

5-2008

Mentoring in Marriage and Family Therapy Programs: Graduate's Perspectives

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MENTORING IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY PROGRAMS:
GRADUATES' PERSPECTIVES

by

Allison Webber Hicken

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

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Family, Consumer, and Human Development
(Marriage and Family Therapy)

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2008

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ABSTRACT

Mentoring in Marriage and Family Therapy Programs:
Graduates' Perspectives

by

Allison Webber Hicken, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2008

Major Professor: Dr. Thorana S. Nelson
Department: Family, Consumer, and Human Development

The purpose of this study was to understand how recent graduates of marriage and family therapy (MFT) master's programs experienced mentoring relationships. Fifteen recent graduates from six different MFT master's-level programs were interviewed about their experiences with mentoring relationships. Graduates shared their experiences regarding forming mentoring relationships, how these relationships affected elements of the program experience, the frequency and duration of contact, and mentors' influence after graduation. All 15 participants reported having at least one mentoring relationship and graduates described the variety of roles that their mentors took within the relationships. Characteristics of mentors are discussed in terms of positive and negative traits, and participants discussed how their mentors influenced and alleviated program stress. Graduates reported that after graduation, concerns included licensing, job placement, and the national exam, though most reported receiving little assistance in this

area. Graduates offered recommendations about mentoring for current mentors, students, and MFT programs. Qualitative analyses of the interviews are discussed in terms of common themes introduced by the graduates and implications for future practice and research are discussed.

(105 pages)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I need to thank my thesis committee for their efforts in encouraging me and being flexible as I have worked to accomplish this task. I would like to thank Thorana Nelson and her willingness to tirelessly edit and revise my drafts so that I could meet this deadline.

My amazing husband, Kyle, deserves more appreciation than I could ever offer. This thesis has been a part of our entire marriage and without his understanding, encouragement, shoulder to cry on, and absolute love, I would have never finished this. His efforts at making my life easier have never ceased. I love you, Babe. As for our baby, I pray that you have been blissfully unaware of my stress in these critical months of development. We can't wait to meet you in a few months!

My wonderful family and friends also deserve credit. I have two great sets of parents who have done everything they could to help me finish this project. Thanks for allowing me to vent and finding every way possible to make this process easier. To my friends, your understanding and support have gotten me through. My cohort, though all finished before me, have been amazing. Every phone call, email, and moment together have centered on how they could offer support and encourage me. We got through the program together and without them, I would not have truly come to the end.

Lastly, my gratitude is for the wonderful participants who shared their time and experiences. Their voices are heard in this document and without them, it would not have been possible. Thanks to you all!

Allison Hicken

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Marriage and family therapy (MFT) as a field has been evolving since its inception. Early family therapists were largely trained in other fields and learned MFT skills from their clients and colleagues rather than entering into formal MFT training. According to the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) and the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE), current aspiring MFT trainees must undergo graduate training in either a master's, doctoral, or post graduate training program that includes MFT coursework and clinical practice, including therapy and individual and group supervision (AAMFT, 2005). Many programs require that students complete thesis or dissertation work prior to graduation. Following graduation, trainees must complete additional years of supervised clinical experience and must pass a national examination in order to be licensed to practice independently in most states (AAMFT, 2008). This intensive and extensive training adds up to considerable stress on trainees.

Problem

Linda Schwallie, president-elect of the AAMFT, discussed some of the concerns she had for the future of MFT (personal communication, May 17, 2007). She reported that the AAMFT Board of Directors was concerned about the upcoming retirement of a large portion of older members and expressed concern that MFT programs would need to establish measures designed to retain students and guide them toward licensure and

continued practice to replace retirees. Ms. Schwallie also stated a concern she had with finding qualified and interested individuals to pursue degrees in MFT instead of seeking counseling degrees with less rigorous training, and maintaining ways to assist students finishing their MFT programs and graduates to become licensed. Without replacement of retirees and increased numbers of new therapists, the field of MFT is in danger of extinction (personal communication, May 17, 2007).

Though many factors negatively influence the rates of MFTs entering the workforce, one such factor may be the stress that MFT students face. MFT programs emphasize focused training related to clinical skill development and supervision in addition to the rigors of coursework, research, teaching opportunities, and balancing personal lives. “Few studies exist in the family therapy literature directly evaluating the positive or negative effect[s] of academic, clinical training, and graduate student lifestyle stressors on students’ ability to adjust or cope” (Polson & Nida, 1998, p. 96). Several researchers have discussed the impact of stress in MFT programs (Polson & Nida; Polson & Piercy, 1993; Sori, Wetchler, Ray, & Niedner, 1996) and unite in reporting that stress in MFT programs has an influence on how students view programs and on their ability to complete varied requirements. There has been no literature since Polson and Nida discussing the impact of stress on MFT students. It is possible that this stress that MFT students face is related to the decreasing numbers of MFTs. If this is true, perhaps the stress, in part, has prevented some trainees from graduating and completing requirements for licensure. With these difficulties, there must be a possibility for some solutions to this problem.

Possible Solutions

According to the literature reviewed, the difficulties that MFT students and trainees face is extensive enough to merit concern. Since many students reported that program requirements, including clinical hours, supervision, and thesis and dissertation work, were very stressful (Polson & Nida, 1998; Polson & Piercy, 1993; Sori et al., 1996), it is logical to assume that one solution would be to ease some of the training demands. However, in order to maintain accreditation status, this might not always be feasible. Polson and Piercy recommended teaching stress management skills to students and encouraging them to voice concerns early in the program. Some students might not know where to turn in order to voice these concerns. One possible solution is to encourage or facilitate mentoring relationships for the benefit of MFT students to assist with program stress and adjustment to life as a therapist. Linda Schwallie (personal communication, May 17, 2007) indicated that there is a need for mentoring in the field of marriage and family therapy. As a possible solution to the problem of potential declining of MFT numbers, Ms. Schwallie further indicated that mentoring in graduate programs could help to address concerns related to students who begin programs and do not complete the necessary steps to graduate and/or become licensed as MFTs. She suggested that mentoring relationships in training programs and internships could prove to be helpful toward assisting new therapists with transitional points in their careers.

Mentoring

Seeking someone with more knowledge and experience to act as a guide for a

novice has been a practice dating as far back as Greek mythology. In Homer's ancient Greek poem, *Mentor* was the name given to a character who was a friend of Odysseus and then was entrusted to teach and guide Odysseus's son, Telemachus, along his journey (Roche, 1979). Since that time, the word mentor has become synonymous with one who assists a protégé with the necessary tasks of development, whether in a professional or personal realm.

Mentoring is frequently studied as a process of furthering the development of new students (Boyle & Boice, 1998; Haidar, 2007; Johnson, 2007; Snyder & Elliot, 2005), academic retention and development of minority students (Dolan, 2008; Walker, Wright, & Hanley, 2001), and as a basis for furthering career development of less experienced employees (Brashear, Bellenger, Boyle, & Barksdale, 2006; Eby & Lockwood, 2005; Roche, 1979; Russell & Adams, 1997). It has been studied in multiple fields including but not limited to nursing, pharmacology, medicine, education, business, academia, and mental health (Blauvelt, 2008; Brashear et al.; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Haidar; Luna & Cullen, 1998; Ramanan, Taylor, Davis, & Phillips, 2006; Roche; White & Tyron, 2007; Willemyns, Gallois, & Callan, 2003; Wu, Turban, & Chueng, 2007). Those receiving the mentoring are typically called mentees (White & Tyron) or protégés (Eby & Lockwood). These terms will be used interchangeably when discussing literature in order to maintain the integrity of each author's voice in the research.

Mentoring relationships are considered important to students and faculty because of potential benefits to both parties (Boyle & Boice, 1998). Protégés have reported increased career planning, learning, coaching, and psychosocial support (Eby &

Lockwood, 2005). Mentoring has been demonstrated to offer psychosocial support to both mentors and participants (Eby & Lockwood), increase earning potential and career advancement (Roche, 1979); increase loyalty to companies providing mentoring (Brashear et al., 2006); stimulate career development and professional growth (Haidar, 2007); offer a safe place to express frustrations, concerns, and vulnerabilities (Blauvelt, 2008); and provide new knowledge and professional guidance (Johnson, 2007). Boyle and Boice found that after a year of participation in a formal mentoring program, 25 participating faculty mentors rated the mentoring relationship as more valuable to themselves as mentors than did the protégés.

Using a group of mentored undergraduate students and a control group of nonmentored students matched in ethnicity, beginning college GPA, age, and gender, Campbell and Campbell (1997) compared the two groups and found that those students who worked with faculty mentors who shared similar interests had higher GPAs, tended to have higher educational retention rates, and completed more credits per semester. This evidence suggests that mentors positively affect the academic development of their protégés.

For the purposes of this study, a mentor is defined as an individual who helps guide and enhance the experience of the protégé throughout a graduate program by offering support, guidance, and direction in areas of academia, professional development, and personal growth. Mentors can be professors, supervisors, university staff, colleagues, employers, family members, religious clergy, or friends (Clark, Harden, & Johnson,

2000; Johnson, 2007; Luna & Cullen, 1998; Snyder & Elliot, 2005; Willemyns et al., 2003).

Purpose of Study

Mentoring has been studied in mental health fields and has been found to be effective in helping graduate students maintain a sense of community, acceptance, support, encouragement, training, sponsorship for job placement, personal friendship, counsel, and guidance (Clark et al., 2000). Though literature exists on supervision of MFT students, there is an apparent lack of information regarding MFT students' experiences with mentoring relationships (Johnson, 2007). It appears that mentoring in MFT graduate programs might benefit MFT students and trainees by offering guidance, support, direction, and personalized help when necessary to combat the stress of clinical training and the process of becoming a competent therapist. The question arises as to what MFT mentoring relationships are like and whether they are experienced as helpful to students in regard to program completion, therapist development, and eventual licensure. The purposes of this study were to (a) find out more about the experiences of recent MFT graduates in regard to mentoring relationships and (b) determine possible improvements and recommendations for MFT programs to better enable students to successfully complete their programs and become licensed as MFTs.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is a general lack of information related to marriage and family therapy trainees' experiences with mentoring. This chapter reviews the literature in mentoring, first in general, and then in mental health followed by what is written specifically about MFT mentoring.

General Mentoring

Mentoring has been studied in depth in a variety of fields including business, athletics, higher education, the military, and even the arts (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Roche, 1979). One study (Russell & Adams, 1997) suggested that there are five main themes universal to mentoring literature. These themes include (a) definitions, (b) functions, (c) influential structural and organizational aspects of mentoring, (d) alternative forms of mentoring, and (e) the relationship between the mentor and the protégé.

Definitions

There is no common definition in mentoring literature. Cronan-Hillix, Gendheimer, Cronan-Hillix, and Davidson (1986) suggested that “[a] mentor is an experienced adult who guides, advises, and supports inexperienced protégés for the purpose of furthering their careers” (p. 123). Similarly, Campbell and Campbell (1997) defined mentoring as

a situation in which a more experienced member of an organization maintains a relationship with a less experienced, often new member to the organization, and provides information, support, and guidance so as to enhance the less experienced member's chances of success in the organization and beyond. (p. 727)

Specific to counseling professions, Johnson (2007) suggested that mentoring requires “dynamic, emotionally connected, reciprocal relationships in which the faculty member or supervisor shows deliberate and generative concern for the student or trainee beyond mere acquisition of clinical skills” (p. 259).

In a study exploring a mentor from the protégé's perspective, Beyene, Anglin, Sanchez, and Ballou (2002) described mentors as “parents, relatives, friends, counselors, teachers, work place colleagues, peers, church members, and members of the community” (p. 97). The 133 college students in the Beyene et al. study reported that a true mentoring relationship was one that was beneficial to both the mentor and the protégé, suggesting that from the protégés' perspectives, mentors need to also benefit from the relationship.

Mentors come from a variety of places within each discipline. In a survey of 109 graduate students from diverse majors, most reported that their mentors were their professors or academic advisors (Luna & Cullen, 1998). Another study suggested that fellow students can be the best mentors and can offer hope to less advanced students if given adequate training (Snyder & Elliot, 2005).

Characteristics of Mentors

The results of one study (Cronan-Hillix et al., 1986) suggested that the most important characteristics of mentors included being interested and supportive, possessing

positive personality characteristics, being knowledgeable and competent, sharing wisdom and ideas, being nonexploitative towards protégés, being involved in research, being resourceful, and maintaining positive attitudes toward students. Other frequently mentioned characteristics of mentors included traits of being supportive, intelligent, knowledgeable, caring, encouraging, approachable, and accepting (Clark et al., 2000; Haidar, 2007). Boyle and Boice (1998) found that mentors who engaged in small talk in weekly meetings with protégés had strong relationships with them and were more likely to continue in the relationships even when the protégés had no pressing questions. Conversely, characteristics of poor mentors according to Cronan-Hillix et al.'s sample included being uninterested and unsupportive, possessing [negative] personality characteristics, lacking knowledge or competence, being exploitative, having poor attitudes towards students, and being unavailable or inaccessible. Eby and Allen (2002) surveyed 242 employees of accounting and engineering firms who suggested that the most negative part of their mentoring experiences involved mentors who used manipulative and distancing behaviors as well as a general sense of poor personality fit between the protégé and mentor.

Forming of Relationships

Mentoring relationships are formed in a variety of ways, depending on their contexts, and can be formal or informal. Formal mentoring programs are those that include an organizational matching and monitoring of goals as well as guidelines on frequency and duration of contact. Some formal mentoring programs involve training and group meetings to ensure that all involved share similar expectations and can discuss

reservations about the program (Boyle & Boice, 1998; Eby & Lockwood, 2005).

Informal mentoring relationships, on the other hand, include spontaneous matching of protégés to mentors and are not as directly focused on specific outcome goals. Informal relationships often are more centered in psychosocial support or on specific foci chosen by the pairs (e.g., careers, academic achievement, stress management, and so forth; Eby & Lockwood). In academic settings, many students create informal mentoring relationships based on friendships, support-seeking from peers and faculty, and commonality with others (Eby & Lockwood).

A comparison study of both formal and informal mentoring pairings found little difference between the two groups in terms of outcomes related to learning; however, protégés in formal relationships were more likely to report feeling more distant from their mentors than those in informal mentoring relationships (Allen & Eby, 2003). One study (Boyle & Boice, 1998) based on new faculty mentoring programs at large universities found that new graduate teaching assistants and new faculty had difficulty agreeing to matched mentors because of fears that their mentors might have influence on career development, tenure, and promotions. One solution to this concern suggested by Boyle and Boice was to pair mentors from different departments with protégés to ensure that mentors would not be involved in performance reviews.

Mentoring in Specific Fields

Business Mentoring

In one of the first empirical studies on mentoring in the business world, Roche

(1979) found it common for executives to have had mentors; three fourths of the sample's 1,250 respondents indicated that they had had mentors, with the majority of the sample indicating that these relationships were formed within the first 5 years of their careers. Executives with mentors had higher salaries, had higher career satisfaction, attained their positions in their fields faster, and were more likely to sponsor protégés later in their careers.

Literature in the business field has included research related to the personalities of employees, their successes in establishing mentor relationships, and their career outcomes (Wu et al., 2007). Employees with outgoing and proactive personalities were found to receive more mentoring. These characteristics also were mediating factors in later career success as measured by promotions, income, and satisfaction (Wu et al.).

Mentors' positions within or outside of business corporations have been found to be indicators of loyalty to the companies as well as performance levels (Brashear et al., 2006). In a study of sales representatives, Brashear and colleagues reported that sales representatives with managers acting as mentors had higher performance ratings and lower intentions of leaving their companies than those without mentors. Results differed slightly when the sales representatives' mentors were within-company peers as opposed to outside mentors; employees still had lower intentions of leaving the company, but were rated more poorly on performance. Employees with outside mentors had high performance but low loyalty to their companies and those with no mentors had low performance ratings and low loyalty to the companies.

Willemys and colleagues (2003) surveyed 157 employees in retail, education,

and business corporations who had been employed full time for at least six months or part time for at least one year regarding their perceptions of trust and mistrust of supervising mentors in the workplace. They found that employees who felt they were in an “in group” and believed that they could trust their superiors were able to address concerns more readily than those who felt they were in an “out group” and were not valued or accepted. The “in group” employees reported that their bosses were approachable and mentored them. This group reported that their supervisors used positive communication, limited self disclosure, and were invested in the success of the employee compared to reports of the “out group,” who felt that their supervisors were not invested in their success or job stability and used negative and coercive communication to motivate employees (Willemyns et al.).

Health Professions

Mentoring is a common practice in many of the health professions including mental health, nursing, and medical fields. In a commentary to new pharmacists, White and Tyron (2007) suggested that it is essential for new pharmacists to seek out mentors who can offer support, share experiences, and help direct mentees in their career paths. The authors recommended seeking someone within the field who is admired and trusted and with whom the mentee feels comfortable to offer direction. Haidar (2007) highlighted her experience in a practicum setting when she mentored one nurse in training. Haidar discussed the need for nursing professionals to recognize students’ abilities and limitations and to mindfully address growth in each area using students’ preferred learning styles. Through a narrative, Haidar demonstrated that effective

mentoring included attention to all learning styles such as aural, kinesthetic, visual, and tactile. In her example, she included demonstrating and practicing techniques and clinical procedures for the trainee, providing written handouts to help the student view and retain information, providing auditory instructions and feedback throughout procedures with patients, and carefully monitoring specific goals that had been agreed upon by both parties. As the mentor, Haidar reported that she took on many roles such as teacher, evaluator, coach, and confidante as she worked to help her mentee progress from a novice to a proficient practitioner. However, she did not report on the experiences from her student's perspective.

Young nurses are not the only ones who are benefiting from mentoring relationships. One nursing program was facing the difficulty of retaining competent faculty members because of the expectation that they have both clinical and academic expertise (Blauvelt, 2008). This program implemented a formal mentoring program in which more experienced nursing faculty members were placed with new faculty members based on interests and needed skill development on the part of the protégé. Protégés received a manual with topics to be addressed within the mentoring relationship including faculty roles, classroom responsibilities, testing, clinical policies, and curriculum. They met in weekly group meetings for the first semester, and then, individually with mentors each week during the second semester. Nine new faculty participated in this program over a two year period and reported that benefits included a cohort for socialization, ability to identify with others' needs, a safe place to express frustrations and vulnerabilities, and having one person to direct questions to instead of feeling lost. The

only recommendations given to enhance the program were to limit the number of protégés for a given mentor and to extend the program beyond the first year of teaching (Blauvelt).

Ramanan and colleagues (2006) surveyed 329 residents from five medical residency programs to gain information regarding perceived mentoring experiences and their effects on career preparation. Ninety-three percent of residents reported that it was important to them to have mentors during their residency training, but fewer than half reported having mentors during their training. Of concern to the researchers were members of minority groups and other medical interns who were less likely to have mentors and felt less prepared for careers than their mentored resident counterparts (Ramanan et al.).

Other Fields

Mentoring occurs in various fields other than business and health. Mentoring relationships can be found in employment, career training, and advancement, and in virtually any situation where new skills and support can be gained from a relationship with another person in a similar setting. In employment settings, mentoring relationships differ slightly, but have similarities to educational mentoring. Often, they are the direct result of hierarchy and proximity to the employee. One business magazine, *Office Pro* ("Mentoring," 2006), listed categories of mentoring specific to the workplace. The authors described *natural mentoring*, where a more accomplished employee offers help to a junior; *situational mentoring* specifically focused on an immediate task and of short duration such as working on a project; *supervisory mentoring*, involving the instruction

of groups of employees who are subordinate to the mentor; and *formal facilitated mentoring*, which is a structured program to match individuals specific to a purpose in the company.

Using a qualitative design, Eby and Lockwood (2005) focused on career mentoring with a population of employees and employers involved in a formal mentoring program. These researchers interviewed participants to learn their views of the benefits as well as problems associated with the program, and to seek feedback for improvements to the program. Benefits included new knowledge, career learning, and psychosocial support. Protégés reported that challenges included mentors' not meeting expectations and feeling neglected by their mentors. Mentors expressed feelings of personal inadequacy. Both groups suggested improving the program with closer monitoring and shared goals, and pair matching based on similarities in interests and career positions (Eby & Lockwood). These findings shed light on the experiences of employment mentors and protégés, but have limited application to marriage and family therapy trainees.

Academia

Professional mentoring also exists within the world of academia when new professors seek more experienced faculty and department leaders as mentors. One author poignantly pleaded, "Mentoring, much like parenting, is better done by example than by exhortation" (Hendrick, 2005, p. 1167). Hendrick further proposed that before faculty can act as mentors, they must first be mentored; experienced faculty and newer faculty can work together in mentoring teams, using past wisdom and fresh ideas to jointly benefit students. Boyle and Boice (1998) initially tracked new faculty over a one year period and

found that fewer than 25% formed spontaneous mentoring relationships and of those, most relationships were dissolved within the year and were restricted to white males. Following this pilot research, Boyle and Boice designed a study in which 25 new faculty members were matched with experienced faculty mentors and asked to meet weekly and to document experiences, and then to meet monthly with all of the mentor pairs to discuss mentoring ideas. These mentor pairs were compared to a control group of spontaneously formed mentor pairs within the same new-faculty cohort. Boyle and Boice found that the paired mentoring teams learned from others in group meetings and were able to strengthen their sense of community. Several pairs reported that they were finished after meeting for fewer than ten weeks, but other groups reported that small talk during weekly meetings helped them to become friends and deepen the relationships. By the end of the year, participants reported that guidance and socializing of new faculty was essential for their development and success in academia (Boyle and Boice).

University Education

Many universities across the nation are working to implement mentoring programs for students. Studies typically focus on specific populations that they are seeking to benefit: minority students, first-generation students, freshmen, and transfer students. Researchers noted the importance of securing mentoring relationships for the students' success at the university level (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Dolan, 2008; Walker et al., 2001).

In order to highlight common trends in outcomes, one undergraduate study will be discussed in depth. At one west coast university, researchers sought to determine whether

ethnic minorities would benefit from a formal mentoring program, measuring GPA and retention rates as outcomes (Campbell & Campbell, 1997). Mentored students were compared to a control group of nonmentored students in a matched-pairs design based on ethnicity, gender, entering enrollment status (freshman or transfer student), and GPA. A total of 339 students participated, roughly 20% of students enrolled in a summer outreach program. Students were assigned mentors based on intended majors and were matched with mentors from within those or closely related fields. At the completion of one academic year, mentored students had higher GPAs, more completed credits each semester, and lower dropout rates. These results were typical of other studies (Obler, Francis, & Wishengrad, 1977; Thile & Matt, 1995) focusing on undergraduate students.

Qualitative data might seem to be a good source for gathering information about graduate students' experiences with mentoring, but remarkably little such data exist. Much of the information gathered has been from closed-question surveys that limit the respondents' ability to speak candidly about personal experiences (e.g., Clark et al., 2000; Hollingsworth & Fassinger, 2002; Luna & Cullen, 1998). Kolbert, Morgan, and Brendel (2002) attempted to fill this gap by interviewing 16 graduate students and six faculty members about their perceptions of the potentially exploitive multiple relationships that can occur within close faculty-student relationships. Researchers used four scenarios related to friendships, mentoring relationships, romantic or sexual relationships, and monetary interactions to examine views on what is acceptable and useful within these types of potentially dangerous relationships. Students and professors alike did not question mentoring relationships as long as both parties were free to enter into and leave

the relationships. Both professors and students agreed that mentoring relationships needed to be based on furthering young clinicians' careers, and would flourish when both parties knew and abided by shared expectations of the relationship.

Graduate Education in Mental Health Fields

Researchers in mental health fields have also sought to study the effects of mentoring relationships on professional identity, personal well-being, and graduate school success. Clark and colleagues (2000) surveyed 1,000 recently graduated doctoral psychologists randomly selected from then-current American Psychological Association-accredited program lists. Through a mailed survey, they explored the prevalence of mentors in graduate programs and students' satisfaction with these mentoring relationships. Of the 1,000 surveys sent, 787 were returned. Sixty-six percent of the students who completed the surveys reported that they had had mentors during their doctoral training, and two thirds of those who had mentors reported that they had received mentoring from a faculty member. Respondents reported that major functions of their mentoring relationships included direct training and instruction, emotional acceptance, support and encouragement, sponsorship for internships, research opportunities, protection, personal guidance and counsel, and friendship.

A total of 34% of nearly 800 respondents in the Clark and colleagues (2000) study reported that they were not mentored during their doctoral training. Reasons listed for not being mentored included that the faculty had not had time to mentor (32%), mentoring was not encouraged by the program (30%), inability to find a mentor (29%), a belief that a mentor was not needed (7.5%), and 5% reported being mentored by a psychologist

outside of the doctoral program. Other reasons given included concerns of racism, ageism, lack of time to find a mentor, feeling like the mentor did not take the role seriously, lack of relationship-seeking skills, and a limited knowledge of the importance of mentoring (Clark et al.).

In a study by Cronan-Hillix and colleagues (1986), 53% of 90 psychology graduate students surveyed reported having mentors, most of whom were from the students' own universities. The students who reported that they did not have mentors indicated that this was due mostly to their inability to find satisfactory mentors or the perception that their programs did not support mentoring. The researchers found that clinical students were less likely to have experienced mentoring relationships as compared to students in research-focused programs (Cronan-Hillix et al.). These results are useful and may have implications for MFT students; however, results were drawn from a closed-question survey and participants were limited in their ability to respond openly beyond the choices provided on the survey.

Marriage and Family Therapy

Stress encountered in MFT programs influence student perceptions of their programs and the field as a whole (Polson & Piercy, 1993; Sori et al., 1996). This information is valuable to understanding the specific needs that MFT students require in supportive mentoring relationships. Polson and Piercy studied the stress experienced in the marriages and families of MFT doctoral students using focus groups comprised of the students and their spouses divided into groups of those with and without children. "The students described themselves as stressed by high program demands, implicit and explicit

faculty expectations of student performance, certain core course requirements, and little family time. Their spouses experienced intense social isolation and anger toward program demands during the first year of training” (p. 69). Students without children seemed to be more resentful of program demands while students with children seemed to be more resentful of the extensive time requirements that pulled them away from their own families (Polson & Piercy).

Similarly, Sori and colleagues (1996) found that 144 MFT students (88% master’s and 12% doctoral) reported high levels of stress. Those with children reported feeling slightly more stress with both academic and clinical requirements and marital and family roles than those without children. Students who had thesis or dissertation requirements reported significantly more stress than those who did not. This report of stress from a small sample of MFT students and their families might be similar to other samples of MFT students across the country. In a second study, Polson and Nida (1998) researched the impact of graduate school on MFT student stress by gathering a national sample from the AAMFT student membership list and surveying both master’s and doctoral students about their perceptions of stress within their MFT programs. Students reported that trying to work to support themselves through their programs as well as rigorous program demands led many to consider dropping out of the programs and led others toward antidepressants to combat program stress.

MFT students undergo clinical supervision as part of their program requirements. Supervisory relationships typically involve weekly meetings to discuss cases and the development of the therapist. Weekly supervision frequently offers components such as

problem-solving, coaching, apprenticeship, academic and clinical evaluation, personal life discussion, and so forth (Johnson, 2007); all of which can be considered mentoring. Prouty, Helmeke, and Lyness (2002) discussed the ability of MFT supervisors to act as mentors. They reported that many supervisory relationships already contain elements of positive mentoring and then challenged supervisors and faculty to be more intentional with their mentoring. Students may work with many supervisors throughout the course of a program or they may work directly with only a few. It is logical therefore to surmise that clinical supervisors are possible mentors for MFT trainees. Knowing what is beneficial and potentially detrimental in supervisory relationships may offer key insights into the mentoring process specific to MFT students.

Though supervisors likely have opportunities for mentoring their trainees, not all supervisory relationships meet the criteria of mentorships. Johnson (2007) discussed the notion of *transactional* supervision (typically hierarchy-based) where cases and academic details are discussed and evaluations are given, as compared to *transformational* supervision. Transformational supervision (typically collaboratively based) is said to occur when a reciprocal relationship has been developed; the supervisor is invested in professional, emotional/psychological, and psychosocial development of the trainee; and the supervisor becomes intentional about the trainee's clinical development and career success. Johnson suggested that when supervision moves from the initial transactional style to transformational supervision, therapists-in-training are able to express vulnerabilities and manage boundaries while continuing in their developmental process.

Due to the nature of mentoring relationships compared to supervisory

relationships (Prouty et al., 2002), it is important to understand how MFT students view their supervision experiences. Anderson, Schlossberg, and Rigazio-DiGilio (2000) surveyed 160 MFT master's and doctoral students from more than 40 accredited MFT programs to gain information on their best and worst supervision experiences. Students rated their best experiences in supervision as times when "supervisor feedback was direct and straightforward, time was set aside exclusively for supervision, exploration of new ideas and therapeutic techniques were explored, practical skills were taught, readings were suggested, and supervisors directly confronted blind spots and resistance" (p. 87). Worst supervision experiences included times when "supervisory contacts were frequently cancelled, distractions and interruptions were frequent, supervisor[s were] indirect and avoidant, conformity was tacitly encouraged, student[s'] weaknesses and shortcomings were emphasized, divergent viewpoints were not tolerated, and supervisor[s] seemed preoccupied with personal problems" (p. 87). It is possible that some of these findings might also relate to MFT trainees' more general experiences with mentoring relationships.

Though there is mentoring literature for other mental health fields, there is little information on mentoring in the field of marriage and family therapy. Though supervision literature discusses elements of mentoring, there is not a clear picture of how mentors have affected MFT students and what roles they take in helping MFT students to progress into the field at large.

Purpose and Objectives

From a review of the literature, it appears that mentoring relationships might be helpful to MFT students in managing and alleviating stress and adapting to the pressures of the field, and to increase the number of MFT students who enter and finish programs. The purpose of this study was to understand how a diverse group of recently graduated MFT students were influenced by identified mentors and the effects this had on their graduate school experiences and progress towards licensure. The objective of this research was to gain this understanding through phone interviews of 15 recently graduated MFTs.

Research Questions

The researcher sought to develop a greater understanding of MFT graduates' experiences in mentoring. Specific research questions include:

1. What are graduates' perceptions of their mentors?
2. How are MFT program experiences influenced by mentors?
3. What is the frequency of contact and duration of the mentoring relationships?
4. How do mentors influence students after graduation?
5. What recommendations do recent MFT graduates have regarding mentoring?

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Design

This study used a qualitative design to gather information from participants via semistructured phone interviews. Data were analyzed following transcription using coding of major themes related to the research questions.

Sample

This study was designed to learn more about the experiences of mentoring relationships of recent MFT graduates. The sample included 15 recently graduated master's level MFTs. Participants were selected through a purposive process through email solicitation. Participants were selected on several criteria. The first criterion was the successful completion of graduation requirements for their particular AAMFT-accredited master's programs; second, participants were required to have graduated within the five years prior to the interview in order to ensure that program experiences and mentoring processes were fresh in memory and had been minimally influenced by other mentoring experiences; and third, participants agreed to an oral informed consent (see Appendix B).

Participating programs were chosen from the AAMFT-accredited program list on the AAMFT website. Ten programs were selected based on the geographic location of the institution and the requirements of the program, specifically that the program offered a

thesis option. The thesis option criterion was based on the assumption that graduates who completed theses would have built-in opportunities for more one-on-one time with faculty as well as an increased likelihood for increased stress. Programs were selected based on a review of the programs' websites for this information. After 10 were selected, the directors of the selected programs were emailed, requesting that they forward an email to the programs' recent MFT master's level graduates, and offer a brief introduction to the purpose of the research (see Appendix A). Graduates were asked to reply to the researcher's email, expressing their interest in the study. The first four individuals from any particular program who responded to the email were offered interviews until 15 interviews were scheduled and completed. An email was sent to the 10 program directors one week following the initial email to ask whether the program director had forwarded the email and to serve as a reminder to the directors to forward the initial email. Directors were asked to indicate the number of graduates who were sent the email. Of the 10 programs emailed, five directors replied to the follow up email to confirm that the initial email had been sent. One director reported that his program had only recently gained their accreditation status and he did not think that his graduates had the experiences that I was looking for in the study. Participants were not screened for exclusion criteria other than those listed above. The Institutional Review Board of Utah State University reviewed and approved the study's protocol.

Fifteen participants were selected on a first-come basis from the graduate responses. The participants represented five different MFT master's programs. Four graduates were from Program 1 (all female), 4 from Program 2 (3 males, 1 female), 2

from Program 3 (1 male, 1 female), 2 from Program 4 (1 male, 1 female), and 3 from Program 5 (all female). No graduates replied from the other five programs selected although one program director emailed to state that the email had been sent to 24 students. The sample consisted of 5 males and 10 females ranging in age from 25 to 40. All had graduated within the five years prior to the interview. All 15 participants were white/Caucasian and all but 3 were currently employed in therapy settings that included court systems, residential treatment centers, not-for-profit groups, private practice, and university settings. Two of the participants were currently licensed and all others reported that they were working toward licensure. See Table 1 for demographic information of the sample listed by pseudonym.

Instruments

Interviewer

The interviewer is a fundamental instrument in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Personal experiences of the interviewer inherently lead to researcher bias (Graziano & Raulin, 2000) and thus require revealing pertinent information. I am a married female in my mid-twenties and am a candidate for a master's degree in MFT. I have experienced various forms of mentoring relationships during my time in an MFT program at a university in Utah. Some aspects of these mentoring relationships have been helpful and some have not been. I am curious about others' experiences and realize that my experiences with mentoring as well as the literature I read influenced my thoughts about mentoring and what is helpful and not helpful.

Table 1

Demographic Information

Graduate	Age	Mentor	Mentor type	Licensure	Graduation date	Thesis completed
Sally	27	Bill	Academic	In process	2007	Yes
Sophia	29	John	Academic	Not pursuing	2006	Yes
Richard	34	Mark	Academic	Licensed	2005	Yes
Renee	25	Susan	Academic	In process	2007	No
Katherine	26	Frank	Academic	In process	2007	Yes
Mike	34	Sam	Supervisor	Licensed	2005	Yes
Sandie	25	Linda	Academic	In process	2005	Yes
Ned	27	Tim	Academic	In process	2007	Yes
Kasie	25	Megan	Peer	In process	2008	No
Erin	32	Sarah	Academic	Not pursuing	2005	Yes
Brooke	25	Hannah	Pastor's wife	In process	2006	No
Victor	30	Patty	Academic	In process	2004	Yes
Ethel	29	Ralph	Academic	In process	2007	Yes
Sara	33	Fred	Academic	In process	2004	Yes
Bob	40	Pete	Coworker	Licensed	2003	No

Note. All names are pseudonyms.

This past experience, my gender, the fact that I am married and have no children, and value helping relationships influenced the questions, how I heard the responses and thus my follow up questions, analysis of the data, and interpretations of the analyses of data. In the interviewing process, I sought to be aware of my responses to the narratives of participants. I worked to minimize the effect that I had on participants by using a semi-structured interview script, recording notes during the interview, and recording my reactions and thoughts after each interview. I have had no formal training in qualitative research interviewing, but have been trained as a marriage and family therapist and have

worked within this capacity at a student clinic and within two community clinics as well as in online therapy. I increased my familiarity with qualitative interviewing during two pilot interviews prior to beginning data collection. This training involved exposure to different beliefs and values and allowed me to gain understanding and the ability to listen somewhat objectively to the experiences of those I interviewed. I reviewed my field notes along with transcript data between interviews to increase validity and consistency (Miles & Huberman, 1994). My field notes also helped me to examine personal biases during analyses and reporting.

Semistructured Interview

In this study, I used a list of questions designed for this research. The questions reflected major themes addressed in the current literature as well as additional information thought to be useful for answering the research questions (see Appendix C for the interview protocol). The questions were predominately open-ended, allowing the participants to freely express their ideas and experiences with the topics presented. I asked probing and clarifying questions to increase understanding of the experiences of the participants.

Pilot

Prior to beginning the data collection, I practiced the interview on two MFT recent graduates. They were personally invited to participate by a program director. Both were male and graduated from Utah State University. This pilot was designed to test the length and flow of the interview and assisted me in developing alternative ways to ask

several questions, as well as combine several items that the pilot participants thought were redundant. These pilot interviews allowed me to practice listening in a manner that was effective for the duration of the interviews. The two participants were asked to offer feedback at the completion of the interviews, resulting in some style changes as well as clarification of the wording of some questions. Because the participants met the sample criteria and their feedback resulted in only minor changes to the interview protocol, their data were included in the research.

Interview Procedures

Graduates were asked to reply to the request for participation to the researcher's personal email or phone number if they were interested in participating. Between 6 and 24 responses were received from each of the responding schools. Only the first four who responded from each school were selected in order to gain a perspective from a variety of graduates and programs. Potential participants were emailed a more detailed description of the study and the letter of information for participation in the study (see Appendix A). Interview times were scheduled at each participant's convenience. The letter of information was read again at the beginning of the scheduled interview and consent was noted on a data sheet. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study as well as the potential benefits and risks, and were informed that they could decline participation in the interview at any time. Participants were informed that their interview participation was anonymous and were asked to provide a pseudonym to be used in reports. Participants agreed to recording of the interviews. Transcripts of the recordings do not

contain identifying information. All correspondence can be found in Appendix A.

Phone calls were recorded for transcription purposes. The interviews were completed over the space of two weeks and averaged 30 minutes each. The recordings were transcribed by the researcher. Impressions of the interviewer and contextual details were recorded in field notes. Transcripts were checked against the audio recordings for accuracy and the audio files were destroyed after the transcription and coding were complete. Participants were asked if they could be contacted in the future if recordings failed or were unclear, though all recordings were clear and no participants were recontacted.

Written transcripts are stored in a locked research file at Utah State University for five years. At the completion of the interview, participants were asked if they would like to receive an incentive of a \$10 restaurant gift card as a thank you for their time. Four declined the gift card, but consented to receive a thank you card. All 15 were sent thank you cards and 11 also received a gift card from their choice of restaurants following the completed interview.

Data Management

All phone interviews were recorded for transcription purposes and recordings were used to refer to the tone and voice inflection in the interview during the data analysis. Notes were kept during the interviews and reviews of recordings about the participants' voice inflections, indications of humor or stress, and any other contextual information, as well as my personal impressions of the participants' remarks that might

have influenced the data analysis or interpretation. Participant data were coded by pseudonyms to protect participant anonymity. Transcripts were entered into a word processing program where the researcher was able to categorize major themes and exemplars that illustrated key points from the interviews.

Protection of Confidentiality and Security of Data

No links connecting participants and data were stored. Participant contact information was destroyed after each recording was checked and the incentive restaurant gift card had been mailed.

Data Analysis

Following completion of the two pilot interviews, the researcher and her major professor independently reviewed the transcripts, looking for initial themes and categories for each research question. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved. Minor adjustments were made to the interview protocol in order to clarify questions. The researcher and her major professor took care to ensure that each was aware of the potential for bias due to the mentoring nature of their personal relationship and addressed any discrepancies.

All interview transcripts were reviewed by the researcher two times: first for general content related to the research questions and a second time for specific themes, categories, and exemplar quotes that supported themes. The major professor similarly analyzed two transcripts and the researcher and advisor then met to discuss findings and

discrepancies. Key themes were discussed and categories were determined. In these discussions, we examined the researcher's personal interpretations of the data and themes as compared to those of the major professor. This open discussion incorporated principles of triangulation (Miles & Huberman, 1994) by including multiple opinions and perspectives in order to increase the validity and reliability of the findings. Themes were categorized and commonalities and differences among the experiences of the participants were included in a research report. The researcher also looked for unexpected findings that surfaced during the interviews and data analyses.

Themes, exemplar quotations, and other interesting findings were coded in a Microsoft Excel file to allow for easy retrieval of information. Verbatim examples were extracted for each category and theme that emerged from the data analysis. Coded notes were then compared and discussed with the major professor in order to increase reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Each category was grouped within one of the research questions and exemplars were added to the report of findings.

Reporting

At the completion of data analysis, research questions were discussed in relation to common themes and categories discussed in the literature as well as those that emerged from analyses that were not found in literature. Personal narratives reported by pseudonyms were used to support common themes. Variations from the discussed themes are presented using participants' narrative examples. Key findings are discussed in relation to relevant literature on mentoring relationships. Additional literature was

reviewed when findings suggested alternative factors not previously discussed.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The 15 qualitative interviews in this study provided information about recent graduates' experiences with mentors and supportive relationships during their graduate programs. Participants shared information about their experiences with mentors from within their programs as well as several individuals outside of the university setting.

The findings have been arranged in order based on the research questions and are grouped according to major categories and themes that emerged through the interviews. Narrative exemplars from the interviews are used to emphasize key themes. Participants chose pseudonyms for themselves and their mentors to be used in this report.

Research Question One: What Are Graduates' Perceptions of Their Mentors?

Relationships with Mentors

Participants described a variety of mentoring and supportive relationships within their graduate program experiences. All 15 participants stated that they had experienced at least one mentoring relationship; most reported more than one. Mentors often had multiple roles in the relationships. Each participant selected one person to focus on for the interview (primary mentor) and was asked about characteristics of other mentors later in the interview.

Academic mentors. Eleven of the 15 participants stated that their primary mentors were from within their academic programs. These 11 participants highlighted the

positions their mentors took within the program, indicating that the mentors took on a combination of roles. These positions included course professors (11 participants), clinical supervisors (8 participants), assistantship supervisors (5 participants), thesis advisors or members of thesis committees (3 participants), and program directors (4 participants). All participants indicated that their mentors took a variety and combination of roles, such as one mentor who was a professor and a supervisor, as well as a member of the thesis committee.

Other positions. Four of the participants stated that their mentors held roles outside of their programs. Of these four, two participants chose individuals involved with their off-campus practicum settings: one chose an AAMFT approved supervisor and the other chose a psychologist coworker. One participant chose a fellow classmate and the final graduate chose her pastor's wife.

Mentor Roles

The mentors in this study took on many different functions and roles. Common themes included roles as clinical supervisors, instructors, research assistantship supervisors, and program directors. Within these roles, mentors promoted self-care, provided encouragement, offered advice, provided clinical training, helped with skill development, provided additional perspectives, and normalized the process of becoming a therapist. Kasie told about the role her mentor, Megan, took: "We'd tell stories, we'd laugh. It was kind of a self-care thing." Ethel said that Ralph took on a normalizing role with her: "He let me know that I was normal. He reassured me that I was on the right track and that I was doing a good job." Sandie reported, "We would discuss the problems

and she would just hear me and listen, . . . give advice to me but knowing that I didn't have to take it."

Characteristics of Mentors

The majority of the participants stated that they had positive experiences in their mentoring relationships. However, one stated that she had a very negative experience with her mentor and many others reported negative elements of their mentoring experiences. Both positive and negative characteristics are described below.

Positive characteristics. Desirable qualities of mentors varied according to differing personalities and needs of the participants. Commonly reported positive characteristics included warmth, openness, availability, flexibility, similarities and common interests with the protégé, passion about therapy, excitement for their jobs, nurturing, supportive, encouraging, and willing to listen.

Ethel highlighted the characteristics of her mentor in relation to her thesis project:

Ralph was . . . willing to work with me and my schedule. . . . He was very supportive of my work both on my thesis and in my . . . supervision and therapy work. I would say that the main characteristic I could think of was "supportive."

Renee described her mentor's characteristics as they related to her role as a clinical supervisor:

She's very gentle and soft spoken. . . . She took her time expressing her thoughts and was very understanding . . . of my feelings. She was also really encouraging. She had a really great way of [knowing] where you were strong and pointing that out to you so you could continue.

Although graduates often described characteristics specific to one role that their mentors took at a given time, others were more general in their discussion of their

mentors' qualities. Richard said, "I would say he was easy going and easy to talk to; he showed concern with me and so I felt like he was invested in our relationship." Regarding her mentor, Sophia stated, "[John] was really laid back about things and he would listen and really valued my opinion and had confidence in my ability as a therapist. . . . Being confident in my abilities is what really helped me."

Participants reported different characteristics as helpful in their mentoring relationships. Kasie said that her mentor "was very quiet. She was shy. She didn't like to socialize. She kind of kept things in . . . but it was different for us, so she was able to talk, so we talked about things." This was very different from what Mike said about his mentor, Sam: "His energy and his excitement for the profession was probably what had the biggest impact on me." Although the described qualities are quite different between Kasie's and Mike's experiences, each said the experiences were very positive.

Negative characteristics. Only 1 participant stated that her mentoring relationship was mostly negative. Sara reported that her mentor, who was her professor, program director, supervisor, and boss, had difficulty giving positive feedback. When asked about his specific characteristics, she stated:

[Fred had] kind of an arrogance to him and . . . an assumption that . . . there is going to be so much that we don't do right. . . . If there was knowledge of certain, you know like things that we were sensitive [about] in our personal lives, sometimes that would be brought up in a way that seemed like it was caring, but at the same time was used strategically to be sure that we were kept in line.

She later said that she felt consistently unsure around him and no one in her program knew what to say and whether he would be pleased. She reported feeling that she had to

approach supervision meetings in a “strategic” way with him in order to gain positive feedback.

Sara was not the only graduate who reported negative feelings about mentors, although hers was the only experience that could be considered mostly negative. Ethel stated, “I think that I would have benefited from a mentoring relationship where Ralph wasn’t my professor and didn’t have so much power over my life.” Many participants brought up this issue of a mentor’s having significant power in the relationship based on elements of hierarchy. Several stated that the mentors’ many roles equated to opportunities for dual relationships where mentors were also potentially in control of grades, practicum placement and success, thesis completion, jobs, and ultimately, graduation. Sandie stated, “If you think you are mentoring, but you are really actually seeking to further your own interests or intents . . . even if unintentionally . . . you should not be mentoring. Don’t abuse power in a program in the name of ‘pushing people to develop further.’”

One other major theme that emerged in the interviews included potentially negative characteristics of mentors who were overly busy, flighty, “flaky,” forgetful, or otherwise unavailable or inconsistent in working with students. Erin reported:

[Sarah was] incredibly smart, really, really busy, had a hard time saying no, so she would take on a lot. Sometimes more than she could really handle, which sometimes made it hard to get things done just because there was too much going on to try and help her organize that.

Victor said the following regarding his mentor: “[Patty] was not very organized. She always had a zillion things going on at once and occasionally her disorganization and forgetfulness made working on projects with her fairly frustrating.” Although many

participants shared negative aspects of their mentoring relationships, all but Sara reported that the negative characteristics were minor and not enough to taint their overall perspectives of the relationships.

Beneficial Aspects of Mentoring Relationships

There were many benefits to mentoring relationships according to the graduates. Themes of gaining confidence as a therapist, being excited for the profession, and help in completing program requirements were consistent among responses. Sophia summed it up by stating, “I wouldn’t be who I am if it wasn’t for him as a therapist and probably as a person because, like I said, my theoretical orientation is because of what I learned from him and the people that he brought into our program.” Sally reported, “[Bill] just [gave] me the confidence that I needed.” Erin, commenting on the helpfulness of her mentor, who was also her program director, stated, “The most beneficial [thing] to me and really rubbed off on me was the love of the field and her style of teaching and caring about her students and [it] really just made it feel like a family.” Ned summarized many of the common themes with his statement about his mentor:

I think the most beneficial thing I gained from my mentor was just someone who cared and I felt like someone just didn’t want me to fail the program. And I think it gave me a lot of confidence, a lot of trust that I could go to him . . . and address any one of my concerns that I had. . . . He just wanted me to succeed. And I felt that.

Detrimental Aspects of Mentoring Relationships

Most of the participants really struggled with the question of detrimental aspects of mentoring relationships. Bob summed the feelings of many of the graduates by saying,

“[I] can’t think of anything detrimental in this relationship. Honestly, I really can’t.” In many interviews, the participants apologized that they were unable to report more detrimental aspects of the relationships and even when they did state something negative, would follow it with a minimizing comment about the impact of what they had just said. Victor was one such participant. When questioned further, he replied, “Huh. . . . I really have nothing but glowing things to say about [Patty]. If I had to pick something, I would say the stress over unclear expectations; but even then, not really. It didn’t damper the positive things from the relationship.” Sara, regarding her negative mentoring experience stated:

It would have been nice to have someone who was a little bit more warm, you know, even when you were excited about something. . . . Somebody who you could relax and share information with and ask for feedback in a way that wasn’t defensive.

When asked about what they might change about the mentoring relationships, only 8 of the 15 participants responded that they would have changed something. Seven graduates discussed themes related to wishing their mentors had been more available, had more time for them, and, as Bob stated, “[I wish I had] kept in better contact after graduation.” Renee stated, “Maybe her being available would have helped a little more. . . . That would have been great.” Ethel stated:

If I had a mentoring relationship based more on . . . [things] external to the graduate program, maybe it would have continued beyond my graduate experience. My relationship with Ralph was tied to the program and therefore when I finished the program, I finished the relationship. . . . I would have liked having a relationship that could have moved beyond the program.

In reference to his thesis, Richard said that he wished that his mentor had been stronger in his feedback and pushed him a little harder to complete it in a reasonable time frame.

Victor said that he wished that he had been able to “watch her collaborate more with other faculty. I think that would have given me a firsthand look and added to the diversity of my experience.”

Research Question Two: How Are MFT Program Experiences

Influenced by Mentors?

Stress

Participants reported that MFT programs were inherently stressful and that mentors influenced stress levels experienced by the graduates during their times as students. Two main categories were determined: (a) how mentors alleviated the stress experienced by participants while in the program, and (b) how mentors contributed to the stress experienced by participants while in the program.

Alleviated stress. Stress in graduate school seemed to be a common experience among the participants. Unanimously, the 15 participants were able to share with me ways in which their mentors had helped to alleviate stress they experienced. Two graduates, Kasie and Brooke, who selected mentors not involved in academic roles (a classmate and Brooke’s pastor’s wife), reported that their mentors took on roles of providing balance and encouraging good self-care during the stressful times. Brooke reported this about her experience: “I’d say a lot of times she was just a good distraction in terms of saying, ‘There’s still life outside of grad school. Let’s go do something about that.’” Both Kasie and Brooke reported engaging in activities outside their programs to release stress and find balance.

Nine of the participants described the process as their mentors’ listening to them,

validating concerns, being empathic, offering a place to process concerns, normalizing the stress, and offering honest feedback. Sandie shared the following when asked about how her mentor alleviated her stress:

She could say often that she'd been through the experience, just hear me out and listen to what I needed to vent about. . . . Sometimes she would offer direct advice. . . . She did a lot of problem solving and really mainly just listening. That was far more useful for me.

Ethel stated a similar sentiment when describing her mentor: "He let me know that I was normal. He reassured me that I was on the right track and that I was doing a good job."

Richard discussed how his mentor, Mark, could offer him direct feedback regarding his thesis, "I think it would have been easy [to give up on me] and [it] would have been difficult to deal with me and he just wouldn't give up. . . . [He offered] more upfront feedback [than others]."

Two participants described specific characteristics of their mentors and how these influenced their stress levels. Both emphasized that humor and flexibility were key in allowing developing therapists to accomplish their difficult tasks of thesis work, learning to be therapists, and applying theory in practice.

Two participants highlighted times when they were struggling personally and professionally as times when their mentors took on the greatest roles in alleviating stress. Bob spoke about a time in his life when he and his wife were expecting a new baby. He discussed concerns in introducing a new baby into their blended family and how his mentor helped him in this time of personal difficulty:

My wife was pregnant and we had our baby while I was working there, actually, and he was supportive and interested in . . . [an] appropriate way. . . . I had a few questions about his step daughter—she was about 7 or 8; just parenting questions

regarding having another child and bringing her home and now that I think about it, he gave really great insight about that.

Mike shared the following experience with his mentor:

Not long after I finished the program, my dad passed away. . . . [Sam] was very supportive of me at that point. . . . I have had clients that have gone through it and it is interesting to go through it myself. He would respond . . . [and] it was supportive.

Though these 2 participants had extreme situations, 14 of the participants reported that their mentors had been helpful when they were struggling personally and/or professionally and offered support, guidance, advice, and openness to discussing these issues.

Contributed to stress. Only one of the participants stated that his mentor, who was a coworker at a practicum site, had in no way contributed to his stress in the program. Several themes emerged related to the contributions of mentors to program stress. Four of the participants commented on the academic workload required of them and the influence of their mentors, who were course professors, in assigning the work. When questioned further about this, Katherine stated, “He was a real stickler for reading; this was more when he was a professor. He usually required us to do usually 120 pages per class. So that definitely contributed to some stress.” Four other participants, 2 men and 2 women, agreed that some of the negative characteristics of their mentors increased their stress levels. Erin said, “Well, during the thesis process, . . . her unorganized style was really stressful for me, just all over the place. That was really stressful for me.” The other 3 commented on mentors who were “flaky” on projects, offered unclear expectations, and had laid-back styles that did not hold the students sufficiently accountable for their work.

Four participants, 1 man and 3 women, addressed a theme of miscommunication and differences in opinion. Brooke said, “We didn’t always completely see eye to eye. Since she was my mentor, I wouldn’t always know how to handle it if I didn’t agree with something she said or did.” Ethel shared Brooke’s sentiment:

He was so different from who I was in relation to philosophy of life. . . . There were times when I felt increased stress and pressure to agree with him and his philosophies. . . . I really had to think about it and decide if I could go against what my mentor was saying and really [had] to decide what I believed in and what I felt about the issues and if I felt strongly enough about it to go against what the mentor said. That increased my level of stress.

Professional Development

Major findings related to professional development were connected to how mentors modeled professional behaviors such as attendance at MFT conferences, involvement in research, and so forth, and how that influenced the graduates and their experiences. If participants viewed the primary roles of their mentors as being involved academically in their thesis or research work, they were more likely to report this as a major influence on their overall program experiences. Major themes included professors’ modeling involvement in the MFT community through conference attendance and research publications or presentations that introduced students to this part of the profession. Sandie said that her mentor was

very active in the MFT community, always attending conferences. She would present and share those things with us directly and then if we saw her at a conference, she was not afraid to say, ‘hi’ and come up to introduce us to who she was with. . . . She really helped me to get my feet wet in the community and to not feel like a kid there.

The influence of mentors in introducing students to conference attendance also

affected the graduates by allowing them to further their careers and seek out research and training opportunities after graduation. Sophia stated, “John helped me as much as possible make connections and network with other people in the field, in the MFT field to help me get a job. He introduced me to lots of people at conferences.” Participants who experienced this taste of the MFT community often reported continuing their research after graduation. Sophia said, “After I graduated, I worked on other papers with him.” This theme of continued research as modeled by professors was prevalent in remarks from 4 participants who suggested that their mentors took on a mostly research-oriented role.

Clinical Development

Major themes that emerged in terms of mentors’ influence on clinical development included the mentors’ roles in assisting novice therapists to have confidence in their abilities, examine personal “self of the therapist” issues, apply theory in practice, and model therapy. Renee said, “Susan let us know what our strengths [were], especially when we weren’t feeling so confident. . . . We were able to gain that confidence from her.” Supervision seemed to be a common place where the participants’ clinical development was influenced. Katherine described her mentor’s influence on her clinical development as helping her “learn . . . how to use theory in [her] practice and how to integrate theories and figure out which theories worked and which clients.” Similarly, 2 participants reported being able to do cotherapy with their mentors and being able to learn as they watched their mentors in action. Brooke reported that her mentor discussed personal concerns as they affected Brooke’s abilities in therapy sessions. She said,

“[Hannah’s goal was] making sure a therapist is healthy so a therapist can help other people become healthy.” Sally said this along these lines:

I think that mostly he helped me and probably everybody to look at what was going on within ourselves. Within ourselves in order to deal with clients so if there was a problem, we had to look at what problem we saw rather than always pointing at the client.

Specific Program Requirements

A major finding in this area related to how graduates varied in their expectations of mentors. Similarities existed for participants who graduated from the same programs, leading the researcher to believe that the programs’ emphasis on specific requirements, including thesis research projects, clinical training and hours’ completion, supervision requirements, university paperwork requirements, theory development, and coursework influenced how the participants viewed their mentors’ involvement in their relationships. Those who completed thesis projects said that flexibility and openness with their mentors helped them to complete these projects. Participants from programs that placed emphasis on clinical training and development reported common themes of theory application and the ability to be vulnerable with their supervisors.

It appeared that the relationship of the mentor to the graduate also influenced the level of assistance for specific program requirements. A graduate who chose a supervisor reported more assistance with theory development and skills application while a graduate who chose a research assistantship supervisor reported more assistance on thesis work and professional presentations. The graduates’ expectations of their mentors also influenced the amount of assistance they received. For example, many of the graduates

reported that they did not receive assistance with university paperwork and other logistics; however, it was not an expectation of many mentors. As Katherine stated, “We always had more of an administrative assistant who did that stuff.”

Research Question Three: What Is the Frequency of Contact and Duration of the Mentoring Relationship?

Relationship Formation

Graduates described the formation of their graduate-school mentoring relationships in a variety of ways. Much of the time, the relationship formation depended on the formal role of the mentor. Those who had mentors outside of the program faculty typically reported that their relationships were formed based on a desire for guidance and the circumstances of a relationship that already included close contact such as working together or seeing each other frequently. Commonly, participants reported that these mentors were approachable and invested in helping participants succeed in graduate school. Kasie, whose chosen mentor was a peer, reported, “I would see her almost every day. We had the same internship and probably say, once every other week, [did] something informal like watching a movie, or going out to eat, or just hanging out.” Bob, whose chosen mentor was a coworker, stated, “We would do cotherapy work in the groups, so [the relationship] wasn’t like a specific assignment but it was just an inevitable outcome of working in that setting.”

Those who had faculty mentors described a theme of the mentors’ being accessible and available. Ethel illustrated this when she stated, “It was convenient. Ralph

was typically there at the program and so I had easy access to him. I could stop by the office fairly frequently to ask questions as well as the formal supervision. . . . There was a lot of opportunity to ask questions simply because he was there.” Victor shared his perspective on how those with research assistantships in his program were more likely to form mentoring relationships as well. He said, “My research assistantship was the key to forming this relationship. . . . I feel bad for those who did not participate in one because they missed key one-on-one opportunities.” Ned said, “I believe [the relationship] was more a choice of who to work with on the thesis project and the assistantship opportunity. . . . [The relationship formed] because I worked more closely with one of the [professors].” None of the participants reported being involved in a formal matching program with their chosen mentors, although 2 participants stated that they had been formally assigned second-year students when they entered their programs to assist with concerns.

Frequency of Meetings

Frequency of contact appeared to be determined based on how the mentors were involved with the students at a given time. All participants who chose a supervisory mentor for the interviews stated that they met one or two times a week for formal supervision and on an as-needed basis informally to discuss clients or personal concerns. Those participants who were involved in research and teaching assistantships reported meeting once a week for a formal business meeting and discussing other concerns on an as-needed basis. Those involved in mentoring relationships external to the program described a range of contact from daily with friends and family members to an as-needed

basis with coworkers and supervisors in mostly informal, self-care types of interactions.

Relationship Evolution

The primary theme that emerged from the interviews about the evolution of mentoring relationships involved a process by which the participants entered graduate school unsure of their roles as therapists and protégés and, as the relationships with the mentors progressed, comfort levels were established. Several of the participants described feelings of being treated as peers by their mentors by the end of their programs. Renee stated:

As a first year [student], we were all kind of scared, nervous, not knowing what really the relationship . . . should be like, but by the end of it, I would say that we were pretty good friends. It's changed from definitely formal to more of a friendship.

Richard shared a similar sentiment:

I think the biggest thing that changed over the relationship was me. [I was feeling] more comfortable with him and feeling that I can be more real with him, . . . more vulnerable around him.

Two participants stated that their needs for mentoring had changed by the end of the program and so they had less contact. Mike reported that as his clinical hours were completed, his need for supervision diminished. He said, "I [didn't] require the same intensity of assistance that I did [earlier]."

Research Question Four: How Do Mentors Influence Students After Graduation?

Post Graduation Concerns

Participants reported their post-graduation concerns in three main categories: (a) internship and job placement, (b) licensing concerns, and (c) the MFT national examination. Each area will be discussed briefly.

Internship and job placement. The common theme derived from this category involved participants' wishing that they had more assistance in finding internships or jobs after graduation. This appears to be an area where mentors were very useful in writing letters of recommendation; however, the graduates did not receive much assistance from their mentors in finding jobs. Only 1 of the 15 participants reported receiving direct job-seeking assistance and though several admitted that they had not asked their mentors for help in this area, some participants felt this was an area that needed improvement in the MFT mentoring process. Some participants, like Katherine, suggested that mentors had been involved in job-seeking processes through letters of recommendation and they did not expect more than that. "He gave me a great recommendation and letters of recommendation for jobs and served as a reference. That was what I really needed." Bob shared similar sentiments: "There has been no ongoing utilization of that relationship at least in any objective way that . . . help[ed] my [job hunt]." Others, like Sally, felt that their mentors could have been more involved in this process. "The only thing that I really would have liked to see is more help with people getting jobs when they graduate."

Licensing concerns. Licensing was a concern for these graduates. Six reported

being able to ask their mentors questions about the licensing process and feeling as though they received answers. Katherine reported, “[Frank] helped figure out licensure stuff since I was moving away from Texas but [was still] planning to move back.” Two participants reported that their mentors also supervised some of their hours towards licensure, which they considered very helpful. Mike said, “Sam did do some supervision with me postgraduat[ion], and he signed off for a 100 hours or so.”

MFT national examination. Only two of the participants said that they had received preparation for the MFT national examination. Richard stated, “[Mark] gave me some tips and ideas for what to study for the exam,” and Erin stated, “She gave me great advice about taking the MFT licensure exam, and continuing to work after I had kids.” When asked, those who reported that they had not been assisted with this process did not report being upset about their lack of assistance. This might be related to the recent graduation of some of the participants who reported that they had not yet taken the examination.

Relationship Evolution After Graduation

The main finding regarding the mentoring relationship after graduation was that though many graduates wanted the mentoring relationships to continue, most were no longer in contact with their mentors. Several reported that their relationships dissolved after graduation because of the lack of contact and immediate need. Others reported that though they were not in direct contact with their mentors at the time of the interviews, they felt comfortable contacting them by phone or email if concerns arose and looked forward to seeing them at conferences and other events. Only two of the participants were

still in contact with their mentors, meeting a few times a year. Others reported difficulty in contact because either the mentor or the graduate had moved far away.

Research Question Five: What Recommendations Do
Recent MFT Graduates Have Regarding Mentoring?

For Mentors

During interviews, participants reported many ideas about how to improve the mentoring process for students. Common themes included taking time to know protégés personally and learning about their personal concerns, as well as a willingness to undertake roles as mentors and making that public to students. Sophia stated, “Have a relationship with that person that is an individual relationship. Get to know them as a person, as a therapist, and then the relationship just flourishes from there.” Renee added, “I just really liked what Susan did: [really] knowing what was going on in our personal lives as well as our professional lives and academic lives.” Sandie stated, “Be supportive, open, nonjudgmental. . . . A new therapist cannot be made to feel like they are not valued and supported if you want them to get anywhere . . . in school and as a therapist.” When discussing availability, Katherine said, “make sure you leave time in your schedule for those little impromptu meetings, those unscheduled times.” Victor added, “Don’t underestimate the value of extra time! Let the mentee be involved in a project, expose them to all of your job . . . even the mundane.”

Other responses varied and focused on specific things related to activities in mentoring relationships such as teaching clinical skills, helping with job seeking, setting

boundaries, and learning self-care. Participants seemed to differ on recommendations about where to seek these relationships. Many described the utility of having mentors within the program, though some felt that it was most beneficial to have someone who was outside of the program and possibly even outside of the field. Brooke reported, “It’s helpful to have somebody outside of the profession who can help you maintain perspective that life is not all about grad[uate] school and life’s not all about therapy.”

Along these lines, Sara stated:

I think that I would have preferred having someone who was already graduated from the program as opposed to someone . . . [who] was actually director of the program because I think that I needed to talk about the stress and how it was affecting my life in general with someone who wasn’t the one affecting it.

For Students

The most significant finding in the category of participants’ recommendations to students for mentoring was related to themes of accepting the influence of mentors, taking advantage of opportunities, being willing to be stretched personally and professionally, and taking an active role in seeking a mentor. Sophia illustrated this by saying, “I believe students need to have an active role in developing a mentor relationship. They can’t just expect someone to take them under their wings.” Richard stated:

My recommendation would be not to be afraid to have a mentor, particularly one who is going to push you, who is going to help you . . . [and] be willing to push you towards positive growth, push you towards change.

Kasie reported the need to take an active role in the relationship:

Mold it to what you need. If you feel like you need mentoring in a certain area, don’t be afraid to tell this person or some person that that’s what you need

because that's going to give you the best results.

For Programs

The key finding in the category of graduates' recommendations to programs was that they make efforts to formalize mentoring programs, allowing for flexibility to accommodate interests that would give students opportunities to be mentored. Many reported that their personal experiences were unlike those of nonmentored colleagues or cohort members and thought that a formalized program would change this imbalance.

Sandie said:

I think that part of it is that formal mentoring that we discussed earlier. . . . Programs have a lot of ability to create the opportunities for mentoring. . . . It is really nice to be assigned a faculty advisor because it just kind of sets you up for an open opportunity to begin a mentoring relationship.

Kasie added:

My program set up buddies and . . . [you] had your assigned supervisor, so that was helpful, having some built-in mentor, but also having the flexibility of allowing other mentorships to naturally occur, where people have certain personalities and similar interests.

Participants were unsure exactly how to incorporate a formal matching program, but many said that they enjoyed having a rotation of faculty supervisors and being able to be exposed to a variety of clinicians. Victor stated, "A formal mentoring program would be great. The formal really sets that stage for the informal interaction moments." Katherine offered a possible process for encouraging mentoring when she suggested that programs have a responsibility to hire professors and supervisors who are interested in helping to develop good therapists and only people interested in furthering students' careers should be involved with the programs.

Summary

The 15 participants in this study provided extensive information about the mentoring experiences of a small sample of recent MFT master's level graduates. Ned summarized the general feeling of the participants when he was asked about the overall impact of mentoring relationships for MFT graduate students. He said that they are "absolutely necessary. I don't see how anybody can become a clinician without direct influence from a mentor or mentors in general." With this information, it is possible to draw some general ideas about what was happening related to mentoring across the MFT programs represented in this sample.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a discussion of the results from this study of MFT graduates' perspectives on mentoring relationships during graduate school. The chapter also includes a discussion of the implications and limitations of the study. The sample of graduates in this study included 5 males and 10 females ranging in age from 25 to 40. All completed their degrees within the 5 years prior to the interviews and represented six different MFT programs.

Research Question One: What Are Graduates' Perceptions of Their Mentors?

Mentoring Roles

Mentoring roles were discussed in two different ways: (a) the description of the mentor's position such as faculty, clinical supervisor, employer, friend, clergy, and so forth, and (b) the function of the mentor within the relationship, such as supervisor, researcher, thesis advisor, supporter, and so forth. The mentors' positions will be discussed first. When asked to offer a description of who the primary mentors were, participants chose predominately academic mentors, though four in the sample chose to discuss mentors who were not faculty in the MFT programs. Mentors who were chosen fit with Beyene and colleagues' (2002) discussion of the various roles that mentors take. Though mentors' perspectives were not obtained for this study, several participants reported that the relationships were beneficial for mentors as well.

It was interesting to note that those graduates who chose academic mentors experienced more focused mentoring related to research, thesis writing, and professional development. The four graduates who chose nonacademic mentors experienced their relationships as being a place for self care, perspective, balance, and stress relief. There was overlap between the academic mentors and nonacademic mentors' bringing additional things to the relationship, such as a coworker who also helped with clinical development or a professor who encouraged self-care; however, in general, the mentor's position indicated what the graduate received most from the relationship.

Two graduates of one MFT program chose nonacademic mentors for the interview. It was interesting that neither chose to discuss professors and, when questioned further, said that they felt comfortable with their faculty, but did not experience an environment within the program that fostered mentoring connections. Conversely, four graduates from a different program each chose to discuss the influence of their faculty mentors. One of these participants reported that the program faculty had changed since she graduated. Although the faculty membership had changed during this time, the program continued to focus on encouraging one-on-one relationships with the graduates, resulting in continuous mentoring. It is possible that the attitude and emphasis of the program on providing opportunities for mentoring relationships had a direct influence on the experiences of MFT students and who they reported as primary mentors in this study. This is an inference I have made from the interviews and from examining patterns in the data, but because it was not a focus of the study, conclusions cannot be drawn.

In reference to the functions that mentors served within the relationships, several

common themes emerged. Participants suggested that their mentors took on roles that included clinical supervisors, instructors, research assistantship supervisors, and program directors. Within these roles, mentors served purposes including prompting self-care, encouraging, offering advice, training, skill development, perspective, and normalizing the process of becoming a therapist. The participants offered a variety of responses when discussing the major roles that their mentors took. It appeared that the focus of the relationships related to the purposes that the mentors filled. For example, a graduate who emphasized research development aspects of his mentoring relationship shared that his mentor was the supervisor of his research assistantship. Conversely, several graduates focused on their mentors' roles in assisting with the thesis process and emphasized the roles that mentors took in editing, offering encouragement, and helping the students to understand the writing process. It was interesting in these situations because the mentors served in other academic-related capacities; however, the focus of the relationships for the students was often based around their expectations and needs within the relationships.

Characteristics

Personality characteristics of the mentors were grouped into two categories: positive traits and negative traits. The characteristics of mentors that were deemed positive varied greatly among responses. Positive qualities included warmth, openness, availability, flexibility, similarities and common interests with the protégé, passion about therapy, excitement for their jobs, nurturing, supportive, encouraging, and willing to listen. These positive qualities were consistent with findings from previous studies (Clark et al., 2000; Cronan-Hillix et al., 1986; Haidar, 2007).

One participant said that his professor's excitement for the profession and outspokenness about this was the characteristic that stood out most. Another participant observed that her mentor was reserved and quiet and that this was a quality that the participant appreciated. Though these appear to be opposite qualities, each participant observed that, for them, these were very positive traits in their mentors. This suggests that there is no single formula for what an ideal mentoring situation should be and that the personalities of the protégé and mentor, and the protégé's needs for the relationship are reciprocal in the successful outcome of the mentoring relationship. The only indicator of a common thread to the mentoring relationships included a general overarching feeling expressed by the participants that their mentors were invested in their success and wanted them to succeed.

The negative qualities discussed included one participant's feeling that her mentor encouraged student success only to further the reputation of the program. Other participants reported the academic mentors' power over their education and training, and misuse of that power. Graduates who had mentors in positions of power over them due to hierarchal structures reported that they did not always feel comfortable disagreeing with their mentors, bringing up problems or concerns, or challenging their authority because of the influence the mentors had on grades, graduation, theses, and research, as well as opportunities for networking and advancement in the field. Other participants described negative qualities of mentors who were overly busy and appeared "flaky" or disorganized, making joint projects and research work stressful. One graduate reported that her mentor's negative characteristics included frequently missing supervision

appointments and spending time focusing on things other than the graduate's clients. Her sentiments appeared to echo the negative supervision experiences discussed by Anderson and colleagues (2000).

Because academic mentors have many foci in addition to their students such as other academic responsibilities, personal needs, private practices, and so forth, it is difficult for them to recognize the impact of their influence on students or provide time for them. This might delay students' completing the programs, or worse yet, might be opportunities for potential manipulation. For example, a protégé who does not follow a supervisor's suggestion might be penalized or criticized during group supervision, or research supervisors might overlook their protégés for opportunities to present at conferences because of personal differences.

Research Question Two: How Are MFT Program Experiences Influenced by Mentors?

Stress and Program Requirements

Participants reported that they had experienced stress in graduate school. Stressors included academic and clinical requirements, thesis/research work, assistantships, fears about being competent as therapists, relational stresses and miscommunications, and difficulties stemming directly from working with their mentors. This variety of stressors echoes prior findings of Polson and Nida (1998), Polson and Piercy (1993), and Sori and colleagues (1996). Participants discussed ways that their mentors had contributed to their stress as well as things they had done to help alleviate stress. All of the participants were

successful in graduating; however, when asked about cohort size and graduation rates, eight of the participants representing five programs said that some members of their original cohorts did not complete their programs due to stress or other circumstances including health, family needs, and decisions to pursue different career paths. One of the participants reported that he took over 5 years to complete his thesis and that his mentor was influential in encouraging him and not allowing him to give up. Another said that her mentor's disorganized style and forgetfulness made her assistantship and thesis project much more difficult to complete. These differing views demonstrate that mentors can make program experiences easier as well as more difficult depending on the needs of students and the ability of mentors to accommodate those needs. Those interviewed almost unanimously said that just having mentoring relationships helped to alleviate stress. Stresses that were attributed to the mentors were considered to be minor and did not change the overall positive feeling that the graduates had towards their mentors.

Professional Development

Graduates said that having mentors who were actively involved in the MFT community helped them to feel comfortable attending conferences, presenting research, and networking with other professionals, and that their mentors even assisted with finding jobs after graduation. This is consistent with the findings of Cronan-Hillix and colleagues (1986). Participants in that study also reported that these relationships helped them to advance their careers by gaining confidence, becoming involved in the larger MFT community, and seeking employment.

Roche (1979) suggested that having mentors in business led to higher salaries for

the mentees as they developed in their careers. The 15 participants in the current study reported salaries ranging from \$5,000 to \$68,000 annually. Without a control group with which to compare salary details, it is difficult to say what influence mentors had on MFT graduates' salaries.

Clinical Development

Participants unanimously discussed positive roles that their mentors had played in their clinical development when they pointed out strengths, offered ideas, were available to listen, modeled clinical techniques, normalized therapists' fears, and instilled confidence. The graduates reported that when mentors were supervisors, they were able to discuss issues about clients as well as personal concerns related and unrelated to therapy. This type of supportive supervision where mentors understand the personal, professional, and clinical needs of students and can be flexible to accommodate those needs appears to help greatly in allowing novice therapists gain confidence and progress in their clinical development (Johnson, 2007; Prouty, et al., 2002)

Research Question Three: What Is the Frequency of Contact and Duration of the Mentoring Relationships?

Relationship Formation

The literature typically discusses two main ways that mentoring relationships are formed. The first is in a formal matching program where parties are assigned and meet regularly. The second is through spontaneous, informal ways where mentors and protégés come together based on common interests and desires for relationships (Allen & Eby,

2003; Boyle & Boice, 1998; Eby & Lockwood, 2005). None of the participants in the current sample reported being involved with formal matching programs as was described by Boyle and Boice. Though assigned matching of mentors and protégés has become part of the norm in other fields, it appears that the six MFT programs represented in this study had not implemented such a matching process. Several participants reported that they were assigned to different MFT supervisors each semester and sometimes those developed into mentoring relationships also; however, each reported that the mentoring aspect of the relationship was formed independently of the supervision assignment. Others reported that they had been assigned research assistantships with their named mentors, but reported again that although the development of the mentoring relationship was influenced by this pairing, it was still a choice for both the mentor and the graduate. All 15 participants agreed that the mentoring aspects of these relationships were spontaneous and that mere matching for specific tasks such as supervision can result in mentoring. Only one graduate reported being involved in a formal mentoring program and that involved being matched with an advanced student for peer mentoring, similar to the peer mentoring program for sales associates described by Brashear and colleagues (2006). This type of mentoring appeared to be helpful to the graduate.

Regardless of the roles that mentors took, participants reported common themes of desiring mentoring relationships, finding people who were available and willing to pursue this role, and then taking time to foster the relationship. The participants typically saw their mentors weekly while taking courses and maintained contact as needed when working on projects and living away from their mentors after coursework was finished.

One participant said that the relationship with her mentor was formed by convenience because her mentor was physically present and had consistent time available to answer questions and discuss concerns as they arose. This theme of availability is essential for mentoring in graduate school and especially useful for MFT students because of the time constraints that students face. One participant reported that she and her mentor, who was a member of the community and not affiliated with the MFT program, met daily during the summer when time demands were not high, but lost contact when the graduate entered the work force, simply because of the many demands for both the graduate and the mentor. This particular graduate reported that she was saddened by the change in this relationship based on her expectations that she and her mentor would maintain their close connection even after schooling was completed because they had interactions that were not tied to the program.

Although availability was a common theme, the degree of availability desired in the relationship varied across responses and was based on the expectations of the interaction. The above example illustrates how the expectations of those in the relationship influence the functions of the relationship and the perceived outcomes of the interactions. It is impossible for mentors to always be available for informal mentoring moments; however, a mentor who understands the demands of graduate programs and can be available for impromptu meetings will be more able to assist students as needs arise. Waiting for formally structured meetings may result in more limited, less frequent contact, and the urgency of the protégé's needs may have passed. It may be difficult for mentors to be as available as mentees might wish, but having clear expectations about

duration and frequency of contact as well as some times when it is known that mentors will available might provides some balance for this issue.

Relationship Evolution

The evolving nature of the relationships between the graduates and their primary mentors was described as a process that changed over time, showing improvements in the relationships. Most reported that they began their relationships unsure of how to act and, over the course of the program, gained comfort in the relationships. After graduation, most graduates reported that they no longer met with their mentors and though most felt comfortable contacting them by phone or email, distance and changed roles appeared to be obstacles to further contact. Several participants expressed sadness that they or their mentors had moved from the school area and indicated that this made the relationship that they had shared more difficult to continue.

Research Question Four: How Do Mentors Influence Students After Graduation?

The three main concerns of MFT graduates following graduation were centered on job placement, licensure, and the national exam. Only a few graduates received direct assistance with job placement from their graduate school mentors, though several reported that their mentors had served as personal references and/or had written letters of recommendation. Several participants reported that their mentors had helped them with licensure questions, but the majority stated that their mentors had not been involved in that process. Only 2 of the 15 had received any form of assistance with the national exam

from their identified mentors. These results may be linked to the earlier finding that most of the graduates were not in contact with their mentors consistently following graduation and it is logical that the graduates looked elsewhere for assistance. The interview did not address these three areas in depth, so it is possible that the graduates received assistance from postgraduate mentors regarding these concerns. This raises questions about the mentoring process for MFT interns after they leave their graduate programs and move toward licensure.

Research Question Five: What Recommendations Do
Recent MFT Graduates Have Regarding Mentoring?

Recommendations for Mentors

Common recommendations for mentors reported by the protégés included taking time and interest to know the protégés personally and learning about their personal concerns as well as broadening the responsibilities of MFT faculty to include mentoring roles. These recommendations were interesting because some of the graduates offered suggestions that would encourage other students to have experiences similar to their own mentoring relationships. For example, a graduate might think that because her mentor was caring and involved her in research, other mentors should do that also. Others discussed the things that they had wished they had seen more in their own mentoring relationships. Regardless, time and interest appeared to be universal themes related to what the graduates would want students to experience in their mentoring relationships. The personal, caring relationships that some participants discussed proved to be as or

more important than assistance with coursework and other requirements of the program. This suggests that graduates did not need as much help with program requirements and instead desired close and personal connections with their mentors and personal support, which would provide a context in which students could feel comfortable seeking assistance with a variety of issues. One participant stated that her mentor's knowing her and understanding what was happening in her life both in the program and outside made her mentor more able to help her with "self of the therapist" issues, and made her mentor seem more approachable when difficulties arose for the participant. According to Kolbert and colleagues (2002), some mentors might be nervous about learning personal details of students' lives, fearing complexities of dual relationships and wanting to maintain professional boundaries. Therefore, a balance between personal investment in students' personal lives and maintaining boundaries would be an important issue to address at the beginning of the relationship.

Recommendations for Students

Graduates recommended that MFT students take active roles in seeking mentors, take advantage of opportunities, accept the influence of mentors, and be willing to be stretched personally and professionally. It was interesting that the graduates placed so much emphasis on students' roles in the mentoring process because, though they each had been involved in mentoring relationships, many reported that their relationships would have been better if they had sought mentors earlier and had been more directive in seeking feedback. Viewing their programs in hindsight allowed many graduates to share that they had wished they had been more specific with their mentors regarding needs.

Some participants suggested that mentors could push students too far academically and in supervision, and yet a common theme included participants' recommendations that students anticipate and accept growth-inducing challenges from mentors even when it was uncomfortable. This was an apparent contradictory finding because some viewed the pushing as a very negative experience and felt that their mentors had the opportunity to abuse power in this manner while others appreciated the challenge and encouragement to move beyond their comfort levels. These differences in expectations and styles of mentoring are interesting. It is likely that some who felt pushed unnecessarily by their mentors may have desired a different type of relationship and others enjoyed this aspect because they appreciated opportunities for growth in other ways such as moving toward Ph.D. work. Further clarification from graduates would be essential in understanding how to implement growth experiences without their being experienced as manipulation or misuse of power.

Recommendations for Programs

Participants almost universally suggested that programs should work to implement versions of formal programs where students and faculty mentors could be paired early in students' programs to allow more time to build relationships. This was interesting because none of the students were actually involved in formal programs. Some of the participants reported that not everyone in their cohorts had mentoring experiences and so it is possible to infer that this recommendation was based on desires to increase opportunities for all students. Many also suggested that it was important for such mentoring programs to be flexible so that students could switch mentors to

accommodate changing needs; others suggested that simply rotating through a variety of clinical supervisors during the program provided opportunities for different mentors. It appeared to be a common practice among the 6 programs represented to rotate through different supervisors and this simple process allowed the participants to gain closer relationships with several supervisors within the clinical settings. However, the possibility of formal mentoring programs in addition to informal pairings might prove useful for MFT students. Allen and Eby (2003) found in an academic setting that faculty involved in formal mentoring programs reported feeling more distant from their mentors than those who were involved in spontaneously-formed relationships. Boyle and Boice (1998) suggested that there were potential problems with matching programs when the protégés felt that the mentors were in positions of power and influence over them. These two studies might caution MFT programs to carefully consider how to implement this recommendation from the participants. It would be important to allow for spontaneous relationships to be formed and it might be useful for programs to seek nonprogram mentors who would not be in positions of power over students.

Implications for Practice and Research

The results of this study offer several implications for MFT programs as well as professional organizations, professionals who might have influence over MFT students, and students in MFT programs. Each of these areas is briefly addressed.

Recommendations for future research also are addressed.

Implications for MFT Programs

MFT programs have a great responsibility to their students. Programs have the ability to set up guidelines for mentoring and can encourage those who interact with the programs' students to do the same. Graduates struggled to offer suggestions on how programs could do this. However, several participants suggested that smaller programs naturally encouraged one-on-one relationships with faculty because of the low faculty to student ratio; the rotation of practicum supervisors gave other participants the opportunity to get to know someone who might be influential in their success. Programs that limit the number of students accepted or increase the number of faculty and supervisors associated with them provide possibilities for greater contact. Because it appeared that graduates differed in their experiences of mentoring relationships based on the position of the mentor, it would be useful for programs to design measures that would expose current students to a variety of potential mentors, including program graduates, outside clinicians, other faculty, and their own peers, and encourage students to seek out one-on-one relationships with a variety of individuals.

Programs could also establish matching programs both within peer settings such as first year students paired with second year students, and/or assign faculty mentors at the beginning of the program as suggested by Boyle and Boice (1998) and Brashear and colleagues (2006). Peer-matching programs were helpful to one participant in this study and further exploration of this concept might assist students with managing program requirements and developing support networks. Utilization of peer mentors might also fill needs for students previously met by faculty, allowing faculty mentors the time to mentor

in other areas. Programs could also provide training for faculty, supervisors, and supporting staff in the process of mentoring and building expectations that mentoring be a priority in the day-to-day setting of the program.

The culture of the individual programs appeared to influence the general attitude toward mentoring as well. Similarities in mentoring experiences existed among students from the same programs, regardless of the year they graduated. This indicates that programs created expectations about how mentoring relationships were addressed. One potential implication would include allowing programs to design an evaluation procedure that would elicit feedback from students and recent graduates regarding the emphasis and availability of mentoring. This evaluation would allow programs to individually make changes based on areas of strength and weakness specific to the program.

AAMFT and AAMFT Divisions

The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy is concerned about retirement rates of current family therapists (L. Schwallie, personal communication, May 17, 2007) and the effect of these retirements on the numbers of practicing MFTs. The AAAMFT has been seeking ways to attract people into the profession. Ms. Schwallie also discussed finding ways to involve new therapists in the professional community and to assist them toward licensure. Establishing mentoring as a topic at conferences, including mentoring in approved supervisor training, and encouraging mentoring relationships between seasoned therapists and trainees might help accomplish this task. Panel discussions with graduates similar to those in this study's sample could also help facilitate an understanding of the importance and the process of mentoring. As seasoned

therapists and supervisors are educated about the need for mentoring and the impact that it has on trainees' overall development, those in positions to mentor might be more willing help MFT students and interns. Graduates also reported desiring more assistance from their mentors in regard to job placement, licensure, and the national exam. AAMFT divisions could provide more information and education to recent graduates about these topics and could also educate MFT professionals about ways to assist new interns with this process.

MFT Professionals

MFT students work with a variety of clinicians during practicum placements and when mingling with other therapists at conferences. Licensed professionals, whether serving as supervisors or not, can befriend young therapists, offer insight, direction, and encouragement. Allowing a student to shadow an experienced therapist or participate as a cotherapist could expose students to people who could continue to help them as they progress through school, through the licensing process, and beyond.

Students

Wu and colleagues (2007) discussed the notion of the protégé's personality being a leading factor in securing mentoring relationships and utilizing that relationship for personal and professional guidance and advancement. The current study did not focus on the role of the graduates in the mentoring process; however, the implications of Wu and colleague's study might apply to MFT students. Beginning students who are unsure of their roles in their programs and how to develop mentoring relationships might benefit

from the recommendations of the graduates in the current study as well as those mentioned by Wu and colleagues. Both samples discussed the importance of being proactive in seeking mentors as essential to establishing those relationships. Students have some control in this area according to participants' responses. Entering trainees can seek out mentors who share their interests and be direct in the relationships about their needs. This might be difficult for students who do not feel comfortable or confident in their ability to ask for this assistance. Programs could have a role in facilitating this process by including a discussion of mentoring in program orientation and letting students know that faculty and staff are encouraging and supportive of these relationships.

Recommendations for Practice and Research

Several studies could be designed to gain further information about this topic. The first project that I see as valuable is interviewing academic and nonacademic mentors to learn more about their perspectives. It would be important to ask similar questions as those asked of the protégés to compare categories and themes between the two groups. Mentoring can be a mutually beneficial relationship (Boyle & Boice, 1998) and understanding what mentors can gain from these relationships might give the MFT field further knowledge as to how to educate and encourage advanced MFTs to mentor students and interns.

It would also be interesting to study a larger and more ethnically diverse sample of MFT recent graduates to determine whether the general themes and categories determined from this study are representative of the general population of MFT

graduates. It would be interesting to learn more about personality characteristics of the protégés and mentors to determine the types of mediating or interactive effects on mentoring relationships in terms of the process and outcomes of the relationships.

None of the represented programs offered formal matching programs and therefore did not provide matching, training, or structured contexts for mentoring relationships to develop. Programs could either match students and faculty or could provide opportunities and expectations that mentoring relationships would develop, similar to expectations that currently exist with students and thesis advisors. Implementing such processes would be interesting considering that the needs of MFT graduate students might be different compared to those in academic and business settings that have previously been researched (Allen & Eby, 2003; Boyle & Boice, 1998; Eby & Lockwood, 2005). Similarly, differences might exist between students who aspire to Ph.D. work and those who do not in terms of their mentoring needs and desires.

Because MFT literature has discussed how supervision times can be opportunities for mentoring (Johnson, 2007; Prouty et al., 2002), students and supervisors could be encouraged to spend time addressing the personal needs of students in addition to discussing cases and theories when appropriate and when the students are open to doing this. A comparison study of formal versus informal mentoring processes would be interesting to determine experiences in spontaneous relationships as compared to the experiences of those in matched programs.

Data from the sample in the current study indicate that more information could be gained regarding the development and dissolution of mentoring relationships.

Understanding better how mentoring relationships change over time and how they end might give more information related to the needs of students and how to continue to assist MFT interns as they transition into the field.

One further area to study might include those populations missed in the current study, including those who dropped out of MFT programs prior to completing them and those who graduated, but never licensed. Information about these groups and their experiences with mentoring relationships would prove useful to the field in understanding how to help students and trainees overcome obstacles to graduation and licensing through the use of mentors.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. The sample size was only 15 individuals and though they discussed their experiences, findings are not generalizable to the experiences of all MFT graduates. The current study was limited to protégés' perspectives only and therefore, is missing information regarding what the mentors would have discussed regarding their relationships. The sample was also entirely Caucasian and participants ranged in age from 25-40. The ages and life experiences of those interviewed likely influenced expectations, interests, and abilities to engage in mentoring. Others (Dolan, 2008; Walker et al., 2001) studied the impact of mentoring programs on minority populations and the lack of ethnic diversity in this sample likely provides a narrow view of the overall experience of all MFT students. Finally, graduates of nonthesis programs might have conveyed different ideas about mentoring because the focus of their faculty

likely are different than others in thesis programs, altering the mentoring context.

Efforts were made to ensure that the sample was obtained from several MFT programs. Of the 10 programs contacted, graduates from 6 responded to the study. Efforts were made to contact schools diverse in their religious affiliation, size, requirements, and geography, but not all contacted schools were represented in the sample. There may have been bias of the directors who did not forward the email to their graduates or the graduates who did not respond to the emails that were forwarded.

As the researcher, I have a bias related to my own experiences in graduate school and mentoring, and though the interview was designed to allow for individual expression of ideas, my own experiences shaped the initial questions, probing questions, analysis of the data, and this report. The semistructured interview allowed for open-ended responses to the questions in order to gather free-formed data. However, personal bias is inherent in interviewing. The open-ended questions also leave room for confusion in interpreting results. For example, the concept of mentoring roles appears to have two potential meanings: (a) the relationship of the mentor such as that of a teacher, a friend, a classmate, and (b) the function of the mentor such as a research guide, a listening ear, a motivator, and so forth. This difference has become clear in the analysis process; however, other differences may be present and differences in responses may be due to personal interpretation on the part of the researcher and the participants.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the literature on mentoring relationships from graduates'

perspectives. The participants in this study identified their mentors chiefly as those involved within their academic experiences, although peers, community members, spouses, and coworkers were also identified as influential mentors. The sample of MFT recent graduates reported that their experiences had generally been helpful at combating program stress and enhanced their experiences within their programs. Areas where graduates reported wanting further assistance from mentors included job placement, licensure, and the national exam. Reports of responses about what was most beneficial in mentoring relationships and positive characteristics of mentors allow the reader to determine that a variety of factors influence successful mentoring relationships for MFT students. Factors such as personality of the protégés, needs of the students, and mentors' awareness of students' concerns influence the purpose and outcome of the mentoring relationships, which were difficult to determine from this study.

The limitations of this study do not allow for the results to be generalized to other MFT students; however, the exploratory nature of this study prompts several questions for future research. These include but are not limited to understanding mentoring relationships from the mentors' perspectives; examining whether the general categories and themes from this study would be replicated in a larger, more diverse national sample; and examining how implementation of the recommendations of the study's participants might affect MFT students' experiences with mentoring relationships. The implications of this study include implementing some of the participants' recommendations as well as learning from their experiences to enhance and improve the mentoring processes that are already occurring to benefit current and future MFT students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Email Correspondence

EMAIL TEXT TO PROGRAM DIRECTORS

Dear insert program directors name,

Thorana Nelson and Allison Hicken, at Utah State University, are conducting a study on mentoring/supportive relationships within accredited MFT Master's programs. If you feel that your program does not have a formal mentoring program, we are still interested in the valuable experiences of your students. We are seeking contact with ***students who have graduated from your MFT Master's program within the last FIVE years***. Would you please take a few minutes and forward the following message via email to those graduates who would fit our criteria (Master's level graduates within the last five years)? If it's difficult to separate for those who graduated in the past five years, please feel free to send to your entire alumni list.

Your graduates will be rewarded for their involvement and I hope that the information gained from my interviews will help programs to develop techniques to better assist future students. If you have any questions, please feel free to email or call Dr. Nelson or me. If you are interested in the results of this study, we would be happy to make the results available to you at the completion of the study at your request. Thank you for your time!

If you would like the results of this study, please reply to this email with your preferred email address.

Sincerely,

Thorana Nelson, PhD
Professor of Marriage and Family Therapy
Thorana.nelson@usu.edu
435.797.7431

Allison Hicken
USU MFT student
Allison.hicken@aggiemail.usu.edu
208.351.9591

Dear Recent MFT Graduate,

The director of the MFT program from which you graduated has forward this email to you. Thanks in advance for taking a little time to read this note from fellow MFT colleagues. We are seeking your participation in a one-time phone interview (less than 30 minutes) so that we can learn more about your experiences within your MFT Master's program. You are eligible for this study if you have graduated within the last FIVE years from an accredited MFT program.

We are studying how MFT trainees have experienced supportive relationships (also known as mentoring relationships) during their academic programs. For the purposes of this study, a mentor is defined as an individual who helped guide and enhance the experience of the participant throughout a graduate program by offering support, guidance, and direction in areas of academia, professional development, and/or personal growth. Mentors can be (but are not limited to) *professors, supervisors, university staff, colleagues, employers, family members, clergy, or friends*. We understand that not all mentoring experiences are positive, so you are eligible for this study even if your mentoring experience was negative.

If you have graduated within the last five years with your Master's in MFT and may be willing to talk confidentially about your experience, please contact Allison Hicken (Allison.Hicken@aggiemail.usu.edu). After we receive your email stating that you are interested, we will email you a letter of information describing the study in more detail. If you are still interested, we will schedule our phone interview at a time convenient for you. Consent per research requirements will be given over the phone prior to beginning the interview. You can choose not to participate in this study at any time.

We are accepting the first **15** participants and those who are selected will receive a ***restaurant gift card*** of their choice as our little way of saying, "Thanks for your help with our study!"

If you have any questions, we will be happy to answer them via email or phone.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Thorana Nelson, PhD
Thorana.nelson@usu.edu
435.797.7431

Allison Hicken
allison.hicken@aggiemail.usu.edu
208-351-9591

Dear *(insert program director's name)*,

Thorana Nelson and I just wanted to touch base with you regarding an email we sent last week seeking your support in emailing a request to your recent Master's level FT graduates. We just wanted to touch base with you and see if you had a chance to forward that email to your alumni list. Please assist us by replying to this email and letting us know if you have been able to email that, and if possible, include the approximate number of graduates that the email reached. If this has slipped your mind, we have included the previous emails below this text so that you will be able to forward it on at this time. If you have chosen not to forward this email soliciting research support to your alumni, we would appreciate knowing that as well so that we can select additional programs to contact. We look forward to your response. Thank you so much!

Sincerely,

Thorana Nelson, PhD
Professor of Marriage and Family Therapy
Thorana.nelson@usu.edu
435.797.7431

Allison Hicken
USU MFT student
Allison.hicken@aggiemail.usu.edu
208.351.9591

(previous email to the graduates was pasted here)

Appendix B
Letter of Information

Letter of Information for Mentoring in Marriage and Family Therapy Programs: Graduates' Perspectives

Introduction/Purpose: Thorana S. Nelson, Ph.D., and Allison Hicken in the Department of Family, Consumer, and Human Development at Utah State University (USU) are conducting a research study to find out more about student perspectives on mentoring relationships in Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) programs. We are interested in your unique experience with mentoring relationships and how they have either been helpful or unhelpful to you during your MFT graduate school program and into the process of licensure. You have been invited to take part due to your graduation from an accredited MFT program within the past five years. We anticipate interviewing 15 individuals who have graduated from accredited MFT Master's programs in the past five years.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this research study, Allison Hicken will arrange a phone interview with you at a time of your choosing and ask you a number of open ended questions in an audio-recorded interview designed for open discussion and response from you. This study consists of only one interview that will take approximately 20-30 minutes. You will be asked to provide a pseudonym to be used as a transcript ID and for reports. We may ask for your permission to call again if a part of the recording is unclear.

Risks: The risks in participating in this interview are minimal. You might feel uncomfortable or confused by some of the questions. You may decline to answer questions at any time. There is a possible risk of people gaining access to the transcribed data; however, risk of breaching your confidentiality is limited by the security measures that are in place to protect your information.

Benefits: There may not be a direct benefit to you at this time; however, benefits of this study are for future MFT students and their faculty who may learn about ways that they can improve the experiences of students in MFT programs. The researchers will learn more about experiences in MFT programs and the influence or absence of mentor during training.

Explanation & Offer to Answer Questions: Allison Hicken has explained this research study to you and answered any questions you may have had. If you have other questions or research-related problems, you may contact Dr. Thorana Nelson at (435) 797-7431.

Compensation: To compensate you for your time and to thank you for participating in this study, a \$10 restaurant gift card of your choosing will be mailed to you at the completion of your interview

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any question, or withdraw at any time without consequence or loss of benefits to you. If you want to stop your participation or have your data destroyed, please inform Allison during the interview.

Confidentiality: Research records and transcripts will be kept confidential consistent with federal and state regulations. At the completion of the interview, the audio-recording will be transcribed and verified against the tapes. At the end of the project the audio-tapes will be destroyed. The transcript will be labeled with your pseudonym to protect your privacy and maintain your confidentiality. All identifying information linking you to this study will be destroyed after the recordings have been checked and a gift card has been mailed to the address you provide. No identifying information will be included in the written transcript or research reports. Only the researchers will have access to the data. Transcripts will be kept in a locked file cabinet at USU for five years after the study is completed.

IRB Approval Statement: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human participants at USU has reviewed and approved this research study. If you have any pertinent questions or concerns about your rights or a research-related injury, you may contact the IRB Administrator at (435) 797-0567. If you have a concern or complaint about the research and you would like to contact someone other than the research team, you may contact the IRB Administrator to obtain information or to offer input.

Investigator Statement: “I certify that the research study has been explained to the individual, by me or my research staff, and that the individual understands the nature and purpose, the possible risks and benefits associated with taking part in this research study. Any questions that have been raised have been answered.”

Dr. Thorana S. Nelson
Principal Investigator
(435) 797-7431

Allison Hicken, Research Assistant
(435) 797-7430

Consent of Participant:

If you would like to participate, please contact me at Allison.hicken@aggiemail.usu.edu to set up a phone interview at your convenience. We will go over any questions that you might have concerning this research prior to the interview and you will be asked to give your verbal consent at that time. You may decide not to participate at any time.

Participant offered verbal consent over the phone on the following day:

Appendix C
Semistructured Interview

INSTRUMENT

Date _____ **Start Time** _____

**** Test to make sure that recording device is working properly****

Read letter of information. Consent given: (date & time)

First of all, I would like to thank you for your willingness to talk to me today. As a reminder, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. All identifying information will be destroyed following interview transcription. Transcripts of the recordings will be kept in a locked research file at Utah State University for five years. Should you have any questions or concerns about protection of your identifying information, you can refer to the phone numbers given in the letter of information emailed to you prior to scheduling this interview.

Would you like to proceed?

Ok then, we will be discussing your personal experiences in your graduate program specific to mentoring relationships and I'll want to report what you say, but I don't want to use your real name. What name would you like me to use?

Let me begin by asking you to tell me a little bit about yourself related to some basic demographics.

Demographic Information

In the situation that our recording fails, may I call you again to complete the interview or clarify some information? Yes _____ No _____

Gender: M F

Age: _____

Are you currently: Married Widowed Divorced Never Been Married
Cohabiting

Children?

Race or ethnicity?

What MFT program did you graduate from?

What year did you begin your program?

What year did you finish your program?

(If more than five years has passed: “You have graduated more than five years ago. I am so sorry, but the limitations of this study require that participants have graduated within the last five years. Thanks so much for being willing to participate, but we will not need to complete the interview. Thanks for your time.)

How many students were in your cohort?

How many students from your cohort graduated?

Were you supervised by faculty who were also your teachers?

Are you licensed or interning as an MFT?

If not, are you seeking licensure? If not, why not?

Where are you in the process of licensure?

Are you currently employed as a therapist? If so, where? What kind of practice setting is this (mental health, substance abuse, group practice, etc.)? Any place else where you do therapy?

Are you employed in addition to therapy practice?

Income?

Interview Questions:

[Participants will be encouraged to respond on their own before prompts are offered.]

For this study, we will define a mentor as a teacher, a guide, a friend, or generally someone who helped you through the process of your graduate program. This relationship is typically based on elements of support over time and is used to help you progress through towards graduation, though not all mentoring

experiences are positive. Would you consider yourself to have been mentored in your graduate program?

Yes _____

No _____

In order to avoid using this person's real name, what name would you like to call this mentor for the remainder of our interview and for my reporting purposes?

If yes, proceed with the following:

Because I am interested in learning more about your experience with a mentor, if you have had more than one mentor, please think in your mind and narrow this *to one person* who was likely the most influential in assisting you with the process of your graduate program. You will have opportunity to discuss any other mentoring relationships at the end of the interview.

1) Tell me a little bit about this mentor so that I can have a picture of your relationship in mind as we continue talking.

Prompts:

- A) Relationship to the student
- B) Characteristics of the mentor
- C) Length of mentorship
- D) Gender of mentor
- E) If faculty, status of mentor (adjunct, tenure, etc.)

Were you assigned this mentor? _____yes _____ no

Was this experience a positive or negative experience? _____positive _____negative

2) How was this mentoring relationship formed?

Prompts:

- A) Formal matching program
- B) Former Supervisor
- C) Family/ Friend
- D) Colleague or classmate

3) How frequently did you meet with your mentor? Were these formal or informal

meetings? How much of each? How were meetings arranged or how did they happen?

4) Describe what happened during a typical meeting with your mentor in as much detail as you can recall.

5) What specific personality characteristics and relational qualities did your mentor possess?

Prompts: kind, caring, compassionate, motivating, challenging, available, disrespectful, unavailable, uninterested, too busy, etc.

6) How did your mentor help to alleviate stress that you may have experienced in graduate school?

7) How did your mentor contribute to your stress you may have experienced in graduate school?

8) Describe the most beneficial and/or detrimental things that you gained from your mentor and the relationship.

9) What would you have changed or preferred to be different about your mentoring relationship?

10) I would like to discuss some of the areas specific to your graduate experience that may or may not have been affected by your mentor. I will go through several areas and ask you to respond when appropriate to any of the areas that applied to your specific situation.

a) How did your mentor assist you with navigating the logistics of the University?

b) How did your mentor influence your development as a therapist?

c) How did your mentor assist you with your research/thesis work?

d) How did your mentor act during informal moments in your relationship? (lunches, sports, activities, parties, etc.)

e) How did your mentor help with completing any additional aspects of your program?

f) How did your mentor assist with the advising/ managing requirements portion of your program?

g) How did your mentor support you when/if you struggled personally or professionally?

i) How did your mentor influence your professional development after graduation? (e.g., working towards licensure, finding a job or supervisor, interviewing skills, resume development, professional recommendation, etc.)

11) How did you see your mentoring relationship evolve or change over time?

a) Are you still meeting with your mentor?

b) Did your mentor help you after graduation with internship or job placement?

c) Did your mentor help you with the licensing process or national exam?

12) How would you describe the impact of mentoring, positive or negative, (if any) on clinical development and eventual licensure?

Do you have any recommendations about mentoring?

For mentors?

For students?

For programs?

13) Is there anything else that you wish to share about your mentor or others who influenced you?

14) Did you have other mentors during your program? _____yes _____no

Please share any additional things you think would be helpful for me to know about that person that might be different from what we have already discussed.

15) Have you had any mentoring relationships since graduating?

16) Because of your experience, are you likely to mentor others now and in the future?

_____yes _____no

**** CHECK RECORDING TO MAKE SURE IT WORKED****

**** Thank you so much for your participation. As part of the incentive for participation, you will be mailed a \$10 restaurant gift card as my way of saying thanks. After I send you the card, I will not keep your contact information. Please choose from the following available restaurants**

_____ CHILI's

_____ OLIVE GARDEN

_____ SIZZLER

_____ FAST FOOD CHAIN (subject to availability)

END TIME _____

Address to send restaurant card to:

TYPE OF CARD REQUESTED _____