



Coping strategies and marital quality of university student couples  
by Kevin Cole

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education  
Montana State University  
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Abstract:

Stress is prevalent in student marriages yet student couples report high marital quality scores. For this reason the married student population was investigated to determine what resources and responses they utilize to reduce stress.

The problem of this study was to determine the relationship between selected demographic variables, coping strategies and marital quality reported by married student couples. This was done by administering a questionnaire to determine (1) demographic information, (2) coping strategies utilized in response to problems or difficulties (F-COPES), and (3) marital quality (DAS) reported by MSU student couples. Ninety-two couples residing in university student housing completed the questionnaire.

Nine null hypotheses were tested at the  $.05$  level of significance. Significant findings included: couples with children reported lower marital quality than couples without children; wives utilized external coping strategies more than their husbands; and length of marriage and marital quality reported are negatively correlated. It was concluded that when internal and external coping strategies are used complementarily, stress in marriage is reduced.

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OF UNIVERSITY STUDENT COUPLES

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of  
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ABSTRACT

Stress is prevalent in student marriages yet student couples report high marital quality scores. For this reason the married student population was investigated to determine what resources and responses they utilize to reduce stress.

The problem of this study was to determine the relationship between selected demographic variables, coping strategies and marital quality reported by married student couples. This was done by administering a questionnaire to determine (1) demographic information, (2) coping strategies utilized in response to problems or difficulties (F-COPES), and (3) marital quality (DAS) reported by MSU student couples. Ninety-two couples residing in university student housing completed the questionnaire.

Nine null hypotheses were tested at the  $-.05$  level of significance. Significant findings included: couples with children reported lower marital quality than couples without children; wives utilized external coping strategies more than their husbands; and length of marriage and marital quality reported are negatively correlated. It was concluded that when internal and external coping strategies are used complementarily, stress in marriage is reduced.

## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Most student marriages are plagued with problems (Bayer 1972). Problems of time, money, communication, and sex, although not unique to student couples, appear to be particularly troublesome due to the multiple roles of student and spouse (Bergen and Bergen 1978; Taifoori 1979; Gruver and Labadie, 1975). Problems specific to student couples (e.g. grades, study time, tuition, and career opportunities) coupled with normative life changes (e.g. beginning parenthood, child launching) and societal changes (e.g. changing roles for women) are demands or needs which call for change, hence are stressor events for the family. Since families seldom deal with a single stressor event, it has been suggested that they experience a "pile up" of stressors particularly in the aftermath of a major stressor such as a major role change for a family member (McCubbin and Patterson, 1981). Clearly many potential areas of stress exist for the student couple.

Despite many studies enumerating the stresses affecting married college students, research indicates that most student marriages are relatively happy. The overall quality of student marriages has been found to be high (Bergen and Bergen, 1978) while the percentage considering divorce relatively low (Gruver and Labadie, 1975). This apparent contradiction is a major focus of this study.

Research by McCubbin and Patterson (1981), Lazarus (1966), Pearlin and Schooler (1978) has raised the question "Why do some families falter under stress while others overcome or even thrive on it?" How do married student couples cope with student and family life stressors? What strategies do they utilize in preventing, avoiding, or controlling emotional and marital distress? While it is not suggested that coping strategies are singularly responsible for fluctuations in marital quality, leading researches on family stress and coping (McCubbin, Olson, and Larsen, 1981) hypothesize that families who utilize a variety of coping responses adapt to stressful situations more successfully than families who utilize single levels of coping responses. Better adaptation to stress is likely to have a positive effect on marital quality.

The two levels of coping responses discussed by McCubbin et. al. (1981) include internal and external coping strategies. Internal coping strategies refer to problem solving responses within the family; external coping strategies refer to the the use of outside resources.

In the present study it is hypothesized that married students who utilize internal and external coping strategies will report greater marital quality than those student couples utilizing single levels of coping responses.

### Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was:

1. To determine the relationship between coping strategies utilized and marital quality reported by married university students.
2. To study the relationship between presence of children, gender, length of marriage, income, and student status of married university students and marital quality reported.
3. To study the relationship between the presence of children, gender, length of marriage, income, and student status of married university students and coping strategies utilized.

### Hypotheses

1. Married students utilizing both levels of coping strategies (internal and external) will report a higher level of marital quality than married students utilizing a single level of coping strategies.
2. Married students with children living at home will utilize external coping strategies more than married students without children.
3. Married students with children living at home will report lower marital quality than married students without children.
4. Wives will utilize external coping strategies more than husbands.
5. Wives will report lower marital quality than husbands.
6. Marital quality of university students will decrease as length of marriage increases.
7. Married students indicating they have adequate income to meet their financial needs will report higher levels of marital quality than married students indicating their financial needs are not adequately met.
8. Graduate students will report lower levels of marital quality than undergraduate students.
9. Married students with only one spouse enrolled in school will report lower levels of marital quality than married students with both spouses enrolled.

### Need for the Study

The active processes of family adaptation involving coping strategies within the family as well as in transactions with the community have received limited attention in both research and theory building.

(McCubbin 1979:59)

There is mounting belief among researchers and clinicians that understanding how families cope with stress is just as important as understanding the frequency and severity of life changes and transitions themselves (Coelho, Hamburg, and Adams, 1974; Moos, 1977). The emphasis of this study focuses on the adaptive nature of student couples. Specifically, it is an attempt to determine which coping behaviors are associated with high quality marriages.

The information obtained in this study will serve university counselors and clinicians dealing with troubled individuals and couples. The study will provide (1) demographic information; (2) statistics on the present state of marital quality of the student population; and (3) the efficacy of various coping strategies utilized by student couples. Information provided by this study presents an opportunity to positively influence coping abilities of couples/families seeking counselor aid. By focusing on student couples reporting high levels of marital quality and ascertaining coping strategies utilized by these couples, helping professionals can offer a positive role model to those couples coping less effectively with married student stress.

### General Procedures

The problem of this study was to determine the relationship between coping strategies utilized and marital quality reported by university student couples. The relationship was determined by administering F-Copes (Olson and McCubbin, 1981), an instrument created to identify coping strategies; a demographic questionnaire designed to obtain background information; and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) a measure of marital quality. The instruments were delivered and retrieved by this researcher.

The review of literature included research pertaining to marital quality, married students, stress and coping. Research cited in the review of literature coupled with responses obtained from the instruments were aimed at more fully understanding the relationship between coping and marital quality and thereby the needs of the married university students. By determining the efficacy of various coping strategies it is hoped that a positive role model may be forwarded.

The subjects of the investigation consisted of a random sample of all couples residing in married student housing on the Montana State University campus.

### Definitions

1. Adaptation -- The ability of a couple/family to change its power structure, role relationships and relationship rules in response to situational and developmental stress (Olson et al., 1979).

2. Coping -- The overt and covert behaviors individuals use to prevent, alleviate, or respond to stressful situations (George, 1980:30).
3. Couple/Family -- Any husband-wife dyad occupying married student housing.
4. Crisis -- The amount of incapacitatedness or disorganization in the family where resources are inadequate (Hill, 1949).
5. Family life cycle -- The span of time from the beginning of a family with the marriage of a young couple, the bearing, rearing and launching of their children, through the time when they are again alone together, until retirement and inevitable death of one or both (Duvall, 1971:144).
6. Hardships -- Those demands on the family unit specifically associated with the stressor event.
7. Marital Quality -- The subjective evaluation of an individual's marital relationship (Spanier, 1980).
8. Strains -- Those enduring problems that have the potential for arousing threat (Pearlin and Schooler, 1978).
9. Stress - A state which arises from an actual or perceived demand - capability imbalance in functioning, and which is characterized by a nonspecific demand for adaptive behavior (McCubbin and Patterson, 1981).
10. Stressor -- Those life events or occurrences of sufficient magnitude to bring about change in the family system (Hill, 1949).

### Limitations

The population of the study included all married student couples living in family housing on the campus of Montana State University (MSU).

### Summary

More than one-fourth of all university students are married (Gruver and Labadie, 1975). This fact coupled with research

indicating that married student life is stressful (Khan and Sharpley, 1980) indicates a need to further study the married student population in hopes of providing those coping ineffectively with effective means of preventing, alleviating, and controlling stress. By determining coping strategies utilized by student couples in response to stress, and by measuring marital quality reported by those couples, it is hoped that the efficacy of coping strategies can be ascertained. It is hypothesized that couples utilizing both internal and external coping strategies in response to problems or difficulties will adapt more successfully than couples using single levels of coping strategies.

A review of literature coupled with results from this study shall enable the reader and this researcher to better understand the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of married student couples.

## CHAPTER II

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature was reviewed in the following areas: marital quality, married students, stress and coping. The purpose is to determine which coping strategies are associated with marital quality of married university students. Current knowledge of each area of this literature review is requisite to understanding the effects of coping on the marital quality of student couples.

Marital Quality

The importance of marital satisfaction to satisfaction with total quality of life has been well documented (Andrews and Witney, 1976; Bharaducy and Wilkening, 1977; Bubolz et al., 1980; Cambell et al., 1976; Glenn and Weaver, 1981; Jackson, 1979; Mancini, 1978; Reltig, 1980). A sound marital and family life has significant positive impact on an individual. Hence, as the quality of marriage is strengthened, so is the quality of life (Retting and Bubolz, 1983). It seems worthwhile, therefore, to pursue quality of marriage research not only focusing on areas of weakness but also focusing on areas of strength. Research of this nature contributes to those who are helping couples/families deal with their weaknesses by focusing on those who have displayed strengths.

"Marital quality" as a concept has been gaining greater usage among marriage and family researchers, since it includes the entire range of variables which have been the traditional dependent variables in marital research (i.e. marital adjustment, marital satisfaction, marital happiness) (Spanier and Lewis, 1980: 825).

Overall, marital quality is defined for the purpose of this study as the subjective evaluation of a married couple's relationship on a number of dimensions and evaluations:

The range of evaluations constitutes a continuum reflecting numerous characteristics of marital interaction and marital functioning. High marital quality, therefore, is associated with good adjustment, adequate communication, a high level of marital happiness, integration, and a high degree of satisfaction with the relationship. The definition does not convey a fixed picture of discrete categories, i.e. a high-versus low-quality marriage, but rather suggests the existence of a continuum ranging from high to low.

(Lewis and Spanier, 1979:269)

Due to the sheer volume of marital quality research it is out of the scope of this study to review the literature extensively. However, the major contributions which have captured the greatest amount of interest pertaining to this study shall be reviewed.

Specifically, literature pertaining to (1) the family life cycle and marital quality, (2) the presence of children and marital quality, and (3) the focus of this study, married students and marital quality. For a further review of marital quality see Spanier and Lewis (1980).

Marital Quality and the Family Life Cycle

Marital quality research continues to be of interest in many disciplines despite the theoretical, methodological, and measurement problems it presents (Retting and Bubolz, 1983). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the family life cycle research. The research has received considerable attention yielding contradictory and confusing results. In their review of research on the quality of marriage during the 1970's, Spanier and Lewis (1980) highlighted the continued interests of researchers in the effects of children on marital quality and the changes in perceived marital quality over the marital career. They found that since the first empirical exploration of marital quality and family life cycle (Hamilton, 1929), many researchers have found a U-shaped curvilinear model. The U-shaped curve refers to the high level of marital quality beginning with marriage, dropping after the birth of the first child, and eventually returning to a high level in the later stages of life. Rollins and Feldman (1970), for example, in their study of middle-class couples in Syracuse, and Rollins and Cannon (1974), in their nonprobability sample of Mormons, found a U-shaped curve. Spanier et al. (1975) also discovered a U-shaped pattern for the marital adjustment of their random sample of working class couples in Ohio. (See also Burr, 1970; Figley, 1973).

However, other researchers have either found no curvilinear relationship (Spanier et al., 1975), or they concluded that the research was flawed (Nock, 1979; Spanier et al. 1979). Nock (1979)

found that marital quality was not so much affected by family life cycle per se, but rather by two variables: the length of marriage and the presence of children.

In a 1983 study by Anderson, Russell, and Schumm, an attempt was made to clear up some of the controversy concerning perceived marital quality and the family life cycle. The study addressed three main areas of controversy: (1) the utility of the family life cycle category as a predictor of marital quality; (2) the shape of the relationship; and (3) the influence of conventionalization (which has been defined by Edmonds, 1976).

The 'conventional' or socially desirable manner in which to respond to questions about the quality of one's marriage is to report that things are going well.

Three research questions were generated to address these areas of interest. Research Question 1 attempted to determine what predictors or combinations of predictors account for the greatest proportion of variance in perceived marital quality; more specifically the criterion variables of (a) marital satisfaction, (b) regard, (c) empathy, (d) discussion, and (e) self-disclosure. Research Question 2 asked if the relationship between perceived marital quality and category of the family life cycle was best predicted by a linear or a curvilinear model; and Research Question 3 asked if the relationship between perceived marital quality and family life cycle categories were an artifact of marital conventionalization.

The results of that study stated that: (1) both family life cycle and total number of children were significant predictors of

marital quality but length of marriage was not; (2) marital quality was shown to be accounted for best by a statistically significant curvilinear, U-shaped trend over the family life cycle; and (3) marital conventionalization were not found to be responsible for reports of improved marital quality at later stages of the family life cycle (Russell, Anderson, and Schumm, 1983:127).

Olson and McCubbin (1983) in an intensive study of families over the family life cycle confirmed the findings of a great deal of research indicating that marital satisfaction, indeed, tends to have a U-shaped curve over the family life cycle. The seven stages of the family life cycle created by Olson and McCubbin (1983) follow:

- Stage 1. Young couples without children
- Stage 2. Families with preschool children
- Stage 3. Families with school-age children
- Stage 4. Families with adolescents in the home
- Stage 5. Launching families (adolescents leaving the home)
- Stage 6. Empty nest families (all children gone)
- Stage 7. Families in retirement

The authors found that beginning with Stage 1, family satisfaction, including marital satisfaction, declines steadily until children begin leaving the home (stage 5). Schram (1979) explains the increase in "post parental" marital satisfaction as a result of relaxation of sex roles between parents. Women are freer to pursue interests outside the home and men find themselves with decreased financial responsibility and more opportunity to be passive and dependent.

Although differences in marital satisfaction across the family life cycle were found to be statistically significant for the large sample (N = 2,692). Olson et al. (1983) caution that the practical value of these findings account for very little variance in marital satisfaction scores, of greater importance was the effect of children.

#### The Effects of Children on Marital Quality

One of the most surprising summaries of the marital research of the 1960's was the conclusion that children tended to detract rather than contribute to the marital quality of their parents (Hicks and Platt, 1970). Research in the 1970's has continued to confirm this relationship (Lewis and Spanier, 1980). Luckey and Bain, 1970; Feldman, 1971; Ryder, 1973; Russell, 1974; Rollins and Galligan, 1978 and others have found that the birth of a child has a negative impact on most marriages, especially for wives.

Although the majority of the literature concerning marital quality and transition to parenthood focused on the dissatisfactions with becoming a parent, a few researchers (Russell, 1974; Luckey and Bain, 1970) reported the satisfactions children brought to parents. Parents of low quality marriages especially, reported the presence of children to be a major source of mutual satisfaction (Luckey and Bain, 1970).

Transition to parenthood research has been a popular focus of inquiry particularly for those who conceptualize the family as an integrated social system. The primary concern in past research has

been whether the addition of a first child creates a crisis for the marital dyad as it evolves from a two-person to a three-person system (Belsky, Spanier, and Rovine, 1983:567). Again the evidence is inconclusive, Dyer (1963); Lemasters, (1957); Wainwright, (1966) conclude that, indeed, transition to parenthood is a crisis, while Hobbs et al. (1977) has stressed the positive consequences of having a baby, while still others are somewhere in between, Rollins and Galligan (1978).

A longitudinal study of 72 couples in 1983 was undertaken by Belsky, Spanier and Rovine. The couples were studied from the last trimester of pregnancy through the ninth postpartum month. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), (Spanier, 1976), was used to determine the stability and change in marriage across the transition to parenthood. The results of the study indicate that the transition to parenthood results in modest, but significant changes in the marital relationship which most would regard as somewhat unfavorable. Not only does marital quality decline following the transition to parenthood, but also the decline continues as additional children are added to the family (Belsky, Spanier, and Rovine, 1983:575).

These findings are consistent with most of the current evidence that:

...the presence of dependent children in the home puts a 'crunch' on the time, energy, and economic resources of parents and results in a decrease of marital satisfaction of parents.

(Rollins and Galligan, 1978:83)

While the majority of the research indicates the negative impact children have on marriage, Menaghan (1983) concludes that family

transitions were not responsible for fluctuations in marital quality, rather the efficacy of coping strategies determined the quality of marriage. This key concept will be addressed in greater detail later in this review.

While children appear to have a significant impact on the marital quality of their parents, researchers using multivariate analyses report that variables of gender, length of marriage, income, and time spent together also effect marital quality, but to a lesser degree than children (Lewis and Spanier, 1980).

Hicks and Platt (1970), Lewis and Spanier (1980), and more recently Patterson and McCubbin (1984), all suggest that men are more satisfied with their marriages than their wives. It appears that women have a greater decrease in marital satisfaction during the childbearing and childrearing years than do men. Mothers report significantly greater difficulties than fathers in adjusting to their infants (Lewis and Spanier, 1980). While Ryder (1973) suggests that fathers seemed to pay less attention to their wives during these years, Komarovsky (1976) contends that wives bear a far greater burden of childrearing, thus accounting for a greater degree of marital dissatisfaction than their husbands.

Length of marriage research has also yielded contradictory results. As stated previously, Anderson, Russell, and Schumm (1983) contend that the family life cycle and total number of children were significant predictors of marital quality, but length of marriage was not. Nock (1979), however, reports that simple years married may have more explanatory power than the family life cycle in explaining

fluctuations in marital quality over time. Both studies concur, however, that there is a U-shaped curve of marital quality over time. Marital quality decreases as time and stage of family life cycle progress until the "post parental" stage.

While variables of income and time spent together have been reported as effecting marital quality, the relationship is not clear. Bergen and Bergen (1978) found it was more the source of income rather than the total amount of income that effects marital quality (e.g. income from wages versus loans). Research generated in the 50's and 60's has been virtually unanimous in its support for the hypothesis that socioeconomic rewards such as income and social prestige levels are causally linked to favorable marital outcomes (Jorgensen, 1979). More recent research, however, generalizes that income and prestige levels alone are unrelated to perceived happiness (Glenn and Weaver, 1978); marital stability (Galligan and Bahr, 1978); and marital quality (Jorgensen, 1979). While lack of adequate finances have been found to be stressors for the family (Olson and McCubbin, 1983), a direct relationship between income and marital quality is not justified by current research.

The situation is similar to that of time married couples spend together. Husband-wife interaction has consistently been found to be an important determinant of positive marital evaluation (White, 1983). Ana Marie Williams (1979), working from the theoretical rationale forwarded by Stuart (1969), maintains that attraction and liking are associated with the exchange of positive behaviors, while repulsion and disliking are associated with negative, punitive, and

coercive social exchanges. Her work suggests an "access opportunity" hypothesis namely, that marital partners who are usually made happy by their interactions will arrange to spend more time together. An effort is made, therefore, to gain access to the rewarding person and thereby arrange the opportunity to be reinforced (Williams, 1979). One purpose of White's (1983) study was to see how the quantity and quality of marital interaction (as recorded on time lines) were related to marital satisfaction (as measured by the Locke-Wallace (1959), marital adjustment scale. The results of the study report that the quality of interaction influences the quantity of interaction, as does the quantity of interaction influence the quality, and they both affect marital satisfaction. It is not the amount of time spent together nor just the quality of time spent together that affects marital quality, it appears to be the proportion of available time and quality of the interaction (Williams, 1979).

White (1983) also examined the relationship between spousal interaction and marital happiness. Reviewing the literature she found that Burr (1973), Miller (1976) and Snyder (1979) all found a strong positive effect on marital satisfaction and spousal interaction. In fact, Spanier (1979:283) stated the relationship in one of his second order propositions that: the greater the interaction, the greater the marital quality.

Her survey study of 2,034 married men and women participating in the labor force suggests that both men and women participating in the labor force reduces the amount of spousal interaction. In addition,

interaction was reduced by the presence of children in the household, and division of labor. White found the most important determinant of interaction is not time constraints like work hours or children but rather the quality of the marriage. The finding of a feedback loop between interaction and marital happiness tends to suggest that it is not the interaction that effects marital quality rather it is the quality that effects the interaction.

While a host of factors such as: self concept (Hall and Valine, 1977); self-esteem (Filsinger and Lamke, 1983); sex role competency (Bahr et. al., 1983) have been posited as having a significant effect on marital quality, they are not critical concerns of the present study. Of greater importance to this study are those factors specifically effecting married university students. While marital quality research appears to be pervasive, the population of married students has yet to receive a proportionate share of this essential research. The following section reviews the major contributions to marital quality of university student research.

#### Married Students

Although one-fourth of all students attending colleges in the United States are married, few studies have focused on their specific plight in marriage (Gruver and Labadie, 1975). Gruver and Labadie (1975) in an attempt to address this issue, investigated 312 married college students living in a university student housing complex. The overall finding of the study reported that over 70% of the married college student population viewed their marriages as either extremely

happy or quite happy; only 2% of those responding viewed their marriages as quite unhappy or extremely unhappy. Despite the fact that their marriages were found to be relatively happy, they were not, of course, without problems. Both husband and wife agreed that sex and communication were the greatest problems, followed by a lack of recreation time, lack of money, and a need for more friends. The lack of time contributed to all areas of dissatisfaction and was not identified by a comparable nonstudent population to be a significant problem (Craven, 1974).

Gruver and Labadie's (1975) study concurred with Bayer's (1972) study, which concluded that most student marriages are plagued with problems, even the relatively happy ones. Marital problems he stated often carried over into college work and vice versa.

It is unfortunate that society loses trained talent due to the dropout rate of married students, but also because the married person may be deprived of many benefits that a college education could provide, including the satisfaction that comes from the full development of one's potential.

(Bayer, 1972:607)

Focusing on the student/marital status of graduate student couples as an indicator of marital adjustment, McRoy and Fisher (1982) compared groups where only the husband was a student (HOS), where both spouses were students (BSS) and where only the wife was a student (WOS). The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976) and a background questionnaire were administered to husbands and wives separately. A 2x3 Analyses of Variance was used to test the effects of student/marital status and sex of respondents on DAS scores.

The results suggest that marital adjustment is affected by student/marital status of the spouses. Specifically, if only the husband was a student (HOS), marital adjustment was lower than both other groups (BSS, WOS). However, the findings suggest that variables other than student status relate to marital adjustment of the couples. When only the wife was a student, family income was higher and couples were older and had been married longer; when only the husband was a student, more preschool children were reported. Along with the presence of children and family income, there also appeared to be a relation between the primary breadwinner and marital adjustment (McRoy and Fisher, 1982).

Bergen and Bergen (1978) also found a relation between the bread winner and marital adjustment. In their study of the quality of marriages of university students in relation to sources of financial support, they found that stereotypical roles of males and females are still evident in marriages. Although the overall quality of marriages was found to be high, as determined by the DAS (Spanier 1976), statistical measures found the quality to be significantly higher if both spouses were enrolled simultaneously and if the couples did not depend on loans as a major source of income. There was more disagreement and lower DAS scores when the wife provided major financial support. Even minor support by the husband improved the marital relationship (Bergen and Bergen, 1978). The marital adjustment was highest when the husband provided the major source of financial support and if both spouses were enrolled in school.

In a study focusing on married students, Davidson, Balswick, and Halverson (1983) examined the relationship between affective self-disclosure and marital adjustment. This relationship was explained by the use of Equity Theory, an Offspring of Social Exchange Theory. Equity Theory predicts that when individuals find themselves participating in inequitable relationships, they will become distressed. The more inequitable the relationships, the more distress individuals will feel (Walster, Walster, and Berscheid, 1978:6).

One hundred sixty-two couples in university student housing complexes participated in the study. The relationship was tested by the use of the Affective Self-disclosure Scale for Couples (ASDC) and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS). The results of the study support equity theory notions about the relations between discrepancies in spousal affective self-disclosure and marital adjustment. Imbalances in affective self-disclosure were, in fact, related to lower marital adjustment.

Conversely, a balance in levels of affective self-disclosure exchange between partners was considered to serve as a stabilizer producing feelings of equity (Davidson, Balswick, and Halverson, 1983). Not only did the reception of self-disclosure serve as a reward; also the exchange of disclosure at similar levels of intimacy seems to have a rewarding quality (Dahr and Banikiotes, 1979).

The tremendous amount of literature pertaining to roles, role strain, role congruence etc. has not escaped married student literature. While previous literature focused on the male student and concluded that role strain was particularly difficult for student

fathers (Isben, 1967; Hepker and Kloyd, 1974), present research has primarily focused on role strain of student mothers (VanMeter and Agronow, 1982; Calhoun, 1980; Bronzaft, 1974).

Komarovsky (1976) reported that while college men endorse equal opportunity in occupational and political positions for women, at the same time they believe the major responsibility for childrearing belongs to women. These men expected their wives to be homemakers and childrearers. Evidence today indicates that college women are preparing themselves for future work with the expectation of combining employment and family life (Epstein and Bronzaft, 1974). The increased employment of married women and the evidence that married women receive little help with housework from their husbands suggest an important source of stress, including role strain and role overload (Blake, 1974; Hoffreth and Moore, 1979).

The multiple roles of wife, homemaker, student, and mother may lead to stress and strain on the marital relationship (VanMeter and Agronow, 1982). However, the stress of multiple roles may be partially ameliorated through preventative strategies or coping strategies such as: establishing role priorities; family members role awareness; value clarification; and family goal setting (VanMeter and Agronow, 1982:137). The most conclusive findings of studies on role strain states that the husband's positive support helps to alleviate strain for the married college women (Berkove, 1979; Brandenburg, 1974; Epersson, 1975; Roach, 1976).

The experience of being a student or being married to a student is accompanied by tension as roles are developing or changing. The period of a person's life when he or she is studying for a university degree is one that often lacks formal external social structure. So marital relationships at this time would also seem to be under stress.

(Khan and Sharpley, 1980:202)

Flowers and Hughes (1975) suggested that the greater the similarity or congruence of value systems of spouses, the less stress would be on the marital relationship. Khan and Sharpley (1980) tested this hypothesis. The study measured the level of marital adjustment to determine if (1) student marriages were more or less satisfied than the norm and (2) there was a relationship between value systems and marital adjustment.

The respondents were administered the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (LWMAT)(1959) and the Flowers and Hughes Values for Marriage Analysis (FHVMA)(1975). The FHVMA is a theoretical framework quantifying value systems in marriage. The six value systems include: (1) security oriented; (2) self-oriented; (3) tradition-oriented; (4) success-oriented; (5) people-oriented; and (6) reality oriented.

The results of this study suggest that student marriages are not at a greater risk than non-student marriages, in fact, student marital quality was found to be higher than the norm (set by the LWMAT). But there was no significant relationship between congruency of primary value systems and marital adjustment for couples. It appeared to the researcher that:

Whatever tensions are being experienced by this sample of student marriages would seem to be alleviated before they become a serious threat to the stability of marriage.

(Khan and Sharpley, 1980:203)

They concluded that there were more powerful factors at work within student marriages than the obvious detrimental ones most commonly suggested (e.g. lack of finances, lack of congruity of interest areas, insecurity regarding future employment). These factors included "an effective internal adjustment process," in a word, the students could cope.

Despite the studies depicting married student stress and strain (Calhoun, 1980; VanMeter and Agronow, 1982; Barnhill, 1975; Eddy, 1977; Spanier, 1980; Bergen and Bergen, 1978), the overall quality of student marriages has consistently been found to be high (Khan and Sharpley, 1980; Gruver and Labadie, 1975; Bergen and Bergen, 1978; McRoy and Fisher, 1982). The evidence points to the adaptive nature of this particular population in the effective manner in which they prevent, alleviate or respond to stressful situations.

The ensuing body of literature to be reviewed shall illuminate this further.

#### Family Stress and Coping Theory

Family researchers, beginning with the work of Reuben Hill (1949) have attempted to identify which families, under what conditions, using what resources and coping behaviors are able to make positive adaptations to stressful situations (McCubbin and

Patterson, 1981). The purpose of this study is to identify which student couples are using what kind of coping behaviors to adapt to married student life. The foundation and theory upon which the proposed research is built stems from Hill's (1958, 1949) original ABCX model of family stress and McCubbin and Patterson's (1981) revision - the double ABCX model.

A brief review of these models are requisite to an understanding of family stress and coping theory utilized in this research.

#### The ABCX Model

A (the stressor event) -- interacting with B (the family's crisis meeting resources) -- interacting with C (the definition the family makes of the event) -- produce X (the crisis).

While Hill's (1958, 1949) model focused primarily on the pre-crisis variables which account for differences in family vulnerability to a stressor event, and whether and to what degree the outcome is a crisis for the family, McCubbin and Patterson's (1981) model incorporates the factor of a family's effort to deal with the stressor "over time."

#### Double ABCX Model

The Double ABCX Model adds post crisis variables to Hill's original model in an effort to describe: a) the additional/life stressors and change which may make family adaptation more difficult to achieve; (b) the critical psychological and social factors families call upon and use in managing crisis situations; (c) the

processes families engage in to achieve satisfactory resolution and; (d) the outcome of these family efforts (McCubbin and Patterson, 1981:9).

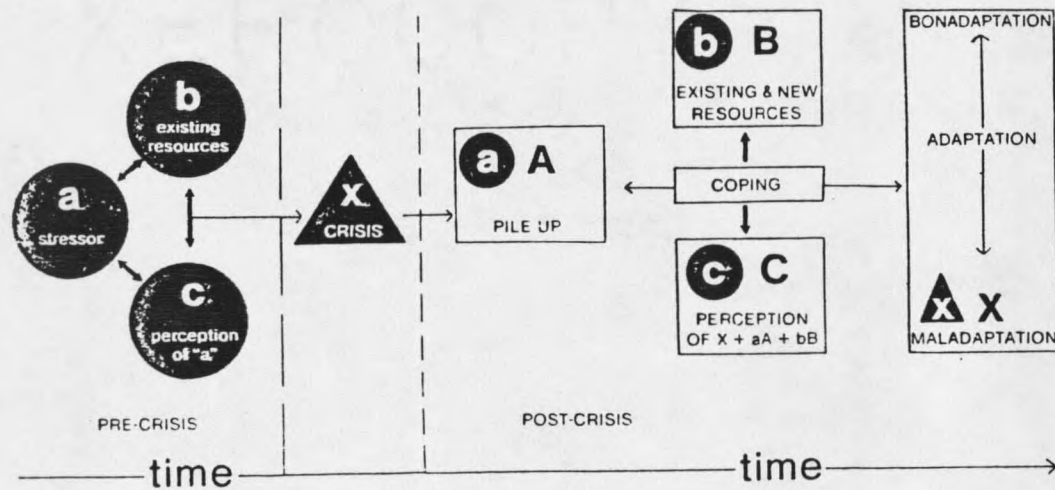


Figure 1. Double ABCX model family adaptation model (McCubbin and Patterson, 1981).

Burr (1973) in an effort to render clarity to Hill's (1958, 1949) model modified the ABCX model to include two lay concepts, vulnerability and regenerative power. For example, the stressor event (spouse(s) enrolled in school) and related hardships (e.g. barriers to communication, loss of income and/or homemaker) and the family's vulnerability (e.g. diminished, absence or paralysis of family resources) influences the amount of crisis in the family. The definition the family makes of the seriousness of the change(s) influences the family's vulnerability to crisis. Concomitantly

regenerative power explains the variation in the family system's ability to recover from the disruptiveness that results from a stressor event (McCubbin and Patterson, 1981:151).

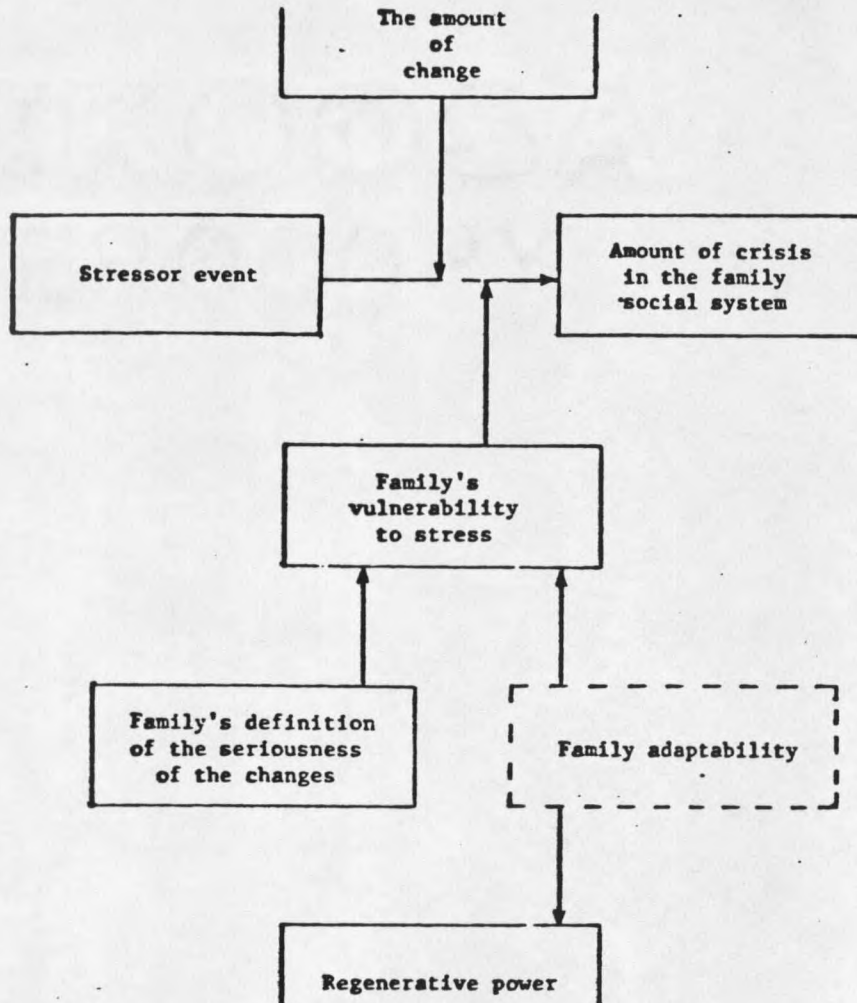


Figure 2. Vulnerability and regenerative power. (For further information and detail, see McCubbin and Patterson, 1981)

### Family Stressors and Stress

Although the concept of family stress has been utilized with considerable frequency in both clinical and research literature, it was frequently used without explicit definition. For the sake of this research and in an effort to establish a link to physiological (Selye, 1976) and psychological (Mikhail, 1981; Lazarus, 1966) concepts of stress, a stressor shall be defined as a life event or occurrence in or impacting upon the family unit which produces change in the family social system. Family hardships are defined as those demands on the family unit specifically associated with the stressor event. Family stress is defined as a state which arises from an actual or perceived demand - capability imbalance in the family's functioning and which is characterized by a non-specific demand for adaptive behavior (McCubbin and Patterson, 1981).

### Normative, Non-Normative Events and Family Stress

Of the two types of stressors, normative and non-normative, non-normative stressors have gained greater prominence in family stress research due to a greater amount of social interest and concern. Non-normative events are those events which may occur in addition to those which are typical and predictable. Such events may occur concomitantly but are independent of normative transitions. The impact of tornadoes on families (Erickson et al., 1976), World War II separation and reunion (Hill, 1949), and family adjustment to loss of family members (Lieberman, 1971) are a sample of non-normative events which have been investigated.

Normative events, transitions and stressors, however, are the focus of this study.

From a sociological perspective many of the difficult problems with which people cope are not unusual problems impinging on exceptional people in rare situations but are persistent hardships experienced by those engaged in mainstream activities within major institutions.

(Pearlin and Schooler 1978:3)

Whereas many studies of stress and coping have examined people faced with unusual threats and trials, such as impending surgery (Jan's, 1958), the present study focuses on people engaged in very ordinary pursuits. It has been assumed by this researcher that married and college life constitute normative events.

Normative events are those which evolve in the context of the family life cycle. They are both typical and expectable and range from the transition to spousehood to widowhood and death. Although these events or transitions are typical or expected, they may still be stressor events.

#### Normative Family Stress

All families, functional and dysfunctional, student and non-student experience stress - that is, change at various times throughout the life cycle (Boss, 1980). Individual and family systems change over time (Olson and McCubbin, 1983). In the course of their lives, both the individual and the family system must deal with various developmental tasks. Eric Erickson (1976) contends that individuals must master a succession of psychosocial crises. For instance the young married individual must master a sense of identity versus a sense of identity confusion. Also the young married

individual must master a sense of intimacy with his/her spouse versus a sense of isolation. The young family, on the other hand, must establish a mutually satisfying marriage and learn to cope with energy depletion and lack of privacy as parents (Duvall, 1977). The family struggles with changes in structure (e.g. the addition of children), shifts in family roles (e.g. spouse returning to school), and tension created by the needs of the individual family members. "Family stress emerges as a consequence of ongoing development and evolution, structural reorganization, and unpredictable disruptions" (Olson and McCubbin, 1983, p. 115).

The most frequently reported stressors and strains are very similar between student and nonstudent couples. Olson and McCubbin (1983) found the major sources of stress to be (1) intrafamily and marital stressors; (2) finance and business stressors; and (3) work/family transitions. Studies of student populations report similar findings, however, college couples/families experience more stress due to the additional role of being a student (Stats, 1983).

Extensive research on stress cites life changes (Holmes and Rahe, 1967), role conflict and role overload (Kahn et al., 1964) as frequent sources of stress. Since married students have experienced an additional set of life changes associated with marriage including a change in status, a role change and probably increased time pressure, married students seem likely to experience more stress.

(Stats, 1983:179)

#### Married Students and Stress

The stress of married college life has been documented in several studies. Heplar and Cloyd (1974) found the husband college

student to experience stress of role overload; VanMeter and Agronow (1982) found wife students to be experiencing stress from multiple roles; Gilbert (1982) concluded that graduate school produces familial stress and is potentially obstructive to family life; Gruver and Labadie (1975) found areas of sex, communication, time, money and friendships to be particularly stressful for the university couples and families; Bergen and Bergen (1978) found that the sources of income could stress the marital relations of student couples. Barnhill, 1975; Eddy, 1977 suggested that the experience of being a married student or the spouse of a married student is accompanied by tension and stress.

Since, in most cases, there is a change produced by a spouse or spouses enrolled in college that effects the family social system, married college life is a stressor event. Traditionally family stress has been viewed as dysfunctional and problematic; prior research focused on the negative aspects of stress. Currently, however, there appears to be a shift away from the dysfunctional view of family stress to an interest in why some families are better able to endure hardships than others. Understanding how people deal with stress is just as important as understanding the frequency and severity of stress itself (Olson and McCubbin, 1983).

The focus of this study, however, is not the stressful nature of married student life but rather the focus is on how married student couples and families cope with the stressful situation.

Coping

By coping we refer to the things that people do to avoid being harmed by life-strains. At the very heart of this concept is the fundamental assumption that people are actively responsive to forces that impinge upon them. Since many of these impinging forces are social in their origins, the understanding of coping is a prerequisite for understanding the impact that societies come to exert on their members.

(Pearlin and Schooler, 1978:2)

Like stress before it, coping is rapidly becoming an enormously popular and increasingly ambiguous concept (Menaghan, 1983). Due to this ambiguity it is necessary at this time to specify our conceptualization of coping. Essentially, the concept is used to refer to any response to external life-strains that serve to prevent, avoid, or control emotional distress. Thus, we regard coping as inseparable both from the life-strains experienced by people and from the state of their inner emotional life (Pearlin and Schooler, 1978).

Social resources, psychological resources, and specific coping responses are dimensions of coping. The primary distinction is that resources refer not to what people do, but to what is available to them in developing their coping repertoires (responses). Basically, social resources are represented in the interpersonal networks of people. They include family, classmates, friends, neighbors, and voluntary associations.

Psychological resources are the personality characteristics that people draw upon to help them withstand threats posed by events and objects in their environment. These resources include: self-esteem, self denigration, and mastery (Pearlin and Schooler, 1978).

Specific coping responses are the behaviors, cognitions and perceptions in which people engage when actually contending with their life problems. The psychological resources represent some of the things people "are", coping responses represent some of the things people "do" and one of particular importance to this study.

Pearlin and Schooler (1978) have posited three major types of coping that are distinguished from one another by the nature of their functions. These are: (1) responses that change the situation out of which strainful experience arises; (2) responses that control the meaning of the strainful experience after it occurs but before the emergence of stress; and (3) responses that function more for the control of stress itself after it has emerged.

While responses that modify the situation (e.g. negotiations in marriage, dropping out of school or reducing workload) represent the most direct way to cope with life-strains, it is surprising that it is not a more commonly used type of coping (Pearlin and Schooler, 1978). In circumstances where coping does not succeed in changing the situation, the stressful impact of the problem may be buffered by responses that function to control the meaning of the problem (e.g. making positive comparisons, selective ignoring). These responses that control the meaning of the problem are the most commonly employed type of coping response (Pearlin and Schooler, 1978). The third type of coping functions neither to alter the stressful situation nor to create congenial perceptions about it, rather this type of coping functions to manage the stress (e.g. denial, optimistic faith, emotional discharge).

To summarize, coping is not a unidimensional behavior. Coping functions at a number of levels and is attained by a plethora of behaviors, cognitions and perceptions. It is useful, moreover, that coping responses be distinguished from what we have identified as psychological resources for coping, those personality characteristics that minimize threat to self. As important as psychological resources may be in confronting life-strains, we cannot completely understand coping without looking beyond the personality attributes of individuals to the specific responses to problems in different social roles (Pearlin and Schooler, 1978:8).

Are there some coping responses and resources that are more effective than others?

#### The Efficacy of Coping

The efficacy of coping must be judged on how well it prevents hardships from resulting in emotional stress. To what extent do coping responses affect the relationship between the life-strains people experience and the emotional stress they feel? While Pearlin and Schooler (1978) point out that the same coping strategies are not equally effective in all role areas, what coping mechanisms actually work best?

Studying the efficacy of coping, Pearlin and Schooler (1978) examined the coping strategies family members used when faced with problems in four domains of family life: marriage, parenthood, household economics, and occupational goals and activities. Utilizing regression analyses, they found that when compared with

measures of psychological resources (self-esteem, self-demigration, and mastery) coping responses (i.e. what one "does") were more important in blocking stress in marriage and parenthood. In contrast, psychological resources (i.e. what one "is") emerged as being more important in the areas of household finances and occupation. The investigators concluded that in stressful situations over which the family members have little control, such as finances and job, psychological characteristics appear to be more helpful in sustaining relations, while in the close personal context of marriage and parenting, it is the specific things that people do that determine whether or not or to what degree they will experience emotional stress (McCubbin et al., 1981).

It is apparent that the kinds of resources and responses people are able to bring to bear in coping with life-strains affect their emotional well being (Pearlin and Schooler, 1970). Since no single response has been shown to be most effective as to insure effective fending off stress, it is possible that a varied or balanced repertoire of responses may help.

*start* In correlations of role strains and stresses among people whose coping repertoires differed in scope and variety, Pearlin and Schooler (1978) found that as the number of responses that people employ increases, stress becomes decreasingly associated with marital strains. They concluded that:

The style and context of coping do make a difference to the emotional well being of people. Furthermore, the greater the scope and variety of the individual's coping repertoire, the more protection coping affords.

(Pearlin and Schooler, 1978:18)

These conclusions are similar to those of McCubbin et al. (1981) utilized in their Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales (F-Copes), that families operating with a balanced level of coping interaction will adapt to stressful situations more successfully.

#### Empirical Studies of Coping

Guided by Hill's (1949) study of adjustment to the crises of war induced separation. A number of studies have been undertaken to assess the effects of coping on crisis. Perhaps the most significant investigations were initiated by the Naval Health Research Center. Three studies of family coping behavior included: (1) the study of wives' coping responses to prolonged war induced family separations (McCubbin, Dahl, Lester, Benson and Robertson, 1976); (2) the study of wives coping to family separations due to husband's 8 month deployment aboard a navy carrier (McCubbin and Lester, 1977); and (3) a study of wives coping with repeated, short term separations which were part of family life with a large insurance company (Boss et al., in press).

McCubbin (1979) created a transactional model to illustrate the coping strategies used in each of the three studies.

The conclusion common to all three studies is that family reaction to separation is neither rigid nor random. As the severity of the hardships increased, the families utilized more complex coping strategies (e.g. use of collective group supports). The family is not in static interaction with a single stressor of separation, rather the family is called upon to cope with a host of changes which

challenge the member's self-esteem, and the family's organization and functioning (McCubbin et al., 1981). Coping is not viewed simply as a response to a single event, but rather has become an active force in sharing what will happen.

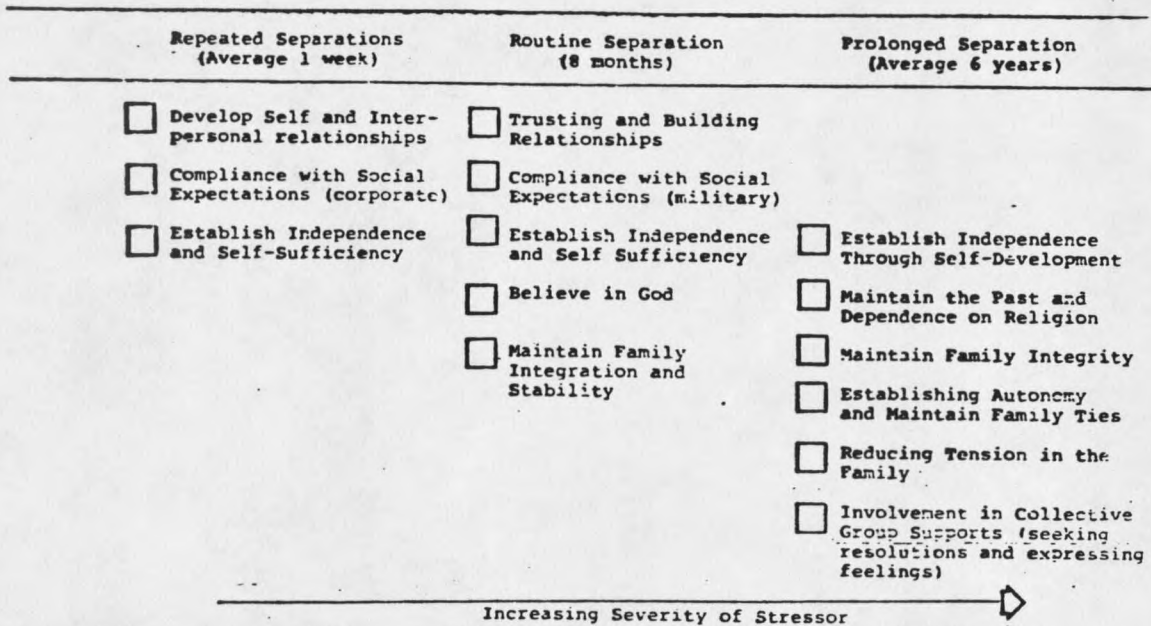


Figure 3. Coping strategies in the management of the stress of family separations (McCubbin, 1979).

These investigations revealed that coping strategies are not created in a single instant, but are progressively modified over time. Because the family is a system, coping behavior involved the management of various dimensions of family life simultaneously: (a) maintaining satisfactory internal conditions; (b) promoting member independence and self-esteem; (c) maintenance of family bonds of

coherence and unity; (d) maintenance and development of social supports in transactions with the community; and (e) maintenance of some efforts to control the impact of the stressor and the amount of change in the family unit. Coping then becomes a process of achieving a balanced family organization and individual growth (McCubbin et al., 1981).

McCubbin (1979) underscored the importance of three major variables which contributed to understanding the role of coping behavior plays in family stress management. First, the fit between the family and community may be the major determinant of successful adaptation to stress. The family's ability to manage stress may depend on the efficacy and/or adequacy of solutions offered by the community. Second, is the strength of the interpersonal relationship. Family theory has paid particular attention to social participation outside the home as important in stress management. The coping studies suggest the emergence of a related variable with emphasis on qualitative, not quantitative, differences (i.e. "close" friendships and sharing of "personal" feelings). The third variable is involvement in collective group support and activity. Increasingly it is clear that major stresses on the family are not amenable to individual family solutions but depend on highly organized cooperative efforts that transcend those of any individual family no matter how well developed its integration and adaptive resources (McCubbin, 1979:243).

From these three coping studies it is clear that successful management of stress is facilitated by coping strategies which include internal management and external support.

In a more recent study, Patterson and McCubbin (1984) examined the relationship of gender-role orientation as a psychological resource and specific behavioral coping responses as mitigators of distress for wives experiencing a long term separation from their military spouses. The specific research hypotheses examined were:

Hypothesis (1) When distressed and non-distressed wives experiencing a military-induced family separation are compared, a higher percentage of wives in the nondistressed group will have an androgenous (both masculine and feminine attributes) gender-role orientation. Hypothesis (2) When distressed and nondistressed wives experiencing a military induced family separation are compared, the wives in the nondistressed group will reveal higher scores on the coping patterns of: (a) maintaining family integrity, (b) developing interpersonal relationships and social support, (c) managing psychological tension strain, (d) believing in lifestyle and optimism, (e) developing self-reliance and self-esteem. Hypothesis (3) When the distressed and nondistressed wives are compared, the nondistressed wives will indicate a more balanced coping strategy; that is, a higher than average composite score developed from all five coping patterns. Hypothesis (4) Wives androgenous gender-role orientation will be positively associated with each of the five coping patterns and a balanced coping strategy used to manage a military induced family separation.

It was concluded that although an androgenous gender-role orientation was not directly associated with non-distress, it appeared to mitigate distress indirectly by influencing the coping patterns wives used to manage the hardships of separation. Those wives experiencing the least distress coped by (a) accepting the life style and being optimistic and (b) by developing self-reliance and esteem. Most importantly, non-distressed wives used a balanced coping strategy which reflected above-average use of all the coping patterns identified (Patterson and McCubbin, 1984:95).

While McCubbin and Patterson (1984) stressed the efficacy of a balance of coping responses, Folkman and Lazarus (1980) noted the predominance of both problem and emotion-focused coping. In an extensive study of how community residents coped with the stressful events of daily living during a one year period, the authors found that 98% of the time their participants utilized problem and emotion focused coping responses. While the study enumerated 68 ways of coping and identified a mean of 13.3 coping episodes utilized by the participants, the major contribution to the present study emphasized the fact that coping is best seen as a complex process and that viewing coping in terms of problem solving only is incomplete. Coping involves both rational and emotional responses (Folkman and Lazarus, 1980).

Although the available literature on married students and coping is scarce, a few researchers (Mitchell, Cronkite, and Moos, 1983; Menaghan, 1982) have focused specifically on married couples. When

comparing 157 community couples and 157 couples in which one of the partners was clinically depressed, Mitchell, Cronkite, and Moos (1983) suggested two major findings of their study. (1) Coping and family support buffered life stressors and strains and (2) spouses of distressed individuals also exhibited stress.

Although coping and family support were found to buffer stress felt by a depressed patient, increases in spouse stress resulted in less family support. Possibly, the authors suggest, that high levels of stress rub off on each partner diminishing their efforts of support (Mitchell, Cronkite, and Moos (1983).

While the study mentioned above suggests a spiral (as stress gets worse coping strategies deteriorate), Menaghan (1982) concurs. Using panel data from a large metropolitan population Menaghan (1982) examined predictors and effectiveness of four marital coping efforts: negotiation, optimistic comparisons, selective ignoring and resignation. The level of current marital problems was strongly productive of coping strategies: people with more problems were less likely to attempt negotiation or to make optimistic comparisons, and were more likely to try selective ignoring and resignation. Effectiveness was assessed net of gender, marital duration, SES, parental experience, and initial problem level. Two coping efforts - selective ignoring and resignation - increased ongoing distress and had little impact on later problem levels.

Negotiation efforts did not reduce feelings of distress, but they were associated with fewer later problems. Only optimistic

comparisons were associated with lower distress and fewer later problems.

The strong link between level of problems and choice of coping efforts suggests a worsening spiral of marital experience over time: as problems mount, typical coping choices may actually exacerbate distress and increase later problems. (Menaghan 1982:220)

These findings suggest the importance of identifying means to alter this spiral. While there appears to be an abundance of specific coping responses, the utility of a balanced interaction of internal and external responses along with problem and emotion-focused responses must be underscored. Rather than looking for specific responses (i.e. dropping out of school) to alter this spiral, the broader categories (identified in McCubbin et al., 1981) Family Crisis Oriented Personal Scales (F-Copes) must be illuminated.

#### Summary

This review of literature highlighted the major contributions to research in the areas of marital quality, married students, stress and coping. While not an exhaustive review of the literature in these areas, a pattern did emerge.

Marital quality research is vital especially in times of the tremendous dissolution of today's marriages. A range of factors effect marital quality, most notably the family life-cycle and children. Married students who have an additional role of student to the already multiple roles of husband/wife, provider/homemaker, and possibly parent, encounter stress yet are not generally disabled by it. The stress and coping research emphasizes that while stress is

prevalent it is not necessarily problematic due to coping resources and responses. In fact several studies indicate that a balanced use of coping strategies goes a long way in dealing with stressful situations.

Although rationales for each hypothesis are implicitly stated in Chapter II, they are summarized here:

1. The greater the scope and variety of the individual's coping repertoire, the more protection coping affords (Pearlin and Schooler, 1978:18).
- 2 & 3. "...The presence of dependent children in the home puts a 'crunch' on the time, energy, and economic resources of parents and results in a decrease of marital satisfaction of parents" (Rollins and Galligan, 1978:83). Olson et al. (1983) report that due to demands children place on their parents, external coping strategies are utilized in alleviating stress.
4. External coping strategies are often regarded as "women's work" (Olson et al., 1983).
5. Due to greater responsibility in the childbearing and childrearing years, women report lower marital quality than do men (Lewis and Spanier, 1980).
6. A U-shaped curve of marital quality over the family-life cycle indicates that during the childrearing years marital quality decreases until children begin leaving the home (Spanier and Lewis, 1980).
7. Financial stressors are a major factor leading to decreased marital quality (Bergen and Bergen, 1978).
8. Graduate student status adversely effects marital satisfaction due to restrictions placed on time and money (Gilbert, 1982).
9. When only one spouse is enrolled in school, a degree of isolation exists for the other, resulting in lower marital quality (McRoy and Fisher, 1982).

This study hypothesizes that students scoring high on the DAS will display a balance of coping strategies determined by F-Copes.

That is, nondistressed student couples will indicate a more balanced level of coping strategies than distressed student couples.

## CHAPTER III

## PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to (1) determine the relationship between coping strategies utilized and marital quality reported by married university students, and (2) study the relationship between selected demographic variables, coping and marital quality. This chapter outlines the procedures utilized to address the problem. Specifically, population description and sampling procedure, methods of collecting and organizing data, statistical hypotheses, and an analysis of data shall be presented.

Population Description and Sampling Procedure

The population consisted of all 630 married couples residing in family housing on the campus of Montana State University during the Autumn Quarter of 1984. From a master list provided by the director of family housing, the 630 residences were numbered one to six hundred and thirty. Using a table of random numbers (Spatz and Johnston, 1976:344), one hundred residences (100 couples) were randomly selected.

Method of Collecting Data

To determine the effect of coping strategies on marital quality, each participating couple received two questionnaires. Each spouse received a questionnaire containing (1) demographic questions, (2)

the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS, Spanier, 1976), and (3) the Family Crisis Oriented Personal Scales (F-Copes) (McCubbin and Olson, 1981).

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), a measure of marital quality, is a 32-item scale consisting of four empirically verified components of dyadic adjustment: dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, dyadic consensus, and affectional expression (Spanier, 1976). The scale has been determined to be both valid and reliable. Content validity was determined by three judges. Items were included only if the judges considered the items: (1) relevant measures of dyadic adjustment, (2) consistent with the nominal definitions, (3) carefully worded with appropriate fixed choice responses.

In testing for criterion-related validity, it was found that for each item the divorced sample differed significantly from the married sample ( $p < .001$ ). The correlation between this scale and the Locke Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale (1959) was .86 among married respondents and .88 among divorced respondents ( $p < .001$ ).

Reliability was determined for each component scale as well as for the total scale. Utilizing Cronbach's coefficient alpha as an estimate of reliability, the total scale reliability was found to be .96.

Respondents were asked to indicate the approximate extent of agreement between them and their partners on 32 items. Respondents then proceeded to check a list of responses on a Likkert Scale from always disagree to always agree; from never to all the time; and from extremely unhappy to perfect. Responses were weighted from 0

indicating no agreement to 6 indicating perfect agreement. A total of 151 points were possible; the greater number of points, the greater the degree of marital quality.

Spanier (1976) found the mean score of his married sample to be 114.78 with a standard deviation of 17.8. By subtracting one standard deviation from the mean, Spanier concluded that scores of 97.0 and above indicate marriages are in the well adjusted range (see Appendix B). Four empirically verified components of marital quality: dyadic consensus, dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, and affectional expression comprise the scale.

The Family Crisis Oriented Personal Scales (F-COPES) was utilized to identify attitudinal and behavioral strategies used by families in response to difficulties or problems. The instrument is composed of two subscales that tap internal as well as external family strategies and resources. The 29-item scale measures five coping strategies: reframing and passive appraisal (internal coping strategies) and acquiring social support, seeking spiritual support, and mobilizing the family to acquire and accept help (external strategies). The internal reliability for the instrument is .77 (Cronbach's Alpha) (see Appendix C).

Respondents were asked "When faced with problems or difficulties in our family, we respond by?" Respondents then proceeded to check a list of responses on a five-point likkert scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree, according to how strongly they felt each item reflected a way in which they faced problems. Responses were weighted from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Five conceptual sub-scales comprise F-Copes. Reframing and Passive Appraisal make up the internal dimension, while Acquiring Social Support, Seeking Spiritual Support, and Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help, make up the external dimension. The eight items included in the Reframing sub-scale assess how respondents view change with respect to their confidence in being able to handle problems. The four items included in the Passive Appraisal sub-scale focus on the less responsive strategies a respondent employs when faced with problems. By adopting a more passive approach, responsibility and self initiative are minimized in dealing with difficulties (Olson et al., 1983:142). The 17 items included in the three external sub-scales deal with the family's ability to actively engage in utilizing resources from relatives and friends, church and community services. Due to the unequal number of items contained in the subscales, no more than an approximation of the perception of use of each strategy can be made (Marotz-Baden, 1984).

Twelve demographic questions were included to determine the respondent's background (see Appendix A).

#### Method of Organizing Data

The data is organized into two main categories:

- (1) Tables. Mean scores and test results are presented to the reader in Chapter IV.
- (2) Descriptive analysis in written form is presented in this chapter and Chapter IV.

### Statistical Hypotheses

The null hypotheses tested in this study were:

- (1) There is no difference on mean marital quality scores (DAS) between married students utilizing both levels of coping strategies (internal and external) and married students utilizing single levels of coping strategies (internal or external).
- (2) There is no difference on mean coping strategies scores (F-Copes) between married students with children living at home and married students with no children living at home.
- (3) There is no difference on mean marital quality scores (DAS) between married students with children living at home and married students with no children living at home.
- (4) There is no difference on mean coping strategies scores (F-Copes) between husbands and wives.
- (5) There is no difference on mean marital quality scores (DAS) between husbands and wives.
- (6) There is no significant correlation between length of marriage and marital quality reported (DAS) by married university students.
- (7) There is no difference on mean marital quality scores (DAS) between married students indicating their income is adequate in meeting their financial needs and married students indicating their income is inadequate in meeting their financial needs.
- (8) There is no difference on mean marital quality scores (DAS) between undergraduate and graduate married students.
- (9) There is no difference on mean marital quality scores (DAS) between student spouses and non-student spouses.

### Analysis of Data

All null hypotheses were tested at the .05 significance level against a two-tailed alternative. Here the chances are five in one hundred or less that no difference exists when the statistic applied

shows there is a difference. T-tests were used in determining significant differences in each of the hypotheses except hypothesis #6 in which case a Pearson product-moment correlation was used to test the correlation between length of marriage and marital quality.

#### Precautions Taken for Accuracy

All analysis of data were performed by the Montana State University computer using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

#### Summary

Approximately one-sixth of the married student population residing in family housing on the campus of Montana State University participated in the study. The questionnaires were distributed and retrieved during the autumn quarter of 1984. Demographic questions, F-Copes, and the DAS were the instruments used in assessing the effects of coping and selected demographic variables on marital quality reported by married university students.

Mean scores were obtained for each of the 29 items on the Family Crisis Oriented Personal Scales (F-Copes) and for each of the five subscales. Mean scores were obtained for each of the 32 items on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) yielding a single mean marital quality score.

Nine hypotheses were tested in this study. Eight hypotheses were tested using t-tests at the .05 significance level while one hypothesis was tested using Pearson's product-moment correlation also at the .05 level of significance.

Findings are presented in tabular and descriptive form. All statistical calculations and frequency distributions were done on computer at Montana State University. These findings are presented in the proceeding Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER IV

## FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to report the results obtained from analyses of the research questionnaire and interpret the findings. Mean scores and tests of significance are presented in tabular form followed by brief interpretations in narrative form. Demographic characteristics obtained from Part I of the research questionnaire, mean coping strategy scores obtained from Part II of the research questionnaire (F-COPES), mean marital quality scores obtained from Part III of the research questionnaire (DAS), and analyses of the statistical hypotheses are presented. Both coping strategies and marital quality scores are presented by demographic category (i.e. presence and number of children, gender, length of marriage, student status, and perceived adequacy of income).

Demographic Characteristics

One hundred couples were contacted to participate in the study. Ninety-two couples actually completed and returned the research questionnaire yielding a 92% return rate. Five couples chose not to complete the questionnaire due to the personal nature of the research. Three couples were unavailable for further contact. Analysis of the data obtained from Part I of the research questionnaire yielded the following descriptive characteristics of

the sample. Forty-four couples had no children living in the home, twenty-eight couples had one child living in the home, nineteen couples had two children living in the home, and one couple had three children living in the home. The average length of marriage was 3.56 years; the average respondent's age was 25.59 years; the average annual income was \$10,500; the average number of credits taken per quarter was 13.65; and the average number of hours worked per week was 22.8. Twenty-two respondents were graduate students, fifty-five were non-student spouses, eleven had been previously married, and eleven were foreign students. Ninety-seven percent of the U.S. citizens were Caucasian, while the remaining three percent were either American Indian or Asian Americans.

#### Coping Strategies

The Family Crises Oriented Personal Scales (F-Copes) (McCubbin et al., 1981) was used to assess preference for coping strategies respondents utilized when faced with problems or difficulties. As stated previously, F-COPES is composed of two subscales that tap internal as well as external coping strategies. Reframing and Passive Appraisal comprise the internal subscale. Acquiring Social Support, Seeking Spiritual Support and Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help comprise the external subscale. Responses were weighted from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). Table 1 illustrates that a coping strategy most commonly used by all respondents was Reframing, an internal coping strategy. A second commonly used strategy was Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and

Accept Help, an external coping strategy. The third, fourth, and fifth most commonly used strategies were Acquiring Social Support, Seeking Spiritual Support, and Passive Appraisal respectively.

Table 1. Internal and external coping strategies means by all respondents.

Coping Strategies	Mean Score
Reframing	3.87
Mobilizing the Family	3.23
Acquiring Social Support	2.62
Seeking Spiritual Support	2.45
Passive Appraisal	2.11

1. Higher means indicate greater use of strategy.
2. Figures rounded to the nearest hundreth.

Reframing describes the respondent's ability to redefine a demanding situation into a more manageable and acceptable way. "Knowing that we have the strength within our family to solve our problems" and "Defining the problem in a more positive way" typify reframing responses.

Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help, an external coping strategy, assesses the extent to which respondents made an effort to seek support from community agencies and professional persons. Responses such as "Seeking assistance from community agencies and programs designed to help families in our situation" and "Seeking professional counseling and help for family difficulties" typify respondents' efforts to Mobilize the Family to Acquire and Accept Help. The relatively high mean scores for both Reframing and Mobilizing the Family indicate that the respondents in this sample use both internal and external responses and resources in responding

to married student stress. It appears that student couples are coping satisfactorily. (This assertion is substantiated by high marital quality scores reported by student couples.) The coping strategies of Acquiring Social Support, which emphasize the use of informal support networks such as family, friends, and fellow students, and Seeking Spiritual Support, which identifies respondents' efforts to seek and rely on church activities and belief in God, were used relatively infrequently by this student population. The coping strategy utilized least by all respondents was Passive Appraisal. "Feeling that no matter what we do to prepare, we will have difficulty handling problems" is indicative of Passive Appraisal responses contained in F-COPES. Passive Appraisal has been aptly described by Pearlin and Schooler (1978) as "helpless resignation." Apparently respondents in this sample prefer some sort of action over passivity.

#### Presence and Number of Children and Preference for Coping Strategies

Couples with children were compared with couples without children on their preference for coping strategies. As Table 2 illustrates, mean coping strategy scores between couples with children and couples without children living in the home are quite similar. T-test analyses of means failed to find statistically significant differences between these groups and preference for coping strategies. Both those with children in the home and those without children in the home preferred Reframing as the coping strategy of choice and Passive Appraisal the least.

Table 2. Internal and external coping strategies means by presence of children

Coping Strategies	No Children (N = 88)	Children (N = 96)	t
Reframing	3.84	4.04	.41
Passive Appraisal	2.17	2.05	.74
Composite Internal	3.28	3.37	.54
Acquiring Social Support	2.54	2.82	1.26
Seeking Spiritual Support	2.46	2.25	.65
Mobilizing to Acquire and Accept Help	3.10	3.31	1.76
Composite External	2.61	2.51	.76

1. Higher means indicate greater use of the strategy.
2. A t value of 1.96 or greater indicates a statistically significant difference at  $p < .05$ .
3. Figures rounded to nearest hundredth.

While no significant differences were found between couples with children and couples without children and preference for coping strategies, significant differences were found when couples with children were further analyzed by the number of children living in the home. According to Table 3, couples with one child living in the home reported significantly greater preferences for Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept help when compared with couples with no children and couples with two children living in the home.

While t-tests failed to find significant differences between couples without children and couples with two children living in the home and preference for coping strategies, t-tests did reveal statistically significant differences between couples with one child living in the home when compared with couples with no children and couples with two children. A possible explanation for this finding suggests that as couples move from a two-person system to a

Table 3. Internal and external coping strategies means by number of children.

<u>Coping Strategies</u>	<u>No Children</u> (N = 88)	<u>One Child</u> (N = 58)	<u>t</u>
Reframing	3.84	3.93	.55
Passive Appraisal	2.17	2.08	.74
Composite Internal	3.28	3.31	.38
Seeking Spiritual Support	2.46	2.50	.39
Acquiring Social Support	2.54	2.70	1.06
Mobilizing to Acquire and Accept Help	3.10	3.44	1.97*
Composite External	2.61	2.75	1.33
-----			
<u>Coping Strategies</u>	<u>No Children</u> (N = 88)	<u>Two Children</u> (N = 36)	<u>t</u>
Reframing	3.84	3.86	.19
Passive Appraisal	2.17	1.97	1.42
Composite Internal	3.28	3.22	.45
Seeking Spiritual Support	2.46	2.39	.45
Acquiring Social Support	2.54	2.67	.34
Mobilizing to Acquire and Accept Help	3.10	2.91	.85
Composite External	2.61	2.57	1.18
-----			
<u>Coping Strategies</u>	<u>One Child</u> (N = 88)	<u>Two Children</u> (N = 36)	<u>t</u>
Reframing	3.93	3.86	.52
Passive Appraisal	2.08	1.97	.64
Composite Internal	3.31	3.22	.84
Seeking Spiritual Support	2.50	2.39	.73
Acquiring Social Support	2.70	2.67	.19
Mobilizing to Acquire and Accept Help	3.44	2.91	2.21*
Composite External	2.75	2.57	1.40

1. Higher means indicate greater use of the strategy.
  2. A t value of 1.96 or greater indicates a statistically significant difference at  $p < .05$ .
  3. Figures rounded to nearest hundredth.
- \* Statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

three-person system, they tend to use community agencies and professional persons in an effort to reduce the stress associated with the presence of the first child. However, as couples move from

a three-person system (1 child) to a four-person system (2 children), their reliance on Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help decreases. Apparently, couples with two children living in the home feel less of a need to rely on resources found outside the family after having gone through the experience of having the first child.

#### Gender and Preference for Coping Strategies

While husbands and wives reported similar preferences for internal coping strategies (Reframing and Passive Appraisal), they reported significantly different preferences for the external coping strategies. Table 4 illustrates the relationship between gender and preference for coping strategies.

Table 4. Internal and external coping strategies means by gender.

<u>Coping Strategies</u>	<u>Husbands</u> (N = 92)	<u>Wives</u> (N = 92)	<u>t</u>
Reframing	3.89	3.86	.25
Passive Appraisal	2.09	2.12	.29
Composite Internal	3.28	3.28	.10
Seeking Spiritual Support	2.35	2.55	2.02*
Acquiring Social Support	2.50	2.75	1.94
Mobilizing to Acquire and Accept Help	3.06	3.30	1.49
Composite External	2.54	2.76	2.36*

1. Higher means indicate greater use of the strategy.
  2. A t value of 1.96 or greater indicates a statistically significant difference at  $p < .05$ .
  3. Figures rounded to nearest hundredth.
- \* Statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

At the .05 level of significance t-test revealed that wives reported greater preferences for Seeking Spiritual Support and overall external coping strategies than did their husbands (a

composite score is the mean of subscale items), and Acquiring Social Support ( $p < .06$ ). When faced with problems or difficulties, student wives tended to "Participate in church activities," "Seek advice from relatives," and "Share their concerns with close friends" significantly more than their husbands. Both husbands and wives reported Reframing as the coping strategy of choice, followed by Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help, Acquiring Social Support, Seeking Spiritual Support, and finally Passive Appraisal, with wives reporting a greater preference for external coping strategies.

#### Length of Marriage and Preference for Coping Strategies

A statistically significant negative correlation between length of marriage and preference for Seeking Spiritual Support and Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help was revealed by Pearson's product-moment correlation tested at the .05 level of significance. Table 5 indicates that as length of marriage increased, reliance on church, God, community agencies, and professional persons decreased. It appears as though as the length of student marriages increases, they are less likely to go outside the family for help in coping with problems or difficulties.

Table 5. Internal and external coping strategies means by length of marriage mean.

Coping Strategies	Length of Marriage 3.58 Years r values
Reframing	-.07
Passive Appraisal	-.13
Seeking Spiritual Support	-.17*
Acquiring Social Support	-.13
Mobilizing to Acquire and Accept Help	-.23*

1. Higher means indicate greater use of the strategy.
  2. An r value of +.159 indicates a statistical significant correlation at  $p < .05$ .
  3. Figures rounded to nearest hundreth.
- \* Statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

#### Income and Preference for Coping Strategies

Respondents were asked to indicate yes or no if they felt their income was adequate to meet their financial needs. When comparing coping strategies utilized and perceived adequacy of income, t-test analyses of means failed to find statistical significant differences between respondents who felt their income was adequate and those who felt their income was inadequate on preference for coping strategies. Table 6 illustrates the difference between coping strategies utilized and perceived adequacy of income.

According to Table 6 the eighty-two respondents who felt their income was adequate utilized extremely similar responses and resources in responding to problems or difficulties when compared to those who felt their income was inadequate. Apparently, perceived adequacy of income has little effect on choice of coping strategies.

Table 6. Internal and external coping strategies means by perceived adequacy of income.

Coping Strategies	Perceived Adequacy of Income		t
	Yes (N = 82)	No (N = 102)	
Reframing	3.86	3.89	.40
Passive Appraisal	2.11	2.10	.15
Composite Internal	3.27	3.29	.25
Seeking Spiritual Support	2.68	2.57	.82
Acquiring Social Support	2.42	2.46	.45
Mobilizing to Acquire and Accept Help	3.27	3.09	1.12
Composite External	2.67	2.62	.46

1. Higher means indicate greater use of the strategy.
2. A t value of 1.96 or greater indicates a statistically significant difference at  $p < .05$ .
3. Figures rounded to nearest hundredth.

#### Student Status and Preference for Coping Strategies

Undergraduate respondents and graduate respondents were compared concerning their preference for coping strategies. T-test analyses of means indicated that undergraduates reported statistically significant greater preferences for Passive Appraisal and overall external coping strategies, as shown in Table 7.

While both undergraduate and graduate students preferred to use Passive Appraisal the least as a means of coping with problems, undergraduate students reported a significantly greater preference than graduate students. This strategy tends to reflect a more negative attitude towards solving problems. Undergraduate students reported significantly greater reliance on "watching television," "knowing luck plays a big part in how well we solve family problems," and "feeling that no matter what we do to prepare, we will have difficulty handling problems" as a means of responding to problems.

Table 7. Internal and external coping strategies means by graduate and undergraduate student status.

<u>Coping Strategies</u>	<u>Undergraduate</u> N = 107	<u>Graduate</u> N = 22	<u>t</u>
Reframing	3.87	3.80	.50
Passive Appraisal	2.17	1.83	2.01*
Composite Internal	3.30	3.13	1.85
Seeking Spiritual Support	2.42	2.20	1.48
Acquiring Social Support	2.60	2.25	1.64
Mobilizing to Acquire and Accept Help	3.14	2.76	1.52
Composite External	2.62	2.32	2.23*

1. Higher means indicate greater use of the strategy.
  2. A t value of 1.96 or greater indicates a statistically significant difference at  $p < .05$ .
  3. Figures rounded to nearest hundreth.
- \* Statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

Undergraduates also reported a greater reliance on overall external coping strategies than did graduate students (Table 7). The external strategies reflect a reliance on resources found outside the family such as relatives, friends, community agencies, church activities, and professional persons.

Table 8 illustrates the preference for coping strategies between students and non-student spouses of students. Very similar preferences for the internal coping strategies were reported by both students and non-students. However, t-tests indicated that non-school spouses of students reported statistically significant greater preferences for Seeking Spiritual Support, Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help, and an overall preference for external strategies at the .05 level of significance, and Acquiring Social Support at the .06 level of significance when compared with student spouses. This tremendous reliance on external coping strategies

suggests that the non-school spouses of students actively pursue outside resources in responding to the isolation of non-involvement in the educational process. The non-school spouses utilized professional persons, community and church activities, and friends significantly more than those who were actively involved in the educational process.

Table 8. Internal and external coping strategies means by student status.

<u>Coping Strategies</u>	<u>Non-Student Spouse (N = 55)</u>	<u>Student Spouse (N = 129)</u>	<u>t</u>
Reframing	3.92	3.85	.69
Passive Appraisal	2.09	2.11	.23
Composite Internal	3.30	3.27	.49
Seeking Spiritual Support	2.61	2.38	2.47*
Acquiring Social Support	2.82	2.54	1.94
Mobilizing to Acquire and Accept Help	3.42	3.07	1.99*
Composite External	2.84	2.57	2.63*

1. Higher means indicate greater use of the strategy.
  2. A t value of 1.96 or greater indicates a statistically significant difference at  $p < .05$ .
  3. Figures rounded to nearest hundredth.
- \* Statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

In summary, respondents tapped both intrafamily and external resources in coping with problems or difficulties. Of the five coping strategies analyzed, Reframing, an internal coping strategy, was consistently reported to be the coping strategy of choice by university students and their spouses. Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help (an external coping strategy) was reported to be the second most commonly utilized coping strategy by married student couples. If as the authors of F-COPES and this researcher

suggest, people who utilize both internal and external resources will be more successful in coping with problems or difficulties, these respondents appear to be coping satisfactorily. Significant differences in the use of coping strategies were found by couples with one child who reported a greater preference for Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help when compared with couples with no children and couples with two children; wives reported a greater preference for overall external coping strategies when compared with their husbands; undergraduates reported a greater preference for Passive Appraisal and overall external coping strategies when compared with graduate students; and non-school spouses of students reported a greater preference for the external coping strategies when compared with students.

#### Marital Quality

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976) was utilized to measure marital quality reported by MSU student couples. The results obtained from this instrument and tests of significance are presented in tabular form by the demographic categories of presence and number of children, gender, length of marriage, student status, and perceived adequacy of income.

#### Marital Quality and Children

The presence of children in the home had a statistically significant negative impact on the marital quality of student couples in the present study. According to Table 9, t-test analyses of means

revealed that couples with children living in the home reported significantly lower marital quality scores than did couples without children living in the home.

Table 9. Marital quality means by presence of children.

	<u>No children</u> (N = 88)	<u>Children</u> (N = 96)	<u>t</u>
DAS	115.68	108.11	2.46*

1. Higher means indicate greater marital quality.
  2. Mean scores above 97.0 indicate well adjusted marriages (Spanier, 1976).
  3. Figures rounded to nearest hundreth.
- \* Statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

Further analyses, however, indicates that it was not so much the presence of a child, but the number of children living in the home that effected marital quality. Table 10 illustrates the relationship between number of children living in the home and marital quality reported by MSU student couples.

According to Table 10, statistically significant differences on mean marital quality scores were found between couples with two children living in the home when compared with couples with either one or no children living in the home. Virtually no difference was found when comparing couples with no children and couples with one child on marital quality reported. (Note: The one couple with three children living in the home was excluded from analyses due to the small number.)

Table 10. Marital quality means by number of children.

	Number of Children		t
	0 (N = 88)	1 (N = 58)	
DAS	115.68	115.47	.11
	Number of Children		
	0 (N = 88)	2 (N = 36)	t
DAS	115.68	108.86	2.46*
	Number of Children		
	1 (N = 58)	2 (N = 36)	t
DAS	115.47	108.86	2.97+

1. Higher means indicate greater use of the strategy.
2. Mean scores above 103.0 indicate well adjusted marriages.
3. Figures rounded to nearest hundreth.
- \* Statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .
- + Statistically significant at  $p < .01$ .

This finding suggests that as additional children are added to the family system, marital quality declines. Although significantly lower marital quality scores were reported by couples with two children living in the home, when compared with couples with one child or no children living in the home their marital quality scores were well within the range of well adjusted marriages.

The finding that couples with one child living in the home reported marital quality scores equally as high as couples with no children living in the home could possibly be explained by the greater reliance on Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help

by couples with one child (see Table 3). It would appear that the use of this coping strategy contributes to the marital quality of couples with one child.

#### Marital Quality and Gender

No significant difference was found when comparing husbands and wives on marital quality reported. Table 11 illustrates that both husbands and wives reported relatively similar and high marital quality scores.

Table 11. Marital quality means by gender.

	<u>Wives</u> (N = 92)	<u>Husbands</u> (N = 92)	<u>t</u>
DAS	113.44	114.78	.81

1. Higher means indicate greater use of the strategy.
2. A t value of 1.96 or greater indicates a statistically significant difference at  $p < .05$ .
3. Figures rounded to nearest hundredth.

While previous research has indicated that wives are less satisfied in their marriages than men (Olson et al., 1983, Spanier & Lewis, 1980), the present study suggests that wives are as satisfied with their marriages as their husbands. Possibly, the greater reliance on the external coping strategies by student wives enhances their perception of their marital quality (See Table 4).

#### Marital Quality and Length of Marriage

A statistically significant negative correlation was found between length of marriage and marital quality reported by MSU

student couples. As length of marriage increased, marital quality decreased. Pearson's product moment correlation between marital quality and length of marriage is illustrated in Table 12.

Table 12. Marital quality means by length of marriage.

Mean Length of Marriage	Mean DAS	R
3.85	114.11	-.178*

1. Higher means indicate greater use of strategy.
  2. An R value of  $\pm .159$  or greater indicates a statistically significant correlation at  $p < .05$ .
  3. Figures rounded to nearest hundredth.
- \* Statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

Again, although marital quality decreases as length of marriage increases, marital quality scores by all groups were well within the range of well adjusted marriage.

#### Marital Quality and Student Status

According to Table 13, student status had little effect on marital quality scores reported. T-tests analyses of means failed to find significant differences on marital quality reported between undergraduate respondents and graduate respondents, and non-school spouses of students and student spouses.

Table 13. Marital quality means by student status.

	<u>Undergraduates</u> (N = 107)	<u>Graduates</u> (N = 22)	<u>t</u>
DAS	114.8	114.00	.26
-----			
	<u>Non-school Spouse</u> (N = 55)	<u>Student Spouse</u> (N = 129)	<u>t</u>
DAS	113.05	114.56	.83

1. Higher means indicate greater use of the strategy.
2. A t value of 1.96 or greater indicates a statistically significant difference at  $p < .05$ .
3. Figures rounded to nearest hundreth.

#### Marital Quality and Perceived Adequacy of Income

Respondents were asked to answer "yes" if they felt their annual family income was adequate in meeting their financial needs and "no" if they felt their income was inadequate. It would appear as though the marital quality of MSU student couples was not significantly effected by perceived adequacy of income. T-test analyses of means revealed that the eighty-two respondents who felt their income was adequate in meeting their financial needs did not differ significantly from respondents who felt their income was inadequate on marital quality reported. Table 14 indicates that while mean marital quality scores were lower for respondents indicating their income was inadequate compared to respondents who indicated their income was adequate, the difference was not significant at  $p < .05$ .

To summarize, marital quality reported by all groups was found to be relatively high. Gender, student status, and perceived adequacy of income had little effect on marital quality reported.

Table 14. Marital quality means by perceived adequacy of income.

	<u>Yes</u> (N = 82)	<u>No</u> (N = 102)	<u>t</u>
DAS	115.54	112.84	1.63

1. Higher means indicate greater use of the strategy.
2. A t value of 1.96 or greater indicates a statistically significant difference at  $p < .05$ .
3. Figures rounded to nearest hundreth.

Children and length of marriage, however, had a significant negative impact on marital quality reported. Couples with either one child or no children living in the home reported extremely similar marital quality scores while couples with two children reported significantly lower scores. These lower scores, however, were still in the range of well adjusted marriages. Although length of marriage was negatively correlated with marital quality reported, caution must be taken in applying the practicality of this finding. As stated previously, all groups reported relatively well adjusted marriages and the average length of marriage of this student population was only 3.58 years. Marital quality reported did significantly decrease with increases in length of marriage but not to a level indicative of low marital quality.

It would appear as though student couples are coping quite satisfactorily with the stress of married student life as evidenced by high marital quality scores and use of both internal and external coping strategies. Having examined the demographic characteristics, preference for coping strategies and marital quality reported by

student couples analyses or the statistical and alternative hypotheses are presented.

### Statistical Hypotheses

Nine statistical hypotheses are presented in the null form. Each hypothesis is stated followed by a brief explanation of the results obtained from the tests of significance. All hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance.

1. There is no difference on mean marital quality scores (DAS) between married students utilizing both levels of coping strategies (internal and external) and married students utilizing single levels of coping strategies (internal or external).

Due to the finding that all married students used both internal and external coping strategies, at least to some degree, it is impossible to accept or reject the null hypothesis. However, it would appear as though married students, as hypothesized, are coping satisfactorily with the stresses of married student life. The absence of a comparison group utilizing single levels of coping strategies further attests to the adaptability of this student population.

2. There is no difference in mean coping strategy scores (F-Copes) reported between married students with children living in the home and married students with no children living in the home.

T-test analyses of means revealed no significant differences on mean coping strategy scores between couples with children and couples without children living in the home (see Table 2).

However, when further analyzed, couples with one child reported statistically higher mean scores for Mobilizing the Family to Acquire

and Accept Help when compared with couples with no children and couples with two children living in the home (Table 3). Mean scores reported by couples with children living in the home and couples without children in the home without regard to number of children did not differ significantly. Accept the null hypothesis.

3. There is no difference in mean marital quality scores (DAS) reported between married students with children living in the home and married students with no children living in the home.

T-test analyses of means revealed marital quality to be significantly higher ( $p < .05$ ) for married students with no children when compared with married students with children living in the home (see Table 10). Further analyses revealed that couples with two children reported statistically significant lower marital quality scores when compared with couples with no children and couples with one child living in the home (see Table 10). The presence of two children living in the home had a negative effect on marital quality reported. Reject the null hypotheses.

4. There is no difference in mean coping strategy scores (F-Copes) reported between husbands and wives.

T-test analyses of means revealed that wives reported statistically significant higher mean scores for external coping strategies and particularly Seeking Spiritual Support than did their husbands (see Table 4). Wives were more apt to utilize resources found outside the family in responding to problems and difficulties. Reject the null hypothesis.

5. There is no difference in mean marital quality scores (DAS) reported between husbands and wives.

T-test analyses of means failed to reveal statistically significant differences between husbands and wives on marital quality reported. Both husbands and wives reported similar, relatively high marital quality (see Table 11). Accept the null hypothesis.

6. There is no significant correlation between length of marriage and mean marital quality scores (DAS) reported by married university students.

Pearson's product-moment  $r$  revealed a statistically significant negative correlation between length of marriage and marital quality reported (see Table 12). Apparently as length of marriage increases, marital quality decreased. Reject the null hypothesis.

7. There is no difference on mean marital quality scores (DAS) reported between married students indicating they have adequate income to meet their financial needs and married students indicating they do not have adequate income to meet their financial needs.

T-test analyses of means failed to reveal a statistically significant difference between mean scores (see Table 14). It would appear as though perceived adequacy of income has little effect on marital quality. Accept the null hypothesis.

8. There is no difference on mean marital quality scores (DAS) reported between undergraduate and graduate students.

T-test analyses of means failed to reveal a significant difference on mean marital quality scores between undergraduate and graduate students (see Table 13). Accept the null hypothesis.

9. There is no difference on mean marital quality scores (DAS) reported between students and non-school spouses of students.

T-test analyses of means failed to reveal a significant difference between mean marital quality scores reported by students and non-students. Accept the null hypothesis.

The hypotheses analyzed above were stated in the null form. The following nine hypotheses were restated from the nine alternative hypotheses stated in Chapter I of the present study. The alternative hypotheses were formulated from research concerning coping strategies and marital quality. The alternative hypotheses stated an expected direction (i.e. wives would report lower marital quality than husbands) while the null hypotheses stated there would be no differences between means. A comparison of the null hypotheses ( $H_0$ ) and the alternative hypotheses ( $H_1$ ) yields additional findings relevant to this study.

1. Married students utilizing both levels of coping strategies (internal and external) will report a higher level of marital quality than married students utilizing a single level of coping strategies.

As stated previously, no group of respondents relied exclusively on single levels of coping strategies as a means of facing problems or difficulties thereby making comparisons unlikely.

2. Married students with children living at home will utilize external coping strategies more than married students without children.

The alternative hypotheses stated that married students with children living in the home would utilize external coping strategies more than married students without children living in the home. The hypothesis is partially supported. Couples with one child utilized Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help (an external

strategy) more than those with no children. It was expected that couples with children would utilize resources outside the family due to the "crunch" on time, energy, and economic resources the presence of dependent children put on parents.

3. Married students with children living at home will report lower marital quality than married students without children.

In this case the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was supported. Not only did couples with children report significantly different mean marital quality scores, they reported lower mean marital quality scores than their husbands as expected.

4. Wives will utilize external coping strategies more than husbands.

Here again the null hypothesis was revealed and the alternative hypothesis was supported. Wives utilized external coping strategies more than their husbands.

5. Wives will report lower marital quality than husbands.

It was expected that wives would report lower marital quality scores than their husbands due to a greater responsibility in childbearing and childrearing. However, no differences were found between gender and marital quality reported. It would appear as though student wives maintained high marital quality partially due to a significant reliance on the external coping strategies.

6. Marital quality of university students will decrease as length of marriage increases.

The correlation between length of marriage and marital quality reported was found to be in the expected direction. As the

alternative hypotheses states, marital quality decreased as length of marriage increased.

7. Married students indicating they have adequate income to meet their financial needs will report higher levels of marital quality than married students indicating their financial needs are not adequately met.

It was expected that respondents who perceived their income as being adequate to meet their financial needs would report higher marital quality scores than respondents who felt their income was not adequate in meeting their financial needs. Results of this study indicate that there is no difference on marital quality reported by perceived adequacy of income, therefore, the alternative hypothesis could not be supported.

8. Graduate students will report lower levels of marital quality than undergraduate students.

Graduate student status was expected to adversely effect marital quality, however, when compared with undergraduate students, no significant difference was revealed. Again, the alternative hypothesis could not be supported.

9. Married students with only one spouse enrolled in school will report lower levels of marital quality than married students with both spouses enrolled.

No significant differences were found between non-school spouses and student spouses and marital quality reported. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted and the alternative hypothesis rejected.

By examining the null hypotheses and the alternative hypotheses a number of conclusions are possible and shall be addressed in the following chapter.

Summary

Analyses of the research questionnaire revealed a number of significant findings concerning the ninety-two participating couples on preference for coping strategies and marital quality reported. Tests of significance yielded the following results.

All respondents utilized both internal and external coping strategies to some degree. Respondents reported the greatest preference for Reframing, followed by Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help, Acquiring Social Support, Seeking Spiritual Support, and finally Passive Appraisal. Couples with one child living in the home reported a statistically significant greater preference for Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help than did couples with no children or two children living in the home. Wives reported statistically significant preferences for overall external strategies particularly Seeking Spiritual Support when compared with their husbands. Length of marriage was negatively correlated with Seeking Spiritual Support and Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help. Undergraduate students reported statistically significant greater preferences for Passive Appraisal and overall external coping strategies when compared with graduate students. Non-school spouses of students reported statistically significant greater preferences for the external coping strategies when compared with student spouses. Couples with children living in the home, particularly those with two children, reported significantly lower marital quality scores than did couples without

children. Marital quality was negatively correlated with length of marriage. Marital quality reported by all groups was determined to be relatively high.

## CHAPTER V.

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

A study of ninety-two randomly selected student couples residing on the campus of Montana State University during the autumn quarter of 1984 revealed that respondents utilized both internal and external coping strategies when faced with problems or difficulties. The two most commonly utilized coping strategies were Reframing, an internal coping strategy, and Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help, an external coping strategy. These strategies reflect confidence in handling change and reliance on professional help when necessary. These findings, coupled with the fact that marital quality of this student population was found to be high, indicate that MSU student couples appear to be coping satisfactorily with married student stress.

Preference for coping strategies and marital quality were analyzed by the demographic variables of presence and number of children, gender, length of marriage, income and student status.

Presence and Number of Children

Statistically significant differences were found when comparing the presence and number of children with both coping strategies utilized and marital quality reported by Montana State University

student couples. Student couples with one child living in the home reported a greater preference for Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help (an external coping strategy) than did couples with no children or two children living in the home. No other statistically significant findings were revealed by t-tests at the .05 level of significance when comparing coping strategies and children living in the home.

Marital quality reported by student couples appears to be effected by the presence of children in the home. Specifically, marital quality reported by couples with two children living in the home was significantly lower than couples with zero or one child living in the home. Although couples with two children reported lower marital quality scores than did others, they still reported marital quality scores in the range of well adjusted marriages. That is couples with two children, while reporting relatively high marital quality, reported significantly lower marital quality scores than did couples with one child or no children living in the home. While presence and number of children effected coping strategies and marital quality of MSU student couples, it would appear that student couples are coping satisfactorily with married student stress.

#### Gender

While sex of the respondent appeared to effect preference for coping strategies, it had virtually no effect on marital quality reported. Women, in the present study, reported statistically significant greater preferences for the external coping strategies

than did men. T-tests revealed statistically significant differences in wives preferences for seeking Spiritual Support and overall external strategies at the .05 level of significance and Acquiring Social Support at the .06 level of significance when compared with their husbands. It would appear that wives are more likely to utilize responses and resources outside the family when faced with problems or difficulties than their husbands. The use of both internal and external coping strategies by both husbands and wives appears to be working effectively in alleviating stress and strain of married student life as indicated by the relatively high marital quality scores reported by these student couples. While Olson et al. (1983) reported that men were more satisfied in their marriages than their wives, the present study suggests that the use of external coping strategies by student wives results in marital quality scores equally as high as their husbands. Both men and women in the present study report relatively high marital quality scores, possibly due to their reliance on both internal and external coping strategies.

#### Length of Marriage

Pearson's product-moment correlations between length of marriage, preference for coping strategies and marital quality reported by student couples revealed that as length of marriage increased, reliance on Seeking Spiritual Support and Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help (external coping strategies) and marital quality decreased. It would appear that as the length of marriage increases for student couples they are less likely to resort

to outside resources for help in facing problems or difficulties. A possible explanation for the negative correlation between length of marriage and marital quality reported is the negative correlation between length of marriage and use of external coping strategies.

#### Income

No statistically significant differences were revealed by t-tests comparing married students who felt their income was adequate to meet their financial needs and those who felt their income was inadequate on either coping strategies utilized or marital quality reported. Apparently, income has little effect on preferences for coping strategies or marital quality reported by married student couples.

#### Student Status

Graduate students, undergraduate students, and non-school spouses of students all reported relatively high marital quality scores. No statistically significant differences were revealed when comparing student status and marital quality reported. However, statistically significant differences were found when comparing graduate students and undergraduate students and students and non-school spouses of students, and preference for coping strategies.

T-tests revealed that undergraduate students utilized Passive Appraisal (an internal coping strategy) and overall external coping strategies significantly more than did graduate students. Although undergraduate students utilized Passive Appraisal as a means of facing problems or difficulties less than all other coping

strategies, they tended to take a passive approach to problems more than graduate students. Undergraduate students also utilized the external coping strategies significantly more than graduate students, indicating they actively sought help when stress became unmanageable.

The non-school spouses of students indicated that they relied on the external strategies of Seeking Spiritual Support, Acquiring Social Support, and Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help significantly more than did students. Apparently non-school spouses dealt effectively with the isolation of non involvement by utilizing responses and resources outside of the family.

#### Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between demographic characteristics, coping strategies and marital quality reported by married university students. Analyses of the research questionnaire has yielded sufficient information for this researcher to make a number of conclusions pertaining to the relationship between selected demographics, coping strategies and marital quality. It was hoped that by examining coping strategies utilized by couples reporting high marital quality scores and comparing those coping strategies with the coping strategies utilized by couples who reported low marital scores, this researcher could attest to the efficacy of various coping strategies and forward a positive model for coping effectively with the stress of married student life. The absence of a low marital quality group, although it makes comparisons unlikely, in no way limits conclusions. Marital

quality of MSU student couples was found to be high regardless of demographic characteristics and it would appear as though the variety and scope of the coping strategies utilized by student couples in responding to stressful situations enhanced their perception of their marital quality.

This researcher concludes that:

1. MSU student couples are relatively well adjusted in marriage.

Results of the present study are similar to other studies pertaining to the marital quality of university student couples (Khan and Sharpley, 1980; Gruver and Labadie, 1975; Bergen and Bergen, 1978; McRoy and Fisher, 1982). Eighty percent of MSU student couples rated their marriages as either very happy, extremely happy or perfect. Only nine percent stated they occasionally considered divorce, while ninety-one percent stated they rarely or never considered divorce. Marital quality scores obtained from the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) enable this researcher to conclude that MSU student couples are quite satisfied in their marriages.

High marital quality scores are indicative of adequate handling of stress. The successful use of coping strategies have been shown to reduce stress (George, 1980:30). The two most frequently utilized coping strategies by student couples were Reframing, an internal coping strategy, and Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help, an external coping strategy. In responding to problems or difficulties, student couples utilized resources residing both within their family and acquired resources outside their family. This

balance of coping strategies, as hypothesized by McCubbin et al. (1981), appears to be an effective means in successfully responding to stressful situations.

Reframing, the coping strategy of choice by all respondents, describes the way in which respondents redefine stressful situations into more manageable and acceptable ways (Olson et al., 1983). Reframing is similar to what Lazarus (1966, 1977) has termed "cognitive appraisal, and what Pearlin and Schooler (1978) identify as "positive comparisons" and "selective ignoring." Olson et al. (1983) and Pearlin and Schooler (1978) regard reframing as "critical" in successfully dealing with interpersonal difficulties, especially in parent-child struggles. The wide use of Reframing reported by Marotz-Baden (1984), Olson et al. (1983) and the present study indicate that redefining stressful situations into less stressful situations is a commonly used effective means in responding to stress.

The second most commonly used coping strategy by student couples was Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help. This strategy assesses the family's ability to seek out community resources and accept help from others. The role of community agencies and professional persons in helping families to weather stressful periods has been shown to be an important supplement to informal networks. These formal networks have been found to be critical when other resources are exhausted and can act as a "safety net" to families experiencing stress (Olson et al., 1983).

These two coping strategies, Reframing and Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help, have been referred to as "critical" in successfully responding to stress. MSU student couples frequently utilized these strategies in responding to problems or difficulties more than any other coping strategy.

High marital quality scores reported by MSU student couples coupled with research indicating the importance of these two coping strategies in reducing stress substantiate the following conclusion.

2. The internal coping strategy, Reframing, and the external coping strategy Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help when used complementarily reduce stress in marriage.
3. The presence of more than one child living in the home has a negative impact on marital quality.

The results of the present study concur with Olson et al. (1983); Spanier and Lewis, (1980); and Rolling and Galligan (1978) that the presence of children living in the home has a negative impact on most marriages (see Table 10). However, results from the present study indicate that decline in marital quality is associated with the presence of two children in the home. Couples with one child reported no significant decrease in marital quality when compared with couples with no children (Table 7). It would appear as though the decline in marital quality increases with the addition of children to the family (Belsky, Spanier, and Rovine, 1983). While Dyer (1963); Lemasters (1957); and Wainwright (1966) have all concluded that the addition of a first child to a two-person system creates a crisis for the marital dyad, the present study concludes that the addition of a first child does not create a crisis. This

study further concludes that the crisis is averted by the significantly greater use of Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help by couples with one child.

4. Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help by couples with one child living in the home reduces stress associated with the presence of a first child.

This is not surprising due to the effect of first children on marital quality (Spanier and Lewis, 1984). Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help appears to be an effective means for couples with one child to cope with the stress of moving from a 2-person system to a 3-person system. Mobilizing the family to use more formal social support networks such as community agencies and professional persons has been referred to as the "safety net" resource a community provides to those families experiencing prolonged periods of stress (Olson et al., 1983). Apparently, by using this coping strategy in conjunction with others, marital quality of couples with one child in the home remains high ( $X = 115.47$ ). The availability of professional resources in this university community and the willingness of couples to utilize these resources demonstrate an effective means to cope with the potential decrease in marital quality associated with the birth of the first child.

5. Marital quality is not significantly effected by gender.

Results from the present study differ from research concerning gender and marital quality. Hicks and Platt (1970), Lewis and Spanier (1980) and Patterson and McCubbin (1984) all reported that husbands were more satisfied with their marriages than wives. Olson

et al. (1983) stated that wives reported a greater decrease in marital satisfaction during the childbearing and childrearing years. Based on research mentioned above, it was hypothesized that wives would report lower marital quality scores than husbands. Although wives did report slightly lower marital quality scores in the present study, the difference was not significant. It would appear as though wives are coping as effectively with the stressors and strains of married student life as their husbands. A greater reliance on the external coping strategies by wives (see Table 3) has undoubtedly reduced the stress into more manageable and acceptable levels resulting in higher marital quality scores. The following conclusion offers an explanation as to why marital quality did not differ significantly in regards to gender.

6. Wives utilize external coping strategies more than husbands.

Olson et al. (1983) have suggested that the external coping strategies are more in line with traditional women's roles and are considered more "women's work" than men's. Results from the present study indicate that, indeed, wives utilize external coping strategies more than husbands. When faced with problems or difficulties, wives tended to "participate in church activities," "Seek advice from relatives" and "Share their concerns with close friends" significantly more than their husbands. The availability of community agencies and professional persons on campus and in the community, coupled with a greater willingness by wives to utilize these resources in response to stress, has enabled wives to reduce

stress in their marriage and report higher than expected marital quality scores.

7. As length of marriage increases, marital quality decreases.

Olson et al. (1983) confirmed a number of previous findings stating that marital quality decreases as length of marriage increases (Anderson, et al., 1983; Spanier et al., 1975; and Rollins and Galligan, 1974). The results of the present study are similar to those mentioned above. Not only is length of marriage negatively correlated with marital quality, it is also negatively correlated with Seeking Spiritual Support and Mobilizing the Family to Acquire and Accept Help (external coping strategies, Table 3). The external coping strategies have been referred to as critical strategies in reducing stress. Possibly the negative correlation between length of marriage and marital quality is influenced by the negative correlation between length of marriage and the external coping strategies. Consistent with prior research, marital quality of student couples decreases as length of marriage increases.

8. Perceived adequacy of income does not significantly effect marital quality.

Adequacy of income (Bergen and Bergen, 1978; McRoy and Fisher, 1982; and Gilbert, 1982) has been reported as a major source of stress for university student couples. However, couples in the present study indicating inadequate income when compared with couples indicating adequate income did not differ significantly on marital quality scores. Although finances are a source of stress for student couples, the stress of inadequate income apparently was not strong

enough to lower marital quality scores to maladjusted levels. Possibly the relative lack of income is acceptable while students are engaged in the educational process.

9. Non-school spouses of students reduce stress in marriage by utilizing external coping strategies.

McRoy and Fisher (1982) found that when only one spouse was enrolled in school a degree of isolation existed for the other, resulting in lower marital quality. The present study determined that marital quality scores were not significantly different between student and non-student spouses. The finding that non-school spouses relied on the external coping strategies significantly more than students may explain why marital quality reported by non-students was not significantly lower than marital quality reported by students. It appears as though non-students effectively fight the stress of isolation and non-involvement by actively utilizing external coping strategies.

10. Student status does not significantly effect marital quality.

Marital quality research focusing on graduate student couples suggests that there are many sources of stress for the graduate student couples (Gruver and Labadie, 1975; McRoy and Fisher, 1982; and Gilbert, 1982). Problems of (a) sexual dissatisfaction, (b) time spent together, and (c) money, appear to be major sources of stress. And although numerous variables impinge on the family and marital system of those attending graduate school, it appears that such a family system can adapt and even thrive under these conditions (Gilbert, 1982:133). Findings of the present study are similar to

those of Gilbert's (1982) and Gruver and Labadie's (1975). Although graduate students ( $X = 114.00$ ) reported slightly lower marital quality scores than did undergraduates ( $X = 114.68$ ), the difference was negligible. Gilbert (1982) explains this ability of the graduate population to adapt by adaptive-passive nature of a family's interaction with a larger social system. "Despite the potentially destructive impact of graduate school on family life, the (graduate) family generally seems to be able to adapt well" (Gilbert, 1982:134). Present study, while also finding problems of sex and time spent together to be troubling graduate student couples, supports the view of the adaptability of graduate students to cope with multiple sources of stress.

Research indicates that if the wife in a student marriage was not involved in the education process herself, then marital quality would be lower than if she was a student (Gilbert, 1982; McRoy and Fisher, 1984). "The wife of a graduate student will experience isolation, goallessness, normlessness, and personal meaninglessness" (Neal and Groat, 1974). The present study indicates that the female non-school spouse is only slightly less satisfied with her marriage than her student counterpart. Female non-school spouses reported mean marital quality scores of 113.05 while student spouses reported mean scores of 114.56, not significantly different and both relatively high. Possibly the non-school spouse's use of external coping strategies (which was found to be significantly higher than students  $p < .05$ ) alleviated some of the "isolation" and "personal meaninglessness" enhancing their perception of their marital quality.

### Recommendations

From the results obtained in this study and from existing literature on coping and marital quality, it is possible to make recommendations for further research and for counselor and clinicians dealing with troubled couples and families. This investigator recommends the following:

1. A longitudinal study should be undertaken to detect change in marital quality by investigating couples while they are students and again after completion of their degrees.

The present study investigated student couples at a single point in time and although it was concluded that married student couples are relatively well adjusted in their marriages, it would be interesting to know what specific effect the university setting had on reported marital quality.

2. Extreme care should be taken in choosing instruments that reflect couple vs. individual scores.

While the present study investigated student couples, most responses were individual. Had this researcher foreseen the limitations of the instruments utilized, perhaps a more effective couples measurement could have been obtained or created.

3. A low marital quality group (divorced or currently in therapy) should be utilized as a comparison group.

The absence of a low marital quality group in the present study may have limited conclusions as to the efficacy of various coping strategies.

4. Counselors and clinicians should focus on behaviors that have been proven to be effective in alleviating stress rather than focusing on dysfunction.

By focusing on the successful coping strategies utilized by this student population, it becomes apparent that a combination of internal and external coping strategies can alleviate, prevent, or control stressful situations. Although focusing on a "client's" feelings and perceptions, displaying genuineness, and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1959) are invaluable in psychotherapy, it appears that what one "does" is more important in blocking stress in marriage and parenthood than what one "is" (Pearlin and Schooler, 1978). Perhaps by focusing on the client's active process of family adaptations involving coping strategies within the family, as well as in the transactions with the community (McCubbin, 1979:129), may be an effective tool in helping clients through stressful situations.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHICS

## Part I

Please answer the following demographic questions. Write in the appropriate response on the lines provided or circle the appropriate number. Should further information be necessary please use the space provided at the bottom of the page.

- 1) How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) How many hours a week are you employed? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) How many credits are you presently taking? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) How many children do you have living with you? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) How long have you been married? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) Estimate your total income from all sources for your household in 1984. \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) Do you feel this income is adequate to meet your financial needs? 1. Yes 2. No
- 8) Indicate the major source of your total family income.
  1. financial support from parents or relatives (not loans)
  2. financial support from loans, grants, assistantships, etc.
  3. wages from employment
  4. savings
  5. a combination of the above
  6. other
- 9) Indicate your student status.
  1. undergraduate student
  2. graduate student
  3. non-school spouse of a student
- 10) Are you a U.S. citizen?
  1. Yes 2. No
- 11) If you are a U.S. citizen do you consider yourself
  1. American Indian
  2. Black or Afro-American
  3. Caucasian or White American
  4. Mexican-American or Chicano
  5. Oriental or Asian American
- 12) Have you ever been married before?
  1. Yes 2. No

APPENDIX B

DAS

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

	Always Agree	Almost Always Agree	Occasionally Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree
1. Handling family finances	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. Matters of recreation	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. Religious matters	5	4	3	2	1	0
4. Demonstrations of affection	5	4	3	2	1	0
5. Friends	5	4	3	2	1	0
6. Sex relations	5	4	3	2	1	0
7. Conventionalities (correct or proper behavior)	5	4	3	2	1	0
8. Philosophy of life	5	4	3	2	1	0
9. Ways of dealing with parents or in-laws	5	4	3	2	1	0
10. Aims, goals, and things believed important	5	4	3	2	1	0
11. Amount of time spent together	5	4	3	2	1	0
12. Making major decisions	5	4	3	2	1	0
13. Household tasks	5	4	3	2	1	0
14. Leisure time interests and activities	5	4	3	2	1	0
15. Career decisions	5	4	3	2	1	0

	All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
16. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?	0	1	2	3	4	5
17. How often do you or your mate leave the house after a fight?	0	1	2	3	4	5
18. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?	5	4	3	2	1	0
19. Do you confide in your mate?	5	4	3	2	1	0
20. Do you ever regret that you married? (or lived together?)	0	1	2	3	4	5
21. How often do you and your partner quarrel?	0	1	2	3	4	5
22. How often do you and your mate "get on each other's nerves"?	0	1	2	3	4	5

	Every Day	Almost Every Day	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
23. Do you kiss your mate?	4	3	2	1	0
	All of them	Most of them	Some of them	Very few of them	None of them
24. Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?	4	3	2	1	0

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

	Never	Less than once a month	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Once a day	More often
25. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas	0	1	2	3	4	5
26. Laugh together	0	1	2	3	4	5
27. Calmly discuss something	0	1	2	3	4	5
28. Work together on a project	0	1	2	3	4	5

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

	Yes	No
29. Being too tired for sex.	0	1
30. Not showing love.	0	1

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

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A Little Unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy	Perfect

32. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship?

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

Please Circle The APPROPRIATE Number.

APPROXIMATE  
VALUES

APPENDIX C

F-COPES

## PART III

As you read each response choice decide how well the choice describes your attitude and behavior in response to problems or difficulty. If the statement describes your response very well, then circle the number 5 indicating that you STRONGLY AGREE; if the statement does not describe your response at all, then circle the number 1 indicating that you STRONGLY DISAGREE; if the statement describes your response to some degree, then select a number 2, 3, or 4 to indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement about your response.

When we face problems or difficulties in our family, we respond by:	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
1. Sharing our difficulties with relatives	1	2	3	4	5
2. Seeking encouragement and support from friends	1	2	3	4	5
3. Knowing we have the power to solve major problems	1	2	3	4	5
4. Seeking information and advice from persons in other families who have faced the same or similar problems	1	2	3	4	5
5. Seeking advice from relatives (grandparents, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
6. Seeking assistance from community agencies and programs designed to help families in our situation	1	2	3	4	5
7. Knowing that we have the strength within our own family to solve our problems	1	2	3	4	5
8. Receiving gifts and favors from neighbors (e.g. food, taking in mail, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
9. Seeking information and advice from the family doctor	1	2	3	4	5
10. Asking neighbors for favors and assistance	1	2	3	4	5
11. Facing the problems "head-on" and trying to get solution right away	1	2	3	4	5
12. Watching television	1	2	3	4	5
13. Showing that we are strong	1	2	3	4	5
14. Attending church services	1	2	3	4	5
15. Accepting stressful events as a fact of life	1	2	3	4	5
16. Sharing concerns with close friends	1	2	3	4	5
17. Knowing luck plays a big part in how well we are able to solve family problems	1	2	3	4	5
18. Accepting that difficulties occur unexpectedly	1	2	3	4	5
19. Doing things with relatives (get-togethers, dinners, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
20. Seeking professional counseling and help for family difficulties	1	2	3	4	5
21. Believing we can handle our own problems	1	2	3	4	5
22. Participating in church activities	1	2	3	4	5
23. Defining the family problem in a more positive way so that we do not become too discouraged	1	2	3	4	5
24. Asking relatives how they feel about problems we face	1	2	3	4	5
25. Feeling that no matter what we do to prepare, we will have difficulty handling problems	1	2	3	4	5
26. Seeking advice from a minister	1	2	3	4	5
27. Believing if we wait long enough, the problem will go away	1	2	3	4	5
28. Sharing problems with neighbors	1	2	3	4	5
29. Having faith in God	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation in filling out this questionnaire. Please use the space below for any additional comments you would like to make.

