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The Lived Experiences of Counseling Graduate Students and the Impact of Their Studies in Their Marital Satisfaction

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THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF COUNSELING GRADUATE STUDENTS
AND THE IMPACT OF THEIR STUDIES IN
THEIR MARITAL SATISFACTION

A Thesis

by

VANIA S. PALACIOS

Submitted to the Graduate College of
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Major Subject: Counseling and Guidance

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AND THE IMPACT OF THEIR STUDIES IN
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August 2017

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ABSTRACT

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Due to high levels of stress that students find throughout graduate programs, professional and personal lives are at times not prioritized. The heuristic study focused on analyzing common themes among counseling graduate students at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, the coping mechanisms students have used to improve their marital/relational satisfaction, and common stressors in their marriage as a reflection of the counseling graduate program. The researcher provided a personal narrative for the study and analyzed transcriptions of the interviews of four counseling graduate students at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family, specifically my husband, Josue J. Alvarez who supported me since day one and encouraged me daily to complete this project. Thank you for inspiring me with your patience and devoutness. To my parents, Jose Palacios and Vicky Palacios, thank you for always believing that I could do more and for instilling the love for education in me. And to my brothers, Jose and Levi, for being part of this roller coaster of life and for being my first friends and confidants in life.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Graduate school is known to be a cause of stress due to the arduous workload that is composed of projects, research, internship hours, and exams (Abel, Abel, & Smith, 2011). The Counseling program at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley for students who began the program before the merging of two universities (University of Texas Pan-American and University of Texas Brownsville) has a requirement of 54 graduate hours for those students who belonged to the University of Texas Brownsville before the merge. Nine of those credit hours are for practicum and internship and as the students advance in the program the courses have many more requirements. Practicum hours require 40 hours of direct hours with clients and 60 hours of indirect hours, while internship requires 240 hours of direct contact with clients and 360 indirect hours divided in two semesters. A program requirement, besides the 54 hours, is to read a counseling related book per semester and attend at least one faculty seminar per semester. A comprehensive exam must be passed before a student can graduate from the program. The counseling program is extensive and requires a lot of time on top of daily personal responsibilities and balancing not only graduate program work but also professional and personal life.

There are married/in a committed relationship students in the graduate program who find themselves having to create a balance among school work, professional advancement, and per-

sonal life. Because of work deadlines as well as school deadlines it could be that their personal lives are left with little to no attention. The marriage/committed relationship of a counseling graduate student could be affected by the lack of attention due to the overwhelming schedule and responsibilities. However, marriages/committed relationships could be successful through the willingness and partnership in the relationship. Counseling graduate students are provided with coping skills and wellness tools throughout the program that can be implemented in their personal lives and marriages/relationships in order to help find the balance needed.

Problem and Purpose Statement

According to Abel, Abel, and Smith (2011) “graduate students in counselor preparation programs are inundated daily with an infinite number of internal and external stressful experiences, such as grades, comprehensive exams, professor demands, competition, intense worry, self-doubt, and even isolation” (p. 65). Without support of a strong network, family support, and stress management education counseling programs can be detrimental for marital satisfaction. It is not always the case that counseling students practice wellness or stress management skills in their personal lives and the effects of stress caused by the requirements of the counseling graduate program could be transferred to their marriages and their perception of their marriage quality. However, there could be students that have managed to balance all requirements and personal responsibilities and who have found that certain mechanisms have allowed them to improve marital quality regardless of the workload. The purpose of this study was focused on western culture and seeking to find common themes among overall stressors in the counseling program experience and the coping mechanisms that have improved marital/relationship quality in counseling graduate students. Previous studies have focused on Eastern cultures and quantitative research

hence this study differs in approach and location. The results of this study yield to implications for research that will contribute to the Counseling program at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Study Purposes

The purposes of this study were, 1) to find common emerging themes of the overall experience of married/in-committed-relationship students while in the counseling program, 2) investigate the coping skills couples have practiced to maintain a positive relationship through the counseling program, 3) and to obtain information on students self-care and how these skills helped them individually and relationally through the counseling program.

Assumptions

1. All participants were married/in committed relationships.
2. All participants would develop thorough and honest answers during interview process.
3. Participants would have the time to participate in more than one interview.

Limitations

Because the study took place at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in Texas, where the population of students is predominantly Hispanic, the main limitation encountered will be that participants in their majority will be Hispanic (possibly mostly Mexican-American). Culturally, the Hispanic population is less disposed to share about their private and personal lives. Thus, the sample could be limited. Also, the willingness of students to contact investigator to volunteer was low as students communicated with investigator the lack of free time to volunteer for study due to prior commitments. This lead to a low number of participants which has left the study with a less representative sample. No male students contacted investigator to volunteer for

this research study thus having all responses from a female perspective might also limit the results as male students might experience the program and relationships differently.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to find common emerging themes among counseling graduate students and their marital/relationship satisfaction including program stressors and coping mechanisms implemented to improve relationship quality. Are there common emerging themes among counseling students in relation to their marital satisfaction and program stressors ? How do students cope with these program stressors? Interview questions were developed based on research questions.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“Though individuals experience cultural change from birth throughout life, encouraging an atmosphere that increases cooperation and decreases instances of conflict between partners in the marital relationship can facilitate greater perceived marital quality through purposive behavior” (Leggett, Roberts-Pittman, Byczek, & Morse, 2012, p. 196). Being in a graduate program can be perceived as a cultural change for students; it could be difficult, however, for a counseling graduate student to find increase cooperation in the home and thus have a positive perception of marital quality. According to Schlemper’s (2011) study, general coping and support for graduate students came first from the help of advisors and other students (p. 70) and only 4% of 117 students surveyed reported relying on family to help cope with graduate school stress (p.69). If Schlemper’s study is reflected on counseling graduate students, they are not relying on their families as a support network and this can be detrimental for a marriage and family as a whole.

Studies “suggest that stressful life events are often associated with more conflict and greater hostility between spouses more marital violence, less warmth towards the partner lower marital quality, and a higher divorce rate” (Peilian et al., 2010, p. 16). In their study, Peilian et al. (2010), 300 households participated and it was found “that the more life crises they had experienced, the lower their satisfaction in the marriage “(p. 20). If not balanced and without well-

ness and coping skills graduate programs can become a life crisis hence lowering marital satisfaction. According to Abel, Abel & Smith (2012) even those people who have achieved wellness and do not have many preoccupations experience stress at some level (p. 640).

Other works have explored marital satisfaction and marital management skills that result in stressful life situations having a negative association with marital satisfaction (Pei-Fen & Wickrama, 2014) as well as balancing graduate school, stress, and marriage (Labosier & Labosier, 2011). The majority of the works explored have been mainly conducted with eastern cultures and have yielded to similar results in marital satisfaction and stress. The research proposed will be focusing on western culture and seeking to find common themes among coping mechanisms that have improved marital quality in counseling graduate students.

The work of Abel, Abel, and Smith (2012) provides in detail the stressors that graduate students, specifically in counseling programs could face. It also allows the reader to learn about the methods that were used during their research in order to reduce chronic stress in counseling graduate students. Although this study is a good starting point for the understanding of the stressors and methods for reduction of stress, the experiences of the students are not present in order to obtain a broader understanding of what they live while in the counseling program.

For the purpose of this research, a qualitative research design was chosen in order to obtain information about participants experiences. More specifically the heuristic research approach is the approach of choice as it is “a way of being informed, a way of knowing. Whatever presents itself in the consciousness of the investigator as perception, sense, intuition, or knowledge represent an invitation for further elucidation” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 10). The methodology of this research is explained in the following section.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Approach

Being part of this study was important to the researcher as the overwhelming expectations of work, school, and personal life were becoming more emotionally and physically apparent though different means. As the researcher believed in the importance of providing this information to current and future students, the Counseling and Guidance department, and the spouses of the students in the program the researcher wanted to also provide the experiences of other students in the Counseling program. Consequently the best approach for this study is qualitative Heuristic inquiry. It is important to note that researcher wrote a personal narrative in the first person in order to provide context to the experiences of other participants.

Heuristic research was developed by Clark Moustaka through his publication of *Loneliness* in 1961 (Moustaka, 1990, p. 9). The word Heuristic derives from the Greek words *heuriskein* (which means “to discover or to find”) and *eureka* (meaning “striking realization”) (Moustaka, 1990, p. 9). Due to the nature of the study, Heuristic inquiry allowed the researcher to emphasize an internal frame of reference and self-reflection, which is an important component of this approach (Moustaka, 1990, p. 12). Whittenberg (1995) states that “this research paradigm includes learning through the self by including the researcher as a participant in the study.

Heuristic inquiry also includes the stories of additional participants or co-researchers” (p.556). Including a personal statement and vivid interview quotes from other participants provided trustworthiness through credibility. The process of self-search, reflection, and observation not only allowed the researcher to have an individual depiction but it allows for meaning in the human phenomena (Moustaka, 1990, p. 9).

Etherington (2004) provides a tactful explanation of the stages of heuristic inquiry:

The stages of heuristic inquiry set out by Moustakas – engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis – echo more general theories of the human creative process that encourage us to reflect on and connect with tacit knowing, images, dreams, hunches, ideas that come between sleeping and waking, intuition, out-of-body experiences, synchronicity and exceptional human experiences (p. 50)

The researcher was able to describe experiences of the six stages of inquiry and they were expressed in a personal narrative as well as provided descriptions in the following sections.

Personal Statement

I have been able to live on both ends of the spectrum, graduate school while only dating and graduate school married. And, by no means, there were challenges in both ends, however, I do believe that being married in the graduate program has brought a lot more challenges to my marriage than I could've have imagined. It all came down on me one evening, when I got home around 10:30 pm after being out of the house since 6:45 am; my husband was asleep, with his phone in his hand and without any covers. I had put the bed sheets in the washer before I headed to work that morning and though I planned to go home for lunch that day and put the sheets in

the washer I was unable to follow through because while at work I remembered that I had an article to read before class. And there was my husband, in bed, without covers, waiting on me I assume because he was still in jeans and with shoes on. I remember going to the kitchen and taking out the chicken I had left thawing in the fridge so that I could prepare lunch for the next day. The moment I took that chicken out I broke down crying, feeling terrible for not even having enough time to make dinner or come home for lunch to put the sheets in the dryer, feeling like maybe my husband felt neglected because most evenings we had limited conversations and he usually went to bed alone. I wondered if anyone else felt the way I did. My husband must have heard me making noise in the kitchen because he got out of bed and just hugged me.

Working 40 hours per week along with having 6 hours' worth of class time plus commuting 35 minutes each way, homework, seminars, group meetings for projects, and more homework does not leave me with much quality time to spend with my husband, let alone friends or other family members. I found myself more irritable when I was tired from school work and wanting to do nothing but sleep as soon as the weekend rolled around. I was not cooking, nor baking, nor cleaning my apartment much and the time off work I had was spent doing homework. I guess I could consider myself fortunate because my husband was helping me with most of the cleaning and actually learned to cook a few meals here and there to make me feel like we were a team and that I didn't have to carry the whole load alone. He also walked the dog when I was in class and never asked for a home cooked meal. I feel as if he really understood that this was only temporary and that come graduation we could spend a lot of time doing things we both love.

However, I still felt guilty, I felt like a terrible wife not caring for my family and being selfish with my time off. The nights when I would get home at around 10:30 pm and cook so that my husband could take lunch the next day made me feel like I was only providing him with the minimum love and respect that he deserves. Not because of the things that I wasn't doing at home but simply because I wasn't present.

The feelings of guilt then turned into creating pockets of regret and self-evaluation. The regret was towards school...why did I stay in school after getting married if I always knew how time consuming it would be? And this is where the support of my husband came in; he noticed how emotionally distressed I felt with everything going on around me and he assured me with his words and actions that he did not resent me for taking on this challenge of graduate school.

I often had to choose between sleeping and spending time with my husband till late and then doing school work. It was exhausting! Most times I chose spending time with him which meant that my sleep suffered and sometimes even my school work. Time with my family was also very limited, I had to always keep in mind that I had to limit my time with them in order to get home with time to finish homework or begin on an assignment. I felt like I was a human calendar trying to schedule things in, really, if you could only see my actual agenda, I even scheduled "rest-time", otherwise I was not going to get that.

It was a challenge to keep positivity in the relationship due to the limited time. I would say that the time in the program did have an effect on my relationship; there was both a positive and negative effect. The negative was, not being able to spend time with my husband during our first two years of marriage...it was difficult to schedule dates and weekend trips the way he wanted because I had to always think of school deadlines. One time I took a risk and had him

schedule a vacation in advance...he booked it right when I was supposed to take the CPCE, so I had to sacrifice taking the CPCE and waiting till the last opportunity just to be able to take this vacation. And the positive was that it made us appreciate every moment together and take what we had gone through as a success that we accomplished together.

I believe that even though I went through moments of feeling like a failure as a wife because I felt like I was neglecting my husband, what kept our relationship positive was our communication and his support, his encouragement and me wanting to still be part of his life regardless of how busy I was. He helped me out a lot around the house so that we could spend time together when I came home from school and me showing appreciation for his support in this way helped us out a lot too. It is safe to say that it was because of my husband and not because of me applying my coping skills that I was able to get through the most challenging moments of graduate school.

Initial Engagement

According to Moustaka (1990) the initial engagement happens when the researcher becomes aware of a theme, topic, question, or problem and begins explaining the significance of the topic (p. 27). There was a moment in the researcher's experience in which she began developing questions about overwhelming feelings and guilt that lead to the development of the research questions.

Immersion

The researcher was able to immerse in the theme not only during the interview process and through the observation of the environment during the process but in social contexts and public settings. For immersion "virtually anything connected with the question becomes raw

material for immersion, for staying with , and for maintaining a sustained focus and concentration” (Moustaka, 1990, p. 28).

Incubation

Moustaka (1990) describes incubation as a time when the investigator is not concentrated on the topic and is allowing a different clarity that will bring outside awareness (p. 29). After the interviews and transcriptions had been conducted the researcher was able to take time for vacation along with her husband. Being away from the research and not focusing on what researcher had found as a theme in her life at the time allowed her to experience closeness to her husband that then lead her to further development of her narrative once they returned.

Illumination

After returning from vacation and being part of immersion and incubation process, the researcher was able to have a new awareness of the theme. Whittenberg (2015) explains that illumination “requires deep levels of self-reflection, but allows for mysterious workings of the tacit knowledge. The process fosters a new awareness, enlightens existing understanding, and insight into experiences previously repressed and hidden in the researcher’s unconscious” (p. 562). The questions asked during the interview seemed to be skewed more towards the experience of the participants rather than their coping skills but within the frame provided of their experiences the researcher was able to discover coping skills that are utilized and the lack there of.

Exploration

At this stage the researcher is able to explain the major themes in the phenomenal and put them together in a comprehensive experience (Moustaka, 1990, p. 31). For this study, the researcher was able to analyze and describe through the vivid quotes the experiences of partici-

pants as a group. It is in this stage that the researcher understood that the commonalities among all participants could be deeper than the ones expressed through narrative and interviews. The lived experiences of each individual allowed for the text to give way for further exploration of commonalities and provided the researcher with questions for further research.

Creative Synthesis

The final stage is where the researcher must put the core themes a creative synthesis (Moustaka, 1990, p. 32). Moustaka (1990) explains that this “usually takes the form of a narrative depiction utilizing verbatim material and examples, but it may be expressed as a poem, story, drawing, painting, or by some other creative form (p. 32). The form chosen for this phase was utilizing verbatim material and examples.

Participants

The participants were five (including principal investigator) female, Hispanic graduate students from the counseling program at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley between the ages of 24 and 40, including principal investigator. Participants were either married or in a committed relationship and were current students or recent graduates of the Counseling Program at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Three of the participants have children younger than 13 years while the other two participants did not have children. All participants were at different stages of the Counseling Program. Each participant was interviewed individually and every individual session was between 30 - 40 minutes in length. Researcher allowed participants to choose the location for conducting the interview in order for participants to feel comfortable with the setting. Interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed for analysis. No male participants were interviewed as no male students volunteered for the study. Study procedure for

Human Subjects was approved by The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Institutional Review Board.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Participants were married or in a committed relationship.
2. Participants were enrolled in or had just graduated from counseling program in counseling and guidance at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Data Analysis

The researcher first listened to interview recordings individually soon after the interview took place. After researcher listened to each recording, a transcription of each interview was made. Researcher then returned to the transcription data to answer the following questions found in the Heuristic Research guide of procedures for analysis of data: Does the individual depiction fit the data from which it was developed? and does the data contain the qualities and themes essential to the experience? (Moustaka, 1990). Next, the researcher took each individual depiction and gathered the information of the experiences in order to obtain the composite depictions of the common emerging themes.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited by criterion sampling through in-person script (see appendix for form) and by word of mouth at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley counseling training clinic using a flyer (see appendix for flyer). According to Patton (2002), criterion sampling means that all participants “meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (p. 238). All participants in this study fulfilled inclusion criteria. In order to avoid a smaller sample size that would affect transferability (Suri, 2011, p. 69), attainable criteria was set for inclusion. Participa-

tion in this study was completely voluntary and participants were informed that they were allowed to withdraw at any moment during the interview process.

Experimental Protocol

Researcher wrote a personal narrative before beginning the interview questions for data collection. The personal statement included a narrative of the personal experiences of the counselor in the counseling graduate program. Moustaka's (1990) explained that the "focus in a heuristic quest is on recreation of the lived experience; full and complete depictions of the experience from the frame of reference of the experiencing person" (p. 39). The narrative of this experience allowed the researcher to be more aware of the need for observation for during interviews with other participants.

Secondly, data was collected via individual interviews with each participant. Interviews lasted between 30-40 minutes in length. First, an informed consent form was provided along with any an audio release form (see appendix for forms). Interview was conducted in a location of participants choosing to ensure that participant felt comfortable during interview process. The following questions were included in the interview process:

1. What have the most difficult challenges you have faced while in the counseling program?
2. How have you been able to balance your family life, social life, and your school life?
3. What are your family's expectations for you while being in the graduate program?
4. What have been your own personal expectations?
5. How have you and your partner dealt with the graduate program's extensive expectations?
6. What do you do for self-care?

7. Is there anything you and your partner do to maintain a positive relationship while in the program?
8. Do you believe that you have satisfactory relationship?
9. How would you describe your relationship at this point in your life?
10. Can you think of a time where you and your partner were able to overcome a challenge caused by the program? What has that challenge done to your relationship?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share in regards to this subject?

Observation of reactions as well as the environment during the interviews was important and allowed the researcher to obtain a much deeper understanding of the lived experiences of each participant. These observations provide this study with portraits that are vivid and comprehensive for the presentation of the data (Moustaka, 1990, p. 54).

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure trustworthiness of the data, the researcher conducted member checking at the end of each interview through summarization of the interview and the themes that arose during the conversation. Cope (2014) described that for Transferability, the “researchers should provide sufficient information on the informants and the research context to enable the reader to assess the findings’ capability of being “fit” or transferable” (p. 89). The researcher was able to provide thorough information on the context of the research as well as the details on the participants in order to achieve transferability. Confirmability was also achieved through “the use of thick, rich quotes that personified the emerging themes” (Cope, 2014, p. 90). Triangulation was not achieved due to the lack of observational notes, however, observation was included in the research to provide more insight to the experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Ensuring the safety, confidentiality and anonymity of subjects was of high priority and preventive measures were taken care before submitting the final copy. Informed consent forms were provided individually to participants before the interviews were conducted. They were asked to read thoroughly and sign the informed consent form and audio release form, and were provided with a copy of informed consent form and audio release form. Identifiable information that arose during interviews was removed in order to ensure confidentiality.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purposes of this study were, 1) to find common emerging themes of the overall experience of married/in-committed-relationship students while in the counseling program, 2) investigate the coping skills couples have practiced to maintain a positive relationship through the counseling program, 3) and to obtain information on students self-care and how these skills helped them individually and relationally through the counseling program.

Themes

Several emerging themes were found through the narrative of the researcher, interviews of participants, and observation of the participant's reactions and environment at the time of the interview providing the following common themes, 1) Greatest program challenges, 2) effect of program on marriage/intimate relationship, 3) finding balance, 4) coping skills for relationship positivity, 5) self-care, and 6) relationship satisfaction.

Greatest program challenges

There was a general consensus about overall program challenges of each participant. Most participants expressed that the greatest challenge of the counseling graduate program had to do with balancing school, work, and family life. It was very easy for participants to be able to describe these challenges as they were quick to provide an answer that stemmed from their re-

cent experiences. Participant SJ stated: "...being able to time manage school, and work, and family. That's the hardest thing, the most challenging, because it's either you give 100% or 90% to school and the rest it would be for the family. And you still sacrifice one or the other."

Two of the participants expressed very different challenges due to language barriers and international studies requirements. Three of the participants (including researcher) did disclose that program requirements and balancing life were the greatest challenges.

Effect of Program on Marriage/Intimate Relationships

It was also noted that program challenges had an effect in personal relationships including marriages or committed relationships. Some effects were negative, others positive, and other participants stated it had both negative and positive effects in their relationship. While researcher disclosed in personal narrative that the greatest effect had to do with time away from spouse, participant JW stated a reaction as an effect of the program on her relationship, "for you to say things it, say things that you probably normally wouldn't say because you are tired and angry, and just want to get through everything. But I mean for the most part, I mean, it made it through so it was just not easy. It just was not easy."

The depiction participant MT provided in regards of the effect of the program on her relationship provided more insight into her experience. As she answered questions pointing to this theme she seemed relaxed and without hesitation described not only how the program had an effect but also how as a couple they managed to turn this effect into something that would still allow them to spend time together:

It's been good, my husband right now has put a stop to his Master's education because of some situations at work, but since we both started our programs almost at the same

time, he really understands what I am going through. So, there were times when, ha, we didn't have time to sit down and watch a movie, because we used to enjoy that a lot, so we would sit down and do homework together and I'd make dinner and we'd sit at the table doing homework, we'd talk as we did our homework but we were both doing the same thing. And now that he has stopped his program what he does now is work on stuff for his job, he'll talk out his computer and ask "do you have homework? okay I'm gonna work" and he won't go to sleep until I go to sleep. Or until, well I'm not like him (laughs) I tell him "I'm done, good night" (laughs) but he is more, he supports me more "if you have homework I'll stay here with you, I always have work stuff to do so I'm gonna keep going until you go to sleep". It's one of the ways that we keep spending time together and of course it's not the heaviest thing in the world in that I am always doing homework. Weekends, mmm unless it's a weekend full of projects or finals then I will be busy with homework but we have a lot of weekends where we go out to eat or on an outing, we rest, we watch movies, so it's not always."

It is important to note that throughout the interview with participant TJ, she stated that being in the program had a positive effect in her relationship. As she explained the development of her relationship in a very positive manner while still explaining its ups and downs she explained that the it was possible that should she not be in the program through the course of her relationship the relationship might have taken a different route:

I think it affected us positively, I think it made us more independent in our relationship than we would've been if we had started dating before. If we had started dating before we probably would have all the time together and nothing else but because he had to work in

the mornings which was when I didn't have class and when I had class in the afternoons he was out already and stuff like that, it made us more independent and to where we didn't have to be together or we could be together but not talking to each other and that was enough. So now that we have all of the free time I feel like it helped because now I still divide the time, "with friends, then with you, and then with something else, and then I gotta get a hobby because if not I'm just gonna be all over you" and stuff like that. But I think it's better, it worked out better for us, 'cause I, I would've been clingy, yeah I just know I would've been clingy, or he would've been and I would've gotten frustrated with that but, it made us adults.

Finding Balance

Due to the program requirements, work requirements, family and personal expectations, it is important for students to learn to balance their lives in order to be successful. Although scheduling the interviews was a challenge itself, participants were able to express the way they were able to balance every aspect in their lives. It is important to note that in order for the interview with participant SJ to take place, researcher had to meet with her during her "family day" and as we were ending the interview her family came home from their family breakfast. Researcher could sense a feeling of wanting to finish the interview as soon as possible as soon as her family entered though the door. For participant SJ when it came to finding balance she shared the following:

I think that, 'cause I wasn't expecting that I was able to accomplish last semester because I had like a lot of classes, I had like three classes and practicum and I had to go to the clinic and see clients and I think that was the point where I was able to experience

that I needed to, like a wakeup call, like I need to do something in order to make this work, because I started to get sick and get like really stressed out and mmm, so, my, what I ended up learning from this semester is that I needed to be able to disconnect from work and from school when I was at home. So that I could enjoy my family, spend time with them, and schedule, mmm manage better my scheduling. I was able to mmm, for example have a day to do homework, have another day to spend with the family, have the rest of the week to go to school, to class, and work (chuckles).

Participants expressed that scheduling and organization skills allowed them to keep a somewhat balanced life while being in the counseling program. Organization skills was one of the few skills described by the participants as something that was done in order to help manage the workload while in the program. Researcher noted:

I often had to choose between sleeping and spending time with my husband till late and then doing school work. It was exhausting! Most times I chose spending time with him which meant that my sleep suffered and sometimes even my school work. Time with my family was also very limited, I had to always keep in mind that I had to limit my time with them in order to get home with time to finish homework or begin on an assignment. I felt like I was a human calendar trying to schedule things in, really, if you could only see my actual agenda, I even scheduled 'rest-time', otherwise I was not going to get that.

Participant MT shared how she had to use her organizational skills in order to allow herself to succeed during the most stressful times during the semester. This provided insight into

being able to use organizational skills to allow satisfaction not only in the relationship but as a graduate student:

There were days when I would do things that never before, like getting a paper and writing down really every hour ever since I was gonna wake up, like from 7:00 - 8:00 get my daughter ready, from 8:00 - 9:00 this from 9:00 to 10:00 this other thing with every minute and every hour; it wasn't every day but there have been days that if I didn't have a schedule like this I wouldn't remember all the things I had to do nor be able to do everything... So basically organization and also an extra sacrifice because in the evenings once I was done with all my housework and then still having to continue with homework is very tiring, but it's been very satisfactory and gratifying.

In regards to scheduling, participant TJ stated, "We work super into calendars now, like everything we put so that we know how much time we have to spend". Overall, participants used organizational skills in order to balance all aspects of their lives. Nevertheless, participants did express that at some point or another at least one area of their lives would suffer in order to prioritize another area and achieve deadlines.

Coping Skills for Relationship Positivity

Participants were able to describe how they maintain a positive relationship with their partners. Most described having the support of their partner as part of maintaining a positive relationship. In her personal note, the researcher stated that in order to cope with the stresses as a couple, the support of her spouse was important in order to maintain positive communication as well as using organizational skills for relationship positivity:

I believe that even though I went through moments of feeling like a failure as a wife because I felt like I was neglecting my husband, what kept our relationship positive was our communication and his support, his encouragement and me wanting to still be part of his life regardless of how busy I was. He helped me out a lot around the house so that we could spend time together when I came home from school and me showing appreciation for his support in this way helped us out a lot too.

Participant SJ stated that through the support of her spouse, communication, and making time for conversation is what has helped them continue with relationship positivity through the graduate program:

...ugh honestly I don't know, I don't know how we do it. I don't know if it's the, because we've been married for ten years, we're going on ten years this year but we've been together longer so I think...at...we've been going through a lot of difficult times and good times also, and...I think that we always had pretty good communication so maybe that can be that is helping, it's helping us to overcome all of these changes in all of the aspects because we always talk even if I'm at school we're texting or whatever he plans to do he will tell me, we talk during lunch like when he gets his lunch hour we're always on the phone checking on each other, after school we do groceries together that's another thing (chuckles), the things that we have to do together we stick to do them together.

Self-Care

Even though participants expressed the importance of self-care and how aware they are of the need to practice self-care, it was disclosed that time was so limited after all that had to be done and self-care did not seem to be a priority at the time. Participants are well aware that self-

care is part of balanced lifestyle, however, time limitations do not allow for participants to carry out thorough self-care routines. Participant MT stated:

I think what I told you about Sundays I see it as self-care, since I am so tired and I need to rest. The whole week I wake up at 7:00 am so it's a day, it's a day that, I initiated that father-daughter Sunday, and it's worked out well. What else mmm, I give myself sometime to go exercise a bit after I leave my daughter at school; at least three days a week I go walk or jog for a bit. Mmm, he always tell me "you always want to sleep" and well yeah I know the importance of sleep and rest so if there's a day that doesn't require me to be awake, it doesn't matter if it's 9:30 pm or 10:00 pm it's "good night I am going to sleep" and I try not to lack in rest...at the end of the day we know what we're supposed to do but that doesn't mean we're going to apply them. For example what hasn't worked for me is my eating habits, because I'm always busy I eat whatever junk so I can continue my homework, or I don't eat, or tomorrow I'll eat a lot and the day after I won't eat a thing. It's something that I haven't been able to organize well. With my sleeping I try not to lack in sleep but not in my eating.

The participants that made a greater effort for self-care still found it challenging to make the time to do so. Participant TJ stated:

I went out a lot and he also liked to do every month amm, a weekend trip, 'cause he also gets really frustrated in his job, so we started doing that. We would go out during the weekends and we'd try to be like "let's go to places that we haven't been". So if they opened up a bar in here, Harlingen, McAllen, we wouldn't go further than that, but somewhere we would try to do just be, to have something to look forward to and not be

just thinking about school and the weekend comes and I have to do homework again. So we set little things and then trying to go out of town and stuff.

In regards to the importance of self-care and participant JW expressed that there was a point while going through the program that she had to think about herself rather than her school progress. This, to her was part of self-care in order to continue with the program and other responsibilities later in time.

I did, I did, I know my limits, you know? I know when I start feeling a certain way, certain things, I mean if I needed to do some journaling that's what I would do. I needed to talk to somebody that's what I would do, I would get out, sometimes I would go out and exercise a little bit, not a lot but I would do some to try to make myself feel better. I knew when it was time to step back and say 'it's time to just let go for a little bit of the program, do so', and I did at one point of the program I think I left for a semester, because I was just really, really overwhelmed, but that was early on in the program. I would've thought that something like that would've happened to me at the very end but like I said, you're on complete adrenaline you don't even have time to think about what you're feeling you're just 'go, go, go' and that's it. And you when you get home you're just ready to hit the bed and go the next day especially when you have a full time job, I mean that's what I had.

Relationship Satisfaction. Most participants shared about their relationship satisfaction with a direct answer. Regardless of all the challenges, the majority of participants stated that they believe that their relationship is satisfactory. The relationship satisfaction seem related to the support of their partners and the communication with their partners. Participant TJ stated: "I

would say it's very satisfactory! Yes." While participant SJ was able to further develop her answer to provide the reason behind her marital satisfaction:

I think it's strong because we've been...two years ago we went through something very difficult in our marriage and, at that moment, if you would've asked me at that time I would've been like "I don't know!" But right now I think that, the problem that we had made us even stronger. So I think that we (pause), we have grown together so much and I think that's amazing like for us to go back and think of all the things that we've done together, how we developed new skills, how we learned more about each other, because we eventually keep changing right? and we changed together and we like the way things are now. So I think our relationship is, we'll be able to describe as strong, fun, and uh (paused), let me think of the word, 'cause we found like a relationship.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Considering the limited time number of participants, there was sufficient information to obtain a basic understanding of counseling students' experiences in relation to the counseling program and marital satisfaction. The common themes about challenges faced while in the counseling program were for the most related to having time to balance work, school, and family. Participants shared specific experiences in the program as examples for balancing their work, school, and personal lives. And for the most part, participants described having satisfactory relationships that, rather than hindering their progress in school, are the support system needed to continue with their studies.

Common Emerging Themes

Participants shared that during their time in the program, regardless of school work-load and other responsibilities, finding time to spend with family was important even if it was limited. During attempts of finding volunteers for research study and scheduling interviews with those who volunteered, it became evident that students have rigid schedules to follow. Time-management for counseling students is important since it will determine the time spent with their partners and other family members. Because many students had schedules in place for weeks at a time, it was difficult to get volunteers for this study as a result of their previous engagements

which included work, classes, vacation, family day/night, homework deadlines, group projects, internship, practicum, children's extra-curricular activities, and date nights.

About half of the students disclosed that they took time for self-care as it is important. The other half of the responses stated that even though self-care is important, time was limited and the attempts for self-care were scarce. There is great importance for self-care for a student who is in the counseling program as the work load is heavy. Regardless of the how many times students might be approached about the importance of self-care, the demands of the program and balancing other responsibilities leave counseling students with very limited time frames for self-care.

Through the interviews it was disclosed that in fact the counseling program had an effect in participants' relationships, without regard, the effect was not always negative as hypothesized. For the most part, participants described their marriages/committed relationships as satisfactory while acknowledging challenges that relationships face as difficult. All participants stated that a support system is important and that they found support within their families and for some, in their marriages/committed relationships.

Studies noted in literature review stated that higher stress levels lead to higher conflict between partners, however, most participants in this study disclosed otherwise as they felt the support of their partner was present. Some participants did disclose specific events in which stress caused by either an assignment or overall school load triggered negative attitudes that were channeled towards their partners.

Implications for Practice

With the discussed results, this research can be used as a starting point for a new student/family orientation for the counseling graduate program. Having the students and their partners participate in an orientation where they will be explained the requirements and expectations of the program before beginning classes would be beneficial. Inviting graduates from the program to return and speak to new students and their partners about their personal challenges and coping skills while in the program would help the students and partners have a general idea of what to expect and see that, regardless of program requirements and other responsibilities, students can be successful in the counseling program. Furthermore, developing a support group for couples in the counseling graduate programs as well as providing awareness for students and their families on coping mechanisms to improve marital satisfaction while completing the counseling program would also be a positive way to promote self-care and overall wellness for the students and their partners.

The counseling graduate program professors could utilize this research study during introductory courses to provide awareness of the experiences of students in the counseling program to the students who are just beginning the program. The counseling and guidance department would also benefit from reading this study and consider the

Implications for Future Research

Due to the limitations of this study, furthering the study should be considered in the future. Having a more representative sample will help with the development of the orientation program and the support groups for future counseling graduate students. A longitudinal mixed methods study including a Marriage Satisfaction Scale at the beginning and of the program in

combination with a phenomenological study throughout the course of the graduate program could provide more thorough information for development of support groups for graduate students. It would also be interesting to see future research conducted in different regions of the United States to compare responses and have a multi-cultural understanding of the lived experiences of counseling students across different universities.

Conclusion

There were common themes in participants' overall experience of the counseling program and the effects of its requirements on their work, school, and family balance. All participants were able to explain how they have coped with the program requirements in order to maintain a positive relationship with their partners. Nevertheless, participants also shared about self-care practices and the lack-there-of these practices.

The information gathered, though limited in sample, could be utilize as a start for orientation program for new students and their partners as well as support group for counseling students and their families. Furthering the study is encouraged as a longitudinal study that will provide more insight into the experiences of counseling graduate students and prepare the counseling students and counseling department to better implement measures to support counseling students through the program process.

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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS

PARTICIPANT TJ

(IV = INVESTIGATOR)

IV: what have been the most difficult challenges that you faced while in the program?

TJ: the most difficult challenges while I've been in the program, mmm, probably for internship because I can't work because internship takes up all the hours that I have per semester as an international student, so once it takes up those hours I can't do anything else. And all the requirements, I mean the special visas, special permits things like that. But you're talking relationship wise or?

IV: no, no, no, just overall.

TJ: okay, yeah that would be it.

IV: yeah and are you able to balance your family life, social life, and school life while you've been in the program?

TJ: I procrastinate a lot so that'd probably be it. I don't really do homework and stuff when I'm supposed to be doing it to give priority to social life and relationships.

IV: so what suffers is your school work?

TJ: yeah (laughs), basically.

IV: great, and what about, did your family have certain expectations of you while you were in the program?

TJ: mmm my family, like my parents and?

IV: yeah your family over all.

TJ: they did, just to graduate. That was the...they weren't checking on my grades or anything so their expectation was just for me to graduate, amm, on time. And I feel like their biggest expectation was to make sure that I was going to be able to get a job afterwards. But other than that they didn't really.

IV: and what about your boyfriend?

TJ: my boyfriend's expectations, amm, my boyfriend's expectation was big, he wanted the grades and he wanted me to, after class he would pick me up sometimes and he wanted to know how school was, if I was getting anything out of it, what my grades were. That's it, that I feel... it's just that we started dating right when we started the program so I never really had a "before" the program. This is, our weird part is now, that we have so much time to spend together. But since I started with the program we started when I was taking summer so we were really stressed with all the things; he started getting really involved with "I have to help you do your homework. You're doing this part, I am going to help you print everything out", and stuff like that. So for him it was really like "you have to do well because I print everything for you, I know what you're studying, I know ", and so, and then we shared calendars to make sure we could see each other different days so he would be like "no you have homework, I saw your calendar, we can't really be going out and stuff".

IV: okay, and what about your personal expectations while you've been...

TJ: my personal expectations...of the program right?

IV: like while you've been in the program, like overall while you've been in the program but overall for yourself.

TJ: amm, I didn't have any expectations when I started the program, 'cause for me it was "I can't work with a psych degree, I need a Master's in anything", I don't even think counseling was my calling at first, yeah I think I went through the first semester and it still wasn't a big thing. I think until we got to practicum that I was like "I really like it, I really like doing stuff, I don't like reading about it but I like doing stuff" so I really did started, I had to do more in the classes that followed like internship and internship II and stuff to learn more to put myself more in the world of counseling. But I think that, probably that, doing the hands-on things, was when I started really developing expectations, like "I have to do well, the CPCE is an actual thing I have to study for it, after I graduate there's other things that I have to do so just now.

IV: and how have you and your boyfriend dealt with all the stress of the program?

TJ: mmm, he deals pretty well (laughs) I mean, he handled it very well. I think I didn't. But we started dating the summer, first summer I took the first semester, and we started dating after

knowing each other a week, so it was very new and I hadn't had a real boyfriend before him. It was very new, I was very stressed, so when we first went in he did calendars for both of us and marked dates and stuff. He has a full time job and he had activities after that so he had a lot going on and he didn't mind. I didn't take it that well, seriously, "you're my boyfriend and I haven't had a boyfriend in a while so I want to spend all my time with you". So I would push homework away a lot of the time, or I'd get really frustrated 'cause I was like "well I want to be with you but I have to do homework", so I think the first couple of months we broke up, like once a week. And I would just "no you don't care this is not fair", mmm, but he usually ignores me when I break up with him, he'll be like "yeah, come back on Thursday". So eventually so that he could pacify me, 'cause I really wanted to be hanging out with him, I'd be doing homework and he'd just be sitting there. And I think that's how we started. Then after that I think we settled with that, when I am doing homework he just sits there and reads or plays video games or whatever else while I do homework. And we work super into calendars now, like everything we put so that we know how much time we have to spend. I think it was just that time.

IV: and how do you think it affected you guys? like your relationship overall?

TJ: I think it affected us positively, I think it made us more independent in our relationship than we would've been if we had started dating before. If we had started dating before we probably would have all the time together and nothing else but because he had to work in the mornings which was when I didn't have class and when I had class in the afternoons he was out already and stuff like that, it made us more independent and to where we didn't have to be together or we could be together but not talking to each other and that was enough. So now that we have all of the free time I feel like it helped because now I still divide the time, "with friends, then with you, and then with something else, and then I gotta get a hobby because if not I'm just gonna be all over you" and stuff like that. But I think it's better, it worked out better for us, 'cause I, I would've been clingy, yeah I just know I would've been clingy, or he would've been and I would've gotten frustrated with that but, it made us adults.

IV: that's good! And what did you do for self-care? Or did you do anything for self-care while you were in the program.

TJ: yeah I went out (chuckles) I went out a lot and he also liked to do every month amm, a weekend trip, 'cause he also gets really frustrated in his job, so we started doing that. We would go out during the weekends and we'd try to be like "let's go to places that we haven't been". So if they opened up a bar in here, Harlingen, McAllen, we wouldn't go further than that, but somewhere we would try to do just be, to have something to look forward to and not be just thinking about school and the weekend comes and I have to do homework again. So we set little things and then trying to go out of town and stuff.

IV: and what about when you would get so stressed, like with class? Let's say that from one day to the next and you can't go on a weekend trip?

TJ: I cried (laughs) I would get so frustrated I cried for a while and then, probably U-mix saw a lot of me crying (laughs). Late night crying and go to U-Mix. I think every once in a while towards the middle of the semester and the end, because I procrastinated so much I would get to that point where I would just explode and start crying, and we would try to do either U-Mix or just take a break and watch "Teen Mom", for me. It encouraged me a lot to do better I was like "you can't do that, you cannot be them!"

IV: yeah, that makes sense. This question, you practically answered it already but is there anything you and your partner did to maintain a positive relationship while in the program? But you said that the program kind of made your relationship positive right?

TJ: Yeah I feel like that, because we didn't have a relationship before, so we didn't have anything to compare it to. Now he's doing his master's so we flipped it around because we had that already.

IV: 'cause with me, I was dating and then when I started the program...like I was dating him without the program, and then while in the program, and then we got married while in the program and I saw the big difference that the three had and I was like "oh my God!"

TJ: I hear that! Everybody says that like "oh my God the program changed my relationship so much", but I kept telling him, "I don't think we really know what a relationship is", he's like "why?", "cause I hear people, like they had a relationship and then they went through the program and it's like, it threw them off a lot" but we've...

IV: you can't compare to anything else.

TJ: yeah we don't have anything to compare to. This was our time to compare to; we had about three weeks since I graduated that I didn't have school or anything and he was kind of in the low season of his job, and then he already started. So we got back, I don't think we know how to be with each other without school.

IV: you guys are gonna have so much time when he's done!

TJ: oh yeah, we don't want to think about that. Umm so that, sex probably, having sex probably all the time, everywhere we could was a good thing for us.

IV: yeah it does help, it really does. How would you describe your relationship at this point of your life? I know you're not in the program right now.

TJ: good, mmm good, well he's in a program now so we're pretty much back where we started. But I want to say it's better. It's better now because his is not as time consuming as ours was his is mostly like, it's like coding and "sciency" thing so it's very limited. He doesn't do as much and he doesn't have to do be in places. But I would say that being in the program, being in a relationship, and now being out of the program helped us a lot. We managed the time that we had

very well and since we have so much time now, free, that it wasn't in our plans to have for me or for him, we are starting to again "oh I'm gonna have girls night", "oh he's gonna have his, his" I don't know what guys do, whatever he does, I don't even ask; or "I'm gonna go walk around this place and he's gonna go somewhere else". So I feel like we're in a good place right now.

IV: so would you say that your relationship is satisfactory?

TJ: I would say it's very satisfactory! Yes.

IV: could you think of a time while you were in the program that you had a challenge related to the program and you guys had to deal with it as a couple?

TJ: yes, when I took community counseling there was one last project we had to do. And I find it weird because a lot of the students complained in that class and it was the last project. It was the last project and you had to bring in some like big plan for the community, you'd do the whole explain from time to bottom and we were gonna talk about it and then get graded. [The professor] spent so much time talking ahead of time that we didn't all get to do that. And before we went to that class I was super stressed about that, and he went, he, I set up the whole thing and he went and printed it out; he arranged it and put everything in order because I was working. I got them, I wasn't able to present, I came back and I was really angry and I think he got the worst end of the stick for that one because I was really angry. I was like, going like this to the sheets and he was next to me, and I was like "and you printed them! Why would you do it if you knew I wasn't going to do it?" I think that lasted the whole weekend, I was angry the whole weekend and the whole weekend he had to kind of stick through it with me as I broke things and as I complained that I wasn't going to get the grade I wanted and stuff. But he's really patient. I think that's the only time where he's had to... well no in Internship I there was a case that got me really frustrated and he had to deal with my moodiness for quite a while.

IV: so it was mainly your attitude towards something that would happen?

TJ: yeah my attitude, something that would happen and I reacted and I reacted with him that he had to deal with. But other than that I don't think mmm I'm usually, I tend to be more slow about reactions like that and he's even slower so...

IV: things were passive...

TJ: yeah we're "whatever happens, it'll happen".

IV: is there anything else that you could think of in relation to your relationship and the program that you would like to share?

TJ: well my relationship with the program... I would say that the people that go into the program with a new relationship or with a "new-ish" relationship and then they come out of the program, I feel like they should be applauded, it's a good relationship the one you have if you made it

through the program still with the same relationship with the one you started. It's a really tough program and I could see how other relationships that I had in the past, I think back and that wouldn't have made it through the program because I wouldn't have gone through the support that I got from [my boyfriend] and because of the dynamics I had in other relationships I could see how that wouldn't work. If you're in a relationship where you're used to spending all your time together and being like in a bubble it's going to affect you. I feel like if they do make it that's a good relationship. I mean I definitely think that having a relationship overall can be really hard in the program but it can also help you de-stress as you have something to look forward to that's not just doing homework and more homework. You have someone to vent to that's willing to stay with you in the middle of it. And at least for me when I would get really angry or frustrated or I just felt like I just didn't want to do it, I had someone that didn't know what was going on in the program, but see, he couldn't know what was going on in the program but that gave me sympathy for my experience of the program. And I feel like even if you have parents, or sisters, or friends, they're not going to be sympathetic with that, they're gonna be like "oh yeah you're stressed with the program" that's as far as it goes. And with a boyfriend, a husband, partner, it's way more that was my experience with him, to be more like "your experience is what matters to me", that's what they take from the program. So [my boyfriend] was at the graduation and he met [one of the professors] and [the professor] told him "this is your accomplishment too" and [my boyfriend] was like "yes it is! like I felt every single emotion she went through, it's like a fake pregnancy almost, I went through it too". And that to me was the best part, that at the end of every homework that I would turn in I was like, "yeah, maybe other people don't know what I'm going through but he knows". He had to sit through it, the boring, the happy, the everything so I feel like if you made it, props to you, it's a good thing yeah, it's a good guy or girl that are there because they're willing to stick through that part then probably other things are gonna be easier.

IV: did you at any point feel guilty about, any, so like me for example I felt guilty for not having dinner ever, or not cleaning ever. You know it was kind of like, "I feel guilty this poor guy is by himself all the time and when I'm here I'm doing homework" so I did feel guilty. So did you at any point feel guilty in any way?

TJ: no (laughs), well we don't live together so that part of it I'm thankful because I probably would have felt like "[poor guy] he's always here alone", but we didn't live together during the program. I had an apartment with my brother and he lives with his friend so we didn't have that. I would feel guilty, mmm I wouldn't say guilty but I would feel a little sad whenever it would be the weekend and he was all ready to party and stuff and by 9 I was asleep; and then he wouldn't go out either he would just be there. And I would wake up in the middle of the night "weren't we going out?" and he's just watching [a TV show] and I was like "aww you couldn't go". Mmm, I can say that I can honestly, I can definitely feel more for like married people, like you guys, I feel like you guys experience it to a different level I think that we're a baby relationship.

IV: but I think the level of support has a lot to do with it because like you said, they feel everything and some people are not always going to be supportive of everything that you do.

TJ: oh yeah.

IV: so I feel like I was lucky, because my husband was like “eh, I’ll pick up food”

TJ: or I won’t eat anymore

IV: “I’ll sweep” and he was fine with it but I feel like, especially in our culture, there would be a lot of...

TJ: oh yeah you have to do it all.

IV: yeah, “why aren’t you cleaning? Why? You want to do this but you still have more”

TJ: commit, “finish your chores and then study”

IV: yeah and then study but yeah that’s it, thank you.

PARTICIPANT MT

MT- Are you married?

Investigator: Yes

MT: and do you have children?

Investigator (IV): no

MT: then that has helped you a lot.

Investigator: It really has.

MT: yeah, because at least me, I don't want to leave this girl in day care so it's been difficult because I have to arrange schedules with my husband so he can help me take care of her and he doesn't work here he works in a different town and when he can't my mother-in-law comes.

IV: that's difficult

MT: yeah because I don't want to leave her it's been rough. Academically, school has been difficult but the most difficult part has been, well, what we're gonna be discussing precisely/

IV: okay then let me ask you a few questions. What are the most difficult challenges you have faced in the counseling program?

MT: Academically?

IV: overall, in general.

MT: well the greatest challenges have been...give me a second. One of the most difficult things for me has been in relation to the language, for example, mmm learning to mmm in relation to writing, everything that has to do with the writing and assigned work is very different. Not only in regards to language but it's a very different style so when I start school here, after studying my whole life in a university and schools in Mexico and I start turning in work when my work over there was excellent my work her was bad, I mean the professors said it was bad and it was a lot of getting used to brief ideas and the writing style is very different, there sentences are more concise and short and there are no long sentences, so everything in relation to the working format I had to learn all that starting from zero and learning from errors and bad grades until I've more or less have gotten the hang of it.

IV: so it's been more challenging on the academic side due to the language barrier?

MT: the language barrier and because it's a very different style, a different culture even in the writing, in submitting work also, mmm, yeah all that and of course the language. I can understand the language well, to speak it? I came here speaking a lot less English and I speak it but, but to write it formally or in academic terms was difficult.

IV: it's difficult

MT: yeah, yeah.

IV: and how have you been able to balance your family life, social life, and your school life?

MT: well, based on a lot of organization. There are days when really, I mean I was never this organized, I'm not that organized but I am more than before, in order to, like I said before, not affect my daughter's schedule, it's what hurts me most, to affect her with my time with school. There are days when I would do things that never before, like getting a paper and writing down really every hour ever since I was gonna wake up, like from 7:00 - 8:00 get my daughter ready, from 8:00 - 9:00 this from 9:00 to 10:00 this other thing with every minute and every hour; it wasn't every day but there have been days that if I didn't have a schedule like this I wouldn't remember all the things I had to do nor be able to do everything. My daughter, for example, I had two semesters with online classes, I always send her to bed early, at 8:00 pm, 8:30 pm the latest, but there were days when I had online classes at 7:00 pm and just so that I could focus in class I was putting her to bed at 6:50 pm, 6:50 pm and she would tell me "the sun's still out" and there was no other way so that by 7:00 pm when class started she could already be asleep and so that I could focus on what I was doing. So basically organization and also an extra sacrifice because in the evenings once I was done with all my housework and then still having to continue with homework is very tiring, but it's been very satisfactory and gratifying. And thank God it's been going well and at the end of every semester I've finished with good grades so you feel as if you're rewarded or bearing the fruit of your effort. And like I was saying earlier, you reach a point where you feel closer to the finish than the start so that motivates you to keep going regardless of how tired you are, and not just tired sometimes even frustration.

IV: Mjjum and do you feel that your family, I mean your daughter obviously has certain expectations of you as well as your partner.

MT: right of course.

IV: what do you feel are those expectations of you while you have been in the program?

MT: I always mmm, I've never been a person who receives honors and awards but I have always

had good grades. I graduated with a psychology degree with a 90 and I've always had at least good grades. My parents, at my house, mmm my brother didn't go to graduate school or at least he hasn't yet, my sister is about to get her bachelor's degree in psychology so it was a lot of happiness and joy from their behalf knowing that I was the first one to do this. And of course they expected for me to be able to do this and they're surprised, well I found out recently as I was speaking to my mom that they, well at the beginning of the program it was very difficult for me and I told her "I don't even know how I've reached this point, I didn't even think I was going to pass the first semester" and I noticed that they thought that it was much easier for me than what they, well that it's not easy, they thought that it was very easy, they were like "really? I never thought that you were going through that", maybe because I didn't show it or I didn't complain or they didn't see me, well they don't live here to begin with but since they never saw me worried I don't know they thought it was easy, so they always expected the best with good results and they probably thought it was something "light" but then they realized that it was heavy work. And my husband well, he is a person who never gives up, who puts every effort, he is a person who understands that to have something good there has to be sacrifice, work, to put every effort, so expects for me to not be defeated or feel like this is the end ever since I started it's "I hope and suppose that you're gonna finish" and he believes it firmly, that I'm going to finish and I'm going to finish well and it's like "yes, you're tired but it doesn't matter, good things have a price, keep going", he's also working on his Master's degree, so "let's show our daughter that we can both have a master's degree so that when she grows up she can maybe have a doctorate and be better" and that's been the expectation of my family.

IV: do you believe that your husband has, in a certain way, put certain pressure on you in regards to your home?

MT: pressure about what?

IV: mmm for the house to be clean or for food to always be ready? Things of that sort that some spouses might have as expectations.

MT: mmhuum, no, really, fortunately my husband, mmm he does have expectations, like everything sometimes he points out my errors or things that he hopes were different, but really it's basic things, it has to be something bad like having the kitchen two days with dirty dishes for him to tell me "what's going on?" he is very, mmm when I started the program I noticed a lot of his support when it comes to, for example on Sundays he knew that I was tired of taking our daughter to school early every day and then my school, and on Sundays for example, one day I told him "on Sundays instead of me waking up when our daughter wakes up you wake up and you take her to the store or go somewhere for three hours or sometime and like that I can sleep a little longer and rest" and it was sort of like a joke but, yeah, he said "yeah that's fine" and he would do it and supported me that way because I was very tired so he leaves with our daughter on Sunday mornings, just 2 to 3 hours not the whole day, so that I can go back to sleep. And the house, mmm he understands a lot that when it's a stressful time or exam weeks the house is second and everything is fine, he'll grab the broom all of a sudden and starts sweeping and...mmm

IV: you feel like he supports you this way...

MT: we have someone that comes and helps with our housecleaning twice a week only and, well before I started school she would come only one day and then he said "why doesn't she come two times, tell her to come two times so that she can help you out more", so really he has supported me a lot, and he is also pays for my school, I have no complaints about his support, really anything that I ask, if for whatever reason I have a seminar which is out of our normal scheduled classes, he'll come home from work early so that I can go. He supports me a lot.

IV: How have you, as a couple, dealt with all the requirements that the program has in order to still keep a couple relationship?

MT: It's been good, my husband right now has put a stop to his Master's education because of some situations at work, but since we both started our programs almost at the same time, he really understands what I am going through. So, there were times when, ha, we didn't have time to sit down and watch a movie, because we used to enjoy that a lot, so we would sit down and do homework together and I'd make dinner and we'd sit at the table doing homework, we'd talk as we did our homework but we were both doing the same thing. And now that he has stopped his program what he does now is work on stuff for his job, he'll talk out his computer and ask "do you have homework? okay I'm gonna work" and he won't go to sleep until I go to sleep. Or until, well I'm not like him (laughs) I tell him "I'm done, good night" (laughs) but he is more, he supports me more "if you have homework I'll stay here with you, I always have work stuff to do so I'm gonna keep going until you go to sleep". It's one of the ways that we keep spending time together and of course it's not the heaviest thing in the world in that I am always doing homework. Weekends, mmm unless it's a weekend full of projects or finals then I will be busy with homework but we have a lot of weekends where we go out to eat or on an outing, we rest, we watch movies, so it's not always.

IV: and what do you do for self-care?

MT: mmm I think what I told you about Sundays I see it as self-care, since I am so tired and I need to rest. The whole week I wake up at 7:00 am so it's a day, it's a day that, I initiated that father-daughter Sunday, and it's worked out well. What else mmm, I give myself sometime to go exercise a bit after I leave my daughter at school; at least three days a week I go walk or jog for a bit. Mmm, he always tell me "you always want to sleep" and well yeah I know the importance of sleep and rest so if there's a day that doesn't require me to be awake, it doesn't matter if it's 9:30 pm or 10:00 pm it's "good night I am going to sleep" and I try not to lack in rest.

IV: I'm asking because when I was presenting the thesis proposal I was sharing that a lot of us do not take a lot of time for self-care because we have so many things to do and usually what we want to do at the end of everything is sleep. So I was mentioning this and even though they teach us...

MT: right, right, at the end of the day we know what we're supposed to do but that doesn't mean we're going to apply them. For example what hasn't worked for me is my eating habits, because I'm always busy I eat whatever junk so I can continue my homework, or I don't eat, or tomorrow I'll eat a lot and the day after I won't eat a thing. It's something that I haven't been able to organize well. With my sleeping I try not to lack in sleep but not my eating.

IV: Do you believe that you have satisfactory relationship?

MT: yeah I'd say is a good relationship, we have, I don't know if it's good or bad but we have conflicts and differences, and I say I'm not sure if it's good or bad because it's always for the same reasons. It's not like we're always fighting about new things or finding surprises. I mean I know clearly what bothers him about me (directed conversation to her daughter for some seconds) so it's good, we do have arguments but it's usually about the same things, nothing new, and they are things like he says that are not deep, they are things, well, due to our different personalities. He is very organized, very methodical, and I am not, so it's things in regards to our personality that we clash but in more important things like he says, like our values, what's most important is our daughter, we're more homebodies and we like to take care of our family, we like to spend time together, etc. In all that we're fine, we are the same and think the same.

IV: Can you think of a time where you and your partner were able to overcome a challenge caused by the program?

MT: mmm no, not really. I'll repeat mmm no, even Wednesdays my mother-in-law would usually take care of my daughter, but this semester she couldn't come on Wednesdays anymore so my husband was coming home early from work every Wednesday to stay with her. Everything related to the program, he has found a way to support me, because he knows it's very important for me and for him also. Argue about something school related? Never.

IV (485): Do you believe that anything about the program had an effect in your relationship?

MT: indirectly, it's not like he gets upset for something school related but what I have noticed, I've noticed that for example if I have a lot of stress, something to submit for example and I don't finish, a lot of times our stress levels do not coincide, his work can be more calm and he says "let's watch a movie" or he's talking to me about stuff that's not very important or telling me a joke and I'm very stressed and not in the joking mood, in those moments yeah sometimes I explode or get angry or am in a bad mood and I answer him in a bad way and it's because of that, because I am very stressed and sometimes yeah he tells me to calm down but it's the only thing. Sometimes I channel my stress towards him because it's just us three, well even with our daughter sometimes, sometimes I do get angry and I get after her more or exaggerate on what she did for the same reason, the stress. I think it's the only thing, channeling my stress towards him.

IV: and that's it...

MT: yes, that's it.

IV: would you like to add anything else?

MT: mmm I think that truthfully, in relation to couples, it is very important to have the support of your partner. If it's been complicated for me and I have his support in all areas, financially, with time, and help I imagine that if that support is missing in any aspect it is much more difficult and it should be a very important role that will affect people to leave the program or not even begin a program. So I do feel very fortunate and am grateful to him for his support and like we mentioned since the beginning his expectations always knowing that it's very difficult since I had never attended a university in the United States and my English, I mean I spoke Spanish all my life in Mexico and he always, in a very natural way would make me feel or believe that I could do it and that I can do it. All that is very important, if it's not a spouse because you're not married then your parents or the people you live with is really important for them to support you in every aspect so that you can finish successfully otherwise you might fail half-way.

PARTICIPANT JW

Investigator (IV): what were the most difficult challenges that you faced while you were in the counseling program?

JW: with challenges you mean with the program or challenges off, personal?

IV: challenges with the program and that could have possibly affected your personal life?

JW: well challenge was actually working a full time job during your internship and practicum and internship II. That was a big challenge. And I would have to say, like for those semesters you talk about not having a social life, there wasn't much of a social life. That is basically, that was a big challenge but I did have someone in my life at the time...still in my life, but it made the relationship difficult at times, yes.

IV: okay, and how were you able to balance your family life? You're saying that there was not much of a social life, but what about your school life and family life?

JW: I was very fortunate, I had my parents that would take care of my daughter and if anyone, I think that made sacrifices was her through the three years of the program because I had to you know, drive to school then come back and she is the one that I think towards the end was like "okay mom, no more classes right?" So she was ready for a change because obviously I wasn't in her life the way I needed to be to go to her extra-curricular activities and stuff like that because I had all this I had to do.

IV: did you have to schedule time with her? Or the person that you're saying that...

JW: scheduling? mmm we both had very busy schedules but we just kind of told ourselves that we were gonna do our work during the week, get it done, and the weekends will be left to get out and have breathers and stuff like that. And it's the same thing with my family.

IV: did your family have any expectations of you while you were in the program?

JW: definitely, if I wasn't in class I better be over there picking my daughter up. Or if class ended early and I'll be honest with you I mean there were times when I think it was a semester that we had part of the class through zoom and I didn't tell my parents that I wasn't going all the way to Brownsville because that time, I utilized that time for me, I had to. They had a real hard time understanding how difficult to find "me time" was. So did I say some white lies? Of course I did! But I did it for me and the better of my own health.

IV: so did you have your own expectations?

JW: I did, I had my own expectations but at the same time, the way I looked at it was, I always put my faith in God. I mean God had a plan and when the time was right, when I was going to finish I was going to finish. So my expectations were based on what I felt I could handle, you know physically, emotionally, mentally; and when I could do more I would do more. Sometimes I think I didn't even think about expectations you're just on full adrenaline and going...that's what you're doing.

IV: you said that at the time that you were in the program you had someone and he's still there but it kind of affected.

JW: it's been, it's been a rough ride because we were dating and in the middle of us dating, or having an exclusive relationship he lost his job. So not only was I feeling like "here I am in internship" and having clients I was having to counsel I felt like I was sometimes a counselor at home. So I myself, the good thing, the positive thing, yes, there were somethings that were negative that maybe happened you know that the program took a lot of my time but at the same time it taught me things. It taught me ways to talk to people, I taught me ways of getting people help, even if it had something to do with not being in the clinic but people close to my life. So there were a lot of pros, I mean there were some cons but there was a lot of pros. So, I did what I had to do to get everybody in the clear and feeling in the clear to keep going.

IV: and did he have certain expectations of you while you were in the program?

JW: oh yes, doing well, he did but I would just kind of brushed it off my shoulders. Because like I said, as it is I am a very controlling person so to have someone else control me was not going to work. So I myself...he had expectations but the good thing it was like my [state of mind], it's what I would call it, you know getting me going, keeping me strong and getting to where I needed to get.

IV: do you think his expectations hurt your relationship in any way?

JW: no, not at all, no, no, no, not at all I think it's the stress levels I was under that maybe did some damage I mean, but other than that, that's part of life you're going to get that wherever you go.

IV: yeah, what I've been hearing from the interviews that I've done is that, the stress levels and how we come home and then we channel our stress to the people that are closest to us and then that turns into conflict and arguments and stuff like that.

JW: definitely, for you to say things it, say things that you probably normally wouldn't say because you are tired and angry, and just want to get through everything. But I mean for the most part, I mean, it made it through so it was just not easy. It just was not easy.

IV: what do you think was the most difficult part to get through?

JW: the program?

IV: like when it came to your relationship while you were in the program.

JW: amm, him hitting depression, and amm, you know as ethically or as a counselor although he is just someone I was dating or someone I am dating, I mean I had a choice I could've liked cooped if I wanted to ... to get that stress away from me but I wasn't going to do that. You know I stuck by him just like I would stick by my clients. And I went and got him help, I got him on medication and did the whole thing. And he's doing fine now I mean he's back to work and he was a doctor, he's a doctor so it was a very stressful time for him 'cause he had expectations of himself. So, I did what I had to do and got myself going and moving and it's kind of like we took turns. It's what we did.

IV: and do you think that there was something that you guys were doing together to keep your relationship, you said there's rough times, but to keep your relationship positive and so that it could make it through what you're telling me.

JW: well, yes, a lot of it was the support system, being of support, I mean obviously he's educated, I'm educated, understanding how important school is, understanding the importance of finishing, what the outcome is going to be. But now that is over, it's like trying to pick up the pieces that were broken during that time.

IV: and I mean, I can relate somehow to you, because that's why I'm doing this thesis, I'm like "I want to know if I was the only one that is going through this stuff" when it came to like my family and when it came to my partner because it's rough. You come home and you have so much and they're dealing with their stuff and you still try and help but at the same time you really can't, and then you're left with like a mess. And so, that's why I'm doing this, so that we can maybe have something to help people who are starting their program.

JW: right

IV: when it comes to their families and relationships. And I know we hear a lot about self-care...

JW: right

IV: but did you do anything yourself during this program for self-care.

JW: I did, I did, I know my limits, you know? I know when I start feeling a certain way, certain things, I mean if I needed to do some journaling that's what I would do. I needed to talk to somebody that's what I would do, I would get out, sometimes I would go out and exercise a little bit,

not a lot but I would do some to try to make myself feel better. I knew when it was time to step back and say “it’s time to just let go for a little bit of the program, do so”, and I did at one point of the program I think I left for a semester, because I was just really, really overwhelmed, but that was early on in the program. I would’ve thought that something like that would’ve happened to me at the very end but like I said, you’re on complete adrenaline you don’t even have time to think about what you’re feeling you’re just “go, go, go” and that’s it. And you when you get home you’re just ready to hit the bed and go the next day especially when you have a full time job, I mean that’s what I had.

IV: so you feel like our time for self-care is very limited?

JW: it’s very limited but you’ve gotta find it. You gotta find the way that’s soothing for you. And self-care sometimes for me was going out and not like drinking or anything like that, that was the worst possible thing I could do, but going out and going and seeing a movie, something that I wouldn’t normally do for myself, go see a movie or go to the island. You know I would preach to my clients, “go to the beach and just sit there and intake the tranquility”. You know here I’m preaching to them but I had to do it myself, that meant like go for a couple hours and just not listen to anything but the water by myself and just be comforted in that retrospect and that’s what I would do.

IV: How would you describe your relationship then at this point, ‘cause I know it’s the after math so how would you describe it at this point of your life?

JW: it’s a little sketchy because of the times that I was stressed out, I had a lot of things going on with school and work that I tended to take it out on that individual quite a bit, and they don’t seem to forget. So to say that I blame the program, I don’t blame the program it was a choice that I made to begin the program but it did affect it. But like I said, trying to pick up the pieces, you know I’m a firm believer that if things are meant to be they’re gonna happen and if they’re not, they’re not. So go from there.

IV: and what do you think that overall, program and family, what would you say to people who are starting the program when it comes to their families, their social life, their relationships, their jobs? If you were able to talk to people that were just starting what would you tell them about it?

JW: I think it would be more so just the advice of “make sure you organize yourself well” one, two “explain to your family, friends, significant other I mean ‘this is gonna be a journey and I’m not gonna be around for a while’”, and emphasize the importance of that so they realize that you’re not leaving them out it’s just part of what you need to do to get through, to be effective, to be successful at what you’re doing or trying to do, or what you’re trying to accomplish. You know it’s different for everybody I mean some people may be working a full time job, some people may not, and kiddos for those who aren’t because it’s gonna easier for you in some [aspects] but right now that I have nothing to do I don’t even know what to do with myself.

IV: yeah I'm kinda like that right now, like "what do I do? I'm just gonna do this I have nothing else" and so I think it's important for us to talk to people who are starting. I've had a few friends ask me "do you think it would affect? What do you think? Am I going to be able to spend time with my family?", "no, not really, not too much, not as much as you're used to, especially if you're working"

JW: Right, or if you have children that's the tough part.

IV: yeah, I don't have kids and I've always said it, I'm very, I think very highly of moms who are in the program because it's a lot of work. It's a lot of work and I can only imagine how much back and forth and trying to explain to your kids that you can't be there and all that. So I don't know if you want to add anything else.

JW: No, I mean other than the fact that it's a great program, I learned a lot, I can honestly say that I had taken a lot with me since I've graduated just what? a month ago and yeah it did hurt my relationships, it sure did, it's like I have friends that I had before that I don't call up on a regular basis because I really never had time to call them up then, it's like how do you pick up where you leave off? But then I do have those friends that I can pick up where I left off, I guess those are your true friends. So, yes it does affect your relationships, you know, at home and etcetera but you yourself, after, now that it's all over I know myself I'm just trying to find ways to put myself back into my kid's life and put myself back into the lives of others where I was separated myself from for such a long time just to get by, just to get through.

PARTICIPANT SJ

Investigator (IV): what have been the most difficult challenges that you have faced in the counseling program?

SJ: I think it would be, being able to time manage school, and work, and family. That's the hardest thing, the most challenging, because it's either you give 100% or 90% to school and the rest it would be for the family. And you still sacrifice one or the other.

IV: yeah. And where have you felt that you have sacrificed the most?

SJ: I think family. Family time, like there are those times that they'll call you and say "hey we're gonna go celebrate this and this family accomplishment" you know? Like a relative that got a promotion or a birthday or things like that and you won't be able to go because you have homework, you have to stay at work and do all you have to do in order to turn in those assignments that you have.

IV: and how have you been able to balance school life, social life, and work life? And family life?

SJ: I think that, 'cause I wasn't expecting that I was able to accomplish last semester because I had like a lot of classes, I had like three classes and practicum and I had to go to the clinic and see clients and I think that was the point where I was able to experience that I needed to, like a wakeup call, like I need to do something in order to make this work, because I started to get sick and get like really stressed out and amm, so, my, what I ended up learning from this semester is that I needed to be able to disconnect from work and from school when I was at home. So that I could enjoy my family, spend time with them, and schedule, mmm manage better my scheduling. I was able to mmm, for example have a day to do homework, have another day to spend with the family, have the rest of the week to go to school, to class, and work (chuckles).

IV: Yeah

SJ: so it was a matter of scheduling things the right way so that I could cope by spending time with my family.

IV: and do you feel like your family has certain expectations of you right now that you're in the counseling program?

SJ: yes and no, I think I have a very supportive husband because, for example, most of the week I am not here and he helps like around like cleaning and washing and all of that, spending time with my daughter, so I think that umm they, as long as I am finished with the program I think that is what they're looking for.

IV: that you finish.

SJ: yes that I finish, that ... that I focus, I concentrate in school and that's it.

IV: Does he have time expectations, like, he wants you to spend a certain amount of time with them?

SJ: I think he got used to having certain days for us, for example, Saturdays are our days, so it's kinda like, umm, eh, I have plans for us to do this and this and sometimes we do miscommunication and he won't tell me and I have like, I think about a test or something that I have to do and I don't tell him and then he gets kinda, a little bit upset, but he's okay with it and he's like "I know I understand that you have to do that". He's kind of strict you know like if I give him a day then it has to be that day.

IV: okay

SJ: but, I mean he doesn't expect the whole week for me to be with him like that, he does tell me though sometimes when he feels like, left behind, because it's like "I don't think you're spending enough time with me", the same with my daughter also because I found out that like, sometimes when I'm here doing homework after work, she comes and she's like, she doesn't want to go to sleep, she wants to be with me and she's like, "I miss you, I wanna spend time with you, can I sit down here with you while you do homework?" and I'm like "just for a little bit then go to bed okay?" "Okay".

IV: they want time

SJ: so they do want time and they do understand. Sometimes I take them to school when I have to meet with someone there or to do research or something they go with me and they go to the library or they go walk around and that works because it's motivation for her too. I see that, she tells me "I want to go to school when I grow up, and I want to do this and I wanna..." she says she wants to go to the same school I go, I hope (chuckles), wherever she wants to go but yeah so.

IV: okay and what about your expectations when it comes to your time with your family and school, like what are your expectations? Do you set a certain standard or you're just kinda like "I'm trying to get by"?

SJ: no I always, I think that is me, and it's been my personal goal to not be so hard on myself, because I'm always like "no, I have to do this and I have to do good in all these areas. If I slack off at work I feel so bad about myself, if I slack off at home I also feel bad, like I feel bad when I can't clean with my husband (chuckles) like seeing him, I get home and he has all of the clothes ready and putting it away and everything, I feel good and at the same time I feel bad about myself 'cause I'm like "I'm not helping I don't feel that I'm putting enough effort at home, or at

school, or at work. Even if I get “A’s” at school, I pass my classes and I get good comments, I feel like I didn’t do enough. So I do have high expectations.

IV: high expectations, and you feel bad when you’re not at home.

SJ: mmjum

IV: yeah, ‘cause I’m going through, I went through the same stuff, I like, I would get home and things were clean and I was like “well thank you” but I felt guilty

SJ: yes

IV: like i was guilty, I was like “man like I should be helping, I should be having dinner” I would be driving super late from class and be like “hey I’m picking up food ‘cause I didn’t have time to make anything, or did you pick up anything?” and so yeah, the expectations are different. How have you guys dealt with, you as a couple, like have you dealt with the expectations that the program gives us on, puts on us?

SJ: well, I talk a lot about the program to my husband and when things bother me, they bother him too. Umm when we discuss mmm class changes, okay “there may be this change that you may have to go to schools and do hours there so that when you graduate you know you can have...” any changes that happen at school I try to communicate to him and he’s like “how can they expect for you, for all of you to do all this” and he tries to like motivate me to advocate, mmm, we were talking about that maybe all of the ones that are gonna graduate this fall we applied for graduation late, so they’re like “no, now you won’t be able to walk” and he was so upset and he was like “how? Like, that’s not possible, this is a big milestone for all of you. If they don’t let you walk you need to do something, write a letter, go up the mmm ladder, talk to someone, do something about it, all of you”, I’m like “okay” (chuckles). I think that he would even go with me or something to fight.

IV: yeah, I think my husband would have too.

SJ: yeah

IV: and what about in your relationship? How do you guys keep a positive relationship with all the busy stuff that you have to do?

SJ: (sigh) ugh honestly I don’t know, I don’t know how we do it. I don’t know if it’s the, because we’ve been married for ten years, we’re going on ten years this year but we’ve been together longer so I think...at...we’ve been going through a lot of difficult times and good times also, and...I think that we always had pretty good communication so maybe that can be that is helping, it’s helping us to overcome all of these changes in all of the aspects because we always talk

even if I'm at school we're texting or whatever he plans to do he will tell me, we talk during lunch like when he gets his lunch hour we're always on the phone checking on each other, after school we do groceries together that's another thing (chuckles), the things that we have to do together we stick to do them together.

IV: so making sure that you spend that time...

SJ: that we spend that time, like as little time as I have available that we spend it together.

IV: yeah. You guys don't have like, date night? Like a set date night? 'Cause I know people do it, like umm

SJ: not right now...

IV: like we go on dates but's not like a set time

SJ: ajam

IV: but some people do...

SJ: no we don't really, we used, we used to, we've been trying in the past. I knew this year was gonna be like stressful, really, really stressful compared to other, other semesters because of my classes that they way I was gonna take classes because I want, I wanted to try to finish this fall. I didn't want to wait till next year, so I was gonna be packed with work and school, and I talked to him before in advance and we were like "okay this is what we want, we want you to graduate so we're gonna do it right?", but before we used to schedule like, a lot of things (chuckles), and it was good I mean it was working out but right now my time is so like little that we want, I think we just had a date yesterday and it happened like, kinda like accident so, date night we don't have (laughs).

IV: I know. And what do you do for self-care, you?

SJ: well...

IV: do you?

SJ: I don't have time for self-care (laughs)

IV: and I'm asking because part of like what I am trying to do is kinda show all the burdens a graduate student has, how it affects their family and how it like, personally we get taught self-care you know, people tell us, like in every class they're like "self-care, self-care, self-care, personal growth" but...

SJ: yeah...

IV: but how much do we apply it because we have no time to actually do it. And so that's why I'm asking if you do anything.

SJ: the most things that I do right now, before I used to be good, but right now...I think that going out, like going outside to the park for walks. My job for example, I drive a lot right? but I have the chance to, if I see a client, okay let's go to the park and let's appreciate nature, let's be able to do a little bit of exercise like walk or something like that, so mostly that's where I use a little bit of self-care. At home, what I do is, I try to disconnect like sometimes just like watch videos, relax, watch documentaries with my husband or a movie; with my daughter like waiting my nails, playing in her room watching cartoons or something like that. Exercise is not one of my things right now before it used to be, but I can't, that's one of my struggles like energy I don't have energy and I know it's because I don't exercise and in the mornings I tried to schedule something to go and workout or workout here at home, I can't. My husband used to go workout in the mornings, but now because he wants to amm, he's trying to go after work, that way in the mornings he stays with me (laughs) sleeping, he's like "no". Or before it would work better when he would go in the morning because he would spend the afternoon with us depending on the classes that I had but right now I don't have any time. Like I work, and from work I stop and go to school right away or go see clients. So yeah, exercise is not, like the only thing would be just relaxing. Eh, we went out of town last weekend, so that was kind of like a time for me to forget about school and work and just focus on knowing new things, learning new things, walking around, having fun.

IV: yeah

SJ: so those, since January, since this semester started, having time to go on a road trip has been very difficult for both of us.

IV: yeah, you don't have time.

SJ: no

IV: yeah. Do you believe that you have a satisfactory marriage? Satisfactory relationship at this moment?

SJ: yes

IV: and how would you describe your relationship right now?

SJ: (paused) fun, and mmm strong. I think it's strong because we've been...two years ago we went through something very difficult in our marriage and, at that moment, if you would've asked me at that time I would've been like "I don't know!" But right now I think that, the problem that we had made us even stronger. So I think that we (pause), we have grown together so

much and I think that's amazing like for us to go back and think of all the things that we've done together, how we developed new skills, how we learned more about each other, because we eventually keep changing right? And we changed together and we like the way things are now. So I think our relationship is, we'll be able to describe as strong, fun, and uh (paused), let me think of the word, 'cause we found like a balanced relationship.

IV: okay, and mmm was at any point that you've been in the counseling program that there was a challenge that kind of affected your relationship and that you guys were still able to overcome that challenge together?

SJ: yes and I will go back to that...

IV: to that?

SJ: to that episode that happened two years ago. It was, it was very hard for us, we were able to get out of that...you know like when you have a strong relationship with all the members of your family and something happens and it kind of shakes it all to the point where you see like things crumbling, right?

IV: mmjum

SJ: and eventually, you don't know how, I guess we were able to like put it back together and make it even stronger. And that's what happened to us, not two years ago like a year and a half ago while I was going through the program, and it did make me think like "you know what? Maybe this is the time for me to take a break, focus on my family, and then go back to school. But then I decided that, 'cause I kept thinking about how everybody says how hard it is for kids when you, they go through a traumatic event and you kind of remove everything and make it even more traumatic because it's not the same, they're not, their routine is not the same so I was kinda like, I was like "no, why am I gonna change this also? If it's gonna affect in some way, no", so I kept going to school, and continued to motivate myself. We did different things, like for example, we took a trip just the two of us where we were able to feel protected again, we were able to feel that we were strong, and had fun and forget about all the negative things that had happened at that moment, and I think that, I don't regret about that, I think that was the best thing that both of us did for her, for our daughter.

IV: mmjum, so being able to get away and just reconnect.

SJ: kinda reset everything as a family. And maybe that's what made us keep going, both of us at school and at work for him, right?

IV: Mjuum, and was it something that, was like, and you don't have to be real specific or anything but was it something that was kind of school related or was it something just like, personal?

SJ: it was personal.

IV: but you were going through the program so it was...

SJ: yes I was going through the program. Even when I was able to talk to someone that was going through the program about what had, what was happening at home, even she was like, "how can you go to school?", and I guess like it didn't really click until she said that, that I started thinking well there's no thing, why would I change that you know? Yeah things happen at home but that doesn't mean that I'm gonna stop everything.

IV: Right...

SJ: 'Cause she was like "I wouldn't be able to like keep going to school and because of what happened in your family", it's something, it was something really bad, right? So I, I guess, maybe I don't know I triggered without wanting, I triggered something... I don't know if I triggered something and she kind of like remembered what she going through difficulties or something like that and how she felt, you know? back then, but at that moment was when I started thinking maybe doubted to continue with the program, "maybe I should wait and focus on my family", and I was like "no, I'm gonna continue, I'm gonna keep going, we're gonna keep having our life the way it is, but not dismissing that problem.

IV: Yeah, acknowledging the problem and working through it. And umm, anything else that you think you can add to this in relation to what the counseling program, and I'm being very specific about the counseling program because we're in the program and I think it's kind of one of the long programs like it's one of the longest programs right now, and I've seen like what we were talking about when I presented this proposal I was like "it's not just showing up to class, there's all these group projects, and proposals, and we have to do presentations, like we have to do a presentation in every class, so we don't get a break, and then seminars and then book readings, it's just so, I guess full of stuff, that I was like "I wonder how much it's affecting our families or ourselves when it comes to your families", so I don't know if there is anything else that you would like to add in relation to that.

SJ: I think that I've been, I don't know if blessed would be the word but, I think the professors have been very helpful. The professors that I've had so far, amm, whenever we have things that we need to do... that make us put things at school, like our time, due dates, things like that, they've been very understanding about that with me, and I've heard that from other students too; not all of them (laughs) but it is a lot, it's a lot of commitment to go for a master's degree, for example, my husband would like to continue with his education but he understands that because it's a lot of time that I'm gonna be putting into school right now, he's on hold. It's like, "when you finish then I'm next and I'm gonna continue with my master's", so like, the perfect world would be for both of us to kind of like at the same time but now he feels like "you know what I

have to do it and I can't wait for you to finish so I can continue". Amm, it is a long program, that's something that sadly there's nothing we can do as students or faculty that's the way it is for state requirements but maybe don't be too much...mmm the assignments are too much, group proposals, the reading of that extra book, we have a lot of books to read especially when we're in practicum and internship we have a lot of research that we need to do for each individual client that we have, not everything works for everyone. Plus, we have to read this and we have to meet with other students so that we can be able to finish, and work, and turn in good quality work and not something done at the last minute.

IV: yeah, and then family life.

SJ: mmjum, I think that having in mind that not every student has a strong support system. There's, and our lives are not perfect right, so there's gonna be moments that we are not balanced and being conscious of that, and have a little bit of more empathy. But other than that the expectations of us are so high as students, they want us to do a lot of things. And it's sad because at the end we should be proud right!? Towards the end of the program but sometimes we're like "I'm tired of it, I just want to finish with this!" And we shouldn't be feeling like that, I think we should feel proud and at the same time a little bit sad because it's an end of a chapter in our life, and to feel like aaah frustrated, "I can't anymore!"

APPENDIX-FORMS

1. INFORMED CONSENT

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Informed Consent Form

The Lived Experiences Of Counseling Graduate Students And The Impact Of Their Studies In Their Marital Satisfaction

Investigator: Yvanis Palacios, graduate student.

Background: We are conducting a research study to find common emerging themes among counseling graduate students and their marital satisfaction including program stressors and coping mechanisms implemented to improve marriage equality. This study is conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education. Participants have been selected using criterion sampling. Criteria for participants is, graduate students in the Counseling and Guidance program who are currently married or living as married.

Procedure: First, you be asked to schedule an individual interview of no more than 45 minutes. Then you will be taking part of a focus group interview of no longer than 45 minutes. These will be scheduled on two separate days. Individual and group interviews will be audio taped for transcription purposes. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All data will be kept confidential, therefore you will not have to disclose your name during the audio taped interviews. You will be asked to sign a separate permission form for the audio recording. Pseudonyms will be used when recording data to preserve confidentiality.

Risks or Possible Discomforts Associated with the Study: There are no anticipated risks associated with your participation in this study.

Benefits of Participation: This study does not provide direct benefit to participants.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. If for any reason you decide that you would like to discontinue your participation, simply tell the researcher that you wish to stop.

Confidentiality: All data will be confidential and will be stored in secure storage. Informed consent forms will be stored separately and destruction of identifying information will take place three years after completion of the study. The only people with access to this data will be the principal investigator and faculty advisor. Disclosures of any information of illegal behavior such as abuse, intent to harm self or others, will be reported to the extent required by the law.

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
IRB APPROVED
IRB# 2017-044-02
Expires: 03/28/2018



1 of 2

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Informed Consent Form

Who to Contact for Research Related Questions: For questions about the research itself, or to report any adverse effects during or following participation, contact the researcher, Vanda S. Palacios at 956-376-9051, vanda.palacios@utrgv.edu. Or contact faculty advisor, James Whitmerberg at (956) 882-5841.

Who to Contact Regarding Your Rights as a Participant: This research has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Protection (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel that your rights as a participant were not adequately met by the researcher, please contact the IRB at (956) 665-2889 or irb@utrgv.edu.

Signatures: By signing below, you indicate that you are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study and that the procedures involved have been described to your satisfaction. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form for your own reference.

Participant's Signature

Date

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
IRB APPROVED
IRB# 2017-044-02
Expires: 03/26/2018



2 of 2

2. AUDIO RELEASE FORM

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Audio Release Form

THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF COUNSELING GRADUATE STUDENTS AND THE IMPACT OF THEIR STUDIES IN THEIR MARITAL SATISFACTION

Researcher: Vanja S Palacios

Phone: 956-376-9053

Email Address: vanja.palacios01@utrgv.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. James Wittenberg

I hereby give permission to Vanja Palacios to audio record my responses during the interview for this study, *The Lived Experiences of Counseling Graduate Students and the Impact of Their Studies in Their Marital Satisfaction*. I further understand that researchers will use a pseudonym to identify me and that neither my name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audio recording or transcript of my recorded responses. The recorded material will only be used for research purposes. As with all research consent, I may at any time withdraw permission for audio recorded material of me to be used in this research project.

I acknowledge that there is no compensation for allowing myself to be audio recorded.

I am permitting the review and transcription of my recorded interview by the investigators. The recorded material will be securely stored under lock and key in faculty advisor's office for approximately 3 years. After that time, all recorded data will be destroyed. No one other than the investigators will have access to the data.

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please keep a copy of this sheet for your records.

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
IRB APPROVED
IRB# 2017-044-02
Expires: 10/01/2019



3. IRB APPROVAL LETTER



The Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Protection (IRB)
Division of Research, Innovation, and Economic Development
Office of Research Compliance

March 20, 2017

To: Vanita Palacko

Cc: James Whitteberg

From: Institutional Review Board

Subject: Approval of a New Human Research Protocol

IRBNet ID: 1019133-1

IRB# 2017-044-02

Project Title: The Lived Experiences of Counseling Graduate Students and the Impact of Their Studies on Their Mental Satisfaction

Dear Researcher,

The IRB protocol referenced above has been reviewed and **APPROVED ON March 27, 2017.**

Based on approval: Exempted B, Exempted 7

Approval expiration date: March 28, 2018

Recruitment and Informed Consent: You must follow the recruitment and consent procedure that were approved. If your study uses an informed consent form or study information booklet, you will receive an IRB-approved stamped IRB of the document(s) for distribution to subjects.

Modifications to the approved protocol: Modifications to the approved protocol (including recruitment methods, study procedures, surveys/interview questions, personnel, consent form, or subject population), must be submitted to the IRB for approval. Changes should not be implemented until approved by the IRB.

Approval expiration and renewal: Your study approval expires on the date noted above. Before that date you will need to submit a continuing review request for approval. Failure to submit this request will result in your study (including subject) on the approval expiration date.

Data retention: All research data and signed informed consent documents should be retained for a minimum of 3 years after completion of the study.

Closure of the Study: Please be sure to inform the IRB when you have completed your study, have graduated, and/or have left the university as an employee. A final report should be submitted for completed studies or studies that will be completed by their respective expiration date.

Approved by:

Dr. Wendy Lawrence Fowler
Vice Chair/acting Chair, Institutional Review Board

4. RECRUITMENT FLYER

**PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR
RESEARCH OF LIVED EXPERIENCES OF COUNSELING
GRADUATE STUDENTS AND THE IMPACT OF THEIR
STUDIES IN THEIR MARITAL SATISFACTION**

Looking for volunteers to take part in a study of the experiences of counseling graduate students and the impact of their studies in their marital satisfaction

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to participate in a personal interview and in a focus group session.

Your participation would involve 2 sessions,
Each of which is approximately 45 minutes.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,
please contact:
Vanis S Palacios
Department of Counseling and Guidance
at
956-376-9053
Email: vanis.palacios01@utrgv.edu

The study has been reviewed and approved by the
Research Ethics Review Board, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

5. PROFESSOR PERMISSION SCRIPT

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley **Professor Permission Script**

My name is Vania S Palacios, I am a graduate student from the Department of Counseling and Guidance at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). I would like to ask permission to enter your classroom to invite your students to participate in my research study. My study is about finding common emerging themes among counseling graduate students and their marital satisfaction including program stressors and coping mechanisms implemented to improve marriage quality

As part of participation, students will be asked to participate in individual interviews and focus group. Participation in this research is completely voluntary, they may choose not to participate without penalty. All data will be confidential and will be stored in secure storage. Informed consent forms will be stored separately and destruction of identifying information will take place three years after completion of the study.

If allowed, I would like to come in at the end of class time. I will ask you to please exit the classroom prior to and during students' involvement in my study to reduce any possible feeling of coercion to participate in the study.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UTRGV Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB).

If you have questions about the researcher, please feel free to contact me at 956-376-9043 or email at vania.palacios01@utrgv.edu. Or, if you have any questions regarding your students' rights as participants in the study, please call the IRB at (956) 665-2889 or email at irb@utrgv.edu.

Please email me back letting me know if I have your permission to enter your classroom and recruit your students.

6. IN-PERSON RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley **Recruitment Script**

My name is Vania Palacios, I am a(n) graduate student from the Department of Counseling and Guidance at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). I would like to invite you to participate in my research study.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UTRGV Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB).

In order to participate you must be married or in a committed relationship and a student of the graduate program in Counseling and Guidance.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary, you may choose not to participate without penalty.

As a participant, you will be asked to set up a time for interview with me and attend one focus group. All data will be confidential and information will be reported utilizing codes to avoid identifiers.

If you would like to participate in this research study, please contact me to make an appointment at 956-376-9053 or at vania.palacios01@utrgv.edu. I will then provide you with the date for the focus group.

If you have questions later, please contact me by telephone at 956-376-9053 or by email at vania.palacios01@utrgv.edu.

You may also contact my faculty advisor Dr. James Whittenberg, at james.whittenberg@utrgv.edu

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Vania S. Palacios was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. When she was 13 years old, her family migrated to the United States to be closer to family and to obtain better opportunities for the future. After graduating high school Vania attended Southern Nazarene University in Bethany, Oklahoma, where she received a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology and Youth Ministry in December of 2009. After a few years, she attended the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley where she received a Master's of Education in Counseling and Guidance in August of 2017. Email: vapalaci@gmail.com