

**Increasing Marital Adjustment in Graduate Students and  
their Spouses through Relationship Enhancement**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Graduate school for most students can be quite stressful. When combined with the responsibility of being a spouse, parent, and/or employee, the stress is elevated. Research has indicated that the greatest area of discord for married graduate students and their nonstudent spouses is communication. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of a relationship enhancement program on the marital adjustment of graduate students and their spouses. The sample consisted of 28 married graduate students and their nonstudent spouses. These couples were randomly assigned to one of two treatment groups or a control group. Some of the treatment group participants received one-on-one training by a therapist certified in Relationship Enhancement (RE) Training while others received the training through an RE self-study manual (Guernsey, 1987). Marital adjustment was measured pre and post to intervention by the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed significant differences between treatment group and control group as measured by scores of marital adjustment. This study also provides suggestions for how institutions of higher education can provide support to married graduate students and their spouses on college campuses.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Graduate school for most students can be quite stressful, namely due to greater demands. When one combines graduate school with added responsibilities such as spouse, work, and parenting, the stress is often elevated. This elevated stress can have a profound effect on the student's marriage. The constraints of time and pressure to complete graduate-level work can place an inordinate amount of pressure on the marriage.

More than 42% of the graduate student population is married (Current Population Reports, 1993). Those who are married tend to have responsibilities outside of their graduate schoolwork. These responsibilities may include the role of the wife, husband, mother, father, care provider, and breadwinner to name a few. Married graduate students' roles may be numerous and conflicting, which may lead to too much stress and a deteriorating marriage.

The focus of existing research on married graduate students is the marital adjustment of this population, and while divorce is not unique to graduate students, the research shows it is more prevalent among this population. Fischer (1981) and Namir (1982), in two separate studies, dealt with the married graduate student population and compared their sample to the general population. For instance, Fischer (1981) found that the Florida State University's married graduate students' rate of divorce was greater than the County of Leon, the State of Florida, and the nation. Namir (1982) found that in comparing three different groups of couples, the graduate school couples reported significantly more life stressors than non-graduate school couples, which Namir theorized may draw the graduate student couples apart more frequently than non-graduate student couples. In related studies, King (1996) found considerable anecdotal evidence

suggesting that the intensity of graduate studies combined with marriage yielded interpersonal conflict, emotional upset, and possibly divorce. Scheinkman (1988) believed that divorce is highly likely among graduate students. The author proposed a model of separation, which is believed to be "typical" among graduate students (p. 351). This model shows the couple moving from an initial sense of adventure and cohesion to an increasingly unsatisfied life during graduate school, and often times to divorce, which coincides with graduation.

#### Statement of the Problem

Although researchers like Nedleman (1991) have reported low levels of marital adjustment among graduate students, solutions to this problem have only been suggested. Writers in the field have suggested many areas to target within the marital relationship of graduate students, such as finances, roles, and the collegiate environment. But very few controlled studies were found to support any ideas. More specifically, no research was found that attempted to increase of marital adjustment in graduate students and their spouses. Therefore, in this study, the researcher will explore the potential for increased marital adjustment among graduate students and their spouses.

#### Background of the Problem

To understand the etiology of marital dissatisfaction in married graduate students, researchers and writers have analyzed various points of focus within the relationship. In 38 studies that dealt with married students enrolled in higher education, commonalties were identified by this researcher (Appendix A). The most often cited variable affecting married students was communication, followed by finances, sex, children, gender roles, and leisure. Not only was communication the most frequently cited variable of concern, communication appeared to be the pivotal variable when dealing with all other concerns cited. Communication provides

the basis for virtually all negotiation processes in which a person becomes involved (Breen, 1989).

According to the research, poor communication contributes to low marital adjustment in students, and conversely, enhanced communication acts as a potential safeguard for student marriages (Dickstein, 1991; Fischer, 1981; Gilbert, 1982; Giles, 1983; Hibbs, 1982; Higgins, 1983; Houser, Konstam, & Ham, 1990; McKeon & Piercy, 1980; McLaughlin, 1985; Rohr, Rohr, & McKenry, 1985; Torkildson, 1986). Because time constraints are a major concern among the married graduate population (Gilbert, 1982; Hedstrom & Hedstrom, 1983; Higgins, 1983; McLaughlin, 1985; Scheinkman, 1988), communication is often restricted, resulting not only in unresolved problems, but also added stress on the marriage. As the number of unresolved problems and the level of marital distress increases, marital satisfaction decreases (Christiansen & Shenk, 1991). "With less opportunity to focus on each others' needs and problems, effective communication becomes of paramount importance, yet it frequently deteriorates" (Dickstein, 1991, p. 472).

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of a relationship enhancement program on the marital adjustment of graduate students and their spouses. Specifically, quantitative methodology will be used to determine if marital adjustment of graduate students and their spouses can be increased by improving communication through Relationship Enhancement (RE) training.

Enabling student marital partners to improve direct communication can improve their marriage (Dickstein, 1991). The researcher believes that improving communication through a relationship-enhancing program is a viable solution for many problems (e.g., finances, sex,

children, roles, leisure activities) relevant to this population. While stress in married graduate students' lives may not be eliminated by way of improved relations or improved communication, it may be somewhat alleviated.

### Rationale for the Study

Research on the married graduate student population indicates that a correlation exists between attendance of graduate school and low marital adjustment. This is not surprising since graduate school by itself is quite stressful. In fact, it has been found that the marriages of graduate students are more at risk than the marriages of the general population (Fischer, 1981; Namir, 1982). Even learning can be affected by poor marital relationships in graduate school; higher GPA's were significantly correlated with higher marital satisfaction (Brown, 1983). When disturbed interpersonal relationships reduce the effectiveness of a students' work, graduate study is less cost-effective (Hibbs, 1982). In other words, if a student is distracted by marital discord, they may not derive the full benefit of a costly graduate education. Indeed, if a student is suffering through severe marital problems, discontinuing graduate school may be a viable option. Due to the financial costs, potential risk for divorce, and lower GPA's, it would be safe to assume that researchers and academic institutions would be very interested in this population. However, the research on this population is limited and mostly concentrated in the decade of the 1980s. This is surprising, since the enrollment of married graduate students continues to increase.

Of the research that does exist, the focus seems to be on which variables in the marital relationship contribute to the decreased levels of marital adjustment. Interestingly, no studies have been found that evaluated the effectiveness of marital intervention programs for the married graduate student population, even though intervention was a common recommendation found in

these studies. Why interventions for this population have not been studied is unknown and surprising.

Since communication is commonly cited as the most influential variable on marital adjustment, an intervention program that focuses on communication seems most appropriate. Of the marital adjustment programs, the Relationship Enhancement, or RE (Guernsey, 1977), training program seems to be the most appropriate since it focuses on teaching specific communication enhancement skills with the idea that when communication improves the other variables of marital discord will also improve. RE has almost three decades of research and practical use to support its efficacy. Numerous studies have been published about RE and it has been compared to major programs that purports to increase marital adjustment. RE is a sound, well respected, popular training program that increases marital adjustment through effective communication techniques.

### Research Questions

The research questions to be asked in this study are:

1. Can marital adjustment be enhanced in married graduate students through Relationship Enhancement training?
2. Can a self-study Relationship Enhancement (RE) training program (Guernsey, 1987) improve the marital adjustment of married graduate students?
3. Is RE training more effective in enhancing marital adjustment than a self-study approach?

The hypothesis statements are as follows:

1. There will be a significant difference in marital adjustment between graduate couples who receive RE training and those who receive no training.

2. There will be a difference in marital adjustment between graduate school couples who receive RE training and those graduate couples who use self-taught methods in RE.

### Significance of the Study

Marital adjustment among graduate students is important and there are many reasons why the academic community should be concerned. First, higher marital adjustment correlates significantly with higher grade point average (Mallinckrodt, 1983; Oyinlade, 1992; Yess, 1981) and fewer personal and social problems (Brown, 1983). In addition, it has been found that the failure of a romantic relationship can adversely affect students' academic performance (Kaczmarek, Backlund, & Biemer, 1991). Second, effective relationships can help make the strain of study bearable (Hibbs, 1982). Third, by enhancing marriages of graduate students, contributions to general competencies in other areas of life are evident, and globally society benefits when graduates enter the work force with effective interpersonal skills (Hibbs, 1982). In the United States, the number of graduate students not completing intended degrees has become very high (Torkildson, 1986). Students who fail to complete graduate programs are well hidden, but nonetheless a major cost incurred to our society (Mallinckrodt, Leong, & Fretz, 1989).

Despite the documented need for formal interventions, graduate students are one segment of the higher education population whose counseling needs have received modest attention when compared to undergraduates (Baker, 1993). Baker argued that this lack of attention is due to university and college counseling centers focusing on the traditional undergraduate population. Since the 1980s, a scant amount of research has been done on married graduate students. The

reason for the current lack of research is unknown. As the majority of graduate students are married, and many studies have identified factors contributing to marital dissatisfaction, the next logical step would be to attempt to enhance marital adjustment with this population. With previous researchers and writers identifying that graduate student marriages are troubled, investigation methods to improve these marital relationships are, indeed, a legitimate inquiry.

If an intervention is determined to be helpful in increasing marital adjustment of graduate students and their spouses, a great burden will perhaps be lifted from the students. Additionally, the likelihood of divorce will probably be diminished. Researchers interested in the marital relationships of graduate students and their spouses have commonly suggested that a therapeutic intervention with this population should target communication. Since marital dysfunction appears to be based more on communication deficits than specific content issues, changing the communication process is likely to result in more satisfying discussions (Margolin & Wampold, 1981) and to improve marital relationships. These findings will be helpful to counselors by providing them with a relationship enhancement tool that would assist graduate students wishing to enhance their marriage, or experiencing marital problems.

The results from this study may also contribute to informing married individuals entering graduate school about specific concerns and potential problem areas associated with this population. Specifically, the results may be used as a preventive measure to inform married students of stress resulting from graduate school, potential communication problems, and marital dissatisfaction. In addition, these results may be helpful to graduate couples making decisions as to the preventative or early treatment actions that can be taken to deal with current or future marital adjustment levels. Being alerted to potentially difficult times may serve to reduce tensions in graduate student marriages (Lewis, 1983).

## Definition of Terms

### Marriage

U.S. legalized marriages of opposite sexed couples, not divorced or separated.

### Graduate Student

Student who is currently enrolled full time (as defined by the college) in a master's level-program.

### Marital Communication

The exchange of feelings and ideas, as husbands and wives try to understand one another and see their problems and differences from each other's point of view (Bienvenu, 1969).

### Relationship Enhancement (RE) Training

A brief therapy for couples that focuses on enhancing communication techniques.

### Marital Adjustment

Happiness or satisfaction shared by both partners with the marital relationship, as evidenced through effective communication.

## Assumptions and Limitations

There are several assumptions in this study.

1. Graduate school is stressful, especially for married students and their spouses.
2. The stress of graduate school can lead to marital dissatisfaction.
3. Communication is the most prevalent concern among married graduate students.
4. Enhancing communication can lead to increased marital adjustment in graduate students and their spouses.

A limitation to this study is generalizability; this study uses a limited number married graduate students, enrolled in a specific master's degree program. As a result, this study will not be generalized to all married graduate students. Another limitation is in the procedures; the researcher is also the manipulator of variables. As a result, the researcher could unknowingly bias the results.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of the Literature

Graduate school can, unfortunately, be quite stressful for many students. Stressors such as tension, frustration, and anxiety coupled with the demands and pressures of graduate school can be detrimental not only to one's academic performance, but also to one's physical and mental health. In fact several authors reported a positive correlation between graduate school and one's physical and emotional health (Goplerud, 1980; Mallinckrodt, Leong & Kralj, 1989; Valdez, 1982). Additionally, the demands and stressors associated with graduate school can also have devastating effects on one's marriage, for those who are married. Because of this, interventions designed to ameliorate the overwhelming stress brought on by a combination of graduate school and marriage are needed.

In this chapter, the researcher will provide the reader with a thorough overview from the literature on stressors that are likely to affect the married graduate student along with interventions that have been suggested by various researchers. First, stress is defined. Second, specific stressors identified by researchers that affect marriages of graduate students and their spouses will be examined. Third, interventions designed to ameliorate stressful marriages will be discussed. Fourth, marital enrichment training programs will be contemplated. Last, the Relationship Enhancement (RE) program will be investigated.

#### Stress

Despite the fact that stress is a very common human experience, it is surprisingly difficult to define. This is due to the fact that stress develops from different perceived sources, and different people exhibit stress in different ways. Stress is defined as the way one reacts physically, mentally, and emotionally to various conditions, changes, and demands in life. It is a

natural and common occurrence in humans. In fact, stress is the body's natural way to protect itself; when stress occurs, as in when a person perceives a threat, the body reacts by producing hormones that prepare it for action. These reactions are helpful to the body, but can be harmful when the body has to endure the stress for extended periods of time such as days, weeks, or months. When people endure extended periods of stress, they may become tired, anxious, or depressed. But people do not always have to endure long-term stress. They can identify their stressors, and take steps to alleviate them in a variety of ways.

### Stressors Affecting Married Graduate Students

As mentioned previously, graduate school can be quite stressful for some students. If students are married and are trying to manage the role of spouse, parent, and student simultaneously, the stress for some can become even greater. According to Nedleman (1991), Pasco (1991), and Sokolski (1995), stressors such as finances, sex, children, gender roles, housework, and leisure are likely to contribute to low marital adjustment among married graduate couples. Another stressor, which is often viewed as the most important among the married graduate population, is communication. The student spouse, preoccupied with academics, may be mentally and physically exhausted, resulting in less desire to talk and listen to their spouse. Communication, and the impact upon married graduate students under stress, will be discussed in the next section.

Understanding the impact of stress on married graduate students requires an understanding of stressors that are likely to have a negative effect on the marriage. It is important to note that the stressors listed in the following pages have not been individually recommended to be a central focus for increasing marital adjustment. Instead, they have been designated as

stressors unique to the married graduate student population. Each of these stressors mentioned will be explored in greater detail in the following section.

### Communication Concerns

Several studies on graduate couples found communication to be the most prevalent issue of concern among graduate couples. For instance, in Higgins' (1983) study, all 141 respondents stated in open interviews that the graduate program had resulted in limiting interaction with their spouses. This limited interaction, which often results in a lack of communication, was an across-the-board response from students in all phases of the graduate programs at three major California universities. Higgins went on to point out that the decreased communication made both student and nonstudent spouse feel that they are less important to the other and not valued, which ruins the quality of a marriage.

In surveys involving 31 responding couples, Pasco (1991) found communication with spouses to be one of the three most important issues among graduate students. Sokolski (1995) also found communication to be the most prevalent response to open-ended questions regarding the primary aspect of successful marriages among 161 married graduate students. In fact, communication was cited more frequently than physical intimacy, friendship, and love combined. In a study by Barker (1981), the highest scores in marital adjustment ratings among 73 graduate students correlated with empathetic listening and good communication. She found that those respondents who scored extremely high on the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959) took more responsibility in expressing their feelings and shared more of their lives with their spouse. Also noted by Barker was that those respondents who scored high on the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test shared more of their lives with each other, including plans for the future.

From studying marital adjustment of graduate students, McKeon and Piercy (1980) concluded that lack of communication plays a major role in decreased marital adjustment, particularly in those students whose spouses are not enrolled. They suggested that these students may be at more risk for marital problems because of the lack of communication stemming from leading significantly different lives. The pursuit of separate lives may naturally reduce communication, resulting in increased stress between the couple. Longitudinal investigations show that poor communication skills precede the onset of marital distress (Markman, 1981; Noller & Callan, 1989).

According to Poplin (1993), improving communication will help couples face stress in a healthier manner. Communication skills are key because spouses must learn to express their feelings, clearly identify behaviors that need to be changed, and engage in efficient negotiations. Since marital dysfunction appears to be based more on communication deficits than specific content issues, changing the communication process is likely to result in more satisfying discussions (Margolin & Wampold, 1981). Giles (1983) used ethnographic interviews with 16 couples to examine the effects of doctoral study on marriages. Her findings indicated that communication, in the form of encouragement and listening, is the most important source of support given by a spouse to the married graduate student. Because of the communication breakdown among married graduate students, colleges and universities must become aware of the needs of graduate students.

McKeon and Piercy (1980) recommended that a marriage counselor be employed at university counseling centers to assist married graduate students with communication techniques. Hibbs (1982), who teaches an elective course at Pepperdine University specifically for graduate students and spouses, writes, "It is my view that the abnormally high failure rate among

marriages of graduate students is neither inevitable nor desirable, and could be reduced by a program designed to enhance these marriages" (p. 8). Through his course, Hibbs attempts to help married graduate students and spouses cope with stress through skill development, including effective communication. Hypothesizing a protocol that married graduate students typically follow, Scheinkman (1988) stated that it is common for these couples to cut off communication in the face of mounting frustration and unhappiness. Scheinkman recommended that the university counselor intervene by re-establishing negotiations, thus increasing communication between partners.

### Financial Concerns

In addition to communication or the lack of, another stressor that is likely to affect married graduate students is finances. Several researchers (Kahn & Sharpley, 1980; McLaughlin, 1985; McRoy & Fisher, 1982; Scheinkman, 1988) believe that financial concerns contribute to marital dissatisfaction among married graduate students. According to Gilbert (1982), stress and marital strain may result from having to sustain a family with marginal financial resources. It is not uncommon for a married couple to have one unemployed spouse, and that spouse is typically the full-time student. In addition to only one income, the employed spouse may lack the experience for well-paying positions. Finally, an otherwise employable spouse may have difficulties in finding employment if the couple had to relocate in order for a spouse to attend graduate school. This could be a significant problem even for a well-trained, skilled, and/or well-educated spouse, if in a geographic area of high unemployment or limited job opportunities.

A study conducted by Namir (1982) used three different groups, two of which comprised nonstudent couples, and one comprised married graduate student couples. The married graduate student group reported the most arguments of the three groups, and these arguments most

frequently revolved around finances. Although it is not unusual for married couples to quarrel over finances, couples with one spouse in graduate school full time may endure the additional burden of a very high tuition bill. Scheinkman (1988) argued that the nature of this one income dyad places the student spouse in a position of dependence. This dependency has been found to be an extremely troublesome situation for the traditional marriage (McRoy & Fisher, 1982; Van Meter & Agronow, 1982).

### Sexual Concerns

Sexual concerns are also a major stressor for married graduate couples (Brannock, 1995). Sexuality can comprise a major part of a relationship, and with the stress of graduate school, the sex life of married graduate students can be negatively affected. Hibbs (1982) contended that graduate school can easily take precedent over the marriage and adjusting to the sexual needs of both spouses is a commonly mentioned concern among this population. For example, McRoy and Fisher (1982) noted that graduate couples reported that being too tired for sex caused the most arguments in their relationship.

### Parenting Concerns

As mentioned previously, graduate school attendance can be quite stressful, and when combined with the demands of child care, it can become overwhelming. Although most graduate student couples are childless (Gilbert, 1982), parenting has been found to be a major contributor to marital dissatisfaction among married graduate students (Charles, 1983; Fisiloglu, 1990; Gilbert, 1982; McLaughlin, 1985; Nedleman, 1991). Unlike nonstudent couples, the graduate student couple may have one spouse working and one spouse in school full time. Essentially, the graduate student couple has both spouses with full-time obligations outside the home. This may lead to child care stressors. In addition, at the end of a workday, a nonstudent family can decide

to participate in family-related activities, whereas the graduate student couple may not have that option because the student spouse may be studying or in class. If one spouse is working all day and providing child care all night, this may lead to resentment of the other spouse.

Houseknecht, Vaughan, and Macke (1984) found that women who had children previous to, or during graduate school, were more likely to divorce or separate than those women in graduate school who did not have children. Giles (1983) contended that because of the added home responsibilities that children create, time for academics becomes limited. Higgins (1983) found that heavy academic schedules combined with child care responsibilities place tremendous pressure on female students who are also mothers. It appears that many female graduate students are required to continue to perform child care and household duties, whereas married male graduate students tend to perform less of these kinds of duties (Torkildson, 1986). The nonstudent spouse may not comprehend the enormous work involved in caring for children when combined with the additional burden of graduate school. These combined stressors may place the marriage at risk for unhappiness and divorce.

### Gender Role Concerns

Gender role concerns are a contributing source of stress among married graduate students (Hibbs, 1982; McLaughlin, 1985). There may be a difference in how genders perceive graduate school. According to Mallinckrodt, Leong, and Kralj (1989), women in graduate school have more interpersonal concerns with significant others than men. They also found that female graduate students experienced more psychological symptoms of stress than men. In a study of 16 couples, in which one spouse was enrolled in graduate school, Namir (1982) found that women reported more life stress events than men.

Gilbert and Rachlin (1987) believed that graduate school is related to marital conflict, particularly when married women students develop new values and attitudes. Houseknecht,

Vaughan, and Macke (1984) found that marriages usually ended after women began graduate school. For married men, higher education may represent a necessary sacrifice for career enhancement, but for married women it may represent a challenge to traditional roles, which consequently may require greater adjustments to the pre-established patterns (Huston-Hoberg & Strange, 1986). These pre-established gender roles are viable if they support individuation while giving the spouse a sense of belonging in the marital relationship (Scheinkman, 1988). But the demands of graduate school may be all encompassing, leaving the partners feeling emotionally distant (Nedleman, 1991) and allowing the nonstudent spouse to develop a sense of isolation (Gilbert, 1982).

Another potential scenario for married graduate students is that their roles become conflicted, leading to role incompatibility (Lange, 1980). This can be quite stressful and lead to marital discord if one spouse believes the other is not taking on enough responsibilities. For example, married female graduate students may have to contend with multiple and contrasting roles such as student, wife, housekeeper, and primary child care provider (Torkildson, 1986). “Because women are responsible for the majority of domestic tasks, role strain is a more significant factor for female than male students” (Ellett, 1994, p.#29). Roles of student and spouse, regardless of respective genders, are competing for scarce time and personal commitment. Such role competition and role conflict produces strain on the marriage (Rohr, Rohr, & McKenry, 1985). Role competition is stressful and incompatible with a well-adjusted marriage.

### Leisure Concerns

A lack of leisure time has also been found to be a stressor among married graduate students. As mentioned before, the human body is designed for stress, but only short-term stress.

Without leisure time, the stress of graduate school may not be alleviated. It is not unreasonable to state that continuous stress, without the benefits of leisure time, may have a negative effect on a marriage. In fact, Ellett (1994) contended that graduate relationship adjustment is influenced by leisure activities.

As stated previously, graduate school can be overwhelmingly time consuming. The demands of graduate school can exceed those of a typical eight-hour work day; academic pressures often take away time allotted for marital and family activities (McLaughlin, 1985). Leisure activities tend to be pushed aside for the sake of pursuing a graduate degree. Indeed, there may be no additional money available for leisure and recreation after the essentials are paid. This may be viewed as a temporary sacrifice for the graduate student (Nedleman, 1991), but it is one that may eventually take its toll and inevitably become one more stressor (McLaughlin, 1985; Nedleman, 1991; Pasco, 1991; Scheinkman, 1988). In addition, the nonstudent spouse may feel the stress from the lack of leisure and recreation activities, and become resentful of the sacrifices being made. As a result, the nonstudent spouse may become unsupportive of his/her spouse's academic pursuits. In addition, if the nonstudent spouse has time and money to pursue activities on their own, this time away from each other may lead to marital discord.

#### Additional Stressors That May Affect Married Graduate Students

##### Widening of the Intellectual Gap

Intellectual growth may be spawned by the pursuit of graduate education. Although intellectual growth may be considered a noble pursuit by many people, the average person may not take into consideration how intellectual change may affect close family members. Newly acquired intellectuality not only may change one's thinking, but also actions, including communication. To faculty, intellectuality may be viewed as positive growth within a student,

but it may strike fear in the nonstudent spouse. This widening of the intellectual gap can be considerably stressful, especially for the nonstudent spouse who sees their student spouse growing intellectually apart from them, making it more difficult to communicate.

The widening of the intellectual gap between student and nonstudent spouses has been a topic of moderate discussion in the literature. For instance, Rohr, Rohr, and McKenry (1985), stated that problems are likely to occur when one spouse pursues continued intellectual growth and the other does not. Couples who are both enrolled in graduate programs may have more common topics, goals, and understand their graduate pursuits more than couples with only one spouse in graduate school. Higgins (1983) stated that the widening of the intellectual gap may cause a change in the way of thinking and communicating that upsets the marital balance. In other words, the student-spouse may be engrossed in a stimulating world of new ideas while the nonstudent spouse is at home or employed at a routine job. Gradually the marriage becomes a utilitarian part of life (Hibbs, 1982), and topics for discussions between spouses are diminished. The working nonstudent spouse may even become resentful due to their initial support of their spouse who continues to grow more intellectually distant.

This widening gap may be more pronounced in couples who relocate in order for one to attend graduate school. Epstein (1982) found that relocation transitions do pull spouses in different directions due to the loss of social contacts for both partners in a study that included two groups of couples. Half the group in the study had relocated to attend graduate school, the other half enrolled but did not have to relocate in order to attend the same graduate school. Both groups had one graduate student spouse and one nonstudent spouse. Satisfaction with self and couple were measured by the Gough Adjective Checklist and the Marital Adjustment Test, respectively. Both men and woman who relocated scored significantly lower on self-satisfaction,

and relocated couples tended to report lower levels of marital adjustment than those who did not relocate. Yet the social loss in graduate student couples Epstein wrote about may be replaced for the student spouse who has colleagues to engage in conversation, and who has a sense of purpose through a specific goal. This situation may leave the nonstudent spouse with no purpose, no social outlet, and with no one to share their ideas. Overall, individuals are more likely to develop mutually supportive relationships with others who share similar experiences and lifestyles (Gottlieb, 1981).

One way for graduate student couples to share similar life experiences is to communicate them to each other. Giles (1983) suggested that the nonstudent spouse become involved in the spouse's work by reading or typing papers and discussing ideas. These techniques improve interaction between spouses, minimize the differences in intellectual attainment, and give formal ways enhancing camaraderie in the marriage. Through the student spouse explaining their newly acquired intellectual concepts to their nonstudent spouse, several positive goals may be achieved: They may enhance communication with their spouse, they may develop ways of explaining their theories so that even nonacademics can understand, and they may come to a better understanding of their own new ideas and how they fit into their marital relationship.

### Academic Attainment

Intellectuality is a subjective term, but academic attainment can be objectively measured with relative ease. The two concepts can be viewed as comparable, so it is not surprising that the literature suggests similarities. A couple can have achieved significantly different academic degrees and, like the widening of the intellectual gap, this could place stress on the marriage. Academic attainment of the nonstudent spouse has shown to be a factor in researching marital happiness of married graduate students. Two studies found that among graduate students, the

more schooling the nonstudent spouse has, the higher the marital satisfaction. Fisiloglu's (1990) results indicated that subjects whose spouses had a master's degree had higher perceived marital adjustment than subjects whose spouses had a high school diploma or bachelor's degree. Also, subjects whose spouses had a doctoral degree had higher perceived marital adjustment than the bachelor's degree group. Higgins (1983) found that for each increase in the nonstudent spouse's education level (e.g., high school, bachelor's, master's, doctorate), the Dyadic Adjustment Scale score (possible 0 to 151 points) of the graduate student spouse went up by 3.76 units. Thus, it is not unreasonable to conclude that couples who have more in common academically may communicate more effectively, share a sense of oneness, and suffer less stress.

### Household Tasks

Household tasks are behaviors that are performed in and around the home. In contrast, gender roles are a variable concept that may be found in all aspects of life. Depending on the couple, household tasks may or may not be seen as a gender role issue. Household tasks are a major contributing source of stress and marital dissatisfaction for couples in graduate school (Epstein, 1982; Gilbert, 1982; Hibbs, 1982; McLaughlin, 1985). The student's increased absence from the home, and involvement in school work while at home, creates additional household responsibilities for the nonstudent spouse (Giles, 1983). Furthermore, Giles contended that attempts to resolve this unbalance may lead to marital conflict. Conflict may occur in part because the nonstudent spouse may not understand the demands of graduate school (Lewis, 1983) and the ensuing lack of effort toward household responsibilities by the student spouse. If there is a disagreement over domestic duties, women perceive the spouse as unsupportive and are likely to become depressed (Vanfossen, 1981). Scheinkman (1988) believed that couples in a student/nonstudent relationship have difficulty defining and agreeing what constitutes equitable

and fair when it comes to household responsibilities. Scheinkman's beliefs may be compounded by the well-established notion that women perform the vast majority of household tasks (Stohs, 1992). This notion presents a problem in both scenarios; the woman may be expected to perform all housework if she is the nonstudent spouse or the student spouse, regardless of whether she maintains a full-time job.

### Marital Neglect

Marital neglect can be quite stressful to both partners. When the spouse begins graduate school, the nonstudent spouse may feel satisfied having to take a back seat in the relationship. This back seat mentality may be born out of feelings of sacrifice for the student spouse's academic career, or feelings of not wanting to interfere in the student spouse's mission. Unfortunately, this may lead to further neglect if the student takes the marriage for granted or assumes it will take care of itself (Giles, 1983). The nonstudent spouse may eventually feel resentful that the partner is so involved in academic work and university life (Higgins, 1983). Similarly, Epstein (1982) noted that in open interviews many couples talked about their need to put their relationship on the "back burner" in order to cope with daily demands; ironically, these same couples turned to each other for support. Giles (1983) duplicated these results stating that the nonstudent spouse has been found to be the primary source of support among these graduate couples, which is contrary to Plaut's (1990) beliefs. He contended that the stress of education beyond a bachelor's degree combined with married life leads the student to rely on colleagues for intellectual and emotional support. According to Plaut, this intimacy can be perceived as competition, and it can be quite threatening to the nonstudent spouse whether it is justified or not. According to Ellett (1994), there is a difference in which female graduate students and their spouses express less attention. Ellett stated that women graduate students take on less traditional

roles, becoming less nurturing and more independent. Yet, at the same time, they seek more nurturing and less independence in their spouses. Men simply stop offering support because their wives are focusing more attention on graduate school and less on the relationship. The goal of a graduate degree usually begins as a common venture undertaken with excitement by the couple. But without careful attention to the marriage, that very goal can become the burden under which the marriage breaks (Hibbs, 1982).

### Summary

Graduate school can indeed be stressful, especially for those who are married. Stressors, such as finances, sex, gender, and parenting have been found to contribute to lowering marital adjustment among graduate students. However, McKeon and Piercy (1980) argued that it is important to go beyond assessment of these stressors and examine interventions that could ameliorate marital stressors of graduate students. McRoy and Fisher (1982) stated that if an effective treatment cannot be found, the drop out rate and divorce rate for graduate student marriages can be expected to increase. Thus, what appears to be needed is not only an understanding of the specific stressors, but also a treatment or intervention that focuses on the marital relationship itself. One such intervention is communication.

### Intervention

Through communication, it is likely that the stressors mentioned may be addressed effectively. For example, married graduate students and their spouses can be better equipped to discuss their financial stressors with effective communication techniques. New sexual relations, due to the difficulties in adjustment to graduate school, can possibly be made easier through thoughtful communication of intimate feelings between graduate student and spouse. Effective communication skills may assist the graduate student parent in conveying their feelings

regarding their children to their spouse, and vice versa. With the unbalance of housework and the differences in each spouse's priorities, married graduate students may benefit from communication enhancement. Thus, it appears that targeting communication may be the panacea when addressing all stressors that married graduate students face.

Communication is basic to every task an individual strives to accomplish (Poplin, 1993), and it can be analyzed in different ways. Most human communication consists of both verbal and nonverbal symbols. Married couples learn these symbols and the unique interpretations of these symbols as they spend time together. Yelsma (1986) noted that marital satisfaction fluctuates in a long-term relationship and the author attributed the highest satisfaction periods, in part, to more effective communication. As more time is spent together, quality communication can occur allowing both partners to freely express themselves and easily interpret each other's symbols. Montgomery (1981) defined quality communication in successful marriages as the interpersonal, transactional, symbolic process by which marriage partners achieve and maintain understanding of each other. Quality communication is not necessarily a natural process, but it can be learned.

In marriage, communication often makes or breaks the relationship (Breen, 1989). Hindrances to communication between spouses can take many forms, and circumventing these hindrances can be difficult especially for couples who are under stress. Communication obstacles may appear to materialize out of no where and threaten the marital relationship. Recognition of these obstacles is important, and a direct way of recognizing them is through communication. This may not be an easy task, but it may be essential to the longevity of the relationship. Deterioration in communication has been empirically linked to eventual separation and divorce in marital couples (Ross & Estrada, 1997). Without steady, quality communication, relationships can become disorganized and fractured (Poplin, 1993), and as a matter of logic, the quality of

one's marital relationship depends on both partners' communication abilities (Rainey, 1988). Communication difficulties are reported among the most common complaints by couples who seek marital therapy (Baucom, 1990). It is no wonder that marital therapists focus on communications issues. In fact, the communications approach to resolve marital difficulties has become the most widely adopted theoretical and practical orientation in the field of marital therapy (L'Abate & McHenry, 1983).

Strong support for the relationship between quality communication and marital adjustment has been demonstrated by several researchers (Boland & Follingstad, 1986; Gottman, 1994; Markman, Stanley & Blumberg, 1994; Willett, 1996). Indeed, quality communication may be both a safeguard for high marital adjustment and a treatment for low marital adjustment. A review of the literature suggests that the quality of the couple's communication is a good predictor of future marital satisfaction (Vijayalakshmi, 1997). In fact, Gottman (1994) claimed to be able to predict divorce of a couple based solely on their communication patterns coded in a brief interview.

This quality communication exists in an unknown cause-and-effect relationship with satisfactory marriages (Hocker, 1985), but several hypotheses have been suggested. During the past 20 years, research on the relationship between marital communication and marital adjustment has been the subject of continued study. Particularly in the past decade, researchers have focused on the attempts to identify factors that correlate marital communication and satisfaction (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990).

Marcus (1997) found communication and relationship satisfaction to be strongly associated in a recent study of 77 couples. A study of married couples and couples planning to marry who answered the Marital Adjustment Inventory (Locke & Wallace, 1959) also revealed

that the frequency of communication is vital to relationship satisfaction. This secondary finding is supported by Richmond (1995), who contended that highly satisfied couples engage in significantly more communication than less satisfied couples do. In researching characteristics of enduring marriages, Robinson and Blanton (1993) surveyed 15 couples who were married between 35 and 48 years. They found five key elements contributing to the endurance of the marriage and one of these elements was communication. Similarly, Marczak (1997) found that communication was one of 16 global themes of marital success when collecting data from 98 respondents.

Overall, it appears that quality communication is undoubtedly a key to higher marital adjustment. Hence, one way to learn and demonstrate quality communication is through training programs.

#### Marital Enrichment Training Programs

According to Giblin, Sprenkle, and Sheehan (1985), meta-analysis have consistently shown that marital enrichment programs enhance relationships and change behaviors through teaching new skills. From the late 1960s through 1970s numerous new marital programs were introduced to the public. Although referred to as “marital enrichment programs,” the focus of almost all of these programs was the enhancement of communication skills (Vijayalakshmi, 1997). And, based on the outcome, it appears that communications training programs work. In a two-year follow-up study in which 52 couples were surveyed, Huppert (1984) used questionnaires, including the Marital Adjustment Test, aimed to determine the effectiveness of the Minnesota Couples Communication Program that they had completed. The purpose of the study was to ascertain the long-term effect of improved communication skills on their relationship. The study confirmed that communication skills training alone, with no other marital

intervention techniques, is effective and useful. In addition, the study confirmed that improved communication leads to improved intimacy, affection, and problem solving in relationships. Last, it was found in the study that a continued reduction of conflict with more satisfactory resolution of problems was reported by the respondents.

In Neff's (1992) study, a basic communication training program was implemented to reduce stress. The major assumption tested in this longitudinal study was that verbal and non-verbal communication training is an important factor in reducing stress. Stress was reduced through improved communication rather than traditional medical model approach. In 42 hours of training over a two-month period, 21 employees were trained in a nondescript communication skills program without their spouses or any family members present. Pre- and post-levels of stress indicators were recorded on a 50-item questionnaire. Not only did the results show a significant reduction in individual stress, it was found that despite the fact that the training had been implemented in the subjects' work environment, the most significant reduction of stress occurred in the home and family environments. In particular, loss of control during stressful home situations went from 56% to 12%.

The communications approach to marital problems involves the idea that all behaviors are outcomes of the interaction in a social system and that marital problems involve persistent, undesirable behavior (L'Abate & McHenry, 1983). The focus is on the partner system, not content of conversation, which means the focus is on the process of how the couple communicates. Responsibility for input and outcome of the communications system is jointly shared. The logical focus for the professional is to assist the couple in changing the communication behaviors that drive the unwanted behavior. A problem is viewed as a result of the interaction from the couple; thus, the couple both designs and perpetuates the problem. Relief

from the problem is found when the couple works as a team to find solutions through clear, concise, positive communication. The theoretical basis of many major communications training programs is derived in part from systems theory, but it is mainly derived from Rogerian principles (Schindler, Hahlweg, & Revenstorf, 1983).

Many programs are specifically designed to enhance relationships in couples. A review of the literature reveals that most programs share a common core that trains couples to improve communication, problem solving, and conflict resolution (Hocker, 1985; Zimpfer, 1988). These programs not only address specific problems among couples, but they also provide educational training and therapeutic experiences that may be viewed as preventative and treatment oriented.

#### Relationship Enhancement Training Program

Among the numerous programs designed to increase marital adjustment by improving communication is a program titled Relationship Enhancement (Guerney, 1977), referred to in recent literature as simply RE. RE teaches couples five basic skills: expressing, empathizing, mode switching, conflict resolution, and facilitating. In RE, spouses alternate playing roles of expresser and empathizer while simultaneously practicing expression and clarification of feelings in an atmosphere of nonpossessive warmth. The expresser skills require expressing thoughts and feelings in a clear, direct situation-specific manner. The empathizer skills include empathizing and helping the speaker verbalize and clarify thoughts and feelings in a nonjudgmental fashion. While in these modes, spouses discuss problem areas of their marriage. In the beginning, the couples are instructed to choose topics that evoke little emotions. Gradually, as the training progresses, more emotionally charged issues are discussed. The therapist models the skills and provides feedback during the practice sessions, serving as an instructor then facilitator as couples improve communication skills. The skills to be learned are labeled as follows: Empathetic Skill,

which is used to increase couples' compassion, trust, openness, and respect; Expressive Skill, which promotes catharsis and enables the couples to express positive emotions even when a troubling and/or anxiety-producing topic is brought up; Problem/Conflict Resolution Skills, which allows couples to remain focused on meeting their needs in a specific and behavioral fashion; and Facilitation, which helps the partners maintain skill usage and perfect skills through coaching one another.

Viewed as educational and therapeutic, the RE model is considered preventive and treatment oriented. This model is intended to offer marital therapists a relatively brief, concisely structured method for enhancing communication among couples. According to Guerney (1977), RE is a strategy applicable to couples experiencing low marital satisfaction as well as couples wishing to improve their relationship. The RE model borrows techniques from Rogers (1957) and Bandura (1969), among others. Specifically, RE emphasizes person-centered theory, which, when established by the RE trainer, is a milieu of acceptance, empathy, and respect. Because of this milieu, it is presumed the client drops their defenses and works toward a meaningful goal, such as clear expression of feelings to their spouse. In addition, RE uses modeling and shaping to achieve behavioral goals expected of the participants. No attempt is made to ascertain what is wrong with the client, nor is there an attempt to determine blame in the relationship. The only change asked of the individuals in RE therapy is for the couple to learn the communication skills, skills that no one acquires naturally.

Numerous studies have shown RE effective in increasing communication skills (Guerney, 1977). Reviews of the literature conclude that Guerney's RE training approach proved to be superior compared to untreated controls (Schindler, Hahlweg, Revenstorf, 1983). Schindler et al. treated 52 couples using a combination of RE and Berlin's (1975) *Paare lernen*

*Kommunikation* programs. Many rating scales were used including the Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959). The results indicated that the combined approach used to treat couples in communication enhancement produced “favorable short-term effects” (Locke & Wallace, 1959, p. 63). Collins (1971) had graduate student therapists lead the training of 24 couples, primarily married undergraduate students, trained over a six-month period. Significant improvements were found with two self-reported questionnaires and no improvements were reported by the untreated group. The RE trained group showed greater gains in marital communication and marital adjustment as measured by the Marital Communication Inventory (Bienvenu, 1969) and the Marital Adjustment Test (Locke and Wallace, 1959). A similar design and result was reported by Rappaport (1976), who studied 21 married undergraduate student couples trained in RE over a two-month period. Once again, all subjects were trained by inexperienced graduate student therapists in four marathon sessions. Results, which were measured by the Marital Adjustment Test, indicated that couples did exhibit significant positive changes, regarding relationship enhancement, from pre-test to post-test; no such changes were found among the control group. Based on Collins and Rappaport’s studies, RE would appear to have significant empirical support in addition to being an effective, short-term training program lead by inexperienced graduate students (Bellack & Hersen, 1979).

In a study by Ely, Guerney, and Stover (1973), 23 volunteer student couples who were somewhat distressed were divided into treatment and control groups. The RE training lasted 10 weeks and 3 self-reported questionnaires (Ely Feeling Questionnaire, Primary Communication Inventory, Conjugal Life Questionnaire) were used, along with behavioral observation by trained observers. The observations and two of the three self-reported measures showed significant differences in the treatment. The results suggested that, by training couples to express feelings

directly and to be empathetic, reflective listening can be accomplished effectively. Weiman (1973) obtained favorable results when he took 36 couples, volunteering for either RE training or a behavioral program, and taught them to be effective speakers and listeners. Self-report and objective behavioral measures were collected before, during, and after treatment. Ratings on 16 semantic differential scales yielded that both the RE group and the behavioral group showed significant gains in outcome measures, such as communication, as opposed to the wait-list control group. But the RE group rated their experience as more profound, worthwhile, important, and professional than the behavioral group. Three more recent studies using RE to train couples all had positive outcomes; Burkacek (1987) and Fuhr (1988) reported significant positive changes in communication, and a general improvement in marital quality respectively. Griffin (1990) found a significant increase in quality of relationship in 18 couples trained in RE. Specifically, significant positive changes occurred in effective communication of the treatment group as measured by the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (Snyder, 1981). In another recent study by Brooks (1997), 22 couples completed a 12-week RE therapy program. In comparison to a control group, significantly positive results were found in the RE group in communication both immediately following treatment and three months post-treatment. RE couples also showed significantly greater gains in marital adjustment, trust, and intimacy.

Guerman and Kniskern (1977) compared 29 marital enrichment programs to assess the efficacy of these programs that emerged throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Their results concluded that the Minnesota Couple Communication Program (MCCP) (Miller, Nunnally, & Wackman, 1977) and RE were the two programs most frequently studied, producing consistently positive effects. Because the MCCP is a popular program, Brock and Joanning (1983) compared it to RE. Results indicated that the RE was more effective in increasing marital adjustment and

marital communication. A three-month follow up to their study concluded that the RE couple's outcome remained superior to the MCCP, and additional analysis revealed that couples experiencing low marital adjustment prior to training benefited more from RE.

Jesse and Guerney (1981) compared RE to Jesse's Group Gestalt Relationship Facilitation program. Both treatments showed gains in marital adjustment, trust and harmony, and rate of positive change in a relationship. The RE participants showed greater gains in communication, relationship satisfaction, and the ability to handle problems. In another study, Ross, Baker, and Guerney (1985) randomized couples seeking therapy into either RE treatment or by therapist's preferred therapy (non-RE). The RE group showed significantly greater gains than the non-RE treated group in areas of communication, relationship, and marital adjustment.

The vast majority of the reviewed studies were done with educated, middle-class couples from university communities (Guerman & Kniskern, 1977), and because this study is targeting that specific community, generalizability is included in the design. RE basics have also been used for cross-cultural couples counseling (Ibrahim & Schroeder, 1990) and has been labeled exceptional regarding gender sensitivity (Snyder, 1992). Through experience, RE has shown to be effective with African American couples, and it has been recommended for this population as a culturally sensitive and effective intervention (Moore, in press).

Many of the previously cited studies were conducted in groups, a format not routinely used in university and college counseling centers where most therapy is performed individually (Ness, Lott, & Greet, 1992). Fortunately, RE has been proven an intervention that can also be effective for individual couples. A couple receiving RE training separately can be more effective than couples receiving training in a group because of the increased attention given to individual couples (Ross, Baker, & Guerney, 1985).

Both counselors and clients value time-limited therapy. RE is a relatively short, but intensive psycho-educational treatment that has shown to resolve difficult relationship issues in as little as one and one-half hours (Cavedo, 1995). There is no rigid time format, but couples can learn the basics of RE in 10 to 12 hours. The training can be conducted in two-day marathon sessions or in a weekly format of 50-minute sessions. The advantage to spreading the training out over weeks is the ability to utilize time provided for home practice where many opportunities are available for the couple to resolve problems on their own. Learning these skills requires a significant personality change, which may succeed in making major positive, mental, and even physical health improvements (Cavedo & Guerney, in press).

It is quite clear from the extensive research that RE is an effective tool for increasing marital adjustment. It is not surprising that RE has stood the test of time, used by researchers and marital therapists for three decades. Due to the evidence of effectiveness, history of use with university students, and relative simplicity, the RE program may be the most efficacious tool for increasing marital adjustment among graduate students and their spouses.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

This section is divided into five sections. In the first section the researcher discusses the research design. The second section consists of a discussion on the sample from the population. The third section focuses on the instruments used in this study. The fourth section addresses the procedures, and the fifth section discusses the data analysis.

In this study, the researcher has investigated the effects of Relationship Enhancement (RE) training on participants' performance by scores on the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT).

This research was guided by the following research questions:

1. Can marital adjustment be increased in married graduate students through Relationship Enhancement training?
2. Can a self-study Relationship Enhancement training program (Guerney, 1987) improve the marital adjustment of married graduate students?
3. Is Relationship Enhancement training more effective in increasing marital adjustment than a self-study approach?

### Research Design

This study uses a pre-test – post-test research design, which is a typical, classic design that involves the random assignment of subjects to two or more groups. The administration of a pre-test and post-test to all groups occurs in this design, but the treatment is administered to only the experimental groups. This study uses three groups: two experimental and one control. In this study an experimental, between-subjects design was used to determine if RE training increases marital adjustment among the sample of graduate students and their spouses. In this particular

study, the treatment group (RE training) serves as the independent variable, and performance on the Marital Adjustment Test serves as the dependent variable. In the control group no manipulation is applied. If the treatment group yields changes and the control group does not, then one might speculate that the manipulation, or treatment, was effective.

The researcher chose this design for two reasons: (1) to test whether Relationship Enhancement (RE) is an effective treatment for married graduate students and (2) to use inferential statistics. Inferential statistics are used only after data are analyzed by researchers using descriptive statistics (Howell, 1992). Descriptive statistics have been used for more than two decades to analyze the data from the married graduate student population. Since a moderate amount of descriptive statistics has been accumulated on this particular population, it is logical to proceed to the next step, which is the use of inferential statistics. In other words, it was a goal of this study to infer the results to a larger, similar population.

As previously mentioned, this research was guided by the following questions:

1. Can marital adjustment be enhanced in married graduate students through Relationship Enhancement training?
2. Can a self-study Relationship Enhancement training program (Guerney, 1987) improve the marital adjustment of married graduate students?
3. Is Relationship Enhancement training more effective in enhancing marital adjustment than a self-study approach?

### Sample

The participants in this study were recruited from a small, private college, located on the east coast, with approximately 5,000 students. The student population is ethnically diverse and

the average age for graduate students is 32 years old. The majority of these students are employed either full or part time, and commute to campus from Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Approximately 2,767 of the students are enrolled in a variety of graduate degree programs (Peoples, 2001), which include Master of Business Administration, Master of Education, Master of Science, and Master of Science in Nursing.

Participants were recruited from the Behavioral Science Master's program at the designated college through classroom announcements, media advertisements (e.g., newspapers, radio, electronic bulletin board, and flyers), and through referral from students and faculty (see Appendix G).

Thirty-five couples recruited by a research assistant volunteered for this study. One couple was not accepted. The criteria to be met for participation in this study were as follows:

1. Currently married
2. United States citizenship
3. Married to a spouse who is not a student
4. Currently enrolled in a graduate program full time

### Instrument

#### Marital Adjustment Test

The instrument used in this study was the Locke Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959), which measures marital adjustment in several general categories such as communication, finances, sex, and recreation (see Appendix E). The MAT is a brief, 15-item, paper-and-pencil questionnaire. It can be easily administered and scored. The possible scores range from 2-158 points. The questionnaire is scored by adding up pre-assigned numerical values to each question for every answer given by the respondents. Respondents are

verbally encouraged to answer each question. This popular instrument, which has been around for four decades, was developed to provide a “reliable and valid adjustment test [that uses] a limited number of the most significant items taken from [marital] studies” (Locke & Wallace, 1959, p. 251).

From the original results of Locke and Wallace (1959), the MAT has a reliability of .90, and more recent studies reported adequate internal consistency ( $\alpha = .83$ ; Cross & Sharpley, 1981; White, Stahmann, & Furrow, 1994). Cross and Sharpley (1981) concluded that, indeed, the MAT measures marital adjustment according to Locke and Wallace’s (1959) original 1959 definition. Regarding validity, Locke and Wallace found the questionnaire discriminated significantly between the adjusted and the maladjusted groups: The mean adjustment score for the well-adjusted group was 135.9, whereas the mean score for the maladjusted group was 71.7. Thus, the MAT has a high reliability, and this test clearly differentiates between persons who are well adjusted and those who are maladjusted in marriage. The test was normed on urban, educated couples that were either childless, or had one child. All couples had been married for at least one year. The sample for this study was similar to the sample the MAT used in that this sample also comprised educated, urban couples. Some couples in this study were childless; some had one or more children. All couples but one were married for at least a year.

The Locke and Wallace MAT, with its long history of use, has accumulated the most validation support (Krokoff, 1989) despite the development of other scales. According to Freeston and Plechaty (1997), of all the well-established marital assessment instruments, the MAT is one of only four that can be considered a rapid assessment instrument. The other three tests are the Quality Marriage Index (Norton, 1983), the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm, Paff-Bergen, Hatch, Obiorah, Copeland, Means, & Bugaighis, 1986), and the Dyadic

Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976). It should be noted that Freeston and Plechaty considered the Dyadic Adjustment Scale a “marginal” rapid assessment instrument at 32 items, and noted that the formats “complicate” the test for the user (p. 420). The MAT is highly correlated with the Kansas Marital Adjustment Scale (men,  $r = .80$ ; women,  $r = .84$ ) (White et al., 1994), and Schumm et al. (1986) found the Dyadic Adjustment Scale to be highly correlated with both the Quality of Marriage Index ( $r = .87$ ) and the Kansas Marital Adjustment Scale ( $r = .83$ ). Spanier (1976) himself reported that the correlation of his Dyadic Adjustment Scale and the MAT equaled .93. Essentially, it may be concluded that all four of these rapid assessment instruments are very similar.

Although the Locke and Wallace MAT is four decades old, it is not antiquated. Freeston and Plechaty (1997) posed the question, “Is [the MAT] still relevant for the 1990s?” (p. 421). After researching archival data, comparing the MAT to other popular instruments and testing the MAT on 281 subjects, their conclusions remained very favorable, suggesting that the test stood up well to psychometric examination. “The [MAT] possesses adequate reliability and good criterion-related validity” (Freeston & Plechaty, 1997, p. 419). The authors stated that the median internal reliability coefficient to be .83, and test-retest reliability revealed a coefficient to be .83 also. In addition, Freeston and Plechaty recommended the MAT as part of screening batteries for routine clinic work and for research with couples.

The MAT is very well suited for this study because it measures marital adjustment. It also measures couples’ opinions on communication, finances, sex and recreation, which are items that explore the same married graduate concerns as listed in the literature. Other reasons for use of the MAT in this study include adequate reliability and validity, and rapid assessment.

In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was used to determine the internal reliability of the MAT. The reliability of this instrument was found to be high, ranging from .76 to .84. (See Table I). The reported reliability of the MAT is .90 (Locke & Wallace, 1959). From these results, it can be concluded that the MAT has internal validity for this sample. In other words, the MAT is a reliable tool for measuring marital adjustment levels.

Table I

Cronbach's Alpha Measure of Reliability of Pre- and Post-Test Scores for Student and Nonstudent Participants

	Reliability
Student Pre-test	0.84
Nonstudent Pre-test	0.78
Student Post-test	0.83
Nonstudent Post-test	0.76

n=28

Data Collection Procedure

In order to control for potential bias by the researcher of this proposed study, the procedures were divided up into two broad tasks for two different researchers. The first task, which was performed by a research assistant, included recruiting subjects and preparing the subjects for the study. Specific tasks included recruitment, screening volunteers, accepting participants, facilitating initial meetings, administering the Demographic Questionnaires (Appendix B), reading the assignments for group B, and administering both pre-tests and post-

tests. The task of administering the RE program to group A was completed by the researcher of this study.

An advertising campaign ran for approximately 30 days for the required number of participants to be recruited. The recruitment advertisement listed the name of a research assistant and a telephone number for students to call who wish to participate. When the research assistant was contacted, the participant was given the Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix B) either in person or by telephone to determine eligibility status. The research assistant informed the volunteer if they were eligible or ineligible to participate. If they were found eligible, the research assistant provided proposed dates for the first meeting and asked the volunteers which dates were convenient to attend. The research assistant also informed them that they would receive confirmation of the date, time, and location of the first meeting by way of phone, e-mail, and/or letter. The research assistant gave the participants a contact phone number and got each participant's phone number, address, and e-mail address for the purpose of future communications.

Attrition may be inevitable in research studies, and this study is no exception. In order to minimize the possibility of attrition, each participant was offered an incentive. The incentive was presented as three potential opportunities:

1. Participants and their spouses could participate in, and learn about, the Relationship Enhancement (RE) program at no financial cost.
2. Participants could add the RE training to their resumes as both a therapeutic experience and a research experience.
3. Participants who completed the RE training would receive a certificate of completion.

In addition, extensive efforts were made by the researchers to retain all participants through accommodating schedules and meeting locations, and maintaining flexibility and respect for the participants. These incentives were extended to all groups in this study, whether they received a treatment, or they simply became part of a control group that received treatment after the study was completed. In addition, the research assistant attempted to recruit additional couples for participation in this study to minimize the impact that attrition may have on this study. Once the required number of participants were identified and the first meeting date was established, the research assistant contacted all eligible participants by phone, e-mail, and/or letter to inform them of the date, location, and time for the initial meeting and to confirm their availability to attend.

Subjects who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study, and who signed an informed consent form, were randomly assigned, with their respective spouses, to one of three groups. To ensure randomization of group assignment a computer program, Microsoft Excel, was used to randomly assign the 30 couples into 3 groups of 10 each; group A (experimental program), group B (experimental self-study), and group C (control). Each participant was also given a number code to ensure confidentiality and used for identification on all data collection instruments.

From the first meeting, all volunteers were told that they had a random chance of receiving RE training in some form, or be placed in a control group with no training for the duration of the study. Participants in groups A and B received Relationship Enhancement (RE) training but in two different venues. Couples in Group A received RE training delivered by the researcher over a three-month period for a minimum of 12 hours for each couple, approximately two hours per week. This training was given to couples individually rather than in a group format for flexibility in scheduling the time and place of meetings. According to Archer and Cooper

(1998), individual therapy, not group therapy, is more representative of how universities and colleges currently approach therapy.

For each couple in group A, the researcher established a regular time and meeting place to conduct the RE training. The time and meeting place was chosen by each couple to ensure retention, commitment, and the comfort of the participants. The training was conducted in the homes of the couples, or in private library classrooms, to ensure comfort and confidentiality. Couples in group B had total freedom as to when and where to conduct their training since they used the self-study approach. Couples in group C had no training because they served as a control group.

Group B was the self-study group. Each couple in group B were given a *Relationship Enhancement (RE) Training Manual*, written by Guerney (1987). This manual provided couples with exercises and activities to practice the RE techniques that they were learning. It also contained numerous assignments for documenting progress and knowledge of RE techniques. The participants in group B were required to complete the assignments and return them to the researcher according to the schedule that was provided to the couples (See Appendix I). This was to ensure that the participants had read the manual. The time frame for completion of this treatment was the same as group A, which was 3 months.

Participants in group C received no treatments. However, after the study was completed, participants in group B and C were given an opportunity to receive the same RE treatment as participants in group A had received. As mentioned previously, all participants were told that they would be randomized into one of three groups. When one-third of the couples were randomized into group C, they were told they would receive no treatment at this time. They were encouraged to continue to participate by completing another instrument in approximately three

months. They were also reminded that a Relationship Enhancement program would be made available to them after they completed the instrument in three months.

The purpose of group B was for comparative reasons. Specifically, the results from participants in group B were used to determine the effectiveness of self-study when compared to the treatment group (group A) and the control group (group C). In addition, the results of group B might be used to further support the effectiveness of the RE model for increasing marital adjustment among married graduate students and their spouses.

#### First Meeting

The researcher provided the research assistant with a detailed script/guidelines of what should be covered during the initial meeting (see Appendix H). After the research assistant covered all the information provided in the script, all participants completed the following questionnaires, tests, and surveys in the order listed below:

1. Consent Form
2. Relationship Questionnaire
3. Marital Adjustment Test
4. Married Graduate Student Concerns Survey

The tests, questionnaires, surveys, and forms completed by each couple were maintained in a folder and then given to the researcher.

During this meeting the research assistant provided each participant in group B with a schedule of the due date for each assignment from the RE manual that was to be turned into the research assistant (See Appendix I). These participants were provided with self-addressed envelopes for them to mail the worksheets to the researcher. In addition, the research assistant

asked each participant in group A to list days and times of the week that were good for them to meet with the researcher.

### Process and Monitoring

The researcher contacted each couple in group A to schedule a regular date and time to meet to provide RE training. These meetings were scheduled on a weekly basis, for a minimum of one hour, for a period of twelve weeks. The researcher maintained an Excel spreadsheet to monitor the attendance of each participant (See Appendix J).

The research assistant was responsible for contacting couples in group B who were late in turning in their assignments. The assistant also kept track of the completed assignments by way of an Excel spreadsheet (See Appendix K).

### Final Meeting

Once the participants in groups A and B had completed their training, a final meeting was scheduled by the research assistant for all participants in groups A, B, and C. At this final meeting, participants in all three groups were given the post-test, the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT), (Locke & Wallace, 1959), by the research assistant. The general procedures of the study were explained, along with expected outcomes, and expected completion date of the study. Participants who were in groups B and C were offered the RE training that was provided to participants in group A. This offer was made due to assure fairness within the study; no group was denied access to any information that other groups were offered. In addition, all participants were told that a copy of the completed study would be mailed to them, as well as an interpretation of the results of the MAT before and after treatment.

### Time Schedule

September 1999:	Recruitment of students.
October – December 1999:	Training for group A and workbook assignments due for group B.
January 2000:	Collect and analyze data.

### Data Collection Tools

The following describes in detail the questionnaires, surveys, and forms that all study participants were expected to complete during the study.

#### Demographic Questionnaire

The Demographic Questionnaire (DQ), designed by the researcher, is a data collection tool consisting of 9 close-ended questions used primarily to ensure that the participants met the criteria for participation in the study (see Appendix B). It was also designed to identify any significant differences between the participants, such as gender, employment, spouse's education level, and number and ages of children.

#### Relationship Questionnaire

The Relationship Questionnaire (RQ), which is based on Guerney's (1977) Relationship Questionnaire, was slightly modified by the researcher from its original version to target married graduate students and their specific concerns for this study (see Appendix C). Specific changes include the following: The modified version asks the respondent to identify him or herself as a student or nonstudent, the original version did not ask this question. Other changes included the exemption of two statements from the original version. The first change was the elimination of

“please feel free to use the other side of the page.” This was eliminated because the original version used larger print than the modified version; therefore, there was more room for respondents to write on the modified version. The second modification was the elimination of three specific “group” questions, because the training was not conducted in a group setting.

Four broad questions on the RQ allow participants to organize their thoughts regarding their marital relationship on positive issues, enhancement issues, minor conflict problems, and major conflict problems. The RQ was very helpful to the researcher who implemented the RE training. The RQ gives a structure to participants’ personal topics by allowing the researcher to begin RE training with topics that are positive, then slowly move on to difficult, conflict problems. The broad purpose of this questionnaire is twofold. First, it is another tool the researcher can use to gain more insight on how couples view their marriage. The second purpose of this questionnaire is for the participants to gain insight into their relationship that they may not have had previously. This questionnaire structured and organized the RE process, making the training easier and quicker to administer. Because the RQ is a required part of the RE training process, it was not used in the final analysis of data.

#### Married Graduate Student Concerns Survey

The Married Graduate Student Concerns Survey (MCSCS) was designed by the researcher specifically for this study (see Appendix D). It lists eight prevalent concerns and/or stressors that were commonly found in the literature. The concerns, listed alphabetically, are academic attainment, children, communication, financial, gender roles, household tasks, leisure time, and sexual issues. In addition, it encourages the participant to list additional concerns that are not listed but are relevant to each participant. Some examples of the additional concerns participants wrote include, “Stress due to academic deadlines,” “Knowing when enough

education is enough,” “Separation due to military duty,” “Unstable home life due to military,” “Pregnancy issues,” “Work commitments,” “Husband’s failure to show affection,” and “Opposing sleep and wake schedules.”

The MGSCS requires that each participant rank their marital concerns by rating them from one to ten. “One” identifies the concern as the most prevalent, and “ten” identifies the concern as least prevalent to the respondent. This survey was used as an intake form, allowing the researcher to identify problem areas quickly. The MGSCS was also be used to compare the results of the survey to the literature findings.

#### Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using Number Cruncher Statistical System (NCSS) was used. The pre-treatment Marital Adjustment Test (MAT) results were compared against the post-treatment MAT results using repeated measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine if the treatment had a significant impact on levels of marital adjustment. Means from couples’ combined scores in group A were compared to means from couples’ combined scores in group B and C, using ANOVA to ascertain whether the treatment had any significant effect.

The results from the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ) were not analyzed. This information was only used to assist the researcher in tailoring the RE training to the needs of each couple. The results from the Marital Graduate Student Concerns Survey (MGSCS) were compared to the prevalent relationship concerns of married graduate students that were cited in the literature review. The purpose of this comparison was to determine if the sample had similar concerns as the literature findings. Results from the RQ and MGSCS are highlighted in the discussion section.

### Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. One limitation is that couples who choose to participate in this study may be experiencing a minimal degree of marital dissatisfaction, which could create a biased sample, thereby placing restrictions to whom the results can be generalized. The potential bias also generates a viable alternative hypothesis that communication training helps those that are motivated for change. A large sample size may remediate this bias.

The question of effects is suspect when the treatment is administered by this researcher, who has only recently been trained in RE. While professional standards were upheld and ethical guidelines were followed strictly, no expert in RE was present to make suggestions or troubleshoot for the researcher who carried out the RE training.

The population for the study is limited to a convenience sample from a small liberal arts college. This sample is limited due to relatively small enrollment numbers. In addition, because the sample is taken from one department, many students may have similar characteristics. As a result, the findings may not be able to be generalized to graduate students pursuing different degrees. Another limitation to having a small sample size is attrition. The researcher chose a sample size of 30 couples to give the study power, but a larger sample size may help solidify the results.

Having the researcher conduct the RE training could cause several problems. The couples may misrepresent themselves in a positive light if the participants, especially those in group A, have a desire to please the researcher by displaying improved communication techniques in the training sessions. The Rosenthal effect could also occur if the participants figure out what the researcher wants and respond accordingly (Wood, 1981, p. 173). The researcher recognizes the limitation that it is very difficult to remain distant and unbiased while using the RE process with

couples. Controlling for bias in the process of collecting data, the research assistant carried out this role. But, the researcher did conduct the training and interpret the data, which could lead to researcher bias.

### Summary

An experimental, between-subjects design was used in this study to determine if RE training increases marital adjustment among a sample of graduate students and their spouses. A total of 34 couples were recruited to participate in this study. The couples were divided into three groups (group A consisted of the treatment group where the researcher conducted RE training with the participants; group B consisted of a self-study group using the RE manual; and group C served as the control group where the participants received no training). Participants in all three groups were given a pre-test and, following the training, the participants were given a post-test. The results of the tests were analyzed using Repeated Measures ANOVA statistics.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

This chapter is divided into three sections: Section one discusses the demographics and section two discusses the data analysis followed by a summary of the chapter.

#### Demographics

A total of 35 couples volunteered for participation in this study. Thirty-four of the 35 volunteers met the criteria for participation. One couple was eliminated because the U.S. citizenship requirement was not met. The criteria for U.S. citizenship was established for several reasons. First, it was established to ensure homogeneity of the sample. Second, it was established because the instrument to be used in the study was normed on domestic marriages. And third, it was established because the researcher has no experience with foreign marriages. The random assignment of participants to groups A, B, and C, resulted in 11 couples being assigned to group A, 11 couples to group B, and 12 couples to group C.

Twenty-eight of the 34 couples (68 participants) completed all the requirements of the group to which they were assigned. This is an overall attrition rate of 17%. The attrition rate for each group, as well as the associated reasons, are as follows:

1. One out of the 11 couples (9%) in group A (treatment group) dropped out of the study because the couple was not willing to share what they determined to be “personal information” with the researcher.
2. Two out of 11 couples (18%) from group B (self-study group) opted not to return their post-tests for unknown reasons.
3. Three out of 12 couples (25%) from group C (control group) opted not to return their post-tests for unknown reasons.

### Gender

Of the 28 volunteers, 10 were male graduate students and their wives and 18 female graduate students and their husbands. The gender composition was unexpectedly equal for all three groups. Each group had 6 female graduate students and their nonstudent husbands. Groups B and C had 3 male graduate students and their nonstudent wives while group A had 4 male graduate students and their wives.

### Years Married

The mean for the number of years married was 11.3 years, which ranged from 6 months to 34 years. The mean for the number of years married for the individual groups were as follows: Group A, 10.5 years; group B, 14.7 years; and group C, 8.8 years.

### Number of Children

The mean for the number of children was 1.9. The couples ranged in children from 0 to 6. Six of the 28 couples were childless. The mean average number of children for the individual groups were as follows: Group A, 1.7 children; group B, 2.8 children; group C, 1.3 children.

### Work Status

The work status question was confined only to the graduate students, not their spouses. Most of the students in the study (18 out of 28: 64%) worked full time. The remaining 10 students were split evenly between working part time and nonworking status (5 part-time, 5 unemployed; 18% each). In group A, 9 students worked full time and 1 worked part time. In group B, 5 students worked full time, 2 worked part time, and 3 were not employed. In group C, 4 worked full time, 3 worked part time, and 2 were not employed.

### Nonstudent Spouses' Education Level

The nonstudent spouses' education level ranged from high school diplomas to master's degrees. Nine (32%) of the nonstudent spouses had a high school diploma, 6 (21%) had an associate's degree, 10 (36%) had a bachelor's degree, and 3 (10%) had their master's. In group A, 10 spouses had a high school diploma of which 2 spouses had an associate's degree, 5 had a bachelor's degree, and 3 had a master's degree. In group B, 3 spouses had a high school diploma, 3 had an associate's degree, and 3 had a bachelor's degree. In group C, 3 spouses had a high school diploma, 1 had an associates degree, and 2 had a bachelor's degree. These results are shown in Table II.

Table II

#### The Demographics of Participants Within Each Group

	Group A	Group B	Group C
Number of Male Students	4	3	3
Number of Female Students	6	6	6
Mean Years Married	10.5	14.7	8.8
Mean number of Children	1.7	2.8	1.3
Number of Students Employed FT	9	5	4
Number of Students Employed PT	1	2	3
Number of Students Unemployed	0	3	2
Number of Nonstudent Spouses with High School Diploma only	0	3	6
Number of Nonstudent Spouses with AA Degrees	2	3	1
Number of Nonstudents with BA or BS Degrees	5	3	2

Number of Nonstudent Spouses with MA or MS Degrees	3	0	0
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### Data Analysis

The data were collected and cataloged in Excel. Repeated measures ANOVA was run through Number Cruncher and SPSS to analyze the data.

### Statistical Means

Means were calculated on the pre- and post-test scores on the MAT for the couples in group A, B, and C. Individual couples' scores were averaged. Pre-test means for groups A and C (105.9, 98.05) were found to be close to the average for couples that are reportedly well adjusted, according to data from MAT studies. The mean scores, pre- and post-test for group B, were higher (116.83, 116.88) when compared to the MAT average of 104. As a result, ANOVA was run on pre-test scores, and no significant difference was found among all three groups. It was found that the post-test means for group A differed and were higher than the pre-test means, but this was not found in groups B and C. These results seem to indicate that levels of marital adjustment increased from the pre- to post-tests for the couples in group A, but not for couples in group B or C. The results are shown in Table III, where n equals the number of couples.

Table III

### Mean Scores of Couples By Groups on the Pre and Post MAT and Standard Error

	Pre-Test Means (Standard Error)	Post-Test Mean (Standard Error)
Group A (n=10)	105.90 (2.22)	119.05 (2.22)
Group B (n=9)	116.83 (2.35)	116.88 (2.34)

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Group C (n=9)	98.38 (2.34)	96.05 (2.34)
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n=28

ANOVA of Pre- and Post-Test Scores

Results from ANOVA found significant differences on post-test scores of marital adjustment for couples in group A (treatment, one-on-one RE training). A one-way ANOVA on the difference scores (post-test and pre-test) yielded an  $F=6.740$  ( $p=.005$ )  $df=2,25$ . A Repeated Measures ANOVA yielded identical results with an  $F=6.74$  ( $p=.004558$ ). From these F values, one can safely reject the null hypothesis. Hence, it appears that one-on-one instructional Relationship Enhancement (RE) training had an impact on the level of marital adjustment for participant couples. No significant differences were found on post-test scores for groups B and C.

Married Graduate Student Concerns

In addition to the MAT, married graduate students were also asked to choose the most important issues concerning their marriage by way of a survey (Appendix D). Overwhelmingly, married graduate students chose communication as their first concern in their marriage, which supports the research that identified communication as the number one concern (Appendix A). Household tasks were of second most importance, followed by children, leisure time, financial, gender roles, and academic attainment.

Table IV

Married Graduate Students Ranking of Factors that Negatively Affect their Marriage

Ranking	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9
Communication	13	3	3	4	2	2	0	1	0

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Household tasks	2	7	5	3	2	5	4	0	0
Children	2	2	8	2	0	3	6	3	0
Leisure time	2	1	5	5	4	2	3	3	2
Financial Issues	3	6	1	3	9	3	1	1	1
Gender Roles	0	1	0	3	2	7	8	5	0
Academic Attainment	0	1	2	2	3	0	2	10	3
Sexual Issues	4	2	3	3	3	5	4	2	1
Other	2	5	0	3	2	0	0	2	0

n=28

### Summary

In summary, the data analyses revealed that significant differences were found between the pre- and post-test scores of couples in group A. Scores on pre-test measures of all three groups were not significantly different. It was also determined that the treatment group A scored significantly higher than the nontreatment group, or control group C. Mean pre-test scores for groups A and C were representative of average scores as found on the Locke and Wallace (1959) MAT, suggesting that groups A and C comprised couples with moderately happy marriages. In addition, communication was found to be the number one marital concern of the student participants.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion

This chapter will summarize the study and findings. Recommendations for married graduate couples seeking marital happiness are included. Also included are the strengths and weaknesses of the study, as well as the contributions of this study and ideas for future research.

### Introduction

This study examined the marital adjustment of graduate students and their spouses. Prior research on the married graduate student population is modest and mostly confined to the decade of the 1980s. The increased interest during the 1980s may have occurred due to the increased divorce rates among the general population and the increasing number of married couples attending graduate school. In fact, it was found that the divorce rate among married graduate students is higher than the divorce rate of the general married population (Fisher, 1981). The more recent lack of interest in this population may have occurred due to the acceptance, or a lack of acceptance, of divorce in society. Additionally, it may be due to the recognition of the continued growth of this population on college campuses and the associated issues graduate school attendance has on marital adjustment and the stability of the marriage.

Many of the studies that exist on married graduate students focus on the stresses and challenges that their marriages face. An analysis of 38 articles revealed that the most prevalent concern among married graduate students was communication (Appendix A). Other cited stresses included finances, sex, and children. Although numerous writers and researchers recommend treatment programs to increase marital adjustment among graduate students and their spouses, no research was found that attempted to increase marital adjustment. Hence, the idea to design a study that would investigate the effectiveness of therapeutic intervention on the

marital adjustment of married graduate students and their nonstudent spouses was generated. Since research indicated that communication is the most prevalent concern of married graduate students, the goal was to find an intervention that would target communication skills. After much research and review of marital interventions, the Relationship Enhancement (RE); (Guernsey, 1977) training program was selected as the intervention tool to be used in this study. The focus of this training is to teach couples how to communicate more effectively. This training can occur in one of three ways:

1. In a group setting with a facilitator trained in RE
2. One-on-one with the married couple and a facilitator trained in RE
3. Self-study using the *Relationship Enhancement (RE) Training Manual* (Guernsey, 1987).

The expectation of this training was that marital adjustment would improve as a result of improved communications. To determine if training led to improved marital relations, the study was designed to have two experimental groups and one control group. The experimental groups consisted of a treatment group (group A) that received approximately 12 sessions of the one-on-one RE training by a facilitator trained in RE and a self-study group (group B) that received a RE self-study manual (Guernsey, 1987) with reading assignments and practice exercises. The control group (group C) received no intervention and was used as a benchmark to determine if the interventions had an impact on marital adjustment. It was hypothesized that group A would experience higher levels of marital adjustment than group B as a result of the intervention and that group B would experience higher levels of marital adjustment than group C as a result of the intervention.

### Summary of the Study

Volunteers for this study were recruited from a small, private college on the east coast. A total of 35 couples volunteered for participation in this study. Thirty-four of the 35 volunteers met the criteria for participation, which were as follows: (a) Enrollment in a master's program, (b) Married to a nonstudent spouse, and (c) United States citizenship. The eligible volunteers were then randomly assigned to group A, B, or C using Excel software.

All three groups were required to complete both the pre and post marital adjustment test. In addition, group A was required to complete all the scheduled Relationship Enhancement (RE) training sessions and group B was required to complete the self-study assignments. Twenty-eight of the 34 eligible couples completed all the requirements of the group to which they were assigned. This is an overall attrition rate of 17%. The attrition rates for each group are as follows: (a) One out of the 11 couples (9%) in group A (treatment group), (b) Two out of 11 couples (18%) from group B (self-study group), and (c) Three out of 12 couples (25%) from group C (control group).

A pre-test, the Marital Adjustment Test or MAT (Locke & Wallace, 1959), was given to all participants to measure marital adjustment before intervention. The student participants in all three groups were asked to complete the Married Graduate Student Concerns Survey (Appendix D) for the purpose of identifying the major marital concerns of married graduate students. The MAT was given again to all three groups upon completion of the RE training to determine if the one-on-one treatment (group A) or the self-study (group B) approach had any impact on the marital adjustment of couples in groups A and B. It was hypothesized that the post-test scores of marital adjustment for group A would be higher than the post-test scores of group B, which would be higher than the post-test scores of group C. Research questions included:

1. Can marital adjustment be enhanced in married graduate students through one-on-one Relationship Enhancement (RE) training?

2. Can a self-study RE training program (Guerney, 1987) improve the marital adjustment of married graduate students?

3. Is one-on-one RE training more effective in enhancing marital adjustment of graduate couples than those couples who use self-taught methods?

The results did support the first and third hypotheses; results indicated a significant difference between the pre- and post-test scores of participants in group A, and couples in group A did score significantly higher than couples in group C. The answer to the second research questions was negative. The self-study group B had practically similar pre- and post-test mean scores. From these results, it appears that there is no reason to believe that the RE self-study method increased marital adjustment of the couples in group B. Some possible explanations for these results are as follows:

1. Maybe the post-test was conducted too soon. It may have been better to conduct the post-test two to four weeks after the close of the training to allow the couples time to practice the techniques. Group A couples had been encouraged by the researcher, who was also the RE trainer, to practice their newly learned communication techniques weekly while the training was ongoing. If the post-tests were given a few weeks after the completion of RE training, couples in group B may have had more time to practice their newly learned techniques. And as a result, marital adjustment levels may have increased as evidenced by the post-test scores.

2. Couples in group B and C received little to no interaction with the researcher and, as a result, may not have been as committed to the study. Due to the lack of interaction with the self-study group, except for the receipt of the completed assignments, it was difficult to determine if

the married students worked together with their nonstudent spouse to complete the assignments, read the manual, and/or practiced the techniques. As a result, minimal effort or no collaboration may have existed between the student and their nonstudent spouse to improve marital adjustment through the *Relationship Enhancement (RE) Training Manual*.

3. The pre-test scores on the MAT may not have been an accurate representation of the couples in group B, and may have been too high. The pre-test score mean for group B was 116.8, which is much higher than Locke and Wallace's (1959) average of 104, but not significant. Mean scores for groups A and B were 105.9 and 98.38, respectively. These means were much closer to the average score on Locke and Wallace's MAT.

4. The researcher, who also performed the intervention of RE training of couples in group A, observed these couples changing their behaviors in a positive fashion. Couples negotiated changes in each other that were desired for years, but never formally presented to each other. For example, some couples negotiated time together through RE, which they did not do previous to RE training. This time together was labeled dates, and allowed the couples to get re-acquainted with each other. Couples enthusiastically reported their new behaviors to the researcher and stated that they would like to continue with their new behaviors. This interaction with the researcher resulted in positive feedback from the researcher, which the couples in group B did not have. The researcher also noted that no couples dropped out of RE training from group A after the first session. Indeed, with few exceptions, RE training sessions were not even rescheduled. Couples were actively engaged in each session, as evidenced of energetic dialogue, few interruptions, and a cheerful atmosphere. Two couples did drop out of group B, and three couples dropped out of group C.

5. The Marital Adjustment Test (MAT); (Locke & Wallace, 1959) did not specifically measure communication. The MAT did not have a subscale for communication. As a result of completing the self-study Relationship Enhancement manual (Guerney, 1987), couples in group B may have experienced enhanced communication, but not necessarily increased marital adjustment. The reason the researcher did not include a measure of communication was because RE had significant research supporting that marital adjustment is increased through the RE communication enhancement program.

Post-test means were lower than the pre-test means for couples in group C. From these results, it appears that the overall levels of marital adjustment decreased from the pre- to post-tests. A possible explanation for this decline in marital adjustment is that the participants may have been alerted to negative factors in their marriage through exposure to the MAT (Locke & Wallace, 1959).

The results of the Married Graduate Student Concerns Survey indicated that married graduate students chose communication as their number one marital concern (See Table IV), which is in support of prior research (Appendix A). Household concerns were of second most importance, followed by children, leisure time, finances, gender roles, and academic attainment (differences in number of years of education/degrees of spouses). These results support the findings in the literature regarding communication and marriage. In marriage, communication often makes or breaks the relationship (Breen, 1989), and in two separate studies Marcus (1997) and Richmond (1995) found communication and relationship satisfaction to be strongly associated. Neff (1992) reduced stress through improved communication rather than the traditional medical model approach. This study attempted to do the same: Through improved

communication, couples were able to reduce stressors that affected their marriages in a negative manner.

### Study Strengths and Weaknesses

The strength of this study comes from its uniqueness and significance. For decades, researchers and writers suggested that treatments be made available to those graduate students who are married. Many of these studies were exploratory research, highlighting concerns germane to married graduate students and their spouses. None of the prior studies tested intervention strategies or the effectiveness of possible interventions. This study does and, as a result, it is unique. A second strength of this study is the design. In this study, a classic research design with random sampling was used. Another strength is that it brings attention to a population that has been overlooked for so long. With a large percentage of graduate students married, educational institutions of higher learning can no longer ignore this population and the issues that arise from these students attending graduate school. This study serves to emphasize the importance of this population. Last, this study supports the literature findings regarding communication as graduate students' number one concern in their marriage.

This study could have been improved by increasing the sample size to a minimum of 20 couples, or more, within each group. This would have increased the total sample size to at least 60 couples. This increased sample size would have given the researcher more power, and hence, the results may be more respectable. Another area of improvement would be to include graduate students and their spouses from other disciplines. By limiting the participants to one academic discipline, it limits the ability to generalize the findings to the married graduate student population as a whole.

The RE training program is designed to teach couples how to communicate more effectively with an expected result of improved marital adjustment as communications improved. The study did not include an assessment of communication skills. An assessment of communication skills prior to training and upon completion of the training would be a beneficial piece of information. In group B (experimental self-study), use of the training manual may have led to improved communications but may not have increased overall marital adjustment. It is reasonable to expect that as the couples become more skilled at communication that marital adjustment will improve. It is also reasonable to expect that it may take longer to improve marital adjustment than communication skills. As a result, with more use of the RE techniques, couples in group B may see increased marital adjustment over time.

The method for obtaining the sample could have been improved by allowing the sample to self-refer, by way of university counseling centers. The motivation for increasing marital adjustment would then be a priority, not an inquiry, among the clients. The sample would be asking for assistance with their marital problems already defined instead of open to exploring. Additionally, at a diverse and large university counseling center, one could expect a sample from a variety of graduate disciplines, not just counseling.

Last, different results may have come about if the researcher allowed another person experienced in RE to perform the training. Had this occurred, the potential for bias would be controlled better. Although the research assistant had collected the data, the researcher may have unknowingly allowed bias to affect the study.

#### Contributions to the Field of Counseling

It is hoped that this study will draw more attention to this population on college and university campuses, especially by the counseling centers on campuses because this population

can no longer be ignored. It is also hoped that this study will draw more attention to the marital concerns of graduate students and their spouses. Prevention and treatment means do not have to be targeted exclusively on “saving” marriages, but simply on identifying and alleviating stressors in order to allow the graduate student to focus on school.

Regarding prevention, married students and their spouses should be made aware of the stressors that graduate school has on a marriage and what resources they have available to them on campus to deal with these stresses prior to beginning graduate school. This could be accomplished by way of brief educational programs, like a specialized orientation targeting the unique stresses that married graduate students and their spouses may face. This orientation can include suggestions on effective coping skills to deal with these stresses. University counseling centers could provide married graduate students with literature about the stresses that graduate school attendance has on marriages, early warning signs of problems, and effective coping mechanisms.

To assist the married graduate student and their spouse throughout their program, university counseling centers can provide services to married graduate student to assist them in dealing with the stresses much like an employee assistance program assists employees in dealing with job-related problems. In addition, a marital therapist should be available at all university counseling centers for the benefit of not only married graduate students, but also the increasing number of married undergraduates. This therapist could also be available for couples who are not married but are in a committed relationship. These marital therapists can focus on communication enhancement, possibly through the use of RE. University counseling centers could also offer on campus support groups and individual counseling sessions for graduate students and their spouses. Couples that have to relocate may endure more stress than those

couples who do not relocate, and as a result, may find themselves being pulled apart (Epstein, 1982). The school could establish a mentoring program for these couples in which couples who have relocated would mentor the couple on how to become established in the new area.

The following section discusses what graduate students and their spouses can do for themselves prior to entering graduate school, upon entering graduate school, and throughout the graduate school program.

### Suggestions for Married Graduate Students

Many authors and researchers had suggestions for married couples, previous to enrollment in a graduate program, that were designed to prevent marital dissatisfaction from occurring. Interestingly, many of these suggestions revolved around communication. This researcher also based suggestions on communication. Some suggestions are as follows: the married couple should share information as to each other's goals and expectations of one another in the attainment of these goals previous to enrollment. Major topics of discussion should include the education needed, degree desired, and career desired. Discussion should also include the institutions that offer the desired degree, location of these institutions, financial matters, and timelines. The couple can work together to select the institution in which to pursue graduate school. Sharing information regarding goals and specifics about the graduate school of choice contribute to making the graduate experience a mutual goal. Both student and nonstudent will feel a part of the goal if information is shared previous to enrollment in graduate school.

Once the student is accepted into a graduate program, the nonstudent spouse should attend as many meetings as possible with the student spouse. It is at these initial meetings that many specific expectations are conveyed that were not previously apparent. In addition, the nonstudent spouse would be exposed to faculty and colleagues that the student spouse is to be

working with over the course of the graduate program. Much information can be derived by the nonstudent spouse in these meetings, such as department expectations, nuances, and social contacts. With this information, the couple can then discuss familial roles during the course of graduate studies. These familial roles can include housework, child care, and leisure time. Their expectations should be posted for both to see and may need to be revisited from time to time during graduate school attendance.

While fully engaged in graduate studies, the nonstudent spouse can assist by discussing ideas and providing objective and/or alternative viewpoints to the student spouse. Assistance may also come from the nonstudent spouse in the form of reviewing, editing, and typing the student spouses' paper (Giles, 1983). The nonstudent spouse may also be able to assist in the collection of the data or compilation of research. Another form of assistance could be giving the student spouse quiet time at home especially during exams. This could entail taking the children out of the home for a few hours or going to visit family on weekends so the student spouse has time at home by themselves.

In regards to leisure activities, it has been found that relationship satisfaction in graduate students is influenced by such activities (Ellett, 1994). Many graduate students and their spouses sacrifice leisure time due to the demands of graduate school (Nedleman, 1991). As a result, the lack of these types of activities will become a stressor (McLaughlin, 1985; Pasco, 1991; Scheinkman, 1988). The nonstudent spouse could take an active role in planning and scheduling leisure activities for the couple so the student spouse can reap the rewards of relaxation but avoid the time consuming process of planning for it.

### Future Research

This section focuses on additional research that is needed to gain a better understanding of how graduate school attendance impacts on the marital adjustment of married graduates students, as well as interventions designed to improve marital adjustment.

To gain more insight into the impact that graduate school attendance has on marital adjustment, research that measures marital adjustment at different stages of graduate school attendance would be helpful to determine when the marriage is at most risk. With this information, preventative measures could be developed and implemented to minimize or eliminate this risk. This type of research should be done for all levels of post bachelor's studies and across all disciplines of study to determine if some disciplines and levels of education are at most risk.

Longitudinal studies to measure marital adjustment at different time periods after the conclusion of the relationship enhancement training to determine the long- term effectiveness of this training. Other types of intervention could be evaluated for their impact on the marital adjustment of students and their nonstudent spouses.

### Conclusion

The married graduate student population is prevalent on college campuses and can no longer be ignored. It is hoped that this study will lead to more research on this population so that married students are not only aware of the academic stresses that they will encounter with graduate school attendance, but also the potential stresses that they will experience in their marriage as a result of graduate school attendance. Because this study utilized, what appears to be, an effective treatment targeting marriages of graduate students, it is suggested that more treatments will be tested on this population. It is also recommended that college and universities

will support further research on this population as well as develop and implement on campus programs to assist this population in both the academic and marital stresses that they may endure.

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## Appendix A

### Literature Summary on Graduate Student Marriages

Study	Summary
<p>Barker, C. (1981). <u>The relationship between marital adjustment and selected variables for student couples at a theological seminary and graduate school.</u></p>	<p>Highest scores among married graduate students were correlated with the following variables: intentionally working on current problems and future planning, success in implementing these plans; role flexibility; flexible vocational planning; good communicators; empathetic listeners; expressed feelings; developed strong sense of “we-ness,” accepting of each other and shared future dreams; spent time together; strong partnership; spent religiously oriented time together.</p>
<p>Baker, H. (1993). <u>Counseling needs and graduate student characteristics.</u></p>	<p>Males and females did not differ in need for counseling services, but females expressed more willingness than males to use marriage and family counseling services.</p>
<p>Brown, M. (1983). <u>Marital status, satisfaction and adjustment to divorce: Male graduate students’ perspective.</u></p>	<p>Married graduate students had significantly fewer personal and social problems than single or divorced men (divorced men indicated the most personal and social problems). Married graduate students were significantly more satisfied with their marital status than single or divorced students; divorced men reported the lowest satisfaction.</p>

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<p>Charles, H. (1983). <u>The relationship between marital adjustment and selected demographic variables of students attending Purdue University (Indiana).</u></p>	<p>Higher marital satisfaction was correlated with higher GPA, higher monthly income, and fewer personal and social problems.</p> <p>Analysis of data indicates that length of time married, presence of children, age of partners, and whether or not both partners were students had a significant effect on the adjustment scores of student couples. The variable found to have no impact were whether the subjects were graduate or undergraduate.</p>
<p>Dickstein, L. (1991). <u>Marital therapy with university students in the 1990s.</u></p>	<p>Author argued that married graduate students are in need of marital therapy, but university counselors don't recognize personal symptoms as signs of marital distress. Effective communication is paramount, but typically deteriorates over time.</p> <p>Common problem #1: nonstudent wife rejects male student. #2: nonstudent husband is jealous of student wife's role. #3: one partner wants marriage to be like parent's marriage.</p>
<p>Epstein, L. (1982). <u>Couples in transition: relocation and graduate school influence on development.</u></p>	<p>Findings indicated that students who relocated had lower self-esteem scores, and couples who relocated had lower dyadic adjustment scores than those who did not relocate.</p>
<p>Fischer, S. (1981). <u>A study of the self-perceived relationship between doctoral study and divorce</u></p>	<p>Rate of divorce was greater among doctoral recipients than it was in the county, state, and</p>

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among married students graduating from the College of Education of the Florida State University from 1965-1975.

nation. Major sources of both conflict and mitigation were the relationship with major professor, communication, and recreation, including time for participation and encouragement of mutual interests.

Fisiloglu, H. (1990). Perceived family cohesion and its relationship to perceived marital adjustment in married graduate students.

The study found: 1. Full-time married graduate students had higher perceived family cohesion and marital adjustment than part-time students; 2. Years married, number of children, and ages of children were negatively correlated to family cohesion; 3. Subjects whose spouses had master's degrees had higher marital adjustment than those subjects whose spouses had high school diplomas or bachelor's degrees. Subjects whose spouses had a doctorate had higher perceived marital adjustment than those with just a bachelor's degree.

Gilbert, M. (1982). The impact of graduate school on the family: A systems view.

Author summarized variables that are sources of stress for married graduate students: sexual dissatisfaction (especially regarding frequency and time of day); lack of communication, recreation, and money; need for more friends; lack of time for both household tasks and academics; and development of social isolation, alienation, meaninglessness, powerlessness, and normlessness in female nonstudents

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<p>Giles, F. (1983). <u>The effects of doctoral study on marriage and family.</u></p>	<p>Findings indicate the most important source of support came from the spouse in the form of emotional/psychological support, which is defined as encouragement, listening to problems, sharing frustrations (i.e., communication), and making the home more conducive for study.</p>
<p>Hamer, B. &amp; Miller, T. (1975). <u>The university student: A model for positive marital adjustment.</u></p>	<p>Tested a proactive model for positive married student adjustment. Results increased interaction and marital communication, with emphasis on quality of empathetic behavior, higher proficiency in loving behavior, and awareness of erotic feelings for one's spouse. Treatment group also felt a more charitable form of love and feeling of being with each other.</p>
<p>Hedstrom, L. &amp; Hedstrom, B. (1983). <u>Academic stress &amp; marital adjustment in a graduate psychology program.</u></p>	<p>Results indicated that the more units of study completed the lower the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. Sixty-eight percent of married graduate students indicated that time constraints and pressures were the most stressful. Additional pressures included lack of time spent with mate, conflict between recreation and study time, time away from family, lack of quality time together, problem with scheduling work, study, and family responsibility. Academic pressures produced irritability.</p>
<p>Hibbs, C. (1982). <u>Graduate study may be a hazard to marriages.</u></p>	<p>Author argued for marriage enrichment courses focusing on understanding the stress of graduate</p>

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marriages.

and professional school. Family therapists should teach this course. Author listed three reasons for argument he proposed. Stressors frequently mentioned by married graduate students: dealing with parents, difficulty in settling conflicts, adjusting to the sexual need of spouse, arranging finances, making major decisions, and agreeing on how household tasks are to be accomplished.

Female married graduate students have to maintain multiple roles, especially if there are children.

Higgins, K. (1983). The impact of a doctoral program in education on marital adjustment.

Graduate education has a deleterious effect on marriages (65% of respondents said it was negative). All respondents stated there was less time to interact with spouse (communication) and to indulge in leisure activities. Fifty-six percent of respondents stated that time and commitment to school negatively affected their marriage. The more schooling of the nonstudent spouse the higher the dyadic adjustment.

Houser, R., Konstam, V., & Ham, M., (1990). Coping and marital satisfaction in dual career couples- Wives as college students.

Couples who use confrontive coping and escape-avoidance strategies reported lower marital satisfaction.

Huston-Hoburg, L. & Strange, C. (1986). Spouse support among male and female returning adult students.

The return to school for women may be more difficult than for men because of "role strain." Wives are more supportive of their husband's return to formal education than vice versa. Women

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Kattenhorn, D. (1982). The effects of graduate school on the marriages of male students who have at least one child prior to entering a graduate school of professional psychology.

get their emotional support from their peers.

Graduate school has deleterious effects on a marriage. Two primary positive causes for the sample's successful marriage were the required development of all available sources of strength to deal with the stress of graduate school. Second, the therapeutic experience helped some couples cope. The same stressors that cause conflict and separation among some may result in improved marital quality among other married graduate students.

Keinanen, M., Ilpo, L. & Kaljonen, A. (1991). Couple therapy & the development phase of couple relations with students.

Student couple therapy is most successful when neither partner has unresolved issues in the "attachment/caregiving" phase of earlier life. Successful is defined as linking two people together, keeping the relationship intact.

Lange, S. (1980). An anxiety support model for graduate education.

Author divided graduate experience into three stages and suggested a model to deal with graduate anxiety. Faculty recognition of anxiety and support for student is key.

Mallinckrodt, B. (1983). Stress management, support, and resource groups for graduate students.

Author made a case for graduate school as a very stressful time. He outlined a didactical program to reduce stress in graduate school.

Mallinckrodt, B. Leong, F., & Kralj, M. (1989). Sex differences in graduate student life change stress &

Researchers found that women report significantly more negative life changes and psychological

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stress symptoms.

symptoms of stress in graduate school than men.

Women have more interpersonal concerns (with significant others and professors) and role conflicts.

McKeon, D. & Piercy, F. (1980). Factors in marital adjustment of graduate students.

Results indicate that adjustment levels are higher in symmetrical marriages (both graduate students) than asymmetrical (one student, one not). Those married < 5 years had higher levels of marital adjustment compared to those married > 5 years.

McLaughlin, M. (1985). Graduate school and families: Issues for academic departments and university mental health professionals.

Stressors: financial, female household roles, children, child care arrangements, sex, lack of time together, recreation time, and communication with professors, spouse, and family. Author recommends couples counseling to focus on feelings and conflicts within the relationship, changes in the marriage or family dynamics brought about by graduate school, and role awareness and family goal setting prior to beginning graduate studies.

McRoy, S. & Fisher, V. (1982). Marital adjustment of graduate student couples.

Asymmetrical couples were lower on Dyadic Adjustment Scale scores than symmetrical couples. Couples had lower dyadic adjustment scores when the husband was a student than other groups (The presence of children in the married graduate student's family could have contributed to the outcome). The item that provoked the most

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<p>Namir, S. (1982). <u>Stresses associated with a major life transition.</u></p>	<p>disagreement was being too tired for sex, followed by dealing with parents and lastly financial concerns.</p>
<p>Nedleman, M. (1991). <u>A survey of married graduate students on sources of stress &amp; their needs for intervention.</u></p>	<p>In comparing three different groups of couples, the married graduate student couples experienced more life stressors than any other group. In addition, more arguments were reported by the married graduate students. Finances were a major source of arguments among the married graduate students. Other contributors to stress were moving, schooling, and changes in living condition.</p>
<p>Norman, K. (1989). <u>A study of graduating college students' perceptions of identifying factors related to persistency in acquiring a college degree.</u></p>	<p>Of married graduates, 98.6% reported most stress from their relationship with their spouse, followed by work, finances, parenting, recreation/leisure, and institutional support.</p>
<p>Pasco, G. (1991). <u>Married graduate students: Effects of the graduate years.</u></p>	<p>Researcher found that marital status has a significant effect on the goal commitment factor.</p> <p>Seven influential factors were identified: financial constraints and supports, communication and intimacy patterns, socialization patterns, status changes in life styles and living arrangements, and changes in couple's interests and activities.</p> <p>Interviews revealed that married graduate students cited finances, communication, and quality of life</p>

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<p>Plaut, M. (1990). <u>Institutional resources for medical students in committed relationships.</u></p>	<p>as primary issues.</p> <p>Married students must balance demands of education against their partners' responsibilities and desires. Close relationships of opposite sexed students, developing naturally as support, may be a hindrance to the married relationship.</p>
<p>Rohr, E., Rohr, K., &amp; McKenry, P. (1985). <u>Role conflict in marriages of law and medical school students.</u></p>	<p>Authors found that medical and law schools have a negative impact on eight factors that are part of a satisfying marriage: forgiveness, intimacy, cooperation, nurturing, trusting, compassion, trustworthy, and giving.</p>
<p>Scheinkman, M. (1988). <u>Graduate student marriages: An organizational/interactional view.</u></p>	<p>Asymmetrical marriages (students married to nonstudents) lead to a disengagement process, which leads to restricted communication resulting in crisis. Stressors: financial, changes in recreation and social life, lack of time, loss of social and economic status, readjustment to student role, and academic work.</p>
<p>Sokolski, D. (1995). <u>A study of marital satisfaction in graduate student marriages.</u></p>	<p>Graduate education can add stress to relationships, and this stress may change feelings of satisfaction. Sources of stress: academic/departmental, personal, and financial. Greater marital satisfaction was found in marriages where both partners were students. Satisfaction was found in personal happiness, marital commitment, physical intimacy,</p>

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Thacker, A. (1977). The impact of graduate and graduate professional education on the perceived marital adjustment of married students at a large urban university.

and equity. Communication was most frequently cited theme in successful marriages.

Graduate school has deleterious effects on marriage. Specifically, doctoral professional students are affected most, followed by non-professional doctoral students. Master's students' marriages slightly improved.

Timberlake, M. (1991). Role stress, personal strain and coping among counseling psychology students.

Purpose of study was to investigate role stress, personal strain, and coping among graduate students in counseling psychology. Married graduate students scored significantly higher than single subjects did on the subscales of inter-personal strain and social support.

Torkildson, J. (1986). An identification of marital and family concerns expressed by graduate students and their spouses (stress, role conflicts).

Twenty percent of married graduate students and their spouses reported serious concerns.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Ed Research & Improvement (1990). Characteristics of "established students": A descriptive study of married 30-50 year old re-entry students.

Results indicated that approximately three-fourths of all married student respondents reported the marital relationship as staying the same or becoming stronger as a result of re-entering college.

Valdez, R. (1982). First year doctoral students & stress.

Forty-eight percent of subjects polled claim to be experiencing major crisis in their lives.

Vera, E. & Betz, N. (1991). Relationships of self-regard and affective self-disclosure to relationship

Self-disclosure was significantly related to relationship satisfaction in males and females. Self-

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satisfaction in college students.

regard was related to both self-disclosure and to relationship satisfaction in females only. Affective self-disclosure was strongest predictor of relationship satisfaction.

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Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire

Identification \_\_\_\_\_

1. Are you currently married?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

2. Are you a U.S. Citizen: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

3. Are you enrolled in graduate school full time as defined by the college or university? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

4. Is your spouse enrolled full time in any college or university?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

5. Number and age of children: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Years Married: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Gender: M \_\_\_\_\_ F \_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you work? Part time \_\_\_ Full time \_\_\_ Do not work \_\_\_\_\_

9. Spouse's education level? \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix C  
Relationship Questionnaire

Identification \_\_\_\_\_ Student? \_\_\_\_\_ Nonstudent? \_\_\_\_\_

Male? \_\_\_\_\_ Female? \_\_\_\_\_

The purpose of this questionnaire is to encourage you to think about your relationship—how you get along with each other, and what improvements you would like to see. I would like you to be able to respond to each item as openly and honestly as possible. Therefore, I ask that you do not show your answers to anyone, including your spouse.

Put either an A, B, or C in front of each item you write. A = You would feel comfortable talking about it in the sessions at the present time; B = It would be difficult, but not impossible, to talk about it in the sessions at the present time; C = You could not talk about it in the sessions at the present time.

1. Positive Issues. In order of importance, list below the three most important things about your relationship and/or your spouse that pleases you or that you admire, despite any problems you may be having in your relationship. Think back, if it helps, to the qualities that attracted you to your spouse. Do not choose anything in which you wish there were significant changes today.

(1.)

(2.)

(3.)

2. Enhancement Issues. In order of importance, list below the three specific things that you and your spouse could do that would be enjoyable for you. In other words, list three things that you believe would help positively change the relationship. These should be specific activities you would like to suggest. However, they must be changes that you think your spouse would also agree were desirable, changes which your spouse is not likely to find really troublesome, changes that are not likely to be resented by your spouse.

(1.)

(2.)

(3.)

3. Minor Conflict/Problem. List three things that you would like to see changed in order to improve your relationship. These may be issues that might be troublesome to work though, but are not among the most difficult relationship problems/conflicts.

(1.)

(2.)

(3.)

4. Major Problems. List, in order of difficulty, the three deepest, most important relationship conflicts/problems.

Include at least one that you would be willing to discuss now or in the near future.

(1.)

(2.)

(3.)

Note. From Relationship Enhancement Manual (p. 69), by B. G. Guerney, Jr., 1987, State College, PA: IDEALS, Inc. Copyright 1987 by IDEALS, Inc. Adapted with permission.

Appendix D

Married Graduate Student Concerns Survey

Identification \_\_\_\_\_ Student? \_\_\_\_ Nonstudent? \_\_\_\_ Male? \_\_\_\_ Female? \_\_\_\_

Please rate the following concerns from 1 to 10 in order of how you believe these concerns affect your marriage in a negative manner. One (1) represents the most serious concern that affects your marriage negatively. Please note there are blanks to fill in any concerns not mentioned.

\_\_\_\_\_ Academic attainment (differences in number of years of education or degrees)

\_\_\_\_\_ Children (including child raising concerns)

\_\_\_\_\_ Communication

\_\_\_\_\_ Financial issues

\_\_\_\_\_ Gender roles

\_\_\_\_\_ Household tasks

\_\_\_\_\_ Leisure time

\_\_\_\_\_ Sexual issues

\_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### Short Marital Adjustment Test

Identification \_\_\_\_\_ Student? \_\_\_\_ Nonstudent? \_\_\_\_ Male? \_\_\_\_ Female? \_\_\_\_

#### Marital Adjustment Test

1. Check the dot on the scale below that best describes the degree of happiness, everything considered, of your present marriage. The middle point, "happy," represents the degree of happiness that most people get from marriage, and the scale gradually ranges on one side to those few people who are very unhappy in marriage, and on the other, to those few who experience extreme joy or felicity in marriage.

0	2	7	15	20	25	35
.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Very Unhappy			Happy			Perfectly Happy

State the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your mate on the following items.

Please check each column.

	Always Agree	Almost Always Agree	Occasionally Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree
2. Handling family finances	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. Matters of recreation	5	4	3	2	1	0
4. Demonstration of affection	8	6	4	2	1	0
5. Friends	5	4	3	2	1	0
6. Sex relations	15	12	9	4	1	0
7. Conventionality (right, good, or proper conduct)	5	4	3	2	1	0
8. Philosophy of life	5	4	3	2	1	0
9. Ways of dealing with in-laws	5	4	3	2	1	0

10. When disagreements arise, they usually result in:

Husband giving in 0      Wife giving in 2      Agreement by mutual give and take 10

11. Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?

All of them 10      Some of them 8      Very few of them 3      None of them 0

12. In leisure time do you generally prefer:

To be "on the go"      To stay at home?

Does your mate generally prefer: To be "on the go"      To stay at home?

(Stay at home for both=10 points; "on the go" for both=3 points; disagreement=2 points)

13. Do you ever wish you had not married?

Frequently 0                      Occasionally 3                      Rarely 8                      Never 15

14. If you had your life to live over, do you think you would:

Marry the same person 15                      Marry a different person 0                      Not marry at all 1

15. Do you confide in your mate: Almost never 0      Rarely 2      In most things 10      In everything 10

Maximum score possible =158

## Appendix F

### Consent Form

#### VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

#### Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects

Title of Project: Increasing Marital Adjustment in Graduate Students and their Spouses through  
Relationship Enhancement.

Investigator(s): Matthew A. Shollenberger, Ph.D. candidate; Dr. Octavia Madison Colmore,  
Ed.D., Chair

#### **I. Purpose of this Research/Project**

The purpose of this study is to research Relationship Enhancement training, a communication program that purports to increase marital adjustment.

#### **II. Procedures**

The subjects for this study will be 30 college graduate student volunteers and 30 of their nonstudent spouses. Recruitment for volunteers will be performed in the Fall of '99 at the designated college through classroom announcements, flyers, and other college media. Criteria for acceptance in this study include: enrolled as a full-time graduate student in the Behavioral Sciences Division of the college, currently married to a nonstudent spouse, and U.S. citizenship.

If you meet the criteria and choose to participate, you and your spouse will be taught an educational marital intervention titled Relationship Enhancement (Guerney, 1977). All recipients of Relationship Enhancement (RE) training will be individually trained by the researcher, Matthew

Shollenberger, for a total of 12 hours. In each training session, you will be expected to listen to the didactic instructions and practice the techniques. RE is relatively simple, and focuses on communication techniques. Each session will last approximately 2 hours.

In order to accommodate all 30 participants, the training will be staggered. As participants conclude their training, additional participants will begin theirs. A schedule will be developed to accommodate all of the volunteers in a fair and equitable manner. The RE training for couples will be administered on the grounds of the college in a private room in the college library. In the event that you and your spouse are inconvenienced by meeting in college library, alternative arrangements can be made with the researcher.

An initial meeting will held \_\_\_\_\_ to answer any questions that you may have. In addition you will be asked to complete several questionnaires that will be used as part of the research

### **III. Risks**

There are minimal risks involved in this research. You will be asked to discuss marital topics elicited of your own volition; however, you will not be expected to discuss any topics against your will. The focus of RE is on the communication process, not content. Should you experience discomfort, whether through researcher training or the RE workbook, free professional counseling services are available through the college.

The following are benefits of participation in the research. If you and your spouse participate in RE training, you will be receiving a marital enrichment course at no financial cost (current rates run from \$17 for the RE workbook to \$350 for 12 hours of RE training). Second, each couple who completes the RE training will receive a certificate of completion. Finally, you will be exposed to research that is relevant to your own studies, which you will be able to add to your professional portfolio.

Although it is hoped that you will complete the training and all of the questionnaires, you may withdraw from the research at any time. No penalty will be imposed for withdrawal from the research.

### **IV. Confidentiality/Anonymity**

Anonymity will be preserved for each participant in the study. Should you express interest in this research project, you will be requested to fill out a Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix B). A numbered code will be assigned to you, and each time you or your spouse fills out a document, the code number will be used. The codes and corresponding names will be kept on a single sheet of paper and contained in a locked file in the researcher's home. Upon completion of the study, the paper with the codes and corresponding names will be destroyed. All topics discussed in group A, and written materials group B, will be kept strictly confidential. Upon completion of the study, participants in group B will have their completed workbooks returned to them.

Analysis of data and reports will utilize group data so that no analyses can be connected to any individual. Any references to individuals will always use pseudonyms. Reports to the final analyses will be available to you if you wish.

#### **V. Biographical Sketch**

The primary researcher and author of this research is Matthew A. Shollenberger. Mr. Shollenberger has been in the counseling field since 1986. Between 1982 and 1986 he had worked with various populations such as college freshman, foster children, and people with mental retardation. Upon completion of a bachelor's degree in Sociology and Psychology from Kutztown University of Pennsylvania in 1986, Mr. Shollenberger worked as a psychotherapist in a rehabilitation clinic. Two years later he completed a master's degree in Counselor Education, again from Kutztown University, and moved to Baltimore where he began teaching for Baltimore City Community College in the Behavioral and Social Sciences Division. In 1990, Mr. Shollenberger went to work for a rehabilitation clinic affiliated with Johns Hopkins Department of Psychiatry, providing intake and counseling for people with psychiatric concerns. Throughout his time working at the rehabilitation clinic, Mr. Shollenberger continued to teach at Baltimore City Community College and the University of Baltimore for five consecutive years. In 1994, he accepted a graduate assistantship to Virginia Polytechnic and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia. He enrolled in the Ph.D. program in Counselor Education while working various university-related jobs like Practicum Supervisor, CACREP Researcher, and Student Counselor at the University Counseling Center. Currently, Mr. Shollenberger lives on the east coast, teaching and practicing therapy since 1997. He is

employed full time as a family therapist for court-ordered families, and part time as an Assistant Professor for a private college.

I have read the above information and I agree to participate in this research project.

Printed Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix G

Research Flyer

**Married Graduate Students Needed for Training in a Relationship  
Enhancement Program**

Please note the following criteria:

- ✓ Enrolled full time in a Behavioral Sciences master's degree program at this college.
- ✓ Married to a spouse that is not enrolled full time in college courses.
- ✓ A spouse that is willing to participate in a Relationship Enhancement program.
- ✓ Willing to volunteer 12 hours within a three-month period.

This Relationship Enhancement program focuses on communications skills, entails no financial cost, and will be conducted by a trained professional. In addition, this program will adhere to the couple's schedule. If you and your spouse are interested, inquiries can be made by contacting: graduate assistant's name and phone number here.

## Appendix H

### Script/Guideline for First Meeting

- Welcome students and their spouses. Have couples sign in on the attendance sheet.
- Introduce self and role. I am \_\_\_\_\_. I will be assisting the researcher with the administrative aspects of this study.
- The purpose of this meeting is to briefly review the study that you will be participating in, expectations of participants, benefits to participation, and timeframes.
- Pass out the informed consent form to each participant and then read the informed consent aloud to all participants. Ask the participants if they have any questions and if they understand the contents of the informed consent. Answer any questions they may have. Have all participants print their name, sign, and date the form. Collect the forms from all participants.
- After the Relationship Enhancement training is completed. A final meeting will be held for participants in groups A, B, and C. At the final meeting, all participants will be required to complete some of the same surveys, questionnaires, and tests that they will be completing today.
- Inform students of which group they have been randomly assigned to as well as their number code. Have participants in group A list what days of the week and times, they are available to receive the one-on-one Relationship Enhancement training from the Certified Trainer. Remind students that they will need to reserve a two-hour period per week for twelve weeks. Ask students to also list which meeting location would be most beneficial to them a conference room at the college library, their home, or another location of their choosing.

- Provide each couple in group B with the *Relationship Enhancement (RE) Training Manual* as well as their reading and written assignment schedule. Each couple should also be given self-addressed stamped envelopes for the students to mail their completed written assignments to the research assistant.
- Inform the participants that they will know be required to complete a number of forms. Tell participants that this form is the Demographic Questionnaire, which is used to ensure that the participants are qualified to participate in the study plus provides the researcher with a demographic profile of the participants. Once they have completed this questionnaire, collect all questionnaires from the participants.
- Distribute the relationship questionnaire to all participants. Read aloud the instructions on how to complete the questionnaire. Tell the participants that the purpose of this questionnaire is to provide the researcher with specific information about each participants relationship so that the researcher can tailor the Relationship Enhancement Training to the needs of each couple. Collect all completed questionnaires and ensure that the participants have listed their number code on the questionnaire.
- Distribute the Married Graduate Student Concerns Survey to all participants. Read aloud the instructions on how to complete the survey. Tell participants that this survey will be used to gain additional information on each participants relationship. Collect all completed surveys and ensure that the participants have listed their number code on the survey.
- Distribute the Marital Adjustment Test to all participants. Read aloud the instructions on how to complete the test. Tell participants that the purpose of this test will be to get a measure of their current level of marital adjustment. Inform students that this test will be given again at the final

meeting after they have completed the training program. Collect all completed tests and ensure that the participants have listed their number code on the test.

- Tell couples that are in group A that the researcher will be contacting them in a few days to set up their individual meetings. Tell couples in group B that they can contact you if they have any questions or are having difficulty in completing their assignments. Tell them how they can get a hold of you.
- Tell couples in groups A, B, and C that they will be expected to attend a final meeting, which will be held in about 3 ½ months. They will be informed about this final meeting about 2-3 weeks in advance of the meeting.

## Appendix I

### Group B RE Manual Assignment Schedule

The following lists the assigned reading and forms to complete each week. The logs and reports should be completed by each participant and then forwarded to the research assistant at the end of each week. Each form should include the name of the participant completing the form.

Week 1

## Assignment 1

Read Introduction and Empathic Skill Chapter	Pgs. 1-11
Read Rules Governing Discussion in Family Relationship Enhancement	Pg. 139
Read Empathic Responding Guidelines Summary	Pg. 140
Complete Log for Brief Practice of Skills: Empathic	Pg. 99
Complete Practice Home Session Report	Pg. 84

## Week 2

### Assignment 2

Read Expressive Skill	Pgs. 12-25
Read Expressive Guideline Summary	Pg. 140
Complete Log for Brief Practice of Skills: Expressive	Pg. 105
Complete Practice Home Session Report	Pg. 85

## Week 3

### Assignment 3

Read Discussion/Negotiation Skill; Signals from Others; & Cues from within Yourself	Pgs. 26-29
Read Discussion Negotiation Skill Guideline Summary	Pg. 142
Complete Log for Brief Practice of Skills: Empathic	Pg. 100
Complete Practice Home Session Report	Pg. 86

## Week 4

### Assignment 4

Read Interpersonal Problem/Conflict Resolution Skill & Phases of Conflict/Problem Resolution	Pgs. 31-36
Read Problem/Conflict Resolution Guideline Summary	Pg. 143
Complete Log for Brief Practice of Skills: Expressive	Pg. 106

Complete Practice Home Session Report

Pg. 87

Week 5

Assignment 5

Read Facilitation Guidelines: Formal

Pgs. 37-42

Complete Skill Generalization Log

Pg. 111

Complete Practice Home Session Report

Pg. 88

Week 6

Assignment 6

Read Guidelines for Formal Teaching/Supervision Pgs. 43-44

Read Guidelines for Formal Teaching/Supervision Pg. 144

Week 7

Assignment 7

Read Informal Facilitating

Pgs. 45-46

Read Informal Facilitating

Pg. 145

Complete Skill Generalization Log

Pg. 113

Complete Practice Home Session Report

Pg. 90

Week 8

Assignment 8

Read Self- Changing Skill

Pgs. 47-50

Read Self –Changing Guideline Summary

Pg. 146

Complete Skill Generalization Log

Pg. 114

Complete Practice Home Session Report

Pg. 91

Week 9

Assignment 9

Read Other Changing Skill Guidelines

Pgs. 51-53

Read Other Changing Skill Guideline Summary Pg. 147

Complete Skill Generalization Log Pg. 115

Complete Practice Home Session Report Pg. 92

#### Week 10

##### Assignment 10

Read Generalization Skill Pgs. 54-63

Read Generalization Guideline Summary Pgs.148-149

Complete Skill Generalization Log Pg. 116

Complete Practice Home Session Report Pg. 93

#### Week 11

##### Assignment 11

Read Maintenance Skill Pgs. 64-67

Read Maintenance Guideline Summary Pg. 150

Complete Skill Generalization Log Pg. 117

Complete Practice Home Session Report Pg. 94

Complete Termination Evaluation Form Pg. 129





Vita

**MATTHEW A. SHOLLENBERGER**  
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EDUCATION

**Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA**  
Ph.D., May, 2001  
Major: Counselor Education      Minor: Family and Child Development

**Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, Kutztown, PA**  
M.Ed., December, 1988  
Major: Counselor Education

**Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, Kutztown, PA**  
B.A., May, 1986  
Major: Sociology      Minor: Psychology

EXPERIENCE

*Assistant Professor* 1-98 to Present

**Wilmington College, New Castle, DE**

Part-time faculty member at Wilmington College Department of Behavioral Sciences. Teach Internship, Practicum, Family Counseling, and Group Counseling courses in the Masters' of Science in Community Counseling Program. Supervise Practicum and Internship students in clinics, hospitals, colleges/universities, and schools. Visit internship sites in the community. Advise students on course selection, internship placement, and dealing with family and school stressors. Facilitate curriculum development including courses, disciplinary procedures, and CACREP concerns.

*Multi-Systemic Therapist (MST)* 12-97 to Present

**Psychotherapeutic Services Incorporated, Wilmington, DE**

Provide family therapy to families in northern Delaware. MST is an intensive, innovative, family therapy, which uses systems family therapy philosophy for treatment. The focus of MST is to enable the family to improve their lives interpersonally through formal family, and informal community resources. Major treatment issues include parenting issues, marital therapy, and drug and alcohol concerns. Psychiatric concerns (including medical treatment), crisis intervention, eating disorders, educational, and career issues are not uncommon in treatment. On-call every third week.

*Graduate Assistant* 8-96 to 5-97

**Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, College of Human Resources and Education, Blacksburg, VA**

Responsible for researching CACREP standards and summarizing and presenting findings to Department faculty who were working towards CACREP accreditation. Completed an assertive and detailed plan to transform the department to meet CACREP standards. Assisted faculty in research and taught graduate classes. Program Area Board Member.

*University Counselor* 8-95 to 5-96

**Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, University Counseling Center, Blacksburg, VA**

Served a year internship providing individual and group counseling to undergraduate students. Focused on adjustment, interpersonal, eating disorders, and substance abuse issues among undergraduates. Administered and interpreted tests. Developed and conducted ongoing workshops focusing on study skills, stress management, and assertiveness in the counseling center and in the dormitories. Developed and co-facilitated a weekly anxiety group.

*Practicum Supervisor* 8-94 to 5-96

**Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, College of Human Resources and Education, Blacksburg, VA**

As a Graduate Assistant, monitored a caseload of Masters' degree candidates in their practicums. Evaluated and advised students on their counseling skills at practicum sites. Practicum sites consisted of clinics, college/university counseling centers, elementary, middle, and high schools. Conferred with site supervisors and reviewed practicum assignments. Co-facilitated practicum classes weekly.

*Intake/Quality Assurance Coordinator* 5-90 to 8-94

**Changing Directions, Incorporated, A Division of Johns Hopkins Hospital, Department of Psychiatry, Baltimore, MD**

Ensured that all clients with mental health concerns obtained the maximum quality of care from staff. Evaluated all new clients and referred them to appropriate services within the community clinic. Designed and executed clinical meetings and supervised a staff of case managers. Advised counselors on counseling techniques and reviewed cases weekly. Provided crisis intervention through individual and team efforts. Monitored a case load of challenging clients until they were ready for placement with a counselor in the clinic. Designed and executed staff development workshops and training.

*Adjunct Faculty* 1-94 to 5-94

**University of Baltimore, Baltimore, MD**

Taught Applied Behavioral Analysis and Methodology to undergraduate students.

*Adjunct Faculty* 1-89 to 12-93

**Baltimore City Community College, Baltimore, MD**

Taught Student Development, Introductory Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Child Psychology, and Adolescent Psychology for five consecutive years, including summer sessions.

*Instructor* 12-87 to 9-88

**Prospectus Associates, Inc, Reading, PA**

Implemented programs designed to enhanced work and psycho-social skills for people with developmental disabilities in a sheltered workshop setting. Developed and implemented treatment plans to assist psycho-social progress.

*Graduate Internship* 9-87 to 5-88

**Albright College, Reading, PA**

Served a 40 hour per week internship at the College Counseling Center. Provided individual and group counseling to undergraduate students. Worked with the Career Center and teaching faculty when it was warranted for student development. Facilitated out-reach services on depression. Taught Behavioral Psychology.

*Psychotherapist* 6/86 to 1/87

**Regional Development Corp., Pottsville, PA**

Provided therapy for clients with psychiatric diagnosis' in an out-patient community clinic. Treatment issues targeted medication compliance and autonomy of the clients.

***ENTRA Orientation Staff Member*** 5/82 to 9/82

**Kutztown College, Kutztown, PA**

Served as an orientation staff member, full-time, for Kutztown College. Lived at the college and provided orientation for in-coming freshman all summer. ENTRA staff was limited to 12 students per year, and were individually selected based on academics, personality, and leadership abilities.

***Vice President of Deatrick Hall Council*** 9/81 to 5/82

**Kutztown College, Kutztown, PA**

Elected to, and served as, Vice President of Deatrick Hall Council at Kutztown College. Developed student-oriented policies and programs encouraging studying, socializing, and non-alcohol related activities.

#### PRESENTATIONS

Shollenberger, M. (2000, October). Higher Education and the Family. Lecture and workshop presented at Wilmington College, Wilmington, DE.

Shollenberger, M. (1997, March). Married Students Under Stress. Paper presented at Quint State Conference on Marital and Family Therapy, Blacksburg, VA.

#### PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

**Chi Sigma Iota Student and Professional Honors Society International/Tau Eta Kappa Chapter-*President*** 6-96 to 5-97; ***President-elect*** 6-95 to 6-96

**Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA**

Elected President-Elect and President of Chi Sigma Iota, Tau Eta Kappa Chapter. Designed and executed counseling seminars and workshops which included lecturers such as Tom Sweeney, Sam Gladding, and Courtland Lee. Recruited and inducted new members. Designed and executed fund raisers.

**American Counseling Association-*Member*** since 2-96.