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A Butterfly Effect: The Impact of Marriage and Family Therapy Training on Students' Spouses

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A BUTTERFLY EFFECT: THE IMPACT OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY TRAINING ON STUDENTS’ SPOUSES

CARLA M. DAHL, MARY L. JENSEN, AND JANE L. MCCAMPBELL
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This qualitative study examines the impact of marriage and family therapy (MFT) training on the marriages of trainees. Analysis of data from 18 spouses of alumni from a training program in an evangelical Protestant seminary found participants reporting mostly negative impacts related to time and finances, both negative and positive impacts related to role changes and adjustments, and mostly positive impacts related to marital communication. The additional contribution of this study has to do with the report of an overwhelmingly positive impact of systemic, integrative MFT training on the student’s faith as observed by their spouse and on the spouse’s own faith.

It’s like you didn’t know you signed up for therapy but you did, and you have five of the best therapists speaking into your spouse’s life and your spouse is reflecting on their stuff, it’s coming home to you and you’re really in the soup right with it. (Female study participant)

For those involved in the formation of serving professionals, it has become increasingly clear that we have more people in classrooms, practica, and supervision sessions than solely the tuition-paying students. They bring with them, for example, their families of origin, their friends, their children, and—for those who are married—their spouses. Sometimes these “less visible” members of training programs emerge in a classroom example, sometimes in discussions of countertransference, sometimes in reports of their frustration with our students’ therapizing of them. Professional formation may be enhanced by trainers’ conscious awareness of and attention to the kind of “butterfly effect” of psychotherapy training on those who are in significant relationships with our students, especially our students’ spouses. As characters as diverse as George Bailey of the Bailey Building and Loan Association of Bedford Falls (Capra, 1946); Eckels, the dinosaur hunter from the year 2055 (Bradbury, 1952); MIT meteorologist Edward Lorenz (1979); and everyman Homer Simpson (Mirkin, 1994) all discovered, the impact of apparently discrete events (in our case, training strategies) can have a complex and unpredictable impact—like the Brazilian butterfly’s influence on the Texas tornado (Lorenz).

The impact of graduate study on students’ marriages is a topic that has been discussed widely in the past three decades. Included in the literature are a number of studies that examine the impact on student marriages of psychotherapy training, particularly marriage and family therapy (MFT) (Duncan & Duerden, 1990; Duncan & Goddard, 1993; Fisiloglu & Lorenzetti, 1994; Ford Sori, Wetchler, Ray, & Niedner, 1996; Guldner, 1978; Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Poison & Nida 1998; Poison, Piercy, & Nida, 1996; Scheinkman, 1988.). Of these, three are quantitative studies (Duncan & Goddard, 1993; Ford Sori et al., 1996; Poison & Nida, 1998) and two are qualitative (Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Poison & Piercy, 1993). All include the spouses of students among their respondents as they examine the stressors of training on both lifestyle (finances, work arrangements, coursework requirements, and so on) and marital relationship.

Themes that were common to two or more studies included (a) the time commitment and course expectations that divert students away from their spouses and families (Ford Sori et al., 1996; Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Poison & Nida, 1998; Poison & Piercy, 1993); (b) financial hardship and the need to work for financial support (Ford Sori et
al., 1996; Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Polson & Nida, 1998); (c) role conflict and the assumption of extra responsibilities by the non-student spouse (Ford Sori et al., 1996; Polson & Piercy, 1993; Polson et al., 1996); and, (d) the sense of the non-student spouse being “left behind” in the process of personal development (Ford Sori et al., 1996; Legako & Sorenson, 2000).

Yet the impact of psychotherapy graduate school training on marriage was not all negative. Indeed, one of the MFT-based studies reported that “students in MFT graduate programs and their spouses found their experience to be significantly more enhancing than stressing” (Ford Sori et al., 1996, p. 265). Such “enhancers” to marital relationships discussed across the literature include “clinical skills such as communication ... [being] ... introduced to the family by the student spouse” (Polson & Piercy, 1993, p. 76); a “greater appreciation for [the student’s] own marital/family strengths and a greater sensitivity to each other’s needs” (Duncan & Goddard, 1993, pp. 434, 440); “awareness of normal life cycle problems,” acceptance of “own part in marital/family problems” and “greater awareness of own humanness” (Ford Sori et al., 1996, p. 265). Additionally, respondents in the psychology-based study reported a greater emotional expressiveness in their student-spouses, attributable to personal therapy and the training experience (Legako & Sorenson, 2000, p. 216).

An additional element introduced to the discussion by Legako and Sorenson (2000) was the impact on the marriage of the students’ intentional integration of psychology with faith. The authors’ hypothesis was that the students’ emphasis on personal faith would decrease during the psychology training process, causing a fearful or angry reaction in the spouse, that would thereby negatively impact the marital relationship. This hypothesis was partially supported, as some respondents did indeed report feeling angry or concerned over what they perceived to be the waning of their spouse’s commitment to God as a result of participating in the program. However, among other respondents, Legako and Sorenson were able to identify that the integration process enabled a reformulation of faith in certain students that resulted in a more varied appreciation of, and approach to, God.

The significance of the Legako and Sorenson study is in the bringing together of studies on the impact of psychotherapy training on marriage with an emerging body of literature addressing the integration of faith and psychotherapy. A valuable summary of this literature may be found in a meta-analysis conducted by Walker, Gorsuch and Tan (2004). The 26-study analysis covered 5,749 therapists from various disciplines—including psychiatry, psychology, social work, marriage and family therapy, and pastoral counseling—examining their personal faith and religious practices and the extent to which these were integrated (or not) into therapeutic practice. Their findings suggested that clinical and counseling psychologists were more likely to define themselves as agnostic or atheist when compared with MFTs, a greater proportion of whom participated in organized religion and considered spirituality to be more relevant. More specifically, one of the studies included in the meta-analysis that questioned 52 MFT students from six programs across the United States (Prest, Russel, & D’Souza, 1999) found that 76.5% of respondents agreed that their “spirituality was an influential force in guiding them towards a career in family therapy” (p. 70).

The combination of the two research topics—the impact of psychotherapy training on students’ marriages and the integration of training and faith—raised some interesting questions for the authors of this article. First, given that MFT training is more systemically oriented and psychology more intrapersonal, do spouses of students in an MFT program report a different set of experiences than were found in prior studies with psychology programs? Second, when psychotherapy training is integrated with faith, do spouses of students enrolled in an explicitly Christian MFT program report a different experience from those participating in an MFT program with no religious affiliation? Third, if the Prest et al. (1999) study is representative and a large proportion of MFTs enter training partly because of the influence of their spirituality, does the spouse have input into the decision to enter training, or does the student’s “sense of call” serve as the overriding factor? How do spouses feel about providing a support system for the student to pursue such a calling? What happens to the faith of both student and spouse during the course of study? Upon retrospective reflection, would the spouse report that the marriage was stressed, enhanced, or both, by involvement in the training program?

In order to gain more insight into the questions raised by the literature, a qualitative study of MFT students’ spouses was undertaken to examine both
the impact of MFT training and faith integration on the marriages of students.

**METHOD**

**Survey Distribution**

The first phase of data collection involved distribution of an Alumni Spouse Survey packet. We used the institution's database to secure current mailing addresses for all married program graduates. Spouses' names were provided by the program director based on personal acquaintance. The survey consisted of background and demographic information and four open-ended questions regarding various aspects of the spouse's experience. Included in the cover letter which accompanied the survey was an invitation to participate in an in-depth interview. A separate Interview Contact Information form was included in the mailing for those willing to be contacted regarding an interview. Two return envelopes were provided to keep information regarding the identity of the survey participants separate from the identity of those selecting to participate in the second phase of data collection—the interview.

**Participants**

Survey packets were sent to 42 spouses of alumni, representing the entire population of married program graduates at the time of the study. Eighteen surveys were completed and returned. Fourteen of the respondents were male and four were female. The average respondent age was 39 years old and couples represented by the survey data had been married an average of 15 years when the student began the program. Nine of the couples represented did not have any children living at home during the time the student participated in the program. The other nine couples had between one and three children in the home. All spouses worked full-time for the duration of their spouse's education with the exception of one who worked part-time in the second year. All respondents and their student spouses identified themselves as Caucasian.

**Interview Procedures**

Responses to the open-ended survey questions provided an initial set of data that was instrumental in developing the interview questions. Two researchers conducted the first two interviews and subsequent interviews were conducted by one of the initial interviewers. Interview questions were revised slightly following the first two interviews for the purposes of gathering more background information and keeping the focus on the experience of the non-student spouse. The initial interview guide was revised to represent these factors (see Appendix 1). The primary questions focused on the participant's experience of their student spouse during the student's Seminary enrollment and the ways that this experience impacted their own faith and values and well as a review of their expectations for change prior to and during the experience. Participants were also asked to identify a story or metaphor that captured or reflected their experience.

Ten individuals agreed to participate in an in-depth interview. Utilizing a coding system on the return envelopes, we were able to determine that the individuals who agreed to be interviewed had also participated in the survey phase of data collection. A research assistant contacted participants to schedule interviews at a convenient time and location. Five volunteers agreed to be interviewed on the Bethel campus. One requested that the interview be conducted in their home, and one volunteer eventually declined to schedule an interview.

Six hour-long interviews were recorded on audio-tape and transcribed verbatim by a research assistant. Transcribed versions of the interviews were identified by a numeric code, providing confidentiality for the participants. The remaining three interviews were conducted via e-mail. Those who participated via e-mail received the initial questions and were asked to respond to follow-up probes as needed. All interview participants received a $10 bookstore gift card as a token of appreciation.

**Data Analysis**

We used three phenomenological human science data analysis approaches described by van Manen (1990) to identify themes. Using a holistic or sententious approach, three researchers trained in interpretive inquiry and analysis each read the surveys and interview transcriptions in their entirety in order to gain a sense of the whole, identifying a phrase or statement for each that expressed the main significance of that response. We read them again using the selective reading approach, looking for statements or phrases that seemed especially revealing about the spouse's experience and highlighted these statements. Finally, we engaged in a third, more
detailed reading that focused on each statement or phrase, reflecting on what it revealed about the impact of the Seminary experience on the non-student spouse. These phrases and statements served as the basis for theme analysis and group discussion.

The group conversation regarding our findings could be described as a dance between wholes and parts; between the whole and part of each survey and interview, between the whole and the unique experiences of each respondent, and between the whole and the parts of the research team. Throughout the process, we were guided by our research question, “What is the impact of the Seminary experience on significant relationships—specifically, non-student spouses?” Out of this collaborative process emerged a number of themes that will be detailed in the Findings section of this article. Our goal throughout the analysis process was to produce a composite description that accurately represents the essential experience of the participants (Cresswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; van Manen, 1990).

Validity

Our research team held a variety of roles with regard to the MFT program. In order to mediate potential bias as a result of our emic perspective, we made a decision to have a relatively new member of the department, who had not been involved in the educational experience of the participants’ spouses, conduct the majority of the interviews. An undergraduate research assistant unrelated to the program transcribed the interviews. Data analysis was triangulated by three investigators, including one who had not been involved in the data-gathering process or the lived experience of the participant’s spouses, until a convergence of findings emerged. Being part of a team allowed us to critique one another’s descriptions and offer alternative perspectives or conclusions, contributing to a greater degree of validity. We also held one another accountable to engage in reflexivity and used verbal check-in as one way to bracket or suspend judgments and assumptions (van Manen, 1990) formed as a result of previous interaction with participants or their spouses that might get in the way of accurately interpreting the voices of the participants.

Findings

Themes clustered into four areas of relational impact: practical, intellectual, communicative, and spiritual. As a team, we identified a phenomenon as a theme if it was mentioned at least once by at least six of the respondents.

Practical Relational Impact

Consistent with the findings in the current literature, these non-student spouses reported an increase in pressures of time (13 reports) and money (6 reports). The reported impact of these practical stressors was generally negative:

- His schedule was always nuts.... he never had a day off for two years.
- The free time that there was we’d be spending cleaning the house.
- We were financially strapped.... The number of times there were conflicts between us, it usually ended up back at the money thing.

An additional area of practical impact, also alluded to in earlier studies, was that of changes in roles and responsibilities (6 reports). One spouse noted that some of the changes were positive and even welcome:

- I had to start doing laundry. Actually, I kind of liked doing it, but then she took it back again.

More spouses, however, described the difficulties involved in navigating these changes:

- I realized when he began classes that he had been taking the primary role at home, and I was a little frustrated about having to pick it up.
- There was a part of me that started to wear down as time went on. Wrestling between wanting to be supportive but wanting help at home and with the children.
- I did resent him for a while. I felt, “I’m doing everything, and all you know is school.”
- For the first time in 25 years I had to seek full-time employment to supplement our income and the expenses of school. ... I was not a happy camper having to give up my valued free time. My life had always been full of activities that I now had to give up.

Intellectual Relational Impact

With regard to self-development, some differences emerged for these MFT spouses in comparison with past studies regarding the sense of feeling “left behind” in terms of personal and intellectual growth. Only two spouses reported this to be the case:

- I became more reserved in discussing spiritual matters because I felt that she now knew more than I did.
Spiritual Relational Impact

The primary theme that reflects differences in this sample from the previous study of graduate training on student marriages (Legako & Sorenson, 2000) is that of the impact on the couple's spiritual experiences as reported by the spouses. Eight participants reported observing a deepening in their student spouse's faith:

- There is now a peace to my husband that will always be there.
- She's learned to let go of control because she's seen that God really does have a better way of doing things than she does.
- They said it should be called a cemetery, not a seminary, because you bury your faith—but the experience was the opposite.

In addition, seven of the nine interview participants mentioned that their own faith was deepened during their spouse's time in the program:

- Throughout her whole journey at seminary, my faith journey was really rooted in learning about God and a hunger for understanding.
- I think my faith became much less encumbered by religious phrasing and the way you convince yourself you're religious.
- I grew much more of a depth to my faith that wasn’t there before... It deepened my faith as I saw how God works, and how all of those little pieces come together and we don’t know how they’re going to, but somehow they do. Looking back, I think God was doing something in my life through this that was tremendously maturing.

Only one spouse mentioned that her faith suffered somewhat due to her loneliness while her husband was in the program:

- I'm a music writer and I really connect with God best at the piano. And I wrote songs about how lonely I was... I felt left out... my husband rarely learned.... I felt left out. He couldn't help but bring that home.
- He was learning how to listen and communicate.
- We were able to talk about things now that we couldn’t before—I feel free to bring up anything and know his reaction will be absolutely steady.
- It’s like you didn’t know you signed up for therapy but you did, and you have five of the best therapists speaking into your spouse’s life and your spouse is reflecting on their stuff, it’s coming home to you and you’re really in the soup right with it.

And finally:

- I learned a lot about what she was learning, too... in the basic sense of what are the implications for marriages and relationships... and I think that knowledge for both of us is really valuable in our relationship. I mean there’s no question about that.

Communicative Relational Impact

Similar to findings in previous studies, students' classroom and clinical experiences were reported to have a positive effect on their marital interaction, particularly with regard to communication. Spouses mentioned (10 reports) improvement to the marital relationship:

- I felt that what she was learning made the marriage better. To the degree she was learning about family systems was a positive bonus in our lives—and it’s changed my life for the better, no question, in terms of my understanding what makes me tick, how our relationship works, how she ticks and then how we want to parent our kids.
- I noticed her being a lot more in tune to me.
- He was learning how to listen and communicate.
- We were able to talk about things now that we couldn’t before—I feel free to bring up anything and know his reaction will be absolutely steady.
- It’s like you didn’t know you signed up for therapy but you did, and you have five of the best therapists speaking into your spouse’s life and your spouse is reflecting on their stuff, it’s coming home to you and you’re really in the soup right with it.

And finally:

- I learned a lot about what she was learning, too... in the basic sense of what are the implications for marriages and relationships... and I think that knowledge for both of us is really valuable in our relationship. I mean there’s no question about that.
influences on students’ faith. Unfortunately because they chose not to participate in an interview, there was no opportunity for follow-up questioning. The first of these three respondents was a 52-year-old male, who offered an equal number of positive and negative impacts of the program in his survey responses. He wrote that while his wife “grew spiritually, emotionally and gained insight into herself and her family-of-origin,” she was also “negative towards [the program] and its feminist theology.” When asked for advice for future couples considering the program he wrote:

• Prepare for radical personal changes, growth … a feminist approach to MFT.

The second of these three respondents was a 23-year-old female, whose responses throughout were extensive and more positive than negative. She commented:

• I feel that certain aspects of the program had a more liberal/feminist slant than I may have preferred, but overall, I’d say the program made him cement in his mind what he did believe, even if it was not always the position held by the professors. Her advice for future couples began, “The program is really outstanding,” but warned that:

• A great deal of what is studied is secular theory (albeit viewed through Christian lenses). There may not be as much biblical study as it relates to counseling (a recommended point to change, maybe).

The third of these three respondents was a 36-year-old male whose overall responses were brief and more negative than positive. He wrote:

• Topics … in which I saw my spouse’s view change and that caused me much concern: homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle, victimization of prostitution, and feminism. I was genuinely concerned that my wife was deviating from truth. I let her go with it and stayed engaged…. I still think she’s wrong on these [things], however we live beyond it.

In his advice for future couples he noted:

• Expect misunderstanding and pain and the change won’t be as disappointing.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with previous studies, this exploration of the spouses of MFT graduates found participants reporting mostly negative impact of time and financial stressors, both negative and positive impact of role changes and adjustments, and mostly positive impact on marital communication.

The additional contribution of this study has to do with the overwhelmingly positive impact of systemic, integrative training in MFT on the student’s faith (as observed by their spouse) and on the non-student’s own faith, with only three of the eighteen respondents expressing concern over the impact of training on their spouse’s faith.

Why might this be? One explanation might be the influence of the infamous “Minnesota Nice” factor, whereby Midwesterners with a less “positive” experience to report may have declined to participate, while the West Coast participants of Legako and Sorenson’s study (2000) may have been equally willing to report on both the good and the bad. This certainly may have been influential, for example, with the three survey respondents who expressed concern about their perceptions of “liberal” or “feminist” aspects of their spouses’ training. Declining to participate in an interview in which that concern could have been further explored may reflect a reluctance to be seen as negative or critical. Alternatively, however, it is worth noting that the spouses of the MFT respondents had graduated from the program at the time the study took place. As a result, the respondents were perhaps able to report a more consolidated view of the overall experience than Legako and Sorenson’s respondents, who were still engaged in the program at the time of their interviews.

Yet three additional factors are potentially at play. First, it is possible that the greater openness of MFT professionals to spirituality and faith/practice integration already noted in the literature (e.g., Walker et al., 2004) may play a part in how MFT trainees choose a training program (i.e., one located in a seminary) and how they approach the integrative nature of training in a seminary-based program. An initial comparison between faith-related outcomes in previous studies (see, for example, Sorenson & Hales, 2002) and in this one suggests—perhaps counterintuitively—that, while religious students in secular programs may find themselves becoming more rigid and compartmentalized in their spiritual/clinical schemas, students in this study (at least as perceived by their spouses) experienced a deepening and expansion of their faith commitments. That programs based in a religious institution may actually have a broadening influence on their students may come as a surprise to trainers in secular programs (as it apparently did to at least three spouses in this
DAHL, JENSEN, AND McCAMPBELL

study as well). This possibility resonated with an anonymous reviewer of this article, who commented: Seminary education may indeed "broaden" the circle of that which is acceptable and integrated into one's life, ... or perhaps another way to say it would be that ... MFT training may reduce spiritual prejudice and judgmentalism of other perspectives and of other life choices, while at the same time holding firm to the core of Christian faith. Perhaps this is a way of "spiritual differentiation of self"—where one does not need to resort to spiritual cutoff (condemnation) of that which is different.

Second, the MFT program from which respondents in this study were drawn contains required curricular and paracurricular components specifically designed to support the spiritual and personal formation of students. Two year-long courses in formation and theological reflection, quarterly formation covenants that are developed and discussed with department personnel, annual formation reflection projects, a senior integrative project and defense, and multiple integrative formation assignments within courses are among the strategies employed by the program to invite students toward intentional, multi-dimensional, personal and professional growth and development. Spouses and/or significant others of students are invited to pre-program orientation sessions that describe the commitment of the program personnel to a holistic, multi-faceted view of formation. The communication of this commitment to spouses as well as to students is an attempt to normalize for student couples the personal and relational challenges that may lie ahead.

A third possible explanation for the findings of this study may relate to the nature of MFT as a discipline, alluded to earlier. Marriage and family therapy comes out of the sociology/social work stream of understanding and responding to human problems in context, as compared to clinical and counseling psychology, which come out of a more individualistic, intrapsychic stream of theory and research. Perhaps the contextual, systemic focus of MFT training lends itself to (a) attracting trainees who have a predisposition to see persons and problems primarily in a relational framework and (b) inviting immediate application of concepts to current relationships (similar to the legendary tendency of psychology and medical students to "diagnose" themselves and others with the "disorder of the week").

Suggestions for Further Research

The three possibilities just described are being explored in comparison studies with the spouses of students in a counseling psychology program and the spouses of students pursuing a master of divinity degree at the same institution as the MFT students. Initial analysis of the M.Div. spouses suggests that they also report either growth or little change in their own faith and that the negative implications of time and housework stressors are not mitigated by relational improvements, as seen for MFT spouses in this study. Study of spouses of students in non-religious settings, as well as spouses of students in a broader range of training programs (for example, spouses of medical students), would no doubt provide interesting insights and opportunities for comparison. In addition, there is a great need for further empirical data regarding the impact of a variety of formation strategies on the maturity and well-being of persons preparing to enter helping professions.

Conclusion

Graduate school and professional development involve what is often a complicated conversation of "deconstruction and reconstruction." It is not unusual for students to find themselves temporarily "unmoored" from their familiar habits of thinking and responding. This is perhaps even more true for students who—having previously experienced themselves as and receiving affirmation by others for being great listeners, helpful advisors, and trustworthy confidantes—find themselves in the inevitable, valuable, but often troubling place of "beginner's mind," where they feel suddenly incompetent in the very things that inspired them to pursue training in a
serving profession. It would be expected that the often-messy, sometimes-chaotic process of moving to a new place of authenticity and competence would impact not only the internal world of the learner but also their external relationships. This study reminds us that complex and unpredictable impact is not inherently, necessarily, or completely negative and may in fact encourage relational, personal, and spiritual growth in those important persons with whom our students and trainees share their lives.

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Dear,

We are writing to you because your spouse is a graduate of the Marriage and Family Therapy Program at XXX. As part of a research project funded by the Lilly Foundation, we are attempting to understand the implications of graduate training in therapy from the perspective of the student’s spouse. Our goal is to better understand the Bethel experience in regard to formation and to use these findings to guide future program development. Your participation would be very helpful to us in this process.

We are inviting you to participate in either or both of two phases. First of all, we would ask that you complete the enclosed alumni spouse survey within the next 10 days and return it in the stamped, self-addressed envelope provided. If you received this mailing while you were out of town for some reason, please return the survey at your earliest convenience. All your responses will be kept confidential; we will not make an attempt to link your answers to your name. Any follow-up requests will be sent to the entire list, so you may receive a follow-up letter even though you have returned the survey.

The second step of the process involves your willingness to be interviewed in-depth by a member of the research team regarding your experience during your spouse’s education at Bethel, specifically as it relates to issues of formation programming. You may participate in the interview phase even if you chose not to respond to the survey. The interviews will be scheduled in August and September and will be no longer than 2 hours in length. If you wish to participate in an interview or would like further information in order to make a decision, please complete the second enclosure and return it in the second envelope provided. If you return the enclosures in the same envelope, your name will accompany your survey. We will separate the enclosures immediately upon receipt. A research assistant will contact you to schedule the interview. As a token of our thanks for your participation, all interview participants will receive a Barnes and Noble gift certificate. Again, your responses to the interview questions will be kept confidential; any use of your responses in research publications will be done in a way that protects the identity of you and your spouse.

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this request. We look forward to the opportunity to meet with some of you and are grateful for your willingness to allow your story to be used for the benefit of couples who follow you. If you have any questions about the research project or your participation in it, feel free to contact one of the investigators.

Sincerely,
Alumni Spouse Survey Packet: Survey

Background Information

Year of spouse's graduation:


Length of spouse's MFT program in years:

2  3  4  5

Years married when student spouse began MFT program:

Age at the time the student spouse began MFT training:

Yourself  Your Student Spouse

Your gender:  Male  Female

Ethnicity:

Yourself  Your Student Spouse

Housing during MFT program:  On-campus  Off-Campus  Both

Number of children at home while spouse was in MFT program:

Was a geographic move required for your spouse to attend XXX?  Yes  No

Your employment while your spouse was in school (check all that apply):

Part-time  Full-time  Worked from home for pay

Worked in home (unpaid)  Worked because spouse was in school

Would have worked whether or not spouse was in school

Who were your primary sources of encouragement and emotional support during your spouse's program?

Rank all that apply, with 1 being most important:

Spouse  Neighbor  Relative

Friend  Pastor  Co-worker

Other (please specify):

Please respond to the following questions in as much depth as possible. You may attach additional sheets if you need more space. Feel free to type out your answers and attach them if you would prefer.

♦ How did your marriage change during the time your spouse studied in the MFT program at XXX? (Please comment on both positive and negative changes)

♦ How aware were you of the personal and spiritual formation components of your spouse's MFT training?

♦ In what ways would you say the seminary experience changed your spouse, either for better or worse? How much do you think the formation components of your spouse’s training contributed to those changes?

♦ What advice would you give to future couples considering the MFT program at XXX?

Thank you for completing this survey. Please return it in the stamped, self-addressed envelope provided. If you are interested in further participation in this study, please complete the enclosed interview contact information form and return it in the second envelope.

Appendix 1 continues next page
APPENDIX 1 (continued)
Alumni Spouse Survey Packet

Interview Contact Information

By completing and returning this form, you indicate your interest in participating in the interview phase of this research project. You in no way obligate yourself to participate. A research team member will contact you to arrange the interview. If you have questions, feel free to contact one of the investigators.

Name ___________________
Address ___________________
City _____________________ State ______ Zip _________
Home Phone ___________________ 
Work Phone ___________________ (if appropriate to call)
E-mail address ___________________

The best days/times to reach me are:

______________________________

The best days/times to schedule an interview would be:

______________________________

Questions I have about this project/process:

Thank you for your willingness to be interviewed. Please mail this form in the second envelope provided. Remember that you may participate in the interview phase even if you chose not to respond to the survey.
APPENDIX 2

Spouse Interview Questions

Original Interview Questions

Primary Objective: Determine the impact of the Seminary experience on significant relationships—particularly non-student spouses

Review purpose of the project

Factual background: describe details of your family situation during the time your spouse was studying at XXX (housing; jobs; years married, etc)

How would you describe what was happening in you during your spouse’s Seminary experience...

- Changes observed in spouse/impact on you?
- On your marriage?
  - Are you reminded of a critical incident/specific turning point?
  - How do you explain that? How did you feel about that?
  - What was most surprising? Frustrating? Satisfying?

How did this experience impact your faith? Your values?

What were your expectations for change...

- Prior to the experience?
- During the experience?
- Reflecting back on the experience?
  - Upon reflection, is there anything you would have done differently?

Do you have a story or a metaphor that captures or reflects this experience?

Based on your experience, what advice would you give to new MFT students and their spouses?

Is there anything that we haven't asked that you'd like to tell us?

Spouse Interview Questions: Final Revision

1. Please describe the details of your family’s situation during the time your spouse was studying at XXX. Include where you lived, years married, work situations, age and stage of any children and any other descriptors/factors that might help us have an accurate view of your family during this time period.

2. How would you describe what was happening in you during your spouse’s Seminary experience? In your marriage? In what ways do you link that impact to your spouse’s Seminary experience (i.e., critical incidents/turning points/surprises/frustrations)

3. How did this experience impact your faith journey?

4. Can you reconstruct your expectations prior to the experience? Reflecting back, in what ways were your expectations met or changed? If you were starting this experience again, how would it look?

5. Do you have a story or a metaphor that captures or reflects this experience?

6. Based on your experience, what advice would you give to new MFT students and their spouses?

7. Is there anything else about your experience of your spouse’s time in the MFT program that you’d like to tell us?