

**THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY
IN THE TRANSITION THROUGH MIDLIFE:
A NARRATIVE STUDY**

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL
AND COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY
AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

We accept this thesis as confirming

to the required ~~st~~ standard.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

September, 2000

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Abstract

This study explores the role of spirituality in the transition through midlife. Using narrative research methodology, in-depth tape-recorded interviews were conducted with ten self-selected adults between the ages of 47 and 63 who felt spirituality had played an important role in their transition through mid-life. Of the seven women and three men who participated, nine were Caucasian and one was Asian. Four participants were not adherents of a recognized religious faith, while the other six reported an affiliation with Eastern, middle-Eastern, or Western faiths. Of this well-educated, middle to upper income sample, four participants were married with children, three were single, and three were divorced.

Tape-recorded interview transcriptions were used to develop first person narrative accounts of the role spirituality in the transition through midlife. These accounts were validated by the participants. Further analysis of the validated narratives yielded ten common elements. The first four elements indicated a significant role for spirituality in the developmental process of midlife, by helping the participants to cope with losses and challenges, revise values and identity, and find spiritual meaning. The next six elements, which suggest an expanded definition of spirituality, described the ongoing importance of spirituality in the lives of the participants. The common elements and findings are discussed in light of current theory and research on midlife, as well as psychological perspectives on spirituality.

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Acknowledgements

I am deeply appreciative of the seven women and three men who generously volunteered their time and energy to share their experiences of spirituality in the transition through midlife. I hope to present their experiences with accuracy and respect, and to honor their individual perspectives.

I wish to acknowledge and express my gratitude to the following people who participated in my journey to completing this thesis:

- Dr. Judith Daniluk, my thesis advisor, for her consistent and frequent support, guidance, encouragement, and confidence.
- Reverend Bill Wiegert and Dr. Rod McCormick, of my committee, for their perceptive commentary, encouragement, and interest in the topic.
- Dr. Larry Cochran for enriching my understanding of narrative research methods and providing the impetus for this study.
- My husband and friend, Larry Trunkey, for his devoted commitment, talented editing, compassion, and daily encouragement.

I also thank the Faculty of Graduate Studies for the University Graduate Fellowship that financially supported this work.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The role of spirituality in human life has been of recent interest to many areas of research and practice, including counselling psychology, psychiatry, nursing, medicine, education, and business (Standard, Sandhu, & Painter, 2000). However, little research has been conducted to identify and clarify the specific role that spirituality might play in human lives. Even so, early and recent theorists in psychology propose that spirituality and religion are important to human development (Hollis, 1996; James, 1902/61; Jung, 1933/71; Walsh & Vaughan, 1996). Similarly, Frankl (1969) and Tillich (1952) stated that spirituality contributes strongly to the construction of meaning in life. Frankl (1975), an existential theorist, also stated that the pursuit of meaning can be achieved through self-transcendence, or by focusing on social and spiritual values, and is an essential part of human striving. These theorists emphasize the contribution of spirituality throughout life to the development of personal meaning.

The revision of personal meaning is a significant process of midlife development, which has been demonstrated through several research studies (Apter, 1995; Josselson, 1996; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978; Levinson & Levinson, 1996; Maris, 1981; Osherson, 1980; Rubin, 1979; Schlossberg, 1981; Vaillant, 1993). Although these research studies explore many specific processes and activities of meaning-making in midlife, there has been no research focussing on the role of spirituality during the midlife transition. In particular, in relationship to the changes in assumptions about oneself that occur during midlife, the role of spirituality and the contribution made by spiritual practices have not been examined. However, O'Connor and Chamberlain (1996)

note the influence of spirituality on meaning-making when they identified categories or domains of life which adults have identified as significant to meaning in midlife. These categories include work/occupation, relationships/marriage, family, and spiritual areas of life. Their research findings suggest that, for some people, spirituality may play an important role in midlife. The study discussed in this paper specifically explores the experiences of people for whom spirituality played an important role in the transition through midlife.

Midlife has been defined as a time during adulthood when a person's awareness of the time left to live becomes more salient than the preceding time since infancy (Jacques, 1965). In other words, the person's view of life becomes shaped by an awareness of life's finitude and the reduced choices, actions, and experiences available. As a consequence of the realization that one's life will end, there is often an increased urgency or pressure to ensure that one's life is meaningful or purposeful, leading many individuals toward a greater psychological interiority (Neugarten, 1968). This increased introspection often leads to an active review of life, entailing an evaluation, reorganization, and a clarification of perceptions and values in order to bring a greater coherence and meaning to one's life story (Cohler, 1982).

Recent theory and research have identified a variety of events and circumstances that might lead to a midlife disruption in one's prevailing sense of self and sense of meaning, including: the loss of parents, siblings or friends; physical signs of aging; severe or terminal illness; loss of reproductive capacity; employment transitions; and children leaving home (Kalish, 1989; Levinson et al., 1978; Levinson & Levinson, 1996; Osherson, 1980). There is some evidence that the disparity between the ideal once held

for one's life and the reality of one's life can lead to a crisis for some individuals (Levinson et al.; Osherson). However, Osherson and Schlossberg (1981) observe that an externally evident loss need not be present for a person to experience a midlife transition. In fact, the term "crisis" may be inappropriate because this awareness, and sense of disorientation and revision of meaning, may not manifest as suddenly and intensely as the word 'crisis' suggests, but rather it may unfold as a gradual, longer term transition (Maris, 1975; Osherson). Midlife transition involves a movement away from previously held assumptions about life toward a revision of values, meaning, and sense of self (Maris; Osherson).

Therefore, the transition through midlife may be described as a process of reconstructing meaning in life, which follows an initial process of loss or disintegration of meaning. This initial process can itself result from the awareness of the disparity between one's actual life and the ideal life one had hoped for. Parkes (1971) emphasizes that midlife involves a psychosocial transition which necessitates "the abandonment of one set of assumptions and the development of a fresh set to enable the individuals to cope with the new altered life space" (p.103). Similarly, Schlossberg (1981) has defined transition as "an event or non-event [that] results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (p. 5). Because the process of midlife development involves the revision of meaning, and evidence suggests that spirituality can support the development of meaning, this study assumes that spirituality may play a role in midlife for some people.

In this study, I set out to explore how spirituality may play a role in people's revision of meaning and of the assumptions held about themselves and the world during

midlife. Given that this topic focuses on the human experience, it is best approached and informed by individuals who have experienced the phenomenon directly (Kvale, 1996; Mishler, 1986). A qualitative approach to this research, using narrative interviews, is an especially suitable method of inquiry (Cortazzi, 1994; Kvale; Mishler). By facilitating rich, detailed explorations and descriptions of the phenomenon under examination, the narrative method is appropriate for topics of study that are difficult to examine through quantitative processes, or as a means of obtaining rich data about topics that have not been thoroughly investigated (Cortazzi; Kvale; Mishler). In addition, as noted by Cohler (1982), revision of meaning is often evidenced in a revised life story.

I collected participants' narratives through unstructured interviews, facilitated by an orienting statement and clarifying questions, as necessary. The central question guiding the research was: **"What is the role of spirituality in the transition through midlife?"** The resulting narratives, developed from the interviews, were later validated by the participants and then analyzed to identify common events, patterns, and/or processes (Cortazzi, 1993; Kvale, 1996; Riessman, 1993). Both the narratives and the common elements are discussed in relation to recent literature on midlife development and spirituality in counselling.

Ingersoll (1994) and other theorists have emphasized the search for meaning or life purpose as an important part of spirituality (Cervantes & Ramirez, 1992; Ellis, 1983; Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, & Saunders, 1988). For this research project, the term spirituality is used to refer to both an individual's internal set of values and beliefs that guide behavior, and to one's sense of the sacred or the divine. An individual's experience

of spirituality may or may not be grounded in an organized religion (Ingersoll; Shafranske & Maloney, 1990).

There are a number of reasons why this research was worth conducting. First, a large proportion of the North American population is or is becoming middle aged (Statistics Canada, 1998). Second, there is a notable increase in the public interest in spirituality, which is reflected in the variety of popular publications and magazines, such as *Magickal Blend*, *Resurgence*, *ReVision*, *Shaman's Drum*, and *Tricycle*, that encourage North American adults to actively explore "spirituality." Emberley (1998), a Canadian professor of humanities, suggests that the current interest in spirituality has emerged from the baby boomers "struggling at midlife to achieve order and meaning in their lives" (p.102). Third, it has been stated that person's spirituality can potentially contribute to the process of developing and revising meaning, especially during midlife (Bergin, 1980; Cornett, 1998; Hollis, 1995; Jung, 1933/71; Jones, 1995; Mack, 1994). Some counselling professionals have noted an increasing number of clients seeking counselling for issues related to the context of midlife transition, including changes in meaning and spirituality (Cornett; Jones; Kelly, 1995). If spirituality and spiritual practices contribute to the revision of meaning for some individuals, it is necessary to increase our understanding of these contributions. An understanding of how a client's spirituality contributes to meaning-making processes and midlife development could assist and inform therapeutic processes (Mack). Such knowledge could allow counsellors to provide increased support for clients undergoing midlife transition (Schlossberg, 1981).

This study was also worth conducting because it helps to clarify previous research about the process of midlife development. Although writers and researchers (e.g. Apter,

1995; Cohler, 1982; Hollis, 1993; Josselson, 1996; Jung, 1933/71; Levinson et al., 1978; Levinson & Levinson, 1996; Osherson, 1980; Vaillant, 1993) have developed theoretical perspectives about the cognitive, emotional, and symbolic processes of midlife transition, these notions may be further clarified and confirmed through research. If spirituality is involved in the midlife process for some individuals, then theories of development may benefit from its inclusion. A better understanding of midlife development would contribute significantly to the field of human psychology, specifically in the areas of life-span development and counselling (Schlossberg, 1981).

Finally, this study helps to clarify what spirituality may mean for individuals and potential clients. Although many psychologists may not be predisposed to consider spirituality in the therapeutic context, clients are increasingly referring to spirituality and spiritual issues during counselling sessions (Cornett, 1998; Kelly, 1995; Vaughan, 1991; Vaughan, Wittine, & Walsh, 1996). Counsellors and psychologists need to know the meaning spirituality has for individuals, how to identify spiritual concerns, and/or how to clarify spiritual meaning with a client. Unless spirituality is discussed, there may be missed opportunities for the therapist to work collaboratively with the client on issues that relate to client spirituality and that help facilitate client change and development (Kelly; Mack, 1994). Because a person's spiritual practices significantly reflects his or her values, an appreciation of the client's spirituality is relevant to therapy (Bergin, 1980; Bergin, Payne, & Richards, 1996; Vaughan et al.). The findings of this study help to clarify how counsellors approach the issue of spirituality with their clients.

In summary, although the issue of meaning making is relevant at any time during life, several psychologists have observed that it appears to be a central focus of midlife

(Hollis, 1995; Jung, 1933/1971; Jones, 1995; Mack, 1994). While these same psychologists have suggested that spirituality is important to the development of meaning, there has been little research conducted in this area. Psychological theory can benefit from exploring the experiences of people for whom spirituality has contributed to the revision of meaning during midlife. Furthermore, it is hoped that this research contributes to a deeper appreciation and understanding of the significance of spirituality in human development. This knowledge can potentially support a more holistic and integrative understanding of human development, and consequently, a more complete therapeutic approach.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

This review of the literature clarifies the issues and tasks of midlife, and locates the concept of spirituality within the psychological tradition. The first section examines how midlife has been defined, presents an overview of midlife tasks, and details the importance of meaning making to the midlife transition. The next three sections summarize essential research findings on midlife development for adults in general, and for groups of men and women specifically. Next, I present some past and current theoretical perspectives on spirituality in the field of psychology, some recent attempts to define spirituality, and discuss the relevance of spirituality to the therapeutic context.

Midlife, Midlife Tasks, and the Importance of Meaning Making

Research into the role of spirituality in midlife transition must begin with a clarification of how midlife is described by theorists and researchers. There is a general consensus that middle age occurs between age 40 to 65, with the transitional period occurring sometime between ages 35 and 50 (Erikson, 1959; Levinson et al., 1978; Sherman, 1987). Even so, it is the tasks, developmental changes, and challenges of midlife that are considered the significant parameters for describing midlife (Erikson; Levinson et al.; Sherman). Although psychology has not yet formulated a comprehensive view of adult development, some significant tasks of middle adulthood have been identified, explored, and conceptualized.

Jacques (1965) and Neugarten (1968) propose that midlife begins in the middle or late thirties with an orientation to time-left-in-life rather than time-since-birth. Cath (1980) and Hollis (1993) emphasize that during midlife one is confronted with personal

reflection on the meaning of aging and death. Jacques, identifying the emphasis on the tragic in the philosophical content in the work of many artists and writers in midlife, suggests that midlife is notable for its emphasis on one's own mortality. Based on research questionnaires answered by 524 white, middle class adult men and women, Gould (1972) indicates that there is an increasing preoccupation with self in the middle years and a turn toward self-exploration.

The period of midlife seems to be a complex time of transition that encompasses many experiences. Most individuals grapple with change, contradiction, tensions, and unknowns because of various experiences related to midlife (Levinson et al., 1978). A number of biological changes occur for men and women, specifically as a result of cell aging, deterioration, and endocrinological changes (Baltes & Brim, 1979-1987). Significant events often occur in midlife, including parental loss, death of siblings or spouses, children leaving home, life-threatening illnesses, major health changes, job losses, and marital breakdown (Kalish, 1989; Sherman, 1987).

Many writers and researchers (Levinson et al., 1978; Levinson & Levinson, 1996; Neugarten, 1968; Osherson, 1980) identify central themes of loss, separation, and growth in midlife. Medinger and Varghese (1981) suggest that key themes in midlife include awareness of the parameters of existence for oneself and others, reflection on accomplishment of goals, reassessment of goals in light of current resources and opportunities, awareness of developmental changes, and awareness of the unexpressed aspects of the self. Buhler (1968), Jung (1933), and Erikson (1959) suggest that a sense of fulfillment, meaning, and ongoing contribution to society are important to psychological health in midlife and beyond. They propose that external losses and change are not

necessary for the experience of midlife transition because, to some extent, the sense of loss and shift in perception occur internally (Medinger & Varghese; Osherson; Schlossberg, 1981).

A change in perception and meaning, which may or may not be prompted by external events, appears to be a significant aspect of the experience of transition for many individuals. Schlossberg (1981) states that a transition has occurred "if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (p. 5). Parkes (1971) adds that psychosocial transitions necessitate "the abandonment of one set of assumptions and the development of a fresh set to enable the individuals to cope with the new altered life space" (p.103). For many people during midlife, an increased introspection and awareness of the finitude of life leads to an active review of life (Cohler, 1982; Medinger & Varghese, 1981). This review may increase the individual's awareness of aging and finitude, the passing of youth, and the recognition of unfulfilled goals and dreams. This sense of loss or change, which may or may not be precipitated by external events, challenges the person in midlife to rediscover or reconstitute meaning. Therefore, this life review also serves to evaluate, reorganize and clarify perceptions and values in order to bring a greater coherence and meaning to one's life story (Cohler).

Research into Adult Development

Buhler (1968) developed a model of lifespan development based upon research into the lives of adults in Vienna in the 1930's. Buhler and her students studied and analyzed the biographical and autobiographical writings of 400 Viennese adults. Buhler found that each life story suggested a progression of life phases relating to major changes

in attitudes, specific life events, and achievements. She was also interested in the relation between psychological and biological development throughout the lifespan.

Based upon the analysis of the life stories, Buhler (1968) proposed five stages corresponding to biological development. Stage one (ages 0 to 15) was the time when a child lived at home and had not set goals. Stage two (ages 15 to 25) involved preparation for, and experimentation with, identifying goals. Stage three (ages 25-45) was a time of specific self-determination of goals. Her analysis of these writings suggests that, between age 25 to 45, most adults have high vitality, self-direction, and specification in their lives. Many of the adults described this period as the culmination of life. Stage four (ages 45-65) involved a self-assessment of goal achievement. Buhler also found that the transition from age 45 to 65 is more stressful, as physical abilities begin to decline and new interests emerge. The fifth and final stage (age 65 and up) involved a sense of fulfillment or failure of goal achievement, as well as continued goal achievement. Buhler concluded that a lack of fulfillment or sense of failure in relation to goals is a significant factor in the development of mid and late life difficulty. Although Buhler's research findings are not theoretically grounded, she provides a framework for understanding the normative psychological changes throughout the lifespan.

Research conducted by Neugarten, Moore, and Lowe (1968) examined the significance of developmental milestones and achieving goals throughout the lifespan. The research took a social perspective and emphasized the influence of social norms upon the individual's developmental experience. An area-probability sample, of 2% of the households listed in census tracts from several locations in the US, was drawn and stratified for age, sex, and socioeconomic status. The final sample of 200 men and 200

women ranged in age from 40 to 70 years. Each participant was asked to complete a questionnaire of 39 questions in which he or she was to indicate approval or disapproval of a person engaging in certain activities or behaviors at specific ages. The findings suggested that there is a "social clock" or a sense of normative timing for events in a person's life. The researchers proposed that the social clock has emerged through an interaction of age norms, age constraints, age-related roles, and age-status systems. These norms, constraints, roles, and systems are themselves subject to the influence of individuals, culture, and historical factors. In 1960's, when the research was conducted, people felt that the best time for men to marry was between ages 20 to 25, and women between ages 19 to 24. It is possible that the normative view for the nineties is quite different. Neugarten and Hagestad (1976) also found that off-time events create consequences, which may be seen as various difficulties or benefits in an individual's development, such as being widowed at a young age.

The research conducted by Buhler (1968) and Neugarten, Moore, and Lowe (1968) supports the notion that adult development follows a course or normative framework of change and growth. The individuals in these studies expected to achieve particular milestones, as well as personal goals by certain times within the lifespan. This research also suggests that the idea of goals and achievement are important concepts for both men and women, although the personal definition of these concepts may be subject to societal and gender influences. The research discussed in the next sections attempts to clarify the ways that goals and sources of meaning are distinct for men and women, although the process and general tasks of midlife appear to be similar.

Research on the Development of Adult Men

Three research projects on samples of men are reviewed below (Levinson et al., 1978; Osherson, 1980; Vaillant, 1993). Each project involved several men in lengthy interviews, which explored psychosocial health, career development, and life satisfaction. These studies are relevant to the proposed research because they provide models for male development and they discuss the process of midlife transition.

Vaillant (1977) conducted a major study of adult development. He was interested in how men adapt to life throughout the lifespan, and whether there were particular personality traits that contributed to healthy adjustment. Vaillant framed his research from a psychodynamic perspective and referred to Erikson's (1959) psychosocial stages in detailing the lives of his participants. His analysis focused on ego dynamics and the contribution of intrapsychic defenses to maturation and aging.

Vaillant's (1977) work was a prospective longitudinal study of the development of 94 college men born around 1920, derived from the Grant Study at Harvard University (Bock & Heath, 1938). These college men were enrolled in northeastern colleges between 1940 and 1942. Initial selection had been made for the Grant Study, based upon whether or not the men were likely to graduate, were healthy psychologically and physically, and were committed to the research. After initial selection, the parents of each of the men were asked to provide a social history. Next, an extensive physical and psychological examination was made of each participant while in college. Forty-one percent of the men in the sample were eldest children and most were veterans of World War II.

After graduation from college, each man completed questionnaire every year until 1955 and every two years thereafter. Between 1950 and 1952, each man was interviewed

at home by a social anthropologist. In 1969, Vaillant (1977) conducted lengthy, detailed, structured interviews with each man, which often lasted two hours or more. In 1969, at the time of the research interviews, most of the men were 47 years old, 95% had been married, 25% were doctors and lawyers, and most were "extremely satisfied" with their careers.

Based upon the interviews, questionnaires, and other information on each subject, expert judges assessed each man on a variety of scales to indicate adult adjustment, childhood environment, physical health, marital happiness, maturity of defenses, and predicted outcomes for each subject's children. Vaillant (1977) found that it was not possible to predict the men's psychological development and adjustment in adulthood from the personality traits that had been assessed during college. However, those men who had been assessed as "well integrated, practical, and organized" in adolescence had the "best outcomes" in midlife and used more mature defenses. The men, who had the best outcomes at age 47 at the time of the interviews, had married before age 30. He also found that the radical changes in midlife were rare for his sample, and that many of the participants reported that the midlife transition was the happiest time of their lives.

A portion of Vaillant's (1977) work relates specifically to the tasks and processes of midlife. As a result of his interviews of men, he attempted to elaborate upon Erikson's (1963) stage theory and suggested the addition of a stage during middle adulthood called "career consolidation versus self-absorption." This stage of adulthood is characterized by a demonstrated commitment to, contentment with, and competence in a specialized role valued by both self and society. To address the task of this new stage, Vaillant (1993) emphasized the dialectic of selflessness (openness to others) and selfishness (sense of self

through self-actualization and self-maintenance). He proposed that one or the other extreme is not sufficient to prepare the person for Erikson's (1963) seventh stage of "generativity versus stagnation," in which one assumes responsibility for the growth and well being of others. Vaillant (1993) also suggested the addition of a stage as a part of the seventh stage, called "keeper of the meaning versus rigidity." He referred to the "keeper of the meaning" task as involving a "more partisan and less personal approach to others" in which the person extends concern for others beyond the immediate community.

Vaillant (1993) also created a research project to compare three cohort groups that had previously been studied for more than half a century. The first group was Vaillant's (1979) sample of 94 college men. The second group was a sample of 456 white core city men, born around 1930, and interviewed by a multi-disciplinary team of investigators at ages 14, 25, 32, and 47 (Glueck & Glueck, 1950). The third group was a sample of 90 gifted women, born around 1910, derived from Terman's study of gifted California public school children (Terman, 1925). In 1987, Vaillant re-interviewed 40 of the gifted Terman women from the original study, reviewed the previous data collected on each woman, and incorporated this information into his findings.

Vaillant (1993) reviewed the information about the Terman women and Core City men in detail and made an analysis of the development of the findings about defenses and life outcome in relation to the findings about the group of college men. He found that the life courses for the group of inner city men and a group of gifted women support the existence of similar intrapsychic processes and defense mechanisms.

In Vaillant's (1993) analysis of the development of the group of college and the group of core city men, he identified an aspect of spiritual growth or religious wonder

through the maturation process. This spiritual aspect was evident in a variety of activities that encouraged creativity, mature defenses, and wonder. Some identified activities included play, dreaming, seeking out sacred places, and the linking of idea and affect. Although Vaillant does not elaborate on the spiritual dimension of adult development, his work suggests that spirituality may play a role. One outcome of his study was the creation of a hierarchy of defense mechanisms from less adaptive to more adaptive and mature. Vaillant's study continues to be one of the most extensive prospective studies of male lifespan development, whereas Levinson et al.'s (1978) research, discussed below, is known for the detailed retrospective interviews that were generated.

Between 1968 and 1970, Levinson and a team of researchers conducted intensive biographical interviews of 40 men between the ages of 35 and 45 to obtain a deeper understanding of midlife. All of these men were from the northeastern U.S. Ten of the participants were paid hourly and were employed by two companies; 10 were executives from the two companies, 10 were Ph.D. biologists from two universities, and 10 were writers of novels. Most of the group was Caucasian, although there were three African American hourly workers and two African American writers in the sample. Seventy percent of the sample had completed college, all had married, 20 % were divorced, and 80 % had children.

The interviews were one to two hours long, once a week, for five to 10 weeks. These resulted in detailed life histories of each man. The same interviewer saw a given participant for up to 20 hours over two to three months. Levinson et al. (1978) report that a follow-up interview was conducted two years later in most cases.

Although the North American social context has changed and in this study, Levinson et al. (1978) focused on men rather than women, this research did create an important foundation for further research. Levinson et al. charted the course of adult development and identified some important processes and themes during middle age. The stages of life identified by the research are: childhood and adolescence (ages 0 to 17), early adulthood (ages 18 to 39), middle adulthood (ages 40 to 59), late adulthood (ages 60 to 69), and late, late adulthood (ages 70 and up).

Levinson et al. (1978) also identified important transitions in early adulthood (ages 18 to 22), adulthood (ages 28 to 33), midlife (ages 40 to 45), and late adulthood (ages 60 to 65). The early adult transition is characterized by the formation of a particular “dream” of orienting goal for one’s life. Levinson et al. found this was true for all participants except the hourly workers. In addition, the early adult transition involves psychological and physical separation from parents, 50 % of the men married during this time. The age 30 transition is an opportunity for the person to reconsider his life structure and to make adjustments or major changes.

Levinson et al. (1978) noted that the opportunity and need to attain greater integration appears to be greatest during transitional periods. They proposed that four intrapsychic polarities exist and are addressed throughout the life course. The concept of intrapsychic polarity is based upon Jung’s personality theory (1933). During the midlife transition, the polarity of young/old is reflected in the need to balance one’s connection with the vitality of youth, while engaging in the work of middle adulthood without becoming prematurely rigid. The polarity of destruction/creation is emphasized during the midlife transition through increased awareness of mortality, an awareness of how

actions and words are irrevocable, and the desire to express creativity and love in both personal and societal domains. The coexistence of masculine and feminine parts of the self also needs to be revisited and addressed. The fourth polarity refers to our relatedness to the external world and the need for separateness.

The midlife transition involves three major tasks for the men. The first task is a review and appraisal of earlier life. This is consistent with Buhler's (1968) findings. This task leads to the second, which is a modification of the existing life structure or testing of a new structure. The third task involves a resolution of the major psychological issues about gender roles and aging.

The men in the study experienced midlife in a variety of ways. Some experienced a relatively manageable transition, whereas a majority experienced a significant struggle, and some of these experienced a severe crisis. The central process identified in midlife was that of questioning and finding meaning, value, and direction. Levinson et al. (1978) concluded that midlife is a time for consolidation of goals, accepting and expressing neglected aspects of the self, and working through discrepancies of what is and what could have been.

Like Levinson et al.'s research, Osherson (1980) reflects the process of midlife transition and its challenges. Osherson conducted intensive, in-depth interviews with six men who changed careers, from a non-arts career to a second career as an artist, between 35 and 50 years. He conducted five interviews, for a total of about seven and a half hours with each participant. While these life history interviews were largely unstructured, Osherson used a set of guiding questions as necessary to elicit each man's perspective about his work, family, friendships and social relationships, recreation and health

activities in the past, present and future. Each interview was transcribed and analyzed for structure, including affective linkages and associations among topics. Osherson also created a narrative presentation of each man's life history.

Osherson (1980) noted that the process of midlife transition entails three stages: a disruption of the self (crisis), a process of reorganization of self (adaptation to crisis), and a reconstitution of the self (resolution of crisis). He found that the transition of midlife arises from the person's sense of self being called into question. In particular, Osherson (1980) found that each of the six men had clear expectations and particular assumptions about career or marriage and, in midlife, found that reality was discordant with their earlier expectations. In youth and early adulthood, many people experience good health, a sense of freedom and future possibility. "The loss at midlife relates to the unfulfilled and the wished-for self of young adulthood" (p. 58). This discovery or awareness created a significant disruption in personal meaning.

At midlife "situations that involve, fundamentally, the (anticipated or actual) invalidation of central interpretations of and assumptions about the world in which the individual lives" (p. 59) create grief, a loss of sense of self, or a loss of meaning, which provide a potential impulse for change.

The experience of loss arises out of a confrontation with experiences sharply discrepant to one's understanding of the world, with a resulting "crisis of discontinuity" between the sense of "who one was" and "who one will be." (p. 59-60)

Osherson (1980) concluded that the midlife transition for these men involved a grieving process of recovery from a loss of self toward the recovery of self. The process

of revision appears to occur through an ambivalent oscillation over months or years between holding on and letting go of the threatened sense of self.

Individuals who can tolerate both the initial painful premature discrepancies of midlife and underlying ambivalences are able to experiment and obtain new information about self, thus finding new roles and objectives and reconstituting self. (p. 104)

Osherson (1980) described the reconstitution process as one of self-exploration and self-testing toward a restoration of continuity. He believed that this process could occur through a range of response patterns, from premature foreclosure to a sculpted, full exploration of the ambivalences toward the self, and of the ambivalent response to the ambiguity. In a premature resolution pattern, ambivalences are not dealt with directly and the person avoids the direct experience of the loss. This is seen as defensive distortion, a form of concrete thinking that requires less differentiation in an individual's perception of experiences.

At the other end of the range, loss is accepted as contributing information about the self to assist in future decision making. "Resignation and detachment result from this loss, combined with greater reality testing, as ambivalently held parts of oneself are acknowledged and integrated" (Osherson, 1980, p. 106). In many respects, Osherson's descriptions of midlife transition are consistent with Kegan's (1982) notion of the "embedded self." The adult at midlife is experiencing a revision of the self, emerging from an intrapsychic organizing structure that has been outgrown. Ultimately, the reconstituted self is expressed through new and more stable roles and opportunities. Although Osherson's study does not specifically identify spiritual processes as the means

of reconstituting meaning in midlife, spirituality and spiritual practices may support a person's inner dialectic in the process.

In summary, the research (Osherson, 1980; Vaillant, 1977) on the development of men supports the three tasks of midlife identified by Levinson et al. (1978). These tasks are a review of one's past life, expectations, and decisions; a resolution of tensions or issues; and a revision of meaning which may involve shifts in perspective or decisions to make changes in one's life. Osherson's work attempts to detail the intrapsychic processes that men engage in to resolve issues and revise meaning and, thus, highlights the significance of intrapsychic tensions in the midlife experience.

For the samples of men in these research studies, significant sources of meaning included work, career, and accomplishments recognized by society (Levinson et al., 1978; Osherson, 1980; Vaillant, 1977). Faced with diminished prospects of these sources of meaning, these men reconsidered their degree of investment and engaged in other activities as sources of meaning. Unfortunately, these studies did not specifically explore whether spirituality played a role in the revised meaning that emerged for these men during midlife. As such, the role of spirituality in the process of midlife transition and development for men remains to be determined.

Research on the Development of Adult Women

Gergen (1990) argued that existing research and theory has not thoroughly addressed or investigated the many ways that women's lives develop, since most of the research has focussed on the development of men. Consequently, there has been a lack of understanding of women's development in adulthood and through midlife. Gergen suggested that the research of women's lives should explore the role of relational

networks over autonomy and individualism, and the roles women perform beyond reproduction and parenting.

Recent research has begun to explore the developmental paths of women's lives (Apter, 1995; Josselson, 1996; Levinson & Levinson, 1996; Rubin, 1979). Interestingly, many of the findings are consistent with the findings about midlife processes that are identified in early research (Buhler, 1968), or the research involving men (Levinson et al., 1978; Osherson, 1980; Vaillant, 1993). In addition, these studies elaborate the distinct experiences of women in midlife that are uniquely based in the psychologically and socially constructed experience of gender.

The focus of Rubin's (1979) retrospective interview study was on women who had taken marriage and motherhood as their primary life tasks. The study involved 160 white women ranging in age from 35 to 54, with the median age being 46.5 years. Most of these women were living near or in San Francisco, and were identified through snowball sampling methods. By comparing the sample's demographic information on income, education, and family background with U.S. census information, Rubin established that the sample was a cross-sectional representation of women at that time in the U.S.

Seventy-eight percent of the women were still in their original marriage relationship and had been married a median length of 25 years. The remaining 22% was comprised of 35 divorced women, of which eight were in a second marriage, two were in nontraditional partnerships, and the rest were living alone and with their children. The median number of children was three and median age of these children was 21 years at the time of the study.

Rubin (1979) conducted life history interviews of between three and 10 hours in length with all the participants; 80 were done by two clinical psychology graduate students and the remaining 80 interviews by Rubin herself. Each interview was tape-recorded. In addition, conceptual categories or topics, such as motherhood, were noted and recorded in writing, during each interview. After transcription and re-listening, Rubin and her associates began to identify the categories in each interview and organize the transcriptions accordingly. Some categories were revised. The final presentation consisted of a discussion of each category and supporting transcribed material.

Rubin (1979) found that all the women entered a period of review in midlife, in which they reconsidered past decisions, mourned the passing of youthful vitality and beauty, discovered their ability to take sexual initiative, and desired and pursued other expressions of their identity and creativity. As their children prepared to leave home, the women reconsidered the central role of motherhood in their lives. The women wanted more from their marriages and wanted to engage in other forms of personal development. Some returned to careers and professions in which they had education or training before marriage; others engaged in new careers or activities of interest. In resolving the issues of midlife, these women reviewed the past, experienced a shift in perspectives about themselves, and made choices to modify their identities. Rubin's findings about the general process and tasks of midlife are consistent with the conclusions drawn by other researchers (e.g. Josselson, 1996; Levinson & Levinson, 1996).

Whereas Rubin studied the lives of women born in the 1930's, Apter's work reflects the lives of women born in the 1950's. Apter (1995) conducted intensive interviews and observations of 80 women. Sixty-five percent were from various areas in

the U.S. and 35% were from various locations in Britain. Sixty-five percent were in their 40's and 35% were between 50 and 55 years. The identification and selection of these women was done through lists of alumni from universities and colleges, as well as personnel lists from companies. Each woman was interviewed about her life history. Following the interview, Apter observed and questioned each woman while "shadowing" her throughout her daily activities for a two or three day period.

Apter (1995) identified four groups of women from her interviews and observations whom she labeled as: traditionals, innovatives, expansives, and protestors. The eighteen women that she referred to as traditionals followed a traditional life course fulfilling social expectations of marriage and motherhood. In midlife, when they came to realize that they were living at a time when social roles and expectations of women were not inevitable or predictable, they began to consider themselves as separate from their relationships. The 24 innovative women had set an early life course for themselves, usually involving a career. At some point, many of these women realized that they were unable or unwilling to pay the price for the achievement that men could attain. Most of these women had married. At midlife, these women were revising their goals and redefining themselves, without completely changing their paths. Unlike the traditionals and the innovatives, the 18 expansives had deliberately set new goals and paths for themselves at midlife, consciously moving away from past choices that had been influenced by a desire to please others. They believed they needed to change to become the people they really were. The 13 women in the group that Apter referred to as protestors were women who had experienced some form of disruption or trauma in late adolescence or early adulthood. Consequently, these women did not have a clear

direction, although their lives before midlife were filled with responsibility and challenge. At midlife, these women experienced a resistance as they came to realize that their youth and early adulthood had past. These women often struggled to recapture their youth.

Apter (1995) found four common themes for all these women, in various realms of their lives. Apter describes each theme as a polarity or tension that each woman expressed about her internal perceptions of self, as well as her external experience of herself as perceived by others. The first theme is that of power, influence, and effectiveness, versus impotence, uselessness, and insignificance. The second theme is one of connection, attachment, and commitment, versus loneliness and isolation. The third theme is one of movement, direction, and freedom, versus confinement and stagnation. The fourth theme involves useful energy, acceptance, hope, clear sight, and balance, versus wasted time, anger, regret, bias, and distortion.

In summary, Apter (1995) found that all the women in midlife were faced with an evaluation of adolescent ideals in light of the paths of their adult lives. For some women, this review resulted in painful awareness and dramatic changes. In others, the revision of self resulted in less dramatic changes. Significantly, Apter believed that the "social clock" identified by Neugarten, Moore, and Lowe (1968) did not have the same impact for the cohort of women that she studied. She suggested that as more women create their own lives, there would not be a clear deadline for marriage, children, or a post-graduate degree.

Like Apter, Josselson (1996) conducted a study of women born in the 1950's and found a variety of life paths represented. Josselson conducted a longitudinal study of 48

women, spanning twenty-two years. The study involved three subsequent life history interviews at ages, 23, 33, and 43, which followed an initial selection interview. Initial selection, conducted in 1971-72, was through a random draw of names of senior-year U.S. college women. In the initial selection process, each woman was assessed using Marcia et al.'s (1993) Identity Status Interview. This interview was taped and rated. After this, each participant was given the TAT and intelligence tests. These tests were not repeated at future meetings. Next, Josselson conducted a two-hour, open-ended, semistructured interview about each woman's personal history. At the time of this interview, participants were completing college and were approximately 23 years of age.

In 1973, Josselson (1996) identified 12 additional women from another university to add to the study. This made the final sample at total of 60 participants. Between the first and second interviews, participants received a comprehensive questionnaire to respond to on tape or in writing. Other than this, Josselson had no contact with the participants until 1983. In 1983, Josselson attempted to locate all of the participants. She was able to re-interview 35 of the original sample of 60. Each interview lasted three to five hours. These women were about 33 years old at this time. In 1993, Josselson was able to locate and contact 29 of the women for yet another interview that lasted four to five hours. At this time, most women were about 43 years old.

In the first selection interview, each participant was assigned to one of four identity status groupings, based upon an identity model developed by Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, and Orlofsky (1993). Josselson (1996) used different titles for the identity status groups, referring to foreclosures as Guardians, identity achievements as Pathmakers, moratoriums as Searchers, and identity diffusions as Drifters. This group

consisted of six Guardians, seven Pathmakers, nine Searchers, and seven Drifters.

Josselson found that all of the women she interviewed in the last session, regardless of their initial identity status were engaged in life review and faced with the need to revise their understanding of themselves and the world once they reached midlife. She emphasized that, while the notion of identity status has been a helpful way of framing the research, each woman that she studied had unique challenges and supports throughout the course of her life. Josselson concluded that each of the four groups had its strengths, achievements, and challenges in development.

At midlife, the Guardians, or those Josselson (1996) identified as foreclosing an identity in college, were loyal to and unquestioning of the values and life course of their family of origin. They had allowed their life course and values to be determined by their family. At age 33, they were struggling with the recognition that their "obedience to authority" could not guarantee a smooth path in their lives and they came to recognize that other people operated from different perspectives and motivations. By midlife, most Guardians recognized the constraints and limitations of their identity construction. Although they struggled with personal revision, they also remained the most rigid and moralistic of all four groups.

During college, the Pathmakers had forged an identity by integrating knowledge from their families with new experiences. In deciding what was right for themselves as individuals, the members of this group forged a personal identity of their own, a process Josselson (1996) found that continued throughout their lives. Throughout the process of midlife revision, the Pathmakers did not abandon their prior selves because, to some extent, they were in the process of integrating and revising throughout their lives.

Although each of the individuals in this group had challenges in her life, she continued to make decisions from her "own center." In the arena of relationships, these Pathmakers did not blindly accept social conventions, but sought partners who were able to be mutually supportive.

At the end of their college years, the Searchers were still struggling to please their parents and other members of their families and to clarify their own identities. Josselson (1996) believed that the members of this group saw life as more complicated and they struggled with self-awareness. She found that the life course for the Searchers group was quite varied, in that their respective paths of seeking involved various domains of life. In midlife, the Searchers were often continuing to change and search, although about one quarter had settled down into a more predictable life path with a stable relationship. Josselson found that, at midlife, this group had less in common than any other group.

By the end of college, Josselson (1996) found that the group of Drifters were psychologically and physically removed from family and described themselves as if they had no past. She also noted that this group was not able to articulate clear plans or goals for themselves. The subsequent life paths for these women was quite changeable, unpredictable, and in some cases tragic. Interestingly, at midlife many in this group had returned to live close to their parents. Josselson speculated that this group was attempting to find the "missing center" of their identity by returning to their family of origin.

Based on her findings, Josselson (1996) concluded that identity is revised throughout the lifespan, in different ways for the different women reflecting, to some extent, their identity status. She found that competence and connection were central issues for all women, although these issues were addressed differently for each woman.

The resolution of these issues was strongly influenced by gender expectations, the presence of opportunities, and the types of support available for women in their family and workplace.

The influence of gender on midlife development of women also emerged as significant in the research conducted by Levinson and Levinson (1996). In an attempt to gain a better understanding of the development of adult women, Levinson and Levinson conducted intensive biographical interviews with 45 women between the ages of 35 and 45. The subjects were organized into three groups of 15, based upon whether the primary focus of their lives was marriage, a business career, or an academic career. The 15 homemakers were randomly drawn from a telephone directory of the Greater New Haven area and appeared to be a cross-sectional representation of social class, education, religion, work and marital history. The career women had average incomes of \$60,000 and were employed in major financial-corporate organizations in the New York City area. The 15 academic women were all employed by one of the several universities or colleges in the Boston-New York corridor.

Based on the findings of this study and the previous study of adult men (Levinson et al., 1978), Levinson and Levinson (1996) suggested that the midlife transition occurs between ages 40 and 45. They noted specifically how the character of the lives of all subjects in both studies changed appreciably after age 40. In discussing the life cycle, they suggested that the processes of *adolescing*, or "positive growth toward a potential optimum" (p. 21) and *senescing*, or "negative growth and death" (p. 21), change in character and relative balance throughout the course of human development. The findings

also suggested that life stages for these women were the same as those of men in Levinson et al.'s earlier study.

Levinson and Levinson (1996) found that three tasks of midlife existed for the women as well as the men in their previous study (Levinson et al., 1978). These tasks included the review and reappraisal of earlier life, change or modification of the existing life structure or identification of a new one, and the resolution of intrapsychic issues about gender and aging. As in their earlier study, Levinson and Levinson suggest that in middle adulthood intrapsychic issues or polarities coexist in an uneasy balance, and that midlife individuation is a "developmental effort toward the resolution of four polarities" (p. 32.). They refer to these polarities as young/old, destruction/creation, masculine/feminine, and engagement/separateness. In this regard, Levinson and Levinson take a Jungian (1933) conceptual approach in interpreting their research.

While their study of women confirmed the process of midlife transition and the stages of adult development, Levinson and Levinson (1996) noted that these women structured their lives and responded to the tasks of midlife transition differently than men. In general, these women's lives were strongly influenced by gender roles and expectations. During midlife, the effects of gender influences became salient and apparent for these women, whether they had chosen a traditional marriage or a career. Specifically, the homemakers were focussed upon and strongly influenced by the traditional expectations and roles of marriage. In midlife, most of them recognized that their marriages were partly or completely unsuccessful and described a desire for a different kind of life structure, marriage and family for their futures. The career women had attempted to pursue a non-traditional dream from early adulthood, either as single

career women or in the context of a neo-traditional marriage. In midlife, these women reviewed and modified their lives. They recognized the extent of sexism in the workplace and hoped for a sense of contribution that was more social, greater creativity, and greater satisfaction in the future of their careers. However, they also expressed a fear that they would not find a way of being valued by society through their work.

In conclusion, Levinson and Levinson (1996) proposed that, because of gender influences and expectations, women create different life structures than men, and cope with developmental tasks with different external and internal constraints and resources. The researchers suggested that these differences are a consequence of “gender splitting”, or the different expectations, opportunities, and norms that exist for men and women in various social situations. “Gender splitting” occurs at multiple levels, within cultures, social institutions, social life, and individual psyche. Although these differences may not be expressed explicitly, the influences are experienced by each individual in many ways throughout life.

It creates antithetical divisions between women and men, between social worlds, between masculine and feminine within the self. It also creates inequalities that limit the development of women as well as men. (p. 38)

Levinson and Levinson suggest that such splitting is evident in the division of domestic and public domains as social spheres for men and women, the traditional marriage roles of men as providers and women as homemakers, the identification as “men’s” work and “women’s” work, and the split between masculine and feminine in the psyche. Therefore, they conclude that an understanding of adult development and midlife transition must include a consideration of gender influences. This study and the studies conducted by

Apter (1995) and Josselson (1996) support the notion that life-review and revision of meaning is significant for women in midlife.

In an unpublished study, Weenolsen (cited in Schlossberg, Water, & Goodman, 1995), asked 48 women, aged 25 to 67, open-ended questions about the meaning of life. This study generated several interesting findings. One finding was that a majority of the interviewed women believed that their lives had meaning. Of this group, Weenolsen found that there were two major themes in the stories the women told of their lives. Some emphasized that which they did not have in life, having a deficit or "loss-orientation" to life. Others discussed processes of overcoming losses. These women were described as "transcendence-oriented." Weenolsen defined transcendence as the process characterized by "overcoming of loss and the re-creation of life-self." A second relevant finding was that 71% of middle-aged interviewees reported that they conducted frequent or occasional life reviews and that these reviews were a significant meaning-making activity. Third, Weenolsen found the participants identified four main orientations to meaning in life: meaning through spiritual predestination, meaning through personal and spiritual growth, specific purpose and meaning through particular activities; and meaning from a general purpose or orientation to life. Other than the small number that reported a sense of predestination, the majority reported believing in their personal influence in creating meaning.

Summary of the Research on Midlife

In summary, the findings of several researchers (Apter, 1995; Buhler, 1968; Josselson, 1996; Levinson et al., 1978; Levinson & Levinson, 1996; Osherson, 1980; Vaillant, 1977) suggest that, during midlife, a reflection and review of one's life is a process that occurs for both men and women. This life review is an important way of revising meaning. The reconstruction of meaning or revision of identity is an important part of the transition process, and may influence several aspects of the person's life, including the person's views of career, achievement, family life, relationships, and identity. Both men and women in midlife appear to face a number of tensions or intrapsychic polarities related to issues of competence, connection, gender, and aging (Apter; Josselson; Levinson et al.; Levinson & Levinson, Osherson).

Although the actual midlife tasks of life review, revision of goals and identity, and resolution of intrapsychic polarities may be similar for men and women, the outcomes of this process appear to differ for men and women (Levinson & Levinson, 1996). Social expectations based upon gender appear to create different pressures for both men and women. For men, the emphasis begins to shift from career and achievements to relationships in a variety of forms (Levinson et al., 1978; Osherson, 1980). Men develop and establish an identity through their efforts and their actions in the world of work and career (Vaillant, 1979). In midlife, men appear to review and revise their perspectives and sources of identity. This may lead to different choices in careers and activities or a shift in focus in their existing career. For women, especially those for whom relationships and parenting have been central, the emphasis may shift to other forms of accomplishment in the world (Rubin, 1979; Josselson, 1996). Women who have

focussed on career also experience a significant shift in perspective in considering the role of intimate relationships and motherhood in their lives (Apter, 1995; Josselson). As with men, women must clarify their identity through finding or creating new sources of meaning.

Some of the issues facing both men and women may suggest spiritual sources of meaning or a process of finding meaning that may be described as spiritual (Osherson, 1980; Schlossberg et al., 1995). However, as stated earlier, there has been little research conducted to explore the role of spirituality in the midlife transition of men and women.

At this point, I have examined midlife, midlife tasks, and the importance of meaning making to midlife from a theoretical perspective. I have also reviewed midlife research as it relates to and supports these topics. The context for the proposed research requires that I include past and current theoretical perspectives on spirituality, and recent attempts to define spirituality, I will close by restating the need for research in this area.

Psychology's View of Spirituality in Human Development

Historically, spirituality has not generally been accepted by the field of psychology as important, or even relevant, to the understanding of human nature (Wulff, 1996; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000). Even so, most major psychological theorists have expressed various perspectives about the role of spirituality in human development. As early as 1902, U.S. psychologist William James, in his book Varieties of Religious Experience, made the distinction between institutional religion, grounded in group or organization, and personal religion, experienced by the individual.

Freud (1905; 1928), the psychiatrist who laid the foundation of psychoanalysis, suggested that people experience conflicts between what they want to do, represented by

the id, and what they are told by society and their parents, represented by the superego. This conflict is resolved, to a greater or lesser degree, by the ego. Freud viewed religion as originating in the child's relationship to the father. In many cultures, God is viewed as a Heavenly Father. He concluded that religion is an extension of unresolved childhood issues and an illusory attempt to fulfill wishes.

Adler (1956; 1979), an Austrian psychiatrist, emphasized the role of social interest, goals, and motivation in his theory of Individual Psychology. Adler proposed that humans' beliefs in God and the characteristics attributed to God reflect their striving for perfection and superiority. He also proposed that humans compensate for inferiorities that they perceive in themselves. For example, in many religions God is believed to be perfect and omnipotent, and commands people to be perfect. By identifying with God in this way, humans compensate for their imperfections and feelings of inferiority.

Adler emphasized that ideas about God are important indicators of how people view the world and that these ideas may change over time. He was very concerned about social movements, including the influence of religion on the social environment. Adler saw the idea of God as a motivator of social interest, and he was not as concerned about whether or not God exists. He felt it was significant that God or the idea of God motivates people to act, which can have real consequences for individuals and for others. Adler proposed that humans can either passively assume that God will care for them, or that humans can actively work in society's interest. In his view, if individuals are motivated by social interest, they will act in ways that benefit the world around them. Therefore, the individual's view of God is important because it embodies goals and directs social interactions.

For Carl Jung (1933) spirituality was a path to wholeness. Jung was concerned with the interplay between conscious and unconscious forces. He proposed two kinds of unconscious: personal and collective. Personal unconscious includes the unacknowledged things about themselves that individuals would like to forget. The collective unconscious emerges from events and experiences that humans share by virtue of having a common human heritage. For example, the image or archetype of a mythic hero is present in many cultures. Archetypes such as these might be viewed as Gods, because they are outside the individual's ego. Jung made comparative examinations of Christian and Eastern religions, was fascinated with non-Western views, and sought to find some common ground between East and West. Jung held a phenomenological view of spiritual experiences. For example, if a person hears a voice from a deity and another does not, the experience can still be viewed as valid for one person. Current depth psychologists who follow Jung's (1933) perspective view spirituality as an instinctual and integral part of human functioning arising from the ancestral collective unconscious. For Jungians, spirituality is an intrinsic part of adult development. Depth psychologists (Hollis, 1993; 1995; Proffoff, 1975) propose that there are essential qualities of the psyche that more adequately reflect the true Self. As the spirit of a person, the true Self is understood to be a microcosm of the divine and connected with all life.

Allport (1950) was interested in individual differences and helped to refine the concept of traits, which he carried over into his work about the role of spirituality and religion in human life. In his classic book, The Individual and His Religion, Allport contrasts mature and immature religion in individuals. Mature religious sentiment is seen in the person whose approach to religion is dynamic, open-minded, and able to maintain

links between inconsistencies. In contrast, immature religion is self-serving. In 1967, Allport and Ross devised religious orientation scales to measure these two approaches to religion. An intrinsic religious orientation reflects an interest in religion itself. The extrinsic orientation toward religion is one where religious behavior is a means to some other end. For example, intrinsically oriented people attend church as for its personal spiritual value, while extrinsically oriented people may perform the same act because it is a way to meet people, or because it helps them cope with stress in their lives

A primary assertion of the existential psychologists (Frankl, 1969; Yalom, 1980) is that humans seek meaning in life. These theorists see the central focus of human existence as the achievement of authentic being, sometimes referred to as the will to meaning (Frankl; Sartre, 1953). Without addressing spirituality directly, Frankl (1975) suggested that self-transcendence is an important way of addressing existential anxiety and finding meaning, and that individuals will likely find meaning through positive works and deeds and through involvement in the lives of others. The achievement of authentic being is viewed as the ultimate responsibility of all, although authentic living is constructed uniquely by each person (Frankl; Sartre; Yalom).

Maslow (1970; 1971), a humanist psychologist, was interested in the development of human potential. He developed a hierarchy of needs: physiological needs, love and belonging, and self-actualization. He proposed that self-actualized people are those who have reached their potential for self-development. He claimed that mystics, or individuals on a spiritual path, are more likely to be self-actualized than are other people. He also suggested that mystics and self-actualized individuals also are more likely to have had "peak experiences" in which the person feels a sense of ecstasy and oneness with the

universe. Maslow's work has been criticized for ignoring the effects of human limitations and pathology (Wulff, 1997).

Transpersonal psychology, which emerged from the work of Maslow and Jung, explicitly focuses on the spiritual well-being of individuals, and views spirituality as a core human value (Cortright, 1997; Washburn, 1995; Vaughan, 1991). Transpersonal psychologists regard a transpersonal orientation to counselling as a holistic approach and they support diverse spiritual perspectives. They also note that spiritual and religious practices can hinder, as well as support, human development (Vaughan). Transpersonal therapists sometimes seek to blend Eastern religion or Western mysticism with modern psychology.

One of the leading writers in the transpersonal movement is Ken Wilber, a philosopher. Wilber has developed an elaborate developmental model of human consciousness and spiritual development (Wilber, 1968; 1997). Transpersonal psychologists maintain that consciousness is multidimensional (Cortright, 1997; Washburn, 1995; Wilber), and that states of consciousness have the potential for moving a person toward an authentic, meaningful life through the integrative experience of interconnectedness (Walsh & Vaughan, 1996). These theorists support the movement of individuals toward a conscious, ego-based, sense-bound meaning state and, where appropriate, they support and respect the development of further spirituality beyond the ego (Washburn; Wilber). For this reason, transpersonal therapists advocate the use of spiritual practices in and out of therapy to help support client work (Walsh & Vaughan). An important notion of the transpersonal approach is that the counsellor cannot support

the development of a client beyond the development attained by the counsellor themselves.

In summary, the field of psychology has contained and proposes a range of theoretical views about the importance of spirituality and religion in human development. Clearly, theorists in psychology recognize that spirituality plays some role in human development, but they differ in their conceptualization about this role. Humanistic, existential, Jungian, and transpersonal theories most explicitly recognize the positive role of spirituality in human development.

Attempts to Define Spirituality

Stanard, Sandhu, and Painter (2000) note that the use of the concept of spirituality has become prominent in current helping professions, including education, social work, counseling, medicine, nursing, psychology. Some psychologists have reasserted the view that the essential human nature is spiritual (Benner, 1991; Cortright, 1997; Richards & Bergin, 1997). They believe that humans are able to seek spiritual connection by deepening social, individual, and transcendent awareness, and that certain practices promote this awareness and experience (Cortright). Some consider these ideas as a perennial philosophy as it occurs in esoteric texts of many religions from throughout time and across cultures, although it may not be expressed explicitly by all religions (Cortright; Huxley, 1945).

The literature on spirituality lacks consensus about the boundaries between spirituality and religion. Many individuals do not make distinctions between religious and spiritual experiences and practices (Stanard, Sandhu, & Painter, 2000). Shafranske and Maloney (1990) define religion as an “adherence to the beliefs and practice of an

organized church or religious institution (p. 72).” They add that although both religion and spirituality involve the sacred, spirituality is more personal and subjective, whereas religion involves institutionalized doctrine or beliefs. Therefore, the concept of spirituality is more universal and has fewer limitations on individual expression and belief. This seems consistent with James’ (1961) early definition of institutional and personal religion.

In exploring spirituality, Benner (1991) suggests that society usually defines individuals as spiritual based upon their commitment to self-transcendence, identity, integration, and surrender. Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, and Saunders (1988) suggest that spirituality:

is a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate (p.10)

They add that spiritual values are reflected in confidence in the meaningfulness of life; a life purpose; a sense of mission; a belief in the sacredness of life; a balanced appreciation for material things; an altruistic attitude; a vision for improving the world; and an awareness of the tragic side of life. Similarly, Ellison (1983) suggests that an individual’s spiritual nature motivates him or her to search for meaning and purpose. Cervantes and Ramirez (1992) suggest that spirituality involves a quest for meaning and a mission in life, a search for universal harmony and wholeness, a belief in an all-loving presence, and the presence of spiritual goals.

Ingersoll (1994) attempts to create a definition of spirituality that is broad enough to include a range of religious perspectives. He defines spirituality as a personal experience. Based upon his experience as a psychologist and therapist, he proposes seven dimensions that contribute to an individual's spiritual development and to their experience of spirituality. These dimensions are one's conception of divinity; one's sense of meaning; one's relationship to the divine, self, and others; the capacity and tolerance for mystery; a sense of spiritual play; and the individual experience of spirituality through peak and ordinary experiences.

Fowler (1996) refers to faith as a central concept and expression of spirituality, and he does not feel that contemporary religions and external practices are essential to the experience of faith. For him, faith is:

characterized as an integral, centering process, underlying the formation of the beliefs, values, and meanings, that (a.) gives coherence and direction to people's lives (b.) links them in shared trusts and loyalties with others (c.) grounds their personal stances and communal loyalties in a sense of relatedness to a larger frame of reference; and (d.) enables them to face and deal with the limit(ed) conditions of human life, relying on that which has the quality of ultimacy in their lives. (p. 168).

In an effort to clarify the role of spirituality in human development, Fowler (1996) has proposed a seven-stage model of faith development. These stages of faith are "invariant, sequential, and hierarchical stages of constructive development" (p. 169). By constructive development, Fowler means that an individual constructs his or her faith throughout the lifespan as a developmental process that parallels psychological, social,

and physical development. The faith stages across the lifespan are primal faith (infancy), intuitive-projective faith (early childhood), mythic-literal faith (childhood and beyond), synthetic-conventional faith (adolescence and beyond), individuative-reflexive faith (young adulthood and beyond), conjunctive faith (early midlife and beyond), and universalizing faith (midlife and beyond).

Fowler (1981) attempted to conduct an initial validation of this model through research involving 359 semi-structured research interviews. Participants, ranging in age from infancy to over 61 years, were selected from various locations in the US and Canada, and were mostly white, middle class, and Christian. Each two-hour interview was recorded, transcribed and analyzed by two separate judges. Inter-rater reliability was estimated to be 85-90%. The distribution of categories appears to support Fowler's developmental model. However, Fowler found only 0.3% of the participants could be categorized at Stage 6. It is unclear whether most people in midlife eventually experience or attain a "universalizing faith." Therefore, it is possible that Fowler's proposed developmental model reflects an ideal or optimal developmental path for humans. Even so, the stage theory is appealing because of the structure it provides.

Spirituality has also been discussed as a significant component in wellness models (Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). In these models, spirituality is viewed as a personal and internal experience, which may or may not be separate from religious observance in an individual's life. In one holistic model of wellness, Witmer and Sweeney suggest that spirituality is one of five life tasks. The other tasks are work, friendship, self-regulation, and love. They propose that spirituality is comprised of one's sense of oneness, purposefulness, optimism, and values. In a

discussion of spiritual wellness, Chandler et al. suggest a view of spirituality as “pertaining to the innate capacity to, and the tendency to seek to transcend one’s current locus of centrality” (p. 169). Furthermore, they suggest that transcendence involves increased knowledge and love.

In a discussion about healthy and unhealthy aspects of spirituality, Vaughan (1991) suggests that healthy spirituality encompasses and encourages the following qualities in a person:

1. Authenticity –responsibility and personal integrity
2. Letting go of the past – releasing negative emotional burdens
3. Willingness to face fears – uncovering and confronting fears to reduce anxiety
4. Insight and forgiveness – of self and others
5. Love and compassion – giving and receiving
6. Community – appreciation for diversity
7. Awareness – a non-interfering attention to inner experience and to one’s perceptions
8. Peace – inner and external
9. Liberation from psychological limitation, i.e. egocentric concern and self-concepts. (Vaughan, p. 188-119)

All of the above described “definitions” of spirituality emphasize the individual’s perception of spiritual experience and assume that spirituality is significant to meaningful, healthy life. Also, spirituality may or may not be expressed through affiliations with organized religions.

The Role of Spirituality in the Therapeutic Context

The need for research into the role of spirituality in human development is supported by the growing recognition of the importance of spirituality to human well-being and in the therapeutic context. Spirituality has increasingly been identified as important to psychological well-being (Richards & Bergin, 1997). Pargament (1997) has advocated spirituality as an effective way of reappraising and coping with life's stressors. In a US survey of 425 mental health professionals, Jensen and Bergin (1988) found that therapists show a high degree of agreement about values and principles that contribute to a healthy lifestyle. One of the ten major themes identified in this research was the importance of spirituality. Most of the other themes appear to be consistent with many values commonly espoused by various religious traditions, including fidelity, self-care, purpose, forgiveness, self-discipline, responsibility, and honesty.

In 1997, the National Institute of Healthcare Research (NIHR) conducted a review of extant research on spirituality and health, identifying 10 key domains of religion and /or spirituality with at least minimal evidence of links to health (George, et al., 2000). These domains of spirituality/religion were identified as preference and affiliation; personal history of involvement; participation in groups or activities; private practices; tangible and intangible forms of support; spiritual/religious coping; beliefs and values; commitment evidenced in personal values and behavior; motivation for regulating and reconciling relationships; and spiritual/religious experiences. Their review of the research was highly suggestive of the positive effects of religion and spirituality on longevity, the course and outcome of illnesses, and the likelihood of not acquiring certain illnesses. Most of the studies were multivariate, with statistical controls for other determinants of

physical health. Furthermore, most of the data was cross-sectional. Longitudinal studies are necessary to clarify and support the findings. This research review is very supportive of the significance of spirituality to physical and psychological health.

Several recent publications have encouraged the re-examination of spirituality and religion in human life and in the therapeutic context (Bart, 1998; Cornett, 1998; Pate & Bondi, 1992; Richards & Bergin, 1997; Shafranske, 1996). These writers assert that spirituality is a significant part of the human experience and must be understood by psychologists as significant to both their clients and themselves. In a recent article in Counseling Today, Bart (1998) presents the perspectives of several therapists who argue that counsellors must respect client spirituality as a part of the client's worldview and culture. Therefore, an appreciation and consideration of any individual's worldview must include the consideration of spirituality and spiritual values (Bergin, 1980; Pate & Bondi). Although there is an increasing recognition of the relevance of spirituality to clients, there is a lack of research-based information on the role of spirituality in clients' lives (Richards and Bergin). Training programs for counselors rarely address the subject (Bart). Other than clinical anecdotes, there is little guidance available for therapists on how to approach spiritual matters in therapy (Cornett).

Several writers (Bergin, 1980; Bergin, Payne, & Richards, 1996; Grimm 1994; Richards & Bergin, 1997; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000) argue that the therapist's values, including spiritual values, influence the therapeutic process, even if the therapist attempts to exclude or control their influence. Many therapists have not received training or education on how to identify and manage value differences, how to deal with spiritual or religious issues, or how to assess the potential effect of their own religious belief on

counseling (Zinnbauer & Pargament). Wulff (1996) acknowledges that it may be difficult for therapists to understand spiritual experiences that they have not experienced personally, and that it is difficult to describe and convey some experiences with words.

Zinnbauer and Pargament (2000) suggest that there are four possible stances that a counsellor may take in relation to client spirituality. These are the rejectionist, exclusivist, constructivist, and pluralist perspectives. A rejectionist view denies sacred realities, and is grounded in an absolute belief in scientific reality. Unfortunately, this stance leads mental health professionals to avoid addressing address spiritual or religious issues in therapy. The exclusivist stance accepts the existence of God within a fundamental or an orthodox religious faith. Mental health professionals holding this perspective are willing to approach spiritual matters in therapy, but only from his or her own religious perspective. The constructivist stance recognizes the existence of multiple realities and therefore is open to the client's construction of reality, including religious and spiritual issues. From this stance, the mental health professional may not really believe in the existence of God but does not need to share the client's view to be supportive and accepting. In the pluralist stance, the mental health professional believes in God or divinity, and is able to support client's perspective on spiritual and religious issues. Of the four stances, Zinnbauer and Pargament propose that both constructivist and pluralist approaches are potentially supportive of client spirituality, whatever form the client's spirituality takes. In both the constructivist and pluralist stances, the mental health professional recognizes and honours multiple paths and interpretations of spiritual reality, and the counselor's skills and client's experiences become resources that are shared to arrive at a supportive therapeutic experience for the client.

Although there is a growing acknowledgement of the relevance of spirituality to human life, and its influence in therapy and human development (Cornett, 1998; Hollis, 1993; Jones, 1995), there is a significant lack of research into the role of spirituality in human development and how spirituality might contribute to therapeutic growth and change (Richards & Bergin, 1997; Wulff, 1996). Richards and Bergin emphasize the need for research into “the nature of spirit, spirituality, and spiritual well-being,” “the major spiritual needs and issues of human beings,” and “religious and spiritual development across the lifespan” (p. 335). In recognition of the importance of understanding the personal experience of spirituality, they strongly advocate the use of qualitative research methods to provide “insight into client’s inner, subjective worlds” (p.327). Narrative research methods, such as the one used in this study, permit an in-depth study of participants’ accounts of these experiences, and their process of constructing lives that are more meaningful.

The Role of Spirituality in Midlife

Other than Jung (1933/71), few psychological theorists discuss the role of spirituality in the specific transition into and through midlife. However, the emphasis on meaning by existential psychologists (Frankl, 1975; Yalom, 1980) is relevant throughout the lifespan and is particularly significant to the midlife transition because, at this time, many individuals appear to engage in life review and revision of meaning. For Jungian psychologists, midlife is considered a particularly important time for exploring and resolving unconscious issues.

Bianchi (1982) asserts that, through the transition into and through midlife, “we realize, perhaps for the first time, our contingent aloneness in the universe” (p.20). It is

through this realization that, "we come to understand that the transcendent dimension forms the core of our selfhood" (p.20). Furthermore, Bianchi emphasizes that midlife can bring a crisis of the self, a review of the past, and a revision of identity that may bring "a reversal of all the ideals and values that were cherished" (Jung, 1971, p.137).

Consequently, previously cherished goals and achievements lose their appeal. Bianchi compares this reversal to the Christian concept of metanoia or conversion, which has the potential to lead to a heightened inwardness (Neugarten, 1968), and a shift from individual, agentic focus to a communion with nature and others (Bakan, 1966). To traverse this period of life successfully, Bianchi suggests that one must cultivate the contemplative attitude to confront losses and pain, and "let go" of ego attachments. Most importantly, he suggests that growth and transformation at midlife have the potential to foster an individual's personal spiritual perspective.

In a discussion of the midlife experience of spirituality, Hollis (1995), a Jungian psychologist, suggests that:

If the purpose of the first half of life is to gather sufficient ego energy to leave home and set out into the world, the purpose of the second half is to align that ego with the grander energies of the cosmos. Then the ego dialogues not with society but with the Self and the gods (p. 59-60).

He also states that the intrapsychic conflicts of midlife may emerge through dreams, impulses, changes in the quality of interpersonal relationships, career changes, and/or general shifts in perception about meaning.

Jones (1995) asserts that the search for spiritual connection is an essential and inherent part of human development that is central to the midlife process:

The struggle to find meaning by connecting or reconnecting with a universal, cosmic, moral, and sacred reality represents... a natural part of the unhindered developmental process. The denial of this quest for the transcendent debilitates and impoverishes our life. (p. 9-10.)

Based upon anecdotal accounts, some practicing therapists have emphasized the importance of spirituality to human development, especially during midlife (Cornett, 1998; Hollis, 1993; Jones, 1995). An understanding of how a client's spirituality contributes to midlife development can assist and inform therapeutic processes (Mack, 1994). Yet, further documentation and research will be needed to bring some clarity and agreement about how spirituality functions in particular life transitions, especially midlife. Such knowledge will allow counsellors to provide important support for clients undergoing midlife transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995). This study is an attempt to begin to add to this knowledge.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Approach to the Question

This study explores the role of spirituality in the transition through midlife using a narrative research approach, by eliciting the participant's experiences through an unstructured interview. Sarbin (1986) argues that human thinking, perceptions, imagination, and decisions are based upon and occur through narrative processes. Bruner (1990) suggests that humans use the narrative form to bring order and meaning to experience. The recounting of events is a natural process of expression for humans that allows for reflection on, and processing of, experiences for both the participant and the listener (Howard, 1991; Reason & Hawkins, 1988; Smith, 1995). Narrative research elicits this natural process as an expression of how a person makes meaning in their life (Mishler, 1986). Therefore, a participant's story is seen as a way of organizing experience, interpreting events, and creating meaning (Howard; Widdershoven, 1993).

In designing this study, different qualitative research approaches were considered, including grounded theory, phenomenological, and narrative approaches. Grounded theory attempts to contribute to and build upon existing theory. Because there is little theory that specifically addresses the role of spirituality in the transition through midlife, a grounded theory approach was not seen as an appropriate choice. Although phenomenological research attempts to clarify the essence of a given phenomenon, the approach does not validate the detailed accounts of participants' stories in a narrative format. In addition, the phenomenological approach to analyzing data interviews based upon experiences alone was seen as potentially limiting and excluding participants'

attitudes, values, and beliefs. A narrative approach was seen as the best way of capturing detailed accounts of participant's experience of the role of spirituality in the transition through midlife, and honoring the participant's unique experience through the development of first person narrative accounts. Moreover, the narrative approach to analysis was viewed as the most holistic means of identifying common features among the validated narratives. This type of narrative analysis, which attempts to identify the shared reality constructed by participants, is also referred to as condensation (Kvale, 1996) or categorical content analysis (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber 1998).

The narrative research approach used for this study is based upon the recognition of the subjective reality and validity of the individual's experience and, thus, is appropriate for examining intensely personal matters, such as the role of spirituality in midlife transition. The depth of the narrative representations reported by narrative research is invaluable and necessary to a thorough understanding of many aspects of human experience (Kvale, 1996; Mishler, 1986). Interviews that are largely unstructured allow the participants to share, in detail, their experiences of the role of spirituality in their midlife transitions (Kvale). Furthermore, this topic had not been previously researched and a narrative research method allows data to emerge without the biases of pre-existing hypotheses (Kvale). Therefore, the application of a narrative method was seen as an effective and an appropriate means of obtaining detailed information about the role of spirituality in midlife transition.

Given that "the investigator does not have direct access to another's experience" (Riessman, 1993, p. 8), the researcher must make special efforts to facilitate the participant's creation of the narrative and be a receptive listener. To conduct effective

narrative interviews, the researcher must be able to build rapport and trust with each participant in order to encourage each to tell his or her detailed story (Kvale, 1996; Mishler, 1986; Riessman). With trust, participants can take the lead. "Eliciting narrative requires that the researcher relinquish control over the direction of the interview and attend to the asymmetrical relationship of power between interviewer and interviewee" (LeCompte, & Priessle, 1993, p. 165).

In this study, it was expected that the researcher would have the skill to create and sustain a safe atmosphere in which the interviewee could tell his or her story. Through the process of unstructured interviews and the subsequent development of narrative accounts, I hoped to develop a deep receptivity to the participant's story (Kvale, 1996). I made other efforts to facilitate the participant's expression of the narrative, by using empathy, openness, and genuineness, which contributed to an atmosphere of trust and helped to build rapport (Chase, 1995; Josselson, 1995).

From a constructivist perspective, analysis in narrative research begins with the interview itself (Kvale, 1996). The participant provides an initial analysis through his or her construction of experiences while recalling and sharing during the interview. During the interview process, participants often discover and express new relationships between the recalled experience and previously held interpretations. Guided by the researcher's questions and responses,

The respondent becomes a kind of researcher in his or her own right, consulting repertoires of experiences and orientations, linking fragments into patterns and offering "theoretically" coherent descriptions, accounts, and explanations. Far from merely reporting a chronicle of what is already present, the respondent

actively composes meaning by way of situated, assisted inquiry (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p.29.)

This process of ongoing interpretation is referred to as a "hermeneutic circle."

The "hermeneutic circle" described by Schleiermacher (cited in Palmer, 1969) addresses the ways in which two people in conversation, or a reader reading a text, mutually transform each other's ideas through continuing interaction. To create an effective narrative research process, the researcher, during the interview, will occasionally condense and interpret the meaning of what the interviewee describes, and check out the interpretation with the interviewee. In this way, the researcher gives the interviewee an opportunity to validate his or her interpretation during the interview itself. However, the interviewer must also recognize that her responses, both verbal and nonverbal, do contribute to the construction of the narrative.

Upon listening to each interview or re-reading each transcribed interview several times, a first person narrative was written by the researcher. During this process, the interviews were analyzed through the researcher's interpretation. The subsequent confirmation of each narrative with each participant in the follow-up interview served to validate the interview process as well as the narrative interpretation of the interview (Huberman & Miles, 1994).

In the first stage of analysis, it was expected that the interviews would yield narrative accounts of important events and the experiences of each participant. In the second stage of analysis, each narrative account was thoroughly analyzed for essential ideas. Then all narratives were analyzed in relationship to the others, to identify common

elements, processes and patterns, using a process known as condensation (Kvale, 1996) or categorical content analysis (Lieblich et al., 1998).

The Interviewer's Preparation and Presuppositions

Kvale (1996) suggests that immersion, reflection, and bracketing helps the researcher prepare for narrative research interviews. Through a process of "bracketing" presuppositions, the researcher may be better prepared to enter the interview with an attitude of "not-knowing" and display an open curiosity about the interviewee's story (Moustakas, 1994). With this in mind, I immersed myself in reading and thinking about the topic to be studied. I reflected upon my own experience of spirituality and midlife. I attempted to identify my biases and assumptions. I have outlined these presuppositions below in an attempt to "bracket" or set aside these assumptions. I recognized that new assumptions and biases might emerge through the course of the research. My training in counselling psychology has given me some skill and awareness of emotional and cognitive cues of personal bias and assumptions. I was alert for assumptions and biases during the processes of interview and analysis. At these times, I noted my assumption or bias and attempted to moderate its influence through my awareness.

Because participants would be self-selecting and voluntary, I assumed that they would be willing to describe, in detail, the role of spirituality in their own experience of midlife transition. I anticipated that the participants would likely describe a range of perspectives about spirituality and spiritual practices that might or might not be based upon specific religious traditions. Although any states of spiritual awareness related by the participants could be interpreted as intrapsychic processes, I was prepared to regard

the experiences shared by each participant as real, valid, and meaningful to each individual.

I believe that I have a very open view of spirituality and religious diversity. I anticipated that this perspective would contribute to my appreciation for, and analysis of, the interview data. Since childhood, I have read and discussed writings of the major religious traditions, including Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism, and Judaism. I believe that individuals construct a unique personal understanding of spirituality regardless of their connection or lack of connection with religion. I believe that spirituality may include one's conception of divinity and the understanding one has of their relationship to the divine and the rest of existence. I also believe that spirituality includes an understanding of what is meaningful in life, and how one makes sense of, and copes with, the unexpected in life. Furthermore, spirituality includes a person's spiritual experiences and activities in everyday life. I anticipated that participants might address the role of spirituality by referring to some of these topics.

I thought that participants might report that spirituality and spiritual beliefs had helped them to make meaning of major changes and losses in midlife. I hoped that they would be able to speak in detail about how spirituality had helped them during midlife.

Conduct of the Research Inquiry

Criteria for Selection of Participants

Because the role of spirituality was central to the research, each participant needed to be able to discuss in detail the role spirituality played in their change of assumptions about themselves and the world during their midlife transition. In narrative research, participants are selected who will be able to provide rich and detailed

descriptions of the topic under investigation (Kvale, 1996). This implies that participants must have experienced the phenomena sufficiently to be able to provide meaningful and detailed commentary about it (Kvale). Therefore, four criteria were used to select participants:

First, each participant needed to be able to communicate, in words, their experience of midlife transition and the role that spirituality played in that process. Second, each participant was asked whether they were in midlife. Third, to establish whether or not a participant had experienced a midlife transition, each person was asked whether she/he had experienced a significant shift in values, beliefs and assumptions about life, themselves or others during midlife (Schlossberg, 1981). It was assumed that by being able to identify this change, the participant was no longer completely "embedded" in the transition process (Kegan, 1982). This criteria was seen as relevant to the degree of reflection that participants would be able to engage in and to the clarity of the subsequent narrative construction (Kvale, 1996). Fourth, participants were included in the study if they perceived that spirituality had played a significant role in their midlife transition.

Ten participants were selected to share their personal stories. Because the role of spirituality in midlife transition had not been previously researched, it was preferable to identify both male and female participants. In addition, it was anticipated that participants would be at least 40 years of age and more likely 45 years or older, although a definitive age for midlife transition has not been delineated by existing research findings, and was not delineated for the purpose of this study.

Selection Procedure

Participants were identified through postings of the research opportunity (Appendix A) at religious meeting places, and spiritually-oriented bookstores. Religious meeting places included churches, mosques, meditation centers, and temples of various religions and spiritual practices. Permission was obtained to make a posting in each location. The posting invited potential participants to indicate their interest in participating in the study by calling the researcher.

When any potential participant called to express interest, I confirmed whether the potential participant met the previously described four criteria through a brief telephone screening (see Appendix B). In addition to screening for suitability, I conducted a pre-interview discussion to review the purpose and process of the research.

The first ten suitable participants were invited to participate in the study and interview times were arranged. Of all the calls received, four people were not included. Two people, one age 33 and another age 73, identified themselves as not being in midlife and did not meet the criteria to be included. Another caller met all criteria but declined to participate because of his concern about the potential of being identified by the uniqueness of his story. A fourth caller could not be included because she called several months after the first ten had been selected and the interviews had been completed.

Characteristics of the Sample

Through the selection process, seven women and three men, ranging in age from 47 to 63, were invited to participate. Nine participants are Caucasian and one participant is Asian; all have been residents of British Columbia for at least 25 years.

Two participants are adherents of Buddhism, an Eastern faith. One participant is an adherent of the Baha'i religion, a Middle Eastern faith. Three participants are adherents of Western faiths, the Unitarian and Unity churches. The remaining four are not adherents of an organized religion.

Four female participants are married and have children, of which one is remarried after being divorced. One female participant is divorced and has two adult children. Two female participants are single, never married, and do not have children. Of the three male participants, one is divorced and has an adolescent daughter, one is divorced with no children, and the other has never married or had children.

Nine of participants are of middle income SES and one male participant is of upper income SES. All participants have post-secondary education and were, therefore, well-educated and quite articulate.

Pre-interview Discussion

In the pre-interview discussion, the purpose of study and the processes of the interview and of the follow up meeting were carefully summarized and the participant's understanding confirmed. Each participant was assured that the tape-recorded interview would be confidential, the recording would be destroyed upon completion of the research, that the transcription would not include names, and that his or her identity would be protected in the research report and any related publications. This pre-interview discussion allowed each participant an opportunity to ask questions and obtain any needed clarification.

Data Collection Interviews

The pre-interview discussion began to build the rapport and trust between the researcher and participant. This rapport and trust continued to develop over the course of the interviews. All interviews took place in private and comfortable settings mutually agreed upon by the participant and researcher. Before the actual interview, I read the consent form aloud to ensure that each participant understood the details (Appendix C). I emphasized that the participant would have the option of withdrawing from the study at any time. Each participant signed a consent form to indicate his or her understanding, and received a copy of the signed consent.

Once written consent was obtained, the formal interview process began. The tape recorder was turned on and I read the orienting statement (See Appendix D), which included the research question, **“What is role of spirituality in the transition through midlife?”** Then, the participant was asked to begin his or her story. I encouraged the person to openly recount experiences without undue direction or interpretation. For the most part, participants gave an uninterrupted recollection of events. All the interviews were 60 to 90 minutes in length.

The interview was largely unstructured, using occasional questions and statements to clarify, focus, or deepen the participant's narrative, as necessary. As much as possible, I was non-directive in my responses. I made use of my training as a counsellor, using the communication skills of active listening, immediacy, genuineness, and respectful appreciation for the participant's experience. I believe this approach helped each participant to engage more fully in the interview and later, in the follow-up meeting. My interview process was reviewed by another doctoral candidate to ensure that I followed

an unstructured, non-directive approach. This person reviewed an interview tape to confirm that my comments did not lead the participant and that I facilitated the participant's story with openness and empathy.

I maintained a log of each interview, taking note of unusual occurrences, events, or personal insights. Immediately following each interview, I recorded in writing my impressions of the interview process commenting on significant or notable observations, such as the demeanor of the participant and nonverbal cues. These impressions and observations were taken into consideration in the subsequent development of the narrative accounts. All the interviews were tape-recorded, with each tape identified using a number code, and stored in a secure place to ensure confidentiality. The tapes will be erased upon completion of the final defense.

Development of the Narratives from the Transcribed Interviews

Each interview was transcribed verbatim from the tape. Afterwards, I began to write first person, linear, and coherent narrative accounts of the original transcribed interviews. Because most participants conveyed their stories in a non-linear, stream-of-consciousness style with limited chronology, writing narrative accounts was a lengthy process of restructuring and clarification of the transcribed interview (Kvale, 1996; Mishler, 1986). As recommended by Kvale and Tesch (1990), I read and re-read each transcription with the original tape-recording several times. This allowed to me to immerse myself in the "data." After several readings, I put the transcribed data into a coherent, chronological order, removed repetitive material, and wrote a narrative account.

To some extent, these narratives reflected my interpretation of each participant's story. However, as much as possible each resulting narrative used the participant's

original choice of words and maintained the participant's tone. Because my interpretation began at this stage of the work, the development of the narratives may be considered a first stage of analysis. Each narrative account was validated and revised by each participant. The validated narratives were used for the next stage of analysis.

Validation Interviews

After developing a first person narrative based upon each transcribed interview, I contacted the participant for a follow-up interview. Each participant had the opportunity to review his or her narrative during a two-week period before the follow-up meeting. In the follow-up meeting, each participant had the opportunity to clarify or correct any language that was inconsistent with his or her personal experience. The guide questions used in the follow-up interview are included in Appendix E.

These interviews were also recorded to allow ease of reference to the participant's comments and criticisms. All ten validation interviews yielded minimal corrections and changes, primarily in specific language. Each participant validated all key events and experiences as accurate. Subsequently, each participant received a final copy of his or her revised narrative. Two sample narratives, one of a female participant and one of a male participant, are included in Appendices F and G, respectively.

Analysis of the Validated Narratives

In the second stage of analysis, condensation (Kvale, 1996) was used to extract the condensed meaning or ideas from each validated narrative. Each phrase or statement in each narrative was accounted for and considered in relation to either the original question or as part of the overall context. Then, each statement was summarized in a brief descriptive phrase. Once each narrative was analyzed in this way, the descriptive phrases

were compared across narratives to identify common elements. Through an iterative process of reviewing all ten narratives in relation to the others, I was able to identify common elements relating to the question, **“What is the role of spirituality in the transition through midlife?”** A research committee member reviewed the common elements for trustworthiness. These common elements describe the role of spirituality in the participants’ midlife, as well as the ongoing role of spirituality in their lives. The common elements are described and elaborated in the results section.

CHAPTER IV

Results

Introduction

In this study, I interviewed ten participants who identified themselves as experiencing an important shift during midlife, in which spirituality played a significant role. The intent was to learn more about the role of spirituality in the transition through midlife. This study generated ten narrative accounts, which were validated by the participants. These accounts were analyzed to identify common elements related to the role of spirituality in midlife. The first section of this chapter presents a biographical sketch of each of the ten participants. The next section introduces ten common elements that were identified in the analysis of the narratives. The following ten sections detail each of the common elements with supporting quotations from the participants' narratives.

Biographical Sketches of the Participants

The following descriptions are intended to provide a brief sketch of each participant's life context with respect to spirituality, and their midlife experience. Names have been changed to preserve participant anonymity and confidentiality.

1. Sandra. Sandra is a 63-year-old mother of two adult children, a retired elementary teacher, and a recently retired opera singer. She was raised in an Anglican home and was very devout as a child. However, she became disillusioned with the Anglican Church in her adolescence. Throughout her early adult life, she was not involved with an organized religion. She became an elementary school teacher and married in her early twenties. She was

trained as an opera singer and obtained a position with a local music company in her early 40's. At age 40 she was in her midlife transition, beginning to review her life, and feeling that she had no purpose. She experienced a strong yearning for a sense of meaning and a desire to help others. With the encouragement of her Baha'i sister, she made a careful investigation of the Baha'i faith from the age of 40 to 44. She made a commitment to this faith at age 44 and she has since dedicated her life to social service as an expression of her spirituality. She identifies spirituality as being a significant support in coping with her bipolar disorder, which was first diagnosed when she was 27. She states that spirituality guides her actions in day to day life, and that she uses prayer to help herself and others. She believes her life has a spiritual purpose and she is devoted to the Baha'i faith.

2. Andrew. Andrew is a 55-year-old semi-retired advertising executive. His father was a minister and Andrew was raised in a strict Christian faith. He abandoned the faith during his adolescence and had not been involved in a religion or in spiritual practices until midlife. At age 45, he experienced a significant sense of despair and lack of meaning in his life. At the same time, his long-term relationship ended in divorce. At that time, he felt depressed and lonely. Over the past ten years, he has sought meaning and spiritual guidance through meditative practices and through reading different kinds of spiritual literature. Through his involvement in the Unity church, he also has explored the possibility of attending a school for ministers and becoming a minister. Through his spiritual search, he was able to "let go" of his attachment to any

absolute need for a relationship and he has established a sense of spiritual purpose in his life. He has made a commitment to living a life of integrity and authenticity, and written two books about his spiritual journey. He supports himself through his consulting business.

3. Laura. Laura is a 59-year-old social worker and mother of two adult children. As a child, she was raised as a Catholic. She also explored the Lutheran faith as a teenager. By early adulthood, she felt disconnected from any established religion. When she was 44 years old, she made a decision to leave her husband, who was abusive and an alcoholic. They had been married for 22 years. After her marriage ended, she experienced a significant loss of financial support and took over the sole responsibility for her children. She sought spiritual support through reading and exploring various groups focusing on women's and Native spirituality. For the next 8 years, she experienced various losses and challenges, including the deaths of both her parents, the diagnosis and treatment of leukemia in her two year old granddaughter, one daughter's separation and divorce, the other daughter's depression, and a severe life-threatening illness of her own. She managed to complete her degree in social work at age 52, and obtain full-time employment for a private agency. However, the stresses in her life and at work were so overwhelming that she took a stress leave and eventually left her job. She states that she has been very depressed and suicidal at times, and that her spirituality supports her commitment to living. She believes this commitment has come from "letting go" and accepting that she may never understand the course of her suffering.

She feels that she is now living an authentic life. She continues to find spiritual support and guidance through her involvement in women's spirituality and ritual, and through a strong connection to nature. She also uses painting as a spiritual and creative expression and is committed to supporting her children's spiritual development.

4. Beth. Beth is 53-year-old self-described spiritual healer and teacher, who is married and has one adult stepson. She states that she was not raised within a particular religion. Previously a single woman and successful businessperson, she married for the first time at age 38. At that time, she found herself in crisis about her identity and the purpose of her life. She attributes this, in part, to her perceptions of society's expectations of married women. She was also coping with her husband's severe, chronic depression. Her spiritual journey began as an effort to "heal" her pain and to become more authentic with herself and others. Through a series of transcendent experiences, it became a journey of spiritual healing and discovery. She discovered that her spiritual beliefs could provide support to herself and to other people. She now works as a spiritual healer and teacher.
5. Vivian. Vivian is a 52-year-old counsellor and mother of two adult children. She states that she was not raised within a particular religion, although her father believed that there was a life after death. She notes that she was overly focussed on her career and family achievement until, at age 47, she lost several relatives and friends. The first loss was a tragic accident killing her 17-year-old nephew. Over the next three years, she also lost a 37-year-old

girlfriend to breast cancer, and a 53-year-old running partner to lung cancer. Her father also died during that time. One year ago, she was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. She began a search for spiritual meaning and support throughout the past three years through reading and talking to many people. She also had several transcendent experiences of a connection with the people in her life who had died, experiencing a strong sense of their presence in specific instances. These experiences have motivated her to continue to pursue spiritual study and meditation. She states that her midlife experiences have given her a new sense of purpose in life, as well as shifting her focus from achievement to relationships. She uses yoga on a daily basis as a spiritual activity.

6. Carl. Carl is a 47-year-old single, high school English teacher. He states that he was raised in an adoptive home where church was a central part of community and family life. However, in his adolescence he did not feel connected to his parent's church. He has explored and studied the scripture and practice of several religions and faiths throughout his life. Yet, he reports that spirituality was not central to his life. However, at age 46, Carl states that he experienced a spiritual awakening because of a sudden experience of severe heart pain and a subsequent diagnosis of heart disease. In preparing for quadruple bypass heart surgery, he faced the possible outcomes of death or disability. He found himself reviewing his life, his sense of life's meaning, and his beliefs about spirituality. He also reviewed the beliefs of many religions, especially pertaining to death and suffering. He was able to realize

an acceptance of uncertainty, a belief in personal responsibility, and a faith in the connection of all humanity. He feels this entire experience has given him a clearer sense of commitment to living a life of integrity and authenticity.

7. Katherine. Katherine is a 55-year-old spiritual teacher and practitioner of Vipassana and Mahayana Buddhism. She has also worked as a social worker, counsellor, editor and writer. Katherine states that she was raised in a Christian home and that she has been on a spiritual journey throughout her life. Her father was an alcoholic and was very abusive, and she felt terrified of him. She was enraged by thoughts of him until her midlife. He died, at age 39, after falling down a flight of stairs at home. She was 7 years old and witnessed this event. In her teens, Katherine became a devout Christian. In university, she became disillusioned and became an atheist. However, her search for a spirituality that would support her identity continued. At age 36, she discovered and committed herself to the practice and precepts of Buddhism. She found Buddhist spirituality could incorporate her interest in science, social activism, and humanitarian concerns. In her midlife transition, she experienced several crises relating to her midlife. At age 38 and again at age 41, she experienced memories of early and repeated childhood sexual abuse. She also had an emergency hysterectomy. She found that her spiritual practice could not fully support her during these crises. However, after obtaining psychological support, she found she was able to return to meditation and complete her healing process. This gave her a new sense of appreciation of her spiritual practice and beliefs. She states that she has clarified aspects of her

identity and discovered her core, personal spirituality. She now views Buddhism as only one part of her spiritual identity. Yet, she continues to teach and guide others in Buddhism. She also facilitates groups for people with HIV/AIDS and other chronic illnesses, as they find spiritual support and guidance through Buddhist practices and principles.

8. Sharon. Sharon is 52-year-old retired computer analyst and mother of one adult son. She was raised in a Conservative Jewish home. She left her first husband at age 32 and began her spiritual search. She remarried at age 42. Her spiritual search intensified in her early 40's, in her midlife, when she experienced a deep sense of meaninglessness and began to review her purpose in life. At that time, she felt a need to live authentically and express a commitment to compassion. She abandoned her career as an entrepreneur and computer systems analyst. She explored several spiritual paths, including Buddhism and women's spirituality. She currently attends the Unitarian church. She feels most connected to nature and to the principles of deep ecology. She uses meditation and tarot reading as spiritual support. She is committed to supporting others in their spiritual work, especially women. She is actively involved in organizing conferences in this regard. She also volunteers as a counsellor to people with progressive chronic illnesses.
9. Caroline. Caroline is a 49-year-old, former dancer and dance instructor. She was raised as a Christian and left the faith in her adolescence. Until her midlife, she states that her spirituality and creativity were expressed in dance. She was a very talented dancer and became a partner and instructor of a dance

company at age 27. When she was 36 years old, her car was rear-ended at high speed. Subsequent to the accident, she experienced severe effects on her balance, coordination, as well as chronic, severe daily pain. As a result, she was forced to abandon her career and rely on her family for financial support. Although she moved in with her family because of her grandmother's encouragement, her family abandoned her a few years later when her grandmother died. As a direct consequence of her accident, she began a search for spiritual meaning and support through meditation and contemplation. She has also studied the spiritual writings of many faiths and cultures, and looks to the example of spiritual guides, such as Mother Theresa and the Dalai Lama. She has found a sense of connection and purpose in volunteering to help other people cope with their disabilities. She has made a spiritual commitment to her healing and to helping others. She would like to express her creativity by supporting the work of other dancers. She currently attends the Unitarian church.

10. Anthony. Anthony is a 48-year-old engineer, and a divorced father of one teenaged daughter. He was raised in Burma, where Buddhism is a pervasive part of the culture. He attended a grade school instructed by Jesuit priests. At age 22, he immigrated to Canada to work, and a year later, he obtained a scholarship to attend university. He met and married his wife a few years later. After marrying his wife, who was Jewish, he studied the mystical and practical aspects of Judaism. During his marriage, he was very busy and committed to his career. When he was 43 years old, in midlife, his marriage

ended in divorce. He experienced significant depression and discovered daily meditation practice as a way of coping. He found meditation allowed him to “let go” of his pain and feelings of loss, and to gain a new perspective. He describes this as a “significant awakening.” After four years of meditation, he realized that his relationships to others, including his daughter are more important than success and earnings. If he can live this way, he feels he is ready to die without regret. He has a strong commitment to his personal understanding of Buddhist spirituality, and to living this commitment daily.

Overview of Common Elements

The purpose of the study was to explore and describe the role of spirituality in the midlife transition experienced by these ten participants. The analysis of the resulting, validated narratives yielded ten common elements shared by all participants, which are listed in Table 1.

Although the order of the common elements does not reflect any particular chronology, they may be considered as two groups. The first four relate to how spirituality plays a role for participants in the midlife processes of identity revision, search for meaning, and acceptance. For each participant these processes of midlife are firmly grounded in their experience of spirituality. The next six common elements pertain to the participant’s experiences and beliefs about spirituality, which are not necessarily related to the process of midlife transition. However, each participant speaks of how these six common elements are significant in describing the role of spirituality in their midlife. Each of the ten common elements are detailed below, with supporting quotations from the validated interviews.

Table 1

Common Elements identified across the Narratives

Common Element
1. The experience of spiritual growth in midlife
2. A search for spiritual meaning and purpose
3. Spirituality supports a revision of identity toward authenticity
4. Openness to life and acceptance of unpredictable events in one's life
5. Support and guidance through spirituality
6. Spiritual commitment
7. Spiritual expression
8. Spiritual connection
9. Participation in spiritual activities
10. Defining spirituality in relation to religion

The Experience of Spiritual Growth in Midlife. All participants describe spiritual growth in midlife, beginning at their midlife transition. This growth is described in various ways, including a significant shift in spiritual awareness, a spiritual awakening or transformation, and/or spiritual growth.

Participants attribute this spiritual growth to significant personal challenges each of them faced during midlife transition. These personal challenges include facing a serious physical disability; mental illness; serious physical illness; loss of career; recovery from childhood sexual abuse; breakdown and loss of marriage; death of parents, friends, and relatives; and the serious illness of a spouse or relative.

Over the course of three years, Vivian experienced the deaths of several family members and friends, followed by her own diagnosis of cancer:

I reached a point in life when terrible things began to happen. I think that was what caused me to start thinking about my spiritual side and the meaning of life.

Laura states that the breakdown of an abusive marriage, and the subsequent loss of her house, the death of her mother, and her granddaughter's cancer led her to significant action in her life, as well as a spiritual search:

I wouldn't be doing this had I not gone through the crises that I went through in my life.

Caroline experienced a severe car accident that has left her with significant disability and daily pain, as well as loss of her career as a dancer and instructor.

Although spirituality was always within me, the consciousness of spirituality was reawakened as I came to realize the physical impact of the

car accident and the invisible damage it had exacted on me. I moved through my anger as I came to terms with the ways my dance career had been dramatically altered. I moved out of denial and sought inner spiritual guidance and affirmation.

With her loss of identity, she experienced a spiritual awakening and an opportunity to clarify her values and beliefs:

My accident and the results of it have been a spiritual awakening. I now have an opportunity to come to terms with what my beliefs are and issues of money, changes in friendship, pain, and pain and ongoing health, unresolved health, and direction, and career. I wonder whether I would have had as strong a spiritual awakening if I didn't have these challenges to deal with.

Sandra views her emerging mental illness as spiritually transformative:

Manic illness is certainly a break between being normal. Suddenly being crazy is a big break. Now I'm looking back from age 63, and I look back with great gratitude. It wasn't a break; it's a breakthrough. Every breakthrough enabled me to keep transforming.

Sharon relates how the loss of her marriage initiated her spiritual awakening:

I was in a very, very low part of my life. I went through many life-changing things at that time. I moved back to Canada with my son and left my husband. So my whole belief system started changing at that point.

All participants describe sadness, fear, anger, and suffering associated with these experiences. However, they also view their challenges and pain as an opportunity for

spiritual growth. For example, Andrew's words reflect an awareness of the relationship between his pain and his spiritual growth, after losing his marriage:

Susan was who I believed I needed in life to be happy. When I had that taken away from me, suddenly I had the classic dark night of the soul. After that, I was able to grow. I haven't figured out why we force ourselves at times through so much pain. Our greatest growth comes from our greatest depths of pain.

In a similar vein, Sandra frames life's challenges, including her bipolar illness, as opportunities for spiritual growth:

Baha'u'llah teaches, as other faiths do, that tests are to make us grow and that difficulties are in fact tests. And the tragedies or ordeals of life are tests. Everything is a test. It is a test to help us to grow. I have a Jewish friend who told me that it is not a stumbling block, it is just a challenge, or an opportunity.

Spiritual growth has also brought each participant a clarification of specific spiritual beliefs and values. For example, Sandra points out that she has compassion for other people's suffering through her experience of mental illness.

I have manic depressive illness. This teaches me all things about suffering and it helps me to be an elder. I'm very good with people when they are suffering. So that is a gift that comes from the terrible suffering of mental illness.

Carl views his sudden serious illness with heart disease and the threat of possible death as an opportunity to clarify, and strengthen, his spiritual beliefs:

Knowing that I would eventually face open-heart surgery, many of my spiritual and philosophical beliefs were really "put to the test" and thereby clarified.

He acknowledges that his spiritual awakening has clarified the importance of spirituality to him:

Now I'm very much more aware of the role that my spiritual side plays in my life. It's always been there but I was taking it for granted before or preoccupied with other things.

Likewise, Vivian describes how the many losses of friends and family to death raised her awareness and initiated her spiritual search, which was deeply transformative:

Up to age 47, I had been thinking about when I was going to retire, what I was going to do, but never thinking about death. I had assumed that I would live forever. I was never thinking about death and dying until these things happened. I never thought about the meaning of life in particular.

Anthony describes how his sudden spiritual awakening, in response to the end of his marriage, clarified the importance of relationships in his life:

I think the main thing was for me to acknowledge my relationship with my daughter and work for my daughter. That's what matters. I knew if I died that day or any day, my relationship with my daughter, and my brother, and people that I know and love should be okay. If my relationships were not okay, then I should fix them, so that I can die any day properly. I had a significant awakening.

After her spiritual awakening to compassion, Katherine made a deep resolve to ongoing spiritual growth and understanding:

When I was 38, I went to a three-month retreat. I felt that I had finally come home. It was at that retreat another resolve arose quite spontaneously, that I would not stop practicing (meditation and Buddhist precepts) until I reached full understanding. Of course, I will never reach full understanding, so the vow is an infinite one.

In summary, all participants experienced some form of spiritual growth, awakening, and/or transformation in their midlife transition. This led to further spiritual activities, commitment, and clarification of values and beliefs.

A Search for Spiritual Meaning and Purpose. Each participant described engaging in a personal search for spiritual meaning and purpose. For some participants, this search preceded significant losses and changes in midlife, while for others the search for meaning grew out of feelings of loss, fear, and suffering throughout the experiences of midlife transition. For all the participants, the search for meaning involved spirituality, spiritual matters, and spiritual understanding. All participants indicated that they have also found meaning and purpose through spirituality.

For example, Sandra talks about her longing for meaning and purpose at age 40, that led to a study of Baha'i spiritual scripture over the next four years:

About that time, I told my sister that I had no idea what my purpose was in life. I had no purpose and I didn't know what I was supposed to be doing. I felt I should have some purpose and I wanted to have a purpose but I did not know what it was. I had no idea why I was here.

Once she made a commitment to her spiritual path as a Baha'i, she found a sense of meaning in actively helping others:

Now along with everything else I've wanted in life, I've always wanted to help to "save the world." I always wanted to be involved in nurturing the world and the people of the world so that they could have a better life. I've always been interested in contributing in some very tangible way.

Andrew was a financially successful executive who says he had all the material security and pleasures that one could possibly want. Yet, during his midlife, he speaks of a deep sense of boredom with his life and a yearning for meaning beyond physical existence:

I remember walking home one night from having dinner with some friends up at Whistler. I looked up at the beautiful, crystal clear, cold night. I felt so bored. I thought, "What is this?" That moment has a lot of significance now. At the time, it was a moment when I realized that there was a lot of dissatisfaction in my life, although, on the surface, I had everything one could want at the age of 45. For the first time, I started to explore the possibility that there might be some meaning to life other than the physical existence. Until that point, I had believed that physical existence was all that there was.

Several participants stated that they searched for meaning or spiritual answers about the suffering they experienced, or the suffering experienced by significant others in their lives. For example, in response to the deaths of several friends and loved ones,

Vivian felt she needed to gain an understanding about death, which in turn has given her life a different meaning:

What really helped was defining and finding something that made sense to me about what happens after we die. I needed to know what had happened after people died. I needed to find some meaning. In a way, the two ideas are related. I find that I'm much easier on myself since doing the reading, doing the exploring, doing the thinking, talking to my friends who are dying about what they thought and what it meant to them to die. Now, what I do has to have some meaning and make a difference to the world.

For most of the participants in this study, there was an absence of spiritual meaning and purpose before the midlife transition. Many participants had a strong sense of connection to material achievement or to their careers. However, all the participants now view their current lives as having a spiritual purpose, explicitly expressed in their relationships to others. In some cases, these relationships encompass their career or volunteer roles. For example, Sandra finds meaning in her service to others, often in serendipitous or chance situations. She metaphorically describes how she experiences the process of spiritual purpose through service:

Sometimes I feel like I'm a little twig on the riverbank. I am swept out into the middle of the river and I'm carried along for a spiritual purpose. And when that purpose is finished, I am gently washed up again on the bank. When I am a twig, in that way, I keep going, not knowing what I am supposed to do next and things happen.

Through her active participation in women's spirituality, Laura describes her purpose as being a spiritual example or teacher to her adult daughters:

My purpose is to teach my children and my grandchild to be spiritual beings. I feel that I'm showing them the way somehow. I'm the transition person between the old, closed, narrow way of living to this new, open, higher consciousness way of living.

As a spiritual guide and teacher, Beth teaches and facilitates other people's spiritual development:

There is a work path and a spiritual path. Sometimes your work is your spiritual path, which is how I see mine.

Having abandoned the life of a competitive advertising executive, Andrew realizes his purpose through teaching and writing about his own spiritual development:

I realized that I was passionate about my spiritual journey. For over two years, I loved the exploration and the increased understanding that I was given. I also realized I was passionate about was teaching. I believe that part of the reason for my being here is to talk about it. I'm getting better at allowing the information to flow through me. It makes it very seamless and very easy to do without having to prepare for it.

Although she lost her career identity as a dancer and instructor, Caroline has found new meaning and purpose through her work with others:

For the past ten years my love and work has been through my social interaction in volunteer work and through being a resource person for the disabled and impoverished community.

She also feels her deeper sense of meaning in life comes from a daily spiritual commitment that may not always be visible to others:

If I can grow spiritually, I can be proud of myself. I don't expect to make huge contributions. I want to have a sense of self-actualization through being, not doing. I want to feel proud on a day to day basis, and have a life worth living.

After a lifelong struggle with existential meaninglessness, and a search for a supportive spirituality, Katherine found meaning in a spirituality that could integrate her interests in social action, science, feminism, and psychology:

At age 36, after struggling with this question for months, there was a pivotal moment when I made a decision, a resolve, that I would make spiritual practice the center of my life and that I would come to all my other activities from that core of spiritual practice. It was as if everything fell into place in that one moment. I would no longer have to ask, "How do I integrate spirituality into social action?" Rather, I came to any social action project from my spiritual practice. I would come to my feminist activities and my radical therapy activities from that same spiritual core. I would bring my spiritual understanding to my readings on evolution and cosmology. I felt a wonderful sense of relief as my life gained more direction and a sense of wholeness.

In summary, all participants have engaged in a search for spiritual meaning and purpose in response to facing various challenges in midlife. These challenges led to a

review of their lives, spiritual growth, and to a discovery of meaning and purpose based upon their spirituality.

Spirituality Supports a Revision of Identity toward Authenticity. All participants discussed how spirituality in midlife supported the process of reviewing and revising their identity, which emerged from the challenges each participant encountered in their midlife transition process. Through the support of spirituality, this revised identity led to new authenticity. Although a revision of identity is commonly reported in midlife, in each instance participants describe how spirituality supported the development of authenticity and how spirituality is now central to their identity.

In coping with the challenge of supporting herself and her adult daughters, losing both her parents, and having to sell her home, Laura suggests that authenticity resulted from her reviewing her life and becoming honest with herself:

I feel that this journey and the things that have happened to me, particularly in the last five years, happened because I wasn't honouring myself. I was not living an authentic life. I was just going through the motions, so it was if the universe had to bring me to a grinding halt to make me stop and look at my life and look at myself and find that identity.

Vivian began her life review in response to her grief in losing so many friends and family members, as well as facing her own mortality. This led to a clarification of her identity, and a movement toward authenticity:

Before these losses in my midlife, I was young and I was making decisions, including career decisions, without a lot of thought. I just wasn't

connected to myself. Now I am much more connected with who I am.

There is maturity and self- knowledge.

She sees a significant change in how she views herself and her life:

As a type A, I was always climbing the corporate ladder. I don't see myself as a perfectionist but definitely pushing myself very hard. Now, I want more balance. I want to appreciate the balance and not compare myself to others. My evolution is ongoing and probably would have happened without those catastrophic things but I think these events have moved me to change.

In actively expressing her values of feminism, deep ecology, and women's spirituality to others, Sharon discusses her midlife revision of identity as entwined with her spirituality and values:

I was going through more than a search for spirituality. I was involved in a greater search. I can't take spirituality and values apart.

She feels that her transition into and through midlife has been central to her revised identity and to being able to be authentic:

The most important part of my midlife has been my personal process. Who I am today is so different than who I was. Obviously, the core was there. The way I've developed is not at all what I thought it would be, or who I would be. I'm glad this is who I've become. It is really comfortable and it's nice. I am grounded. It's safe for me to be who I am now and that's one of the beauties of midlife, as I get older. So midlife has allowed me to

come into my own. That's been one of the most liberating things about getting older.

After marrying in her midlife and leaving a successful corporate career, Beth felt inauthentic in the traditional role of wife and mother. Her spirituality both emerged from and supported her revision of identity and movement toward authenticity:

I was yearning and longing for some deeper meaning and to heal those parts of myself that didn't feel authentic.

For her, the revision of her identity required facing herself honestly:

My spiritual journey was about coming face to face with what I needed to do with my relationship with myself. It affected the choices that I made, the direction that I went, and the things that I did. It led me to find meaning in my life and purpose, which I had never experienced before.

Having faced possible death due to heart disease, Carl reviewed his life and revised his identity in terms of personal responsibility for his own experience and health. He continues to examine himself in an effort to remaining spiritually authentic in his daily life.

I think it was Aristotle who said that an unexamined life is not worth living. I want to know myself as well as I can in relation to other people and other things. It's not that I have reached a state of perfection but I'm aspiring to that direction. It's the same in any spiritual pursuit. There is an element of aspiration where you see certain values as true and worthwhile and you aspire to those in your daily life. That's all I'm doing here. It's a humbling experience. It keeps me humble.

After careful and lengthy self-examination, Andrew faced aspects of himself he did not like and significantly shifted his identity. He discusses how this examination of himself, revision of his identity, and movement toward authenticity was essential to his spiritual growth:

I spend quite a lot of time talking about the process of working on my own stuff concurrent with my spiritual experience. We are attached to people and to things outside of ourselves because we're not comfortable with who we are. This is why our spiritual experience has to be preceded or accompanied by personal understanding. Until we know who we are, we are continually attached to things outside ourselves for our satisfaction and our happiness.

Because of a car accident, Caroline has experienced significant physical disability and chronic pain, which affect her ability to work and how she sees herself as a person. She also has lost her identity as a dancer and dance teacher. Because her spirituality was grounded in her physical experience and creative expression as a dancer, she needed to grow spiritually, as a part of her struggle to find a new, revised identity:

Because my spirituality has been so much a part of my physical experience, and my physical experience has changed, the characteristic of my spiritual experience has to change as well. My experience is about creating another identity.

She discusses how her current identity is emerging from her spirituality, and she wants to express this authentically in her actions, rather than intellectually:

I'm at a point where I don't want to hide anymore behind a course. I could very easily become intellectual and analyze. I don't want to hide behind that. I want to focus on the spiritual. It's how to walk the talk. With the spiritual, you don't have to make something. It's the intangibility really and it's okay. But I don't quite know how to do that. It's the old thing of being and doing thing with our disabled selves. Amongst each other, we want to show something, to validate who we are. How do you do show and tell with the spiritual? It's hard.

Before her midlife transition, Katherine felt she needed to fit aspects of her identity, such as her feminist beliefs, her social activism, and her appreciation of the arts, psychology, and science into her spiritual path:

I wanted to find a spiritual path that could integrate my political concerns, the best aspects of feminism, psychological understanding, my continuing interest in science, and an appreciation of literature and philosophy.

After her midlife transition, she was able to authentically locate a compassionate identity as her core self, in relation to her feminist beliefs, her social activism, and her appreciation of the arts, psychology, and science, as well as her commitment to Buddhism:

In 1981, when I had made the resolve to make spiritual practice the center of my life and go to all my other activities from that spiritual center, Buddhist teachings and practice formed the basis of the spiritual core. Now I realized that for me the center was still the spiritual path, but it was more a path that involved opening to the mystery and working for the

benefit of all beings. Buddhist teachings and practice had become one of the eight spokes rather than the center.

Sandra notes that her mental illness has led her to find her identity in her spiritual nature, rather than in an attachment to her physical or mental nature:

My illness has influenced my spiritual development. I'm so aware of my soul. The mind may be ill but the soul is not. My soul is who I am. I'm so aware of the soul and that is what I identify with.

In noting the approach of old age, she uses a metaphor to describe her movement to greater authenticity over time.

Now I've begun to be an elder. This is what all my development is heading me toward. Yet, I have never been different, from my birth I have always been on this path. I was born the way I am. It's like the acorn and the oak tree. The acorn may not look like the oak tree. When the little sprout shoots out of the acorn, someone might say that is a break or a change, but it's really only a transformation. I'm not an oak tree yet, but I'm trying.

In summary, each participant felt that the personal challenges faced in midlife fostered a careful review of life and study of themselves. This led to revision of self or identity, and the need to do this in a meaningful and authentic way through spirituality.

Openness to Life and an Acceptance of Unpredictable Events in One's Life.

Through an individual experience of spirituality, each participant came to accept the presence of the divine or the mystery of life. For many participants, this involved an acceptance of various events that occurred just before, or during, the midlife transition.

Although unique to each participant, these events all involved some form of loss, pain, and suffering. Participants described the experience of acceptance as a “letting go” of the need to control, an acceptance of divine influence or the mystery of life, and acceptance of events not understood by the human mind.

For example, Sandra has discovered a connection to the divine in her study of and commitment to the Baha’i faith. In coping with the unpredictable course of her mental illness, she speaks about opening to the mystery of the divine in her life:

Well as soon as I knew I didn’t have to imagine God and couldn’t possibly imagine God, it really helped me to put my faith in that God. Because it’s an unknown power. It is an acceptance of mystery.

After leaving an abusive and alcoholic husband, Laura experienced so many losses and challenges over a period of five years that, at times, she felt overwhelmed with sadness and fear. In coping with these challenges, she speaks of “letting go” of her need to understand why she was experiencing so many losses in her life:

The only way that I could keep going through all of those experiences was to believe that there was a reason for everything that was happening. As I look back on it now, it was a process of me letting go of a lot of things and letting go of how I thought my life should be. I just had to trust that there was some other process happening, that I did not understand. Without that belief, I don’t think that I would have made it through all that happened.

Vivian faced the loss of several family members and friends over three years, as well as her own diagnosis of cancer. A significant part of her coping with those challenges has come through an acceptance of aging and mortality:

I very rarely feel sad anymore about my cancer and the loss of these people. I just view it as a gift and remember them. I have allowed them to put my life in perspective for me.

After facing his fear of sudden death from heart disease and the risks of triple bypass surgery, Carl finds that an acceptance of his mortality and future death has given him an opportunity to view the future with less fear:

I had heard about acceptance of death and how people come to terms with it. Now I know a little about what that means and I'm comfortable with that. It's not death as I was told it was. For me it's something different. It's a passage into something else.

Through counselling, Andrew came to the realization that his spiritual growth has emerged from "letting go" of his desires for, and attachments to, people:

My counsellor was very helpful with helping me to understand the power of attachment and to understand the need to let go and how growth comes out of letting go.

In accepting the unpredictable nature of life, he has come to realize that he doesn't need to understand everything that happens to enjoy and appreciate life:

There are lots of things I don't understand. There's not as much of a pressing need to understand. Of course, understanding doesn't matter. It's being here that's important.

In accepting how her life has evolved and the uncertainty of the future, Sharon describes how her experiences in midlife have allowed her to move into a state of acceptance and flow:

It's a Buddhist saying, "Don't push the river!" I go with the flow instead of swimming up stream and pushing the river, which I did for so many years. My midlife has given me permission to just be, be myself and be in a flow with what is right.

Some participants describe the acceptance of uncertainty as a belief in the mystery of the divine. For example, in discussing religious ritual, Anthony emphasizes that belief is essential to acceptance of spiritual mystery, whereas ritual serves as a symbolic reminder of the mystery:

There are all these actions involved in a miracle and a mystery. Do they really need all these actions? They don't. All you need is belief. Not even your mind can do it. If you're going to say it's a divine mystery, it has nothing to do with your actions or your mind.

In summary, all participants emphasize the importance of accepting life, and letting go of attachment and understanding. It seems that the external challenges lead to an internal struggle for meaning. In the face of inevitable aging and death, as well as inexplicable suffering, each participant has found that spirituality has helped them to move to a place of acceptance of the unique course of their lives. A part of this acceptance entails letting go of the need for control, having less attachment to the physical world, and accepting that some things can never be understood or explained.

Support and Guidance through Spirituality. For all participants, spirituality is a support for the loss or suffering that each experienced in the midlife transition. Spirituality provides guidance in helping participants to make decisions about how to think or act, and to take action in their lives. Spiritual support and guidance continues to

be obtained through a variety of spiritual experiences, including study of scripture or other inspirational writings, prayer, meditation, ritual, dreams, and unexpected visions.

Participants also speak of how spirituality provides ongoing support in their lives. In her work as a spiritual guide and teacher, Beth speaks of how spiritual support can come from a sense of community:

I have realized that it's different when you have support. I was in a supportive group, working with people that are in agreement. That's the advantage of a community. The presence of spirituality is there.

After a deep spiritual search and revision of meaning, Carl uses a metaphor to describe how his spirituality must be elaborated and abundant with possibility to be supportive:

My spirituality is like a balloon. I want to fill the balloon, make the balloon larger so that it kind of floats. When it's my time to go I want to grab on to it and up I go. If I don't see all the limitless possibilities of spirituality and it's forms and it's facets, then I have this little balloon and won't go anywhere. It's not going to support me when I need it. The balloon was large enough so I got through the operation in a positive way, and I'm looking at the future optimistically.

He found that studying the writings of various spiritual traditions provided him with psychological and spiritual support in coping with triple bypass surgery for heart disease and the possibility of imminent death:

I reacquainted myself with what the different religious or spiritual traditions have to say about death and dying. I learned some things that

helped to get me through this difficult period. By the time I had my operation, I was energetic and entirely positive.

Other participants describe specific instances when spirituality has provided them with support or guidance. Laura, during her recovery from an abusive childhood and marriage and the many losses of her midlife, was frequently depressed and suicidal. Her spirituality was essential to coping with these challenges:

Spirituality is the thing that saved me. I had to depend on some power greater than myself to heal that inner fear, because life was a very fearful thing for me.

In preparing for an emergency hysterectomy in her midlife, Katherine discusses how her study of Buddhist writings provided her with ongoing spiritual support and growth:

For the ten years preceding the surgery, most of my reading was related to Buddhism, or other spiritual teachings. I did a lot of study as well as practice, reading perhaps 200 books on Buddhism, including many of the sutras (scriptures) from both the Theravadin and the Mahayana schools.

This same participant found that her spirituality, in addition to extensive psychological therapy, supported her healing from childhood sexual abuse. Her memories of abuse had been repressed throughout her life and were vividly and painfully remembered during her midlife transition. The practice of lovingkindness is a Buddhist practice used to cultivate a sense of compassion and forgiveness to self and others:

Eventually, after about two years of therapy work dealing with the abuse, I was able to meditate again, and when I did it was the lovingkindness

meditation that I wanted to do. It was at this point that I realized that although meditation practice was not useful or possible for me during the first two difficult years, and some of the teachings were problematical, that my ten-year foundation in Buddhist teachings and practice had helped during the difficult healing work. The meditation practice had established a sense of equanimity that was sometimes available to me, and was there even when I could not recognize it as such. The lovingkindness meditation was also an invaluable source of support to me even during the time I was not actually practicing it.

In coping with the periods of mania and depression with her bipolar illness, Sandra asserts that her spirituality is a powerful support for her in helping her manage her illness:

My soul has become so capable that the instances when my illness overtakes me are quite rare. I use prayer in my management of my illness. I actually can assist in bringing my mania down or bringing my depression up on my own.

At 63, she speaks about how she is also using her spirituality, as well as the support of friends, to help her cope with her fear of aging:

I'm trying to deal with my fear of the body falling apart, but I am afraid of the process. Right now, I have to use my faith, reading, the writings, and praying. I have to seek out old people, especially older women. I am seeking out older people to try to learn from them what it is to be old. I'm

definitely preparing now for old age and I want to get through it. I want to get through it very, very successfully.

Anthony's spirituality involves daily meditation to observe thoughts and feelings, thereby gaining perspective on various situations and challenges. He speaks of how his meditation practice is central to coping with, and recovering from, the loss of his marriage:

My wife and I split after 16 years. That really shook me up. It was a significant event in my midlife. I was 43 years old and I was depressed. Then I thought that, maybe, I should just sit. My meditation came back again, maybe from when I was growing up. Meditation is part of the culture in Burma. People use it when they are in trouble or confused. Also my time spent in Aikido kept me in touch with meditation. So I spent a lot of time by myself, just thinking or meditating. It took a long time, maybe about four years. Then I more or less recovered.

In coping with daily pain from her car accident and loss of her career, Caroline uses spiritual metaphors to describe how she copes with her daily pain and takes care of herself:

One time in my journal I wrote about the metaphoric aspects of my pain and what it was. I felt that I had dark angels with me all the time. They weren't nasty angels, although sometimes they could be a bit sadistic. But it's a presence that's there absolutely all the time. For my own well being, I try and think of it as of being forced to acknowledge a dark presence, whether I like it or not. If I don't acknowledge it and pretend it's not there

I get in trouble. I'll get really sick, if I overdo it when I try to ignore my pain. So the dark presences are an integrative measure somehow and definitely a reminder.

In planning her future career and retirement based upon her midlife shift in identity and spirituality, Vivian speaks of the sense of support she felt based upon a tarot reading:

I did a tarot card reading last night with a good friend. I've only done that a couple of times in my life but I've found it very powerful each time. Again, the message was that I am already everything I need to be. I just need to use the strengths that I have right now. I don't have to keep pushing to try. It will require me to take risks. I must trust and take risks. So I can use the skills and strengths that I have.

In allowing himself to be guided by divine presence, Andrew has discovered that his meditation helps support his sense of direction in the universe.

I spent quite a lot of time meditating. I would meditate and ask the universe to help me make this happen, because I really believed that there was an energy that I could have access to.

As a regular spiritual practice in her life, Sharon does tarot reading for herself to obtain spiritual guidance and plan for the day. Her tarot reading supports the process of meaning making in her life.

My tarot reading is a private and intuitive process. It's my own little meditation and it really doesn't include others. I use it to make sense of certain things, to get more than a general surface meaning.

Sandra reports that she receives much of her spiritual guidance and support through prayer. However, just before her midlife awakening to Baha'i spirituality when she was searching for meaning, she experienced spiritual guidance through the presence of her grandmothers:

I have had a few psychic things happen. I was sitting here on a sofa in this position. I was saying to one of my sisters that I never feel guided. I wanted to be guided and, suddenly, I felt both my grandmothers. I didn't hear anything but in my mind's eye, I knew where one was and where the other was. I didn't see anything and I didn't hear anything, but my mind had the knowledge that my grandmother said, "You will be guided."

In summary, all the participants found that spirituality supported them through their midlife transitions. Many participants describe how specific spiritual events or activities provide them with support and guidance. All participants continue to find spirituality to be a critical source of support and guidance in their lives in reinforcing their direction and providing meaning and purpose in their lives.

Spiritual Commitment. Through the experience of midlife transition, each participant asserts that they have made a commitment to the spiritual path and to spiritual practice in their daily lives. Spiritual commitment was described variously by each participant as a commitment to life, to enlightenment, to self-knowledge, to healing, and to guidance of others. All participants broadly expressed this commitment as a commitment to themselves and to living authentically, as well as a commitment to helping others, either through social action or in their immediate relationships.

Sandra is very devoted to her spiritual practice and to the Baha'i faith. She describes how this commitment developed after yearning for meaning and purpose. She was introduced to the Baha'i writings by her sister, and then made a careful consideration and study of the Baha'i writings, over the course of four years, from the time she was 40 until 44 years:

So when I became a Baha'i, it was like getting married. I tend to build my commitments. I didn't enter the faith in a mad passion. I just had a sense that I must do this. I was sort of a lukewarm person to become a Baha'i. But my faith has built and developed so that now I am a very deeply committed member of the Baha'i faith. I love Baha'u'llah and I find his teachings are life giving. I'm a very committed member of my faith and I am completely devoted to the faith.

Now, her spiritual commitment is central to her daily life, involving her in many activities helping and supporting others:

My whole life became a spiritual existence. Nearly all my excitement is in the spiritual realm.

After struggling with depression and suicidal feelings for several years, Laura states that her spirituality has fostered a commitment to herself, to her children, and to living:

I haven't felt suicidal for a very long time. I've gone past that. Without my belief in some kind of process going on, although I didn't completely understand it, there would be no point or reason for continuing. Of course, my kids are the other reason. I couldn't do that to them, because if

I did that, it would give them permission to do the same. Somehow, I have to show them that there is a way to make some sense of all of the pain, that there is some higher purpose and some higher meaning.

After her midlife awakening to spirituality, Vivian feels a strong spiritual commitment to people and feels that career and financial success are relatively less important than previously:

I have to make sure I have some fun and I have quality time with the people I love. Nothing is as important as that.

Growing out of her revised identity and values, she speaks of her spiritual commitment to making a positive social contribution:

At that time, it is important to me to make a difference doing something, contributing, something that is very important to me. I know I'll be able to find an outlet for that commitment. That's a very important spiritual value for me.

Since the opportunity to successfully test whether his spirituality supported him through his triple bypass surgery, Carl speaks of his commitment to his spiritual principles of self awareness, compassion and personal responsibility as guiding his daily attitudes and actions:

I'm more committed than ever to those tenets of my spiritual philosophy because when I needed them they were there. One the other hand, I'm not preoccupied with spirituality. I do not operate on an esoteric level every minute, but there are gentle and subtle reminders as I go through each

day. I'm aware of my own mortality, and the mortality of others, and that time ticks along.

A part of his commitment is to his self-knowledge:

I want to know myself as well as one can in a lifetime. After this operation, I'm recommitted to knowing myself as a spiritual pursuit.

He adds that this commitment to ongoing spiritual development and living authentically entails a strong sense of responsibility for himself and his own life:

If I take responsibility for myself, then it is possible for me to have expectations of my own conduct, my moral conduct, my own emotional actions and reactions. I do my best not to have expectations of anyone else.... By not having that expectation, I can give emotionally, spiritually and in every other way to other people in an unconditional way that doesn't depend upon reciprocation.

Following years of abuse as a child, Katherine found herself depressed and suicidal. Her spirituality helps her to make a spiritual commitment to living and to healing herself:

I realized that since I had made the resolve not to kill myself, I must also resolve to live in the best possible manner, in a way that was no longer dominated by internal torment.

Andrew has found meaning and commitment through his spirituality, which is reinforced through his meditative practice. His commitment to meditation reaffirms his spiritual commitment to himself and others on a daily basis.

The most important step I made was to realize that I had to make meditation the single most important thing I do every day. Once I made it a high priority then it became easy. If I was going out early, I'd get up earlier. I'd always allow that half an hour to meditate before I went out. It's as important as cleaning my teeth or getting out of bed.

He has discovered meaning and purpose in his spiritual connection to humanity, which he describes as universal love and compassion. He asserts his commitment to this spiritual principle:

There is only one truth that I've come up with which is the absolute truth. The best way to paraphrase it is to use the words that Jesus used. He said that the most important commandment is, "Love God, love your neighbour as yourself." Basically that says if you love God, you love your neighbour and you love yourself - those three things, everything in life will flow from that. I believe those are paramount truths.

During her midlife transition, Sharon experienced transformative moments of awareness about the suffering of others, especially women as well as all living things. She has made a spiritual commitment to compassion for all living things. She expresses this commitment in her work, in her involvement in women's spirituality, and in the deep ecology movement:

For years and years and years, I had been told that I cared too much. I used to think, "How can you care too much?" I would get involved and I would want to fix things and make things better and not just for me. I am

very idealistic, even at this age. So I wanted to find something where I could show my compassion.

After her car accident and midlife transition coping with disability and loss of her career, Caroline continues to cope with daily chronic pain. She underscores her ongoing commitment to her spiritual development through discipline, and to supporting others in their spiritual journeys.

A part of me wants to become comfortable with the stillness. How I cope with my pain is more frenetic. I think that spiritual discipline might be important. If I do make peace, if I am able to find that within myself, I hope that I am disciplined, that I don't rest on my laurels. I would like to teach or help somebody else.

In summary, all the participants in the study found spiritual meaning and purpose through the challenges and losses of their unique midlife experiences. Consequently, they each state a spiritual commitment to various principles, values, and ways of living. This commitment entails a commitment to their own lives, the well-being of others, or a commitment to daily practice and living by spiritual principles.

Spiritual Expression. All the participants emphasize the importance of expression of their spirituality and spiritual values in their lives. This appears to be a significant part of their commitment to spirituality. After their midlife transition and spiritual growth, all participants continue to express their spirituality in various activities in their lives. Subsequently, several participants have undertaken spiritual careers. For several participants, spirituality is expressed in creative expression, social action, ritual, and sexually.

During her spiritual awakening during midlife, Beth attended a weekend retreat to experience her deeper nature. She describes how her spirituality was expressed in a spontaneous painting that she made during one activity at the retreat:

What came out of it was a very spiritual painting. I can't believe all the symbols and images that came to unfold. I didn't know where it was coming from. There was so much symbolism, from Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

Now she expresses her spirituality in her career as a spiritual guide and teacher, which involves helping others in their spiritual practice and healing:

Eventually, I ended up working full-time at the center where the focus is on helping people find themselves, through ways of knowing themselves, and learning how to self-heal through working with their energy. It became my spiritual practice.

Before her accident, Caroline describes how dance was her expression of spirituality:

My involvement in dance has been spiritual because it was using the physical art to transcend physical boundaries and reach into ethereal and imaginative.

Since her accident and loss of career in midlife, she has lost her ability to dance. Through her spiritual growth and increased awareness of her connection to others however, she finds spiritual expression in her volunteer work:

So I find the love through connection with others as a volunteer. I've chosen that life over working part-time. For example, if you volunteer to

stuff envelopes then you can go to a concert. So, it started out that way but I have ventured into anti-poverty groups, different disabled groups, and different political areas. My volunteer work is very important to me. I've discovered that volunteering is an expression of my love.

She also continues to consider how she can use her knowledge of dance to express her spirituality:

Now I have a file at home on research I want to do about notions of dance as sacred. Maybe I could move into that and maybe I could choreograph for somebody who could move. I might have a gift for helping somebody who had a gift of movement and to encourage them to express that.

Although Sandra views her current work in directly helping others as an expression of her spirituality, she believes all of her occupations express her spirituality:

In my life, I've been an elementary school teacher, a professional singer, and a mother. I think are very spiritual occupations. Certainly for me they were.

Now she finds spiritual expression through helping others in need, whenever the opportunity presents itself:

This woman went home to Bangladesh and she promised she'd get in touch with the Baha'is in Bangladesh. She also started a clinic for pregnant women, newborn babies, and little children. All the women of Bangladesh suffer terribly. So I started sending her my opera earnings. The money was used for various equipment and supplies at the clinic and I was told that my name would appear on plaques on the equipment.

Instead, I asked that the name of one of the Baha'i women who had been hung in Iran be placed on these plaques.

Katherine has found that her spiritual practice helps her to cope with chronic health problems and chronic pain that emerged during her midlife. She now expresses her spirituality and compassionate commitment to others in her work with others with chronic health problems:

I discovered that I could facilitate small meditation and discussion groups from my home with people who knew that I had been experiencing chronic health problems and where I would be able to lie down when necessary.

The first group was on Thich Nhat Hanh's fourteen precepts. Then I began a group for people dealing with chronic health problems where I taught Vipassana, lovingkindness and more recently compassion meditation. I have taught this group in a series of five to eight sessions for the past four years. Then in 1997 I began teaching a lovingkindness meditation group which also continues to this day.

Underscoring her commitment to spirituality in all aspects of her life, her expression of spirituality reflects many other interests in her life:

I try to bring to my teaching Western psychological understanding, a valuing of personal relationships and responsible sexuality, an appreciation of science, especially evolution and cosmology, a commitment to social action, an honouring of the natural world and an openness to continually learn from other traditions and disciplines, and especially from the people who come to my classes.

All participants engage in expression of their spiritual beliefs through various means, including career, volunteer work, charitable acts, and creative expression.

Although a few participants feel that their lives before midlife involved some expression of spirituality, most participants did not have any sense of spirituality in their lives before midlife. However, since their midlife transitions and spiritual awakenings, each participant feels a strong need to express their spiritual commitment and values in how they act in the world.

Spiritual Connection. Each participant described their spiritual search as a search for connection to the divine or universal, and for connection to other people. This connection was experienced in a variety of ways by each participant, including a general connection with humanity; a connection through nature; a connection to specific people, present or distant, alive or deceased; and as a connection to universal or divine energy.

Several participants speak of a sense of spiritual connection to other people, usually associated with feelings of compassion, love, and a desire for peace. This sense of connection to humanity is reflected in Carl's belief in the spiritual connection between all humans, and how this understanding has the potential to promote harmony and understanding:

I believe that we are all connected. We want to be unique. As individuals, we want to be special and that's wonderful but I think the essential truth is that we are related and connected, irrevocably, and absolutely. If we conducted ourselves more accordingly, we'd make better the life that we have. You can't fight an enemy with any kind of fervour with whom you feel an essential connection.

In describing her spirituality and her commitment to others, Katherine reflects on her sense of connection to other people and to the universe:

Spirituality at its heart is the yearning for wholeness within ourselves, and that which brings a sense of connection with other people, with other species and with the whole of creation. That means that we need to work for the liberation from suffering of every being.

Several participants also reflect on their spiritual connection through nature. For example, Laura experiences a spiritual connection to the divine through nature:

Nature is very important to me. A lot of my healing has come from just being in nature. I love the ocean. I love animals and trees. I just love to be in nature. I feel some peace in nature and a gentleness. Nature is gentle.

This has been an important part of my spiritual connection.

Vivian also shares this sense of spiritual connection to divine energy through nature. Her existence and identity are positively affirmed through her experience of nature:

I've always felt most connected to nature, most in touch with higher forces when I'm outside. I feel like my most true self when I am outside and doing something physical. I feel like the kind of being that I was put on the earth to be. It's a feeling of pure joy.

Sharon also experiences a spiritual connection between all life, in nature, rooted in the philosophy of deep ecology:

Deep ecology is very melded to spirituality because it looks at the web of life and how we're all inter-connected and how there is no difference between other creatures and humans.

Andrew believes that by connecting with nature, we connect with a universal, spiritual energy:

We can also connect with universal energy by being in nature, out in the beauty.

Some participants shared specific experiences of feeling connected spiritually to living or deceased people. Vivian shares her continued sense of spiritual connection to deceased family members through experiences of birds in nature:

After the deaths of both of Andrew and my dad, I found that I would feel connected with them through nature, through birds in particular. I would sense their essence, that their souls were present, and that there was something that survived after this life.

While coping with her diagnosis and treatment of thyroid cancer, she talks about spiritually connecting with her deceased father for support and guidance:

In my journal, I talked about and thought about my dad and what messages he would be giving me to get through this time. This was a spiritual process. I was trying to connect with someone who meant so much to me. I admired the way he lived his life. I connected to what would he be saying about this and that really helped. It just got me back on track, it helped me feel level again and believing that I could get past this.

In her emerging spirituality in midlife, Beth came to appreciate her ability to sense her spiritual connection to other people. She discusses her new spiritual connection with her husband, as something that changes and grows with her spiritual growth:

I will be on a path all my life, and my marriage has changed as a result. There is a lot more respect between my husband and me. I think it's because of the work that I've done and the work that he's done. There is a respect and a trust. The one thing that we both can do is experience a deep spiritual connection with each other.

Andrew also experiences a spiritual connection to other people since his midlife transition. Early in his midlife transition, before he had clarified his beliefs and spiritual meaning, he shares how he unexpectedly experienced a deep spiritual connection with someone at a distance:

Over a period of two months, I had a relationship that I can only describe as a psychic relationship. I had an experience of a relationship with a spiritual being. It was very blissful. It was a very blissful experience. It was very loving, very blissful, and very powerful. It didn't bother me but it got to a point where I was wondering how what I was meant to do with this experience. Was I just meant to have it? Was I meant to be in love with a spirit for the rest of my life?

After her car accident, Caroline struggles with coping with daily life and financially supporting herself. Her spiritual connection to her grandmother was and continues to be a source of spiritual support.

I moved home after the accident because I couldn't manage on my own. While I was living there, my grandmother died, about ten years ago. She was my spiritual mentor and very important to my development. My grandmother's death has been an opportunity for my belief in the spirit because her spirit speaks to me. I'm pretty sure she does. I have to believe that I have a spiritual connection to her. She brought creativity into my life and that creativity is spiritual.

Several participants speak of the importance of connecting with universal or divine energy as a source of inspiration and support to their spiritual activities in daily life. Andrew reflects on his increasing awareness of universal energy as he progresses on his spiritual journey:

All this time I was developing and building a sense that there is more to this life than I'd ever realized. That there is a form of energy in the universe which one could call God, but I didn't like to refer to it as God. That word carried too much baggage for me. I would call it universal energy. By aligning ourselves with that energy, our lives would flow more smoothly. That was as far as I'd got at that stage in my spiritual development.

He believes that it is necessary for him to access this spiritual connection to the divine through daily meditation or other activities to maintain his emotional and physical well-being:

Our minister in church did a series of talks. He said that we don't have enough energy personally to get through life and that's why we get sick.

That's why we have breakdowns and why we burn out. He said if we rely upon our own energy, eventually those things happen. The only thing we can do is to connect ourselves with universal energy.

Sandra speaks about how her connection to divine energy helps her in coping with her mental illness. She believes that this approach can also help others:

From my experience, if a person has a strong spiritual connection, the soul can reach out past the illness and help the person. A lot of mentally ill people don't know they have a soul, and doctors, on the whole, are timid to work with the soul.

Since their midlife transitions and spiritual development, all the participants experience and describe a sense of spiritual connection, which serves to inspire and support them in various ways. Each participant experiences this connection in different ways, through others, nature, and a divine or universal energy.

Participation in Spiritual Activities. All participants engage in specific spiritual activities, including ritual, prayer, meditation, and retreat. Many participants engage in a variety of different activities, on a regular basis. These activities are a source of support, guidance, and healing. Spiritual activities are undertaken with others and alone. It is through these activities that participants report experiencing a range of spiritually based feelings, including awe, peace, joy, acceptance, insight, bliss, and compassion.

Several participants discuss their participation in structured ritual or church services as a way of experiencing spirituality and spiritual affirmation. For example, Sharon shares how her experience of Unitarian services gives her a sense of belonging:

Unitarianism is something that I have been following and learning about over the last year. That is becoming more and more a part of my life and I'm getting to know people in the church. I love going to services, which surprises me completely. Most Sunday mornings I go to church and I sit in that beautiful, beautiful room and I feel very spiritual there. I feel like I'm allowed to be who I am with the people around me.

Laura speaks about participating in rituals created by groups of women. In affirming her spiritual connection to divine energy in nature, these celebrations help her to review her life in structured ways and maintain a focussed intention on the future:

I go to a Goddess circle. Two of them actually. I belong to a sisterhood and I also go to a circle one Saturday a month. We celebrate the seasons. We also perform rituals, which help me to focus on intention in my life. The last circle focused on what have we harvested over the last year and what we want to harvest over the next year. It brings focus and thought to what I want to create in my life and where I have been over the past year. It just helps me stop and think.

Since the emergence of a strong sense of spirituality in her midlife, Beth speaks of her desire for ritual and the structure that comes with it. She feels that this is necessary as a way to remind her of, and affirm, her spirituality:

Over the last six months, I have felt a strong need to have some ritual in my life. A body needs some structure but on a spiritual level, I need some ritual. It doesn't necessarily mean going to church or something like that. Doing something on a regular basis seems to nourish the soul.

As a part of her spirituality, Sharon regularly engages in a ritual of reading her tarot cards. This spiritual practice is her way of spiritually connecting and clarifying issues in her life using her intuition:

When I'm working with the cards, when I'm holding them and reading them, I don't get visions. It's not visions but I do feel connected to spirit. I don't feel that it's coming from me. I feel that it's coming from the universe and I'm just a channel. It's a really neat feeling when it happens. Then I'll start writing and that is a conversation with spirit.

Several participants speak of their use of prayer as a spiritual activity that inspires and supports their spiritual connection. Andrew shares how he felt moved by prayer during a religious service at the Unity church:

We started off singing a couple of hymns, which were too familiar. I was a bit skeptical. Then it became really interesting. We stood up and we sang the Lord's prayer. Now, I hadn't said the Lord's prayer in probably 30 years. Yet suddenly I was standing up and singing it. I remembered all the words and I found it very moving. I found it very, very moving.

As a way of spiritually connecting to the divine, Sharon finds prayer is a powerful activity for experiencing her spirituality. She uses prayer on a regular basis to cope with her mental illness and to help others:

Prayer has helped me many times. Now I rely heavily on prayer. In fact, prayer is how I get through life because I feel so strong a connection at the same time. If I ever get any feelings or start sensing anything, I beg God to protect me from vain imaginings. This is the phrase that is used in

our writings. Vain imaginings are so bad because, first, you can be deluded or secondly you can be led astray or even tormented with vain imaginings. My fridge magnet says, "Life is fragile, handle with prayer." This is my philosophy. Manic illness is certainly a break between being normal.

Several participants engage in various forms of meditation as a way of spiritually connecting to themselves and the universe. Andrew speaks of his commitment to daily meditation as a spiritual practice that connects him to universal energy:

For me, meditation is an easy practice. It wasn't at first. It took time and discipline but now I love it. I can't spend a day without meditating. I would miss it too much. I meditate for close to an hour in the mornings and half an hour in the evenings. I also do walking meditations. I'll probably meditate in total for three hours per day because I know it's important for my energy.

Anthony shares how his spiritual practice of meditation helps him to shift his awareness from his busy work life to a present and introspective awareness of himself. During his midlife transition, this helped him to cope with the painful emotions associated with his divorce, and allowed him to let go of those painful feelings:

If I didn't meditate or sit down and get rid of all these other distractions, I don't think I would have recovered as well. A lot of guys push thoughts and feelings away. They get busy and try to fill up the time. I didn't do that and I'm glad I didn't do that. I found a way of accepting and

acknowledging my situation. My meditation really stopped all my busyness.

As a way of staying spiritually connected to herself, Vivian practices yoga on a weekly basis, which also involves meditation:

I do yoga regularly. I work on being able to be very centered and to be able to get completely relaxed.

Caroline describes her process of meditation and prayer when she goes for walks. She uses this practice to connect to the divine in nature and to feel spiritually affirmed:

I walk my dog everyday, as walking is a kind of a spiritual meditation and I pray. I pray to a multiplicity of spirits, like a pantheism, or spirits in nature. That feels comfortable because as a child that's who I was.

In her personal spirituality, Katherine finds the act of meditation helps her to stay spiritually focussed in her daily life. She is involved in regular meditation activities, as a participant, organizer, and instructor:

I became involved in a whirlwind of activity organizing meditation retreats, publishing a newsletter that eventually became a journal, and began after a couple of years to teach meditation. I also attended both Vipassana and Zen retreats.

She describes how meditation has supported her healing from childhood abuse. By using the practice of lovingkindness meditation, which promotes compassion, she has been able to forgive her childhood abusers:

There were ways in which the therapeutic work, especially when I got to forgiveness, paralleled the lovingkindness meditation. One of the most powerful experiences I had was when I decided to put up photographs of my abusers on the altar I have in my bedroom. Going through this process was immensely healing both for the child who was so traumatized, the adult who can now forgive and the spiritual seeker who can now reclaim the helpful teachings and practices from Buddhism.

Sharon speaks of her journal writing as a spiritual activity because she uses it to clarify her spirituality. She finds this activity is a helpful way of tracking spiritual ideas and feelings that she does not feel able to share with others:

My journal is my safety place, my safe, private place for me to put things. It has been for the past 20 years. It's an important part of my life and a spiritual thing. Sometimes I complain in the journal and do other things but quite often, it's the place where I put my spirituality, my writing about spirituality.

All of the participants are involved in a variety of spiritual activities, including group ritual or services, meditation in groups or alone, private ritual, and prayer. For many participants, regular participation in spiritual activities affirms their spirituality and therefore supports their commitment to a spiritually purposeful life.

Defining Spirituality in Relation to Religion. All ten participants hold some common views in their awareness of spirituality. They discuss the distinctions between religion and spirituality, and suggest that there is a common spiritual core among religions. For four of the participants, their spiritual beliefs and experiences are not

grounded in a recognized religious faith. Two of the female participants attend the Unitarian church, and one male participant attends the Unity church. Two participants are involved in Buddhism and one female participant is a member of the Baha'i faith. Yet, for all ten participants, the distinction between spirituality and religion is significant because they believe that their spirituality is a personal experience that need not occur in an organized religious context.

Although each participant has a unique perspective about how spirituality is expressed and experienced, they share the view that spirituality is inherent to being human. Because spirituality is a part of being human, anyone can experience it if they choose. For example, Beth asserts that everyone can connect with his or her spiritual nature:

I believe that we can connect with our own spirituality. If there is a real willingness to be aware of what is really going on, we can get to a place of awareness. If we do, we have our own information and answers. That willingness to be aware is how change takes place. Once we're aware, change happens. I also believe that all healing is self-healing. We do have that power in each of us.

Similarly, Andrew proposes that humans exist for a spiritual purpose, and to support others in their spiritual journey:

We come here for the human experience, which is one of the choices we make when we came here. We come here to learn lessons about ourselves and to work on our souls. We come here for the purpose to help other

souls on their journeys. For many of us, we need to do a lot of the personal stuff before we can truly help other souls.

He also suggests that the variety of spiritual paths that exist within and outside of religions support our diverse human nature:

I believe that there are many paths. I don't believe there is only one path. I believe there are many paths and there is a path that perhaps suits each one of us best in this incarnation.

In a similar vein, Carl clearly states his belief that spirituality transcends religion.

He also believes that religions have a common core of truth that reflects spirituality:

I believe spirituality transcends any one particular religious tradition. My concept of spirituality includes all religious traditions. I think religious traditions are magnificent. They must be all inherently true or they're all inherently false because each one is built upon similar premises.

Caroline suggests that for her, spirituality entails a broad belief in the connection among all humanity:

Spirituality could be religion; it could be studies in mythology. It could be the belief in Jung's collective unconscious, or it could be the Hindu concept of Akashic records of soultime. I think it's a belief in the eternal spirit and human spirit.

She emphasizes the importance of tolerance and spiritual connection between different religions and culture:

I'm learning about multi-faith and inter-faith work. It's about tolerance for other people's religious tradition, commonality amongst different people's cultures, and how spirituality expresses itself.

Sandra explains how she feels connected to people who have a spiritual focus, regardless of religion:

I find a person of true faith of any faith is easy to connect with because they share faith. It isn't the same religion but it is essentially the same faith. They have faith as opposed to not having faith.

In discussing how their concept of spirituality gives them a strong personal connection to all other people, all ten participants assert that spirituality exists outside of religious dogma and ritual. For example, Laura distinguishes between religion and spirituality. For her, spirituality is an inherent part of existence that is undeniable. As an undeniable spiritual force, divine or universal power is greater than we are, and the religious institutions that we create.

There is a big distinction between religion and spirituality for me. There's dogma in religion, in that you have to follow all these rules and they're fear-based. They're all fear-based. For example, if you don't live your life in a certain way, you will be punished in purgatory. Spirituality is more of a connection to a universal energy, a higher power, and a connection with nature. There is something greater than us out there and we're all a part of some larger plan.

In distinguishing the personal experience of spirituality from religious practices, Anthony suggests that spiritual beliefs and practices were taught and promoted by certain people in

the past. It was later that these practices and beliefs became the foundation of organized religion:

I've always been interested in religion, the structure and the philosophical systems. It has nothing to do with spirituality. It's just religion, as a bureaucracy. If you would ask Jesus whether he was a Christian, he wouldn't know what you were talking about. Same with the Buddha. If you would ask him if he were a Buddhist, he wouldn't know what to answer you. All these "isms" came years after.

In discussing the connection between religions, Anthony suggests that studying different religions helped him to see the connection between them. For him, essential spiritual truth cannot be, and need not be, communicated in words.

I think that studying religion is like studying language. If you study more than one language, you get to know a little bit about your own language. If you study more than two or three, then you begin to see the trend and what language is all about and how important language is, but it's not an end in itself. The best language, of course, is if you don't have to say anything to get it across, because as soon as you say something, then you detract something.

Several participants agree that a religious person may be spiritual, but that the converse is not necessarily true. Anthony sums it up this way:

A person can be spiritual, but he may not be religious like, not go to church and all this. A person can be religious, and he may be spiritual. So

what does that mean? Religion is a subset of spirituality right, not the other way around.

All ten participants assert that there is spiritual truth in all religion, and therefore, there is a common core, or spiritual ground, between all religions. For all ten participants, this common core is compassion, universal love, or one's sense of harmonious connection to other beings. Katherine clarifies that all religions have the potential to be meaningful at a deeper spiritual level:

I now do believe that Christianity can be practiced in a way that is deep and meaningful, as well as other religions can be deep and meaningful.

However, you have to get beneath the religious establishments to find the core of truth in each religion.

Anthony also discusses his understanding of the commonality among three religions: Buddhism, Christianity, and Judaism. He suggests that the spiritual core among these religions has to do with our relationship to others, and how we connect to other people and the divine in a spiritual way:

When I studied these three religions, I found one important thing. If you look at them, not on the surface but a little bit deeper, the central thing is the "self." The common thing is you have to lose your self. You can't be thinking about your self. Your self has to go. That has to be the better part of religion. If you want to call that spirituality, okay. That's the common thing. Even in psychology, you can never be psychologically happy if you're thinking about yourself. You can only be happy when you're not

thinking about your self, when you're lost in some work, in what you're doing, or being with somebody else.

Similarly, Caroline suggests that the spiritual nature among people has to do with being less focussed on the self, and more compassionate to others:

I suppose the commonality that I'm looking for has to do with kind of the good-naturedness of people. I think all religions point to that. It's about not being so self focused.

Andrew believes that universal love is a connecting truth among all religions and humanity:

The truth of universal love is the one thing that has the capability to change this planet eventually. In my personal experience, that is the one truth that is inviolate. I think all the other truths are variations on different aspects of that truth.

In summary, all participants assert a belief that spirituality is an inherent part of the human experience, which may be expressed within or outside of religions. They also suggest there are core spiritual truths within all religions. The single core truth that all ten participants identify is a belief in the power of compassion or universal love in connecting humanity, and promoting peace and harmony.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to learn more about the role of spirituality in the transition through midlife. Narrative interviews were used to document the recollections and personal understanding of ten self-selected adults who identified spirituality as playing a significant role in their midlife transition. The narrative accounts of the ten participants provide a sampling of experiences and perspectives to professionals involved in supporting adults in midlife and beyond.

The narrative interview approach consisted of unstructured interviewing, development of narrative accounts, validation of narratives, and review and analysis of the narratives for common elements. Participants later affirmed and validated that the narrative accounts were an accurate representation of their experiences (Kvale, 1996; Mishler, 1986). The analysis of the interviews identified ten significant elements that were common for all participants. Four common elements reflect a similar midlife process of facing challenges and losses, revision of identity, search for meaning, and acceptance of uncertainty. For each participant these processes of midlife were firmly grounded in spirituality. Six elements describe the experience of spirituality in the lives of the participants. These six elements suggest an expanded definition for spirituality. In this final chapter, the common elements among the ten participants' narratives are discussed in light of current psychological perspectives on spirituality. Recommendations are offered for psychologists and other counselling professionals, and directions for future research are suggested. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the present study and a personal statement by the researcher.

The research question “**What is the role of spirituality in the transition through midlife?**” is answered by three significant findings. A fourth finding clarifies the meaning of spirituality for these participants. First, this study found that spirituality provided significant support for coping with losses and uncertainty during midlife. Second, spirituality was a central support to the midlife developmental process of life review, identity revision, and clarification of values. Third, through the meaning-making process of midlife, each participant found new meaning within the spiritual dimension of his or her life. Finally, each participant described how spirituality continues to play a significant role in his or her life. The fourth finding suggests an expanded definition of spirituality that may help to inform the counselling profession.

Spiritual Coping with Losses and Challenges of Midlife

For the participants in this study, spirituality was central to how they were able to cope with the losses they experienced during midlife. All ten participants experienced many losses, and some experienced multiple losses and challenges within the span of a few years. These included the death of a parent, breakdown of a marriage, severe disability, severe illness, illness of children or spouse, deaths of friends or relatives, loss of career, financial losses, and loss of a home. Similar to the available literature, these significant challenges and losses precipitated a significant transition in their lives (Gould, 1972; Hollis, 1993; Jacques, 1965; Kalish, 1989; Sherman, 1987). However, there has been little or no acknowledgment of the significant role that spirituality can and may play in helping adults cope with the losses and challenges characteristic of this life stage.

In addition to facing the many challenges of midlife, spirituality also helps the participants cope with the ongoing uncertainty and challenges of daily living. Pargament

(1997) proposed that spirituality could be a potential way of coping in people's lives. For the participants in this study, spirituality continues to provide significant support and guidance in their lives. Although some had not realized the spiritual dimension previously in their lives, spirituality became an important component of the way they learned to make sense of, and cope with, their lives from midlife onward. If spirituality provides ongoing support for these ten adults, there may be significant implications for the support spirituality can give others, during midlife and perhaps at other stages of the lifespan.

Spirituality Supports the Revision of Values and Identity at Midlife

The findings of this study suggest that spirituality was a central support to the transition process of midlife for the men and women in this study. In their search for new meaning, midlife adults are often faced with self-reflection, reassessing their values, and with the task of revising their identities to better fit their revised goals and values (Apter, 1995; Josselson, 1996; Levinson et al, 1978; Levinson & Levinson, 1996; Osherson, 1980; Rubin, 1979; Vaillant, 1993). However, unacknowledged in previous literature, spirituality was a central support in the transition process for these women and men, suggesting that this may be an important component of midlife change and adaptation for some adults.

As a part of the revision of identity, spirituality may also facilitate and support the development of authenticity in midlife. Spiritual beliefs and commitments helped each participant find their authentic selves and live more authentically. This movement toward authenticity is consistent with the existential view that the achievement of authenticity is strongly linked to finding meaning in life (Frankl, 1969; Yalom, 1980; Walsh &

Vaughan, 1996). Previous research suggests that people vary in the degree to which they achieve a sense of authenticity during midlife, based on their capacity to live in a way that reflects their revised values and identities (Apter, 1995; Josselson, 1996; Vaillant, 1993; Osherson, 1980). There may indeed be differences based on whether individuals can connect with the more spiritual aspects on their lives, which holds implications for how counselling professionals support client spirituality. Spiritual development, although long ignored in the psychological literature on adult development, may well be a significant component of the developmental process for some adults facing the challenges of midlife and the uncertainties of the decades beyond.

Finding Spiritual Meaning in Midlife

The findings of the study suggest that for some spirituality can be a potent force in the search for meaning at midlife. Spirituality appears to support a significant shift in values and an actively expressed commitment to those values. For each participant the search for new meaning was uniquely spiritual. Moreover, all of the participants found new or revised meaning in their lives through spirituality. The change for each was so profound and foundational that the participants have all been impelled to live differently, enacting their spiritual commitment and new values in their work, and in their relationships to themselves and others. These findings are consistent with theoretical and anecdotal writings on midlife by Bianchi (1982), Hollis (1993, 1995), Jones (1995), and O'Connor and Chamberlain (1996), who propose that successful midlife transition must involve development of the spiritual dimension of self. Although largely unrecognized by psychology in the past, spirituality may be a potential source of meaning for adults in midlife and beyond.

An Expanded Definition of Spirituality

The results of this study suggest an expanded definition of spirituality. The field of psychology has, for the most part, avoided the topic of spirituality, and mental health professionals rarely discussed spirituality with their clients (Mack, 1994; Richards & Bergin, 1997). With the recent public interest in spirituality, psychologists have struggled to understand what spirituality means for their clients (Ingersoll, 1994; Mack). The findings of this study suggest that spirituality is grounded in personal meaning and values, the personal construction of that meaning, and how a person enacts that meaning in their lives.

For the most part, the participants' descriptions of spirituality are consistent with previous attempts to describe and define spirituality as emerging from a sense of spiritual purpose, meaning, or mission in life (Cervantes & Ramirez, 1992; Elkins et al., 1988; George et al., 2000, Ingersoll, 1994). Consistent with these previous definitions in the literature, each participant's spirituality appears to involve personal beliefs, experiences, and practices with respect to their view of life and relationship to the divine, and a sense of spiritual meaning and purpose. However, the participants in this study also emphasize specific experiences of spiritual connection, expressions of spiritual commitment in their actions, and a movement toward authenticity supported by spirituality. Furthermore, spirituality for these ten participants is characterized as being embedded in spiritual practices and beliefs, while distinct from religion. This is consistent with James' (1902/1961) distinction between institutional and individual religion. In addition, all ten participants identified universal love or compassion as a larger spiritual concept that

exists across religions. These aspects potentially contribute to a more wholistic and inclusive definition of spirituality.

While speaking about their belief in the inherent spiritual nature of humans and their own unique experience of spirituality, each participant constructed a personal view of spirituality, and searched for a common spiritual connection to others and to other religions. Historically, a personal construction of spiritual experiences may have always existed but was not socially shared, for various reasons, including the fear of being socially and religiously condemned. For whatever reasons, the current historical context has permitted these participants to engage in, and express a personal construction of the spiritual dimension. The participants' experience of spirituality as personal and subjective is consistent with previous definitions of spirituality (Chandler et al., 1992; James, 1902/1961; Shafranske and Maloney, 1990; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992).

Although past definitions of spirituality emphasize the individual's spiritual purpose, meaning, and mission (Cervantes & Ramirez, 1992; Ellison, 1983; Elkins et al., 1988), few definitions have emphasized the expression of spiritual commitment and purpose through daily action, or the direct experience of spiritual connection. For each participant, spiritual commitment has come to mean that he or she feels committed to living in accordance with his or her deepest beliefs and principles on a daily basis. Moreover, participants reported that the experience of spiritual expression, through various spiritual and nonspiritual activities, supports and affirms their beliefs. This is a potentially significant finding that suggests that spirituality involves specific, observable actions and activities that a person may perform.

The findings of this study suggest that spirituality can play an important role in the transition through midlife, and possibly at other times in life. However, other than recently proposed wellness models (Chandler et al., 1992; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992) and Jung (1933/1971), most psychological theories have not discussed spirituality as an important part of human development. A review of recent research on physical health and spirituality suggests a strong relation between participation in spiritual activities and positive effects on health and coping with illness (George et al., 2000). Although this study did not specifically examine the role of spirituality in terms of physical health, the findings do suggest that spirituality may play an important role in supporting psychological well-being. Each participant's sense of authenticity, sense of purpose or mission, connection to others and to the divine, ability to let go of past hurts and losses, and sense of commitment to self and others is consistent with Vaughan's (1991) definition of healthy spirituality. This suggests that, for these ten participants, the experience of spirituality supports their psychological health in a positive way.

Therapeutic Implications

The results of this study emphasize that spirituality can be an important part of the midlife developmental process for some people. Spirituality seems to help in coping with loss, in revising values and identity, and in finding new meaning. These findings should encourage mental health professionals to recognize the role of spirituality in their client's lives, and find ways of exploring and facilitating the client's use of spirituality as a resource to support midlife, other life transitions, and possibly other challenges in life.

First, mental health professionals should be more aware that their client's spirituality may be an existing or potential resource in coping with the losses and various

related challenges that occur in midlife. If a client reports significant challenges and losses, counsellors can actively help the client to explore their spirituality to determine whether their spiritual beliefs and values have the potential to support and sustain the client. In addition, it is possible that spirituality will be a source of support for clients experiencing losses and challenges at any time in the lifespan. Mental health professionals are encouraged to be aware of spirituality as a potential resource for their clients.

Second, the findings suggest that client spirituality and spiritual practices may serve to support the midlife process of revising identity. Therefore, if psychologists and other counselling professionals are more aware of the potential for spirituality to support the midlife process, they can intentionally explore and encourage client spiritual development as a part of the midlife developmental transition. Counsellors may find that a client's spirituality may help to define a context for reviewing life, clarifying values, and revising identity. When clients are struggling to find ways of becoming authentic and living authentically, during midlife or at other times, spirituality may play a role in supporting this process. Mental health professionals are encouraged to recognize the connection between spirituality, revised values, and authenticity, so that they can support clients in making these connections. Mental health professionals may also find that, for some clients, spirituality supports the meaning-making process of other life transitions, or other challenges in life.

Third, this study suggests that spirituality may be a potential source of new meaning and purpose for some adults in midlife. For some clients, new meaning is found directly through spirituality, leading to spiritual purpose in their lives. Counselling

professionals who recognize spirituality as a potential source of meaning can more fully support their client's search for meaning in all domains of life.

The fourth and final finding of the research emphasizes that each client personally constructs spirituality. Richards and Bergin (1997) explain that assessment helps us understand our client's worldview, determines if religion is healthy or unhealthy, determines whether the spiritual community is a source of support, assesses whether spiritual interventions are helpful, and helps to determine if and how problems are related to spiritual issues. It should be noted that for these ten participants, spirituality has played a supportive and positive role in their transition through midlife, and continues to be a positive factor in their lives. However, it is possible that some clients may report that their spiritual beliefs and practices do not contribute to psychological health (Vaughan, 1991). It would seem incumbent upon the counsellor to explore the role of spirituality in clients' lives in a way that helps the client determine whether or not spirituality is a supportive and healthy resource in their lives. Given this, mental health professionals need to make an effort to understand each client's unique perspective about spirituality (Kelly, 1995; Stanard, Sandhu, & Painter, 2000). The counsellor can engage in a direct discussion about the client's spiritual beliefs and activities, how spirituality is a part of his or her daily life, and the frequency of involvement in spiritual practices. Specific assessment instruments can be used to investigate and clarify client spirituality (Kelly), and mental health professionals can become familiar with these tools. Moreover, the process of assessing spirituality serves to acknowledge and validate the client's spirituality as a potential support for the process of midlife transition.

To be able to explore the client's understanding of spirituality, mental health professionals are encouraged to clarify, for themselves, their personal stance with respect to understanding spirituality. Zinnbauer and Pargament (2000) suggest that if counsellors are able to adopt either a constructivist or pluralist stance to spirituality, they will be able to explore client spirituality by recognizing and honouring multiple paths and interpretations of spiritual reality. Furthermore, mental health professionals should become familiar with the range of spiritual and religious perspectives so that they have at least some familiarity with the diversity of spiritual perspectives among their clients. Therefore, when clients are facing midlife issues, or other losses and transitions that may benefit from exploring the spiritual dimension, psychologists may be better able to acknowledge the client's spiritual journey and spiritual commitments.

As a part of clarifying their own position on spirituality to be able to support client spirituality, psychologists and counselling professionals are urged to recognize and develop the spiritual dimension in their own lives (Kelly, 1995). There are many means available for this professional and personal development. Kelly asserts that the counsellor's personal spiritual development, and the incorporation of the spiritual dimension into the therapeutic process, will help to support both the client and the counsellor in both spiritual and non-spiritual matters.

Implications for Research

Qualitative research is not concerned with extracting generalizable conclusions to the same degree as in the quantitative tradition. However, it is possible for qualitative research to provide an important foundation for future research. Through analysis and the identification of common elements across interviews, this study suggests and supports

topics for further research, especially in defining spirituality. Furthermore, the study may suggest an initial framework for both understanding the role of spirituality in the transition through midlife, and for guiding further inquiry.

First, the results of this study suggest that, for some people, spirituality can play an important role across the lifespan, particularly as a source of support in coping with significant losses and changes. Researchers might also study what role spirituality can play for people in midlife who do not experience difficult challenges or losses. Further research might also determine whether and how spirituality helps people cope with other life crises, such as critical health diagnoses or significant losses.

Second, the results of this study suggest that spirituality may provide significant support for some people through the developmental process of midlife. It is not possible, nor appropriate, to extrapolate these findings in an attempt to develop a general explanation of how spirituality factors into the midlife experience of all adults. However, the analysis and interpretation of the participants' experiences reveal distinct commonalities for these ten individuals. Specifically, spiritual beliefs and values can aid in coping with the external challenges and internal awarenesses that come with midlife, the review and revision of identity, acceptance of the uncertainty of life, and the discovery of new meaning through spirituality. Further research might confirm the findings of this study, by exploring the specific ways that spirituality provides support to the midlife transition, and by determining whether many other adults in midlife experience spirituality as a support.

Because this study was limited to nine Caucasian people and one Asian person, future research might clarify whether a similar midlife process occurs in different cultures

and ethnic groups, and whether or not spirituality is significant to that process. If spirituality can play an important role in the transition through midlife for some people, there may be other developmental transitions in which spirituality is also important. For example, further research could determine whether and how spirituality factors into the transition from adolescence into adulthood, or the transition from old age into death.

This study involved two participants who participate in Buddhism, one Baha'i, two Unitarians, one adherent of the Unity church. Four participants reported no affiliation to an organized faith. Further research might determine whether members of various other Eastern and Western faiths report a similar process in the transition through midlife in which spirituality plays a significant role.

In addition, all participants belong to middle to upper SES and have post-secondary education. Therefore, they were all well educated and articulate. Further research might explore the role of spirituality in the transition through midlife for other people, using methods that do not require exclusive reliance upon verbal articulation, such as participant-observer methods, videotaping, or other expressive means.

Finally, this study suggests an expanded definition of spirituality that might include active expression of spirituality, specific experiences of spiritual connection, and the movement to greater authenticity supported by spirituality. For the ten participants, spirituality also appears to be a personal experience that underpins religion and can exist outside of religion. Further research might clarify whether these are consistent elements in the descriptions of spirituality shared by other individuals. Furthermore, further research might confirm to what extent members of various faiths and cultures hold this perspective of spirituality.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this research is the reliance upon the literacy of the participants. The participants needed to be able to read the invitation to participate and needed to articulate their experiences in English (Kvale, 1996). All ten participants have post-secondary education and were quite articulate. There may have been individuals who did not have the opportunity to participate, due to difficulty in communicating their experience in words, or because English is not their language. There may be aspects of the experience of spirituality that could best be represented symbolically or through actions, that could not be captured through the research interview and thus, will not be known to the researcher.

Because this is a narrative study, each participant's self-report has been the primary source of information or data. The narratives and common elements have been drawn only from what has been remembered and described by the participants. Consequently, the participants' memories of their experiences, as well as their ability to articulate those memories in a coherent manner must be taken into consideration in interpreting the findings. However, narrative research, as a part of the qualitative tradition, seeks to understand people's construction of meaning of life events, so this is not a limitation but rather, only a factor that needs to be taken into consideration in determining the generalizability of the findings. (Kvale, 1996; Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 1993).

This study is also limited by the demographics of the sample. Because of the limited sample size, the findings cannot be assumed to represent all adults, and the results should not be generalized to all adults in the range of SES, various family configurations,

different relationship status, various religions, different races, and various ethnic backgrounds. The sample was comprised of middle to upper income, well-educated participants. Four were not adherents of an organized faith, whereas six belong to various Eastern, middle-Eastern, or Western religions. The sample included four married people and six people who do not have partners. Given the specific demographic characteristics of the sample, it is necessary to consider that the sample may represent a select group of people whose needs and issues at midlife differ from other potential participants. For example, only four participants were partnered at the time of the study. It may be that for this group of participants, the lack of intimate relationship in their lives created a greater need to find meaning and purpose through and within spirituality.

Because each participant's personal experience of making meaning through spirituality and spiritual processes is socially and culturally embedded, the current socio-cultural context of North America likely influenced the participant's construction of experiences, and the researcher's interpretation of those experiences.

Another potential limitation is my ability to interpret each interview for its inherent structure and meaning without unduly distorting or losing the participant's original intended meaning. In qualitative research of this type, findings are inevitably the co-constructions of the participants and the researcher. Every effort was made to be true to the words and meaning of the participants, and each participant validated the narrative describing his or her specific experiences. However, these findings also reflect my identification and interpretation of the significant common elements among the participants' experiences. Because I engaged in a thorough and reiterative analytic process, I trust that these findings are verifiable. I hope that my presentation of the data

collection and analytic process and findings are consistent and accurate, and therefore, trustworthy.

Personal Experience of the Research

I embarked upon this study motivated by a life-long interest in spirituality and in how spirituality is understood by different people. Throughout my life, I have explored various religions and many forms of spirituality. As a counsellor, I am concerned with how people cope with life's challenges, including developmental transitions. Therefore, I found it rewarding to hear the ten participants speak of their journey to spirituality, how it has been a significant part of their midlife experiences, and how spirituality continues to support their paths.

I expected to hear about each participant's experiences of midlife and how spirituality was involved in the process. However, I did not anticipate that each participant would clearly identify a similar midlife process, in which spirituality was a significant source of support and meaning. I also did not expect that all participants would describe their identify revision as a movement toward greater authenticity supported by spirituality. Finally, I was surprised that all participants provided a description of spirituality in relation to religion.

All ten participants faced significant and unexpected challenges and losses during midlife. They all coped and came to terms with their grief, with the support of their spiritual beliefs and activities. The experience of conducting this research has been a source of personal, psychological support and inspiration, as I listened to these stories and considered them in relation to my own spirituality. Over the past year, while I was involved in this study, I experienced several personal challenges as a part of my own

midlife experience. This research has provided me with perspective and support. In an unanticipated way, the participants of this study have been spiritual mentors for my own coping. I am grateful to every one of them.

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APPENDIX B

Telephone Screening Guide

- Thank you for calling. My name is Donna Paproski and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. This research is for my doctoral dissertation. My supervisor is Dr. Judith Daniluk.
- Before we begin, I need to ask you three questions to clarify whether or not you meet the criteria for participating in this study.
 1. Are you in midlife?
 2. During your midlife, have you experienced a change in how you see yourself and your life?
 3. Has spirituality played a significant role in these changes?

If the person answers “no” to either question, I will thank them for their interest and tell them that they don’t meet the criteria for the study. If the person answers “yes” to both questions, I will proceed to outline the research process and purpose.

- Now I’ll review the purposes and processes of this research. This may help you to decide whether or not you are still interested in participating. You may ask questions at any time.
- The purpose of this study is to explore the role of spirituality in your transition through midlife. It is hoped that this study may validate your midlife experience, inform professionals involved in counselling adults about the role of spirituality for adults in midlife, help to develop theory about spirituality in midlife, and help inform future research in this area.

- Overall, I hope that participating will be an enjoyable experience for you and an opportunity to share some of your significant experiences. Do you have any questions?
- The study involves two, confidential tape-recorded interviews, of one to two hours each, at a private space on the UBC Campus in the Department of Counselling Psychology or another suitable place.
- In the first interview, you will have the opportunity to talk about the role of spirituality in your midlife transition. The interview will be tape-recorded.
- After transcription, analysis of the interview and development of a narrative summary based upon the interview, I will meet with you for about one hour follow-up interview. This interview will also be tape-recorded.
- Your participation is voluntary and confidential. You can refuse to answer any questions during the interview. If you choose to discuss any sensitive events in your life, you may request that I stop the tape, or that recorded material be dropped from the analysis and research. You may do this at any time during the interviews.
- The tape-recorded interviews and your identity will be kept confidential, and the recordings will be erased at the end of the study. All tapes and transcriptions will be identified by code numbers and stored in a locked file cabinet.
- When we meet for an interview, we will review this information again and you will be asked to sign a consent to participate, and you will receive a copy of that consent form.

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- If you have any questions, now or at any time during the research, you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Judith Daniluk, at 822- 5768.
- Are you still interested in discussing your experiences?

APPENDIX D

Orienting Statement

“The purpose of this study is to explore the role of spirituality in your transition through midlife. In our earlier discussion, you identified yourself as someone who has experienced a significant change in midlife. As well, spirituality was significant in your experience of this change. To help you begin your story, please take a moment to consider when or how this change started for you. When did it end?”

I will pause to allow the person to reflect. Then I will read the following section slowly.

“Over the next two hours, I would like you to tell me your story about this change. Although I may ask you to elaborate upon or clarify details about your story, I encourage you to tell your story in the way that you understand and remember it. For this reason, most of the time I will just listen and not interrupt or direct your process. You may begin whenever you feel ready.”

During the interview, I may use questions or statements to deepen the interview, such as:

1. Tell me more about how that (event, experience, time, etc.) was for you.
2. What was the significance of that event (experience, etc.) ?
3. How did spirituality figure into that event (experience, time period, etc.)?
4. What were your thoughts or feelings at that time?

After the participant has completed the story, I will ask if there is anything else that they wish to add. Then I will ask the following questions pertaining to the topic of research.

“In your story, you have spoken about the role of spirituality in your midlife. I would like to clarify your understanding about a few aspects of spirituality.”

1. Is there anything else that you wish to add about your spirituality that is relevant to your story? Is there anything that you didn't mention earlier?
2. Now that you have gone through this change, what do you think are the significant aspects of spirituality for you?
3. With respect to the spiritual aspect of your change, is there anything that you would have wanted help with? If so, what kind of help?
4. What kind of person would you wish to discuss your spirituality with?

APPENDIX E

Guide Questions for Validation Interview

The purpose of this meeting to review the narrative which was based on our earlier interview. You have had a chance to read and review this narrative for a few weeks. It is important that this narrative is an accurate presentation of your experiences relating to the role of spirituality in your transition through midlife.

1. Is there anything of relevance that is missing in your story?
2. Has anything been distorted or presented inaccurately?
3. Has anything been stated in too extreme or too soft a way in this narrative?
4. Are there certain words or phrases that you would like to replace or remove?
5. Would you like to comment on your experience of sharing your experiences in this research project?

APPENDIX F

Sandra's Narrative

As far as a significant change in mid-life, I have had crises throughout my life. However, I see my life is an unbroken pattern of growth. I've always had a sense of unity in my life. From the time that I was born, I have always been on a path, although sometimes I didn't know it. Sometimes I've been confused and I have wondered what am I doing and why am I here. It's like a daffodil. When the leaves come out of the earth, that is a crisis. When the bloom opens that is a crisis and there is a change, but it's always like a daffodil growing from the bulb. My transformation is that kind of transformation. It's growth. I don't have a sense of a sudden change in my path or a sudden change in my basic nature, which is the same from birth. I have had some very "earth-shattering" experiences but they were always part of my growth and I see them as part of my growth.

It is difficult to speak of the depth of my spiritual experiences in a single narrative. The main thing to me is that I am a spiritual creature, that I am a soul. Spirituality is the investigation of the spiritual world and that is an ocean for me. I don't know whether to talk to you about the waves or the depths or the denizens of the ocean or the pebbles or the salt. I don't know what to talk about because it is an ocean for me.

I'm the eldest of six children. My spirituality has always been connected with my faith. When I was a little girl, from about age 4 to 15, I went to the Anglican Sunday school. I never felt oppressed by the church or by the faith. I only felt a joyful

sense of learning in my Sunday school. I loved Jesus. I have loved humanity ever since I could remember. I have always been connected with the spiritual world.

I was a very faithful, devoted child. For example, one day when I was about seven or so, the Sunday school teacher said, "We must have God in our thoughts at all time." So I went to school and I spent a whole day with God in my thoughts. I didn't do anything without God in my thoughts. I did my arithmetic, I did my history, I talked to my teacher, I walked with my best friend, and I skipped my rope and always kept God in my thoughts.

When I was maybe 10, I wrote a Sunday school exam administered worldwide by the Anglican Church. I got a bible from London because I was one of those children who achieved the highest mark in the world on these exams. My reverend, an Anglican minister, wanted me to become a deaconess. Being a deaconess in the Anglican Church was as high as any woman could aspire in the 1940's. Although I didn't become an Anglican deaconess, I became an elected administrator of the Baha'i community in Vancouver. At that time, I thought, he got his wish after all. The Baha'i don't have priests or clergy but we have elected administrators and so I have in fact I've become a deaconess. I am licensed as a religious representative to do weddings.

When I was 17, I lost my faith. I lost it because I no longer could believe what the church was teaching. For example, I couldn't say the Anglican creed anymore, "I believe in God the Father and Jesus Christ, His only begotten, etc." I thought, "I don't believe this. I don't believe Christ is the only begotten son and I didn't believe he was born of a virgin." I think I questioned these things because of my spiritual and mental

development as an adolescent. Many adolescents do question and I did. When I searched and questioned and examined, I couldn't believe. I left because I just couldn't believe.

One important event happened when I was 17. I went from Vancouver to Portland, Oregon to visit a friend who was a fundamentalist Christian. Her church was quite fundamentalist Protestant, more than the Anglican Church, which is a rather conservative Protestant church. I went with her to a Youth for Christ rally. By then I was already quite an accomplished actress and singer. A gentleman got up and was saying how he used to be a drug addict and how he had been saved. He was putting on a great act. I thought, "He's a damn good actor. He's as good as I am, this guy," and I thought, "He's a fake."

Then I went home to Powell River where I had grown up. I went back to the Anglican Church and I thought, "This church is dead. This is a fossilized faith." For awhile, I thought, "Well I can go to the church and not say the creed." But I couldn't. I thought, "This is hypocritical. How can I stand here and not say the creed. Either I believe or I don't." I also used to pray and I would say, "Dear God, if there is a God," and then I would pray most earnestly. But I didn't find any answers. I guess I recognized the phoniness of that Evangelist and the lack of the living faith in the Anglican Church. So, I left the church completely when I was 17.

I need a living faith. My religion is closely connected with my spiritual development. However, I believe in spiritual development even in a human being who says they have no faith. I think every human being is a spiritual person. From the ages of 17 to 44, I had no faith. I was searching and I was in the wilderness of my

life. I need to be married in a sacred place, so I was married in the Anglican Church at age 23. I was longing for a spiritual connection. And sometimes, when it came to be Thanksgiving, I'd say to my husband, "Can we go to a Thanksgiving service? I really want to go to a Thanksgiving service." So, we would just go to some church to go to the Thanksgiving service. I still wanted a connection. But it was a lack of faith that made it impossible for me to feel connected.

My first child and only daughter was born when I was 27. I am a manic-depressive. The onset of my illness occurred at the birth of my daughter. The birth was so marvelous, and so mind-blowing. I got so ecstatic that it triggered a manic episode. Then I went into depression. When that happened, I would pray out of despair, although I didn't have a firm concept to hold onto. I had a series of depressions for many years after this first manic episode. My son, my second child, was born when I was 30. He was a big baby at 8 pounds and 11 ounces. I felt the children weren't really mine but were a trust from God. I was so grateful and happy to have these beautiful trusts and it was a spiritual trust. When my children were born I had no faith, but I couldn't imagine denying them the opportunity for faith, so I had them both christened.

To me, singing is and was a spiritual act. As a professional singer, my specialty was making people cry. In the many roles that I played, the reviews noted that I could express emotion through the music and share it with the people in the audience. They would sit there and weep. If they weren't weeping, I knew I wasn't on that night. I love to sing tragedy but I found that if I ever got depressed I could no longer sing tragedy. I had to be really happy and then I could pour on all these

emotions. In my life, I've been an elementary school teacher, a professional singer, and a mother. I think are very spiritual occupations. Certainly for me they were.

My son became a Baha'i at age 13 through his own efforts. I was 43 at the time. He became a Baha'i before me. He was a very spiritual youth. He was very devoted and interested in spiritual matters. This is what got me through the whole of my son's upbringing from the age of 13 until he was a man. We could argue and fight about everything else, but we were just walking together in the same path, searching out the same knowledge when it came to our faith. This was a wonderful bond between us.

Before I became a Baha'i, I used to search in psychic phenomena. I have had a few psychic things happen. I was sitting here on a sofa in this position. I was saying to one of my sisters that I never feel guided. I wanted to be guided and, suddenly, I felt both my grandmothers. I didn't hear anything but in my mind's eye, I knew where one was and where the other was. I didn't see anything and I didn't hear anything, but my mind had the knowledge that my grandmother said, "You will be guided."

When I was about 40 years old, my youngest sister said that she had become a Baha'i. This youngest sister first introduced me to the faith. Now my youngest sister seemed to be someone without a core; she had a restlessness and a lack of purpose. I noticed that once she became a Baha'i she seemed to me to have a core. I thought that was good for her but it's nothing I wanted to be involved with. I didn't want to become a Baha'i.

But I became curious and I started reading and studying the writings. In the Baha'i faith there are many books. The founder of the faith, Baha'u'llah, wrote thousands of tablets, prayers, and meditations. Tablets are like letters or statements and are the words we use for sacred scripture.

About that time, I told my sister that I had no idea what my purpose was in life. I had no purpose and I didn't know what I was supposed to be doing. I felt I should have some purpose and I wanted to have a purpose but I did not know what it was. I had no idea why I was here. So, I started reading. For four years from the ages of 40 to 44, I read every book on the Baha'i that I could find. I studied and I studied. I still didn't want to be a Baha'i. I loved all the teachings but I didn't want to be a Baha'i.

Now along with everything else I've wanted in life, I've always wanted to help to "save the world." I always wanted to be involved in nurturing the world and the people of the world so that they could have a better life. I've always been interested in contributing in some very tangible way. While I was reading, I came across the handbook of administration. Now you might not expect the great spiritual teachings to be in a handbook of administration. As I was reading, I saw one sentence, "We are building a refuge for mankind." I thought, "Okay, I can't do that alone. A refuge for mankind, I can't do that alone. I'll just have to join them because I can't do it alone." So I became a Baha'i when I was 44.

So when I became a Baha'i, it was like getting married. For example, when I got married I loved my husband but I wasn't madly crazy about him. I really loved him but as time went on, I loved him more. Now that we've been married for 40

years, I believe that my love is growing- becoming more, not less. In my faith, it's the same as my marriage. I tend to build my commitments. I didn't enter the faith in a mad passion. I just had a sense that I must do this. I wasn't overly excited about being a Baha'i. I just thought I have to be a Baha'i because I don't think I can do this myself. I just had a feeling I should be a Baha'i. I wasn't madly in love with Baha'u'llah. I was sort of a lukewarm person to become a Baha'i. But my faith has built and developed so that now I am a very deeply committed member of the Baha'i faith. I love Baha'u'llah and I find his teachings are life giving. I'm a very committed member of my faith and I am completely devoted to the faith.

As soon as I became a Baha'i, things started to happen. It's as if I put my hand in the hand of God. Now the Baha'is believe that all religions are part of the same religion which is the religion of God. So, He sends a messenger here and a messenger there, in this time or that, like Moses, Krishna, and Jesus and, in this age, Baha'u'llah. So when I say that I've put my hand in the hand of God, I don't mean that a Roman Catholic wouldn't be doing exactly same thing. But Baha'u'llah is my prophet and the Baha'i faith is my faith and I truly believe. So I had put my hand in the hand of God, so things started to happen.

I became a Baha'i in May. In May, I auditioned and was accepted into a large, local singing company. I had tried to get into that organization for years, and I was never accepted. I was 44 years old and I had done everything, but I never could get into the opera. I wanted to do it not so much out of love of it, more for the money and prestige. I'm a darned good singer and I darned well wanted to be in the opera and I couldn't. I got into the opera. I was only in opera for four years. I also auditioned and

was accepted for the leading role as Golda in *Fiddler on the Roof*, which was a transformation for me from being a coloratura soprano. Golda wasn't the last role I did, but it was the last role I took fantastic satisfaction in. As soon as I became a Baha'i, all these things that I had wanted became mine.

I became a Baha'i to build a refuge for humanity and all of the sudden I was getting all these goodies. They're goodies, because when the goodies are finished, you get on with the work. I had a feeling of a great sense transformation at that point. I knew that I couldn't stay in the opera for very long, I knew that all these wonderful things were temporary. There is a story of Abdu'l Bah'a. He wanted a translator from Arabic to English. He found a young man who knew Persian and English to be his translator. But the translator didn't know Arabic. So Abdu'l Bah'a took him into a room and gave him a piece of rock candy. When the translator had eaten the rock candy, Abdu'l Bah'a said, "Now go and start studying the dictionaries." I had that feeling when I got into the opera. I'm very connected with my spiritual life so that I recognize the spiritual rewards when they come.

Sometimes I feel like I'm a little twig on the riverbank. I am swept out into the middle of the river and I'm carried along for a spiritual purpose. And when that purpose is finished, I am gently washed up again on the bank. When I am a twig, in that way, I keep going, not knowing what I am supposed to do next and things happen. For example, in 1982 or 1983, when I was in my late forties I was asked to take part in an interfaith service at UBC for the International Country Women of the World. There were thousands of delegates from all over the world. I was to go just to say a Baha'i prayer. At that time in Iran, eight young women had been hung because

they were Baha'i. They were hung, just for being Baha'i. I got a phone call from the national representative asking me to make a statement about these hangings. Over the phone, I wrote down 12 pages of a statement to be delivered to the international forum of women. I really had no control over the situation. I believe that I was being an instrument of the spirit.

I went out to UBC and there was no way I could get this message delivered. I was one of several readers and we were gathered together in a large room. I just started to pray. I prayed and I said, "I'm supposed to try. Please help me because I don't know how I can get through here." There was a woman standing beside me, a Dutch woman and she spoke to me. I told her my difficulty and she said, "I am the president of the organization. If you give me the statement I'll see what I can do." I don't know what happened. She took the statement and I went and watched. The whole morning she was assailed by people who were using technicalities to hold things up. They couldn't even get started on the program. So the statement never was read. She told me that she would go back to Holland, contact the Dutch Baha'is, and see if there was anything that could be done to assist the Iranian Baha'is.

I went to the bus stop to go home. There was a lady standing in a sari who was a delegate from Dhakkar, Bangladesh. She represented the territory from Bangladesh to Iran. She told me that she was disappointed with the conference and had hoped to talk to Canadian women." So I invited her to my house and invited other women over.

Now I was secretary of the Vancouver Baha'i assembly and the Muslims in Iran had just hung women of my faith. This woman shared with me the terrible things

that happened when East Pakistan broke away from West Pakistan. I told her about the girls that had been hung and she was so upset. We became very close. We spent four days together, talking about peace and other topics. We became very close and she loved being here. In fact, she was called by her Bangladeshi representative in New York and invited to come for a visit and she declined, very politely, so that we might spend a little more time together. I happened to have several books that I had acquired for someone who was not able to accept them. One by one I offered them to her, and one by one she eagerly accepted them. I offered her each of these books as an expression of my support.

This woman went home to Bangladesh and she promised she'd get in touch with the Baha'is in Bangladesh. She also started a clinic for pregnant women, newborn babies, and little children. All the women of Bangladesh suffer terribly. So I started sending her my opera earnings. The money was used for various equipment and supplies at the clinic and I was told that my name would appear on plaques on the equipment. Instead, I asked that the name of one of the Baha'i women who had been hung in Iran be placed on these plaques. That is one of the very good illustrations of what happened to me when I was 44 years old and I became a Baha'i. My whole life became a spiritual existence. Nearly all my excitement is in the spiritual realm.

What happened is as Baha'u'llah says. We cannot imagine God, that he is the divine essence. Well as soon as I knew I didn't have to imagine God and couldn't possibly imagine God, it really helped me to put my faith in that God. Because it's an unknown power. It is an acceptance of mystery. From the time I became a Baha'i I got a lot of support from fellow human beings because I have friends of many

religions. I find a person of true faith of any faith is easy to connect with because they share faith. It isn't the same religion but it is essentially the same faith. They have faith as opposed to not having faith. So if I wanted help, I have and would turn to God.

I had one extremely bad manic episode in 1986, when I was 50. I was elected to go to the Baha'i national convention as a representative. I went. It absolutely blew my mind. There were over two hundred people concentrating and praying. We're not crazies. But it blew my mind and I came home manic. Now this time I was really psychotic. I really was wandering in my mind. I was terrified by my vain imaginings. It was terrible because I hadn't fully appreciated my illness.

I asked my psychiatrist several things about manic-depressives. I'm not a schizophrenic, but this was really psychotic behaviour and psychotic understandings in my brain and imaginings. That's why I watch out for vain imaginings, or my mind leading me astray. My psychiatrist confirmed that manic-depressives could have this kind of psychotic episode. I would see the world very differently from other people and imagine things that are not so. And you feel things that are not true. So the second time I had a manic episode was the ecstasy of religious experience. I have to watch out for ecstasy.

Since then, I have manic episodes quite frequently but I spot them and I just nip them in their bud if I can. I treat my poor brain as if it has a slight handicap. My soul has become so capable that the instances when my illness overtakes me are quite rare. I use prayer in my management of my illness. I actually can assist in bringing my mania down or bringing my depression up on my own. I do take lithium and I

could not help myself without the chemical assistance. It isn't as if I'm doing it on my own. I have the medication as a safety net. And I beseech God when I'm manic to preserve me from vain imaginings and I beseech God to heal me.

When I'm depressed, it's harder. It's harder to pray when you're depressed. Depression is horrible. I have a continuing struggle with my illness but the spiritual development has been fantastic. Having a manic episode would have seemed to be a break but I don't see it as a break. I broke through to another stage of my development with a great deal of pain. It's terrible because manic depressive illness is simply dreadful. Even so, I have grown.

However, I always have knowledge and insights when I have a manic episode. From my experience, if a person has a strong spiritual connection, the soul can reach out past the illness and help the person. A lot of mentally ill people don't know they have a soul, and doctors, on the whole, are timid to work with the soul. I would love psychologists and psychiatrists to investigate the connection between manic depressive illness and changes in the serotonin and dopamine and true religious experience. Maybe the manic episode is a pseudo or false kind of an experience, but it mimics something real, something spiritual. I have a feeling the brain chemistry is similar. I wish they would study it. Like everything else in science, you can get a clue from something, which you can then use, to some benefit. I wish they would study manic depression and the connection with the creativity on the one hand, and the spiritual experiences.

At about age 53, I had a remarkable psychic episode. I read in the paper that the Emperor of Japan, Hirohito, the father of the current one, was dying. He had been

very ill for about a year. He was bleeding internally and they kept giving him transfusions so that he would continue to live. I never could figure out why. I was a child in World War II and I was 10 years old when the war ended. I have always been very interested in World War II and the people involved. I remembered Hirohito becoming an emperor when he was a child. We don't know whether he wanted peace, but I believe that Hirohito must have wanted peace because he named his reign, "shoa" which means peace. I imagine that he wanted peace even if he couldn't get it and my heart has always gone out to him. The newspaper said that he was near death but they had given him more transfusions. I couldn't stand it anymore.

In our writings there is a prayer written by Baha'u'llah's son, Abdu'l-baha. When he was quite old, he revealed a prayer. He beseeched God in that prayer for his own release from this world. He spoke of his loneliness, of being broken-winged, submerged in seas of sorrows. "Oh Lord, my bones are weakened and the hoar hairs glisten on my head, and I have now reached old age, failing in my powers. No strength is there left in me wherewith to arise and serve thy loved ones. Oh, Lord, my Lord, hasten my ascension unto thy sublime threshold and my arrival at the door of thy grace, beneath the shadow of thy most great mercy." So I prayed to Abdu'l-baha, "Please let me use this prayer for the Emperor of Japan." I felt I had permission to do that. I had a box of Kleenex and I wept and prayed and prayed and I wept and this went on and on for three hours. It was about three in the afternoon. I turned on the six o'clock news and the Emperor had died. I found that he had died about the time I started to pray for him. I put so much effort into helping him die. I consider that a genuinely interesting experience of a psychic nature.

In the writings of the Baha'i faith, it says we should not be involved with psychic phenomenon. If they happen to us, fine. But we do not seek them, because they are not intended for this life. It's a precocious capacity that we should not play around with. It's very dangerous. I really take that to heart but I feel that praying for somebody is different. Hirohito was alive and I was just praying to God please let him go. When I checked he had probably died just about the time that I had started to pray for him, so it wasn't a perfect connection.

We have a very powerful prayer also and this is the prayer, "Is there any remover of difficulties, save God? Say praised be God, He is God. All are his servants and all abide by his bidding." This prayer is so powerful that remarkable things happen. I was in a mining town in the Yukon. I was sitting on a porch outside a hotel waiting for my husband. I noticed a woman beside me and I sensed she was extremely agitated and upset. When I asked, she said, "Well, I'm a cook and I work in the mining camp. The camp crew came into town. They were supposed to pick me up an hour ago. I don't know what's happened but they haven't come and picked me up. Maybe they've gone back to camp." I said, "May I pray for you?" She said, "Yes." She saw I was praying. I prayed with my whole heart, "Is there any remover of difficulties..." We looked up and her friend came around the corner after one minute. Now I knew before I prayed that if her friend was supposed to pick her up, she was probably only late. But I thought, "Well, this prayer ought to give her a kick so she gets here." So the woman's friend approached her and the woman said, "She prayed for me, she prayed for me....and you came!" Prayer has helped me many times.

Now I rely heavily on prayer. In fact, prayer is how I get through life because I feel so strong a connection at the same time. If I ever get any feelings or start sensing anything, I beg God to protect me from vain imaginings. This is the phrase that is used in our writings. Vain imaginings are so bad because, first, you can be deluded or secondly you can be led astray or even tormented with vain imaginings.

My fridge magnet says, "Life is fragile, handle with prayer." This is my philosophy. Manic illness is certainly a break between being normal. Suddenly being crazy is a big break. Now I'm looking back from age 63. I don't know what I would have said to you when I was 27, at the time of my first manic episode, or when I was 44 but now I'm 63 and I look back with great gratitude. It wasn't a break; it's a breakthrough. Every breakthrough enabled me to keep transforming.

My illness has influenced my spiritual development. I'm so aware of my soul. The mind may be ill but the soul is not. My soul is who I am. I'm so aware of the soul and that is what I identify with. My body is what I use in this world. My mind is an aspect of my soul, which uses the brain as a tool or an instrument. I never forget that when I die that my brain with its faulty biochemistry will lie in the grave and it will decay and my soul will go on to the next life.

My illness is spiritual. I haven't suffered. I have never starved, or been tortured or been in war, or been badly abused by anyone. I have manic depressive illness. This teaches me all things about suffering and it helps me to be an elder. I'm very good with people when they are suffering. So that is a gift that comes from the terrible suffering of mental illness.

I deeply believe in what the Baha'i faith teaches. I've been a Baha'i so long I get confused between what Baha'u'llah has taught me and what I thought myself. We are all spiritual. Baha'u'llah teaches our soul is born at conception, that every human being is a soul. The body and everything else is a material reflection of the reality of life, which is spiritual. I deeply believe that.

I have good access to my unconscious mind and to my early memories. I can remember back to a very early age, very early. When I imagine my infant self, or myself in my mother's womb, I only see this spiritual creature developing and developing. Baha'u'llah teaches, as other faiths do, that tests are to make us grow and that difficulties are in fact tests. And the tragedies or ordeals of life are tests. Everything is a test. It is a test to help us to grow. I have a Jewish friend who told me that it is not a stumbling block, it is just a challenge, or an opportunity.

Because the Baha'i faith is a new faith, people tend to choose it rather than to be born into it. There are Persian, Iranian people who are born into the faith but many of us, like me, are not. So I have many friends who are sharing the same faith. We run around and quote from the books to each other. I have many friends with whom to discuss my faith. I'm the eldest of six children. I discuss spiritual matters with my youngest sister who first introduced me to the faith and with another sister who is very close to me. I'm first and she's fifth but our genes are so similar it would seem we're almost like twins. I also talk with my mother and my husband, who both became Baha'i. There are quite a few Baha'i in the family, including my son.

Now 63 may not be mid-life anymore. I would say that I am coming at the end of my mid-life. I'm going through a tremendous change right now. I am trying to

know how to be old. I'm trying to know what the gifts of age are. I'm trying to deal with my fear of the body falling apart. I wouldn't mind dying tomorrow if I could just die and go to that other world which the Baha'i faith call the Abha kingdom. It's called heaven by the Christians. I can't wait to get there because it's going to be so exciting and wonderful. But I am afraid of the process. Right now, I have to use my faith, reading, the writings, and praying. I have to seek out old people, especially older women. I am seeking out older people to try to learn from them what it is to be old. I'm definitely preparing now for old age and I want to get through it. I want to get through it very, very successfully.

Now I want to be an elder. Yet, I don't really want to be an elder because being an elder is not easy. I had an experience during a recent manic episode. It was a real conversation with God about becoming an elder. When I say an elder, I mean in the old village sense. I want to be a village elder.

I don't mind this new experience of becoming an elder. Unfortunately, it coincides with losing my freedom to sing as I used to. I don't want to lose the joy of singing but that's part of aging. The story of my singing is from my heart, as well as from my spirit. It is a physical thrill but, in fact, it is also spiritual. There came a time, when I was 48, when we all auditioned for the organization, under new management. I simply didn't get in. I grieved terribly. I love singing and now my vocal cords aren't able to do what they used to. How can I play a soprano heroine now that I'm old and heavy? I used to be able to look beautiful, I used to be able to sing most beautifully, and I used to sing all the soprano heroine music. Therefore, I grieve over that. I haven't found my way through that yet. I just grieve for it.

I'm really at the end of this mid-life. I need to know now how to be old. I always need to know and now I need to know how to be old. I don't think of myself now as old. When I was a little girl I wanted to grow up. I feel like I'm a little-girl old-lady now, and I've got to learn how to grow up to be an old lady. I'm at the beginning of something new.

Now I've begun to be an elder. This is what all my development is heading me toward. Yet, I have never been different, from my birth I have always been on this path. I was born the way I am. It's like the acorn and the oak tree. The acorn may not look like the oak tree. When the little sprout shoots out of the acorn, someone might say that is a break or a change, but it's really only a transformation. I'm not an oak tree yet, but I'm trying.

APPENDIX G

Carl's Narrative

Rather than changing my view of things, what has recently happened to me has reinforced many of my previously held beliefs. Last January, I had open-heart surgery for a quadruple bypass operation. That event was the culmination of two years of medical treatment, changes in lifestyle, as well as emotional and spiritual growth. Knowing that I would eventually face open heart surgery, many of my spiritual and philosophical beliefs were really "put to the test" and thereby clarified.

I have always been aware of my spiritual side. My parents felt an obligation to give me a religious "education" rather than a strict adherence to any particular religious traditions. When I was young, I attended religious services on Sunday at the United Church, which became the center of our social interactions with members of the community. I was a Cub, I was a Scout, and my parents were leaders. They were involved in the church and I was involved in the church. It was the center of much of our family and community life.

As a young person, I was very curious and asked many questions, specifically the "why" of things. Yet, I felt as if I was imposing by asking "why this" or "why that", because it seemed to make other people uncomfortable. I was very comfortable with these questions because they seemed logical ones to ask.

My father and my mother were born before and lived through the Great Depression. They had very rigid ideas and a very clearly defined view of life. As a young person, I admired my parents for that because I went through a lot of confusion and emotional chaos. I was envious of anyone who seemed to have a clear view of things

because I did not. However, I didn't share my parent's views. As a teenager, their views gave me a greater sense of confusion.

In my late teens, I began to realize that there is nothing inherently wrong with "confusion." I realized that out of confusion and chaos comes order. Eventually, I came to see this confusion as part of the human condition. We work through a sea of contradictions and try to land in safe harbours on foreign shores. I have accepted that nothing in life is necessarily clear, sure, or absolute. That idea has been incorporated into and is central to my philosophy.

By the time I was sixteen, I was reading the literature of other religious traditions: Buddhism and Islam and Judaism. It became a journey of discovery, which continues for me to this day. It began as a journey of discovery into the ways in which other people, other cultures, and other religious faiths ask similar questions and find their own answers to these questions. I noticed very early on that the questions from one religious text seemed to be very similar when compared to another. Not only were the answers similar, but the language in which they were expressed seemed to be similar as well.

In reading the Old Testament, the Torah, and the Koran, for example, I noticed similarities in the use of language, and the similarity with respect to the metaphorical nature of some of the explanations. Certainly there are differences as there are differences in time, place and tradition, but I was more interested in what was essentially the same about them. I found similarities and that was very exciting for me. As time went on, I learned more about the practical side of different religious faiths, and how various faiths were practiced in terms of ritual. Again, I was more impressed by the similarities than by

the differences. To me, the differences seemed superficial and the similarities for me appeared to be quintessential to each religious tradition.

My point of view was beginning to grow and widen and that became very exciting. I should like to say that there was no arrogance involved in this at all. In fact, rather than making one arrogant, I think that to realize how spiritual traditions and religious practices may be tied together, as roots of the trunk and branches of a tree are connected, tends to make one more humble.

Therefore, my concept of spirituality includes all religious traditions. I think religious traditions are magnificent. They must be all inherently true or they're all inherently false because each one is built upon similar premises. That is why I don't adhere to one particular religious faith; I see them as part of the whole.

From this awareness, I've adopted certain philosophical tenets as part of my life. For example, I try, to the best of my ability, to take responsibility for my thoughts, my actions, and my emotions. I think our society has become one that is terrified of doing that and instinctively seeks to blame someone else or give someone else responsibility for its thoughts and actions. I don't see that as a very empowering act. It is moral and spiritual turpitude. I feel stronger if I can say I am responsible for my own emotions, for my own ideas, and my own actions whatever they may be.

Likewise, I believe that it's not my responsibility to take responsibility for the thoughts, actions, and emotions of others. I don't mean that I don't empathize with other people. I think empathy is one thing but actually taking responsibility for someone else's emotions, thoughts, and actions is a different issue. I've always been aware of this

approach to spirituality in me and in the world in general. However, it wasn't until I reached my forties, when my health began to fail that my beliefs were really tested.

I am now 47 years old. Two years ago one evening, I felt that I was having a heart attack while I playing a game of tennis with a friend. The sensations came and went away rapidly. Like a fool and against the wishes of my friend, I decided not to go to the hospital. I waited until the next day. Not feeling any better, I went to my doctor. He didn't do any tests. He announced to me that it wasn't a heart attack; he said that I had high blood pressure and he would prescribe some medicine. He said to go home, relax for a couple of days, and then resume my daily routine, which I did. He recommended exercise, such as walking, running, playing tennis, and getting back into my regimen.

Instead of feeling better, I felt worse and worse. I kept going back to him with that message. He became quite exasperated and annoyed with me. He told me, "This is basically a psychological thing. You had a panic attack on the tennis court. You have high blood pressure so just work through it. It won't kill you. Just get more exercise." However, every time I did so, I felt that my throat and forehead were in a metal vice. I was on the verge of passing out many times. I've always been fairly active. I've been a tennis player and a coach for many years so I am very aware of my body. I realized that whatever was my condition, something was not right and the medicine was not making it right. I tried to tell my physician that but I didn't feel that he listening. I felt worse and worse. This went on for about six months.

I was quite demoralized and severely depressed throughout that period because there were activities that I couldn't do anymore. I decided to get a second opinion, which was not an easy process. Medical colleagues protect each other. It took me about three

weeks to find another doctor. I asked for cardiological tests. He was very reluctant to do that but I was adamant this time because I felt that my symptoms were worsening. So I was sent to an internal medicine physician and then to a cardiologist. I had all the necessary tests, which showed that four arteries in my heart were severely blocked, and one was occluded. The doctors shook their heads. They said that I shouldn't really be doing any physical activity.

It was a relief to have my suspicions confirmed, but it was also profoundly disappointing for me. I have never been a person who likes to rely on others, in any situation. I also had relied upon a doctor's opinion, diagnosis, and treatment, which turned out to be entirely wrong. There was no turning him around. However, I was beginning to feel fortunate and empowered. I felt stronger because I had been the one to change doctors. I had been the one to insist on tests, and my suspicions had been borne out. I became more clear about what I wanted to happen. To my surprise, the specialists to whom I spoke gave me new respect and concurred with my original suspicions. I felt that I had been vindicated.

In some ways, the medical profession seemed to be comparable to the religious institution I attended when I was young. A minister or priest runs around in a robe and so does the doctor. Some people see doctors as intermediaries for something transcendent, and some doctors act like it, too. I began to see this comparison between the medical and the spiritual domains. That was my initiation to the medical industry. For the next year, I went on a weekly round of doctor's appointments and tests, learning as I went along.

Strangely enough, the experience brought my philosophical ideas and spiritual beliefs to the forefront. The experience of cardiac surgery was going to be fairly

formidable. I needed to call upon some of my beliefs and values, about responsibility and staying positive, to fortify myself. Strangely enough, I found that was very easy; the things that I value, such as family and friendship and honesty and integrity, served me well throughout the process. These things were available to me, more so than I had anticipated. I was and I continue to be amazed at the response of friends and colleagues and family. I didn't anticipate that there would be as many people who cared about me as there turned out to be. I'll never forget that.

I also found tremendous energy in helping other people who had their own sort of physical or emotional issues. Rather than becoming self-absorbed, I left my health concerns for periods of time in order to care about other people. The recognizance of my spiritual nature seemed to have a life of its own. It wasn't a conscious thing.

I was taking responsibility for myself as well. Although I was getting bad news on a regular basis, I was not giving the responsibility for my personal health, or how I conduct my life, or how I react to things, to someone else. I read about the operation so I knew what questions to ask. I placed value on not just one prescribed medical therapy but I embraced alternative medical therapies. I was treated with acupuncture and I went for chelation therapy. I don't care if it's physically or mentally beneficial. It made me feel better than I was feeling. I did a number of things which I feel were of benefit along with Western medicine. I found that it gave me energy beyond what I would have had if I had just been sitting around in a chair waiting for a phone call.

It took several months to get the operation. I was on a waiting list and was bumped a number of times. I had no real contact at that time with anyone who had gone through cardiac surgery. I knew, however, that the main priority was to survive long

enough to have the operation. It was a difficult emotional period for me. I recommitted myself to my philosophical tenets, my spirituality. I would remain positive, because that's a choice I could make. I felt that any outcome would be better than the present. There came an eventual acceptance of my situation. For me, it was a very early and clear insight. I had felt badly for so long that anything was preferable.

My changing awareness of spirituality was happening by itself. When one is in a serious medical condition, one begins to think about mortality and related issues. I was doing that because I was afraid. I'd heard stories of people, who went to sleep, had a heart attack during the night and never woke up. So there were many nights I couldn't sleep at all. It was terrifying until I got an idea. Through my connection to people who practice Buddhism, I had been to temples. I have a room upstairs, which had been a music studio. I put a rug down, pillows along the wall, added a little stereo, and hung pictures on the wall. I blacked out the window so no light came in. There, I created a relaxing atmosphere for myself. It became my meditation room. I practiced various forms of meditation because I don't ascribe to one in particular. Sometimes in the middle of the night when I couldn't sleep, I would go into the meditation room, throw a blanket over myself, put on a relaxing tape of sounds or music, and lull myself to sleep to the sounds of the sea.

I became preoccupied for a time about preparing a will, which I did. Some of my friends who were supportive have their own religious traditions. I know people who are Buddhists, Orthodox Jews, Sikhs, and devout Muslims. It rekindled my enthusiasm for learning more about how they practised *their* faith. I reacquainted myself with what the different religious or spiritual traditions have to say about death and dying. These things

helped me get through this difficult period. By the time I had my operation, I was energetic and entirely positive.

The night before the operation, I stayed awake all night. Sitting on the hospital bed, I became very introspective. I thought about all the things that had happened up to that point. I felt tremendously fortunate. There was also a sense of guilt. In the post-op interview with the doctor, I mentioned the tremendous guilt that I felt. He asked why I felt guilty. I explained that, during the night, I remembered at least six people, friends around my age, who had died suddenly of heart attacks. The questions I pondered was: "Why me? Why do I deserve this operation when so many other people are dead?" I had a kind of survivor's guilt and it continues to this day. Perhaps I was not aware of it at the time, but it was a spiritual question that I was asking.

I've always believed that death is a passage from what we call life to something else. My father died very suddenly of a stroke. He had an aneurysm and lasted only a few hours in the hospital. Beyond a few minutes of crying and grieving, I had a crystal clear insight that there is no such thing as a death which leads to nothing. Physicists say that all matter goes through changes, that matter is never really destroyed. It changes. I don't see why that should be different for human beings. I didn't grieve beyond that for my father. I miss him very much but I saw him as "passing". That's a good way of putting it. I don't think it's a euphemism at all. It's more accurate to say someone has "passed on" to something else. Therefore, I see death as a passage. When I confronted that possibility myself, I wasn't in the least afraid or intimidated.

The night before the operation was the most profound of my life in many respects. Potentially, it was the culmination of my life. I didn't know whether I was going to

survive the operation. I have friends who have had the operation and have never been the same. You're under anaesthetic for six hours, your lungs are flat, and your heart is stopped. It's not as simple as it sounds. It's physically stressful. So I didn't know if I was going to see light of day again. Doctors say that you heal within a year, but apparently some people don't. I didn't know what the outcome would be. But I knew it would be better than that with which I had been dealing.

It's probably the same for everybody that goes through major surgery. I don't think I'm unique. When I was in the process of sitting on the bed and looking out the window, I thought of how many millions of people go through that same thing. That was my moment of realization where I reconciled the spiritual with the physical. It all came together on that particular evening.

Now I'm very much more aware of the role that my spiritual side plays in my life. It's always been there but I was taking it for granted before or preoccupied with other things. In some ways, the recuperation has not been an easy thing. It's a humbling experience to for me realize that I have gone through such an operation. In many ways, I'm feeling better than I did before although I've had certain setbacks. However, I cling to a sense of the spiritual in my life as being ever present and essential. I believe that spirituality informs my daily life. I'm more conscious of it now than I have ever been.

After the operation, a friend of mine said, "You were physically or clinically dead in one sense and they brought you back, so this is your life - Part Two." I thought that was a nice way of putting it. So this is my life Part Two. Knowing what I know now gives me a sense of rejuvenation. It's a recommitment to the spiritual aspect of life because I believe it's very important. I'm wondering which comes first: whether it's the

coming of midlife in terms of one's age or whether the spiritual comes first or whether they all coincide. I've always been aware of it but it has certainly proved to be my saving grace to be able to put some beliefs into practice.

My interest in spirituality of every kind continues. I recently had a discussion with a neighbour of mine about what he referred to as the theory of evolution, natural selection as opposed to Creationism, to which he alluded from the Old Testament. At that moment, I stated that perhaps the greater miracle would be for a higher power, or supreme power, to set in motion a pattern of existence that would apply to all physical matter and all natural life, and that the infinitely complex pattern, having been set in motion, continues to this day. For me, that is the greater "miracle." He said he believes one and not the other. To me, it seems incomprehensible to deny entirely the existence of the natural order of things.

I am committed to seeking out knowledge and wisdom whenever and wherever I find it. I'm even more earnest about listening to people, finding out what they believe, and mulling those ideas over in my own mind. Sometimes, I can reconcile new ideas with what I've come to believe about myself, about others, and about life. For example, I've talked to people who are researching cellular biology at UBC. I had a very interesting discussion with one researcher. While they used to think that brain cells alone were responsible for memory function, now they're fairly certain that every cell in the body has within it, or carries within it, the responsibility for *every* function, including memory and intelligence and creativity. I was impressed because I was educated that certain cells in the body had responsibility for certain functions and in certain areas. For a cellular biologist to say that each cell has within it, material responsible for all of these functions,

has extraordinary implications. It has spiritual implications for me because it relates to the idea of responsibility, what is your responsibility, what is mine. Even in medicine and medical research, people are open to and are being amazed at what they discover when they leave the island of the norm. I am a big believer in leaving that island for long periods to go on a journey of discovery. Within us, like within every cell of the body, is the potential to be responsible for our own thoughts, actions, and feelings but also to be an integral part of humanity. This is something I've been thinking about.

I believe that we are all connected. As the millennium ends, for the last thousand years or so, we have done everything possible as a civilization to deny that. We want to be unique. As individuals, we want to be special and that's wonderful but I think the essential truth is that we are related and connected, irrevocably, and absolutely. If we conducted ourselves more accordingly, we'd make better the life that we have. You can't fight an enemy with any kind of fervour with whom you feel an essential connection. You would have to say that that person is different, that these people, by virtue of their religious beliefs are inferior. In the face of so much evidence, we are in denial. We say that we are a fellowship of humans but then blow each other up!

Throughout my life, a million and one things have probably influenced me, not one thing nor one person. Nothing exists in a vacuum; I hope I don't. I've been influenced by a myriad of people and things but probably not on a conscious level for them or for me. I haven't had someone sit down and say, "I'd like to give you some insights or advice." By listening to people and by thinking about one's own situation and one's own nature, one arrives at this place.

Throughout this experience, some individuals have supported me but I have a natural reluctance to be “guided” or directed. As an example, I’ve gone to various kinds of meditation groups. I don’t respond well to guided meditation, where someone tells you what you are to see and how you are to feel. Other people respond very well but I guess it’s in my nature to be very resistant to that kind of thing.

Those who are very good listeners have helped me. Not someone who is quiet all the time but someone who is genuinely interested, listens, and bases whatever guidance they have on what they hear. I’ve had experiences with physicians who nod and scribble something on a writing pad; who knows what they’re writing. They appear to be listening to me, bending forward at a forty-five degree angle. It’s quite apparent by their diagnosis or their recommendation that they weren’t listening at all. It’s like an obligatory ten-minute period of listening, give the diagnosis and write out a prescription. I’ve had a lot of that. I don’t necessarily blame doctors. I’ve talked to the surgeon who did the operation. He said they’re making a concerted effort to change the thinking of doctors entering medical school to get away from the god-like syndrome.

I think my enjoyment of life has increased and the enjoyment or appreciation of the time I have left. I think that’s very much a part of it. I’m very clear on how I want to live the rest of my life. Whether I’ll have an opportunity to do so I don’t know. It maybe beyond my control but I will aspire to my spiritual and personal development. I really am committed to doing that. It’s not an insurance policy either. The idea of facing heart surgery as you’re staring death in the face is a little bit of an over-statement because we stare death in the face every minute of every day and we don’t think about it. I was just forced to think about it. The result is a greater appreciation of the beliefs that I held all

along. Also, whatever sense of humour I have was invaluable in keeping me going. After the operation I could be running down the block with clear pipes and get run over by a truck. There's always irony lurking around every corner. Such an experience made me more aware of things that ordinarily would have made me nervous. I was surprised. Those kinds of issues made me only clearer about who I thought I was and who I want to be.

I also believe spirituality transcends any one particular religious tradition. Joseph Campbell, in the final chapter of The Power of Myth, wrote that a truly spiritual person is one whose level of consciousness must transcend the notion of any specific god that can be given a name. When I read it I was breathless because here was another human being that came to the same conclusions to which I had come. Orthodox Jews do not speak the name of their God. They do not speak it because by giving god a name and a face, you diminish god. The same is true of Orthodox Muslims. Nowhere is Mohammed depicted because that would diminish the divinity of that individual.

I don't see any individual, whether it's Mohammed or Jesus or Buddha, as greater than the wisdom that they impart. For example, the Sikh religion has a history of nine living "gurus" or teachers and their tenth, their Garanth is their holy book. And so their greatest teacher of all is inanimate, having transcended the physical to become wisdom as symbolized by their holy book. Therefore, I've never ascribed to the "cult of personality." Again, the idea of worshipping the individual doesn't appeal to me as much as the appreciation of the wisdom imparted by that individual. I don't ever remember, in my readings of the New Testament, Christ saying, "Get down on your hands and knees and worship me." What I understood him say, by implication, was that the kingdom of

heaven is in each one of us. If we can only practice some of these things. Unfortunately, that doesn't seem to happen very often with religion. People seem more concerned with the worship of the individual rather than with the wisdom of the particular person.

From childhood, my religious education seemed firmly grounded in the worship of individuals rather emphasizing the wisdom for which those individuals were responsible. To this day I don't believe in the concept of worship. Who is Buddha or Christ or Mohammed or anyone without wisdom? Which is more important? Jesus was no more than a religious kind of rabble-rouser who caused problems both for the Hebrew establishment and the Roman government. What made that individual valuable to the world was the wisdom that he tried to share. I believe that the prophets or mystics were people who essentially said the same thing over the centuries. The problem is that people don't listen to that wisdom.

It's easier to pray or worship the individual or their persona, than it is to put beliefs into practice. That's the hard part. It wasn't that Buddha was perfect. Buddha was a rich kid from a rich family, who decided he was going to forsake it all. He had a tough life and he modelled his way of looking at life as did all the great religious leaders and thinkers. It's an easy thing to get down on your hands and knees and clasp your hands and worship something, and then to walk away, not committed to putting any of those things into practice. I see a lot of people doing that. Rather than the worship of a personality, I think here's an individual who lived and died and tremendous wisdom and a tremendous way of expressing it. The person said many times in various incarnations, "Here, take these ideas. It's not so difficult to put the stuff into practice, if you really

want to.” That’s why I’m interested in various religious traditions, but I don’t lean to the practice of one over another.

Years ago, I met a very orthodox Muslim man. He was sitting on a cushion in his living room reading the Koran. I sat down with him and he asked, “What do you believe?” I said, “I think religious belief is a magnificent thing until people become involved in it.” He smiled at me and said, “That’s a good answer.” Here was a religiously devout person, who was aware of a larger truth. I see spirituality diminished by so many people. People seem to be so needy, in terms of spirituality. They want quick and simple answers and quick and simple solutions. The beauty in spirituality, is that of something that is both very complex and also very simple and direct.

It seems as I get older that spirituality does seem to play a more important part in my life. Perhaps it’s playing an important part throughout my life, but it came into focus, now, for me. My open heart operation was the single event that re-awoke, in me, my spiritual nature by emphasized putting those principles to work for me. Anyone who contemplates the spiritual, believes that life is a test. We’ve all been tested. I’m more committed than ever to those tenets of my spiritual philosophy because when I needed them they were there. They may not be useful for anybody else but they worked for me when I needed them the most. One the other hand, I’m not preoccupied with spirituality. I do not operate on an esoteric level every minute, but there are gentle and subtle reminders as I go through each day. I’m aware of my own mortality, and the mortality of others, and that time ticks along.

I have come to another realization. The way that I was raised encouraged me to have expectations of myself, expectations of the community, expectations of this person

or that person, this institution or that institution. This created in me a sense of reliance or the notion of expectation. For example, I relied upon doctors to take care of me. These days, I do my best every day not to have any significant expectations of anyone or anything beyond myself. If I take responsibility for myself, then it is possible for me to have expectations of my own conduct, my moral conduct, my own emotional actions and reactions. I do my best not to have expectations of anyone else. I find that if you do go through life having expectations of others, and you rely upon others, you'll always be disappointed. While it's difficult to put in practice because of social conditioning, I have arrived at a place where I really don't have those expectations of others beside myself. I'm finding myself very content with things. When I have an opportunity to talk about this with other people, they find it a difficult idea to accept.

I appreciate when someone does or says something in my direction, or on my behalf. It makes it all the more wonderful because I'm not expecting it. If I said or did something to someone, with a hidden agenda that they would reciprocate and they didn't, I may feel dejected or rejected or let down because I had an expectation. By not having that expectation, I can give emotionally, spiritually and in every other way to other people in an unconditional way that doesn't depend upon reciprocation. When I do so, I take responsibility for myself and not for the other person's reaction.

Aristotle said that an unexamined life is not worth living. I want to know myself as well as I can in relation to other people and other things. When someone says something to me or about me that I know to be untrue because I have examined and know myself sufficiently to know that, it's like another language to me. It doesn't have to be an insult. It can be a compliment. Someone can say you're fantastic, you're wonderful,

you're this, and you're that. People used to have comments when I used to play music for years. I knew how good I was and what my strengths and weaknesses. Either I didn't understand the comment or I knew it wasn't true. I want to know myself as well as one can in a lifetime. After this operation, I'm recommitted to knowing myself as a spiritual pursuit.

My spirituality also contributes to how I will experience death and how I see it. All religions speak to the process by which one dies. There are all kinds of rituals involved. It was a very unique opportunity to be able to confront the issue and not die. It's the next best thing to being there. We'll all get there sometime. Some people have very serious medical situations, far more serious than was mine. Maybe they have a disease, which is untreatable or incurable. I had heard about acceptance of death and how people come to terms with it. Now I know a little about what that means and I'm comfortable with that. It's not death as I was told it was. For me it's something different. It's a passage into something else.

My spirituality is like a balloon. I want to fill the balloon, make the balloon larger so that it kind of floats. When it's my time to go I want to grab on to it and up I go. If I don't see all the limitless possibilities of spirituality and it's forms and it's facets, then I have this little balloon and won't go anywhere. It's not going to support me when I need it. The balloon was large enough so I got through the operation in a positive way, and I'm looking at the future optimistically.

The journey is not over. Even at the time of my death, whenever that comes, it will not be over. It's just another state of awareness. It's not that I have reached a state of perfection but I'm aspiring to that direction. It's the same in any spiritual pursuit. There is

an element of aspiration where you see certain values as true and worthwhile and you aspire to those in your daily life. That's all I'm doing here. It's a humbling experience. It keeps me humble. I like that place for me.