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Is There a Relationship Between Perceived Spousal Support and Marital Satisfaction of Female Graduate School Students?

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IS THERE A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED

SPOUSAL SUPPORT AND MARITAL SATISFACTION OF

FEMALE GRADUATE SCHOOL STUDENTS?

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An Abstract Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
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ABSTRACT

Deciding to return to graduate school as an adult student creates another role for an individual to fulfill. Studies have shown that women, especially, feel role strain or conflict more than men when returning to school. Little research has been done on the role the woman's spouse plays in her attempts to complete her degree. This correlational study examined perceived spousal support and marital satisfaction among female graduate school students. Thirty-nine female students volunteered for this study. The volunteers completed the Dyadic Adjustment Scale and the Student Relationshps Questionaire. The results suggest there is a significant relationship between perceived spousal support and marital satisfaction. The more supported the female graduate student feels by her spouse the more satisfied she appears to be in her marriage.

Since women, as research indicated, tend to choose family responsibilities over school responsibilities when role conflict arose these finding may be beneficial to graduate school advisors in retaining female graduate school students.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The world of work and family is ever changing. More women are entering the workforce than ever before. As women enter the workforce, they also tend to make gains in higher education in relation to the obtainment of degrees. A large portion of adult continuing education students are mature women (Norton, Thomas, Morgan, Tilley, & Dickens , 1998). According to Rogers (1999), as women go back to school and enter the workforce, their roles at home become less defined.

Traditionally, a woman's job has been considered to be that of housewife, nurturer, and caretaker. This tradition was challenged after America's involvement with world wars, the industrial revolution, and the women's movement. Today women enter the workforce for various reasons. Among those reasons are economic necessity, intrinsic motivation, and the drive to succeed. Regardless of the reason, a challenge to the traditional role of wife has to be dealt with by the spouses involved with the situation (Marx, 1990; Cassidy & Warren, 96; and Coltrane, 1997) .

The changing of these roles may create controversy at home (Norton, et al 1998; and Marks & Lambert, 1998), which in turn

may lead to marital discord (Rogers, 1999). It is noted that marriage is considered to be a top priority for both men and women (Aldous & Ganey, 1994), but that women have been raised to make family the leading priority. Aldous and Ganey (1994), found that women perceive themselves to be the center of the family and responsible for how members interact. The authors also stated that women see themselves as having a high degree of skill for dealing with intimate family circumstances. It is this generalization, and/or expectation that can lead to marital distress for women who choose to continue with their education and try to balance the demands of their married life. Rogers (1999) reported that, while women might find the change in roles as timely, husbands often find the adjustment as infringing upon their privileges. Sullivan, Pasch. Eldridge. and Bradbury (1998) believe that spousal support plays a key role in the understanding and prevention of marital dissatisfaction.

A 1998 study involving the importance of social support in a marriage by Sullivan, Pasch, Eldridge, and Bradbury suggests that social support is a primary factor in marital satisfaction. The authors stated, " Social support in the context of marriage includes the spouses' effort to fulfill the immediate needs of their partners,

engendered by stressful life events as well as by the cumulative

benefits of supportive interactions such as senses of security and

self-efficacy." (paragraph 8). Given that graduate school is a

significant life stressor it would seem that spousal support would

play an important role in the graduate students' rating of marital

satisfaction.

This study examines the relationship between perceived

spousal support and marital satisfaction of women during graduate

school. This is an important topic to explore, given the number of

women returning to school. Norton and Thomas (1998) indicated

that full-time study may have a devastating effect on a relationship.

At times this could include the extremes of one partner having an

affair or the partners getting divorced.

The authors referred to a 1987 study by Radhika and

Prakash, in which results indicated in families where the husband

and wife are highly committed to their careers there is often a shift

in the traditional gender roles of the spouses. The characteristics of

women in dual career couples, and in women who return to school

are similar. Therefore, the findings of the Radhika and Prakash

study are important to this research project.

The similarities include the fact that whether it be a job,

commitments at school or both, families involved with these

situations suffer stress and role conflict which could lead to marital

dissatisfaction. The supportiveness of each spouse plays a critical

role. Radhika and Prasch (1987), found the more spouses feel

supported the less likely they are to experience a higher degree of

marital dissatisfaction. As the pressures of running a household,

being a partner in a marriage, and job responsibilities mount,

women need a supportive environment to help aid them in dealing

with the stress of managing the numerous roles.

Returning to school creates another dimension of stress for

people. The degree of the stress, as well as the cause of the stress

is viewed differently by men and women. Norton et all (1998),

reported that for women the stress was mainly created by family

factors. The authors go on to conclude that full time students tend

to be more successful if they feel supported at home. Couples

with established support and rapport may be more likely to handle

the stress while reporting lower marital dissatisfaction scores.

Norton et al (1998) said, "Crisis points in any relationship can

have the effect of either drawing a couple closer together, or driving

them apart..." (paragraph 9). The research that has been done

appears to indicate that women feel significant pressures in

determining priorities between school and traditional family roles
(Norton, and et al, 1998; Marks & Lambert, 1998; Sullivan et al.
1998; and Burch, 1998). This conflict could result in a crisis point.

Previous research on the roles of women and family status
(Bullers, 1999) have discovered that women who are able to get
support and assistance with household labor are more likely to feel
less overwhelmed by all the roles with which they are involved.
The author also reported that a change in the distribution of
household labor had a positive impact on a woman's feelings of
support.

This research seeks to contribute to the effort to make
graduate school possible, and successful for married people,
especially women, who wish to pursue an advanced degree. The
implications of the research could be used in providing a greater
understanding to women of the stresses that graduate school may
bring about, and how their relationship with their spouses could
positively or negatively be impacted. Likewise, the results could
be used to help women achieve a greater understanding of the
impact that graduate school might have on their marriage. These are
important topics to pursue in working with the success of being a
wife, and a student.

Three specific frameworks will be drawn upon in investigating this study. The frameworks include, Gender Theory, Role Enhancement Theories, and Life Course and Life Span Development perspectives. These frameworks will provide a basis for understanding the changes that couples encounter throughout their life.

Role enhancement is defined as the degree to which people interpret and handle the role associated with their current life stage. Each stage of life brings about different responsibilities and roles. In addition, Gender theories will be used to explain the ways in which individuals interpret and handle the roles they perceive to be their responsibilities. The theory explores the ways roles effect people's lives. Role interpretation can cause conflict between spouses, resulting in disagreements, and leaving spouses feeling a general lack of support and understanding. This theory is relevant to this study because one of the variables being examined is how supported the female graduate student feels during her return to school.

The life course and life span development perspectives deal with different stages people encounter and their response to those stages. Specific to this research are the developmental categories of

early to mid life adulthood. These stages are being focused upon because this research effects mainly women in the early to mid life adult stage.

The research question posed is "Does perceived spousal support among female graduate school students correlate to marital satisfaction?" The premise is that female graduate school students who report a higher degree of spousal support will report a higher level of marital satisfaction than students with lower reported degrees of perceived spousal support.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

The reviews researched in this project provide background information to gender roles, marriage, dual career families, and mature students in education. The combination of these factors has the potential to help a family succeed or fail in their academic endeavors. This project is centralized on females in education, the stress associated with grauate school, work, and the demands of being a wife and possibly mother.

Gender

Gender is a delicate issue that has yet to be truly defined. There are characteristics that society and individuals hold as either being more masucline or feminine in nature. There is not a concurrent opinion as to when these beliefs become ingrained in an individual. There is considerable discussion that the beliefs men and women hold towards gender have a significant impact on marital and family dynamics, as well as, careers, business, and politics (Blee, & Tickamyer, 1995).

The formation of gender attitudes regarding gender roles are affected by many factors, some experienced in childhood, and others being formed from the experiences held by adults.

Weitzmann in 1979 argued that ".children model their attitudes and behaviors on those of significant others: because women are the primary figures for most children, this suggests that mothers will exert a significant influence on the future attitudes of their children" (Blee, & Tickamyer, 1995, paragraph 9). Therefore, if attitudes are in some aspects, handed down from generation to generation, change could be a slow and tedious occurrence.

Since this research is focused on adults, it is the gender roles of adults that will be examined. Coltrane (1997) stated that most people would report they believe men and women should be equal, but the fact remains that gender is one of the most important determinants of a person's life chances. The author goes on to explain that when comparing men and women, "women are more likely to earn low wages, takes orders from others, perform domestic labor, live in poverty, and be raped or abused" (Coltrane, 1997, paragraph 1). Sources agree that these dynamics occur as a result of generations and centuries of societal beliefs about gender (Feree, 1990; and Coltrane, 1997).

Coltrane goes on to suggest that the primary reason from keeping women from positions of authority is a held-over romantic belief of the 19th century. During this time, known as the

Victorian era, women were expected to have and raise children, and provide a sense of realism for their husbands. Men conversely were suppose to compete in a cruel sometimes violent world, and relied on the wife to provide a sense of comfort from the ever demanding world of work. These characteristics were passed down from family member to family member each generation Ferree (1990) stated, "Mothers socialize daughters to subordinated behaviors because they themselves have been socialized to them, not because they perceived the dangers of insubordinate behaviors in a male dominated society" (p. 867). These traditional roles have been challenged over the years with the occurrence of world wars, and the industrial revolution (Feree, 1990; and Granello & Navin, 1997).

Perhaps the largest shift in gender roles began to occur in the 1970's and has continued to be on the rise sense that time. As Coltrane (1997) reported, in 1950 there were twice as many families that had a breadwinner father and a stay at home mom. Today the number of dual earner families out number families where only the man works two to one. What has not changed, necessarily, is the roles of women at home. The traditional roles of women being responsible for the childrearing, cooking, and cleaning

are still evident.

Even though more fathers are participating in raising their children, there is still much discrepancy in the amount of work performed by men and women at home. Fathers tend to either be uninvolved or only involved with certain aspects of housework. When examining all the chores associated with the household, such as, cooking, taking care of children, cleaning, laundry, trash, lawn mowing, etc., men who participate tend to do the more enjoyable, or least redundant tasks. Fathers usually play with the children and cook, but do not seem to pick up after play, or shop for the cooking necessities and/or clean up after cooking. Thompson and Walker, (1989) said, "The family work women find most enjoyable and fulfilling, cooking and child care, are the activities men often are most willing to share: this makes men's contribution a mixed blessing for their wives" (p855).

In reviewing traditional gender roles and their changing facets authors agree that women still hold the primary responsibility for taking care of the family and children. In some families this may be viewed more as a burden of being a woman and one of her duties, where as in other families it may be viewed by the female as one of the enjoyable aspects of motherhood. It quite

clearly depends on the family, the individuals, and the situation.
The case by case considerations is what causes gender to be
difficult to define. There are common physical characteristics
shared by all females and all males; however, gender is not defined
by physical features (Gemmil & Schaible, 1991, Burnett &
Anderson, 1995, and Coltrane, 1997).

Lambert (1981) refers to renowned psychologist Dr. Carl
Jung's perspective to explain the gender role classification. The
author explained that Jung viewed attributes in the terms of the
anima and the animus. Anima is the unconscious female qualities
possessed by males, and the animus is the unconscious male
qualities possessed by females. Gemmil and Schaible (1991) report
that these qualities are split and projected onto the opposite sex,
thus creating an attraction that comes from the collective
unconscious. In other words, what we lack, or see split in
ourselves, we project onto other people. It is the need for healing
and completion which creates an attraction. All the while this
attraction is performed at the unconscious level. This aides in
explaining, why on a conscious level we are often not able to
explain our immediate attraction to certain people. Jacobi (1959)
classified this as a healing that occurs when an individual is seeking

to repair his or her split self.

The anima and the animas are unproven hypothesized phenomenons, but Carl Jung believed them to be living influential parts of the human existence (Stanford, 1980). Some people have a difficult time accepting or even believing in the unconscious. The difficulty stems from a fear to explore the unconscious (Gremmil and Schaible, 1991). People are sometimes cautious in their efforts to rely on something that is intangible to explain events. Tannenbaum & Hanna (1985) reported that some believe nothing constructive could come from relying on the unconscious to explain how behaviors are affected.

The importance of Jung's classification is that all people are born with certain characteristics, and seek those characteristics which are split or absent from themselves in other people . It is ironic that both men and women possess the same qualities, but it is those characteristics lacking in one that is viewed by society as being held only by the opposite (Gremmil & Schaible, 1995). It is this so called possession which creates classifications of certain traits being more male or female and society usually determines these classification.

Therefore, when examining gender, it should be remembered

that all people possess similar characteristics, and are born with the unconscious capacity to develop both. It's the influence of society and customs along the way that lead to gender classification. or at times discrimination. Gender is more than being male or female, and when discussing gender issues, society as a whole must be taken into account. Through gender role discovery and life span development people have the capacity to develop their attributes. Personalities are, therefore, effected by biological codes, and the influence of society and environment. It is these experiences that affect the type of person an individual might seek to marry.

Marriage

A couple is defined as two people working together in a relationship. The relationship can be the familiar one of marriage or a relationship can involve a non-married couple, a couple of the same sex, or two people brought together through different circumstances, such as a working couple. For the purposes of this project, the focus is on married couples. This section defines the characteristics of marriage, the different stages of marriage, and issues in the realm of marriage.

The characteristics of marriage are two people making a commitment to each other to establish a family. Marriages usually,

in the United States, occur between two people who are in love.

The concept of love being grounds for a marriage is a relatively new

concept.

> The concept of romantic love in marriage is recognized to be
> a recent innovation and one   that is peculiar to Western
> civilization. In other cultures, and in our own prior to the
> 16th century, marriage was a contract having little to do
> with love and much more to do with property and progeny.
> (Beavers, 1985, p.135)

Being in love is not enough to make a marriage successful.

Although, it is noted that love promotes optimism, it is this

optimism that aids couples in finding solutions to difficulties they

may encounter as their relationship grows (Crow & Ridley, 1990).

Couples must also learn strategies for keeping their marriage

healthy and each of its' members satisfied.

Crow and Ridley (1990) define couples as being distressed

or nondistressed. According to the authors the difference between

the two revolves around the issues of eye contact, non-verbal

interaction, and positive attention to the other person. A couple

that listens attentively, and provides positive body language

suggest that the couple is nondistressed. Likewise, if a couple

doesn't communicate and aren't accustomed to displaying attentive

listening styles the couple is viewed as distressed. These are

important issues when working with couples.

The authors go on to refer to a 1979 study by Feldman that

identified anxieties in couples. The anxieties were listed as sexual

closeness, physical and non-verbal closeness, emotional empathy,

and operational closeness. These anxiety issues are often causes of

conflicts in the context of marriage. It is important to note that all

couples experience different anxiety issues and it's the positive

resolution of the issues that constitute a successful marriage.

Healthy couples are able to work together because they are

capable of recognizing a person's feelings and wishes. The ability

to recognize an issue is the first step in solving marital anxieties.

The next step is to work on positively resolving the issue. Beavers

(1985) wrote:

> Resolving one's mixed feelings and making choices are
> necessary contributions to a loving relationship. Healthy
> couples know this and generally operate this way. They
> can usually express to each other significant personal
> desires, fitting them to the limits of the situation and the
> people involved. p. 81

Healthy couples are able to negotiate, discuss, recognize and share

feelings and ultimately resolve the issue in a way to allow for the

marriage to continue to grow with its members still intact and

happy. In comparison to troubled couples who avoid personal

feelings and responsibility (Beavers, 1985). These couple tend to

blame each other and take no responsibility for their own actions in

relation to marital concerns and anxieties. Beavers (1985) went on to note that the marked expectations of marriage have not resulted in couples being anymore skilled at taking responsibility and/or the ability to resolve conflict.

The best of marriages will encounter conflict. The conflict arises because as a couple grows they also begin to change. Several sources cite that change can be a positive aspect for marriage (Krantzler, & Krantzler, 1992, Dym, & Glenn, 1993, and Glasser, 1995). Couples are forever growing and changing the dynamics of their marital world. Krantzler and Krantzler (1992) contributed:

> Your marriage changes as you change. This is a positive aspect of marriage. If a relationship didn't change.....a couple would smother in the boredom of each others' unchanging personalities, in the dreary predictability of each additional year of marriage. You would simply be older, worn-out copies of who you were at the time you took out your marriage license. p. 1

The authors also reflected that because of the above mentioned change, the marriage has allowed for many different parts of the individual members to emerge. The emergence of the differences is what keeps the marriage interesting to each partner. Therefore, couples should be encouraged to embrace change and work together for the betterment of the marriage.

A successful marriage is determined by the individuals

involved. It doesn't matter how successful the outside society

views a marriage if the partners involved view the marriage as

unsuccessful. While society's opinion may not determine the

success of a marriage, it is vital that marital partners realize how

society can impact their marriage. Dym and Glenn (1993) provide

insight into the relativity that society has on a marriage. The

authors wrote:

> Couples do not grow in a straight line the way an acorn
> becomes an oak. Nor do they develop a part from others in
> their society. Couples are profoundly influenced by their
> social and historical surroundings. Through out the years,
> the partners weave their couple relationship out of different
> threads of their own lives, strands of their families stories,
> and the fabric of beliefs and expectations of other groups to
> which they belong-all in relation to the prevailing cultural
> narrative, a vast tapestry that presents the sum of society's
> messages about how people are supposed to do things.
> Each step of the way, the couple reacts to one factor after
> another, defies it or accepts it, steps aside or strides ahead.
> The partners make choices, take risks, move closer, or
> further apart, stick together or break up. p.9

A couple has to provide a strong front to not allow society to

destroy their union. The couple should recognize the influence that

outside members have on the marriage. The couple should work

together to resolve the issues. The influence of society will be

different depending on the stage of the married couple. Society

cannot be ignored, because couples are judged and judge themselves

in relation to the standards appointed by their culture.

Krantzler and Krantzler (1993) characterized seven different stages of marriage. Each stage is encountered dependent upon the couple's age, length of marriage, and health issues. The first stage is the "movie- marriage in your mind marriage". During this stage couples expectations of marriage clash with the reality of marriage. Couples are challenged by all the work of a successful marriage. The authors remarked that this stage is when the majority of divorces occur.

The second stage of marriage is classified by Krantzler and Krantzler (1993) has the "our-careers-are everything marriage". During this stage a couple has survived the first stage and is looking to establish a career and obtain material goods. Many couples have to adjust to both partners working outside the home. The couple has to adjust to jobs taking a priority.

The next stage is discussed as the "good-enough-parent marriage". This stage is characterized by couples who once said they would never have children. Couples struggle with the issues of parenthood and the effect children will have on careers and their marriage. It is noted that some marriages remain childless, but that is the exception to the rule (Krantzler & Krantzler, 1993).

Upon completion of the third stage the couple enters the

next stage of married life, the "time-is-running-out marriage"

(Krantzler & Krantzler, 1993). The main struggles of this stage are

to face the qualities of life. This stage of marriage is often

associated with a mid-life crisis, a time at which partners are hit

with the realization of how short life is. This stage resolved

unsuccessfully can cause chronic problems in the marriage.

Uncertainty, insecurity, and hopeless are listed by the

authors as characteristics of the next stage of marriage. The fifth

stage is the "is-this-all-there-is? marriage". The authors wrote of

this stage by saying " In neither -fish-nor-fowl period of your

fifties, our society's stereotype is that you are too old to try

anything new and too young for Social Security" p. 18. This is a

time when couples strive to enjoy financial security and hold on to

youthful aspirations.

After sixty-five marriages enter the "end-is-the-beginning

marriage". During this stage couples have more free time together

than ever before in their marriage. In addition to the new found free

time, couples struggle with their own career identity loss. It is

important that couples feel they are retiring to something and not

just from something (Krantzler & Krantzler, 1992).

The final stage of a marriage occurs with the loss of a

spouse. This sad time for a marriage is described as the "after-death marriage". Couples rarely die at the same time. The surviving spouse must learn to go on living. If the marriage has been a successful one, then the surviving partner has memories to hold and cherish in their times of joy and also emptiness. This stage can be difficult for couples who had unresolved life long issues (Krantzler & Krantzler, 1993).

No matter which stage of marriage, there are conflicts that the couple encounters. Dym and Glenn (1993) reflected :

> The character of couples is forged through regular cycles of conflict and resolution. Conflict is not an aberration that can be ignored or cured; it is inherent in couples' lives. It stems from real dilemmas that couples must acknowledge and resolve. p. 10

As previously stated it is the positive resolution of conflicts that cause a marriage to grow and endure. The endurance creates a workable and hopefully enjoyable marriage. With regards to a workable marriage Krantzler and Krantzler (1993) wrote:

> Although many different types of marriages are now 'workable', all have one essential element in common. They are all 'two-gether' marriages or relationships, in contrast to the old stereotyped 'together' form of marriage in which it was believed that a couple had to think, act, and feel the same in order to be successfully married. The new two-gether marriage acknowledges that a happy marriage compromises two equal partners; both believe they are treating each other fairly and that differences can enhance their relationship rather than diminish it. p.14

It is important for the couple's well being that both feel they have equal input in the relationship. When conflicts arise the couple has basically three choices. They can remain in conflict, break-up, or move forward towards a resolution. Couples seek help when they desire to save the relationship, move forward from conflict, and their own measures are not satisfying the needs of the relationships. Some seek advice from friends or relatives and others consult a therapist. The couple that is successful must have support, conflict resolution skills, and communication skills. Support and satisfaction are two variables being examined in this project.

Dual Career Families

As adults begin to choose marriage partners, many factors need to be assessed. One such factor is the needs of each spouse and their family unit to decide if one or both spouses will work outside the home. Currently families in which both the husband and wife have paid employment make up the largest percentage of families in the United States. Current research indicates that approximately 56.8% of married women have employment outside the home (Blair, 1993). The factors that influence these marriages are similar to those that affect women and men who return to

school. In that whether it be working outside the home or working to obtain a degree there are demands placed upon each spouses time that interfere with traditional roles at home.

It is necessary to define the differences in families in which both the husband and wife work. There are two terms currently used to define these family units. Dual earner is used to define a family in which both the husband and wife work, but it is generally the husband's income that is viewed as the provider, whereas the wife's income is seen more as contributory. Dual-career families are characterized by the implication that both the husband and the wife hold their own as well as each others career as important. (Granello & Navin, 1997; Ferree, 1990; Burley , 1995; Crispel & Flangan, 1995; Wilkie & Ferree, 1998). For the purpose of this study the focus is on dual career couples.

There are other characteristics which separate dual career couples from dual earner couples. Dual career couples tend to both hold college degrees, and as Granello and Navin (1997) stated "... money is rarely the only motivation; each partner is usually well educated and aims to advance steadily in his or her chosen business or profession, seeking psychological as well as financial satisfaction" (paragraph 4). This emphasis is important to the

purpose of this study which examines the relationship of perceived

spousal support and marital satisfaction of graduate school

students. Dual career couples, as previously stated, hold similar

characteristics to couples where one spouse has chosen to obtain a

graduate degree. The obtainment of a graduate degree, much like

the pursuit to further your career, often times means a redefinition

of family roles. It is role strain, for both males and females that can

lead to feelings of resentment, neglect, and depression. (Granello &

Navin 1997).

Gender role theory is used to define the traditional roles of

men and women in the home. Raising children, taking care of the

house, and addressing shopping needs are traditionally seen as the

responsibility of women (Blair, 1993; Yogev & Brett, 1985; Benn

& Agostinelli, 1988). It was reported by Benn and Agostinelli

(1988) that even when women spend equal numbers of hours

working outside the home, they spend twice as many hours per

week working on household tasks and child care needs as their

spouses. Interestingly, women do not necessarily report this as an

area of concern.

In fact it depends on how women view the contributions of

their husbands that is the determinant of this area creating marital

dissatisfaction. A 1983 study by Ross, Mirowsky, and Huber explained that even though housework could be viewed as menial work that a person of lower status would perform for a person of higher status. if the husband contributes in even a small way the wife may then find housework less demeaning. By contributing, even just a little, husbands are lessening the power distinction that is often associated with gender role theory. In other words, by contributing to household task men are sharing responsibility with women and not contributing to making their dual career wives feel somewhat less than equal in the relationship.

It is not necessarily that women dislike playing the role of mother and household caretaker (Blair 1993). As suggested by the author it is more likely that women who have careers outside the home are not willing to let go of the enjoyable benefits that come with being a wife and a mother. Blair goes on to report that husbands and wives are both affected by the wife's opinion of fairness in the marriage. In the same study Blair found that in couples where both the male and female held careers that were of importance to them and also displayed traditional gender roles at home the reported degree of marital satisfaction was higher.

This study coincides with other research which focus is on

the area of support, rather than the changing of gender roles.

Burley (1995) reported that "By definition, dual-career couples

place primary importance on the development and progression of

two careers, as well as on the development and maintenance of a

marriage and family life" (paragraph 1). This suggests that in dual-

career couples the family is still very important and that the

husband and wife view nourishing the family unit as important.

Part of nourishing comes in gaining support from each other. When

support is present, role strain is decreased.

Internal and external factors contribute to role strain.

Wilcox-Matthew and Minor (1989) explained that men have been

socialized to pay attention to their career and neglect family, and

women have been socialized to believe they can have it all, so long

as it all entails concentrating on their career while not giving up any

of their family responsibilities. Women and men may be unaware

of these external and internal social pressures. If the pressures are

not realized, and somehow dealt with, then when role strain does

occur it cannot be explained or understood by the individuals

involved and those individuals are left feeling like they are failures.

These feelings of failure can lead to marital dissatisfaction.

Dual-career couples face a battle in that they need the

support of each other even more when their friends are not in dual-career marriages. In those instances dual-career couples may be left without the social support of their friends, because their friends do not understand the role strain and conflict the dual-career couple faces. This can create a compounded problem for the dual career couple (Wilcox-Matthew & Minor, 1989).

Research is conflicting on the degree to which women's employment contributes to marital satisfaction. As women find gainful, fulfilling employment they also experience increased opportunities for financial freedom, making new friends, and the exposure to different potential mates (Spitze, 1988). It is not evident if it is the process of women working, the quality of their previous relationship, the potential for another relationship, or the need to be financially independent which causes the greatest number of marital interruptions to occur. Most likely it is a combination of many factors, including role strain and marital satisfaction.

Intimacy needs and support needs should be addressed by dual career couples. Since dual career couples have additional roles, compared with those couples involved solely in traditional roles it is important for dual career couples to devote time to their

relationship. Granello and Navin (1997) stated, "The possibilities or the deterioration of intimacy and marital satisfaction are great for the dual-career couple. These couples are often two individuals who place a high premium on achievement and success, strive to be independent, and respond more to external than internal validation" (paragraph 23). Couples must learn to place importance and value on their own relationships. They must learn to devote as much energy to their own relationships as they do to their careers.

This is not always an easy process because the payoffs from working hard at a career are often more tangible than the payoffs from working hard at a relationship (Granello & Navin, 1997). Since the payoffs are less tangible the relationship may get ignored and then feelings of dissatisfaction may occur because the support element is missing. This dissatisfaction could lead to marital discord.

Dual-career families must make many adjustments to traditional gender roles. The adjustments may not be on a grand scale, but they must be such in that each member, especially women feel that the division of labor is fair and equitable (Blair, 1993). Equitable does not have to mean equal. As several studies have pointed out the division of labor and feelings of support are

greatly effected when men make even a minimal effort to assist their wives in what gender theory refers to as traditional gender roles.

Mature Students

Another role that many adults currently face is that of returning student. There are various reasons for adults to return to school. While the focus of this research relates to the adult who returns to graduate school, there is a much larger depth to returning students. It is important to realize that a conflict could arise because adults are faced with another role to fulfill once they decide to return to school. Greenberg (2000) commented:

> Adults are heading back to school in droves, many drawn by the demands of a marketplace that has little patience for academic or technological laggards. The returnees are a diverse lot, with motivations ranging from the desire to enhance their workplace skills by keeping pace with technological advancements to the desire to change careers entirely. paragraph 1

Much as the dual-career couple makes adjustments to their lives so must the returning student. If the returning adult student is also in a dual-career relationship and plans to continue with his/her career while attending school, this individual has now assumed yet another role. For example if a female is employed, a wife, a mother, and a student she has a minimum of four roles to fill. In

addition, she may have to fulfill the duties of friend, socialite, and daughter. It is evident how role strain could occur.

Drawing from life course development theory the adult student is examined as a life process. Through life course development an individual seeks to make sense of, contribute to their purpose in life, and continuously works on identity construction (Giddens,1991; Beck, 1992, Britton, 1999). In examining the life stage developmental tasks of adults, they vary depending on the age of the adult. Younger adults students are working to establish their careers, find a career identity, and establish a family. Middle Adults are working to maintain family commitments, managing a career or moving up in a career, and expanding caring relationships. While older adults are working to promote intellectual vigor, acceptance of one's life, dealing with an empty nest, and acceptance of their life (Newman & Newman, 1995). These stages are based on Erikson's model.

Given these crisis as defined by Erikson, it is a difficult task for higher education institutions to meet the needs of their adult students. For the purposes of this study the focus is solely on graduate school students; however, it is noted and worthy of further discussion to review the role strains that other adult

students face. Research indicates that what makes a school

attractive to adult students is not the same as what attracts

traditional undergraduate students to an institution (Levine, 1993).

While undergraduates may seek entertainment outlets,

student services, varsity athletics, campus social groups, and

housing., adult graduate students focus on the convenience, cost,

location, and accreditation of the school (Levine, 1993). Moreover,

the experiences and expectations of men and women returning adult

students is different. While a great majority of adult students are

female, educational institutions are approaching education from a

male model. (Britton, 1999). The author stated,

> ...mature women students have been seen as posing
> problems for higher education, which is geared to the needs
> of students without family responsibilities by, for example,
> lacking childcare facilities or timetable arrangements that can
> accommodate women's family commitments. paragraph 8

This statement alone recognizes that women in particular are

placed in a desperate situation screaming for extra support from

their spouses when the wife decides to return to school.

Supportiveness of spouse is extremely important to the

likelihood of women completing a program of study. Because as

gender theory indicates, taking care of the children and the family

usually falls on the wife of the family, wives need the extra help

from their spouse to accomplish the task of graduate school
(Huston-Hoburg & Strange, 1986).

Norton, Thomas, Morgan, and Tilley (1998) found that
women report dropping out of programs of study, more often than
men, due to conflicts with their family obligations. The authors
advice that there are certain advantages to being an adult student,
but that institutions need to be aware of the disadvantages that
returning students also face. Norton et al (1998) recommend that
institutions be aware of specific problems that might arise, so that
the student can be guided or advised.

Consequently institutions may need to deal with male and
female students differently in their return to education. Britton
(1999) found that the experiences for male and female returning
students is significantly different. These findings are concurrent
with other studies which indicate that males return to school and
receive more support from their partners, because as gender role
theory describes, men are traditionally seen as the bread winners,
and returning to school may be seen as a necessity for career
advancement. Thus, the wife may be more supportive because the
role is more expected and accepted. Whereas, when women return
to school it is often seen as a leisure activity, one that is not taken

seriously, or as a hobby. Women report feeling like family is their first responsibility. In fact when asked to choose between a family and school conflict, men would usually choose to devote their energy to school, whereas women would choose family over the school requirement (Britton & Baxter, 1999; Huston-Hoburg, 1986; Norton, et al 1998).

In specifically examining supportiveness of spouse, women were more likely to report a greater degree of social support from their friends and classmates than from their spouses, while men were more likely to report getting more support from their spouses. (Huston-Hoburg & Strange, 1986). Another study by Norton et al (1998) indicates that more women than men believe that their spouse received greater encouragement from immediate family and friends for degree completion than the women receive. The presence or lack of support can have impact on the student's completion of a program and on their marital satisfaction levels.

A 1984 Kerns and Turk study indicated that one of the most important factors in determining satisfaction, stress, and self-esteem of students is spousal support. Spousal support is defined in different areas. Among those areas are intellectual support, emotional support, and help with family obligations.

Persistence with family obligations is important because women take on the traditional roles of mother and wife. When disruptions occur this can create great stress for women, in that either or all of the family members are dissatisfied that Mom is not meeting all of her traditionally defined roles. In households where men are willing to share the tasks a greater degree of spousal support could be expected.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

<u>Hypotheses</u>

A. There is a significant relationship between perceived spousal support and marital satisfaction in female graduate school students.

B. Female graduate school students with more perceived spousal support are more likely to have higher GPA's than female graduate school students with lower levels of support.

C. Female graduate students whose spouse holds an advanced degree will report significantly higher levels of spousal support than those female students whose spouse does not hold an advanced degree.

D. There is a significant relationship between perceived spousal support and intentions to complete graduate school in female graduate school students.

<u>Participants</u>

The group obtained for this study were graduate school females. Participants were found by visiting graduate level classes at Lindenwood University and asking for volunteers to complete the surveys. Lindenwood University is a private institution that

has shown significant growth in the last ten years. The campus is located in St. Charles, MO, a suburb of St. Louis, MO. The campus serves many students from the city, suburbs, and surrounding rural areas. The volunteers at Lindenwood University had to be married and be enrolled in a graduate school program in order to participate in the research.

Thirty-nine females completed the surveys for this project. Lindenwood University graduate school students who completed this survey could be considered a homogenous group. Graduate school students were predominantly white (89 %) and middle class (90%). Race and socioeconomic status were not criteria for this study, although volunteers were asked to report race, and income range on the questionnaire for research purposes. Among the respondents 8 % were african american, and 3% were mixed heritage.

Of the thirty-nine respondents, 69% were majoring in either school or professional counseling, and the other 31 % were majoring in business. Participants were asked to classify their age according to predetermined age ranges, 28% were in the 20-29 year-old range, 39% were between 30-39 years of age, 21% were between 40 and 49 years of age, 7% belonged to the 50-59 year old

range, and 5% reported being in the 60 plus range. All were married, the years married ranged from one to twenty-nine years (m=10.56, sd=8.72) and 77% married couples reported having children (n=30), were as 23% reported having no children (n=9). With regards to education level of spouse 23% were married to high school graduates, 23% had spouses with Associates or Technical School Certificates, 26% of spouses had obtained Bachelor's degrees, 23% had obtained Master's Degrees, 5% of spouses held Doctorates or Professional Degrees.

An impressive 77% of respondents reported they were absolutely certain they would finish their graduate degree programs. The other 23% of the responses ranged from very certain to most likely certain that they would finish their graduate program. No participants reported feeling they would not finish the program. GPA's were also impressive, GPA's ranged from 3.4 to 4.00 (m=3.89, sd=.1683).

Instruments

The instruments utilized for the study of marital satisfaction and perceived spousal support among female graduate school students were the Dyadic Adjustment Scale and the Student Relationships Questionnaire. These instruments were chosen

because of their reliability, validity, the norm group, and the ease of administration. Other questions such as GPA and intentions to complete graduate school were obtained from the demographic questionnaire.

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale was designed to measure marital quality, and satisfaction among marital couples, and/or couples in committed relationships. It is among the best at rating marital satisfaction (Burroughs, 1994). The instrument comprises a 32 question self-report Lickert scale. Responses range from 1-Never to 5-Always (Fischer & Corcoran, 1987). Total response scores range from 1 to 151 (m=114.8, sd=17.8 for married couples, and m=70.7, sd=23.8 for divorced couples). Higher scores indicate a higher degree of relationship satisfaction. The instrument provides five scores that measure dyadic consensus, dyadic satisfaction, affectional expression, dyadic cohesion, and a total score.

Dyadic consensus refers to partners ability to agree or disagree on issues. Dyadic satisfaction measures the degree to which respondents are satisfied with different aspects of their relationship. Affectional expression is measured by asking a series of questions that would be considered affectionate. Respondents

are asked to rate how often the events occur. Dyadic cohesion

comprises questions to determine how much of oneness there is

between the couple. A total score uses the total from all questions

to provide an overall rating of relationship satisfaction.

The norm sample for the DAS was 218 married couples and

94 divorced persons. One of the weaknesses of the DAS is that

109 of the participants were from rural Pennsylvania and

considered to be in the lower socio-economic status. In addition,

the divorce norm group was obtained by contacting divorced

couples by mail, about a year after their divorces were final. The

norm groups pose one of the major weaknesses with this widely

used testing instrument. Among the problems are the fact that no

representative from homosexual couples, or heterosexual

cohabitating couples were included in the norm groups. This is a

problem, because the test purports to be applicable for a variety

of couples (Fischer & Corcoran, 1987).

Despite that, the overall ratings of the instrument are

favorable, widely accepted, and frequently used. The alpha

reliabilities have been found consistently. The DAS has an

excellent internal consistency with an alpha of .96. Subscale

reliability scores range from fair to excellent. The internal

consistency reliability scores for the subscales are as follows:

DS-.94, DCoh=.81, DCon=.90, and AE=.73. Validity checks

resulted in the DAS having logical content validity. Known groups

validity was established by the author distinguishing between

married and divorced couples on each item. The DAS has

concurrent validity with a correlation to the Locke-Wallace Marital

Adjustment Scale (Fischer & Corcoran, 1987).

The Student Relationships Questionnaire is a less

empirically tested instrument. The SRQ was developed in England

for the study of spousal support, of long-time couples who had

one spouse in college. Questions were derived after a series of

interviews and literature review. The final version of the SRQ

contains 3 sections. The first section measures satisfaction. This

section is comprised of three questions. Using a seven point

Lickert scale, with responses ranging from 1-extremely dissatisfied

to 7-extremely satisfied, the possible score in this category is 21

(m=16.41, sd=5.30) with higher scores indicating greater

satisfaction.

The second section measures perceived spousal support.

In this section students are asked four questions dealing with

supportiveness of their spouse. Using a Lickert scale responses

include a range of 5-extremely positive to 1-extremely negative.

Scores range from 1 to 25 (m=18.98, sd=4.81) in this section, with

higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived support.

During the third portion of the SRQ the instrument ask 7

questions related to domestic obligations, childcare, financial

constraints, partner educational/career goals, childbearing decisions,

social life, and support of spouse. Using a Lickert scale, possible

answer choices range from 5-extremely stressful to 1-not at all

stressful. The score range is from 7 to 35. Since all categories do

not apply to all couples, scores are derived by finding the mean and

adding it to the general question of how stressful is was to be a

student, also scored on the same 5 point Lickert scale. The score

range in this category is 2-10 (m=7.21, sd=1.50) Higher scores

indicate higher stress levels among couples. A final open ended

question is asked to allow for specific problems not covered in the

previous questions (Norton et al, 1998).

Norm groups for the instrument included 16 students

enrolled in a college Access Course. The background of the college

students closely match the make-up of the student body being

studied in this thesis project. The norm group consisted heavily of

white, middle class, early to mid life adults. Test-retest reliability

was used to ascertain a reliability for the SRQ. The reliability was strong with a .95 ($p<0.001$). No validity information is available for this instrument. Caution is noted in using this instrument because of the lack of validity information and the limited use of this instrument in other studies (Norton et al, 1998).

Design and Procedure

A correlational study was chosen for the design of this study involving perceived spousal support and marital satisfaction of female graduate school students. This design was chosen in order to see if a relationship exists between the two variables.

Groups for this study were chosen by selecting graduate school classes at Lindenwood University. After chosen classes were selected the instructor for the class was contacted for permission to come to their class to ask for volunteers to complete the questionnaires. The instructors were fully informed as to the researcher and the purpose of the study. If permission to use his/her class was granted, the class was asked to be a part of the correlational study. The final process, the selection of actual subjects, was dependent on volunteers who were willing to complete the questionnaires. Complete confidentiality and anonymity were assured to all students who chose to volunteer.

Using volunteers can create threats to validity. In an attempt to control this, confidentiality and analysis of group only responses was assured.

Students who volunteered to complete the instruments were given a cover letter, the questionnaires, and time to complete the questionnaires in class. This greatly helped with the return rate of the questionnaires. The researcher waited at the front of the class in an attempt to allow the students to feel more comfortable, and feel less watched in answering the questionnaires. Volunteers were asked to place the questionnaires in an envelope left at the front of the class.

After questionnaires were scored, groups were broken into different categories. Nominal categorical data was then analyzed to see if the variables involved were relational.

The analyzing of data involved examining the results to see if there was a significant relationship between perceived spousal support and marital satisfaction of graduate school students. A correlational statistical software package. SPSS Inc., was used in determining the significance of relationships. The Pearson r was calculated in determining if a significant relationship exists between the variables.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and range, of female graduate school students regarding martial satisfaction, spousal support, stress, satisfaction with partner (SAT), and the certainty of finishing graduate school scores

Table 1 Marital Satisfaction, Support, Stress, and Certainty of Finishing Program Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
DAS	114.79	18.0	67-146
Support	19.90	3.49	10-25
Stress	6.675	1.31	3.0-8.7
Satisfaction	16.77	4.92	3-21
Certainty of Finishing	1.38	.81	1-4

The scores on the DAS can reach a top score of 151, with a higher score indicating a greater degree of marital satisfaction. The original norming group of the DAS had a mean of 114.8 with a

standard deviation of 17.8 (Fischer & Corcoran, 1987). The

sample tested reported similar means and standard deviation.

Therefore the results could be viewed as corresponding to the

original norming groups.

The scores of support, stress, and satisfaction were all

derived from the Student Relationships Questionnaire (SRQ). The

SRQ is divided into three sub -categories, Satisfaction, Support,

and Stress. For this study the scores were analyzed on a sub-

group basis, and not a total score. Results for the three categories

yielded similar results to the norming group of the original SRQ

test. The means and standard deviations of the original group for

the three sub-categories are as follows: Satisfaction (m=16.41,

sd=5.30), this closely correspondents to this studies results

(m=16.77, sd=4.92); with regards to Support (m=18.98, sd=4.81),

this also closely corresponds to this study (m=19.90, sd=3.49);

lastly original Stress scores (m=7.21, sd= 1.50) moderately

correspond with this studies results (m=8.7, sd 6.675). Higher

scores on these sub-scales indicate higher levels of satisfaction,

support, and stress.

The final category, certainty of finishing program, had a

possible range of 1 to 4 for an answer, with 1 indicating absolute

certainty that the student would finish her graduate program. As

indicated by the results (m=1.38, sd= .81), nearly all participants

77% (n=30) were absolutely certain they would finish their

graduate program.

The four hypothesis being examined were tested using the

Pearson Correlation. The results are seen in Table 2.

Table 2 Correlation's of DAS, Support, Stress, Satisfaction,

Certainty of Finishing Program, Education of Spouse, and GPA

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. DAS	---	.714**	-.357**	.708**	-.130	.258	-.039
2. Support	---	---	-.357**	.512**	-.124	.271**	.133
3. Stress	---	---	---	-.208	.086	-.171	.095
4. Satisfaction	---	---	---	---	-.119	.261*	-.137
5. Cert. of Finishing	---	---	---	---	---	.265*	-.334*
6. Education of Spouse	---	---	---	---	---	---	.088
7. GPA	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

** p<0.01 level

* p< 0.05 level

The results to hypothesis A, There is a significant relationship between perceived spousal support and marital satisfaction of female graduate school students yielded the following results as reported in Table 2. Hypothesis A proved to have a significant positive correlation at the 0.01 level ($r=.714, p<0.01$). Therefore hypothesis A is accepted.

The results to hypothesis B, Female graduate school student with reported higher degrees of perceived spousal support are more likely to have higher GPA's yielded the following results and are reported in Table 2. Hypothesis B did not proved to have a significant correlation. Therefore we reject the hypothesis.

The results to hypothesis C, Female graduate school students whose spouse holds an advanced degree will report significantly higher levels of spousal support yielded the following results and are reported in Table 2. Hypothesis C proved to have a significant moderate correlation ($r=.271, p<0.01$). Therefore hypothesis C is accepted.

The results to hypothesis D, There is a significant relationship between perceived spousal support and intention to complete graduate school among female graduate school students, yielded the following results and are reported in Table 2. There

was not significant evidence to support the hypothesis. Therefore the hypothesis is rejected. Scatterplots for the hypothesized results can be viewed in Appendix F.

Other un-hypothesized results were gained from this study. As the results in Table 2 indicate, there is a strong correlation between the satisfaction subcategory of the SRQ and the total score of the DAS ($r=.708$, $p<0.01$). These results suggest that the DAS and the sub-category of the SRQ correspond with each other in regards to measuring marital satisfaction.

Lastly, a correlation was found to exist between certainty of finishing program and GPA ($r=-.334$, $p<0.01$). These results suggest that the higher the GPA of a female graduate student the more likely she is to report certainty of finishing the graduate program.

A strong negative correlation was found to exist between perceived support and stress of female graduate school students ($r=-.365$, $p<0.05$). These results suggest that the more support a female graduate school student has the lower her stress level. The types of stress are further examined in Table 3.

Table 3 Life Stressors Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Domestic Obligations	3.21	1.07	1-5
Childcare Obligations	3.13	1.07	1-5
Financial Constraints	2.77	.99	1-5
Partner's Education Goals	2.33	1.11	1-5
Childbearing Decisions	2.26	1.26	1-5
Social Life	3.03	1.16	1-5
Supporting Partner	2.54	1.14	1-5

These life stressors are indicative of the dual student/spouse role conflicts that female graduate students may experience. Higher scores indicate a greater amount of stress. Domestic obligations include such items as household chores, grocery shopping, etc. Childcare obligations mean any obligations associated with taking care of children; Financial constraints are viewed as money matters such as not enough, how to spend it or how to save it; Partner's educational goals refer to the educational goal of the partner not in graduate school; Childbearing decisions

means stress that might occur as a result of a difference in opinion to have or not have children; Social life, which appears to be one of the greatest stresses for female students, means obligations to self, family, and friends in a social or recreational environment; and Supporting partner was described as support directly related to how stressful it is for the female graduate student to supply her spouse with support in general.

These results indicate that female graduate students feel certain amounts of stress in different areas. Percentages of the stressors can be viewed in pie charts found in Appendix F.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The results of hypothesis A, There is a significant relationship between perceived spousal support and marital satisfaction of female graduate school students is supported by the data. The data indicates that students who report higher degrees of perceived spousal support also report higher degrees of marital satisfaction. These results are supported by existing studies which indicate that spousal support is important to the components of marriage (Burleson & Denton, 1997; and Norton et al, 1998). It would also indicate couples who feel more supported are going to be more satisfied with their marriages.

When an individual feels supported he/she is provided with a feeling of safety in knowing that someone is there for them if they hit a crisis point, or someone is there for them to celebrate and rejoice in their accomplishment. Cutrona (1996) said, "Social support is conceptualized most generally as responsiveness to another's needs and more specifically as acts that communicate caring; that validate the other's words, feelings or action; or that facilitate adaptive coping with problems through the provision of information, assistance, or tangible resources" (p.10). In the case

with graduate school, students will need support in the areas that their household roles tend to shift, by providing support for these shifts, spouses are helping to increase the marital satisfaction levels of their spouses.

As Sullivan et al (1998) stated, "When this kind of responsibility to the other's needs is consistent over time, it fosters love, trust, tolerance, and commitment, elements that contribute to the stability of intimate relationships" (paragraph 9). The author goes on to explain that the context of providing and receiving support is one that warrants further investigation by the research community. The results of this hypothesis also concur with studies completed by Norton et al (1998) and Kerns & Turk (1984). Both studies concluded that students who report higher levels of partner support were more satisfied in their marriages.

Hypothesis B, Female graduate school students with reported higher degrees of perceived spousal support are more likely to have higher GPA's than students with reported lower levels of support is not supported. This hypothesis is also not supported by current literature. It is noted that most studies have not specifically focused on gpa's and perceived spousal support. If the wording indicated graduate school success the findings may

have been more substantiated. The analysis of gpa alone, the lack of research articles, and the comparison of gpa and spousal support are weaknesses of this study. To expand upon this hypothesis more research is needed and factors such as inherent intelligence, self-efficacy, and motivation to succeed would need to be taken into consideration. It is cautioned that solely relying on gpa to determine graduate school success could be a mistake, given that other variables, besides just grades, have a great impact on whether a student would define graduate school as successful. Because sometimes you learn more, experience more, and are better prepared than a grade may reflect.

Hypothesis C, Female graduate students whose spouse holds an advanced degree will report significantly higher levels of spousal support than those students whose spouse does not hold an advanced degree is supported by the data. Other research indicates that people, especially those with college degrees tend to marry people with the equivalent education levels (Crispell. 1995). The demographic data of this study revealed that of the participants only 23% indicated their spouse to hold a masters and 5% of the spouses held a doctorate. The greatest number of students (25%) in this study were married to people with

bachelors degrees and 46% had spouses with either two year degrees or high school diplomas, this could explain the significance of these findings. Since this study is evaluating female students in graduate school, it is possible that the spouses of the females who hold bachelor's degrees or less may not be giving the female student the support she needs at the graduate level, because they have not experienced the level of stress and dedication that graduate school requires. This of course is speculation and further research is needed to expand upon this suggestion.

Hypothesis D, There is a significant relationship between perceived spousal support and intentions to complete graduate school among female graduate school students, is not supported by the data. Therefore spousal support for this study is not a good predictor of finishing graduate school. It is noted that there was a moderate correlation between certainty of finishing graduate school and GPA. Results can be viewed in Table 2.

Stress was an area examined, but not hypothesized by this study. As a result of the Pearson Correlation a moderate relationship was found to exist between stress level of students and spousal support. This could indicate that the more support students perceive the lower their stress levels are for dealing with

around other family events (Levine. 1993: Norton et al. 1998; and Huston-Hoburg 7 Strange, 1986).

The results of the un-hypothesized data warrants further research. As the data was analyzed, it appeared that women feel stress from the areas of social obligations, childrearing decision, domestic tasks, and financial obligations. Further research is needed to determine if these stressors are enhanced by graduate school and if the stressor is a primary responsibility or a supplementary responsibility of the female graduate student.

Dual student spouse role and stress

The following percentages, available in Appendix F, were determined with regards to how difficult women find their dual roles. The data was similar among most categories. With regard to domestic obligations 26% found it fairly difficult and 13% of women found it very difficult. Childcare obligations displays that 43% of women found the roles fairly difficult and 3% reported it to be very difficult. It is important to note that nearly half the respondents reported this particular role conflict to be fairly to very difficult. Financial constraints displays that 23% found it fairly difficult and only 2% of women reported it to be very

difficult. Partners/educational goals displays that 15% of women found the roles fairly or very difficult.

Childbearing decisions displays that 23% of women found the roles fairly difficult. This could be explained by the fact that most of the women (77%, n=30) who participated in this study already had children Social life displays that 33% of women found the roles fairly difficult and 7% reported it as very difficult.

Supporting your partner, appeared to create the least amount of stress for female graduate school students. The results indicate that 39% of women found the roles fairly easy and another 18% reported it has very easy. This is an area warranting further study to examine the difference in perceived spousal support given and perceived spousal support received.

A final open ended question was asked with regards to specific problems that a graduate student has who is in a long term committed relationship. Of the responses nearly half responded that time management was of key importance. Another frequently occuring response indicated that conflicts over school and family events caused them problems.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to assess the relationship

between perceived spousal support and marital satisfaction among graduate school students. As discussed in the introduction it is important for these factors to be addressed. Marital satisfaction transcends the marriage and effects different aspects of an individual's life. It should be important to graduate schools for their students to succeed.

The success of a student depends on many factors, and marital satisfaction alone does not solely address those success issues. Given that studies have suggested that women especially choose family obligations over school or work commitments it is inherent that schools take care in preparing their students for the life of graduate school (Norton et al, 1998). Much the same way that some businesses are addressing work-family programs with their employees (Young, 1999). In these programs allocations are being made to be more accommodating to the demands of work and family responsibilities.

Graduate schools could benefit from taking steps to meet the needs of their graduate adult students, which are different from the needs of their traditional undergraduate students. The first step may be in addressing the needs of support. As Sullivan et al (1998) suggests "Perhaps the most useful starting point in helping

couples to enhance social support in their marriages is to educate

them on what social support is and why it is important for their

relationships" (paragraph 21). Graduate schools could offer

seminars to entering graduates and their families to expose them to

the sacrifices and the support that may be needed to help the

graduate have a successful experience with graduate school. In

accordance with this is Norton et al (1998) recommendation which

stated:

> The implications for counsellors working in a further and
> higher education context would seem to be twofold. First,
> thee is the effect of stress on the student, with the
> consequence of possible withdrawal from the course of
> study. Second, there is the effect of stress on the
> relationship itself and on the student's psychological well-
> being, with the consequence of possible relationship
> breakdown. In looking for possible preventative strategies,
> the present research suggests that partner support may well
> act as an important buffer for students who are faced with
> the dual demands of meeting degree course requirements and
> maintaining family responsibility. paragraph 39

The research and results of this study are consistent with the above

recommendation. In addition, based on the response to the write in

question a course in time management might also be useful to

graduate school students. Although it is probably not the

responsibility of graduate schools to make full accommodations for

all a students conflicts, it is probably in the school's best interest

to address some of those concerns and help the student deal with

the demands.

By informing graduate students and their families of the demands of graduate school they will be better prepared to deal with the frustration and sacrifices as the demands occur. Informing students early and helping prepare them may lead to larger retention and completion rates of graduate school students.

Limitations

As with any study there are limitations. This study is no exception. It must be remembered that this study was completed by volunteers. Volunteerism creates a limitation, because previous research has suggested that certain types of people volunteer for research studies. Those characteristics include a willingness to help and feeling confident that they can help. Therefore, this study may not represent those students who's personalities do not necessarily lend them to wanting to help others. In addition the surveys used were self report measures which lend themselves for participants to not be completely honest in their responses. This discrepancy could have an impact on the results.

Another limitation of this research is the homogeneity of the research group. The applicability of this research is limited to married, middle-class, and for the most part caucasian students.

Possible sampling bias exist due to the voluntary nature of the sampling. The subjects could result in sampling bias, because they are volunteering, which may not provide as accurate results as random assignment might provide. Another source of sampling bias could be the use to the two self-report testing instruments. There is the possibility of volunteers not providing an accurate reflection of their situation. To help reduce sampling bias, volunteers were assured anonymity.

In reviewing the surveys it is extremely important to note that the Student Relationship Questionnaire has only been used in one other study. The reliability for the interest remains high, but before generalizing results more research needs to be completed on the reliability and validity of this instrument. Also, the instrument was first developed in England. The participants involved in originally establishing data for the Student Relationship Questionnaire did, however closely resemble the participants in this study.

When examining the correlation it is necessary to point out that the standard deviation is relatively low in comparison to the mean, this could indicate a restricted range for the data. Further research is warranted in this area to encompass greater

representation of all student types, and therefore provide a more accurate mean and standard deviation for the variable discussed.

Recommendations

Further research is needed in this area. As job demands continue to rise and adults continue to seek advanced degrees competition among schools will increase for those students. The next logical research question would be to perform a descriptive study detailing the needs and suggestions of current graduate students. By learning from its students institutions may be able to implement programs to better prepare their students, help make family life more supportive, and retain quality students.

Appendix A

Cover Letter

Dear Graduate School Colleague:

I am currently working on finishing my Master of Arts in School Counseling at Lindenwood University. As part of my graduation requirement, I am working to finish my thesis.

I am requesting students to complete two questionnaires. The questionnaires will take a total of approximately fifteen minutes to complete. In advance for your cooperation, I have enclosed a snickers' bar as a small token of appreciation.

All responses will be analyzed according to group responses, and no individual responses will be pointed out, or discussed in any way. I will hold your responses in complete confidence.

I greatly appreciate your cooperation. I will be happy to discuss the results of my findings with you, and/or if you have questions please feel free to call me. Thank you for your help, enjoy the snickers, and best of luck to you with your graduate school pursuits.

Sincerely,

Kelle M. McCallum

Appendix B

Demographic Information

1) Masters' program you are enrolled in? _____

2) Current Number of Graduate hours you are enrolled in ___

3) How many graduate hours have you completed?_____

4) How long did it take you to complete graduate hours?_____

5) What is your graduate school student status? (Circle all that

apply)

      A. Full-Time (Enrolled for at least 6 hours per term)

      B. Part-Time (Enrolled for less than 6 hours per term)

      C. Evening (Most classes are attended in the evening)

      D. Day (Most classes are attending during the day)

6) Number of Years Married:_____

7) Do you have children: Circle one: Yes or No

8) What are the ages of your children?

9) Number of children: _____

10) Education level of spouse (Circle One)

      A. Did not finish high school
      B. High School Graduate
      C. Tech School Graduate/ Community College Graduate
      D. Bachelor's degree
      E. Master's Degree
      F. Professional Degree (ie. doctor, lawyer, vet, dentist)
      G. Doctorate

11)How certain are you that you will finish the program

     A. Absolutely certain

     B. Very certain

     C. Pretty Certain

     D. Most likely

     E. Not Certain

     F. Not going to finish the program

12) Age (check one box)   ____20-27, _____29-35, _____36-42,

_____42-50, _____50+

13) Race: circle one

Asian   African American   Caucasian   Native

American   Mixed Heritage

Hispanic   Other_____

14) Are you currently considering divorce?_____

15) Are you satisfied with your choice to go to graduate school?

Yes Unsure No

16) Current GPA_____

17) Socio economic status: (Check the one you perceive your

family to belong to)

_____. _Low

_____. __Middle

_____Upper

_____Elite

Appendix C

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale

Most persons have disagreements with their relationships. Please indicate below the appropriate extent of the agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

5= Always agree
4= Almost always agree
3= Occasionally disagree
2= Frequently disagree
1= Almost always disagree
0= Always disagree

_____ 1. Handling family finances:
_____ 2. Matters of recreation:
_____ 3. Religious matters:
_____ 4. Demonstration of affection:
_____ 5. Friends:
_____ 6. Sex relations:
_____ 7. Conventionally (correct or proper behavior)
_____ 8. Philosophy of life:
_____ 9. Ways of dealing with in-laws:
_____ 10. Aims, goals, and things believed important:
_____ 11. Amount of time spent together:
_____ 12. Making major decisions:
_____ 13. Household tasks:
_____ 14. Leisure time interests:
_____ 15. Career decisions:

Please indicate below approximately how often the following items occur between you and your partner.

1− All the time
2= Most of the time
3= More often than not
4− Occasionally
5= Rarely
6− Never

_____16. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating the relationship?

_____17. How often do you or your mate leave the house after a fight?

_____18. In general, how often do you think things between you and your partner are going well?

_____19. Do you confide in your mate?

_____20. Do you ever regret that you married (or lived together)?

_____21. How often do you and your partner quarrel?

_____22. How often do you and your mate "get on each other's nerves"?

23. Do you kiss your mate? (Please Circle)

Every day	Almost Every day	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
4	3	2	1	0

24. Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together? (Please Circle)

All of them	Most of them	Some of them	Very Few of them	None of them
4	3	2	1	0

How often would you say the following events occur between you and your mate?

1= Never
2=Less than once a month
3=Once or twice a month
4= Once a Day
5= More Often

_____25. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas:
_____26. Laugh together:
_____27. Calmly discuss something:
_____28. Work together on a project:

There are some things about which couples sometimes agree and sometimes disagree. Indicate if either item below caused differences of opinions or problems in your relationship during the past few weeks. (Circle yes or no)

29. Yes No Being too tired for sex
30. Yes No Not showing love

31. The numbers on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, "happy," represent the degree of happiness of most relationships. Please circle the number that best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
extremely unhappy	fairly unhappy	a little unhappy	happy	very happy	extremely happy	perfect

32. Please circle the number of one of the following statements that best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship.

> 5= I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and would go to almost any length to see that it does.
> 4= I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do all that I can to see that it does.
> 3= I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do my fair share to see that it does.
> 2= It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but I can't do much more than I am doing now to make it succeed.
> 1= It would be nice if it succeeded, but I refuse to do any more than I am doing now to keep the relationship going.
> 0= my relationship can never succeed, and there is no more that I can do to keep the relationship going.

Appendix D

Student Relationships Questionnaire

1. How long have you been in your current
relationship?_____ .. years

2. Use the following chart to answer the question.
     1-Extremely Dissatisfied
     2-Very Dissatisfied
     3-Somewhat Dissatisfied
     4-Mixed
     5-Somewhat Satisfied
     6-Very Satisfied
     7. Extremely Satisfied

How satisfied are you with the following (Please circle)

Your Marriage: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Your partner as a spouse 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Your relationship with your partner: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. What does your partner feel about you being a student? (Please circle)

Extremely Positive	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Extremely Negative
5	4	3	2	1

4. How much does your partner understand the demands made on you as a student? (Please circle)

     5-Completely Understands
     4-Partly Understands
     3-Neutral
     2-Doesn't Really Understand
     1-Doesn't Understand At All

5. How much does your partner get involved with your life as a student? (Please Circle)

     5-Very Involved
     4-Sometimes Involved
     3- Neutral
     2-Not Particularly Involved
     1-Not at all Involved

6. Use the following chart to answer question.

     5-Extremely Supportive
     4- Supportive
     3-Mixed
     2-Not Particularly Supportive
     1-Not Supportive at all

How supportive is your partner? (Please Circle)

Emotionally: 5 4 3 2 1

Practically: 5 4 3 2 1

7. How stressful is it being a full time student with a committed

relationship as well? (Please Circle)

> 5-Extremely Stressful
> 4-Fairly Stressful
> 3-Mixed
> 2-Not Particularly Stressful
> 1-Not at all Stressful

8. Use the following chart to answer the question.

> 1-Very Easy
> 2-Fairly Easy
> 3-Mixed
> 4- Fairly Difficult
> 5- Very Difficult

How easy do you find it coping with the dual student/spouse role

in the following areas? (Please circle, but leave blank any areas that

do not apply to you)

Domestic Obiligations: 1 2 3 4 5

Childcare: 1 2 3 4 5

Financial Constraints: 1 2 3 4 5

Partner's Educational/
Career Goals: 1 2 3 4 5

Childbearing Decisions: 1 2 3 4 5
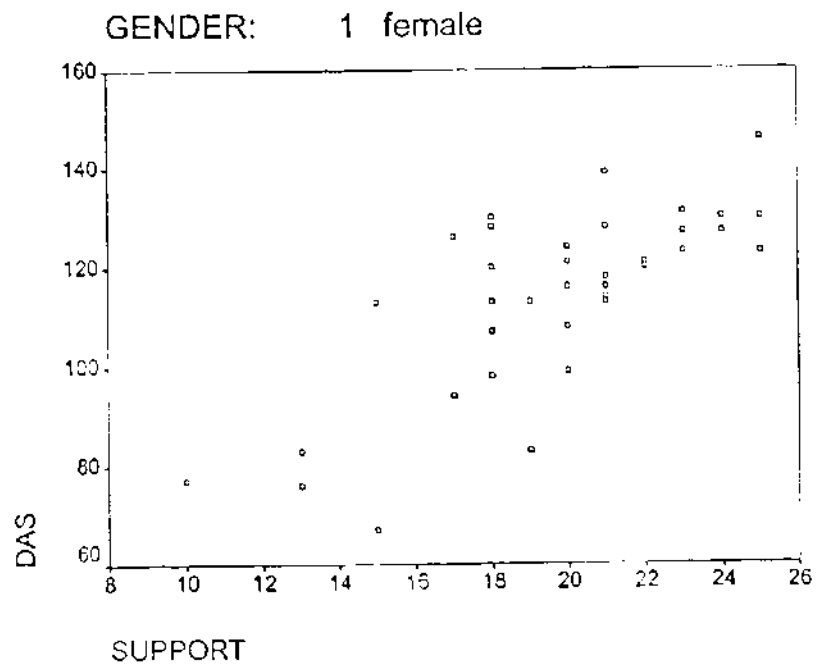
Social Life: 1 2 3 4 5

Supporting Your Partner: 1 2 3 4 5

9. What specific problems do you have as a student who is also in
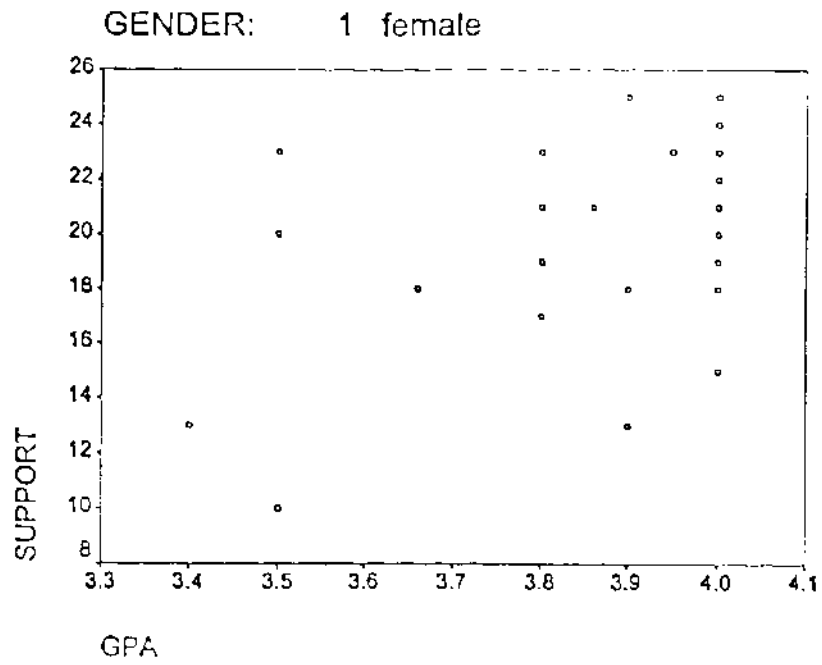
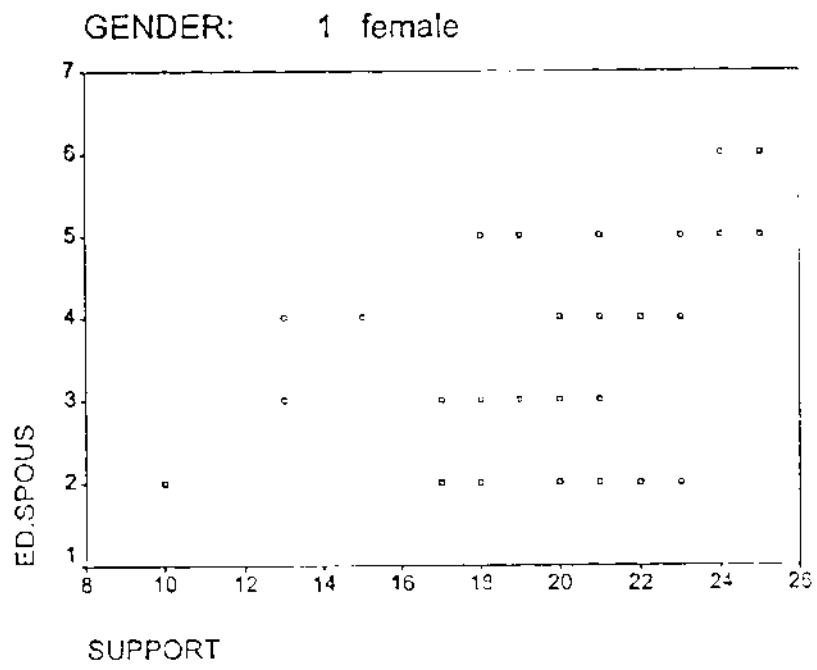a long term committed relationship?

Appendix E

Scatterplots

Scatterplot of Marital Satisfaction (DAS) and Perceived Spousal
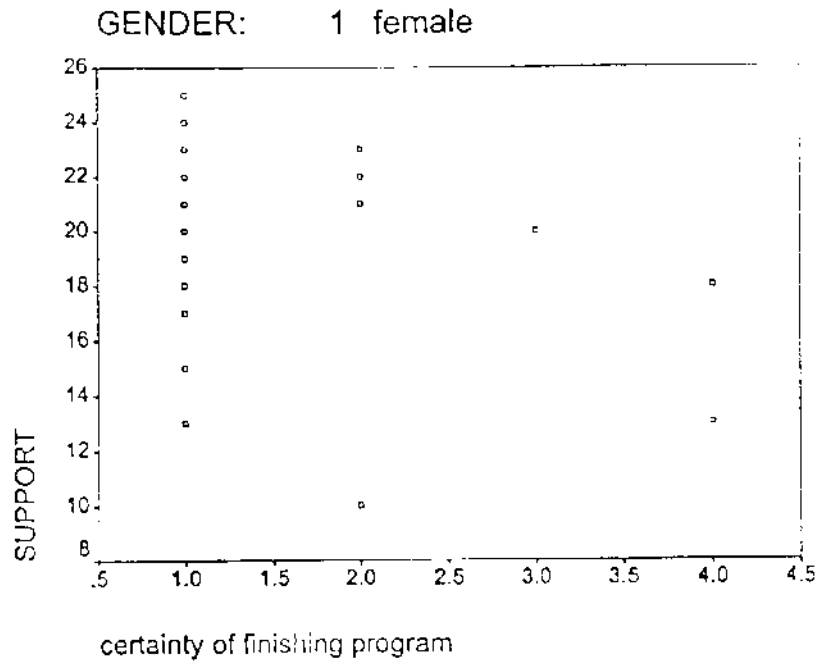Support

GENDER: 1   female

DAS

SUPPORT

Scatterplot of Perceived Spousal Support and GPA

Scatterplot of Educational Level of Spouse and Perceived Spousal
Support

GENERAL: 1 female

SUPPORT

Scatterplot of Perceived Spousal Support and Certainty of
Finishing Program

GENDER: 1   female
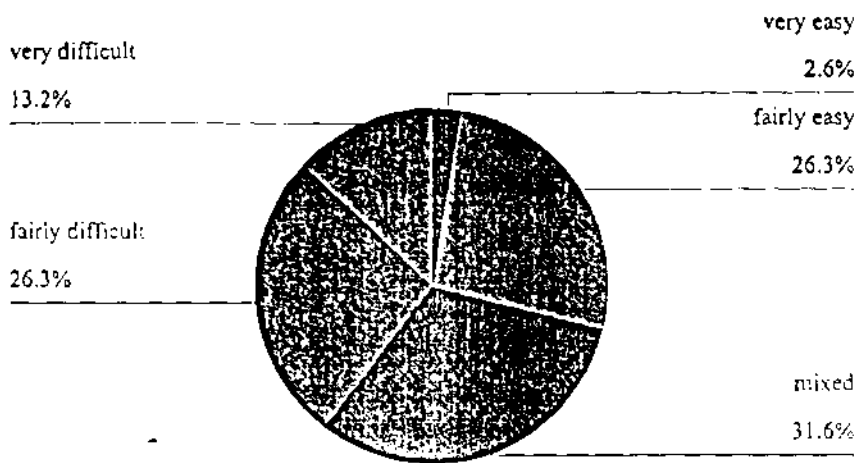

certainty of finishing program

Appendix F

Pie Charts

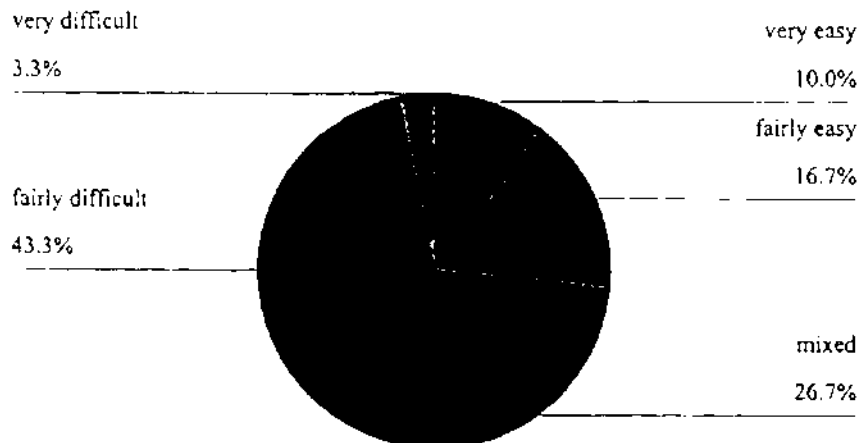Pie charts of various dual student/spouse stressors of female graduate school students.

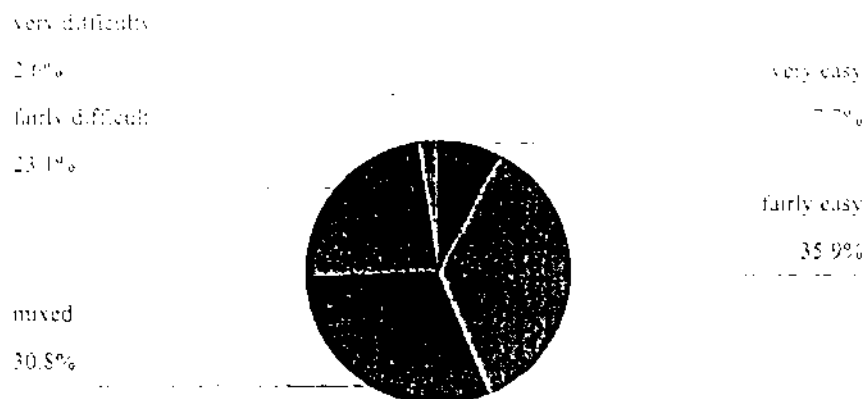Female graduate students and coping ability with regards to:

Domestic Obligations

very difficult
13.2%

very easy
2.6%

fairly easy
26.3%

fairly difficult
26.3%

mixed
31.6%

Female graduate students and coping ability with regards to:

Childcare

very difficult
3.3%

very easy
10.0%

fairly easy
16.7%

fairly difficult
43.3%

mixed
26.7%

Female graduate students and coping ability with regards to

Financial Constraints

very difficult
2.6%

fairly difficult
23.1%

mixed
30.8%

very easy
7.7%

fairly easy
35.9%

Female graduate students and coping abilities with regards to:

Partner's educational/career goals

very difficult
5.1%

fairly difficult
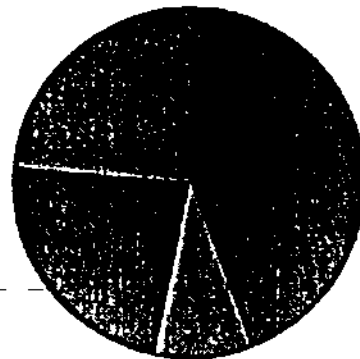10.3%

mixed
20.5%

very easy
23.1%
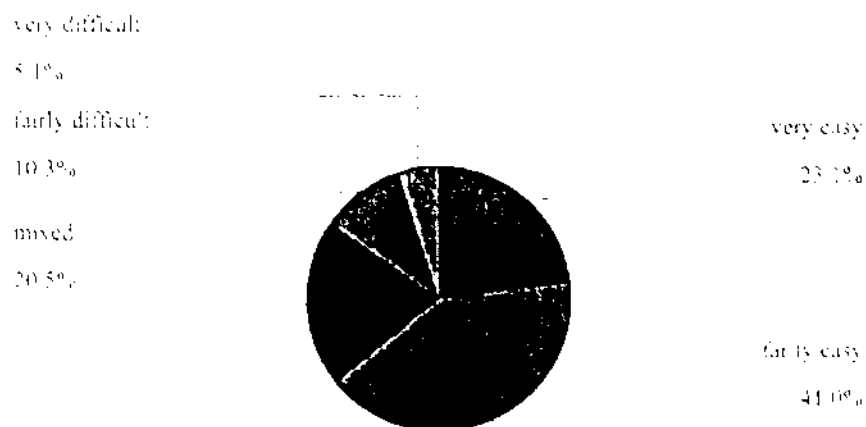
fairly easy
41.0%

Female graduate students and coping ability with regards to

Childbearing Decisions

fairly difficult
23.5%

very easy
44.1%

mixed
23.5%

fairly easy
8.8%

Female graduate students and coping ability with regards to:

Social Life Obligation

very difficult
7.7%

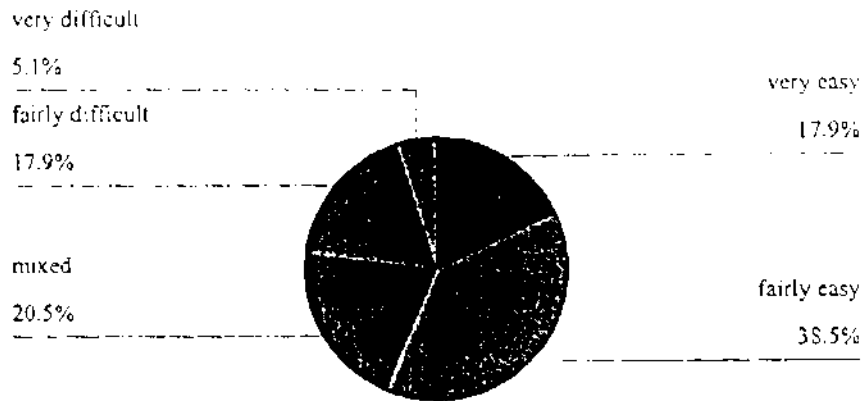fairly difficult
33.3%

very easy
12.3%

fairly easy
25.6%

mixed
23.1%

Female graduate students and coping ability with regards to:

Supporting Partner

very difficult

5.1%

fairly difficult

17.9%

mixed

20.5%

very easy

17.9%

fairly easy

38.5%

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