EXPLORING THE SPIRITUALLY FORMATIVE EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE

SEMINARY SPOUSES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

by

Benjamin Kelly Forrest

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present the findings of a qualitative research study

exploring the spiritually formative experiences of nonstudent, female, seminary spouses

whose student spouses are beyond the halfway point in their pursuit of an M.Div. at a

large evangelical seminary in the eastern United States. Fifteen participants (twelve

online nonstudent spouses and three residential nonstudent spouses) were purposefully

sampled. The data, which was collected through questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and

discussion forums, was analyzed using transcendental phenomenological analysis.

Through this analysis it became apparent that seminary spouses did in fact experience

spiritual formation through their husband's education. Spouses experienced

enhancements in their spiritual formation as well as detractors in their formation.

Formation enhancements included relational, intellectual, and practical enhancements

whereas detractors were not thematically segmented.

Descriptors: Graduate education, seminary, spiritual formation, nonstudent spouse,
female spouse, formative experiences, transcendental phenomenology, enhancements,
detractors, spillover, crossover, Work/Family Enrichment, Work/Family Border Theory.

DEDICATION

To my daughter Reagan Adeline, my son Hudson Benjamin, and all those that may follow. My hope for your lives is the same hope that King David had for his children.

> Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight. Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a graceful garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown. (Prov. 4:5-9, ESV)

May the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of this wisdom, be the foundation for your own spiritually transformative experiences!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my wife Lerisa for all of her support throughout this degree. We met during the first semester of my program, and she has shared me with the mistress of graduate school for far too long. Your support and encouragement has meant everything to me. I am finally done and now I get to be a full-time husband! To my daughter Reagan and my son Hudson, thank you for allowing my focus to be distracted, may it quickly return to its proper place with the two of you.

I want to thank the rest of my family as well. Dad, you were correct education has been a key to the door that has unlocked many opportunities. I thank you for your example on how to be a lifelong learner. Mom, thank you for wearing the hat of editor throughout my education. You have encouraged me and challenged me throughout it all and I am sincerely thankful for your support. To Will and Greg, thank you for challenging me to be a man, for your encouragement along the way of life, and for the blessing of being your brother!

I also want to thank my many professors throughout my education (you know who you are) and specifically my committee members. Dr. Pounds your prayers were refreshing and encouraging in spite of the distance between us. Dr. Zabloski, you have made me a better writer and I appreciate your constant encouragement. Dr. Milacci you have turned a seminarian into a qualitative researcher, thank you! I am better for it!

Lastly, I want to thank God who has blessed me with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, called me by His grace, and adopted me as a Son through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. May the good work that you began in me, be carried out until completion and may it be for your glory alone!

Soli Deo Gloria

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

Graduate education can be a challenging experience for students (Dahl, Jensen, & McCampbell, 2010; Gilbert, 1982; Gold, 2006b; Polson & Piercy, 1993; Wormus, 2009). It can also be a rewarding experience (Dahl et al., 2010; O'Connor & Cordova, 2010). Similarly, the experience of graduate education presents challenges and benefits for the nonstudent spouse (Dahl et al., 2010; Legako, 1995; Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Polson & Piercy, 1993). These challenges extend beyond the classroom as relational conflict stems from problems with finances, communication, sexual satisfaction, time-with-spouse, the maturation of one spouse over the other, expectations of academia, and expectations of the professional role (Dahl et al., 2010; Gold, 2006b; Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Sori, Wetchler, Ray, & Niedner, 1996; Polson & Piercy, 1993). Sori et al. (1996) and Polson and Piercy (1993) provide precedent for exploring student experiences during graduate school. Conversely, Cymbal (2004), Dahl et al. (2010), Legako (1995), and Legako and Sorenson (2000) provide precedent for studying nonstudent spouse experiences during graduate school.

This current study focused on graduate education within the context of an evangelical seminary. Pierard and Elwell (2001) described evangelicalism as a nondenominational, theological system emphasizing the sovereignty of God, the transcendent and immanent nature of God, the authority and inerrancy of scripture, the vicarious substitutionary atonement of Christ, and the future return of Christ (pp. 405–407). In evangelicalism, seminary is graduate education that focuses on the theological, pastoral, and practical training of pastors and clergy (Calian, 2002; Morgan, 2008). Several degrees are consistently offered in a graduate, seminary education (e.g., Master

of Arts, Master of Arts in Religion, Master of Religious Education, Master of Divinity, and a Master of Theology). This dissertation will specifically focus on the Master of Divinity (MDiv), a traditional pastoral degree which typically requires at least 90 credits for its conferral; however, in this seminary there is also a version of the degree that is a 72-hour MDiv in Chaplaincy.

DeGroat (2008) explored the experiences of male seminary graduates. He focused on the connection between what seminarians expected from ministry throughout their education and what they found to be the reality of ministry after seminary (p. ii). The conclusion of DeGroat's (2008) analysis was that "while grateful for their theological preparation, [seminarians] reported dissatisfaction about the adequacy of their education for the complexities of ministry" (DeGroat, 2008, p. ii). This present investigation focused on a similar goal; to explore spiritually formative experiences during seminary, but from the perspective of the nonstudent, female spouse (Dahl et al., 2010; Legako & Sorenson, 2000).

The central phenomenon of this study was spiritually formative experiences. Milacci (2006) noted that the definition of spirituality in adult education is often found to be historically, religiously, theologically, and etymologically wanting. The imprecision of nebulous definitions makes it much easier for spirituality to be "co-opted, commodified, and misused" (Milacci, 2006, p. 214). Like the term spirituality, spiritual formation can be misunderstood (Porter, 2008). To dispel confusion that can be associated with the term spiritual formation, Porter (2008) connected spiritual formation with the Christian doctrine of sanctification, thus defining spiritual formation as the process of growing in Christian holiness (p. 130). It is with this theological connection to the doctrine of sanctification that the phrase *spiritually formative experiences* was used.

In this sense, spiritual formation can also be understood in a holistic sense where spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess. 5:23–24) are ushered into maturation, growth, and development (Chung, 2011). Reisz (2003) noted that spirituality in a Protestant context intimates individual and corporate practices or disciplines. Thus, spiritual formation was operationally defined as a set of personal or corporate practices and disciplines that contributes to and leads toward Christian maturity, growth, progress, and ultimately toward a conformity to the image of Christ himself (Boa, 2001; Chung, 2011; Copan, 2010; Porter, 2008; Reisz, 2003, Strobel, 2013; Willard, 2002).

Situation to Self

As a graduate of the residential program of the seminary that provided the setting for this research, I have an interest in the educational quality that is produced through this seminary. As a married, doctoral student in a blended (online/residential) program at a Christian university, I am interested in research that examines the influence of graduate and postgraduate education on spiritual relationships. Finally, as an administrative faculty member of this seminary, I am one of the target populations for the significance of the findings of this research.

Problem Statement

Graduate education is a time in life when many couples find increased stressors (Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Polson & Piercy, 1993). It is also a period in life when many nonstudent spouses feel left behind relationally (Kendall & Brady, 2009; Polson & Piercy, 1993), socially (Polson & Piercy, 1993), vocationally (Sori et al., 1996), or intellectually (Dahl et al., 2010). Yet, some nonstudent spouses identify the graduate educational experience as a formative experience not only for their spouses, but also for themselves (Dahl et al., 2010; Sori et al., 1996). These findings represent graduate

programs in psychology (Cymbal, 2004; Legako & Sorenson, 2000), marriage and family therapy (Dahl et al., 2010; Sori et al., 1996), and the generic graduate school (Gold, 2006b) or doctoral program (Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000). Morgan (2008) and Williamson and Sandage (2009) identified seminary as a formative experience in the life of those training to be pastors or clergy; however, little research exists examining if seminary education has a similarly formative impact on nonstudent, female, seminary spouses.

To date, Dahl et al. (2010) is the most recent inquiry exploring spousal experiences of graduate education (i.e., Marriage and Family Therapy). At the conclusion of their findings, Dahl et al. (2010) recommended researching the spousal experiences of MDiv students signifying a gap in the literature. In addition to the void noted by Dahl et al. (2010), there is a paucity of research regarding the experiences of nonstudent, female spouses whose student spouse is pursuing a degree in an online educational paradigm. One particular graduate program of engineering at a large, research university in the Midwest has conducted internal, programmatic research on the spousal experience of engineering students, but the results of this data have not been published (T. W. Smith, personal communication, Sept. 13, 2011).

Current research dealing with the impact or experiences of the nonstudent spouse is predicated upon the student spouse attending a residential graduate program (Brannock et al., 2000; Cymbal, 2004; Dahl et al., 2010; Gold, 2004; Legako, 1995; Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Sori et al., 1996). Unlike residential graduate programs, online education is a relatively new educational phenomenon (Power & Gould-Morven, 2011). Distance education has been around in various media (e.g., open education or correspondence education) for years, but online education offers immediacy in the

education and interaction with curriculum, peers, and faculty in ways that the historic

versions of distance education were unable to offer (Ally, 2008; Moore & Kearsley,

2012; Power & Gould-Morven, 2011). Due to the scarcity of research on spousal

experiences in online education, it is fair to conclude that there is an equally scarce

amount of research on the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses pursuing

their degrees in an online format. Thus, pursuing an exploration into the experiences of

MDiv spouses will address the gap in the research that was noted by Dahl et al. (2010).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the

spiritually formative experiences of nonstudent, female spouses whose student spouses

are beyond the halfway point in their pursuit of an MDiv in a residential or online

program at a large evangelical seminary in the eastern United States. Spiritual formation

has many definitional nuances. Therefore, spiritually formative experiences will be

defined as a set of personal or corporate practices and disciplines that contributes to and

leads toward Christian maturity, growth, progress, and ultimately toward a conformity to

the image of Christ himself (Boa, 2001; Chung, 2011; Copan, 2010; Porter, 2008; Reisz,

2003, Strobel, 2013; Willard, 2002).

Research Questions

Three research questions provided a foundational guide into this exploration of the

spiritually formative experiences of nonstudent, female seminary spouses.

1. How do nonstudent, female seminary spouses describe their spiritual lives at the

   beginning of their spouses' seminary experience? Lowe (2010) commented that

   the academe needs to purposefully engage in defining, nurturing, and assessing

   the spiritual formation of students. Reisz (2003) recognized the challenge of

assessing spiritual formation as he noted that spiritually formative assessment is essentially self-assessment (p. 31). It is precisely the self-reflective nature of spiritual assessment that is necessary for casting the first research question of this study. In order to adequately explore the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses, the research must first examine the experiences of this population.   Gathering a baseline for the spiritual life of seminary spouses will offer insights into the maturation and growth experienced by seminary spouses over the course of their student spouses' educational careers.

2. What aspects of formation occur in the spiritual lives of female, seminary spouses while their husbands are in seminary? The experiences being sought in this question are the general, overarching spiritually formative experiences that take place in the lives of the nonstudent, female seminary spouses. Finding the answers to this question requires that participants re-present their spiritually formative experiences in narrative form in order to thematically categorize what is experienced regarding their formation.

3. How do nonstudent, seminary spouses describe the factors that have influenced their personal spiritual formation? Explaining how spiritual formation is experienced in the lives of seminary spouses is valuable for the stakeholders invested in a seminary education. This information will provide students information regarding how to facilitate spiritual formation in their spouses, it will equip spouses with information regarding what to expect from seminary, and it will equip professors/administrators with insights regarding how to educate students holistically so that their spouses are formed as a result of their education.

Significance of the Study

The implications of this research have significance for four major stakeholders who operate within graduate, seminary education. These stakeholders are seminary spouses, seminary students, faculty members, and program administrators. The implications are explained below.

Seminary Spouses

One of the goals of this study is to offer future nonstudent, seminary spouses insights into the types of spiritually formative experiences seminary spouses have had during seminary. Legako and Sorenson (2000) noted that knowing the types of experiences that are common during graduate education might inoculate spouses against the typical stressors of their spouses' educational training. By focusing on the current topic from the standpoint of seminary spouses, this research may offer a particular demographic a new and unique voice in the literature (Olesen, 2011). The insights gleaned from spousal experiences may equip others to understand the challenges and rewards that come from being the spouse of a graduate (or seminary) student (Legako & Sorenson, 2000).

Seminary Students

The graduate, educational experience creates significant challenges for family relationships (Gardner, 2008, 2009; Polson & Piercy, 1993; Sori et al., 1996). Polson and Piercy (1993) found that some of the challenges faced by graduate students were based on whether the family unit will relocate to attend graduate school, how far to move when choosing a graduate school, whether to work during the graduate program, and how to create a new community within the graduate program. They also noted that some of

these challenges are easier to answer for the student spouse than the nonstudent spouse such as how to create community during the graduate years (Polson & Piercy, 1993).

In addition to the generic challenges of graduate education, seminary education adds yet another dynamic to the potential challenges, and that is the challenge of cultivating the personal spiritual maturation necessary to fulfill one's calling (Calian, 2002; Setran, Wilhoit, Ratcliff, Haase, & Rosema, 2010). Spiritual maturation is not only necessary for seminarians and future pastors, but also for the spouses who may eventually find themselves in *two-person single career* (Murphey-Geiss, 2011). Thus, in preparing to make the decision regarding the location and medium for attending seminary, it can be valuable for future students to have insights on the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses in both a residential and an online program. Given these experiences of seminary spouses, student spouses may find it easier to choose a school and educational medium that will have the most positive impact on their family and future ministries. Legako and Sorenson (2000) commented on the importance of ministry partners becoming personally adept in ministry obligations and social mores.

> For a theoretical physicist, or a mathematician, or even a more applied professional like a primary care physician, his or her spouse is not expected to know the professional's area of expertise. In a more service oriented sphere, such as the ministry, it helps if the spouse has his or her own sophistication on the topic due to the more all-encompassing demands of the profession socially. (p. 218)

Faculty Members

The typical goal of a seminary education is to fulfill the calling to pursue a religious profession or occupation (Calian, 2002), and because the spouses of those working in ministry are often expected to function in a defined or undefined role within

their spouses' ministry context (Murphy-Geiss, 2011), it is important for faculty members to be cognizant of how their own teaching translates from the student to the nonstudent spouse. As a result of a similar study conducted by Polson and Piercy (1993), the Marriage and Family Therapy program at Purdue University reevaluated certain requirements of their program. The program became more family-friendly and the program administrators also drafted a standard code-of-conduct of interpersonal behavior for the relationships between students and faculty. This code created a greater awareness and sensitivity among faculty to the issues faced by students and families (p. 90). In turn, it is the goal of this study that faculty members will be better equipped to emphasize the importance of family, personal ministry, and both personal and corporate spiritual formation while maintaining high academic standards.

Program Administrators

DiGiorgio and Strongman (2008) noted that at times students identify their schoolwork as their vocation. Home (1997) used the language of life-domains explaining that adult students often must add a school domain to lives that already include a work domain and family domain. Stress and strain increase when individuals try to balance the role of student along with their other roles as spouse, parent, and employee (Home, 1997; Wormus, 2009). Thus, the relationship between school, work, and family should make it acceptable to use work/family theories as a basis for the interaction between school and family. Numerous work/family or work-family theories (depending on the researcher) frame the interrelationship between work and family contexts (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989; Clark, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Ferguson, 2012; Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2007, Westman, 2011). Specifically, the work/family boarder theory postulates that work and family share boarders as two

domains that represent the life of an individual (Clark, 2000). Border-crossers are individuals who traverse two different life-domains such as work and home or school and home. It is when those who are border-crossers find balance between the boarders and bridges of their life-domains that they also find balance at work and home (Clark, 2000).

Using the frameworks offered by these human resource theories, program administrators will be able to increase the permeability of the graduate experience (and educational/spiritual content) as it interacts with family relationships (Clark, 2000). Just as family/work theories increase business administrators' understanding of how to utilize life-domains, seminary administrators can use these theories to identify the relationships between the two domains of work (school) and family. The goal is for this understanding to increase the ability for seminary to not only minister to the students individually, but also holistically to their families (Wormus, 2009).

In a similar theory of Work-Family Enrichment, Greenhaus and Powell (2006) identified two paths of interconnectivity between the two domains of work and family. With the *instrumental path,* "A resource can be transferred directly from Role A to Role B, thereby enhancing Role B," and with the *affective path,* "A resource in Role A can promote positive affect within Role A, which, in turn produces high performance and positive affect in Role B" (p. 80). Using these paths as a basis for understanding the integration of school and family can equip administrators in their program development and administration in creating programs that are holistically educational.

An added benefit for program administrators is an understanding of the experiences of nonstudent spouses based on the educational medium of their student spouses (online/residential). Studies have been conducted that explore the nonstudent spouses' experiences from graduate education programs in psychology (Legako &

Sorenson, 2000), marriage and family therapy (Dahl et al., 2010; Sori et al., 1996; Polson & Piercy, 1993), and other programs (Gold, 2006b). However, these studies focus only on residential programs. Is the experience for nonstudent spouses different based on the educational medium of their spouses? For example, do nonstudent spouses find greater or lesser spiritual growth and maturation if their spouses are taking classes in the next room, online or if their spouses pack up their family to lead them to a residential seminary? Does the familiarity that comes from not having to relocate to seminary breed spiritual maturation or does the act of giving up some of life's comforts in a familiar setting to move to seminary generate a more rewarding spiritual experience? What are the spousal experiences and preferences for the medium of education? The answers to these questions can be used to aid program administrators in their marketing, recruitment, and retention of students (Wormus, 2009).

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

Male students represent the main demographic of this seminary as the denominational background of this seminary does not ordain women for the pastorate. In spite of this historical tradition, there are many women in the online program of this seminary, but significantly fewer women in the residential MDiv program. Thus, for the purpose of this study, participants were female, nonstudent spouses whose student spouses had completed at least half of their credit hours toward the MDiv program requirements (Legako & Sorenson, 2000). Participants had to have been married during the entire time that their spouses were in the program. This delimitation ensured that nonstudent spouses had a significant experience as seminary spouses.

Teshome and Osei-Kofi (2012) examined narratives of international student

spouses. Their research revealed the unique experiences of these spouses due to the status of their visas and their status as a dependent of their husband while in country. Cho, Lee, and Jezewski (2005) found that Korean student spouses experienced a lack of social support, economic hardships, parenting burdens, language barriers, a lack of transportation, racial discrimination, acculturation, and limitation of self-achievement. While some of these experiences could be common for American spouses, attempting to distinguish between seminary experiences and acculturation issues could have confounded the results of the study. Thus, I delimited participants to American citizens in order to ensure that the experiences reported were typical experiences of seminary spouses rather than an amalgamation of experiences based on seminary and a new cultural setting.

In order to maintain boundaries in research as I discussed the spiritual formation of individuals, I conducted all interviews using video conferencing software (Bertrand & Bourdeau, 2010; Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011; Saumure & Given, 2010). Using WebEx as the interview medium required that the participants had reliable Internet connectivity, a web camera, and a phone. Creswell (2007) suggests that interviews be conducted in a natural setting (p. 37). Using WebEx allowed for the participants to be in a natural setting of their choosing.

Limitations

This study only used participants from one specific seminary in the eastern United States. This seminary is an evangelical seminary with a Baptist heritage that may limit the research from being readily transferable to the experiences of other online or residential seminaries or seminarians. Another limitation was that this study only sampled female participants. Thus, this limitation of the population will also impact the

transferability of the research to other seminary populations. Since other seminaries with different denominational affiliations may be more open to ordaining women for the pastorate, their nonstudent spouses may experience spiritual formation in a different manner.

Delimiting my interviews to WebEx, in turn, created a limitation because I was unable to personally assess whether the participant was alone in the room during the interview. Four of the fifteen participants were unable to get the video capabilities of WebEx to work. These four interviews were conducted by phone. There was also the potential that the student spouses would desire to listen to the interview without my awareness, thus limiting the spouses' willingness to openly explain their spiritually formative experiences; however, most participants were noticeably free of this limitation. At times distractions in the interview setting decreased the participants' focus and potentially limited the depth of the interview material. As many of these nonstudent spouses were stay at home mothers, their children, at times, became minor distractions.

Research Plan

Qualitative methodologies have been used to study the experiences of nonstudent spouses whose student spouses are pursuing graduate education (Legako, 1995; Dahl et al., 2010). This current approach explored the spiritually formative experiences of nonstudent, female spouses from the qualitative lens of transcendental phenomenology. On transcendental phenomenology, Moustakas (1994) says, "I must first explicate my own intentional consciousness through transcendental processes before I can understand someone or something that is not my own" (p. 37). Thus, the transcendental approach attempts to describe experiences rather than interpreting experiences as other phenomenological methodologies (e.g., Hermeneutic; van Manen, 1990). Instead,

transcendental phenomenology attempts to approach a phenomenon as if it were experienced for the first time (Moustakas, 1994). It gives the primary voice to the participants, and seeks their experience, unattached from my own previous notions. Transcendental phenomenology provided a basis for articulating the spiritually formative experiences of nonstudent, female, seminary spouses in a way that clarified how seminary spouses have experienced their relationships with God during their spouses' seminary training.

Summary

Graduate education is a formative experience in the life of students and spouses (Dahl et al., 2010; Gold, 2006b; Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Polson & Piercy, 1993; Wormus, 2009). Research on the experiences of those living through graduate education is an all-encompassing venture that focuses on students and spouses from multiple degree fields (Dahl et al., 2010; Gold, 2006b; Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Sori et al., 1996; Polson & Piercy, 1993). However, a specific exploration into the experiences of seminary spouses is missing in the related literature (Dahl et al., 2010). One study has explored MFT student-spouse experiences in which the MFT is a part of a seminary curriculum (Dahl et al., 2010); however, this degree is not the typical pastoral degree offered in a seminary. Studying the experiences of MDiv student spouses provided a greater understanding of seminary spouses. Expanding this study to include the experiences of online MDiv spouses further clarified spousal experiences as it pioneered research on the spiritually formative experiences of online spouses.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

During seminary, nonstudent, female spouses are beginning their roles in what will likely be life-long, tandem ministry (Murphey-Geiss, 2011). Murphey-Geiss (2011) explained that clergy spouses have historically "long been considered unpaid partners in two-person single careers [*sic*]" (p. 932). The implication of this designation is that there is an innate expectation of parishioners that non-clergy spouses will play in their spouses' ministries. It is noteworthy from this research that these expectations were unidirectional falling only on wife-spouses rather than husband-spouses (Murphey-Geiss, 2011). Recognizing this unique role of seminary spouses and clergy spouses, one seminary in New York State has created a "wives program" which was "designed to acclimate and encourage wives of seminarians for life in the pastorate" (St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary, 2010). The realization of this unique role of a pastor/clergy-wife reveals the need for studying and understanding the experiences of seminary spouses, especially those experiences which are spiritually formative.

The following literature review begins by providing a theoretical framework based in human resource management as the foundation for exploring the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses. The review then explores the subject of spiritual formation in order to identify the least common denominators in an attempt to synthesize definitional consent on the topic. Finally, the review explores current research on graduate education and its impact on relationships. It starts with the broad and general categories while working downwards toward a synthesis which is more closely related to the focus of this study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework undergirding this study is based on human resource management and work theory. Human resource management has an extensive theoretical basis for exploring and understanding the relationship between the work and family domains of life (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989; Clark, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Polk, 2008; Ramarajan, Bezrukova, Jehn, & Euwema, 2010; Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2007, Westman & Etzion, 1995; Westman, 2011). Family-life researchers have also appropriated this research for their own theoretical framework as they attempt to understand how the role of the family-life professional enhances or stresses the professional's family-life (Duncan & Goddard, 1993; Sori et al., 1996; Wetchler & Piercy, 1986). This literature base, rooted in work/family studies, purposes to explain how life in one domain interacts with the other domains of life such as family-life and/or home-life (Bolger et al., 1989; Clark, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Wayne et al., 2007). Three theoretical bases were explored as I attempted to justify the use of these theories as the theoretical foundation for this study. These are Work/Family Enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), Spillover/Crossover (Bolger et al., 1989; Grzywacz, 2000), and the Work/Family Border Theory (Clark, 2000, 2001, 2002).

Work/Family Enrichment

Work/Family Enrichment, as used in the precedent literature and defined by Greenhaus and Powell (2006), is also known as *resource enrichment* (Cohen & Kirchmeyer, 1995; Kirchmeyer, 1992a), *positive spillover* (Grzywacz, 2000; Ferguson, 2012; Grzywacz, Almeida, & McDonald, 2002; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000a, 2000b; Hammer, Cullen, Neal, Sinclair, & Shafiro, 2005; Kirchmeyer, 1992b; Kirchmeyer, 1993,

Polk, 2008; Stephens, Franks, & Atienza, 1997; Stevanovic & Rupert, 2009; Sumer & Knight, 2001), *facilitation* (Grzywacz & Bass, 2003; Grzywacz, Carlson, Kacmar, & Wayne, 2007; Hill, 2005; Tompson & Werner, 1997; Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2007; Wayne, Musisca, & Fleeson, 2004), and *enhancement* (Mathew & Panchanatham, 2010; Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002; Tiedje et al., 1990; Wadsworth & Owens, 2007). These constructs in the literature all focus on explaining a similar understanding, the transmission of experiences and emotions between life domains. The essence of this theory is two parts. The first part is that an action in Role A can influence (positively or negatively) an individual's work in Role B. Secondly, an individual's action in Role A can improve his or her own functioning in Role A, which will thereby be translated positively to his or her functioning in Role B (p. 80). Work/Family Enrichment is bidirectional meaning that "work-to-family enrichment occurs when work experiences improve the quality of family life, and family-to-work enrichment occurs when family experiences improve the quality of work life" (p. 73 see also Bolger et al., 1989; Grzywacz, 2000; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000b). The bidirectionality of the impact that stressors and enhancers have on the family domain provides a foundation for the spillover/crossover theories (Bolger et al., 1989; Grzywacz, 2000; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000b; Stevanovic & Rupert, 2009). Greenhaus and Powell (2006) concluded by explaining that perhaps the ramifications of their proposal extend beyond work-family enrichment and may include work-life enrichment, or, in the case of this current study, school-family enrichment.

Spillover/Crossover

Barnett (1999) and Gilbert (1982) both noted that life in one domain impacts the life as it is lived in other domains. What they have observed is the concept of spillover

(Bolger et al., 1989; Grzywacz, 2000; Staines, 1980). The basic premise of spillover/crossover is that life experiences in one domain impact other domains of life. Spillover proposes that stress and strain spill from one area of an individual's life to another area in the same individual's life (Almeida, Wethington, & Chandler, 1999; Bolger et al., 1989; Ferguson, 2012; Hammer et al., 2005; Polk, 2008). The focus here emphasizes that life is unified and difficult to segment. Because an individual is a whole entity, the individual is not likely to compartmentalize his or her life-domains without allowing one domain to spill over into the other domains. Similar to spillover is crossover which proposes that when spillover impacts another individual, it becomes crossover (Crossover, Kinman, & Jones, 2005; Ferguson, 2012; Westman & Etzion, 1995). Thus the difference between the two is the individual receiving the excess of emotion (either positive or negative emotion). In spillover theories an individual is carrying stress and strain from one domain to the other. In crossover theories an individual is carrying stress and strain over to another individual. Even though most of the research focuses on the direction of work to home spillover and crossover (Staines, 1980), spillover and crossover can be bidirectional (Bolger et al., 1989; Grzywacz, 2000; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000b).

Work/Family Border Theory

Doble and Supriya (2011) recognized that student family conflict and student life balances are issues scarcely researched. Thus, they set forth to develop a scale for assessing "student life balance" which involves managing academics, family, and work life (pp. 237–238). In their research they explored the following 15 factors that influenced life balance: personal habits, the college environment, hobbies and curricular activities, career expectations, distractions, family and society, teaching and evaluation

methods, family origin, desires and apprehensions, living conditions, teacher support, variables pertaining to coping, special classes, household duties, and marriage (pp. 241– 245). Based on their exploratory factor analysis, they found that there is a need in academic arenas for an emphasis on the facilitation of student life balance. This recognition of the need for student life balance leads to the first theory which will form the foundation of this theoretical framework, the Work/Family Border Theory (Clark, 2000, 2001, 2002).

Clark (2000) defined the Work/Family Border Theory as, "An attempt to explain this complex interaction between border-crossers and their work and family lives, to predict when conflict will occur, and give a framework for attaining balance" (p. 748). Theoretically, the Work/Family Border Theory could facilitate student life balance if it was redeployed from the human resource field to the academe. Balance was defined as, "A product of how a person manipulates aspects of their environment to fit their individual preferences" (Clark, 2002, p. 24), while work/family balance is further defined as "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict" (Clark, 2000, p. 751). The essence of what is proposed is that work and family life are interrelated and "are not separable spheres – what happens in one affects what happens in the other" (Barnett, 1999, p. 147).

There are four central characters in this theory (Clark, 2000). The first character is (work or family) domain. This is followed by the borders between work and home, the border-crosser, and the boarder keepers (p. 753). The borders are the constraints that keep work and family as separate entities. These borders may be physical, temporal or psychological borders, or they may be a combination of two or more of these three borders (p. 756). The border-crosser is the character that lives in and operates in both

domains, and the border keepers are those that keep one domain from crossing over into another (i.e., bosses, spouses, etc.).

This theory supposes that permeability, flexibility, blending, and boarder strength are the constructs that identify how experiences, emotions, and expertise traverse the borders between life-domains (Clark, 2000). Clark (2000) defines permeability as "the degree to which elements from other domains may enter" (p. 756). Permeability is the ease with which a spouse is able to take work (or school) to home and home to work (or school). This idea of permeability is similar to the concepts of spillover and crossover as proposed by Bolger et al., (1989) and Staines (1980). Without explicitly referring to this construct, Gilbert (1982) described the potential negatives of permeable borders when he explained that strain experienced by graduate students "will be related to family strain" as well (p. 131). Permeability is not always negative though (Clark, 2000). Some experiences that travel from work to home and home to work can bring positivity to the respective domain.

Flexibility of borders is the "extent to which a border may contract or expand" (p. 757). Clark (2000) uses the example of time to explain this concept. If a worker is not bound to his or her work based on a time schedule, the temporal border of the work domain is flexible. Home (1997) commented that the university setting is often characterized by "inflexible scheduling of classes and services, inconvenient locations, and rigid pacing" (p. 337). The inflexibility of the university then is one of the challenges in balancing school/family. The third characteristic that describes the sharing of experiences between borders is the idea of blending. Blending occurs when permeability and flexibility are strong. High levels of blending create "borderlands" which are areas that cannot be distinctly called work or home. Self-employed individuals

working from home often find a blending of their life-domains as they talk on the phone with clients while completing household chores (Clark, 2000).

Border strength is the final construct that explains how experiences move from one domain to another. Border strength is created by the permeability, flexibility, and blending of the domain borders. Clark (2000) suggests two propositions regarding the border strength. The first proposition is that "When domains are similar, weak borders will facilitate work/family balance" and the second is that "When domains are different, strong borders will facilitate work/family balance" (p. 758). Thus, border strength is the ability of an individual to bring experiences across the borders of his or her domains. The border strength between domains facilitates the balance between work and family or, in this case, school and family.

Work/Family Theories Applied in Education

These theories from human resource management provided a theoretical framework for understanding how graduate/seminary students can operate in two domains while enriching both domains based on their experiences in the other. The Work/Family Enrichment theory provided a methodological foundation for explaining how spillover and crossover create enrichment experiences across multiple domains. The Work/Family Border Theory then provided an explanation regarding how these spillover and crossover experiences traverse domain borders in order to generate the enrichment that can be experienced by student and spouses.

These theories gave credence to studying the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses through the theoretical lens of human resource management theory. As seminary spouses progress through their education, they will carry their educational experiences across the border of school and into the family domain. Their education will

spill over in their own life, thus enriching themselves, and crossing over into the life of their spouse and family. Of particular interest here is how the spiritual formation of students crosses over to the nonstudent spouse. The attention of this literature review will now turn to an examination of the precedent literature relating to spiritual formation.

Spiritual Formation

Historically, spiritual formation has been a process of practicing, what orthodox Christianity has termed, "the spiritual disciplines" in order to grow in spiritual maturity (Foster, 1998; Ortberg, 2002; Whitney, 1991; Willard, 1991). In spite of vast agreement on the use of these disciplines as a means for spiritual formation, definitional consent on spiritual formation is a uniquely difficult task (Boa, 2001; Copan, 2010). Some of the difficulty lies in the ethereal nature of spiritual formation and the inconsistent use of common terms when discussing the concept (Copan, 2010). The same challenge in defining spiritual formation was observed by Milacci (2006) in attempting to define spirituality. Milacci (2006) noted that definitions of spirituality were often "co-opted, commodified, and misused" because of the imprecision of definitional standards (p. 214). Thus, spiritual formation is often known by many descriptions (Boa, 2001; McGrath, 1999; Mulholland, 1993; Strobel, 2013).

Definitional Nuances

Terms that are used synonymously (or with ontological similarity) to spiritual formation are Christian formation (Bramer, 2007; Brown, Dahl, & Reuschling, 2011, Chung, 2011, Estep & Kim, 2010); human formation (Brown et al., 2011); wholeness and holiness (Brown et al., 2011; Lowe, 2010; Mulholland, 1993; Porter, 2008); becoming (Brown et al., 2011); spiritual direction (Copan, 2010); soul reformation (Willard, 1998); holistic spirituality (Chung, 2011); Christian spirituality (Boa, 2001); and biblical

spirituality (Boa, 2001). Dettoni (1994) proposed a definition of spiritual formation as, "an intentional, multifaceted process which promotes the transformation by which Christ is formed in us so that we can become His continually maturing disciples" (p. 16). This concept of the many facets of spiritual formation is reflected in Boa's (2001) own attempt to create a definition. He identified 12 facets that make up the study of spiritual formation. These facets are relational spirituality, paradigm spirituality, disciplined spirituality, exchanged life spirituality, motivated spirituality, devotional spirituality, holistic spirituality, process spirituality, spirit-filled spirituality, warfare spirituality, nurturing spirituality, and corporate spirituality (Boa, 2001, pp. 21–23). While there is no authoritative agreement on one particular definition of spiritual formation, there are common threads that run throughout the literature that will allow for the synthesis of a working definition.

Theological Context

In addressing spirituality in adult education, Milacci (2003) contextualized his definitions of spirituality in an evangelical context. He explained that while biblical or Christian spirituality is not the only type of spirituality recognized in academic literature, this was his context of understanding and experience on the subject (pp. 4–5). Similarly, this examination of spiritual formation will also be contextualized in evangelical, theological system (Pierard & Elwell, 2001). Estep and Kim (2010) stated, "For spiritual formation to be distinctively Christian, theology is an indispensable and irreplaceable element" (p. 5). In connecting theology to spiritual formation, Porter (2008) presented an apologetic solidifying the practice of spiritual formation in the context of the doctrine of sanctification. In his essay he argued that spiritual formation was in essence the pursuit of holiness which is inherently an aspect of sanctification. Likewise, Fee (2010)

emphasized a biblical pneumatology in his discussion on spiritual formation. He claimed

that in order for evangelicals to honestly identify themselves as trinitarian, instead of

functional *binitarians,* then a renewal of the role of the Spirit in formation and

transformation must take place. Lying in the crossroads of these two key doctrines (i.e.,

sanctification and pneumatology) is the theological context of spiritual formation. Estep

and Kim (2010) affirm the importance of having theological underpinnings as the

foundation for this subject by stating, "For spiritual formation to be distinctively

Christian, theology is an indispensable and irreplaceable element" (p. 5). The doctrine of

sanctification and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit undergird the theological conversation

from here forth as this study pertains to spiritual formation.

Themes in Spiritual Formation

Common themes regarding spiritual formation stem from Scripture (Rom. 12:2;

Gal. 4:19; Matt. 28:19; Col. 1:28–29; Eph. 4:13) and scholarly literature (Wilhoit, 2008;

Willard, 1998). Some themes, such as analogies, are used to bring clarity and a physical

understanding to a spiritual reality (Wilhoit, 2008). Other themes unify, situate, or

contextualize spiritual formation (Boa, 2001; Issler, 2010; Porter, 2008; Wilhoit, 2008).

The following will examine some of the common themes regarding spiritual formation.

Spiritual formation analogies. Wilhoit (2008) identified three biblical analogies

that were commonly associated with spiritual formation throughout scripture. Spiritual

formation as *nurture* which understood through scriptural references associated with

agricultural and human growth or development (e.g., Matt. 7:17; John 12:24, 15; 1 Cor.

3:2; Gal. 4:19; Heb. 5:11–12). Spiritual formation as a *journey* or a *race* (1 Cor. 9; 2 Tim.

4) and spiritual formation as an experience of *death, life,* and *resurrection* (Gal. 2:20–21;

Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:21–22; 1 Peter 1:3). While no specific approach to examining spiritual

formation is authoritative, these three themes are consistently referenced in the spiritual

formation literature (Boa, 2001; Mulholland, 1993; Thornhill, 2013; Wilhoit, 2008).

Spiritual Formation as Nurture. Dettoni (1994) noted that the means of

Christian formation and discipleship found in scripture clearly reveals the importance of

nurture. He proposes that the task of nurture is to encourage, comfort, and urge others

"just as a father deals with his own children" (1 Thess. 2:11–12). Greenman (2010) used

the concept of nurture to describe spiritual formation, but instead of it being parental

nurture, he describes it as an agricultural nurture saying that "it is primarily a matter of

cultivating an intimate relationship with the triune God" (p. 24). Imagery of spiritual

formation as parental nurture and agricultural nurture are common throughout the

literature on spiritual formation (Demarest, 2009; Kim, 2010; Ortberg, 2010: Wilhoit,

2008).

Spiritual Formation as a Journey or Process. The Apostle Paul used the picture

of a journey or a race to portray the Christian life (1 Cor. 9; 2 Tim. 4). Boa (2001)

clarified that this journey is a "journey with Christ rather than a journey to Christ" (p.

19). Similarly, Mulholland (1993) described the process and the journey of spiritual

formation as much like the process or journey of physical growth. Greenman (2010)

called spiritual formation an "ongoing process" and a "lifelong journey" (p. 24). Boa

(2001) used the theme of the journey of the Christian life to point out two critical truths:

others have preceded us in this journey there are spiritual road maps along the way (i.e.,

historic spiritual disciplines) and God has equipped us for this journey (through scripture,

community, etc).

Carlson (2010) explained that confusion often exists when describing spiritual

formation because we do not clarify between "the process of spiritual formation and the

transformation of becoming a new person in Christ" (p. 223). In order to make this distinction he points out that regeneration (from transformation) is a work fully completed by God. Spiritual formation on the other hand requires that the believer cooperates with the work of God. Regeneration is "instantaneous and complete while spiritual formation is progressive and incomplete" (p. 223). In this statement Carlson (2010) underscores the finality of the atonement that is described by the author of Hebrews who said, "And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*" (10:10, emphasis added). There is no need for a continuous atonement, but spiritual formation is continuous. Lastly, Carlson (2010) points out the regeneration is a gift whereas "spiritual formation results, in part, from obedience and faithfulness to Him" (p. 224).

> ***Spiritual Formation as Death, Life, and Resurrection.*** Death, life, and resurrection are salvation-pictures that are intimately intertwined with scriptural (Mark 8:34–35; John 14:6; 1 Cor. 1:23, 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:14; Gal. 2:20–21) and scholarly depictions of spiritual formation (Fee, 2010; Reeves, 2011). Peterson (2005) commented that "spiritual formation is primarily what the Spirit does, forming the resurrection life of Christ in us" (p. 237). Thornhill (2012) further explained the role of Christ's resurrection as it relates to spiritual (trans)formation by connecting Christian maturation to an identification of Christ's resurrection, submission to the Lordship of Christ, and a hope in the future resurrection for those "in Christ."

> **Spiritual formation through spiritual disciplines.** Foster (1998) divided the spiritual disciplines into three categories, the inward disciplines, the outward disciplines, and the corporate disciplines. The inward disciplines are meditation, prayer, fasting, and study. The outward disciplines are simplicity, solitude, submission, and service. The

corporate disciplines are confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. The use of spiritual disciplines should be a part of spiritual formation through discipleship as believers concretely follow the example of Christ who "live[d] a life filled with prayer, quiet service, Scripture reading, meditation, worship, and fasting" (Dettoni, 1994, p. 16). Dettoni (1994) cautioned that these spiritual disciplines should be "the catalyst for, but not the cause of, spiritual transformation" (p. 18). Willard (1998) divided the spiritual disciplines into disciplines of abstinence and disciplines of engagement. The disciplines of abstinence included solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice, while the disciplines of engagement consist of study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission (p. 158). Calhoun (2005) expands on the historic disciplines incorporating disciplines rooted in the historic practices, but contextualized in modern culture. For example, she discusses the discipline of "unplugging" which is "to be fully present to and uninterrupted in my interactions with God and others" (p. 13). This idea is similar to what Foster (1998) would describe as simplicity; however, unplugging is an inherently modern contextualization of simplicity. In all Calhoun (2005) divides and subdivides the spiritual disciplines into 62 different practices.

      Spiritual formation commonalities. If spiritual formation is a practice that has been long observed by Christians throughout history and in various cultures (Blaising, 1994; McGrath, 1999; Peters, 2011, Sittser, 2007; Wilken, 2003), then there should be unifying commonalities that tie the Christian experience of today with those of past centuries. What is evident in the literature is that in spite of the varying definitions and terms used by spiritual formation practitioners and writers, the central goal is the same –

conformity to Christ, or as Gorman (2004) puts it – *cruciformity,* conformity to Christ crucified (see also Greenman, 2010).

Other commonalities advocate individual and corporate practices of spiritual formation. Spiritual formation can be a process experienced in isolation through the historic disciplines (Calhoun, 2005; Foster, 1998; Whitney, 1991; Willard, 1991) or through Spiritual Desertion or the Dark Night of the Soul (Wang, 2011). Corporate practices are also a part of the historic disciplines, but community formation as Mulholland (1993) described, is more than just practicing the corporate spiritual disciplines; it is spiritual formation *for* the sake of others. This emphasis is echoed by Greenman (2010) who commented that spiritual formation is "for the sake of the world" (p. 27).

Conformity to Christ. Christian spiritual formation is not a cognitively difficult process, but the application of spiritual formation often falls in a gap between desire and action (Issler, 2009). Recognizing the intellectual simplicity and practical difficulty leads to a simple, yet unifying goal of spiritual formation— to be conformed to the image of Christ (Boa, 2001; Copan, 2010; Greenman, 2010; Strobel, 2013; Willard, 2002). This sentiment is expressed differently based on the author's style and verbiage, but the message is the same, "[Spiritual formation] refers to the spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself" (Willard, 2002, p. 22). Greenman (2010) justified conformity to Christ as the essence of spiritual formation based upon Roman 8:29 and 2 Corinthians 3:18. He also noted that this conformity is our "eschatological destiny as Christians" because of the promise in 1 John 3:2 that "we shall be like him" (p. 25).

Copan (2010) examined the imitation statements of the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 4 &
11; Phil 3; 1 Thess. 1 & 4) to evaluate the accuracy of defining spiritual formation as
conformity to Christ. In these imitation passages, Paul presents himself as a brother, a
spiritual father, a servant, a steward (Copan, 2010). Copan (2010) said, "Without
exception, all of Paul's references to imitation of himself focus directly on and are
oriented toward Christ and his gospel" (p. 149). Paul's own concern for Christological
imitation confirms Willard's (2002) definition that spiritual formation is in essence the
process of being conformed to Christ. In agreeing with this aspect of spiritual formation,
Wilhoit (2008) cautioned that in imitating Christ, individuals must recognize the tension
between imitation powered by the self and imitation powered by the Spirit.

Community and formation. Greenman (2010) situated spiritual formation "in the
faith community" (p. 27). According to his definition, the body of Christ becomes the
context for spiritual formation. Similarly, Dettoni (1994) noted that spiritual formation
"involves the whole church's ministry" (p. 11). According to Wilhoit (2008), "Worship
filled with prayer and praise and opportunities for confession, repentance, receiving the
sacraments, hearing and giving testimonies of God's activity, and learning/challenge is
the most important context of community formation" (p. 86). Kim (2010) emphasized
nurture as the context of spiritual formation and explained that because "nurture is
relationally driven, it demands, most of all, that teaching be done in a koinonic context,
relationally – just as Christ, the master teacher, taught his disciples" (p. 93).

According to Wilhoit (2008) spiritual formation is a process that all people go
through, not just Christian believers. He said, "All persons are formed spiritually. It may
be in either a positive or negative direction" (p. 17). Mulholland (1993) and Pazmino
(1994) also recognized the universal nature of spiritual formation as did the Apostle Paul

who affirmed in 1 Corinthians 15:33, that culture and societal currents will form individuals if a person is not active in letting himself or herself be formed by Christ (1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:1; Phil. 2:5).

Imitation and formation. Instead of using the term spiritual formation, Copan (2010) used the term "spiritual direction" or "spiritual director" to emphasize the relational nature of spiritual formation. This relationship between the former and the formed provides the basis for what Copan (2010) defines as the role of a spiritual director. He defined this description saying,

> Spiritual direction is the (variegated) means by which one person intentionally influences another person or persons in the development of his or her life as a Christian with the goal of developing his or her relationship to God and His purposes for that person in the world. (p. 146)

Throughout the Pauline corpus, the Apostle Paul encouraged the recipients of his letters to follow him as he followed Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). In these instances Paul placed himself as an authority in the life of these readers explaining to them that he has set before them an *ethos*—a life example worthy to follow (Copan, 2010).

Holistic Spirituality. Chung (2011) uses 1Thess. 5:23 to object to the terminology of "spiritual" formation. Instead he prefers Christian formation or holistic spirituality. Without arguing the merits of terminology, it is important to observe that his motivation for this objection is based on Paul's letter to the church at Thessalonica. In this passage Paul says, "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole *spirit* and *soul* and *body* be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23, emphasis added). Chung (2011) points out that our spirit, soul, and body

should be kept blameless. His point is that formation is more than spiritual, but holistic.

Maddix (2010) echoes this belief saying,

> If a person decides to stop growing intellectually, it impacts his/her spiritual
>
> formation. If a person decides against developing relationships within the body of
>
> Christ, he/she ceases to grow. Thus, the five aspects [physical, emotional, social,
>
> mental, and moral] of the human person must be nurtured and developed in order
>
> for a person to grow toward spiritual maturity (p. 265).

While the idea of holistic spirituality may not be explicit in all writings on this topic, it

does seem to be an undercurrent that is recognized in the literature (Chung, 2011;

Maddix, 2010). Thus, spiritual formation should not be relegated to only the pneumatic

realm, but it should be nurtured in the whole of the human experience (Maddix, 2010).

The Content and Curriculum of Formation

Wilhoit (2008) cautioned that "Christian spiritual formation should always be

more than the teaching ministry of the church, but never less. True formational teaching

is compressive, deeply orthodox, healthy, and anointed by the Spirit of God" (p. 139).

This idea is echoed in Dettoni's (1994) definition of spiritual formation when he

explained that knowledge is a means of formation, but it is not the end of formation.

Copan (2010) extrapolated six principles for creating a curricular metamodel for spiritual

formation. Regardless the approach to organizing the content of a spiritually formative

message, the gospel foundation must always be the same (Forrest & Lamport, 2013;

Wilhoit, 2008; Willard, 2010). Forrest and Lamport (2013) explain that when Paul wrote

to the church at Rome, the foundation of his spiritually formative message was that of the

gospel (Rom. 1:16–17). According to Wilhoit (2008) the gospel message is the means of

spiritual formation; however, the gospel is not just the means into a spiritually formative relationship, but it is the beginning, middle, and end as well.

Counterfeit Formation

Many authors recognized that negative examples identifying what is *not* spiritual formation can help dispel common misperceptions or anxieties (Greenman, 2010; Phillips & Bloesch, 1994; Porter, 2008; Wilhoit, 2008). Estep and Kim (2010) maintain that spiritual formation is not merely a developmental process; although development is a part of the process. Elsewhere it is noted that spiritual formation is not behavior modification or a set of routines that will achieve spiritual value through mere human will (Dettoni, 1994; Fee, 2010; Willard, 2010). Stedman (1996) explained that the authentic Christian life is not lived in our own power, but in a recognition that everything comes from Christ (2 Cor. 3:4–6).

Phillips and Bloesch (1994) identified five tendencies of counterfeit Christian spirituality based on misinterpretations of orthodox theology. The first counterfeit system of subjectivism and mysticism disregards "spirituality [as] established by God in Jesus Christ" (p. 61). Instead, subjectivism and mysticism replaces "Christ as the means" with "Christ as a spiritual guide" (Phillips & Bloesch, 1994). The next counterfeit is that of Pelagianism in which humanity has enough internal and intrinsic power to change self and obtain righteousness. This counterfeit version replaces "God's supernatural act of regeneration" with mortal acts of mankind (p. 63). The third and fourth counterfeit are legalism and formalism. Legalism is the belief that correct action can earn a right standing with God; whereas, formalism is the belief that correct actions are true spirituality. Both of these counterfeit systems are built on a foundation that has removed justification in Christ through faith as the means to reach and please God. The only

antidote to legalism is a "full and thorough reliance on the Spirit" (Fee, 2010, p. 39).

Their final classification of counterfeit spirituality is that of Gnosticism. Gnosticism is

the belief that "salvation is gained within 'by oneself without ambassador'" (Phillips &

Bloesch, 1994, p. 70).

        Greenman (2010) identifies four challenges in evangelicalism that can be a

strength or weakness when practicing spiritual formation. The first challenge facing

evangelicals wanting to pursue spiritual formation is that of Biblicism. While a high

estimation of the Bible is a key doctrinal requirement for evangelicalism, Greenman

(2010) says the danger of Biblicism is that "scripture can easily devolve into an

information-oriented rationalism" rather than a transformational experience (p. 28).

Crucicentrism is the reality of Christ and the cross in spiritual formation; however, these

key doctrines must not be emphasized at the expense of other doctrines related to spiritual

formation such as pneumatology. Conversionism is the emphasis on the experience of

salvation. The potential problem is that if this is the only focus, then discipleship and

maturity are not properly emphasized. Greenman (2010) said that this conversionism

"can lead to spiritual impatience in the long journey of transformation" (p. 30). Peterson

(2000) defined discipleship as, "A long obedience in the same direction." Many

Christians believe (and/or act) as if spiritual formation is an instant appropriation of

spiritual maturity rather than a result of a long obedience. Maddix (2010) echoed this

definition while noting that its acceptance is counter-cultural for our society which

pursues instant-gratification. The last challenge for evangelical practitioners of spiritual

formation is activism (Greenman, 2010). Activism is dangerous when "energetic service

is emphasized at the expense of prayer, solitude and meditation…. [It] can devolve into a

lazy anti-intellectualism that seeks little beyond a handful of prepackaged 'simple steps to spiritual success'" (p. 31).

Wilhoit (2008) noted six myths or false models of spiritual formation. The quick-fix model is the idea that spiritual formation is a quick fix for spiritual problems and/or struggles. The facts only model emphasizes spiritual formation as only an intellectual or academic pursuit. The emotional model attempts to confine spiritual formation to emotional experiences and the feelings that come with spiritual growth. The conference model is the idea that spiritual formation primarily takes place in special yearly "conference" type experiences, rather than in the day-to-day realities of life. The insight model relegates spiritual formation to the realm of spiritual or devotional insights rather than a continued investment in transformation. The last model is the faith model which supposes that spiritual formation is only an act of faith rather than a cultivation of one's spiritual life.

These classifications and descriptions of counterfeit formation provide insight into the human tendency to make spiritual formation an act of the will/flesh (see Ex. 19:7–9) instead of an act of the spirit in combination with the will (Gal. 2:20–21). Understanding the taxonomy of counterfeit formation can aid in the assessment of true spiritual formation. Personal and corporate assessment of spiritual formation can provide the foundation for taking corrective steps in pursuing true formation. Without a proper understanding of the pitfalls common in spiritual formation, practitioners can easily descend into the temptations of embracing a counterfeit version of spiritual formation.

Spiritual Formation in Higher Education

Coe (2000) argued that "all of our instruction and skill development in the [Christian] university and seminary should be a means to the goal of loving God and

neighbor, of advancing true growth in our identity in Christ" (p. 86). To a varying degree, other authors approve of this suggestion that spiritual formation in Christian, higher education is a vital (if not the most vital) portion of the student experience (Coe, 2000; Forrest & Lamport, 2013; Lowe, 2010; Lowe & Lowe, 2010; Maddix & Estep, 2010; White, 2006; Wilhoit, Setran, Ratcliff, Haase, & Rosema, 2009). Jones and Jennings (2000) stated,

> Theological education ought to be about forming people for ministry, not simply conveying information. Information is important, but theological education must shape ministerial identity. Forming ministerial identity requires attention to the care and nurture of souls beyond the classroom as well as in it. (p. 124)

However, Coe (2000) and Wilhoit et al. (2009) revealed that there is a tendency in Christian higher educational settings to connect academic interests with the curricular aspects of college life, while leaving spiritual interests connected to the co-curricular features of the institution. Because of this (or in spite of this) there is a "pressing need [in the lives of students] for the development of righteous virtues, affections, commitments, and patterns of living rooted in a right understanding of God and self" (Wilhoit et al., 2009, p. 155). Setran et al. (2010) commented that the means to this end is most often not found through didactic instruction. They said, "Professorial exhortation is rarely sufficient to furnish a fruitful context for spiritual formation" (p. 405). Coe (2000) recognized that in fostering a spiritually formative education in the classroom course curriculum should serve as a means for faith development rather than relegating it to a subservient role in the curriculum. His point was that Christian higher education exists to aid the students in recognizing and fostering their true identity in Christ (p. 95). If this is the goal, then Setran et al.'s (2010) observation is helpful. They explained that the

college setting provides a context that can be adapted to encourage students "to see God's work in the academic vocation and to nurture receptivity to the work of the Holy Spirit in their own souls as they interact with class material" (Setran et al., 2010, p. 408). Coe (2000) cautioned that in the classroom "the medium is the message" (p. 95). Thus, what is emphasized is what will be what is learned (i.e., content and/or formation).

Summary

For the sake of this dissertation, discussions of spiritual formation will be contextualized in an evangelical, Christian, theological tradition. Discussions pertaining to spiritual formation will integrate concepts related to scriptural and scholarly literature. Thus, for the purposes of this study, spiritual formation will be defined as a set of personal or corporate practices and disciplines that contributes to and leads toward Christian maturity, growth, progress, and ultimately toward a conformity to the image of Christ himself (Boa, 2001; Copan, 2010; Chung, 2011; Porter, 2008; Reisz, 2003, Willard, 2002).

The Impact of Education on Relationships

Graduate education has a positive (Dahl et al., 2010; Gilbert, 1982; Polson & Piercy, 1993) and negative (Dahl et al., 2010; Gilbert, 1982; Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Schwartz-Mette, 2009; Wormus, 2009) impact on both students and spouses. Research has explored student experiences in graduate education (Brannock et al., 2000; Gardner, 2009; Gold, 2006a, 2006b; Golde, 1998; Hudson & O'Regan, 1994; Kuperberg, 2009; Maclean & Peters, 1995), and it has explored spousal experiences in graduate education (Cymbal, 2004; Dahl et al., 2010; Legako, 1995; Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Maclean & Peters, 1995; Polson & Peircy, 1993; Sori et al., 1996). However, these programs have been limited to programs in psychology (Cymbal, 2004; Hudson & O'Regan, 1994;

Legako, 1995; Legako & Sorenson, 2000) marriage and family therapy (Dahl et al., 2010; Polson & Piercy, 1993; Sori et al., 1996) or the generic doctoral or graduate program (Brannock et al., 2000; Gardner, 2009; Gold, 2006a, 2006b; Golde, 1998; Maclean & Peters, 1995).

According to Dahl et al. (2010), a gap exists in the literature regarding the experiences of nonstudent spouses whose student spouses are pursuing an MDiv. Equal in scarcity to the experiences of seminary spouses is research on the experiences of online student spouses. Thus, this study addressed a gap in the literature because of the focus on MDiv student spouses and online student spouses. The following will synthesize the research on student experiences and nonstudent spouse experiences during a graduate or doctoral program in order to provide a foundation for exploring the spiritually formative experiences of nonstudent, female spouses whose student spouse is pursuing an MDiv at a large evangelical seminary in the eastern United States.

The Impact of Education on Personal Relationships

In a study on the marital satisfaction of graduate students, Gold (2006b) concluded that "while graduate study may be 'short-term', the effects of that life experience on the marriage will persist for its duration" (p. 494). In order to evaluate these effects of graduate school on the marriage, I will borrow the terminology of Duncan and Goddard (1993) who explored the stressors and enhancers of marital/family life on family professionals and their spouses.

Stressors. Dahl et al. (2010) found the following four themes in their research on the impact of a graduate education on nonstudent spouses: (a) there is a significant time commitment to be away from the family for course work; (b) finances are stressors in the relationship; (c) there is conflict because of new roles and extra responsibilities; and (d)

some spouses feel "left behind" regarding their own maturation or development (pp. 3–4). Similarly Gilbert (1982) noted that there were five typical sources of dissatisfaction among married graduate students. These were sexual dissatisfaction, lack of communication, lack of recreation time, not enough money, and a need for more friends (p. 132). These themes are confirmed in the literature; thus, a synthesis of these themes will be used to organize the stressors of graduate education on the student and the nonstudent spouse.

Family stressors. One of the most common stressors associated with graduate education is the time spent away from the family (Dahl et al., 2010; Wormus, 2009). According to Gold (2006b), both male and female graduate students reported that they were distressed about the amount of time they were able to spend together. Teshome and Osei-Kofi (2012) observed how crossover can impact a student spouse. In their study exploring the acculturation experiences of international student spouses, one spouse commented, "When I am not happy or not busy enough, the problem will affect my husband" (Teshome & Osei-Kofi, 2012, p. 70).

Another aspect of stress that can impact families is the feeling of being left behind (Dahl, et al., 2010). Two different types of being left behind were characterized in Dahl et al.'s (2010) study: some spouses felt left behind academically and others felt left behind intellectually.

Role stressors. There were two notable ways to explain role stressors in the lives of students (Dahl et al., 2009; Wormus, 2009). Dahl et al., (2009) noted that an increasingly egalitarian sense of functional family roles increased stress in the home. This was typically a stressor in homes where the wife was returning to school which left the

husband to more of the chores historically associated with duties of the wife such as cleaning, laundry, and meal preparation.

A different way of describing role stressors was found in Wormus' (2009) study of college students with families. She addressed role conflict from the student perspective as the student found increased stress in his or her attempt to balance the role of student, spouse, parent, and employee. She noted that role conflict and role overload had a "significant impact in on academic persistence for students with families" (p. 21). The definition of these constructs of role conflict and overload come from a study of 443 women who balanced work and family roles while pursuing education (Home, 1997). Home (1997) explained that role strain was a hierarchical designation that included role conflict, role overload, and role contagion. She defined these constructs by explaining that "role strain is a felt difficulty in meeting role demands…and involves three dimensions: role conflict (simultaneous, incompatible demands), role overload (insufficient time to meet demands), and role contagion (preoccupation with one role while performing another)" (p. 336).

Relational stressors. Relational stressors would be those stressors that involve relationships with people outside of the family unit. Gilbert (1982) identified that the need for a stronger social life was important for graduate students and their spouses. When social relationships were not present, there was increased dissatisfaction of the marriage Gilbert (1982).

Financial stressors. Finances are often stressors for married students involved in higher education (Gold, 2006b; Dahl et al., 2010; Maclean & Peters, 1995; Teshome & Osei-Kofi, 2012; Wormus, 2009). Gold (2006b) noted that doctoral students often disagreed about their finances. Dahl et al. (2010) found that the time dedicated to study

and finances were both negative stressors in the lives of graduate student spouses.

Maclean and Peters (1995) also found that "the financial status of students may be an important predictor of marital happiness during graduate school" (p. 123). Home (1997) found that income level was a predictor of role conflict for students balancing family, vocation, and school.

     Enhancers. As noted earlier, there are also positive experiences stemming from graduate education (Dahl et al., 2010; Gilbert, 1982; Polson & Piercy, 1993). Gilbert (1982) concluded that in spite of the challenges of graduate education, families were able to adapt to the new circumstances reasonably well. Dahl et al. (2010) found that the nonstudent spouses reported a positive impact on marital communication and on "role changes and adjustments" (p. 8). Another aspect of enhancement is the sense of accomplishment that the entire family gets from achieving academic goals. When a family member pursues higher education, it "becomes a family task rather than an individual endeavor" (Gold, 2006a, p. 417; Wormus, 2009).

The Impact of Distance Education on Personal Relationships

     Home (1997) found that female students participating in distance education had less stress and role strain than their counterparts pursuing a traditional education. Wormus (2009) had similar conclusions commenting on the value of distance education or online education as it pertains to the married student. She said, "Distance education and part-time study give students more opportunity and flexibility to balance their schedules. Married students are the primary demographic in online classes, and distance education is the only tangible support that has proven to reduce role contagion" (p. 23). Because of the predicted ease in stress and role strain for distance education students, Home (1997) recommended that distance education access and options be expanded "to

all students whose life situations and responsibilities make time conflicts a potential problem" (p. 345).

Student Spouse Experiences of Graduate Education

Six studies have specifically explored the relationships of married individuals during graduate school form the perspective of the nonstudent spouse (Cymbal, 2004; Dahl et al. 2010; Legako, 1995; Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Polson & Piercy, 1993; Sori et al., 1996). Dahl et al. (2010) is the only study that has previously explored the experiences of seminary spouses. The Marriage and Family Therapy degree explored in Dahl et al.'s (2010) study was a part of their seminary; however, the participants of this study were not what would be typically deemed as seminarians because the student spouses in this case were studying in the field of counseling rather than pastoral ministry. In spite of this, Dahl et al. (2010) concluded that the results showed 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" (p. 3).

Spiritually Formative Experiences of Graduate Students

Legako and Sorenson (2000) noted that in their study they found two-thirds of their participants expressed that their student spouse had waned in their commitment to God during the course of their graduate program. This was opposite of what Dahl et al. (2010) found in their study which integrated faith and marriage and family therapy. They found that only three of the eighteen spouses expressed concern of their spouse's faith because of the graduate training.

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Summary

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As noted throughout the literature, studying the experiences of graduate students is an important task for those interested in the well-being and quality of the graduate

education experience (Dahl et al., 2010; Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Polson & Piercy, 1993). The literature also notes that using the experiences of the nonstudent spouse to research graduate education provides a different, but similarly important perspective on the qualitative impact of graduate education on the student and the family (Dahl et al., 2010; Legako & Sorenson, 2000). Likewise, for those in a Christian, graduate program, it is important to recognize the impact that an "integration" of faith and learning has on the student spouse and the nonstudent spouse (Dahl et al., 2010; Legako & Sorenson, 2000). These experiences provided the basis for this current study, and as Dahl et al. (2010) noted, there are no studies that have explored this topic with the population of MDiv students.

To this date, no new study has been published with this demographic; yet, similar studies have focused on counseling students, psychology students, marriage and family therapy students, graduate students, and doctoral students (Brannock et al., 2000; Cymbal, 2004; Dahl et al., 2010; Gold, 2006b; Legako & Sorenson, 2000; Sori et al., 1996). Because seminaries are responsible for training the pastors and the pastoral team (Morgan, 2008; Murphey-Geiss, 2011), an emphasis on the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses should be of programmatic interest for faculty and administrators. Programs must also focus on the spiritual maturity of the nonstudent spouse as they will be a valuable part of the clergy-spouse ministry (Hileman, 2008). Thus, the importance of the gap in the literature is clarified. In order for seminaries to improve on the spiritual formation of the seminary spouses, the experiences of these spouses must first be understood.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Introduction

Qualitative research inserts the researcher into the world of the participant (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It is exploratory in nature as the modern foundations of qualitative inquiry stemmed from colonial ethnography (Creswell, 2009; Erickson, 2011; Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011). Thus, qualitative research is often employed when researchers are seeking to understand concepts and constructs that are not well-defined in current literature (Creswell, 2007). Each qualitative research methodology available has a specific aim or focus (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Given that the purpose of this study is to explore the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses, phenomenology has been chosen as it offers a method for describing experiences (Cohen & Omery, 1994; Creswell, 2007; Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological Research

Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a research methodology (Creswell, 2009; Dowling, 2007; Milacci, 2003; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). The philosophical foundations of phenomenology have given birth to the processes of phenomenology as a qualitative research methodology (Cohen & Omery, 1994; Dowling, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Ray, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology comes from the Greek word *phaenesthai,* which means to "flare up, to show itself, to appear" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). The maxim, and uniting goals, of all types of phenomenology are the search for the *Zu den Sachen* (Dowling, 2007) which means "to the things themselves" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26), or "Let's get down to what matters" (van Manen, 1990, p. 184). Dowling (2007) and Racher and Robinson (2002) noted four philosophical

approaches to phenomenology (positivist, post-positivist, interpretivist, and constructivist), while Milacci (2003) noted three research approaches to phenomenology, eidetic or descriptive, hermeneutic or interpretive, and Dutch phenomenology. Each phenomenological research approach is rooted in the philosophy of phenomenology (Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). In order to clarify the phenomenological method, it is valuable to offer a synthesis of these two contrasting typologies of phenomenology. Positivist and eidetic or descriptive phenomenologies are one and the same. Synonyms for this approach are transcendental, Husserlian, or the Duquesne school of phenomenology (Milacci, 2003). Dowling (2007), Milacci (2003), and Racher and Robinson (2002) similarly classify interpretivist phenomenology. Milacci (2003) also identifies this approach to phenomenology as hermeneutic or Heideggerian phenomenology. This is where the similarities in the typologies end. It seems that Dowling's (2007) post-positivist and constructivist phenomenologies, which are rooted in the philosophies of Merleau-Ponty and Gadmer respectively, do not have a counter type in Milacci's (2003) framework. In regards to what Milacci (2003) calls Dutch phenomenology, Dowling (2007), likewise, recognized that van Manen (1990) is a part of this branch of phenomenology. In her estimation, this branch does not necessarily fit within the four philosophical categories she proposes since van Manen's (1990) phenomenology uses both description and interpretation.

Phenomenology has three major methodological approaches (Milacci, 2003). Each approach lies on a continuum bookended by understanding and by description (Dowling, 2007; Milacci, 2003). Husserlian phenomenology, and all of its synonymous methodologies, emphasizes description, while Heideggerian (or interpretive, or hermeneutic) phenomenology emphasizes understanding (Dowling, 2007; Milacci, 2003).

Dutch phenomenology falls somewhere in the middle of this continuum as it is a combination of description and interpretation (Dowling, 2007). In the process of identifying which phenomenological approach was most suited for this particular study, Creswell (2007) advised that qualitative researchers should clarify their assumptions, explicate their theoretical lens, and identify the research problems or questions leading to the inquiry being studied.

Phenomenological Assumptions

The purpose of this study was to explore the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses. Thus, this research focus situates me within a Husserlian or Transcendental phenomenological camp (Moustakas, 1994). It is transcendental because I described the experiences rather than sought to interpret them.

Theoretical Lens/Framework

The theoretical lens of this study is grounded in human resource management theory and literature (Bolger et al., 1989; Clark, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Grzywacz, 2000; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000b; Kabanoff, 1980; Staines, 1980; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). While human resource management has little to say on the spiritual formation of seminary spouses, it does identify specific and general theories about the interrelation of life-domains (Bolger et al., 1989; Clark, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000b). Life-domains are the spheres of life in which an individual operates (Clark, 2000; Home, 1997). For example, most individuals operate in a family domain and a work domain (Clark, 2000). Instead of using these theories to identify the relationship between family and work domains, these theories were used as a basis for exploring the relationships between the family domain and the school domain. Therefore, I posit that a school domain can replace the work domain in these human

resource management theories resulting in a family domain and a school domain.

Kabanoff (1980) sets forth a two-part definition of work that can be used as a basis for defining the work domain. Work includes (a) a prescribed set of tasks that an individual performs for an organization and (b) these tasks are monetarily rewarded (Kabanoff, 1980). School requires a set of tasks that an individual performs for an organization; however, school work is not monetarily rewarded. Instead, the tasks performed by students in school are rewarded with a grade. Grades are not monetary in nature, but they do provide extrinsic motivation similar to that of monetary rewards. Thus, in a theoretical sense, a school domain can replace the work domain in work/family theories for the sake of clarifying the spillover and crossover between these domains. (Grzywacz, 2000; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000b; Westman & Etzion, 1995)

Research Questions

The following three research questions guided this exploration into the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses:

- How do nonstudent, female seminary spouses describe their spiritual lives at the beginning of their spouses' seminary experience?

- What aspects of formation occur in the spiritual lives of female, seminary spouses while their husbands are in seminary?

- How do nonstudent, seminary spouses describe the factors that have influenced their personal spiritual formation?

Research Design

Moustakas (1994) clarified the role of transcendental phenomenology explaining

that transcendental reflection,

> [Attempts] to eliminate everything that represents a prejudgment, setting aside presuppositions, and reaching a transcendental state of freshness and openness, a readiness to see in an unfettered way, not threatened by the customs, beliefs, and prejudices of normal science, by the habits of the natural world or by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience. (p. 41)

In explaining the nuances of transcendental phenomenology, Moustakas (1994) noted that transcendental phenomenology first brackets out or removes external, preconceived, and prereflective opinions of an experience. Transcendental phenomenology then explores the essence of the phenomena using the *noematic* (textural essences) and *noetic* (structural essences) meanings which are then used to derive the essential essence of the experience. "Noema is *that* which is experienced, the what of experience, the object-correlate. Noesis is the way in which the what is experienced, the experiencing or act of experience, the subject-correlate" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 69).

Noema is the perception of an object, the size, the shape, the texture. This textural description of noema asks *what* is experienced as a part of an experience. Noesis, on the other hand, is the essential nature or the structure that undergirds the noematic meaning. The noesis asks *how* an experience is experienced. In relating the noema-noesis relationship to this study, the noema is *what* is experienced by seminary spouses as a part of spiritual formation, while the noesis is *how* spiritual formation is experienced. The noema is the meaning ascribed to the experiences of spiritual formation as the experience is considered from many angles. It is what makes spiritually formative experiences different from other formative experiences. The noetic meaning is how seminary spouses experienced spiritual formation, and it is the reflections on the process

of spiritual formation and the analysis of the meanings associated with these experiences.

Researcher's Role

Qualitative researchers recognize the bias innate in human science research (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). These biases can lead researchers to prejudge experiences or phenomena (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Due to the tendency of prejudgment, transcendental phenomenology brackets out the researcher's preconceived notions about the phenomenon so that the phenomenon can be experienced as a part of a fresh encounter (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41). Removing one's prejudgments is called phenomenological reduction (van Manen, 1990) or the *Epoche* process (Moustakas, 1994). The Epoche process "refers to the act of holding in abeyance or suspending one's beliefs or presuppositions about a phenomenon so that, by means of deep reflection, the essential structures of the phenomenon, 'the things themselves,' can be understood and studied" (Milacci, 2003, p. 52). Moustakas (1994) clarified the use of this tool saying,

> [It is used] in order to launch the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience and professional studies – to be completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated. (p. 22)

As the researcher, I came to this study with preconceived notions about the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses. I am a seminary graduate and now an administrative faculty member. I was not married as a seminary student, but I have had ample opportunities to informally observe seminary students and spouses interact on a spiritual level. These personal experiences have formed my interest in the experiences of seminary spouses and have provided an amalgamation of what I could

expect to find in my research. However, according to Moustakas (1994), I must bracket out these experiences throughout the research process using reflective memos. It is important for me as a researcher to overtly note these prejudgments in order to bracket them so that the phenomenon can be "known naively and freshly through a 'purified' consciousness" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85).

Setting

The setting of this study was a large evangelical seminary in the eastern United States. This seminary has residential and online degree offerings with both programs granting pastoral and professional degrees. As of the fall 2012 semester, there were 381 residential students enrolled in degree programs for this seminary. Of these students, 161 were enrolled in the MDiv. In the online program, there were 6243 students enrolled in a degree program. Of these students, 2531 were enrolled in the MDiv. There are 25 full-time faculty members teaching in the residential and online portion of this seminary. Conversely, there are 100 full-time, online, terminally degreed faculty members teaching in the online portion of the seminary. In addition to the full-time online faculty, there is a pool of approximately 149 terminally degreed adjunct faculty members who teach each semester.

Regarding the setting of the interviews to be conducted within the study, Creswell (2007) suggested that a natural setting for the participants should be chosen. The challenge in interviewing the participants in a natural setting is the proximity of location between the interviewer and the participants. Spouses interviewed for this study were located all of the United States. In an attempt to solve this challenge while keeping the interviews in a natural setting, I conducted each interview using WebEx, which is similar to using Skype in qualitative research (Bertrand & Bourdeau, 2010; Saumure & Given,

2010). Participants had their choice of location for their interview setting (depending on their Internet capabilities), while I was in my home/work office.

Participants

There is no correct answer as to how many participants are needed for a qualitative study (Patton, 2002). However, according to Creswell (2007) five to twenty-five participants are needed for a phenomenology. Similarly Groenewald (2004) recommends 10 participants for phenomenology. While these guidelines provide a minimum and maximum, the common goal is that the number of participants should allow the researcher to reach data saturation. In this study, data saturation was reached at 15 participants. Twelve of these were online student spouses and three of these were residential student spouses.

Nonstudent spouses chosen for participation in this study were American citizens, female, married for the entirety of their spouses' seminary education, and not seminary students themselves. Participants were only chosen if their spouse had completed at least half of the credits toward the degree program (i.e., 45 credit hours); this ensured that the nonstudent spouse had ample experience in spiritual formation as a seminary spouse. Within this seminary, students have the choice to take classes residentially or online. If they used both of these educational media (online and residential), their program is considered blended. Participants in this study were chosen based on the medium of their student spouses' education. More specifically, nonstudent spouses chosen were required to experience the majority (defined as three-fourths of more) of their spouses' seminary education from an online or residential paradigm. Spouses of students who have blended their education were not chosen if their spouses had a blended education consisting of less than three-fourths of their education in either paradigm. This stipulation ensured that

the experiential reflections of seminary spouses were based predominantly on their experience in an online or residential paradigm rather than on a blending of their experience in both educational settings.

Sampling Procedures

The sampling procedures used in this study were a combination of convenience sampling, purposeful sampling, and contrasting case sampling. (Bickman & Rog, 2009; Patton, 2002; Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011). I sampled participants purposefully in order to achieve contrasting cases. Based on the number of volunteers, the final sample was a cross between convenience and contrasting cases meaning that I accepted all participants who qualified, but in the recruitment process I purposed to find contrasting cases. In order to access my potential population, I followed the steps required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval to request a report run through the Business Intelligence Office (BIO). This report delimited seminary students by their gender, their degree, their credit hours completed, and their educational medium (online/residential). The number of potential participants generated from this list was 880 online M.Div. students and 21 residential M.Div. students. An email was sent to all 901 students requesting that they forward a participatory recruitment email on to their spouse.

This email requested that male students relay to their spouses an introductory letter communicating the need for female, nonstudent, seminary spouse participants in order to conduct a study on the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses (see Appendix A, B, C, D, & E). The *Study Explanation Letter* (Appendix A) identified the specific stages of the study. Participants had the option of participating at different commitment levels. All commitments were communicated as voluntary and all participants were alerted to the fact that they could withdraw at any time without negative

ramifications. If spouses were interested in participating, they were instructed to return the *Seminary Spouse Questionnaire* (Appendix B) by a target deadline. This questionnaire provided them with the opportunity to answer both general and open-ended questions regarding their seminary experiences. Participants were informed that this could be their only form of involvement or they could continue on in their involvement by submitting the *Seminary Spouse Interview Contact Information Form* (Appendix C). The *Seminary Spouse Interview Contact Information Form* recruited participants who were willing to be interviewed for this study. Along with these appendices, the IRB Approval Letter (Appendix D) and the Informed Consent (Appendix E) were sent along to seminary students for them to forward to their spouses.

Two questionnaires were returned at the end of the target deadline and only one participant had responded by submitting their contact interview form in order to be interviewed. The day before the end of the target deadline I sent a second recruitment email to the same 901 seminary students. This generated three more questionnaires, and three more interviews, but not enough for data saturation. A week later I sent a third email recruiting participants for participation in this study; however, in the meantime I filled out a *Change of Protocol Form* for the IRB requesting that instead of emailing documents back and forth I would send potential participants a surveymonkey.com link to coordinate the participant questionnaire, informed consent, and interview contact information. Over the next week, the surveymonkey link generated seven responses, but none of them volunteered to be interviewed. I went back through my emails from spouses and followed up with those who returned emails as interested, but who never followed through with the questionnaire or contact information form. In this email I also included

two sample articles on a similar topic (Dahl et al., 2010; Legako & Sorenson, 2005) and a

personal explanation of why I thought this research was beneficial.

Following up with spouses who expressed initial interest proved to be fruitful.

Within the next 10 days, six spouses had interviews scheduled. However, up to this point

it was only online spouses who had volunteered to be interviewed. Finding residential

students who met the delimitations was much more difficult than I initially anticipated. In

order to find residential students who met the delimitations, I resulted to asking

residential faculty members for recommendations and visiting residential classes to

recruit students who might fit the delimitations. Connecting with professors yielded three

students who qualified for the study. One of the students had recently relocated away

from campus and did not think that his wife could participate; another student passed this

information on to his spouse who was willing to volunteer, and the third was a student

who had recently relocated to campus from the online program. His spouse qualified to

be interviewed as an online spouse rather than as a residential spouse.

After consulting with my committee, I decided to make a purposeful effort in

exploring whether or not residential students even qualified for the study based on their

marriage length and degree blending. I individually emailed each of the 21 residential

students who were in the population pool from the BIO report based on the delimitations

(i.e., gender, degree, credit hours completed, and educational medium) and the students

who were recommended to me from professors (24 students in all). I asked them to

respond to the following questions whether they fit the delimitations or not: (a) Are you

an American citizen? (b) Are you in the MDiv program? (c) Are you married? (d) Have

you been married throughout your entire seminary experience? (e) Is your wife an

American citizen? (f) Is your wife a seminary student? (g) Will you be halfway done (45

credits) with the MDiv at the end of the semester? (h) Have you taken at least three fourths of your course work residentially? Of the 24 residential students who responded, four students qualified and three had spouses willing to be interviewed.

In all I had twelve online seminary spouses and three residential seminary spouses willing to take part in the questionnaire, interview, and discussion board forum focus group. The total number of participants included 904 who were invited to participate (24 residential spouses and 880 online spouses). Five online spouses volunteered to participate in the questionnaire portion of the study, but in no other portion of the study. Twenty online students responded that they did not qualify or were uninterested. Sixteen online students expressed a willingness to forward the email on to their spouse based on perceived interest, but these resulted in no participant volunteers. Eight residential students responded that their spouses were not qualified to participate, while 13 did not respond, and one responded as qualified but uninterested. Therefore, 1.6% of the population participated in the full study, while 5.4% responded as unqualified or not fully interested, which means that 93% of the target population did not respond at all.

Data Collection Procedures

No data was collected prior to receiving permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix D) and informed consent (see Appendix E) from the participants. Participants who volunteered did so by participating in a spousal questionnaire, interview, and focus group. Participants were notified that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative ramifications.

Seminary Spouse Questionnaire

The first data collection point was a modification of the Dahl et al. (2010) *Alumni Spouse Survey.* In the original study (Dahl et al., 2010), this survey was sent to alumni

spouses of students in a Marriage and Family Therapy program. This modified *Seminary Spouse Questionnaire* (see Appendix B) was sent to seminary students via their campus email addresses. This questionnaire includes background questions, demographic questions, and the option of writing out responses to open-ended questions that related to the three research questions of the study (see Appendix D). The email with the questionnaire also included the *Informed Consent Letter* (see Appendix E); thus, participants were to return the questionnaire along with their informed consent. The questionnaire has been adapted with permission from Dahl et al. (2010) (see Appendix B). At the end of the *Seminary Spouse Questionnaire,* spouses were requested to email their responses to an email address that was set up in advance dedicated solely to this portion of the study. As in the Dahl et al. (2010) study, potential participants were instructed that if they were interested in further participation (i.e., Part 2 and beyond) they would need to send a second email to the email address containing the *Seminary Spouse Interview Contact Information Form* attached (see Appendix C).

In-Depth Interviews

The second data collection point was in-depth interviews (see Table 1). The in-depth interviews addressed research questions one through three. Interviews were semi-structured and recorded using the recording feature available through WebEx. The recorded interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Interviews were conducted in a natural setting of the participants' choosing as long as they had Internet access and the ability to use WebEx for the interview.

The three types of questions that were asked during the in-depth interview were background, experience, and opinion questions (Patton, 2002). The introduction and historical background questions provided the researcher and the interviewee with an

introduction to the interviewing process. The goal of the history/background question was to provide a framework for understanding the context of the student spouse's decision to enroll in seminary and the nonstudent, spouse's pre-seminary description of her spiritual life. Questions pertaining to the spiritually formative experiences of the participants provided the essence of the experience. Legako and Sorenson (2000) asked these same type of questions to explore the experiences of psychology student spouses whose student spouse was being purposefully trained in the integration of theology and psychology. Lastly, recommendation questions at the end of the interview provided insight for the marketing, retention, and administration of the program.

Table 1

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

Questions
Background
1. How did you meet your spouse?
2. Please describe the details of your family's situation while he is in seminary. Include where you live, how long you have been married, work situations, age and stage of your children and any other descriptors/factors that you deem valuable.
3. Describe the decision-making process involved in going to seminary. What factors led your spouse to choose this school? What factors led your spouse to choose the type of educational medium that they chose? (i.e., primarily online vs. primarily residential)
4. What is your spouse's current vocation? Is he currently involved in ministry?
Experience - Spiritual Formation
1. Can you describe spiritual formation?
2. Can you describe your spiritual life before your spouse enrolled in seminary?
3. Please describe your spiritual life now.
4. In what ways has your spiritual situation changed from pre-seminary to now?
5. Can you provide a narrative, metaphor, or example to describe your current spiritual relationship or development? Do you have any stories or analogies that capture or reflect your experiences?
6. How has your spouse's seminary experience influenced your own faith journey and spiritual maturity?
7. How has your spouse's educational paradigm (online or residential) directly impacted your spiritual formation?

Opinion - Recommendations for the future
1. What general advice would you give to future couples considering attending seminary?
2. What advice would you give to future couples interested in attending seminary regarding their choice of an online or residential context?
3. If you had one suggestion for seminary administration as a program, what would that be?
4. Is there anything else about your experience of your spouse's time in seminary that you'd like to tell me?

Note: These questions have been adapted from Dahl, Jensen, & McCampbell, 2010 and Legako & Sorenson, 2000. Attempts were made to contact these authors for permission. Dahl et al., 2010 gave permission, but neither Legako nor Sorenson were reachable.

Discussion Forum Focus Group

Remler and Van Ryzin (2011) noted that in some circumstances it is not possible to conduct a focus group due to the distance between participants. In these situations, they suggest having an online focus group (p. 70). Their suggestion was centered on the idea of using an online program such as WebEx to video chat the focus group; however, in this study, I used their idea of an online focus group in another way. I created an asynchronous online discussion forum using a Blackboard course shell offered through coursesite.com. This Blackboard shell offered a medium for securely hosting a focus group because access was only granted to participants. Participants in the focus group were able to sign up using their own name or a created pseudonym based on their own preference.

I provided the discussion forums with writing prompts related to the three research questions (see Appendix F). These prompts allowed for the participants to engage in conversation regarding their own spiritually formative experiences with those in a similar situation. After providing the initial writing prompt(s), I asked follow up questions as if I were asking them to a physically-present focus group. Reminders and

updates about new prompts were sent out periodically throughout this portion of the study to encourage participation in the focus group.

Data Analysis Procedures

Coding Software

Qualitative data analysis software can be effectively used for coding and clustering qualitative data (Creswell, 2009; Delgado, 2012; Zabloski, 2010). The qualitative data analysis software chosen here was ATLAS.ti (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2012). This software was used to code the interview transcriptions and focus groups.

Transcendental Phenomenological Analysis

Moustakas (1994) listed several steps in the data analysis procedures for a transcendental phenomenological study. Data analysis begins with *horizontalization.* When horizontalizing the data, I coded each expression from the verbatim transcripts. Each horizon that is created is given equal credence in its ability to describe the experience.

After horizontalization, *invariant horizons* or *invariant constituents* were clustered into themes/horizons. Each horizon that contained a "necessary and sufficient constituent" of the phenomenon was preserved (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). Horizons that did not meet this requirement were eliminated. Horizons that were necessary and sufficient were clustered into themes and subthemes. *Invariant horizons and themes* were then measured against the complete participant transcription. Two guiding questions were used to validate the invariant horizons and themes, "Are the themes, as written, explicitly expressed in the transcription?" and "If they are not explicitly expressed, are they compatible with what is explicitly expressed" (Moustakas, 1994, p.

121)? Themes and constituents that were affirmed through the validation process were included in the descriptions of the experience.

The textural description asks *what* is experienced as a part of the experience (i.e., *noema)*. In this portion of the analysis, I compiled a textural description of each constituent/theme. After the textural descriptions were finished, I proceeded to a structural description of the constituents/themes. Structural analysis differed from the textural analysis in that it focuses on *how* the experience is experienced (i.e., *noesis).* After the structural analysis, these textures and structures were synthesized in a composite description of the thematic essences of the spiritually formative experiences.

Trustworthiness

There are multiple ways to address trustworthiness in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1996; Maxwell, 2002). LeCompte and Goetz (1982) attempted to use a quantitative vocabulary for qualitative trustworthiness (i.e., internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity). Lincoln and Guba (1996) suggested that qualitative researchers use more naturalistic axioms for their description of qualitative trustworthiness (Creswell, 2007, p. 203). Maxwell (2002) presented a realist typology because he believed that "understanding is a more fundamental concept for qualitative research than validity" (p. 39). Each of these approaches is satisfactory in addressing the trustworthiness of qualitative research; however, for the sake of this dissertation I referred to Lincoln and Guba's (1996) analysis of trustworthiness as the means for garnering validity in qualitative research. Their approach to trustworthiness emphasizes credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility

Creditbility comes from using various data gathering methods and data verification methods. Lincoln and Guba (1996) recommended the following steps in securing credibility in qualitative research. *Prolonged engagement* implies a continual and lengthy time investment in the phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1996). The data gathering and analysis stage of this study was a prolonged engagement. This means that I had multiple opportunities to engage in the experiences of seminary spouses throughout the study. *Triangulation* indicates that a researcher uses at least three methods of data collection or data verification. In this study I used the Seminary Spouse Questionnaire, In-depth Interviews, and the Discussion Board Forum – Focus Group. *Peer debriefing* and *expert review* were employed as I interacted with my dissertation chair, committee members, and other professionals in the field regarding the focus, implementation, and analysis of this study/data.

Transferability

Thick descriptive data were incorporated into the essential descriptions of the phenomena. Essences were synthesized into a composite description using the narratives of the spouses themselves. These narratives provided the readers with the opportunity to take part in his or her own interpretations of the narration as they read and translate the essence of this experiences to his or her own experiences and schemas.

Dependability and Confirmability

Sandelowski (1986) described a 12 step process to imposing rigor through auditability in qualitative research. She explained that this is achieved by,

A description, explanation, or justification of (a) how the researcher became interested in the subject matter of the study, (b) how the researcher views the

thing studied, (c) the specific purpose(s) of the study, (d) how subjects or pieces

of evidence came to be included in the study and how they were approached, (e)

the impact the subjects or evidence and the researcher(s) had on each other, (f)

how the data were collected, (g) how long data collection lasted, (h) the nature of

the setting(s) in which data were collected, (i) how the data were reduced or

transformed for analysis, interpretation and presentation, (j) how various elements

of the data were weighted, (k) the inclusiveness and exclusiveness of the

categories developed to contain the data, and (l) the specific techniques used to

determine the truth value and applicability of the data. (pp. 34-35)

Creswell (2007) noted that using auditing processes improves both the dependability and

confirmability of the research project. Koch (2006) explained that auditing focused on

the events, influences, and actions of the researcher over the course of the research

process. This auditing process can be applied through the use of a decision trail, which

Koch (2006) describes as a sequentially written trail that links the "theoretical,

methodological and analytic choices throughout the study" (p. 92). Continuing on, Koch

(2006) defined confirmability as the process by which the researchers identify how they

have reached their interpretations via the inquiry (p. 92). Similarly, Lincoln and Guba

(1996) explained that confirmability was a result of an audit concerned with the product

(i.e., the results, the data, and the reconstructions). In order to achieve these ends, I kept

a decision trail and a reflective memo for the same of adding dependability and

confirmability to this study. These memo logs kept track of methodological,

administrative, and interpretive choices as a means for tracking my decisions in order to

facilitate trustworthiness.

Ethical Issues

Ethical considerations are an important part of all research. The particular ethical considerations for this study were threefold. The first was the anonymity of the participants. All participants (as well as participant spouses) referenced in this dissertation were given a pseudonym. Depending on the nature of the data, all data gathered during this study was securely stored via a locked office or a password protected computer file.

Another ethical consideration that needed to be considered was the potential of boundary blurring (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2006, 2007, 2008). This construct typically refers to blurred relational boundaries forged in the fields of counseling, psychotherapy, nursing, and medicine (Dickson-Swift et al., 2006); however, recent attention has been given to the boundaries between qualitative researcher and co-researcher (Dickson-Switft et al., 2006, 2007, 2008). Boundaries are generally defined as the space between persons (Scopelliti et al., 2004). Because of the need for boundaries between the counselor/counselee, Scopelliti et al. (2004) noted that boundary management is the responsibility of the clinician. Therefore, this idea of boundary blurring needs to be addressed by qualitative researchers who function in a similar role as a clinician would in the field of counseling, etc. Gilbert (2001) provided a framework for understanding this issue in the context of the qualitative researcher explaining,

> The combination of highly charged topics, an in-depth and long-term contact with the phenomenon, and the evolving emotional environment of the researcher's own social world may result in a lack of clarity or 'fuzziness' in boundaries. These boundaries must be negotiated and renegotiated, an ongoing part of the research

process, as a balance is sought between the dangers and benefits of being too far in or too far out of the lives of the researched. (p. 12)

Immersion into the life-world of the co-researchers is a hallmark of qualitative research (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). However, there is an emphasis also placed upon maintaining boundaries and a reflexive stance in order to avoid a complication of the research relationship (Dickson-Swift, 2006; Gilbert, 2001). Dickson-Swift et al. (2006) suggested that qualitative researchers researching sensitive topics create procedures for dealing with any blurring that occurs through the research process (p. 867). They specifically refer to "difficulties in leaving research relationships, researchers' feeling emotionally and physically overwhelmed by the commitments placed on them, physical symptoms, and burnout" as the negative consequences for researchers to watch for and avoid (p. 865). Included in their analysis on blurred boundaries was recognition of the potentially therapeutic nature of qualitative research. They noted that most researchers are not formally prepared to offer therapy to their participants, and those who are prepared are not functioning as counselor while in the role of researcher. In this same way, situations could have been imagined where participants desired some sort of spiritual counseling. While I am equipped to offer spiritual encouragement and edification, this was not my role as the researcher. In these cases I was prepared to offer contact information to participants for pastors and/or counselors should it have been needed. Once the study was concluded, correspondence with the participants ceased.

As a graded absolutist, I believe in ethical absolutes. This ethical classification assumes the likeliness of ethical conflict at some point in moral decision-making. In these situations it is responsibility of the graded absolutist (as opposed to unqualified absolutist

or conflicting absolutist) to choose the higher moral good (Geisler, 2010). Geisler (2010)

defines the principles of graded absolutism as the following:

> There are higher and lower moral duties – for example, love for God is a greater
>
> duty than love for people. These moral laws sometime come into unavoidable
>
> moral conflict. In such conflicts we are obligated to follow the higher moral law.
>
> When we follow the higher moral law, we are not held responsible for breaking
>
> the lower law. (p. 115)

Understanding this description of graded absolutism was important preparation for the

last of the possible ethical considerations for this study. While it may be difficult to

consider that a seminary student could be abusing his spouse or children, finding this

information would have presented an ethical dilemma between confidentiality and safety

of others. While I am thankful that this did not take place, *if* it had taken place, I would

have been presented an ethical dilemma. However, according to graded absolutism, there

is a hierarchy or an order of priority in moral law (Geisler, 2010). Thus, I would have

been responsible to the higher moral law and would not be held liable for the lesser of the

moral laws. In this case, confidentiality would have been broken and I would have

reported the information to my dissertation committee per university policy so that the

proper steps could be made to report this information to the appropriate authorities.

Summary

Thus far I have provided a foundation for exploring the spiritually formative

experiences of seminary spouses using the framework of transcendental phenomenology

(Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas' methodology was chosen because it provides a

framework for bracketing my own biases as I voice the experiences of female seminary

spouses, naively and without preconceived notations of what I might find. There is a

significant gap in the scholarly literature on the spiritually formative experiences of

seminary spouses. This gap exists whether these experiences are explored for online or

residential students/spouses. What is presented in the results section below will add to the

literature on the experiences of graduate student spouses, but it will nuance the research

in a way that has not been previously explored.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

Three research questions have guided the formation of this study and the analysis of this data. Consequentially, these questions will also guide the organization of this chapter. With regards to phenomenological organization, Milacci (2003) noted that, "Decisions regarding the construction of the phenomenological text fall solely upon the shoulders of the researcher" (p. 71). Therefore, this chapter, which is focused on the results of this study, will be organized around the following research questions:

1. How do nonstudent, seminary spouses describe their spiritual life at the beginning of their spouse's seminary experience?

2. What aspects of formation occur in the spiritual lives of female, seminary spouses while their husbands are in seminary?

3. How do nonstudent, seminary spouses describe the factors that have influenced their spiritual formation?

The remainder of this chapter will explore the answers to these research questions. Research question one will be answered in the form of a group portrait and a brief individual portrait of each participant. Research questions two and three will be synthetically organized around an exploration of the phenomenological descriptions and factors that have influenced the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses.

Participant Portraits

Phenomenological and narrative research is a process of re-presenting an experience of another (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Riessman, 1993). Groenewald (2009) and Kvale (1996) explained that data captured in qualitative research are quite

literally a process of an inter-view where the researcher *enters* the life of the participant

in order to *view* his or her experiences. This inter-view and re-presentation process are by

nature an interpretive process as the researcher renders a lived-experience into a narrative

form (Riessman, 2002; van Manen, 1990). The process of narrative depiction is valuable,

but it is not infallible because "human agency and imagination determine what gets

included and excluded in narrativization" (Riessman, 2002, p. 218). Therefore, what will

be presented in the following must be understood in three contexts. First what is

presented must be viewed in the context that the researcher is re-presenting the

experience of seminary wives from their narrative to my own. Riessman (2002) explained

this role saying that narrators "create plots from disordered experience" (p. 220). Second,

what is presented here is a translation of experiences from the time that seminary spouses

lived these experiences to the time that they re-presented these experiences in their own

oral depictions (Riessman, 1993). Narrative research is unique in this sense because it

does not take place in controlled or context-less environment. This type of research takes

place in the lives and the situations of the researcher and participant (Riessman, 1993).

Therefore, the stresses, stories, and life-setting of the participant all play into how the

story is re-presented on the day that participants were interviewed. The life-setting of the

researcher is also a part of the re-presentation of the narrative which, in turn, reveals the

shifting dynamics of phenomenology researched through narration. Third the experience

itself is being translated from being lived to being told which limits the experience to

language and to the imagination of the listener or reader (Riessman, 1993). Because of

the importance that context then plays on the fruits of the research, understanding the

participants at a portrait level is an important foundation for the results of this study.

Thus, the following discussion will begin by examining a group portrait before turning to individual participant portraits.

Group Portrait

In all, 15 spouses were interviewed as a part of this research project. Twelve of the fifteen spouses were categorized as online seminary spouses (Abigail, Brittany, Carrie, Danielle, Evangeline, Faith, Hailey, Ilise, Jocelyn, Kaitlyn, Mary, and Sarah), while three were categorized as residential seminary spouses (Natalie, Olivia, and Rachel). Olivia's husband, while categorized as a residential student based on his credits, has recently reclassified his program so that he can finish his degree online in order to work around the needs of his schedule at work. Conversely, Sarah's husband recently relocated to campus so that he could finish his degree in residence. These two spouses have a unique position in their reflection because they have experienced seminary as both a residential spouse and as an online spouse.

Spouses interviewed in this study came from various and different backgrounds. All spouses were married the entire length of their husbands' seminary experience, but the length of marriages ranged from almost 3 years to over 33 years. One couple had no children while three couples had five. Five of the couples interviewed had at least one spouse in their marriage that had been previously divorced. A different set of five spouses met their husband online in some form while one of them met their husband through a personal ad in a local newspaper.

These spouses also have a wide range of religious backgrounds and stories. When asked about their conversion experience, 10 participants shared that this took place early in their lives before their teenage years, while five noted that conversion to Christianity took place in adulthood. Three of these five noted that they did not have their own

conversion experience until *after* their husband started seminary. Two of these three

noted that their husbands had taken on a pastoral role before they experienced their own

conversion. Most of these wives grew up in various Protestant denominations, while two

grew up in the Roman Catholic Church. One grew up Mormon only to fully renounce her

Mormon faith after her husband started seminary and had taken his first pastoral role.

This wide range of religious backgrounds provides insight into what may be the new

norm of seminary spouses. Each individual is unique and therefore their portrait and life-

story will be different. It will also contextualize their experiences of spiritual formation

during their years as a seminary spouse.

Individual Portraits

The following section will present specific and detailed portraits of individual

spouses (see Table 2 for overview). In this section, pictures of spouses and where these

spouses were in their spiritual lives at the beginning of seminary will be presented, along

with how they have summarized their spiritual locations now that they are several years

into the seminary experience. This re-presentation of these seminary spouses' spiritual

lives will correspond to research question one. As noted previously, all names (spouses

and students) that follow are pseudonyms.

Table 2

Participant Overview

Spouse	Educational Medium	Years Married	Children
Abigail	Online	2.75	No
Brittany	Online	10.5	Yes
Carrie	Online	33.5	Yes
Danielle	Online	14	Yes
Evangeline	Online	9	Yes
Faith	Online	17	Yes
Hailey	Online	10	Yes
Ilise	Online	6	Yes
Jocelyn	Online	10	Yes

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Kailyn	Online	10	Yes
Mary	Online	17	Yes
Natalie	Residential	3	Yes
Olivia	Residential	15	Yes
Rachel	Residential	4.5	Yes
Sarah	Online	6	Yes

Abigail. At an early age Abigail's parents sent her and her sisters to church each week with a neighbor who lived across the street. It was through this church experience that Abigail eventually experienced her own religious conversion. Abigail's spiritual formation started long before she met her husband. She said, "Before [Andrew] had started seminary a lot of my spiritual formation was definitely more of a feeling type. I was very much into what I felt with God." In further elaborating on her spiritual life pre-seminary, she described it in two different ways. First she said that she was "fairly mature spiritually prior to him starting his coursework." Yet, in another instance she explained that while she was working in ministry, spiritual formation was a natural thing for her to cultivate in life; however, as life progresses it is easy to "lose some of those things because you're so inundated with time constraints and, and needed to get things done." She went on to explain,

> So for me, I had actually, um, it was really actually lacking in my spiritual disciplines... you know, I would still say, oh, I feel very close to God and I know that He loves me and I do talk to Him all the time, but I didn't actually take the time and sometimes even still don't take the time, um, to just sit and read His Word.

Brittany. Brittany's conversion experience took place while she was in elementary school. She grew up in a Christian home and had been asking her parents questions about what it meant to become a Christian. About six months after she started

asking these spiritual questions, her church had a revival and the preacher was speaking about the reality of Hell. She said that during the altar call, "I pretty much ran down the aisle and said I don't wanna go there." She pointed out that this was the beginning of her Christian walk noting that her faith was childlike at this point. Throughout life she had ups and downs in her spiritual walk, but at some point she "sold out to Christ."

Brittany described her spiritual life before seminary as "fairly mature, but with *plenty* of room for growth" (emphasis original). On several occasions Brittany noted that she has a stronger desire for spiritual formation because of her husband's time in seminary; however, her current life schedule has impacted her ability to set aside time to invest in her own growth. She said,

> I find myself jealous at times of his rapidly growing understanding of the Word and his grasping of new insights now that he better understands the original languages. I desire that….but although I now have more access to the tools and his knowledge to help me, I find little time to get the chance to dig in due to the added responsibilities.

Carrie. When Carrie was a child she remembers her own conversion experience taking place during a sermon focusing on the need for and steps to salvation. She recognized her own personal need for a relationship with Christ that was not dependent on anyone else. When Carrie's husband enrolled in seminary, Carrie described her spiritual life as tired. She said, "I was probably – um – how many people see this – actually, God already knows [laughing]. It doesn't matter if anybody else knows [laughing] – no hidden secrets here. I – um – I was probably at a lull." At this point in life, her husband's vocation and ministry was focused on "troubleshooting" struggling churches that had recently split or were on the verge of splitting. Often these churches

couldn't afford to pay a full salary and so he would often have to work bi-vocationally. Throughout his ministry he has pastored churches in six different states which meant that they were constantly moving, resettling, and having to re-prove themselves to their new churches. All of these experiences led to a spiritual exhaustion in Carrie. Her husband's seminary education has challenged her to get up and start again.

Danielle. In reflecting on her own conversion experience, Danielle shared about her father's conversion. She remembers the importance that he placed on church during her childhood because of his own religious conversion. She credited his leadership with being part of the impetus for her own conversion when she was eight years old. Later in life, after heading to college, she became apathetic in her faith, not renouncing or falling away from her faith, but not pursuing it with the purpose or intimacy that was characteristic of her pursuit during childhood. It was during these college years that the Lord slowly showed her that her life needed to be redirected.

Danielle reflected on her formation from the beginning of seminary and has realized that her spiritual formation is "expanding." She said that at the beginning of her husband's studies that spiritually she was "stuck in neutral. Not growing" and "present but not intimate." She continued, "I struggled for a really long time to get it to the point where I feel like I'm growing." Now that her husband is most of the way through seminary she has recognized that seminary has contributed to her own growth and spiritual formation by challenging her to grow in the relational aspects of her formation and in her own ministry calling.

Evangeline. Evangeline remembers her conversion experience taking place when she was in children's church at the age of seven. She explained that her faith started out of respect for her parents, but later it became personally real as she cultivated her

relationship with the Lord. At the beginning of seminary, Evangeline reflected on her spiritual life as "very mature." However, during the interview she said,

> I mean, it – it was there. It was a hard time though because — I don't know. It's just after ya have a baby, there's all kinds of — hormones and all these things that go on. So I think I went through a round of depression for a while and kind of lost my footing – um – with my walk with the Lord.

Recently she has noticed a growth in her own relationship and walk with the Lord commenting that now, "It's much more – um – prevalent in my life, I guess. It's much more [of the] focus of my life." She elaborated on this saying,

> My spiritual life has gone through many ups and downs. A lot of that was/is due to life and things that we go through as adults, but some of the contributing factors are from Edward being in seminary. However, through it all, I can say that my Christian walk is more solid today than it was when we began this whole process.

Faith. It never made sense to Faith that she needed to confess her sins through a priest instead of going straight to God to make her confession. Being raised in the Roman Catholic Church, Faith knew this was expected of her. During the summers when she would visit her aunt, she would attend a Protestant church. Shortly after this introduction to Protestant theology, Faith experienced her own conversion testimony. She tried to live the Christian life throughout her childhood and adolescent years, but it was in college that she realized living the Christian life is not sufficient; it is Christ who saves, and during this time, she solidified her faith and realized that she wanted to follow Christ.

When Faith was asked about her spiritual maturity before seminary, she said that on a scale it would be a seven but now, with a busier schedule and demands on her time,

it would be a five. However, later when asked about how seminary was an impact on her current spiritual life, she said, "I think before, I would just read the Bible [but]since Frederick has been in seminary, it's like causing me to dig deeper, I guess." She went on to say that when she was in college, she used to do inductive Bible studies, "But since then, I haven't had the chance or the— or the desire pretty much." Later on in the interview she returned to reflecting on her current formation practices saying, "It kinda like goes back and forth. Sometimes I feel really weak in that [prayer] area. And sometimes I feel – I feel really strong in that area." She concluded this line of discussion sharing that Frederick's seminary experience is a significant reason of her growth experience especially because of the classes he has taken on prayer and the course material he has shared with her.

Hailey. When Hailey was six months old, her older brother passed away. Shortly before this event her parents joined the Mormon Church. Whether it was explicitly or implicitly expressed, there was great comfort shared by her parents in the fact that Mormon doctrine espouses the idea that family is forever, meaning that family is truly eternal if they are joined together under the covenant and reach the highest level of heavenly exaltation (Church of Latter-day Saints, 2012). Thus, according to the doctrine of the church, their family would eventually rejoin him for eternity after death. When Hailey turned 14, her father passed away from cancer, and 15 months later, her sister passed away without warning. Throughout all of these losses, the Mormon Church provided love and the hope that they would see their loved ones again.

During Hailey's first year of marriage to Harold, he started to realize that he needed to get his faith straight and shortly thereafter returned to his evangelical, theological roots. Upon returning, he felt the call to pursue a pastoral vocation. It was at

this point of time that Hailey started to realize that their differing faith was causing tension in their marriage. She felt that she had the following three options: (a) continue with her marriage the way it was with two differing belief systems that caused contention, (b) get a divorce, or (c) figure out where she wanted to be spiritually. This realization started a process in her life where she began to explore questions about what she believed and who she wanted to be. She explained this journey saying, "[I] just did a lot a soul searching for myself and a lot a researching and praying and spent a lot a time on my knees and – and — realized that – um – it [Mormonism] just wasn't for me."

Hailey had not come to her own consensus on her theological beliefs until after Harold took his first pastorate. It was during his first Easter sermon that she realized what was offered in salvation through Christ. This realization led her to her own conversion experience because she realized that the requisite qualifications placed on salvation, by Mormon doctrine, were not necessary. Instead all she had to do was believe in Christ and respond to his offer of salvation.

Ilise. Ian and Ilise met at church, working on a theater production. She was in high school and he was recently out of high school. They continued their friendship and eventually were engaged years later while on a mission trip with their church. Shortly after they married, he started seminary and she explained, "The initial months that he spent in seminary were very hard on our relationship because of resentment and jealousy that I was experiencing over the amount of time that he was spending [in] study." This resentment and jealousy eventually gave way after she began to understand why he spent so much time in his studies.

During a revival at their church, Ilise realized that her knowledge of Christ was merely factual knowledge rather than relational knowledge. This recognition upset her

and she hesitated sharing this with her husband who was the youth minister at their church. Later that night before going home, she had to help Ian with a course project. It was an evangelism/missions course that required gathering together in a small group and praying for a specific people group that had limited access to the gospel message. She could not concentrate throughout the evening. Ian recognized her frustration when they were heading to bed later that night. After recounting her realization earlier in the night, Ian prayed with her and led her into her own, personal relationship with Christ. Since this experience she has learned to not feel as overwhelmed in life. She has started to be purposeful in her own spiritual formation and growth as she has observed the purposefulness of her husband's investment in his own formation.

Jocelyn. Jocelyn consistently described her pre-seminary spiritual condition as non-specific, but interested in spirituality. She grew up in a Lutheran church and referred to a childhood experience where "something just touched me." She said this was the moment "when I feel like for the first time I met God." However, in her post-seminary reflection, she said that these experiences during childhood and adulthood were "non-specific." She explained her non-specific spirituality as the process of "gleaning philosophies from different religions or— or just things you hear, things you read – nothing that is with such as— as the Bible being as important to me as it is now – as a center—no center."

At first Jocelyn was excited that Jacob wanted to pursue a seminary education. She explained her spiritual disposition at this point in life saying, "We both believed in God. I accepted Jesus. At that point, I'm gonna say I *felt like* I accepted Jesus" (original emphasis). It wasn't until Jocelyn developed her own relationship with Christ that she was able to fully understand why Jacob was pursuing his seminary studies. She explained

that as a result of their relational disconnection, she started searching. She said, "Once I started really reading the Bible— and reading some of the things Jacob gave me to read—I would—edit his papers….Some just touch my heart." She summarized her spiritual journey saying,

> All I can say is where before I felt like a spiritual person, and I felt everything's – ya know—there is a greater good; there is a God—I now have a very personal relationship with Jesus in that I feel like—the walk that he took on this earth was for me.

Kaitlyn. Being raised Catholic gave Kaitlyn an understanding of faith and religion. However, she did not come to Christ until she was a young adult during a sermon at a Protestant church. Once she heard the gospel message, she was ready for her own conversion. When her husband Kenneth decided to start seminary in 2003, she described her current spiritual life saying, "Back then it wasn't as mature." She admitted that at this time she attended church, but "as far as our relationship, I think, with Christ— I think I didn't know as much then as I, of course, as I do now in terms of discipleship and all that type a stuff and the Great Commission." In expanding on this spiritual assessment of her pre-seminary life, she said, "I would describe my spiritual maturity as 'still growing.' I attended church and studied the Bible etc., but did not consider myself to be a 'mature' Christian yet." Regarding her spiritual life now she says, "Of course, it's a lot better" but "I could grow further." She went on to explain

> In my experience as a being a seminary spouse, I would say that my spiritual formation has matured. My husband shared many of the books and ideas that he had learned with me. I learned a lot about discipleship, the Great Commission,

and other ways to reach people through ministry. I read a couple of the books and now seek out writing and opportunities to hear other pastors.

Mary. Growing up in the home of a pastor taught Mary about the importance of ministry. This lesson has followed her throughout her life. Her conversion experience took place at a young age. She commented that some people in the church are skeptical of young conversions, but even though she was young she understood that she needed a savior. She explained that as she matured, she grew in the understanding of the significance of her salvation. Mary also knew from a young age that she was called to serve in ministry, and while she was not sure what kind of ministry this would be, she knew that it would be a part of her life.

Mary described her spiritual formation saying that it is a "conglomeration of many things." She went on to summarize her formation using the phrase, "In Christ alone." She further explained that she has learned that her ministry effectiveness is contingent upon her spiritual life. Before seminary her faith was strong, but it has definitely grown through the process, in that, "Seminary has caused me to become more independent in my faith."

Natalie. Natalie grew up in a Lutheran home that was committed to Christ and replicated this dedication in her, but this relationship waned during her first marriage. After her divorce and before meeting her present husband she had moved east and started attending church again which "allowed for a lot of healing, a lot of restoration, [and] a rededication of my life." It was during this time that she first intentionally pursued spiritual formation.

Because of Natalie's previous experiences, she described her pre-seminary spiritual formation as a purposeful pursuit in life. She said, "I was grounded and rooted in

my understanding of the Word of God and my calling as His daughter." Her recognition of the importance of spiritual formation was founded long before seminary, but it did mature through her husband's seminary experience. Some of this maturation was the result of seminary, but a greater portion of this maturation came from her new marriage and having a husband who became a genuine spiritual leader in the home. She said,

> I would say that my relationship with the Lord now is more developed. It's a process of being refined. There was so much for so long that I didn't know because I was just unfamiliar with the Bible, where now, it's more of a continual, deliberate, being consistent – ya know – more of a relationship.

Olivia. As a single mother, Olivia was working her way through college when she met Oliver who ended up being a major impetus for her own conversion experience. She was raised Roman Catholic, and he was raised Baptist. While they were dating, they would have theological conversations and through these conversations she became aware of what the Bible says about salvation through grace. What she did not know at the time was that Oliver, even though he was sharing with her what the Bible says about salvation, had not experienced his own personal conversion. It wasn't until several years into their marriage that he had his own conversion experience.

Olivia explained that it is difficult to assess her spiritual life before seminary because of her husband's continuous enrollment in college moving directly from his undergraduate studies to seminary. In spite of this she said, "I can always be more mature, but I wouldn't count myself as immature while he was doing his undergrad work, either. We learned a lot prior to him starting seminary." She explained that before her husband started his education, "I had very little confidence in myself. I was—I was starting to do better but just didn't have the confidence in myself, really, and didn't have

the full knowledge of who I am in Christ." Since then she said, "[God has] really pushed us in a lot a ways to where I've gained a lot of confidence. I feel a whole lot more comfortable now talking about my spirituality."

Rachel. Her conversion experience was always a story Rachel remembered hearing about while she was growing up; however, she did not personally remember the event. When she was 11 years old she realized that if she was unable to remember the event it might be something that she needed to reevaluate. Consequently she rededicated her life to Christ and now uses this experience as the expression of her conversion.

Rachel described her spiritual formation before seminary saying that it was present and real, but "it was lacking." She saw the relocation process to seminary as a chance to start fresh and to be put in a position where she would be challenged to grow spiritually. She went on to explain that through seminary God has redirected her passions and vision for her future ministry. Before seminary she said she was thankful that she would never be called to be a church planter, but now "God has completely changed me where I'm like [church planting's] all I wanna do. I'm really, really excited and looking forward and scared to do it." This current description of her spiritual formation was expressed with excitement and anticipation of the future. Through seminary she has been challenged to grow in practical ways that she looks forward to using in her future ministry.

Sarah. Sarah's conversion experience took place when she was nine years old, but it grew in stages of commitment. When she was 16, she reconfirmed her previous decision and then again in her early 30s. She said that it was at this time in her 30s that she "gave [Christ] lordship over my life."

Toward the beginning of the interview process Sarah said, "I don't know that [seminary] has impacted my spiritual formation." She explained that before seminary and even before she was married to Samuel, she was mature in her faith. She was involved in ministry and her spirituality has remained a consistent emphasis in her life throughout Samuel's education. In spite of her statements here, the interview process revealed that her explanation reflected a narrow view of spiritual formation that did not include intellectual growth as a component of spiritual formation. When asked, she agreed that while her husband's seminary education did not necessarily impact her devotional commitment, it has positively impacted her ability to understand theology.

Summary

The group and individual portraits in the preceding sections are an important part of the phenomenological and narrative process (van Manen, 1990). They are phenomenological because they are based on experience, and they are narrative because the experiences are re-presented by a second-party narrator. As Riessman (1993) observed, "Nature and the world do not tell stories, individuals do" (p. 2). In the following section these narratives will be used as the foundation for a synthesized, phenomenological analysis of the spiritually formative experiences of female, seminary spouses in order to create a new presentation of these experiences for third-party readers who will then assimilate these experiences into their own personal narrative.

Phenomenological Descriptions of Spiritually Formative Experiences

Overview

Finding phenomenological descriptions is the task of doing phenomenological research. The challenge of thematic analysis is reflected by Riessman's (2002) explanation that "narrators create plots from disordered experiences" (p. 220). Therefore,

that which follows, while viewed transcendentally and naively will be an interpretation of the participant's re-presented narrative and my re-presentation of these narratives into a written medium.

Data Analysis and Organization

Research in the area of family life professionals reveals a common taxonomy for assessing the impact of spillover experiences (Duncan & Goddard, 1993; Sori et al., 1996; Stevanovic & Rupert, 2009; Wetchler & Piercy, 1986). *Spillover*, as defined in the literature, is an experience that travels from one life domain to another. *Crossover*, on the other-hand, is when that same experience traverses domain borders and impacts another person (Bolger et al., 1989; Crossfield et al., 2005; Grzywacz, 2000; Staines, 1980; Westman & Etzion, 1995). The nomenclature used to assess spillover in the lives of family professionals is that of enhancers and stressors (Duncan & Goddard, 1993; Sori et al., 1996; Stevanovic & Rupert, 2009). The designation of enhancement is also a common term used in human resource management literature (Matthew & Panchanatham, 2010; Ruderman et al., 2002; Tiedje et al., 1990; Wadsworth & Owens, 2007). In human resource management, enhancement is used euphemistically for positive spillover, enrichment, or facilitation (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Duncan and Goddard (1993) found that family professionals/spouses experienced work to home spillover that both enhanced their marriage and stressed their marriage. This definition of spillover used by Duncan and Goddard is generic and would be better classified as spillover and crossover (Bolger et al., 1989; Grzywacz, 2000; Staines, 1980). Similarly, the experiences a student personally takes from school to home are spillover experiences, but when their spouse shares in these experiences it is crossover. Thus,

relational experiences that traverse borders provide either enhancement or stress (Duncan & Goddard, 1993; Sori et al., 1996; Stevanovic & Rupert, 2009).

The implications of the enhancer/stressor research, as applied here, is that spiritual formation is an inherently relational experience (Demarest, 2010; Strobel, 2013) and, therefore, able to adapt this framework for the purpose of this current study. This taxonomy of enhancers and stressors could be used as a vehicle for clarifying the spousal experiences of spiritual formation as spiritually formative experiences cross over from the domain of their husband's seminary education. While Duncan and Goddard's (1993) terminology is valuable, the connotation of stressors may not the best descriptor for the data. Instead of stressors of spiritual formation, I will refer to detractors of spiritual formation. Therefore, the data analysis portion of this study will be organized around these two aspects or themes of crossover experiences: Enhancers and Detractors of Spiritual Formation. Included in the Enhancers of Formation are the following three subthemes: *Relational enhancers, Intellectual enhancers,* and *Practical enhancers*. Following these enhancements will be an explanation of the Detractors of Formation. In the explication of these two themes which follows, the research will synthesize the textural and structural essences of the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses per Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological framework. The textural essence (noematic essence) of an experience answers the questions pertaining to *what* is experienced by the participant. The structural essence (noetic essence) is *how* this experience is experienced. This synthetic organization is built around the supposition that the separation between *what* and *how*, or texture and structure, is a fine expression and therefore will be presented linearly. Instead of presenting the phenomenological descriptions and the factors of influence as textural and structural essences, experiences

will be synthesized into a singular narrative re-presenting categorical experiences that integrate the answers of research question two and research question three in one narration without distinction.

Theme One: Enhancers of Spiritual Formation

Enhancers of spiritual formation are experiences that added to the formation experiences of spouses. Kaitlyn explained her experience as a seminary spouse in a way that encapsulates the three subthemes of enhancement. Her reflection provides a glimpse into how these themes operate collaboratively and as a unique aspect of the whole of spiritual formation. Specifically, when asked about what it takes to be spiritually equipped, a term she referred to independently, Kaitlyn said that it requires (a) a relationship with God, (b) better knowledge of the Bible, and (c) living it—or practicing what has been formed inwardly. What she recognized in her statement was the inclusion of *Relational enhancers, Intellectual enhancers,* and *Practical enhancers* as experiential aspects that generate spiritual formation.

Relational Enhancers

In order to understand how relationships enhanced spiritual formation it is valuable to recognize that spouses discussed these relationships in two distinct spheres. The first sphere is identified as *horizontal enhancement,* a term used here to describe the relationship between spouse and student and spouse and others as these relationships encourage spiritual formation. The second sphere, termed *vertical enhancement*, describes the relationship between the spouse and God through Jesus Christ and/or the Holy Spirit. Therefore the sections below will start with an explication of horizontal enhancers followed by vertical enhancers.

Horizontal relationships. Horizontal relationships are primarily those that take place between the spouse and student. However, on occasion others in the family or community of believers aided in the spiritual formation experiences of seminary spouses. The following will examine the experiences of seminary spouses as they were challenged toward formation by their spouses and challenged by others.

Spousal relationships. While all participants expressed that their husband's spiritual formation had a significant impact on their own spiritual formation, Rachel and Kaitlyn provided the most succinct statements. Rachel, for example, said, "Seminary has a huge influence on Robert. So it's gonna have an influence on me…Robert is my husband. He is my spiritual leader. So anything that has an influence on him is gonna have an influence on me." Kaitlyn explained this differently but with the same reference to how her relationship with her husband led to a matured relationship with God saying, "Even though each of us is responsible for our own spiritual maturity and our own relationship with God, I found that I wanted to mature and grow with him. It was not in a competitive way, but rather it was to complement him." Abigail, Brittany, Danielle, Evangeline and Mary also commented on how seminary has challenged their husbands' formation which has in turn challenged their own formation. Brittany shared,

> As I see Bradley growing spiritually and in his understanding of the Scripture and
> as he gain[s] access and understanding of resource tools that we now have, it is
> growing in me a desire to also get my hands on those resources and gain a better
> understanding of the Scripture along with him.

Abigail explained that her maturation experience was unique as an online spouse because her husband did not have a professor to sit down and talk with when he had theological questions. Instead, she became the sounding board for these queries. They had to, as a

team, come to a resolution together rather than depending on a professor to solve these theological dilemmas for them.

Ilise, Jocelyn, and Hailey also experienced formation through their spouse. In the narrative of each of these wives their spouse had a significant impact on their spiritual formation. This was because their husbands played a central role in the conversion experience of these spouses. Hailey recalled, "I think the reason— well, the reason why I did convert fully is because of one of his sermons. It just really touched me." After Ian led Ilise in her conversion experience, he modeled the Christian life to her. She said, "It is very challenging and uplifting to see him grow and mature. It makes me want to better myself and experience the same kinds of growth and maturity."

Natalie, Jocelyn, and Evangeline explained that their husbands have grown in their ability to provide spiritual leadership in the home. Jocelyn expressed a profound level of respect as she reflected on the confidence she has gained in her husband's ability to lead their family. She attributes his leadership maturation to his personal, spiritual formation stemming from his seminary experience, which has in turn impacted her own formation. Evangeline also recognized this transformation brought about by seminary saying,

> He is much better at being the spiritual leader of our family than he was before… I believe that our decision for Edward to go to seminary was one of the most important decisions we have made in our life together. The impact it has had on him has affected every part of our lives from his own Christian walk, to our marriage relationship, to his relationship with our children. Because of how grounded he is and how solid his relationship with Jesus is now, I trust him fully and am glad to follow his leadership in our life together. Because of his spiritual

leadership, I am challenged to deepen my relationship with Christ....The depth I see in him now is not something I would have seen in him if he hadn't gone to seminary.

Part of being a spiritual leader in the home is a biblical emphasis on family discipleship or training (Deut. 6:4-8, Prov. 22:6). Kaitlyn said that they always prayed with their children, but now they do a Bible study with them every night. This has helped their family to be on the same page and has helped them in assisting their children in their own spiritual development. Sarah, Olivia, and Evangeline also discussed the role of family or couple's devotions as a discipline in their formation practices. Sarah explained that her day includes personal Bible study and also prayer time with her husband so that their family decisions are made in order to honor God. Olivia explained that her husband has led her in formation through these devotional times. He has done this by finding books that will challenge them both on a spiritual and intellectual level.

Brittany, Carrie, Hailey, Kaitlyn, Natalie, Rachel, and Hailey experienced relational enhancement through the encouragement of their husband's preaching. Hailey was overtly impacted by her husband's preaching because her conversion experience took place during one of his sermons. Conversely, Brittany, Carrie, Hailey, Kaitlyn, Natalie, Rachel were less explicitly formed by their husband's sermons, but all mentioned them as a valuable aspect of their formation. This is evidenced in Rachel's statement as she explains that seminary "has given him more knowledge yes, but more importantly a greater passion for understanding, sharing, and teaching God's Word." In a similar vein, Carrie said that if she had known how impactful seminary was going to be on Carl's preaching that she might have let him enroll in seminary earlier. She continued by saying that she is not the only person to have noticed the "renewed vigor" in his preaching.

Kaitlyn explained that her husband has become more adept at preaching. She said, "Now, it's a different level than…when he first started." Brittany also found this to be true in her husband's preaching as compared to before seminary. She said, "[Before] his preach' was uh—I mean, even as his wife, I was like good job [laughing]. But—um—it wasn't anything fantastic." She went on to explain,

> Now when he preaches, it's phenomenal. And I'm not just sayin' that as a proud wife, just as a—anybody who has watched him over the past four years can see his work is remarkable preaching—his understanding of the Word, his desire to read the Bible all the time or just to be immersed into it especially because of Greek and he now understand[s] different things.

Other-Centered relationships. Most of the horizontal relationships discussed had to do with the relationship between husband and wife; however, Danielle, Faith, Ilise, Jocelyn, Kaitlyn, Olivia and Sarah noted the impact of horizontal relationships from individuals other than their spouse. Danielle, Jocelyn, and Ilise explained that their parental role has revealed new perspectives on their relationship with God as the Father. Ilise expanded on this concept by explaining that she is motivated to invest in her own spiritual formation for the sake of her son saying, "I want him to see that [formation] in me. I don't wanna be the one he sees and thinks, well, Dad took it seriously [laugh]. But I don't know what Mom did [laughing]." Faith's experiences were perhaps the broadest in how she experienced horizontal-relational enhancement of her formation as her daughter, her sister, and a close friend were all mentioned as individuals who encouraged her maturation. Olivia and Kaitlyn's other-centered formation stemmed from the relationships with their church community. Sarah was the only spouse who specifically

tied the other-centered formation into her seminary experience sharing about the formation that takes place from her involvement in seminary chapel service on campus.

Vertical relationship. One's vertical relationship with God is recognition of one's position as it relates to God's transcendence (Tozer, 2009). This positional awareness is rooted in the process of being placed *in Christ* by God the Father. 1 Corinthians 1:30 says, "And because of him [God], you are in Christ Jesus." In Christian theology, being placed in Christ is an event that takes place at the point of conversion. Hailey, Ilise, and Jocelyn experienced their conversion after their husband started seminary. Therefore, their ontological and eschatological position changed after seminary by being placed in Christ. Before seminary each of them embraced varying degrees of spirituality or religion. Ilise explained her embrace of religion saying, "I was doin' all the things that—ya know—you are 'supposed to do.' But there was no life in it—ya know. It was just kind of—it was dead." Jocelyn's version of spiritual formation was a system of spiritualized morality gleaned from various philosophies. Early in the seminary experience, spouses found themselves feeling bitter and jealous of the time their husbands invested in their education, but through this same investment by their husbands, each spouse became aware of their own need for reconciliation and conversion. Ilise said, "And so I—when I was saved, it—it changed for me. And I saw the purpose in what he was doin'. And—ya know—it changed my attitude towards what he was doin'."

Hailey's conversion experience took place during her husband's first Easter sermon. What struck her during the sermon was the passion that Christ expressed on the cross for her. It was her understanding that his death was purposed for her personally. When she recognized this reality, she understood the necessity of having a relationship with Christ. Jocelyn's experience was less of an event, but more of a process of coming

to grips with who Christ was and is. She said, "All I can say is where before I felt like a spiritual person, and I felt…there is a greater good; there is a God—I now have a very personal relationship with Jesus." Throughout her interview she explained that now "it's our lives" and everything "center[s] around it." She consistently referred to the importance of understanding God's love in this process saying, "You feel it inside. Everything wells out of you…it's really, really boiled down to a pure love."

The theological impact of being *in Christ* implies an increased level of spiritual freedom (Rom. 8:1), spiritual victory (2 Cor. 2:14), and spiritual blessing from above (Eph. 1:3). Rachel recognized the fruit of this ontological location saying, "At the end of my day, I want to be able to say that I have claimed the victory I have in Christ in the areas I struggle in." Ilise shared about the freedom she has experienced through her recognition of her position in Christ. Prior to her conversion experience she was an anxious person, but through this transforming process, she has learned to not let her anxieties weigh her down. Jocelyn shared that worry does not occur in her life in the same way that it occurred previous to her conversion experience or her husband's seminary experience.

Rachel, Sarah, and Mary experienced formation in unique manners because of their own recognition of their position of dependence before God. Mary shared that she grew in her faith because of her husband, but she also grew in spite of her husband. She explained this saying, "Seminary has caused me to become more independent in my faith because I can't rely on my husband…. I can't use the busyness that he is going through as an excuse for me to set my spiritual life aside." She went on to say that because of this her spiritual life is more personal.

Personal in the sense where—not that my husband and I don't have time together. But so often, our time that is spent, it's—this is what's going on with the kids. This is what's going on here. This is what's going on in the ministry. We don't have as much of that personal time together to be able to discuss spiritual things. And—so my walk with my Lord is a lot more personal. Um—it's a lot more private. That's not necessarily a bad thing. But I had to force myself to be more accountable for myself. Because—um—we don't have as much of that time together—to be able to discuss spiritual things.

Rachel and Sarah both recognized their own position of dependence on God through tangible experiences. Sarah explained that she has matured because of the circumstances surrounding life and their relocation to seminary. When they packed up to move to the residential program, she started experiencing some health problems. She said that some days "God was all I had to hold onto." She went on to describe what this type of growth is like saying, "It's a wonderful thing. And it really is just very reaffirming when you are able to know that God's there—always, regardless of how you feel or what you're goin' through." Rachel's experience was similar in that she has recognized the importance of dependence on God. She explained this lesson saying, "God has just come through and come through over and over again. And he provided for us and made this possible and just—really just blessed us in so many ways—um—just materially and spiritually." Sarah reflected on this idea of learned dependence saying, "As we grew in the Lord, we learned that we need to lean on him—more, whether we think we know the right way or not."

Intellectual Enhancers

Intellectual enhancers is the second subtheme of enhancements to spiritual formation. This subtheme is not always recognized as an important aspect of spiritual formation. Sarah demonstrated ambivalence to the importance of intellectual enhancement as a key construct in spiritual formation. When she reflected on her husband's seminary experience, she explained that seminary did not have much of an impact on her spiritual formation. However, shortly thereafter she explained that what Samuel was learning in his classes was revelatory and challenging to her on a practical level. She went on to share that the seminary chapel services can be "dangerous" because they make you "take stock of your life and of your relationship with Christ." To her, this aspect of learning was separate from spiritual formation instead of an important part of the whole. Two common subthemes emerged as aspects of this intellectual enhancement of spiritual formation: proofreading/editing and learning/study.

Proofreading/editing. The concepts of proofreading and editing were reoccurring themes leading to the formation of seminary spouses. Abigail, Brittany, Carrie, Danielle, Evangeline, Faith, Jocelyn, Mary, Olivia, Rachel, and Sarah, all shared that their husbands' homework impacted their own spiritual development. Brittany had the most concise statements about how seminary enhanced her intellect as a component of spiritual formation. She said that she "grew in Christ because [she] just read what he wrote." Danielle also experienced growth through editing her husband's papers. She explained this saying, "I edit all of his papers…I mean, I can read a 32-page paper on 12 books, say, and get exactly—it all funneled down to the meat of what needs to be said." She went on to explain,

Seminary helped me realize the formation of the Bible. Before it was just a here's a collection of stories. I believed them. But they don't all fit together. Ya know—it's a book written by God, but it doesn't have any significance [until] you put it all together, I guess…But it took a really long time for it to click.

Carrie and Mary shared that they often feel like they are learning right alongside of their husbands. Not only does Mary proofread her husband's papers, but they discuss them as well so that she is able to understand what she is reading. This practice gives them an opportunity to dialogue about their faith. She said that proofreading "has allowed me to be a part of that course of study without actually doing most of the work. He does all the work. [And] I enjoy [the benefits]." She continued by explaining the unique way that the Lord has used this method of formation in her life and in her relationship with her husband.

I have to laugh because God has a way of dealing with both my husband and I through whatever book my husband is reading or assignment he has to submit. How God does it is beyond me but He always seems to bring out the areas in our lives that we are struggling with. My husband will use his life situations in his writing as well as candidly expressing how a certain book changed his life. He knows I am going to read what he writes yet he never holds back. His honesty breaks down my defenses and allows God to pierce my heart to make the necessary changes I need. Sometimes we talk about it, sometimes we just give each other a kiss and smile but watching the growth in my husband through his papers has inspired me to want to grow more.

Jocelyn shared that not only was editing an important part of her growth throughout seminary, but it was one of the key factors in her conversion experience.

Early in her husband's seminary experience before her own conversion she would read and edit his papers. Some of these papers challenged her spiritually and also gave her an understanding of scripture. Throughout this process she learned about the prophecies and how the Bible fit together in the big picture and it encouraged her to start asking questions about salvation which ultimately led to her conversion.

Curriculum and study. All of the spouses mentioned specific aspects of the seminary curriculum that impacted their husband and then translated to themselves as their husband shared what he learned (See Table 2). Faith shared saying, "For me, I love it because I get to learn alongside him and not be responsible to write a paper or deliver the sermon." Evangeline put this in her own words saying,

> Specifically, I can see what he is learning in his classes played out in his life. Many times when I am editing his papers I will read something that he is doing in his life, because of his class, and I can see the difference tangibly.

Olivia explained that her husband's hermeneutics course had an impact on her own understanding. Carrie, Danielle, Evangeline, Faith, and Mary were impacted by the courses related to pastoral counseling because of their practical impact on their marriages. Mary shared that what her husband learned in his counseling classes he immediately applied in their marriage relationship. Danielle, likewise, explained that her husband's counseling classes had the most impact on her because they were related to topics that had application in her everyday life. Carrie, Faith, Ilise, Jocelyn, and Natalie explained that the church history courses were extremely beneficial in their development because it placed the church and the issues in the church in the context of history which led them to realize that the positives and the negatives of the church have been experienced by generations past. Carrie explained that it was encouraging to her to realize

through these church history courses that their church was not the only imperfect church in history. Natalie explained her own fascination with church history saying, "I think the most interesting ones for me were church history. Because no matter how many times you read the Bible—that doesn't have church history in it, really—except for the beginning part."

Table 3

Spousal Formation Enhancements through Seminary Curriculum

Course	Spouses														
	A	B	C	D	E	F	H	I	J	K	M	N	O	R	S
Apologetics						x									x
Church History			x			x		x				x			
Church Planting										x				x	
Conflict Resolution						x									
Counseling			x	x	x	x					x				
Discipleship										x					
Greek												x		x	
Hebrew						x								x	
Hermeneutics													x		
Logos		x				x									
Miss./Evan.			x					x							
S. Formation	x					x			x						
Youth Ministries							x								

Carrie and Ilise also identified the impact of evangelism/missions courses in their own personal development. For Carrie this was impactful because she realized the need to impact the world for Christ. However, she also realized that the world is much more connected and she does not need to leave her home to present the gospel message to those of other cultures. Instead, she can stay in the Midwest and have ample opportunities to share with people from different cultures. Ilise's experience through her husband's studying of evangelism/missions played into her conversion narrative. Hailey explained that she was challenged by the youth ministry courses that her husband has taken, even to

the point of reading some of his textbooks. She commented that these youth ministry courses had an impact because of her own upbringing and the pain she experienced through loss during her adolescent years. Ilise and Jocelyn both shared that at times they would watch their husband's course lectures. This impacted them in different ways. Ilise explained that through watching these videos with her husband, she felt like she was able to understand the course material as if she were taking the class. Jocelyn enjoyed one of the course lecture series so much that she sought out the ability to watch other course videos independent of her husband. Brittany, Faith, Jocelyn, Natalie, and Rachel all commented on how their husbands' grasp of Hebrew or Greek has impacted their own understanding of the meaning of scripture as their husbands have been equipped to explain these deeper meanings. Rachel shared that since moving to seminary, God has redirected her vision and passion for their future ministry with Robert. This transformation in her life is a direct result of his transformation through the seminary curriculum.

> As Robert learned things at seminary, and we would talk about them…. We weren't thinking about church planting until we came down here. That's one time in my past—like I helped out with the church plant and heard the church planter come and talk about his plant. And I was like oh, I'm so thankful we'll never do that. And now—like God has completely changed me, where I'm like that's all I really wanna do it. I'm really, really excited and looking forward and scared—um—to do it. But—um—so I mean, that's one major thing just—different direction that God has—has taken us. And that came up through seminary through one of his classes.

Abigail, Faith, and Jocelyn often mentioned the courses relating to prayer and spiritual disciplines. Abigail specifically shared, "The course work has challenged him to develop his spiritual disciplines more, and in that, it has challenged me as well to focus on my own walk with Christ." She went on to explain how this has then impacted her formation saying,

I have recently begun reading "Celebration of Discipline" by Richard J. Foster, which was required reading for one of his classes. I have always had a fairly good prayer life, it's pretty much a part of my daily routine, in the sense that I feel that I am constantly communicating with God. But I was challenged in reading this book that I need to also work on study. That's been my husband's specialty. Also, reading his papers has challenged some of my beliefs that I held. Most of those beliefs where based solely on what someone told me when I was young, I had never researched them myself. Seeing his research, and many times even helping with it, has challenged those beliefs and brought me closer to God.

Olivia stated that because of seminary, "I know more about theology now than I ever thought I would." This experience of an increased understanding of theology was common to seminary spouses. Hailey, however, was the best example of a spouse experiencing theological formation. As noted, Hailey grew up Mormon and because of this her theological understanding changed dramatically in seminary. Almost the entirety of her theological framework has been replaced in the years since her husband started seminary. Mormonism, as a religion, uses similar terminology to Christianity, but the definitions of these terms are typically different (Blomberg & Robinson, 1997). The theological differences between these two groups are vast and for her to move from Mormonism to Christianity represents a significant aspect of formation. She summarized

her theological formation saying that now, "I don't believe that God puts criteria—or certain criteria on our salvation. Um—ya know—you don't have to do this, this, and this to receive that. And—um—that's kinda how it is with the LDS [Latter Day Saints] Church." She reemphasized at a later point saying, "I didn't have to follow all the *Words of Wisdom* and all that to receive my salvation…. The only thing I had to do was believe in Christ and—um—and live my life accordingly – ya know – live righteously."

Evangeline also experienced the challenge of having previously existing theological schemas confronted. She grew up in the Assemblies of God denomination while Edward grew up Presbyterian. Together they chose a Baptist church and seminary because it was "kind of a meet in the middle." Throughout this education process, they have had to dig deeper to reevaluate what they believed about particular doctrines. She grew up believing in believer's baptism while he grew up believing in infant baptism. On the other hand he grew up believing in predestination and while she does not fully agree with this doctrine she has "probably come a little closer to his way of believing than he has to my way of believing." She summarized her experience of theological formation saying, "I have been challenged in my faith and what I grew up believing in many different areas."

Danielle and Abigail had a similar experience. Abigail shared, "My theology has become more concrete and something that I can articulate more clearly because of him attending seminary. Our dialogues have challenged previously held beliefs at times, and at other times, have strengthened what I already believed." This is an important statement for her to make especially when her assessment of her formation before seminary is reexamined. At the beginning of seminary, she said that her formation was based more on feeling more than knowledge or understanding. This type of challenge to existing

theological schemas is an important part of spiritual formation. She shared one example of how seminary has challenged her theology.

> In the course of my spiritual development, free will was a huge thing. We make our own choices and even though I knew God was sovereign and I knew God was in control of my life, I would still always have this, um, but we, you know I have my free will. I have to make these choices. I have to—and so over the course of the studies, um, and in talking through the implications of what absolute free will means, um, we've come to the conclusion that we're more Calvinistic in our— you know, not, not, not on the far side of Calvinism. But um, we definitely lean on God's Sovereignty a heck of a lot more. Um, and that has been hours of discussing Scripture, discussing other people's um works. You know, reading um reading books and all that stuff.

Danielle, Ilise, and Mary were challenged to emphasize personal Bible study in their lives. Natalie and Ilise reflected on their experiences and what they learned by studying with their husbands. When Ilise's husband started his program, he had to purchase lectures to watch along with his courses. She recalled how much she learned from watching these lectures and helping him study for his exams. Likewise, Jocelyn was also challenged by her husband's education because through seminary, Jocelyn realized that faith is not unreasonable. She explained this saying, "I don't think my faith could be so deep if I didn't delve into the books of the Bible the way I have – and the way I continue to." Like Jocelyn, Rachel commented on how the value of study has helped her increase her faith and ability to understand truth. She said that when she reads something now, she does not "just take it for truth 'cause it's written by someone." Instead she is willing to challenge these ideas based on what scripture sets as the standard.

Practical Enhancers

Practical enhancers are anything that adds to the formation of the spouse by challenging them to put their formation into tangible or ministerial action. This was the least referred to construct adding to the spiritual formation of seminary spouses. However, in spite of this, spouses were clear that practical enhancers were experienced through a practice of the spiritual disciplines and through ministry praxis.

Spiritual disciplines. Abigail, Faith, Ilise, Mary, Olivia, Natalie, and Danielle all expressed a purposeful investment in practices that would be considered part of the historical, spiritual disciplines (Foster, 1998). Abigail shared about her investment in these disciplines saying,

> I try to take specific time each day for more structured prayer times, but I also feel like I am constantly communing with God. I will find myself unconsciously praying throughout the day. There have been times in the past couple of years that I have been lacking in my other disciplines, specifically Bible reading and study, but seeing my husband's diligence in his own disciplines has challenged me, setting a standard for me.

Similarly Olivia shared that she also has structured her life to spend time in disciplined prayer, study, and listening. This takes place at regular intervals and throughout her day. Prayer and fasting have always been important spiritual disciplines in Natalie's life, and during seminary, this has not changed. She has continued investing in the disciples of prayer and fasting, as well as emphasizing the discipline of worship. Danielle did not explicitly refer to spiritual disciplines, but she said that she has forced herself "to take time to be intimate with God" which is similar to the discipline of meditation. Faith's spiritual formation has centered greatly around the discipline of

prayer. Recently she has volunteered for a prayer ministry targeting an upcoming evangelistic crusade in her state capital. Practicing prayer has existed in her life for years, but it has been rekindled through the classes her husband has taken on the subject.

Ministry praxis. Praxis is a common theological term connoting action; therefore, one of the ways that spouses experienced practical enhancements to their formation was through ministry action. The Great Commission mandate stems from Christ commissioning of his disciples in Matthew 28:20. This mandate was brought up by Kaitlyn who referred to her role in fulfilling this *great* commission. Faith also referred to this concept by talking about her role in ministry that is "kingdom building." Several other spouses, while not using this terminology, also alluded to the idea that they had a specific and personal role to fulfill in ministry. It was through a painful event in life that Carrie came to this conclusion. In almost a frustrated search for purpose, she asked, "God—ya know—what am I here for?" She explained her personal search for purpose saying "Even though I'm a part of [Carl's] ministry, I've got my own separate ministry as well. And right now, I'm having to deal with that." She went on to say, "I have a purpose. And I'm trying to figure that out right now." At a different point in the interview, Carrie expanded on how God might be answering these questions, and while the following experience did not go as she would have liked it to, it seemed to be a formative one as she battled with her personal role in ministry. She explained that in one of Carl's courses he wrote a paper on a particular people group from an Islamic country. Shortly thereafter they attended a conference on how to minister to Muslims in their own community. A few months after this, she was provided with the opportunity to speak with a Muslim lady at a social event that they were attending. She said, "My reaction was not what I wanted it to be…I avoided her…and I kept thinking—ya know—I'll talk to anybody but her."

Upon leaving that night, she told Carl, "I'm so ashamed of how I reacted." She continued to reflect on this experience and concluded with the thought that perhaps God would open doors for her to minister to Muslims.

Jocelyn's understanding of her role in ministry has grown exponentially because of seminary. She said that before seminary, she was not an individual prone to ministering to others. However, now she finds great joy in it. While not explicitly referring to the construct of "spiritual gifts" in the context of the biblical passages on the topic, Jocelyn shared that now she knows her role in ministry. She described this saying, "We cook meals for the men's shelter that's basically—my—ya know—my gift that I provide is—is basically fellowship and providing meals and food and things like that. Um—and I am better on a one-on-one basis." What Jocelyn is describing here is the gift of hospitality and service which is described by the Apostle Paul in Romans 12 where he charges the Roman Christians to "practice hospitality."

Natalie shared that while their family is busy, they are at a point where they are beginning to ask how they can give back and serve in ministry. As she looked to the future ministry praxis, she noted that there is a gap in many churches regarding how to minister to the unique needs of military families which may comprise a significant portion of their future ministry. Olivia experienced a similar challenge based on her desire to serve in the church, but busyness that currently prevents her from the level of investing what she would like. Sarah does not have the same challenges stemming from busyness as Natalie and Olivia because her children have left the home and she is retired from her fulltime vocation. However, since she is new to the area she is still working on finding where she will get involved in ministry beyond serving at the local food pantry. Mary, Jocelyn, Kaitlyn, Brittany, Carrie, Danielle, and Faith all referred to maturation

through practicing their faith. Danielle summarized this saying, "[Seminary] seems to be designed to prepare you for ministry. And, and you can't help but grow if you're serious about going into the ministry." Jocelyn shared how she has been transformed in her own ministerial praxis. She said that ministry was new to her life and has flowed from her new found relationship with Christ.

> I've never been one to want to minister [to] people. And now I find that such a great joy. And to just open up and talk with people about God and Jesus, and it's just – I've never been one to do that, ever.

Mary also provided a clear context for understanding how spiritual formation provides an important foundation for ministry. She explained, "I knew in order to be able to minister to others; I need to continually make sure that I am receiving what I need from the Lord. Because I know if I become [spiritually] stagnant, my ministry becomes stagnant."

Kaitlyn and Rachel's praxis has centered on new possibilities regarding future ministry calling. Kaitlyn's awareness of these new possibilities stemmed from her denominational background which emphasized social justice ministry rather than ministry rooted in theology. Several times she mentioned how important the concept of discipleship has become in her understanding of ministry. Part of this discussion on discipleship then moved into the concept of church planting. She explained that church planting as a result of a biblically-rooted ministry philosophy was foreign to her before seminary. Rachel's vision for ministry has similarly been transformed through Robert's seminary experience. While she recognizes that preparation is never a finished product, but one that is ever evolving, she is excited about how God is leading her and Robert toward church planting.

When I think about church planting and actually going up there and doing it—um—it's scary at times. Um—but I know—like God has us here. He's preparing us. Don't know if I'm exactly where I need to be yet or the woman I need to be— the wife I need to be—as a mother or the child of God—or—It's that spiritual place yet—I don't think I'm there yet. And I think that's why he has us here – not just me, both of us—ya know—he's preparing us for that. I'm more so excited because I know that God – I mean, all this time he has provided for us. He will continue. He'll continue to show us the next step as it comes. So I—I'm really not that nervous looking into the future. I mean, it's—there's moments and days. But for—for the most part, I'm—I'm really at peace and trusting God in it.

Summary

What was demonstrated above was the experiences of seminary spouses who enhanced their spiritual formation and that were a result of their husband's education. These enhancements to their formation were thematically classified based on Relational Enhancers, Intellectual Enhancers, and Practical Enhancers. In addition to experiences that enhanced the spiritual formation of seminary spouses, spouses also experienced detractors in their spiritual formation, which will be discussed below.

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Theme Two: Detractors of Spiritual Formation

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All of the spouses, except Rachel, at some point or another, referenced various detractors that impacted their spiritual formation. While Rachel did mention stress, she did not connect her stress to a detractor in her formation. These detractors had various impacts on spousal, spiritual formation and serve to form the two subthemes explicated in this section: *Challenges to formation* and *Deformative experiences.* Brittany summarized

these detractors when she was asked if seminary as a whole had been a positive or negative experience. She responded,

> Um, both, I guess. I mean, positive in the fact that we know that he's grown spiritually. Positive in the fact that it's going to in the long-run be better for us than—ya know—career-wise church. I mean, it's not that I like to look at it like that necessarily but that's…a given. Um, it's gonna open up more opportunities for him maybe in the future. So I guess long-term, positive. If you ask me right now today? Negative! Because, right I'm lookin' at laundry pilin' up. I'm lookin' at a cluttered house. I'm looking at I haven't spent time with my husband in two and a half weeks. Um I know he's stressed out … And so that's negative. Long-term, yes, positive – his spiritual growth—I mean—um—I do see, I see both sides—I can see where the long-term's gonna be very, very positive experience. And some days we are [conscious of that positive experience]. And other days we don't. Um—so I guess kinda both in a sense.

Challenges to Formation

Most of the spouses expressed frustration at some point or another in the amount of time that the seminary program takes away from the family. These frustrations have varying degrees of impact on the spouse's formation, but all were impacted to some degree. Brittany explained how time commitments of seminary impacted her own ability to pursue her own spiritual formation. She explained that she has little time to emphasize her own spiritual formation because of the added responsibilities placed on her in her role of mother, teacher, pastor's wife, and now seminary spouse. Her role as seminary spouse requires for her to fulfill roles that her husband used to fulfill. She concluded that because of these demands on her time it is not possible for her to have a consistent devotional

time and the time she does have is merely a surface investment in her formation. She explained this saying,

> I can't get up at four in the morning. I can't stay up till two in the morning. So I don't know where to fit it in—that it's just that time. And it's like instead of having a set time where I—I do my study, it's so sporadic—Ya know. If I get a few minutes at school, I may do something, which is rare…I may escape to the bathroom and do it there and just lock myself away. But to have anything consistent is out the window, to do anything deeper beyond just the surface – is not existent.

Danielle agreed about the challenges associated with the time commitment. She said that adding seminary has exacerbated their already stretched schedule, which has in turn impacted her formation. She explained how this has impacted her formation because it has required her to force herself to take time with God; however, "sometimes [I] still don't take the time to just sit and read his Word and spend time in prayer." Mary explained that the time commitments of seminary have impacted her relationship with her husband, "because—um we don't have as much of that time together—to be able to discuss spiritual things."

The time commitment involved in seminary created an exhaustion experienced by Hailey, Natalie, Mary, and Carrie. Hailey shared about the emotional exhaustion that comes from being invested and focused on spiritual needs. In fact, exhaustion and tiredness was a fairly common phrase used to describe how spouses felt during seminary. Natalie and Mary shared that it is normal to be frustrated and tired. Carrie shared about her own feelings of exhaustion saying,

I'm just—I'm tired. It's—uh—I know that Christ got tired; he continued. But he also rested whenever people would let him. So it's—um—God and I are having this continual conversation—okay, Carrie [laughing] get up off and start again.

Deformative Experiences

As a structure of formation detractors, deformative experiences are representative of that which aided in or highlighted a regression of spiritual formation. Brittany shared the most explicit statement saying, "Actually, I'd say my spiritual [formation] has kinda declined." Carrie said, "I've kind of plateaued." Faith said that because of her busyness and the demands on her time she would rate her spiritual life as a five out of ten whereas she would be a seven if her schedule was more flexible. This type of experience was not normative or equally experienced by all spouses, but as Wilhoit (2008) noted, all people experience spiritual formation, the formation, however, is either negative or positive in its direction.

An aspect of deformation was the feeling of being left behind spiritually. Abigail tried to encourage future spouses saying, "The spouse who is NOT in seminary will at times feel inadequate, maybe even ignorant." Ilise was not as emphatic in this feeling of being left-behind, but she did recognize it in her own life. She explained this feeling saying,

I think it makes me feel—um—makes me feel inferior sometimes [laughing]. Because I want to be what he is—ya know. And I want to be as committed as he is to what he—ya know—like I see him do and study. And it makes me feel sometimes like a slacker [laughing]—because I'm not doin' as much as he does.

Brittany expanded on her previous statements sharing her advice to young women interested in marrying a pastor. She said that she joked with the girls in her church

saying, "Well, be prepared to be a single married woman – basically a single mom that's married because you have to do it all." This feeling of isolation in ministry is expanded when school is added to the picture although not on purpose because as she explained, "Not because he does it on purpose. It's just ministry has to be done. School has to be done, family seems to be what gets shoved away…I feel slighted with that sometimes – understanding that it just has to be done right now."

Summary of Findings

Seminary is a unique graduate education experience (Calian, 2002). It is different than other graduate programs because it is not just educating for a vocational profession, but it is educating for a life rooted in a ministry calling. Kaitlyn explained her perception of this uniqueness saying, "I guess it's different than just going to get a master's 'cause that's just academic." Seminary on the other hand is not just academic it's spiritual. "So you're learning, you're growing, you're expressing the different things that you've learned more so than—just getting a master's degree where you're just usin' that in your work." Not only is seminary a unique experience for students, this research has shown that it is a significant, spiritually formative experience for seminary spouses. These spouses have experienced enhancements and detractors in their spiritual formation. Enhancements that encouraged spiritual formation took place when spouses grew in their relationships with loved ones and peers in a way that resulted in an encouragement to mature in their vertical relationship with God. Spouses also experienced spiritual formation through a growth in their intellect and their ability to understand the theological message of spirituality. Practical enhancements encouraged formation because spouses applied their faith in disciplined and tangible ways. In addition to these facets of spiritual formation, seminary is also a time where spousal experiences added

stress to their spiritual formation. However, in all, seminary spouses agreed that seminary was a positively formative experience and the challenges were worth the process. Jocelyn said, "I do feel like the spiritual formation has been phenomenal—ya know—where the journey has taken us so far." Similarly, Evangeline said, "The change you will see in your spouse and the growth they will achieve in their own spiritual walk (and ultimately share with you and encourage you in) is enough to make it all worth it." Olivia, without downplaying the challenges, recognized the value, "It's tough. It's challenging. It separates you from your family very—very likely. But the benefits outweigh the cost." These experiences summarize the overall message of this study, that while seminary challenges individuals in tangible ways, the outcome of being spiritually formed is worth the journey of formation.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study has explored the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses. Based on the results reported in chapter four, it is clear that seminary spouses recognized enhancements and detractors in their spiritual formation. Below is an assessment of the enhancements and detractors of spousal, spiritual formation using the literature base reviewed in chapter two. Following this assessment is an explanation of how the theoretical framework can provide a theoretical basis for understanding the results presented in chapter four. I conclude with suggestions for institutional application of this research and suggestions for future research.

Implications of Research for Seminary Couples

According to Glatthorn and Joyner (2005) and Zabloski (2010), the purpose of this section of the research should be focused on finding the value and meaning innate within the study. Therefore, that which follows will provide a brief and summative evaluation of the research addressing the question of "so what?" This will be accomplished through an analysis of enhancements and detractors of spousal, spiritual formation.

Enhancements in Spiritual Formation

In spite of all of the challenges of graduate school, spousal experiences are often positive (Dahl et al., 2010; Polson & Piercy, 1993). Gold (2006a) explained that families of graduate students experienced their own sense of achievement when their spouses succeeded. All of the previous research is built around crossover experiences from graduate students and their spouses. This present research focused on how spiritually formative experiences have crossed over from seminary student experience to seminary

spouse experience. Wilhoit (2008) explained that spiritual formation takes place in every person's life whether it is recognized or not. Spiritual formation that takes place is going to be positive or negative as it moves people toward Christ or away from Christ. This analysis views these crossover experiences through the lens of chapter four and the literature base in chapter two.

Relational enhancements. According to the findings of this study, spouses are encouraged to grow in their relationship with God through their relationships with others. Copan (2010) emphasized the relational nature of spiritual formation. His use of this concept is not focused on husband to wife spiritual formation, but it is consistent with and applicable in this context. The Apostle Paul also provides a precedent for setting oneself as an example by which others should measure their own spiritual life (1 Cor. 11:1). While seminary students were never quoted as saying, "Follow me as I follow Christ," their example was reminiscent of this encouragement, and spouses did just that: they followed their husband as their husband followed Christ.

Common themes in spiritual formation literature stem surround the ideas of community as formation, nurture as formation, the death, burial, and resurrection as formation, and the emphasis of disciplined formation (Dettoni, 1994; Greenman, 2010; Thornhill, 2012; Wilhoit, 2008). Greenman (2010) and Wilhoit (2008) both refer to the necessity of spiritual formation taking place in the faith community. This community is larger than just the family unit and refers to the universal church. Danielle, Faith, Ilise, Jocelyn, Kaitlyn, Olivia, and Sarah all referred to other-centered formation that took place in their relationships in the church and with other believers.

Nurture as spiritual formation is a common analogy used within the literature (Dettoni, 1994; Greenman, 2010; Wilhoit, 2008). Based on Dettoni's (1994) definition of

nurture, this aspect of formation is similar to the experiences of seminary spouses as they experience a challenge to grow spiritually because of their parental role and a greater understanding of the Father's nurture and love for his children. Danielle, Jocelyn, and Ilise referenced their own insights regarding how their parental roles revealed to them a deeper understanding of God's love and motivation toward spiritual maturation.

A second analogy used in precedent literature is the idea of spiritual formation as Death, Life, and Resurrection (Peterson, 2005; Thornhill, 2012). During seminary Hailey, Ilise, and Jocelyn all experienced the death of their flesh and a spiritual resurrection into new spiritual life (Mark 8:34–35; John 14:6; 1 Cor. 1:23, 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:14; Gal. 2:20–21). Thornhill (2012) expanded on this analogy focusing on the concept of being "in Christ" which was an important aspect of positional awareness and the vertical relationship in spiritual formation.

Spiritual discipline as a means for spiritual formation is perhaps one of the most common denominators of formation practice (Foster, 1998; Whitney, 1997; Willard, 1998). This was no less common in the experiences of these spouses. Abigail, Faith, Ilise, Mary, Olivia, Natalie, and Danielle all practiced one or more of these spiritual disciplines. Foster (1998) categorized these disciplines into inward, outward, and corporate disciplines. While the inward disciples of meditation, prayer, fasting, and study were the primary foci of the spouses, Jocelyn recognized her practice of the outward discipline of service, and Natalie shared about her corporate discipline of worship.

Intellectual enhancements. Dettoni's (1994) definition of spiritual formation emphasized that a growth in one's understanding was part of spiritual formation, but it could not be the whole content of spiritual formation. This is represented by the experiences of Sarah in her formation through seminary. At first Sarah explained that she

did not think seminary had a formative impact on her. However, as the conversation

continued, it was evident that seminary has had a significant impact on her intellectual

formation. Maddix (2010) explained that an individual's physical, emotional, social,

mental, and moral developments are all aspects of the spiritual formation process. He

elaborated on this saying,

> If a person decides to stop growing intellectually, it impacts his/her spiritual
>
> formation. If a person decides against developing relationships within the body of
>
> Christ, he/she ceases to grow. Thus, the five aspects of the human person must be
>
> nurtured and developed in order for a person to grow toward spiritual maturity (p.
>
> 265).

An interesting aspect of the literature as it related to intellectual enhancement of

formation was the warning that came from the literature base. For example, Setran et al.

(2010) stated, "Professorial exhortation is rarely sufficient to furnish a fruitful context for

spiritual formation" (p. 405). Throughout the literature, readers were warned not to make

intellectual formation an end in itself, but instead make it a servant of spiritual formation

in order to cultivate Christlikeness (Dettoni, 1994; Greenman, 2010; Phillips & Bloesch,

1994; Wilhoit, 2008). The implication here is that intellectual enhancements in formation

cannot and should not be the only aspect of formation that seminary spouses should seek

to experience.

     Practical enhancements. Jones and Jennings (2000) explained that theological

education must focus on formation that leads people toward practical ministry. Seminary

is not merely factual assent; therefore, practical ministry is a vital aspect of the

educational experience. They went on to explain, "Information is important, but

theological education must shape ministerial identity. Forming ministerial identity

requires attention to the care and nurture of souls beyond the classroom as well as in it."
(p. 124). Foster (1998) also references practicality as belonging to the outward spiritual
disciplines. The outward spiritual disciplines consist of simplicity, solitude, submission,
and service. In this classification, Foster (1998) purposefully connects practical
enhancements of formation as a component of spiritual formation nurtured through
discipline of service. Jocelyn explained that through the seminary experience, her view of
service has been expanded greatly and through this she has been given a new insight into
the joy that comes from serving others. Mulholland (1993) recognized the necessity of a
practical component of spiritual formation in his explanation that spiritual formation not
only takes place in the context of community, but it takes place *for* the sake of others.

Detractors of Spiritual Formation

Dahl et al. (2010) found four negative themes regarding the experiences of
graduate student spouses. These themes revolved around the time commitment necessary
for graduate school, the financial stressors in the relationship, the increased role conflict
because of added roles and responsibilities, and the feeling of being left behind. These
stressors were similarly experienced by seminary spouses, however, this study was
different because the phenomenon being explored was different. Most of the spouses
agreed with these findings regarding the negative impact that the time commitments had
on their own relationships and formation. Brittany, Carrie, and Faith were most explicit
about how this impacted their formation in a negative manner. Brittany desired the time
to invest in her formation while Carrie felt like her own tiredness had a negative impact
on her ability to fully invest the time needed for her formation. Faith also felt busy but
was not as emphatic as Brittany regarding how this has negatively impacted her
formation. Abigail, Brittany, and Ilise also expressed various levels of feeling left

behind. However, the difference here is that they felt left behind spiritually rather than relationally. Regarding conflict stemming from new roles, Brittany explained that many of the ways her husband used to help around the house were now left up to her to complete. Brittany's experience of deformation, while not normative compared to the group, was reflective of her personality and life experiences. She explained that she had a lifelong battle with an illness that continually took much of her energy. Her lack of energy was a major contributing factor of her deformation in that she explained that she did not have the time (or energy) to invest in her formation to the degree that she would prefer. She was the only spouse not to reference a specific class as beneficial to her formation, but instead mentioned that she was encouraged by resources and tools that have been made available to her through her husband's education such as *Logos Bible Software*. This disconnect from the content and curriculum of seminary may have had some impact on her deformative experiences.

Wilhoit (2008) explained that spiritual formation experiences can be negative in the sense of deformation. Detractors that inhibited spiritual formation were reflected in the spousal narratives. This was most explicit in the experience of Brittany who said that during seminary she regressed in her spiritual formation. Carrie and Faith, while not as explicit, also alluded to minor setbacks or plateaus in their formation. Just as Wilhoit (2008) explained, the overall seminary experience of Brittany, Carrie, and Faith were a mix of positive and negative spiritual formation.

Nelson (2010) explained that spiritual formation is not a simple, straightforward progress in sanctification. Individuals pursuing spiritual formation should not expect sequential stages of maturation. He explained that scriptural accounts of following Christ are often found through spiritual paradox where weakness is strength, loss is gain, and

death is life. He expanded on these paradoxes by explaining that typically the knowledge of spiritual formation grows at a faster rate than the practice of holiness in the life of a believer. The gap between knowledge and practice is what Paul brings out in Romans 7:14-25. Issler (2009) also recognized this reality in the Christian life describing it as the willing-doing gap. These paradoxes of spiritual formation were recognizable in the detractors of formation experienced by some of the seminary spouses. For instance, Brittany shared in several instances that she wanted to invest more in her formation, but lacked the time or ability (i.e., the willing-doing gap). Likewise, Carrie had an experience where she felt like she was afforded the opportunity to minister to a Muslim woman at a social event, but she avoided the opportunity and afterwards felt guilty for not doing so (i.e., the willing-doing gap). The paradoxes Nelson (2010) described indicate that many times these experiences of defeat will encourage individuals to rebound in a stronger, more purposeful pursuit of formation. Wang (2011) similarly recognized that spiritual desertion or *The Dark Night of the Soul* is a means for experiencing eventual spiritual growth and formation.

Theoretical Framework Applied

The theoretical framework for this study borrowed concepts from human resource management such as Work/Family Enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), Spillover/Crossover (Staines, 1980; Westman & Etzion, 1995), and the Work/Family Border Theory (Clark, 2000). The value of this theoretical framework is that it can assist seminary stakeholders in understanding and explaining the phenomenon studied in this research. What is provided below is an amalgamation of these three theoretical frameworks in order to propose a theoretical understanding of school/family enhancement.

Work/Family Enrichment applied in this context would suppose that positive experience in the school domain would provide one of two things: (a) Increased positivity at school can be transferred directly from the school domain to the home domain thereby enhancing the home domain, and (b) Increased positivity at school can facilitate continued positivity at school which eventually will affect the home domain. What Greenhaus and Powell (2006) achieve in this proposal is a means for describing how spillover becomes crossover. Spillover is experience that spills over from one domain to another domain, in this case experience that spills over from the school domain to the home domain. However, spillover is only that which impacts the student in both domains (Bolger et al., 1989; Staines, 1980). When the experience impacts another individual, the spillover becomes crossover (Crossfield et al., 2005; Westman &Etzion, 1995). Therefore, what is described in these two proposals is the same essences, namely how spiritually formative experiences spillover, crossover, and enrich the lives of seminary spouses.

With these two theoretical views as the basis of this discussion, the Work/Family Border Theory will supplement these theories in order to provide a foundation for school/family enhancement (Clark, 2000, 2001, 2002). This theory will further expand the explanation regarding how the transmission of spiritually formative experiences can be understood within the context of a seminary education. Applying the Work/Family Border Theory in this context would require, like the theories above, an acknowledgement of multiple life domains such as school and family. As experiences from the school domain spillover, crossover, and enrich the home domain, it is important to understand what facilitates this transmission. The borders between two domains have varying degrees of experiential transmission resistance or acceptance.

Key constructs for this experiential transmission across domain borders are permeability, flexibility, blending, and strength. Permeability relates to how resistant borders are to transmitting experiences. Flexibility (physical, temporal, and psychological) relates to how malleable a border is based on the needs of the student or spouse. Domain/border blending occurs when borders are more permeable and/or flexible, while border strength is based on permeability, flexibility, and blending. Within the context of this research, the borders that separate the school domain from home domain are permeable for online students, but less so for residential students. Online students and spouses can carry experiences from school to home much more readily than residential students. This was exampled in Ilise and Jocelyn's experience as they were able to watch course lectures with their husband. Online education is also more flexible in that students have the opportunity to choose where and when they take part in their education. Residential students do not have this option as they are told when and where. Lastly, because online education is highly permeable and flexible, the possibility for a strong blend exists between the two domains of school and home. When online students complete their course work in home offices or bedrooms, the borders between these domains have blended in a way that makes it difficult to define where one domain starts and the other stops. This is not the same for residential students who have distinct borders between school and home. Lastly, when domains are permeable, flexible, and blended it means that there is little border strength. This means that it is difficult for domains to keep from allowing transmitted experiences (spillover/crossover) from passing through the borders that separate the domain. When there is high border strength, it means that permeability, flexibility, and blending are low, and the border maintains its integrity resisting the transmission of experiences. This theoretical framework provides a

foundation for understanding how spiritually formative experiences are transmitted from school to home. With this theoretical framework in mind, administrators can facilitate a *school domain* that is permeable and flexible so that positive spillover, crossover, and enhancements travel from school to home and from home to school.

Implications for Institutional Application

Just as Purdue University applied lessons from Polson and Piercy's (1993) research on the experiences of married graduate students in their Marriage and Family Therapy program, this study may likewise cause an institutional reaction and application. Specific steps have already been taken to use this information in the programmatic and administrative oversight of this seminary. The following is a discussion of changes that have already taken place and recommended changes for future application.

Current Application of Research

Since the beginning of this research project, this seminary has begun the process of requiring a new introductory course that is a portion of all degree plans offered. This course, SEMI 500 Introduction to Seminary Studies, will deploy in the Fall 2013 semester as a required course for the first time seminary student in both the online program and the residential program. This course was originally designed to equip seminary students with the requisite research and writing skills necessary for graduate education; however, because of this research a portion of this course will also be dedicated to equipping students to include their spouse and family in on the education venture they are starting. In order to include nonstudent spouses in on the educational venture of their student spouse SEMI 500 will include *Team Videos* which will be weekly lessons to husband and wife couples. These videos will seek to prepare students and spouses for the eventualities of seminary as well as prepare them spiritually for the

journey that they are starting together. The final project for this course will be a *Ministry Integration Paper* which will require students to create a four part research project. The first part requires that students evaluate relevant research on the impact of graduate education on student spouses; the second part is a spousal interview assignment where students and spouses will discuss certain aspects of the seminary experience in order to recognize the journey that they will take over the course of their education. The third portion of this assignment results from specific recommendations by the participants in this study. It requires that students, along with their spouses, create a proposed schedule so that they can visually see the various demands that are being placed on their time and energy. The last portion of the assignment is a spiritual formation reflection which will provide the students the requisite opportunity to analyze the first three portions of the project and create a plan to encourage the spiritual formation of their spouse (and/or children), focusing specifically on the relational enhancements, intellectual enhancements, and practical enhancements of their families spiritual formation. Advice regarding the construction of this assignment came from spouses during the interview portion of this study. At the conclusion of the majority of these interviews, I asked spouses to create a hypothetical assignment completed by their husband that could have included them and prepared them for the seminary journey. Feedback from these spouses was used in creating the instructions and guidelines for this project

Proposed Future Application of Research

Some aspects of this research have not yet been applied in the programmatic administration. However, various ideas recommended to the researcher by the seminary spouse participants will be used in the future. At the end of the interviews, I asked each spouse for recommendations to the administration. These recommendations will be

compiled and submitted to the associate dean, dean, and provost for their consideration. A recurring suggestion by spouses was to find a way to encourage spouse participation in seminary through the use of seminars for residential spouses or webinars for online spouses. Spouses requested seminars/webinars focusing on topics related to spiritual formation and other seminary related topics. One spouse even requested a simplified version of what her husband was learning in his classes. Creating this type of program for seminary spouses should be a purposeful initiative of the seminary administration based on the results of this research.

Suggestions for Future Research

A number of potential research projects could stem from this dissertation and the research set forth herein. I will address nine of these research ideas in the following section below:

- I would first suggest that this study be replicated at another school to see if the themes span various educational cultures. This study could sample residential spouses only, online spouses only, or an equal number of both in order to compare the experiences of the two types of spousal experiences.

- I would also recommend that another research fully follow the suggestions of Dahl et al. (2010). In their study, they recommended that a seminary explore the marriage satisfaction and experiences of MDiv student spouses. Exploring the marriage of seminary spouses may in turn reveal interesting experiences regarding the spousal spiritual formation.

- Quantifying this study would also provide a unique insight into the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses. Using a pretest/posttest to measure

the maturation in spiritual formation of seminary spouses over the course of seminary would be useful in understanding spousal experiences.

- The fourth research recommendation would be to expand this research beyond the participant delimitations outlined in this study. As I have proceeded through this process, I realized that the "typical" seminary spouse no longer exists. Seminary spouses take many shapes and many forms. For instance, over half of the students at this seminary are not MDiv students, but are, instead, pursuing a 60-hour degree such as the Masters in Religious Education (MRE).

- I would also recommend that this study be broadened to include research at the doctoral level regarding the spiritually formative experiences of spouses. The Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree is a doctoral-level practitioner degree for students pursuing pastoral/ministerial vocations. Entrance into a DMin program typically requires a minimum of three years in vocational ministry. It is likely that these spouses will have different starting points in their spiritual maturity, but because of this, it may reveal a more articulate expression of their spiritually formative experiences.

- A longitudinal study of these spousal experiences would also provide valuable for the literature base. I expect that the spiritually formative experiences of these spouses would be articulated in a new manner if I were to re-present their narrative five years from the time their husbands finished their seminary experience.

- Another project I would recommend would be to explore this phenomenon while recognizing the theological conservatism of the various seminaries or students.

Perhaps spiritual formation is experienced differently at seminaries considered theologically liberal or moderate.

- Next, I recommend an exploratory study into the motivations of spiritual formation. In this study, I would recommend focusing on *what* motivates individuals toward spiritual formation and then what they are motivated *toward* as a result of their motivation.

- I also recommend varying this study based on gender. It may be of interest to explore how male, seminary spouses experienced spiritual formation through their wives advanced study in ministry preparation. A study such as this may reveal an altogether different experience or it may confirm the experiences of these seminary spouses.

- Lastly, I recommend an expanded study of the theoretical framework used in this research. I propose that researchers explore and create a unique school/family enhancement theory to propose how students transmit school experience to the home domain and vice versa. An aspect of this study may also include a comparison study of school/family enhancement in the lives of residential students and their spouses as compared to online students and their spouses.

Conclusion

Seminary spouses experienced enhancements and detractors in their own spiritual formation during their spouses' seminary education. This is important because as Murphey-Geiss (2011) pointed out, spouses pursuing vocational ministry are often expected to fill their roles in ministry as a tandem-team. In order for seminary spouses to be equipped to take part in their student spouses' future ministry, it is important that the seminary experience is transformative for the spouse as well as the student. Not only is

this transformation important for team ministry, but it is important for these spouses as individuals as they seek to fulfill their own spiritual calling. What was presented here is a foundational analysis regarding these experiences and will hopefully provide a starting point for future researchers as they explore the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses.

EPILOGUE

This experience of researching the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses has been both personally and vocational gratifying. I appreciate the willingness and candor of each of my participants who aided me in the research process. Their narratives have revealed to me the importance of recognizing the spiritual condition and curricular obligation that seminaries have in the investment of seminary spouses. Equipping the second member of a pastoral ministry team is an obligation of seminaries as we prepare pastors for the pastorate. It is a responsibility that I hope seminaries take seriously as we all work together to equip the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12).

I will take three specific lessons or realizations with me as I conclude this study. The first is that there may no longer be a typical seminary student. In the past it was assumed that seminarians who were called to fulltime pastoral ministry packed up their family and moved to seminary. However, this paradigm no longer seems to be the norm. Finding married residential seminarians was a challenge which is why there are a disproportionate number of online spouses in the study. Unmarried or recently married residential students/spouses were easier to find in the sampling process. Finding married spouses, however, was not as difficult to find in the online program. Second to this realization, but even more interesting was the fact that three of the fifteen spouses interviewed were not saved prior to their husband starting seminary. This revealed an expectation that I had not verbalized. I believed that if an individual was called to ministry they came with the full support and understanding of their spouse. However, because seminary was readily available online for students, some spouses were not initially aware of the spiritual impact that pursuing seminary would have on their whole

family. A call to ministry is not a singular call, but one that is holistic and applies to the entire family of a minister. It is important for seminaries to realize the unique possibility of unsaved spouses (and spouses?). With this realization seminaries should have a plan for guiding and encouraging the spiritual maturation of students and spouses who do not understand the basic tenets of the faith.

Lastly, I was pleasantly surprised to realize how impactful the curriculum, homework, and proofreading was on the spiritual formation of spouses. With this realization I hope that seminaries include spouses in on aspects of the curricular processes. I believe that purposeful inclusion of spouses in the educational ventures of a classroom will further equip spouses for ministry and for full spiritual maturity in Christ (Col. 1:28).

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APPENDIX A: STUDY EXPLANATION LETTER

Dear Seminary Spouse,

I am writing to you to invite you to participate in a dissertation study I am conducting on the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses. Over the next few months I will be gathering data from questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups regarding how seminary wives grow in their spiritual walk with the Lord through their husband's education. Of particular interest to me are the stories of spiritual formation for individuals whose spouse is taking classes toward an M.Div. in either the online program or the residential program at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary (LBTS). For the sake of this study, I am defining spiritual formation as a set of personal or corporate practices and disciplines that contribute to and lead toward Christian maturity, growth, progress, and ultimately toward a conformity to the image of Christ himself. Essentially, I want to know what your spiritual life was like before your husband started seminary and what it is like now that he is halfway through his master's program. If this is of interest to you please continue reading about the details of the study and the role of the participants. If you are not interested please feel free to discontinue reading and thank you for your time!

Participant Qualifications

Before I explain what participation in the study looks like I would like to explain the requirements for participants. In order to qualify as a participant for this study you must be the wife of a student at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. Your husband must be pursuing the M.Div. and they must have 45 of the 93 credits finished. Your husband must have taken at least ¾ of his program in either the online or residential format, and you must have been married the entire time your husband has been pursuing this degree. If this applies to you please keep reading, if it does not apply to you then feel

free to stop reading and thank you for your time!

Part 1 - Questionnaire

For those of you still reading, I would like to invite you to participate in the following ways. This study will be conducted in four parts. Participation in all parts of the study is voluntary; however, if you volunteer to participate in the second part I ask that you would remain invested in the study for part three and four as well, although you are free to withdraw from participation at any time. Attached to this email is a document titled *Informed Consent* and *The Seminary Spouse Questionnaire*. Please fill out the Informed Consent letter and the questionnaire and email it to the following email address spirituallyformative@gmail.com by (Date: TBD). Please include the following phrase in the subject line, "[Your Last Name, First & Last Initial] – Part 1 Response." An auto-response email receipt will be sent upon receiving your email.

Part 2 – In-Depth Interviews

The second part of the study involves an in-depth interview that will be conducted over a web conferencing program titled WebEx. If you choose to volunteer to participate in part two, I would appreciate it if you would commit to part three and four as well; however, you are not required to do so. For Part 2 of the study you must have reliable internet capabilities, a web camera, and a phone that will allow you to converse over WebEx. WebEx is an easy to use computer program which allows face-to-face interaction and voice interaction over phone lines. During this interview you will need to be in a quiet and comfortable setting that will allow you to reflect on your own experiences of spiritual formation during your spouse's seminary education at LBTS. The interviews will take place between December 2012 and December of 2013 and will range in time required from 30 minutes to no more than 2 hours in length. If you would

like to volunteer to participate in this second portion of the study please send another

copy of the *Informed Consent* letter along with *The Seminary Spouse Contact*

Information Form to the following email address spirituallyformative@gmail.com

by(Date: TBD). Please include the following phrase in the subject line, "[Your Last

Name, First & Middle Initial] – Part 2 Response." An auto-response email receipt will be

sent upon receiving your email.

Part 3 – Discussion Forum Focus Group

The third part of the study is participation in a discussion board forum that will

act as focus group for the study. All participants will have access to the discussion board

forum and I will be posting nine prompts to generate discussion between the seminary

spouses that have been interviewed as a part of this study. Only spouses that have been

interviewed will be invited to participate in this stage of the data collection. At the end of

the discussion forum, participation will be completed until the final part of the project

which is termed *member checking*.

Part 4 – Member Checking

The final part of the study is to provide feedback on my analysis of your

experiences; again, participation here is optional, but only those participating in Part 2

will be invited to participate in this stage of the data collection. I will provide each

participant a written description of their spiritually formative experiences based on their

involvement in the first three parts of the study. If there is anything that I have

misidentified at this point I would ask for your correction. If I do not hear back from you

regarding the member check I will proceed as if the written description of your spiritually

formative experiences is acceptably accurate and your role in the study will be fully

completed.

Confidentiality

All participants in this study will be given a pseudonym and interview responses will be kept confidential. Any use of the information you provide will be described in such a way that protects yourself and your spouse. The results of this dissertation will be provided to the Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary and Liberty University, but again the participant information will be kept confidential so that no professor or administrator will be able to match responses to participants or students.

Thank you for the time you have invested into this process already. I am looking forward to this study and the benefits that will be reaped because of your experiences. I hope that this study will be used to improve the spiritually formative experiences of future seminary spouses. If you have any questions about this study or the processes to get involved please let me know by emailing me at bkforrest2@liberty.edu or spirituallyformative@gmail.com. If you would like to get involved right away please follow the action steps below:

1. Download, (ask questions if necessary), print, and sign the *Informed Consent* letter.

2. Fill out the *Seminary Spouse Questionnaire*.

3. Return the signed *Informed Consent* letter and the *Seminary Spouse Questionnaire* by email to spirituallyformative@gmail.com. Please include the following phrase in the subject line, "[Your Last Name, First and Middle Initial] – Part 1 Response."

4. If you want to continue on to volunteer for Part 2, fill out the *Seminary Spouse Interview Contact Information Form* and return this by email (along with another copy of the *Informed Consent* letter) to

spirituallyformative@gmail.com. Please include the following phrase in the

subject line, "[Your Last Name, First and Middle Initial] – Part 2 Response."

 Thank you,

Benjamin K. Forrest, Ed.S.

APPENDIX B: SEMINARY SPOUSE QUESTIONNAIRE

<u>Background questions:</u>

1. Are you an American citizen? _____ Yes _____ No
2. What is your gender? _____ Male _____ Female (If you are male, you can discontinue the remainder of your involvement.)
3. How long have you been Married? _____ years
4. Were you married _____ before or _____ after your spouse started seminary? (If you were married after, you can discontinue the remainder of your involvement.)
5. How many children do you have that lived with you while in seminary? _____ Not living with you? _____
6. What is your highest level of education? _____ High School, _____ Some College, _____ Baccalaureate, _____ Masters, _____ Post-Masters, _____ Doctorate
7. Is your spouse currently pursuing an M.Div. at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary? _____ Yes _____ No
   (If you answered no, please discontinue the remainder of your involvement.)
8. What is your husband's vocation while he is attending seminary? _____
9. Have you been married the entire time your spouse has been in this program? _____ Yes _____ No
10. How many credits has your spouse completed out of the 93 required credits required for the M.Div.? _____
11. Which of the following mediums describes how your spouse is taking their courses toward their M.Div.? (Check all that apply) _____ Online, _____ Residential, _____ Blended (which means both online and residential)
12. If your spouse's program has been blended how many credits have they taken in each medium? _____ Online Credits _____ Residential Credits
13. What is your employment status while your spouse is in school? _____ Part-time, _____ full-time, _____ worked from home for pay, _____ worked from home unpaid, _____ worked because spouse was in school, _____ would have worked whether or not spouse was in school.
14. Who were your primary sources of encouragement, spiritual, and emotional support during your spouse's program? (Rank in order of importance: _____ Spouse, _____ neighbor, _____ relative, _____ friend, _____ pastor, _____ mentor, _____ co-worker, _____ other _____ – please specify

<u>Open ended questions:</u> The following definition of spiritual formation is being used for this study. With this definition in mind please answer the following questions. You can be as brief or verbose as you would like. Spiritual formation is being defined as, **"A set of personal or corporate practices and disciplines that contribute to and lead toward Christian maturity, growth, progress, and ultimately toward a conformity to the image of Christ himself."**

1. How would you describe your spiritual maturity before your spouse started seminary?
2. What narrative(s) could you use to describe your spiritual formation during your experience as a seminary spouse?

3. What are the spiritual formation components of your spouse's seminary training?
4. How does your spouse's spiritual formation during seminary impact you?
5. In what ways would you say the seminary experience changed your spouse's spiritual formation for the better?
6. In what ways would you say the seminary experience changed your spouse's spiritual formation for the worse?
7. What advice would you give to future couples considering the same seminary program your spouse is completing?
8. What suggestions do you have for the seminary administration in regards to offering a spiritually formative education to seminary spouses?

Thank you for your participation in Part 1 of this study. Please return this questionnaire and the informed consent letter to the following email address: spirituallyformative@gmail.com by December 1, 2012. Please include the following phrase in the subject line, "[Your Last Name, First and Middle Initial] – Part 1 Response."

If interested in participating in the in-depth interviews please continue on to Part 2 and fill out the *Seminary Spouse Interview Contact Information Form.*

APPENDIX C:

SEMINARY SPOUSE INTERVIEW CONTACT INFORMATION FORM

Interview Contact information

Contact Information

1. My name is: _____
2. I would be willing to be contacted for participation in the interview portions of this study _____ yes _____ no.
3. I understand that if I volunteer for participation in Part 2 of the study I will also be asked to participate in Part 3 and Part 4 (However, you are not obligated to participate in any portion of the study and can withdraw at any point without any negative ramifications) _____ yes _____ no
4. I understand that I am freely volunteering for participation in this study and I can withdraw from the study at any time _____ yes _____ no
5. The best times of the week that I would be available for an interview are:
   _____
6. My preferred method of contact to set up the interview is: _____
7. My phone number is: _____
8. My email address is: _____
9. What is your age? _____
10. How long have you been married in years? _____
11. What is your ethnicity? _____
12. What is your spouse's vocation? _____

Thank you for your participation in Part 2 of this study. Please return this questionnaire and the informed consent letter to the following email address: spirituallyformative@gmail.com by December 1, 2012. Please include the following phrase in the subject line, "[Your Last Name, First and Middle Initial] – Part 2 Response."

APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

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The Graduate School at Liberty University

December 4, 2012

Benjamin Forrest
IRB Approval 1467.120412: Exploring the Spiritually Formative Experiences of
Female Seminary Spouses: A Phenomenological Inquiry

Dear Benjamin,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the
Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection
proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to
human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms
for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your
research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

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APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT

Exploring the spiritually formative experiences of female seminary spouses: A
phenomenological inquiry
Benjamin Forrest
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of the spiritually formative experiences of
seminary spouse. You were selected as a possible participant because your husband is
beyond the halfway point in their pursuit of an M.Div. at Liberty Baptist Theological
Seminary. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before
agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Benjamin K. Forrest, School of Education & Liberty
Baptist Theological Seminary.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to: Explore the spiritually formative experiences of seminary
spouses during their spouse's time as a seminary student at Liberty Baptist Theological
Seminary. There are three research questions guiding this study:
1. How do nonstudent, seminary spouses describe their "spiritual life" at the
   beginning of their spouse's seminary experience?
2. How do nonstudent, seminary spouses describe the influence of seminary on their
   spiritual formation?
3. What are the common themes in the spiritual formation experiences of
   nonstudent, seminary spouses based on the educational medium (online vs.
   residential) of the student spouses?

Procedures (What you will do in this study):

If you agree to be in this study, we would/could ask you to do the following things:
1. Part 1: Complete a questionnaire and email it along with an informed consent
   letter to the researcher (*Please note that I will be unable to use your questionnaire
   or allow you to volunteer for a later portion of the study without the informed
   consent letter*). The questionnaire can take as little or as much time as you would
   like to invest in it. The first section is objective answers that can take as little as
   10 minutes. The second section has short answer/essay/subjective questions that
   can take as much time as you would like to invest. You will not need to spend
   more than 30 minutes on the second part of the questionnaire, but you can spend
   more time if you would like.
2. Part 2: If interested, I would also like for you to volunteer to participate in Part 2
   by completing the Seminary Spouse Interview Contact Information Letter and
   returning it (along with the informed consent letter – even if you have already
   returned this letter once) to the research. Out of this pool of participant volunteers

I will choose 10-25 participants to be interviewed over an online computer program called WebEx. WebEx allows for Face to Face interaction through webcams and voice interaction through a phone line. In order volunteer for this part of the study, participants would have to have access to a computer, a webcam, internet, and a phone all at the same time. This interview will be recorded and transcribed so I can analyze the data for my research. The interview will take anywhere from 30 minutes to 120 minutes.

3. Part 3: Participation in an online discussion forum with other seminary spouses about your spiritually formative experiences during your husband's seminary education. Again the online discussion forum will take as little or as much time as you would like to invest in it. A typical response to one of the prompts (i.e. thread) would/could be around 400 words whereas replying to another spouse typically will be shorter in length somewhere around 250 words. However, there is no maximum or minimum word count or time limit that you need to spend in this portion of the study. You could successfully participate in this portion of the study in 30 minutes, but if you want to spend more time you may do so.

4. Part 4: Check my written description of your spiritually formative experiences in order to validate whether my description is accurate. The time included in this portion of the study will vary. It will vary based on how much time you take to read through my written description of your experience and how much you might like to discuss the description after you have read through it. I would suggest spending no more than an hour on this portion of the study.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The study has minor, potential risks:

- First, there is a potential that through the course of this study the researcher will become privy to information that triggers the mandatory reporting requirements for child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others.
- Second, there is also the potential that participants will experience emotional distress as a result of increased self-awareness or thoughts of current/past events. In this case it is recommended that the participant seek professional counseling. If counseling is needed please see the following link for a counselor locator through the American Association of Christian Counselors: http://www.aacc.net/resources/find-a-counselor/.
- Other risks are minimal and the risk is no greater than the participant would encounter in everyday life.

The benefits to participation are:
- An opportunity to discuss and reflect on the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses.
- This study will also give this particular demographic a voice in the literature and an opportunity to express concerns and/or assurances based on their experience.

Compensation:
There is no compensation for involvement in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any reports published, authors attempt to include no information that makes it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researcher(s) will have access to the records.

All physical information collected, recorded, or printed will be locked in a desk that is only accessible by the researcher. All electronic information such as emailed questionnaires, audio files, and discussion forum responses will be saved on a password protected computer. Since a focus group is involved I cannot guarantee that all information stated in the focus group will be held in confidentiality. In order to address this issue, research participants have the opportunity to sign up for the focus group using a pseudonym. If you choose to register with a pseudonym instead of your real name you will need to communicate to the researcher your pseudonym. All information collected for the purposes of this study will be deleted by the researcher three years after the research project has been completed. Keeping this information for three years is a federal requirement for a study such as this.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University/Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary or your spouse's current or future relations with Liberty University/Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.
Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Benjamin K. Forrest. You may contact him at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 434-592-6274, bkforrest2@liberty.edu or spirituallyformative@gmail.com. His faculty advisor is Dr. Fred Milacci and you may contact him at Liberty University School of Education, 434-582-2445, fmilacci@liberty.edu.. You may ask any questions you have now by contacting the researcher or the advisor via email or phone. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact the researcher or the advisor by email or phone.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

How to withdraw from the study:
In the event that you would like to withdraw from this study, please email the principle researcher Ben Forrest at bkforrest2@liberty.edu. Please cc Dr. Fred Milacci in on this

email using fmilacci@liberty.edu. In this event the information that you have submitted during the current research stage will not be used in the written record of the research or study. At this point all information collected in this research stage will be deleted from the digital and physical records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.
Check here is if you give your consent to be recordered if/when you are interviewed:_____

Signature:_____   Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____   Date: _____

APPENDIX F: DISCUSSION FORUM FOCUS GROUP PROMPTS

Step 1: Email Invitation: *Part 3 – Discussion Forum Focus Group Invitation*

Hello,

I would like to invite you to participate as a Student in my course **Spiritually Formative Experiences** which I'll be teaching using [CourseSites by Blackboard](). I've provided a brief description below for more information.

Course Description :
This online course shell will be used as a forum for dissertation research conducted at Liberty University and Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. The forum and all discussions will be confidential and used in accordance with permissions received from the Institutional Review Board at Liberty University. The researchers conducting this study are: Benjamin K. Forrest and Dr. Fred Milacci. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact them at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 434-592-6274, bkforrest2@liberty.edu or Liberty University School of Education, 434-582-2445, fmilacci@liberty.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

To confirm your participation, please register using the following link. Once you create an account, you will be enrolled automatically and can begin.

- [Click to confirm and register]()

If you have any questions about the course, please contact me via email at spirituallyformative@gmail.com. Please visit the [CourseSites Help]() page to contact support with any technical questions.

For all future visits to the course, after registration, please use the link below.

- [Click to visit course home page and login]()

I look forward to seeing you online soon!

Sincerely,
Benjamin Forrest

Step 2: Click "I Need a CourseSites Account"

Spiritually Formative Experiences

Welcome!

This online course shell will be used as a forum for dissertation research conducted at Liberty University and Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. The forum and all discussions will be confidential and used in accordance with permissions received from the Institutional Review Board at Liberty University. The researchers conducting this study are: Benjamin K. Forrest and Dr. Fred Milacci. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact them at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 434-592-6274, bkforrest2@liberty.edu or Liberty University School of Education, 434-582-2445, fmilacci@liberty.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

Invitation To Participate

You have been invited to participate in this course. To enroll, please choose one of the options below:

I Have a CourseSites Account

Use this option if you *already have* a CourseSites account. You will be asked to enter your login credentials, and then will be enrolled into the course.

I Need a CourseSites Account

Use this option if you *do not have* a CourseSites account. You will be asked to register, and then will be enrolled into the course.

Step 3: Create New Student Account. Feel free to login with your real name, or if you prefer you can create a pseudonym for your interaction in this focus group. If you choose to use a pseudonym for your interaction please email the researcher at *spirituallyformative@gmail.com* *to let him know that you are using a pseudonym for this focus group.*

1. Create New Student Account

Not in the mood for another account? Sign up using:

Otherwise, please let us know more about you below.

First Name
Sample

Last Name
Student

Email Address
xxxxxxxx2@verizon.net

Country
United States

Institution / District
Liberty University   Change

Username
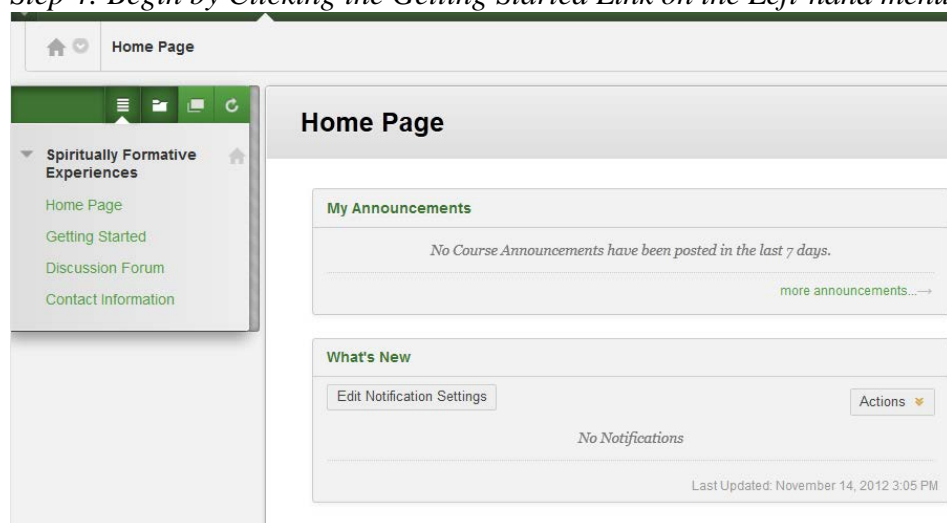SampleStudent1971

Password
••••••••••••••••
Password Strength

Repeat Password
••••••••••••••••

Terms of Use   ◉ Accept ○ Deny

any

Enter the words above:

Go Back   Save and Continue ›
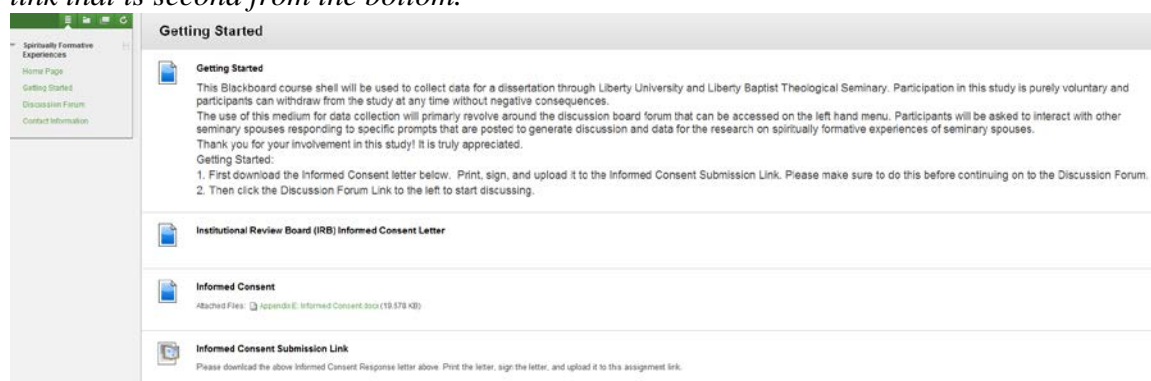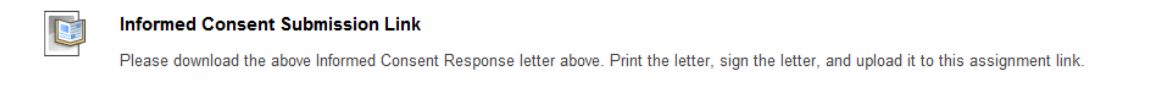
Step 4: Begin by Clicking the Getting Started Link on the Left-hand menu
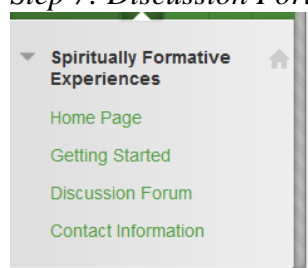

Step 5: Getting Started → Download the file titled "Informed Consent" attached to the link that is second from the bottom.

Step 6: After downloading the IRB Informed Consent Letter, print the letter, sign the letter, and upload the letter to the link at the bottom.
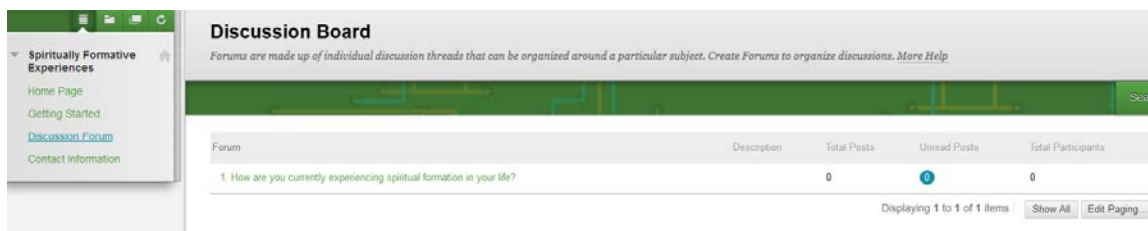

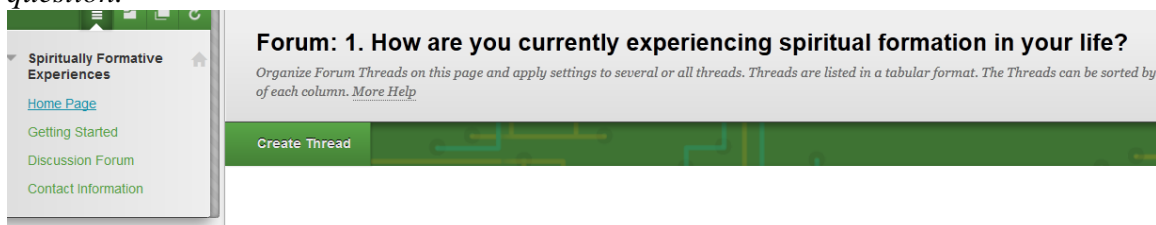*Step 7: Discussion Forum: Click the Discussion Forum Link on the Left-Hand Menu*

Step 8: Forum 1: Click the first forum labeled, "How are you currently experiencing spiritual formation in your life?"
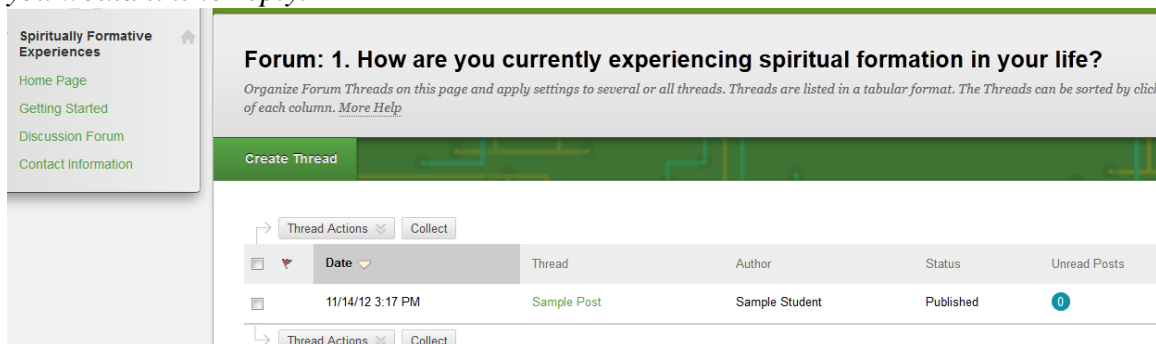

Step 9: Forum 1 Thread Creation: Click "Create Thread" to post a reply to the Forum 1 question.

Step 10: Forum 1 Authoring a thread: Insert a subject title, the body of your response, and click submit.
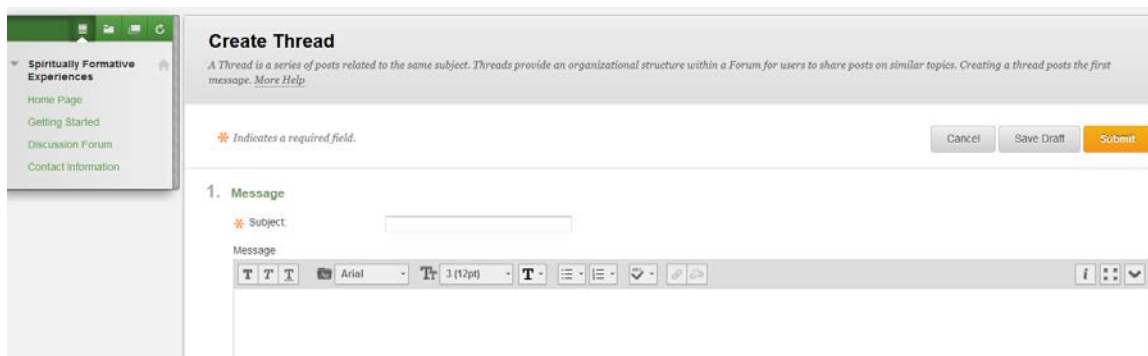
Step 11: Forum 1 Replies – Click "Sample Post" or the title of the current post to which you would like to reply.

Step 12: Replying – Click "Reply" to send a response to this particular thread

Step 13: There are 9 Discussion Forum Focus Group Prompts. Feel free to repeat steps 8-12 as many times as you would like in order to respond to the prompts and interact with your peers. Please check back as often as you would like in order to carry on the conversation and discussion regarding the spiritually formative experiences of seminary spouses. Please do not feel overwhelmed by the discussion forum, the purpose of this part of the research is to see what additional thoughts surface regarding your spiritually formative experiences as you interact with other individuals experiencing a similar stage of life. I will post all 9 prompts from the beginning of the discussion forum experience, but would like for the discussion to take place over the course of at least two weeks. Please check back in as often as you can.

Step 14: When returning to the website please follow the link: coursesites.com and login in with the username and password you created in step 3. When reclogging in make sure to click "Spiritually Formative Experiences" link in the "My Classes" section at the top right (see below).

Step 15: Discussion Forum Focus Group Prompts

Questions
1. How are you currently experiencing spiritual formation in your life?
2. How would you measure, assess, describe your spiritual maturity? How would you measure, assess, describe your family's spiritual maturity?
3. What is the most rewarding aspect of seminary education for you? What is the most challenging aspect of seminary education for you?
4. What do you hope to get through this seminary education experience?
5. How have you grown spiritually because of your spouse's seminary education?
6. What is your opinion of online education or residential education (depending on your spouse's educational medium)?

7. What suggestions would you make to the administration regarding the administration of the program?
8. What advice would you give to future couples considering the seminary program at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary?
9. What types of experiences does your spouse seem to share with you and the family with regards to what they are learning through their seminary experiences?

APPENDIX G: INITIAL EMAIL TO SEMINARY STUDENTS

Dear LBTS M.Div. Student,

I am writing to you to ask for your help in recruiting participants for my dissertation research. What I hope to achieve in this research is to explore how seminary spouses experience spiritual formation throughout your education during seminary. Specifically, I want to know how seminary wives are spiritually formed in their walk with Christ during the seminary years. Here is where you come in. I am hoping to find and recruit seminary spouses for this study.

I am looking for seminary wives of seminary students who are in the M.Div. degree. In order for your wife to qualify as a participant, you need to be finished with half of your M.Div. (45 credits) by the end of the Fall 2012 semester. You need to have been married to your spouse throughout the entirety of your degree. Also you need to have taken at least ¾ of your course work in the online portion of the degree **or** the residential portion of the degree. This means that if your program has been blended it cannot be more than a ¼:¾ ratio of blending. I am also looking for spouses who are American in their ethnic and cultural background. If these delimitations fit your spouse, I ask that you would please forward this email along with the Study Explanation Letter (attached), the Seminary Spouse Questionnaire (attached), Seminary Spouse Interview Contact Information Form (attached) the IRB Approval Letter (attached), and the Informed Consent Letter (attached) to your spouse in case they are interested in participating in this research.

Volunteering for participation will include completing a seminary spouse questionnaire and potentially taking part in an online video interview with a follow up discussion forum focus group using a blackboard course. All participants are invited to

volunteer for the questionnaire and for the interview. Participants can withdraw from participation at any point in the study without negative ramifications, but participant involvement throughout the entire project is highly valued. All information gathered will be kept in secure storage and all participants will be provided a pseudonym in all written documents regarding the research.

I ask that you would please forward this email on to your spouse with the attached letters which further explain the participant role in the research. If your spouse is interested in participating there are instructions for her to follow on the attached *Study Explanation Letter*. In order to participate she will need to follow these instructions and return the *Informed Consent* letter with her expressed interest in participating.

I thank you for your time in response and assistance.

Benjamin K. Forrest, Ed.S.

APPENDIX H: STANDARDIZED OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions

Background

5. How did you meet your spouse?
6. Please describe the details of your family's situation while he is in seminary. Include where you live, how long you have been married, work situations, age and stage of your children and any other descriptors/factors that you deem valuable.
7. Describe the decision-making process involved in going to seminary. What factors led your spouse to choose this school? What factors led your spouse to choose the type of educational medium that they chose? (i.e. primarily online vs. primarily residential)
8. What is your spouse's current vocation? Is he currently involved in ministry?

Experience - Spiritual Formation

8. Can you describe your spiritual life before your spouse enrolled in seminary?
9. Please describe your spiritual life now.
10. In what ways has your spiritual situation changed from pre-seminary to now?
11. Can you provide a narrative or example to describe your current spiritual relationship or development? Do you have any stories or analogies that capture or reflect your experiences?
12. How has your spouse's seminary experience influenced your own faith journey and spiritual maturity?
13. How has your spouse's educational paradigm (online or residential) directly impacted your spiritual formation?

Opinion - Recommendations for the future

5. What general advice would you give to future couples considering attending seminary?
6. What advice would you give to future couples interested in attending seminary regarding their choice of an online or residential context?
7. If you had one suggestion for seminary administration as a program, what would that be?
8. Is there anything else about your experience of your spouse's time in seminary that you'd like to tell me?

Note: These questions have been adapted from Dahl, Jensen, & McCampbell, 2010 and Legako & Sorenson, 2000. Attempts were made to contact these authors for permission. Dahl et al., 2010 gave permission, but neither Legako nor Sorenson were reachable.