Statement of Intent Example #1

While riding a bus on a dusty mountain road a few hours outside of Mexico City, I had a discussion with a professor facilitating my study abroad. Many students talked with him; he was very perceptive and often asked introspective questions (which is probably not surprising to any of you since he has a PhD in marriage and family therapy). Our conversation kept coming back to the idea that I held myself back when it came to empathy and allowing myself to feel with other people. By nature, I am a happy, outgoing, and optimistic person, but he suggested that I don’t always let myself feel hard things. He said to me, “You aren’t the person I want to talk to when I’m having a bad day.” As someone who has crafted much of my self-concept around being empathetic and connected, this initially stung. My heart broke a little, I think. However, without this conversation, I would never have progressed to become a person who can be truly connected.

I have come a long way since my experience on the bus in Mexico City. Conversations with professors, mentors, and friends about this discussion have given me new insight and challenged me to improve. My experiences have refined my empathy skills and enhanced my ability to connect more fully. I have tried every day to really feel with others. Now, more than ever, I believe in the power of connection. I believe that people are hardwired to connect: to other people, to ideas, to hobbies, to things. My personal interests have led me to focus much of my academic and extracurricular effort and attention on the first of these connection points, connecting to people. Although I am interested in relationships, I never imagined myself being so attracted to marriage and family therapy. This was not something I even considered. Truthfully, I didn’t see much value in therapy, especially after my father passed away. My mom and I went to therapy, and it was anything but helpful. I did not feel understood or supported by my therapist, much less connected to him. Yet, through my experiences in the past year or so, I have realized more fully not only the importance, but the absolute necessity of fostering connection to others and I have come to see the way that therapy and connection are related.

In the latter half of my college experience I have sought out, and been blessed to participate in, many transformative experiences. I have connected to different backgrounds, ethnicities, religions, and cultures. Each of these experiences has shifted my perspective on relationships and connection, and each has strengthened my desire to pursue a degree and a career in building, cultivating, and promoting these connections that hold so much power.

One such experience has been with Camp Kesem, a nationwide nonprofit organization for kids whose parents have cancer. Serving as a counselor and coordinator at Camp Kesem has demonstrated to me the sacred responsibility of being a witness to others pain. The kids that I worked with in Camp Kesem were incredible and funny and brave and strong. They so willingly and courageously let me in and allowed me to see the deep emotions and hurt that comes from their unique set of challenges. In SFL 395R, a helping relationships practicum taught by Dr. Mark

Butler, we learned about therapeutic techniques such as motivational interviewing, therapeutic relationships, and mediation. However, the kids at camp taught me how to simply be comfortable in recognizing and sitting with pain. They taught me that people do not need fixing, they need supporting. These kids showed me that in order to help people, the most important thing is to first be a friend.

Another one of these transformative experiences was the College of Family, Home, and

Social Science’s Civil Rights Seminar. This course opened my eyes to others’ experiences.

Being from a small town in a rural area, learning about what it means to be a racial minority in

America came as a bit of a shock to me. However, once I came to understand my privilege, there developed within me an immense desire to use that privilege to connect people to one another.

Because of this experience, I would like to study minority populations, particularly African

American youth. Partly because of this research interest, BYU is my top choice school. Not one, but several of the MFT program faculty at BYU study cultural competence and ethnic/racial minorities. I firmly believe that there is a dire need for more research which attends to ethnic minorities. During my research capstone with Dr. Bean I recognized the underrepresentation of ethnic and racial minorities in the social science arena. The Civil Rights Seminar brought to my attention the importance of culturally sensitive material and it is my hope to contribute to this body of knowledge in my future career and the marriage and family realm as a whole.

Whether it is connecting with someone who experiences a different America than I do because of his or her race, or connecting to kids who have to watch their parents suffer with a life-threatening illness, connection is simple. I finally understand what connection is all about. To me, it is saying, “Hey, I don’t understand your experience, but I know what it feels like to be sad, or scared, or lonely. What you’re dealing with is really hard. I’m sorry that you’re going through this. I’m here for you and I want to try to understand.” I hope I have become the type of person that people want to go to when they are having a bad day.

I know what BYU can offer me as a marriage and family therapy graduate student. This program can provide me with an education from top researchers in the field, both a secular and gospel lens on therapy practice, the opportunity to start seeing clients within the first year of the program, and a jumpstart into a future of connecting clients to those they cherish most. If I am accepted into the program I will contribute a sense of empathy and understanding that was fought for and cultivated, a deep yearning to step outside of my comfort zone to witness others experiences and realities, and a dedication and commitment to ensure that the learning that goes on within the program extends far beyond the walls of the classroom.