's spouse. *Journal of Medical Education*, 51(9), 726-734.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In R. S. Valle & S. Halling (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology* (pp. 41-60). New York: Plenum Press.
- Polson, M., & Piercy, F. P. (1993). The impact of training stress of married family therapy trainees and their families. *Journal of Family Psychotherapy*, 4(1), 69-92.
- Pope, M. (2000). A brief history of career counseling in the United States. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 48, 194-211.
- Price, J. (2006). Does a spouse slow you down?: *Marriage and Graduate Student Outcomes*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Price-Bonham, S. (1973). Student husbands versus student couples. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 35, 33-37.

- Protivnak, J. J., & Foss, L. L. (2009). An exploration of themes that influence the counselor education doctoral student experience. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 48*(4), 239-256.
- Proulx, C. M., Helms, H. M., & Buehler, C. (2007). Marital quality and personal well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 69*(3), 576-593.
- Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ray, D. C., Huffman, D. D., Christian, D. D., & Wilson, B. J. (2016). Experiences of male counselor educators: A study of relationship boundaries. *The Professional Counselor, 6*(2), 107-120.
- Rockinson-Szapkiw, A. J., Spaulding, L. S., & Knight, A. (2015). Protecting the marriage relationship during the doctoral journey: Strategies for students and partners based on the strong marital house concept. *The Family Journal, 23*(2), 141-146.
- Scheinkman, M. (1988). Graduate student marriages: An organization/interactional view. *Family Process, 27*, 351-368.
- Schweiger, W. K., Henderson, D. A., McCaskill, K., Clawson, T. W., & Collins, D. R. (2012). *Counselor preparation: Programs, faculty, trends* (13th ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Scott, C., Burns, A., Cooney, G. (1998). Motivation to return to study as a predictor of completion of degree amongst female mature students with children. *Higher Education, 35*(2), 221-239.
- Smith, R. L., Maroney, K., Nelson, K. W., Abel, A. L., & Abel, H. S. (2006). Doctoral programs: Changing high rates of attrition. *Humanistic Counseling, Education, and Development, 45*, 17-31.
- Spaulding, L. S., & Rockinson-Szapkiw, A. J. (2012). Hearing their voices: Factors doctoral candidates attribute to their persistence. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 7*, 199-219.
- Sori, C. F., Wetchler, J. L., Ray, R. E., & Niedner, D. M. (1996). The impact of marriage and family therapy graduate training programs on married students and their families. *The American Journal of Family Therapy, 24*(3), 259-268.
- South, S. C., & Krueger, R. F. (2013). Marital satisfaction and physical health: Evidence for an orchid effect. *Psychological Science, 24*(3), 373-378.
- Strauss, A. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Suarez, A. (2014, November). *From the ground up: A review of Dr. John Gottman's Sound Marital House Theory*. Poster presented at the Arkansas Counseling Association Conference, Hot Springs, AR.
- Suarez, A., & Carver, C. (2017, October). *The doc marital house: Addressing married doctoral student issues with the Sound Marital House model*. Presented at the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision Conference, Chicago, IL.
- Suarez, A., Carver, C., & Higgins, K. (2015, October). *'Til death or doc do us part: A look at unique challenges that face married/partnered doctoral students in counselor education*. Presented at Association for Counselor Education and Supervision Conference, Philadelphia, PA.
- Suarez, A., Yam, F., & Carver, C. (2016, October). *'Til death or doc do us part (Part II): Spouses' perspectives of challenges that face married doctoral students*. Presented at Southern Association for Counselor Education and Supervision Conference, New Orleans, LA.
- Tell, S. J., Pavkov, T., Hecker, L., & Fontaine, K. L. (2006). Adult survivors of child abuse: An application of John Gottman's Sound Marital House theory. *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal*, 28(2), 225-238.
- Trainor, A., & Bouchard, K. A. (2013). Exploring and developing reciprocity in research design. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(8), 986-1003.
- University of Arkansas Office of Institutional Research. (2017). *Enrollment report* [Data file]. Retrieved from <https://oir.uark.edu/students/enrollment-reports/spring2017enlrpt.pdf>
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Van Meter, M. J. S., & Agronow, S. J. (1982). The stress of multiple roles: The case for role strain among married college women. *Family Relations*, 31(1), 131-138.
- Wertz, F. J. (2005) Phenomenological research methods for counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 167-177.
- Williams, R. E. (1977). The perceptions of the impact of a doctoral program upon the marriage relationships of doctoral students at the University of Northern Colorado. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 38, 1908.
- Willis, B., & Carmichael, K. D. (2011). The lived experience of late-stage doctoral student attrition in counselor education. *The Qualitative Report*, 16(1), 192-207.

Wolniewicz, R. (1996, November). *The psychology of the graduate student: A preliminary study*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, San Diego, CA.

Zemirah, N. L. (2000). *Burnout and clinical psychology graduate students: A qualitative study of students' experiences and perceptions* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (Order No. 9949157).

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

March 10, 2017

MEMORANDUM

TO: Anthony Suarez
Kristi Perryman

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 17-02-441

Protocol Title: *The Shared Lived Experience of Married Male Doctoral Students in Counselor Education and Their Non-Student Spouses*

Review Type: EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 03/10/2017 Expiration Date: 02/27/2018

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscpi/index.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 8 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT LETTER

A Phenomenological Inquiry on the Shared Lived Experience of Married Male Doctoral Students in Counselor Education and Their Non-Student Spouses

Greetings,

My name is Tony Suarez. I am a doctoral student in Counselor Education and Supervision at the University of Arkansas. I am conducting a research study and hope you will consider being a participant.

The purpose of this study is to explore the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students in Counselor Education and Supervision programs and their non-student spouses. Participation is open to all married male doctoral students in Counselor Education and Supervision and their non-student spouses, regardless of length of marriage or the number of years spent in the doctoral program.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to sit for a semi-structured interview with questions pertaining to your individual experience and to your marriage. Additionally, you will complete a brief, weekly written reflection that addresses issues related to doctoral study and your marriage for a 6-week period. At the end of the six weeks, you will take part in a focus group to share additional thoughts and to discuss issues with other participants similar to yourself. Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants are free to stop participating at any point during the study. A decision not to participate will bring no negative consequences.

Those couples who participate in the study to its completion will receive a \$25 restaurant gift card as compensation. If you feel you and your spouse would be interested in participating in this research, or if you have questions about the study, please contact the principal researcher, Tony Suarez, by email at alsuarez@uark.edu. You may also contact the faculty advisor for this project, Kristi Perryman, at klperry@uark.edu.

Thank you to you and your spouse for your time and participation.

IRB #17-02-441
Approved: 03/10/2017
Expires: 02/27/2018

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

A Phenomenological Inquiry on the Shared Lived Experience of Married Male Doctoral Students in Counselor Education and Their Non-Student Spouses

Informed Consent

Investigator: Anthony Suarez, M.A., LPC
University of Arkansas
479-575-6808 alsuarez@uark.edu

Faculty Advisor: Kristi Perryman, Ph.D., LPC-S
University of Arkansas
479-575-6521 klperry@uark.edu

Description: The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the shared lived experience of married male doctoral students in Counselor Education and Supervision programs and their non-student spouses. As part of your participation, you will be asked to sit for a semi-structured interview with questions pertaining to your individual experience and to your marriage. The interview should take approximately 1-2 hours. Additionally, you will complete a brief, weekly written reflection that addresses issues related to doctoral study and your marriage for a 6week period. At the end of the six weeks, you will take part in a focus group to share additional thoughts and to discuss issues with other participants similar to yourself. The focus group should take approximately one hour. Demographic information will also be collected including gender, age, number of children, number of years married/partnered, number of years you/your spouse has been in the doctoral program, and household income. Participant responses will be collected through email.

Risks and Benefits: Potential risks include an increased awareness of areas of dissatisfaction within your marriage. In extreme cases, should you experience distress as a result of your participation in this study, a referral will be made to a Licensed Mental Health Professional. Benefits include becoming more self-aware of the circumstances unique to your own relationship and learning coping strategies from other married students and their spouses.

Compensation: By participating in this study to its completion, you and your spouse will receive a \$25 restaurant gift card.

Voluntary Participation: You are free to refuse to participate in the research or to stop participating at any point during the survey. A decision not to participate will bring no negative consequences to you.

Confidentiality: Your responses to this study will be collected in a secure location. You will be assigned a participant code. All identifying information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy.

Questions: If you have any questions about the research, please feel free to contact me through the email listed above. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's IRB Coordinator, Ro Windwalker, 109 MLKG Building, 479-575-2208, irb@uark.edu.

I have read and understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's signature: _____ Date: _____

IRB #17-02-441
Approved: 03/10/2017
Expires: 02/27/2018

APPENDIX D: STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Individual Interview Questions

What is the lived experience of married male doctoral students in CES programs?

The following questions will be asked to the doctoral student participants:

1. What has your experience been of the doctoral program so far?
 - a. Best/worst parts?
2. Have you experienced any personal changes and/or growth since beginning the program? If so, please explain.
 - a. What about professional changes?
3. What are the benefits of being a married doctoral student in counselor education?
 - a. How does being a male affect this, if at all?
4. What are the challenges of being a married doctoral student in counselor education?
 - a. How does being a male affect this, if at all?
5. How, if at all, has your marriage changed since you began the doctoral program?
6. How do you split your time between school and home responsibilities?
7. How much time would you say you spend thinking about school compared to home or other responsibilities?
8. How do you divide up household responsibilities with your spouse?
 - a. How is this different from when you began the program?
 - b. How does being a male affect this, if at all?
9. Financially speaking, how, if at all, have things changed since you began the program?
10. What about physical intimacy? How, if at all, has that changed since you began the program?
11. How would you describe your level of friendship with your spouse?
12. What are some things you admire about her?
13. What kind of stressors is she currently facing?

14. Do you look forward to spend your free time with her?
 - a. What types of things do you do together?
15. How do you handle conflict in your relationship?
 - a. What are the most common things that you disagree on?
 - b. How has that changed since you began the program?
16. What coping strategies do you use to handle issues that arise as a result of the doctoral program?
17. What kinds of traditions or rituals do you have in your marriage?
18. How would you describe how your personal values match up to those of your spouse?
19. Would you say that you share similar long-term goals with your spouse? Why or why not?

What is the lived experience of the non-student spouses of married male doctoral students in CES programs?

The following questions will be asked to the non-student spouse participants:

1. What has your experience of your spouse's doctoral program been thus far?
2. Have you experienced any personal changes and/or growth since your spouse began the program?
If so, please explain.
 - a. What about professional changes?
3. What are the benefits of being married to a doctoral student in counselor education?
 - a. How does being a female affect this, if at all?
4. What are the challenges of being married to a doctoral student in counselor education?
 - a. How does being a female affect this, if at all?
5. How, if at all, has your marriage changed since your spouse began the doctoral program?
6. How do you divide up household responsibilities?
 - a. How is this different from when your spouse began the program?
 - b. How does being a female affect this, if at all?
7. Financially speaking, how, if at all, have things changed since your spouse began the program?

8. What about physical intimacy? How, if at all, has that changed since your spouse began the program?
9. How would you describe your level of friendship with your spouse?
10. What are some things you admire about him?
11. What kinds of stressors is he currently facing?
12. What would you say are most significant components of your spouse's program?
13. What kind of interaction have you had with other students or professors in your spouse's program?
14. How do you handle conflict in your relationship?
 - a. What are the most common things that you disagree on?
 - b. How has that changed since your spouse started the program?
15. What coping strategies do you use to handle issues that arise as a result of your spouse being in the doctoral program?
16. What kinds of traditions or rituals do you have in your marriage?
17. How would you describe how your personal values match up to those of your spouse?
18. Would you say that you share similar long-term goals with your spouse? Why or why not?

APPENDIX F: STRUCTURED FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Focus Group Interview Questions

The following questions will be asked in both focus groups:

1. What was it like for you to complete the weekly journal entries?
2. What, if any, changes did you notice about yourself during this process?
3. How, if at all, did your feelings about your spouse change during this process?
4. Have you noticed any differences in the way you and your spouse communicate since beginning this process? If so, please explain.
5. Do you feel that the themes accurately describe your experience as a married male doctoral student (as someone who is married to a doctoral student) in the counselor education program at the University of Arkansas? Why or why not?

APPENDIX G: EXAMPLE OF RESEARCHER MEMO

Researcher Memo

Date: 3/26/2017

Interview #: 1

Today I conducted my first interview. I wasn't sure what to expect going in, and I was a little unsure about whether the structured questions I came up with would be enough to generate the dialogue, and ultimately the amount of data, I think I will need. But now that it is complete, I feel pretty confident that seven more interviews just like this will be more than enough.

I found myself feeling a lot of different emotions throughout the interview with Student 1. I am a little envious over some of things in his life based on his comments, especially when it comes to rituals his wife and him do on a regular basis. I like the idea of a big Saturday morning breakfast! I also think it is pretty nice that his wife leaves him a note in his luggage every time he goes away to a conference.

On the other hand, the stress he deals with because of all the roles he has to juggle is something I'm grateful I don't have to deal with – at least not as much. This mainly has to do with having two kids. Student 1 apparently does not do any school work in the evenings before his kids are in bed, and he doesn't do anything on the weekends either. Those self-imposed restrictions would have made my process a lot more difficult.

Overall, I think the first interview went well. I think this memoing will be an effective tool in making sure I practice good self-awareness in terms of how I feel about my participants' responses, and how I compare that to my own experiences.

APPENDIX H: EXAMPLE OF INVARIANT CONSTITUENTS

Clustering and Thematizing of Invariant Constituents

Couple 1

I. Individual experience

1. So far I've really enjoyed the program.
2. I think it's been a very positive experience.
3. The amount of work has been doable.
4. The fact that I really enjoy my GA position has really helped.
5. I enjoy the people I'm in the program with, which is really nice.
6. I'm a clinical guy, so the best parts of the program are when I get to do supervision or teach class, or see clients – things like that.
7. I'm really enjoying the research side of things too, the qualitative side.
8. I think sometimes I get frustrated with some of the level of people in the program sometimes. It's a, "Why are you here?" kind of thing.
9. *I needed to vent a bit about the doc student of the year award and how it was annoying me. I felt annoyed by the situation and wanted to vent.*
10. *I was involved in the hiring process of a GA position and it was very frustrating. I talked to (spouse) about it and vented to her about what was going on.*
11. No, for me, I think because I went straight from my master's, I think that I've enjoyed the pace of it, and where I'm at is where I'm at. So I don't get burned out very easily and thinking I'm ready to be done with this.
12. Overall it's been a good experience honestly.
13. He went straight from master's to doctoral program, so we were kind of in the swing of things as a family throughout his master's program, so it gave us a chance to acclimate to that.
14. So when we went to a doctoral program, we were used to study time, homework time, work, that kind of balance.
15. But it's had it's hiccups for sure.
16. Overall it's been a good experience, but I'd say for the most part it's because how he manages his time. That makes a big difference for our family.
17. He's made it a big priority to do homework and studying on what I would say quote 'his time' I guess, his office, or he'll wait until his kids are in bed.
18. So there's been little blessings in that, and he makes sure he's not missing church, or soccer, or school plays, or those family times. He's very cognizant of that. It makes a big difference.
19. Pretty limited.
20. It's like he's got his fingers in so many pies and I try to keep up.
21. We did get together at the beginning of last semester with the different housing, counselor in residence, the housing department, we got together with them. And that was nice to put some names and faces together. The same thing with that picnic last year. But that's pretty much it.
22. I'm familiar with Dr. Perryman and Dr. Blisard from before we came here, from that program, and I've seen them a couple times since we've been here, and I know about his colleagues and things and who he talks about, and you know, and courses and stuff, what he's taking.
23. He's talked about a few times getting together with people, which has been great, but we have kids, and that's really hard.
24. So historically how it goes, is we get together with people and it's super fun for about three minutes, and then I'm taking care of my son who's running outside trying to pee on a fence, and my daughter who wants 17 cookies, and then somebody hits somebody, and then I'm alone anyway.
25. Because I want him to have that time to bond with those people that I want to get to know too, but it's really hard to take that mom hat off.
26. When we went to that dinner for the housing department, we had to bring the kids. We couldn't afford a babysitter. That was nice to get to see people, but it was for me, very limited. So I have a hard time saying,

'Okay let's go do this, because I know it's stressful for me, and it's stressful for the kids.' So I think that's a big component of it.

27. When he says 'Hey there's a trivia night or a volleyball game, and it sounds really great. But the reality is, we've got these really great kids, but I'm not sure how they fit. But on the flip side, I know that drives him crazy because he wants to go with me as his spouse, and he's told me that before. Well let's go meet some people, and God, I would love to meet some people because I don't know people here, I really don't.
28. And he wants to go as a team. I want to show you off, and I want to be there with my spouse. And that's excellent. It sounds really great in theory, but the reality side of it, that's not how it's going to go. It sounds really nice though.
29. *My husband was invited by a colleague to their house and myself and our kids were also invited. I want to support him and his program. I want him to know I'm interested. I agreed to go and he was so happy! I was anxious, but ended up having a great time and am so glad we went.*
30. *I had an important work dinner to attend that I told him about on more than one occasion. The night before we were talking and he says he has things to do for school that night. He had totally forgotten about my event. I felt hurt, and forgotten, and unimportant.*
31. And when we moved down here, I looked into university had a spouse relocation program, or something. I remember I emailed them. What a great opportunity, we are relocating for my husband's position. I don't know a soul in Northwest Arkansas. I've got children. I'm taking a new job. I'd love to get a tour of campus or meet some people. I didn't hear a word back. I emailed them about a month later because I was getting a little frustrated. I never heard back.
32. Yeah, even once every month, or just an opportunity for spouses to get together, even outside of students. I just think, not just in the counseling program, but that would be phenomenal. I think that would've made my experience here so much better. It would've helped with my health a lot. Processing things, even hearing you guys say yeah we've gone through that.
33. But I think as the spouse, you have got to be the most consistent thing in that entire house, because you can't expect little people to be consistent with anything they do in life, and that can be really tiring.
34. I feel like everything else is on me then to keep the waters smooth in that house.

II. Personal and professional changes

1. It's hard for me to tease out completely with how much I grew during my master's program until now, because I went back to back, so it's been more of a continual growth pattern.
2. Definitely my ability to do research, my ability to think in that manner, to understand qualitative research. To understand how to do that, that's something that's grown exponentially.
3. Supervision as well. That's not something you touch on in a master's program. So how to do supervision, things like that.
4. I think even my ability to work within theory and everything else is just continuing to grow because the more you do it – I'm seeing 10 to 12 clients a week – so the more you do it and teach it, the better you get at it.
5. I think the self-esteem continues to grow more. You learn more about yourself. The more you're willing to accept, the more you're able to look at it some of things you didn't want to look at before, it makes you a more rounded out person.
6. I think for me it's made me a more supportive spouse in ways I didn't realize I needed to be.
7. Trying my hardest not to feel selfish with my time, because you know when we're as a family with two kids, it's all of us.
8. So for he and I to have time, just he and I, is super, super rare.
9. But I know it's a season, and I know he's doing it to better our family, and for the bigger picture. So that I've noticed.
10. I've had a lot of professional changes. That's been a big one for our family.
11. So when he went to do his master's, we talked about okay, what does that mean? What comes next for you? And that was the avenue to do his phd, obviously, which took a lot for he and I, because we knew that would mean moving for his career.
12. So when he got accepted into the program here, it was a huge, huge blessing. We were thrilled. All those things were really good, but we knew it meant leaving my career.
13. So that was really, really, really difficult. So we talked a lot about that, and there were lots of tears on my end.

14. But our faith is a big part of our family, and a lot of prayer time, and we just knew we needed to do it.
15. So the hospital company I worked for has hospitals down here in Rogers, and they were wonderful and helped me find a position there, but not in child life. It was a medical assistant at a clinic, and I had no experience in that whatsoever! But I took the job because it paid what I needed, and it gave me the insurance to cover the kids, because the insurance at the school wasn't feasible for our children. It was rough, and I worked there for about a year, and I really hated it. I really, really, really hated it. So that was a hard time for us.
16. I wasn't home enough, and I couldn't be as supportive for him and the kids because I would come home dog tired, and really wasn't here.
17. So I left the job at Rogers, and went back to working with kids and families. Totally different setting, but back to working with kids and families. I'm a teacher's aide at an elementary school, and I do really love it. I'm home after school with my kids, and our family has completely changed since last August when I started. So my career hugely changed!
18. Looking back it all makes sense, but it was very, very difficult. I'm a mom, but I like to work. I like to be independent in my career. I like to supervise, I like to know what I'm doing. I'm an educated person, and I enjoy sharing that with people.
19. And it was hard for me sometimes to take a step back from myself and say I really need to support my husband in furthering his education and his career, which is a very good thing, because it will fulfill his life more, and it will help better our family, but it kind of meant putting my heartbeat on the back burner for a little while.

III. Benefits of marriage during program

1. The income is beneficial. Doing this on a one person income would look very different. Where I'd be living, and things like that.
2. I have a partner in crime. I have someone to kind of, when I need to, not really vent, but if I want to discuss things or deal with things, or have someone to kind of lean on a little bit.
3. It's nice to have someone here who can help do that, so it's not all on my shoulders.
4. *I was happy to have an ear to tell my feelings to. (spouse) was also upset with the situation. I felt validated in my reactions. It made me feel supported and heard.*
5. *(spouse) was supportive of the initiation and for me to go get a drink.*
6. *I am thankful she is worried and looking out for me.*
7. I actually have more time now than I did during my masters program because classes are not at night. It's more like a 9 to 5 day.
8. He's so happy! He loves what he does. Seriously, we've been married 8 ½ years, and he's worked a couple jobs he did not like. He's so fulfilled, and it rolls over into your family when you're loving that part of your life.
9. So this has been great since it's in the daytime, so our family time is awesome. I've seen how he interacts with our kids has changed. He's always been an awesome dad. But some of the ways he's patient has changed, in a really good way, and I think that has to do with some of the things he's learning.
10. *My husband recalled to me some positive feedback he received from a professor regarding how he's doing in his program. It was really nice to see him feel pride as a result of these comments. I was able to support him and share in his proud moment. It ended up making us both feel good!*

IV. Gender role effects

1. I think it would probably look different if I was the female in this situation, but it's hard for me to say because I don't fit that stereotypically male formula of things, so I'm not sure.
2. When I've talked to others who have gotten their PhD, or their dads or something, it was always like, that was just what they did.
3. They didn't have to do with the family.
4. But for me, it was very different.
5. For the first year and a half, a little over a year, that we were here, I was the one who got up in the morning and got the kids up, got them dressed and breakfast, took them to daycare. When it was time for them to get out, I would pick them up from daycare, I would make dinner, and then (spouse) would get home around 6.
6. I don't want to be a stereotypical male, that's just not what I want to do.

7. I make sure I'm doing the dishes, the laundry, and cleaning the house.
8. Maybe if I was stereotypical I wouldn't worry about it so much.
9. So for me, it does make a difference. I feel like I just have to put more on my plate.
10. But as a wife in a relationship, and also feeling I guess, selfishly, feeling that I've given up a whole lot of my personal career and my development, that's a conversation we've had numerous times of we need to carve out some time for you and I, or you need to figure out how to be a little more romantic, or plan ahead for me.

V. Challenges of being married during program

1. Just being married itself is difficult, because you have two very different experiences.
2. One person in the program is dealing with the homework and the stress, while the other person is not. They're dealing with just work, and things like that.
3. You're trying to balance out who's doing what around the house, how much not to do, how much is too much to do, and then you have the children in there.
4. It gets crazy.
5. For me, it's always just a time management thing. Like, I will not do homework while the kids are awake. It's just been my rule from the beginning. When the kids are awake, that's my time with the kids. So throughout the week, I only do homework while the kids are in bed.
6. At least one of those nights, I make sure it's a (spouse) and I night, where we just watch TV or hang out, and that kind of thing.
7. It's about 4 nights a week where I can get homework done from 8 until midnight.
8. So unless it's test time, or I have a big thing due, I won't do anything on the weekends either, because that's my family time. Occasionally after the kids go to bed on the weekends, I'll try.
9. So balancing all of that is very, very difficult.
10. If it was just me as a single guy, I wouldn't have any of that to try to balance. I would just be doing what I needed to do when I needed to do it.
11. On top of that, with the same thing in mind, I've got school, I've got a wife, I've got kids, I run. I try to keep myself balanced in the wellness area.
12. So that pretty much doesn't leave time for anything else.
13. I don't spend time with anyone. I don't get time with friends. It just doesn't happen. So that's a really difficult thing.
14. *Afterwards, I felt guilty for doing it. I brought up my problem to her when she has a lot more stressful things going on. I felt a bit selfish not just dealing with or talking to someone else.*
15. *The CSI initiation was tonight. This caused me to be away from my family and not be around for bedtime with the kids. I also went out for a drink afterwards with others from the initiation. This caused some strain for (spouse) to have to put the kids to bed alone.*
16. *I felt guilty for having to be gone.*
17. *I also get annoyed at times when I have to be so aware of money and can't just enjoy a drink with friends when I want.*
18. *I have been stressed. There's a lot going on with (spouse) and a lot going on at school.*
19. *I want to go for a run, but I haven't had much time for that.*
20. *I decided to skip going to church to go to a coffee shop and work on a research project. This left (spouse) to get the kids ready for church, to get them to church, and to take them to play after church.*
21. *I was sad for having to miss church, but happy that I got to work on my project.*
22. We have this kind of a funny phrase in the house that I've coined. There's no therapizing in the house! You cannot therapize in the house. There should be a big sign in the house!
23. It's such a double-edged sword, it totally is. Sometimes I'm needing something, and I'll do the wife thing. You should just know what I need. Put yourself in the chair. You should know.
24. But we've really worked through that in the last year, when we've had an argument in the last year, or something stressful come up, he's been really great to say, 'here's something I learned, and I thought we could try it.' Sort of front load it a little bit, instead of trying to slip it in there, because for whatever reason that makes me really angry. I don't like it.
25. Even though it's a great skill, I want his head and his conversation to be there with me as his wife, and not be there with me as a client.

26. But there are some great things he's learned that's been very helpful. Just with me, personally, I've struggled with a long time with anxiety, so he's been so careful and so kind to help me, but not to look at me as a client coming to see him, because that's not what I want from him as my husband.
27. I had asked him, 'Is there a support group for spouses of people in counseling?! How do they do this?! Because we need to figure out how to make this work.'
28. I would honestly say you'd have people participate because it would give you a community – not to get together to bash things – you know, people in the same profession who have spouses, when they get to know each and stuff, a lot of times their spouses can get together and do these kinds of things.
29. And you can kind of feel isolated – I feel isolated from the school sometimes. Not that I need to be included. That's not where I go, that's not what I do. But it would be nice to have someone to have lunch with, or someone who just gets it. So we could just say 'This is driving me crazy!'
30. So anyway, I think a support group is a phenomenal idea.
31. *My husband needed to study for an exam on a Sunday, which meant I would go to church alone with the kids. He told me he needed to do this the day before church, but insisted he told me earlier in the week. I was frustrated that he was so insistent that he already informed me of this when he hadn't.*
32. *I understand he's stressed and most likely just forgot, and I try to be patient, but his forgetfulness regarding our conversations has been a running theme lately.*
33. *I am tired of being looked at as inattentive when he talks.*
34. *It was a stupid argument, and I believe it was the result of stress and pent up frustration.*
35. *He talked about everything as though I was there and knew all these people. This irritates the shit out of me! It makes me feel insignificant and stupid. I feel uninvolved and like a total outsider to a private world he lives in.*
36. *At the beginning of each semester, my husband's fellowship paycheck is considerably less due to course fees. He never knows until the last minute. I always feel like there has got to be some way for him to better anticipate this, but he insists there is not. I get so frustrated by this as I do all our family budgeting. I sometimes feel as though he doesn't get the big impact this has on our family.*

VI. Program-related changes to marriage

1. It's been very similar since my master's program.
2. One thing that was difficult was that we relocated here, so the support structure we have here is not as prevalent down here.
3. As far as friends go, (spouse) doesn't have any friends here. Well, she does now, but she hasn't had anyone to just spend time with. There's never been a time since we've been here when it's been like, "Okay, you go out with the girls, and I'll go out with the guys." That just doesn't happen.
4. We've been able to get a babysitter just a couple times so just (spouse) and I can just go out and spend the night. Or we've dropped them off at the church daycare for the night.
5. But to get a babysitter for four hours, that's \$20 an hour, that's \$80 right there. And after we added it all in, it was going to be \$150, \$170 to go to a football game, and that's just not doable.
6. That's why you see me at a lot of the school functions alone. Because for one, we don't have a lot of babysitters around here, and even if we did, we'd ask is it worth 60 bucks for 3 hours, you know?
7. I think it's changed quite a bit.
8. You know, life experience changes you, but you choose to change together, and make that a conscious effort, or you choose to change apart, in my opinion. So we've both made natural changes in our life, but it's taken some real deep conversations to make sure we are both on the same page, because I don't want to lose what makes us, us. And why I love him, and how I love him. And the same thing for him, with me. And just to love and accept those changes, even though they are not always what I had envisioned or thought would happen. And he the same of me.
9. I think he works really hard because, I like I said, I left a really big career. And I think I learned that really identified a big part of who I was, and I didn't realize that until I moved.
10. So when I get really excited about stuff, (spouse) is really good to get really excited too. That fulfills the independent part of me that I lost.
11. So I feel that our marriage has become stronger, but not without the speed bumps. But we've chosen – and it's a conscious effort – we've chosen to work on in together.

VII. Roles and responsibilities

1. This year it's looked a little different than last year because (spouse) switched jobs.
2. So before that, the year prior to that, it was I'd wake up in the morning around 7, get the kids up and ready and dressed, to daycare at 8, go to school or work from 8 to 5, pick up the kids at 5:15, come home, cook dinner at 6, and then put the kids to bed around 7:30.
3. At every function she has, every party or anything, I carve it out and make sure I'm there. It's important that I'm there. I try to carve out as much time as I can with them.
4. With (spouse), I try to balance the time. It's really hard on (spouse) because most of the time we're together, the kids are with us. So we're together, but it's not us time.
5. Getting us time is really difficult. One night a week, I definitely do it. On the weekends, I try to do it as well. But like going out on dates, it doesn't happen very often.
6. But then balancing everything else out, when I'm getting ready for races and things like that, I run during the day while I'm at school. Every other weekend I try to go for a run during the mornings, or Fridays, I try to carve out so I have time to do long runs on Fridays.
7. It's just a giant juggling act.
8. Wherever I'm at, that's where I'm at. I'm a very present-minded person.
9. Most of the time that works out really well for me, because I'm able to focus on where I'm at.
10. Sometimes that gets me in a jam because I forget about things that are coming, or things I need to be aware of or prepare for, or things like that.
11. I'm generally a pretty low stress person, but when stress does hit it makes it a little tougher to be present minded.
12. Then things start getting foggy and I have to go back and wonder if I've missed something like at work.
13. It's definitely evolved through my master's program into my doc program.
14. But speaking about right now, I'll do laundry, (spouse) does laundry, whoever is available.
15. In the mornings, I do the dishwasher. So everyone eats breakfast, I put the stuff in there, run the dishes, then (spouse) gets home before I do, and she'll empty it.
16. All yard stuff is me. So anything outdoors or yard is me. That's always how it's been.
17. I'm usually the one who does all the vacuuming. (spouse) does also occasionally.
18. And then the kitchen, I'm a stickler about the kitchen. I don't like when my kitchen is dirty, so I'm usually the one detailed the kitchen a couple times a week. (Spouse) recently learned how to clean the stovetop, so that's been good.
19. I have all the male responsibilities and extra on top!
20. When it comes to outside, anything gross – if it includes trash or toilets. Or anything that's cars, that falls under my 'you do it.'
21. *I really don't like doing homework on the weekends. I actually don't do this very often.*
22. *I missed my kids and church, but I did a lot of work. I met up with them after I was done, and then (spouse) left to do some work. This was all planned, so there wasn't any issues between (spouse) and myself.*
23. In a way, having kids has made this whole process a lot easier, but in a way it made it more difficult. Because I don't have the same challenges I had, even in my Bachelors, where I'd be out with friends 3 or 4 nights a week, and now I'm home and I'm with them. So it's almost been easier because I have a schedule and boundaries now. So it's kind of a weird balance of it's difficult, but I don't know if I would've even gotten my PhD if I didn't have kids.
24. It just kind of naturally happened, honestly. He's always been really picky about a clean kitchen, and the floors, but that's been forever. So he's always done.
25. Because I have my afternoons open now with my new job, I make sure I have dinner ready for when he comes home, but that also helps me as a wife. I like that.
26. I like having him come home and not be stressed, and say, we are ready to have a nice sit down dinner together with the minimal amount of a 2 year old screaming. But that feels good to me as a wife.
27. Some things that he does do go by the wayside because he is so busy, and I just have to get over it. I have to not nag about it, and that's hard sometimes.
28. But he's been great. He'll sit there and fold the laundry with me and that kind of thing. He's a really good dude.
29. So before he started any of this, he's just a caretaker, and so if it needs to get done, it typically just does it.
30. I don't think anything has changed too much except for I try really hard not to be as naggy, because like I said, there are somethings he used to do, and I just need to just let go because he is so busy, or I just need to learn how to do it.

31. Because I have a job where I'm happier now and have more time with the kids, I try really hard to do the things with the kids so he doesn't have to think about them. Lay out the clothes the night before, get things ready for daycare, make sure homework is done with my daughter.
32. I make sure all the grocery shopping is taken care of. I try to make sure all that's done, so it's one less thing that he has to even think about because he's doing such a big thing for our family.
33. I do, only because I really don't want to mow, and I don't take out the trash, and he gets on me because he says, 'This is not a guy's chore!'
34. But yep, so there are some things I call dude stuff, that I just won't do, which I'm sure is obnoxious to him.
35. But even when our kids were little, he's always changed diapers and all that good stuff. He doesn't complain too much.
36. I think probably, 80% of the time I spend it with my family, although I never really considered that free time.
37. When I think of free time, I think of not being obligated to the family.
38. I would love to spend more of that free time with (spouse) but the logistics behind all of that is rough.
39. So some of the free time I do have, I mean I enjoy spending it on myself. And I think I need some of that time. Like I think of my running, and stuff like that. I do 2, maybe 3 races a year where I'm gone for the weekend, stuff like that.
40. Then there's the Saturday runs. I just need that, that's my meditation, my mindfulness, my wellness, what I have to do to keep me balanced.
41. *I keep a schedule for the entire family.*

VIII. **Financial changes**

1. They're actually better than they were since when I was in my master's program.
2. I actually make more now than I did working fulltime in the state of Missouri in the Division of Youth Services as a Youth Specialist.
3. Things have shifted from when we were first here, because (spouse) had a different job at the hospital making significantly much more money than she does now working at the school district.
4. I was actually working two jobs at the time while going through my master's program. So financially it's been better because I haven't had to work two jobs, so that's been nice.
5. (spouse) does really good. She controls all the money. She's the budgeter. She's the financial person.
6. We've done a nice job, where we don't have debt, which is really nice. We don't owe anything on the cars or anything like that. We owe \$300 on a credit card, and then the mortgage on the house.
7. We've had a lot of changes. One of the big things that happened when we moved, my income stayed about the same, when I kind of had a lateral move within the system.
8. Shockingly, taking the fellowship that he was offered, we had a little more income than when he was a master's student.
9. Also when we moved here, we went from a daycare situation where we had an in-home daycare with a girl we loved and trusted and it was easy on our budget. When we moved, the daycare on the two kids was almost twice our mortgage on the new house we built, and that was at a mediocre rate. Not at the most expensive place in town, but a place we were comfortable.
10. We even looked at, do I just stay home? But we couldn't afford at that time to stay home. The kids made it really hard.
11. We even looked at do we rent or do we not? And it was just as affordable to build, especially if we had to sell. So that was another big thing when our daughter left daycare.
12. I took a big pay cut from when my job in Rogers to here, it was almost exactly her daycare. Almost to the penny, it was amazing.
13. I mean, things are tight. We just started the Dave Ramsey envelope system, which I think drives (spouse) nuts. But I'm the financial person. I take care of all of our budgeting. I'm a super bargain finder.
14. We try to do things on the cheap for the kids when we can.
15. You very much have to be on top of it and be on a strict budget, especially when you think of our children and what are things they enjoy.
16. His family is in Branson, so not terribly far, but we don't have the extra money for date nights very often, which does stink, because that's something you need as a couple I feel.

17. We started going to a church a couple months ago where they actually do a date night for couples, and they do this really cool program for kids, and they don't charge. And it's like 3 hours. So we've taken advantage of that once, and it was awesome. It was the coolest thing. So that's been a huge blessing.

IX. Marital friendship

1. I think we're good friends.
2. I think that we could be better friends, but sometimes I think we're too good of friends, if that makes sense.
3. Sometimes because of how busy we are, and how limited the time we spent together is, it's easier to see her as just a friend than as a lover and a spouse.
4. We're two friends living in a house raising two kids.
5. The dating, the romance, that kind of things. It's not the friendship that suffers.
6. But as far as what I would want out of a friend, reliability and things like that, it's definitely where I'd want it to be.
7. And our 2 year old, God love him, he's very committed to being 2. I love him very much, but he takes a lot.
8. But sometimes it's just survival. 'Hey how you doing? Going back to work after the kids go to bed. See you later!'
9. This semester, I think it was Tuesday nights, he made sure that he was just home, and we'd catch up on Netflix shows, or just whatever. But no homework.
10. I feel like our friendship is a little bit on the backburner some days, because it just kind of is what it is right now.
11. Because we don't get to do the things together that built that friendship sometimes like going for awesome hike, or going climbing, and the things that aren't super romantic, but the things that are just jovial. I'm ready for that to come back.
12. But I think because our marriage and our love are based on a really strong friendship, I know that it's always there. I don't worry about that.
13. That's kind of the foundation. But I'm excited to do things that get that back and going.
14. I think for the most part they match up, but there are some differing things.
15. But I mean, we both hold Christian values.
16. We both value our families. Family is number one.
17. We value each other.
18. Then we have some different values as well, but for the most we're good.
19. Really in sync.
20. I think that and the basis of friendship we had formed the foundation of our marriage.
21. We both have our faith and our religion as our foundation for our family, and that's super important for both he and I, and how our kids view that is really important.
22. We both value people as individuals. We both are really open and accepting of people, as in come as you are. We both really practice paying it forward. No need for the acknowledgement, you just do the right thing.
23. And even when it comes to money – because we're doing this envelope system and it's really strict – he'll come home and say 'I did this today because this person needed that.' And there's never a qualm with that because that's just what you do, that's how you love people.

X. Physical intimacy

1. Honestly I don't know if it's changed much. It's been an up and down rollercoaster since we've been married. Like it's been good for a period of time, and then it's just not for a long period of time. And it's just been like that, even before I was in my master's program.
2. It's been a point of contention at times, where because of how busy we are, she doesn't feel like she's getting her needs met, that she's not a priority. So then she shuts down and won't tell me about it, so I get frustrated, so then I'm not getting my needs met either.
3. So then I'm like okay, I don't have any need to try to be romantic because I'm not getting my needs met either.
4. So it's like this cyclical thing where it ends, 6 months later we'll get into a fight and talk about and try to correct it. Then 3 months later we fall back into the pattern. And that just goes down to how difficult trying to be married is.

5. I only have 24 hours in a day, I only have X amount of energy, and I can only put so much of me into each position. And I can't be the same person that I was when I started dating. It's not possible!
6. That's changed too because some nights he needs to go back to the office to study, and I'm tired, because not really work, but because kids.
7. So that's changed since he's started the program.
8. But we've also gone through a lot of changes. This doesn't totally relate to your study, but I had to have a histrorectamy a year and a half ago, at 30, and that was a huge change for so many reasons. And the poor guy just started his program, and that was a really hard time.

XI. **Admiration**

1. Her tenacity. Her stubbornness, although it drives me absolutely insane at times, I can also appreciate how stubborn she can be about certain things.
2. She also keeps me on track, but at the same time she helps me keep on in the boundaries of things.
3. I'm more of a free flowing person, more of an optimist. She's there to, as she calls it her realism.. her pessimism, or whatever you want to call it. But being that helps me balance that out at times. Helps me pull it back a little bit and take things into consideration.
4. She's a wonderful mother. I'm very blessed to have a wife that's such a good mom to my kids.
5. He is so determined and passionate, and not just about school. I love how driven he is.
6. School yes, but ya know, our marriage has had some hardships because it has, and when we talk about what we need to do to fix it, he's determined about that.
7. He's so committed to our kids.
8. He took up running, oh my gosh, right before we got married. And you know his runs, are legitimately insane. I am not a runner. I had no idea I was going to be married to an ultra marathoner who's getting his PhD and living in Fayetteville, Arkansas! If you would've asked me like 5 years ago, I would've laughed in your face.
9. I admire how – I'm not sure if calm is the right word – but he's relaxed almost to a fault, where I can get more worked up about things, so we kind of even each other out.
10. And we both have the same sense of humor, so I admire that about him too.
11. He's a good leader for our house, and that's a big deal in our faith, so that's something I'm really thankful for.

XII. **Stressors and cognitive room**

1. She's got a lot of stressors right now.
2. Work stuff, that's probably her biggest thing she's dealing with right now.
3. Some of what I think she's always struggled with here is that friendship thing. She does have a good friend now. But she's always been someone who work friends are work friends, and outside friends are outside friends.
4. Money is another stressor for her.
5. She's pretty convinced that we're consistently broke, no matter what. That's just her though, that's her mentality. She's always been like that.
6. And we have a 2-year old. I'm not sure if you've noticed. And our 5-year old. I think those two can be the biggest blessing in your life, but be one of the biggest stressors in your life at the same time.
7. She's always made it clear that your friends are your friends even though they may be my friends, they were your friends first, so they're really not my friends. That kind of thing.
8. And she gets really annoyed that I'm friends with lots of people, and she would only say she has a few friends, and everyone else is an associate.
9. The financial stuff, I do what I can. She tries to budget, and I say 'Okay let's do it.' So I try to be supportive. We don't discuss it too much, because I get frustrated with the realistic, or pessimistic talk about finances, and she gets frustrated with my optimistic talk. So our conversations are pretty short. We know this about each other, but occasionally it still turns into an argument or stuff like that.
10. When it comes to the kids, we take turns putting the kids to bed, we spend time with them.
11. We're both very much involved in correcting them, and consequences and everything else. We're a pretty united front with the kids.
12. I still don't know for sure how much (spouse) gets how taxing this is and stuff like that.

13. Even though it's a while away, looking at what the next year brings for us as a family as far as employment, finishing up dissertation all that kind of stuff. I know he always has that in the back of his mind because me and the kids are in this for him.
14. The reasons we're in Fayetteville, Arkansas is because (spouse).
15. He never talks about it, but I can see he feels a lot of pressure. I don't think we put that on him, but I know he feels like 'okay, my family has sacrificed a lot for me to do this to have a – I mean we have a great life, but to have a better life.
16. His family, school, exercise regimen stresses him sometimes. If he doesn't run daily he's a different guy. If he doesn't run for a week, we just all just not talk maybe. So I know he gets all stressed out when he can't go run. But that's a good thing for him. That's his de-stressor. He tries really hard, when he needs to go run, he'll get up early and go do it before people wake up, or he'll get it in on a lunch break.
17. I know for him, the outlook for his program is that courses are finished up for him in August and then he'll stay on and he'll teach a couple of courses the next year, and he'll have some clients, but he'll be working on his dissertation. That'll be his full time focus.
18. He's pretty good about that stuff too, but sometimes he'll come home and he'll start talking about people and things like I know what they are, but he'll start talking about people and things and conferences, and I have to slow him down and say 'Hey, I'm not there. I don't know what we're talking about. I've got nothing.'
19. *How could he forget the one event I have planned?*

XIII. Managing conflict

1. I think that for a long time I would shy away from the conflict. I would get angry on the inside, and I would comply, I would just do, which would make me even more angry on the inside. And I couldn't let it go. And I think over the past year, I've been able to show, that when I'm angry, I'm angry.
2. Conflict with (spouse), I think it comes in a couple of different forms. A lot of times I try to slow down and stop, and say hey is this worth it? Is something I need to fret about or not? If not, then let it go. But then there are times when I need to speak up and need to be heard. I need my feelings or voice to be heard.
3. A lot of times that's met with a very defensive posture, which either – I'm a talker, I'm a counselor. So I want to talk about something to figure this out.
4. We should be able to have a conversation where you and I are talking about things and showing different sides without being defensive. Just honor each other's opinions and talk things through.
5. Now that may or may not work at times. There are other times when we're like, fine, we'll just shut down.
6. It's the same argument we've always have, it's not going anywhere, so let's just shut it off, and then I'll just keep to myself for a while and let it pass, because things pass with me pretty quick.
7. I mean, finances, that's always something, but it's usually not much.
8. Time management, probably. Where she doesn't feel like she's a priority.
9. I think some of the bigger things that come up, definitely the intimacy thing.
10. The disrespect comes up periodically every 6 to 8 months, discussion about how I don't feel respected, where I don't feel like the man of the house, and I'm not allowed to do those things. Those are probably the big categories.
11. I think I'm more vocal about it now. The topics haven't changed, but I'm more vocal.
12. I've just gotten tired of it, and part of it is this realization that it's just not going to get any better. So it's just a very steadfast problem that I need to address. I can't continue to brush it aside.
13. I always do 'Is this worth it?' and will stop and take a breath, and just say okay, is it worth it? Do I need to say something or do I not?
14. What I can't do is that I would have full conversations in head, and just play it through and just let it go. But now I stop myself, and know it's not healthy to just brood on this, even if it's just 20 or 30 minutes, I just don't that. It's not helpful.
15. Being present, running, trying to be healthy, things like that. They're all things I've done, like in the last – January 2016 I stopped drinking soda, so that was one thing that was helpful.
16. He wants to talk about it right away, and I tell him not to talk to me for a while. Typically that's how it goes. That's how we initially handle things. I need a little bit of space sometimes before I'm ready to talk.
17. With the factor of kids, we're very cognizant that we handle that when they're not there. It's okay that they see us disagree a little about over what goes in the pasta or something, but the big things they don't need to be privy to. So we're very careful about that as a couple.

18. We're not a screaming and yelling couple, that's for sure. I try really hard not to be passive-aggressive. But I think sometimes when I shut down, it comes off like that, but in reality, I just need you to go away for a bit, so I can figure out exactly how I feel.
19. He's more eloquent with his thoughts and feelings than I am. It takes me longer to put my feelings into words. But we've had to have a handful of sit down conversations since the program started about where our marriage lies.
20. I know as a priority – it's a high priority for him because, he's my husband, and I know that that's always there. And like I said, this is a season, and it's a great season, and we are going through this program together, and that's great.
21. So some things have taken a backburner, and there have been times when that's gotten to be a little too much to me, and we've had to sit down and talk about it.
22. I would say sometimes it's communication, like the way that I need to be shown that I'm appreciated or loved is a common denominator that we talk about.
23. I don't feel like we have tons and tons of disagreements.
24. I tend to worry and stress, and he feels like I don't need to, or in reality I don't need to. We don't necessarily argue about that, but it definitely makes the air a little thick to cut sometimes.
25. Sometimes it is school. A lot of times he starts talking about things like I was there, or that I understand, or that I should understand. That causes a problem sometimes.
26. Or scheduling, looking at gone for this conference, gone for that race, gone for that race, gone for that conference. I try really, really hard to let that be what it is, because it's a season.
27. But other than that, we have little kids, so they're a lot of what our significant arguments are about!
28. These are all very good things, and I just have to tell myself that these are all very positive things. And my calling, my job right now is just to keep everything else in order. It's just not always easy!
29. So there's a lot of things I look back on now that he's getting his PhD, and think, you know, collectively we've sacrificed a lot, and collectively we've made it through a lot, and how thankful I am that he's worked his butt off. He works *hard*. And how thankful I am to let our family be here, and forward from here. When I look back on all of those things, it makes some of things that bother me totally obsolete. And you have to look at that sometimes.
30. It was an argument of where you're going to do you PhD and what does that mean for me and my career. That was our biggest deal, and (spouse) was never like 'Well I'm going to do this and do this without you because that's what I want.' He was always like 'Where are there programs where there are children's programs where you can work? Let's look.'
31. If we can get through that, we can certainly get through a PhD!
32. He goes running.
33. I just need space, that's really my thing. I either need a hot bath, or I need to be gone, even do the grocery shopping by myself. It just helps me relax a little bit.
34. Then we sit down and talk. He's obnoxiously good at that. Who would've thought?
35. *I got super mad and shut down. This is not the first time this cycle has happened, and we both agreed that he needs to be more sensitive to these facts, and I most likely need to lighten up.*
36. *He apologized and said he'd take the kids to get his school things done. I was honest about my feelings, and let it blow by.*

XIV. Traditions and rituals

1. Obviously we have like the holiday stuff, but that's not where my head goes when I hear this question.
2. Saturday morning breakfast are always a big deal around here. Whether it's making a big thing of pancakes, or I make homemade gravy, with biscuits and sausage and eggs.
3. Which becomes a point of contention at times when I'm trying to ramp up my mileage before a race, and I need to take off in the morning for a 6 hour run. I'll say 'Hey I need to go do this,' and there's obvious resentment because we're breaking up what we normally do, and I understand that, but I got to find time for that at some point.
4. Other things, like books before bed are always a thing. Friday nights, we don't always get to, but we try to do a movie night with the kids.
5. We either eat dinner here or eat dinner in a picnic in the yard and watch a movie and cuddle up.
6. With (spouse) and I, like I said, one night a week we have a few TV shows we watch on Hulu. So that's our night to watch things and do stuff. So I think that's a tradition, or something!

7. Our walks when it's nice outside, around the block.
8. I can think of a lot as a family with our kids.
9. Every Saturday we have a really big breakfast. (spouse) gets up and makes a big, ol' breakfast for everyone, and we sit down, and that's cool. We do that as a family.
10. We have a family handshake, which is pretty cool! Our daughter really likes that. Just silly, family stuff.
11. This only happens once a year, and this sounds absolutely ridiculous, but at Christmas – actually this past year we decided not to get each other Christmas presents. Finances. But we wrap each other's gifts in food boxes, like cereal boxes, or food boxes. It goes back to when we first got married. We had no money. But I thought it'd be funny to wrap his gifts in food boxes, and he did the same thing! So every year we wrap our gifts in food boxes. It's just funny!
12. I know that when he goes to conferences or races, and I've done this since we were dating, with the exception of just a couple times, I write him a letter or devotional for every day that he's gone, and I hide them in his luggage. And our daughter, when he went to take his exam a few weeks ago, she did one and stuck it in his bag, which I thought was really cool because she's catching on, 'this is what mom and dad do for each other.'

XV. Goals

1. There are some similarities, and then there are some differences, then there are some giant question marks.
2. So, in one aspect, I mean, I think we both know I'm headed toward professorship somewhere, so I know ideally both of us ideally would love for me to pick up a position somewhere in the fall of 2018, and then just kind of be where we set roots in until at least the kids are out of high school. I know we both want that. Is that going to be the case? I don't know.
3. Where that place is definitely comes into the contention of things.
4. I know her desire, at least currently, would be back toward St. Louis somewhere, in that area, and that's because that's where her brother is right now. Her parents will be moving back there once they're fully retired, she has lots of friends there. It's familiar to her.
5. I would be willing to go there, but would not be really excited about going there. And knowing that there is only one program that I can work at, really limits the possibility. It's probably like maybe a 2% chance we end up there!
6. So knowing that, it's like, I hear your dreams, I know what you want, but the reality may not be that.
7. So then we start looking at other places. I know she wants to stay close to her family. I have different feelings about that. It's a point of contention.
8. When it comes to her, that's a big question mark for me. I know in this day and age we need to be a two income family. That's the reality of how it is, unless we're going to live very meagerly. So what that looks like, I know she wants to have basically the same hours she has right now, only working the school hours, off during the summers, off after school, so that makes it very difficult.
9. I've encouraged her to get her teaching license, and she doesn't want to do that.
10. I get frustrated at times. So basically you want to be a paraprofessional, which is great, and I'll support you, but you also want a house with a basement and all this other stuff, but yet you're making a very meager amount of money compared to what we might need in order to give our family what we want to give them.
11. Yesterday, we were talking about the new children's hospital that's coming open, because she used to be a child life specialist, and I asked if she had thought about it. And she said there's no point, so we'll be moving, and I asked if she had any interest in going back to a position like that. And she's sad because she went to school for 5 years for this, but she was like 'No because the medical hours don't match with what I want.' And we've gone over this a few different times. You can't have your cake and eat it too.
12. Unless you're literally going to come up with your own position, it just doesn't exist. So she got angry with me, bringing up the idea of going back. It was a weird situation.
13. I still want to be professor, but maybe I can take a position at an online school if needed. I don't want that, but I'm willing to vary.
14. Part of me on the inside is like, I'll do it, but that's not why I just spent 10 and ½ years in college, but I also don't want to have the resentment for not being able to follow her dreams.
15. And then it's where does all of this happen? Because I don't want to limit myself of where I might take a job, but that's a strong possibility.
16. It gets frustrating thinking about what the future might look like, but I also know that she'll budge on some things, and I'll budge on some things.

17. (spouse) has decided to go back to get her master's now. She actually starts on Monday, and she'll be able to do some adjunct teaching, and that's something she'll really enjoy. And so, I think possibly, just the more topical our conversations have been about school, I think has encouraged her to kind of chase that dream as well.
18. And with her seeing my process as well maybe got that fire burning, and that recently caused her to make that jump. So she decided this was the time to do it.
19. But what I fear is the resentment that comes along with that budging. Because I felt it, even though we had this discussion a long time ago and it was a mutual decision, I felt that resentment at different times being down here.
20. And the remarks at times, and I'm like, 'Well we kind of made this decision together!'