The Influence of Higher Education and the Perceived Effects on Women and Their Interpersonal Relationships with Significant Others

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Eastern Illinois University

This research is a product of the graduate program in Educational Psychology and Guidance at Eastern Illinois University. Find out more about the program.

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The Influence of Higher Education and the
Perceived Effects on Women and their
Interpersonal Relationships with Significant Others

BY
Tracy L. Conn

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SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
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The Influence of Higher Education and the Perceived Effects on Women and their Interpersonal Relationships with Significant Others

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Abstract

This study of professional women holding advanced degrees examined the influence of doctoral education and the perceived effects on women and their interpersonal relationships with significant others. It was found that half of the women believed that their level of education affected their relationship status. Though there were a group of women who reported that their level of education limited them in their interpersonal relationships, the majority of the women reported being in gratifying relationships with supportive significant others. Therefore, it is not surprising that the majority of the women reported that their significant other was one of the greatest sources of encouragement, along with faculty members in their doctoral program. One particularly important theme which emerged indicated that finding the suitable partner attributed to relationship satisfaction and success. It was also found that despite their full time careers, the majority of women in this study are still primarily responsible for household responsibilities. Regardless of the challenges acknowledged by these women, the majority found combining marriage and career to be fulfilling and rewarding. There was however, some controversy in
regard to combining children with a career and the quality of parenting that would develop as a result of "wanting it all". Of the women with children, it was reported that despite the stress involved, the experience was fulfilling and gratifying.

This study further examined women's motivations for entering doctoral programs. The findings revealed that intellectual stimulation was the most collective motivation among women. Personal and professional growth categories of motivations followed close behind. It was established that women were more motivated by personal and professional enhancement versus obtaining a sense of self separate from the family or financial gains.
Author Notes

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Chapter 1
Introduction to the Study

The Present Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the interpersonal relationship experiences of women who have earned their Ph.D or who are in the pursuit of obtaining a degree in higher education. The research focused on: 1) describing demographic profiles of women respondents and how they perceive their level of education to have effected their interpersonal relationships with significant others (i.e. romantic relationships, marital relationships; dating relationships and relationship status), 2) exploring women's perceptions of the support they received during their doctoral experience from significant others and other important interpersonal relationships in their lives, 3) investigating women's perceptions of their level of satisfaction in their interpersonal relationships with significant others, 4) identifying the importance, if any of the level of education the significant other holds 5) and describing women's perceptions about combining marriage, family and a career.

The present study sought three objectives: 1) to add to the growing body of research concerning the
effects of higher education on women and their interpersonal relationships with significant others; and 2) to attempt to define the feminine stereotypes that are imposed on women that encourage them to place their relationships with significant others in front of everything else, including themselves, their educational aspirations, and their careers; and 3) to describe any perceived changes in attitude that women report from their significant others that encourage them to reach their educational potential.

Although much research has examined trends in enrollments, degrees earned, and the impact that graduate school has on the family, it was the focus of the present study to examine if obtaining a doctorate degree influences a women's relationship status with significant others. More specifically, do women who have obtained or are currently working toward a level of higher education perceive their experience as having a negative or positive effect on their interpersonal relationships with significant others?

It is important for women who are considering an advanced degree to understand to what extent, if any, the effects of obtaining a doctoral degree has on her interpersonal relationships with others. Such an understanding of what a woman is likely to experience (i.e. the benefits or burdens it may place on her
current relationship with a significant other or combining career and family roles) may help women in the process of determining educational goals. It can also help mental health, family therapist and educators provide the most effective, empowering, supportive services for women and more fully understand their personal experiences in the academic arena.

**Limitations of the present study**

The findings of this study are specific to a mid-sized university in East Central Illinois and may not be universally generalized to other institutions. Furthermore, the sample of women who respond are volunteers and not a random sample. It is possible that women who are satisfied in their interpersonal relationships responded to the survey, while those who are dissatisfied did not respond. Another limitation to consider is that fact that the sample is not conclusive of a diverse population of women. In fact, the faculty at Eastern Illinois University are predominantly Caucasian. And finally, the following study does not include a comparison group of women who chose not to get a Ph.D. as a result of the perceived affects it would have on their family and interpersonal relationships with significant others.
Research questions which guided this investigation

What is the range of age of the women holding advanced degrees at this time?

What was the primary motivations for women seeking advanced degrees?

Who provided these women with their greatest encouragement and support while obtaining an advanced degree?

What is the relationship status of women who hold advanced degrees?

If in a committed relationship, what is the level of education that the significant other holds?

If in a committed relationship, who is predominately responsible for household activities?

What is the level of satisfaction women with advanced degrees have in their relationships with significant others?

Do single women with advanced degrees perceive their level of education as restricting their relationship status?

How has obtaining an advanced degree affected women's interpersonal relationship with their significant other?

How do women with advanced degrees perceive combining marriage, family and career?
Chapter 2
Research Procedure

This chapter presents the method used in this study. The population sample is defined and described, followed by an explanation of the data-gathering procedure and instrument used. A description of the methods of qualitative data analysis concludes this chapter.

Population sample

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of interpersonal relationships with significant others for women holding advanced degrees. Therefore, the population was obtained by means of the cluster sample method in which "the unit of sampling is not the individual but rather a naturally occurring group of individuals" (Borg & Gall, 1983, p. 249). A cluster sample was obtained from a list consisting of names of women who were members of the Women's Studies Counsel at Eastern Illinois University, a mid-sized university in East Central Illinois.

Instrument Questionnaire For Women In Doctoral Education (QWDE)

The instrument in this study was adapted and used by the researcher from an established instrument, based
on a larger questionnaire designed by Susan R. Kaplan in an earlier study (1980). The 87-item questionnaire was adapted to compose the Questionnaire For Women In Doctoral Education (QWDE). The QWDE was designed to measure the perceived affects of advanced education on women's interpersonal relationships with significant others. The survey measured the following demographic factors: age, racial or ethnic group, and advanced degree status. The QWDE consisted of the following items: two fill in the blank; 15 multiple-choice items, two of which left room for explanation; and 3 open-ended questions, in which the subject responded in her own words. The QWDE was designed to obtain the following information: current relationship status, significant other's level of education, motivations for entering graduate school, support systems obtained, perceived role conflict, level of satisfaction in interpersonal relationships, and attitudes regarding combining career and family (see Appendix A).

Data Collection

The data were collected by the author by means of a survey questionnaire. A Pilot study was administered to three professional women with doctoral degrees at Eastern Illinois University. The purpose of this pilot study was to exclude ambiguities in items and to
analyze whether questions provided the desired information for this research project. The revised QWDE was sent to fifty professional women serving on a Women's Studies Council at Eastern Illinois University. The QWDE was sent during the second week in March, 1996 by the means of campus mail. Enclosed with the questionnaire was a cover letter that explained the intent of the survey and ensured the confidentiality of her reported personal experiences, (see Appendix B). Survey responses were identified by numbers in place of names to ensure subject confidentiality. A self-addressed envelope was enclosed to encourage the subjects to return the survey to the author by March 15, 1996. Thirty-two questionnaires were returned.

The data from the multiple-choice items were analyzed by means of descriptive statistics. Qualitative analyses were drawn from the open-ended questions. Responses were sorted into a cluster of themes. Percentages were obtained by ranking the number of responses to each question from highest to lowest.
Chapter 3
Review of Related Literature

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Role conflict of the woman student

In a study of attitudes of university faculty members toward the married professional woman, Etaugh (1973) cited sources which supported the idea that the attitudes of academic professionals impacted women in their pursuit of advanced degrees. For example, with regard to the compatibility of dual roles as wife, mother and career woman, such attitudes strongly influenced whether or not the professional woman pursued advanced training. In addition, it was found that professional men had a more negative attitude than professional women toward the ability of the married professional woman to handle family and career roles adequately. The disturbing aspect of this study indicated that qualified females who desired both marriage and a career may be discouraged from obtaining an advanced degree. Specifically, these women might have been discouraged by male university professionals, particularly in the fields of business and engineering, and by older mentors holding less advanced degrees.
within the university.

Several studies of women in higher education (Powell & Rezznikoff, 1976; Sales, Shore & Bolitho, 1980; Holmstrom & Holmstrom, 1974) have demonstrated that married women found integrating their educational role with the role of wife and mother to be difficult and that the potential for role conflict and role overload was excessive. In a study of lifestyle aspirations of women doctoral students, Jacqueling & Hardee (1982) found that professional women were primarily focused on obtaining a career role. However, when roles occurred simultaneously, the wife role was considered more important. Harris (1994) identified psychologists' who studied the behavior of women in relation to interpersonal relationships. She concluded that interpersonal relationships are very meaningful to women, and that women in fact altered their behavior and redefined their original identities in order to sustain relationships.

In an earlier study, Furniss & Graham (1974) reported that typical graduate women were sensitive to the challenge of planning for family and career. It is further reported that the typical age (between twenty-two and thirty) for women in graduate school is also that of the age when society encourages the traditional role behavior (that of wife and mother of
preschool age children). Furniss & Graham further reported that the largest proportion of women hoped to be married and have a career but that a substantial number of women preferred the role of a wife and mother if in fact they had to choose between the roles of career and mother.

Feldman (1973) found that women who attempted to combine student and spouse roles were less successful in their graduate experience and career than women who did not. He also concluded that marriage enhanced graduate school success for men but not for women. Giles (1983) further supported this finding in a study on the effects of doctoral study on marriage and family. She found that husbands pursuing advanced education benefited more than wives pursuing an education, because the wife's responsibilities actually increased when she enrolled.

With regard to the relationship status of divorced individuals, Feldman (1973) found that divorced women were more likely than divorced men to prosper in the academic arena. It appeared that divorced women were able to shed some of their stereotypical responsibilities as compared to divorced men whose responsibilities actually increased. Feldman also noted that the most committed and active graduate students in his study were divorced women. Kaplan
(1982) supported Feldman's conclusion that divorced women were more determined and committed to both school and child care roles, whereas married woman were found to spread their commitments to include school, children and spouse. This study also suggested that women with children, married or divorced, experienced significant emotional strain or lack of time in the role conflict between family and school versus the women in the study who were single or married without children.

In an earlier study where sex roles were perhaps even more predominant, Chilman & Meyer (1966) found that the wife who chose to further her education gave greater indication than any other group of women students of marital dissatisfaction. Therefore, it is not surprising that Powell & Reznnikoff (1976) conducted a study regarding role conflict and symptoms of psychological distress in college educated women. These researchers cited evidence which strongly suggested that women were more likely to develop symptoms of mental illness due to the role expectations imposed by society and her personal achievement needs.

Teachman & Polonko (1988) hypothesized that marriage and parenthood had independent and negative effects on higher education for women more so than for men. These researchers concluded that both marriage and parenthood had negative effects on the education of
both men and women. However, it was also found that marriage prevented more women than men from obtaining an education. In addition, household responsibilities and marriage contributed to the lack of women pursuing higher education. Results from this study also indicated that the longer a couple was married, the better the couple adjusted to the combination of school and family.

Giles (1983) cited evidence that students who experience the most conflict in dual roles identified with traditional sex roles. He also suggested that some women avoided the student/spouse role conflict by choosing to remain single. In terms of choosing divorce as a solution to resolve role conflict, data on doctoral couples did not support this. Poloma & Garland (1971) formed a strong argument pointing to discrimination that the institution of marriage had on women and career advancement. These researchers also reported that women, through socialization, adapted to men rather than to their own educational aspirations. Further, these researchers concluded that marriage was a "handicap" on a woman's professional career and has been described as institutional "slavery" (p.533).

Gilbert (1982) concluded that married female students were particularly vulnerable to familial stress, and therefore graduate school for women was
potentially destructive to family life. Poloma & Garland (1971) contend that employers may discriminate against women because of the dual role expectations of family and career. In addition, they found that many women felt that the role of wife and mother was more important than their professional role. The respondents in the study indicated that while they were aware of the limitations of their professional careers due to marriage and children, they reported feeling content with their situation. In addition, Sales et al. (1980) cited four factors which reduced the role conflict that women experienced when pursuing an advanced degree: 1) the absence of preschool children, 2) the extent to which a partner helps with household and child care chores, 3) the availability of extended family ties, and 4) the use of paid house workers.

With regard to the professional roles of men and women, Feldman (1973) contended that due to family commitments, women were less likely than married professional men to be as committed to such academic responsibilities as publication which often contribute to the success of a professional in the university setting.

On a more favorable note, Holmstrom & Holmstrom (1974) cited evidence that did not support commonly held assumptions regarding women and their roles in
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education and the family. In fact, this study supported the notion that women were better than their male counterparts when it came to dealing with the stress of marriage, family, and the demands of obtaining a doctoral degree.

In a study of women entering college for the first time, Feinstein (1979) found that women did not report role conflict between their family and student roles. In fact, this researcher reported the women's interpersonal relationships had been enhanced as a result of their educational experiences. A later study conducted by Spreadbury (1983) supported Feinstein's findings and indicated that undergraduate, married women did not feel their husbands or children had significantly suffered as a result of their changing roles to students. Thus, the studies cited above indicate that the evidence was mixed with regard to the effects of doctoral education and continuing education on woman students and the impact on their families.

Trends for women in higher education

In a direct assessment of women in higher education, Touchton & Davis (1991) found that, "Between 1948 and 1986, the number of doctoral degrees received by women each year increased from approximately 500 to 12,000" (p.82), and that, "Between 1950 and 1970, the
proportion of all doctorates earned by women increased by a small margin, from 10% to 13% of the total. By 1986, however, the proportion of all doctorates awarded to women had risen to 35%" (p.82). These authors predicted that "By 1998, women are projected to receive 46% of all doctorates awarded that year" (p.82).

Likewise, Ottinger & Sikula cited evidence which suggested that Ph.D.s awarded to women increased by 25% between 1981 and 1991. These researchers also concluded that the number of women who completed four or more years of college actually doubled since 1981.

According to the National Research Council (1994), women earned 15,806 of the Ph.D.s awarded in 1994. The council also concluded that men still earned a substantially greater number of Ph.D.s in comparison to women in all fields with the exception of education. Nonetheless, women have made certain obvious advancements in higher education. Thus, it appears that women are striving to be successful in their pursuit of a level of higher education. Randour, Strasburg, & Blumen (1982) supported these findings by indicating that women are also entering law and medical school and earning doctoral degrees in astonishing numbers. However, they also reported that still fewer women than men are earning degrees at the higher degree levels.
Motivations for women attending graduate school

Astin (1975) reported that adult women who return to school were searching for an identity other than wife and mother. She also discussed adult development and the adult woman's need for independence, assertiveness and the detachment of the role of the caretaker. She went on to report that the largest percentage of her sample included women who were seeking new experiences, and that only a small percentage of women in her study had careers prior to returning to school. Thus, it appears that the women in this study returned to school once family demands decreased, and there was more time for their personal interest.

Hooper & Traupmann (1984) reported that women students over fifty who were working on their Ph.D. were predominantly motivated by career goals. These researchers further supported Astin by finding that many of their respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their traditional roles and furthered their education after their children were adult age.

Kaplan (1981) found that women over thirty years of age entering medical school, who had similar motives to that of women in Ph.D programs, were predominantly motivated by "intellectual stimulation", "competency"
and the need to "feel achievement" (p. 856). An additional area of importance for entering higher education included the desire to change careers due to being bored in other professional positions. Thus, the women in this study appeared to be motivated by the desire to develop to their fullest academic potential.

Kaplan further reported a significant difference in the motivations for men entering higher education, who did so based on status and economic gains, whereas women did not. In a later study, Kaplan (1982) cited research which indicated that at one time, women were expected to live their lives through their husbands' accomplishments. Kaplan further cited research which indicated that the notion of fearing success or losing one's femininity by furthering education has vanished.

Feldman (1973) and Gilbert (1982) supported Kaplan through their research by finding that women in their study were mainly motivated by intellectual reasons versus males in the study who were primarily motivated by the financial motives. However, it is important to note that the motivations for women changed to financial motivations when their relationship status was that of single or divorced.

**Benefits of continuing education for women**

Astin (1975) and Hooper (1979) found that the women
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in their research reported an overall increased self-awareness, greater happiness, confidence and self-esteem after pursuing a college education. In addition, Astin (1975) found that women also reported having a higher respect for other women. Giles (1983) supported these positive benefits by adding that doctoral, married women also found satisfaction in their ability to influence outcomes, as well as in finding new interests outside of their traditional roles. She further reported that women (as well as men) experienced heightened self-esteem as a result of pursuing a doctorate. Sales et al. (1980) reported that despite the role conflicts associated with returning to the classroom, most women reported an increase in personal competence. Furthermore, women reported an increased level of respect from their family, as well as status improvement. Overall, it was reported that returning to school increased the women's personal fulfillment and life satisfaction.

Gilbert (1982) supported this favorable notion of continuing education of women by citing evidence which suggested that married women were considerably more "self-actualized" than single-female students who suffered from role conflict in interpersonal relationships (p.134)
In an attempt to address the concerns of women pursuing their achievement goals and higher education, Hodgson (1978) reported that the most habitual conflict that women in their twenties faced was between the desire to "nourish" intimate relationships and professional needs (p.5044). A study conducted by Yorkis (1981) revealed that marital status and women's professional positions in higher education were adjacent. This researcher concluded that single, childless women held top level positions, obtained the highest level administrative positions, and held graduate level degrees. Dublon (1983) found that single doctoral women reported that their relationship status gave them more flexibility and an added advantage in obtaining a Ph.D. Furthermore, Giles (1983) reported that the university environment was not a setting which fostered or facilitated the progression of intimate relationships due to the demands of doctoral study.

Feldman (1973) cited research which suggested that due to the increase in women's education, there appeared to be a decrease in the marriage rate. Furthermore, women in higher education were found to be married less than males in higher education. Solmon
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(1976) cited evidence that suggested that most women Ph.D.s were unmarried and that a substantial number of males pursuing their Ph.D.s were married. Gilbert (1982) cited research which indicated that only 20% of all full-time females in graduate school were married in comparison to 50% of all full-time males.

In a recent study, Wehrle (1982) found that African American female doctorates who were unmarried were ten times more likely than married women to believe that their level of education had restricted their relationship status.

**Intimate Relationships**

In a study conducted by Berry (1995), an attempt was made to understand the experience of women students. The researcher concluded that the level of satisfaction for post-graduate women in their social lives as well as availability and quality of relationships dropped slightly. It was further concluded that the increase in educational requirements and time pressure contributed to a women's unhappiness in interpersonal relationships during degree completion.

Vartuli (1982) examined and discussed the differentiating issues doctoral women faced in interpersonal relationships. The author identified
four general categories of different intimate relationships which women experienced in graduate school. 1) **The makers and breakers of relationships** who usually made some type of relationship change as a result of entry into doctoral study. For example, these women often experienced a divorce or termination of a long-term relationship before, during or after their doctoral study. Williams (1982) also cited evidence which suggested that the incidence of divorce and other relationship changes throughout the doctoral experience was high. 2) **The daters** who are described as carefree women who chose this lifestyle due to the time constraints of doctoral work and lack of time to devote to intimate relationships. It should be noted that the researcher found this category of women to be extremely low. 3) **The abstainers** are described as women who chose to abstain from intimate relationships altogether to devote themselves to their doctoral work. 4) **The sustainers** are described as women who are in committed, long-term, and in most cases, married relationships that are maintained throughout the doctoral process. It remains unclear in the research which group of women was most predominant. In fact, the research suggested that there was a large array of women entering doctoral programs and higher education despite their relationship status.
Benefits or threat of education and the effects on intimate relationships or marriages

Feinstein (1979) contended that the women who presumed their roles as mothers and wives, in addition to taking on the role of a student, reported positive effects on intimate relationships. For example, women reported they had a richer area of discussion with their significant others which enhanced their relationship. Likewise, in another study by Hooper (1979), women reported that their husbands considered them better conversationalists as well as praised them more for their accomplishments and decreased dependence. Moreover, couples reported that their family had become closer as a result of having to work together, and that their marriages had improved. In this study, not one couple reported that their marriage had suffered as a result of the wife returning to school.

Conversely, Bergen & Bergen (1978) reported that marriages and intimate relationships during undergraduate study can suffer as a result of pressure. These researchers discussed marital problems that developed for even the most happily married students. Such challenges included financial strain, poor
communication, lack of time, and sexual disharmony. However, the same study reported that when the wife pursued an advanced degree versus an undergraduate degree, the quality of marriage was actually higher. The researcher went on to state that higher quality of marriages were found if both spouses were experiencing graduate school at the same time.

Gruver & Labadie (1975) found that sexual dissatisfaction due to lack of time was reported as the greatest criticism. In addition, these researchers found that communication problems were rated second most problematic among married college students. In a later study, Gilbert (1982) supported this research by citing evidence which also suggested that sexual dissatisfaction was most problematic in students' marriages due to time constraints. Second, lack of communication was reported as a strain to the relationship. The third and fourth items reported were the lack of free time combined with lack of financial resources to pursue recreational activities. Fifth was the essential lack of friendships due to lack of resources such as time and money to engage in leisure activities.

Gilbert (1982) & Astin (1975) cited research that supported the notion that the family system can modify and even flourish under graduate school conditions or
it can fail miserably. Overall, he found that most graduate school families reported high levels of marital satisfaction. Astin supported this finding by revealing that the couples in her study reported that the overall effects of continuing education were positive in the areas of family members becoming more organized and self-reliant. She also reported that the children's level of respect for the mother increased, as did family interaction and overall marriage quality.

Moreover, Giles (1983) cited evidence which indicated more distinct advantages than disadvantages for women doctoral students in intimate relationships with significant others. Advantages included sharing greater common goals, increased cohesiveness with spouse due to less time with friends, and emotional security with one another. Disadvantages included (but were not limited to) financial stress, lack of time for one another or for social experiences. Giles reported that the common predictor of marital stability in families in which women were working on their doctoral degrees was a shorter duration of the marriage and egalitarian roles. Spreadbury (1983) reported that due to the increase in women returning to obtain higher levels of education, it can be concluded that women are perceiving education as being less detrimental to their marriage and families.
On the other end of the spectrum, it cannot be denied that the doctorate experience has in fact harmed some marriages and intimate relationships with significant others. Vartuli (1982) referred to the combination of marriage, children and the pursuit of the Ph.D as the "impossible dream" (p.93). The author went on to report that women obtaining Ph.D.s will pay a price in ways not anticipated due to an attempt to manage a home, family and studies. In her writing about her own experience in continuing education and the pursuit of a Ph.D., Giles (1990) elegantly narrated her personal journey. Here, the author described an ambivalence toward education due to the conflicts which arise in alliance to the split of life as a mother, wife and a student. She further discussed the liberation that education provides women. She described the person she was before her doctorate and the woman she is after her doctoral experience. Now divorced, Giles reported that at times, she "mourns" the passing of the woman she was before her education, and yet, she reported being grateful for her successes (p.361).

**The importance of husband/significant other support**

In a study by Hooper (1979), women students defined "support" as being verbal comments and encouragement
from their husbands and reported it as being very consequential to their success. However, it was confirmed that this same sample of women did not necessarily view lack of help with family/home responsibilities as being nonsupportive. Nonetheless, as previously mentioned, a high rate of role conflict and time restriction was reported as a hindrance in the research of married, women students.

Giles (1983) defined emotional/psychological support as, "... encouragement, listening to problems, sharing frustrations, and making the home more conducive for study by assuming certain responsibilities for managing the household" (p.10).

Berkove (1978) distinguished four areas of husband support: 1) attitudinal; 2) emotional; 3) functional; 4) and financial. She concluded that in order for women to make the choice to pursue higher education, emotional support appeared crucial. However, merely having emotional support from significant others did not keep some women from dropping out. Attitudinal and financial support, on the other hand, appeared to be predictors of academic success for the majority of the women. Functional support appeared to be of little value to the women in this study. Women who had significant others who provided them with high support in attitudinal, emotional and financial areas were most
likely to experience low levels of psychological stress and reported marital satisfaction. The reverse was true of women who reported low husband support.

Dublon (1983) concluded that marriage and family were viewed as having a positive effect on women and their advancement of education and professional furtherance. Nonetheless, it is important to note that this perspective was reported by women who viewed their husbands as being supportive. In a study conducted by Carroll, Ellis, & McCrea (1991) a sample of university professional women reported that their greatest support came from their significant others.

Holmstrom & Holmstrom (1974) cited research that clearly demonstrated that commitment, determination, and self-confidence were essential ingredients of success for women doctoral students. Further, these researchers demonstrated that the graduate environment was not conducive to providing a supportive atmosphere for women pursuing a doctorate. Thus, it would be reasonable to expect that significant others played a consequential role in the support of women in higher education. However, it has been reported that other areas of support are also influential. For example, a recent study of women over thirty years of age reported that their greatest source of encouragement came not from significant others, but rather from parents and
Sales et al., (1980), Kaplan (1982) & Giles (1983) have demonstrated that the primary stabilizer, source of support, comfort, and encouragement for the doctoral female student was the support received from the significant other or husband. Gilbert (1982) cited evidence which suggested that married women who were academically successful were most often found to report being in happy marriages, whereas those who were less successful reported being in a dysfunctional marriage.

In general, it appears unambiguous that the research supports the notion that the more anxiety husbands or significant others experience about their relationships with female partners who have returned to school, the less supportive they are (Hooper, 1979).

**Division of labor**

Psychological problems deter numerous women from returning to school to pursue an advanced degree. Many of these problems were a direct result of sex-role stereotypes (Sales et al., 1980). These researchers also concluded that the greatest affliction women expected if they returned to school was the maintenance of household tasks. These researchers cited evidence which suggested that the family was crucial in helping a woman overcome personal conflicts as a result of
Influence of Higher Education

combining roles. Thus, it would appear that in an egalitarian household, women would suffer less stress as a result of returning to school.

Gilbert (1982) cited evidence that defined egalitarian marriages as those in which both parties share household tasks. Poloma & Garland (1971) similarly defined the egalitarian family as "...a family form which we feel is essential to allow the married professional woman the opportunity for equal achievement and advancement" (p.534). These researchers concluded that the egalitarian marriage was merely a myth and found that only one case out of the sample researched could actually classify as egalitarian. In all other couples, it was found that the wife was responsible for the traditional feminine household responsibilities.

Hooper (1979) introduced a study of husbands' attitudes and behaviors regarding their wives returning to school and revealed three groups of husbands: 1) Agreement group, in which the women students remained in their traditional sex-role responsibilities in a general agreement (these men reported that they had more to talk about with their wives, but that her performance in home responsibilities had suffered); 2) Egalitarian group, in which the husbands reported assuming greater responsibility for household duties.
Influence of Higher Education (these men also reported that their relationships were vital and growing); 3) and the last and most common among this study was the Division of Labor by Disagreement group (these men reported conflict due to their career requirement that prevented them from taking on additional traditional female household responsibilities). The research in this study revealed that the women with husbands who were least egalitarian had the most unfavorable attitudes regarding their marriage.

An opposing view held by Giles (1983) reported that families in which the wife was pursuing her doctorate degree were highly egalitarian. However, she also reported that the husbands referred to increased household responsibilities as "helping out" as if it were the woman's primary responsibility to begin with (p.13). She also ascribed to the notion that women who pursued their doctoral degrees suffered from guilt and resumed the traditional roles in addition to doctoral obligations.

**The significance of the husband/significant other's level of education**

Giles (1983) reported that the level of emotional/psychological support was prominent among significant others and husbands who had the doctoral
experience. Further, if the significant other had not obtained a doctorate, the level of support was reduced. Giles additionally reported that it was likely that the significant other held a degree comparable to women who obtained higher degree status. In cases where there were consequential degree differences in educational levels, it was reported that this factor could in fact threaten the significant other's self-esteem, and therefore plague marital stability.

It remains unclear in the research whether the predictor of education level of graduate student husbands effected the couples' interpersonal relationships. For example, in opposing research, it was found that the husbands of graduate students did not find it threatening that their wives had equal or superior levels of education (Hooper, 1979).

Giles (1983) concluded that there were no perceived differences in marital happiness by educational level of significant others. Bergen & Bergen (1978), on the other hand, found that husbands with advanced degrees had lower quality of perceived marriages than husbands with less education.

Much research, however, does agree on the probability of similar levels of education among couples. In an earlier study on patterns of educational homogamy, Michielutte (1972) reported that
women with four or more years of college were most likely to marry husbands with the same education. Likewise, Feinstein (1979) found that married women who were pursuing an education in addition to fulfilling their homemaker role were all married to men who had some college education. Additionally, Feldman (1973) supported this notion by finding that the women in his study pursuing graduate education were likely to be married to a spouse with similar education.

Khosh (1976) illustrated that husbands of women in higher education were perceived to be the major source of support through encouragement to their wives. In addition, it was found that husbands' attitudes toward continuing education and similar level of education positively correlated with women returning to academics.

The above studies have addressed the experience of continuing education for women; support from meaningful interpersonal relationships with spouse, and the effects that the doctoral experience has on some families. In addition, these studies have clearly demonstrated the increased number of women determined to seek growth, equality, and advancement in the professional and academic world due to the choices available to them.
Chapter 4

Presentation of Data

Subjects

Subjects were professional women who held advanced degrees including Ed.D.s and Ph.D.s. Of the total sample that responded \((N=32)\), 87% were Caucasian, 7% Asian, 3% Hispanic, and 3% African American. The range of women sampled were between twenty-seven and fifty-nine years of age with the median being that of forty-five years of age. The questionnaire data showed that 80% of the sample were in a committed relationship at the time of the survey \((N=24)\), while the additional 20% reported that they were single \((N=6)\) (See Graph 1). These findings do not support previous research that suggested that women in higher education were found to be unmarried (Solmon 1976).

![Graph 1. Current Relationship Status of Women in Doctoral Education](image_url)
The questionnaire data showed that 73% of the women reported that they were in a stable situation with respect to their lives and work (N=22). Furthermore, 20% reported that they had just come through a transition period in regard to their lives and work (N=6), and 7% reported that they were on the verge of making changes in their lives and/or work (N=2) (See Chart 1).

More respondents (93%) indicated that intellectual stimulation was an important motivation for entering a doctoral program than any other reason (N=27), thus supporting previous research by Kaplin (1981) and Feldman (1973). Other motivations that seemed important included: to obtain a feeling of achievement
and to develop a sense of competency. The present finding also supports Hooper & Traupman's (1984) research which indicated that women were motivated by career goals. Other motivations that were less important but still important included: the desire to be self supporting, to upgrade job or pay, and the need for independence. Additionally, the desire to develop a sense of self separate from the family and to get a job for financial reasons were even less important motivations, thus conflicting with previous research by Astin (1975).

The least important motivations were the desire to escape boredom, and the possibilities of divorce or widowhood. (See Table 1)

**Table 1. MOTIVATIONS FOR ENTERING GRADUATE SCHOOL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Relatively Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For intellectual stimulation</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To obtain a feeling of achievement</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To start or change a career</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Develop a sense of competency</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next step in existing career</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to be self supporting</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To upgrade job or pay</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for independence</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To develop a sense of self separate from family</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to get a job for financial reasons</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To escape boredom</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility of divorce</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>85.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility of widowhood</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>88.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Relationship satisfaction and status during graduate school

The questionnaire data showed that 80% of the women reported that they were either married or in a committed relationship at the time they entered graduate school or during their degree program (N=24). Over half, 59% of the women, also reported that they were either satisfied or very satisfied in their marriages or interpersonal relationships with significant others while working on their doctoral program (N=17). Among the remainder of the women who reported being in a committed relationship during their doctoral program, 24% reported that their relationship satisfaction fluctuated or that they were dissatisfied in their interpersonal relationships (N=7) (See Chart 2).
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Of the unmarried women (N=10), 6 reported that they were either satisfied or very satisfied in their dating relationships during and after completion of their doctoral program. The other 4 reported that they were dissatisfied in their dating relationships during and after completion of their doctoral program in comparison to post doctorate work. One woman discussed her concern for future women in doctoral programs:

I don't know if I will ever have a romantic relationship again. That is the price I have paid (and choose to pay) for obtaining a doctorate. But I'm still glad I did it. I hope my daughter (who is obtaining a doctorate) will be able to find a lasting relationship! It is still not totally acceptable to be a smart woman in our society.

Another woman voiced her opinion regarding the cultural acceptance of intellectual women by saying, "...I hate to say this but the combination of my education and age makes me less desirable." She went on to say that she was happy where she is in relationship to her life situation. A third woman reported, "The opportunity to interact on a personal level is very limited during the graduate school experience." Another woman stated, "...I feel that
because of my drive to get a degree, I postponed my personal life."

**Effects of doctoral experience on relationship status**

The questionnaire data showed that the vast majority, 92% of the women reported that they believed their doctoral experience had affected their relationship status (N=23) (See Graph 2).

![Graph 2: Has your doctoral experience affected your relationship status?](image)

One woman reported that her doctoral experience had a favorable effect on her relationship status by saying, "...It allowed me into the environment where I met my present husband." Another woman reported, "...Studying in a program created a situation where I could meet men and start dating again. I met my husband after my first year." Still another woman reported that she met and married her present husband
who was also a fellow student and reported, "...We were both studying and could help each other."

**Interpersonal relationship difficulties during/after doctoral program**

Regarding relationship status during and after completion of the doctoral program, 57% reported that their interpersonal relationship with a significant other remained in tact during and after completions of their doctoral program (N=17), while the other 33% of the women who were in interpersonal relationships during their doctoral program reported that their relationships terminated through divorce or separation during or after completion of their doctoral program (N=10) (See Graph 3).
One woman reflected that the doctoral experience provided her the empowerment to end an unpleasant interpersonal relationship with a significant other:

The degree has made me more confident and self-assured. It enabled me to find the courage to leave a bad relationship and venture out on my own. I am now in a healthy relationship. We both are contributing to the partnership on all levels and we celebrate our successes together.

Half of the women reported that their doctoral experience had been a significant contributor to their interpersonal relationship difficulties with a significant other (See Chart 3). These findings support Giles (1993) research that suggest that the university environment is not conducive to producing intimate relationships.
One woman reported:

There was a large gap in educational level with my first husband that he found difficult to deal with especially when my salary jumped upon completion of the degree. I often felt as if I had to apologize for my success. It wasn't healthy.

Explaining how her accomplishments damaged her marriage, another woman said, "My ex-husband was not as successful in his program and resented my success."

Another woman discussed the demands that her doctoral program inflicted upon her marriage, though she reported that the personality of her significant other was what ultimately ended their relationship. "We were separated geographically which didn't help. But mostly, he was not sensitive to my needs and acted selfishly." Another woman reported, "It's difficult for people with two doctorates to find meaningful employment."

Reporting that the doctoral experience allowed her to explore aspects of herself which resulted in the termination of her marriage, another woman said, "I was discovering other things about myself that led to the marriage ending."

Another woman, reporting that the personal changes she went through may have caused relationship difficulties said,
"I was becoming my own person and was not so compliant or dependent."

The results were mixed for those women whose interpersonal relationships were terminated during or after completion of their doctoral program. For example, 50% of the women reported that their doctoral program was a significant contributor to relationship difficulties and may have contributed to the relationship's demise (N=6). The results support the notion that some marriages and intimate relationships can suffer as a result of academic pressure as promoted by Bergen & Bergen (1975). One woman reflects on this issue by saying, "...I knew many people whose relationship suffered from the pressures of graduate school. The work is so all-consuming that it is hard to find the extra time to build and maintain personal relationships." Another woman discussed her experience by saying, "Pursuing a degree meant living apart from my partner. After our breakup, it was difficult to meet someone serious about a relationship. Especially since our career would mean moving in most cases."

On the other hand, 50% of the women reported that their doctoral experience was not a significant contributor to their relationship difficulties (N=6). One woman recalled tough times and acknowledged her married spouse by saying, "There were times when I'm
sure that divorce would have been an easier short-term solution. Fortunately, both my husband and I believed that staying together was important." According to another woman, her marriage hardships were not directly related to her doctoral program:

The degree is part of me! My marriage is always going to be rocky - one day smooth and the next day not, regardless of my education and achievements. I only recently came to this realization.

Another woman, whose husband was also pursuing personal interests, described their dedication to each other in adjusting to doctoral demands she experienced:

I was lucky I believe because my spouse was busy too. He had his own job in addition to other committed interests and he understood that our time together would be limited. We also made a real effort to find 'bits of time' for each other during each work day. Meals became very important sharing times and we took frequent breaks and sometimes went away for the weekend to 'get away from it all'.

Several women reported that their doctoral experience strengthened their interpersonal relationship with a significant other. This finding contrasts with Berry's (1995) research which indicated
that women's quality of relationships dropped and that they were unhappy in their interpersonal relationships due to the degree process. One the other hand, this finding supports research (Gilbert, 1982; Astin, 1975; Giles, 1983) which cited evidence that indicated there were more distinct advantages for women doctoral recipients in intimate relationships. For example, one woman stated, "Our relationship has grown as I have become more outgoing and confident." Another woman stated that the doctoral experience "enhanced my relationship, without a doubt!" when referring to her significant other. Another woman reported that her doctoral experience "Strengthened our love and commitment to each other" when referring to her significant other. Yet another woman reported, "It's been great for my marriage! We've both grown from the experience and our marriage is stronger than ever."

Two women commented on the betterment of their relationships with their husbands by stating, "It has made my husband and I closer than we were before," and "It has strengthened my relationship with my husband."

One woman reported that the personal changes that she went through as a result of her doctoral program improved her relationships with her significant other and her family by stating, "It has made me a stronger person in general and my husband expresses a great deal
of respect and admiration for my accomplishments. It raised my status in the family." Another woman added, "My greater independence has created a stronger interdependent relationship with my marriage (an unexpected benefit!)."

Additionally, women commented on the positive impact their doctoral experience had on their interpersonal relationships with significant others as well as other meaningful relationships: "My satisfaction with life in general and my personal relationship with my husband and children in particular have increased," and "I have learned a lot about myself and my relationships with others." Another woman discussed the impact of her doctoral experience on her interpersonal relationships by stating, "Receiving my doctorate degree has positively affected my relationships with others. I look at the world through different eyes -- I am more tolerant."

**Level of education of significant other**

Of the women who reported being in a committed relationship at the time of the survey, 81% reported that their significant others held the advanced degree of a Masters or a Ph.D (N=14), while the remaining 19% reported that their significant others held bachelors degrees or less (N=7) (See Chart 4).
The results of this study were mixed in regard to previous research by Giles (1983) that reported the likelihood of the significant other holding a degree comparable to women with higher degree status. The findings of this study indicated that the largest percent of degrees held by significant others was a Masters degree. However, a substantial percentage of significant others held a Ph.D.

Only two women discussed the level of education of their significant other and the impact it has on their interpersonal relationship. One woman discussed her negative experience in dating men with a similar educational background:

During my years as a student (divorced mother of
three small kids) and the first decade or so of my teaching career, I found that men of similar intellectual and educational background were competitive and/or intimidated by my intelligence and achievements. Eventually, I met a younger man with less education and no aspirations to a "profession". He was able to appreciate me as a human being, a woman he could admire and be close to, and we married. It has not always been easy but we are happy, share many interests, and are not troubled by the competitiveness that pretty much precluded close relationships during my student and early professional days.

Another woman, whose significant other did not have a similar educational background, reported, "My husband without even having a college degree himself, supported my graduate school decision and experience totally. I may not have done it without him! Our relationship is stronger now than ever before." These women's stories conflict with previous research that suggest significant others level of education positively correlated with women's achievements in higher education and that women were more likely to marry men with a similar level of education (Khosh, 1976; Feldman, 1973).
Household responsibilities

Of the women who responded to the survey, over 60% reported that they were primarily responsible for record keeping, bill paying, meal preparation, and household laundry (See Chart 5).
Similarly, over 50% are responsible for housecleaning, kitchen clean up, and food shopping (See Chart 6).
The questionnaire data displayed a more proportional distribution of responsibility with regard to driving children, though still not equally distributed. Of the women, 36% reported that they were primarily responsible for driving the children. (See Chart 7).

![Chart 7. DRIVING CHILDREN](chart)

Despite results indicating that the women were independently responsible for the majority of the household responsibilities addressed above, one woman reported that she was satisfied with the arrangement with her significant other:

... My husband and I try to split household work as evenly as possible, and I'm satisfied with the set up. I expect/hope it will be the same
when we have children. Combining marriage and career requires bargaining, give & take, and lots of communication . . .

Another woman discussed her relationship with her significant other and her frustration in household responsibilities:

. . .My husband is definitely a feminist and is more supportive than most men (of my career). He has actually been my biggest encouragement in completing the Ph.D. program. HOWEVER, I still am the one who is the 'household manager', and I wish that household cleaning duties were more equally distributed. He is less aware of things that need to be done on a regular basis around the house (sweeping, vacuuming, dusting, etc.). He will do them when prodded, but not spontaneously. I'd say house work is the biggest stress in our marriage. I need a maid!

Perceptions on combining marriage, family and career

Women shared their interpersonal reflections and reasoning on combining marriage, family and career. A common theme emerged specifying the support of a significant other as an essential ingredient to being able to succeed in combing the three roles. For example, one woman stated, "An egalitarian marital
relationship helps with stress." Another woman reported:

Marriage, family and a career can be combined only if the husband and wife support it. The career of the woman must meet family and marriage goals. Each family member must continue his/her personal and professional development to keep a family viable.

One woman commented on the challenge of combining marriage, family and career and emphasized the importance of a good relationship, as well as shedding guilt for deviating from stereotypical roles. She stated, "It is difficult. I met my husband during our Ph.D. program. We share everything (some job specialization at home). Must have an understanding spouse! Must be able to get rid of guilt!". Another woman added, "It can be done - but it takes lots of work, flexibility, caring and love. Also a sense of fairness on the part of both spouses."

Another common theme which emerged among childless women was that having children was not compatible with the professional lifestyle the women chose for themselves. For example, one woman stated, "Combining a marriage and a career is possible only if the couple engages in a lot of sharing and discussion of one another's work. I imagine children would make a career
nearly impossible, which is one reason I chose not to have any." In addition, another woman reported, "With the right partner, marriage and career are compatible. My husband and I have decided not to have children, however, because a family would not be compatible with our lifestyle or careers."

One woman commented on her personal situation and choice to remain childless. With regard to combining marriage, family and career, she stated:

It is very difficult. My husband was supportive in my decision to go to graduate school and we have no children (have been childless by choice), so we were more flexible than couples with children or women whose husbands are not able to share some household responsibilities.

Another woman reflected on the importance of the careers of her and her significant other and their decision to remain childless by stating, "Combining marriage and career has been fine. We opted not to have children. But we made non-traditional decisions about life-style and treating BOTH careers equally important."

Women reflected on their convictions regarding women who have children in combination with marriage and career. On women stated, ". . .I feel strongly that during critical preschool years, children need a
caring, dependable care-giver." Another woman who shared similar views, described her experience with, "...I worked only part time and was home with the kids. I considered it important to their welfare and education." For one mother, starting her doctoral program was not desirable until her oldest child was nine years old. She stated, "...Pursuing a degree requires tremendous time and energy, and I believe my parenting wouldn't have been as effective if I had been trying to deal with young children and school". This woman reported that she didn't want to give up her family time, so she pursued her degree only part time.

One woman discussed the negative aspects of combining marriage, family and career:

It is very difficult. You can pretty well count on NOT doing well at one or more aspects that, if you were spread less thin, you could handle very competently. Career demands of college teachers make no allowance for any personal life, and if you determine to make time for personal life, you will not excel as a scholar. You may still be able to have a satisfactory career if you make up your mind not to blame yourself for not publishing, going to conferences, etc, as often as it requires to get professional recognition, promotions,
raises, merit awards and the like - and also, if you have a position where you can teach or perform the basic professional duties without excessive pressure to put in all the extra hours it takes to compete for these things. . .I have long been an advocate of professional lives for women who choose them - but we are fooling ourselves if we imagine 'we can have it all' and achieve excellence as marriage partners, mothers, members of our families, and career women.

A second woman noted the differences between men and women seeking an advanced degree and described the possible difficulties of combining a doctoral program with parenting based on her personal experience as a single mother:

It was relatively easy for my former husband to obtain a doctorate because all he had to do was go to school and study. On the other hand, it was hard for me because I had all the responsibility, financial constraints and had to study too. (This was especially true after the divorce). I think this is the case for many women. However, in the long run, I think I am the luckier one. I know a lot about time management, priorities, goal-setting, etc., but most importantly my children and I are closer
because of it. I believe I was a good role model. Children, especially daughters need that. It was definitely worth the struggle. Also, I think people with many facets to their lives are healthier and more interesting.

A third woman discussed her sentiments about combining marriage, family and career and stated, ", ...Professionals who have a good marriage and well raised kids probably have a 'wife' who takes care of those areas of their lives, while they devote themselves to their careers."

One woman shares her story which takes us through history and the changing perceptions of women who combine the roles of mother and wife with that of a career woman:

..., I was a young woman coming of age in the fifties, and it is difficult for today's young women to imagine the effects of the cultural "propaganda" of those post-war years, when we were taught that a husband and family and taking care of a home were the highest of aspirations for any woman. During the years I was doing graduate work, the early stirrings of the 'Women's Liberation' movement of the sixties were in the air, but both women and men generally, were hostile toward it, and there was a lot of
disapproval of women who did not focus their lives on a man. Intellectual was not a word of admiration when applied to women. So I had to really know my priorities, to choose an intellectual life. I guess what really kept me on track was that I had three kids to support alone. I knew that no one would have the commitment to them that I had, and preparing myself to be in a profession I liked, that would pay well ('for a woman' I always added) and would allow me some flexibility to schedule time with my children - that had to be my highest priority. It was very lonely for me, for a lot of years, until my children were all raised and I could have more freedom in my personal life. I would hope that in the 1990's, there is less hostility and ambivalence toward women who are competent and professional, so 'romantic relationships' would be less problematic. But still, the intellectual career life will probably always make demands that pull in directions opposite to marriage, family, or the intimate personal life.

Several other women in the study commented on their enjoyment, fulfillment and positive outlook in combining marriage, family and career. One woman stated, "Combining these three is a big job! For me, I
wouldn't have it any other way. I enjoy and am rewarded by all three." Another woman described her experience as "Satisfying" and "Beautiful" and went on to say, "Of course there are some difficulties or adjustments but they can be addressed." Another woman enthusiastically stated, "It works! That's why I'm committed to keeping all of these going!!! I also like the challenge." Another woman reflected on her experience of combining marriage, family and career and stated, "It all works beautifully for me, my husband, and my child. Though we've been forced to live separately at times over the past ten years, our relationship has thrived. It takes dedication and love, I think." Another woman stated that combining the three is "simply a fact of life."

Other women also reflected on the challenge of dual roles but they also addressed the fulfillment they experienced as a result of combining marriage, family and career. One women stated, "This is a difficult juggling act. However, I'd never give up my roles. Each gives me tremendous satisfaction." Another woman stated:

...I think combining marriage, family and career can be tough at times - but as long as we maintain our sense of self, our friendship, our sense of humor and the recognition that life
can't be perfect - the combination can work.

**Greatest encouragement to attend doctoral program**

Women were asked to list, in the order of importance, three individuals who gave them the greatest encouragement to attend their doctoral program. Of the women who responded to this question, 47% indicated their husband or significant other gave them the greatest encouragement to attend a doctoral program (N=14), 47% indicated faculty and staff at the university (N=14), 33% indicated their parents (N=10), 23% indicated their friends (N=7), 13% indicated themselves (N=4), 10% indicated their siblings (N=3), 3% indicated their children (N=1), 3% indicated other family members (N=1); and 3% indicated a therapist (N=1).

Several women discussed their interpersonal relationships with their significant others and the importance of the support they received during their doctoral program. One woman described her husband and stated:

My husband is my best friend, major supporter etc. . .I'm lucky that my husband is my biggest cheerleader - but that is partly because I don't do my work at his expense (flexibility and good fair negotiating are important to us).
Another woman described her significant other and discussed several areas in which he provided meaningful support during her doctoral program:

He was incredibly supportive - even when I had to live away from home in order to complete a required internship - he remained at home with our two children and managed everything. He didn't complain about it. He helped me on the computer when I prepared graphs and charts for my dissertation. His support made me realize how lucky I am to have him in my life. We have been married twenty years.

Another woman shared her experience about the support she received from faculty members and fellow students by stating, "The faculty and students at my degree institution were great -- helpful, stimulating, considerate, bright, etc.. It was a great experience!"

Greatest emotional support during doctoral program

Women were asked to rate individuals based on how emotionally supportive they were during their doctoral program. Of the women who responded, 84% reported that their significant other or husband was supportive or very emotionally supportive (N=21), while 16% of the women reported that their significant other or husband
was rarely or not emotionally supportive during their doctoral program (N=4).

Moreover, 97% reported that university faculty was supportive or very emotionally supportive during their doctoral program (N=28), versus 3% of the women who reported that university faculty was rarely emotionally supportive during their doctoral program (N=1). Additionally, 93% reported that other students were supportive or very emotionally supportive (N=25), while 7% of the women reported that other students were rarely emotionally supportive during their doctoral program (N=2).

Further, 100% of the mothers reported that their children were supportive or very emotionally supportive during their doctoral program (N=13), 88% of the women reported that their in-laws were supportive or emotionally supportive (N=15), and 12% reported that their in-laws were rarely or not emotionally supportive during their doctoral program (N=2).

Finally while 96% reported that their male friends were supportive or very emotionally supportive during their doctoral program (N=22), and 4% reported that they were not emotionally supportive during their doctoral program (N=1), 100% reported that their female friends were supportive or emotionally supportive during their doctoral program (N=30).
One woman voiced her thankfulness for the level of emotional support from her significant other during her doctoral program:

To survive the doctoral process I relied heavily on my husband's emotional support. He supported me at the lowest points of the process, even when I had doubts about finishing. But it was also mutual support, as he was working on his MA at the same time...

Another woman addressed the importance of support from interpersonal relationships other than that of a significant other:

Other "interpersonal" relationships mattered too. Support from my mother and grandmother in particular - sometimes it was as if they saw themselves in me and relished the opportunities I had. My friendship (deep friendship) with them, my father, and one of my brothers reinforced my own identity and my relationship with my husband.

Yet another woman communicated on the support of her significant other and her children by stating, "The support of my husband and children has kept me going in times of stress. I'm not sure I could keep going without having them with me."
Discussion

Women's opportunities and choices are increasing substantially. Women appear to be working on their intellectual and professional development as well as maintaining and developing interpersonal, intimate relationships with significant others. The meaningful significance of this research project can influence, and possibly prepare women for the changes that take place in their interpersonal relationships as a result of following dreams of obtaining a Ph.D.. Part of the foundation for this investigation rests upon the assumption that interpersonal relationships, including love and friendship, are significant aspects of human existence and that educational accomplishments are often relevant to their quality.

Though it was clear through this research that women believed their level of education affected their relationship status, it is not clear to what extent doctoral degrees impact whether a woman remains single or chooses to be in a committed relationship with a significant other. It cannot be denied that a group of ten women experienced the termination of a relationship due to divorce or separation during or after completion
of their doctoral program. This may simply represent a larger societal problem but nonetheless, it appears that there are some special considerations relevant to women striving for their doctoral degrees and the effects on their family and interpersonal relationships. This is particularly true for the six out of ten women who believed that their doctoral experience was in fact, a significant contributor to their relationship difficulties.

One particularly important finding that emerged from this study indicated that the women attributed relationship success and satisfaction to finding the "right" partner. Of the ten women who reported ending an interpersonal relationship during or after completion of their doctoral degree, seven reported that they have since found a satisfying relationship. It is also important to note that 67% of the women reported that their marriages or interpersonal relationships survived during and after their pursuit of the Ph.D.. In addition, it was clear that women who described their significant others as their greatest source of encouragement during their academic and professional aspirations reported higher levels of satisfaction in their interpersonal relationships and in combining career, marriage, and family. These women also reported that their doctoral experience in fact,
enhanced and strengthened their interpersonal relationships with significant others.

Another noteworthy finding was the magnitude of encouragement and emotional support that nearly all women reported they received during their doctoral program from an array of important people in their lives. What was striking about this category of supporters was that all of the women who had children reported that they received considerable emotional support from them, despite common held assumptions that children are a burden to women pursuing advanced degrees. However, it is not clear how old the children were when they were considered to be emotionally supportive. In regard to the person who provided the greatest level of encouragement throughout the doctoral process, the women reported that their significant others and faculty were most encouraging. It is also evident that female friendships provided the most consistent emotional support for the women of this study. All respondents, (100%) reported that their female friends were emotionally supportive throughout the doctoral process. This indicates that female ties and connections remain a powerful tool in women's movement toward equality.

Most women reported that intellectual stimulation was a very important motivation for entering their
doctoral program. Additionally, obtaining a feeling of achievement, sense of competency and career goals appeared to be important motivations as well. Thus it would appear that women are seeking personal and professional growth versus the need for independence or to develop a sense of self separate from their family. This finding could indicate that women were satisfied in their relationships with significant others and perhaps already had a sense of independence before entering their doctoral programs. Further, it was found that women were more motivated by personal enhancement than financial gains. In other words, at least for these women, money was not a motivation.

Married, working women appear to be doubling their workload when combining career, marriage and family. The results of this study indicate that the majority of women are still primarily accountable for stereotypical, feminine household responsibilities despite having full time careers. It is stimulating to hear about the experiences of women who have obtained their doctoral degrees, but rather disheartening to know that there is still much need for improvement in regard to true equality in relationships. An equitable exchange between men and women in terms of career and family priorities remains a goal to be reached.

Although a great deal of information was generated
as a result of this study, it is hoped that research in the area of women's experiences in higher education will continue. The findings of this study raised questions that suggest other avenues of research. Further studies might examine the perceived effects of doctoral education on interpersonal relationships between female same sex relationships versus heterosexual relationships. In addition, more research is needed to explore the issues of women who chose to remain childless as a result of career and educational aspirations. Further studies should be broadened to these other areas.

In conclusion, gender roles and relationship roles are in constant flux. Women are fighting to destroy cultural myths, including internalized oppressive myths that limit their choices, achievements, and personal fulfillments. As displayed in the stories of the women in this study, those myths have the capacity to limit their interpersonal relationships with significant others. This is especially true of women who are in relationships with less than egalitarian significant others. However, as the majority of women in this study demonstrate, with the right partner intimate relationships can flourish as a result of a woman obtaining her doctorate. It seems natural that as women become closer to self-actualizing in their
intellectual and emotional lives that they would also
become more fulfilled, thus enhancing healthy,
supportive intimate relationships.
References


Appendix A

Questionnaire For Women In Higher Education
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR WOMEN IN DOCTORAL EDUCATION:

1) How old were you at your last birthday? _____(years)

2) How old were you when you began your doctoral education? _____(years)

3) With which racial or ethnic group do you identify yourself?
   - American Indian
   - Hispanic
   - Asian-American
   - White or Caucasian
   - African American
   - Other. Please Specify_____________

4) Which advanced degree have you obtained or are working toward at this time?
   - Law degree (L.L.B., J.D.)
   - Medical degree (M.D., D.D.S)
   - Ph.D.
   - Ed.D
   - Other. Please specify.________________________

5) What is your current relationship status?
   - Married (Once only)
   - Married (Remarried)
   - Separated
   - Single (Never Married)
   - Single (Divorced)
   - Single (Widowed)
   - Living with someone in a committed relationship

6) If you are currently in a relationship, what is your significant other's highest level of education?
   - High School
   - Law Degree (L.L.B., J.D.)
   - Associates Degree
   - Medical Degree (M.D., D.D.S)
   - Bachelor Degree
   - Ph.D.______________(field of study)
   - Masters Degree
   - Other. Please specify.______________
7) How important were the following reasons for entering your graduate program?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Relatively Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. For intellectual stimulation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. To develop a sense of competency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. To obtain a feeling of achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. To escape boredom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. To start or change a career</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. To upgrade job or pay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Need to get a job for financial reasons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Possibility of divorce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Possibility of widowhood</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Next step in existing career</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Need for independence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. Desire to be self supporting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. To develop a sense of self separate from family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n. Other. Specify</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8) Who gave you the greatest encouragement to attend your graduate program? Please list the relationships to you in the order of importance.

   ____________________________
   ____________________________
   ____________________________

9) Were you married or in a committed relationship at the time you entered your graduate degree program or during your program?

□ Yes □ No
10) While enrolled in your degree program, who was mainly responsible for the following household activities? If more than one person was responsible, check all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myself</th>
<th>Significant Other</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Preparing meals</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ] Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Kitchen clean up</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ] Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Doing Laundry</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ] Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Shopping for food</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ] Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Housecleaning</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ] Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Driving children</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ] Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Paying bills/keeping checkbook</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ] Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Other Activities</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ] Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11) How did you generally feel about your marriage or significant relationship while working on your graduate program?

[ ] Very satisfied
[ ] Satisfied
[ ] Dissatisfied
[ ] Very Dissatisfied
[ ] Fluctuated most of the time
[ ] Not applicable to me

12) Have you been divorced or separated from your husband or significant other since starting your degree program or after completion of your degree?

[ ] Yes, during degree.
[ ] Yes, after degree.
[ ] No
[ ] Not applicable

13) If yes, was your graduate school experience a significant contributor to your relationship difficulties? Please explain your answer.

[ ] Yes
[ ] No

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3
14) How do you feel about combining marriage, family and career? Please explain in the space below.

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

15) During your graduate program, how **emotionally** supportive were the following people?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Supportive</th>
<th>Somewhat Supportive</th>
<th>Rarely Supportive</th>
<th>Not Supportive</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant Other</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-laws</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male friends</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female friends</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other students</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16) **If unmarried**, have you experienced one or more dating relationship during or since the completion of your graduate degree?

☐ Yes, during degree. ☐ Yes, after degree. ☐ No ☐ Not applicable.
17) How satisfied have you been in these dating relationships in comparison to post doctorate work?

☐ Very Satisfied ☐ Satisfied ☐ Dissatisfied ☐ Very Dissatisfied

18) Has your doctoral experience had any effect on your relationship status? Please explain your answer.

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

19) Please check below one statement that best describes your general situation at this point in your life.

☐ I'm in a stable situation with respect to my life and work.

☐ I've just come through a huge transition period in my life and work.

☐ I feel I'm just on the verge of making a lot of changes in my life and/or work.

☐ Other
A questionnaire can never capture the total story of a person's experience. Please share with me anything you feel will better help me understand how obtaining your doctorate degree has affected your interpersonal, romantic relationships with others.
Appendix B

Cover Letter
February 21, 1996

Dear Professional Colleague,

I'm administering the following questionnaire in order to fulfill the requirements for my Specialist Degree in Community Counseling. As a result of the review of literature I have become interested in finding out how obtaining your level of education has affected your interpersonal relationships with significant others. I am a strong believer that women like you can empower other women who are traveling similar paths.

I would like to encourage you to participate in the Survey that I have enclosed. It will take approximately 30 minutes. All questions are equally meaningful. I hope you will take time to answer the open ended questions as well, providing me with information in your own words that will help me better understand your experiences. Your truthful answers to these questions will support the quality of this study. Your individual responses will remain confidential.

When you have completed the questionnaire, please place it in the envelope I have enclosed and drop it in the campus mail by March 15, 1996.

If you would like to receive information regarding the results of this study, please fill out the form at the bottom of this letter. Thank you in advance for your prompt assistance.

Sincerely,

Tracy L. Conn, Project Director

Enclosure

To receive results of this study:
Name__________________________________________________________
Address_______________________________________________________