THE EXPERIENCES AND MEANINGS OF ADULTS WHO WERE RAISED IN AND
LATER DEPARTED FROM EVANGELICAL FUNDAMENTALISM:
A DESCRIPTIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

by

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Abstract

In this descriptive phenomenological inquiry, I explored the experiences and meanings of five adult research participants who were raised in and later departed from evangelical fundamentalism in some measure. Life Review, a structured guided autobiographical group-based adult learning model designed to assist people in organizing life events, was utilized to explore the research participants' experiences and meanings of being raised in a religious fundamentalist orientation. As a result of participating in Life Review, the research participants generated thirty descriptive written narratives that served as the primary source of data for this inquiry.

For the purpose of this inquiry, the research participants attended eight Life Review sessions. Sessions one and eight focused on group formation and closure, respectively. Sessions two through seven focused on assigned topics. In this regard, the research participants prepared six two-page single spaced narratives via a word processor describing their experiences and meanings specific to: 1) choosing to participate in this study, 2) major branching points in life, 3) family of origin, 4) parenting practices, 5) the effects of being raised in evangelical fundamentalism, and 6) the meaning of life. During Life Review sessions two through seven, the research participants read their respective narratives aloud to the other participants. A time limited reflective group discussion followed the reading of each narrative.

A phenomenological data analysis model was applied to the research participant's narratives. The analysis of the data culminated in the emergence of themes that revealed the essence of the lived experience and meanings of being raised in and later departing from evangelical fundamentalism. The themes included the experience and meaning of: 1)

unresolved pain, 2) unfulfilled longing, 3) coping strategies, 4) identity formation, 5) God and church, 6) being a Parent, 7) crippling fear, 8) engaging culture, 9) departing, and 10) finding home. These emergent themes described the essence of the research participants' life worlds specific to having been raised in and later departing from evangelical fundamentalism. The significance of the emergent findings and their relevance to evangelical fundamentalism, the psychology of religion, counseling psychology, and continued research were addressed, as were the limitations of the study.

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My appreciation is extended to several individuals who contributed to this study. I am particularly indebted to the research participants for choosing to courageously disclose portions of their life stories that were often enveloped by varying degrees of historical and present pain. As a result of their vulnerability in this regard, this study was graced with poignant revelations that brought to light the essence of the lived experiences and meanings of having been raised in and later departed from evangelical fundamentalism in some measure. I am grateful to each one of the research participants who in their own unique manner embraced the vision of this study and generously invested in its eventual outcome.

Dr. Marv Westwood, my academic and research advisor, was an untiring source of motivation and encouragement throughout the research process, not to mention my doctoral program in general. Dr. Westwood bolstered my confidence amid frequent bouts of personal and professional uncertainty and angst. My appreciation for Dr. Westwood's influence in my life is extensive and I consider him to be both a colleague and a friend in whom I place my trust.

Research Committee members, Dr. Marla Buchanan and Dr. Susan James, edited my writing in order to hone the nature and content of what was being communicated within these pages. Their work on my behalf added clarity to the printed representation of the research process, the research methodology, and the emergent findings. Dr. Buchanan and Dr. James' attention to detail also enhanced the precision associated with articulating the expansive conceptualizations inherent in this study. Their attention to accuracy of meaning was invaluable as it came to bear on my written and oral presentations for which I remain extremely grateful.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

"When religion closes people up in their own particular group, it puts belonging to the group, and its success and growth, above love and vulnerability towards others; it no longer nourishes and opens the heart. When this happens, religion becomes ideology, that is to say, a series of ideas that we impose on ourselves, as well as on others; it closes us up behind walls. When religion helps us to open our hearts in love and compassion to those who are not of our faith so as to help them to find the course of freedom within their own hearts and to grow in compassion and love of others, then this religion is the source of life."

Jean Vanier (1998)

<u>Preamble</u>

Evangelical Pastor Takes Aim at Microsoft Over Gay Rights

By Toby Harnden

The Daily Telegraph, November, 2007

A black conservative Christian pastor of an evangelical mega-church has vowed to take over Microsoft by packing it with new shareholders who will vote against the company's policy of championing gay rights. Rev. Ken Hutcherson, a former Dallas Cowboys linebacker, heads the Antioch Bible Church in Redmond, home of Microsoft. He told Microsoft executives at a shareholders' meeting last week that he would be their "worst nightmare" if they continued to defy him.

Antioch Bible Church attracts around 3,500 worshippers for its services and Hutcherson is a powerful figure in the Christian conservative movement. His church, which emphasizes racial diversity and a strict moral code, grew from a bible study class for just 15 people in 1984.

An advocate of a "biblical stance" against divorce and homosexuality, Hutcherson, 55, is asking millions of evangelical activists, as well as Orthodox Jewish and other allies, to buy up Microsoft shares and demand a return to traditional values.

Microsoft, he declares, will be just the first company targeted in an escalation of the culture wars between evangelicals and corporate America. "There are 256 Fortune 500 companies alone pouring millions upon millions of dollars into pushing the homosexual agenda," he told The Daily Telegraph. "I consider myself a warrior for Christ. Microsoft don't scare me. I got God with me. I told them that you need to work with me or we will put a firestorm on you like you have never seen in your life because I am your worst nightmare. I am a black man with a righteous cause with a whole host of powerful white people behind me."

Hutcherson's office is decorated with the heads of deer, elk and a buffalo – "when I run into animals, I kill them and bring them home and eat them" – as well as invitations to the White House and signed pictures of himself with President George Bush. His ambitious plan signals a new offensive in his two-year battle with Microsoft after it abandoned its neutral stance on gay rights legislation, which he says he helped negotiate before outraged gay employees intervened.

By trying to become a political player in Washington State, he said, the company was trying to impose its sinful way on others. "Microsoft stepped out of their four walls into my world so that gives me the right to step out of my world into their world," he said. "They tried to turn their policy into state policy, making their public policy something I had to submit to. And my playbook (the bible) tells me you don't submit to sin."

Microsoft has some 79,000 employees in 102 countries and annual revenue of more than $50 billion. Hutcherson said that this made it a Goliath to his David but he insisted that he could call on enough Christian foot soldiers to win. "I don't care how big Microsoft is," he said. "They are nothing but a feather in the wind of God. America basically got started with a tea party and Goliath, if I'm not mistaken, got taken down by David, who believed in the same cause I believe in. "I'm going to go after the new Goliath with one little rock called a share and I'm going to make them tremble before we get through." At the shareholders' meeting, Brad Smith, Microsoft's general counsel, said it was up to shareholders to continue their longstanding support of Microsoft's diversity policy, which includes an internal "affinity employee group" called the Gay and Lesbian Employees At Microsoft (GLEAM).

Hutcherson, who grew up in segregated Alabama and played football to "hurt whites" before he became a Christian, believes homosexuality is a sin rather than a biological phenomenon. He rejects comparisons between the black civil rights movement and calls for gay rights. "How many homosexuals have you even seen had to ride on the back of a bus? I haven't seen one. I know that many blacks have in the past. "I've never seen an ex-black. Michael Jackson couldn't even achieve that. But I've seen ex-gays. We minister to them every day. We talk to them about how to get out of that sin."

This article, appearing in the November 17, 2007 edition of the Vancouver Sun, poignantly illustrates some of the obvious core tensions and values inherent in at least one variant of evangelical fundamentalism as a social, political, and religious construct that frequently intersects with secular society. Variants of evangelical fundamentalism range from moderate (a moderate approach to Christian faith and life based on widely accepted and non-controversial scriptural principles such as 'love your neighbor as yourself') to extreme

forms of fundamentalism as practiced by the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas. In this case, congregants openly and unashamedly promote hatred and hostility towards gay people and people of color via public demonstrations characterized by hostile yelling and screaming, and the display of placards that read "GOD HATES FAGS", "THANK GOD FOR AIDS", and "FAGS DOOM NATIONS".

The focus of this descriptive phenomenological inquiry is a moderate to extreme form of evangelical fundamentalism operative within Canada and the United States characterized by unwavering dogma, confrontation, absolutism, certainty, and an *us versus them* mindset. Despite the fact that variants exist within evangelical fundamentalism concerning doctrine, worship genres, outreach initiatives, and life-style practices, evangelical fundamentalism's primary mission is building the church of God. The fulfillment of this mission is generally realized through an array of evangelistically oriented outreach initiates concurrent with maintaining adherence to a set of core doctrines known as the fundamentals of the faith by which the gathering of believers, known as the church or the body of Christ, reinforce their beliefs via regular teaching and preaching of the Word of God, typically referred to as the Bible.

Moderate to extreme variants of evangelical fundamentalism can also be characterized as social communities in which members and adherents regularly gather together around activities that seek to reinforce the idea and practice of community. In addition to an emphasis on regular church attendance, many programs are offered through evangelical fundamentalist churches for children, youth, young adults, divorcees, single parents, married persons, and the elderly. These programs are vehicles through which believers are built up and encouraged in their faith and Bible knowledge, as well as in their

relationships, outreach initiatives, and more recently, aid to impoverished cities and countries around the world.

Based on my familiarity and extensive experience within evangelical fundamentalist ideology and practice, this particular variant of fundamentalism has evolved in recent years to include increasingly trendy and atypical forms of community outreach that are thought to be more appealing and readily accessible to non-believers. Instead of the traditional hell fire and brimstone messages from years past, and in an effort to promote evangelism that caringly guides the wayward to repentance while building up the saints, the evangelical fundamentalist church is somewhat more prone to support programs such as ALPHA, a soft sell form of evangelistic or apologetic outreach intended for the 'non-Christian seeker' who has questions about Christianity and the church. Other initiatives in recent years include humanitarian efforts for the poor and needy in North America and around the world. Evangelical fundamentalists, for instance, can be found in places like Uganda, Somalia, city slums, and Aboriginal communities that struggle with social, psychological, emotional, and relationship challenges.

These particular outreach initiatives are becoming increasingly commonplace within evangelicalism fundamentalism. Interestingly enough, they are not all about winning souls for Christ. These initiatives are typically motivated by the desire to provide aid where and when appropriate for those persons in the world who exist in poor and chaotic socio-economic and political conditions. Although theses initiatives may include, at times, references to God and or Christ, they are usually culturally sensitive and attempt to be mindful of not exploiting the poor or disadvantaged for the sake of the gospel. Naturally, these initiatives can be controversial depending on how they are interpreted by rigid or

extreme evangelical fundamentalists and even liberals who question the integrity and motives of those leading these causes. Despite prevailing interpretations and speculation surrounding these movements, evangelical fundamentalists are attempting to shed their extremist past.

Regardless of diverse and similar variants, evangelical fundamentalism in general is a theological and social orientation held by many persons in North America. Evangelical fundamentalism can be defined as a movement within protestant Christianity that emerged around the turn of the century to defend fundamental beliefs of Christianity against secular influences. The basic tenants of fundamentalist doctrine were put forward in a series of booklets published from 1910 to 1915 titled, "The Fundamentals", from which the movement took its name. These booklets summarized the fundamentals of the faith specific to the inerrancy and literal interpretation of the Bible, the belief that Jesus was God incarnate born of the virgin Mary via the immaculate conception of the Holy Spirit, eternal salvation through faith in the saving work of Christ, the mandate given to disciples of Christ to evangelize the lost, discouraging a modern critical analysis of the Bible, and the conviction that those who did not share these points of view were not actually Christians at all (Barr, 1977).

The stand that fundamentalists made with these non-negotiable points of doctrine cast them as separatists who in many cases broke away from mainline denominations to form independent Bible schools and churches. The fundamentalist message was disseminated by way of radio and later television, although the local fundamentalist church became the primary institution and the sustenance and propagation of the fundamentalist cause. Ammerman (1988) described the culture of a typical fundamentalist church as being based on a literal, inerrant Bible as it is interpreted by the ultimate authority of the pastor.

Ammerman's field research revealed that fundamentalists were occupied with church-centered activities that essentially reinforced the basic tenants of fundamentalist doctrine and limited contact that members had with those who thought or believed differently.

Evans and Berent (1988) noted that those withdrawing from fundamentalism's prescribed lifestyle experienced problems perhaps as intense as any others associated with psychological trauma. Richard Yao (1985), founder of Fundamentalists Anonymous, identified the following emotional and social distresses found in former fundamentalists: loneliness and isolation, sexual difficulties, fear that evil will befall them or their loved ones, chronic inability to trust people, bitterness and depression over lost time, occasional lapses into 'fundamentalist consciousness', feelings of being let down, inability to talk about past involvement and background, and fear of harassment and persecution by fundamentalists.

These disaffected fundamentalists found their experience later in life to be unsatisfactory and therefore chose to engage in a process of leaving while attempting to retain some core beliefs and values associated with their faith. It has been argued (Evans & Berent, 1988; Yao, 1985) that this transition of departing may prove to be traumatic, sending dissatisfied fundamentalists in search of support from those who would understand their dilemma. The magnitude of this phenomenon is evidenced by the response received by Fundamentalists Anonymous (FA), a national organization in the United States offering support groups for troubled former fundamentalists. Since its origin in 1985, FA has attracted 50,000 members (Burek, 1991).

Given the nature of the problem, it stands to reason that a number of those who were raised in and transitioned away from fundamentalism might turn to mental health professionals for intervention. There is a need, therefore, for counselling psychologists in

particular to be informed about the experiences and related meanings associated with being

raised in and later departing from religious fundamentalist orientations. A review of the

literature in this regard reveals a dearth of research specific to persons disaffected by their

evangelical fundamentalist orientations. It is the objective of this study, therefore, to

augment a body of literature concerning the effects of being raised in evangelical

fundamentalism by offering a general description of the lived experiences and meanings

associated with persons who were raised in and later departed from this particular religious

orientation.

It is anticipated that this study will confirm previous findings associated with similar

research initiatives and that it will generate additional research questions and directions while

establishing insights applicable to clinical settings. In this regard, it is not uncommon for

mental health professionals such as counselling psychologists to encounter religious

fundamentalists in clinical settings. This study, therefore, may be helpful in both confirming

and de-mystifying common beliefs, perceptions, and biases that clinicians may or may not

have when working with people with religious fundamentalist orientations.

Inquiry Rationale

The rationale associated with this study is located in the fact that research specific to

adults who were raised in and later departed from evangelical fundamentalism is noticeably

scant. In fact, social scientists and mental health practitioners, both religious and non-

religious, have paid little attention to this particular phenomenon despite its presence in

North American society. Research specific to this population is essential in order to better

understand and appreciate the complex variables associated with being raised in religiously

repressive and pervasive world views. It is my sense that many people have left or are in the

process of leaving their conservative religious orientations and do so with a significant degree of struggle. In essence, many of these individuals are leaving an absolutist, authoritative, and prescriptive social and religious paradigm that provided a high degree of structure and therefore likely struggle to locate and identify themselves within their new found freedom.

Instead of simply viewing these individuals as persons disaffected with their evangelical fundamentalist orientations, it is essential to understand and appreciate the essence of what the experience was like to have been raised in fundamentalism and how over the long term fundamentalism impacted them spiritually, relationally, psychologically, and emotionally. There is room in the literature for social scientists in particular to better understand and appreciate the effects of evangelical fundamentalism in the lives of human beings. It is the bias of this study that social scientists and psychological practitioners in general make uninformed assumptions and generalizations concerning religious fundamentalists and evangelicals in particular without taking the time to understand and appreciate the complex variables coming to bear on those who were raised in and later departed from fundamentalist orientations. The issue of psychological, emotional, and relational distress and loss, for instance, is of value when considering the issues of psychological theories and clinical practice.

Based on my personal and clinical observations concerning adults who were raised in evangelical fundamentalism, many of these individuals display symptoms consistent with psychological, relational, emotional, and spiritual distress - presumably in response to oppressive fundamentalist church, familial, and institutional systems such as institutions of higher learning. Many of these individuals in my clinical practice exhibit symptoms

consistent with long term stress, depression, anxiety, addictions and, interestingly enough, extreme dogmatism characterized by unwavering certainty. Some adults who were raised in fundamentalism while choosing to leave the orientation later in life have struggled with emotional and relational isolation and existential uncertainty. These individuals long for inclusion, acceptance, and validation within a caring community or persons who are able to appreciate and embrace the process of *coming out* of fundamentalism without diminishing the significance and meaning associated with their personal and religious histories.

The rational for the inquiry, therefore, rests in the fact that studies specific to adults who were raised in and later departed from evangelical fundamentalism are limited in number despite the challenges associated with growing up in and leaving this particular religious orientation. Increased knowledge and understanding of the variables associated with being socialized into fundamentalism will naturally aid researchers and mental health professionals in addressing salient issues coming to bear on their lives both now and in the future. There is a need for a more in-depth appreciation for what it was like for people to be raised in a religiously oppressive culture that was initially and over time experienced as being normal. It is important therefore to shed light on this particular population in an effort to better understand how the fundamentalist structures and systems initially gave people a sense of security and certainty while at the same time oppressed individual freedom of expression and preference.

Another rationale associated with this study rests in its significance and relevance to religious culture wars currently underway in North America, referring specifically to theological and philosophical variations and differences found in conservative versus liberal denominations and churches. These variations often times result in interpersonal and

organizational fractures and appear to be increasingly common as is evident, for instance, in the Anglican Dioceses of greater Vancouver, British Columbia, specific to the issue of gay marriage and Biblical interpretation. This study therefore holds potential for informing both conservative and liberal churches and denominations about the challenges faced by parishioners who are engaged in a process of transition either away from fundamentalism towards liberalism, or, alternatively, away from liberalism towards fundamentalism. Regardless of the direction, persons in transition of any kind within the context of religious and denominational allegiances, especially those that are characterized by extremism, face the prospect of being misunderstood, misperceived, criticized, and potentially abandoned. Hence, this study may shed light on fundamentalism inherent in liberalism that may reflect religious fundamentalist ideology and characteristics found within conservatism, and also on how fundamentalism affects persons who choose to depart from fundamentalist ideology and practices regardless of its liberal or conservative context.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to explore the experiences and meanings of adults who were raised in evangelical fundamentalism and to shed light on a population of individuals who elected later in life to depart from their religious orientation due to its restrictive and pervasive nature. These individuals essentially disappeared from fundamentalism and in some instances, their families of origins in order to know and to be known as someone or something other than religious fundamentalists. This study attempted to better understand the dynamics of being raised in and later departing from evangelical fundamentalism in some measure.

The task of this research endeavor, therefore, was that of revealing the essence of the experiences and meanings of five adults who were in a process of departing from the confines of a religious fundamentalist construct. It was hypothesized that the process of departing from their religions of origin resulted in varying degrees of psycho-social-emotional-spiritual challenges characterized by varying degrees of personal and interpersonal stress. These individuals were thought to reflect a wider population of persons who similarly struggled to gain a clearer sense of personal identity amid having been raised in fundamentalism. It was also hypothesized that these individuals struggled to meaningfully locate their personal identities on the continuum inherent in the polarized views found within evangelical fundamentalism and secular liberalism.

As a result of this study revealing the essence of the lived experience of growing up in a religious fundamentalist orientation while choosing later in life to depart from it, it is anticipated that mental health professionals, psychological and social theorists, academics, and church leaders will gain a better understanding of appreciation for the historical, immediate and long term psychological, spiritual, and interpersonal attributions and meanings that come to bear on persons seeking intervention as they either cope with and or move away from fundamentalism. It is not uncommon, for instance, for clinicians such as counselling psychologists to encounter clients who come from conservative religious orientations. Clinical interventions specific to religiously oriented persons need to be informed about their lived experiences, world views, inherent cultural values, historical influences, current issues, their immediate challenges associated with leaving religious oppression, and the challenges associated with defining one's self as something other than a fundamentalist.

This study, therefore, took the form of descriptive phenomenology by which the research participants described at length via written narratives and group discussions their experiences and meanings specific to the issue of having been raised in fundamentalism while departing from this particular religious orientation later in life. It is the position of this study that many of these individuals who attempted or attempt to depart from fundamentalism are intellectually astute, experientially broad, emotionally aware, and creatively successful despite the restrictive nature of their pasts. Conversely, many others can be relationally and professionally crippled due to the haunting memories of being emotionally, spiritually, socially and sometimes physically compromised or abused in the name of fundamentalist Christianity that resulted in intense self-doubt and shame. Despite their courage to move away from fundamentalism, many of these adults struggled for years in their effort to make sense of the past in light of the present and the present in light of the past.

Essentially, the purpose of this study was to give a voice to persons who faced the daunting challenges associated with navigating the emergence of their personal convictions amid intense pressure to conform or adhere to fundamentalist corporate convictions imposed on them since childhood. In giving these individuals a voice, it in essence helped them to name their situations both historical and current, and in so doing talk openly about their experiences in a milieu of personal safety and freedom as a result of being with like-minded persons with similar experiences. It should be noted, however, that not all persons raised in this particular religious paradigm are discontent. In fact, evangelical fundamentalism continues to flourish amid the proclamation and promise of eternal salvation, the emancipation from whatever ales people, and the ultimate triumph of good over evil. In this

sense, evangelical fundamentalism is attractive to many persons and therefore flourishes. In this regard, many persons throughout Canada and the United States adopt and practice fundamentalist theologies and ideologies. Fundamentalism provides a sense of community, inclusion, certainty, and alleged freedom from past sins and encumbrances believed to impede a healthy relationship with God and other believers.

Nevertheless, there are a growing number of persons who are disenfranchised with their fundamentalist heritage and are therefore considered as viable research subjects in order for the scientist practitioner to better understand and appreciate their issues academically and clinically. This study therefore attempts to locate and describe the essence of the experience of having been raised in and later departed from fundamentalism in some measure. Informed insight and increased understanding will likely result from this study concerning theoretical and treatment issues inherent in persons electing to move away from an oppressive religious orientation. This study will also add to a growing body of literature concerning the effects of fundamentalism in the lives of its members and adherents, as well as those choosing to depart in some measure.

Locating the Researcher

This research initiative was motivated in part by my theory that some adults who were raised in evangelical fundamentalism struggle later in life to locate themselves somewhere between religious fundamentalism and liberal secularism. This study also grows out of my personal experience with having been raised in evangelical fundamentalism while choosing later in life to move away from the pervasive and controlling nature of fundamentalism in general. At the present time, I attend a large evangelical church. In this context, I administrate a professional fee for service community-oriented counselling clinic

staffed by seven counsellors with earned graduate degrees in counselling, counselling psychology, clinical psychology and developmental psychology, as well as appropriate registration with recognized licensing associations in the province of British Columbia.

In our work at the counselling centre, we address a broad range of psychological, emotional, spiritual, interpersonal, and mental health issues for people from both secular and religious communities who struggle to make sense of their lives for a plurality of reasons. For those with religious fundamentalist orientations, their struggles appear to be augmented in part by the immediate and or residual effects of fundamentalism. In this regard, the effects of fundamentalism seems to stunt or inhibit their sense of personal and relational wholeness and well-being, due in part to unrelenting feelings of shame or guilt associated with departing from fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism, a construct that arguably retains and controls people, continues to influence how these individuals perceive themselves and the world around them. Seeing themselves as something other than that of a fundamentalist is difficult despite their longings for personal change. Despite the difficulty, their primary goal is to experience themselves as being free from rigid psychological, emotional, and relational boundaries and barriers that for so long controlled their thoughts and behaviors. Hence, my interest in how persons are affected by fundamentalism is both personal and professional.

Throughout the course of the course of my life, and generally without complaint, I actively participated in evangelical fundamentalist Baptist churches. Following graduation from a public high school I attended and eventually graduated from an accredited conservative Baptist Christian liberal arts college and seminary where I completed both undergraduate and graduate degrees. Eventually, I became a pastor to youth and over time

ended up working as an associate pastor of 'family life and counselling' at a large Baptist church.

This particular position was framed as a pastor of 'family life and counseling' by the senior leadership of the church in order to emphasize 'family life' first, and 'counselling' second. This intentional framing of this position title was important for those in leadership to distinguish that the church was more interested and invested in healthy families than it was in emphasizing the need for and legitimacy of counselling. The senior leadership of the church emphasized that the church was not a hospital and that the mission of the church was to encourage and foster healthy individuals and families through Biblical teaching and related programming.

Regardless, as an associate pastor of family life and counselling, I became ordained into an evangelical fundamentalist denomination despite my moderate interest in the process and outcome of ordination. Nevertheless, and because ordination was expected by senior leadership, I wrote and publicly defended a set of doctrinal statements and beliefs, essentially reiterating the denomination's theological, philosophical, ideological, and epistemological assumptions and beliefs as expressed in it's statement of faith. I recall being ambivalent towards the process of ordination, wondering what it really meant, and why it was important for me to become ordained. Regardless, I conformed to the required standard and eventually became ordained

Concurrent with my general compliance to evangelical fundamentalist beliefs and lifestyle practices, I was somehow able to maintain an underlying propensity to question religious dogma, to evaluate religious leaders' self-proclaimed authority, and to be curious about the meaning of prescriptive traditions, rules, guidelines and mandates. I often times

wondered about who or what might be driving an initiative and for what purpose, and, more importantly, to what extent was I being swept along by the prevailing political trend as opposed to embracing, with informed consent, the religious norms and social mores inherent in my denomination of origin. In essence, I have always 'held out' at some level concerning self-proclaimed religious judgments and pronouncements by those in spiritual authority.

I find it interesting that in addition to my fundamentalist beliefs and practices, be they previously embraced or in a process of dismissal at some level, that I also immersed myself in secular work, education, and relationships with liberal minded colleagues and friends. These professional opportunities and associations over time tempered my fundamentalist orientation. My exposure in this regard brought to my attention the fact that a world larger than my own existed and that this world need not be feared. Over time, I realized that I, too, played a significant role in the shaping of the greater society in which I lived, be it religious or otherwise, and that my role was no less significant simply based on my fundamentalist history.

In essence, I was learning to integrate my fundamentalist religious history into my present 'on again off again' relationship with liberal secularism and the people in it as opposed to maintaining a rigid 'holier than thou' fundamentalist stance. I view my journey in this regard as a lengthy and long overdue process of individuation that is resulting in increased freedom to be and to do, whether in the presence of religious fundamentalism or liberal secularism. My interest in this study is not to dismiss fundamentalism altogether, nor is it to embrace liberal secularism at the expense of cores beliefs and values that may or may not reflect fundamentalist traditions.

I value the idea of being 'both and' as opposed to 'either or', although this positioning of myself is not necessarily popular with contending ideological camps. In this regard I believe that secular minded liberals often dismiss fundamentalist religion and those in it as being simplistic and anti-intellectual. But a quick review of literature generated by scholars within evangelical academic circles reveals quite the opposite as being true. Many evangelicals and evangelical fundamentalists think critically and assess the world in which they live in through the rigors of scientific scrutiny, and do so with integrity, taking into consideration their biases, as would any other scholar from a liberal orientation. Evangelicals are also well represented at both secular and religiously oriented colleges and universities and carry out their academic activities with zeal and precision, possibly fueled in some measure by overcompensation for their religious orientation.

Nevertheless, being an evangelical fundamentalist or a Christian at a secular university is not overly popular. Yet many of them exist in government funded universities and do so with care and respect for diversity, recognizing that they, too, are a part of the fabric of the academic community despite what may be their anxieties about 'coming out'. Suffice it to say, there is room for those with religious orientations to come out of the closet at it were in order to normalize and validate their histories and their heritages despite how it may or may not be received by others.

With respect to the issue of researcher subjectivity, it was my intention throughout the course of the study to check in with certain individuals who knew me well. These individuals who by virtue of their professional status or personal friendship were able to ask challenging questions concerning the extent to which my research and findings were influenced by my personal and entrenched experience in evangelical fundamentalism. While

there were no easy answers to these questions, it was my intent to remain open to scrutiny in this regard and to thoughtfully reflect on the degree to which my experience influenced this study.

My stance, for instance, in the Life Review group that eventually generated the written narratives that became the data source for this inquiry was not that of participant observer. My role was that of facilitating a process of discovery during which I served as a moderator of sorts. Although I designed the structure of the Life Review format, I did not enter in to the format other than to facilitate the activities of the research participants and to keep them on task. Throughout all of the discussions that ensued during the course of Life Review, I positioned myself as a listener and did not enter into the discussions nor did I offer my perspectives despite my history being similar to those of the participants. My neutral stance did not appear to inhibit the group in any way. On the contrary, the group appeared to feel at liberty to do and say what came naturally to them within the Life Review format. On occasion, I intervened only when discussions became overly dynamic or prolonged in order to maintain the focus of the group.

Statement of the Problem

The research focus of this inquiry is that of the experiences and meanings of adults who were raised in and later departed from evangelical fundamentalism. In this regard, it is not uncommon for people later in life to re-evaluate their religious histories and their relevance to the lives they lead in the present. Some individuals leaving fundamentalist orientations are often times encumbered by guilt and shame, while others feel liberated from the restraints inherent in their religion of origin. Either way, many persons choosing to leave

their fundamentalist religious heritage encounter significant challenges in locating or re-defining themselves psychologically, emotionally, interpersonally, and spiritually.

It is anticipated that the findings associated with this inquiry will inform and enrich the theory and practice of counselling psychology specific to persons who are either in or coming out of repressive and pervasive religious fundamentalist orientations. Presently, there is limited academic literature concerning the experiences of persons who might choose later in life to depart from their faiths or religions of origin and in so doing experience negative social, political, spiritual, and economic repercussions. It was therefore the intent of this research initiative to shed light on one variant of religious fundamentalism and to explore the lived experiences and their meanings of persons who chose to depart from their fundamentalist orientations later in life.

Introduction

My literature review highlighted a lack of research specific to the lived experience of persons who were raised in and later departed from evangelical fundamentalism. In addition, my review revealed that the subject of religious fundamentalism is expansive and characterized by a plurality of universal yet culturally specific issues concerning doctrinal beliefs and life style practices. Attempts to define religious fundamentalism emerged in the literature as an arduous and frustrating task due to its culturally specific yet diverse nature concerning meaning, functions, mandates, theologies, theories, philosophies and practices unique to each fundamentalist variant. Some researchers and theorists claimed that it was almost impossible to define fundamentalism due to its elusive qualities despite its obvious existence.

Equally apparent in a review of the literature was the absence of psychological theories specific to religious fundamentalism and in particular evangelical fundamentalism. Social psychology was occasionally presented as a viable lens through which to explore and explain the social dimensions of those who live (or lived) within fundamentalist orientations. Social psychology fell short, however, in explaining the fundamentalist psyche, the formation of thoughts and beliefs, and the complex emotional worlds and relational attachments, healthy or otherwise, of persons who were raised in and later departed from a form of fundamentalism.

A review of the literature also confirmed that the lived experience of being raised in fundamentalism while choosing later in life to depart from it remains relatively untouched by psychological research. Many, if not most, research articles specific to religious

fundamentalism focused on its immediate relationship to terrorism, violence, prejudice, racism, and homophobia. Often underscored in this regard was the restrictive and pervasive nature of fundamentalism that was thought to result in negative emotional and psychological outcomes in the lives of its adherents. This emphasis on what appears to be the negative consequences or by-products of fundamentalism and the questioning of its existence only serves to silence the lived experience and meanings of those who have been raised in fundamentalist orientations.

Religious Fundamentalism

Characterizations of religious fundamentalists are innumerable and range from glowing endorsements to questions concerning whether or not fundamentalists in general are pathological or irrational. Debates in this regard are generally characterized by heightened emotionality fueled by assumptions that are often based on perception rather than on fact. Characterizations of fundamentalists are sometimes informed by research and lived experience and historically reflect a negative bias rooted in emotional reactivity. More often than not, characterizations of fundamentalists are speculative in nature and often media driven and may therefore lack credibility concerning the core nature and function of fundamentalist orientations.

Characterizations of religious fundamentalists have generally been born out of society's observations of fundamentalism's more public manifestations, thereby making fundamentalists popular due to some of their antics or some of their moral failures. Characterizations in this regard are believable because they are easily observed and evaluated by people who support fundamentalism or by those who attempt to dismantle or attack fundamentalist movements, leaders and their followers. Characterizations of fundamentalist

are many and may or may not have credibility depending how one experiences and interprets fundamentalism in general.

What is known about religious fundamentalism, despite its elusive and resistant nature concerning a concrete definition across social and ethnic cultures, is that it exists in many societies world-wide and that its presence is felt in different ways. Fundamentalism can be found in humanitarian efforts, evangelistic crusades, higher education, secular and religious vocations and professions, acts of terrorism, local, regional, and national politics, hell fire and brimstone preaching, the practice of feeding the poor, the re-building of communities affected by natural disasters, caring for the down and out, and the bombing of abortion clinics. Defining with certainty the nature and pervasiveness of religious fundamentalism is at best a slippery slope in light of its many permutations, related associations, and multiple and diverse mandates.

Nevertheless, religious fundamentalism requires characterizations that are balanced and accurate in description. Characterizations need to take into account fundamentalism's inherent diversity and its propensity to be duplicitous concerning its claims and related behaviors. In this regard, fundamentalism might claim to be peace-oriented concurrent with practicing violence.

Regardless of the challenges associated with establishing a workable and universal definition of religious fundamentalism, fundamentalism is generally counter cultural and highly committed to a set of core values, beliefs, and assumptions concerning faith and life, all of which are typically non-negotiable. Fundamentalism tenaciously guards its sacred texts, be they Biblical or otherwise and usually opposes modernism despite its obvious need to adapt to modernism at some level in order to survive. Fundamentalism is a significant

dimension of the global community's fabric; to dismiss fundamentalism is to disregard a part of humanity that attempts to make sense of the world in which it lives, albeit with obvious challenges, not unlike other philosophical or ideological paradigms embraced by its own converted.

Marion (2004) characterized religious fundamentalists as falling within the mythic stage of his evolutionary spirituality model of spiritual formation. The nine stages of Marion's model include: 1) the archaic consciousness of infants, 2) the magical consciousness of young children, 3) the mythic consciousness of preadolescents, 4) the rational consciousness of teenagers and adults, 5) the vision-logic consciousness of today's consciousness pioneers in the universities and in other fields, 6) the psychic consciousness of beginning contemplatives, 7) the subtle consciousness of advanced contemplatives and mystics, 8) the causal or Christ consciousness of those few humans who have followed Jesus into the kingdom, and 9) the non-dual consciousness of identity with God. Marion (2004) noted that people in the mythic level of consciousness with respect to spiritual formation are called fundamentalists, that they exist all over the world, and that they tend to believe their religion, their ethnic group, their nation, their morality, and their values are supreme. Marion further noted that fundamentalists believe that their sacred texts are uniquely revealed by God and are to be followed literally and exactly, even centuries after the revelation - despite the fact that the revelation was made known through men and women whose culture and world views were vastly different from their own.

Marion (2004) also reported that fundamentalists believe that God, the mythic God, is a being who is separate from humankind, lives in the sky (heaven), and intervenes in human affairs whenever believers petition him to do so. They believe in the literal truth of the myths

inherent in their religion and see themselves as good and unbelievers as evil. They seek to use the power of the state to impose their beliefs upon unbelievers and that they are charged with converting the entire world to their beliefs.

In contrast to the mythic level of consciousness, Marion (2004) suggested that people at the rational level of consciousness are essentially more enlightened and see the world as one. They believe all people are created equal and have inalienable rights such as the right to practice their own religion. They see the world as governed by universal scientific and spiritual laws that apply to everyone no matter what their politics or religion. Thus, Marion noted that these enlightened people usually tolerate fundamentalists even though, according to Marion (2004), the favor is not normally returned.

In this regard, Marion (2004) speculated that people at the mythic level are incapable psychologically of thinking globally, that they neither think about nor care about such matters as the global environment, health issues, financial conditions, or population. Marion further suggested that people who are stuck in the mythic stage of his model of spiritual enlightenment are normally, if not totally centered upon their own financial, familial, ethnic, sectarian, and nationalistic concerns. Anything universal, noted Marion, does not concern them. If they do happen to think about the United Nations, for instance, they are very likely to see it primarily in terms of a threat to themselves, their values, and their group. Finally, Marion suggested that persons in the mythic level of enlightenment hold to a monotheistic God who is ethnocentric and not universal - for the simple reason that the emerging concrete, operational mind (what psychologists according to Marion call the mythic consciousness of today's seven to 14 year olds) is not capable of abstract universal thinking.

Appleby and Marty (1993), from a more curious position concerning fundamentalists, reviewed a collection of studies that provided historical and phenomenological sketches of fourteen religious fundamentalist movements. Sketches include but were not limited to Protestant and Catholic fundamentalism in North and South America, two combative Jewish movements in Israel, and five movements of Islamic fundamentalism in five different locales in South Asia and the Middle Far East. Also profiled were fundamentalist strains in Hinduism, the Sikh religious tradition, and Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Thailand.

Appleby and Marty (1993) noted that these studies, when assessed as a collection of stories, identified a number of commonalities between what is generally perceived as disparate religious movements. Despite emerging from different traditions and historical circumstances with different holy books and sources, all of these movements shared 'family-like' resemblances. The movements studied revealed in general a strong fundamentalist tendency to fight back under God (or in the case of Buddhism or Confucianism, under the signs of some transcendent reference) against a number of defined and villainous enemies. These militants were thought to battle in the realm of civil polity on behalf of a religious tradition and way of life they perceived to be under attack. As their principle resource in this desperate struggle, they selectively mobilized real or presumed pasts in order to maintain their identities and to shape the future of their societies.

Appleby and Marty (1993) noted that this collection of studies also shed light on the arrival of modernity, a process and set of forces that fundamentalists perceived as the threat that in essence inspired them to action. The editors suggested that in their efforts to integrate their religious understandings into every aspect of their lives, fundamentalists generally resisted the compartmentalizing tendencies of modern social sciences. Contrary to common

stereotypes, Appleby and Marty (1993) found that fundamentalists were not simply nostalgic, backward-looking conservatives and that they frequently utilized modern means and made pragmatic adaptations to suit changing conditions. In the third world, for instance, fundamentalist and evangelical groups are often crucial in assisting former peasants to adjust to a modernizing and urban world.

Contrary to common misconceptions and fears concerning the role and influence of religious fundamentalists, Appleby and Marty (1993) noted that fundamentalists were generally much less inclined to remake the broader political and economic landscape than they were to reclaim the intimate zones of life in their own communities. They expended more energy and realized more success, for instance, in creating alternate social and educational institutions than in pursuing major political changes at the state and national levels. It appeared that religious fundamentalism manifested itself as a strategy by which seemingly beleaguered believers attempted to preserve their distinctive identity. Feeling this identity to be at risk in contemporary culture, fundamentalist believers attempted to fortify their identity by the selective retrieval of doctrines, beliefs, and practices from a sacred past.

In a subsequent article, Appleby and Marty (2003) responded to several claims about religious fundamentalism, noting that fundamentalists were not confined to any particular faith or country, nor were they confined to the poor and uneducated. Instead, fundamentalists were likely to spring up anywhere people perceive the need to fight a godless, secular culture – even if they had to depart from the orthodoxy of their traditions to do so. Appleby and Marty noted that what fundamentalists everywhere had in common was the ability to craft their messages to fit the times and to proclaim their message where and when appropriate in their estimation.

Appleby and Marty (2003) also found that fundamentalism was not limited to monotheistic religious orientations and could therefore be found, for instance, in Hinduism and Buddhism, religions that do not believe in a personal God. These religious orientations, along with Sikhism, tended to believe in a reality that transcended or rendered illusory the mundane world. Again, both orientations produced powerful modern, anti-secular, anti-modernist, absolutist, boundary-setting, exclusionary, and often violent movements that revealed startling resemblance to fundamentalism within the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic worlds.

Another claim by Appleby and Marty (2003) is that fundamentalists were not necessarily literalists, contrary to popular belief, opinion and perception. In this regard, Appleby and Marty noted that fundamentalists were eager to adapt to the exigencies of the moment if it suited the movement's needs. Fundamentalists laid claim to preaching and practicing the unvarnished word of God as revealed in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, or the Koran. This claim underscored fundamentalists' larger assertion that their authority came directly from God and that their program for reform and transformation was, in principle, beyond criticism.

Another misconception noted by Appleby and Marty (2003) was that fundamentalism attracted poor people. Without question, fundamentalist groups often recruit among and appeal to people of lower economic status. Often the followers are poor, jobless people, lacking in worldly prospects. More commonly, however, recruits come from the educated unemployed or underemployed, or from gainfully employed teachers, engineers, medical technicians, and other professionals in the applied sciences and areas of specialization in which modernizing societies are playing catch-up. Nevertheless, a growing trend in

evangelical fundamentalism, for instance, is deploying educated and gainfully employed professionals to developing countries in an effort to tangibly assist impoverished populations while at the same time anticipating at some level that at least some of the recipients finding assistance will adopt the helpers' faith.

Appleby and Marty (2003) also note that fundamentalism does not necessarily lead to violence. Social context and the local and regional political culture have much to say about the directions that fundamentalism takes. Within the abode of Islam, nation states are either weak or failing on the one hand or dictatorial and repressive on the other. Both contexts encouraged violent variants of fundamentalism bent on replacing the state or overthrowing it.

Alternatively, American Christian fundamentalists argued that they were and always have been law-abiding citizens. Although this segment of the fundamentalist population may at times be associated with abortion-clinic bombers and white supremacist or antigovernment militias – neither of which qualified as fundamentalists due to their tenuous connections to organized Christianity – American fundamentalists in general do not resort to violence. As Appleby and Marty (2003) noted, the lack of violence within or generated by American fundamentalists may have more to do with the character of their society – open, pluralist, governed by the rule of the law, and tolerant of moderate expressions of fundamentalism – than their principled rejection of violence.

That fundamentalists oppose change was also a misconception according to Appleby and Marty (2003) who report that fundamentalists are dedicated to changing a world they see as godless, but their remedy is not to preserve or recreate the past. Appleby and Marty cited fundamentalists as industrious progressives as opposed to stagnant conservatives. In essence,

fundamentalists have inhabited the modern material and technical world while attempting to cast aside dehumanizing and materialistic philosophy.

In assessing fundamentalists' capacity for change, Appleby and Marty (2003) suggest that fundamentalists, despite their efforts to preserve religious doctrines and lifestyles, are in essence attempting to keep pace with rapid changes taking place in the societies in which they live and function. The challenge for fundamentalists, therefore, was to maintain core values and beliefs, packaged in ways that might make sense to the modern and post-modern spiritual seeker who may be exploring religiously oriented options and opportunities.

The final assertion by Appleby and Marty (2003) was that fundamentalism was not generally driven by a 'cult-like' personality. Essentially, fundamentalist movements are not cults. Fundamentalist leaders were thought to be typically charismatic, generally authoritarian, dogmatic, persuasive, and unyielding in the tenants of their faith and related traditions. In other words, a fundamentalist leader's appeal for potential recruits is located in their entrenched commitment to continuity with the religious tradition that they claim to uphold and defend. Thus, fundamentalist leaders must be perceived as acting and interpreting within the bounds of the tradition. Scholars therefore avoid placing fundamentalists with cult-like leaders such as Branch Davidian leader David Koresh, Jim Jones in Guyana, or Aum Shinrikyo's Shoko Asahara. In this regard, cultic leaders have decisively broken with tradition, in rhetoric as well as behavior. Nevertheless, most fundamentalist congregations have relied on their local pastors to decree what "the Bible says."

Appleby and Marty (1993, 2003) shed an interesting light on the issue of religious fundamentalism around the world. Their observations and insights presented

fundamentalism in a forgiving and favorable light, as if all fundamentalists around the world are pro-social and kind despite their tenacious commitments and adherence to religious dogma and practice. Appleby and Marty's account of religious fundamentalism in many respects unfortunately undermines the reality of the lived experience of fundamentalism's dark side often characterized by power and control, conformity at all cost, repression, oppression, extreme certainty, and a fundamentalist leader's absolute and final authority on issues related to faith and life. Concurrent with these characteristics is the reality that many religious fundamentalist orientations and practices spawn spiritual, emotional, relational, psychological, and sexual abuse that can and does ensue with limited or no accountability. It is important, therefore, that texts such as "Fundamentalism_Observed" (1993) are read with judicious care and discernment, with attention given to what is not being said surrounding the underbelly of repressive fundamentalist orientations.

Despite these apparent and somewhat grave omissions, Appleby and Marty (1993) erred in favor of drawing attention to the positive elements of religious fundamentalism, a unique and refreshing change from other literature focusing primarily on the negative attributes of fundamentalism. In so doing, Appleby and Marty proffered refreshing characterizations of religious fundamentalists. This particular focus heightened awareness surrounding the fact that not all fundamentalists are uptight, backward, anti-intellectual conservatives. In fact, emerging within fundamentalist religious orientations is that of social activism focused for instance on the eradication of poverty concurrent with initiatives being taken to preserve the environment. These activities are less about covert modes of evangelistic opportunity and more about simply being responsible care-takers of the planet

and its inhabitants. Appleby and Marty's work, therefore, highlighted fundamentalism's more positive characteristics, taking into account the movement's diversity.

As it pertains to the focus of this study, Christian or Protestant fundamentalism is a variant of global religious fundamentalism that arose mainly within British and American Protestantism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by dogmatic conservative evangelical Christians in a reaction to modernism. These individuals actively affirmed a fundamental set of Christian beliefs including the inerrancy of the Bible, the virgin birth of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and the imminent return of Jesus Christ. A number of evangelicals in the 19th century prepared the way for the movement, including the late Dwight L. Moody and British preacher John Nelson Darby (Marsden, 1980).

The term fundamentalist was derived from a series of twelve volumes entitled The Fundamentals: Testimony to the Truth. Among these volume's 94 essays, 27 of them objected to higher criticism of the Bible. The essays were written by 64 British and American conservative Protestant theologians between 1910 and 1915. Using a $250,000 grant from Lyman Stewart, the head of the Union Oil Company of California, about three million sets of these books were distributed to English-speaking Protestant church workers throughout the world (Marsden, 1980).

Important early Christian fundamentalists included Baptist pastor William Bell Riley, the founder and president of the World Christian Fundamentals Association, who was instrumental in calling lawyer and three-time Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan to act as the organization's counsel in the famous Scopes Trial. The Scopes trial was a landmark legal battle during which a public school teacher in Tennessee, John Scopes, was charged and found guilty for teaching evolution to students. Although

fundamentalists won the legal battle, they were widely ridiculed in the press and society in general and lost credibility with the public at large. This event was influential in fundamentalists' continued sharp withdrawal from society. Evangelicals, however, have always participated in wider culture as part of the American establishment, whereas fundamentalists have consistently separated themselves from what they understood to be an 'ungodly society' (Marsden, 1980).

Marsden (1980) noted that fundamentalists were not just religious conservatives; they were conservatives who were willing to take a stand and to fight. In the late nineteenth century American Protestantism was gradually dividing between liberals who were accepting new scientific and higher critical views that contradicted the Bible and defenders of the more traditional evangelicalism. By the 1920s a full-fledged fundamentalist movement had developed in protest against theological changes in the churches and changing mores in the culture. Building on networks of evangelists, Bible conferences, Bible institutes, and mission agencies, fundamentalists coalesced into a major protest movement that proved to have remarkable staying power.

In reference to Christian fundamentalism, Lawrence (1991) defined fundamentalism as the affirmation of religious authority as holistic and absolute, admitting of neither criticism nor reduction; it is expressed through the collective demand that specific creedal and ethical dictates derived from Scripture be publically recognized and legally enforced. Lawrence argued that fundamentalism was a specific kind of religious ideology. It was anti-modern but not anti-modernist. In other words, it rejected the philosophical rationalism and individualism that accompanied modernity, but took full advantage of certain technological advances that also characterized the modern age. Lawrence noted that fundamentalism, as a

world-wide phenomenon, must be compared in various contexts before it can be understood with clarity.

Lawrence (1991) summarized his general discussion by citing five "family resemblances" common to fundamentalism. First, fundamentalists are advocates of a minority viewpoint. They see themselves as a righteous remnant. Even when they are numerically a majority, they perceive themselves as a minority. Second, fundamentalists are oppositional and confrontational towards both secularists and wayward religious followers and adherents. Third, fundamentalists are typically led by charismatic males. Fourth, fundamentalists generate their own technical vocabulary. And fifth, fundamentalists have historical antecedents and no ideological precursor.

Evangelical Fundamentalism

Evangelicalism refers to a broad collection of religious beliefs, practices, and traditions found among Protestant Christians and some Evangelical Catholics. Evangelicalism is typified by an emphasis on evangelism, a personal experience of conversion, biblically-oriented faith, and a belief in the relevance of a Christian faith to cultural issues. Historically, the movement began in the early 18th century in response to Enlightenment thinking. It stressed a personal relationship with God at the individual level, as well as activism (evangelism) based on biblically based beliefs. Current media usage of the term in North America is synonymous with conservative Protestant Christians and embraces a range of faith expressions (Eskridge, 2006).

John C. Green, director of the Ray C. Bliss Institutes of Applied Politics at the University of Akron in Ohio, found in the "2004 American Religious Landscape Report" that

despite many variations, evangelicals in North America generally adhere to four core beliefs: 1) biblical inerrancy, 2) salvation comes only through faith in Jesus and not good works (in particular the belief in atonement for sins at the cross and the resurrection of Christ), 3) individuals (above an age of accountability) must personally trust in Jesus Christ for salvation, and 4) all Christians are commissioned to evangelize and should be publically baptized as a confession of faith.

Evangelicals today are varied in their orientations. Some work entirely within their own denominations while others pay less attention to denominational differences and may be members of less formal and locally based independent churches. Some churches have grown to large sized and are often referred to as mega-churches. There is a long-standing evangelical tradition of practical assistance (e.g. medical, educational) along with the gospel as ministry (Eskridge, 2006).

Others, particularly in the United States, engage in attempts at social improvement through political means. Evangelical activism might be expressed in literacy training, inner-city relief and food banks, adoption agencies, marriage counseling and spousal abuse mediation, day-care centers for children, and counsel and care for unwed mothers, or any number of other help and advocacy works. Popular perception seems to categorize all of evangelicalism as being conservative concerning political controversies like abortion and same sex marriage or civil unions. This supposed uniformity is not a proven fact, although there is some general correspondence between theological and religious conservatism and social conservatism (Eskridge, 2006).

Contemporary Issues

Based on my personal and professional experience with evangelical fundamentalism, prevailing views of contemporary and or controversial issues are typically conservative. With respect to abortion, sex, and gender, evangelical fundamentalists generally support the pro-life movement in opposition to abortion, human cloning, euthanasia, and embryonic stem cell research. Because the Bible makes statements that condemn homosexuality, fundamentalist Christians consider it to be immoral and harmful to the individual and to society at large. Some favor reparative therapy for homosexuals, while others believe that sexual orientation cannot change or that change is immensely difficult and therefore urge that homosexuals be celibate.

With respect to marriage and child rearing, evangelical fundamentalists hold that both the masculine gender role and the feminine gender role are necessary for healthy relationships and child development. Concerning the role of women in relation to men, many fundamentalists hold that God intentionally created males and females to fulfill different yet complimentary roles. In more extreme forms of fundamentalism, women are subjected to men in all matters of life and faith, essentially reflecting a totalitarian relationship model. Less extreme forms of evangelical fundamentalism espouse an egalitarian model in marriage and relationships in general with the opposite sex. Nevertheless, women typically defer to men in the event that a matter is not easily resolved for any one of a number of reasons.

With respect to lifestyle, some fundamentalists have endorsed strict codes of conduct that prohibit even the moderate consumption of alcohol and tobacco, dancing, gambling, or engaging in secular cultural activities such as watching movies or listening to pop music that conflict with traditional beliefs. These codes of conduct may also require adherents to dress

in certain ways going beyond simple modesty (for example, by ordering women to wear lengthy dresses/skirts or prohibiting men from having long hair). By avoiding conformity to the secular world in such small but significant ways, fundamentalists hope to protect themselves from moral corruption while calling the world to salvation and holiness by their example and testimony.

Towards a Psychology of Fundamentalists

Theories that are associated with religious fundamentalism appear to be significantly influenced by social psychology and therefore essentially explain fundamentalism as a religious and social construct. These theories do not provide substantive psychological theoretical explanations concerning fundamentalist persons and in particular persons who were raised in and later departed from a religious fundamentalist orientation. In response to this lack of theory in the literature, I chose to briefly consider four representative theories that I believe have varying degrees of relevance to this inquiry as it comes to bear on developing an understanding and appreciation for the psycho-social-spiritual dimensions of fundamentalist persons.

The theories presented here include intra-textual theory, social learning theory, attachment theory, and cognitive dissonance theory. None of the theories presented considered the spiritual formation of fundamentalists, although the intra-textual theory might come close due to its emphasis on the centrality and significance of a sacred text. In this regard, a sacred text in religious fundamentalism often touches on spiritual formation that is linked to thoughts, emotions, beliefs about one's self and the world, and interpersonal relationships.

Intra-textual Theory

The Intra-textual theory (Hood, Hill, & Williamson, 2005) suggests that fundamentalists, despite their religious orientation, rely on one text such as the Bible as the source and meaning of life and that it is the sacred text. Therefore, religious fundamentalists are thought to have a unifying philosophy of life, a sense of coherence amid complexity, absolutes concerning moral and ethical dilemmas, a shared sense of meaning and purpose, and a sense of efficacy through the power of God and a sacred text. Hood, Hill, and Williamson (2005) theorized that those who were raised in fundamentalist traditions grow up in identifiable and predictable social and religious orders that enable them to think and to function within well defined and prescribed theological and life style methods. Hood, Hill, and Williamson present their theory in a favorable light in the sense that fundamentalism provides people with what they long for in life - security amid uncertainty or ambiguity.

The challenge associated with the intra-textual theory when applied to the psychology of fundamentalism is that its cause and effect analysis does not take into consideration the complex issues associated with how those who were raised in fundamentalism experienced or experience their fundamentalist orientation. The forgiving nature of the theory implied that those being raised in one-text fundamentalism will naturally experience conflict free psychological and relational security and certainty. The intra-textual theory does not appear to grapple with the complex psycho-social tensions and conflicts that arise in the minds, emotions, and relationships of those persons who may not over time embrace the security and certainty of fundamentalism despite being raised in it.

Social Learning Theory

With respect to social learning theory, Simpson (2000) noted that people are malleable creatures who are formed by the absorption of influences such as operant learning, the imitation of others, and the influence of peers, parents, and other significant relationships. Change in a person's behavior was thought to be possible provided that the conditions and the consequences would change and that self acceptance was embraced. In its application to fundamentalism, social learning theory would suggest that persons who were raised in a fundamentalist milieu would have ideal conditions for change and that the consequences of their change process would be favorable. Social learning theorists might also suggest that regardless of the ripple effect associated with moving away from fundamentalism, dissenters in a process of change would ultimately be able to accept themselves.

The challenge associated with social learning theory as it comes to bear on the issue of fundamentalists such as those leaving fundamentalism is the altruistic nature of its orientation and desired outcomes. The theory does not take into account the challenges associated with fundamentalism that essentially disallow favorable conditions for change unless the change is in keeping with fundamentalist ideology. Social learning theory also assumes that the consequences of change need to be favorable which is highly unlikely within the fundamentalist paradigm in the sense that fundamentalists would not view dissention, whether real or perceived, as favorable. Finally, the issue of self-acceptance is problematic in that the negativity associated with moving away from fundamentalism would be a natural, if not an insurmountable limitation for one to truly accept their identity as something other than fundamentalist.

Attachment Theory

Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory focused on the lasting psychological connection between human beings. In particular, Bowlby argued that the earliest bonds formed by children with their caregivers had a significant impact on the child's life throughout the course of their life. Characteristics of healthy attachment were thought to include a safe haven, a secure base, proximity maintenance (meaning that the child stays in close proximity so as to be secure), and that upon separation, the child may become distressed.

Attachment theory as applied to being raised within a fundamentalist orientation appears to make sense in significant measure in that children are raised in seemingly safe and secure environments within close proximity to resources that are readily available to reinforce security and certainty. Upon separation, however, the child may in fact become distressed as a result of no longer being immediately associated with the structures that provided a strong sense of familiarity and security. In this regard, many children will look for the source of security and upon finding it within the fundamentalist paradigm and will eventually associate security with fundamentalism. The central question therefore surrounds the issue of healthy individuation and whether or not those who stay or those who remain in fundamentalism are less or more healthy emotionally, psychologically, and relationally. Naturally, there are arguments that could easily support both perspectives.

Attachment theory nevertheless is highly applicable to understanding and appreciating the dynamics associated with persons who were raised in fundamentalism. The thought of leaving fundamentalism, not to mention that actual act of leaving, is theorized as being potentially if not probably innately unsettling, disturbing, and responsible for the emergence of cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and relational dissonance. The emergence of

guilt surrounding the perceived or real experience of rejecting the available source of

attachment and security therefore potentially adds to one's sense of conflict as a result of

contending agendas – that of remaining in familiar security, predictability, and certainty as

compared to leaving in order to experience a life of uncertainty, ambiguity, and lack of

familiarity.

This study supports the basic principles associated with attachment theory principles

as a means of understanding the multiple tensions associated with leaving fundamentalism.

Those who are leaving fundamentalism leave behind the thought and or belief of security

despite the obvious challenges associated with remaining in fundamentalism. The

dissonance that these individuals may feel is thought to influence the degree to which they

either remain or leave. For some, fully remaining or fully leaving is not an option, choosing

instead a hybrid approach to finding a place between seemingly polarized options, thereby

living in a state of both/and as opposed to either/or.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory theorizes that individuals seek

consistency among their cognitions (i.e., beliefs, opinions). When there is an inconsistency

between attitudes or behaviors, something must change to eliminate the dissonance. In the

case of a discrepancy between attitudes and behavior, Festinger (1957) believed that it was

most likely that the attitude would change to accommodate the behavior. Two factors that

affect the strength of the dissonance included the number of dissonant beliefs and the

importance attached to each belief. Festinger (1957) therefore proposed three ways to

eliminate dissonance: 1) reduce the importance of the dissonant beliefs, 2) add more

consonant beliefs that outweigh the dissonant beliefs, or 3) change the dissonant beliefs so that they are no longer inconsistent.

Festinger (1957) claimed that dissonance occurred most often in situations where an individual must choose between two incompatible beliefs or actions. The greatest dissonance is created when the two alternatives are equally attractive. Furthermore, attitude change is more likely in the direction of less incentive since this resulted in lower dissonance. In this respect, dissonance theory is contradictory to most behavioral theories which would predict greater attitude change with increased incentive (i.e., reinforcement).

With respect to its application to those who were raised in fundamentalism, Festinger (1957) suggests both a theoretical explanation and a methodology to better understand and address the cognitive processes inherent in those navigating the obvious dissonances associated with considering leaving fundamentalism. One of the greatest challenges associated with leaving fundamentalism is the cognitive dissonance that occurs when: 1) a belief system is in a process of change due to the person assessing fundamentalism's validity to their lives, and 2) a change in a belief system resulting in obvious behavioral changes evidenced in one's departure from a fundamentalist culture, ethos, paradigm, community, or even that of a family of origin.

In this regard, cognitive dissonance is experienced as a process of both eliminating and establishing. Eliminating involves letting go of or discarding beliefs and cognitions that are thought to be disruptive and therefore unhealthy, while at the same time establishing and reinforcing consonant cognitions and beliefs that are reflective of internal congruence born out of in-depth soul and mind searching. The underlying assumption at this point is that the person engaged in this process of discarding and establishing is doing so in response to an

internal tension that is no longer sustainable or manageable, resulting in an intentional and purposeful movement way from historical philosophical and religious paradigms that were experienced throughout one's life as pervasively restrictive and dogmatic.

Cognitive dissonance theory has a significant degree of applicability to persons who were raised in and later departed from evangelical fundamentalism. The research participants, amid their disclosures concerning their movements away from fundamentalism, described in detail the cognitive and emotional tensions that they felt in response to parents and others who could not understand or accept that their loved one was in a process of growth and change. In this regard, the research participants struggled in their psychological and emotional dissonance despite their continued progression towards their emergent internal and external consonance. Their respective journeys towards this end were filled with self-doubt, fear, apprehensions, and varying degrees of guilt and shame. Nevertheless, the research participants overcame their fears and their experiences of cognitive and emotional dissonance in order to establish personal congruence.

An Integrated Theoretical Approach

For the purposes of this inquiry, I formulated an integrated theoretical approach that serves as the lens through which the psychological, emotional, and relational issues of fundamentalists leaving fundamentalism can be addressed. In this regard, I integrated the basic tenants of intra-textual theory, social learning theory, attachment theory, and cognitive dissonance theory. The integration of these four theoretical constructs provides room to explore fundamentalists' allegiance to one sacred text, the problematic dynamics associated with the restrictive and controlling nature of their formative social learning environments,

their problematic relational attachments to persons in positions of authority and power, and their cognitive dissonance surrounding the idea of leaving their fundamentalist orientations.

This integrated theoretical approach reflects an emerging orientation that draws on four schools of thought and considers the historical, current, and future psycho-social processes that affect fundamentalists before, during and following their departure from a fundamentalist milieu. This emergent orientation may assist in the understanding of fundamentalists as they attempt to 1) make sense of their allegiance to a sacred text amid the world in which they live (intra-textual theory), 2) make sense of their formative social learning years (social learning theory), 3) make sense of healthy and unhealthy attachments to family and religion of origin (attachment theory), and 4) make sense of their continued pursuit of cognitive, emotional, and relational consonance as a result of living in increased internal and external congruence (cognitive dissonance theory).

With respect to intra-textual theory, persons leaving fundamentalism have a hard time arguing with the voice of God as expressed in the Bible. As their sacred text, the Bible is often revered as the final authority in all matters of faith and life. Those growing up in evangelical fundamentalism are keenly aware of the centrality of the Word of God, its significance to spiritual growth, and its significance to hearing from God. The Bible is the believer's guide in all aspects of life and is therefore relied upon for spiritual sustenance, guidelines for moral development and living, maintaining a vibrant relationship with God, and basically guiding the believer throughout the course of their lives. The Bible is highly influential in the evangelical fundamentalist's life as a guide or blue print, applicable to many, if not most of life's challenges. The believer's identity therefore is generally wrapped up in a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible as it comes to bear on every day life,

relationships, and the will of God. The task for the fundamentalist leaving fundamentalism is to re-define their interpretation of the sacred text as it comes to bear on daily life outside the interpretive confines of fundamentalism.

With respect to social learning theory, people who are born into fundamentalism are intellectually, socially, and spiritually socialized to fit the psycho-social and behavioral norms associated with fundamentalist culture. In particular, children being raised in fundamentalism learn to internalize and abide by socially acceptable standards of conduct thought to be consistent with living a life honoring to God. Practically, this touches on issues of conservative dress codes, life style practices, associations, education, church commitments, Christian-based community oriented service, disciplined reading and studying of the Bible, impeccable morality, becoming warriors for Christ – meaning the pursuit of evangelism and the praying away of evil, and regular church attendance.

The fundamentalist culture is not an ideal setting for the formation of personal identity and healthy individuation from family and religion of origin. By virtue of its controlling, rigid, prescriptive, and controlling nature, fundamentalism does not provide room for individual thought and belief. Instead, fundamentalist culture strongly encourages and in many cases enforces compliance to the culture, thereby ensuring allegiance and commitment to the vision and mission of the fundamentalist organization or community.

As far as social learning is concerned, persons growing up in fundamentalism for the most part do not have safe and nurturing environments in which personal change can occur without censorship. Children raised in fundamentalism are highly censored by parents and those in leadership and in so doing undermine the child's natural and presumably appropriate sense of self. Essentially, the child is raised with a fundamentalist identity. The search for

an identity unique to the self becomes the struggle for those persons who choose to leave fundamentalism later in life. Embracing and validating their new found identity a part from fundamentalism becomes a life-long task.

With respect to attachment theory, the research participants in this study reflected strains of attachment anxiety, uncertainty, and confusion with respect to families and religions of origin that defined and mandated relationships based on prescribed conditions stemming from Biblical and/or theological beliefs and lifestyle practices. Ironically, and despite its controlling and pervasive nature, fundamentalism was a place of safety and security for the research participants throughout the course of their lives as long as the conditions or criteria for relationships and inclusion were met and maintained. Attachments became conflicted and problematic if in the event a fundamentalist person questioned the criteria for relationship and inclusion and then attempted to leave a fundamentalist attachment or fundamentalism in general. Fundamentalism, despite being a place of certainty, safety, and predictability was also a place of power, control, fear, undisputable dogma, and socially enforced compliance to beliefs and lifestyle practices.

Leaving fundamentalism does not equate with being unaffected for years to come by the variables and characteristics associated with religious fundamentalism. Attachments to this particular religious orientation, whether healthy or unhealthy, are operative even to this day for many if not most of the research participants. Ongoing and unresolved issues with families of origin or denominations of origin are ongoing sources of pain and confusion. On the one hand, some families of origin express their desire to maintain relationship with disaffected fundamentalists, while on the other hand, they are only able to relate on the basis of their religious beliefs that determine the nature and outcome of the relationship.

Disaffected fundamentalists therefore have the option of aligning themselves to a prescriptive oriented relationship or, alternatively, remain outside the fundamentalist fold while being perceived by fundamentalists as being out of the will of God. The issue of attachment in this regard becomes essentially forced attachment minus the freedom to think, to do, and to be unless it falls within the acceptable range of belief and behavior. Despite these inherent and troubling dynamics associated with staying in or departing from fundamentalism, the process of creating healthy non-threatening attachments for the research participants is characterized by an intentional moving away from the smothering or restrictive nature of fundamentalism.

Finally, the theory of cognitive dissonance is complimentary to attachment theory and sheds significant light on the tension that exists in the minds of those who are considering what it would mean to depart from fundamentalism. The process leading up to, during, and following one's departure from fundamentalism is fraught with cognitive dissonance for theological, philosophical, life-style, relational, and pragmatic cognitive tensions. The search for consonance is a highly motivating factor. The process of getting there is laden with uncertainty, the voices of significant others, long term considerations, evaluating the past in light of the present and the present in light of the past, and both the past and the present in light of the future. Cognitive dissonance theory affords one the opportunity to consider the nature and functions of dissonant thoughts and processes while attempting to locate and integrate consonance initiatives in order to diminish the extent to which one is burdened by and ultimately immobilized by dissonance. Essentially, the process, if handled well, is theorized as resulting in freedom from cognitive unrest and uncertainty, culminating in

cognitive consonance consistent with the evolution of one's quest for healthy individuation in relation to family/denomination/religion of origin.

Previous Studies

Brent (1990) explored the experience of leaving fundamentalism via in-depth interviews with seven research participants referred to as disaffected fundamentalists. Brent presumed that the experience of leaving fundamentalism took place as an intentional and important life event. He also presumed that leaving an authoritarian and restrictive fundamentalist environment was in the best interest of one's mental health and spiritual development. It was also thought that a personal experience, possibly that of a crisis, would initiate the process of leaving, and that the transition would affect other areas of one's life.

In face to face interviews, Brent (1990) invited the participants to tell their stories, to provide a description of their fundamentalist environments, to identify that which initiated their departure from fundamentalism, and to share related thoughts and emotions and other changes in their lives provoked by this transition. Brent's data analysis yielded seven sequential and essential phases found to be common among the research participants. In this regard, Brent viewed these phases as being descriptive accounts of the research participants' experiences of leaving fundamentalism.

The phases, as conceptualized by Brent (1990) based on feedback from the research participants included: 1) participation in the fundamentalist context, 2) the initial disillusionment, 3) tolerating the tradition, 4) leaving the tradition, 5) the emotion-laden aftermath, 6) establishing new horizons, and 7) living with problematic residue. Brent also noted that issues specific to women emerged in the data and found that women's experience of subordination and male dominance was commonplace. Finally, Brent found that the

principle outcome of the study was the delineation of leaving fundamentalism as an identifiable phenomenon that was thought to be in need of further investigation.

Brent's (1990) study, despite being phenomenological in nature, seemed to offer more of a step-by-step account of the research participants' experiences of leaving fundamentalism as opposed to a rich descriptive revelation of the essence of being raised in fundamentalism and choosing to leave the orientation later in life. Although helpful in providing accounts of the experience of leaving fundamentalism, thereby laying the groundwork for further explorations, the outcome of Brent's study impressed me as being significantly influenced by his underlying assumptions. His belief that one's mental health and spiritual growth would be enhanced due to leaving fundamentalism is slightly reactionary and somewhat presumptuous. Hence, the issue of the extent to which Brent was able to bracket his own biases and assumptions is questionable. Despite this, however, the study provided what appears to be an initial entry into the phenomenon of leaving fundamentalism.

Smull (2002) explored the experiences of women who were disillusioned with and consequently left Christian fundamentalism and demonstrated the use of heuristic research to explore personal mythology. Ten women, referred to as co-researchers, were interviewed on two separate occasions. Characteristic of the heuristic method (Moustakas, 1990), the investigator was also one of the co-researchers. The data were evaluated for old, counter, and synthesized personal myths according to Feinstein and Krippner (1998, 1997).

All women experienced problems with mythic challenges relating to absolute truth and related attitudes, rigid rules of conduct, and emotional conflicts regarding love, fear, and anger. Problems with absolute truth and related attitudes centered around epistemological

assumptions in which authority figures interpreted religious principles, including that of questioning anything was to risk eternity in hell. Rigid rules of conduct included restrictive roles for women and mandatory involvement in the church and the mission of Christian fundamentalists. Acceptance of fundamentalist beliefs resulted in emotional double binds (Bateson, 1972). Co-researchers reported that these double binds produced disillusionment, simultaneously creating intense ties to Christian fundamentalism. The findings provide vivid, poignant accounts of the experiences of disillusionment and leaving Christian fundamentalism. They may also be of import for mental health practitioners studying and working with psycho-religious and psycho-spiritual issues.

Van Loon (2004) explored how Christianity affected gay men and lesbians who came from deeply religious families, or were once deeply involved in the church. Specifically, this study examined the effects of Christian fundamentalism or evangelicalism on gay men who were born into a family that had a belief in this form of Christianity, or gay men who had a "born again" experience before coming out of the closet. In this regard, ten men were interviewed from which themes emerged specific to the experience of coming out amid or despite religious orientation.

It was found that the participants' previous Christian beliefs affected their process of coming out and that their beliefs in this regard had a significant negative effect on their emerging sexual identity. All of the participants reported that they felt judged, unaccepted and condemned by many Christians and much of the Christian church. Nevertheless, they believed that Jesus accepted them and loved them regardless of their sexual orientation. These findings supported the hypothesis that Christian and fundamentalist beliefs regarding

homosexuality contributed to the negative thoughts and internalized homophobia held by many gay men today.

Davies (2006) attempted to sift out the essence of Christian fundamentalism from a psychoanalytic perspective. Towards that end, he set the stage by citing Charles Strozier's Apocalypse wherein Strozier identifies four beliefs as fundamental to Christian fundamentalism: 1) inerrancy or biblical literalism, 2) conversion or the experience of being reborn in Christ, 3) evangelicalism – or the duty of the saved to spread the gospel, and 4) apocalypticism or endism – the belief that the biblical book of Revelation describes the events that must come to pass for God's plan to be fulfilled. Davies' premise is that Christian fundamentalists embrace what Nietzche would call a strong valuation: an effort to take up the fundamental problems of the psyche and fashion a will to power out of resentment by developing a system of beliefs that will make one strong and righteous in that resentment, like Falwell (referring to the late Dr. Jerry Falwell), smug in its certitudes like President Bush, confident in the right to rule over those it reduces to the status of sheep, blissful in the blind obedience to a will that has been collectively imposed on them.

Garo (2006) explored via a multiple case study the potential adverse developmental consequences for 10 participants reared in a Christian fundamentalist environment who eventually departed from their religious roots to an alternative religious world view. Interviews were carried out to characterize commonalities of the fundamentalist environment and the lived experiences of participants with particular emphasis on the critical periods of adolescence and young adulthood. The study data depicts a highly uniform childhood environment where participants' enculturation was thorough, meaning that they were nurtured in safe harmony with God and insulated from the sinful outer world, they were

instilled with high levels of guilt; they experienced several forms of manipulation to assure their enculturation and faith maintenance, including rigid authoritarianism; and the concept of salvation was thoroughly engrained.

The study data were found to fit an evolutionary model. Participants were in homeostasis with their fundamentalist environment throughout childhood. During adolescence and early adulthood, they were exposed to perturbing stimuli where exogenous worldviews conflicted with their enculturation. Developmental adaptation was additionally burdened by the need to resolve the worldview conflicts along the course of defining individualized identity and a vision for their future during the critical development windows. The primary mediating mechanism for conversion away from fundamentalism was critical, existential thinking, but the timeframe and endpoint of conversions were highly variant. All participants eventually rejected the rigid strictures of their fundamentalist rearing. Half of the research participant group became agnostics or atheists, whereas the other half retained the supernatural beliefs, especially the alluring aspect of salvation and an all-powerful male God image. The ways and means that the fundamentalist environment constrains critical and existential thinking and hinders the development of such thinking skills should be a matter of cultural and psychological professional concern. Those that convert away from fundamentalism such as the participants of the study comprise a smaller cohort than those that remain unconverted.

Herriot (2007) considered the perceptions of fundamentalists and social science scholars who share a similar 'in-group out-group' mindset. Fundamentalists via their in-group lens, see the out-group as secular society or the apostates (Christian or Muslim). Social science scholars similarly view themselves through the same lens as the in-group and

fundamentalists as the out-group, a view supported by Herriot who claims that fundamentalists typically react negatively against modernity. In this regard, he promoted the idea that fundamentalists view themselves as being engaged in a conflict, struggling for their survival against modernism.

The challenge with Harriot's (2007) assessment of fundamentalists versus social science scholars within a social identity theory is that many groups view themselves as the in-group while assessing other groups with alternative philosophies and ideologies as the out-group. Examples of such tensions include environmentalists who in opposition to new technologies such as nuclear energy have been called Luddites. Peace movement advocates protest modern technologies that make war increasingly lethal. Vegetarians abhor cruel factory farming of animals, modernity's replacement of traditional animal rearing. Hence, objecting to what is perceived as objectionable, and having conflicts about it, expands considerably beyond fundamentalists.

Herriot (2007) also does not consider that some fundamentalists are environmentalists, that some believe that war is always immoral, and that some are vegetarians. Furthermore, he does not indicate any awareness that fundamentalists may also be social science scholars. In essence, his definition of fundamentalist is limited at best. Nevertheless, surveys of fundamentalists as a whole show more conservative tendencies on positions associated with social and political issues, although this does not preclude them from engaging in social and political activities not normally associated with fundamentalism.

Fundamentalists, however, are generally perceived as less likely to support women's equality as compared with the general population, just as a survey of feminist activists will likely show less support for the fundamentalist view than among the general population.

There are nevertheless feminist fundamentalists depending on how one defines feminism and fundamentalism. To think that fundamentalists are not spread out among the social movements is to engage in another construct of social identity theory, the out-group homogeneity bias.

Herriot (2007) culminates his ideas of in-group and out-group under what he refers to as the super-ordinate category. Many decades ago, many of the people active in racial segregation were fundamentalists. Now, however, the super-ordinate category of fundamentalist Christians and secularists has permeated, and an accusation of racism would be rightfully met by many fundamentalists with indignation. As Martin Luther King Jr. is admired in many fundamentalist Christian bookstores, and the Promise Keepers movement among fundamentalist men includes a strong component of active racial reconciliation.

Another case of using the super-ordinate category comes from the history of the American fundamentalist movement. The word fundamentalist was first coined in the 1920's when American Protestants were establishing certain fundamentals, primarily biblical inerrancy as a reaction against liberals. As strong Protestants of the time period, they also opposed Catholics. Yet the dynamics of the current right-to-life movement have large numbers of fundamentalists and Catholics eagerly working together for a super-ordinate goal. Fundamentalist pro-life activists are also commonly in touch with liberals (as with pro-life feminism, or the peace-oriented, and consistent life ethic). They are even in touch with agnostics and atheists who are pro-life. They are also Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and others within that movement, as well as a pro-life alliance of gays and lesbians. The super-ordinate goal, perceived as protecting human life, often appears to allow for differences to be either set aside or ignored.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

Formulating the Research Question

This phenomenological inquiry focused on the lived experience of adults who were raised in and later departed from evangelical fundamentalism in some measure. The research question, therefore, focused on what it was like to have been raised in evangelical fundamentalism and what was it like to later depart from evangelical fundamentalism in some measure. The purpose of this inquiry therefore was to elicit rich descriptions of the lived experiences of the research participants who were raised in and later departed from evangelical fundamentalism.

This study was conceived one Saturday morning over coffee with a friend of mine who shared a similar history of having been raised in while later in life departed from evangelical fundamentalism despite remaining in an evangelically oriented church. My friend and I shared a similar disdain, yet awkward appreciation for our respective fundamentalist histories despite feeling frequently challenged by the question of "Where do we go from here?" We found ourselves questioning what it meant to live life outside the confines of our religious orientations that had defined and continued in some measure to powerfully define our identities.

As a result of this Saturday morning discussion, I felt led to pursue this research direction with the support of interested friends and colleagues who shared similar histories and research interests. Over time, the basic research questions of "What was it like to have been raised in evangelical fundamentalism?" and "What was it like as an adult to depart from fundamentalism in some measure?" were asked to other interested parties. Due to my awareness of the massive scope of fundamentalism and the numerous variants associated

with evangelical fundamentalism in North America, it was daunting to consider how one might go about creating a research method that was specific yet open ended, particular in its meaning yet generally applied, easily contained yet elusive in its nature. At a very basic and subjective level, the research method needed to provide room for open ended questions, ponderous and thoughtful reflection, in-depth written descriptions, and in-depth oral discussions where and when possible with those who were raised in and later departed from fundamentalism.

Formulating the Research Philosophy

The philosophy of phenomenology explores the essence of being and can also serve as a psychological research method focused on lived experience and meaning. In this regard, phenomenology enabled room for individual and group accounts of life worlds and related meanings relative to the experience of being raised in and later departing from evangelical fundamentalism. The selection of phenomenology as a philosophy and psychological research methodology made sense to me because of the expansive nature of the subject matter combined with the unique and diverse ways in which the research participants might understand their fundamentalist histories and their present lives and relationships. It also made sense to me because the literature review did not yield phenomenological accounts of the lived experience of having been raised within fundamentalist orientations, thereby making this inquiry unique.

The Philosophy of Phenomenology

This inquiry is situated in the broader philosophical context of phenomenology. In this regard, phenomenology is understood as a movement and as a disciplinary field in the history of philosophy that preceded other philosophical movements such as existentialism,

post-structuralism, feminism, postmodernism, culture critique, and various forms of analytical and new theory. Contemporary figures such as Foucault, Derrida, and Rorty found their initial motivations and sources of their writings in the phenomenological writings of Husserl, Levinas, Heidegger, and Blanchot. As a philosophy and as a human science method, phenomenology emerged as a reflective inquiry into human experience and meaning (van Manen, 2002; Smith, 2003; Smith, 2005).

In brief, phenomenology can be defined as the study of structures of experience or consciousness. In the literal sense, phenomenology is the study of phenomena, the appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology therefore studies conscious experience from the subjective or the first person point of view. In this regard, phenomenology is distinguished from yet related to other fields of philosophy such as ontology (the study of being), epistemology (the study of knowledge), logic (the study of reasoning), and ethics (the study of right and wrong) (Smith, 2003; Smith, 2005).

In recent years, phenomenology refers to the characterization of sensory qualities of seeing, hearing, feeling, etc. and what it is like to have sensations of various kinds. Phenomenology lends itself to a wide range of interests and topics and addresses the meaning that things have within the realm of our experience as they are lived and felt in our life-world. Phenomenology, therefore, studies the structure of various types of experience ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity (Smith, 2003). The structure of these forms of experience typically involves what Husserl referred to as the directedness of experience toward things in the world (i.e. intentionality, the property

of consciousness - of or about something). According to Husserlian phenomenology, experience is directed towards or represents or intends things only through particular concepts, thoughts, ideas, images, that then make the meaning or content of an experience, and are distinct from the things they present or mean (Smith, 2003).

The basic intentional structure of consciousness is therefore found in reflection or analysis that similarly involves further forms of experience. Thus, phenomenology develops a complex account of temporal awareness (within the stream of consciousness), spatial awareness (notably in perception), attention (distinguishing focal and marginal and horizon awareness), awareness of one's own experience (self-consciousness), self-awareness (awareness-of-oneself), self in different roles (as thinking, acting, feeling, receiving, keeping giving, etc.), embodied action (including kinesthetic awareness of one's movement), intention in action, awareness of other persons (in empathy, inter-subjectivity, collectivity), linguistic activity (involving meaning, communication, understanding others), social interaction (including collective action), and everyday activity in our surrounding life-world (in a particular culture) (Smith, 2005).

Phenomenology as a Psychological Research Method

With respect to its application to psychologically oriented research, phenomenology is the study of phenomena: their nature and meanings. The focus is on the way things appear to us through experience or in our consciousness. The phenomenological researcher aims to provide a rich textured description of lived experience. Phenomenology asks, "What is this kind of experience like?" Therefore, the challenge for phenomenological researchers it twofold: how to help participants express their world as directly as possible; and how to

explicate these dimensions such that the lived world – the life world – is revealed (Finlay, 2005).

The life world comprises the world of objects around us as we perceive them and our experience of our self, body, and relationships. This lived world is pre-reflexive of meaning in that it takes place before we think about it or put it into language. The idea of 'life-world' is that we exist in a day-to-day world that is filled with complex meanings which form the backdrop to our everyday actions and interactions. The term life-world directs attention to the individual's lived situation and social world rather than some inner world of introspection. Phenomenological theorists claim that there are certain essential features of the life world, namely identity, sociality, embodiment, temporality, spatiality and discourse. The task, therefore, for the researcher is to reveal these dimensions as he or she experiences them (Finlay, 2005).

While the aim of phenomenological research is to describe the everyday world as we immediately experience it, variants of phenomenology highlight different dimensions that are frequently contested among those practicing phenomenology. Descriptive phenomenology inspired by Husserlian ideas (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003) attempts to study essences of phenomena as they appear in consciousness. In contrast, hermeneutic researchers following Heidegger prefer to focus on reflexive and existential dimensions exploring a person's sense of self, space, time, embodiment and relations with others in a less essentialist way. In Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Osborn, 2003), we find another hermeneutic variant – one that is more idiographic in intent, focused as it is on the individual's cognitive, linguistic, affective and physical being (Finlay, 2005).

With respect to research methods, the starting point of most phenomenological

methods rests on the practice of Epoche which is the on-going effort of the researcher to

suspend or 'bracket' previous assumptions and understandings. Rather than attempting to be

objective and unbiased, the researcher is engaged in a process of trying to see the world

differently – freshly – and to attend more actively to the participants' views. The researcher

is therefore prepared to be surprised and awed. The aim is to allow the phenomenon to

present itself to the researcher instead of the researcher imposing pre-conceived ideas on it.

This openness needs to be maintained throughout the entire research process (Finlay, 2005).

The basic purpose of phenomenology, therefore, is to reduce the experiences of

persons with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence (a "grasp of the very

nature of the thing"; van Manen, 1990, p. 177). To this end, qualitative researchers identify a

phenomenon (an "object" of human experience; van Manen, 1990, p. 163). This human

experience may be phenomena such as insomnia, exclusion, anger, or undergoing coronary

artery bypass surgery (Moustakas, 1994), or in the case of this particular study, the

experience of being raised in evangelical fundamentalism. The inquirer then collects data

from persons who have experienced the phenomenon and develops a composite description

of the essence of the experience for all the individuals—what they experienced and how they

experienced it (Moustakas, 1994).

With respect to analyzing phenomenological data and writing it up, van Manen (1997,

p. 345) notes that phenomenological understanding is distinctly existential, emotive,

enactive, embodied, situational, and non-theoretic; a powerful phenomenological text thrives

on a certain irrecoverable tension between what is unique and what is shared, between

particular and transcendent meaning, and between the reflective and the pre-reflective

spheres of the life world. To manage these tensions, researchers need to engage in reflexive analysis (Finlay, 2003) moving back and forth in a kind of dialectic between experience and awareness; between studying the parts and the whole. As Hertz (1997) puts it, "To be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation about the experience while simultaneously living in the moment" (p. viii). As researchers, it is important to strive, explicitly, to understand some of the connections by which subject and object influence and constitute each other. It is also important to acknowledge both our experience and our experiencing.

Finlay (2005) suggests that while all phenomenological analysis involves reflection, different variants privilege either the use of systematic procedures or the spontaneous emergence of creative intuition. For instance, using the analytical method as suggested by Wertz (1983) and Giorgi (1985), systematic readings of the transcript are undertaken by first dwelling on the phenomenon (through emphatic immersion and reflection), then describing emergent psychological structures (i.e., constituents and recurrent themes). In contrast, with dialogal analysis (Rowe *et al*, 1989), researchers prefer to use open, spontaneous, fluid dialogue in a group context rather than adhering to any explicit procedures. The process of writing and re-writing aims to create depth: multiple layers of meaning are crafted to lay bare certain truths while retaining the ambiguity of experience. To write phenomenologically is to write poetically, says van Manen. It is the "untiring effort to author a sensitive grasp of being itself." (van Manen, 1990, p.132). Whatever method of writing up is used, the key is to try and capture the complexity and ambiguity of the lived world being described.

The quality of any phenomenological study can be judged in its relative power to draw the reader into the researcher's discoveries allowing the reader to see the world in new and deeper ways. Polkinghorne (1983) offers four qualities to help the reader evaluate the

power and trustworthiness of phenomenological accounts: vividness, accuracy, richness and elegance. Is the research vivid in the sense that it generates a sense of reality and draws the reader in? Are readers able to recognize the phenomenon from their own experience or from imagining the situation vicariously? In terms of richness, can readers enter the account emotionally? Finally, has the phenomenon been described in a graceful, clear, and poignant way (Finlay, 2005).

For the purpose of this inquiry, phenomenology is defined as the study of human beings' lived experience with the intent of gaining in-depth insight and understanding into the nature and meaning of the experience (van Manen, 1997). The intent of this descriptive phenomenological inquiry, therefore, was to elicit poignant descriptions from the research participants that adequately portrayed the way they experienced various aspects of their evangelical fundamentalist worlds, thereby bringing the researcher into more direct contact with that particular experience. In this way, I worked from the participants' specific descriptions of experience and meaning in order to construct an overall descriptive account of their life worlds as they understood them at the time of writing and oral presentation (Creswell, 1998; 2007).

Epistemology

My epistemological orientation specific to this phenomenological inquiry is located in van Manen's (2002) Epistemology of Practice model comprised of three forms of knowledge and modes of knowing. van Manen's model, consistent with phenomenology as a philosophy and research methodology, assisted in conceptualizing knowledge specific to the experiences and meanings of adults who were raised in and later departed from evangelical

fundamentalism. The forms of knowledge include Knowledge as Text (product), Knowledge as Participation (understanding), and Personal Knowledge (being).

Knowledge as Text (product): van Manen noted that phenomenological texts are a form of knowledge in the same sense that books and documents are bodies of knowledge. He clarified, however, that phenomenological texts differ from other texts in that they contain embedded meaning specific to the phenomena. van Manen (2002) further stated that phenomenological knowledge-as-text has cognitive and pathic, conceptual and poetic, informative and formative dimensions. When considering the issue of knowledge as text in relation to this study, I think particularly of the research participant's narratives that served as the primary source of data for this inquiry. The narratives generated discernable knowledge concerning the life worlds of the research participants. In so doing, the life worlds of the participants were made explicit through written descriptions laden with emotionality, passion, personal experience, insights, assessments, and conclusions concerning their respective journeys of having been raised in and later departing from evangelical fundamentalism. In this sense, the narratives (texts as knowledge) are consistent with van Manen's model in that they reflected cognitive, pathic, conceptual, poetic, informative and formative characteristics specific to the life worlds of the research participants. These characteristics are readily apparent in many of the participant quotes appearing later in this document.

The research participants' narratives consequently enlightened me as to the essence of their life worlds, thereby making me aware of and therefore knowledgeable about the experience of growing up in and later departing from evangelical fundamentalism. Knowledge of the participants' life worlds was essentially transmitted to me via their

narratives that resulted in my experience and absorption of their life worlds - to the extent

that it was possible for me to understand and appreciate the complexities of their historical

and current lived experience. In this sense, the narratives held tremendous content and

related meanings that influenced my portrayal of the participant group in the emergent

themes appearing later in this document. In this regard, the narratives as texts contributed to

the formation of my thinking, my emotions, my beliefs, and ultimately my knowledge base

concerning the research participants' life worlds. This knowledge therefore influenced my

characterizations of the participants.

Knowledge as understanding: Phenomenology is the active and reflective

participation in meaning. The notion of phenomenological knowledge as understanding aims

at a special form of discursive and embodied understanding. My knowledge of the life

worlds of the research participants specific to their experiences of being raised in and later

departing from religious fundamentalism emerged in the form of an in-depth understanding

derived from their written and oral revelations of their lived experiences and related

meanings. Not only did their narratives and oral presentations in the group inform me of

their experiences, they also increased, broadened, and enriched the extent to which I could

understand in my mind and in my emotions what it must have been like for them to be

socialized into a religious fundamentalist life world.

Understanding then became a form of knowing concerning the experiences and

meanings of the research participants' historical and current experiences with

fundamentalism. This level of understanding further informed my conceptualizations and

characterizations of the research participant group as it came to bear on the findings

associated with this inquiry. Understanding as knowledge, or knowledge as understanding in

this regard was more experiential as it touched on my emotions and my spirit, resulting in my empathic stance that led me into a richer and more meaningful experience of understanding and appreciating the inherent challenges and struggles associated with departing from evangelical fundamentalism.

Knowledge as being: The end of phenomenological reflection is the achievement of a personal, formative knowledge. The practical import of the phenomenological text and understanding is not primarily useful theory and techniques that one can apply to solve problems in practical situations. The connection between phenomenological knowledge and practice is not a technical relation. Phenomenology does not provide us with information in the usual sense of the term. Instead, the practical significance of phenomenological knowledge is formative in nature; it enhances our perceptiveness, it contributes to our sense of tact in human relations, and it provides us with pathic forms of understanding that are embodied, situational, relational, and enactive. In this regard, "knowledge as being" embodies the ideas of what it means to absorb the life world of another person and therefore be emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and relationally enhanced in response to what I heard, what I saw, what I felt, and what I now believe. I agree with van Manen (2002) in that the outcome of "knowledge as being" is not about theory and practice or attempting to quantify or formulate interventions; it is simply about having my being influenced to the point where the knowledge in a sense is sacred, not to be utilized, trivialized, or manipulated in any sense. Rather, to be respected, upheld, honored, and valued amid the intersection of lives that tell us more about who we are as human beings.

<u>The Role of Researcher</u>

Once the research question was formulated in concert with the research philosophy and methodology, I located a research strategy that would 1) compliment the research question, 2) include a method of data collection that was both process and group oriented, and 3) be philosophically consistent with the basic tenants of phenomenological inquiry, meaning that there would be room for the emergence of descriptive accounts and the sharing of information and experiences within the research participant pool. With respect to data collection, it was decided in consultation with my Research Advisor that group based Life Review (Birren, 1991) would be an appropriate method through which the research participants could openly share their respective stories surrounding the issue of being raised in and later departing from evangelical fundamentalism. In brief, Life Review is a structured guided auto-biographical group based learning model designed to assist people in organizing their historical and current life events. In this regard, people are able to re-tell their life stories according to assigned topics that include but are not limited to major branching points in life, the meaning of life, and family of origin, to mention a few.

For the sake of this inquiry, I identified six subject areas that I believed were relevant to the nature and purpose of this inquiry specific to being raised in and departing from evangelical fundamentalism. Three of the subject areas (family of origin, major branching points in life, and the meaning of my life) were based on Birren's (1991) Life Review model. These subject areas were selected so as to remain within an approximation of Birren's model of inquiry as well as to elicit written descriptions concerning the influence of the research participants' families of origin, significant branching points in their lives that influenced their

eventual departures from fundamentalism, and how they made sense out of the meaning of their lives.

Based on my history and familiarity with evangelical fundamentalism, I developed three unique subject areas in an effort to elicit experience and meaning that I assumed at some level were connected to the participants' fundamentalist histories (why I chose to participate in this study, my parenting practices, and the effects of evangelical fundamentalism on my life). First, I was curious about the research participants' motivations to participate in this inquiry in light of their fundamentalist backgrounds and my underlying view that many people coming out of fundamentalism are discreet in their disclosures relative to person and venue. Second, I wanted to learn about their parenting practices in light of their own experiences of having been parented within an evangelical fundamentalist orientation. And third, I wanted to learn about the research participants' thoughts and feelings concerning the effects of evangelical fundamentalism on their lives in general. The research participants were therefore asked to write two page descriptive narratives specific to 1) why I chose to participate in this study, 2) major branching points in my life, 3) my family of origin, 4) the effects of evangelical fundamentalism on my life, 5) my parenting practices, and 6) the meaning of my life. These topic areas therefore served as the focus of the participants' written narratives and subsequent group discussions.

The research participants met for eight Life Review group sessions, each lasting for approximately three hours. The first session focused on the development of group norms and group cohesion. Sessions two through seven focused on the assigned topics as previously mentioned. Session eight focused on group closure, including an in-depth discussion of what

it was like to participate in the Life Review group format and also what the participants were taking away with them as a result of their participation.

At a practical level, it was my responsibility to ensure the safety of the group both during and following disclosures, and to remind the group of the nature and purpose of the study if and when the discussions turned from disclosure and supportive feedback to disclosure and prescriptive feedback or unsolicited advice. In this regard, the group's residual fundamentalist orientation occasionally emerged with varying degrees of certainty and absolutism causing some participants to feel uncomfortable. It was my role, therefore, to bring this development to the group's attention in order to help the group remain focused on supportive and affirming remarks in response to what they heard or experienced from another participant.

With respect to my own objectivity in light of my fundamentalist history, it was my responsibility to maintain a professional presence amid the emerging content and related group dynamics. I reminded myself on several occasions throughout the Life Review group process that I was facilitating a dynamic group of individuals who were in the process of disclosing years of emotionally laden information. Despite my thoughts and opinions surrounding what I heard or saw within the research participant group, it was my role and responsibility to maintain a professionally distant yet readily available presence in order to navigate some of the emergent dynamics within the group. Maintaining my presence in this regard was not a distraction from the group; rather, it was simply something I was aware of and therefore chose to maintain my objectivity as opposed to entering into collusion with one or more group members.

A few weeks following the dissolution of the group, the participants gathered together in a private room of a restaurant in order to share a meal together while talking through their respective and group experiences of the research study. This time together also served as a means of extending my appreciation to the group for the significant contributions that were made to this inquiry. All of the participants were in attendance and took the opportunity to reflect and comment openly concerning their respective experiences. The group impressed me as being very cohesive and desirous to remain in touch with one another. The group affirmed the nature and purpose of the study and voiced their concern for other disaffected fundamentalists who might benefit from a group similar to the one they participated in.

Research Participant Selection

The research participant selection process began with making religious, non-religious, professional and non-professional colleagues, friends, and acquaintances aware of the study. I did this through word of mouth as well as posting advertisements in strategic locations at local Christian oriented and secular universities and colleges. I also utilized the internet as a means of communicating the study such as the University of British Columbia List Serve in order to disseminate the necessary information surrounding the study and to ask others to communicate the proposed study to potentially interested persons.

Despite not anticipating a great response to these initiatives due to the nature and focus of the research, five persons eventually contacted me concerning the study and expressed interest in learning more about the study's rationale, time commitments, responsibilities, confidentiality, anonymity, and so on. I met with these individuals individually in various locations such as coffee shops or in their homes if they so desired in order to discuss the nature and purpose of the study. I provided each prospective research

participant with documentation concerning the nature and purpose of the study, required time commitment, the rights and privileges of research participants, members checks re: trustworthiness of the research methodology and the findings, verification of the study's approval by the University of British Columbia's Office of Research Services, the limits of confidentiality, the name and contact numbers of my Research Advisor, my responsibility to the research participants, and participants' freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. Within a one month period, five persons elected to participate in the study. Some of the participants knew at least one other individual in the group while others did not. All of the research participants were eager to talk out loud about their respective experiences and related meanings concerning growing up in evangelical fundamentalism.

Research Participant Group Profile

The research participant selection criteria included: 1) being a self-defined disaffected evangelical or evangelical fundamentalist who was raised in a fundamentalist orientation or denomination (i.e., the Pentecostal Assembly of Canada or the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Canada) and a fundamentalist family of origin and or fundamentalist church context not affiliated with a particular denomination, 2) being self-defined as one who was in a process of departing from fundamentalism in some measure, and 3) being self-defined as one who was open to introspection, reflection, the writing of narratives, and related group discussions.

The participant group was comprised of three adult men and two adult women ranging in age from 36 and 51 years who originated from conservative denominations inherent in evangelical fundamentalism. All of the participants were heterosexual, Caucasian, and married with children. The participants' vocations included community

college instructor and film maker, elementary school teacher, cabinet maker/installer, professional music producer, and graduate student. The participants presented themselves as interpersonally astute, well educated, psychologically minded, dynamic, articulate, insightful, ponderous, and motivated. The research participant group was therefore high functioning and in this regard generously engaged in the Life Review process in its entirety. Some eventually became highly influenced by Catholic and spiritual formation writers (i.e., Jean Vanier, Henri Nouwen, Brennan Manning, Fredrick Buechner, Eugene Peterson, Mike Mason, Anne Lamott, Susan Mutto, Harold Kushner, and Walter Wangerin Jr.), and preferred a reflective and contemplative approach corporate worship.

With respect to education, one of the participants completed three years of undergraduate course work. Four of the participants completed undergraduate and graduate degrees from accredited private post-secondary institutions. One of the participants had a Masters degree from a professional Christian oriented theological graduate school while another participant was a graduate student in English literature during the time of the study. Three of the participants regularly attended evangelical oriented churches while two did not attend any church on a regular basis. These two individuals, however, maintained ties with friends and associates who regularly attended church.

The group members were in varying degrees of departing from fundamentalism. One female participant and one male participant considered themselves to be contemplating departing concurrent with being in a process of departing. One female participant considered herself to be only in a process of departing. One male participant believed that he had already departed from fundamentalism, while the remaining male participant understood

himself to be departing while already having departed. Three of the participants attended church while two do not.

With respect to the participants' families of origin, two of the participants had parents who were relatively well known evangelical Christian leaders in Canada. In this regard, one parent in years past was significantly instrumental in shaping both Christian and public opinion from a Biblically oriented fundamentalist perspective. This individual developed and maintained a prolific presence in what was often presented in the popular media as culture wars, taking on intellectual liberals who were deemed by this individual as leading our country astray with respect to morality. The other parent is relatively well known in evangelical circles as an astute and proficient educator focused on promoting accredited, yet distinctly Christian higher education as a viable alternative to secular educational opportunities.

One of the participant's parents continues to be career missionaries. They have spent the better part of their adult children's lives in foreign countries in an effort to follow what they have believed over the years to be the call of God on their lives. In this regard, these parents have maintained an arms length relationship with their children and grandchildren in deference for the work of God and at the expense of fostering and maintaining healthy relationships with their loved ones who have remained in Canada. The research participant in this regard spent the better part of their primary school years in boarding schools in foreign countries and later came to Canada to attend an accredited Christian-based university without any financial assistance from their parents.

The remaining two research participants were raised in evangelical fundamentalist homes and attended church on a regular basis which was an assumed part of family life.

These individuals described their home lives as being organized around church life and related activities. There was a strong Christian fundamentalist ethic that pervaded home life to the extent that speaking out against it was unthinkable. One of these individuals attended a Bible college and later became a minister to youth. The other participant eventually attended an accredited Christian based university for three years and is now involved in church leadership despite what appears to be emergent misgivings in this regard.

Data Collection Model: Group Based Life Review

As previously mentioned, Life Review (Birren, 1991) was selected as the data collection strategy for the purposes of this inquiry. In this regard, The Life Review method compliments the phenomenological nature and purpose of this research initiative. This is due to the fact that Life Review by virtue of its intent and design is given to reviewing and exploring the life worlds of the research participants specific to growing up in and later departing from evangelical fundamentalism. The Life Review model therefore encourages insight into both experience and meaning specific the lived experience. In this regard, Life Review proved to be an invaluable tool in extrapolating experiences, beliefs, thoughts, emotions, and rich accounts of meaning.

In particular, the process of Life Review is designed to provide a personal and interpersonal opportunity for reflecting on, re-storying, re-presenting, re-integrating and potentially re-authoring the meaning of one's life stories (Pearson, 2005). In its original form, Butler (1963) initiated life review as a way to allow people nearing the end of life to revisit memories and deal with conflicts in need of resolution. The original model did not involve group work or the suggestion of themes by a facilitator or therapist. Rather, it relied more or less on free-flowing memories.

The Life Review model has been widely used and researched (Birren & Deutchman, 1991; Kenyon & Randall, 1997; Silver, 1995). It appeared to have natural therapeutic and integrative potential. Birren and Deutchman (1991) summarized the benefits of Life Review from twenty-two studies. Some of the positive outcomes of Life Review included a sense of increased personal power and importance, recognition of past adaptive strategies and application to current needs and problems; reconciliation with the past and resolution of past resentments and negative feelings; resurgence of interest in past activities or hobbies, development of friendships with other group members; greater sense of meaning and purpose in life; increased role clarity, self-esteem and self-understanding; and ability to face the nearing end of life with a feeling that one has contributed to the world (Pearson, 2005).

The model was originally researched with older adults in residential care facilities and in more recent years has been successfully used with older adults facing job loss (Rife, 1998), veterans from WWII and the Korean War (Molinari & Williams, 1995), Canadian WWII and Peacekeeping veterans (Westwood, Black & McLean, 2002), terminally ill patients (Kuhl, 2002; Westwood and Kuhl, 2002, and beginning counselors (McLean, 2001).

The distinguishing feature of the process of Life Review was the semi-structured format. A set of core themes and guiding questions were used to foster self exploration (through personal reflection and writing) and sharing (telling one's story and listening to others' stories) in small groups of five to eight people. The following nine core themes were chosen as reflecting key life and existential issues (de Vries, Birren & Deutchman, 1995): History of the major branching points in my life; family history; career or major life work; the role of money in my life; health and body image; loves and hates; sexual identity, sex

roles, and sexual and experience; experiences with and ideas about death and dying, and other losses; influences, beliefs and values that provide meaning in life.

The opportunity to view one's life story through the perspective of the various themes was been described by Birren and Deutchman (1991) as similar to that of shining a light through a nine-sided prism. Just as the light is refracted differently depending on the side of the prism it is shone into, so each theme provided a different angle for re-viewing one's life stories. Themes could be used flexibly to fit with the make-up and time frame of the group program, and specific themes could be developed to reflect the interest of group members as was the case in this particular inquiry. In keeping with non-invasive view ethic of the process, members could choose not to address a particular theme (Kenyon & Randall, 1997). Nevertheless, structured group activities such as the previous suggested themes were believed to enhance a sense of psychological safety for group members (Borgen, Pollard, Amundson, & Westwood, 1989).

The way a group member chose to be during any particular session was bounded by the structure of that situation and did not have open-ended implications or consequences for the process as a whole. In Life Review, while the various themes were inextricably interwoven in the complexity of individual life stories, each theme/session was also an entity within itself. Group members were free to adjust their level of disclosure according to their degree of comfort with the theme and their personal sense of safety and interpersonal trust.

The Life Review process would always begin with an introductory session to clarify the facilitator's role, group expectations and goals, and the structure of the process. This first session was geared towards reducing natural anxieties that often arise in meeting other members for the first time and entering in the process. Knowing about Life Review is

different than actually experiencing it. Questions surrounding participant's level of comfort and acceptance, not to mention their levels of disclosure were discussed in an effort to alleviate fears or anxieties in this regard. Establishing group agreements, guidelines for giving and receiving feedback, and providing structured activities that allowed members to begin to get to know each other and engage in non-threatening self-disclosure provided the foundation for building a safe and cohesive group climate (Pearson, 2005).

Following the introductory session, participants were invited to spend time personally reflecting on the theme that has been selected for the subsequent meeting. They were asked to write about how the upcoming theme related to their life and were encouraged to do this in their own individual way. To increase a sense of being able to write freely and spontaneously, members were reminded that they were not required to show what they had written to anyone else, that they would be invited to share only what they chose to disclose, and that they should plan to share up to a maximum of two typewritten or four pages with the group (Pearson, 2005).

The reflecting and writing time that participants engage in outside of the group meetings is an integral part of the process and serves a two-fold function. It not only provides an opportunity to enhance introspection, integration and personal meaning making, it also increased the personal control that individuals have over what they will subsequently share. As participants review what they have written, they have time to quietly reflect on their personal comfort about disclosing parts of the story that may include affectively charged material and decide which part of their writing they want to share with the group, and what they prefer to keep private (Pearson, 2005).

Participants share their stories verbally in the group in a non-judgmental atmosphere. At the end of telling their story, each participant can choose to hear from others in the group how listening to the story impacted them personally and, as noted earlier, guidelines are established to enhance the effectiveness of both giving and receiving feedback. Hearing from others can offer the speaker new perspective on his or her experiences and enhance the realization of both unique and common experiences.

However, as de Vries, Birren, and Deutchman (1995) emphasize, life review is distinct from group therapy and does not actively seek to promote change in individual member's emotional, cognitive, or behavioral responses. Rather, the purpose of life review is to provide a learning climate within which people can increase self-awareness, integrate and make meaning of their life experiences to date, and begin to think about future hopes and intentions.

Sharing life stories in a safe, small group context gives individuals the chance to recall events, and feelings about those events, that may have been forgotten or perhaps suppressed because they were experienced as unacceptable at the time. Being able to compare and contrast one's own experiences with those of the other group members can help participants to feel accepted, acceptable and self-accepting (Birren & Deutchman, 1991; de Vries, Birren & Deutchman, 1995; Brown-Shaw, Westwood and de Vries, 1999). Sometimes an individual may join a life review group carrying out what they feel is a shameful secret, only to find that disclosure of the secret is met with acceptance, little surprise, and similar revelations on the part of others (Birren & Cocran, 2001; Birren and Deutchman, 1991).

The process of critical reflection and interactive sharing may lead to new insights, the resolution of past issues, affirmation of the journey that is unfolding, or bring to light issues that merit further exploration. Brown-Shaw, Westwood and de Vries (1999) noted that life review sometimes results in a deepened awareness of issues that remain unresolved and challenging. In this way, it can serve as a self-diagnostic tool that allows people to consider whether, or how, they wish to address difficulties that may be preventing them from living life as fully as they wish.

According to Kenyon and Randall (1997), group-based life review can provide a means for engaging in transformative learning. Specifically, Kenyon and Randall suggest that the mere expression of our life story is transformative at some level, that going from experience to expression inevitably changes us, and that we become different persons due to the exercise of life review having both an emptying and filling effect. Kenyon and Randall suggest that this process begins to purge us from troubling pasts while at the same time increases personal power for self and for others around us. The group leader's role in life review is to ensure that each group member receives equal time to express themselves and the non judgmental remarks or interpretations interfere with an atmosphere of mutual respect. The therapeutic benefits of the process are greatly enhanced when group leaders have a solid theoretical foundation and expertise in group facilitation and can ensure that issues of inclusion, control and intimacy are maintained at optimal levels (Dimock, 1976; Borgen et al., 1989).

Life review welcomes the presence of the whole person, including the pain and suffering people have experienced as well as their joys and triumphs (Birren & Cochran, 2001). Leaders need to be aware that sometimes life review may involve a group member

describing a traumatic event from their own life story. Given the prevalence of trauma in our society, it is not unlikely that life review may lead to remembering either direct exposure to violence and victimization, or witnessing the traumatic suffering of others. Recovery from trauma cannot occur in isolation. It requires safety, remembering, mourning the losses, and the possibility of reconnecting to life and community (Herman, 1997).

Although life review is not considered to be group therapy per se, leaders may be prepared to navigate the disclosure of traumatic memories during the life review process, thereby making the venue fertile ground on which participants can both share and integrate distressing memories into their broader lives. Proponents of life review recommend that facilitators have an understanding of trauma recovery processes, the ability to act in preventative, and, if necessary, remedial ways to reduce the risk of re-traumatization, and knowledge about sources of referral to other helping professionals if extreme reactions to traumatic memories arise.

A therapeutic life review process is one in which there is a natural and incremental deepening of the level of disclosure among participants reflective of, and embedded within, an increasing sense of cohesion, mutual trust and personal safety (Birren & Cochran, 2001; Birren and Deutchman, 1991). When effectively facilitated, life review can confirm not only a sense of one's uniqueness and worth as an individual, it can also promote intimate connection with other people, an awareness of commonalities, and sense of community (Birren & Cochran, 2001).

In summary, there are two features of life review that make it a preferred method of helping adults raised in evangelical fundamentalism to share their stories: First, life review is framed within an educational approach. Although it can have a naturally therapeutic and

integrative potential and has increasingly been used in counseling psychology, it was not

designed to be a group therapy technique (Birren & Birren, 1996). This, I believe, may make

it accessible and acceptable to a broader audience of participants, some of whom may shy

away from therapy models for fear of stigmatization or because they view therapy as solely

focused on repair or problem solution. Second, the structured format of life review allows

participants who may be un-used to disclosing personal feelings or distressing experiences to

move into the process in a gentle way, a way that endorses a sense of personal control around

self-disclosure and is respectful of the religious cultures of origin from which adults raised in

fundamentalism have emerged (Sotile & Sotile, 2002).

For the purposes of this study, therefore, group based Life Review was utilized to

look into lives of individuals who were raised in evangelical fundamentalism. The selection

criterion included that participants had to be adults who were raised in evangelical

fundamentalism as they understood the term, that they were willing to commit to an eight

week group based format, that they were willing to commit to writing two page narratives for

six of the eight sessions, and that they would read their respective writing to the group while

listening to the groups feedback upon completion of the reading.

Group based life review, therefore, became the vehicle through which the research

participants were able to share their respective stories with one another both orally and in

writing. In this regard, research participants attended eight life review group sessions, each

lasting approximately three hours. Each of the participants came prepared to discuss

previously assigned topics such as 1) what was it like for me to decide to participate in this

study, 2) what are the major branching points in my life, 3) what was it like being raised in

evangelical fundamentalism, 4) what is the meaning of my life, 5) what was it like growing

up in your family of origin, and 6) what is the meaning of my life. Topics 2, 4, and 6 were

based on Birren's (1996) Guided Autobiography model, whereas topics 1, 3, and 5 were

developed to extrapolate the participants' experiences and meanings specific to their

evangelical fundamentalist histories.

A Phenomenological Data Analysis Model

Giorgi and Giorgi's (2003) model of phenomenological data analysis was utilized in

order to carefully conceptualize the emergent findings specific to the research participants'

experiences and meanings associated with having been raised in evangelical fundamentalism

and later departing from this particular religious orientation in some measure. Giorgi and

Giorgi's method of data analysis was chosen due to its reflective and ponderous nature that

lent itself to my subjective experiences when engaging with the written narrative data as well

as the subsequent Life Review group discussions. Giorgi and Giorgi's model, therefore, was

helpful by providing me room to explore the data while aiding in maintaining my focus on

the formulation of descriptors associated with and descriptions of the lived experience of the

research participants.

Giorgi and Giorgi's (2003) model of data analysis is as follows:

1. Read for a Sense of the Whole

When I assessed and reflected on the narratives from which a general description of

the experience was formulated, I read the entire description of experiences in light of the fact

that the phenomenological perspective is a holistic one. In this regard, I read the

participants' individual written descriptive narratives of what it was like to have been raised

in and later departed from evangelical fundamentalism in some measure, followed by the

entire collection of narratives in one sitting in order to absorb and assimilate the richness of

the data. The entire grouping of narratives was therefore read individually as well as collectively from beginning to end in order to get an overall sense of the participants' experiences and their meanings from their personal points of view and in language that made sense to each one.

2. Determination of Parts: Establishing Meaning Units

Due to the fact that most descriptions are far too long to be handled in their entirety, Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) suggest that parts of the descriptions have to be *established* in order to formulate a more thorough analysis. Because the disclosure of meaning is the ultimate outcome, the parts that are established are based on meaning discriminations, and the results are called meaning units. Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) suggested, therefore, that I go back and begin to reread the description with the perspective of this phenomenological reduction and with a psychological attitude, mindful of the phenomenon being researched, and every time I experienced a shift of meaning in the reading of the description, I made a mark in the appropriate place. The research continued in this particular endeavor until the whole description was delineated with meaning units. The meaning units were then viewed as practical outcomes to help with the analysis as opposed to emerging theories associated with the participants' experiences and related meanings.

The establishing of meaning units was consistent with my earlier comments concerning epistemological assumptions. It assisted in the formation of meaning making claims that eventually spoke to the meaning surrounding the experience without necessarily being further transformed into a knowledge claim. Again, the emphasis here is on the emergent description of lived experience that is both fluid and at times elusive despite what might appear to be an observable truth claim in some other context.

3. Transformation of Meaning Units into Psychologically Sensitive Expressions

The meanings expressed by the participants, likely idiosyncratic in the use of language, were made psychologically explicit concerning the phenomenon that was being researched. In this regard, the whole purpose of the method was to discover and articulate the psychological meanings being lived by the participants that reveal the nature of the phenomenon being researched. The third step, therefore, was at the heart of the method and ultimately expressed the psychological meaning of the participants' everyday language more directly with the help of free imaginative variation on my part.

In articulating these psychological meaning claims, it was important to avoid pursuing meanings that were clinical in nature such as commentating on or assessing in detail or otherwise on the participants' personal lives. It was similarly important for me to avoid the use of psychological jargon as it exists in the literature. Ordinary language, therefore, bent towards psychologically heightened revelations was Giorgi and Giorgi's (2003) recommended strategy.

This particular phase of the data analysis also impressed me as being consistent with the epistemological assumptions previously mentioned. The descriptions offered by the research participants in concert with the expressions of psychological meaning that I proffered was in essence phenomenological in nature, neither source containing or retaining the emergent data in restrictive or diagnostic terminology. Instead, the collaborated descriptions that later emerged into meaning making claims honored the process of phenomenological methodology.

4. The Determination of Structure

The fourth step of the analysis ended with a series of transformed meaning units that were originally in the language of the participants but were now expressed with heightened psychological sensitivity concerning the phenomenon being studied. I then practiced imaginative variations, as suggested by Giorgi and Giorgi (2003), on these transformed meaning making units to see what was truly essential about them. Following the determination of the essential tone, essence, and sense associated with the meaning units, I carefully described the most invariant connected meanings that belonged to the experience and hence the general structure of the experience and their meanings.

The work of transformation and heightened psychological sensitivity concerning the phenomenon being studied required a significant degree of laying aside my personal biases, experiences, and beliefs, while choosing instead to focus on and absorb and then articulate the essence of the lived experiences of the research participants. I experienced this particular part of the process as being sacred in nature, not wanting to exploit the vulnerability of the research participants for the purposes on this study, yet recognizing my mandate to see, feel, touch, listen, absorb, interpret, and represent as necessary so that the integrity of the study was maintained.

The issue of my personal and professional bias is noteworthy. It is my view that bias is unavoidable and inescapable, yet manageable. One of the central tasks associated with this study was staving off my biases towards evangelical fundamentalists and in particular the research participants as I read and heard during the course of the Life Review group residual yet operative fundamentalist oriented interactions. There were moments in the Life Review group, for instance, during which I felt offended, or disturbed with what I was hearing,

triggering inside of me historical fundamentalist relationships and circumstances. I was also disturbed on occasion by the manner in which the participants engaged with one another during moments of differing opinions and experiences. Remnants of fundamentalist certainty and the avoidance or fear of ambiguity, for instance, were evident.

In order to compensate for and manage my biases and the occasional triggers that led me to think critically about what I was hearing, I purposed throughout the study to talk openly about my experiences with trusted colleagues and friends who were not associated in any way with the study or the participants. In this regard, my colleagues and friends assisted me in managing my thoughts and emotions in such a way so as not to impede of diminish the reality of what was transpiring within the Life Review group. In essence, I am referring to professional accountability and responsibility as it came to bear on the research study and hence, how I related to the research participants. My clinical background and experience was helpful to me in maintaining a strong sense of neutrality in response to the emerging data and how it emerged in both written and oral form. I was validated on several occasions by the Life Review group for maintaining a healthy and constructive distance from the group dynamic while letting myself experience the dynamic as a part of the overall process of discovery.

Finally, the transformed meaning units associated with this process in reference to this study eventually emerged in the form of observable themes. The themes were initially constructed as "coping with and learning from pain" and "coping with and learning from human longing", for example. As a result of one of four member checks, these representations of the lived experience were not validated by the research participants in the sense that they inferred a life time coping, which in the estimation of the participants was not

necessarily the case. After a few more initiatives in framing and establishing meaning units, it was determined in collaboration with the research participants that the themes that best described their individual and collective experiences would be framed as the Lived Experience and Meanings of Pain, for example.

This process of establishing and further transforming meaning units into psychologically sensitive statements or descriptors necessitated collaboration with the participants in order to establish the integrity and credibility of the findings. In this regard, the nature and process of phenomenological inquiry was further validated as credible in the sense that member checks provided opportunity for the participants to confirm or disconfirm the emergent findings, thereby establishing, in part, the trustworthiness of the study. Again, the nature of this study emerged as a collaborative endeavor in order to reach a place of clarity and moderate certainty that what was being described by me as the researcher was a fair representation.

The Trustworthiness of the Study

With respect to ensuring the scientific credibility of this inquiry, I utilized Giorgi and Giorgi's (2003) criteria for trustworthiness that speaks to the issue of rigor. The criterion is as follows: 1) the inquiry was open to scrutiny, 2) the inquiry could be duplicated, 3) the inquiry was open to skepticism, and 4) the knowledge gained from this inquiry was general in nature and applicable to similar situations (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

First, I ensured that the research methodology was open to scrutiny by human research scientists and one clinical practitioner. My research committee and one professional colleague, all of whom were familiar in some measure with issues specific to religious fundamentalism and or research methodology, scrutinized my research process in its entirety.

At least two persons on my research committee were very familiar with fundamentalism and evangelical fundamentalism in particular. One committee member assessed my methodology and provided invaluable feedback on its theoretical framework as well as its structure and subsequent application. Essentially, my committee members in whole and in part thoroughly scrutinized my research question, my research direction, my methodology, my epistemology, and my emergent findings.

I also discussed my research inquiry with a third party registered psychologist who is well informed in matters pertaining to religious fundamentalism and similarly familiar with qualitative research methods and their application. In addition to my several discussions with my research advisor, the psychologist and I frequently engaged in discussions about the nature and content of my study. He assisted me on several occasions in honing my thinking as well as my growing capacity to accurately conceptualize complex philosophical and psychological constructs inherent in this study. The psychologist also did this by asking challenging questions related to my research, my biases, my experiences, and my beliefs while encouraging me towards in-depth thinking surrounding the many complex facets associated with my inquiry.

Second, I ensured that the method of the inquiry could be duplicated by presenting it in this document in a manner that was methodical and straightforward. In particular, the research rationale, the research purpose, the statement of the problem, the identification of relevant theories, the trustworthiness criteria of the study, the research participant selection criteria, the data collection strategy, the research epistemology, the research methodology, and the research findings were clearly defined in this study. In this regard, this research

inquiry was clear in its intent, in its method, and in its findings, thereby ensuring that it could easily be duplicated.

Third, I maintained a healthy skepticism of the emergent data via regular consultations with my research advisor and the research participants. I met on several occasions with my research advisor in an effort to discuss the unfolding of the research process and issues inherent in the inquiry. My research advisor was an immediate source of feedback, questions, comments, and recommendations, and provided me with substantial issues to consider as they came to bear on maintaining a healthy skepticism with respect to the emergent process and eventual findings. I also engaged the research participants in four member checks specific to the emergent data so that the data could eventually be reported with confidence, with minimal bias, and with certainty. Specifically, I communicated electronically via email with the research participants in order to reveal to them my conceptualizations of their lived experienced in the form of emergent themes. Their feedback was invaluable and generally reflected a significant degree of thought and exploration. Eventually, I communicated with the research participants on four separate occasions, inviting them to read and respond to lists of themes and descriptors. The research participant group eventually became unanimous in their support of my final submission of themes, verifying that this list of themes reflected their understanding of the emergent data.

Fourth, I believe that the knowledge gained from this inquiry could be generalized in some measure to a similar population of research participants (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). While I believe that the knowledge in this study can be generalized to a certain degree, I would encourage a judicious application of the knowledge to similar research populations. Essentially, it is impossible to replicate the exact research participant conditions associated

with this study, thereby making generalization a topic of careful discernment in the knowledge and awareness that others in a similar research participant pool may have experienced their life worlds in similar and dissimilar ways. Nevertheless, the knowledge gained in this inquiry is both formative and informative and as such should be used judiciously and sensitively where and when appropriate with similar research participant pools.

CHAPTER 4: Findings

Introduction

The findings of this descriptive phenomenological inquiry were based on written narrative accounts of both experience and meaning. The narratives were assessed by the researcher in order to create meaning units (categories, i.e., the experience of being hurt or feeling pain in response to a problematic relationship) that were later collapsed and developed into theme labels. A theme label, therefore, is one word that best summarized an emergent theme inherent in the research participants' narratives and related group discussions. The theme labels were then assessed by the researcher as contextualized in the participants' collective experiences of coping and finding meaning specific to a theme label. The theme label of pain, for instance, is understood and presented in this study in the broader context of coping with pain and therefore finding meaning in pain.

For the purpose of this inquiry, I defined the concept of coping as an internal process, be it short or long term, that assists in the negotiation or navigation of emotion, thoughts, and behaviors - in response to problematic life events caused by adverse circumstances and/or relationships that prove in the initial and longer term stages of their etiology to be non-optional. In the sense that being raised in evangelical fundamentalism was non-optional, the research participants revealed via the Life Review group that they had coped throughout the course of their lives with problematic and challenging relationships. Although strategies varied among the research participants (i.e., denial, intellectualizing, moving away, rebelling, complying, dutifully submitting, etc.), the common thread among the group was that they coped and found meaning in their fundamentalist orientations and the impact it had and continues to have on their lives.

One of the central coping mechanisms utilized by the research participants was that of finding meaning in healthy and unhealthy relationships, positive and negative experiences, and turbulent and calm emotions – all connected to their respective fundamentalist orientations. In this regard, the issue of finding meaning in life events and relationships was characterized by thoughtful reflection, ponderous evaluations, probing questions, future oriented forecasting, grieving history, making sense of the present, and remaining remarkably focused on the immediate and eventual outcome of their lives to date in light of the past. The research group was wonderfully given to meaning making in both the narratives and in oral group discussions.

A decision was made by the researcher to develop and maintain ten theme labels and the content specific to each theme as 'stand alone' descriptors as opposed to merging some of the theme labels thereby reducing the number of emergent themes. For the sake of expediency, it would have been easier in some measure to combine the theme labels. However, in considering the nature and content of each of the ten labels, I chose to retain the individuality of each label so as not to diminish the significance of each theme by marrying the theme to another relevant or closely associated theme.

In this regard, I believe that a stronger voice specific to the research participants will be heard as opposed to limiting or diminishing their voices via amalgamating the emergent content and resulting themes. The research participants are accustomed to not having strong voices and are presently in a process of increased openness, transparency, disclosure, and ownership of identity. Hence, the telling of the themes and related content needs to be thorough and complete to the extent that it was apparent and revealed in the written narratives and subsequent discussions.

Research Participants' Responses to Life Review Subject Areas

Preceding the emergent themes associated with the findings of this study, I chose to reveal some of the research participant responses to the Life Review topics that I believe assist in creating a richer understanding of the research participant group, including their thoughts and emotions surrounding Life Review and the research process, as well as the assigned topics areas. Although this section could arguably be placed in the preceding research group profile found in the Methodology section of this document, I chose instead to place it here as it seems especially relevant to the emergent themes that will be discussed at length in this chapter. The research participants' written and oral responses to the assigned subject areas generated rich data for this study despite focusing primarily on the written narratives. All of the participants appeared to invest themselves fully into the Life Review process as was evident in the extent to which their narratives were substantial, and also the extent to which they engaged in thoughtful and reflective discussion following the reading of the narrative.

The writing and reading of the narratives generated not only rich data, but also a significant degree of pain associated with remembering, frequent laughter often times in disbelief concerning the content of disclosures, and intense discussion in response to difficult and challenging revelations. Although group therapy is not a central component of the Life Review format and process, Life Review nevertheless had a significant therapeutic influence and impact on the research participants' lives. All of the participants expressed interest in and attraction to the Life Review theory and process and without reservation invested themselves in the process of remembering, writing their narratives, disclosing, listening, and supporting one another in a manner that was appropriately caring given the subject matter.

The participants expressed interest in continuing in a similar Life Review group where and when appropriate.

The following participant quotes, therefore, best represent the participants' thoughts and feelings associated with: 1) choosing to participate in this study, 2) major branching points in life, 3) my family of origin, 4) my parenting practices, 5) the effects of evangelical fundamentalism on my life, and 6) the meaning of my life.

Why I chose to participate in this study:

Life Review session two focused on why the research participants chose to participate in this study. Most of the participants chose to participate in order to talk out loud about their respective experiences and to normalize their experiences in this regard by meeting with other like-minded individuals who shared similar backgrounds. Despite their similarities, each of the participants brought their unique and diverse experiences and interpretations into the group, thereby making the group experience both rich and dynamic. Interestingly enough, the group discussions were not passive. Divergent views gave way to lively debate that sometimes spilled over into assessing each other's histories. This development impressed the researcher as being somewhat of a by-product of judgmental fundamentalism. Nevertheless, the participants engaged with one another in a spirit of hopefulness that no one would leave the group feeling disrespected or disenfranchised.

Participant Quote:

Why am I going into this group? Man – that's like kicking up serious emotional bile on purpose. Both my parents are advanced in years and health so if I was to make peace, now would be the time. One of my closest friends said that I need to deal with it if I'm to be effective in the church. So I thought this group would be good for me, not to make these

feelings, reactions and juvenile responses go away, but maybe give them enough air to look at them.

Participant Quote:

I have decided to participate in this group based on the deep emotional and spiritual impact that fundamentalism has had on my life. Being raised, educated and employed under such a sacred tent makes it difficult to live outside. This is my struggle. I have already moved out of the tent. However, the impact is deep and one does not simply shed the robe and put on the clothing of the world. How do I – a recovering fundamentalist – live and thrive outside of it? Also emotionally I seek like-minded people. I want to know that I am not alone.

Participant Quote:

I am interested in this group in because I am curious to explore the ways this experience shaped my spiritual life and beliefs. I know that my family need to go (to church) even though I have a knee jerk reaction to the evangelical culture i.e. singing the same chorus over and over again until the Spirit moves or somebody pretends it does, the anti-intellectual aspects of the evangelical church that values emotional response above critical thought, the entertainment factor in the service to evangelize and the Sunday School indoctrination. I admit I am reacting against something.

Participant Quote:

That's what moved me to this place and space. With the loss of both Mom and Dad this year, all this 'stuff in the box' is waiting to be sorted through under a good reading light no matter how dark and lonely the palliative care room is feeling at this moment. Like Dad in that hospital bed – something's dying in me, but something is yet very much alive and

vital...and it wants to be set free into a wider, wilder space – of love, yes, but not the 'anything-goes' kind. I'm in search of a faith-love that corresponds to ethics and beauty – ultimately to the form of Christ. I just feel myself straining intellectually for this goal, and I'm in such a hurry to understand and 'get it right', but it's not coming clear – it seems ploddingly slow. I'd like to get clear on what my obstacles are...and I'm hoping this group will help me with that.

Participant Quote:

I was raised overseas in a missionary family. I have been involved throughout my life with several fundamentalist institutions as well. This has impacted my life, both positively and negatively. There are some obvious issues I have to deal with being a missionary kid. However, there are also more subtle effects that may have more to do with coming from a fundamentalist background than being raised oversees in the missionary lifestyle. These are areas that I have only just begun to realize how they have impacted my life: who I am and why I feel the way I do sometimes. I wanted to join this Life Review group to have a chance to learn from other people with similar backgrounds.

Major branching points in my life:

Session three focused on major branching points in life wherein the research participants were able to identity and discuss significant turning points, learning experiences, transitions, relationships, and difficult decisions surrounding their fundamentalist backgrounds. The general theme of 'departing' became increasingly apparent as their respective journeys were made known. Each one in their own way began what is now believed to be a life long process of departing from the tentacles of fundamentalism that continues to ensnare their lives even today in some measure. Some branching points were

highly relational and involved the arduous process of separating from families of origins. A few of the participants continue to be in a process of individuation even today despite being seasoned adults with families of their own.

Participant Quote:

With respect to going away to university, "My cozy religious world was being expanded and I didn't know if it was wrong or right or just different. After much thought, discussion and anxiety, I made a very conscious choice to throw away my upbringing because it couldn't contain the new things I was learning and understanding. One of the consequences of coming out was I wrote a song that was my first real song (a relationship song that didn't mention or include God) and in an instant all 400 songs I'd written (folksy dogma) suddenly seemed old and false. I married not only my best friend, but one outside my Baptist upbringing. Anyone of 'mainstream churches' was held in suspicion in my Baptist upbringing and I married a Presbyterian with a much wilder past than I had experienced. I couldn't believe that a viewpoint so narrow had governed my life for so long. I was moving farther and farther away from my roots. I stayed away from the established church for about 9 years and nourished a distain for it. Too narrow, too judgmental, and too socially conditioned or structured for me. I wanted freedom and non-responsibility. Church felt from the 'old 'way of life that was too stagnant.

Participant Quote:

"...it marks the end of my leadership in the Christian church. Now, four years later, I have little association if any with evangelical fundamentalism. I long now for two things, meaning from this past journey and a new branch – direction – and certainty of what God has planned next.

Participant Quote:

My parents took me to Youth for Christ concerts often. As a teenager I loved the music. Music, through these and other small moments, became a huge part of my life, consuming a great deal of my time. Another seemingly insignificant factor of my childhood were the many recurring nightmares I would have. I remember them in detail today. Do they affect my art, my films? They often drive it.

Participant Quote:

Next memory: I attend Liberty Baptist College. Could there be a more ironic name for one of the crossways in light of life? I think I'm going off to college for the 'growing up' of it. I find out mere days into it that it is more restrictive than home. All students MUST attend church, and church will be Jerry Falwell's, unless you have special parental permission to attend elsewhere. There is a Gestapo-like search of dorms every Sunday AM to make sure everyone has gone to church. I am in the fundamentalist 'camp' and everywhere I turn is this reminder that America has a manifest destiny to protect the truths of God. Somehow that works out to look clean-cut and sparkly, with perfect four-part harmony. The reigning interpretation of scripture is literal, as is the application of school rules. I find a few 'radical' (for that place) artsy friends, and make my truncated way through two years. The professors are very kind. But that can't make up for the fogginess in that Lynchburg valley. I imagine getting out in two years (engagement to my boyfriend back home) without a fight from my parents. Dad has managed to persuade my boyfriend into being youth pastor at the church Dad is pastoring, that's another story!

Participant Quote:

My parents were encouraged to send their children to boarding school for their education. I will never forget the sick feeling in the pit of my stomach the moment my parents drove off the school campus and I was left on my own. I was told that this was necessary in order for my parents to continue to serve God. My parents did not talk with me about how I might feel and no emotion was shown when we said our goodbyes. My parents were not allowed to visit me and I was seldom allowed to go home. The school has a dress code and strict rules for behavior. These are enforced with several consequences including spanking.

My family of origin:

The fourth Life Review session focused on family of origin. This session was likely the most emotionally dynamic of all the sessions. One by one, each of the research participants shared openly, some for the first time, what it was like growing up in their respective families of origin. Central to the narratives was the issue of unfulfilled longing for relationship with their parents. Each of the participants expressed grief over the fact that their respective parents were limited in their capacity to engage with their children in a manner that exceeded the superficial and the life style standards associated with their religious orientation. There was limited room for critical thought and discussion before being dismissed as non-compliant or being suspect in some measure due to the emergence of divergent points of view. Others in the group had seemingly positive family of origin experiences wherein Mom and Dad would entertain difficult discussions for a period of time before resorting to their dogmatic stance on issues related to matters of faith and life. The

theme of this particular session in essence was that of longing to be known, to be heard, to be understood, and maybe even emotionally and intellectually embraced.

Participant Quote:

How we looked at church was almost as important as our religious beliefs because it somehow set an example. This was equated with showing God our best. I've left my family but I still have to deal with them. I suppose without delving too deep, there is a family of origin I've always longed to be a part of, which I didn't get in this lifetime. A   family that truly loved, understood, and respected me. And saw me as I was, not what they wished me to be and didn't react to me. To make things worse, in quieter moments I've wondered if I've ever given to them what I most needed from them.

Participant Quote:

My older sister – the black sheep of the family – is most like Jesus to me. She loves all the people that Jesus loves. She is constantly befriending the down and out and caring for them. Even more moving, three years ago despite her alienation from my Dad, she gave him a kidney without even questioning how it might affect her in the long run. She is the least fundamental in our family with her cigarettes, lack of church affiliation and yet she exudes Jesus. I love who she is.

Participant Quote:

The Superman effect. Confident in our Pentecostal beliefs, we knew that God was on our side. We knew that God was working through us and using us for great things. The 'fruit' is the product of our commitment and favor with God. We are called for great things and He has put us in this place at this time to use our gifts for the Kingdom. There is an urgency to act now to shine as an example to the world and we are proud of the way God is

using us. That's a hell of a pressure, one that has tainted my self-concept and created a great deal of stress and feelings of inadequacy in my life, especially comparing myself to my father. Am I out of the will of God because I have not done great things, the world would not recognize me as having done great things, and in my late thirties I'm not sure what I should do to achieve great things. It is only recently that I have begun changing my thinking; saving the world is not my responsibility.

Participant Quote:

I know where the fear comes from for me. It's a fear of losing home. And 'home', as loving and belonging a place as it is in my memory, included this religious notion of certainty and absolutism. SO when my intellectual inquiry leads me into space of ambiguity, the fear factor is heightened, because it feels like it threatens or puts in jeopardy my belonging to home. Home here is not only family of origin - it's also church, the Christian faith, friendships, theology, my interpretive tradition.

Participant Quote:

I am looking forward to a time when I can have a better relationship with my parents; or rather, deal with them in a way that doesn't leave me crumpled on the ground for days afterwards. A question I have is how to stay in a relationship with people who hurt you, who are fundamentalists? Every relationship has hurt, of course, but in this relationship, I feel powerless. The Ten Commandments say we are to honor our parents – is that a fundamentalist statement? How do I do that and not let them run me over? I cold stand up to them, but I am not sure the repercussions would accomplish my goal of looking forward to a visit with them without fear. The last time I stood up to them I got sent to boarding school!

<u>My parenting practices:</u>

Session five focused on the research participants' parenting practices in response to how they were raised from childhood. All of the participants struggled in one form or another with the issue of parenting, wanting to err in favor of grace and freedom as opposed to their experiences of intolerance and pressured conformity. The narratives and related discussions were characterized by painful memories punctuated by tender and heartfelt disclosures surrounding parenting practices. The research participants expressed their respective desires to parent their children in a manner that honored their individual gift sets and interests. The research participants were protective of their children in the sense that they did not want them exposed to fundamentalist ideology or practices. Instead, the participants desired to have open and honest communication with their children that would lead to processes and discussions of exploration and discovery, thereby honoring their children's capacity to think critically while assessing situations and relationships with confidence.

Participant Quote:

When people ask me about my kids' spiritual lives, I often tell them I'm raising them not to be 'little Christians', but that I want them to love God. I want them to find a relationship that is theirs without the encumbrances of the church around them. However, that being said, I'm afraid my contempt for the religiosity of the cultural church has rubbed off on both of them because they've both complained, unprovoked, of the 'churchiness' of our new congregation. I don't know how they even know what that is. So I've spent a bit of time with them talking about the true church versus the cultural church that is more like club med for the religiously inclined.

Participant Quote:

My wife and I have determined not to shelter our kids in Christian institutions, in fact as parents we have taken on the major responsibility in teaching our kids about a relationship with God and worship. Furthermore we have worked to create openness to sexual discussion in our home; we have also resolved not to react to sexual exploration or discovery with punishment. This is a tough one. My oldest is 12 and is discovering the vastness of the internet. My upbringing and my background in fundamentalism wants me to react with an immediate resolve to punish for such discoveries or to ban him from friends' homes where I know they are probably watching things they shouldn't. What we have discovered is that by not reacting we are creating a safe place for our kids to discuss their sexuality, they can ask us questions or tell us things they have seen without the fear of punishment. Now we get to add our perspective to what they have seen. My father was really good at scaring the hell out of me regarding the consequences of sin. Fear is a disastrous way to manipulate people into a lifestyle. It influences every aspect of life and cripples development. I have determined that fear is a substitute for relationship. I don't want my kids to live a certain way because of fear, nor do I want them to miss out on living this life to the fullest because of fear.

Participant Quote:

Much of my parenting points are reactions to evangelical fundamentalism. Humor is a defensive way to distract from whatever is causing discomfort or satirizing what I disagree with without directly engaging it. Humility is not something fundamentalists are known for; arrogance is more the association. Even though we want to be like Jesus, humility in evangelical fundamentalism meant turning the other cheek to our enemies. Raising children was about behavior – I see it as about helping my kids to learn and grow.

Participant Quote:

And I'm an idealist. This comes from my fundamentalist background. I don't think it's bad, it just needed serious balancing-out. What does the ideal of a human directing themselves God-ward really look like when it has a crackling voice, pimples sprouting on the forehead, and girl-angst? How do I model 'loving God' to a seven-year old? What about the ideal of loving others as yourself? How does this translate to my boys? Discipline in our home looks quite different than it did in my home. How does Jesus become meaningfully known to them with no memory verses, no Sunday night service and sometimes no Sunday morning one either!

Participant Quote:

My first response to writing about parenting in light of my fundamentalist background is one of reaction. I've always had a strong sense that I wanted to parent differently than how I was parented. I would say that most evangelical fundamentalist homes could probably be described as authoritarian and disciplinarian, which is my experience as well. However, knowing this is my experience and that permissiveness would be the instinctive reaction, I have struggled to create a balance.

<u>The effects of evangelical fundamentalism on my life:</u>

The sixth session, focusing on the effects of evangelical fundamentalism in the lives of the research participants, was poignant, reflective, and emotionally alive. Tears flowed from some of the participants as they recalled times and events that shaped their lives irrecoverably. Sacred and quiet moments ensued during the course of the session as the participants openly considered the effects of fundamentalism in each of their lives long-term. This particular session was probably the least dynamic in terms of group interaction. Instead,

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the ethos of the evening was quiet, reflective, caring, and supportive as each participant shared their respective experiences that were both similar and dissimilar.

Participant Quote:

In some ways, the best way to describe the effect of evangelical fundamentalism on me as an adult is to describe how freedom hits me now. What I feel free from or what I seek to feel free from. I recognize that freedom in all its permissive and abused glory is the one thing that I'm driven to seek. I can only glimpse a bit of the oppression I felt growing up by looking at my appetite for freedom. Not so much a freedom to 'do', but a freedom from my own judgment, and God's. Even others. I often feel constrained; the way I look, the way I act, and the way I speak. What's acceptable. The effect of evangelical fundamentalism on me is an incurable cancer that permeates every thought and action I undertake, in the name of love, God, friendship and art. You name it, it's lurking there somewhere to qualify my soul.

Participant Quote:

When I consider the effects of evangelical fundamentalism on my life, I think immediately of the wounds. There are several wounds that still pain me, some of them still festering and open and some just scars remind me and direct me. One scar is intellectual blindness. Another large and present wound that I retain is fear. Christian children are immunized with fear, a tool for protecting them from the dangers of the world. My parents, Sunday School teachers, Pastors and friends all built lessons on the platform of fear. Through my teen I lived a textbook Christian life, but I am now convinced that my purity was not based on a spectacular relationship with God, but rather on fear.

Participant Quote:

Growing up with evangelical fundamentalism as part of my weekly experience has affected my life and the way I look at the world. I have not been to a Pentecostal church in many years by choice. I react to two things from my Pentecostal experience: the anti-intellectual basis of my church experience and the unquestioning belief by church members that everything is a part of God's will and his hand is in every detail of our lives. My Pentecostal experience said that if something is not caused by God, it must be Satanic. One of the most profound effects of my evangelical experience has been the need to be 'used by God'. We were taught that we were meant for great things. However, if we are not achieving great things it must mean that we are not in God's favor because he is not making things happen for us. This expectation was unrealistic and led to disappointment. Again, not achieving the exceptional in our lives and careers leads to the guilt that we must not be spiritual enough.

Participant Quote:

Sometimes I feel like an alien in the church and without. So I've got these two polar opposite impulses – countering and embracing over nearly every decision. Part of my critical thinking comes from 'counter-culturing' – thinking about hidden agenda. But this isn't aimed at the world for me – it is very much aimed at evangelical 'crusades' of any mass-kind, mega-churches, and the counting of people making 'decisions' – I have an aversion to the Billy Graham conversion approach. I don't want my kids to be tainted in their faith-journeys by any Christian marketing approaches. I get a Christian bookstore flyer in the mail and I'm literally repulsed by 99.5% of what I see being sold. To be fair, I have it toward

New Age-y and motivational/business speakers of any stripe. I don't trust mass-persuasion, pyramid schemes, or happy, sparkly testimonials for products of any kind.

Participant Quote:

Another effect is that I have never been able to disagree with or confront my parents on any issue because it is seen as disrespectful and in some ways questioning God and they were supposedly 'in tune' with Him. Any questioning I have ever attempted did not bode well for me. Perhaps this is partly why I never turned from my faith; I was too afraid of the consequences. I think that being raised in this background makes you feel a lot of unnecessary guilt. This is something I struggle with a great deal. I have felt guilty over having anything nice, about relaxing, taking holidays, and so on. I have felt guilty over not being able to please my parents and for choosing to be different from them. I have felt very guilty over being such a difficult teenager for them, and I have felt guilty for not being able to get over them leaving. I have felt like somehow I should be able to handle all of the stress, sadness, disappointment, and loneliness better if I was truly doing things right. I feel terribly guilty for saying anything negative about my parents and putting them in a bad light. Probably the most profound effect that evangelical fundamentalism has had on me is that is has robbed me of my parents. They have been gone my entire adult life and I wonder if they ever were really 'there' in the first place. There were times as a young adult I didn't have a home to go home to.

<u>The meaning of my life:</u>

The dynamic of the seventh session focusing on the meaning of my life was similar to the ethos of the previous session. Once again, while nearing the end of the Life Review process, the research participants were rather reflective and ponderous about the meaning of

their lives. Thoughtful consideration to the outcome of their lives to date became increasingly apparent as each participant disclosed their understanding of their respective meanings. Once again, responses to this particular focus were characterized by painful emotion, the experience of lost opportunity, curiosities surrounding what life might have been like under different circumstances, and how to go about making sense of life in light of the past.

Participant Quote:

I've thought all week about what effect my evangelical fundamentalist upbringing has had on me regarding the meaning, or meanings of my life, but the only things that have come to mind is what wasn't there. I don't know if that means my life was devoid of meaning, except that meaning wasn't mirrored in the way I could see or sense it. Thankfully, the meaning of life is something I find in process and is as ever changing as I am, in my journey towards a wholeness of spirit. It is like a buried treasure I continually find in different spots because I so quickly forget where I last found it. Like beauty, it is less about 'what is', and more about in a way of seeing 'what is'. And the pursuit of such is the foundation of my life.

Participant Quote:

It has been meaningful in life to know who I am. It seems to me that the meaning of life has to do with relationships. My meaning in life is about family, my kids and my wife and becomes more so every year. My heart sings and cries every time I look at or think about them. I am desperate for their well-being. I find a great deal of meaning in creating but have not done enough of that to satisfy that meaning. Life is about harmony. Meaning in life is best understood, felt, and appreciated when it is complimented by something or someone else.

Participant Quote:

Meaning is nonetheless fluid for me. What I am certain of today may be the reason I am banging my hand to my head a few years from now in derision (How could I have been so stupid? So naïve? So SURE?). I'm becoming more aware of myself in being in 'certainty' stance – so I'm second guessing my impulses, putting brakes on my visceral reactions to things. I do not want to be an alarmist chicken-little, statistic-bending, short-on-the nuance-details ignoramus. On the other hand, I don't ever want to be a do-nothing. Somewhere in my psychic memory is the poem that ends with: "and they came for me…." Auschwitz is somehow impressed upon me – the fear that horrible things are being done as the result of horrible ideas, all the time. I'm just not sure how to connect the dots from the big things happening out there that I may or may not be right about, and my little life…

Introduction to Themes

The emergent themes specific to this study were constructed according the process identified in the Methodology chapter of this document. The themes are descriptive in nature and reflect the content of the research participants' written narratives and their subsequent group discussions that ensued following the reading of each narrative. The themes are not prescriptive nor are they predictive. They are simply a representation of what I found to be the general experience of the group as a result of reading through and evaluating the participant's descriptive accounts of their respective and collective experiences. The related group discussions served as a secondary source of data for this inquiry and similarly influenced the shaping of the emergent themes. As previously mentioned, I isolated key elements of the narratives that I thought best represented both individual and group

experience, leaving the certain details of a participant's story out of a theme due to its particularity that did not appear to influence the emergence of a theme one way of the other.

I then gave thought to various psychologically sensitive words or descriptors that I felt best represented the overall experience of the group specific to having been raised in a later departed from evangelical fundamentalism in some measure. These descriptors were scrutinized by two professional and therefore objective colleagues and two personal peers, all of whom were familiar with research processes and practices as well as issues related to fundamentalism and the effects that it can have on people's lives. Finally, the emergent themes were submitted to the research participants via four separate member checks until such time that the participants as a group concurred with the theme titles and their descriptions based on their familiarity with their own stories.

As previously mentioned, the themes are enveloped by the greater context of experience and meaning. The themes therefore need to be read with the ideas of experience and meaning in mind. Unresolved Pain, for instance, is best understood and appreciated in the enveloping dimensions of the participants' experiences of unresolved pain and the meanings that the research participants attached to the experience. In so doing, a fuller and more complete understanding and appreciation for the theme will be created.

Theme One: Unresolved Pain

Participant quote:

Probably the most profound effect that evangelical fundamentalism has had on me is that it robbed me of my parents. They have been gone my entire adult life and I wonder if they ever were "there" in the first place. I had to learn to be a grown up by myself. As a

young adult, there were times when I didn't have a home to go home to. I learned to depend on only myself.

Participant quote:

Dad loved to work and this is where our relationship experienced tension. Nothing was ever good enough for him. This translated into his relationship with me. I hated working for him because he always told me it was wrong or not good enough. We started a custom cabinet business together when I was 20. Each afternoon after he was done teaching he would show up at the shop and rip to shreds the work we had done. To this day, my father criticizes and questions most of the decisions I make. He visited in September and had a talk with me; he was concerned that I am leading my family astray by not attending church.

Participant quote:

I've said my EF hangover leads me to assume guilt, condemnation and/or judgment in copious tendencies. With that comes an overreaction to "fix" the source of these feelings. I often overcompensate in my fixing whether its in brokenness in relationship, or a misunderstanding, or a misinterpreted action. I tend to go overboard to make it right and frequently make it worse.

Without fail, all of the research participants described in detail their personal experiences of being pained and experiencing unresolved pain specific to their fundamentalist backgrounds. Their collective pain was generally associated with problematic relationships with parents, family members, and fundamentalist leadership. Parents in particular were characterized as being primary sources of pain due to their dogmatic actions, words, and behaviors that came to bear on the participants' lives during their formative and later years. A central theme associated with the participants' collective

experience of unresolved pain is the issue of abandonment, or at the very least, a parent's disinterest in knowing who the child was throughout his or her formative years into adulthood. The unresolved nature of the pain is due to the fact that many of the participants' parents to this day are not overly interested in the fabric of their adult children's lives, their personalities, their hopes, joys, sorrows, and their love for their own children.

Most of the pain was associated with the research participants' experiences or lack thereof concerning what it meant to be loved, respected, affirmed, and known despite whether or not the participants embraced the ideologies and practices of fundamentalism. Equally painful was the experience of being judged or unduly criticized for independence of thought and or behavior that in some measure was perceived by parents as deviating from fundamentalist norms. The idea of thinking for one's self while having the liberty to make healthy choices in life was frequently undermined and treated as suspect by apparently well meaning parents who would go so far as to suggest that their child's quest for independence was possibly the work of Satan.

Even today, many of the research participants live with emotional pain and self doubt as a result of aging parents who continue to undermine their adult children's sense of autonomy and confidence in decision making concerning life choices. The hold that some of the research participants' parents continue to have on their children is cult-like. In a sense, these relationships can be described as abusive due to the continued intellectual and emotional carping that results from parents unable to accept that their children may have moved on from fundamentalism. Again, the hold of fundamentalist dogma and its related persistence on the lives of the research participants was overwhelmingly apparent.

Theme Two: Unfulfilled Longing

Participant quote:

I mentioned in one of the past sessions the interaction at 19 with my parents that left me sobbing in the bathroom 'it's so important, it's so important'. At the core of that is the profound heartache of not being understood or seen clearly, or more poignant and accurately, in not being received. Almost like rejection (which it was in essence), but without the activeness of rejection. It's like you give of yourself and there is a hollow silence, a resounding emptiness. I can't communicate how deeply, deeply lonely this feels. It would take pages and pages to describe all the direction this loneliness leads to in my life as it seeks to quench its bottomless desire for home.

Participant quote:

Do my girls feel they have to overcompensate to me when they have done something wrong? There is a natural desire to make things right when a healthy relationship is broken, but there is also a darker side in which overcompensation tries to recapture something that never was. Which is a contradiction in terms, for one can't recapture what wasn't. So it seems in trying to recapture something one wishes for, like a healthy relationship, is really about longing. And it is precisely in this longing that I understand what I never sensed as a child. That longing is wonderfully completed, resolved and answered in a healthy parent/child relationship, which mirrors the parent/child relationship modeled in the God of the Bible.

All of the research participants in one form or another identified unfulfilled longings amid being raised in fundamentalism. Central to their unfulfilled longings for identity, significance, meaning, and purpose was the absence either in part or in whole of affirmation

and validation from parents and fundamentalist leadership. Parents were often experienced as being emotionally absent or emotionally controlling and manipulative in some measure.

Alternatively, some parents were experienced as being emotionally present to varying degrees but often times when the child was in compliance with the parents' world view and day to day interpretations of the view and its application to life. Hence, emotional availability was experienced as being conditional on the child's capacity to perform or adopt prevailing fundamentalist views and practices, and was therefore somewhat manipulative. A few of the research participants expressed that this dynamic is operative even today, and that longing for their parent's validation and respect is as strong now as it was during their formative years.

Theme Three: Crippling Fear

Participant quote:

For all my moves in life from career to marriage to friends to spiritual views, there is always a layer of fear in behind it asking 'Is this right?' that is rooted in my parents caution towards life and the Baptist fear of doing something wrong, inappropriate or 'out of God's will'. For all my bravado, it's sometimes merely a reaction to this caution, like I'm trying to overcompensate.

Participant quote:

The birth of my first child was a fairly traumatic experience where both of us came close to death, myself in particular. At the time, no one could understand my sheer panic every time I woke up and my daughter wasn't there. I couldn't really understand it either. The only person who did was my sister. I guess she was the only one who instinctively knew

the abandonment issue I was facing (referring to abandonment by parents on mission field in a foreign country) since she's been through it herself.

The experience of crippling fear seemingly kept the research participants in a perpetual state of undermined confidence characterized by their pervasive need for certainty amid ambiguity. The participants were raised in a faith and home life paradigm characterized predominantly by conformity at all cost and as such lived in the fear of emotional and physical repercussions in the event of deviating from prescribed norms. Value and worth were assigned to conformists, whereas non-conformists were assigned emotional, relational, and sometimes physical dismissal.

The undercurrent of fear informed the degree to which the research participants engaged in the prevailing culture of secularism and also the degree to which they maintained and practiced fundamentalist and worship related traditions and practices. The research participants' fear was evident on a few occasions when, during the course of the Life Review group, they would challenge one another in response to what they heard during the reading of a participant's narrative. In this regard, the ethos of the group changed from a safe place to a place of threat and unease. The researcher assessed this development as residual fundamentalist threat revealing itself through verbal challenges seemingly in an effort to contain, control, challenge, or even dismiss the participant who held a divergent point of view, or at the very least, a point of view that was complex and therefore problematic to others' points of views and or beliefs.

As the facilitator of the group, I drew this development to the group's attention. A discussion ensued surrounding the emergence of this particular issue. Almost immediately, the group realized that it was acting out its historical relationship strategies within the greater

context of their fundamentalist histories characterized by unwavering certainty. The discussion became meaningful as the group members eventually saw themselves as 'in recovery' while continuing to address the residual effects of fundamentalism in their respective styles of relating to others.

Theme Four: Coping Strategies

Participant quote:

With the loss of both Mom and Dad this year, all this "stuff in the box" is waiting to be sorted through under a good reading light – no matter how dark and lonely the palliative care room is feeling at this moment. Like Dad in that hospital bed, something is dying in me, but something is yet very much alive and vital…and it wants to be set free into a wider, wilder space – of love, yes, but not the "anything goes" kind. I'm in search of a "faith-love" that corresponds to ethics and beauty – ultimately to the form of Christ. I just feel myself straining intellectually for this goal, and I'm in such a hurry to understand and "get it right" but it's not coming clear – it seems ploddingly slow. I'd like to get clear on what my obstacles are.

Participant quote:

Conflict, unmet expectations, violated principles, utopia shattered. Branching moment? I've bumped head on into my own absolutism, my tenacious commitment to the idea/l, my lack of skill in negotiating my own integrity through the shoals of relationships, in holding onto my own truth without yielding to the other for the sake of peace and ongoing relationships, but also, holding on to my truth without demanding that the other yield to my way. I realized that all the gathered experience of my relating with Dad has been re-played with this friend (larger than life, charismatic, intelligent, against-the-grain, dogmatic in her

own way), and the broken relationship with her offers me the reflection to see who I become with this personality type, how I subordinate myself and then break out against this sort of authority.

The theme of coping strategies emerged amid the reading of the narratives and related group discussions. Each of the research participants identified various coping strategies that were created over time amid the prevailing fundamentalist ethos of home life. Strategies included but were not limited to leaving home, complying with fundamentalist rules and regulations, actively participating in fundamentalist culture while at the same time developing and maintaining an intellectual counter culture that gradually emerged into distancing behaviors and activities, blatant rebellion such as refusal to attend church worship services and related activities, and passively aggressively tolerating fundamentalism until such time as leaving home became a viable option.

Other coping strategies included intellectualizing the fundamentalist experience by attempting to locate it somewhere amid contending world views in fundamentalism versus secular humanism. In this sense, coping became an intellectual endeavor focused on attempting to deconstruct fundamentalism - even in the presence of parents who were either immediately offended by the endeavor, or were tolerant of their child's initiatives in this regard, or chose at times to engage in such a discussion despite their conclusions predictably resting in fundamentalist thought and belief. The challenge associated with this particular strategy was its vulnerability to immediate attack by those who were threatened by the intellectual challenges associated with such a discussion that would have likely exposed fundamentalism's dark side.

More recent coping mechanisms for a few of the research participants included not attending church, choosing instead to remain at home alone or with various family members. In some instances, these individuals and families opted for some form of devotional or activity that focused on the nature of God, while others simply elected to do something completely different such as an outdoor activity, if anything at all. Regardless, these individuals chose to separate themselves from church gatherings due to finding it difficult to relate to church culture.

Theme Five: Identity Formation

Participant quote:

To be human is to be made up of interaction with the community into which I have been "thrown" or "grown" and to which, no matter what occurs, I will always, in some way, belong. They say you can never go home...and that's as true as saying that you can never leave home.

Participant quote:

One of the most profound effects of my evangelical experience has been the need to be "used by God". We were taught that we were meant for great things. However, if we are not achieving great things it must mean that we are not in God's favor because he is not making things happen for us. We believed that we could expect our lives to be almost magical and witness God's grace all around us as we lived exceptional lives. This expectation was unrealistic and led to disappointment. Again, not achieving the exceptional in our lives and careers leads to the guilt that we/I must not be spiritual enough. Still, I have lived with the need to change/impact the world even though my interests were not to convert it to Pentecostal beliefs.

None of the research participants were comfortable with their historical identities as being wrapped up in and or associated with fundamentalism. One of the participants was able to break away from this identity at a relatively young age leading up to and during post-secondary years of education. The other four participants, however, had a more difficult experience in coming to terms with their fundamentalist identities in that being a fundamentalist was their normal throughout their formative years. In this sense, they were socialized into fundamentalism resulting in this religious paradigm or orientation as being their normal. The other participant, however, was raised in a fundamentalist denominational orientation but somehow managed to formulate independence of thought and behavior a few years earlier than the others.

Overall, it wasn't until the participants moved away from home and attended Christian oriented post-secondary educational institutions that they began to appreciate world views other than fundamentalism, and that their 'normal' wasn't necessarily considered by other Christians and non-believers as being normal. The 'us and them' tension was no longer related to fundamentalism and secularism. It was now related to the participants being fundamentalists within a broader population of Christians who did not espouse or adhere to fundamentalist ideologies and practices. This realization naturally begged the question concerning what it meant to be a Christian if the participants were not fundamentalist Christians.

I should distinguish between what is normal and what is healthy. Fundamentalism for the participants was 'their learned normal' in the sense that they were raised in and participated in fundamentalism as would any other person being raised in a particular socio-religious culture or sub-culture. Over time, however, the research participants began to

recognize that their rigid interpretations of faith and life were being deconstructed, assessed, and evaluated by virtue of meeting other Christian-types who expressed a faith in God minus all of the encumbrances associated with a form of religious fundamentalism. The research participants inadvertently found themselves in varying degrees of personal assessment, somewhat to their initial shock and dismay, the normalcy or lack thereof of their histories that were steeped in fundamentalism.

At some point in each of their lives, the research participants began to critically assess their fundamentalist histories. One of the first questions being asked was whether or not the participants were allowed to question their religious orientations, and if so, to what extent did they have permission within themselves to question - before questioning became a source of guilt and shame. Essentially, the participants experienced inner conflict surrounding whether or not there was freedom within themselves and within their home life to question fundamentalist ideologies, commitments, and practices.

It is my view that the participants were beginning to individuate relative to being raised in evangelical fundamentalism. Inherent in their processes of individuation from family of origin was the daunting and arduous task of individuating from a dogmatic, pervasive, controlling, and rigid religious orientation that they had known and been a part of since infancy. It is my understanding based on my experience with the participant group that each one desired to individuate in a way that was healthy and productive. In this regard, all of the participants engaged in a process of thoughtful and critical evaluation concerning their religious orientations. Their commitment to personal integrity appeared to motivate them to pursue a faith that made sense to them amid what they had previously learned about Christianity and the evangelical fundamentalist church.

The participants were also mainly focused on creating and maintaining identities characterized by openness and curiosity; keeping that which made sense in regard to theological assumptions, beliefs, and related practices, while learning to let go of and discard aspects of fundamentalism that over time proved to be hindrances to personal, interpersonal, intellectual, and relational well-being. The issue of identity, therefore, as it relates to the research participants is about creating and maintaining personal health and well-being regardless of the prevailing circumstances or cultural influences, be they fundamentalist or otherwise.

Identity formation is therefore central to the research participants' lives as they unfold over time their thoughts, beliefs, preferences, and values. In this regard, none of the participants wanted to abandon their faiths in their entirety. Rather, the participants wanted to thoughtfully assess and evaluate the credibility of their fundamentalist histories and beliefs in light of what they know to be true about their lives today and the worlds in which they live. All of the participants struggled and continue to struggle with locating their identities within their faith orientations amid the prevailing secular society of which they are a part.

With respect to locating their identities on a continuum somewhere between evangelical fundamentalism and liberal secularism, the research participants had and continue to have internal tension surrounding what is permissible to think and to do and to believe, and what is off limits, as it were, before crossing a line and thereby transgressing historical and well-entrenched dogmas and certainties concerning negative consequences, historically referred to as 'falling from grace', or 'living in sin', or becoming 'wayward'. In this regard, the identities of sinner or saint are paramount. No one in fundamentalism wants to be labeled as a sinner. Yet critical thinking is often perceived as opening the door to

becoming something less than a saint, or increased speculation from the greater fundamentalist community that the one doing the questioning is perhaps deviating from the basic tenants of the faith and therefore no longer conforms to the prevailing criteria associated with fundamentalist purity. Hence, the burden on the departing, whether the departures are philosophical, theological, and or practical, or a combination of all of the above, is extremely emotionally, psychologically, and interpersonally expensive, usually resulting in some degree of relational and irrecoverable fracture.

Theme Six: God and the Church

Participant quote:

Growing up with evangelical fundamentalism as part of my weekly experience has affected my life and the way I look at the world. I have not been to a Pentecostal church in many years by choice. I react to two things from my experience; the anti-intellectual basis of my church experience and the unquestioning belief by church members that everything is part of God's will and his hand is in our daily lives. A focus on biblical teaching is not anti-intellectual. However, the denial and ignorance of other aspects of life such as history, science, socio-cultural studies, etc, in favor of exclusive use of the bible created a culture of anti-intellectualism. My Pentecostal history said that if something is not caused by God, it must be Satanic.

Aside from the influence of parents and families of origin, the other two significant and powerful influencing factors in the lives of the research participants included God and the Churches of which they are a part in some measure. Two of the research participants do not attend a church in the conventional sense but associate regularly with people of like faith, or not, albeit in informal and highly social milieus. The remaining three participants attend

and participate in various forms of evangelical church life that are not known to be fundamentalist in nature, theologically restrictive nonetheless, or at the very least, committed to denominational affiliations and statements of belief.

God and the Church for the research participants have historically fulfilled dual purposes; one being a safe haven amid spiritual and relational turbulence and or unrest, the other being authoritative and punitive if and when the believing saint 'falls from grace' as it were and becomes in need of restorative intervention, usually experienced as some form of punishment and alienation until such time that 'sinner turned saint' paid their penance while eventually making their way back into the fold. In essence, God is the dispenser of grace and consequences associated with sin, and the Church is the vehicle through which the application of grace and discipline is made manifest. Regardless of how it all comes together in some form of divine and man-made intervention, God and the Church play the parental roles of nurture and correction.

As a group, the research participants described 'arms length' relationships to God and the church, not really knowing from one incident, occurrence, or relationship to the next, whether or not God would be pleased with their thoughts, beliefs, emotions, reactions, interactions, and associations. And the church continued to be predictably unpredictable in its orientation and functions, reported to be a place of healing and restoration, while being rather knee-jerk in its response to those who knowingly or unknowingly tested the theological and lifestyle boundaries and limitations inherent in the denominational preferences and practices.

The participants expressed appreciation for the ideologies of Scripture reflected in Biblical stories such as that of the prodigal son. In this case, the father upon seeing his son in

the distance, ran to his son, threw his arms around him, and later held a party in his honors regardless of the fact that the son squandered his father's inheritance. This poignant vision of God's grace, when distilled through church disciplinary processes, for instance, is seldom if ever experienced in application. Instead, church intervention for the repentant sinner is generally according to rules and regulations designed to ensure conformity to existing behavioral norms. It became apparent that the participant group at this point in their lives was choosing instead to focus on the core truths of the Bible, meaning that the overall message of the Bible is about reconciliation and restoration of relationship. The group shunned, for the most part, current practices surrounding church discipline, choosing instead to focus on what it means to restore someone to the community via open and honest dialogue and ongoing commitment to relationship as opposed to the easier route of enforced conformity to a prescribed list of behavior modifications. In this regard, the group expressed concern for the eventual outcome of their relationships with God and the church, desiring to re-visit the core values inherent in Scripture, and thinking of ways in which these values could be operative in their lives, the lives of their families, and their influence in the communities, both sacred and secular.

Theme Seven: Being a Parent

Participant quote:

Today, as a parent, I feel the effects of fundamentalism in a positive and negative way. I'm so aware of the shaping influence of the culture, especially the 'pop' culture and feel like I need to be on the alert all the time, and coach myself to not be afraid to say no, even if all else are saying yes. But it's so hard to say no when everyone (it seems) is saying yes. But then I second guess myself – "is this the fundamentalist impulse?" I don't want the

kids to have the same baggage of fear of the world, nor do I want them to feel alienated just for the sake of being different. So I've got these two polar opposite impulses – countering and embracing – over nearly every decision, from what DVD to let them watch, or song to let them download, or game to rent to play on the Nintendo.

Of high priority to the research participants was the issue of being redemptive parents as opposed to punitive in the event that their children rebelled in some measure from the values and practices associated with their respective home lives. All of the participants expressed concern for their parenting practices in the sense that they do not want to repeat patterns associated with their childhood experiences, and that their core values would be evident in the manner in which they influenced their children's lives. Of specific concern was the influence of secularism in the lives of their children.

The participants were sensitive to maintaining some core values and beliefs based on their religious heritages and orientations, while at the same time, concerned over the degree to which their children were being influenced by secularism, not unlike their parents' concerns rising out of fundamentalism, although with much less intensity, dogma, certainty, and enforced conformity. Instead, the research group appeared to be engaging their children in the development of critical thinking skills, attempting to help them think through the variables associated with issues and decision making.

The research participants' concerns surrounding their efforts to meaningfully raise their children in the prevailing culture of secularism was realized in what could be defined as their approach to parenting by way of encouraging integration of thought, belief, and practice, as opposed to an imposed standards of belief and conduct by which one's personal worth and meaning was measured and tested. Instead of being censored by the community,

the research participants wanted to create within their children's mindset a healthy form of self-censoring, not in relation to an outside standard prescribed by the church or an organization or a person, but an internal 'radar' that might alert their children to assess, evaluate, and think critically through the issues, and not just accept a proposition or a trend or a societal norm just because everyone else thinks it is acceptable, right, or even moral.

The research participants were therefore sensitive to not repeat their experiences of having been parented within a fundamentalist paradigm, choosing instead to forego the rigidity associated with that particular era of parenting while attempting to formulate parenting processes that would embrace collaborative assessment and the development of critical thinking skills. The participants valued critical thinking, responsibility for self, making wise and informed decisions, treating their children as people, respecting their child's emerging capacity to be and to choose and to mature within certain boundaries until such time as they became independent. The group reflected a balanced approach to parenting in this regard and chose not to be heavy-handed in the application of their personal spiritual and religious beliefs, choosing instead to live out a life of peace, generosity, guidance, care for people, concern for the environment, attention given to critical thinking, and what it means to live respectfully and meaningfully within a pluralistic society that may or may not choose to approach life and faith in a similar manner.

Theme Eight: Engaging Culture

Participant quote:

Part of my critical thinking comes from "counter-culturing" – thinking about hidden agenda. But this isn't all aimed at "the world" for me – it's very much aimed at evangelical

"crusades" of any mass-kind, mega-churches, and the counting of people making "decisions". Sometimes I feel like an alien both in the church and without.

Participant quote:

During the fifteen years of my life that I spent working with youth I observed that evangelical fundamentalism had some negative influences on parenting; I found that the students who were most sheltered in most cases had some of the deepest, darkest behaviors. There is a movement in evangelical fundamentalism to keep our children from the world. There is a belief that the more removed from the world a child is the more likely they are to walk in the light or in the law of God. I discovered the opposite is true. My wife and I are determined not to shelter our kids in Christian institutions, in fact, as parents we have taken on the majority of the responsibility in teaching our kids about a relationship with God and worship. Furthermore, we have worked to create openness to sexual discussion in our home; we have also resolved not to react to sexual exploration or discovery with punishment.

The impetus behind the research participants paying so much attention to their parenting practices amid the continued rise of secularism was rooted in their historical and current experiences of trying to locate their identities somewhere between their fundamentalist orientations and secular values, beliefs, and practices. A few of the research participants struggled with finding the internal freedom to explore and entertain ideas or philosophies or parenting practices that were different from their own. Some expressed that they felt afraid or uncertain in how things would turn out for them if they engaged with the philosophical, ideological, and theoretical underpinnings of liberal secularism. Inherent in their concerns was the pervasive notion that to engage with culture would somehow weaken

their respective faiths, thereby rendering them displeasing to God and possibly to others within their faith communities.

Other participants took a more liberal approach, deciding instead to engage with culture and to learn from it, not being afraid to ask the harder questions about societal trends so that they could live within an informed relationship with culture rather than in a reactionary relationship based in fear and a lack of understanding. All of the participants eventually came to the conclusion that engaging with the secular culture in which they live was non-optional, that it was necessary to understand the culture rather than simply dismiss it, and that their role and voice in the culture could be significant. The underlying assumption that their role in culture would be insignificant was rooted in their historical experiences of not having a voice.

If the research participants didn't have a voice in fundamentalism (and some of them don't have a voice in fundamentalism even today due to fundamentalism's resistance to dissenting voices), then why would secularism be any different if their voices were proclaiming an alternative or divergent view? In a very real sense, engaging with and finding identity in secularism is about having a voice that could be expressed appropriately and possibly even heard as that of reason, a voice of care, a voice of conscientiousness and compassion, and mindfulness. The group realized once again that it is a 'both and' engagement rather than an 'either or' based position entrenched in that commitment that my truth is applicable to all human persons, thereby minimizing the significance and value inherent in diversity.

<u>Theme Nine: Departing</u>

Participant quote:

I keep going back to what I know for sure. I am responsible for my own family, for three kids and making sure that I am not sacrificing them to some evangelical fundamentalist impulse that I have to go out and save the world. I think God wants them to be my world to save!

Participant quote:

I think I know what my gut is telling me but I'm really wrestling with what God's real purpose is for us – what he really does require of Christians. I'm not sure what to trust anymore. My instincts have been telling me certain things all along but they have rarely matched up with what I have been taught, or with my experience. So, I've felt guilty, rebellious, lazy and self absorbed about meaning in my life. I'm pretty excited to begin to think that maybe some of my instincts are right and I can let all the guilt or self doubt go. I like this process but I'm impatient to be free of the stranglehold that evangelical fundamentalism has had on my life and how it has influenced meaning in my life.

For the departing, the idea of leaving fundamentalism is attractive and enticing yet tempered by the thought that a betrayal of one's lover is likely immanent, or an infidelity has already occurred. The idea of leaving for some of the participants was fraught with confusion and despair as if in some measure the person doing the leaving was initiating what would eventually become a messy divorce. The person doing the leaving will no doubt be held responsible for being the home-wrecker, the deviant, or the weaker Christian brother or sister who was sadly unable to maintain and uphold all that was held dear and true and unquestionable.

Difficult to locate for the leaving are new found friends, Christians or otherwise who experientially and intellectually appreciate the complex tensions inherent in being raised as religious conformists, and maybe even as true believers. Of necessity, therefore, for those in a process of departing from fundamentalism are people who share a similar longing for spiritual and social identities unencumbered by the snares of restrictive fundamentalist ideologies, theologies, and enforced social conformity. In a very real sense, the departing and the departed are in need of mindful and caring survivors of religious oppression. There is comfort in like-mindedness despite uncertainties with new found freedom to be and to do minus crippling shame, fear, and self-doubt.

Persons choosing to move away from evangelical fundamentalism seldom discuss their issues with those who remain, likely due to the fact that their uncertainty in this regard becomes a threat to the perceived stability of relationships. This development in turn compounds a sense of spiritual and relational aloneness for the departing. As unrest and uncertainty builds within the person considering what it will mean to depart from their fundamentalist orientation, a significant sense of intellectual, emotional, and relational dissonance begins to emerge, thereby making it difficult to remain in relationship with the immediate and greater religious community. Hence, the journey begins concerning what it means to leave that which has been understood, believed, and practiced since childhood.

Theme Ten: Finding Home

Participant quote:

During my university years, my parents decided to return to the mission field. All of their children were finally out of high school, so they could continue with their true ministry once again. When they left, they went to a remote place where we were unable to contact

them. They did not have a phone and mail service was unreliable. I remember them asking us kids for permission to leave for five years. We all agreed because we did not want to hamper God's work. Our goodbyes were matter of fact and with little emotion or talk of how we felt. After my parents went through the boarding gate to the airplane, I turned to my siblings and told them that we had better get used to being on our own because they were never coming back. It has been twenty years, my entire adult life and a lot longer than five years.

Participant quote:

I know where the fear comes from for me. It's the fear of losing home. And "home", as a loving and belonging place as it is in my memory included this religious notion of certainty and absolutism. SO, when my intellectual inquiry leads me into the spaces of ambiguity, the fear factor is heightened, because it feels like it threatens or puts in jeopardy my belonging to home. Home here is not only my family of origin, it's also church, the Christian faith, friendships, theology, my interpretive tradition…

The theme of finding home for all of the research participants was readily apparent. Each participant expressed their unique, yet similar desire to create a safe haven for themselves and for their families. The issue of personal and corporate safety, inclusion, identity, and freedom to be and to do and to explore was central to the participants' expressions of thought and emotion, especially as it came to bear on the lives of their children. Without fail, each of the participants expressed their interest in having their children learn about God, but in a manner and method that was exploratory, informative, open ended, unrestricted, personal, and intimate. Although each of the participants viewed the church as the historical venue of choice for the spiritual, social, and religious formation

of children, the issues of pervasiveness, intolerance, dogma, conclusiveness, and lack of critical thought were first and foremost in the participants' thinking as it would come to bear on and shape their children's views, experiences, and perceptions of God and the role of the church in general.

The theme of finding home was consistent with the themes of departing from fundamentalism, parenting, and longing. The desire for home, a place of being and affirmation, was of high value to the research participant group. Implied in the idea of home are the qualities and characteristics of inclusion, identification, safety, rest, the formation of one's healthy identity in relation to others, community, care, respect, and the elevation of personal dignity despite the emergence of divergent values and lifestyle practices over time. The emphasis on home for the research participants focused on the issue of grace as applied to building and retaining healthy familial relationships, as opposed to assessment and evaluation that seeks to undermine, tear down, and destroy.

The concept of home was also thought by the participants to be a place of meaning and purpose surrounding each one's unique contribution to home life and life in general. Home was valued as a place to honor its residents, a place that would value the innate beauty and intrinsic value of the individual as well as the family cluster as a whole, and a place to elevate a strong sense of being with and for one another despite the challenges that emerge in family life. Home was viewed as both a real and figurative place where people were free to be themselves, not at the expense of others, but in the sense that there was freedom from fear to ask questions, create ideas, consider the complex issues of life, and experience what it means to be valued as a person.

The Residual Allure of Evangelical Fundamentalism

Evangelical Fundamentalism has a history of attracting and retaining people for similar and diverse reasons. For some, they had no choice but to be raised in this particular religious orientation and, as a result, have not known anything other than a fundamentalist approach to life and faith. For others, they have been brought into fundamentalism as a result of evangelistically oriented strategies motivated by the church's mission to convert sinners by bringing them into a relationship with God through faith in Christ.

Evangelical fundamentalism holds an appeal that speaks to the emotional and relational longings of human beings. It claims to offer a strong sense of community and inclusion for faith seekers, for those in the process of conversion, and for those already converted. Evangelical fundamentalism appeals to people because of its built-in 'family oriented' and welcoming presence grounded in the belief that people are special, that they are persons of worth and significance due to being created in the image of God, that they matter to the Christian community at large, that God has a special plan of their lives, and that their purposes here on earth can be more easily recognized, understood, and acted out in the context of knowing God while being a part of His special people who do His special work.

Evangelical fundamentalism also reinforces family values, thereby being an attractive methodology, organization, or venue by which to raise healthy responsible children with the help of God and other like minded individuals. Evangelical fundamentalism places great emphasis on the traditional nuclear family and opposes anything that might be a threat to maintaining this particular model and approach to faith and life. In this regard, a concerted effort is made to strongly influence the outcome of families via seminars and workshops that seek to retain marriage despite the obvious challenges that many relationships face. Again,

the issue of finding something more, or better, or noteworthy in the eyes of God and the Christian community motivates people towards a goal of being different and healthier than they are now.

For lack of a better expression, evangelical fundamentalism holds out the carrot of a little slice of heaven on earth, a place where there is no more pain, or crying, or conflict, or tension in relationships, for instance, that seeks to erode one's sense of spiritual and relational well-being. And who wouldn't want a pain free life devoid of earthly cares and sorrow that creep in as a result of personal, relational, social, physical, psychological, and emotional fragmentation? Most of humanity seeks a better life, a healthier life, and care free or pain free life in one form or another.

Hence, the residual allure of evangelical fundamentalism for persons such as those who participated in this study concerning the experience of being raised in and later departing from this particular context in some measure. It needs to be noted here that the participants are essentially in a process of making sense of their respective experiences of disillusionment and disappointment surrounding the fact that their fundamentalist orientations did not deliver on real or implied promises. Rather, fundamentalism, despite its efforts to maintain doctrinal and evangelistic purity, turned into a social-religious system that eventually over time resulted in rigid control, dogmatic certainty, and unwavering belief in absolutes. In this sense, evangelical fundamentalism, not unlike its highly conservative predecessors, erred in the creation and maintenance of internal faith-based and lifestyle oriented structures and processes that for some resulted in smothering oppression.

The five adult participants in this case are working through or coming out of oppressive social and spiritual origins, not in an effort to discredit or abandon their

evangelical histories altogether, but in an effort to assess and evaluate fundamentalism's impact and influence in their lives for good and for ill. In so doing, these individuals are naturally pulling away from archaic forms and thinking and related practices while at the same time learning to maintain relationships with family members, for instance, or others in the wider Christian community who may or may not share their perspectives or even attempt to understand the nature of their questions and curiosities.

The process of departing from fundamentalism while maintaining a relationship with the basic tenants and beliefs associated with evangelical faith is complex and challenging. It is my view that departing from a culture of origin entirely is impossible. Therefore, the participants' task associated with leaving the confines of their social and spiritual cultures of origin is somewhat akin to asking a Jewish person raised in the practices and lifestyle associated with a conservative form of Judaism to leave Judaism. The idea of leaving in this regard is fraught with social, spiritual, political and sometimes economic dilemmas and repercussions. Hence, the idea of leaving altogether is a cost for some that is too heavy to bear. Others, however, such as the participants, choose instead to carefully and thoughtfully consider historical and current philosophical and theological orientations associated with their respective evangelical histories, and in this regard choose to let go of ways of thinking of behaving that are no longer applicable to their lives as believers and followers of Christ.

The research participants have chosen instead to assess and integrate ways of thinking, believing, and behaving that they believe are more consistent with the basic message of the Bible and in particular the life of Christ who made himself available to both religious and non-religious people, and generally without extreme evaluation or condemnation. Naturally, one can site several scriptural passages in the New Testament, for

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instance, in which Christ's extreme initiatives are apparent, such as that of cleansing the temple from those who sought to use it as a place of commerce. More often than not, however, the model of Christ's more extreme forms of confrontation in the New Testament were directed towards religious hypocrisy and those in positions of religious leadership who violated some of the very basic tenants of the Christian faith and its focus on being both redemptive and conciliatory.

Despite the participants' movements away from the more oppressive strains of evangelical fundamentalism, all of the participants struggled to locate themselves spiritually and intellectually in their beliefs amid what they believe in some measure is the decay of the evangelical church concurrent with the rise of secularism. They often referred to themselves as being aliens in their religious orientations as well as their movements within secularism, not feeling completely at home in either context, yet compelled to relate to each one out of necessity as either one is completely inescapable. The task therefore for the research participants is to develop and maintain belief systems that enable them to practice their faith in a way that is congruent with who they are as individuals, while at the same time learning to live within the greater construct of secularism. Naturally, the task is complex and often times tiring due to the amount of energy needed to 'let go of' while 'adopting' or 'embracing' an approach to faith and life minus the fundamentalist structures that were and continue to be steeped in dogma, certainty and predictability.

The allure of evangelical fundamentalism is therefore significant. Human beings in general function well with certainty, with structure, and with outcomes or goals in mind. The research participants were raised in the certainty of their spiritual and religious orientations. They learned later in life that the certainty with which they were raised had its flaws due to

its inability to adequately and meaningfully address complex social, political, spiritual, and

economic issues that come to bear on everyday life, not unlike other prevailing world views.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion

Introduction

Having examined in detail the emergent findings of this study, it is important to contextualize the findings relative to the research question and the existing literature on the subject matter. The process of contextualizing the findings relative to the research question and the existing literature essentially serves as a final validity check. This process is helpful in determining the extent to which the findings are consistent with previous research and the degree to which the findings expand understanding of the lived experiences and their meanings of being raised in and later departing from evangelical fundamentalism.

Contextualizing the Findings

With respect to the research question, this study inquired about the lived experience of five adults who were raised in evangelical fundamentalism who eventually chose to depart from this religious orientation while retaining certain core faith-based beliefs. Life Review, a group based adult educational learning model, was utilized to establish a research participant group that would reveal life worlds specific to being raised in and later departing from fundamentalism, thereby generating a rich source of data for this inquiry. As a result of their participation in the Life Review group and process, the research participants generated thirty written descriptive narratives that served as the primary source of data for this inquiry. Included in the process of the Life Review group were several group discussions that emerged in response to the reading of the narratives.

These discussions were informative concerning the experiences and meanings associated with being raised in a fundamentalist milieu. In this regard, the group discussions as a secondary source of data influenced the shaping and the content of the emergent themes.

The group discussions were not audio or video taped. However, following each of the group meetings and related discussions, I kept a written journal pertaining to individual and group accounts of both experience and meaning, outlining the main points that were raised throughout each discussion. The group discussions and subsequent journal records served as a secondary source of data that was instrumental in establishing clarity specific to the emergent themes while establishing the relevance of each theme.

As a result of the research participants' activities throughout this study, it was learned that the experience of being raised in fundamentalism impacted the research participants in the realms of unresolved pain, unfulfilled longing, crippling fear, the formation of coping strategies, identity formation, views of God and the church, being a parent, engaging with the prevailing culture in which they live, the process of departing from fundamentalism, and the issue of finding home. These findings emerged as across-group themes and were presented in this study as reflecting the lived experience and meanings associated with having been raised in and later departed from evangelical fundamentalism. In this regard, this research initiative did what it intended to do in that it explored and inquired about the lived experience of being raised in fundamentalism while departing from it later in life. This study therefore expanded on what appears to be a growing body of literature concerning the effects of religious fundamentalism on those who are raised in it from childhood, as well as those choosing later in life to leave.

The findings of this study resonated with portions of the literature review that revealed insights into religious fundamentalism and in particular, evangelical fundamentalism. Evans and Berent's (1998) study, for instance, noted that those departing from fundamentalism's prescribed lifestyle experienced problems perhaps as intense as any

others associated with psychological trauma. Although the findings of this present inquiry did not frame the psychological and emotional outcomes associated with this study as traumatic per se, it was readily apparent that many, if not most, of the participants were significantly affected in areas of fear, self-doubt, unresolved pain, uncertainty, and undermined confidence. The findings of this present study therefore resonate in some measure with Evans and Berent's (1998) findings, thereby reinforcing the idea that long term psychological and emotional effects of being raised in and later departing from religious fundamentalism are not without personal cost.

The findings of this study initially challenged Marion's (2004) negative characterizations of religious fundamentalists and in particular evangelical fundamentalists in the United States (i.e., Pat Robertson, George W. Bush, and Jerry Fawell). While Marion's characterizations may hold validity with respect to extreme variants of religious fundamentalism (i.e., the evangelical fundamentalist pastor taking on the Microsoft Corporation and the Westboro Baptist Church), Marion makes sweeping generalizations concerning the irrationality of fundamentalists, as if to suggest that all fundamentalists were non-thinking, non-reflective, non-critical, non-contemplative and unintelligent human beings. On this basis alone, as a Christian mystic presumably given to exploring the inherent mysteries associated with mystical experiences, Marion's (2004) capacity to fairly assess the breadth and depth of a globally diverse and well entrenched socio-psycho-religious construct such as religious fundamentalism is suspect.

Marion (2004) offered no explanations, for instance, concerning the sources of his assessments surrounding religious fundamentalists. He did not cite any research studies specific to the etiology and prevalence of religious fundamentalism and the psychological

effects it can have on human beings, nor did he seem to be curious about the blatantly critical nature of what appeared to be his politically motivated assumptions concerning fundamentalists, inadvertently cementing the divide between fundamentalists and the avant-garde enlightened persons referred to in his book. Sadly, it is doubtful that many fundamentalists would be drawn to Marion's evolutionary spirituality model of spiritual formation after having been characterized as incapable of complex critical thinking.

Despite Marion's (2004) dogmatic assessment of fundamentalists, Fowler (1981) noted that people with a synthetic/conventional type of faith were simply concerned about what others think about them. Marion in this regard suggested that these individuals wanted an identity that would fit into the community or group to which they belonged, and they wanted God to be their friend, to care for them personally, to value them, and to anchor their identity (p. 97). Marion also noted that persons at this level were very others-directed versus inner-directed. They cared most about what their peers said or thought about them. They wanted to fit in and attend church primarily as a social ritual, wherein their value as a good person was affirmed. These individuals were not as rigid, aggressive, or literal minded as people at the mythic level, but neither did they have much creative ability. They went along to get along (p. 97).

Fowler (1981), however, noted that some American Christians began to graduate into the second level of rational consciousness, what he called "individuative/reflective faith" (when individuals begin to think for themselves), as early as age 17, but that most did not complete the passage until their mid-20's, some not until their late 30's – and some never. People at this level were thought to begin to think for themselves while ceasing to engage in

group think. This particular assessment of persons who were raised in and later departed from fundamentalism appeared to hold a degree of credibility and relevance to this inquiry.

I suggest that the research participant group in this study reflected Fowlers' (1981) assessment to a certain degree. Most of the participants reported that they began to question and contemplate moving away from fundamentalism in their mid to late teens while attempting to depart or departed from fundamentalism in their mid to late 20's. Whether or not they attended church for the sake of identity and personal significance is unknown at this time. However, most people, religious or otherwise, engage in a process of individuating from family of origin structures in their late teens and early twenties and in this regard are considered to be healthy or normal. In this sense, it is my understanding that the research participants inherent in this inquiry thoughtfully and reflectively individuated from both families and religions of origin, and did so with significant critical thinking skills that took into consideration complex issues, aware that their decision making in this regard would have long term relational consequences and implications.

Marion's (2004) evolutionary spirituality model is therefore disturbing in that it dismisses the fact that many people raised in religious fundamentalism are in fact rational, insightful, contemplative, peace keeping, responsible, politically aware, environmentally involved, caring, benevolent, others oriented, socially aware, and deeply committed to living peaceable and productive lives amid the prevailing secular society in which they live. Marion's generalizations and weak supporting arguments are unfortunate, and therefore misrepresentative of the diversity and pluralism inherent in various forms and expressions of religious fundamentalism.

Despite this being the case, Marion (2004) raised what I believe are legitimate concerns with respect to arbitrary and dogmatically assigned confines inherent in evangelical fundamentalism, generally revealed in unwavering judgment, exclusion, intolerance, and the assigning of prescriptive lifestyle standards. In this regard, it goes without saying that many persons raised in fundamentalism were not taught to think reflectively or critically and therefore lived out their beliefs and biases according to what they had learned in their religious orientations, expecting or anticipating that others will eventually do the same. I suggest that this was the case in some measure with many if not most of the research participants' fundamentalist orientations and activities, meaning that they were socialized into and practiced intolerance, for instance, and maintained the belief that people from other religions were doomed to hell, and that the mission of the evangelical fundamentalist was to convert the world concurrent with lobbying for laws in support evangelical fundamentalist ideology (i.e., same sex marriage). Despite this being the case, it is the position of this thesis that Marion's (2004) evolutionary spirituality spiritual formation model in its application to fundamentalists is seriously laden with negative bias, thereby limiting the degree to which fundamentalists might take it seriously.

Marty and Appleby (1993) noted that contrary to common stereotypes, religious fundamentalists were not simply nostalgic, backward-looking conservatives. Rather, they were also persons who frequently utilized modern means and therefore made pragmatic adaptations to accommodate changing social and political conditions. Religious fundamentalists were also characterized as pro-social persons committed, for instance, to aiding needy people in third world countries without an evangelistic agenda.

These characterizations would also hold true for the research participant group that was the focus of this study. This particular group tended to avoid at all cost any association with historical evangelical fundamentalism while attempting at some level to retain their respective core values and beliefs. While definitely not backward in the sense of being entrenched in marginalized conservatism, the research participants were active in their faith and residential communities with friends and neighbors, attempting and succeeding at stepping outside historically shunned or forbidden life style practices such as enjoying a glass of wine with non-religiously oriented neighbors.

Other historical characterizations or representations of fundamentalists also did not hold true for the participant group and therefore confirmed Marty and Appleby's (1993, 2003) findings that fundamentalists or those departing from fundamentalism were not literalists with respect to Biblical interpretations, for instance. It was also found that many evangelical fundamentalists, or those departing from fundamentalism, were not prone to violence, that they effectively related to professionals in the community and places of employment, that they were critical thinkers with strong capacities to debate social, political, and religious issues, and that they wanted to have a voice rather to do dominate contending voices in this regard. It was also noted by Marty and Appleby that fundamentalists have a strong capacity for change, something that became abundantly obvious in the group, that their capacity to cope with tensions, restrictions, imposed mandates, and so on was noteworthy and significant.

Also resonating with this study were the findings of Brent (1990) who found that those leaving fundamentalism represented an identifiable phenomenon worthy of additional exploration and investigation. Brent also learned that those leaving fundamentalism

experienced heightened levels of ongoing tolerance in order to cope, disillusionment, emotional aftermath, and challenges associated with establishing new or different lifestyles. These findings are similar to my own findings in that those persons who were interviewed by Brent appear to have had similar lived experiences as those who participated in this study. Brent's study concluded that one's mental health and spiritual growth would be enhanced as a result of leaving fundamentalism. Although it could be argued that the participants might concur in some measure, it is also noteworthy that none of the participants were altogether dismissive of their fundamentalist pasts. Instead, they were thoughtful in their efforts to be constructively critical despite their frequent heightened emotionality.

Smull (2002) explored the experiences of ten women who were disillusioned with Christian fundamentalism. It was reported that all of the women struggled with rigid rules of conduct, and emotional conflicts regarding love, fear and anger. They also struggled with enforced missions related activities that were central to their churches vision and mission.

In this present study, two of the research participants were women. One woman in particular was raised by missionary parents in the initial stages of her life while in a foreign country. Her parents, despite their chronic absenteeism in the name of God, were restrictive in their approach to parenting their children, meaning that they had to abide within Biblical standards and expectations of lifestyle practices. Their restrictions in this regard were generally presented as God's will that was non-negotiable.

This research participant's experience in growing up in rigid protestant fundamentalism while living in a boarding school in a foreign country left long term damaging effects that are similar to those cited in Smull's (2002) study. Obviously, there is room to expand the nature and scope of this particular research initiative. But suffice it to

say at least one of the research participants in this present study reflects similar characteristics as those described by Smull.

As was the case with Garo's (2006) study that explored the adverse development consequences for ten participants reared in a Christian fundamentalist environment, the participants in this present study experienced uniform childhood environments, thorough enculturation, high levels of guilt, several forms of manipulation to ensure enculturation, and found that later in life, conversion away from fundamentalism was characterized by existential and critical thought resulting in various degrees of rejecting rigid religious theological and lifestyle structures. Similarly consistent with Herriot's (2007) study focusing on religious fundamentalism and social identity, the research participants for this study who were raised in fundamentalism struggled during their formative years and later in life to not see themselves and others as the 'in-group' or the 'out-group'. This tension was expressed in this present study by the participants as feeling like aliens in both fundamentalist and secular associations, not knowing where they truly fit, if anywhere.

The Significance of the Findings

The findings associated with this study confirm in some measure the findings of a few similar research initiatives that have ensued over the past decade. The emergent findings associated with this study, however, are not considered to be redundant. Instead, they are additive in the sense that they emerged out of a group based model of exploration, and therefore yielded both individual and collective revelations, thus providing a rich account of what it was like to have been raised in a fundamentalist milieu while deciding later in life to depart from it. Although previous findings point in a similar directions with respect to outcomes, this phenomenological inquiry went beyond individual accounts inherent in case

study in-depth interviews and therefore incorporated individual accounts within the context of group discussions whereby the experiences and meanings were honed and confirmed as experientially valid by the research participant group.

This study is therefore significant because the participants validated their respective and group accounts of being raised in fundamentalism through thoughtful and critical exchanges that were collective in nature. This study is also significant in that it included the Life Review model as a means of extrapolating individual and group-related data specific to the lived experience and meanings surrounding what it was like to be raised in fundamentalism. Life Review was therefore instrumental in drawing out lived experience in the context of *community* that both confirmed and validated the research participants' experiences, perceptions, meanings, emotions, and beliefs surrounding their respective and collective enculturation into fundamentalism.

The communal nature of this study is not considered non-critical collusion. Rather, the fact that five adults raised in fundamentalism gathered as a group to talk openly about their histories is remarkable in and of itself. Central to the participants' concerns when being interviewed as potential participants was whether or not meeting in a group setting would be a safe venue in which to share their stories. Accustomed to negative or critical feedback, the research participants were oriented to Life Review concerning theory, philosophy, group norms, safety, and so on. Fortunately, all of the participants remained respectful and caring amid their respective disclosures and general senses of being emotionally and relationally vulnerable.

Hence, another significant aspect of this study is the continued validation of the Life Review model as a viable and safe research tool in which to continue exploring the lived

experiences of disaffected fundamentalists. I believe that the group model, although initially met with uncertainty by the group, provided a container of sorts that enabled the participants to talk openly, to cry without embarrassment, to be angry without repercussion, to be sad without being humiliated, and to be glad with authenticity in their movements away from fundamentalism. In this sense, their experience of the group was incredibly validating. The fact that they were generally of like mind was also reinforcing to their individual and collective sense of moving in the right direction in their lives in general. The Life Review group, therefore, provided a safe and predictable context in which the participants were able to share their stories. In so doing, Life Review provided a structure that included a beginning, middle, and an end, and the opportunity to not participate at any time if and when it felt necessary.

The Significance of the Findings to Evangelical Fundamentalism

The significance of the findings for evangelical fundamentalism focuses on the issue of the movement's relevance to society at large amid the prevailing liberal and secular cultures in which fundamentalism is located. Evangelical fundamentalism's reputation as being an extreme form of religiosity continues at some level to undermine the movement's core nature and motives focused somewhat ironically on loving your neighbor as yourself. Evangelical fundamentalism's efforts to be a healing, restorative community of believers is sadly disregarded by society due to its shame-based, dominant, and aggressive approach in relating to the rest of the world.

Evangelical fundamentalism continues to foster and promote an "us versus them" mentality as was evident, for instance, in the news article appearing at the beginning of this thesis. Despite the goodness associated with the movement's core motive of promoting the

overcoming of evil with good, the methods with "getting there" sadly end up being counterproductive due to the manner in which the "overcoming" is enacted. Evangelical fundamentalists are dutifully bound to maintaining doctrinal and lifestyle purity to the extent that they no longer know how to relate to the world around them, seeing others only as viable evangelistic prospects rather than as fellow human beings in need of practical care and attention.

The significance of the findings associated with this study therefore includes not only evangelical fundamentalism's immediate relevance to society in general, but also to those in leadership within this particular movement. Evangelical fundamentalist leaders, be they parents, pastors, school teachers, professionals, or lay persons have the opportunity to shape opinion, thought, and belief in a manner that is consistent with effective relationship with both believing and non-believing populations, while attempting to establish viable and effective forms of intervention into the lives of those who are within their realms of influence. In this sense, I would like to think that evangelical fundamentalists might recognize their need to assess and evaluate their practices while asking themselves hard questions concerning their efficacy within their own circles as well as in society in general. In other words, are evangelical fundamentalists effective in the application of their beliefs and practices, or, conversely, do they undermine their faith-based initiatives, be they evangelistically or humanitarian oriented as a result of their dogmatic and controlling stance on political and social issues inherent in North American society? It is my hope that this study might alert evangelical fundamentalists to the need for ideological and practical transformation in an effort to be better understood and appreciated by the greater society in which it is located.

The significance of this study to evangelical fundamentalism is especially apparent to those who are considering leaving fundamentalism or for those who are in a process of leaving, or for those who have already left. The findings associated with this study may serve as a source of encouragement, healing, and motivation for persons engaged in a thoughtful process of evaluation and assessment concerning the basic tenants of fundamentalism and their relevance to life in general. In essence, the findings associated with this study could be confirming of one's direction in life, and also affirming as a result of identifying with the emergent themes that in turn might become a source of encouragement amid a challenging process of departure. Persons leaving evangelical fundamentalism are in need of resources that could aid in the process leading up to, during, and following departure. It is my sense that the process of disengaging is often times lonely and misunderstood by those observing the leaving. I trust this study may be uniquely helpful for the departing.

The Significance of the Findings to Counselling Psychology

The significance of the findings of this study are relevant to the theory and practice of Counselling Psychology, especially for counsellors or psychologists who work within faith based organizations, or for therapists who have occasion to work with persons who are either in fundamentalism or coming out of fundamentalism. With respect to theory (i.e., intra-textual theory, attachment theory, social learning theory, and cognitive dissonance theory), this inquiry considered the integration and application of four theoretical constructs in an effort to conceptualize the psychological, relational, spiritual, and emotional worlds of five persons who were raised in and later departed from evangelical fundamentalism. The application of these theories were informative to the extent that they provided a theoretical framework through which counselling psychologists and other mental health professionals

might better understand the complex nature of the issues coming to bear on the life worlds of those persons who are raised in and later depart from evangelical fundamentalism.

The findings of this study are also informative to clinical practice in that they sensitize clinicians to the salient issues coming to bear on the lives of persons affected by evangelical fundamentalism. In this regard, the findings inherent in this study by way of implication speak to the issues of cultural sensitivity, diversity, and pluralism, therefore reminding clinicians of their professional obligation to value, respect, and care for all persons despite their histories that may include a form of religious fundamentalism. The findings of this study emphasize the values of neutrality and sensitivity to bias and how clinicians' views with respect to religion and evangelical fundamentalism in particular may influence the issue of intervention and treatment.

The findings associated with this study, therefore, serve to dismantle negative biases surrounding religious fundamentalists that may be held in some measure by mental health practitioners and academics. In this sense, the findings normalize, or at the very least acclimate, the reader to the issues confronting fundamentalists. In so doing, it is anticipated that those reading this study will develop an informed understanding of and appreciation for the greater context of religious fundamentalism in general and its inherent challenges for those who were or continue to be brought up in this paradigm. More significantly, however, is that clinicians will ideally develop a greater understanding of extremists within evangelical fundamentalism, and despite the degree to which the practitioner might be offended by such extremism, the fundamentalist client will be ideally be treated reasonably and fairly within ethically sensitive professional standards.

With respect to the issues of practice and intervention, I believe there is a need for sensitive and informed practitioners who are educated in issues related to evangelical fundamentalism, theoretical underpinnings specific to the intersecting of psychology and religion, and the insidious nature of spiritual and religious abuse inflicted on persons by caregivers and persons in positions of spiritual authority and power. In so doing, I believe that persons of faith regardless of their religious orientation will ideally be more adequately served. Intervention can likely be in the context of individual therapy or, alternatively, in the context of group work, where the experience of mutual identification and support will be fostered and enhanced. The participant group for this study expressed their desire to continue meeting due to what they reported to be the therapeutic benefits of the group and the collective exchanges that ensued that essentially normalized and validated their experiences.

With respect to the issues of education and intervention, this study holds promise for the creation and delivery of educational opportunities for clinicians working with people raised in and later departing from fundamentalism, as well as persons negatively affected by their evangelical fundamentalist orientations, or religious fundamentalism is general. Training seminars, for instance, for clinicians could be incredibly helpful in acclimating practitioners to the salient issues coming to bear on people lives affected fundamentalism. Seminars of this nature could take on various forms depending on the nature and content of the material and the intended focus of the training. Support groups could also be created for clients who are looking for immediate and tangible support, not to mention identification with people who have had similar life world experiences.

<u>The Significance of the Findings to Future Research</u>

The significance of the study to future research is located in the fact that research specific to persons who were raised in and later departed from fundamentalism is noticeably limited. In fact, it does not exist to a great extent. I am particularly curious about this development and wonder why there have been a limited number of research studies on religious fundamentalists and evangelical fundamentalists in particular. This particular subject area is of great interest to me and I can envision developing this research focus in the future. I believe there is potential with respect to various and diverse research directions, be it in relation to North American fundamentalism or fundamentalism around the world and its impact on its followers.

I am also interested in studying the spiritual health and well-being of those who were raised in evangelical fundamentalism who later in life chose to depart from this orientation. I am particularly interested in researching spiritual formation post-fundamentalism, and how this gets played out in peoples' lives over time. The issue of where and when and how to express faith apart from a fundamentalist structure is a curiosity that I give considerable to attention to, and would therefore be interested in others' experiences.

Despite there being a Psychology of Religion division within the American Psychological Association, studies located within this division tend to be based in social psychological theory rather than in psychological theory such as cognitive dissonance theory, attachment theory, cognitive behavioral theory, and so on. I would like to broaden the scope of research in this regard and develop an area of expertise specific to religious fundamentalism with a focus in particular on evangelical fundamentalism, due in part to the

fact that it is operative within North America and is therefore likely to impact larger religious

and non-religious circles as it already does in some measure. My desire is to understand

more fully and completely the nature of fundamentalism and how it is played out in society

in general. Presently, I believe the religious fundamentalists are tolerated by society rather

than understood and valued. There are obvious reasons for this divide. Despite this being

the case, I believe there is value in studying the fundamentalist phenomenon for the sake of

those who are immersed in it and also for the sake of those who out of their own sense of

bias, interest, or disinterest, might stand to benefit from learning more about the etiology and

maintenance of fundamentalism and its impact on society.

The Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are primarily associated with the homogeneity of the

research participant group. This study was limited to a population of middle-aged and

middle class Caucasian heterosexual married persons, all of whom had children. The

participants were raised in evangelical fundamentalism from birth and were engaged in a

process of departing from the basic tenant of evangelical fundamentalism prior to and during

the course of the study. In this regard, this study did not include persons raised in other

religious fundamentalist orientations, thereby omitting the issue of religious diversity, not out

of disregard but rather out of maintaining the evangelical fundamentalist focus inherent in

this study.

Despite their collective sense of disillusionment and dissatisfaction with evangelical

fundamentalism, none of the participants denied their faith in God. Rather, all of them

expressed their desire to maintain their faith in God while seeking to establish *faith*

expressions consistent with what it meant for each one to move away from their religious

fundamentalist orientations. Three of the participants attended non-fundamentalist evangelical churches while two of them did not attend any church for at least one year prior to this their participation in this study.

The research participants were raised in similar evangelical fundamentalist orientations despite some denominational differences. The participants were therefore familiar with similar denominational, theological, social, and political issues and their implications as they came to bear on their past and present lives. In this regard, the participants spoke a very similar language and held common understandings and appreciations for the obvious and more subtle nuances associated with the inner workings of evangelical fundamentalism. It was therefore easy for the group to bond, express, understand and collaborate around the erosive effects of evangelical fundamentalism as it came to bear on their personal and interpersonal development throughout the course of their lives.

The aforementioned characteristics and commonalities associated with the participant pool are identified as significant limitations to this study due to the homogeneous nature of the group. In particular, all of the participants were married once to one opposite sex partner. None of the participants came to faith later in life, nor did any of them report having been physically or sexually abused despite all of the participants being exposed to power and control throughout the course of their lives. None of the participants reported that they had been emotionally or psychologically abused although some of their disclosures reflected emotional abuse in the context of conditional, shame based and guilt ridden familial and congregational based relationships inherent in fundamentalism.

None of the participants were from visible minority populations such as First Nations persons, people of color, gays, lesbians, bi-sexuals, and or trans-gendered persons. The

female participants did not express in any measure that they were subjected to or forced into roles often times assigned to women in religious fundamentalist orientations. The research participant pool also did not include former leaders of evangelical fundamentalism who may have become disillusioned and therefore disaffected with their religious orientation, or those former leaders who were asked to leave their church and or denomination due to fraudulent practices, immorality, and/or theological or Biblical heresy. The participant group did not include persons who self-reported to be struggling with mental health issues and or addictions to alcohol and drugs and or sex.

In a sense, the participant group reflected a middle class white Anglo-Saxon demographic that is often times associated with evangelical fundamentalism in Canada and the United States. The findings of this study, therefore, cannot be generalized entirely to persons who were raised in and later departed from evangelical fundamentalism in some measure. Nor can the findings be generalized entirely to persons raised in religious fundamentalism due to the multi-faceted nature and cultural variations associated with religious fundamentalism world-wide. The findings could nevertheless be generalized in some measure to a replica research participant pool that mirrors the group that participated in this inquiry. As previously, the issue of generalizing the findings needs to be approached with careful discernment, taking into account the extent to which a proposed participant group reflected the group in this study.

The aforementioned limitations of this study, therefore, provide a basis on which to continue pursuing research specific to persons who were raised in and later departed from evangelical fundamentalism. Of particular interest to me is that of researching church leaders and minorities who have departed from fundamentalism for reasons specific and possibly

unique to their own experiences. I believe that pursuing research in this vein will enhance the domain of the psychology of religion, thereby enhancing both the theoretical and clinical considerations inherent in the field of counseling psychology.

<u>Conclusion</u>

It was the purpose of this descriptive phenomenological inquiry to explore the life worlds of adults who were raised in and later departed from evangelical fundamentalism. This study was born out of my personal and professional experience within evangelical fundamentalism and my interest in furthering research within this particular domain. Religious fundamentalism and in particular, evangelical fundamentalism, is becoming increasingly prominent in Canada and the United States, realized in what is increasingly becoming known as culture wars between liberal secularism and religious fundamentalism.

Amid these culture wars, human beings, fundamentalists in particular, are often times negatively characterized by the media, thereby reinforcing stereotypes that work against appreciation for diversity and pluralism. It was my desire in this inquiry to shed light and therefore increase understanding specific to one variant of religious fundamentalism, not in an effort to expose or humiliate, but in an effort to understand and gain insight into the life worlds of persons who, with integrity, are in a process of making sense out of their lives in a manner that is both peaceable and constructive.

This inquiry revealed, among other things, that not all persons raised in evangelical fundamentalism appreciate their religious heritage. Many prefer to distance themselves from fundamentalism while attempting to establish faith based beliefs and world views that are consistent with their personal and unique understanding and appreciation for God, faith, and spirituality in general. It was my belief coming into this study that many individuals process

their thoughts and feelings in private while attempting to make unpopular decisions in the eyes of their families of origin as well as their denominations or churches of origin. It takes a fair amount of courage and integrity to emerge from evangelical fundamentalism and to do so in a manner that is healthy and constructive. It was my intent therefore to explore the experiences and meanings of at least five persons who chose at some point in their lives to distance themselves from fundamentalist ideology and practice. In so doing, it was my intent to shed light on theoretical constructs and clinical practices that would inform and aid theorists and clinician's work to help people adjust and make sense of life transitions.

It is my belief that this inquiry fulfilled its purpose and in this regard provided a thought provoking account of evangelical fundamentalism. The literature review, combined with vivid descriptions of lived experience and meaning, yielded rich and substantive accounts of life worlds associated with being raised in and later departing from evangelical fundamentalism. If nothing else, this inquiry shed light on the need for authentic human understanding and care amid the culturally diverse world in which we live. My hope is that those who read these pages will be changed in some aspect of thought, feeling, or belief specific to the value of others.

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APPENDIX A

Letter of Initial Contact

UBC

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Letter of Initial Contact

Doctor of Philosophy Research Project
Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling Psychology, and Special Education
(Division of Counseling Psychology)
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC

"The Experiences and Meanings Of Adults Who Were Raised In And Later Departed From Evangelical Fundamentalism: A Descriptive Phenomenological Inquiry."

Dear Prospective Research Participant:

Thank you for your interest in the research project "The Experiences and Meanings of Adults Who Were Raised in And Later Departed from Evangelical Fundamentalism: A Descriptive Phenomenological Inquiry".

This project is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Philosophy degree by Co-Investigator, Malcolm Cameron, MA, RCC, 4th Year Ph.D. student in Counseling Psychology at the University of British Columbia under the supervision of Principal Investigator, Dr. Marvin J. Westwood, Professor, Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling Psychology, and Special Education at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.

The purpose of this study is to explore, via group-based Life Review, the experiences and meanings of adult persons raised in and later departed from evangelical fundamentalism. As a result of this study, it is anticipated that a significant contribution will be made to the existing literature specific to growing up in religiously oriented fundamentalism. It is further anticipated that theory and practice specific to those raised in religious fundamentalism will be enhanced.

Group base Life Review was originally designed by Dr. James Birren, former Associate Director of the UCLA Center on Aging, to assist people in recalling, organizing, and sharing life experiences specific to assigned topics or themes. For the purposes of this study the themes are as follows: 1) choosing to participate in this study, 2) major branching points in my life, 3) my family of origin, 4) my parenting practices, 5) the effects of evangelical fundamentalism on my life, and 6) the meaning of my life.

If selected to participate in this research project, you will be required to invest approximately 40 hours of your time over an 8-9 week period. Specifically, you will participate in a screening interview either in person of via telephone with the Co-Investigator (1hour). You will attend one 3 hour session once a week for 8 weeks (24 hours). In preparation for each session, you will prepare in advance a two page single spaced paper specific to a previously assigned topic (12 hours). During the 3 hour session you have the opportunity to read your paper following which the other group participants will comment on what they heard, what they felt, how they were impacted, and so on. This feedback is affirmative in nature rather than corrective or directive. At the completion of the 8 sessions, you will submit copies of your papers to the Co-Investigator without your name on the documents. These papers will become the data for the dissertation that will reveal the experiences and meanings associated with being raised in evangelical fundamentalism.

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Following the completion of the group, you will be asked to meet on two occasions with the Co-Investigator to review the narratives about your experiences and meanings associated on with being raised in evangelical fundamentalism (2 hours). Following the completion of the group, you will receive a $50.00 Milestones gift card in appreciation for your time and commitment to the study.

With respect to confidentiality, all aspects of group sharing are confidential. As a group participant, you will commit to maintaining confidentiality and will agree to not engage in discussion about the group and or group participants with persons outside of the group. Furthermore, you will commit to not discussing group members with other group members during or after group sessions and following the completion of the 8 group sessions. Confidentiality is limited in that if you are at risk to yourself or to others, such as other group members, family, friends, or acquaintances, an appropriate disclosure will be made to ensure the safety of all persons involved. The study's Research Committee will have access to the written documents that, as mentioned, will be unnamed. Pseudonyms and the elimination of identifying characteristics will be used in data analysis discussions and in the writing of the dissertation in order to protect your identity and the identity's of the other participants. All of your written data will remain in secured office and secured filing cabinet of the Co-Investigator for the duration of the study. Following the completion of the study, your written data will remain in the secured office and secured filing cabinet of the Principal Investigator for a period of five years following which all written documents will be shredded. All written data analysis and writing specific to the dissertation on lap-top or pc will be password protected.

Should you be interested in pursuing involvement in this study, please contact the Co-Investigator at the phone number or email address identified below. A screening interview will ensue either in person or via phone during which the Co-Investigator will 1) ask you some reflective and open ended questions in an effort to determine your suitability for the Life Review group and 2) make you aware of the limits of confidentiality, criteria for participation, and your right to refuse participation at any time during the course of the study. Following the screening interview, opportunity may be given to you to participate in the study and will therefore require that you read and sign the attached Letter of Consent.

Should you have any concerns about the protection of your right to confidentiality or any concerns surrounding the nature and content of the study, or your treatment as a human subject, please contact either the Principal Investigator, Dr. Marvin J. Westwood at (604) 822-6457 or call the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia at (604) 822-8598.

Sincerely,

Malcolm Cameron, MA, RCC
Ph.D. Student, Co-Investigator
(604) 946-7288
malcolmc@cmappac.org

Dr. Marvin J. Westwood, ECPS, UBC
Principal Investigator
(604) 822-6457
westwood@interchange.ubc.ca

APPENDIX B

Publication Poster

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Research Study Poster

For the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Counseling Psychology in the
Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling Psychology and Special Education
(Division of Counseling Psychology)
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC

"The Experiences and Meanings of Adults Who Were Raised In And Later Departed From Evangelical Fundamentalism: A Descriptive Phenomenological Inquiry"

Principal Investigator
Dr. Marvin J. Westwood, Professor
ECPS, Division of Counseling Psychology, UBC
(604) 822-6457 westwood@interchange.ubc.ca

Co-Investigator
Malcolm Cameron, MA, RCC, 4th Year Ph.D. Student
Division of Counseling Psychology, UBC
(604) 946-7288 malcolmc@cmappac.org

Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to explore via a Life Review group the experiences and their meanings of adults who were raised in and later departed from evangelical fundamentalism. Group based Life Review was originally designed by Dr. James Birren, the former director of the UCLA Center for Aging to assist people in recalling, organizing, and sharing life experiences specific to certain topics such as family of origin, the meaning of life, sexuality, the role of money, and relationship. It is anticipated as a result of this study that a significant contribution will be made to the existing literature specific to persons raised in fundamentalist religious orientations, and that theory and practice specific to these populations will be further enhanced.

Recruitment Criteria, Time Commitment and Compensation

Participants will be selected following a screening interview either in person of via telephone in an effort to determine suitability for the research project. Non-threatening, reflective and open ended questions will be asked so as to give the Co-Investigator a sense surrounding your suitability to participate. Approximately 40 hours of your time will be invested during an 8-9 week period in the form of preparing two page papers per week per assigned topic, attending eight 3 hour meetings once per week, and two follow-up interviews to review your written contribution to the formation of the narratives surrounding the lived experience of being raised in evangelical fundamentalism. Compensation for your participation will be a letter of appreciation with an enclosed $50.00 Milestones gift card for your time and commitment to the study.

Counselling Psychology • Development, Learning and Culture
Measurement, Evaluation and Research Methodology • School Psychology • Special Education

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Expression of Interest

Should you be interested in participating in this study, please contact either the Principal Investigator or the Co-Investigator to receive the Letter of Initial Contact and the Letter of Consent that identifies in greater detail the nature and purpose of the study, confidentiality, time commitment, and your freedom to withdraw from the research project at any time without prejudice.

APPENDIX C

Letter of Consent

Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education
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Letter of Consent

Doctor of Philosophy Research Project
Department of Education Psychology and Counseling Psychology, and Special Education
(Division of Counseling Psychology)
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC

"The Experiences And Meanings Of Adults Who Were Raised In And Later Departed From Evangelical Fundamentalism: A Descriptive Phenomenological Inquiry."

Project Title
The Experiences and Meanings Of Adults Who Were Raised In And Later Departed From Evangelical Fundamentalism: A Descriptive Phenomenological Inquiry.

This study is in partial fulfillment for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Counseling Psychology in the Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology and Special Education at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada.

Principal Investigator
Dr. Marvin J. Westwood, Professor
Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology and Special Education, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada.
Contact Number: (604) 822-6457

Co-Investigator
Malcolm Cameron, MA, RCC, Ph.D. Student, Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology and Special Education, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada.
Contact Number: (604) 946-7288

Purpose of Study
The purpose of this study is to explore via group based Life Review the experiences and meanings of adults raised in and later departed from evangelical fundamentalism.

Confidentiality
As per the Letter of Initial Contact, all aspects of your participation in this study are confidential. As such, you will commit to maintaining the privacy of other group members by not sharing anything about the group or your experience in the group or your interactions with other group members with anyone outside of the group. You will commit to maintaining the privacy of other group members by not sharing anything about others with other group members. This includes your impressions, what you heard, what you saw, what you think, and what you felt about other group members. With respect to your written documents, they will be submitted unsigned at the

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end of the group to the Co-Investigator. These documents will become the bases of the data that will later appear in narrative form in the dissertation minus names and identifying characteristics. As such, pseudonyms will be used in the writing of the data in order to protect your privacy and the privacy of the other group members.

Your written documents will remain in the secured office and secured filing cabinet of the Co-Investigator for the duration of the study. Following the Completion of the study, the written documents will remain in the secured office and secured filing cabinet of the Principal Investigator for a period of five years following which the documents will be shredded.

Time Requirements

To participate in this study, you will be required to invest approximately 40 hours of your time. Specifically, you will attend and participate in eight 3 hour sessions, once per week for 8 weeks (24 hours). You will be required to write 6 two page single spaced papers on the assigned topics (12 hours). You will be required to attend or participate in a screening interview either in person or via telephone (1 hour). You will be required to attend two one on one follow up sessions with the Co-Investigator to review and respond to the emerging narratives from your papers as understood by the Co-Investigator (2 hours). Following the completion of the group, you will receive a $50.00 Milestones gift certificate in appreciation for your investment of time and commitment to the study.

Questions or Concerns

The Principal Investigator and Co-investigator, as named above, will be available to answer any questions and concerns participants may have prior to, during, and following the study. If you have any concerns regarding your rights or treatment as a research participant, you may contact the Director of the UBC Office of Research Services and Administration at (604) 822-8598.

Right to Refuse to Participate

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time. The Co and Principal Investigators will support your decision to withdraw your participation.

I have read the Letter of Initial Contact and the Letter of Consent and hereby consent to participate in this study. I have received a copy of the Letter of Consent:

_____

Participant's Printed Name

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Co-Investigator's Signature   Date

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	DEPARTMENT	NUMBER
Westwood, M.J.	Counselling Psychology	**B06-0775**

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT
UBC Campus ,

CO-INVESTIGATORS:
Cameron, Malcolm, Counselling Psychology

SPONSORING AGENCIES
Unfunded Research

TITLE :
Exploring Group Based Life Review with Adults Raised in Evangelical Fundamentalism: Constructing Narratives of Experience and Meaning

APPROVAL DATE	TERM (YEARS)	DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:
OCT 2 0 2006	1	Oct. 12, 2006, Consent form / Contact letter / Sept. 11, 2006, Advertisement

CERTIFICATION:

The application for ethical review of the above-named project has been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approved on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board
by one of the following:
Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair,
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
Dr. Arminee Kazanjian, Associate Chair
Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Associate Chair

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures

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