

**THE VIEW FROM OUTSIDE THE COCOON:**

**The inner theaters of non-studying life partners in the context of a  
transformational executive education program**

Executive MA Thesis

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Executive Master in Consulting and Coaching for Change

Wave 19

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**Abstract:**

This thesis describes a psychodynamic research conducted to explore the inner theaters of non-studying life partners (NSLPs) in the context of INSEAD's Executive Master for Consulting and Coaching for Change. The findings suggest that NSLPs experience inner theater themes of neutrality, engagement or exclusion. A model is proposed to understand the construct of the NSLPs' inner theaters, linking them to life and family cycle stages, attachment styles and family system balance. The discussions in this paper provide insights for prospective participants of transformational programs, as well as for their NSLPs, institutions and faculty conducting such programs, and therapists helping couples involved in such dynamics.

*Keywords:* midlife, romantic relationship, transitional space, non-studying life partner, family life cycle, attachment style, jealousy

## The midlife cocoon

He built a small house, called a cocoon, around himself. He stayed inside for more than two weeks. Then he nibbled a hole in the cocoon, pushed his way out and . . . he was a beautiful butterfly!

—Eric Carle, *The very hungry caterpillar*, 1969

Under certain weather conditions, the life-span of a monarch butterfly ranges from 20 to 32 days. Having gone through the egg and larval phases, the monarch builds its cocoon<sup>1</sup> between days 12 and 19 and starts its miraculous metamorphosis into a beautiful butterfly (*Monarch butterfly facts*, n.d.). One could say the monarch has then gone into its midlife passage to become better.

Like the monarch, we humans go through life phases and transform ourselves. As with the butterfly, midlife probably plays the most important transformational, transitional role among the stages of family and individual life. Typically, midlife takes place somewhere between the ages of 40 and 55 and is referred to as the second adulthood (Hollis, 1993). It is marked by the phenomenon Jung called individuation, which Hollis describes as follows:

Simply put, individuation is the developmental imperative of each of us to become ourselves as fully as we are able, within the limits imposed on us by fate. (p. 97)

The midlife passage (popularly called “crisis”) is therefore our opportunity to change from a caterpillar into a unique and individually beautiful butterfly. Rather than just a biological process like the one lived by the monarch, human midlife is a process that unfolds in both the body and the soul. Much of it happens under the surface, in the emotional and psychological dimensions. When we face some level of frustration and emptiness during midlife, we have an opportunity to reexamine our life and to

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<sup>1</sup> A cocoon is a constructed silk casing used by moths and certain other types of insects. Only very rare butterflies build cocoons. The monarch butterfly, as most of the butterfly species, go through their metamorphosis inside a chrysalis, which is a butterfly pupa. (*A cocoon and a chrysalis are not the same thing*, n.d.) Although not scientifically correct, inspired by Eric Carle, I chose to use the term cocoon instead of chrysalis in this paper as it is a word often used by the layman in connection to biological metamorphosis.

ask sometimes frightening questions, discovering that what we have been living constitutes a false self and opening the door to a fantastic redesign into a true personhood (Hollis, 1993).

Midlife is also a milestone phase for the family. For those who married and had children during the first half of their lives, midlife comprises the years where children, now teenagers, are launched into the world, and a new dynamic begins at home (the “empty nest”) with the couple readjusting to being home “only” with each other (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999). With so much going on during midlife, it is no wonder that symptoms like boredom, repeated job and partner shifts, substance abuse, self-destructive thoughts or acts, infidelity, depression, anxiety, and growing compulsivity are observed (Hollis, 1993).

In the face of confusion and doubt during midlife, one can use many available resources to navigate through the turbulent waters of the metamorphosis. The popularization of psychoanalysis over the last five decades has shown people they can use an expert as an instrument of self-reflection on the unconscious aspects guiding one’s inner world (Milton, Polmear, & Fabricius, 2004)—a tempting idea for those stuck in the confusion of midlife. Recent mass-market derivations of that idea have given rise to easier-to-digest and more popular practices such as cognitive life coaching, self-help literature, TED talks, conferences and focused aid groups, to mention a few. Educational institutions have also found a role in this context—business schools in particular have either embedded personal (leadership) development elements in existing programs or created whole programs to serve this new demand. More recently, the trend has expanded beyond traditional business schools, and now large consulting firms, professional social networks, and human resources service providers are also looking at how to tap into the growing demand to support life transformation (Lavelle, 2012).

In this context, so-called transformational executive education programs have become a mecca for many midlife adults (many of them business executives) in search of answers to questions that are themselves not yet clear. Often masked by a “socially acceptable” intent to acquire more knowledge and sharpen leadership skills to progress in their careers, such programs offer these midlife individuals transitional spaces with a safe experimental environment where exploration is allowed and

encouraged (Kets de Vries & Korotov, 2007). Like the cocoon of the monarch butterfly, these transitional spaces help minimize the impact of external noise, facilitate sense making (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010), and provide the nutrients (the faculty, the knowledge, the peer group) to catalyze a metamorphosis process that might propel the participant into a new identity during or after the program. No wonder such programs have been called identity laboratories (Korotov, 2005, as cited in Florent-Treacy, 2009), since, at some point, participants may begin to experiment with new roles and behaviors that might shape their future self.

### **The view from outside the cocoon**

Caterpillars do not pair up. In a butterfly's life cycle, mating and reproducing comes after the metamorphosis. Humans are different as we develop our romantic relationships and find our life partners normally before the age of 40. Our relationships with romantic partners are among the closest and most important relationships we experience in our adult lives. Unlike family links, which one generally does not choose, in a romantic partnership one elects to spend a significant part of one's life with another person based on an emotional connection of love.

The bond of love also seems to evolve over time. Studies on the types, styles, and stages of romantic love have resulted in a widely accepted differentiation between passionate and companionate love (Kim & Hatfield, 2004). Passionate love is an intense emotion characterized as a state of intense longing for union with another. Companionate love is less intense; it is a warm feeling of affection and tenderness for those with whom one's life is deeply connected. Companionate love is often described as friendship love and involves shared values, deep attachment, long-term commitment, and intimacy (Hatfield & Rapson, 1996, as cited in Kim & Hatfield, 2004). Romantic relationships provide connectedness and are proven to be linked to happiness and health as we grow older (Waldinger, 2010).

As love partners engage in their journey throughout life, a script is written with all sorts of possible ramifications and bifurcations. In this fascinating ride a family life cycle unfolds (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999), and the couple navigates both at individual and family levels the phases of leaving their homes, joining families (not

necessarily through marriage), potentially having children, raising them, launching them into the world, and then aging together. These stages are complex, as each partner in the couple is also undergoing his or her own individual development and maturing process at the same time. The dynamic of romantic relationships, therefore, undoubtedly change as each new phase in the family and individual life cycle unfolds. When participation in a transformational program is added to this already convoluted system, more complexity is added and the relationship dynamic is very likely to be influenced.

Ironically, participants themselves, institutions, faculty and sponsoring companies seem to often forget or ignore that many of those midlife individuals in transformational programs happen to have life partners and families. They all forget to ask how the program may impact the student's life partner. How do these extremely important "outsiders" perceive or experience the journey? How will they feel while their loved life partner is transforming in a metamorphosis that takes place inside a strange business school cocoon?

As important as these questions might seem, very little research has been dedicated to them. Abundant studies have explored the journey of the participants going through transformational programs (Korotov, 2007; Florent-Treacy, 2009) as well as the programs themselves (Kets de Vries & Korotov, 2007; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010), but little attention has been given to the voice of those who I call non-studying life partners (NSLPs).<sup>2</sup> While some researchers have looked into the practical, covert aspects of the phenomenon (Price-Bonham, 1973; Bergen & Bergen, 1978; McRoy & Fischer, 1982; Scheinkman, 1988; Sori, Wetchler, Ray & Niedner, 1996; Brannock, 2000, Gold, 2006), research in this area, perhaps with the exception of the work by Scheinkman (1988), has only scratched the surface. If romantic relationships are a central part of our adult lives, and if transformational programs indeed serve as a transitional space for their midlife participants, then it is important to consider the view of the NSLPs in this context. It is time to move the spotlight from the cocoon and its inhabitant to those living the whole process from the outside.

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<sup>2</sup> The *non-studying* life partner (NSLP) is the member of the romantic relationship who is not a participant in the transformational program, whereas the *studying* partner is the participant of the program.

I have had the privilege of going into such a transformational program during midlife myself, and I naively assumed this would be *my* ride only. Clearly, I assumed wrongly. In the case of couples, each transformational journey lived by the studying partner is accompanied by an inner theater evolving in the minds and hearts of the NSLPs. Often at unconscious level, this inner theater is the place where fantasies, perceptions, fears, anxieties and other emotions are kept, occasionally surfacing in the form of actions and responses to what is going on at the conscious level. Exploring the NSLP's inner theater, its construct and potential outcomes, is the main objective of this paper.

### **The burning question**

The cocoon I chose for my midlife reflections was the Executive Master in Consulting and Coaching for Change (EMCCC), offered by leading business school INSEAD at both its Fontainebleau and Singapore campuses. As I reside in Europe, I applied to the course in France and was admitted to what they call Wave 19 of the program. I was then 39 years old; I had been married for 15 years, had two wonderful children and a successful career. There were some early warnings of a midlife crisis, I admit. I was looking forward to gaining new knowledge, adding a few gadgets to my professional toolbox, and advancing in my career. My employer applauded my initiative. But I was also personally interested in understanding my own stage in life and hopefully transforming myself. Yes, I was ready to become better.

According to the program's website,

the INSEAD Executive Master in Consulting and Coaching for Change (EMCCC) is a degree programme unlike any other. Spanning over 18 months and eight modules of three to four days, it takes you deep into the basic drivers of human behaviour and the hidden dynamics of organisations.

Integrating business education with a range of psychological disciplines, the programme enables you to understand yourself and others at a fundamental level – and to use that knowledge to create more effective organisations.

Whether you are an HR professional, a coach, a consultant or an executive seeking new ways to make an impact on your organisation, this programme

offers you not simply a prized degree from one of the world's leading business schools but a life-changing intellectual and emotional experience.

The eight modules of EMCCC form a journey that starts with the exploration of the self and grows into exploring elements of family systems, group and organizational dynamics, and finally society and the world. The program faculty consists of experienced psychotherapists, leadership scholars, and experts in the areas covered by the modules. They provide a safe space where participants can work on their personal transformation processes: the perfect cocoon.

Early in this quite transformational program, I realized the journey was more complex than I had anticipated. Besides the challenge of being faced with new parts of myself (and being reminded of old ones), I was struggling to keep my wife appropriately involved in what was going on with me. Suddenly I needed a lot of time for myself because of the workload and the reflection load of the program. Communicating with my wife about EMCCC was difficult. I did not know exactly why, but it was just hard for me to share just enough, at the right time. Some of my attempts to share did not end up well; her reaction activated defenses in me or were simply not what I expected. For long periods of time, communication about EMCCC was kept to a bare minimum. In the absence of inputs from my side, I had the impression that my wife started fantasizing about the program and about my changing self. Gradually EMCCC was turning into an ugly chapter in the beautiful track record of our love story.

I started asking myself how something that was supposed to help me become better was now actually distancing me from somebody I loved. If EMCCC is the perfect cocoon, why is it causing side effects to my relationship? In search of reassurance, I started asking my EMCCC classmates whether they faced similar difficulties, and I found that some had indeed similar struggles. Maybe there was something of a phenomenon to it.

My thesis has therefore focused on answering the question: how do NSLPs experience the journey of a transformational program? I spoke to NSLPs and many were delighted to finally have a channel to voice their views. I carried out semi-structured interviews with 10 of them, listening with the third ear (Van de Loo, 2007) for meaning beyond what was being said and using myself as an instrument to give

sense to their views. I then analyzed the outcomes of these conversations in a process that allowed me to sit next to the NSLPs and decode some of their inner theaters related to EMCCC.

I watched the acts and also interpreted the backdrops of the NSLPs' inner theaters. Based on these elements, I found different themes dominating their perceptions of EMCCC, and hence defining their predominant feeling during the journey of the program. This paper summarizes my attempt to construct a holistic model to connect the inner theater acts and the backdrop elements so as to interpret and predict the nature of each inner theater theme. Through this exercise I hope to provide insights for prospective transformational program participants and their NSLPs, institutions and faculty running or planning to run such programs, and therapists helping other couples involved in similar dynamics.

### **Literature review**

In the past 40 years, researchers have studied marital relationships and graduate programs. This is the closest research has come to my topic. The major focus of this work has been on trying to understand and therefore predict sources of positive and negative impact, with the aim of providing insights for therapeutic approaches to support these couples.

Widespread agreement exists that enrollment in graduate or extended studies by either one or both spouses triggers additional stress on the relationship (Sori et al, 1996; Scheinkman, 1988; Brannock, 2000). Several aspects of this dynamic have been explored by psychologists, family and couples therapists, and sociologists, with some areas of agreement and some space of divergence or contradiction.

In 1973 Price-Bronham looked into student husbands versus student couples, suggesting that increased levels of stress were observed when both parties were enrolled in their studies, but the quality of the relationship was actually better than in so-called asymmetric couples (where only one spouse was enrolled). Price-Bonham found that symmetric couples were more equalitarian in the sense that no partner was sacrificing for the other or felt "left behind," while in asymmetric couples the breadwinner gained more power through further education.

Bergen and Bergen (1978) explored other elements of the marital relationship in the context of university students, looking at how the quality of the marriage was influenced by the source of financial support and demographics of the couple—such as the amount of time the couple had been married, their ages, the level of education of the wives versus the husbands, academic performance, mean income, etc. They affirmed Price-Bonham's findings that quality of marriage was significantly higher if both spouses were enrolled simultaneously and suggested that couples where only the husband studied had better marriage adjustment compared to those where the wife was the one pursuing further education. The only other significant demographic variable, according to Bergen and Bergen, was the source of income: couples depending on loans to finance their studies experienced significantly higher levels of stress. Financing graduate studies was a recurring source of stress in other studies as well (Gold, 2006; MacLean, 1995).

McRoy and Fischer (1982) replicated Berger's hypothesis in a slightly different setting and came to a slightly different conclusion. They found that when wives were the only ones enrolled, the quality of the marriage actually increased. This was an interesting finding: McRoy and Fischer's sample included older couples, married for longer, where the husband had already probably completed his own studies, suggesting that the wives were, at this stage, catching up on their own education. This indicates that age or duration of marriage could also be a variable of influence.

In one of the greatest contributions to the studies of graduate student marriages, Scheinkman (1988) presented the dyadic relationship from an organizational and interactional angle. She looked exclusively at asymmetrical (student / working spouse) marriages and the disengagement process they go through during graduate studies. Using a systemic view, Sheinkman suggested that asymmetric couples develop hierarchical confusion, reciprocity confusion, and a widening contextual gap.

The hierarchical confusion presents itself in the form of economic and educational inequality, and also in the sense of inequality of household responsibilities. As one spouse engages in his or her academic activities, the rules of the marital relationship have to be adapted and this causes stress.

Reciprocity becomes an issue as timetables get difficult to negotiate and resentment builds up on the non-student spouse who is sacrificing his or her needs to support

his loved one in her or his studies. The dismissal of individual needs makes the relationship prone to crises.

Perhaps the most dangerous and difficult to mitigate stress factor is the contextual gap. The asymmetry in graduate student marriages is stressful because it emphasises different schedules, different frames of mind, and triggers different dimensions of the self to be brought out by each of their environments. When these contextual differences are mishandled in couple interactions, the void between the spouses becomes wider and wider.

Scheinkman also analyzed, based on her clinical cases, dysfunctional interactional sequences that couples engaged in as a result of their growing contextual gap. As a final finding, she suggested that no matter how low the quality of the marriage may be during the graduate program, couples tended to suspend negotiations and maintain the structure of the relationship until a major milestone—very often graduation—was accomplished. Separation was a common next step.

Studies published by Sori et al. (1996) and Legako and Sorenson (2000) have suggested a possible additional element of the dynamics of marital relationships in the context of graduate programs. The work of Sori et al. was carried out in the context of students of marriage and family therapy, and although she confirmed that graduate school increased stress in marital relationships, both trainees and spouses rated their experiences as significantly more rewarding than stressing (Sori et al., 1996). Similarly, the sample used by Legako and Sorenson, which involved student/spouse dyads in Christian psychology graduate studies, supported the overall statement that graduate studies had a detrimental effect on student marriages, but with spouses reporting that their student spouses had become more emotionally expressive due to therapy and the experience of psychology graduate training (Legako & Sorenson, 2000). This could signal that in more introspective, self-reflective areas of graduate studies, the marital relationship—although under stress by all the organizational and structural challenges pointed to by Price-Bonham, Bergen and Bergen, and Scheinkman—could actually be enhanced over time by the application of the new knowledge and skills, if proper communication is established between the spouses.

These studies could, however, be criticized on several grounds. First, they do not explore deeply enough the experiences of the NSLPs themselves during the graduate program, including their own personality and inner theater. Most of the studies relied on quantitative analysis of responses to marital adjustment or satisfaction questionnaires rather than in-depth interviews. Valuable information about the inner theater of the NSLPs is still missing.

Second, they can be criticized for underplaying the relevance of the life and family cycle stages in the context of the graduate studies. As seen in Bergen and Bergen's work, these factors seem to play an important role but were never looked into with proper attention, especially in the case of those in the midlife stage, with its convoluted individual and family cycle dynamics. This might be too large a topic to be ignored.

Last, studies of marital relationships and graduate studies over the last 40 years ignore the role that transformational programs play as transitional spaces or identity laboratories and their consequent impact on the participants' life choices. Korotov (as cited in Florent-Treacy, 2009) has called these programs identity laboratories because of the experimental environment they create for participants. Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010) have named them identity workspaces, suggesting that business schools are called upon to fulfill a function of growing importance—developing management education that goes beyond influencing what managers know and do, and supporting them in understanding and shaping who they are. Kets de Vries and Korotov (2007) have gone as far as defining what it takes to create such transformational programs, looking at challenges from the admissions process to the selection of faculty. However, nobody has yet connected the transformational program to the journey of the NSLPs.

Therefore, justification exists to examine issues not addressed in the previous studies and issues that have evolved over time. Research needs to examine more deeply the journey of NSLPs, especially those who are part of midlife couples where the studying partner engages in a transformational program. This is the gap I intend to address in this paper.

## **Methodology**

In order to conduct my thesis research, I have chosen the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method (Pietriewicz & Smith, 2012) of qualitative research, as the objective was to investigate the experience of NSLPs in the context of EMCCC. The phenomenon under study is the NSLP's inner theater evolution through the different phases of EMCCC—from the moment their partners first mentioned the intention to join the program to the time when the classroom modules are finished and the students focus on their master thesis.

The IPA method allows perfectly for this exploration as it gives room to investigate how individuals make sense of the world, how they experience events, and what meaning they attribute to phenomena (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Since my objective was to sit next to the NSLPs and watch their inner theater, I opted for a hermeneutical phenomenology approach, reflecting on essential themes that constitute the journey of the NSLPs throughout EMCCC (Creswell, 2013) and not only describing what I saw but also interpreting the contents of the interviews I carried out.

I conducted 10 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with NSLPs from my EMCCC cohort and followed the recommendations of the IPA method for the data analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). In order to capture my own reactions, I took notes during the interviews, pointing to moments where I felt distinctive emotions as a reaction to the statements of the NSLPs or to passages I thought were significant to describe that person's inner theater. Using digital audio recordings of each interview, I carefully analyzed the contents of the conversations. I listened in detail to each recording, making audio tag marks at every significant point. Each interview yielded 14 to 28 tag marks. I then transcribed the texts around those tag marks and produced a master table where each NSLP was represented in a column and their tag-marked texts were listed below their names, one tag mark per row.

Next, I dove deep into the single texts and looked at them horizontally in search of similar significant statements considering emphasis and imagery that could be common among different interviews, in what Moustakas (1994, as cited in Creswell, 2013) calls horizontalization. I marked the texts, giving similar relevant topics the same color, so I could read across the interviews and investigate their trends. When

I clustered the coded texts around similar meanings, themes emerged that I then organized as part of the NSLPs' inner theater.

### **Research setting**

Wave 19 of INSEAD's EMCCC program, in which I took part, had 42 participants of many nationalities, with a gender split of 45% male and 55% female, and included about one third business executives, one third human resources professionals, and one third independent consultants. My interview sample comprised 10 NSLPs (five male and five female) from this cohort. My subjects' nationalities were Western European (5), Eastern European (2), North American (1), and Latin American (2), which was a representative set of the INSEAD EMCCC class in Fontainebleau.

The sample was chosen by means of request to my classmates—that is, they were the ones, not me, to directly invite their partners to be part of my research project. Although one could argue that this increases the risk of biases in the sample, I thought there would be added value in triggering discussion in the student/non-student dyad about the topic of my thesis. I intentionally kept an equal gender distribution and focused on NSLPs in the midlife age bracket: the age range in the interview sample was 38 to 53 years old. I also looked for couples with a longer relationship time; the range in my sample was 10 to 32 years.

In terms of family structure, seven of the interviewed NSLPs had young children still living with the family, and the other three either had no children or had children who were no longer living with the couple. In terms of professional activity, six were employed full-time at the time of the interview (two of them were business owners), and the remaining four worked part-time. Besides that, half of my sample had already previously been engaged in some type of self-development activity such as coaching, psychotherapy, or some type of psychological, behavioral, or leadership training.

The interviews I conducted with my subjects took between 50 and 90 minutes. Except for one interview that was done over the phone, all interviews were carried out over Skype with both audio and video, so body language could also be captured. The interviews followed a common but rather open social interview script, flowing

chronologically through the different stages of the EMCCC experience (the list of interview questions can be seen in Appendix 1). In the final question I included a visualization exercise whereby I asked the subjects to describe their view the EMCCC by means of an image—which they verbally described to me rather than drew on paper. I did this as an attempt to generate a small clinical spike to tap into more unconscious levels of the subjects' experience in relation to EMCCC. As suggested by Meyer (1991, as cited in Nossal, 2013), “pictures and graphics and drawings are seen as affording a means of communicating information about multi-dimensional organizational attributes with clarity and precision... informants often possess more copious and meaningful information than they can communicate verbally” (p.70).

Seven of the ten interviews were carried out in English, two in Portuguese, and one in German. I am a native Portuguese speaker and fluent in the two other languages, so I offered the interview subjects the choice of language that would make them feel most comfortable given the relative complexity of the subject. From my human resources background I have come to realize that people are more comfortable finding the appropriate vocabulary for emotions in their mother tongues.

### **A sequence of acts unfolding on stage**

In applying the IPA method to the data collected during the interviews, I organized the emerging themes using the analogy of a dramatic work, which is suitable since my intent was to investigate the NSLPs' inner theater.

A play is a story told through a sequence of acts unfolding on stage that are performed in front of one or several backdrops. Such is also the inner theater of the NSLPs. What they see, the common themes surfacing from my data analysis and interpretation, are the acts unfolding in their minds and hearts—their perceptions, emotions, and fantasies related to their partner's participation in the EMCCC. The backdrops are their frames of mind, perhaps their personality traits and other factors that affect the way they see the world, that give flavor and temperature to their inner theaters. The story told by the play is a combination of the acts and backdrops. I have called this the NSLP inner theater theme.

In the next pages I will explore the acts, themes, and backdrops of the NSLPs' inner theaters. Let us start with the five main acts.

*First act: The leap of faith*

It is hard to explain what EMCCC is really about: the program title, the contents, the semi-structured modules, the unorthodox exercises, the written tasks. If even participants sometimes have difficulty describing what they are doing in the program, imagine how hard it is for the NSLPs to make sense of it. Getting into the program represents, therefore, in most cases, a leap of faith into an unknown environment. Non-studying partners reflected this in their statements<sup>3</sup>:

- M1: "The EMCCC decision was not easy, it was not clear what the program was about, it's expensive, what's the return on that investment? I was actually against it because of the money, of our small child, the time away."
- F2: "I did not know what the program was about, something to do with leadership?"
- M2: "Not another degree! . . . she had already so many degrees and so much going on in her life."
- F3: "CCC is a master's degree, I don't remember exactly the name of the program . . . so normally I say it's about coaching."
- F4: "When people ask me what is this program that he is doing, I say it's a business course, something he is putting on his CV, he's coming up with something for his own business—it's work."
- F5: "It's very hard to explain what the program is about. I normally used the words master's and coaching, this seems to work normally."
- M5: "I normally explained EMCCC [to others] as something to do with coaching, MBA, so and so . . . I realized that even when my wife, who is in the program, had to explain it, it could take her hours to get to the point."

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<sup>3</sup> Interview quotes are identified by the gender ("M" for Male and "F" for Female) and a number I have assigned. The language in all interview quotes in this paper is a faithful transcription or a literal translation of the interviews, many of which were conducted with people whose first language is not English.

### *Second act: Rationalization via previous experiences*

As the program is complex to explain, NSLPs responded to the anxiety of the unknown by rationalizing what EMCCC could mean for their partners. Probably as a sort of defense mechanism (Milton, Polmear, & Fabricius, 2004), or as what is known as an experience bias (Halvorson & Rok, 2015), they used their previous experiences (their own experiences or those of others) to process and decode this new phenomenon and to try to predict outcomes. As neuroscience has it, our expectations, past experiences, personality, and emotional state all color our perception of what is happening in the world (Halvorson & Rok, 2015).

- F1: “Studying again was good for me, so it would be good for him too.”
- F1: “My spouse’s EMCCC experience reminded me of ‘Frere Roger’ and the Taizé community,<sup>4</sup> I went there when I was 17 years old, actually it’s quite similar.”
- M1: “I was influenced by what I had seen before about change management in the training programs in my company.”
- M3: “When I did this other program, it was difficult every time I came back to share with her what I had experienced. You get to know yourself better, you want to take much more space in the world. It was very similar to what happens now with EMCCC.”
- M4: “The EMCCC group gives me the same feeling as the high school camping—I experience that feeling when I’m traveling with my friends, which I do once a year. There’s a connection when you’re there.”
- F5: “When he explained EMCCC to me [before he had been accepted], I had some hesitation because of the experience of my brother-in-law. He was gone for two months into such a program and when he came back he had changed a lot and thought now he could do everything. I didn’t have fear but respect for EMCCC, I told my spouse, ‘Be careful, you might change!’”

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<sup>4</sup> The Taizé Community is an ecumenical monastic community in Burgundy, France, founded by the Swiss Christian leader and monk Roger Schütz, popularly known as Brother Roger (French: Frère Roger). The community is a meeting point for people from all over the world who come for events to search for communion with God through community prayer, song, silence, personal reflection, and sharing. (Ref!)

*Third act: Interactions with the transitional space*

As the program starts, its first visible impacts are the travel to the modules and the time the studying partner needs to dedicate to pre-readings and post-module work. This is where the program makes a grand entrance into the couple's routine. Beyond the logistical arrangements, the topics, the emotional load and the exchanges before and after the modules also gradually start to pop up in conversations and to embed themselves into the couple's dynamics, penetrating time that was previously dedicated to the couple themselves.

- F2: "My husband is so keen on Manfred [referring to Manfred Kets de Vries, EMCCC's program and scientific director]. We have now since two years Manfred in our bed!"
- F1: "I felt I had to respect his space" [referring to the days after EMCCC modules].
- M1: "She was so emotionally involved with EMCCC, I expected something more academic."
- M3: "I hope the program is over soon, I did not like that EMCCC involved her more than I expected. The worst time was the two or three days before she left to Fontainebleau, no time to do anything, she was not available before, then she was going one day earlier and coming back one day later, and when she was back she needed to sleep for two days because she was totally exhausted."
- F3: "He was away at a time when I needed him."
- F4: "I think he needed some time for himself, to explore himself. Maybe he's different when I'm not around. I see that I'm different when I'm with him at company events for example. . . . It's difficult [to give him that space] because I also have a lot of time for myself, the kids are not around anymore."
- F5: "When he came back from Fontainebleau, I had had my three or four days alone with the children, maybe sometimes he came back on a Saturday evening and we had a social event straight away, so it was difficult to find the time to exchange . . . sometimes we ended up discussing about the EMCCC topics on Sunday morning while we were still in bed having a cup of tea."

- M5: “She came back tired, she needed a few days to come back to her normal condition. . . . For me it was normal, I just had to adjust. . . . It’s a combination of both: she needed some space for self-reflection and she also needed some space to share.”

In the same way that the transitional space enters the couple’s territory, the reverse also happens, and the NSLPs had opportunities to interact with their partner’s classmates:

- F1: “He took me with him to [location name] when he had to go there for the peer observation practicum, and I met his classmate and their family. We went together to an alumni event, and now we’re going to [location name] to visit another classmate with the whole family. I didn’t even have to ask for it. Meeting with the people was demystifying, the stereotypes were dismantled.”
- F5: “I met [classmate name] and also [classmate name]; this was very nice. It’s a very nice group, everybody in this midlife age, very multi-culti.”
- M3: “I found the EMCCC classmates were quite nice and normal!”
- M5: “The interactions with the other classmates were good. I think you a had a good team, you had a little bit of everything . . . with some people I had very early a connection, with others not so much.”

#### *Fourth act: Jealousy kicks in*

Several of the non-studying partners mentioned jealousy, with various levels of intensity, contained or not.

- F4: “I accompanied him to Fontainebleau for one of the modules and when we were at the bar in the evening with some of the classmates, somebody said, ‘What happens in Fontainebleau stays in Fontainebleau.’ . . . I thought, ‘What is this—Vegas?’. . . I thought everybody was just making a big party and simply using this program as an excuse for it. . . . I started to believe there was something else going on. . . . Maybe an affair? . . . But then I realized this was perhaps a transition phase, he has started to get interested in psychology, etc. . . . I confess I’ve started to check his calendar, new names I did not know, he changed his therapist. . . . This man is different!”

- F1: “As a partner you want to feel privileged as the one who knows everything and more. . . . Jealousy crosses your mind, but I gradually grew out of it.”
- M3: “[When I did my own self-development work] it triggered jealousy on her side, very similar to how I feel about her over the last 18 months.”
- F5: “I asked him how old the women in his group were; you feel a bit jealous because he comes back very happy, all energized. . . . It has generated some stress in the relationship. . . . Sometimes I could not reach him by phone when I tried [during the modules]. . . . I saw a number in his phone from a bar in Fontainebleau with a woman’s name on it. . . . But this was later clarified.”

### More about Jealousy

At this point I believe it is worth taking a brief sidestep to investigate more deeply the feelings of jealousy reported by the NSLPs and the differentiation between jealousy and envy. The most common distinction made between envy and jealousy focuses on the different circumstances that give rise to each. Whereas envy involves a desire for something another person has, jealousy seems rooted in the possibility of losing a relationship one already has (Smith, Kim, & Parrott, 1988). Envy involves two elements: oneself and a person to whom one compares poorly. Jealousy requires three: oneself, a partner with whom one has a relationship, and a rival to whom one fears that this relationship will be lost (Parrott & Smith, 1993). Jealous feelings are labeled with terms such as fear, anger, and suspicion. White, 1981), whereas feelings of envy are labeled with terms such as discontentment, longing, ill-will, and a sense of inferiority (Foster, 1972, as cited in Smith et al., 1988).

Even though jealousy and envy supposedly have these distinct experienced qualities, experimental work in psychology has suggested that the average person rarely makes distinctions between the words *envy* and *jealousy*, and it is the term *jealousy* that apparently carries the most semantic ambiguity, being often used interchangeably with *envy*, depending on the context (Salovey & Rodin, 1984, as cited in Smith et al., 1988).

The implication of this potential semantic confusion on my study could be that the NSLPs did not experience jealousy only but also envied their studying partners. As far as envy is concerned, one hypothesis is that the NSLPs would like to have what

the partner has through the program—reflection space, time away from home, guiding figures to help with midlife issues, and so on.

As mentioned before, jealousy requires a third party, and although this is typically a romantic “other,” oftentimes the object of jealousy is a situation that does not involve a person but creates a distance that is experienced as threatening to the exclusiveness or priority of the love bond. Work, graduate school, hobbies, pets, smart phones, the internet, pornography, or any other time-consuming interest may trigger feelings of exclusion and stimulate reactivity between the partners (Scheinkman, 2010). The jealousy NSLPs experience could therefore be projected toward other participants, but perhaps it is a fear that they might lose their studying partners “to the program,” to the transition space, the cocoon that will turn the partner into a different self who might no longer wish to be in a relationship with them.

#### *Fifth act: Studying partners’ “new magic powers”*

As studying partners acquired new knowledge and learned about themselves module by module, they tended to enthusiastically share or even experiment with this new knowledge, which I call “new magic powers”, with their NSLP. These attempts could trigger unexpected responses or lead to disagreement, conflict, and awkward or even funny situations.

- M3: “I fear that now she thinks she’s got all answers and that all is over now . . . whenever she came back [from Fontainebleau] with her new fantastic knowledge and tools, and I was the guinea pig . . . I knew it, no surprise really . . . I felt I was just the laboratory for her, it was not really for me.”
- M3: “I tried to tell her that the limits of that [the new knowledge and specifically some of the new concepts she learned at EMCCC] is that it’s not magic. . . . But she disagreed.”
- F4: “I’ve seen some of the books that he wanted me to read, but I ended up not reading anything. . . . Because I did not want it. . . . He was trying to coach me, he wanted to change me, and I don’t need this.”

- F4: “Now he analyzes everything and wants to try to connect everything to childhood traumas, it seems that everything [about me and others] is now connected only to this. . . It feels like he now has the answers to all questions, but it’s always the same answer!”
- M1: “She shared a lot of the topics with me. All were very interesting, but I would not agree with some of her conclusions.”
- F5: “When he told me about the contents of the topics, some things I have looked at more critically than he has. . . . It does not work always so easily with the concepts . . . sometimes he then tried to use his new knowledge on me. This was actually funny, he has tried to act differently to the situations just to try it out and see how I would respond. I have of course realized it . . . it was funny and actually a bit awkward.”

### **Three very distinct inner theater themes**

The five acts described above showed themselves at different levels of intensity in each interview. It was as if each one of my 10 conversations had a different formula; they seemed to be dominated by a slightly different overall theme. I suspected that this could be the theme of the inner theater playing in the NSLP’s mind, which somehow permeated answers to each of the questions. I investigated this hypothesis further also considering my own notes on my emotions during the interviews. After some clustering three themes came to the surface. I explain them in the next pages, with quotations taken from the interviews.

#### *Neutrality*

Some NSLPs almost did not notice that their partners were doing a transformational program (“Cocoon? What cocoon?”). In the interviews they mentioned little interest in the contents of the program, seemed to have hardly been involved in the decision by the partner to apply for EMCCC, and did not seem to be disturbed by the fact that they did not really understand what EMCCC was about. These NSLPs were happy their spouses were doing something they enjoyed, and that was enough for them to know.

- M2: “I don’t have an interest in that stuff, it’s part of life, some people like ice cream, others don’t.” (...) “I only understood what the program was very superficially, but that’s ok.”
- M4: “Not much came to my mind when she decided (told me, actually) about EMCCC; I can’t even remember that she asked me about it.” (...) “I don’t think I understand what the program is about even now, but I don’t need to understand it either.” (...) “I don’t fantasize about the program; it’s just studies”. (...) “CCC was a good chapter for her. She likes writing and reading; she likes studying; but otherwise I don’t think much about it.”

Their level of interaction with the program seemed to stay at the surface, and—at least from the viewpoint of the NSLP—that did not seem to be a source of distress for either person of the couple. The key topics were the logistics and time arrangements for their spouse’s participation in the program, and sometimes the financial aspect—the program was seen by all as an expensive endeavor. As long as these elements were under control, then the neutral NSLPs had uneventful inner theater activity.

When asked to visually describe their own experiences as their partners went through the program, they either did not have any imagery to offer or stayed relatively superficial and descriptive with little reference to feelings or abstraction:

- M4: “This is a very difficult question. . . . I’m normally quite visual, maybe you realize now that I’m not so involved in this part of [my spouse’s] life.”

When asked about the level of perceived change in their studying partner, in themselves, or in their relationships as a result of EMCCC, they also reported little or no change.

- F3: “For me EMCCC was nothing new as [my spouse] has always been in HR, done coaching, etc. Maybe it’s more transformational for him than I can see, but I don’t see any big change. . . . He always came back [from Fontainebleau] the same; I did not feel any difference.”
- M4: “I think [my spouse] did not change, and my level of change is also about zero.”

- M2: “CCC has not impacted me or our relationship per se.”

### *Engagement*

The second inner theater theme was almost the opposite of the first one: these NSLPs became deeply involved with the program from its early stages. They were like scientists who found a cocoon and became interested in understanding what was going on in it. Either by reading the materials themselves or by extensively exchanging with their studying partners, they came to understand what was being discussed in each module and many times were glad to serve as the “case” for their studying partners.

The engaged NSLPs reported a feeling of self-development during the program; they felt they had themselves earned a diploma and achieved important steps during the course of EMCCC. Some of these NSLPs even considered doing EMCCC themselves in the future.

- F1: “I feel like I’ve earned a certificate myself! . . . I’ve learned a lot as he was learning. I would not do EMCCC myself because I feel I have already done it!”
- F5: “[Because of my interactions with my spouse during EMCCC] I think more about some topics today; I’m more self-reflective. In general, it’s a positive impact.”
- M1: “I have read a lot of the materials, the cases from the group, etc. She shared them with me and I was glad to take the opportunity. . . . I got interested by the different approaches. . . . I would definitely do the program if I could afford it.”
- M5: “I probably know most of the contents of the program already now, but I would do EMCC because of the personal experience.”
- F2: “We talked about things, exercises, simple things; we took every opportunity to exchange about the program.”

They also described the program as something that brought them closer together as a couple.

- M1: “CCC gave me a much deeper understanding of what she’s going through. I gave her more time. It made me think about my impact on her and the family. . . . Being able to accept each other as we are.”
- F1: “CCC gave us tools to communicate.”
- M5: “The program has surely positively impacted our relationship . . . so much self-development; she’s changing and therefore the whole system changes. We are now spending a lot of time talking about these topics; we both have the same interests so it’s a multiplication effect.”

When asked to talk about any changes they have observed in their studying partners, these subjects used positive language and described their observations with enthusiasm:

- F1: “I saw him blossom! . . . The course made him open up; before he was normally closed and did not show his feelings.” (...) “When he is reading to prepare the thesis . . . when he sees the light he comes to me from his computer or his books, and it was great to see that!”
- M1: “I feel that she is out of the prison. I’m fine with her strolling in the fields.”
- F2: “He is more talkative. I support him because he’s more interesting; he’s more alive!”
- M5: “You should see how passionate she is writing and reading and phoning around [to do her thesis research].”

When asked to express their view of EMCCC in a visual manner, these NSLPs used more positive imagery and expressed that with equally positive emotions:

- M1: “I see kids in a big room running around, painting, making a mess, doing their thing . . . And enjoying themselves like hell” [followed by big smile].
- M5: “I see a growing flower coming up in spring, and now the thesis on top of the flower, like the colorful petals . . . I feel joy to see her unfolding.”
- F2: “I see colorful, chaotic concentric frames, like a cosmos. . . . Growing and gaining order . . . It makes me feel calm, like when you look at the sky full of stars. . . . I feel safe even if it’s a very large environment. . . . Every start in its own way, all harmonized.”

## *Exclusion*

The third inner theater theme was voiced by the NSLPs whose experiences were mostly distress about their spouse's participation in EMCCC. These partners either felt gradually excluded from their spouse's journey in the program or grew resentful about it because of conflicting interactions with their studying partners or with the transitional space. They saw the cocoon and tried to interact with it, but either lacked the tools and skills to engage, or were denied access by their studying partner.

- F2: "In the first modules he shared a lot with me, but now I'm upset because he does not share anymore. . . . If he does not talk about EMCCC then I create my own story. . . . And if I ask, then he blocks!"
- M3: "The first and second modules were quite easy in regards to what I've seen [when she got back from Fontainebleau], but after module three she started to go away. . . . 'Please do not disturb me.'"
- F4: "My return to therapy is directly connected to his participation in the program. . . . I felt excluded from this part of his life and of the program. This is the word: excluded!"

The imagery used by these NSLPs when describing their journey throughout EMCCC is more intense and laden with emotions and pictures.

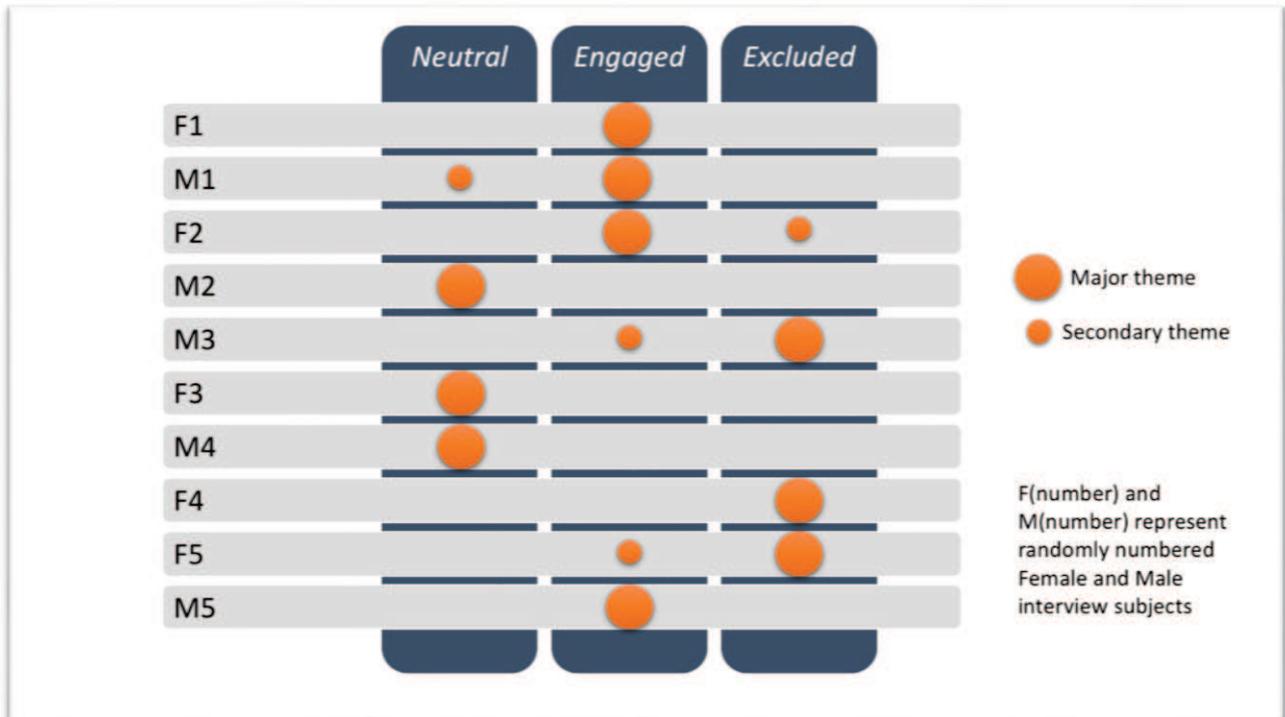
- M3: "I see colors like in a palette of a painter, going out from the center but with sharp limits one to the other. When you put this into a centrifuge, or a turning table, the colors that were sharp at the beginning are now moving, strong wind and storms, one mixed with the other. . . . Now the speed of this turning table lowers; we put the colors in a cylindrical vase; then this looks like a drink with many different colored layers. The table turns during the modules [of EMCCC] but afterwards the colors start finding their new place. . . . They are new colors . . . With the same ingredients, but new colors. This image is for me attractive at the beginning, a bit scary in the middle, but at the end there's a good chance that it's a great piece of art. I would have to wait until the colors are dry and then see if it matches [with my room] to hang it."
- F4: "I see a boat in turbulent waters, almost sinking, going into an uncertain destiny. The boat would be our relationship, the program would be the sea—

not constant, not predictable, which rocks the boat—the sea directs the boat. This image makes me feel insecure.”

- F5: “I see a curve, like a chart, with a neutral, a negative and a positive zone. The curve goes up and down. The positive is that he thought about himself, but he could still apply things better himself. . . . The negative is the sense of distance, sense that he applied things too quickly, too euphoric without thinking.”

Based on the 10 interviews, I applied a simple tabulation of the frequency and strength of the passages mentioned, as well as my own interpretation, to qualitatively estimate what major and secondary themes I could identify for each NSLP. Figure 1 below shows this attempt at a distribution of trends classifying the interview results according to the three inner theater themes.

As can be seen in Figure 1, my interpretation is that non-studying partners live through one major theme during the journey of the program, but secondary themes also take place every now and then, depending on momentary triggers or experiences. A NSLP who was initially neutral about his spouse’s participation in the program became very engaged after his spouse had a traumatic experience in the classroom. He reported being worried about the stress the program was adding to her physically and emotionally, and decided to take a more active role in the journey, which his spouse appreciated. Two of the NSLPs were quite positive and engaged with the program at first, but felt that as the modules progressed, their studying spouses did not allow them to be part of the journey anymore, and a feeling of exclusion took over.



**Figure 1: Qualitative distribution of inner theater themes in the interview set**

### Exploring the backdrops of the inner theater

Why do the journeys of the NSLPs differ so much? What are the elements, looking through the lens of the psychodynamic approach, that impact this system? The acts in the NSLPs' inner theater during different moments of the program were part of the system but a theater always has a backdrop as well, one that is more static than the dynamic play unfolding on stage. In the case of the inner theater this backdrop could be seen as the psychological system of the NSLP. What elements do they bring with them once the curtains of EMCCC are pulled open? What could be important factors when one party of the long-term romantic relationship goes into the transformational cocoon? The 10 NSLPs with whom I spoke gave me clues about where to look. Following are some backdrop elements that I believe play a role in shaping the inner theater of the NSLPs during their partner's EMCCC journey.

### *Life and family cycle stages*

Most of the EMCCC participants fall into the midlife age bracket and so do their NSLPs. This is a stage in life known for questioning our prior assumptions, for acknowledging that the formula that has made us happy for the first half of our lives may not work for the second half. As this reflection takes place, many other sub-processes unfold.

My hypothesis is that if NSLPs have already worked out at least part of their midlife journey, they might be more stable themselves and hence more inclined to perceive their partner's journey at EMCCC positively. From my sample of NSLPs, those who had made significant career changes or undergone self-exploration through therapy or coaching prior to their partner engaging in EMCCC seemed more likely to see their partner's potential transition in a positive and constructive manner. It could be just another manifestation of experience bias, but it suggests that it may make a difference if the NSLP is already at an advanced stage of the midlife passage.

For those NSLPs who were themselves struggling with the midlife passage and not yet ready to engage with it, the experience of seeing their spouses jump into the transitional space might have activated in them defenses such as denial or rationalization, which might have fed into a contextual gap (Scheinkman, 1988) and emphasized some of the previously described inner theater acts.

Another interesting element is that men and women experience midlife in different ways; in this phase of their lives they are somehow "out of sync," as Carter and McGoldrick (1999) describe it:

Thus, during midlife, men and women are moving past each other in different directions and at different paces. As women develop autonomy and move toward outside commitments, men want more time for leisure and/or travel and expect their wives to be free to join them (Carter & Peters, 1996). These gender contradictions are often confusing and unsettling to the partners and may lead to significant shifts in the marriage, including a redefinition of what constitutes a good husband and wife. As women become more independent, there may be a change in the balance of power in the marriage and a renegotiation of marital expectations, plans, and dreams—or the viability of the marriage itself. (p. 291)

Furthermore, beyond the life stage of the NSLP and that of his or her partner, the family life cycle stage also seemed to be a backdrop factor. Each phase of the family life cycle as described by Carter and McGoldrick (1999) presents the couple with unique challenges, and what may look at first sight as a simple evolution (like having a second child or launching children into the world) can play a determining role in this complex system. Research has shown that marital satisfaction actually constantly declines throughout the stages of the family life cycle until the launching phase (Rollins & Feldman, 1970), which is basically the couple's midlife. In many cultures, divorce rates peak exactly at that stage (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999), but couples who stay together end up experiencing a significant increase in marital satisfaction in subsequent life stages.

Most of the NSLPs I interviewed had young children. Two of them lived through pregnancies during EMCCC. Another one talked about their "empty nest" (now that their children have moved away) and the resulting challenge of readjusting the family routine. These three family stages have different characteristics, each with its own emotional process of transition. Each of them means a different type of alignment in the family: accepting new members into the system, as in the case of new children; increasing flexibility of family boundaries to permit children's independence, as with adolescents; or renegotiating the marital system as a dyad after the children have been launched to the world (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999).

Given the significance of the life and family cycle stage to our own psychological system, I conclude that they are key elements in the backdrop of the inner theater of any given NSLP. When the studying partner joins the transitional space he or she takes along the whole NSLP system, in its own stage of life and family cycle, and what unfolds becomes therefore very complex.

#### *Family cohesion, flexibility, and communication levels*

In their circumplex model of marital and family systems, Olson and Gorall (2003) developed a way to look at family systems from three different aspects: cohesion, flexibility, and communication. My research has led me to think that all three elements can influence what theme will dominate the inner theater of the NSLPs in relation to EMCCC.

*Cohesion* is defined as the emotional bonding that couples and family members have toward one another. It focuses on how systems balance separateness and togetherness. Family *flexibility* is the amount of change in its system's leadership, role relationships, and relationship rules. It concerns how a family system balances stability with change. Finally, *communication* is the facilitating dimension considered critical for facilitating couples and families to alter their levels of cohesion and flexibility (Olson & Gorall, 2003).

The circumplex model envisions that if cohesion and flexibility are at a balanced level, and if communication is effective, then the couple or the family will generally function more adequately across the family life cycle than in systems showing unbalanced levels. Olson and Gorall's hypothesis is that balanced family systems will modify their levels of cohesion and flexibility to deal effectively with situational stress and developmental challenges across the family life cycle. When one member's needs or preferences change, the system must somehow respond (Olson & Gorall, 2003).

I believe this serves perfectly as a model to decode some of the patterns I have seen in my research with the EMCCC NSLPs. When the family operated with balanced cohesion, meaning that the system presents healthy levels of togetherness and separateness, then the organizational challenges of the graduate program—all the time away required by the studying partner—seemed to be accommodated without generating distress. Furthermore, previous communication about practical arrangements seemed to take place in order to allow the system to remain balanced during the program. One of the NSLPs I interviewed reported how her husband decreased his workload during EMCCC in order to absorb the study time without impact to the family. This was pre-contracted as a sign of an effective, balanced system. A similar argument can be built for balanced flexibility, since potentially the NSLP would have to take over leadership on specific family tasks that were, prior to the program, executed by the studying partner. One NSLP spoke in the interview about how she had to take over the planning of their family holidays during the EMCCC period, as normally her husband was in charge of this. It was a source of distress for her. If the system is balanced and communication is positive, the couple will navigate smoothly the change caused by one partner's participation in the program.

In terms of the NSLP's inner theater, it seems logical therefore to posit that the acts played and the overall theme will be influenced by the backdrop element of where the family sits in the circumplex model of marital and family systems.

### *Personal attachment styles*

John Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) attachment theory grew out of observation of the patterns of emotional reactions of human infants and young children when separated from their caregivers (mainly mothers) for different lengths of time. Caregivers are the secure base from which infants allow themselves to explore the world. As Hazan and Shaver summarize in their 1990 paper:

According to Bowlby, attachment and exploration are linked as follows: to learn about and become competent at interacting with the physical and social environment, one must explore, but exploration can be tiring and even dangerous, so it is desirable to have a protector nearby, a haven of safety to which one can retreat" (p. 270).

The caregiver's responsiveness when this retreating function is called upon generates variations in the baby's attachment styles. On the basis of Bowlby's theory, Ainsworth, Blehar, Walters, and Wall (1978, as cited in Hazan & Shaver, 1990) identified three infant attachment styles: one secure and two insecure, namely ambivalent/anxious and avoidant. Based on the work of Cassidy (1994) and Cassidy and Berlin (1994), Popper, Mayseless and Castelnovo (2000) summarized as follows the internal working models of the three distinct attachment patterns:

The internal working model of secure individuals includes a basic trust in their caregiver and confidence that their caregiver will be available, responsive, and helpful should they encounter adverse or frightening situations. With this assurance, they are bold in their explorations of the world and able both to rely on themselves and to turn to others when needed.

The internal working model of the ambivalent pattern is characterized by uncertainty as to whether the parent or caregiver will be available, responsive, or helpful when called upon. Because of this uncertainty, the ambivalent individual is always prone to separation anxiety and tends to cling while

manifesting unresolved anger directed at the caregiver. This behavior is seen as an attempt to coerce an otherwise unresponsive caregiver to pay attention.

The third pattern is that of avoidant attachment, in which individuals have no confidence that when they seek care they will receive it. On the contrary, they expect to be rebuffed. In the extreme, these individuals attempt to become emotionally self-sufficient and to live without the support of others (p. 269).

Research has shown that attachment styles seem to remain throughout adulthood, and that they influence the nature of the romantic relationships one develops in adult life. In their 1987 study, Hazan and Shaver found that secure lovers described their most important love experience as especially happy, friendly, and trusting. They emphasized being able to accept and support their partner despite the partner's faults. The avoidant lovers were characterized by fear of intimacy, emotional highs and lows, and jealousy. The ambivalent subjects experienced love as involving obsession, desire for reciprocation and union, emotional highs and lows, and extreme sexual attraction and jealousy (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

My hypothesis is that when NSLPs experience their partner's participation in a transformational program, the NSLP's inner theater is also a result of his or her experience in the romantic relationship, which is in turn related to the person's attachment style. The move of the studying partner into the transformational cocoon will trigger in the NSLP a response that is affected by his or her attachment pattern. Since there is a parallel between the way we attached to our caregivers and the way we attach to romantic love partners, the secure style will probably serve as a backdrop for a constructive inner theater, whereas insecure attachment patterns might feed into acts of jealousy and doubt of the self and of the partner.

### **The NSLP inner theater model**

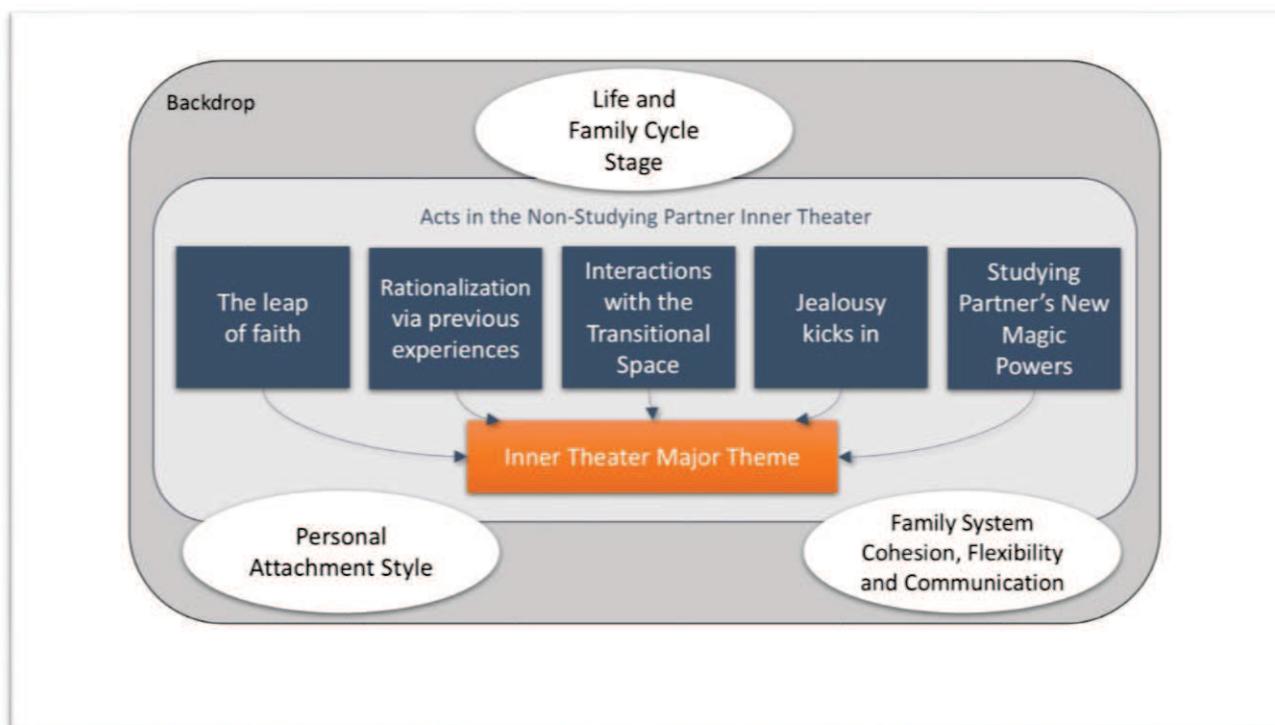
With more knowledge of the backdrop elements and the inner theater acts, it is possible to hypothesize about how the dynamics play out at the unconscious level of the NSLPs during EMCCC. Although it is probably unreasonable to believe that any of the acts and backdrops are fully independent from one another (for instance, attachment styles probably influence the balance level of the family system in the

circumplex model), isolating them might provide room to dissect the phenomenon and to look at significant variables.

Figure 2 summarizes what I call the NSLP inner theater model and puts these pieces together in a sensible way so that the model can be understood and the interactions among the different pieces made more explicit.

Simply explained, the model depicts the NSLP inner theater main theme in the center as a result of both the acts played on the inner stage and the backdrop elements. The theme is how the NSLP experiences the journey of his or her partner throughout the program. If we had to give a title to the inner theater play of a specific NSLP, this would be it.

The inner theater consists of the five main acts that surfaced in the thematic analysis of my interviews. My hypothesis is that the main inner theater theme will be a result of how strongly, how dramatically, or for how long each of these acts makes its way onto the stage. This might vary during the program and as the modules progress. Indeed, as Figure 1 has suggested, there might even be a secondary theme taking over for some time during the program; it is not a linear and constantly predictable process, after all. The inner theater acts are themselves activated by the elements in the backdrop: how the NSLP attaches to others, how his or her family system works, and where he or she is in the life and family cycle stage. These more intrinsic features of the NSLP's personality indicate the probability that one or the other act shows up. The model in Figure 2 can be applied to explore and build hypotheses about the specific construct of the three major themes found in my research: neutrality, engagement, and exclusion.



**Figure 2: The NSLP inner theater model**

*Neutrality analyzed through the NSLP inner theater model*

Seen within the frame of the model, neutrality is probably the least active inner theater play. In terms of attachment styles, my hypothesis is that those NSLPs whose interviews hinted at a neutral view of EMCCC could either fall in the secure or avoidant groups. They showed characteristics of secure attachment demonstrated by the high level of trust in their partners and by their reported stability of emotions and feelings throughout the EMCCC journey. On the other hand, the “turn to the neutral world of things” could indicate a suppression of attachment behavior, which is a sign of the avoidant attachment style (Ainsworth et al., 1978, as cited in Hazan & Shaver, 1990). Avoidant attachment, in romantic relationships, is also often connected with the mental model of “I can get along quite well by myself,” which seems to be present in what the neutral NSLPs reported.

The family system of the neutral NSLPs appear to be balanced in terms of togetherness and separateness, and adaptable in terms of the leadership roles in the family. In the “neutral” group I found some clear examples of mitigating actions taken

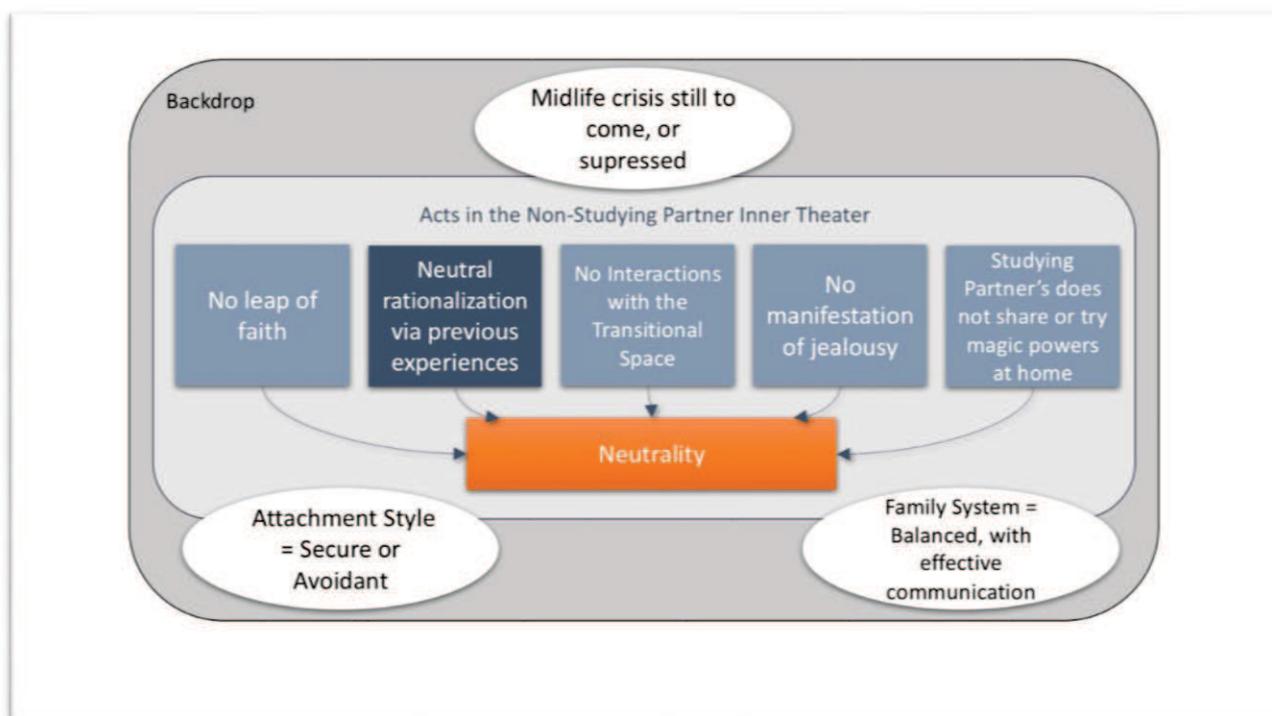
to reduce the impact of the structural challenges posed by the program—for example, activating support from extended family to help the NSLP in the absence of the studying partner and rebalancing the work hours of the studying partner to accommodate the program activities. This indicates the presence of positive communication and an overall supportive base from which the studying partner could embark on to EMCCC.

Neutral NSLPs did not experience anxiety when the program started, suggesting there was no leap of faith needed. The main act on stage of neutral NSLPs is the rationalization of the program as something that would be a happy chapter for their spouses. As long as the logistics and time management did not negatively impact the family, they did not care that much about what was going on, and they also did not ask much about it. Not surprisingly, there were limited encounters between the transitional space and the neutral NSLPs.. Jealousy was not on the neutral NSLP's list—which could be either another sign of secure attachment or yet a sign of either effective coping mechanisms or the suppression of negative emotions. The studying partners of neutral NSLPs did not seem to try their new magic powers at home, or at least not on the NSLP: the response would be neutral, so why bother? This could leave room for potential frustration for the studying partner, but that is not the focus of the present study.

Apart from secure or avoidant attachment, what could be other sources of neutrality? The neutral NSLPs did not seem to be deeply connected with their own emotions and feelings. They did not sit very long in their inner theater—perhaps there was something playing, but they didn't give it too much attention. The distance to one's own inner world could indicate that one has not yet reached their midlife reflection stage. As Hollis (1993) puts it:

the middle passage is less a chronological event than a psychological experience. . . . It occurs when the person is obliged to view his or her life as something more than a linear succession of years. The longer one remains unconscious, which is quite easy to do in our culture, the more likely one is to see life only as a succession of moments leading towards a vague end, the purpose of which will become clear in due time" (p. 18).

Figure 3 summarizes how the NSLP inner theater model might look in the case of neutrality. There are, in my view, some key questions with regards to the neutrals: How do their studying partners feel about their neutrality? Is there something else playing, suppressed, in the background? Would the mid- or long-term development of the relationship differ depending on their secure or avoidant attachment styles? Is neutrality a sign of suspended negotiations (Scheinkman, 1988) until the program reaches its end? These issues are too complex to be covered in this paper, ad might be interesting leads for future research.



**Figure 3: Neutrality analyzed through the NSLP inner theater model**

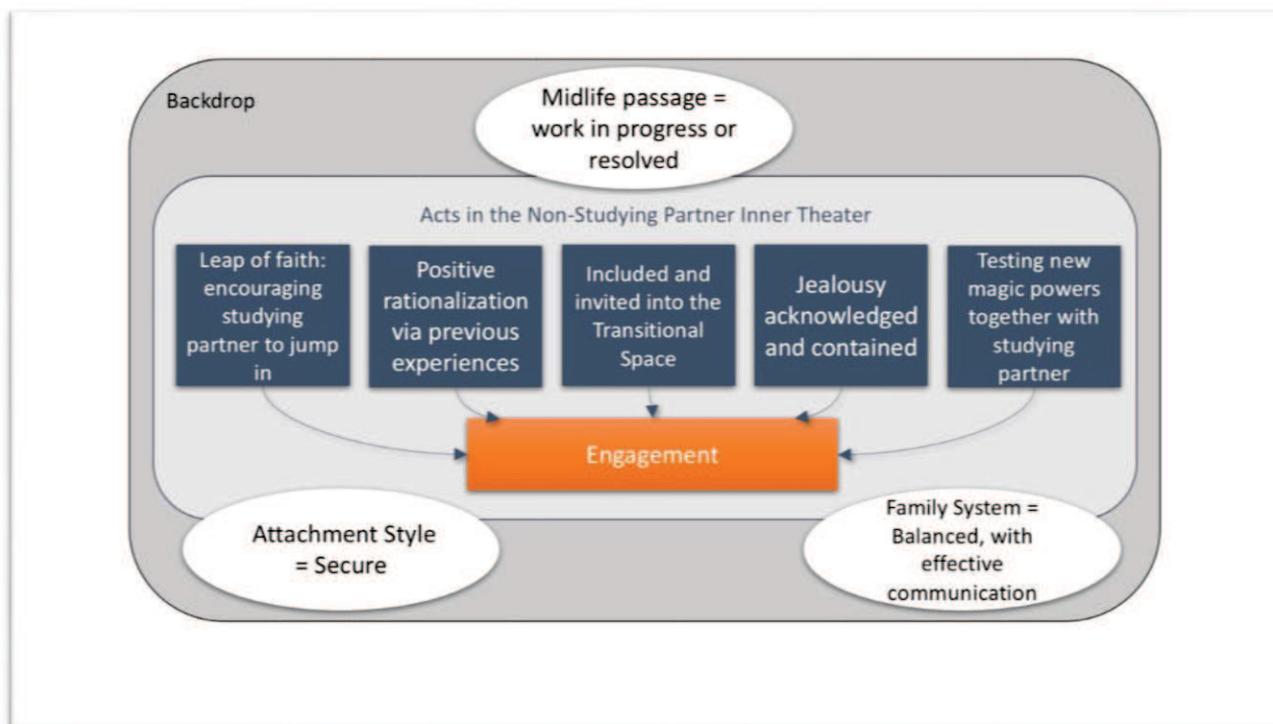
*Engagement analyzed through the NSLP inner theater model*

The engaged NSLPs were a different breed. Their backdrops showed several signs of secure attachment, such as encouraging their partners to go into the exploration of the transformational cocoon (even though they did not know exactly how that exploration would unfold), allowing them to take the time and space needed for their self-reflections, and providing help as a safe haven when required by the studying partner. As in the neutrals, the family systems of the engaged NSLPs seemed well balanced; communication facilitated adaptations needed for the maintenance of

balance during the program. Compared to the neutrals, the engaged demonstrated a deeper connection to their inner theater, as well as a desire to explore the inner theater of their partner, to see through the shell of the cocoon. This could be a sign that they were further advanced in their individuation process—three of the four engaged subjects talked about their midlife transition and about having been already engaged in transitional space explorations themselves (therapy, coaching, etc.). When asked whether they would do EMCCC, these NSLPs always had a positive response—they liked the inner theater they were watching.

The acts in the engaged NSLP's inner theater were like smooth transitions, Cirque du Soleil style. The leap of faith was not such a tough decision after all. There were discussions about time and money, but these issues were also dealt with through positive communication in advance of the program, and good working models were contracted between the partners. As they were themselves familiar with transitional spaces, self-exploration, and change, the engaged NSLPs used a positive experience bias to create their own image of what EMCCC was about. Encounters with EMCCC were much more common in this group than in either of the other two groups of NSLPs. By reading the materials, visiting the campus and attending informal meetings and dinners with other participants, they were like an extended part of the community. These interactions gave NSLPs opportunities to demystify preconceptions about the program and learn through the stories of other participants how EMCCC worked and how they felt. Engaged NSLPs also reported experiencing jealousy, and they were able to acknowledge the feeling and to rephrase it as a natural part of the process. The new magic powers of the studying partner were tested at home with constructive discussion and joint learning. NSLPs did not necessarily agree with every conclusion, technique or framework taught at EMCCC, but they accepted the platform as an opportunity to generate a learning experience for the couple as a whole.

Figure 4 summarizes the factors influencing the inner theater of engaged NSLPs during EMCCC, according to my model. This is the most balanced inner theater theme, the one to aspire to. That is not to say engagement makes for a conflict-free ride through EMCCC, but it seems to be the most constructive frame of mind to allow for a positive impact on the couple's family system.



**Figure 4: Engagement analyzed through the NSLP inner theater model**

*Exclusion analyzed through the NSLP inner theater model*

The excluded NSLPs were the ones with the most active and distressing inner theater. At the beginning of the program or as the modules unfolded, they experienced anxiety and that triggered defense mechanisms in them. My hypothesis is that these NSLPs have ambivalent/anxious attachment styles, which are reflected in their romantic relationships. This was indicated by the stronger presence of jealousy and the emotional highs and lows in this group than in the other two NSLP groups. In an intertwined effect, the family systems of these subjects appeared less balanced than in the other two groups, especially in terms of flexibility: in all three of my subjects with a major inner theater of exclusion, the family breadwinner and family leader was actually the studying participant, and no agreements seemed to have been discussed in advance in order to renegotiate family leadership patterns during the program. The excluded NSLPs were also the ones in the most restless stage in the life and family cycle. These individuals had already realized what midlife means and were in a process of self-reflection and redesign of the self. They were

launching children, relaunching their careers (in the case of women), or contemplating a more balanced life for the next many years (in the case of men).

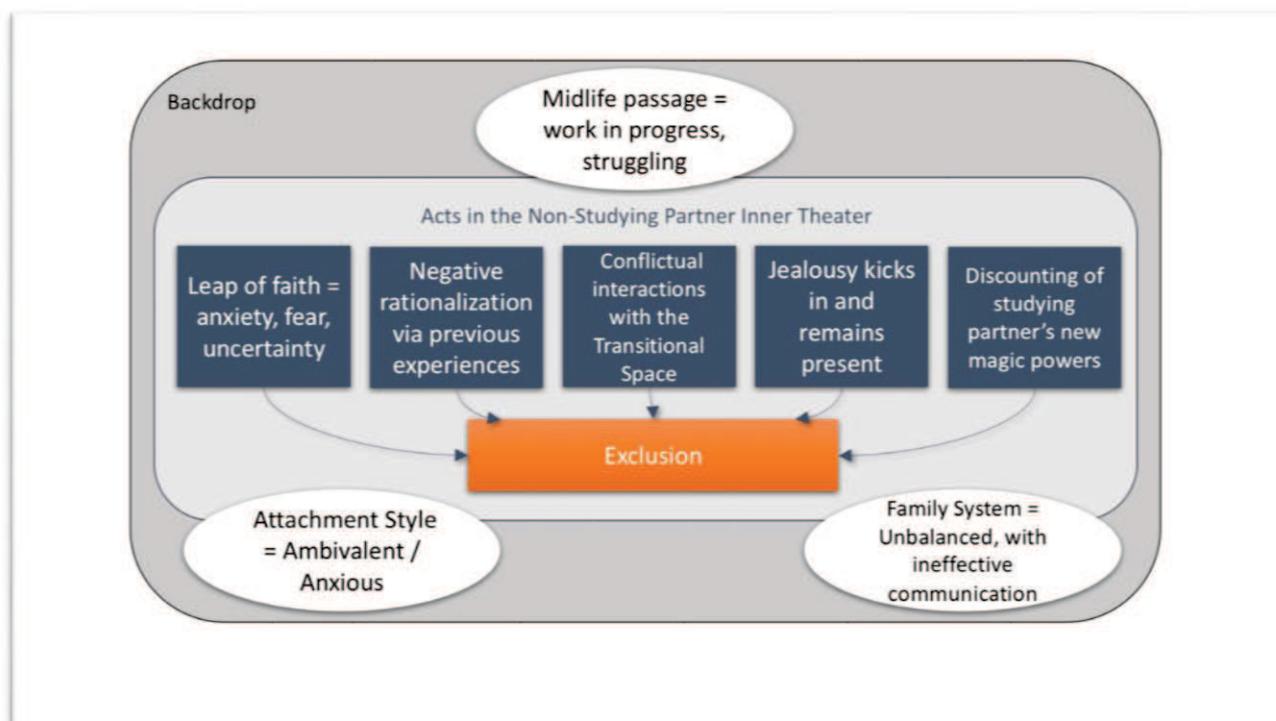
The acts of inner theater in the excluded NSLPs were lively. The leap of faith into the program came with anticipation of the change the studying partner would experience and whether love would exist after EMCCC. Their own disoriented life and family stage cluttered their rationalization process of what EMCCC is about, and their connection with previous experiences turned toward the negative—they tended to interpret EMCCC with fear of negative previous experiences they or people they knew had lived. These NSLPs encountered the program materials with doubt and contestation, a defensive reaction to what might drive their love partner away from them. Interactions with other work participants were skeptical, influenced by value judgments and self-doubt driven by comparison (“Am I as good as them?”).

Jealousy was therefore a natural consequence of the backdrop and the scenes unfolding in the inner theater of the excluded NSLPs, and it was indeed reported by my interview subjects. Although the excluded NSLPs reported jealousy about the participants of the program (“I wondered how old the women in his group were”), I suspect their jealousy was actually toward the whole experience of EMCCC – the cocoon.

When participants tried to use their new magic powers at home the reaction of the excluded NSLPs was resistance, with a tendency to discount the new knowledge and sometimes to counter-attack. The attempt to share or apply the new knowledge backfired and fed into a destructive cycle.

Figure 5 summarizes the hypothetical dynamics of the inner theater of excluded NSLPs using the model previously presented. One could speculate that excluded NSLPs were not living through their inner theaters exclusively by their own conscious choice. The anxiety they felt might be theirs, but it might also be the anxiety of their studying partners in the EMCCC identity laboratory (Korotov, 2007). They might have wanted to be included, and would perhaps even become engaged, but their studying partners might have shut the door as they were not ready to share the ride. As a matter of fact, in two of the three excluded NSLPs, I picked up signals of a secondary inner theater theme of engagement. This was referred to, for example, as the initial intent of the NSLP (“I actually wanted to be part of it”) which took different

directions depending on the response of the studying partner. Again, one could connect this to attachment style, since anxious/ambivalent individuals may have a confused model about themselves, of whether they are worth of standing their ground and fighting for what they desire.



**Figure 5: Exclusion analyzed through the NSLP inner theater model**

### Potential Implications

My research indicates that there might be room to better incorporate NSLPs in the journey of their studying partners' transformation. This could have potential implications for some of the key stakeholders in this scenario: institutions, faculty, participants, and the NSLPs themselves.

The role of institutions offering and hosting transformational programs is often the first to be questioned. One could wonder, and some of my interview subjects did wonder, whether the institution and its faculty should play a more active role in fostering inclusion or encouraging program participants to integrate the NSLPs more effectively (Gold, 2006). I would like to offer a brief discussion on it. I feel the institution in a transformational program should be the container of the identify

workspace (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010), and should provide a safe environment with professional faculty that serve as guiding figures to the identity work happening during the program. One could argue that since it is hard to know in advance that the program might trigger such metamorphosis in the participants, the institution possesses more information than the participants and could therefore be seen as responsible for providing guidance and anticipating the issue. In my research, some NSLPs recommended that the school offer a manual explaining roughly what happens in each module so they can be better prepared. Would that really help, or would it just activate defenses unnecessarily?

One could also argue that it is part of the participants' learning to consider the journey of their NSLPs, to look outside of their cocoon more often during the process. The role of the institution would in that case be offering support once students identify issues that they do not feel yet ready to deal with and ask for support. Faculty could then help upon request and on a case-by-case basis, which is the current *modus operandi* at EMCCC.

Potentially a middle ground could be found by better equipping the participants to handle the couple dynamics, which would also enhance their learning. This could occur as part of the onboarding to EMCCC and in the parts of the program that already hint at the participation of NSLPs, such as the Personality Audit (Kets de Vries, Vrignaud, Korotov, Engellau & Florent-Treacy, 2006), where participants can ask their partners to answer a personality-focused feedback survey, or the family systems chapter, where the circumplex model of marital and family systems (Olson & Gorall, 2003). Discussions about the family life cycle (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999) could be included, as this is important for managing the extended system.

As a participant of EMCCC, I must also admit that writing and reading about the NSLP topic has given me immense space for self-reflection and has triggered constructive (not always easy) interactions with my wife. My thesis has probably become the object I needed to be able to raise topics and handle them properly, it has given us the vocabulary to hold these conversations, which has been a strong facilitating mechanism. This suggests that putting the topic on the table may be already an important step to start the conversation and create awareness in couples as one of the partners engages into a transformational program.

My personal advice to future EMCCC “wavers” is therefore to read this thesis and use it as a reflection instrument as you onboard the program. I do not claim to have solved the mystery of how NSLPs feel during our EMCCC journey, but I have created a basis for dialogue on the topic.

To future NSLPs, the recommendations come straight from the source. This is what my interviews subjects gave me to pass on:

- M1: “Have some free time, an open mind, accept as much as possible without judging. Pause for perspective.”
- F4: “I would have given him more freedom, would not have insisted so much to be part of it. But he could have invited me to be closer to this new life project of his. . . . He has tried to share the materials with me but it wasn’t relevant to me at that time. Maybe I could have acted differently, I could have been more interested.”
- F5: “The partners need to take the time and exchange about the program. It’s very important. Maybe this is some way to narrow the knowledge gap for the partners even if just by sharing the topics and highlights of each module.”
- M5: “Trust the process . . . you will both learn and develop. Be honest, don’t be afraid, don’t hide. It’s much easier if you say what’s going on, even if you don’t know exactly what’s happening. Maybe you don’t know and that’s ok. But share it anyway.”
- F2: “For me, it’s all about closeness.”

## **Limitations**

In my process of peeling the onion to get to the core of the inner theater of NSLPs, perhaps the greatest limitation is that I cut the onion in half before peeling it. By exploring only the journey of the NSLPs, I have vastly ignored the role that the studying partner plays in this system, bringing their own backdrop elements and the nature of their own EMCCC journey into the playroom and, with that, also impacting the NSLP’s experience.

As a participant of the program and studying partner myself, my interpretations have certainly been affected by my own biases and the quality of my analysis was set by

my ability to keep myself in check in order to remain as neutral as possible as I was studying the phenomenon.

My sample selection process might also have affected my research. By asking my classmates to contact their NSLPs on my behalf, I might have built in a filter early in the process and missed important testimonials impacting my research results. I have not gained any insights either on why studying partners did not invite their NSLPs, or whether, once invited, some NSLPs declined to do the interview.

Finally, I did not investigate the history of the relationships between NSLPs and studying partners, and that could have also influenced the inner theater of the NSLPs. A past betrayal experience, for example, deeply impacts the jealousy pattern in a couple.

### **Future Research**

The present study lays the foundation for many possible further explorations of the experiences of NSLPs. One avenue that could be further investigated is the impact of the backdrop elements on the journey of the NSLPs in order to confirm the existence of those conditions before the program (pre-entry). One idea could be to assess the couple system pre- and post-program using the FACE IV assessment for the circumplex model (cite) to see how cohesiveness, flexibility, and communication might evolve due to EMCCC. Another pre-entry condition that merits more study is the attachment style, which could be easily assessed in order to study its correlation with the NSLP's inner theater.

Furthermore, as this paper has dealt exclusively with non-studying partners, future research could engage with both sides of the couple and also analyze the inner theater of students, as well as their backdrop motives, to see how their part of the system influences the result.

The long-term impact of EMCCC on non-studying partners could also be an object of future investigation. Analyses could investigate how the inner theater evolves for some of the alumni over the years after the program; this could shed light on the relationship paths of neutral, engaged, and excluded non-studying partners. I have

conducted some initial study based on an online survey with the alumni community of EMCCC, whose initial results can be seen in Appendix 2.

And finally, as this study focused on non-studying life partners, an equally interesting idea might be to analyze the journey of non-studying *business* partners—for example, entrepreneurs, small family businesses, consultancy firms, or even larger companies where only one member of the team jumps into a transformational program. The topic of envy and the potential victimization of the studying party resulting from participation in the transformational program might interest companies sponsoring high-potential employees in such endeavors (Kim & Glomb, 2014).

### **Conclusion: the sixth act**

i carry your heart with me (i carry it in  
my heart) i am never without it (anywhere  
i go you go, my dear; and whatever is done  
by only me is your doing, my darling)

—E. E. Cummings (1894–1962)

Until very recently, studying metamorphosis was only possible by cutting open a cocoon that one believed was at a certain stage of the process: in order to understand the phenomenon one had to fatally interrupt it. With the recent invention of micro-CT scanners, however, observations of the metamorphosis process have been revolutionized as the same cocoon can be observed throughout the transformation without harming it (Davies, 2013).

The micro scanner has established a channel of connection between the individual under transformation and the one outside the cocoon, observing the process. I believe the same has been achieved by all studies dedicated to understanding transformational programs (business school cocoons) and their participants (midlife individuals, monarch butterflies in the making). My research, on the other hand, has given the micro scanner a new lens in the reverse direction – instead of looking at the cocoon, my micro scanner looks at the one observing it from the outside, the scientist trying to understand it, the NSLP.

As I activated this reverse direction, my micro scanner not only revealed the five inner theater acts and their backdrops, but it also uncovered a sixth act on stage. This last act was the one where the screen of my iPad showed shiny eyes and smiling faces on the other end of the line; where I was touched by a feeling of warmth, happiness and serenity coming from my interview partner, and where a sense of generosity, compassion, gratitude and selflessness took over. I believe the sixth act is love, unconditional companionate love. Love is present throughout the play, weaving together all other elements of the inner theater even when the NSLPs had very little idea of what was really going on, or whether their partners would still love them back after EMCCC.

During individuation, as during the metamorphosis of the monarch, one is called to go into isolation to find one's full self. As Hollis (1993) reminds us,

the paradox of individuation is that we best serve intimate relationship by becoming sufficiently developed in ourselves that we do not need to feed off others. Similarly, we best serve our society by being individuals, by contributing to the dialectic necessary for the health of any group. Each chip in the social mosaic contributes best by the richness of its own coloration. We remain most socially useful when we have something unique, our fullest possible selves, to offer.

This temporary separation process places great amounts of stress on the bond of love, putting it at test. For some NSLPs it might be the first time they see their partners undergoing such transformation process. For the participants the whole redesign of the self might be overwhelmingly difficult to digest and explain. In this times of distance and transformations, it is essential to activate both directions of the micro scanner in order to keep the bond of love alive and strong. I would like to conclude this paper with a quote from an EMCCC alumnus who has wisely described this process as follows:

“When asked by my partner before the programme, ‘Will you still love me after your CCC?’ I had to tell him, ‘I don’t know.’ (...) I am now many years out of the program. The stresses before the program were largely unconscious. During the program I had to help my partner manage the anxiety of not knowing as I made my journey. Following the program my partner said I was

again the teenager from MANY years before. And we still both say that this is one of the best things to have happened to us and to our family in our journey.”

## **Afterword**

I feel privileged and blessed for having been presented with the opportunity to write this thesis. I do not think I have chosen the topic, I strongly believe it has chosen me instead. Here is my immense gratitude to those who encouraged me to accept this challenge and make it as good a work as I could produce:

First and foremost to my wife Carolina, an amazing woman, the love of my life, my best friend, the living proof that unconditional love exists. She has spoken when I was not able to.

To my 10 interview subjects, NSLPs who made my work meaningful and trusted me with their honest inputs, feelings and emotions. I hope to have been able to give you something back through these pages.

To my thesis siblings Constance Vieco, Himanshu Kalra, Florian Kraft, Tim Veil and Evelyn MacLean for sharing their wisdom, providing friendly criticism and encouraging me during the months of the thesis journey.

## **Appendix 1: Interview Questions**

All interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way. The guiding questions are listed below and served as direction vectors rather than compulsory elements of my interviews.

### *Demographics*

- Age?
- How long have you been together?
- Children?
- Do you work?

### *Personal situation*

- Have you done a graduate program yourself?
- How about coaching, psychotherapy, etc?
- Do you feel to be at a point of transition in your life of any kind (professional, personal, etc)?

### *EMCCC program journey*

- Can you recall the moment your partner told you she/he was considering doing the EMCCC? What came to your mind when your spouse decided to apply?
- What feelings did you experience every time your partner travelled to FB?
- What about when he/she came back? How did you two exchange about what had happened in the module?
- Did you read any of the materials that we used at EMCCC? Or any cases? How did that feel? Anything in special that you have kept in mind or even applied in your own life?
- Could you please share a few examples of moments or situations you've had related to your partner's participation in the EMCCC?
  - o How did you feel?
  - o Why do you think you felt like that?

- What is your crazy idea about the EMCCC program? Why?
- What has surprised you about it?
- What has been your level of interaction with other classmates? Have you met some of them? Any particular incidents worth mentioning? Why, what feelings and emotions were triggered?
- When you're telling your friends about what your partner is doing at INSEAD, how do you describe it?
- What else have you experienced in terms of your partner's participation in the EMCCC program? What other emotions and feelings did it trigger in you?
- How do you feel now that the program (modules) has ended?
- How do you think your partner's participation in the program has impacted you?
- What about your relationship as a couple?
- Do you plan to come to graduation? What do you think you will see there? Any anxieties about meeting the whole group or being there with all?
- Do you feel prompted to do something similar to EMCCC?
- What came to your mind when your partner invited you to give this interview?
- If you had to describe CCC as a visual picture, what would that image be?
  - o Why do you think you came up with this image?
  - o What emotions does it trigger in you?
- What advice would you give to future participants and their partners

## **Appendix 2: There is life after EMCCC**

I have conducted initial research with the EMCCC alumni community (the raw data can be seen in Table 1 and Figure 6), which seems to confirm that the program is a bumpy ride for many participants, with about a third of them admitting to having experienced stress in the romantic relationship during the program. The topics coded in my interviews with the NSLPs surfaced again in the comments from alumni: the difficulty in explaining what EMCCC is about, the complications when sharing or using the new knowledge (magic powers) at home, jealousy, and the challenges of managing interactions between the transition space and real life. If the inner theater is very active, the journey is quite choppy.

However, the data I have gathered also points out that, over time, the potential outcomes of program participation are predominantly positive for the couple. Former participants talk about having better tools after EMCCC to manage the relationship and about having become better husbands and wives. The increased self-awareness also seems to encourage some couples to continue to explore with aid of therapy, separately or as a couple. Even among those who reported experiencing stress in the relationship during EMCCC, 30% have added positive comments in relation to the mid- and long-term impact of the program.

Negative outcomes also occur, especially for those who were living a dysfunctional relationship before their entry into the transitional space. Within my survey subjects, however, only approximately 8% of the alumni reported having separated from their life partner as a result of their participation in the program. Taking as a reference the high double-digit average divorce rates of many Western countries, and considering that those rates peak at midlife, the EMCCC divorce rate is actually extremely low. This might actually suggest that transformational programs trigger a metamorphosis that very often propels the participants and their NSLPs to a better life together.

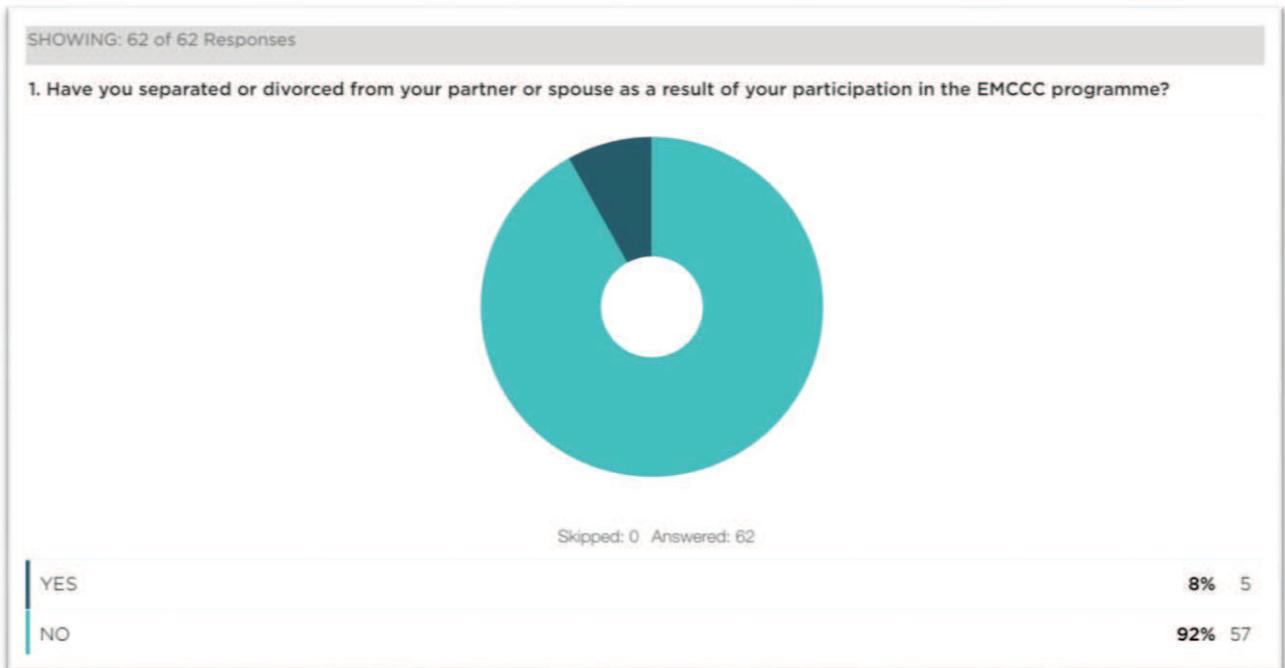
Table 1: Raw data from online survey with EMCCC alumni

Resp. nr.	Have you separated or divorced from your partner or spouse as a result of your participation in the EMCCC programme?			Would you consider that your participation in the EMCCC programme has caused additional stress in your relationship with your partner or spouse?		
	YES	NO	ANY SPECIFIC COMMENTS YOU'D LIKE TO ADD?	YES	NO	ANY SPECIFIC COMMENTS YOU'D LIKE TO ADD?
1		X	I am separated but years later and I believe it is not such a direct link the CCC programme as much as becoming much more aware. Some of the conclusions one makes during CCC regarding their partner is still from living an illusion of that relationship and is full of our own projections. I think a stronger drive of separations is the mid-life crisis of becoming or approaching 50 years old which in my opinion. This is true regardless of taking CCC or not with over 50 percent of individuals over 50 being separated or divorced in the US for example. Nonetheless - I am very curious as to why you choose to study this question. Why is this important to you?		X	In fact at the time of the CCC it brought us closer as perhaps it brought me closer to true self.
2		X		X		
3		X			X	
4		X			X	
5		X			X	
6		X		X		
7		X		X		
8		X			X	
9	X				X	
10		X		X		
11		X		X		Not being able to explain the intensity of the programme, discussions and bonding with the group. After INSEAD school weeks at home more busy with thoughts and little grumpie and irritated, tired.
12		X			X	No, not additional stress. It has improved the relationship. but only because of my hard work! Using the maxim 'you cannot change people you can only change yourself and through that, their interaction with you' I have 'improved' myself using elements I have learned from CCC
13		X		X		As my self-awareness grew during the CCC journey, I become a different person and that was reflected in the relationship. On the other hand, CCC raised the frequency of deep emotional moments and the need for containment at home, and that was not always there. There are still some grudges from those periods, on both members of the couple. There was also some emotional involvement with a colleague from the same cohort and that affected the relationship, because it created a distance inside the couple.
14		X			X	
15		X	Actually we deepened the relationship by sharing my experience and taking him with me. Also the journey has been through the mechanism of the head, not yet the heart. The CCC actually helped me realize something was not working in my life (mainly professional) and that I had cross my boundaries too much.	X		because I have changed as a result of it. But not negative stress, just some stress from the organizing our family (2 small children). I am however further developing myself in a transformational way by further focussing on the spiritual side. Therefore I am meeting more people who are very interesting now who are activating this side of me.
16		X	the programme even strengthened my understanding and reflection on our relationship.	X		during the programme, due to the "closed shop" nature of the class, there was a lot of anxiety on the side of my spouse what is really going on and if it was a threat to our relationship. even some jealousy regarding the close relationships that developed within the class.
17		X		X		I underestimated how much stress emccc would put me and my wife under. We work together in the same consulting firm but the pressure was not at work but at home. The introspective nature of the programme created a distancing effect and made me feel very lost in myself and that affected us a great deal.
18		X			X	
19		X		X		Due to time investment
20		X			X	
21		X	Single before, during and after. CCC paved the road to better understanding of myself and of the sources of my behaviour/limited success in partnerships.		X	Single before, during and after.
22		X		X		
23		X		X		In the contrary, I became more aware of own behaviour and how to improve self containment
24		X	I was already divorced from my first husband at that time and enjoying my single life. I was able to give the programme a lot of focus		X	as above. I could offer that I think it very much depends on the degree of understanding and supportiveness shown generally by a partner. My second husband has a much more supportive demeanour than my first. We met 3 years after I completed CCC
25		X			X	
26		X		X		
27		X	Strengthened my marriage		X	
28		X	My relationship is a lot better		X	On the contrary
29		X			X	to the contrary
30		X			X	
31		X	I became a better husband		X	
32		X			X	
33		X			X	

Table 1 (continued)

Resp. nr.	Have you separated or divorced from your partner or spouse as a result of your participation in the EMCCC programme?			Would you consider that your participation in the EMCCC programme has caused additional stress in your relationship with your partner or spouse?		
	YES	NO	ANY SPECIFIC COMMENTS YOU'D LIKE TO ADD?	YES	NO	ANY SPECIFIC COMMENTS YOU'D LIKE TO ADD?
34	x		It was the cause of timing a medical intervention earlier and that (among other things) led to the divorce. So indirectly, CCC was responsible.	x		There was some resentment over having to shoulder extra (parenting) duties during my absence for the modules.
35		x			x	
36		x	Divorced while thinking about doing the program		x	She was very supportive. New relationship...
37		x	I had my first child as a result of emccc and I love my life and husband even more		x	I learnt to know myself better and to live my good and bad which has simply resulted in more inner peace and better relations
38		x			x	
39		x	We didnt but in feb 12 I told my partner I wanted a divorce (started EMCCC in april 11) , we went the in therapy for nearly 2 yrs	x		
40		x			x	
41		x	When asked by my husband before the programme "will you still love me after your CCC" I had to tell him "I don't know".	x		I am 8 years out of the programme. The stresses before the programme were largely unconscious. During the programme I had to help my husband manage the anxiety of not knowing as I made my journey. Meeting the other participants did not help him until the programme had finished and we had the distance to reflect back on our journeys. Following the programme he said he had rediscovered the teenager he knew from MANY years before. And we still both say that this is one of the best things to have happened to us and to our family in our journey.
42		x	I cant say whether it is a result but it was a catalyst for sure.	x		It didn't cause additional stress. It stopped the avoiding and denying bit.
43		x	quite the contrary - we became closer, improved listening skills, deepen respect and gratitude, maximized tolerance		x	
44		x			x	
45		x			x	
46		x			x	
47		x			x	
48		x			x	The opposite, overall it has reduced stress as I have become less reactive and able at times to mitigate or eliminate some problems in our relationship. EMCCC has not been a panacea but it has made a positive difference. It certainly helps that my wife understands EMCCC content (she did a lot of undergrad industrial psych courses) and encouraged me to apply to the program.
49		x			x	
50		x			x	
51		x		x		It has added both healthy stress (being more connected with whom I am, dropping the mask) and unhealthy stress in that it has taken time for my spouse to adapt and me not too wanting to experiment new behaviours without enough consideration of the impact.
52		x	I would say I perhaps did CCC, in part, to explore and expand my thinking and being in what was already a dysfunctional marriage.	x		It helped for a while as it gave me/us a great container to talk about stuff.
53		x		x		Yes, especially in the beginning. But over time, it has deepened and strengthened our relationship.
54		x		x		But it also made us and our relationship stronger - now, 2 years after graduation, we are still evolving and much of this is related to my ccc experience.
55		x		x		in some ways yes...but with the ultimate goal of improving the relationship. Stress facts include differences in self-understanding, desire to look inward versus outward, need for silence, CCC time commitment, and the this of course!
56		x			x	
57		x	I answered "yes" even though I find the question to be too definitive. I divorced a few years after CCC, and my participation in CCC was a factor in my realization that our marriage was no longer functioning. However, I wouldn't say that my divorce was "as a result" of the programme.	x		As I followed my path of greater self awareness, this did cause additional stress.
58		x			x	
59		x			x	
60		x			x	
61		x	I am married for 40 years		x	In fact it furthered strengthened it as my wife and children very supportive
62		x			x	

**Figure 6: Distribution of responses to the alumni survey questions**



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