

FOLLOWING THE ENLIVENING THREAD: THE EXPERIENCE OF
PROVIDING CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

by

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Abstract

This dissertation is an exploration of spiritual direction, from the perspective of counselling psychology, as it manifests in the reflective phenomenological experiences of the spiritual director. To explicate this topic, I asked the research question *What is the meaning of the lived experience of the spiritual director in providing spiritual direction?* In the tradition of spiritual direction, a person deepens their individual relationship to the Divine through a personalized spiritual practice with the help of a trained spiritual director (Gratton, 2005). Although the spiritual direction discourse, one of healing and personal development, is similar to many types of psychotherapy (Vittersø & Søholt, 2011; Vittersø, 2016), it has not often been examined systematically in counselling psychology. In this dissertation, I used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to focus on the meaning of the experience of the spiritual director. Five expert spiritual directors were interviewed for the study. The individual experiences of the participants were analyzed, and six collective themes with emergent subthemes were developed. Embedding the findings in psychology theory, clinical implications and future research implications were discussed. The findings add to the literature by noting connections of the spiritual direction process in this study to psychological theories including the model of therapeutic presence (Geller & Greenberg, 2002), the emergence model of clinical process (Marks-Tarlow, 2015), love as a process in therapy (Fosha, 2004) and corroborated Gubi's (2011) findings on the similarities and differences of spiritual direction and therapy. The study added to the literature by using a recognized qualitative methodology to provide a rich description of the experience and meaning of being a spiritual director. It touched on the experience using a broad scope: from

the participant's development of becoming a spiritual director over time to their approaches and experiences in sessions. Finally, the study gave a sense of the profession of spiritual direction in an experience-based way by interviewing the 5 spiritual directors and developing themes described in the voices of the participants.

Lay Summary

This dissertation is about the experience of five spiritual directors in their work, and the meaning they make of their experience. Spiritual direction has not been studied extensively in counselling psychology. It can inform the cultural competencies of counsellors, as well as help them work with spiritual issues with their clients. The study uses a well-recognized qualitative methodology called Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, which is well suited to exploring and describing personal experiences. Six main themes described the spiritual directors' experience. Spiritual direction uses a collaborative relational approach, looks for what emerges in session, includes love as a foundational theme, involves ongoing personal and spiritual learning, and has a mutual impact on the people who take part. The sixth theme was about the types of activities that are part of spiritual direction. Spirituality is an important human endeavour. This study looks at that through the experience of spiritual direction.

Preface

This dissertation is the original work of K. Maier. This research project was conducted with the approval of the University of British Columbia (UBC) Office of Research Services Ethics Behavioural Ethics Board (BREB), certificate number H16-00241. Participant interviews and data analysis were carried out by the author. During the data analysis, two peer co-researchers reviewed, validated and provided feedback on the analysis at several points in the process. They were: Dianne Westwood (Ph.D., Counselling Psychology, University of British Columbia), and Bernard Fitzpatrick (Ph.D., Clinical Psychology, Pacifica Graduate Institute).

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Dedication

To Dr. Bonnelle L. Strickling

Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation is an exploration of spiritual direction, from the perspective of counselling psychology, as it manifests in the reflective phenomenological experiences of the spiritual director. It is my hope that this dissertation will give readers a rich sense of the experience of spiritual direction as a process where spiritual directors and seekers intentionally follow the enlivening thread of their lives through the spiritual practice of Christian spiritual direction.

In the tradition of spiritual direction, a person deepens their individual relationship to the Divine through a personalized spiritual practice with the help of a trained spiritual director. Dating back to the beginning of religious practice, the purpose of spiritual direction is to increase the person's ability to live as the authentic being they were created to be. This is accomplished through the development of a personal relationship to the Divine, a deepening of this relationship by ongoing spiritual formation, an increase in self-awareness and personal consciousness, and the resulting reflection of this personal wholeness in service to the world (Gratton, 2005). Although the spiritual direction discourse, one of healing and personal development, is similar to many types of psychotherapy (e.g., eudaimonia¹, Vittersø & Søholt, 2011 among others), it has not often been examined systematically in counselling psychology. In this dissertation, I used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to focus on the meaning of the experience of the spiritual director and thereby add to the literature around this practice.

¹ *Eudaimonia* definition: A contented state of being happy and healthy and prosperous. www.webstersonlinedictionary.com, retrieved May 17, 2012. It is also described as human flourishing.

The literature in this area uses several terms to describe the process of spiritual direction and counselling, and the people involved. Terms for the guide in a spiritual direction relationship include spiritual director (Gratton, 2005), soul friend (Leech, 2001), and spiritual accompanier (Gubi, 2010). The term *spiritual director* can lead to an authoritarian interpretation of the relationship because of the connotations of the word director. Regardless, I have chosen to use this term for this dissertation. It is historically the most commonly used term in the literature. It was also the term that the participants used most often (although this is likely an artefact of the study, since it is the term I used). The terms therapy, psychotherapy and counselling appear in the literature explored in this study and will be encompassed here by the term clinical counselling or counselling to describe a psychological process that may or may not include a spiritual component. I use the terms *therapist*, *psychotherapist* and *counsellor* in different parts of this dissertation as is congruent with how the terms are used in the literature I have cited and by the participants in their interviews. For both clarity and the fact that this dissertation is one in counselling psychology, I will use the terms *counsellor* or *clinical counsellor* to encompass the people who provide a psychological process. The term *clients* is used in this dissertation to describe people who receive counselling. The term *seeker* will be used to describe people who are receiving spiritual direction. This is in place of the term *directee*, to be more true to the collaborative nature of a modern spiritual direction experience.

What is Spiritual Direction?

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the importance of the relationship between self and God has been a constant; however, the way that this relationship has been interpreted over the past two millennia has changed according to the context of the time and the projects of

the community at that time (Manschreck, 1985). Study, ritual, mystical experience, prayer, communal worship and personal practice have all been part of the tradition throughout history (Mursell, 2001).

Activities in spiritual direction include learning about the authentic self/selves, working with sacred texts, working with dreams, contemplative practices (meditation and prayer), artistic expression, and exploring personal service in the world (Gratton, 2005). The people guiding the process use many names: spiritual guide, mentor, soul friend, spiritual companion, *mashpia* (in Hebrew) and *anam cara* (in Gaelic) (SDI, 2011).

The professional group, Spiritual Directors International (SDI), an ecumenical and multi faith association, was founded in 1990. SDI currently has 6500 members from 50 countries. Current writers in the field include K. Leech, *Soul Friend* (2001); G. May, *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit* (2006); T. Edwards *Spiritual Friend* (1980), and H. Nouwen *Spiritual Direction* (1981). There are no established standards for the training of spiritual directors, although there are several university based programs. Spiritual direction is in a stage of increasing professionalization (Benner, 2002).

Typically in spiritual direction, a seeker meets every few weeks with a trained director to explore life and deepen their relationship with the Divine (Leech, 2001). Over the last 200 years or so, the secularization of society has impacted the trends of membership in religious organizations. This has led to a trend of more *intentional* searching for a spiritual connection to life as opposed to a more *conventional* connection to spiritual institutions (Borg, 2008). Such spiritual intentionality fits well with the research paradigm of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA); which will be described in detail later in this dissertation.

Psychology and Spirituality

In the last 30 years, there has been a resurgence of interest in spirituality in and out of academia (Aldridge, 1991; Cloninger, 2006; Fukuyama & Sevig, 2002). The existing literature cites many noted health benefits of spiritual practice (Oleckno & Blacconiere, 1991; Mills, 2002); the reduction of stress and existential anxiety (Siegel, Anderman, & Schrimshaw, 2001; Shreve-Neiger, & Edelstein, 2004); increased life-expectancy (Hall, 2006); increased social cohesion (Allport, 1956); and benefits in managing emotion (Durkheim, 1995).

To date, there is no agreed upon definition of either *spirituality* or *religion* in Psychology (O'Grady & Richards, 2010). This challenge goes back to the founders of modern psychology, as implied in William James's observation: "Religion, . . . , as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the Divine." (James, 1903, p.46). Religion is, however, seen to create a world view of meaning and actions, which become a community tradition (Norcross, 2002). For the purposes of this dissertation, spirituality and religion will be defined using the criteria outlined in the foundational paper by Hill et al, 2000:

Criteria for (the definition of) *Spirituality*: A. The feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors that arise from a search for the sacred. The term 'search' refers to attempts to identify, articulate, maintain or transform. The term 'sacred' refers to a divine being, divine object, Ultimate Reality or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual.

Criteria for (the definition of) *Religion*: A. The feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors that arise from a search for the sacred. The term

‘search’ refers to attempts to identify, articulate, maintain or transform. The term ‘sacred’ refers to a divine being, divine object, ultimate reality or ultimate truth as perceived by the individual; AND/OR, B. A search for non-sacred goals (such as identity, belongingness, meaning, health or wellness) in a context that has its primary goal the facilitation of (A).; AND, C. The means and methods; e.g., rituals or prescribed behaviors, of the search that receive validation and support from within an identifiable group of people. (Hill et al, 2000, pp. 66).

Spiritual direction is one of many practices that fit within the definition of spirituality and religion above. Living as a spiritual person is conceptualized here as including, by the nature of the Christian endeavour, a relationship with God and living in service to others.

Comparing Counselling Psychology and Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction and counselling psychology have been described as “two forms of soul care” (Benner, 2002, p. 360). Spiritual direction is a one-to-one relationship between a trained director and a person seeking a spiritual journey; spiritual direction aims to deepen the personal relationship with the Divine, recognize and manifest personal meaning, deal with suffering, embrace mystery, and accept our total humanness (Gratton, 2005). The definition of *counselling* used in this dissertation is from the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (2015):

Counselling is a relational process based upon the ethical use of specific professional competencies to facilitate human change. Counselling addresses wellness, relationships, personal growth, career development, mental health, and psychological illness or distress. The counselling process is characterized

by the application of recognized cognitive, affective, expressive, somatic, spiritual, developmental, behavioural, learning, and systemic principles.

Counselling psychology is part of the wider medical system, which is typically seen by society as having a soteriological (that is, salvation-oriented or redemptive) function when offering healing or service to clients (Good, 2008).

Kenneth Leech (2001) compares spiritual direction and counselling by suggesting that counselling

is the meeting between two humans in the presence of God to pursue a human goal of growth, whereas spiritual direction is a meeting between a person and God in the presence of another person for the divine goal of relationship with the Divine.

(Benner, 2002, p.360).

This dissertation explores the broad meaning that the spiritual director makes of the experience as they facilitate the seeker's relationship to the Divine. Given the definition above, from the lens of counselling psychology, the purpose of the development of this relationship may be the remediation of the seeker's existential or personal problems in living, which arise from the lack of deep divine relationship, and facilitating a learning process using culturally relevant activities that are appropriate to this individual's needs with the purpose of living a fulfilling life. I am curious about two aspects of this context: the experience of the spiritual director as they participate in this work, and their use of culturally specific psychological skills and knowledge as they appear in this context.

Some attention has been paid to the skills and knowledge in question. In a 2003 article examining the three professions of spiritual direction, psychotherapy and pastoral counselling, Tisdale, Doehring and Lorraine-Poirier outlined their individual perspectives and approach to care. Whereas all three perspectives share a focus on the psychological and

spiritual well-being of the person, spiritual direction has a stronger focus on the person's relationship to God and acknowledges the third entity of the Divine in the relationship. This third entity is described as being visible through life experiences and relationships. There is also the concept of an inner spiritual relationship accessed through personal reflection and practices such as silence. Whereas the psychotherapist focuses conceptually on pathology; i.e., depression, and formal assessment in an effort to provide specific therapy for personal development, the pastoral counsellor focuses on assessment adding a theological component, as well as addressing issues of community justice and community resources. The focus of pastoral counselling is also often more on personal skill development using a coaching model. Nevertheless, there is considerable overlap between the conceptualizations of the three professionals in this article.

In another article, "The Integration of Spiritual Direction Functions in the Practice of Psychotherapy," Sperry (2003) compares eight spiritual direction functions to functions in psychotherapy (Table 1). Since the reader is probably more familiar with the psychotherapy functions, I will focus here on the functions of spiritual direction.

Table 1: Functions of Spiritual Direction and Psychotherapy

Spiritual Direction	Psychotherapy
Spiritual assessment	Initial psychological evaluation
Differentiating spiritual experience from psychopathology	Differential diagnosis
Transformation	Symptom reduction, increasing functioning, change
Triadic relationship	Dyadic therapeutic alliance
Advisement	Therapeutic interventions; i.e., interpretation, cognitive restructuring, etc.
Discernment	(Mutual collaboration)
Spiritual resistance	Psychological resistance
Transference and counter-transference	Transference and counter-transference

(Sperry, 2003, p.7)

Spiritual assessment involves exploring the client's experiences and beliefs. After about six months of spiritual direction, the assessment is revisited, and there is some discussion of the seeker's perceptions of how the healing cultural concept of grace is experienced (or not) in the spiritual direction relationship. Spiritual experience can sometimes involve similar symptoms to some forms of pathology, including psychosis, anxiety, mania, or depression. Sperry discusses the work of Grof and Grof (1989) in creating a differential diagnosis of *spiritual emergency* to distinguish the manifestations of spiritual experience from the symptoms of the previously defined psychological disorders. The concept of a spiritual emergency has a long history in all religious traditions, but was relatively recently defined in psychology by Grof and Grof (1989). It speaks to the intense and sometimes overwhelming new experiences and un-integrated spiritual energy that some new practitioners of a spiritual practice will encounter. Different forms of treatment are suggested depending on the formulation of the client's distress as a spiritual emergency or a psychological disorder. The authors have also argued that treating a spiritual emergency as a psychological disorder can be a destructive missed opportunity for the healthy development of the client, although of course it would be ethically irresponsible to leave a psychological disorder untreated (Sperry, 2003). The life-long process of *transformation* is described by Sperry as the central goal of the spiritual direction process. Sperry defines transformation as "the process of undergoing a radical change of mind and heart, a dying to the false self, and continually assenting to one's true self, which reflects the image and likeness of God" (Sperry, 2003, p. 8). The *triadic relationship* is a relationship between the spiritual director, the client and God. The process of transformation is meant to foster the relationship between the seeker and God. *Advisement* in spiritual direction takes the form of suggestions arising from the material brought to the session by the client; such suggestions are offered in a spirit

of mutual collaboration, and can include homework such as spiritual practices. *Discernment* is the function of listening together for the ways that the Spirit is moving in the life of the seeker and making decisions based on this information. *Spiritual resistance* includes avoidance of spiritual experience such as a regular prayer practice, and can be due to a fear of the intensity of the divine presence. Resistance also includes interpersonal blocks in either direction within the spiritual direction relationship; for example, the spiritual director's resistance to exploring some types of the client's experience. *Transference and counter-transference dynamics* constitute the final function, and are very similar to the same concepts in psychotherapy. The forms this transference can take include idealizing the spiritual director, seeing the spiritual director as a God figure, developing erotic feelings for the spiritual director and identifying the spiritual director with a specific institution. Counter-transference is of course also sometimes present in numerous forms. How transference and counter-transference are explored in the helping relationship is significant to the experience. As the title of Sperry's article indicates, he is advocating for spiritually-oriented therapists to include the above functions in their practice as a way to address the client's spiritual concerns (Sperry, 2003). I include the description of these functions in spiritual direction here to elucidate some of the skills and knowledge that spiritual directors have been attributed to use in their practice. They are a useful example in the comparison of the clinical focus in both counselling psychology and spiritual direction.

Situating this Dissertation in Counselling Psychology

Counselling competencies and spirituality. In addition to the clear common concerns and differences between counselling and spiritual direction described in the above discussion, there are additional reasons why I would like to pursue this research into spiritual

direction from a counselling psychology perspective. One reason is that research into spiritual direction furthers the ethical development and clinical practice of professionals in our field.

Knowledge about psychological diversity in relation to spirituality and religion is considered a necessary competency for training and practicing psychologists (Richards & Bergin, 2014). In 1995, nine spiritual competencies were developed by the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) to address this mandate (adapted from Robertson, 2008):

1. A counselor should be able to explain the relationship between religion and spirituality, including similarities and differences.
2. A counselor should be able to describe religious and spiritual beliefs and practices within a cultural context.
3. A counselor should engage in self-exploration of his/her religious and spiritual beliefs in order to increase sensitivity, understanding, and acceptance of his/her belief system.
4. A counselor should be able to describe his/her religious and/or spiritual belief system and explain various models of religious/spiritual development across the life span.
5. A counselor should demonstrate sensitivity to and acceptance of a variety of religious and/or spiritual expressions in the client's communication.
6. A counselor should identify the limits of his/her understanding of a client's spiritual expression and demonstrate appropriate referral skills and general possible referral sources.

7. A counselor should assess the relevance of the spiritual domains in the client's therapeutic issues.

8. A counselor should be sensitive to and respectful of the spiritual themes in the counseling process as befits each client's expressed preferences.

9. A counselor should use a client's spiritual beliefs in the pursuit of the client's therapeutic goals as befits the client's expressed preferences.

Similarly, the American Psychiatric Association has acknowledged that religious and spiritual issues are worthy of clinical attention. For the first time, in 1993, the Spiritual Problem V62.89 was coded in the DSM-IV as an Axis V (non-pathological) issue in therapy. This has been upheld in the DSM-V with a new coding name of Z65.8 a Religious or Spiritual Problem. This designation is used

when the focus of clinical attention is a religious or spiritual problem. Examples include distressing spiritual experiences that involve loss or questioning of faith, problems associated with conversion to a new faith, or questioning of spiritual values that may not necessarily be related to an organized church or religious institution (DSM-V, p. 725).

In this current study, spiritual development may or may not be seen by the spiritual directors as having a pathological aspect, depending on the individual with whom they are working. The seeker's spiritual direction experience may stem from or elicit mental distress, and/or it may be based more on an experience of non-pathological personal development. It is interesting to see how or if the spiritual directors in this study make meaning of their experiences in relation to their seekers' experience using a perspective of health or illness.

More generally, when the focus of clinical attention in a session is religious or spiritual in nature, as mentioned above, it is important for mental health practitioners to

approach this with an awareness of the strengths and possible dangers of such experiences in mind. Religion itself has two purposes as part of formalizing an emergent cultural spiritual system: 1) as a path for moral and social development, and 2) as a path for deepening religious experience and relationship; i.e., mysticism. All world spiritual traditions have practices to structure this; however, the very nature of the second path is to get beyond structure to ineffable experience.

For this reason, the spiritual traditions of the world recommend choosing a path and finding a guide; in other words embarking on spiritual direction. Again, this is partially because there are potential dangers in spiritual practice that need the same kind of container as in counselling psychology, and extensive practice can lead to periods of spiritual crisis. As mentioned in the previous section, Transpersonal Psychologists such as Grof and Grof (1989) and Lukoff (1999) have written extensively about these transitions and view them as non-pathological if handled appropriately. The DSM-IV Cultural Appendix I listed several examples of this type of spiritual experience, including Qi-Gong Psychotic Reaction (DSM IV, p.902) and Zar (African) (DSM IV, p. 903).

Part of the current cultural context in North America is a non-institutional interest in spirituality. The 2011 Canadian Census indicated that 76.1% of respondents had some spiritual belief indicating that more Canadians than previously are reporting no religious affiliation (Canadian Census, 2011). A survey conducted for the National Post of 1355 participants by Forum Research on December 18, 2012, found that 65% considered themselves spiritual while 50% see themselves as religious (Johnson, 2012). Therefore, 15% have a personal spiritual practice not connected to spiritual institutions for guidance. It is

likely that counselling psychologists will encounter clients who have a spiritual practice outside of institutional settings. Counselling psychologists need to be versed in the recognition and management of spiritual formation experiences to best support these clients.

Christian spiritual direction is one of the culturally designated paths for the Christian religious tradition to provide the kind of therapeutic container necessary for spiritual emergence in particular, and spiritual development in general. To support counselling psychologists in their professional competence, a second reason to pursue this research was to bring current psychological research design to the exploration of spiritual direction.

Researching spirituality using a qualitative research design. In his *History of Psychology*, Hilgard (1987) describes the traditional research challenge in this area. Religion is considered a humanistic topic, along with literature, music, and art; there has long been a dualistic split between the science of psychology and the humanistic aspects of experience, including the transcendent and the mystical. As Hilgard puts it

The awkwardness arises because there may be intriguing psychological problems that psychologists do not know how to deal with. The standard approach of psychology is to stand outside religion, the arts and literature, and to do studies of how people react to these areas of experience (Hilgard, 1987, p. 791).

Hilgard goes on to describe the main streams of study in the psychology of religion as falling into two principal categories: the sociological aspects (such as group membership) and the aspects of meaning as they relate to life experiences (such as mortality) (Hilgard, 1987). This dissertation may touch on the above two categories, but is fundamentally a study that goes beyond the two; adding the study of the process using a phenomenological approach to gain a deeper understanding of the practice of Christian spiritual direction. It brings the strength of

counselling psychology research design to bear, adding to the already valuable body of other types of study in the area of spiritual direction.

Much of the historical difficulty in researching spirituality stems from the lack of fit between the ineffable quality of spiritual experience and modern forms of positivist scientific inquiry. This challenge is not new. The 13th century Christian mystic Meister Eckhart wrote, “When we speak of divine matters, we have to stammer, because we are forced to express our experience in words.” (Fox, 1982, p.7) As mentioned above, six hundred years later, William James similarly noted that spiritual experience exists beyond a positivist definition (James, 1903) and Carl Jung wrote expansively about spirituality and mysticism in his clinical and psychological theory (1972a, 1972b). The psychological researcher must then grapple with the problem of creating a rich description of this elusive but impactful human experience. Thankfully, we have moved well beyond the need to stammer. Counselling psychology has supported the development of qualitative methodologies, which open many avenues for researching spiritual experience.

Research in spirituality has exploded in the last several decades. This is epitomized by Koenig, McCullough and Larson’s 2001 review of 1200 studies relating to religion and health in *The Handbook of Religion and Health*. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods are used to research spirituality, religion and psychology, including phenomenological approaches (Graham, McDonald, & Klaassen, 2008), correlational approaches (Desimpelaere et al., 1999; Laurencelle et al., 2002), hermeneutic approaches (Blanco-Beledo, 1998), qualitative survey studies (O’Grady & Richards, 2010), and narrative approaches (Ruffing, 1986) to name a few.

The study of spirituality in counselling psychology has traditionally been framed in a cultural context. Reisner (2005) discusses the concept of the *culturally sanctioned healer* (p.

377) that exists in many cultures. This is a relevant concept in the study of spiritual direction, since individuals seek out people in the community who are recognized as spiritual directors. Religions and spiritual traditions are particular cultures and reflect particular world views; conceptually they go beyond the medical model in psychology. Wampold (2001), the renowned common factors researcher in psychotherapy process, holds that the positivist medical model is inadequate in the pursuit of psychological research. Research must be approached using at least a post-positivist, culturally sensitive model.

Many studies have explored the concepts of spirituality and religion, the integration of spirituality into psychology and health care, and spiritual formation. Although spiritual formation is included in spiritual direction, to date there is a dearth of counselling research studies into spiritual direction itself. The literature review uncovered extensive discussion of spiritual direction theory and conceptual papers from various traditions, and a search on Dissertation Abstracts revealed 167 works with the key words “spiritual direction,” but the studies do not often have a methodological foundation offering the epistemological benefits in understanding that systematic study can provide. The purpose of this dissertation is to begin to remedy this gap in the research in general, and in the counselling psychological literature in particular.

Thus far I have sought to establish what spiritual direction is as a tradition, that there is an interest in academia in the study of spiritual aspects of human experience, that there are psychological benefits and dangers to spirituality, and that there is an imperative for counselling psychologists to be competent in their understanding and clinical ability to work with spiritual issues. The next step explores the rationale behind using a qualitative research design to understand the experience of the spiritual director. Their role in the spiritual direction relationship is parallel to that of a counsellor in a therapy relationship.

Statement of the Problem

Since the development of modern psychology, clinicians and researchers have been interested in determining if counselling and psychotherapy are effective ways to bring about change in the client. The Task Force on Empirically Based Principles of Therapeutic Change determined that

there is now enough supporting, or at least promising, evidence for humanistic, interpersonal, psychodynamic, and mindfulness-based therapies to justify substantial investment, in terms of time and funds, from our scientific community to more solidly and broadly demonstrate their therapeutic impact (Castonguay & Beutler, 2006, p. 367).

Given that there are so few systematic studies of spiritual direction in the literature, and only one study on spiritual direction in counselling psychology (Gubi, 2010) that I could locate, a focus on the meaning, interpretations and descriptions of what happens for the participating spiritual directors is a beneficial research goal and the primary aim of the research here. Gaining an understanding of the experience of spiritual direction adds to both the counselling literature on the experience in types of counselling psychology and the clinical competencies of counsellors addressing spiritual issues.

Studying spirituality has traditionally posed challenges for research design because of the mismatch between the phenomenon of spirituality and the philosophy of science as viewed in the past. This dissertation addresses these challenges by using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) which is a qualitative method coming from a postpositivist phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophical perspective. It is a well-tested method for the study of therapeutic experiences.

Research Question

To begin to address the gap in research on spiritual direction, this dissertation will use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as a method to explore the following question:

*What is the meaning of the lived experience of the spiritual director
in providing spiritual direction?*

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to create a rich and deep description of Christian spiritual direction from the point of view of the spiritual director and the researcher, in order to illuminate the practice of this spiritual approach.

I believe it is interesting to look systematically at the experience of the spiritual director for the reasons outlined above. This dissertation explores the viewpoint of the ‘counsellor’ in this spiritual practice. The research does this by using a reflective method looking closely into meaning, themes, feelings and thoughts related to the spiritual director’s experience.

As a PhD dissertation, the purpose of my study was three-fold. First, it was practice oriented, in that it was to “inform practice by providing rich, elaborated descriptions of specific processes or concerns within a specific context” (Haverkamp & Young, 2007, p. 274). In this instance, the process was the spiritual director’s experience and the meaning he or she makes of the experience as a counsellor in the context of Christian spiritual direction. The study was idiographic in that it privileges the individual experience of the participants to provide a sense of the experience. It was also emic in that it looks at “constructs or behaviours that are unique to an individual, sociocultural context that are not generalizable” (Pontorotto, 2005, p. 128). Secondly, the purpose of the study was research-oriented, in that it

explores spiritual direction using the recognized research method used in counselling psychology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to add to the literature on spirituality in counselling. Thirdly, the purpose of the study was to explore how the results of this study correspond with existing theory, primarily in counselling psychology.

Chapter 2: Research in the Experience of Spiritual Direction and Counselling

In this chapter, I review the literature on spiritual direction and spiritual formation. I also review the literature about counsellors' experience in therapy. These discussions provide a stronger foundation for the concepts outlined in Chapter 1 around the context and study of spiritual direction. They also set the stage for the actual practical implementation of the study that will be described in Chapter 3.

Research in Spiritual Direction and Spiritual Formation

To date, there is a dearth of systematic research on the experience of spiritual direction. Most of the research in the field is conceptual or does not follow an established method of enquiry. One notable exception is the recent masters thesis by Gubi (2010). It is similar to this dissertation in that it used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to explore the perceptions of five counsellors who are also spiritual directors, to explore the similarities and difference between counselling and spiritual direction. Gubi discussed a model where counselling and spiritual direction are “a process of oscillation between the encounter being soul-orientated or psychological-orientated” (Gubi, 2010, p.339). Other distinctions included intentionality of including the Divine in the session, a distinction in the language of discourse used and the type of resources accessed in the process (Gubi, 2010).

There is also a dissertation by Ruffing (1986) using narrative methodology to study one man's spiritual direction experience from the seeker's viewpoint. In addition, Miller et al. (2008) conducted two controlled trials of the inclusion of spiritual direction within addictions treatment and found no effect on the participant's substance use outcomes or spiritual practices. Miller theorized that the results may have been influenced by the lack of compliance of participants attending sessions. He also wondered about the possibility of a

conflict between the level of functioning of the particular participants and the level of functioning needed to make good use of spiritual direction. They may have been focusing on too many basic life needs (such as those described by Maslow, 1962) to be looking at a higher-order need such as spiritual transformation.

Despite the limited number of rigorous research studies, interest in this spiritually-focused form of counselling is evidenced in two special issues of the *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 2002(4) and 2003 (1); these two volumes were dedicated “to examining the ancient and modern practice of spiritual direction and the implications for mental health professionals... [and] to promote dialogue among those interested in the process of authentic spiritual change and transformation”(Moon, 2002, p. 261). These issues include articles from seven different Christian perspectives (Orthodox, Catholic, Episcopal, Reformed, Holiness, Social Justice, and Charismatic) that describe the way spiritual direction is practiced. Each perspective addresses topics such as definitions, the role of the counsellor, the process of change, and the markers of maturity in each setting. Moon classifies three approaches to spiritual direction: “support, teaching, and reconstruction. Supportive approaches emphasize the qualities of spiritual accompaniment and friendship, whereas teaching approaches emphasize the instruction in classic spiritual practices, and reconstructive approaches focus on the process of spiritual transformation” (Benner, 2002, p. 356). Each of the perspectives presented has aspects of support, teaching and transformation present within them. Although the use of the term “spiritual direction” to describe these processes of spiritual nurturing is problematic, due to the possible impression of authoritarianism inherent in the word “direction,” this negative experience is not borne out in the literature (Benner, 2002).

The seven spiritual direction perspectives explored in the special issues of *The Journal of Psychology and Theology* look at changes in the person/self, emotion, behaviour,

and the relationships of the individual as stemming from the Divine (Benner, 2002). The metaphor of the spiritual director as a midwife in change is common. Different terminology, both within denominations and between religion and psychology itself, is used to understand the process of spiritual transformation. Indeed, as Benner notes, “It requires a real commitment to genuine dialogue to not allow these tribal dialects to block communication” (Benner, 2002, p.358).

Theories and Research into Spiritual Development

There is a body of literature around spiritual development and formation, which can be used as a broader context for the spiritual direction process itself. In this section, I outline the most traditional form of the Christian spiritual journey in the medieval contemplative path, a recent theory of spiritual formation in Fowler’s six stages of faith, Miller’s research into quantum change, the Intensification Model of Spiritual Transformation, and Bidwell’s dissertation on the embedded psychologies of spiritual direction. It is my hope that this overview, though not exhaustive, will provide some understanding of the spiritual journey as it is relevant to my research.

Medieval spiritual formation. The classical spiritual direction approach arose out of the Catholic counter-reformation in the development of the Ignatian exercises. It has a mystical focus, is linear and includes three stages: Purgation, Illumination, and Union. Although it is the cultural product of a medieval philosophy of science and could be viewed as deterministic, each of its stages is an expression of some aspect of transformation. As Benner points out:

A careful reading of the accounts of these traditions makes clear that the stages are never to be understood in a mechanical manner. Rather, they represent an attempt to

summarize a few of the most important components of the journey as we “put on Christ” (Rom. 13:14) (Benner, 2003, p. 358).

The *Purgative* way uses meditative prayer to reach out to God, beginning with meditation, and often includes experiences of joy. This gives way to the Dark Night of the Senses which is marked by both a longing for connection and a perceived lack of meaning in the spiritual practice. Purgation or the experience of difficult life events and dryness in prayer challenges the seeker to move past the illusion of rewards for their spiritual practice. After moving through this difficult time, the Prayer of Simplicity can be experienced. Unlike meditation, which is something the seeker *does*, the Prayer of Simplicity or Contemplation is a gift from God, something the seeker *receives*.

The *Illuminative* Way describes the prayer of infused recollection, when the individual moves deeper into relationship with God. The prayer of infused recollection is a gift from God that turns the person further inward on their soul journey. It can include spontaneously hearing words from God during prayer. The Dark Night of the Soul happens in this part of spiritual formation. It is an intense experience of doubt and again feeling separate from God. Everything in the person is in flux. It is a lonely and frightening time on the spiritual path. God has not abandoned the seeker, but the seeker’s way of perceiving God through ego no longer works. The seeker must give up the old way before they can move into the deeper experience and perceive God more clearly. This dark experience gives way to prayers of quiet and union. The experiences of the Illuminative Way transform the whole person in preparation for the third and final stage.

The *Unitive* Way is the third and final stage on the traditional mystical path. It can only occur when a person’s soul is pure enough, and their desires are in alignment with God. Then the prayer becomes transcendent. The person experiences a period of what St. Teresa of

Avila called “betrothal with God.” This is a period of intense anticipation. It moves into The Mystical Marriage, which includes the expansion of the soul and the experience of ecstasy with God (Teresa of Avila, 2004).

Experiences of what St. Ignatius called consolation and desolation occur throughout the formation process. Consolations are experiences of comfort and reassurance; desolations are experiences of feeling separated and full of doubt. Sweeney (1983) compares these two states to Jung’s descriptions of the progression and regression of a person’s internal energy, respectively. Sweeney goes on to say that, despite the state of the seeker’s feelings, God is still working in the person’s life:

The Holy Spirit can guide the soul both in times of consolation and desolation. One will know that he/she has responded properly to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in either instance if the result is an enduring increase in courage, freedom, and insight. (Sweeney, 1983, p. 411).

The first of the four models of spiritual formation discussed in this dissertation, the medieval model has three stages and is very extensively used in Christian spiritual formation.

Fowler’s six stages of faith. Another more recent example of spiritual formation literature is Fowler’s stages of faith development (Fowler, 1995). It provides a linear structure for conceptualizing how the seeker approaches spirituality. Stage One, the Projective Stage, is an intuitive way of experiencing spirituality. It includes magical thinking about God and the world, and constitutes the early childhood stage of spiritual understanding. Stage Two, the Mythic Stage, is a literal way of experiencing spirituality; at this stage the seeker uses the story as a literal experience to explain God and their relationship, and holds fast to authority and rules to guide their life. Stage Three, the Synthetic Stage, is a conventional way to experience spirituality. At this stage the person gains a large part of their

spiritual understanding from the group they choose to belong to and with which they identify; their personal relationships in the community are a mirror for their identity and opinions. Being good and gaining approval are important at this stage. Stage Four, the Individuative Stage, is a stage of questioning, doubt, and reflection, where people often begin to criticize and demythologize spirituality. People move beyond their old communal role and may fall into a cynical view of spirituality. Stage Five, the Conjunctive Stage, is a stage of re-integration of spiritual ideas, since personal spiritual formation at this stage includes both an inner and a cultural perspective. The ability to work with paradox and the symbolism in religious constructs and ideas is also part of this stage. For example, a person in this stage is comfortable with the concept that it is possible to make a spiritual journey without being Christian. Stage Six, the Inclusive Stage, is a spiritual approach that few people attain. It includes a sense of connection to the Universe and to social justice. Possible examples of people in this stage are Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, the Dalai Lama, and Bishop Desmond Tutu.

Fowler outlines a linear developmental model of spiritual development that moves from fusion of identity, through differentiation, into union. Like all stage models, it is open to the criticism that it cannot reflect the particularity of each individual's experience.

Quantum change. In 2004, Miller and C'DeBaca conducted a qualitative study of the very sudden and life-transforming experiences they called Quantum Change. Their work built on William James' description in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* of Two Types of Transformational Change (1903), where type 1 change is common and gradual and type 2 change is instant and dramatic. Maslow (1962) described the later type of changes as Peak Experiences.

Miller and C'DeBaca interviewed fifty-five people who had self-selected as having

experienced a quantum change. The interview question was simply, “Tell me what happened.” The stories from the interviews were analyzed for content and outcome.

The stories of quantum change were preceded by a range of current life circumstances, from hitting bottom and feeling trapped, to experiencing a period of aimless wandering, to having everyday mundane experiences (such as cleaning the bathroom). About a third of the quantum experiences happened during prayer (sometimes the person’s first prayers in a long time).

The quantum change could be categorized into two types: insightful quantum change, where the person had a revelation of knowledge which they had not had access to before; and mystical epiphanies, which were experienced passively and were characterized by feelings of unity, transcendence, and awe. They were typically followed by a sense of gratitude and the question of “Why me?”

Both types of quantum change had an immediate positive effect. The quantum change experiences transformed emotions (bringing relief from negative emotions), priorities (involving a profound shift in values), behaviour (letting go of destructive patterns), relationships (often being healed or deepened), spirituality (increasing in vibrancy and trust), self-actualization (experiencing personal growth), sense of self, and trust in the future (believing that life is safe).

Miller (2004) reported that the shift in values experienced by the participants moved them from more typical gender stereotypes and attitudes, toward values of spirituality, personal peace, family, honesty, humility, faithfulness, growth, self-esteem, generosity, and forgiveness.

The meaning(s) of the quantum change experiences could be viewed as messages about life: “Change is possible. There are different ways of knowing other than common

rationality. Material reality is a small part of all that is. Possessions ought not to possess us. The nature of God is a love and acceptance so profound that it overwhelms comprehension. Love is what we are and are meant to be. Human shortcomings are best met with compassion and forgiveness. All things in life are a unity. Life is a gift and opportunity” (Miller, 2008).

This research into quantum change illuminates one of the fascinating aspects of human experience and spiritual transformation. Furthermore, quantum change appears to be more common than previously anticipated and fits into the tradition of mystical experience.

The Intensification Model: integrating theological and psychological change.

One of the most interesting theoretical works providing a model of spiritual formation and psychology in recent years is called the intensification model and was developed by LeRon Shults and Steven Sandage (2006). In their book, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology*, they propose a rigorous relational and dialectical model for joining spiritual formation and psychotherapeutic work. They note the importance of including culturally salient theological concepts that may impact change and transformation in therapy. In particular, their model addresses the concept of transformation by the Holy Spirit. The concepts they discuss are complex, but since they help to illustrate the type of discussion that is currently possible in the evolution of the field of spiritual transformation in psychotherapy, I will spend some time elaborating the model below.

The Intensification model describes spiritual transformation as an “ongoing qualitative intensification of redemptive relations in embodied community” (Shults, 2008). It views spiritual development as a holistic process with three simultaneous experiences: intensity, intentionality and intimacy, which are only loosely analogous to the traditional model of purgation, illumination, and union described above. The aspects of intensity, intentionality, and intimacy are operative concurrently in a dynamic process of ongoing spiritual

transformation. Intensity of desire for relationship works together with the consciousness necessary for an intention to relate to the other and results in intimacy. In the interplay of the three, a relational personhood emerges. In this model, the intention that happens between two beings when *tending* to each other is part of the intention of living and development. This intention is constantly dynamic and can lead to new forms of connection through conscious relating. It is a cyclical process, as with connection comes more intensity, which in turn leads to more longing for intimacy.

Unlike the traditional model where a mystical transformative endpoint is assumed (at least by some), this model is one where the transformation is ongoing and does not end. Instead of a Cartesian philosophy with a dichotomy of matter, this model uses a post-modern philosophy of relational interplay and co-construction. Instead of a focus on the individual, it has a relational focus. Instead of a philosophy of mechanistic determinism, it uses a philosophy of dynamic growth. I find the model of spiritual change proposed by Shults and Sandage (2006), one of ongoing transformation throughout life, particularly appealing.

Shults and Sandage (2006) encourage caution in operationalizing the spiritual because of a resulting tendency to diminish the experience. They outline three types of transformation for healthier functioning in the world: Functional – changes in patterns of behaviour; Systemic – changes in social and contextual areas; and Religious – change in relation to human desire and fear around the sacred. This last transformation is culturally co-constructed. The religious form of growth and transformation in this model focuses on negotiating the relational boundaries with the self, the other person and the other divine. Shults and Sandage's (2006) intensification model is only briefly included here as a current model of spiritual formation. Its philosophy and theoretical assumptions coincide with

counselling psychology's focus on the relational, co-constructed becoming of a person as a liberated and healthy being who can navigate intimacy with self and others.

Embedded Psychologies in Spiritual Direction

One of the interesting research dissertations in the field of spiritual direction, written by Bidwell (2003), explores the embedded psychologies in spiritual direction. Bidwell found that most Christian spiritual direction is framed in traditional forms of psychodynamic theory. He proposes extending the study of spiritual direction by using a social constructionist approach. Bidwell used frequency and content analysis of 187 books on spiritual direction to examine the psychological and philosophical assumptions present in current research in the field. Forty-six percent of the texts referenced Carl Jung and thirty-two and a half percent of the citations overall were in relation to Jung and Freud. Humanist theorists such as Rogers, Erikson, and Maslow were also cited frequently.

Bidwell (2003) warned against the over-psychologizing of spiritual direction. He found “three primary themes, (which) illustrate the ways in which psychology has influenced the contemporary literature of spiritual direction; these include a psychodynamic anthropology, psychodynamic terminology as the dominant psychological discourse of the literature, and a psychodynamic understanding of helping relationships” (p.7).

Psychodynamic therapy emphasizes insight, which in turn can facilitate clearer prayer and personal guidance in the spiritual direction process. Bidwell argues that research to date captures religious/spiritual experience, but privileges inner experience and fails to address cultural and interpersonal manifestations. He argues that it is important to privilege an awareness of God's presence in spiritual direction over psychological awareness.

Bidwell outlines several gaps in spiritual direction research, which this study can begin

to address: “The texts in the sample pay little attention to the ways in which psychological thinking has evolved over the past twenty-five years; in particular, they fail to account psychologically for social and relational aspects of human identity and religious/spiritual experience, especially as understood by feminist, constructivist, constructionist, and transpersonal psychologies” (Bidwell, 2003, p.7). He calls for the study of “the embodied practices of spiritual directors to determine the extent to which the embedded psychology of the literature shapes what directors actually do during a meeting with directees; qualitative research of this sort may represent a “next frontier” in writing and research related to spiritual direction” (Bidwell, 2003, p.7). The current study explores the experiences of spiritual directors and the meaning spiritual directors make of their experience. In these ways, my study begins to address some of the gaps mentioned by Bidwell by paying “attention to the well-established communal-contextual and emerging intercultural paradigms” (Bidwell, 2003, p. 16) of the experience of the spiritual directors who participate.

In this chapter, I have outlined some of the research in spiritual development and formation as a context for my study. Before moving on to Chapter 3 with its discussion of methodology, in the next section of this chapter, I outline research that explores the experience of counsellors when providing therapy. The literature about spiritual development, the literature about schools of psychology and the literature about counsellors’ experience providing therapy are relevant to the experience of spiritual directors when providing spiritual direction.

Counsellors’ Experiences in Counselling

The experience of counsellors when taking part in therapeutic interactions has been a fruitful area of research. In this section of the dissertation, I describe six aspects of this

research as part of the background of the current study. Some studies described the experience of counsellors generally. There is also literature on counsellors' personal and professional attributes as well as counsellors' spiritual experience in sessions. Theoretical orientation has been researched both in relation to how theory might shape experience and how the counsellor's personality traits might connect to preferences for experiencing a particular type of counselling orientation. Some literature about ongoing supervision as part of a counsellor's experience is discussed along with select literature on how counsellors' experience receiving therapy themselves.

Some general experiences. Some research focuses on the positive aspects of working as a counsellor. The positive experience of counsellors themselves was studied by Kadamhi, Audet and Knish (2010) to explore some of the satisfying and rewarding aspects of providing counselling. They created a concept map with ten clusters of experience from the sixty-five participants. These included: witnessing the process of change, contributing to client change, feeling hopeful for clients, perceiving work as meaningful and valuable, experiencing personal competence and growth, forming meaningful connections, living out counsellor beliefs and values, having diverse external types of support, noticing positive client characteristics, and the diversity and resourcefulness of the client population. These concepts provided intrinsic and extrinsic sources of satisfaction for the counsellors in their work.

A positive psychology study by Gilat and Sarah (2012) described the feelings of joy experienced by school counsellors when they had successful therapeutic experiences with their clients. Altruism, or unselfish caring for others, is another significant experience when working as a counsellor. In a research project about this experience, most of the participants noted that altruism developed and was used regularly as part of their counselling (Swank,

Robinson & Ohrt, 2012).

Other research discusses feelings of anxiety and incompetence as part of counselling experience. In a study of eight experienced counsellors, the experience of feelings of incompetence was found to be common (Thériault & Gazzola, 2005). They discussed different levels of this type of feeling on a continuum at three levels. Inadequacy was the first level, which was often related to professional aptitudes such as knowledge or questioning an ability to help. This feeling of inadequacy was expected by the participants and they found it easier to manage as part of their work. Inadequacy went from a preoccupation with being correct to a preoccupation with being effective. The second level of feeling was insecurity. Insecurity was related to the counsellors assessment of their professional roles. It arose if there was a discrepancy between the outcome of treatment and the expected process of therapy. It spoke to self-doubts that came from communication or relationship obstacles. These doubts were not seen as much as a natural part of being a counsellor and were more intense for the participants. Insecurity was more intense than inadequacy and went from a preoccupation with being confident to a preoccupation with faith in the process. The third and most intense level of feeling, a type of existential anxiety, was described as a type of experience, which attacked their sense of worth as a person. This most difficult level of self-doubt arose from situations such as when the counsellor could not identify how they had been helpful to the client or had an experience where they feared they had done harm in the session. Existential incompetence feelings included a preoccupation with assessing their contribution to a process and understanding the ambiguous nature of attributing success or failure to the people involved in a counselling process. The final aspect discussed in the most intense feelings of incompetence was a preoccupation with identity. This level of doubt included questioning their basic human qualities to be intelligent enough,

empathetic enough, bond well enough, or be warm enough to be a counsellor. It could impact their sense of self outside of counselling as well.

A more recent study looked specifically at how male counsellors experience anxiety in their practice (Kierski, 2014). Themes that arose from the research included that anxiety was: experienced as having many facets (physical, mental, existential, related to processes that arose in sessions), related to concrete threats that could arise in sessions (uncontainable aggressive emotion), related to the loss of control of therapeutic outcomes, reflected lifelong personal patterns of experiencing anxiety, could give valuable information about the counselling process, and related to an opportunity to increase self-knowledge. Working constructively with the feelings of anxiety was seen as congruent with a larger perception of masculine identity and improved the counselling experience.

The studies outlined here point to the dynamic nature of the counselling experience. It is an experience that is by its nature both rewarding and challenging, as it attempts to engage with the human situations brought into sessions by clients.

Spirituality experience. Some research described the experience of spirituality in counsellor work. Blair (2015) found that the counsellors were in an ongoing “reflective, dynamic and developmental process... in order to integrate their spiritual and therapeutic identities” (p. 161). The counsellors in the study also described experiencing a level of harmony between their beliefs and therapeutic orientation, which often led to an adjustment in both areas.

O’Grady and Richards (2010) describe a theistic framework for psychological treatment where counsellor and client can seek inspiration. In their article, they imply that inspiration is a communication from God, which can aid with healing and coping. Seventy-four percent of the participants in their study (245 people) indicated that they experienced

inspiration in their professional practice. This was primarily aided by intentionally adopting a spiritual posture, which included seeking inspiration, engaging in a regular spiritual practice and nurturing a relationship with God. The participants described the experience of inspiration as a consistent way of being, a state of sacredness, gaining insights, and a heightening of attributes or abilities.

In a study of Buddhist counsellors in Thailand (Srichannil & Prior, 2014), counsellors described how their personal spiritual practice and the qualities that it fostered within them were important in producing positive therapeutic impact. They followed a culturally specific form of Buddhism as a therapeutic framework for counselling. It first develops a strong personal practice for the counsellor based on the Four Noble Truths. “The first Noble Truth outlines the symptoms of suffering; the second offers a diagnosis of suffering; the third identifies the state of optimal mental health; and the fourth provides the Noble Eightfold Path as a way to eliminate suffering; i.e., proper understanding, proper thought, proper speech, proper action, proper livelihood, proper effort, proper mindfulness, and proper concentration” (p.244). Then the counsellor’s personal presence in the session is viewed as key to dealing with the client’s suffering. In this form of counselling the intervention is context specific to the larger culture and is similar to Western therapeutic orientations, which are client-centered and humanistic. These studies on counsellors’ spiritual experience discuss a way of being a counsellor, which asks the person to infuse their professional work with a lifestyle that is guided by a conscious spiritual perspective.

Counsellor attributes. Research about counsellors’ experience also includes exploring individual attributes that counsellors may have, both as individuals and in sessions. One experience described in recent literature, cited below, is the effort of counsellors to develop in their work the ability to be present and real in therapy sessions. In a study of

counsellors transitioning from training to professional work, this theme of 'being real' in their work was a primary experience. It was explored alongside concerns about personal competency and learning about themselves (Pierce, 2016). This study describes the value counsellors placed on being congruent internally and externally as an important experience.

Counsellors also develop the ability to be psychologically minded, which “involves an interest in and ability to extract and make sense of psychological information (thoughts, feelings and behaviours) from a situation” (Daw & Joseph, 2010, p. 233). Being psychologically minded is correlated to the positive attributes of higher empathy, more self-understanding, building a strong working alliance, better emotional wellbeing and emotional adjustment (Daw & Joseph, 2010).

Moltu and Binder (2014) looked at how counsellors experience their contributions to change in sessions. They found that the counsellors kept a double awareness of observing each moment and of relational closeness. This included a sense of spaciousness within the counsellor and between the counsellor and the client. The counsellors tailored the counselling frame to the specific (often relational) struggles of the client. They also focused on embodied empathy and emotional closeness to the client. Finally, the counsellors engaged in meaning-making using their perspective of a therapeutic model. The primary experience was relational within the unique context of the counselling encounter.

Fox, Hagedorn and Sivo (2016) also explored the concept that counsellors tailor their framework to the client in their study on intuition in the session. They conducted a Q-Method factor analysis of how counsellors make decisions in sessions and discovered a common factor that transcended all of the demographic and theoretical considerations. They are calling this factor clinical intuition. From their results they postulate that experienced counsellors develop a way of decision making which “eventually transcend(s) the confines of

any single theoretical perspective” (p. 244).

Valuing the fostering of relational depth in sessions was also seen in the literature of mindfulness. Baker (2016) described how mindfulness enhanced working in the present moment, which was helpful to trainee counsellors in their work. Mindfulness was also experienced as useful for counsellors in processing countertransference responses that arose in session. They could process and contain their reactions to the client, which are partially an unconscious communication from the client to the counsellor, for the mutual benefit of all involved (Millon & Halewood, 2015).

More generally, there is writing about who a master therapist is and what a master therapist does which can inform the conversation about counsellors’ experience and attributes. There are variations on the themes by different authors. Sperry and Carlson (2014) have 11 key characteristics which include master therapists as voracious learners who use their accumulated experiences, value cognitive complexity and ambiguity, have emotional receptivity, are healthy and nurture their own emotional well-being, are aware of how their emotional health effects their work, possess highly developed relationship skills, cultivate strong working alliances, excel in using their therapy skills, trust their clients and are culturally competent.

Master therapists work by enhancing the therapeutic alliance, enhancing positive expectation and client motivation, increasing client awareness, facilitating corrective experiences, identifying patterns and focusing treatment to those patterns. They also facilitate first, second and third order change for clients. First order change is when clients are assisted in making small changes, reducing symptoms, or achieving stability. . . In second order change, clients are assisted in changing a maladaptive pattern to a more adaptive pattern. This order of

change is transformative . . . In third order change, clients change patterns on their own without the assistance of a therapist. In essence, clients become their own therapists (Sperry & Carlson, 2014, p. 14).

As is seen in the literature, the personal attributes of the counsellor have an impact on creating a relational atmosphere of psychological growth and change.

Experience by theoretical orientation. Many articles approach the experience of the counsellor through the lens of the theory being practiced. Theoretical orientations discussed here will include: Logotherapy, Person-centered, Psychodynamic, and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

Counsellors in South Africa who volunteered at a crisis center gave examples of how their experience included making meaning while providing support in high crime circumstances. This meaning-making process in turn gave the victims of crime an opportunity to make new meaning of the experience themselves. Their experience was framed in the theory of Logotherapy where a tragic optimism gives the participants a realistic view of the cost of traumatic situations and a way to find personal meaning to move beyond the traumatic events (Mason & Nel, 2012).

In person-centered counselling, research found that counsellors have a perspective about their clients, which sees them as capable of using a crisis for personal growth and learning (Carrick, 2014). The experience of congruence is also central to person-centered therapy. Congruence is seen as acting authentically, being “personal, honest and real. [It is] a key characteristic of contemporary person-centered and experiential practice” (Grafanaki & McLeod, 2002, p. 20). Congruence is related to both an internal state within an individual as well as to a state of relationship between the therapist and the client. Counsellors experience

congruence both within themselves and between themselves and their client. The experience of incongruence is also common, but must be managed well to facilitate successful therapeutic outcomes (Grafanaki & McLeod, 2002).

One study of both CBT and psychodynamic master counsellors explored how they approached the work in significant parts of a clinical session (Goldfried, Raue & Castonguay, 1998). Both types of counsellors judged similar portions of a session to be significant. These were parts of a session which included themes of the client's self-worth, the client's capacity to observe themselves in their experience, the client's expectations for the future, the client's thoughts and feelings. When a section of a session was deemed to be significant by the counsellor, he or she was more likely to do particular interventions with the client. These included: making connections and links about the client's functioning or relationships and the impact these had on their lives, encourage the client to approach things realistically, to provide information, or to look at how something specific in the moment related to a larger theme. Although the research did not find many differences between the approaches of the counsellors from the two orientations, they did find that CBT master therapists were more likely to focus on the future, to encourage specific activities between sessions, to mention other people in the client's life as part of the therapy and to compare the client's experience to how other people function. Psychodynamic counsellors were more likely to focus on emotion, to use themselves as part of the therapy process, and to focus on the general themes of the client's life (Goldfried, Raue, & Castonguay, 1998).

Part of a counsellor's experience in sessions is to create case conceptualizations about the problems and symptoms that the client brings to therapy. In a more recent study of CBT and psychodynamic-interpersonal counsellors, Luca (2011) looked at how they made sense of clients who presented with medically unexplained symptoms. The research found that the

counsellors used two approaches when creating case conceptualizations for these clients. They used a “bottom-up” approach, which was based on practical clinical experience. One interesting thing about this approach is that counsellors from both orientations created similar explanations of the medically unexplained symptoms based on their in-session experiences. The second approach was labeled a “top down” approach, where clinical explanations of the symptoms were understood based on the theoretical framework of the counsellors.

The research mentioned in this section of the literature review is interesting as a general description of how counsellors may have different types of experience in a session based on the assumptions and resulting focus of their theoretical orientation.

Supervision. Supervision is a common experience for many counsellors. Ongoing professional consultation is considered a part of best practices in many jurisdictions for practicing. It is a similar relationship to a counselling/therapy relationship, but has different dynamics depending if the participants are in a teaching dynamic or a peer consultation dynamic. In a teaching dynamic, the supervisor has legal responsibility for the activities of the supervisee. There is also a power dynamic around the fact that a teacher has an evaluative role, which can determine the success or failure of a student. If the supervision is a peer consultation between two licensed practitioners, the dynamics are more collegial and egalitarian. The following is a brief discussion of some of the research looking at the supervision relationship for counsellors.

The supervisory alliance is the core component of good supervision. In order for an effective relationship to be established, experienced counsellors noted that the relationship needed to have a sense of equality between the participants, to be a safe environment in which to explore their practice and to include appropriate challenging of the counsellor to bring new insight to their work (Weeks, 2002).

The culture of receiving ongoing supervision is strong for counselling professionals. Grant and Schofield (2007) found that counsellors sought ongoing supervision to have a space for reflection, to increase the effectiveness of their practice, to feel supported in the work that they do, to gain help when working with difficult clients, and to have a place to process their feelings about their clients.

Finally, Wheeler and Richards (2007) conducted a systematic review of the research into clinical supervision. Although they mentioned some limitations to the study, they reviewed eighteen articles. There is evidence from the articles that supervision provides counsellors experience with increased self awareness, skill development, self-efficacy, ongoing development of their theoretical orientation, and professional support. This in turn was found to have a positive impact on client outcomes. Ongoing supervision as part of counselling experience is seen in the literature to strengthen and support the work being done.

Counsellors receiving personal counselling. Another fairly common experience for counsellors is to take part in personal therapy themselves (Savic-Jabrow, 2010). As practitioners, you could expect a counsellor to see the value of personal therapy and to access it as part of their lifestyle. The following is a brief discussion of the experience of counsellors when they take part in personal therapy. I have not to date found studies discussing the personal therapy experience of professional Canadian counsellors.

Daw and Joseph (2007) did a study of forty-eight qualified counsellors to explore their experiences of personal therapy. Two thirds of respondents had taken part in personal therapy. Personal growth and psychological distress were most often given as reasons to be in therapy by the respondents. Those who took part felt the value of therapy in both personal and professional domains including for the purposes of self-care, personal development and

the existential knowledge of being in the role of the client. They noted that it would be beneficial to follow up with research on negative experiences for therapists in personal therapy.

Oteiza (2010) interviewed ten professional therapists in Spain to explore their experiences of receiving therapy. Regardless of personal theoretical orientation, the participants indicated that personal therapy is “essential” (p. 224) for counselors. This was particularly for the purpose of self-awareness in relation to differentiating the counsellors’ emotions from the clients’ emotions. Different perceptions about the amount of time spent in personal therapy were related to the types of experiences sought by the client, but at least three years was considered to be a common time to participate in personal therapy.

Participants noted that they chose their therapist using four influences:

- participants’ perceptions toward the therapist and their feelings when working together;
- gender;
- the therapist’s professionalism in terms of . . . being respectful with the client, keeping confidentiality and inspiring participant’s confidence; and
- aspects related to or associated with location/ place and school. (Oteiza, 2010, p. 225).

They also spoke about choosing their therapist based on a personal recommendation, trying several sessions or using intuition/unconscious choice to find the best therapist.

The participants described their experiences in therapy as both challenging and helpful. In particular, they found that they were able to:

- be more conscious, more aware of their own personal issues;
- abandon the fantasy of considering themselves as the “healthy ones”;

- admit they are “merely” human too;
- respect an individual’s personal rhythm;
- let themselves be guided and accompanied; and
- expect to be challenged (Oteiza, 2010, p. 225).

They noted several contributions that receiving therapy made to their personal affective development and their professional development. They were more able to manage their personal experiences in therapy as well as to hold whatever clients’ experiences may arise. Therapists mentioned using their personal therapy as a professional reference where their therapist is a model for them. A few of the participants mentioned the necessity of having been in personal therapy in receiving professional licensing. Several spoke about the challenge of thinking less like a therapist and more like a client to more fully enter into the experience. Other aspects of personal development that were mentioned include the quality of the interpersonal relationship (richness, connection, respect, intimate, sincere and real) (Oteiza, 2010, p. 227), personal similarity between themselves and the therapist, and the importance of living the experience of being a client. These descriptions are similar to other studies mentioned above and to the study cited next.

Ciclitira and her colleagues (2012) explored the experience of participating in personal therapy for nineteen female counsellors from a community-based clinic in the UK. All the participants claimed professional benefits and fourteen of the participants claimed personal benefits. Participants had a preference to be in therapy with someone who practiced the same type of therapy that they did. They found that with professional therapy, they were better able to deal with their own psychological difficulties and they could better separate a client’s issues from their own issues. Five of the participants noted the difficulty of going through a personal counselling process, including aspects such as learning from watching

what their therapist did (well and not well), financial and time challenges, and experiencing the arc of painful personal development. The core positive ingredients for the participants were the counselling relationship: “learning through relating . . . learning aspects of theory and skills through live observation, [and] how it feels to be a client” (Ciclitira et. al, 2012, p. 140).

Summary of the Literature Review

This part of the dissertation is divided into two sections. In the first half of the chapter, I described several traditions of spiritual formation. In the second half of the chapter, I have briefly outlined some aspects of counsellor experience as found in the literature. The positive and challenging nature of counselling experience was explored. Spiritual experiences were also described. How experience can be shaped by theory and how personality traits can influence the counsellor’s theoretical orientation was noted. Finally, I explored counsellor experience in relation to receiving clinical supervision and personal counselling. The literature outlines how the experience of counselling is a complex, rich and dynamic endeavour. It requires the counsellor to continually develop and grow in many aspects of life: in theoretical orientation, intrapsychically, and interpersonally. The counsellor is a living instrument, co-creating the psychological work of being human with the client. I have included this literature to explore how the experience of the spiritual directors in this study may or may not be similar to the broader literature in the field. In Chapter 3, I explore in more detail, both the philosophical grounding of this dissertation and the procedures I use to understand the meaning of the lived experience of being a spiritual director.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Previous research into spirituality and counselling has not often studied the experience of spiritual directors using a systematic research method. In order to contribute to this field of research, the following question was posed:

What is the meaning of the lived experience of the spiritual director in providing spiritual direction?

To create a deeper understanding of the experience in focus, this study used a qualitative methodology. It followed the work done by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) outlined in their book, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*. Although I read some of the original works of the philosophers mentioned below, such as Gadamer (2004), my work in this study is based primarily on interpretations by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), Langdridge (2007), Finlay (2009) and Wertz et. al. (2011) of the other original sources. A brief discussion of the philosophical underpinnings of this study and the related philosophy of science follows. The procedures in the study are also described in detail.

Rationale For the Methodology

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) specify that their interpretative phenomenological model subscribes to the larger field of interpretive phenomenology. It looks at what a participant's experience of a specific process is like. It also recognizes the necessity of interpretation by both the participant and the researcher in the collection of the data. Interpretive phenomenology calls for the researcher to use a "hermeneutic circle" approach in the analysis of the data to explore the meaning-making process of the participants, the researcher and the study itself. The participants share their perspective on constructs that

remain consistent in their experience of spiritual direction.

Interpretive Phenomenology is situated in a postpositivist philosophy of science where there is an objective reality, but that reality can never be fully seen. Following Gadamer and Heidegger's philosophy of hermeneutics, the ongoing interpretation and meaning-making process that is part of living is the foundation of understanding (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Understanding speaks to an epistemology or way of knowing. The epistemology here is a subjective reflection on being (ontology) which is shown through the discussions in the participant interviews and the double hermeneutic, iterative analysis process. There are multiple perspectives from the participants and the researcher that shine light on different parts of the phenomenon, which help to create a broader picture of the experience of spiritual direction. The researcher makes sense of how the participants make meaning of their experience. Making sense of making-meaning is subjective and accessible through the interpreted hermeneutic analysis. In interpretive phenomenology, the meaning that comes out of the discussion and analysis can lead to new understandings of an experience.

Similarly, Andrews (2012) describes the iterative construction of contextualized concepts using the work of Berger and Luckman.

Berger and Luckmann (1991) view society as existing both as objective and subjective reality. The former is brought about through the interaction of people with the social world, with this social world in turn influencing people, resulting in routinization and habitualization. That is, any frequently repeated action becomes cast into a pattern, which can be reproduced without much effort. This frees people to engage in innovation rather than starting everything anew. In time, the meaning of the habitualization becomes embedded as routines, forming a general store of knowledge.

This is institutionalized by society to the extent that future generations experience this type of knowledge as objective. Additionally this objectivity is continuously reaffirmed in the individual's interaction with others (Andrews, 2012. p. 1).

Viewing spiritual direction as contextual and interpreted is also consistent with the field of spiritual direction itself. "Human beings are a personal and social presence...that actually co-form and co-create the world they inhabit, by giving a certain form to things, events, and persons that represent themselves" (Gratton, 2005, p.16).

My stance in this study is that the participants and I discussed and constructed the analysis of the data. In discussing their experiences, the participants came from a post-positivistic perspective (where they looked to discover what they believe God is saying or manifesting in the relationships they experience). Nouwen's writing (2006) is an example of this perspective. He suggests that part of the experience in spiritual direction is to make meaning of what emerges when listening for where and how the Spirit is working in the life of the seeker. The participants spoke of making meaning, and living according to that meaning, as they went along in the relationship. As is consistent with IPA, I initially looked for the perspective of the participant to the best of my ability and then included my interpretation in the creation of the analysis. This was done in an iterative way. Two examples of this are how the analysis was done using a dialectic discussion with the participants in the primary interview, and the followup member check of the emerging themes in the analysis. Thus the analysis was specific to the participants.

As is consistent with the method of IPA and the philosophy of Gadamer and Heidegger, my perspective in this study was that meaning and understanding are created *within* the individuals involved (being shaped by the interaction of fore-structures and new experience), *between* the individuals involved (in the conversations and meaning making or

that experience), and at the *community* level (by accepted and constantly developing forms of meaning and understanding).

IPA brings together the fields of phenomenology and hermeneutics to better understand our being in the world. How, then, does phenomenology undergird the approach to this study? The following is a brief exploration of the underlying assumptions in phenomenology, which contributed to the development of this dissertation.

Phenomenology. Phenomenology, is “the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/2015>). This method is used to explore what human experience is *like* and is interested in how experience can be examined on its own terms (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

The initial roots of phenomenology lie in the post-positive arena of uncovering an essence in experience, building from the early work of Husserl (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The interpretive phenomenology used by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) is influenced by more contemporary writers with a dialectic philosophy of phenomenology. Heidegger, who was a student of Husserl, expanded on his phenomenological work and brought phenomenology together with hermeneutics and existentialism (which will be explored later in this chapter). For Heidegger, phenomenology was about how humans interpret and make meaning of experience, both individually and intersubjectively. His concept of *Dasein* (there-being) situated the person as always existing within a worldly context of relationships, objects and languages that shape their experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Merleau Ponty also influenced current forms of phenomenological inquiry by emphasizing that people are embodied beings with individual viewpoints. They can empathize with each other, but not fuse with another in perception or understanding. Sartre

further contributed to the field of phenomenological inquiry by forwarding existential phenomenology where the self is always in the process of becoming (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

This study is phenomenological in that it is looking at the lived experience of the spiritual director as counsellor in a spiritual direction process. It is an interpretive phenomenological study based on Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2009) interpretative phenomenological approach. The research question is specifically formulated within this approach as it looks for the meaning of the experience that the participants shared. They shared phenomenon in the form of the things they talked about that were consistently part of being a spiritual director for them. In this type of phenomenology, it is not possible to have an experience without meaning-making. Knowing about an experience that an individual had can only be talked about through their recollection of it. It is interpreted. The interpretive aspect of this type of phenomenology cannot be properly explained without looking at Heidegger's and Gadamer's hermeneutics, so this will be discussed next.

Hermeneutics. The field of hermeneutics is an integral part of how I approached this topic, so I will now turn to a brief discussion on the perspective of a few of the philosophers whose work in hermeneutics shape this research project. Hermeneutics began as a procedure for examining meaning in literature. During the German Romantic movement it became a philosophy about the nature of living (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics>, 2015). Schleiermacher was a German Romantic theologian and philosopher who contributed to the expansion of hermeneutics as an interpretive form of philosophical inquiry (Smith, 1993). His perspective that the researcher could act as an interpreter of the participant's experience, and indeed see the participant's experience more clearly from the outside than the participant themselves, speaks

to both how he shifted inquiry into the realm of interpretation while not completely freeing himself from the scientific value of his era by privileging objectivity. Dilthey, at the beginning of the 20th century, developed the use of hermeneutics as the foundation of the field of *Geisteswissenschaft* (human science) in comparison to *Naturwissenschaft* (natural science) (Smith, 1993).

As mentioned above, Heidegger integrated phenomenology (the study of a phenomenon) and hermeneutics (the study of interpretation and meaning). He posited that we have access to *verstehen* (understanding) through the interpretation of the *Dasein* (experience of human being by there-being). This allows a phenomenon to appear with both visible and latent meanings. Our engagement in phenomenological and hermeneutic analysis is an explicitly interpretive activity with dynamic relationships between all involved (objects, people, etc.). His description of the back and forth nature of our shift in awareness between perspectives, people, data, parts of the data, or whatever else might emerge in the appearance of the phenomenon, has been described by phenomenologists universally as the hermeneutic circle (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Gadamer (2004), in his work on Philosophical Hermeneutics, has added an emphasis on the dialectic nature of the creation of meaning and interpretations. The creation of meaning, from this perspective, resides in the intersubjective interaction between the researcher and the participant. Sense and meaning emerge from the dialogue between the people and how they engage with the data. The purpose of this approach is to have a *fusion of horizons* between the consciousness of the researcher and the participant, which leads to mutually expanded perspectives. The pre-structures of understanding that everyone brings to their experience and the living of the experience are both changed through engagement with the hermeneutic circle in the interview and in analysis (Smith, 1993).

My stance in this research is that the lived experience, the interpretation of that experience, and the person's fore-structures about the experience interrelate, both within the individual and between the individuals involved, at different points in the research process. Meaning-making through this type of interpretive phenomenology leads to a deeper explicit understanding of the experience in question (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This research draws specifically on Heidegger's form of hermeneutics in that Being is accessible and understood in the meaning made of an experience. Making sense and meaning in this is specifically interpretive and necessitates engaging with the experience and the data analysis in a cyclical way. This research draws on Gadamer's form of hermeneutics in that it views dialogue as the process that brings shape to the experience and understanding of it. This dialogue broadens the perspective of the participants and the researcher both in the data collection and in the findings. The importance of using this interpretive phenomenological qualitative paradigm, is that it allows this research to create a new and rich understanding of the lived experience and the meaning of that experience for the spiritual directors involved.

Situating Myself as a Counselling Psychologist and Researcher

Since it is important in this qualitative paradigm to work explicitly with pre-conceptions, I now describe some of my perspectives in approaching this research. My personal therapeutic stance is informed by the spiritual writer Moore's (2000) statement that:

Far beneath the many thick layers of teaching about who we are and who we should be lies an original self [or emerging selves], a person who came into this world full of possibility and destined for joyful unveiling and manifestation (p. 2). (the brackets are mine).

My personal background adds to my ability to study the topic of spiritual direction and therapy. I grew up in a Lutheran household, which shaped my perception of spirituality by valuing a relationship with a generous and loving God who relates to us by grace. It is a reformation tradition of questioning, which holds an appreciation of paradox as part of lived existence. My spiritual development led to personal reading and experience in many spiritual traditions. I studied psychology, philosophy, and theology formally before training and working as an MA psychotherapist. For several years, I worked with a Jungian-oriented spiritual director as part of my practice. After learning about Christian spiritual direction, I trained in that tradition before beginning a PhD in Counselling Psychology. I continue to develop a personal spiritual practice, which is part of my daily life. This has included working with a spiritual director for several years. Professionally, I have also had the experience of providing spiritual direction in my private practice. Working with people as they expand and develop their personal relationship to the Divine in their own unique way has been very engaging and meaningful to me. It often feels like working in sacred space. This training and experience makes me an “expert insider” when approaching the study. As is consistent with IPA, I tried to be as aware as possible of the fore-structures I brought to the study and worked with them in an iterative way to see what latent meaning and changes in perception might emerge (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Thus it is clear that my axiology includes a value that spirituality is important in living. I believe that the world spiritual traditions are leading people to the same place; they are different shaped scoops dipping into the same well. Along these lines, the historian of religion, Smith (1977), has suggested that the original meaning of the word *belief* was not prescriptive or dogmatic (as some Christian communities practice it today); instead the word originally meant to “belove,” to hold dear, to cherish. This more flexible meaning of belief

changed with the greater need for certainty that people wanted during the Enlightenment period in history. As a result, their need gave rise to a positivist ontology and epistemology in religion, similar to the same movement in the philosophy of science, which led to a loss of dialogue about some types of spiritual experience. I value the earlier meaning of the word *belief* as a part of my understanding of spirituality. My axiology also encompasses a respect for the ever-changing understanding of the meaning of spirituality for individuals and society. Therefore, I valued a reflective, iterative research design as a way to explore this experience.

Research Participants

As is common with IPA studies, sampling was purposive and homogeneous (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The spiritual directors I interviewed had between twenty and forty-five years of experience. Four were also trained therapists in addition to being trained spiritual directors. I conducted interviews with five spiritual directors. There were 15 main sources of data in the audio of the interviews, the interview transcripts and the member checks with each participant. This number of participants is cited by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) as usually consistent with a doctoral level dissertation to provide trustworthiness to the study (Morrow, 2005). This is due to the ideographic nature of the method which privileges the experiences of the participants as being sufficient for explicating the research question in this study.

Participants were found by contacting spiritual directors and church communities. Through this type of contact, I found three spiritual directors in Canada and two in the United States who agreed to be participants. I initially sent out letters and posters to spiritual directors whom I knew and to local church communities (see Appendices A and D). When the spiritual directors expressed interest in person, by phone or by email, I conducted a screening interview (see Appendix B).

Chosen participants were interviewed for data collection using a semi-structured format outlined in Appendix E. The first participant was with a spiritual director whom I had known about for some time and who had expressed interest in being part of the study when we discussed my study as a possibility when we met by chance on the street several years ago. He suggested that I contact a spiritual director who became the third interview participant. She referred me to another spiritual director who became the fourth participant. The person who became the second interview participant expressed interest when I was visiting a church congregation. The fifth participant was a suggestion from a spiritual director whom I approached with my recruitment material in California. This recruitment approach is consistent with both the ethics requirements of UBC and with the purposive sample used in IPA. Inclusion criteria were specifically that the person currently works as a spiritual director as a major part of their professional practice, and that they had attended a spiritual direction training program.

Spiritual director participants took part in three meetings: a phone based screening interview for the research project (mentioned above), a semi-structured interview, and a member check interview. The participants had the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time. No one did. Analysis focused on the meaning of the experience of the spiritual director.

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study and was explained to the participants through a discussion about the consent form. Participants were offered a summary of the study after completion. An honorarium of \$50 was given to each participant. This honorarium was first described to the participants as part of the participant consent form at the time of the main interview and after the screening call to guard against the possibility that the honorarium would overly influence the participants to take part in the study.

Data Collection

The data collection procedure was as follows: The focus was to maintain attention on the meaning and experience for the participants as it emerged in the interviews and the subsequent data analysis. Interviews were between one and three hours in length. After the interview, participants were debriefed about their interview experience to make sure they remained comfortable with their research experience. Four participants mentioned that they found the research experience meaningful as it encouraged further self-reflection of the participant's experiences.

I was aware that I experienced a feeling of familiarity with concepts and experiences as they were discussed in the interviews, based on my personal experience and training with spiritual direction. I attempted to be conscious of this possibility and to keep an open mind to experiences and concepts as they emerged, to glean as deep and broad a data set as I could. The interviews followed the semi-structured outline of questions developed during the study proposal phase. This is outlined in Appendix E. There was also some flexibility in the interview to include new questions, such as "Do you have a specific Bible verse that you would see as having been influential in your spiritual direction experience?" This question emerged in the first interview and I included it in the subsequent interviews.

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed by an independent company and were used as the main source of data. The transcriptions were verbatim. The process of this analysis is described below.

Another source of data, for the purposes of rigor and thick interpretation, included notebooks of the research process. I recorded my thoughts, questions, concerns, research articles or academic sources I came across in the process of my work in the notebooks; both when I "formally" sat down to work on the study and when I had thoughts or insights during

my daily life. Often the notebooks became a preliminary structure for shaping the data analysis over the course of the study and as a precursor to my writing the dissertation document itself. They were part of the iterative and reflexive process of the data analysis that shaped the study as a whole.

In summary, the sources of data included:

- an audio recording of an in-depth interview with each participant
- transcriptions of the interviews
- notes and feedback from the member check interviews to explore the emerging themes with the spiritual directors
- my research journal
- IPA representation of how the themes developed in the analysis from the video recorded session to the final themes using the steps described below.

Data Analysis

After the data was collected, I analyzed it all using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method as outlined in Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009). IPA is a method that was developed using the philosophy of phenomenology and the theoretical meaning-making perspective of hermeneutics. It is an idiographic method that looks for the relational experience of individual participants. It allows the researcher to retain particular parts of the data and also to make thematic claims based on the whole of the data.

The method uses an iterative approach based on the hermeneutic circle of analysis. The hermeneutic circle is a complex and powerful construct in the analysis of data. It is a process of coming to an understanding of the data that uses a “dynamic relationship between a part (of the data) and the whole (of the data)” (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 28).

The researcher uses discrete words or sections of transcript to gain an understanding of the whole of the study, and looks at the whole of the study to understand smaller parts of the data in return. The back and forth style of mental activity used in the hermeneutic circle applies to multiple levels of the analysis. It can be used at the level of the words of the interviews or at the level of comparing themes between participants. The hermeneutic circle of making meaning can also be applied to the level of the researcher's life experience as a "whole" as well as to the level of the interviews with the participants (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 35). It works with qualitative data using ongoing interpretation and dynamic meaning-making of an experience as it appears. Examples of how the hermeneutic circle was used in this study are described in the data analysis steps that follow.

The steps laid out by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) were used as the scaffolding for the analysis and as a jumping-off point for a dynamic and evolving form of data analysis. I began the analysis with the transcribed interview of the first participant, Roderick. I began with reading and re-reading the transcript of the recorded interview and listening to the recording to immerse myself in the data. I focused on perceiving the data from the participant's point of view. The second "step" was to make initial notes about the data. "It begins to identify specific ways by which the participant talks about, understands and thinks about an issue" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, p. 83). I explored content and language. For example, I noticed that the word *presence* was a significant concept for Roderick. I began thinking about how presence is part of the meaning of spiritual direction for him. I added to my notes in the margins of the transcript and in my research notebooks with each reading. Notes included descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments in a "fluid process of engaging with the text in detail, exploring different avenues of meaning which arise, and pushing the analyses to a more interpretive level"(Smith, Flowers & Larkin, p. 91). Step

three involved the development of emergent themes, where the now much larger data set of that transcript was explored to create statements of what is important in the data. For example, in the first transcript, the term *presence* became an initial emergent theme along with the other concepts in that transcript.

I then explored the data in the fourth step for connections across the themes developed in step three. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) outline six strategies that could be part of step four. Patterns and connections between the initial emergent themes are found using abstraction. Superordinate themes result from this part of the process. During my analysis, a table of superordinate themes did emerge. As the analysis evolved, themes were tweaked and moved. For example, initially, I had the theme of discernment under the superordinate theme, the *collaborative relational approach*, but later moved it to *emergent perspective*. Subsumption is a process where an initial emergent theme is given the status of a super-ordinate theme because it can bring together a number of ideas. The theme of Love is an example of this process. I had it as an emergent subtheme, but moved it to be a superordinate theme due to the weight that participants gave it in the interviews. Polarization is the process where the data is explored for opposites presented in the themes. An example of this in the data is how the concept of redemption was mentioned by several of the participants. For Anne, it was a useful aspect of spiritual experience; whereas for Andrew, it was unnecessary and even harmful as a concept. Contextualization is a strategy to look for “temporal, cultural and narrative elements within the analysis” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 98). I did this on an ongoing basis, looking at the aspects of the interviews that were specific to the dialect of spiritual direction (such as discernment). In other words, my analysis took into account the vocabulary which was culturally significant to the participants, in the development of the themes of the study. This use of specific dialect was noted in Benner (

2002) and called the “language of discourse” in Gubi’s (2010) thesis. Contextualization was also a strategy used to explore the value of practicing spiritual direction as relevant in current culture. Numeration is the process of looking at how often a theme appears in the data. In the development of the study’s themes, I noted in each interview the times a concept arose and used that in the formation of emergent themes overall. Finally, I used the strategy of looking at the possible function of the theme within the data. Each theme was annotated in the analysis with examples of the words used and the line in the transcript where it was found.

My data analysis process was recursive both in the interpretive phenomenological analysis, and in that I went back to the participants for confirmation of the themes that I was constructing as a form of member check. The notes I made after having contact with the participants during the member check were also included as data, and analyzed in relation to the other transcripts and interpretations. An example of this was the adaptation of the boundaries between therapy and spiritual direction that became more nuanced after the member check interview. The phrase “spiritual direction begins where therapy ends” was changed to the idea that the boundaries are overlapping and there is a possibility that spiritual direction can get to personal material that therapy often does not. I also had a peer co-researcher examine the interviews and the emergent themes to see if I was missing any areas of information and to verify the development of the themes. My co-researcher has a PhD in Counselling Psychology and is familiar with qualitative hermeneutic methods of research. Because of this process the emergent subtheme *Good Enough* was added to the table under the superordinate theme of Love. The co-researcher validated the development of the themes found in the study as being transparent and coherent based on the interview transcripts and the data analysis process.

Step five in Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2009) six strategies involved moving on to the next case in the study. I analyzed interviews two to five using steps one to four, each on their own merits, to try to see them individually for what might be offered. My pre-conceived ideas of the findings were influenced by each case that was analyzed. It was important to try to remain as conscious of these preconceptions as possible and see each subsequent case as potentially contributing something newly unique to the results.

Step six explores the now individually analyzed cases to look for patterns that emerged across all the cases. For each participant, I created a document of themes with supporting phrases and the number of the lines where they can be found in the transcripts. I then created a summary table of the superordinate themes from the collective results of all the participants. I included the emergent subthemes which made up the superordinate themes of the study in this table. This table went through several iterations as the analysis progressed to become the themes that are presented in the study. IPA offers the opportunity to write both about specific instances for participants, which may not be seen in the experience of all the participants, which are represented in Table 3 (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). In addition to the table of superordinate themes and emergent subthemes, I created a table of individual participant themes to value the contributions of each participant to the study. I used these tables as a scaffolding to begin writing complete narratives of the participants' experiences. I began by writing the individual participants' narratives to be sure not to lose the individual contributions in the larger context of the study. I then wrote a complete narrative of each superordinate theme with quotes from the data, interpretations of the data and the meanings that emerged in the results section of the dissertation. I shared the findings with the participants.

In addition to these steps, I deepened the level of interpretation of the data to include more nuanced understandings of the themes and the data set, by selecting particularly resonant passages of the text to explore in more specific detail. This was done by looking for comparisons, elaborating on metaphors and symbols that appeared in the text, and listening for the influence of such things as temporal language on the overall meaning that is made of the theme. These are all examples of what the authors call the hermeneutics of empathy, looking at the meaning within a text on its own terms.

I found the data analysis process to be somewhat parallel to the process of discernment itself. Engaging with the data and listening for the themes that were meaningful and richly descriptive was similar to listening for guidance and making decisions about life through the spiritual direction process. It took time and mental space to digest the data intellectually and emotionally, and to come eventually to a space of writing what was “there” in the data. I attempted to distill the transcripts and concepts without losing the richness of their meaning. My process often included seeing an emerging idea in the data, talking it out with a peer co-researcher to help me gain clarity, writing it in a notebook, writing it in a draft of the dissertation, seeing where it fit in the table of themes, re-writing and working with the idea until it was well enough represented in the results of the study.

The overall aim of the data analysis was to create a rich, deep, thick analysis which led to emergent themes in the data. By doing this, the themes can be seen as strong understandings of the meaning and experience of working as a spiritual director for the participants involved and viewed with confidence by the researcher and other readers.

Criteria For Quality

In order for readers to have a strong sense of the trustworthiness of the study, I used the following criteria of quality in conducting the study: reflexivity, sensitivity to context, transparency and coherence, as well as commitment to rigor. They are outlined in Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009).

Reflexivity. To increase the study's overall credibility in a qualitative sense, I kept an awareness of reflexivity in mind throughout the research process. I switched perspectives using the hermeneutic circle to look at concepts that were mentioned from the point of view of the participant, from my preconceptions of the process from previous reading and personal experience. I looked for meaning from the perspective of the words themselves and how that might relate to the values that the participants shared. I wrote an account of the research process in my first person voice in the data analysis section of this study.

To strengthen reflexivity, the experiences were filtered through the participants perceptions and constructed by the research process. Both in the data collection and analysis, the emergent concepts were shaped around what the participants shared and what was important to them. The interpretation of the meaning of the concepts was strongly shaped by the understandings that the participants shared in the interviews. I consistently asked questions to explore a concept more deeply in the interviews, to be more sure that I would represent what the participant intended.

I ensured that there were several levels of credibility checks during the research process. My own focus on reflexivity in the data analysis and the use of the hermeneutic circle was my personal form of credibility check throughout the study. Credibility checks were done with the participants themselves. The resonance of the study and its findings was

primarily determined by the participants at the time of the member check. The participants also provided feedback about the findings during the discussion at the time of the main interview. A credibility check was done by a peer co-researcher of the interviews, transcripts and the findings after the initial data analysis and the member checks. She was a discussion partner for me throughout the dissertation process. She is a licensed therapist and has a PhD in Counselling Psychology. Her research experience includes qualitative methods that use hermeneutics. My dissertation committee also oversaw the development of the dissertation and guided me in the research and writing process.

I balanced the ideographic research findings, privileging the individual experiences and concepts from the five participants, with the shared concepts that emerged between them. To do this, I began with discussion of the individual participants' stories and the concepts that were important to them, before discussing the collective emergent themes in extensive detail. To be consistent with the interpretive phenomenological philosophy, I maintained a stronger focus on how things were understood by the participants rather than speaking more narrowly about what happened at a descriptive level. For example, the concept of a collaborative relational approach emerged from my interpretation of the data as a whole and was not specifically language that the participants used. I felt that this language encompassed how the participants understood the experience.

Sensitivity to context. The writing included a significant level of contextual detail to increase its sensitivity to context. This was a way to give the reader as strong a sense of the experience as possible. Contextual detail was also central to the findings of the study, particularly in the use of theological terminology that is specific to spiritual direction; i.e., discernment, grace, redemption, and contemplative approach. The value of the findings is enhanced by that context. I also added to the contextualization of the data in the use of the

research notebooks. For example, I made notes after the interviews to capture my sense of the interview itself.

Transparency and coherence. I conducted the study to increase transparency and coherence. The account of the research process and a description of the reflexive level of the analysis is explained in Chapter 3. The findings chapter provides a contextualized description of the participants, their understanding and the meaning they make of the experience of spiritual direction. This is followed by a contextualized description of the findings in relation to the larger field of counselling psychology in Chapter 5.

The account that was created in the data analysis and in the dissertation itself is coherent and plausible given the data and the post-finding literature review. I took care to persuasively evidence the claims and the findings of the study by extensively using quotes from the participants and allowing the findings to be expressed in each participant's voice. I also did this by situating the findings in more general counselling psychology literature to enhance theoretical transferability.

Commitment and rigor. I demonstrated commitment and rigor (the thoroughness of the study) in a number of ways. I was attentive to the participants when interacting with them in the research process and being attuned to what they were saying. I also took continued care with the collected data and the indepth analysis of that to construct the findings. I was careful to select the participants to include those that have appropriate experience to answer the research questions well. I was aware to keep a sense of both connection and distance as the interviewer to try to glean the most useful data for the study. I probed for depth with the concepts and followed the interpersonal cues that seemed important when they appeared in the interviews. For example, when a participant's voice increased in warmth or excitement,

such as when Lynn was talking about her experience of engagement in a session, I explored this further in the interview. This eventually became part of the concept of mutual impact.

By conducting the research with these criteria of quality in mind, and outlining here how they were integrated into the study, I hope to clarify how this study has validity and trustworthiness.

Ethical Considerations

The UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) provided approval for the research project. Informed consent was obtained from the participants at the intake interview. Participants were informed about the ethical boundaries of the project, including the participant's choice to leave the research project at any time during the data collection process. Participants were informed about the possible negative impacts of participating in research and a list of external counselling resources was provided. They were also informed about the types of data that will be collected and the ways in which it will be safeguarded.

The data collected included consent forms for the participants, audio recordings of the interview sessions, interviewer notes from the sessions, researcher notes from a journal about the research project, transcripts of the interview, and the resulting analysis of the data. All of the above forms of data and paperwork were kept by the researcher in a locked cabinet at her home. The electronic forms of data were held on an encrypted memory stick belonging to the researcher, which is password protected and used exclusively by her. Relevant files were additionally protected with internal computer restrictions to access.

The identity of the participants was protected by assigning a pseudonym to each person, which was used in the data after the signing of the consent form. The collected data could be viewed by the researcher, the participant (for their file), the members of the

researcher's dissertation committee as appropriate, and an independent researcher when audit for internal fidelity is required.

Summary of the Methodology Chapter

Spiritual direction, a subset of spiritual experience, has not been extensively studied in psychology. It is worth looking at, both for its transformative (clinical) potential and as part of the professional mandate for counselling competencies in spiritual diversity. This study addresses the research problems discussed above by using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the research method. IPA is a current phenomenological approach in psychology which uses the method of hermeneutics, a method which was originally developed to explore the meaning of biblical texts (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The study looked at the experience of the spiritual director both in sessions and more generally in their lives, and the meaning that can be made by the director and the researcher of that experience. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis provided an understanding of spiritual direction as a psychological and spiritual experience using a systematic and recognized qualitative research model.

Chapter 4: Results

Five interviews of experienced spiritual directors were conducted for this study between February and May 2016. Member check interviews and reviews by two peer co-researchers were also done as part of the analysis. The main interviews were done in person in quiet locations at the participant's home or place of work. The interviews were uninterrupted and lasted between 60 and 180 minutes, with a mean length of 160 minutes.

The participants were Caucasian. English was their first language. The participants ranged in age from 47 to 73. Two of the participants were female and three were male. The participants were actively working as spiritual directors and members of professional associations related to their work. Three of the participants came from an Anglican/Episcopalian background. One of the participants was raised in the United Church. The fifth participant was not raised in a specific church community, but was influenced by family affiliations to Seventh Day Adventist and Baptist traditions. Four of the participants were trained in an Anglican/Episcopalian program. One was trained in a Catholic program. They were recruited purposively for their experience and ability to speak to those experiences related to spiritual direction. The participants had been practicing spiritual direction for twenty to forty-five years, with a total of 143 years.

Each interview is summarized in the first part of this chapter. Special attention is given to the experiences of each participant in spiritual direction and the meaning that they make of that experience. Table 2 provides a summary of these individual themes. Each participant's individual theme came from a unifying concept that emerged from their individual interview. This unifying concept became an emergent subtheme in the collective themes of the study.

The collective themes that were found in the analysis are presented in detail in the second half of this chapter. Each collective theme is supported by emergent subthemes that will be presented. This is intended to provide a rich description of the experiences that can encompass the common and unique aspects of the participant's experiences. It is hoped that these narratives will be sufficiently deep to allow the reader to connect to the lived experience of the spiritual directors in the study. The participants have been given pseudonyms to maintain their personal privacy.

Individual Participant Summaries

The individual themes from each participant are outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Individual Participant Themes

Participant	Individual Themes	Unifying Concept
Roderick	Multi-faith perspective Healthy male identity 3 level focus: personal, interpersonal, political	Presence
Andrew	Parish work Community development Process Theology Addiction and trauma	Good enough
Anne	Non-verbal creative modalities Jungian theoretical perspective Being sustained through personal crisis	Redemption
Michael	Discernment teacher Multigenerational faith experience Surrender	Discernment
Lynn	Following a call Faith development in evangelical settings	Grace

Roderick. Roderick and I met for our interview in his sunlit living room, with a pot of green tea, surrounded by piles of books, pictures and artwork around the room. Roderick was trained as a clergy person. While working in a parish, he was asked by several congregation members to be their spiritual director. He began taking spiritual direction

himself in order to better provide spiritual direction support to others. Soon after, he met another clergy person and started a spiritual direction training program with him. Roderick's spiritual direction training was initially through seminary, secondly while receiving his own spiritual direction, thirdly as an apprentice in the spiritual direction training program he founded, and finally through the years he has worked as a spiritual director. He has been a practicing spiritual director, teacher and publishing writer for thirty-three years. Several years ago, he wound down his spiritual direction practice due to worsening health problems. He is now semi-retired.

Although he was an experienced clergy person, he did not feel that his seminary training was an education that prepared him well for work as a spiritual director. He mentioned one unsuccessful experience receiving spiritual direction during seminary where he went to an older spiritual director who "just had chats" with him. He was missing a sense of mentorship and learning from the older man's experience as a model for his own journey. As a spiritual director himself, he spoke about being present with the unique experience of each person he works with in the moments during a session. He sees their spiritual journey as their own and himself as a companion for them. He also talked about the somewhat psycho-educational component to spiritual direction, which includes awareness of possible spiritual development experiences from the tradition of spiritual direction. Sharing teaching stories (either from scripture, others' experiences, or his own experience) when appropriate is a part of his work. He spoke about a movement in society, where individuals wanted to connect their inner life to their faith and deepen the relationship to both the true self and the Divine. From his perspective, using a Jungian framework, the true self and the Divine are interchangeable – both involve "seeking the deeper reality of life".

He described how spiritual direction helps to deal with the Dark Night experiences of a person's life, or the katabasis (Bly, 2004) experiences where the person goes through dark emotional experiences. While working through his own experience, he found a connection in this dark time to the Christian concept of the time of Jubilee, which is a time of freedom and rest. He shared a personal experience where he had a dramatic shift in his personal life when he realized that his katabasis experience was a refocusing and freeing experience. He made meaning of it in a new way by framing it as a jubilee experience, which for him has two parts: the first is an experience of freedom, forgiveness, going home, and rest; the second is a contemplative perspective of living in the Naked Now (Rohr, 2013). He shared a second experience where he was changed by making new meaning, when he worked with the biblical phrase "Now is the time of salvation." Corinthians 6:2. The emphasis shifted from the word *salvation* to the word *now*. The only moment he had for life was now, which held the experience of salvation which he interprets as wholeness. This is the perspective he brings to spiritual direction: trying to model being in the now as a way of living.

He spoke about a paradigm he uses with people, describing spiritual awakening in six parts of a journey: being asleep (psychologically unconscious), waking up, realizing there is brokenness in yourself and the world, going "crazy" from feeling the pain of that brokenness, responding to and moving through the pain to sanity, and maintaining that sanity in the way you live life.

Roderick noted that while spiritual direction can be a place to work on theological issues, this focus can get in the way of a person's spiritual journey. This can be looking at how the person views the nature of God; i.e., loving or punishing. Our experience of God as loving or punishing changes our daily relationship. In spiritual direction, the attention is focused intentionally on looking with curiosity at the person's experience of God – in the

present moment and from the person's past experience. It can also be recognizing the transcendence of God – we as human beings can “know God” in the cultural use of the term, rather than knowing the full essence of God. He used a Hindu story to illustrate his point. “The finger points to the moon. The finger is not the moon.” God is the abiding witness (Psalm 89). So, his perspective of the relationship to God is that it is both an awareness of the Divine within the person and the Divine outside of the person (incarnate and transcendent). He talked about a Buddhist friend who mentioned that the first half of our lives we tie ourselves in psychological knots and in the second half of life we try to untie them. This is a metaphor for moving beyond feeling stuck in life. So, he talked about working with the stuck parts as the parts that bother the person, or the parts they want to experience differently. He described these things as the academic theological thickets. They are resolved through new insight and understanding, which often is accompanied by a sense of relief.

Presence was the central theme of Roderick's interview about the experience of spiritual direction. Presence in the spiritual direction relationship has several aspects. One is the presence of the Divine in the people and things in the room. The purpose of this presence is to bring elucidation, or in other words, to bring life to a situation through relationship. He experiences satisfaction when someone finds relief and new understanding. He described being present as meeting the person wherever they are at in a session. He likened it to dancing the tango, “four legs, one heart”. His experience and guiding assumption is that attunement between the spiritual director and the client is central to the experience and the success of the experience. It is nourishing. For him, attunement is an intention to be a warm presence, which includes love (both human and divine). He said, “God says, ‘You are my beloved child. In you I am well pleased.’ Everyone needs to hear that. Everybody needs to know themselves as beloved and capable of love.”

He distinguished spiritual direction from counselling, by noting that in counselling, the focus is often on an issue that is resolved through the sessions. When resolution is found, then the person discontinues counselling. Although spiritual direction can also be episodic and time limited, it can become a long term part of a person's lifestyle. The decision to continue or finish in spiritual direction is determined by the client. The client holds the intention to take part and therefore has personal agency. Roderick also mentioned that in his experience, most people who attend spiritual direction are single. He attributes this to the possibility that there is a form of spiritual companionship in a marriage which can take the place of formal spiritual direction.

Besides being present, attuning, meeting the person where they are at and working with what they bring, another important aspect of spiritual direction for Roderick is to have the capacity to point out when the person is unconsciously deceiving themselves. His phrase was to have the type of relationship where the spiritual director can name a "full of shit" experience. This can only be done in a loving relationship with a strong therapeutic alliance. He described this as helping people to move from living in the false self (such as persona) to living in the true self. The false self is not bad or evil, it is living only in the ego self or the persona which isn't as whole or alive as living from the true self. This dynamic includes times when he wonders aloud if the person is fooling him or herself or when he sees a block in their energy that could be freed for living.

Working with clients who are Christian, he uses theological concepts and language explicitly in session. When working with clients who are not Christian, he does not evangelize or change a person's mind about their theology, but focuses on supporting the person in their personal spiritual journey.

Similarly, he shared a meaningful experience when he visited a spiritual teacher himself, in India, which profoundly changed him. In the Zen Buddhist tradition, the teacher slapped him to symbolically wake him up. Roderick asked questions, which were given answers. The teacher instructed him to “decide for yourself what is the most important thing that Jesus ever said, and take it as far as you can.” He incubated the experience for several months until an answer arrived within him:

So I pushed that to the back of my mind. I deliberately didn't think about it, and then about three months later, I was just not thinking about it, and it rose up within me, “Let your yes be yes, and your no be no,” Matthew 5:37.

He spoke about weeping at the meeting itself because of the intensity of the personal presence in the relationship in that moment:

I was weeping because I had received from the teacher, an experience of spiritual fathering. I had been fathered in the ten minutes that I was with him, in an incredible way. I mean, the guy, his gaze was like a laser beam. It just cut straight through you. And I realized that it had to do with the unrealized character of my relationship with my own father. I had an absent father, sweet, sweet guy, never there. Almost never there . . . [The teacher was] loving, intense, personal, present, all of the above, and at the end of it, he reached down and clasped my hands in his enormous hands, which was a final blessing of departure.

He compared the experience with the spiritual teacher to an experience in the tradition of the Christian desert fathers and mothers. A person would go to the desert to visit them and they gave the individual a word or phrase to practice and focus on for a time in their spiritual practice and growth.

He also spoke about the profound influence Thomas Merton has had on his personal spiritual path. He based his experience on the tradition that spiritual direction can happen via writings and letters. There was an experience for him, when reading the the writings, of being seen and of feeling an intimacy with the author. He valued Thomas Merton's emphasis on both the inner life of the individual and the life of the communal society. This includes an awareness of justice, which had been a guiding factor in Roderick's choices in life. He spent significant time fighting against the development of nuclear weapons and was involved in grass roots political activities.

Thomas Merton also proposed a focus on dialogue between the world religions to encourage an "exchange of gifts" between them. Roderick described this as:

Our task is to ask Islam, for example, what gifts it has for us, and to ask Islam what gifts they would like to receive from us. In other words, framing the relationship between the great religions, or among the great religions, as one of sharing, communication, gift giving, mutual practice of the contemplative life.

He mentioned several psychological theories in his conversation with me: Jung and the individuation of the person; Attachment theory and the need for the person to feel safety; Person-centered theory in the need for the person to be seen and experience mirroring; and the Depth Psychology perspective that the person needs to experience the Divine from both an archetypal mother and father perspective. He also views the human being as a self-regulating organism that has the capacity for self-healing. This includes healing of the soul.

Roderick views spiritual direction as a journey of becoming: to explore where a person's journey is currently, how they came to be here, where they might go in the future. It is an ongoing journey of human imperfection and living toward wholeness. Any issue is situated in relation to the whole person. He contrasts spiritual direction with positive

psychology. Positive psychology focuses on happiness, positive functioning and thriving rather than dysfunction. Spiritual direction looks at more than happiness. It looks toward participation in a “more than human world” with soulful and spirit related dimensions. It takes the perspective that human imperfections need to be seen, embraced and integrated as part of an acceptance of the whole person.

Roderick outlined several ritualized activities that he includes in a spiritual direction session. He begins with a period of silence. Sometimes he will then share a small piece of writing that he found meaningful or that is salient to the person, for reflection. The session continues with discussion and exploration of emotions, concepts and experiences as they emerge. He often anchors the session at the end by asking the person “what have we been talking about?” as a way to see what was important to them. Roderick finishes with three Sufi rakus (three vows). The rakus are practiced as follows: He and the client stand facing each other. They put their hands, pressed together, to their sternums. They repeat responsively, “I vow to my own work. I vow to the work of others. I vow to the Great Work.” This reflects the personal, the communal and the cosmic/universal aspects of the spiritual direction work. He gave an example of the Great Work by mentioning Thomas Berry, a geologist, who focuses on theology as related to the healing of the planet. He also mentioned the importance of political healing as another aspect of the Great Work. So he finishes each session with a focus on the three levels of vows, which was how we finished our interview as well.

Summary of Roderick’s individual themes. Roderick was unique in the interviews in two respects. He spoke often of a multi-faith perspective and used numerous examples from the Buddhist, Sufi and Hindu traditions. He was also unique in that he spoke explicitly to the importance of the development of a healthy male identity. He tied this to spiritual direction

with his male clients. Roderick focused his experience on the meme of presence between the beings taking part in spiritual direction.

Andrew. I met with Andrew in a small meditation room in the venerable rural church where he is pastor. It was a room he designed for meetings and prayer when his office was being used for other activities. Andrew is a trained clergyman, and was the only one of the participants who is in active parish ministry. He also has a degree in organizational psychology, has specialized in chaplaincy in prisons, addiction counselling and trauma recovery. He had extensive pastoral psychology training in his seminary, which formed a foundation for working as a counsellor and spiritual director. He did three times more units of pastoral counselling than was required by his university; working in hospitals, mental hospitals, and parishes. His training included verbatims of sessions, interpersonal experience groups, supervision and reflective learning. He views it as an ongoing process over his forty-five years of ordained ministry. He credits his first parish, which happened to have a well-educated group of members, for significantly shaping his pastoral and theological perspective and setting the stage for his ongoing learning.

His view of spiritual direction is broad. He experiences working as a spiritual director in all of his clergy work. One to one spiritual direction is sometimes a part of the work he does, but community building, working at a recovery centre, group scriptural study, raising funds for scholarships, multi-faith prayer groups and weekly services are a few of the other activities that are part of his work. He said:

Well, I think every clergyman is a spiritual director, and it comes with the territory ...

For me, life is prayer, that, as an ordained person and as a committed Christian,

whether I was ordained or not, every day has to be considered prayer, from the time I

wake up to the time I go to bed. That I dedicate everything to the glory of God, and to propagating the sense of who is God, both by my words and my actions.

When people ask for more focused spiritual direction sessions, he will meet with them in that context. He uses a Benedictine perspective along with his psychological and broader theological foundation. This is a contemplative approach to spiritual life, with a strong focus on developing the inner spiritual life of a person. One of the resources he uses is *St. Benedictine's Toolbox* (Tomaine, 2005), which is a book that teaches prayer practices and a contemplative perspective. He also encouraged the congregation where he works to put in a stone labyrinth on the grounds of the church for people to walk as part of their reflective practice. He tries to get to know each person, to understand their perception of themselves, and their motivation. They talk about a relationship with God in an overt way, explore Christian identity or spiritual identity and the person's understanding of God. The work clears up misunderstandings about God that "they soak it up from our environment around us. Any spiritual direction has to help squeeze out that crap, and help people come to a more loving, calm, more full, not crazy-making journey in life." He looks at deeper questions that may arise, and affirms the Spirit in the person. Andrew's therapeutic stance is gentle, affirming, healing, educating, warm, pastoral, caring, friendly, inclusive, and accepting. He spends time on what's important to them and where they are at personally to support and encourage spiritual pursuits.

A backbone of Andrew's experience is Process Theology (Cobb, 1982). This involves being "in tune" with the current world as it continues to evolve. It includes a reflective learning stance. "Process Theology says we're on a journey. We're on a journey in this life with each other, in community, and with God, and that God is in the midst of our community, and that Heaven is now." Andrew is clear about his theological

perspective and his impression that parts of the way Christianity is practiced is harmful. He spoke about Opus Dei (www.opusdei.org), an organization which encourages people to engage in such practices as attaching barbed wire to their body to encourage spiritual development:

An Opus Dei spiritual journey to me is crap, because it makes you demean you. God does not want you demeaned. God wants you to love and to love yourself and to know that you have been created in love...even if your parents weren't loving, still there's the love of God in you.

Another example he gave was of a minister in his community who was fired for telling his congregation that Eve never spoke to the snake in the scriptural story in Genesis. He was fired for not taking the Bible as a literal:

The Bible is not a literal cookbook. The Bible is a set of wisdoms of people in their own time, written for their own expectation. It is a book of wisdom for people on their journey at their moment of time.

He advocates a perspective based on the knowledge and cultural context of the present day.

A third story he shared was about working as a recording technician and journalist in his earlier life. He was recording a church service for a major media company. At that time there was a technical limit to recording in the form of 45-minute tapes. He spoke with the pastor to problem solve how to manage the transition of switching tapes at the 45-minute mark. The pastor said he would take care of the problem. So Andrew gave the pastor a signal at the appointed time:

He nods, he got the message "And now brothers and sisters, Jesus is calling me, and the holy spirit's calling me, that we all stand up and Praise Jesus!" So these

thousand people stood up. He hardly finished his sentence. He got right into it, and they all sang a couple of choruses, we changed the videos, put the video in, I told him one minute to go, then down thirty seconds and go “Oh, the spirit is talking to me now, we’re all supposed to sit down, and the message will come from the holy spirit, and I am the vehicle of the holy spirit,” and he went on . . . But, what I did learn was that this guy was manipulating this crowd of a thousand people, and that bothered me. That’s not spirituality, that’s manipulation, and mass hypnosis. And that’s not God. And so I share all that, that my formation and teaching of formation is to not be manipulative, and not be hypnotic, and to always empower, not disempower.

When people come to him for spiritual direction he maintains a transparent stance about his personal perspective. “You’ve come to me for a spiritual journey. I’ll tell you where I’m at. If you want to stay walking with me, that’s fine. If you don’t, that’s okay too. My ego is not vested in it.”

A core principle in Andrew’s work is his belief that each person is created as good enough:

We have now got people who have got a misguided understanding of scripture, which has been portrayed by certain segments of Christianity, much to the detriment of the meaning of scripture, and to the detriment of individuals. And it’s really built up a whole sense that you’re not good enough, and that you have to be redeemed, and there is all this bogus theology that came into the church around (the year) 1030 CE, about “you’re not good enough.” There’s this bogus theology that you have to be redeemed.

He attributes some of this to current society, particularly in the forms of advertising and negative interpersonal relationships, and how it “squashes people”. An important part of spiritual direction for him is to help people get in touch with the perfect God that is within them and all parts of creation. “God loves you because you’re you. And I find often when people come looking for spiritual direction, somehow that whole understanding is somewhat damaged . . . They’re lovable already.”

His focus is on building a community that is diverse and inclusive. Sometimes Andrew uses the Myers-Briggs Typology Inventory as a way to explore the value of different approaches and individual personal strengths in community. He used the metaphor of the orchestra to illustrate the necessity of uniqueness and cooperation in community. “Like an orchestra, not everybody plays the same instrument, and so we have to work together in that.” How people treat each other reflects how we see and trust God (or not). From a Process Theological perspective, heaven is now:

We can create a community of heaven, where we respect each other, treat each other with equality and respect and inclusion and forgiveness and love . . . We’re supposed to be going through this world as heavenly people, understanding the world around us, but still building a community where we are inclusive of each other, and we’re always open to everybody coming, and it’s not a judgmental place.

This type of community builds trust, which is important in living life and taking the mature risks that are part of relationships.

Andrew shared a personal experience, which was formational for his life and healing. He was severely burned by an accident with boiling water in the hospital as a premature child in the first few days of his life. He saw his mother twice in the following eight months that he was recovering and growing in the hospital. He learned to be a survivor and he learned to use

food to comfort himself and manage his anxiety. He also needed to do personal trauma-related healing work in relationship to trusting women:

I always had a love/hate relationship with women. I wanted to be with a woman, but then I'd be afraid that "Wow she's going to leave me," so I'd find another woman on the side, just in case this one left, and I never got into a trusting, risking relationship, until I did my own trauma work around that.

This horrific experience was part of his own journey of learning to love and trust God. It also shaped his approach to spiritual direction:

It speaks to the impact of trauma. So, that's why I'm always aware and alert as a spiritual advisor and journeyer with people on the journey. As they get more comfortable, and as I observe them, if I see them being really always on guard, and I will talk gently about that and oftentimes we'll do some trauma work, just to help them. . . . And I talk about what I just shared with you, and talk about how (trauma) works on the brain, talking about resetting the Dendrites and the importance of REM sleep, and so on. I'm an EMDR therapist. So. That's all part of the whole. That's all part of the spiritual.

An interesting part of our interview was the discussion about addiction. Not only addiction to external substances, but how some approaches to Christianity become an addiction to God:

Addiction is, "I need to get this in order to feel whole or complete." And that's also true with religion. . . . An integrated, mature person will recognize in themselves, "I'm needing this sense of mood altering, but I don't need to go into crazy literalism or just blindly following what somebody else says. I have a way of going to my safe place, where I can see myself, that I can nurture myself and I can love myself. I don't have

to mood alter in order to love myself. But I'm lovable even when I feel stupid or inadequate, or whatever."

He went on to speak about how a mature approach works from a place where emotions include a moral stance. People make decisions about their behaviour based on the morality they can use when feeling an emotion and the ability they have to not respond impulsively. A moral stance is one that is not harmful to yourself or others around you. I had never heard of a perspective where emotion was connected so closely to morality.

When I asked Andrew what he did not appreciate about some of his spiritual direction experiences, the topic of codependency came up in our conversation. He does not appreciate congregational members, spiritual direction clients, or counselling clients using him as an object on which they are codependent:

I'm worried when people are feeling so inadequate, that they want me to live their lives. . . There's some clergy that foster that, and I hate it. I want you to walk on the feet that God gave you, and so if I smell it coming at me, I will call it out.

Another challenging aspect is when a congregant or client experiences erotic transference:

If you're going to love me as a brother or sister in Christ, part of the family of heaven (that's fine), but I don't want you falling in love with me, and if I sense that's coming, I will call it out, and if I can't get the message through, I'll say, "look, we just can't work together anymore".

He also spoke about the personal challenge of living from a non-judgmental space in relation to the spiritual journey of others. It is an ongoing practice for him.

His focus is on connecting the person to the energy of life. He used a battery metaphor to illustrate his point:

If you believe spirituality is all about power and empowerment, and self-actualization of the power that God gave you. It's like, we're all born with a battery, but sometimes life didn't allow the battery to get (properly) connected, and I think spiritual direction is supposed to help get the battery reconnected and functioning.

When I asked Andrew if he had a favourite guiding verse from scripture, he talked about Luke 4:18 "let the prisoners go free. Now is the year of the Lord's pardon." He related this to his 20 years of work as a prison chaplain:

I'd say . . . "the most secure prison is the one between your ears. So what I hope you'll do now is use your time in incarceration, not to be a place where you're just complaining and whining every day about how unfair it is that you're here behind bars, but use the time to really look into yourself, find the prison you're in, in your head, and then use people like me to find the keys to help you get out, so when you leave this joint, you'll never come back. . . It's the most powerful prison there is; the one between your ears. And God doesn't want you in that prison."

Through his relationship to the men he worked with, he found that it could be healing for them on many levels, including their spiritual trauma. For example, he worked with a man who had been sexually abused by his father, and at the end of their clinical relationship, the man asked to give him a hug. The connection had been healing.

Summary of Andrew's individual themes. Andrew's experience was unique in the study in several ways. He was the most explicit in speaking about fostering spiritual direction at a community level. He was the only participant who worked primarily in a parish setting. He was the only participant that spoke from a process theological perspective (as described

above). He also had a specialization in addiction and trauma, which shaped his perspective. Andrew focused his experience on the meme of knowing that each person is good enough.

Anne. Anne and I conducted our interview at a retreat centre by a lake. We spoke for several hours in the evening in the living room of one of the visitor apartments. Anne is the only participant who works full time at the retreat centre. She runs courses and individual retreats and is coordinator for a spiritual direction training program. She is a visual artist, which brings a creative aspect to the expression of her spiritual direction experience. She is also interested in bodywork modalities of healing experiences.

Anne came to spiritual direction via a journey of personal development over many years. She grew up in a church community and is aware of how some of her family of origin experiences prepared her for her spiritual direction work. For example, she was the oldest child in a family that valued social connection. She moved often as a child, which taught her how to make connections with many people. Anne received spiritual direction as an adult and took part in ongoing personal development through courses in retreat centre communities. She went on to have formal training in a two-year spiritual direction program:

I just knew I'd come home. There was such a sense of "wow, my whole life has been bringing me here." . . . I really felt like I'd moved back into my own skin, in a certain way. I felt as though I could really be who I am, whatever that might mean moment by moment. I felt unguarded, safe, trusting, trusted. . . It just felt like I had found my people, and I love to learn, and so it's certainly a work where you never stop learning. You're never done in this realm. The whole contemplative realm for sure, the spiritual realm, and that's no less true in spiritual accompaniment.

She currently works with individual seekers, provides retreats and gives training. It is not common to work as a spiritual director full time. Sessions often happen once a month

unless the person is on retreat. Some seekers take part in silent retreats. There is no preconceived outcome. The seeker is the expert and the hope is that they will “gain something of value to them.” She is helping others make meaning of their life. The work is guided by the context of the moment. She works in a way that is not overly cerebral as it disturbs the process for both participants of being present and listening. She also works consciously to know herself and her biases in order to approach the work in a clean way.

A significant part of our conversation centered on the concepts of redemption and discernment. Redemption is the idea that something generative or healing can come out of a bad or broken experience. Discernment is a way of knowing and making decisions that is a process over time. The process is relational and emergent. “Space and time are really critical components of good discernment for me.” She described it as considering any options that arise but tuning into her personal responses such as emotional gut reactions, listening to her thoughts, noticing energy levels in herself, looking for feelings of tension and peace and generally paying attention to body-based information. She also spoke about talking to others as part of the relational process, including her partner and people who may be impacted by her decision. She gave an example of trying to decide how to proceed with a current job offer she was considering. She worked with the possibilities until she came to a space in her discernment that worked well for her. In this case it wasn’t a yes or no response, but rather a counter proposal that she felt would be good for all parties.

Anne shared a very significant personal experience of trauma through her husband’s illness in her first marriage that catalyzed her spiritual formation. Anne was in her early 20’s when she married and they soon found out they were expecting a baby. A few weeks after that, her husband contracted viral encephalitis. He never completely recovered:

Very traumatic. And I'm pregnant with our first child, and last child, as it turned out, and it was an extremely tough time. And then, (he came) home, and I had a pretty naïve faith, an incredibly naïve faith, and so, you know, that juvenile faith of mine was completely inadequate to what happened to us, and the outcome of, the long term implication of that. It was like, at the time when I really needed my faith in something and believe in something the most, my juvenile "if you just get it right, play it out, blahblahblahblah, it will work out, you won't have things like this happen to you," REALLY juvenile, just like the rug that's pulled out from under. So, then began the long journey, and it was a 10-year journey for me, of trying to accompany my husband back to wellness, thinking if I kept praying enough, working enough, trying enough, getting the right specialists, the right doctors, he'd recover fully. And he never did recover fully, and when pieces of the brain have been removed, you're never going to recover fully, right? So that 10-year journey for me was one of survival, in large measure, and I had, some really great people came into my life, and I really started to come to (the retreat centre) and take programs and courses to help me make sense out of life, to change my theology, to expand my world views, I mean, all those things . . . Ya, so that really led me on the journey to all manner...it just opened up a world of things to me that in my young and modestly educated being, I just knew nothing about . . . So, one of the things that happened in those years of trying to make sense of life and loss. . . was I, I spent a lot of time alone, I spent a lot of time with a journal. I spent a lot of time harvesting the wisdom that I learned in programs here, and other places, and from a spiritual director, and ministers and counsellors, and an art therapist I encountered once was great . . . I did a ton of healing work on my own, and reconciling work, and like hours and hours and hours

alone, just working through stuff, and grieving and ritualizing grief, and letting it go, but one thing I really found useful was Jung's Active Imagination, and I just spent, who knows how many equivalent days, an hour here and two hours there, working with dream imagery, and working with issues and symbols and projection, and all the you know, the stuff coming out as I tried to make sense out of life, and so it really just, that became just a part of who I am and how I got to be here.

Analytical Psychology influences Anne's therapeutic approach. She holds an awareness of complexes that the seekers are caught in, to help to free them from what is holding them back. They do this by working with emotion, shame, and by unpacking whatever might arise in a session. She invites the use of Active Imagination and dreamwork where appropriate. She has found that seekers experience insight and epiphanies as well as shifts in emotion. She has also found the concept of doing shadow work useful in the sense that it is helpful to make unknown sides of the individual more conscious.

Anne cited Marion Woodman as a professional mentor and helpful on her personal journey. Constructs that Anne finds meaningful from Marion Woodman's work include holding the tension of the opposites (not either/or thinking), fostering inner integration (particularly the inner marriage of the masculine and feminine parts of a person), valuing the idea of wholeness, and working to be fully who you are. Anne described Marion's job in terms of holding a space of attention and presence, and to be aware of an unconscious level of connection in the session. For spiritual direction work specifically, Anne added working from a stance that includes non-judgmental acceptance and unconditional love as much as possible. She spoke about how in her experience judgment gets in the way of therapy. In the tradition of Marion Woodman's body- and movement-based approach to therapy, Anne spoke about her experience of receiving therapy where there was a pattern of talking, then

body work, then talking. She benefited from that approach. She also gave two examples of integrating body work into providing spiritual direction. She asked permission of the client to do body based work and then in the first case, held her hand to the chest and back of a client she was working with in spiritual direction, and in the second case, psychologically grounding the person by holding her hands over their feet. These were careful and respectful interventions to help the person regulate their body and emotions after “dealing with something huge”; such as old trauma or a current “stuckness.”

She has a current professional development interest in contemplating ways of attending to the physical as well as the psyche (mental), spiritual and emotional aspects of a person in spiritual direction. This new direction in the work is enlivening. She has also found Inner Family Systems therapy to be interesting; particularly how the conscious individual can lead the various internal parts of him or herself with respect. Anne spoke about working responsibly and carefully with things known as Psychology. She is guided by the theories and experiences she has from her own therapy/spiritual direction and ongoing learning. When she considers the external frameworks that are part of the type of work each professional discipline is assigned and the question of working within the limits of her expertise, she talked about a tendency within her work to “offer the support that comes naturally” in the session. She mentioned using clinical expertise and intuition to help determine potential psychological dangers to the seeker and in choosing the timing in sessions as ways of providing different types of support.

Summary of Anne’s individual themes. Anne’s individual themes in the study were the use of creativity and other modalities in spiritual direction sessions, often coming at the work from a Jungian focus, and being clear about how she came to the work of spiritual

direction through her growth and transformation experience instigated by personal crisis. Anne focused her experience on the theme of redemption during our discussion.

Michael. Michael and I conducted our interview in his office at the community mental health clinic for children and families where he is director and therapist. He is the only registered psychologist who participated in the study and the only one who works regularly with children. He has been in psychological practice for thirty years. Currently he often does phone sessions with spiritual direction clients who do not live in his area.

Michael described his path of becoming a spiritual director as one that developed over time. He graduated from university as a clinical psychologist and noticed over the next few years that the way he was speaking to clients was changing. He attributed the change to finding his own voice as a therapist, until he attended the funeral of a friend at a church. It was a surprise to him to realize that the pastor was using language and explanations that were similar to how he had been speaking to his clients in therapy:

That's that voice. What it was, was an evolution, I think, of maybe that triangle, you know that triangle – self, others, God/higher power/spirit/whatever is put there . . . Psychology deals a lot with this bottom, our relationship with ourselves and relationship with others, and so it was an evolution where my language was moving out of some of that. It wasn't excluding it, but it was including this different language that had to do with relationship with something greater than ourselves, and really there were a lot of synonyms for whatever I was calling that. Usually it would be life, or relationship with life seemed to be the main thing that stuck with me. I was very curious how that was happening.

This was a surprise to him, particularly since his clinical psychology training had not viewed spirituality and religion in a very favourable light:

I had all kinds of biases about “things spiritual weren’t for rational people,” and maybe even some of that weak-minded bias, and I’d had this history of feeling like I was force-fed religion, had as a young man gone through . . . was in a marriage and a divorce that ended up where I partly conclude it was because I couldn’t go down a fundamental Christian road.

He became more interested in spirituality and although he was not familiar with the tradition of spiritual direction, he began exploring spiritual issues with clients when they came up.

He was again surprised when he came across an ad in a psychological magazine for a program in spiritual direction. The term discernment stood out for him in the ad. It was very interesting to him that there was a place to study where people spoke about that kind of spiritual knowing. So, he inquired about the program and was guided by the academic advisor to explore a second program in spiritual direction. He called the second program and initially was turned off by his conversation, so he waited another two years before exploring it again. During that time, he continued to develop his exploration of spiritual and religious issues with clients. He eventually enrolled in a 2-year spiritual direction program and has worked as a spiritual director since that time. He noted that the program freed him from his academic prejudice and allowed him to look at spiritual aspects as part of human experience. He also gained a comfort that he had not had before with using overtly spiritual language in a client-centered way in his sessions. In some cases, he has unsecularized his language.

Michael spoke specifically about the multi-generational impact of his family’s relationship to religion. He had a mixed experience. His mother was a strong humanitarian who felt that “life’s meaning was in how much you can contribute to the lives of others.” His paternal grandfather was religious in a different way. He was a significant figure in raising

Michael. His grandfather's approach to religion was rigid and strict. This alienated Michael from organized religion. Until he took the spiritual direction program, "most religious things, more than anything, just scared me."

There were other experiences of spirituality and growth that shaped him. His work as a therapist became a spiritual practice before he was even looking for that:

What I realize now, is that what was changing me was the psychotherapy; doing psychotherapy, not as a client, but as a therapist . . . (Doing psychotherapy) as a spiritual practice . . . Kind of an interesting thought. You put yourself in community. You do everything you can to forget about yourself, and have this focus on the other person. Then part of the work is trying to glean the information from what I call nonlocalized ways of knowing; kind of the intuitive stuff. Even the intention to listen in that way, during the therapy. I'd think that, this hour after hour of kind of being in that place (in a therapy session). People are coming, and they're sharing their stories which you're attempting to listen to without judgment as much as possible. Maybe there is more, but that all seemed to be a recipe for something that was a major part of my evolution from this place of therapy to include spiritual direction.

His own experience receiving therapy also shaped him, particularly in his exploration of the mystical perspective of Harold Thurman. He also talked about a disconcerting experience of altered consciousness gazing at his friend's art work:

(We would) gaze at them, just focus and look, and then talk about what seemed to come from that. So, early practice around discernment. And I remember having sort of terrifying experiences, of what I would call now kind of . . . things got too expansive; there's that little theory about the invisible fence that we all put up around us, quite constricting, but it's that kind of payoff in terms of safety, of this is containable. So

here was this experience of “oh yeah, there is so much more than I’m aware of.” It was terrifying to me, and I did wonder “gosh, am I kind of loosening the grip here?” (There was no one) to just say this is kind of what that is, and isn’t this grand! . . . How much of the time did we look at terror and grace and all kinds of gifts , you know . . . I would say now, as I understand it more, I was really starting to get a glimpse of unconditional love.

He also experienced development through dreamwork and meditation:

There was dream life, there was meditation that were contributors early on. It’s interesting, because I really thought “I understand faith, because it’s evident, and it’s evident all the time by these mind pictures.” Of course, that all eventually went away, not completely, but for the most part, and now I understand more, trusting and faith and that kind of thing when they’re not evident.

Michael’s perceptions of the similarities and differences between spiritual direction and therapy are well articulated. His experience is that the psychological movement in therapy can grow only so far, and then spiritual direction can be used to break through whatever glass ceiling has been reached into different realms of personal development. He spoke about his initial professional discomfort presenting the intersection of spirituality and mental health in a public lecture he was asked to present. It felt vulnerable and professionally dangerous to broach the subject. His training in both psychology and spiritual direction has been helpful to his clients:

In doing spiritual direction as a therapist, what has been really helpful to people is to come from both those disciplines, to be able to say “you know what? I don’t think you’re crazy, I think this is a spiritual something,” and they kind of believe it because, you’re supposed to know what crazy is . . . You’re telling me “it’s not that kind of

crazy, it's this other thing.” That's been really, really helpful to folks. . . . “I trust you're saying that because you have that background.”

He further distinguishes them as follows: “Oh, a spiritual crisis is maybe more a crisis of growth, so has beginning, middle, and end. Importantly it has an end. You keep moving, whereas (mental illness) could be a death sentence, in terms of hope.”

Working with spiritual trauma from the past and spiritual crisis in the present, are both part of his practice. He said, “Most of what seemed like spiritual abuses, in working with folks, is where (they) have gotten really conditional love.” He described further:

In working with kids for years and years and years, there was a time when I would ask them routinely, ‘What has an adult said to you about how to live life that has been helpful?’ And the poorer or more broken the kids are, they all tend to say, ‘Well nothing really.’ There was never much about that broader picture.

He describes himself as a discernment teacher. “I think there's a lot of different types of spiritual direction. I think they're all valid, and I would sort of identify myself a spiritual director that is more, maybe a discernment teacher.” One of his clients described how he helps people explore their inner landscape:

”It's like you're a tour guide around the internal world, driving along with a microphone, let's stop on the side here, in this little dark area, blahblahblah,” you get the idea that, just somehow talking about the terrain of this thing of discernment, or what it may mean to live discerningly, or that whole piece (is important). So, we go to psychologists to try to make sense of our human experience, to try to learn about ourselves, and there's this whole area where nobody talks about it, but spiritual direction talks about it.

Discernment is a way to navigate life and to understand unconscious spiritual activity.

Love gives a central meaning to Michael's work. He said:

I am quite a greatest commandment kind of guy, and I understand that in this way, with this triangle: First and foremost, love God with everything you have in you. Everything...and second to that, almost to say, (the first) informs this love of self as others, that that's an equal thing . . . and that balance, love thy neighbour as yourself, that kind of thing . . . is really a difficult, complex something, as loving something intangible is.

Michael shared a current story of working with a client where he is working to tolerate the unknown. He acknowledged a deepening of his sense of mystery and working with ambiguity in the counselling process:

M: I find myself more in uncharted territories; this is probably a mixture of my own fears and his fears and all that that means, and doubts; are we going to be able to find God and surrender around some of this or not. So, it's interesting to me, . . . I find, as I do this work and as time goes on, I say it this way, a cheeky way. . . . I just get stupider (laugh).

K: The more I know, the more I don't know.

M: It is just that, and the bigger it all seems to get, and the more mysterious it all is.

K: But it also sounds like you're more able to sit in that, be in it, and the capacity for you to do that allows the people that you're working with to do that.

M: And isn't a synonym for presence, love?

As mentioned in the quote above, Michael spoke about the concept of surrender.

When we spent some time delving into surrender as a concept, Michael described it as part of really engaging with life experiences by embracing the mystery of them. It is surrender

to the unknown in an experience. “Living it fully however it is.” In the case of this client, the challenge was to get past the continuum of growing older with a healthy mind or having the mind succumb to dementia. In the context of surrender in spiritual direction, there is an intention to listen for ‘the third story’. “What we don’t know that isn’t even on the continuum.” This perspective opens up opportunity.

Summary of Michael’s individual themes. Michael contributed several individual themes to the study. He spoke about working as a discernment teacher. He focused on the importance of using language that is expressive of experience and conducive to connection between the people involved. He outlined how multi-generational spiritual experiences can influence the development of the person and how that impacted his own experience. He described a perspective of curiosity by using surrender in approaching life experiences. Michael also looked specifically at the constructs of love and the importance of healing shame. Michael focused his experience on the meme of discernment as a life skill.

Lynn. Lynn and I conducted our interview at her private practice office. She is a career academic in sociology and social psychology, who has worked on significant projects such as contributing to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. She has also dedicated significant time to issues of social justice, working with people like Joan Baez. She teaches and publishes extensively. Currently, Lynn is working in private practice as a spiritual director, as well as functioning as executive director of a graduate school of Christian studies.

Lynn described her development as a spiritual director as one that unfolded over many years. She grew up in the Episcopal church. She was not familiar with spiritual direction. While doing a fellowship at the National Institute of Mental Health, she spent time with Psychiatrists and Psychoanalysts. She began taking courses in psychoanalysis.

Her graduate school in Sociology had a Marxist perspective. Lynn was interested in the impact of depth work:

I found, with people who were doing some of that kind of work, that they were less reactive, less . . . I don't like the overuse of the word narcissistic, but it's what comes to mind. They were less only able to hear their own point of view, and to push it, and that seems like a religious virtue, as well as a psychological one.

[During one research project, it] surfaced just how much is unconscious for people. . . . I became increasingly aware of that, and was wondering what Christians did for their own soul's sake, as well as for the sake of the world in which they lived and moved, to get in touch with their own unconscious material.

At that time, Eric Erikson told her about the field of spiritual direction. "So I started reading about that. I didn't actually know at the time that it was alive and well. I thought of it more as kind of esoteric, monastic, and ancient." She also explored pastoral counselling programs at the time:

I studied the [pastoral] counselling service, and saw how people with an evangelical theology, which had certain components, became more progressive theologically through the work of being a lay counsellor, cuz they moved much more toward a compassion stance, rather than sort of a purity stance. They moved to compassion from purity, which I thought was just incredibly interesting. It was also, for them, unconscious (chuckle). So, that's what I looked at in my dissertation, and then I didn't think much about spiritual direction again.

After years of a busy life, raising children, working at the university, and continuing social justice work, she began taking spiritual direction herself:

I really felt God nudging me to find a spiritual director. I had been in therapy, probably was in therapy at the time, but I felt God nudging me to find a spiritual director, which at the time sounded to me like, “find a unicorn.”

She found a spiritual director by speaking with her Roman Catholic colleagues, and she found it a profound experience:

So after writing this dissertation about where Christians turned for that kind of growing familiarity with parts of themselves that were not yet recognized, I suddenly plunged into it and discovered it happening in spiritual direction. . . . So I became a true believer. I saw a spiritual director once a month, and kept on with the rest of my life.

She continued her personal spiritual practice and her life continued to unfold. As she describes it:

Then I felt a subsequent nudge, to get the training in spiritual direction, which I really didn't want to do. I was training people to be counsellors in churches at the time, I was teaching a Marriage and Family Therapy program. I didn't really want to enter into a program like that myself. Not when I had small kids at home. But the push was strong, and so I did enter into it; . . . really for the first year, I thought it was just an opportunity for me to pray more, because the training is so contemplative.

She trained in a Roman Catholic program for spiritual directors. She was not intending to work as a spiritual director, but as the program required practicum clients, people began coming to Lynn for spiritual direction sessions.

Working with the attunement to grace is the central focus of Lynn's sessions. Grace as an experience is explored further in the collective themes that follow in this chapter.

Lynn made an interesting connection in our discussion between the Christian concepts of grace and the psychological construct of elevation:

[Many people can relate to] grace as some sort of inner recognition of goodness or rightness. It's the kind of thing that in positive psychology, they write of as related to the experience of elevation. I write about that a little bit in my latest book, that what scripture calls exaltation is very akin to what Haidt (2003) and others are calling elevation. It's a moral emotion, they call it. I would call it a spiritual emotion; even there, articulation of moral emotion is more esthetic than it is moral. So it is a response to what some of them so often call moral beauty. What you experience is a dilation of the chest and . . . it's been pretty well researched now. It has its own physiological response, and also it has an effect, so people are more apt to then do generous, altruistic sorts of things, after they've witnessed moral beauty. It can be really tiny little experiences of moral beauty. It can be someone like a man helping an old woman across the street. It doesn't have to be some huge thing. And then the person has this elevation experience, and is more apt to be kind to someone after that. I would call that grace, because I have a personal theology that these things come ultimately from God. That's what I see myself as doing, as helping people notice grace, and part of the way it's noticed is by that personal experience of it.

In fostering this experience in sessions, Lynn describes her clinical approach as more contemplative than didactic.

Lynn works with lay people and clergy. She has found the vocation of spiritual direction to be both personally and professionally rewarding. Her natural interest developed and deepened. "I was just fascinated by how people grow, essentially, psychologically and

spiritually, how they develop; how they discover more and more who they are and what makes them tick, and develop a greater spiritual, but also moral and social compass.”

Spiritual direction has become the frame that encompasses a lot of Lynn’s life. “Spiritual direction was the mustard seed that I swallowed. It just grew and grew and grew and grew in my life, so that a lot of my work life has something to do with spiritual direction now.”

Summary of Lynn’s individual themes. Lynn contributed several individual themes to the study. Lynn’s description of following the development of her call to work as a spiritual director, was an informative part of her interview. It describes a relational approach between her and the Divine in the unfolding of her career. Her experience with different academic settings and with the spiritual development of people in evangelical communities was also unique. Lynn focused her experience extensively on the meme of grace.

Reflections on the interviews. In finishing this section on the summaries of the individual experiences of the participants, there are a few aspects of the study more specific to the interviews themselves that will be mentioned. These are general observations about the interviews that I found significant and meaningful to the dissertation, but are in addition to the individual or collective themes of the results. Each participant found their way into the work they do as spiritual directors by using a specific word as an organizing concept. They also each shared personal examples of their own spiritual growth as important parts of the interviews. Similar to this, each of the participants shared the names of specific writers and teachers who had a strong impact on them. They also approached the interviews with an inquiring spirit of openness which added to the richness of the results. I have collected these observations here, because it seemed useful to have them as a reflection of the meaning of the interview experience.

Each participant had a specific word that became the main focus of his or her interview. These words were organizing principles in all five of the interviews to some extent, but it was interesting how each participant found a word that was strongest in our conversation. They used their word as a way to enter into the larger experience of spiritual direction and spiritual experience. Roderick focused on presence. Andrew focused on being good enough. Anne's interview centered on redemption. Michael spoke about discernment. Lynn focused on grace. Although there were individual words that were unifying concepts for each interview, these words were present enough in all of the interviews to make them emergent subthemes in the study as a whole.

All of the participants shared examples of their own personal spiritual growth experiences during the interviews. Roderick spoke about his experience with the now and jubilee. He also talked about his experience with the spiritual teacher in India that had a profound impact on his life. Andrew told the story of the need to heal from his personal trauma to be in mature relationship with God, himself and others. He also spoke about a negative learning experience, where he saw how spiritual community can be used to manipulate people. Anne shared her experience of coming to a strong lifestyle of spiritual and personal development through the very difficult experience of helping a close family member through a near death experience and the resulting severe brain injury. Anne also spoke about the emergent process she uses when making life decisions. Michael talked about how working as a therapist helped him in developing his spiritual practice and how his family shaped his approach to spirituality. Lynn mentioned how she experiences herself in spiritual direction sessions as more relationally connected than in some other aspects of her life. These were very meaningful and sometimes vulnerable experiences for the participants.

All of the participants spoke about writers and teachers who had a strong impact on shaping their spiritual direction practice. Roderick spoke about Thomas Merton in particular. Andrew mentioned being influenced by five authors: John Cobb, Viktor Frankl, John D. Crossan, Marcus Borg and John Spong. Anne mentioned the work of Marion Woodman, C.G. Jung, and Father Luke Dysinger. Michael appreciated the influence that the writings of Howard Thurman had on him. Lynn mentioned psychoanalytic teachers that she had, and learning from Erik Erickson.

The participants were generous with their time. They were thoughtful and their discussions were engaging. For some of the participants, the discussion led to new insights into their experience. They described their participation as personally generative for their spiritual path. Overall, their participation in spiritual direction as part of their life work was both a personal and a professional endeavour.

Collective Themes from the Study

Six superordinate themes came out of the study of the spiritual directors' experience and the meaning they made in providing spiritual direction. The collective themes and emergent subthemes are summarized in Table 3. Each collective theme will be described in detail using the emergent subthemes and participant's quotes, to create a rich and deep understanding of each theme.

Table 3: *Collective Themes of the Study*

Superordinate Themes	Emergent Subthemes
Collaborative Relational Approach	Journey Presence Grace Redemption Human limitations
Emergent Perspective	Living fully Becoming Contemplative approach Discernment, decisionmaking
Theme of Love	Good enough
Ongoing Personal and Spiritual Work	Becoming a spiritual director Daily practice Ongoing spiritual direction
Mutual Impact	Mutuality Satisfaction in the work
Working as a Spiritual Director	Activities Self-disclosure and sharing teaching stories Non-verbal creative modalities Language Working with Christian and non-Christian people. Spiritual direction and clinical counselling

Theme 1: Collaborative relational approach. The experience of spiritual direction was one of using a collaborative and relational approach to the sessions and the relationship. The spiritual director develops an attached therapeutic relationship to the seeker. Both the director and the seeker are exploring the seeker's life and listening for the movement of God in that life to deepen his or her spiritual experience. As a superordinate theme, the collaborative relational approach in spiritual direction was described by five emergent subthemes. These include the concept of life as a journey, the centrality of experiencing presence in the spiritual direction relationship, an awareness of the gift of grace in life, a sense of redemption of difficult experiences and an awareness of human limitations. At the member check interviews, the participants each confirmed that their experiences were reflected in all six superordinate themes.

Journey. The first subtheme is viewing life as a journey, and spiritual direction as a part of that journey, shapes the way the spiritual direction session is led and experienced. Other similar metaphors, such as a life path, fit into this perspective as well. Roderick described the motivation to take part in spiritual direction by saying, “There are a lot of people around here who want to connect their inner life with their faith, or their life journey with their faith.” Andrew described his experience as wanting to “walk with people on their personal path.” He goes on to say, “We’re on a journey in this life with each other, in community, and with God, and that God is in the midst of our community. . . It’s all about connection.”

Valuing collaboration and relationship creates the model of a companion on a spiritual journey. It creates an approach to a session in which the spiritual director works without a structured agenda. Roderick says, “My style is eclectic. I respond to what the seeker offers me, and just travel with the seeker, wherever it takes both of us.”

The spiritual director takes their lead from the seeker and what they perceive to be God’s guiding in the session. Anne said:

I want to meet people where they are; that they may just be able to come with what’s up. . . . That concept came strongly to me from a friend doing a lot of end-of-life companionship with people, working in a hospice and kind of the wisdom there of meeting people where they are. When people are dying, you know, you could decide, “well, they’d better face up to the fact that they’re dying.” But who says? So, it’s a bit like that for me in spiritual direction. It’s not for me to say it’s time for them to take a plunge into the pits of their soul (laughs) or anywhere else. But I love taking the plunge into the depth of the soul. I have a bias for that. To the point where, in the early years after I finished the training program, I went through a

period where I thought if we didn't get to that kind of depth, you know, where a great insight comes, an epiphany comes, or, you know, there's Jung's measure of truth, the tears come, you know, if there wasn't a moment like that, I really thought that I failed and they failed. . . . It's that intention to be in the place of listening for readiness.

Presence. A second subtheme of the collaborative relational approach is the awareness of interpersonal presence. The presence of the director and seeker with each other was described by several of the participants. "It may be the first time in their lives that they've had somebody pay full attention to them for an hour," said Roderick. The assumption is that the experience of that kind of attention and presence is a significant part of a transformative relationship. The form of the personal presence that the director brings to the session also mirrors the way the seeker shows up in the session. Roderick referred to it as the way the seeker makes themselves present in the session. That relational meeting guides how the session unfolds.

Holding space in the session is an attribute that the participants also tried to foster when building presence. Spiritual direction training encourages listening as a goal, and to be respectful and present in any relationship. In her description of her work, Anne said, "The primary job is to hold a space of attention and presence. . . . For spiritual direction, I would add non-judgment, acceptance, to the best of my ability. To be the presence of unconditional love."

The collaboration in a session can also include a contemplative attitude. As Roderick stated, "The contemplative life is the life of presence to that which is in front of us. That which is (in front of me) in spiritual direction, is the seeker. Whoever that person is, and

whatever that person is offering.” This was similar to the focus of all of the participants to be connected and bring him or herself to the session with personal presence.

It was also important to the participants to recognize the presence of the Divine in the experience. Lynn marks this reality by lighting a candle in her spiritual direction sessions:

I say I light the candle as a reminder of God’s presence. We’re not invoking God, it’s not like we’re saying if we light the candle, God suddenly appears.

. . . (That) smacks of magic to me. I know there are religious traditions that say that, and that’s fine, but for me, if I were doing it one-on-one with someone, it would sort of be like I’d be somehow conjuring God, and I don’t see it (like that) at all. I am just simply trying to do something that helps me remember God’s presence, and helps the other remember God’s presence, who would, in my view, be present whether a candle was lighted or not.

Grace. A third subtheme of the collaborative relational approach that came out of the study was the concept of grace. The spiritual director and seeker are working together to explore what the experience of grace looks like in the seeker’s life. Lynn was the participant who spoke most directly to the experience of grace. She offered this definition of grace:

I find that grace is a word that almost anyone can appropriate. Even those who don’t have any particularly articulated theology resonate with a notion of grace as some sort of inner recognition of goodness or rightness. It’s the kind of thing that in positive psychology, they [Haidt & Keyes] write of as related to the experience of elevation.

Lynn goes on to describe developing an attunement to grace as a major goal of her sessions:

Primarily, helping people notice grace is a matter of helping them notice what goes on within themselves. . . . (Notice) the kinds of things that they rush past. (Notice) what is experienced as grace. It's simple things, like coming to a full stop; whether that's in the morning with a cup of coffee on the deck, or right in the middle of the press of everything. Just stepping out of the room for a minute; even in a busy corporate environment, and breathing. So, we're paying attention to that.

When attuning to that type of experience for the seeker, Lynn noted that the session can expand to include the current experience of past personal patterns or existence. She works with this in sessions. "Also, what gets evoked in that experience of grace. There's sort of the historical aspect; what does it reverberate with, from past experiences." This can bring the seeker an increased sense of self awareness.

Increasing awareness and building the psychological ability to notice grace has a component of change to it as well. Lynn noted, "There's also the practical component, where once you notice where you might experience grace, you can seed your life with more of those opportunities." When people have this experience over time Lynn says:

They become more aware of where it is they're not experiencing it, and they sort of inventory their lives. It's possible that if there's some part of your life where you're never experiencing anything the least bit gracious, that maybe that is not a part of ones' life that should be sustained and maintained.

I call it going after the enlivening thread of life.

Redemption. Redemption is the fourth subtheme when using a collaborative relational approach as part of the spiritual direction experience. Redemption is the idea that

something generative or healing can come out of a bad or broken experience. Of all the themes in the study, this one was the most divergent in the way that the participants made meaning of it. There were two general uses of the word in this study. One addressed the idea of redemption as a state; people are fallen or not worthy people until the Divine intervenes in their lives. The other is more of a process of dealing with the suffering or ruptured experiences in living.

Andrew spoke of redemption as a state of being. From his theological point of view, the traditional perspective on redemption is out of date. “The concept of needing redemption is unnecessary from a Process Theology point of view. We are inherently good enough.” His use of the concept in spiritual direction sessions seemed specifically to underline a state of relationship between the Divine and individuals that was in a state of acceptance from the Divine’s perspective.

For the other participants, redemption was connected to the concept of salvation. For example, Roderick spoke philosophically about how an experience of redemption is an ongoing process of relationship in the now:

I was preparing a sermon once, on second Corinthians 6:2, which says “Now is the day of salvation.” I had always read that, because he’s talking about the journey, Christ’s own journey, and the effect of Christ’s redemption and so on. I had always read that as, now is the day of *salvation*. That was the important word. And then, this one day, I read it – *Now* is the day of salvation. Now is the only moment that salvation ever occurs. I can’t go into the past and be saved. I can’t go into the future and be saved. If I’m going to be saved, it’s right here, right now! . . . It gives me a focus, which I think I’ve maintained ever since, which is that, now. Now. This conversation right here is the day of salvation. If there’s going to be any salvation for

you and for me in this interview, it's not likely to happen in the past or the future.

It's more likely to happen now.

So, the interaction in relationship, within the person, between people, or between the individual and the Divine were all experiences that were significant for Roderick as part of the concept of redemption.

Roderick also viewed part of redemption as living in relation to the deep self. Living in relationship to the deep self involves authenticity within the individual. Redemption becomes necessary when the person does not live in inner balance or gives priority to parts of their inner self that can cause personal difficulty:

We all have a persona, and (Thomas) Merton would say that the persona is part of the false self, and he makes it clear that the false self is not evil or bad; it's just not the true self, and the false self only becomes false when we mistake it for the true self. In other words, if we mistake our own ego for the deep self, we're on the wrong track.

Roderick described how his experience of inner congruence in this way helps him to stay in healthy relationship in this life, and is a guiding principle in his spiritual direction sessions.

Anne spoke at some length in her interview about her understanding of redemption. She looked at it from two perspectives: as a process in external relationship and as an inner healing process. Her description of external redemption was intentionally relational in that it is lived out through sharing and witnessing others' experiences. There was meaning for her in hearing or reading about others' life experiences, although it is not a comfortable or easy experience for her to take part in:

But I will read things that are hard, if there's something redemptive in the telling.

That doesn't mean a happy happy ending. It isn't that. It's that there's some

purposefulness. Something is served in the telling of the story and the hearing of the story, that matters to the health of, it sounds a bit grandiose, but that matters somehow to the state of the world. That we know these things, and we're conscious of them. . . . Awaken. Open and seeing the world. I think we're called to be present and witness each other. . . . Although, I have to say, a lot of my true tendency is to hide from a lot of that kind of really painful . . . to hide from suffering.

There is something generative for the collective human experience for Anne in participating in a redemptive process of witnessing others.

Anne's second aspect of redemption is more personal. It is an internal experience: When I say there was redemption for me, it is some healing, some grace, some resolution. Sometimes maybe it's just closure. Sometimes it's quite a healing moment. Something, some old wound is healed up and I can move on from it in a certain way." She also spoke about this as part of the spiritual direction experience she has with others. "You can just get to some remarkable depth. . . . Depth of their disclosure, depth of their turning to face whatever it is in them that is ready to be seen, worked with, acknowledged, and there's an awful lot of redemption in the process.

The work of spiritual direction itself is experienced as having redemptive qualities for the participants. Here I will mention two examples. Anne spoke about her personal challenge of feeling a strong personal emotional toll when she is exposed to horrible suffering, either in the media or in movies and literature. She practices self-care by being conscious not to expose herself unnecessarily to that type of experience. Her sense is that she has a "thin skin." When providing spiritual direction, however, she finds herself in a different personal space. She experiences a new way of relating to the thin emotional

filters she suffers from in other parts of life. She said, “In session *it* doesn’t stick to me.” Lynn also spoke directly about how being in a spiritual direction session is a redemptive space for her:

(One aspect) of my joy in the work, is I have all sorts of interpersonal difficulties on multiple levels, but when I’m with a seeker, I just sort of feel like I’m sitting in the lap of love. What I feel toward the other is love, and it’s relatively uncomplicated. That for me is a great gift, and I think transforms me and helps me be better other places too. Not entirely, but a little bit.

The experiences described above are generous examples of how the participants shared their human vulnerability in the interview and how their work changes them in the process of providing spiritual direction. Redemption is a complex experience that describes a state of being and a process. The participants saw it as part of present time, as an external process of staying connected to the world for collective benefit, as an internal process of healing, as an experience they witness with seekers in sessions, and as something that is transformative for them when in the collaborative relational space of a session.

Human limitations. The fifth and final subtheme of using a collaborative relational approach is the concept of recognizing human limitations. The participants shared their recognition that they are people trying to be part of a dynamic process. They valued a recognition that there was power for them to be present, even though they and the spiritual direction session are not perfect. Roderick said, “Well, it requires focus, presence, intentionality on my part, and I’m not pretending that I have done that perfectly.” Andrew described it by saying “Sometimes the actions are not perfect. You know, I’m not a perfect person. I’m a human being, not a human doing. So, you know, I’ve made mistakes over the

years, but at the same time, life is prayer.” His experience of the concept of prayer in this context is that he is engaged in ongoing intentional relationship with the person he is sitting with and with the Divine.

This subtheme also came through in discussions of professional limitations and self-awareness. Anne spoke about the importance of working as fully in a session as possible, while remaining aware of personal limitations on her role. She advocated remaining conscious of any tendency in the director to lead the process in a specific direction that does not emerge from the seeker, or to assume where the process for someone should ‘go’. She recommended recognizing the depth of soul work that can happen in spiritual direction. It is important to be as conscious as possible about person biases, such as a bias toward seeking a life affirming direction in the work. Anne also spoke about the necessity to be aware of the human limitation of the seeker in a session. This involved using her clinical judgment about pacing the session to stay with what the seeker could handle in that moment, asking directly for God’s guidance, and remaining conscious of the goal to “Do No Harm.” She was clear about the need for spiritual direction training to help directors recognize that they are “not coming from a space of saving the world.”

Anne expressed a perspective that was common for the participants. The healing that might happen in a spiritual direction session is “from beyond me. . . . The source of healing is divine.” This looks directly at a framework of meaning in the spiritual direction process where the Divine is perceived as an active participant in the collaborative relational process of a spiritual direction session. Other theories recognize this as healing coming from within the client or as a result of the interpersonal co-created field of a session. Both of these understandings are incorporated in the world view in spiritual direction, that there is active participation of the Divine in the experience.

Collaborative relational approach summary. The first superordinate theme of the study is that the experience of spiritual direction is one that uses a collaborative relational approach. The spiritual director takes part in walking with the seeker on their life journey as it unfolds. Experiencing interpersonal and divine presence is an important part of the spiritual direction relationship. Giving attention to the moments of grace in the seeker's life is one of the main collaborative focuses of providing spiritual direction to nurture the seeker in following the enlivening aspects of their experience. Understanding that there is an aspect of redemption in finding generative ways to work with each seeker's life is also a focus of the work. This is supported by a world view which recognizes the power that can be found in acknowledging human limitations and seeing the Divine as a source in the relational spiritual direction process.

Theme 2: Emergent perspective. The second superordinate theme that was present in the study is the centrality of having an emergent perspective of the spiritual direction experience. The participants valued looking at life and the spiritual direction process as coming into view over time. They worked with the aspects of experience that arose unexpectedly in the sessions and in the seeker's daily life. The subthemes that support this concept include an ideal to live life as fully as possible and value wholeness. This perspective is supported by a subtheme where a person is in a constant process of becoming who they are as they live. Living fully, wholeness and becoming are often grounded in contemplative practices. One of the most meaningful of these is the concept of discernment, which is a practice used in intentional decision making.

Living fully. The first subtheme in the superordinate theme of having an emergent perspective is the concept of living fully and valuing wholeness. Neither living fully nor wholeness are states that are fully realized in a person's life; rather they are viewed as

guiding principles for personal reflection. Roderick stated, “St. Irenaeus says the glory of God is the human being fully alive.” He went on to quote a Buddhist friend, who taught him “We spend the first half of our lives tying ourselves in knots, and we spend the second half of our lives untying the knots.” The inference here is that the knots we symbolically tie ourselves into have a real capacity to get in the way of living fully.

Andrew described this theme as follows: “I am an emergent theologian.” “Spiritual direction for me is helping people have a spiritual recovery. (To) no longer be (living) in an addictive way, but to really feel a sense of completeness and wholeness in their life as they journey through it.” He used the analogy that each person has access to a battery of life energy. Sometimes the connection to the battery is not solid and then the person does not have access to the energy, there is a resulting interruption in a sense of aliveness. Andrew wants to help the person connect in a clear way to their personal battery.

Anne spoke about it this way:

I think it’s about wholeness. A strong impulse for me is to seek the ways to join back together what we’ve torn asunder, in our Western world view. So, I’m very interested in wholeness, my own and others’. I’m really interested in people being as fully who they are as possible.

For Lynn, the concept of living fully was related to a deepening of a relationship to the Divine and to themselves. “There’s something just very engaging about watching that longing unfurl within them, and their surprise by it, and their joy in it.” Living more fully, in this sense, brings the enlivening experiences of positive surprise and joy.

Becoming. The second subtheme of an emergent perspective is the concept that a person is constantly engaged in a process of becoming. Michael described this aspect by saying:

We're trying to ferret out who we are and live according to who we truly are, true self, or whatever. . . . That certainly is a premise in spiritual direction. There can be just much more movement with that. Things can be understood in a different way in that whole integrating process.

Roderick elaborated on the idea of connecting to the Divine and a developing true self when he said:

We are trying to permit the true self, which is in each of us, to emerge. . . . If you find the true self, you find God, and if you find God, you find the true self. . . . We are seeking the truth of our own divinity. . . . Jung says that, archetypally, when he is looking at the archetypes of the collective unconscious, that the archetype of God and the archetype of the true self are empirically indistinguishable.

Andrew tied the concept to personal actualization:

All I want is for people to be, I mean, a term that came out of the 1960s was *actualization*. I liked that. I mean, we may not use that word any more, but people feeling who they really are. Getting into who they are and finding all their juices that they've always had. Now they can use them.

Lynn found an aspect of becoming includes the examination of expectations, growing through freedom of expression and a change in personal understanding. She described this particularly in relation to her work with some of the clergy she sees in spiritual direction:

Sometimes, I see a lot of people who are clergy. . . . They can be immersed in theological conversation, and dry as a bone spiritually. So, I love being able to offer them a space where they can just say that. They can dismantle all kinds of expectations on them, and constructions they've created to have this edifice of Christian leadership or something or other. To let them just come out from under all of that, and pay attention to what is real for them.

Roderick summarized this aspect as his "spiritual anthropology." He defined it by saying:

The human being is a being of infinite capacity. I can never say I've done it all. I'm as loving as I'm ever going to be. I'm as smart as I'm ever going to be. I'm as healthy as I'm ever going to be. I'm as rich as I'm ever going to be. . . . Becoming. It's all about becoming.

Contemplative approach. The third subtheme in an emergent perspective is that the spiritual direction lifestyle is influenced by a contemplative approach to living. In this approach, the person has a "perspective of being lovingly present to the present moment, commonly called, now" (Roderick). Unlike the contemplative practices of some religious orders where the focus of daily activity is specifically on prayer, Andrew views having a contemplative approach as balanced and holistic. "They have to have a balanced life between prayer and service and fun and earning a living. (In this) all of them are fine. It's a holistic approach."

Anne spoke about this subtheme in two ways. One was the stage of contemplatio, which is the fourth stage in going through the steps of the Ignatian Lectio Divina. She described this type of experience by saying:

I love the definition that Father Luke Dysinger (uses to explain a contemplatio). It's like resting in the arms of the beloved. That's the contemplation phase. It's like falling into the arms of someone who loves you and you love back, and with whom you have complete trust.

The second type of contemplative practice she described seems to be more global as an approach to living. She sees it as counter-cultural in that it allows an open approach to timing and pacing in life. In general, the contemplative approach fosters a deep listening and spaciousness. There is confidence in the process and the development of patience. There is an intention and attentiveness to focus on "whatever the moment is asking or offering."

Discernment. The fourth subtheme of an emergent perspective is the concept of discernment. This is a part of spiritual direction that is involved in making decisions and maintaining a conscious direction in life.

Anne described discernment in the following way:

Discernment is really that process of deep listening for a sense of, often for me it's a sense of direction. Of course, some more dramatic discernments are the life changing ones. But for me essentially, it's a process of deep listening for the truth of my own being. Beyond the machinations of mind alone, beyond my egoic considerations (status, fame, success). In whatever small way, to really listen for what feels like the truth in my bones, in the core of my being. So, in a way, I guess, it's listening for the imminent God. It's listening for that; the wisdom that lives through me in a particular way. Then it's the listening, which of course is trickier, to the transcendent God. To the sense of direction, the guidance, encouragement, challenge, whatever it might be, of what is bigger than me.

Discernment is a way of knowing and making decisions that is a process over time.

Anne said:

It's a way of knowing, and the way of knowing isn't exactly prophetic in the sense of "What will happen next if you do this." . . . (It's) not that. But at those times when the stakes are high; the stakes are high to say yes, the stakes are high to say no.

(When)it's not a clear way forward. I really have come to trust that if I stay true to the process, no matter how long it takes, until I know, I really know, in the moment, that it's always been the right thing. That doesn't mean easy (chuckles), cuz life isn't like that. But having the discernment, and the intention, focus, and the really taking on board of the discernment. It boils down to when I know, it comes to a point when I know. I know this is the way I'm going to go. I know, it's the, language is always limited, but I know it's the right way for me at this moment to go in this direction. . . .

Space and time are really critical components of good discernment for me.

The word discernment is used here in several ways to describe an experience. It is used as a verb in the action of listening, intention and focus. It is used as a noun in that the concept is attached to finding an answer to specific situations. Such as a discernment about taking a job. It involves looking for wisdom in the form of God's communication to the person practicing discernment. It is also described as coming to a particular point of knowing, mentally and physically, that may bring a process of discernment to an end. The process is relational and emergent.

Several of the other participants also spoke directly about experiencing discernment as part of their spiritual direction life. Michael and Lynn talked about it as a part of their process of becoming spiritual directors. When Michael became aware that his language in

therapy had changed to be similar to the language he heard from a clergy person at a funeral, he described the emergence of a process of discernment:

That was kind of the beginnings of thinking that, well, maybe this is a spiritual something that's happening. That there was some sense in me to follow that. (See) where it might go. . . . That little knock on the door, that angst of discernment.

The experience had a component of mental awareness, an invitation from God, which he described metaphorically as a “little knock on the door,” an action of seeing how this experience might develop, and an emotional component of feeling angst and uncertainty.

Lynn also described becoming a spiritual director as part of a process of discernment. Meaning-making is also part of the process here:

I was nudged to do it. . . . My experience was that my attention just kept being drawn to it, and I took that to mean that God was inclining me that way. . . . Inclining my ear in that direction. It didn't go away, because I did want it to go away.

Lynn experienced discernment as an inner nudge. There was also an aspect of a direction taking shape in her life that she did not want to follow. So, although discernment may have a moment of knowing, as Anne described, there can be aspects of internal struggle and not wanting to follow the message.

Roderick described discernment as a way to make intentional decisions about life while listening to God. It's a process for him to “know where I'm going.” He shared an example of a discernment process that he experienced when he took several months to incubate the question that a spiritual teacher gave to him. Roderick allowed the question to be part of his life, although in this case, he described the discernment process as maintaining an awareness of the question while not trying consciously to find a specific answer. He “put it out of his mind” and lived his life. Then after some time, an answer came to him: “Let your

yes be yes and your no be no.” His discernment process was complete and he used the answer as a guiding principle to live his life.

Michael explored two different parts of discernment in our interview. The first aspect is that discernment is learning a process of inner relationship to and conversation with the Divine. The second is that the conversation, or the activity of God, could be happening to a person, but they can be deaf to it. If the person is not aware, then they have less conscious opportunity to shape their life or to make informed choices:

Father Thomas Keating said, as a Catholic priest, we have religious education all backwards. . . . He said we should be teaching kids about the imminent God first, before we ever teach about the transcendent or the God of commandment. That so makes sense. That it’s somehow this relationship with the God within, and I’m calling it discernment, is such a critical piece of who we are, and how we navigate life.

Without that, you’re kind of (a) victim to conventional wisdom, or whatever significant others think you ought to be doing, or whatever ideology you might buy to guide you or whatever. But you’re, it seems to me, kind of rudderless, navigating life. So that’s why it seems important. The other reason it seems important is because (God) can be active in a person, and (the person may) not know quite what that is.

The fourth subtheme of discernment is a significant part of the experience of spiritual direction for the participants. It is emergent over time. It is a way of knowing about a direction to take in life. Discernment can be related to a particular question and it is an active practice. It is experienced as a valuable skill to foster as part of navigating life. Discernment is a concept that the participants practiced personally as well as taught to others.

Emergent perspective theme summary. The second superordinate theme of having an emergent perspective in spiritual direction came out of the experiences of the participants

in the study. Living fully and experiencing a process of becoming are both guiding principles in the ontology of Christian spiritual direction. Following a contemplative approach and using the skill of discernment are two practices that are significant in supporting this emergent way of living life.

Theme 3: Love. The third superordinate theme of the study was love. Giving and receiving love appropriately in this spiritual context was seen as important to the spiritual direction process by all the participants.

Roderick stated:

All spiritual direction is an opportunity for love. Love as something both human and transcendent, that God is love. That they need to know that they are both lovable and capable of love. It's not just that they receive love, but that they're capable of giving love. They are both beloved and loving. Now, in a sense, I've never used this word about this aspect of spiritual direction, but in a sense, this is my anthropology of spiritual direction, in the theological sense of anthropology. You know, what is our understanding of the human being, the *Anthropos*. I think in spiritual direction generally, I don't think I'm exceptional in this regard, there is a sense that the ability to love and be loved is basic to being a whole human being.

Andrew viewed the role of love in his experience of spiritual direction as healing a damaged perspective of not experiencing the giving and receiving of love. When working with people, he said:

I know I'm getting somewhere when they can tell me "Hey I love me." It's valuable because you're affirming the beautiful person that God made. . . . And the whole of spiritual development for me, is for them to start to see the loving God that is residing within them.

For Andrew, recognizing the receiving of love is a starting point for a lifestyle of responding to others with love. “God loves you because you’re you. We have to love and respect each other.”

Michael also described love as central to his experience of spiritual direction and growth. “Movement – growth I’m talking about – maybe it’s ultimately love. Without movement, there is no sense of life almost.” He went on to say:

Love is the thing period for me. That’s the whole thing, and so I think all the therapies, spiritual direction, or combinations of whatever, is movement toward love... Love of self, love of others, love of God, and how those all happen at the same time, is what I would call being in right relations.

Good enough. The only subtheme of love in the study was the concept of being good enough. Roderick noted how important it is for him in spiritual direction to view each person as good enough. “God says to Jesus at his baptism ‘You are my beloved child. In you I am well pleased.’ Everybody needs to hear that.”

Andrew spoke more extensively about the importance of recognizing that people are good enough:

What troubles me is, in our society, we have this, and I think all churches, denominations have it within Christianity to some degree, some more than others, you know, but the sense of an external God. That people are not good enough, and are trying to come to that God. (They) feel that they’re not good enough, that they’re inadequate. For me, spiritual direction is about helping the individual affirm that they are the vessel of God, and helping them to explore that, and helping them to become cognizant of that, and then to live it.

Michael talked about the role that shame plays in preventing people from feeling that they are good enough, or reflecting God's perception of them:

Shame psychology has become very significant to me. That's a word that folks just always react to and don't understand at all the not enough-ness aspect of shame. They associate it more with that word ashamed. So, it's hard for people to get, and I have been successful at it, to understand the fear that comes from shame, the fear of exile.

He goes on to say:

I do say to people, I have never been able to release shame on my own, nor have I been able to forgive on my own, and I'm not sure it's possible for you to do that on your own, but I do believe we can help with that.

In his world view, healing shame and recognizing at an ontological level a person is good enough can have two effects. It allows for feelings of ongoing connection and belonging. It also facilitates the expressing and receiving of love.

Love theme summary. The third superordinate theme is the importance of the experience of love for the participants in spiritual direction. This was a concept that all of the participants mentioned. They were framing love as both something they offered their seekers and something that came from the Divine in the spiritual direction experience.

Theme 4: Ongoing personal and spiritual work. The fourth superordinate theme of the participants' experience of spiritual direction is the value of ongoing personal and spiritual work. This was reflected in three subthemes: how the participants became spiritual directors, the need for ongoing daily practice, and the necessity of receiving ongoing spiritual direction if one is providing spiritual direction.

Becoming a spiritual director. The participants talked about their path to become a spiritual director as one that was gradual. Life was fine for most of them, and they felt a

yearning toward the work. For Anne, the path was somewhat different. She described finding her calling as a spiritual director at least in part through a severe personal crisis in her family. She talked about how influential her personal spiritual direction experience was for her. “It was really powerful for me, to have that presence of someone there to witness, observe, reflect back, particularly with a spiritual focus. I just never had it in quite that concentrated a form.”

There was for the participants an internal sense of wanting to follow the work, and people in the community making suggestions about it. In addition, people naturally approached them to talk about their lives in ways that were similar to the work. Someone may be trained as a spiritual director, but the community chooses who will work as a spiritual director by choosing that person as their guide. Anne described this process as an innate knowing on the part of the seeker of who to choose as a spiritual director.

The participants came to train as spiritual directors as second careers or continuing education. Two have careers as clergy, which they view as spiritual direction work. One was a long-term chaplain in a prison. One was a mother and caregiver and became a retreat leader and teacher. One was a psychologist, and one a sociologist. They valued personal growth and a spiritual aspect to life. For the two participants who trained as clergy, they had divergent perspectives regarding the efficacy of seminary training as sufficient for them to be prepared to work as spiritual directors. Roderick did not experience his seminary training as sufficient to be a spiritual director. Andrew, on the other hand, did feel that his seminary training prepared him for the work. This may be due to the significant amount of clinical pastoral units that Andrew took part in as part of his degree. It may also be a difference in generation. As Roderick experienced seminary earlier than Andrew did, it may reflect a change in seminary training.

Several of the participants began spiritual direction training without a clear career goal. As Anne said:

I don't remember that I had an expectation that I would become a spiritual director. I just knew I needed to keep on the journey. In my application I remember (needing to answer) "what draws you to this program?" It distilled down to this for me: it feels that this is the direction of hope.

Daily practice. The second subtheme in ongoing personal and spiritual work is the activity of maintaining a daily spiritual practice. The purpose is to intentionally keep God overt in life. Andrew stated, "Spiritual direction is all about intention and putting it into the context of an awareness and intentionality that we're walking with God and inviting God into the moment. Both of us [the director and the seeker] are."

One example of a daily practice is recommended in the training program where several of the participants studied. It is one hour of spiritual practice in the morning that is divided into three equal sections. Body movement, such as tai chi, walking or yoga, is the first segment. Reflective reading on a spiritual text is the second segment. Prayer and meditation makes up the third segment. This facilitates an ongoing growth process with personal reflection. As Andrew stated, "We become more intentional and aware of the world and creation that God gave us."

Receiving ongoing spiritual direction. The third subtheme of ongoing personal and spiritual work is the professional expectation that if a person is providing spiritual direction, they should be receiving it as well. Roderick said:

That connects with what I said about being in spiritual direction, and needing to have a spiritual director. I have to be aware that my way of being a spiritual director will affect the seeker. If I'm a good spiritual, this is very simplistic, if I'm a good spiritual

director, it'll have a good effect – the good tree brings forth good fruit. . . . So, I have to live as a whole person myself, and I do that with the help of my spiritual director.

Anne noted that a spiritual director works to the limits of what they have themselves personally integrated in their own work, which makes the ongoing personal development of the spiritual director a very important factor in the work. Ongoing supervision and personal spiritual direction are a part of the work.

Ongoing personal and spiritual work theme summary. The participants valued continued personal development as a part of their spiritual direction experience. This included their awareness of the emergent process that led them to become spiritual directors. This process was often something that unfolded over a longer period of time. There was also a recognition of the importance of maintaining a daily personal spiritual practice. They were clear about the importance of ongoing supervision through working with a spiritual director themselves, both for their benefit and the benefit of the people they work with.

Theme 5: Mutual impact. The fifth superordinate theme in the study is the concept of spiritual direction having mutual impact on the participants. The participants' experience showed them that both the director and the seeker are changed through the process. The two subthemes that emerged in the study to describe this concept are mutuality and satisfaction in the work.

Mutuality. The relationship in spiritual direction involves mutuality. As Roderick said:

There does have to be a sense of, not peer relation, but mutuality, in the spiritual direction relationship. . . . The director is working with the seeker, as the seeker (attempts) to find direction in his or her life. . . . The mutuality is that we are both seeking the deeper reality of life.

It is a process of mutual empowerment and learning. Andrew said, “I learn from the people I walk with too, and I’m often very humbled.” Taking part in spiritual direction sessions has a mutual impact on the participants. As Anne said:

I’m always learning from the people I sit with; their stories inform my story. Their wisdom becomes part of what’s available to me to know, and so I have a debt of gratitude for all that living shared. . . . I’m enriched by those stories told.

Satisfaction in the work. The second subtheme connected to the theme of mutual impact is a theme of satisfaction for the participants in doing the work. Roderick said, “For me, (there is) a sense of satisfaction that I have led them through the jungle of their ideas.”

Andrew spoke about this in the following:

I just enjoy people, and I just enjoy walking with people, and watching people come alive, and, in a sense, rebirth, and that to me is what being born again is all about. They have a new vision, they’re not an outsider, they are an important person, and they are lovable and they can love themselves, and they can love the world, and be connected, and it’s all about man’s search for meaning. . . . We talked about happiness as (a process of) finding meaning. That’s been a touchstone for my own life. Helping me understand to build a heavenly community now. So that, to me, has been important. That’s what’s driven me to help others. When somebody finds new life and meaning, because of some work we’ve walked together about, that excites me. It gives me energy. Cuz they have energy. . . . It’s very humbling to be with people who have the courage to confront their issues, and recover and move on. So, it’s, for me, to be asked to do that, is very humbling, and I’m happy to do it. It’s rewarding, I’ll agree, and it’s sometimes sad when they have slipped, and they do sometimes, but nevertheless, it’s part of the journey. It’s all about empowerment.

Lynn expressed the satisfaction by stating:

I just find great joy in that. I feel like I'm just accompanying people as they discover things (chuckles). And as they discover things, I discover things. Cuz I might never have thought that such-and-such experience could be so rich and full of the sense of God's presence. So maybe when I go into that kind of environment the next time, I'm ready for that.

She went on to say:

I think it keeps me more open, my soul more open, growing, corrected, and it's just healthy for me, because my life can become very goal-oriented and deadline driven, electronically connected, so for me, it's breathing space. I can't imagine not doing it. It nourishes me. It never drains me. I'm really extremely introverted, though my life doesn't look like that, but it comes within the scope of my introversion, so it's enlivening rather than enervating.

Mutual impact theme summary. The participants talked about their experience of spiritual direction as one with mutual impact on the people involved. There needed to be mutuality in the relationship for it to be most successful. They recognized that they were shaped by their work and brought the changes they experienced into new sessions. There was a satisfaction in accompanying people in the spiritual direction journey.

Theme 6: Working as a spiritual director. The sixth and final superordinate theme of the experience of spiritual directors providing spiritual direction is the theme that covers some practical aspects of working as a spiritual director. Working as a spiritual director has six subthemes: the activities that the participants used in session, self-disclosure and sharing teaching stories as interventions in a session, approaching the process through creative modalities, using language consciously in the session, aspects of working with Christian and

non-Christian clients, and exploring spiritual direction and therapy. In general, the quote from Michael described working as a spiritual director by saying, “(We) could find the common ground between us. . . . The place of growth for them and maybe detecting their desire, or maybe their love, or their hunger, just like me.”

Activities. The first subtheme of working as a spiritual director is the type of activities that the participants use in their sessions. They spoke about working in a range of settings including one-to-one, group work, working with children and families, teaching, and publishing. All of these settings were opportunities to encourage development and learning. Creating times of silence in a session allowed the participants to listen to their inner messages and deepen their perception. A sense of spaciousness in the atmosphere of a session was also valued by the participants. Mindfulness meditation such as focusing on breathing and prayer with no content, known in the Ignatian tradition as Apophatic prayer was part of some sessions. Kataphatic prayer, or prayer with content such as words and images was also often included in sessions. Readings, both from scriptural texts and other spiritual literature was used for discussion and reflection in some sessions to encourage exploration of personal meaning. Andrew spoke about the use of blessing and anointing in his practice. Roderick talked about finishing his sessions with a ritual from the Sufi tradition where he and the seeker express an intention to continue work in the personal, interpersonal and larger world arenas. He also talked about anchoring the work in a session by asking the person what they remember about the session. Modeling an open and curious approach to spiritual experience was also part of the sessions.

Self-disclosure and sharing teaching stories. The second subtheme of working as a spiritual director was the use of self-disclosure and teaching stories by the directors in a session. Generally, it seems that the spiritual directors in the study use their personal stories,

scriptural stories, stories they have come across in life and the anonymous stories of people they have worked with as a source of change and guidance. The assumption seems to be that stories are a powerful way to normalize experience and learn about living.

In the first interview, Lynn spoke about using her own development as a spiritual director to explain the field of spiritual direction in intake interviews with new seekers to situate herself in the world of spirituality. Self-disclosure is a way for the participants to develop trust and a therapeutic alliance in sessions. As with other types of counselling, the choice to share a story was made because it was intended to benefit the seeker rather than the director. For example, in the followup interview, Lynn mentioned that using self-disclosure is something that she typically teaches her students not to use in sessions.

Michael also talked about the impact of hearing stories from the seeker as an important aspect of his spiritual direction experience:

The people's stories. That's really the pay-dirt. If there's anything that has influenced me the most, it is the stories that people have come with. So, when I could start more comfortably moving in to people's spirituality, then boy, that was a whole world. I was interested to find people say, "You know, I've never shared any of this with anybody." Now, others say that to a certain extent, in therapy, but boy, it seemed to be very universal when it came to spirituality.

He went on to say:

So the stories. Very, very endearing, and I think that's mostly what changed me, and I actually had someone say one time to me, essentially, and I don't remember the words verbatim, but essentially they were saying "I've come here to talk to you because you have heard these stories, and I want to know what you have learned from other people's stories. I don't want to know what you learned from graduate school or

whatever. Those stories like mine, people like me that you've heard their stories.

That's how I think you could be helpful to me."

The disclosure and use of stories is a way to underscore common human experience and give people a chance to learn through reflecting on the experiences that are shared.

Non-verbal creative modalities. The third subtheme in working as a spiritual director is the use of non-verbal modalities such as creativity and body-based work as a basis for experience. Anne spoke most directly to this aspect of the work. In beginning her training as a spiritual director she said:

My art practice really returned to me. . . . It was struggle, struggle, struggle, as it often is for me, but it had been a long dry spell, and there's just something for me about a depth of spiritual attention that makes possible the creative work. Often my creative work comes out of that inner landscape, rather than the outer landscape, and so that was a really big piece of it.

Anne also talked about the importance of creative work as part of her process in providing spiritual direction. She described the use of Active Imagination as an intervention in her work:

So cycling around this long stream of consciousness, that's what I find very often happens when I'm sitting with another. There will be something. There will be an affect off of them that is really debilitating them in some way. Or an aspect of themselves they've been so embarrassed of and so ashamed of that they are exiled. So, if they're willing, sometimes I'll say, "Wow, this seems to have a lot of hold over you. Do you feel comfortable to really look at this?" And that's what's really emerged to be one of my primary ways I just naturally go to. "So, do you feel ready to look at this?" Then I listen, and then I say, I'll often say "A process I've used often

in my own inner work in areas like this is Jung's Active Imagination. Here's a little bit about it. Would you like to try that?" And most people are ready, because they're there because they have things they want to be able to work through, so often that's where we go.

This intervention focuses on images and impressions that emerge for the seeker.

She also talked about the use of body-based interventions in relation to processing trauma in a session:

It's happened a few times, where maybe somebody's really dealt with something huge. It might be an old trauma. It might be a current stuckness. But something big has happened (in the session). You just have a sense that, now they've got to go back out into the world and they may be a bit, just might feel a bit jangly or a bit tender. So, I sometimes ask, "Could I just put my hands on your feet and help you ground; would that be welcome?" So far, every time I've asked, because it isn't an automatic thing for me. So far, every time I've asked, it's been the right thing, and people have been happy for that.

The use of expressive arts techniques and body-based techniques is a significant way that Anne approaches the work of spiritual direction.

Language. The fourth subtheme of working as a spiritual director is the use of language. The participants spoke about being conscious in the use of language that facilitates rather than inhibits a positive spiritual direction experience. They talked about the possibility of alienating others through inappropriate language.

Andrew talked about having an inner perspective that always includes God for him, but that does not always include making that explicit when it isn't helpful:

I always invite God into the moment, so I never not do that. But I may not articulate it to you. If I mention the word God to you and it's going to put up your barriers, you're going to put a concrete wall around you. I'm just going to waste my next hour with you, because "I don't want anything to do with that Goddamn God talk!" because of whatever happened to you long before I ever knew you. . . . I'm not going to do that, cuz it's all about communication.

Anne talked about listening for the seeker's language about God and follow that lead in the session. "I want them to be comfortable with their language. I want them to not be held up or tripped up or hampered by using language that's not their language." She also noted that she needed to hold her own shape in this linguistic process and maintain her own personal integrity about her spiritual perspective:

There's some places I can't go, in terms of matching language. It doesn't ring true for me. Like, "washed in the blood of our lord and saviour, Jesus Christ" would be one I couldn't say with integrity. But I seek to find what's the essence of what they're talking about, and I can hear that and just honour their language.

Michael talked about choosing words consciously when working with a seeker. He used the metaphor of 'hot words' to frame his discussion. "I go to lengths to stay away from those hot words, or words that people may respond to (negatively) like I do." The 'hot words' that he mentioned in the interview included God, spirituality, Jesus, Lord, anything patriarchal, and sin. It comes into play for him with people at both ends of the spiritual continuum; those who are not religious and those who are fundamentalist. There are less problematic synonyms that he uses to connect. One 'hot word' he does use when it comes up in a session is forgiveness:

The only word that I'll use, just because there's no other word for it, and it's just way too important and significant to me, and it's a hot word, . . . but it's a hot word that derails people all the time. It's forgiveness. I try to find synonyms for that the best I can. . . . There is nothing I know so little about as forgiveness. It's totally a mystery and mystifying to me, but I do consider it very important.

The use of language in spiritual direction can also be seen in terms of a lack of restrictions. Roderick noted that the people who come to see him are aware of the context as it relates to language. This allows him to speak theologically. "They know I'm a Christian, so I get to talk Christian talk if I want to." Similarly, Lynn said, "I love that listening to another person. I love watching people sort of discover themselves grow. But in spiritual direction, I particularly appreciate the total freedom to speak in theological language, if that's what's appropriate, with the other."

Working with Christian and non-Christian people. The fifth subtheme in the theme of working as a spiritual director is working with Christian and non-Christian people. The participants mentioned their experience of this need for diversity in the work. They began by saying that Christian and non-Christian individuals are all uniquely at different places in their journey, so the approach is personal to begin with.

When working with Christian people, Roderick spoke about the symbolic frame of following the Jesuit tradition "to bring the seeker to an experience of The Passion and Resurrection of Christ. To live their lives in the spirit. . . . That Christ is the paradigm for human reality." He added a philosophical perspective to describe his experience of the work. In the Gospel of Luke, Christ is described as the Logos:

The ancient philosophers, both Greek and Jewish, saw the Logos as the, that was their name for the principal of universal creation and creativity. That the Logos is the

electricity. . . . It's the Logos, that cosmic energy which gives form. So, I'm ready to say that if I see my seeker assuming a fuller human form, I'm quite ready to attribute that to the work of Christ; that is understood cosmically. Which I might or might not say to the person, as appropriate.

Andrew spoke about holding his own personal perspective, while maintaining an awareness of the importance of the perspective of the person he is with:

So my intentionality is always spiritual awareness and spiritual journey, but that doesn't mean I expect you to be there (with the same intention). But if you're there, you've come that way, and that's your purpose and intention, I recognize that, and we do it openly. It's really client-based.

Andrew spoke about the positive experience when he is working with someone in a conscious Christian spiritual space:

It works great, because it's affirming. You know, when we recognize the God within, being alive within the midst of us. And within each of us, with the one-on-one. It's very uplifting, and a joyful moment. It's an Easter.

Michael's experience is one of openness to including a spiritual direction conversation in the work he does. This is based in a perspective that people find a counsellor who fits well for the place they are at in their personal work:

I always knew that there was some rhyme or reason to anybody who came to see me. To take that further, I knew that anybody coming to see me was coming for the spiritual direction part of it, whether they said that or not. So, I always felt a lot of permission to go there, whether they asked for it or not, and there was never ever resistance about that.

When working with people who are non-Christian or from a different spiritual tradition, the approach is still unique and open-minded. Roderick said, “So, I would try to do whatever the situation presented to me to do to support this person, Christian or otherwise, in their journey toward wholeness.” Andrew spoke about spirituality as a guiding principle beyond Christianity. He said, “I mean, you may not choose to practice as a Christian. I don’t really care. I just want people to be spiritual and engaged with the whole.” Andrew encourages the person to find what fits them. He used a metaphor to describe this. “Spirituality is a smorgasbord, and I invite people to take the meal off the table if they want. Take the plates you want. . . . I don’t sell this plate is better than that plate, it’s just that both plates - they’re okay.”

Lynn spoke about her experience working with people who are against spirituality or God. For her it often reflects a healing process of a previous psychological wound:

People with that staunch opposition to God stuff, who come to see a spiritual director, are usually recovering from some harsh theological background. Something judgmental. So, they’re assertively opposed to that for the sake of their own wellbeing. It takes them a while to trust this process long enough to admit to some more genuine experiences of God. (Experiences) that seem more like grace. (Experiences) that are actually what are prompting them to see a spiritual director. You don’t really need to pay someone to go and tell them you don’t believe in the God they believe in.

Lynn described a progression in the work she does, regardless of whether the person she is with is Christian or non-Christian. “If they continue working with me, what I usually see is an opening to a different understanding of God than they’ve had.” She experiences a shift in the person’s view of God.

Spiritual direction and clinical counselling. The sixth and final subtheme in working as a spiritual director is examining the concepts of spiritual direction and clinical counselling. The participants spent time teasing apart differences and discussing similarities between the two types of experience. Overall, they found that the two disciplines have overlapping areas within the pursuit of personal development.

Lynn spoke directly about the difference she encountered between her clinical counselling and her spiritual direction experiences:

What I discovered was, unlike the therapy I had been in, the spiritual direction made me attuned to the experience of grace in my everyday life. In psychotherapy, I more became attuned to themes and patterns and blocks and channels that might open. There was a large, sort of (what) sociologists call more of a genetic component. Then the historical was very important; the childhood - present connection. In spiritual direction, I found myself attuning much more to my minute daily experience, and noticing where there was a whiff of grace, or not. I also started noticing where I didn't ever experience grace, and that helped me learn more about my spiritual topography, my interior spiritual landscape, which I had been pretty clueless about until then, and nothing like any kind of church related, or seminary related experience I'd had.

Spiritual direction takes a broader view of the person's issues and the work that is done with the person. Roderick said:

Now, there's a distinction there, between spiritual direction and counselling. Now, and this is my understanding as not a therapist. I'm open to correction. The client who comes to a counsellor, comes with a presenting issue, typically. The focus is that issue, and when that issue is resolved to any extent, the counselling relationship

terminates. That's a very simple view of it. Whereas, the person who comes for spiritual direction, they can be dealing with that same issue. That's fine, but it's not the whole thing. Like that the person, the crisis is not the person. I'm not saying a good counsellor takes that attitude either, but you want to see, . . . the spiritual director wants to see the whole person in which the current crisis has a particular part. Michael described his perception of a difference between the attribution of problems in life and the way that spiritual direction or counselling might approach the problem. He said:

It felt like to me, that folks were coming in, really in some way saying, I call them air beaters, beating the air . . . against life. "I'm coming in because I want you to make life's circumstances conform to how I think they should be." . . . I think that can be supported more in psychology, kind of covertly. . . . (Psychology might say) "Yes if you're unhappy in a certain way, life isn't shaking out the way it should be, maybe there's something wrong with you." But in spiritual direction, it's more about "let's see if we can truly look at what is the nature of all of this and our relationship with it, and you'll see (this situation is) just much more expansive." There's just much more to work with somehow.

Another concept is a difference of the intention in a spiritual direction or a counselling session:

It's all about intention. Spiritual direction is prayerful, and counselling can be or not be prayerful. I can do counselling with someone who says, "I hate fuckin' God." I meet those people too, but I'm still going to work with them, cuz I don't care. It's not me. . . . But, spiritual direction is all about intention and putting it into the context of an awareness and intentionality that we're walking with God and inviting God into

the moment. Both of us are. Before I see everybody one-on-one, no matter where they come from, I pray for that moment, so for me, it's always spiritual. As I said earlier, life is prayer.

This subtheme was also significant in a discussion of professional labels and the context of the helping professions. All of the participants had counselling training. They were trained in community counselling groups, in university-based (sociology, psychology and seminary) programs, and in spiritual direction training programs. There was discussion in the interviews about external perceptions of using specific labels in calling yourself a spiritual director or a counsellor. Anne spoke about professional boundaries and how blurry they can be. She said:

The lines are pretty overlapping and soft sometimes, oftentimes, so I don't want to draw too hard of a line. . . . (My supervisor) says that spiritual direction can begin where counselling leaves off. And that's not to devalue one, or over value the other. It's a recognition that there's a territory that we traditionally think of as counselling or therapy. Often people trained and practicing in that context, will choose not to step over, it's the land of gross generalities, but often people won't want to step over into the spiritual.

There is value for a personal development journey in making the spiritual part of life explicit.

The participants described when they find it important to refer the person to seek clinical psychological help. Roderick said, "If it seemed to me that the crisis was taking up, let's say, most of the person's energy, I would say 'Why don't you find a therapist and work on this, and then come and see me again.'" Anne mentioned that she would refer a seeker for clinical counselling for situations such as very severe depression, when the person does

not have enough ego-strength to tolerate the spiritual direction work and could experience psychosis, when the seeker expects too much of the spiritual director (dependency), or when she recognizes that the psychological context may limit the work that can be done without being addressed first.

The spiritual direction and psychological training that the participants received impacted how they approach a session. Lynn noted:

I was trained more in the Ignatian form, which is more contemplative. And I told you that I had that huge immersion in psychoanalysis. I think contemplative Ignatian spiritual direction has more in common with psychoanalysis than it does with any of the other psychotherapeutic modalities, so that's my way.

Anne spoke to this when she said, "Like every spiritual director practices differently, every person offering counselling and therapy practices differently to a certain extent." The individual is still present and shapes the session based on who they are and how they have been trained.

Anne noted that often the seeker is working with both a counsellor and a spiritual director. In her experience, people find both counselling and spiritual direction helpful. She mentioned that some have said they find spiritual direction more helpful than therapy. This makes sense in that the person of the spiritual director, the spiritual direction process itself, or the personal development needs of the seeker are better served by spiritual direction in that moment of their lives than by counselling.

Working as a spiritual director theme summary. The participants shared six subthemes that made up the theme of working as a spiritual director for the study. They described a variety of activities that they used as part of a typical spiritual direction session. They shared personal experiences and teaching stories as a way to build a therapeutic alliance

and normalize their seekers' human experiences. The use of creative non-verbal therapeutic modalities was also part of the work, to allow the seeker to access different aspects of their experience. The use of language was also important to match the seeker and facilitate a positive spiritual direction process. The participants spoke about working with people who were both Christian and non-Christian. Using Christian language when appropriate created a stronger experience in the sessions, but supporting the seeker wherever they were in their personal development was more central to how the participants worked in a session. The final subtheme of exploring spiritual direction and counselling was nuanced and diverse. The participants recognized that there is overlap between the two types of personal development. They also were clear that in some cases, one type of process was more beneficial than the other.

Summary of the meaning of providing spiritual direction. This chapter of the dissertation described the results of the study, looking at the meaning and experience of the participants providing spiritual direction. I began with some general observations about the study. I looked specifically at the individuals who took part in the study and how their personal stories provided unique aspects to the results of the study. I explored collective themes of the study and used subthemes to describe the results in a rich and deep way. I focused on the words of the participants themselves to ground the analysis. I will finish the results chapter in a similar way, by sharing one quote from each participant that was a summary for them of the meaning of providing spiritual direction.

For Lynn, I summarize the meaning of the work and the experience as living “attuned to the experience of grace in everyday life.” It is experiencing the relational presence of God. The process of spiritual direction increases consciousness for the person, both at an individual and a societal level.

Andrew summarized the meaning by saying, “Healthy Christianity is where we can speak our truths, but do it as mature people. That we understand emotions, but know that faith should not be based in emotion. It’s based in the balance and integration of all elements of ourselves.”

Michael described the process by saying:

We’re trying to ferret out who we are and live according to who we truly are, true self, or whatever. That certainly is a premise in spiritual direction. There can be just much more movement with that. . . . Just somehow talking about the terrain of this thing of discernment, or what it may mean to live discerningly.

Anne summarized providing spiritual direction as:

Who are you . . . as a spiritual companion? Who are you as a human being and your capacity to sit with another, honour their experience, hear them, nudge them when they might need a nudge, comfort them when they might need a comfort. . . . (Maybe being with) somebody having some shift that leads them in the direction of life rather than death on a psyche, on a spiritual level.

Roderick summarized the experience overall as follows:

The purpose of spiritual direction is to provide a presence where people can get to know themselves. Get to know themselves as the image of God. Deepen their relationship to the Divine. And where they can be challenged to live authentically.

Love, be loved and respond with action in the world.

Summary of the results chapter. Six superordinate themes emerged from the research. Spiritual direction uses a collaborative relational therapeutic approach. It takes an emergent perspective to the course of a session and arc of spiritual development. Spiritual direction has a theme of love. It includes ongoing personal and spiritual growth for the

spiritual director. The spiritual directors felt mutual impact between themselves and the seeker as part of the spiritual direction process. They also discussed several aspects of working in sessions as a spiritual director.

In Chapter 4, the individual stories of the participants were explored. The six superordinate themes were described as collective themes of the study using the quotes of the participants to ground and explain the themes. The six superordinate themes included twenty-six emergent subthemes, which were described in this chapter to add to the rich and thick writing of the spiritual director's experience. In Chapter 5, the results will be discussed in relation to existing literature, new results from this dissertation and future directions for research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of the study was to research Christian spiritual direction using a recognized methodology used in counselling psychology, to provide a rich description of spiritual direction that might inform clinical practice by giving a sense of the lived experience and its meaning for the participants. It was also studied to provide possible new directions for future research. The results are used to reflect on theory and literature in the fields of psychology, spirituality, theology, and counselling.

The research question asked was: What is the meaning of the lived experience of the spiritual director in providing spiritual direction? In this discussion chapter, the six superordinate collective themes of the study found in Chapter 4 are discussed in sequence in relation to existing theory and literature, to consider the results in the broader field of counselling psychology. The unique contributions of this study will be discussed, and future directions for research will be suggested.

Embedding the Results in the Literature

This section explores the theoretical connections of the current study by drawing on psychological research and theory to contextualize the findings of the six main themes of this dissertation. The results of the dissertation linked extensively to counselling psychology research. The most salient connections will be explored below.

Collaborative relational approach. The theme of using a collaborative relational approach in spiritual direction as the foundation for the relationship is similar to several areas of counselling psychological theory. The participants' description of this collaborative clinical experience in sessions is related to Wampold's (2001) finding that the efficacy in counselling is primarily based on the therapeutic relationship.

The emphasis placed by the spiritual directors in the study on presence is consistent with counselling psychology literature. It supports the work of Geller and Greenberg (2002) who developed a model of therapeutic presence. “Therapeutic presence is defined as bringing one’s whole self into the encounter with clients, by being completely in the moment on multiple levels: physically, emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually” (Geller, Greenberg, & Watson, 2010, p. 599). It is integral in creating relational depth to create a space for the therapeutic work to take place. The concept of therapeutic presence is viewed as a way of being with the client, which encompasses Roger’s therapist conditions of empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard (Geller, Greenberg & Watson, 2010). Bazzano (2013) goes on to discuss Geller and Greenberg’s distinction between presence and mindfulness. Presence is a way of being, while mindfulness, as it is currently practiced in psychology, is a set of techniques for the purpose of symptom amelioration and self-regulation. Harrison and Westwood (2009) found a related theme in their study of therapists who commonly work with clients with extensive trauma. They called it exquisite empathy and described it as “the ability to establish a deep, intimate, therapeutic alliance based upon presence, heartfelt concern, and love” (Harrison & Westwood, 2009, p. 213). Presence is a form of being with another person that was highly valued by the participants of the study.

The addition to the link between the results of the current study with literature in counselling psychology regarding the importance of therapeutic presence is the cultural assumption that the presence is not just interpersonal but includes acknowledgement of the presence of the Divine in the spiritual direction session. As Lynn stated, “I am just simply trying to do something that helps me remember God’s presence, and helps the other remember God’s presence, who would, in my view, be present whether a candle was lighted or not.” Depth Psychology writers such as Jung and Bion have explored ways to discuss this

divine presence in therapeutic sessions. Jung spoke about the Self as the central divine archetype. For the ego (the conscious part of an individual) to be healthy, it needed to be in relationship to the Self as much as possible (Schoen, 2009). Listening in sessions for manifestations of the Self or the ego-self axis is a part of Analytical Psychology. The Psychodynamic therapist Bion's concept of the mysterious O is another example of addressing a divine presence in a non-personified way by experiencing an "inherently curative transcendent state" in a session (Quinn, 2007, p.10). Recent writing has noted the convergence of Analytical Psychology (Jungian) and Relational Psychoanalysis in clinical practice (Quinn, 2007).

Overall, the participants' collaborative relational approach focuses on the importance of relationship. It emphasizes the relationship of the seeker to the Divine, the seeker and the spiritual director, and the seeker to themselves. It is in keeping with relational counselling as described by Geller and Greenberg. It is also similar to the relational psychoanalysis and their concept of the relational/interpersonal field. As Stern (2015) writes, "the analytic situation is defined in terms of its relatedness. Analyst and patient are continuously and inevitably, and consciously and unconsciously, in interaction with one another" (p. 388). A collaborative relational approach in spiritual direction is supported by valuing an emergent perspective in sessions and an emergent perspective in the development of the persons involved.

Emergent perspective. The description of the experiences of the spiritual directors in this study clearly dispels any concepts of spiritual direction as a top down process of spiritual formation adhering strictly to a structure of religious dogma. The religious system of the participants informs the process, but the content of the sessions and the growth of the participants emerged from their personal experience. The participants recommended

following what emerges in the experience of a session. Stated in terms of depth psychology, “a successful analysis necessitated an emergent experience for both the analysand and the analyst” (Jung, 1959, in Quinn, 2007, p. 26). The participants in the study described this emergent perspective as part of using a contemplative stance in living.

The contemplative emergent approach in spiritual direction can be related to Marks-Tarlow’s (2015) emergence model of the clinical process. This model describes a non-linear way of following the experience of the participants in a session. It has implications for clinical work in that we begin to look at the session as an ever-evolving experience of personal exploration and growth in the container of the relationship. Shapiro (2015) reflected on Marks-Tarlow’s model in the following description:

(She explores) the therapeutic dialogue while showing a desire to place the person of her patient before the theories; humility to flow with the patient’s implicit currents; curiosity to trace the emergence of new experiences without trying to control the process; and courage to assume the role of an open and authentic partner in her patient’s journey.

Approaching a session from this perspective is unpredictable, creative and attuned in its dynamic and unfolding process.

The participants in the study valued discernment as part of the attunement in a spiritual direction session. They described learning discernment in spiritual direction as an important skill for navigating life. Discernment as a term is not used often in counselling psychology literature. The concept is described in transpersonal psychology literature. Evolving as a fairly recent field of psychology, “transpersonal psychology addresses the full spectrum of human psychospiritual development – from our deepest wounds and needs, to the existential crisis of the human being, to the most transcendent capacities of our

consciousness” (Caplan, 2009, p. 231).

Discernment is valued in other spiritual traditions as well.

Spiritual discernment, called *viveka khyatir* in Sanskrit, is said to be the ‘crowning wisdom’ on the spiritual path. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali say that the cultivation of discernment is so powerful that it has the capacity to destroy ignorance and address the very source of suffering. According to Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, to discern is ‘to recognize or identify as separate and distinct.’ Discrimination, its synonym, ‘stresses the power to distinguish and select what is true or appropriate or excellent.’ Those who possess spiritual discernment have learned this skill in relationship to spiritual matters, and they can consistently make intelligent, balanced, and excellent choices in their lives and in relationship to their spiritual development (Caplan, 2009, p. 22-23).

Fostering the type of listening required for discernment is part of maintaining the emergent perspective used by the spiritual directors in the study. It is intended to promote self-reflection in the pursuit of conscious living.

The emergent perspective also applies at an individual level to the emergence of the person in the process of spiritual direction. Living fully and personal becoming are concepts that draw on an emergent perspective. In the counselling psychology literature, they have been described by Rogers as the actualizing tendency, and by Jung as individuation.

Rogers’ actualizing tendency is the first personal form of emergence I will discuss here. “By it he postulated a sole motivating force which, if fully accessed, drives a person toward the accomplishment of his or her unique version of full humanness” (Thorne, 2012, p. 188). This fits with the experiences expressed by the spiritual directors in the study where seekers or the participants grew on a personal level. Their conceptualizations went broader,

however, than the development of the individual to encompass a community based aspect where the individual also acts in the broader world. A similar collective aspect of the actualizing tendency is described in the work of Mearns and Thorne (2002).

In recent times, my colleague, Dave Mearns, and I have attempted to rescue the actualizing tendency from its purely organismic and non-relational interpretation by introducing the idea of 'social mediation'. . . . We are suggesting by this concept that the actualizing tendency can only be fully accessed and thereby be fully trustworthy when its motivating energy is tempered by the conscious reflection of the individual on the implications for his or her social relationships and the life of the wider community. Such a socially mediated actualizing tendency does justice, we believe, both to the organismically unique being of the biologically separate individual and to the intra- and interpersonal life of the essentially relational person who has the capacity as a psychological being for ever-increasing consciousness (Thorne, 2012, p. 188).

By looking at the actualizing tendency in this way, it becomes more relational, bringing together another aspect of experience with the focus of the collaborative relationship and the emergence model described above. It also is better able to have explanatory power regarding the type of experiences the participants shared in the results of the study.

The second form of personal emergence I discuss here is Jung's dialectic intra-psychological concept of individuation. The concept of individuation describes the process of an individual person to develop and become the unique person they are. In Jungian thought, it includes the conscious part of the person (the ego) expanding its perspective to include unconscious parts of the person, in particular to the Self. The individual learns more about who they are through self-awareness and relationship to the intra-psychological aspects of

themselves as much as they do through relationship inter-psychologically (Schoen, 2009). Individuation creates a person who has the capacity to integrate continuously evolving parts of themselves and their external relationships. They develop a personal 'shape' that is relational, open to interaction and has appropriate personal boundaries.

In this study, the emergent perspective looks at both the emergence of the individual person over time and the emergence of the therapy process in sessions. The experience of the participants is explored in relation to Marks-Tarlow's emergence model, discernment in other religious traditions, Roger's actualizing tendency and Jung's concept of individuation.

Theme of love. The theme of love as part of the spiritual director's experience was a surprise to me, although it should not have been, given the value and central theological emphasis that love has in Christianity. In recent years, counselling has moved beyond the narrow perspective that love in therapy is universally destructive. The English language only has one word for the many facets that love can encompass. The concept that a counsellor could feel healthy love for their client has been overshadowed by inappropriate sexual relationships in psychotherapy. Love is often more intimate than counselling relationships are expected to include. Attachment, unconditional positive regard, a strong therapeutic alliance are all terms that have pointed to the possibility in counselling of a positive therapeutic love for the benefit of the client. The love discussed in the results of the current study was both of the spiritual director for the seeker, and of the Divine for both people involved in the spiritual direction relationship. Harrison and Westwood's (2009) discussion of exquisite empathy views love as a vital part of the healthy therapeutic experience.

Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy (AEDP) is a clinical counselling approach that grew out of relational depth psychology. Its focus is on the experiential use of emotions in counselling to bring about therapeutic transformation (Fosha, 2004, Schoettle,

2009). It also speaks specifically about the value of love in the therapeutic relationship. Closely echoing the words of the participants in this dissertation, the AEDP author Maryhelen Snyder wrote “The willingness and capacity to love and be loved on the part of both therapist and patient are core to optimally successful psychotherapy, both as a process and as an outcome” (Snyder, 2017). Although AEDP does not specifically address the transcendent spiritual aspect of love in the counselling experience, it does situate it as important. The experience of the spiritual directors in the current study adds recognition of the divine aspect to their discussion of their personal and professional experience of love. Through the embodied relationship of the spiritual director and the seeker, they become an image of the Divine for each other.

Ongoing personal and spiritual work. Similar to the perspective that Yalom (2002) discussed, where the counsellor is the instrument in therapy, the participants viewed ongoing personal and spiritual work to be important to their experience of spiritual direction. The results of the current study support the findings of the counselling literature outlined in the literature review chapter in relation to spirituality experiences, counsellor attributes, theoretical orientation/personality traits and orientation, and supervision/personal counselling.

In relation to spirituality, the spiritual directors were in a similar process as the counsellors in Blair’s (2015) study of engaging in an ongoing “reflective, dynamic and developmental process... in order to integrate their spiritual and therapeutic identities (p.161). They described similar types of inspiration that O’Grady and Richards (2010) outlined as part of counsellors’ experience. The spiritual directors also fostered a personal spiritual practice which they described as laying the foundation for positive therapeutic

impact in their session, which echos the study by Srichannil and Prior (2014), looking at the experience of a group of Buddhist counsellors in Thailand.

There was similarity between the results of the current study and the literature on counsellor attributes. As mentioned above, the spiritual directors valued congruence, being present and being real in sessions (Pierce, 2016). Although the focus of a spiritual direction session is not primarily on psychology, the spiritual directors were psychologically minded in sessions, as described by Daw and Joseph (2010). They also had attributes found in Moltu and Binder's (2014) study of counsellor experience, which included a double awareness in the session of each moment and the relationship, tailoring the session to the client, embodied empathy, meaning-making, and fostering an inter-personal and intrapersonal sense of spaciousness in the session. They also fostered relational depth through a contemplative approach that is similar to the findings of relational depth and mindfulness (Baker, 2016; Millon & Halewood, 2015).

One way the participants of the study shared their ongoing personal and spiritual work as spiritual directors was by talking about the continuing development of their theoretical orientation and personality traits in relation to how these world views reflect on the spiritual direction process. This was part of the subtheme of becoming a spiritual director. They valued meaning-making as is similar to Mason and Nel (2012). As mentioned above, there is a similarity between the spiritual director's approach and person centered theory. Several of the themes in the dissertation speak to this. They support the work of Carrick (2014), which sees clients as capable of using crisis for personal growth, and of Grafanaki and McLeod (2002) about the importance of personal and interpersonal congruence. The spiritual directors also described examples in their interviews of noting and working consciously with significant parts of each session similar to the findings of Goldfried, Raue

and Castonguay (1998). The results of this dissertation are congruent with the findings that personality traits can guide a person to gravitate toward experiences in the theoretical orientation that fits best for them, both in practicing and receiving therapy as described by (Ciclitira et al, 2012). The participants discussed how their style of spiritual direction they practiced had been both personally and professionally meaningful to them and the experiences they sought out.

Supervision as part of personal spiritual direction experience was highly valued by the spiritual directors in the study as part of their ongoing personal and spiritual work. This was reflected in the subtheme of ongoing spiritual direction, including such aspects as the supervision alliance safety, equality and bringing new insights through appropriate challenging, reflection, improve their practice, experience support for the work, difficult clients, process feelings (Grant & Schofield, 2007; Weaks, 2002). The participants concurred with supervision, as found by Wheeler and Richards (2007), to be an experience that provides them with increased self awareness, skill development, self-efficacy, ongoing development of their theoretical orientation, and professional support. The participants' experiences also support the literature regarding the value of personal counselling (Daw & Joseph, 2007; Oteiza, 2010; Ciclitira et. al, 2012) to live more consciously and to be more aware of their own personal issues. As is noted in several of the themes in the study, the spiritual directors learned from supervision and spiritual direction in similar ways to the findings of Oteiza (2010):

- to abandon the fantasy of considering themselves as the 'healthy ones';
- to admit they are 'merely' human too;
- to respect an individual's personal rhythm;
- to let themselves be guided and accompanied; and

- to expect to be challenged (p. 225).

The participants exhibited the attributes of master therapists mentioned by Sperry and Carlson (2014). They are continually learning in numerous interrelated fields (spirituality, theology, psychology and philosophy). They discussed how they used their collected experience in sessions. They discussed concepts and clinical experiences using intellectual complexity, and gave examples of sitting in sessions with a sense of clinical ambiguity. They approached their experiences with emotional receptivity. They noted practicing self-care for their health and well-being. They were aware of how their inner life, including their emotional life, can impact the work that they do. They exhibited highly developed relational skills, both in the interviews and in their description of sessions. They were aware of developing strong alliances with seekers and valued a deep relationship in sessions. They showed exceptional ability at using their general and spiritually specific therapy skills. They trusted their seekers as part of the spiritual direction process. They were specifically culturally competent in possessing skills related to spiritual direction work and in using those skills in appropriate client-centered ways.

Mutual impact. The experience that the participants discussed acknowledged a lived relationship in spiritual direction where the spiritual director and the seeker have a mutual impact on each other and their personal development. This has long been a recognized concept in counselling psychology (Gelso and Carter, 1985), where “the therapeutic relationship is a real relationship . . . in which each partner’s characteristics, presence, and actions directly impact one another” (Westwood, 2016, p. 187). Jung wrote that the psychotherapy process, of necessity, requires that both the counsellor and client be deeply affected by each other (Quinn, 2007). “Jung’s dialectical approach, (is one) in which the therapeutic encounter is seen as a meeting of equals characterized by mutuality (Samuels,

1985, in Quinn, 2007). Following Kohut's concept of intersubjectivity, Sullivan and Fromm described this mutual impact as the interpersonal field which is a co-creation of experience through the conscious and unconscious relationship (Stern, 2015). Ogden called this co-creation the intersubjective analytic third (1997). With the concept of derivatives, this mutual impact is the foundation of Odgen's construct of change in psychotherapy.

The participants expressed satisfaction in following the life of a spiritual director. This is specifically connected to an experience of mutual interaction and supporting the people they work with on their life journey. The participant's satisfaction in the work of being a spiritual director is similar to the findings of positive counsellors' experiences in the counselling literature (Harrison & Westwood, 2009; Kadamhi, Audet and Knish, 2010; Gilat & Sarah, 2012; Swank, Robinson & Ohrt, 2012). This ties into positive psychological literature on living a full life through the experience of three types of happiness outlined by Peterson, Park and Seligman (2005). The participants discussed experiences of a life of engagement and flow in their work. They also discussed a life of meaning, which is the happiness that is related to "connecting to a greater good" (Peterson, Park and Seligman, 2005, p.27). The life of pleasure based on hedonism was not seen as much in the participants' experiences.

Working as a spiritual director. One of the rich aspects of the spiritual directors' experience was their descriptions of what they do in sessions and how some of that activity comes about for them. As mentioned above, the aspects they discussed are all client-centered and about listening to an authentic, broad spiritual process. Harborne (2012) proposes that spiritual direction is a modality of psychotherapy. This being the case, the spiritual directors' experiences and the meaning that they share in the dissertation is a picture of how an ancient practice is lived out in our present day.

When viewing the results through the lens of Moon's (2002) three approaches to spiritual direction, the participants spoke most often about using a support-based approach of accompaniment as the foundation of the experience. Their experiences also mentioned instances of spiritual transformation that occurred as part of the process; what Moon called the reconstructive approach. The teaching approach, focusing on the instruction of spiritual practices, was not mentioned as often as a focus of the participants' experiences in the study.

The participants' comments reflected education in the traditions of classic spiritual direction (Ignatian practice and Fowler's [1995] stages of faith were both mentioned specifically). These traditions influenced their personal approaches to both a personal spiritual practice and activities in sessions. Their approach also reflected the broad study of many world spiritual traditions. Their study extended to psychological clinical work and they used these skills in their sessions. They spoke most about maintaining a contemplative approach in a session as part of a personal moment-to-moment relationship to the seeker and the Divine in sessions.

When considering the impact of spiritual direction on therapeutic change, the results of this study add to the literature supporting the findings of the Task Force on Empirically Based Principles of Therapeutic Change (Castonguay & Beutler, 2006). This is reflected particularly in two principles of therapeutic change found by the task force. The first principle speaks to prognosis of change. "If psychotherapists are open, informed and tolerant of various religious views, treatment effects are likely to be enhanced" (p.357). The second principle speaks to the benefit of matching the counsellor to the client. "If patients have a preference for religiously oriented psychotherapy, treatment benefits are enhanced if therapists accommodate this preference" (p.357).

Adding to the literature. In summarizing and considering the results in relation to counselling psychology and broader psychological literature, this dissertation adds to the literature in a unique way by providing a rich description of the experience of being a spiritual director. Other studies have focused on one research participant or the dyadic experience, or on a narrower research question in relation to spiritual direction. This study touches on the experience using a broad scope, from the participant's development of becoming a spiritual director over time, to their approaches and experiences in sessions. The study gives a sense of the profession of spiritual direction in an experience-based way by interviewing five spiritual directors and developing themes described in the voices of the participants.

Clinical Implications

This dissertation has unique implications for counselling practice. It became an exercise in translation for me by presenting the participants' experiences of being spiritual directors to the counselling psychology community. Writing about the topic itself, for the potential of a better understanding of this type of therapy within the counselling psychology field, could help counselling psychologists have confidence in working with spiritual issues that arise in sessions. It could provide new language that counselling psychologists can use to address clients' spiritual formation experiences.

This study corroborates the findings of the study done by Gubi (2010) looking at the similarities and differences of spiritual direction and counselling. From their independent perspectives, the participants touched on the clinical points of Gubi's study. The process can oscillate between a soul and a psychological orientation. The participants kept an awareness of this in mind when working as a spiritual director. They maintained an intentionality that

included the Divine as a central being in the spiritual direction relationship. The language of discourse in a session used different vocabulary when the participants had a spiritual direction focus, and the types of resources suggested to the seeker were expanded to include spiritual sources when doing spiritual direction. The participants added to the Gubi study by providing a broader experiential description of this rich practice.

The findings also shed light on the nine necessary spiritual clinical competencies developed by ASERVIC that were described in Chapter 1 of this dissertation (Robertson, 2008).

1. A counselor should be able to explain the relationship between religion and spirituality, including similarities and differences.
2. A counselor should be able to describe religious and spiritual beliefs and practices within a cultural context.
3. A counselor should engage in self-exploration of his/her religious and spiritual beliefs in order to increase sensitivity, understanding, and acceptance of his/her belief system.
4. A counselor should be able to describe his/her religious and/or spiritual belief system and explain various models of religious/spiritual development across the life span.
5. A counselor should demonstrate sensitivity to and acceptance of a variety of religious and/or spiritual expressions in the client's communication.
6. A counselor should identify the limits of his/her understanding of a client's spiritual expression and demonstrate appropriate referral skills and general possible referral sources.

7. A counselor should assess the relevance of the spiritual domains in the client's therapeutic issues.

8. A counselor should be sensitive to and respectful of the spiritual themes in the counseling process as befits each client's expressed preferences.

9. A counselor should use a client's spiritual beliefs in the pursuit of the client's therapeutic goals as befits the client's expressed preferences.

In particular, the findings should help counsellors describe the spiritual practice of spiritual direction as part of its particular context (#2). The description of spiritual development models outlined in Chapter 2 could help counsellors with competency #4. Understanding the findings of this study could help counsellors have sensitivity to the client's spiritual expression (#5) and understand what experiences a client might have if they are referred to a spiritual director (#6). The findings could support a counsellor in understanding some common spiritual themes that came out of these findings (#8) and could support the client in leveraging their personal beliefs to facilitate change based on the client's goals (#9).

The clinical implications of this study mirror the description of spiritual direction and counselling given by the psychologist, Paul Midden, in an interview on the CBC radio program *Tapestry*, when he was discussing his long-term work with priests in Chicago. Although he was speaking about working with priests, the results from this study concur with his comments. He described the process of counselling by saying:

One of the purposes of treatment is to help them identify what their experience... is about. That contains different elements, one of which is there are things in their history that contribute to it if there are things in their thinking that contribute to it, the

way they handle their emotions or the way they behave. All these things can be involved. (48:15-48:40)

He described the importance of concurrent spiritual direction by saying:

In order for the changes or the transformation that happened in treatment to endure, an individual . . . needs to have a spiritual way to understand them. I think that's really critical (47:00-47:15). . . . (People) had both an individual therapist . . . and also a spiritual director, who assisted the process and whom they would see every week. The job of that person (the spiritual director) was to help the client assimilate his personal growth into his spirituality, in effect expanding his spirituality to include a model of growth that is more compassionate and more realistic than they had when they presented for treatment. . . . So the purpose of the spirituality component is not to try to put Humpty Dumpty back together again. Go back to what they thought spirituality was prior to treatment. The point of the spiritual direction is to help them expand their spirituality to help them understand that perhaps through no fault of their own they are suffering a reaction that they need to understand and need to address more realistically (Midden, 46:30 – 46:49).

The clinical implications of this study give a deep and rich understanding of the meaning and value of spiritual direction for the participants involved. The findings relate to a specific spiritually related context but, as is seen above, can be situated in the theories of current clinical aspects of counselling psychology.

Implications For Future Research

This dissertation satisfies Bidwell's (2003) call to conduct research in this area using postpositivist philosophies of science. It did this by using IPA methodology; a method that is

rigorous as a research approach and that is congruent with the meaning-making (hermeneutic) and experience-near (phenomenological) focus of the spiritual direction process itself. The participants reflected this perspective. They experienced spiritual direction as a holistic, constructed, relational endeavour, always incomplete, taking place in conversation between and within people.

The results of this dissertation point to several areas of future research. One is to explore the experience of both the seeker and the spiritual director in a process study of their sessions. A second is to continue to add more studies using qualitative methods, since there is a good fit between the phenomenological and hermeneutic foci, both in the model and in the process of spiritual direction. A third is to continue to explore spiritual direction as a type of psychotherapy to further tease out the common transformative aspects and the unique aspects specific to a spiritual direction relationship. Following on the research of master therapists, a study could be conducted to explore the spiritual director's participation in the three orders of change (symptom amelioration, changing patterns, engendering the client's ability for independent self-change).

This is a qualitative study that has broadened the knowledge about spiritual direction, both by using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to gain new insight, and by using one framework (counselling psychology) to look at another (spiritual direction). Applying the research in counselling psychology on what makes the process effective could be used in the future to explore what might contribute to making spiritual direction effective, and the efficacy process of the rich tradition of spiritual direction can inform the field of counselling psychology.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to this study. The sample size of 5 spiritual directors, of whom 4 were trained therapists is a limitation of the study. The study might have been different if there were an equal number of participants who were not trained in a spiritual direction program who were not trained in a psychology program. For example if there were 4 spiritual directors who were also therapists and 4 who were not. The second limitation stems from the exclusive exploration of the spiritual director's experience, and does not look at the point of view of the seeker directly, or the interpersonal field that is created between the two people in the session. The third limitation is that it does not explore the transformation of spiritual direction in a process study over time. The fourth limitation is the the possible overlap in the findings between spiritual direction processes and counselling processes, due to the backgrounds of the participants in psychological training and their professions outside of spiritual direction. I am confident that the study, however, provides a rich and useful picture of the participants' lived experiences of spiritual direction.

Conclusion

This dissertation is an exploration of spiritual direction, from the perspective of counselling psychology, as it manifests in the reflective phenomenological experiences of the spiritual director. In the tradition of spiritual direction, a person deepens their individual relationship to the Divine through a personalized spiritual practice with the help of a trained spiritual director (Gratton, 2005). Although the spiritual direction discourse, one of healing and personal development, is similar to many types of psychotherapy (Vittersø & Søholt, 2011), it has not often been examined systematically in counselling psychology. In this dissertation, I used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to focus on the meaning

of the experience of the spiritual director. Five expert spiritual directors were interviewed for the study. The individual experiences of the participants were analyzed and six collective themes with emergent subthemes were developed. Spiritual direction uses a collaborative relational approach including aspects of viewing life as a journey, interpersonal presence, attending to experiences of grace, experiencing redemption, and acknowledging human limitations. Spiritual direction uses an emergent perspective, including aspects of living fully, becoming, a contemplative approach, and discernment in decision making. The participants strongly emphasized the experience of love, including the aspect of inherently being good enough as a human being. Spiritual direction is a lifestyle of ongoing personal and spiritual work, including the path of becoming a spiritual director, maintaining a daily practice, and having the supervision of personal spiritual direction. Spiritual direction is an experience of mutual impact where there is mutuality between the participants, and the spiritual directors described their satisfaction in the work. Finally, working as a spiritual director included a variety of activities, using self-disclosure and teaching stories, using non-verbal creative modalities of counselling, the conscious use of language, working appropriately with Christian and non-Christian people, and exploring the similarities and differences of spiritual direction and clinical counselling.

Theoretical comparisons, clinical implications and future research implications were discussed. The results are discussed in light of current and foundational counselling theory and relational psychological theory. The dissertation provides a current picture of the practice of an ancient experience, vitalized by current science and theological thinking and experience.

How the spiritual directors lived out the concept of following the enlivening thread of life reflected the feeling of the dissertation. The poet William Stafford (Stafford, 1998) wrote

“The Way It Is,” shortly before his death. I include it here as a depiction of the metaphor of a thread in life.

There’s a thread you follow.

It goes among things that change. But it doesn’t change.

People wonder about what you are pursuing.

You have to explain about the thread.

But it is hard for others to see.

While you hold it you can’t get lost.

Tragedies happen; people get hurt

or die; and you suffer and get old.

Nothing you do can stop time’s unfolding.

You don’t ever let go of the thread.

Among many things, the poem is a comment on the thread of a life that has individual action and personal meaning. The spiritual directors in this dissertation also spoke about such a thread. Their experience and the meaning they illuminated about spiritual direction shares a sense of an enlivening thread; an enlivening thread that weaves through all aspects of life. In writing this dissertation for counselling psychology, I have shown how some people choose to touch that enlivening thread through the process of a relationship in spiritual direction.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Letter for Spiritual Directors



**Department of Educational and
Counselling Psychology, and Special
Education**

The University of British Columbia
Faculty of Education
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver BC Canada V6T 1Z4
Tel 604-822-0242 Fax 604-822-3302

Dear Spiritual Director,

My name is Kirsten Maier and I am a doctoral student in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia (UBC) investigating Spiritual Direction. I am particularly interested in how the Spiritual Director experiences providing Spiritual Direction and the meaning which they make of that experience.

I am contacting qualified Spiritual Directors, such as yourself to participate with me in my dissertation study. The study is to facilitate the completion of a Ph.D in Counselling Psychology and is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. William Borgen as the Principal Investigator. I am recruiting Spiritual Directors who have been trained in a recognized program for Spiritual Direction and are members in good standing of a Spiritual Direction association (such as Spiritual Directors International). Your participation in the study would involve 3 meetings: An *intake phone interview* to learn about the study and provide informed consent if you would like to participate a *confidential interview* of about 3 hours with me, where I will ask you to share your experience, perceptions, thoughts and feelings about being a Spiritual Director; and a *follow-up meeting* to get your feedback on my interpretations of the data regarding your interview.

If you have any questions or would like to indicate your interest, please contact me.

If you prefer, print your name, telephone number and sign below indicating I have your permission to contact you personally.

I, _____ am interested in participating in this study, and I give

(print name)
my permission for Kirsten Maier to contact me at _____ to discuss the
study. (telephone number)

(signature) _____

Appendix B: Telephone Screening Interview

Date of screening call: _____

Name/contact info:

1. Introduce myself and ask how he/she heard about the study.

2. Thank-you for your interest in this study. The purpose of this call is to explain the study and to determine whether your experience fits with the purpose of the project. There is potential for this phone call to take up to 45 minutes. Is it alright to proceed, or would another time be more suitable?

3. Description of the Study:

The research study will investigate your experience as a spiritual director. For you, the study will consist of one 3-hour audio recorded interview and one follow-up interview. During the primary interview I will ask you open ended questions about your experience. Once I have read over the transcribed interview and analyzed it for the themes it may contain, I will meet with you again in a follow up interview. This interview will be up to one hour, and its purpose is to seek your feedback about the themes I have identified and how they represent your experience.

4. Questions for Participant Selection:

For you to be included in this study I first need to ask you a series of questions to determine if your experience fits with the purpose of the study. If you don't meet the criteria, the information you have provided will be destroyed. Is it alright to proceed?

a. Have you attended training in Spiritual Direction?

b. Does spiritual direction guide your practice?

c. Are you a member in good standing of a Spiritual Direction Association?

d.. Are you available for a 3-hour interview and a 1-hour follow up interview? I will explain the procedure and purpose of these interviews.

5. At this point, the determination is made to either proceed with the intake interview or to respectfully thank the potential participant and close the conversation.

6. If the person agrees to the criteria and fits the study, the following aspects will be discussed: To conclude this intake interview I would like to explain to you your rights as a participant, the risks and benefits, and the limits of confidentiality to which I must abide. At this point I would proceed to discuss compensation, rights to withdraw at any time during data collection, and the limits of anonymity etc. You meet the criteria for the study and I would like to invite you to participate. Please think over the time commitment carefully, and then contact me within one week (by email or phone) to let me know that you are definitely

willing to participate. At that time we can determine the place, the details of how we will contact clients in your practice that may be interested in participating with you.

7. Are there any final questions you would like to ask?

Appendix C: Participant's Informed Consent

Participant Informed Consent



**Department of Educational and
Counselling Psychology, and Special
Education**

The University of British Columbia
Faculty of Education
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver BC Canada V6T 1Z4
Tel 604-822-0242 Fax 604-822-3302

Consent Form

A Counselling Psychology Study of the Lived Experience of Spiritual Directors in Providing Spiritual Direction

Principal Investigator:

Dr. William Borgen, UBC Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education (Counselling Psychology Program, 604-822-5261).

Co-Investigator:

Kirsten Maier, UBC Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education (Counselling Psychology Program).

The research conducted for this study will fulfill the dissertation requirement for a PhD degree for Kirsten Maier under the direction of Dr. William Borgen. It will eventually be made available to the public.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to explore how Spiritual Directors understand their experiences in providing Spiritual Direction. This study will add to our ability to have conversations between the fields of psychology and theology. It will bring this cultural tradition into the Counselling Psychology literature in a different way.

Study Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in a 3-hour interview in which you will speak with the researcher about your experience, perceptions, thoughts and feelings about the spiritual direction process. In addition, after the interviews are transcribed and analyzed, you will be asked to participate in a 1-hour interview to review the results, to provide your feedback to the researcher, and to discuss any remaining questions or comments you may have, including any positive or negative impacts of the study that you wish to share. The total amount of time required of you is approximately 5 hours. Any questions you have regarding the study procedures may be directed to the study co-investigator, Kirsten Maier.

Potential Risks:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any questions or provide any information. You may also withdraw your participation at any

time during the data collection of the study. The interview is meant to be reflective, not therapeutic. If issues arise that need therapeutic attention, you are encouraged to discuss this with an appropriate support person such as a spiritual director or with another therapist. A list of appropriate and affordable counselling services will be provided to you before the interview begins, in case you decide you would benefit from counselling support, and you do not wish to discuss this with your current therapist.

Potential Benefits:

The potential benefits of talking about your spiritual direction experience include gaining new insight(s) into your experience that you did not previously have, and sharing your experience may be helpful to others. It may also affect your relationship with your clients in a positive way. You will be compensated for your participation in this study.

Anonymity:

All efforts will be made to ensure your identity remains anonymous. Any information that is obtained in this study will remain anonymous and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. You will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. Direct quotes from the interview(s) may be reported in the findings of this study, but these quotes will not reveal any identifying information. All printed documents and recordings will be kept in a locked file cabinet and all electronic files will be on password protected computer hard drives. All data for the study will be encrypted. Within five years all the data will be destroyed. Only the researchers, research dissertation committee members, and one expert peer researcher will have access to the data during the analysis period.

Remuneration/Compensation:

You will be reimbursed for the cost of transportation to and from the interviews by the co-investigator. In addition, participants will receive \$50.00 for the time spent in the two interviews.

Contact Information About the Study:

For further information about this study you may contact Dr. William Borgen, the Principal Investigator at 604-822-5261.

Contact for Concerns about being a Research Subject:

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

Consent:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time during data collection. Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Subject Signature

Date

Subject name (printed)

Appendix D: Advertisement Copy for Recruitment

Seeking Spiritual Directors as Participants in a Counselling Psychology Dissertation Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how Spiritual Directors understand their experiences in providing Spiritual Direction. Our goal is that this study will add to our ability to have conversations between the fields of counselling psychology and theology. If you are interested, we anticipate that participation will take about 5 hours of your time. You will be offered an honorarium as a participant.

The study is to facilitate the completion of a Ph.D in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia by Kirsten Maier under the supervision of Dr. William Borgen.

If you would like any further information or would like to indicate your interest, please contact Kirsten. We look forward to speaking with you.

Appendix E: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Introduction

I want to thank you for your interest in this study and for meeting with me. Today we will spend about three hours together for this interview. You have already taken a look at the Informed Consent form, but I want to make sure that you feel comfortable with the structure of the study and that I answer any questions that you may have. So we will spend some time going over the form and signing it, before we begin the interview itself.

Everything that you share with me will be kept as anonymous and confidential as possible. This means that the only people who will have access to the data will be myself, the professional medical transcriptionist and the Principal Investigator, Dr. William Borgen. All of the electronic files will be encrypted and password protected. Any paperwork will be held in a locked drawer in my office at home. Your information will be given a number, which will identify your data as I gather and organize it in the study. When I write my dissertation, your identity will be protected using a pseudo name.

It is important for you to know that your participation in the study is completely voluntary. At any time, you have the right to leave the study. Outside of our interview today, I will be contacting you to set up a follow-up meeting. I want to make sure that the way I am interpreting and analyzing our interview is correct. I am interested in your feedback.

The interview today will explore your experience as a spiritual director. I will ask you open ended questions about your experience. I will be recording the interview today using a digital recorder and my iphone as back-up. This information will be transcribed and explored for themes, as well as similarities and differences with the other three people I am interviewing for the study. My goal is to understand the experience and meaning of providing spiritual direction.

Consent form

Before we begin the interview today, I would like to spend some time with you going over the consent form for this study.

I will begin recording as we talk about the consent form. We will read the consent form together and I will explain the various parts of the form. I will test the recording after this part of the discussion is finished to be sure the recording devices are working well.

Do you have any questions regarding the consent form, what we have read, or the study itself?

Outline of Questions.

These questions are guideline questions. The interview will be semi-structured. In addition to the questions given here, other questions will be created based on the participant's responses. This is with the intention to gain clarification and glean as much information

about the lived experience of the participant as possible in relation to providing Spiritual Direction.

We will be spending up to three hours talking about four different types of questions. First, we will talk about your background as a Spiritual Director. Then, we will talk about your day-to-day experiences of being a Spiritual Director. Third, I will ask you questions, which invite you to reflect on the meanings of your Spiritual Direction experiences. Finally, there is space in the interview to explore other aspects of the experience that may arise from our conversation. Since we will be talking for quite a while, we may take a break part way through, as we feel is necessary.

If there is any point in the interview where something I say is unclear, or you do not understand a question, please ask me to clarify. You are also free to decline to answer any question included in the interview. I am interested to hear what it is like for you to provide Spiritual Direction.

Historical Background Questions

Section 1: Biographical questions. The rationale here is to describe the context of the participant's experiences.

1. *Tell me about your background experiences of being a Spiritual Director.*
What guided you to become a Spiritual Director?
Where did you study? How did you find the experience of the program?
How long have you been working as a Spiritual Director?
Are there any Spiritual Directors you view as mentors or who influenced you?
Is there a cultural context that shaped your development as a Spiritual Director?
What were the styles you studied that you related to the most or the least?

Research Centered Questions

Section 2: Recreate the details of the experiences of providing spiritual direction. The rationale here is to probe as much detail as possible of the day-to-day experience of providing Spiritual Direction.

2. *What do you experience when providing Spiritual Direction?*
Tell me about a typical session for you.
How do you set up the space in a Spiritual Direction session? What is your intention behind doing this?
Without using client's names, describe your interactions with clients in a session.
What are some of the activities that you do with a client?
3. *How do you feel while you are working in a session? Do you notice any typical responses...?*
.... any physical sensations?
.... any emotional feelings ?
... any common thoughts?

*Do you have any spiritual experiences when providing Spiritual Direction?
Can you tell me more about that?*

Reflective Questions

Section 3: Reflect on the meaning of your experiences. The rationale here is to illicit more implicit information regarding the participant's experience with their work.

4. *What do you view as the purpose of Spiritual Direction?*

What do you hope people will gain from taking part in Spiritual Direction?

Is there anything you hope to gain?

*What do you think are some of the main similarities or differences between
Spiritual Direction and other forms of personal development?*

5. *In what ways, if any, has the work that you do changed as you have gained experience as a
Spiritual Director?*

In what ways, if any, has your involvement with Spiritual Direction changed?

6. *What other important things, if any, would you like to tell me about being a Spiritual
Director or about providing Spiritual Direction?*

7. *Are there any things that have come up during our interview that you would like to spend
more time discussing or exploring in this interview.*

Concluding Statements

As our time comes to a close, I want to thank you again for our conversation. If you have any concerns or questions about this research going forward, please feel free to contact me. You can also contact Dr. William Borgen, my dissertation chair and the Principal Investigator, at William.borgen@ubc.ca or at 604-822-5261.

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

I have enjoyed our interview, and I will be in touch in the next 2 months for follow-up.

Appendix F: Counselling Resources

Counselling Resources

Taking part in research can sometimes bring up unresolved personal issues. If you notice that being part of this study raises something that you would like to work through, I encourage you to find support.

The following is a list of resources you can use:

British Columbia Psychological Association

You can search for a Psychologist online at <http://www.psychologists.bc.ca/content/find-help>

If you are unable to access the information online, you can also call 604-730-0522 or 1-800-730-0522 from Monday to Friday, 9:30 AM to 4:30 PM.

British Columbia Association of Clinical Counsellors

You can search for a Registered Clinical Counsellor online at

<http://bc-counsellors.force.com/CounsellorSearch> You can also call 250-595-4448 or 1-800-909-6303 for help locating a Counsellor by phone.

Other Options for Support

If you have a previous relationship with a counselor or your employer has an Employee Assistance Program, contacting them is also a good option for support. Speaking with your Family Physician is another way to find counselling services.