

## Attachment, Stress, Dyadic Coping, and Marital Satisfaction of Counseling Graduate Students

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### **Abstract:**

A sample of 191 married students from 23 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs-accredited programs participated in a survey designed to examine factors that affect the marital satisfaction of counseling graduate students. Results indicated that attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and dyadic coping accounted for 67% of the variance in marital satisfaction. Additionally, dyadic coping partially mediated the relationships between both attachment dimensions and marital satisfaction. Findings provide direction for future research and practical implications for counselors, educators, and graduate students.

**Keywords:** attachment | perceived stress | dyadic coping | marital satisfaction | counseling students

### **Article:**

Counseling graduate students experience a number of stressors that have the potential to negatively impact their marriages and their ability to successfully navigate their training program (Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000; Gold, 2006). As developing counselors, they are learning both the skills-based aspects of counseling (i.e., how to do counseling) and the relational aspects of counseling (i.e., how to be in authentic, therapeutic relationships with clients). The personal and emotional nature of clinical work may create spillover stress and affect student home life. The reverse also may be true, such that marital distress affects the student's ability to navigate counselor training effectively. How counseling students cope with the range of stressors in graduate school is an important area of inquiry that has relevance for both the personal and the professional development of counseling trainees and the counselor educators responsible for training effective counselors. Simply put, counselors who are physically and psychologically healthy are better able than distressed counselors to provide therapeutic services and meet the needs of their clients (Lawson, 2007; Witmer & Young, 1996). Given the ongoing stressors and high risk of compassion fatigue

inherent in helping professions (Skovholt, 2001; Stebnicki, 2007), the exploration of factors that affect various aspects of student well-being likely will serve counseling trainees well throughout their careers.

One such factor is marital satisfaction. Graduate students have reported specific sources of marital dissatisfaction, including lack of time and energy for the marriage and family (Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Sori, Wetchler, Ray, & Niedner, 1996), changing or differing levels of personal development and philosophies of life (Brannock et al., 2000; Sori et al., 1996), financial strain (Gold, 2006; Legako & Sorenson, 2000), affective communication (Brannock et al., 2000; Gold, 2006), sexual relations (Brannock et al., 2000; Gold, 2006), and difficulties with problem solving (Gold, 2006). Collectively, these findings provide evidence that participation in graduate study introduces a number of stressors that have the potential to affect student marriages negatively.

Dyadic stress results from a specific event, situation, or transition that directly or indirectly threatens both spouses and prompts coping responses from both spouses (Bodenmann, 2005). Dyadic coping is a joint process of responding to dyadic stress, based on the interdependence of spouses in a shared social context (Bodenmann, 2005). When spouses cope in ways that consider each other's satisfaction and well-being, the well-being of both the individuals and the dyad is enhanced. Researchers have found that the use of dyadic coping buffers the marriage from the negative effects of stress and shapes relational appraisals of the marriage as a trusting, intimate, and supportive partnership (Bodenmann, Pihet, & Kayser, 2006). In the current study, graduate school was examined as a contextual source of dyadic stress, because it affects both the student and the spouse and requires some form of coping response. Further, dyadic coping was explored as a predictor of marital satisfaction.

In this study, attachment theory was used as a framework for understanding the relationships among stress, dyadic coping strategies, and marital satisfaction. In brief, attachment theory highlights the importance of primary attachment figures in the development of "internal working models" (Bowlby, 1973, p. 238), which are mental representations of others (i.e., Can I depend on them if I am in need?) and the self (i.e., Am I the sort of person that others will help when I am in need?). Internal working models and the corresponding attachment styles have been found to remain fairly consistent into adulthood, affecting the way adults view themselves and their partners, how they experience intimate relationships, and how they respond in times of stress (Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1994).

The three primary attachment styles are secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent. Adults with a secure attachment style tend to describe their romantic relationships as happy and trusting (Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1994). They are able to get emotionally close to others rather easily and tend to be comfortable giving and receiving support from their spouses. Adults with an avoidant attachment style tend to be afraid of intimacy and emotional highs and lows. They find it difficult to trust others and are wary of getting too close. Finally, adults with anxious/ambivalent styles describe love as an obsession, and tend to experience romantic relationships characterized by emotional highs and lows, extreme jealousy, and strong desire for emotional connection. The association between attachment style and the way in which one views and experiences intimate relationships is well documented in the attachment literature (see Mikulincer, Florian, Cowan, & Cowan, 2002, for a detailed review).

Recent practice in measurement of adult attachment has involved variance along the two dimensions of attachment anxiety (level of fear of separation and abandonment) and attachment avoidance (level of discomfort with intimacy and dependency), rather than the original categorical system (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Discussions of adult attachment, however, still include reference to attachment styles or orientations, based on one's combined levels of anxiety and avoidance (Rholes & Simpson, 2004). In the current study, attachment or attachment style refer to the combined dimensions of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance.

Hazan and Shaver (1994) suggested that when the basic needs of comfort, care, and sexual gratification are met, individuals are more likely to feel satisfied with their relationships. Given the aforementioned stressors of graduate school, it is likely that at least some of these basic relationship needs may not be fully satisfied during this time period. Thus, attachment theory provides a useful framework within which to conceptualize the marital experiences of counseling graduate students. More specifically, attachment style may affect one's cognitive appraisals about the stressors that accompany the graduate school experience. In addition, it is possible that attachment affects the choice of dyadic coping strategies employed by couples. For instance, securely attached spouses may be more likely to use supportive dyadic coping responses that contribute to both spouses' marital satisfaction and well-being.

The purpose of this study was to discover how perceived stress, adult attachment, and dyadic coping strategies affect the marital satisfaction of counseling graduate students. Researchers have examined the relationship between graduate student stress and marital satisfaction (e.g., Brannock et al., 2000; Gold, 2006), between adult attachment and marital satisfaction (e.g., Butzer & Campbell, 2008; Marchand, 2004), and between coping strategies and marital quality (e.g., Bodenmann, 2005; Bodenmann et al., 2006). There is no indication in the literature, however, about how this combination of variables affects the marital satisfaction of counseling graduate students. The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: What proportion of the variance in marital satisfaction can be uniquely accounted for by perceived stress level, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and dyadic coping among a sample of counseling students.

Research Question 2: To what extent does dyadic coping mediate the relationship between attachment anxiety and marital satisfaction.

Research Question 3: To what extent does dyadic coping mediate the relationship between attachment avoidance and marital satisfaction.

## **Method**

### Data Collection Procedures

Participants were recruited from randomly selected Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)-accredited counseling programs. Of the 45 programs

contacted, CACREP liaisons from 7 master's-only programs and 16 master's and doctoral programs agreed to distribute the survey. For the purposes of this study, only data from married participants beyond their first semester of study were analyzed. The e-mail invitation included a brief description of the study, approximate time required to complete the survey, a description of the incentives offered to participants (a drawing for four \$50 gift cards), and a link to the survey. No identifying information was attached to the survey group of instruments.

### **Description of the Sample**

Based on rough estimates provided by program liaisons, the e-mail invitation was distributed to approximately 1,200 married students. There were 209 married respondents, for an approximate response rate of 17.42%. Ten respondents did not complete the entire survey and eight were in the first semester of their program, and thus did not meet the criteria for inclusion. Therefore, a total of 191 surveys were included in the data analyses. Based on power analyses, the minimum number of participants needed for adequate power to detect moderate effect sizes in the data analyses was 128.

The average age of the participants was 34.8 years ( $SD = 9.76$ , range 22–60) and female ( $n = 167$ ; 87.4%). Whereas the majority of participants identified themselves as Caucasian ( $n = 162$ , 84.8%), others identified as African American ( $n = 6$ , 3.1%), Asian ( $n = 6$ , 3.1%), Latino/Latina ( $n = 8$ , 4.2%), and other ( $n = 7$ , 3.7%). Most of those in the “other” category identified themselves as multiracial. One hundred and forty-six participants (76.4%) were enrolled in master's programs, and 43 (22.5%) were enrolled in doctoral programs. Participants were fairly evenly divided between part-time students ( $n = 88$ , 46.1%) and full-time students ( $n = 101$ , 52.9%). Participants indicated that they had been married an average of 11.61 years ( $SD = 8.75$ ), and nearly all participants were in their first marriage ( $n = 173$ , 90.6%). The average number of children in the home was 0.8 ( $SD = 1.08$ ). The demographic questionnaire was not forced-choice, and some participants chose not to answer all of the demographic questions; thus, not all demographic questions had a total  $N$  of 191.

### **Instrumentation**

Participants completed an electronic survey that contained several instruments, including the Perceived Stress scale (PSS; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983), the Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire–Revised (ECR-R; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000), the Dyadic Coping Inventory (DCI; Bodenmann, 2008), the Relationship Assessment scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988), and a demographic questionnaire.

PSS. The PSS (Cohen et al., 1983) is a 14-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure the extent to which life situations are appraised as stressful. Participants were asked to rate each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (very often). Sample items include “In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?” The PSS was found to be moderately correlated with related measures of the number of stressful life events ( $r = .17$  to  $.39$ ) and the impact of certain life events ( $r = .24$  to  $.49$ ). Notably, the PSS was more strongly correlated with a scale that measured a more subjective perception of the impact of stressful events than the more objective frequency of stressful events.

Also, the PSS was found to be a better predictor of depressive and physical health symptoms than either of the two life event scales (Cohen et al., 1983). The PSS was normed on both college and community samples, with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients ranging from .84 to .86 and 2-day test-retest reliability of .85 (Cohen et al., 1983). For the current sample, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .89.

ECR-R. Attachment style was measured by the ECR-R (Fraley et al., 2000), a 36-item self-report questionnaire consisting of two 18-item subscales. The first subscale measures the avoidance dimension of attachment, with items such as "I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners." The second subscale measures the anxiety dimension of attachment, with items such as "I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me." Participants were asked to rate each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher mean scores on each subscale represent greater avoidance and anxiety, respectively. The instrument initially was derived from a combination of virtually all existing self-report measures of adult attachment. Principal components analysis was used to construct two 18-item scales, using the items with the strongest correlations to the two higher-order factors (anxiety and avoidance). Validation studies (Brennan et al., 1998; Fraley et al., 2000; Sibley, Fischer, & Lui, 2005) have provided evidence that the ECR-R has strong construct validity. Previous researchers have found the evidence of strong internal reliability, with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  ranging from .89 to .94 and 3-week test-retest reliability coefficients ranging from .90 to .95 (Fraley et al., 2000; Sibley et al., 2005). For the current sample, Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s were .90 for anxiety and .95 for avoidance.

DCI. The DCI (Bodenmann, 2008) was used to measure the relational coping strategies of participants. The DCI differs from measures of social support in that it focuses on the support that partners provide each other when one or both are under stress (Ledermann et al., 2010). The DCI is a 37-item self-report instrument with a 5-point Likert-type scale. Higher scores on the DCI indicate more positive dyadic coping behaviors. Although the instrument contains nine subscales, only the total scale was used as a unit of analysis for this study. Validation studies of the DCI have indicated that the instrument is effective at predicting marital quality and conflict communication, and in discriminating between community and clinical samples (Ledermann et al., 2010). The instrument has shown evidence of solid internal consistency ( $\alpha$  = .92 for men and .93 for women on the total score (Bodenmann, 2008). For the current sample, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .94.

RAS. The RAS (Hendrick, 1988) was used to measure marital satisfaction. This brief, 7-item measure assesses general satisfaction, regrets about the relationship, love for the partner, problems in the relationship, and the extent to which one's needs and expectations are met by the partner. Participants were asked to rate each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The RAS has been shown to be correlated with other established relationship satisfaction measures, such as the Dyadic Adjustment scale ( $r$  = .80 to .88; Spanier, 1976) and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction scale ( $r$  = .64 to .74; Schumm et al., 1986). The RAS has exhibited consistency across samples of Anglo, bicultural, and Hispanic-oriented couples (Contreras, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1996). The RAS has shown evidence of good internal consistency ( $\alpha$  = .86) and 6-week test-retest reliability ( $r$  = .85; Hendrick, 1988). For the current sample, the RAS had a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .94.

Demographic questionnaire. A questionnaire created by the researcher was used to collect

demographic data, including age, gender, ethnicity, years married, first marriage, number of children, spouse employment status, spouse education level, spouse, student status, household income, student level (master's or doctoral program), and student status (part-time or full-time).

Table 1. Pearson Product Moment Correlations.

Variables	Marital Satisfaction	Perceived Stress	Attachment Anxiety	Attachment Avoidance	Dyadic Coping
Marital satisfaction	(.94)				
Perceived stress	-.15*	(.89)			
Attachment anxiety	-.57*	.39*	(.90)		
Attachment avoidance	-.74*	.19*	.56*	(.95)	
Dyadic coping	.77*	-.14*	-.53*	-.73*	(.94)

Note. Instrument reliabilities are placed along the diagonal in parentheses.

\*p < .05.

Table 2. Multiple Regression: Predictors of Marital Satisfaction.

Variable	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	SE	Stand. b	t	Zero Order	Partial
Model summary	.67					
Perceived stress		.04	.06	1.25	-.15	.09
Attachment avoidance		.02	-.31	-4.68*	-.75	-.33
Attachment anxiety		.02	-.17	-3.07*	-.57	-.22
Dyadic coping		.03	.42	6.60*	.77	.44

Note. SE ¼ standard error.

\*p < .01.

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

Pearson product moment correlations among the study variables are presented in Table 1. Statistically significant correlations existed between all study variables. Additionally, to assess for differences between master's and doctoral students in the study variables, a one-way multivariate analysis of variance was used to assess for main effects of degree program on each of the five variables. Consistent with the researchers' hypotheses, no significant mean differences were found,  $F(5, 183) = .87, p > .05, \eta^2 = .02$ . Accordingly, all data were aggregated.

### Research Question 1

To assess the proportion of variance in marital satisfaction that could be uniquely accounted for by perceived stress level, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and dyadic coping, an ordinary least squares regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis that each of these variables would significantly predict marital satisfaction. When all four variables were entered into the regression equation, the model accounted for 67% of the variance in marital satisfaction, with attachment avoidance ( $b = -.31, t = -4.68, p < .01$ ), attachment anxiety ( $b = -.17, t = -3.07, p < .01$ ), and dyadic coping ( $b = .42, t = 6.60, p < .01$ ) accounting for a significant proportion of the variance. Perceived stress did not, however, contribute significantly to the prediction model. The results of this multiple regression analysis are presented in Table 2.

## Research Question 2

To test whether dyadic coping mediated the relationship between attachment anxiety and marital satisfaction, three base hypotheses were tested. Correlation analyses confirmed a significant, negative relationship between attachment anxiety and marital satisfaction ( $r = -.57, p < .01$ ), a significant, negative relationship between attachment anxiety and dyadic coping ( $r = -.53, p < .01$ ), and a significant, positive relationship between dyadic coping and marital satisfaction ( $r = .77, p < .01$ ); thus, the base hypotheses were supported.

To test the hypothesis that dyadic coping served to mediate the relationship between attachment anxiety and marital satisfaction, multiple regression analyses were performed, first with attachment anxiety as the sole predictor of marital satisfaction, and then adding dyadic coping. When dyadic coping and attachment anxiety were used simultaneously to predict marital satisfaction, the significant direct path ( $b = -.57, t = -9.64, p < .01$ ) between attachment anxiety and marital satisfaction was greatly reduced ( $b = -.23, t = -4.40, p < .01$ ), indicating that dyadic coping served a partially mediating function. Although anxiety was still a significant predictor, the semipartial correlation between attachment anxiety and marital satisfaction was  $-.20$ , whereas the zero-order correlation between attachment anxiety and marital satisfaction was  $-.57$ .

Because the direct path between attachment anxiety and marital satisfaction remained significant, follow-up analyses suggested by Sobel (1982) were conducted to determine whether the reduction in the size of the coefficient was significant. These analyses confirmed that the reduction was indeed significant, indicating that the entire mediating pathway from attachment anxiety to dyadic coping to marital satisfaction was significant ( $b = -.34, t = -6.96, p < .01$ ).

## Research Question 3

The same analyses were used to ascertain whether the relationship between attachment avoidance and marital satisfaction was partially mediated by dyadic coping, starting with the three base hypotheses. Correlation analyses confirmed that there was a significant, negative relationship between attachment avoidance and marital satisfaction ( $r = -.74, p < .01$ ), a significant, negative relationship between attachment avoidance and dyadic coping ( $r = -.73, p < .01$ ), and a significant, positive relationship between dyadic coping and marital satisfaction ( $r = .77, p < .01$ ); thus, the base hypotheses were supported.

To test the hypothesis that dyadic coping mediated the relationship between attachment avoidance and marital satisfaction, multiple regression analyses were completed, first with attachment avoidance as the sole predictor, and then adding dyadic coping. When dyadic coping and attachment avoidance were used simultaneously to predict marital satisfaction, the significant direct path ( $b = -.74, t = -15.18, p < .01$ ) between attachment avoidance and marital satisfaction was reduced ( $b = -.39, t = -6.31, p < .01$ ), indicating that dyadic coping served a partially mediating function. Although attachment avoidance was still a significant predictor, the semipartial correlation between attachment avoidance and marital satisfaction was  $-.27$ , whereas the zero-order correlation between attachment avoidance and marital satisfaction was  $-.74$ . Sobel's (1982) follow-up analyses confirmed that the entire mediating pathway (from attachment avoidance to dyadic coping to marital satisfaction) was significant ( $b = -.47, t = -9.32, p < .01$ ).

## **Discussion**

The zero-order correlations revealed several interesting findings, as reported in Table 1. First, there was a significant positive relationship between attachment anxiety and perceived stress ( $r = .39$ ,  $p < .01$ ), suggesting that those with anxious attachments appraise potential threats as more stressful than others. Anxiously attached individuals are prone to heightened negative emotion, worry, and rumination on stressors, which serves to keep these concerns more salient (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). Consistent with this premise, it appears that attachment anxiety was strongly associated with perceived stress for this sample.

Another notable finding was the strong negative relationship between attachment avoidance and dyadic coping ( $r = -.73$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This is also theoretically consistent, as highly avoidant individuals tend to use deactivating strategies to cope with stressors (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988), including denial of attachment needs, avoidance of intimacy, and attempts to cope with distress alone (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). In addition, avoidant individuals may even dismiss stress-related thoughts and emotions, which may help explain why attachment avoidance had a weaker correlation ( $r = .19$ ,  $p < .05$ ) with perceived stress than did attachment anxiety ( $r = .39$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These findings underscore the importance of attachment-related differences in perceived stress and dyadic coping.

## **Predictors of Marital Status**

Together, attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety, and dyadic coping accounted for 67% of the variance in marital satisfaction, as reported in Table 2. Given the large effect size of the regression model, attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety, and dyadic coping appear to be vital factors in the prediction of marital satisfaction of counseling graduate students. These findings replicate previous research that supports the strong links between attachment and relationship satisfaction (Butzer & Campbell, 2008; Marchand, 2004) and between dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction (Bodenmann et al., 2006). Although the model does not indicate that the predictors cause changes in marital satisfaction, it does provide valuable information about the strong relationships between the predictors and marital satisfaction and offers evidence that these variables have a great deal of influence in predicting marital satisfaction.

It is unclear why perceived stress did not significantly predict marital satisfaction in this sample. Some researchers have found that stressful situations do not always negatively affect marital satisfaction and may, in fact, provide opportunities for couples to strengthen their relationships (Story & Bradbury, 2004). It is possible that this is the case for some participants in the current sample. Also, it is possible that the regression model tested in the current study did not include one or more key moderating variables, which would help explain the relationship between stress and marital satisfaction among counseling graduate students. These questions and inconsistencies with prior research warrant additional exploration.

## **The Mediating Role of Dyadic Coping**

The hypotheses for Research Questions 2 and 3 were supported, indicating that the effects of

attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance on marital satisfaction are partially mediated by dyadic coping. This is consistent with theoretical and empirical research on adult attachment, which provides evidence that attachment models of one's self and others influence the way one experiences close relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Rholes & Simpson, 2004) and the way one perceives and responds to stressors in the context of those relationships (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). Although results for Research Questions 2 and 3 are similar, the explanations for the avoidance model are distinct from the explanations for the anxiety model; thus, each will be discussed separately in the following paragraphs.

Individuals with high levels of attachment anxiety have a strong fear of rejection and tend to worry a great deal that their partners will not be available or responsive in times of need. As a result of these fears, anxious individuals tend to overreact to stressors, experience high levels of negative emotionality, and use maladaptive coping behaviors (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006). Because these strategies tend to backfire, they neither help manage stress nor help foster satisfaction with the relationship. Thus, a negative cycle is perpetuated. As hypothesized, highly anxious individuals tended to engage in maladaptive coping strategies, which fail to foster the mutual trust and positive relational attributions that would result from dyadic coping. When this occurs, highly anxious individuals continue to feel as though their relational needs are not being met (confirming their worst fears), which contributes to lower levels of marital satisfaction. In this way, the effect of attachment anxiety on marital satisfaction can be explained partially by its effect on dyadic coping.

Individuals with high levels of attachment avoidance, on the other hand, find it difficult to trust others and tend to be afraid of intimacy, likely due to experiencing a consistent lack of availability and responsiveness in prior attachment relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Whereas anxious individuals tend to overreact to stressors, avoidant individuals tend to underreact (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006) and, therefore, may not take appropriate advantage of dyadic coping opportunities, which could help manage stress and contribute to higher marital quality. Thus, a different kind of cycle is perpetuated. As hypothesized, highly avoidant individuals tended not to engage in dyadic coping, perhaps due to beliefs that attachment figures will not be responsive and, therefore, that joint coping efforts will not be productive in alleviating distress. As a result, these individuals do not experience the benefits of dyadic coping and their relational needs are not met, which contributes to lower levels of marital satisfaction. In this way, the effects of attachment avoidance on marital satisfaction can be explained partially by its effect on dyadic coping.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

As with all empirical research, there are limitations to the current study, which should be considered when interpreting the results and designing future studies. First, the study is cross-sectional and correlational, and therefore does not provide information about causal associations among the variables or evidence of change over time. Future researchers should consider other research designs to add to the breadth and depth of this study. Second, the sampling limitations of the current study include a low response rate of approximately 17.4%, and the use of self-report data, collected only from students and not from their partners. Additionally, the current study examined only those in heterosexual marriages and, therefore, any interpretation of the findings is limited to that subset of the population. Future researchers could expand the sample by collecting paired data from both students and partners, exploring these variables among other relationship

statuses (such as committed, cohabiting, and same-sex partnerships), and considering methods to increase the response rate. Finally, future researchers could add depth to the information gained in the current study by exploring the nine subscales of the DCI and including more potentially moderating or mediating variables (e.g., parenting strain, age of children, employment status, individual coping style, depression, and general optimism).

## **Implications and Conclusion**

Attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety, and dyadic coping accounted for about two thirds of the variance in marital satisfaction of counseling graduate students. Although perceived stress did not emerge as a significant predictor, it appears that the way participants cope with stressors is an important factor in their marital satisfaction. This is valuable information for students entering a counseling graduate program and could be incorporated into an orientation program designed for both students and spouses.

A better understanding of attachment and how it affects one's appraisal of stress, coping strategies, and marital satisfaction could be beneficial to counseling students and their spouses. If they choose to seek counseling, it might be helpful to explore attachment insecurities of each partner and ways to bridge the gaps that attachment wounds create. For instance, emotionally focused couple therapy is one approach to couple counseling that uses attachment theory as a guiding framework (Johnson, 2004).

This study highlights the key roles of adult attachment characteristics and dyadic coping patterns in predicting the marital satisfaction of counseling graduate students. Due to unexpected findings regarding perceived stress, it also points to the need for further exploration of factors that affect the stress and coping processes of this population. Although many questions remain unanswered, the current study provides strong evidence that adult attachment characteristics and dyadic coping strategies are important to consider in the lives of counseling trainees.

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