

COUNSELLORS AND SPIRITUALITY:

**Autobiographical Accounts of how Counsellors Integrate their
Experiences with Spirituality with their Counselling Practice**

by

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Abstract

This study explored how counsellors' experiences with spirituality affect their counselling practice. The study determined how spirituality can be important to the counselling field and exemplified ways in which counsellors can include this dimension within their practice. An autobiographical method was employed where participants wrote stories of their experiences with spirituality and described how they incorporate spirituality into counselling. Narrative analysis was used to review the data. Interpretation of the findings revealed that examining their personal spiritual development is a crucial process for counsellors as their counselling style and practice is influenced by spiritual beliefs. All participants consider spirituality to be important in making meaning for clients and for themselves. The narratives further illustrate that spiritual questioning and/or openness to spirituality tends to occur as a result of traumatic or life-changing events. This study illuminates the uniqueness of spirituality, inspires counsellors to examine their own spiritual development, and reminds the field of psychology how imperative the inclusion of spirituality is to the healing process.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

I came to explore this topic through my utter curiosity of our world's conception of the human spirit. My Christian upbringing opened up the world of the spiritual to me at a young age, yet as I grew, the idea of a strict and judgmental Higher Power became less and less fitting for me. I sought knowledge of other religions and opened my mind to alternate ways of thinking about spirituality. Having some knowledge about various religions allows me greater respect and awe for many perspectives of the human spirit. The quest for spiritual understanding by people of all cultures and belief systems drives my own quest and curiosity and reminds me how quintessential this spiritual searching is to human nature.

Given the universality of the search for spiritual understanding, I have found it odd and curious that in my years of psychology training the mention of human spirit has been so rare that I can count the experiences on one hand. I am fascinated by this lack of attention to the spirit or soul in psychology. The very essence of an individual, in my opinion, has been ignored! This oversight is understandable considering the history and evolution of psychology. However, our society is opening to a broader understanding of spirituality, and in turn, I believe counsellors and the field of psychology should follow.

Counsellors will most certainly encounter clients undergoing spiritual questioning. Therefore, to broaden the knowledge base of spiritual issues within the healing professions is imperative. Research in this area is important for providing a place for counsellors to discuss an aspect of themselves that has not necessarily been validated within their training. This study attempts to take a first step into discovering how spirituality within the counselling realm is important and, given the lack of

attention to this topic in most mainstream counsellor education institutions, how counsellors come to include this dimension in their practice. In particular, this study reviews autobiographical accounts of counsellors' experiences with spirituality and how those experiences may have affected their practice.

Definitions

Many psychologists and other academics have written extensively on the conceptual meaning of the soul or spirit. However, discussions of incorporating these concepts into the healing professions have been few and far between. Before examining some of the work which invites the idea of the spiritual into counselling, it is necessary to discuss the varied meanings of the terms soul, spirit, and spirituality.

To gain a more in depth understanding of the original meanings of spirit, etymology is useful. The word *spirit* stems from the Latin for breath, or the Greek and Hebrew for "wind" which also refers to the breath. The Chinese use the word *chi* for spirit which refers to the energy with which the Universe is filled (Chiu, 2000, p. 28). Similarly, the Sanskrit word, *prana*, refers to "life energy" or "life current" which makes up everything in the Universe and which we take in through the breath.

Thomas Moore (1992) hesitates to define the soul but described it as follows: "'Soul' is not a thing, but a quality or a dimension of experiencing life and ourselves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart, and personal substance" (p. 5).

Gary Zukav (1989) has a slightly different slant. He has stated that:

your soul is not a passive or a theoretical entity that occupies a space in the vicinity of your chest cavity. It is a positive, purposeful force at the core of your being. It is that part of you that understands the impersonal nature of the energy dynamics in which you are involved, that loves without restriction and accepts without judgment (p. 31).

Though Jung (1938) seemed to equate his term 'unconscious' with the soul, he also asserted that, "...it is quite impossible to define the extension and the ultimate character of psychic existence." He continued, "I have chosen the term 'self' to designate the totality of man, the sum total of conscious and unconscious existence." (p. 100).

My personal conceptualization of soul is as follows: the aspect of the Self separate from the personality which consists of Universal energy and is boundless, limitless, and exists eternally. Spirituality, to me, is the process or experience of cultivating a sense of connectedness to the highest part of the Self and to the Universal energy which exists within and all around us. This definition attempts to be broad and inclusive and can include a feeling of connectedness to a Higher Power, to nature, to animals, and to other human beings.

Other understandings of spirituality noted here illustrate the depth, variety and personal significance that the term carries. Ballou (1995) described spirituality as a type of consciousness resulting from reflection of one's experience as connected to and in relationship with self, others and communities (p. 16). Chiu (2000) described spirituality as a "process of evolving toward wholeness and integration" (p. 43).

Although some authors and individuals may use the terms interchangeably, spirituality and religiousness are seen as disparate concepts by this author and therefore, the terms and their meanings must be differentiated here. In Frame and Williams, (1996), spirituality was noted as an "inner journey toward a relationship with a transcendent Being" while "religion is associated with institutional expressions of spirituality" (p. 17). Richards and Bergin (1997) expanded on the distinction between the religious and the spiritual. Using a dictionary definition, religious is defined as "having or showing belief in and reverence for God or a deity" and "of, concerned with,

or teaching religion". Richards and Bergin made their own distinction between the religious and spiritual by noting that religious expressions tend to be denominational, external, cognitive, behavioral, ritualistic, and public. In contrast, spiritual expressions tend to be universal, ecumenical, internal, affective, spontaneous, and private (p. 13). Furthermore, the authors posited that, one can be both religious and spiritual or may be one or the other. This paper aims to emphasize the universality of the concept of spirituality without condemning or condoning religiousness.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

History of Spirituality in Psychology (1950-1980)

Psychology as a discipline has endured a turbulent past. Its attempt to earn respect and recognition and to fit into the science worshipping 20th century forced a strict adherence to the scientific model of research and a distant and objective view of the therapeutic relationship. This rigidity that continued for many years led to biases against spiritual institutions as potentially helpful in people's healing and led to a fear and disdain for issues dealing with the unknown or mysterious. Although science and psychology claimed to be value-free, the blatant disregard of spiritual and religious needs clearly imposed values on our society. Given this closed mindedness, there have been few notable works published in the area of spirituality within psychology until the last decade. Although there may have been many writings from the 60's through the 80's on spirituality, consciousness, and the lack of attention to the spiritual in psychology, the academic community at large did not readily accept these notions and the reign of science as its own "religion" remained. Despite the potential lack of receptiveness, some psychologists believed enough in the importance of spiritual pursuits to brave the critics of the time.

In *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, Fromm (1950) reviewed the history of psychology and noted the lack of attention to the soul in this new science. He described the attention that philosophy paid to the soul and said that psychology concerns itself with mechanisms and "specifically human phenomena" (p. 6). Fromm went on to review the impact of Freud on the connection between psychoanalysis and religion. He believed that Freud was not necessarily the opponent to religion that he was assumed to be. Fromm views Freud's idea that 'truth' is the aim of psychoanalysis

as a pursuit towards enlightenment.

Fromm asserted that there are two types of psychoanalysis as he sees it. There is the psychoanalysis which aims at social adjustment and that which aims at the 'cure of the soul' (p. 65). The analyst who aims to aid the patient in adjusting to his or her social norms merely encourages a level of suffering relevant to the general population. In Fromm's opinion, Freud was an analyst concerned with the 'cure of the soul'; a phrase more commonly described as being concerned with a person's optimal development and realization of their potential (p. 74). Fromm maintained that the latter is a religious pursuit and can be likened to some of the main ideas of life's purpose that many enlightened beings have professed:

man must strive to recognize the truth and can be fully human only to the extent to which he succeeds in this task. He must be independent and free, an end in himself and not the means for any other person's purposes. He must relate himself to his fellow men lovingly. If he has no love, he is an empty shell even if his were all power, wealth, and intelligence. Man must know the difference between good and evil, he must learn to listen to the voice of his conscience and to be able to follow it. (p. 76)

As a psychologist during a period of psychology where the focus was on behavioural science and human function Fromm's emphasis on the importance of the soul in psychology stood out.

Jung was another early psychologist who stressed the need to acknowledge the complex inner workings of humans. Jung would most certainly be called a spiritually minded counsellor today. He asserted that a force within pushes us to achieve wholeness and meaning (Kaufmann, 1989, p. 120). He encouraged recognition of the inner guides which he named anima and animus. Jung's idea of a

Self archetype represents a conceptual understanding of the god within ourselves. Acknowledgment of this internal god, however, is not meant to "affirm or deny the existence of whether there is a God outside ourselves" (p. 129). Jung's Self archetype is the representation of internal wisdom. Despite the potentially spiritual nature of some of his views, Jung was not an advocate of religion. His opinion was that "it seizes and controls the human subject which is always rather its victim than its creator" (Jung, 1938, p. 4)

A little over a decade later, the "third force" in psychology emerged. Rogers (1961) and Maslow (1971) are thought to be the leaders in this humanistic-existential school of psychology. They argued that humans are here to discover and live up to their fullest potential and that we have an innate drive to "self-actualize" (Richards & Bergin, 1997). Their brand of psychology challenged the strict experimental, behavioral schools of the time by acknowledging the importance of emotions, values, and a sense of meaning. Rogers' "client-centered" focus was thought by some to be in opposition to traditional religion since he emphasized individuals' adherence to their own values and not necessarily those of any institution. Rogers also acknowledged spirituality by noting the benefits of telepathy, psychic healing and out of body experiences (Fuller 1982, cited in Mack, 1994).

Maslow (1971) directly acknowledged the human need for spirituality in psychology. Within his famous "hierarchy of needs", there are both self-actualizers and transcendent self-actualizers (Chandler, Holden & Kolander, 1992).

Transcendent self-actualizers are described as follows: a) having a holistic perspective about the world, b) a tendency toward cooperative action, c) more consciously motivated behaviour, d) more responsiveness to beauty, d) a greater appreciation for peak experiences, e) non power-seeking attitude over others, e)

attitudes that are more loving and awe-inspiring, and f) more awareness of the sacredness of every person and living thing. Although there was no emphasis on the spiritual, humanism opened the door to a new way of thinking about humans and their natures and capabilities.

Psychology and the Spiritual: More Recent Issues

Cognitive psychology and the systemic models of therapy gained great favor in the decades to follow. Most recently, eclecticism seems to have become prominent. In fact, Jensen, Bergin, and Greaves (1990) found that a majority of therapists are now using an eclectic approach in therapy (cited in Richards and Bergin, 1997). This openness by many counsellors to use the most appropriate intervention for the client rather than rigidly adhering to one school of psychology or another, is encouraging. Many counsellors may likely be open to incorporating spirituality into their counselling practice if they believed that this was integral to the client's healing.

Stanislav Grof, most often associated with his research on LSD experiences, has written extensively about transpersonal experiences. In one of his many books, Beyond the brain: Birth, death and transcendence in psychotherapy (1985), he reiterated the inadequacy of the psychological system when it comes to describing or explaining transpersonal experiences. To account for experiences induced by psychedelics wherein the person is in another state of consciousness, Grof has found it necessary to draw upon many Eastern spiritual philosophies (e.g. different systems of yoga, Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, etc.).

Unfortunately, the only framework that has been legitimized in the Western world to account for experiences in the spiritual realm has been a medical model based upon medical illness and disease metaphors. Although Western society's eagerness to make assumptions and label as 'crazy' what it does not understand may

be less apparent today, the power of psychiatric labels and the hesitancy to admit ignorance remain. This historical practice of viewing spirituality and religious beliefs or experiences as unscientific and therefore, of little value, has few exceptions. However, Grof notes, if some form of spirituality is shared by a large enough group, it is "more or less tolerated" by the psychological and psychiatric traditions (p. 333). On the other hand, those involved with non-Western spiritual traditions and experiences are often dismissed as experiencing "ignorance, childlike gullibility or superstition" (p. 333). To generalize, this Western attitude of superiority in science and therefore, knowledge, seems to continue to hold us back as a society from accepting a variety of perceptions of consciousness and spirituality from other cultures.

In the present day, many psychologists, theologians, and counsellors do consider it necessary to acknowledge the spiritual side of the Self. As Moreland (1998) noted, "psychology has had a tendency to reduce a person to his or her brain or to a being with a "set of functions or structures" (p. 29). The author further asserted that the study of the self within psychology is not enough. Moreland's view of the limitations of psychology stem from his Christian background which conceives of the human as a being comprised of body and soul. This notion, described as substance dualism, provides a template from which to understand our natures and capabilities. The author described substances as containing inherent abilities to change and the need for a particular environment to extract the substances' true nature. Beneath the wordy overview of semantics, the message is a valid one, psychology, originally the study of the psyche, or the soul, has clearly avoided a fundamental aspect of human nature.

Thomas Moore has been a leading advocate for altering the science of psychology to include attention to the soul. As a psychotherapist, a theologian and

past monk, he offers a unique perspective of psychology and its potential areas for improvement. In his popular book, *Care of the Soul*, Moore (1992) describes symptoms like obsessions, addictions, and violence as stemming from one problem: the loss of the wisdom of the soul. Moore attempts to steer away from defining the soul, stating the mere act of definition is a "intellectual enterprise" while the soul "prefers to imagine" (p. xi). He describes the purpose in counselling as one of bringing imagination to those areas devoid of it. These various areas, having no imagination, express themselves by becoming symptomatic. Because we now live in a world where the soul and its expressions aren't often highly valued, the soul is yearning more than ever for attention. Moores' words sum it all up: "The soul needs an intense, full-bodied spiritual life as much as and in the same way that the body needs food" (p. 228).

He maintains that this continued lack of attention to the soul's needs is manifesting itself in several deleterious ways: peoples' lives lack meaning, unhappy relationships are common, violence seems to be on the rise, addictions are common and often encouraged, and various other obsessions and compulsions are too numerous to mention. People come to their physicians and their counsellors wanting a quick fix and our society welcomes and encourages this way of thinking. There is an increase in solution-focused brief therapies which is fueled by support from profit conscious insurance agencies. Sadly, the medical community encourages this symptom healing model and there continues to be a race to find more of the 'easy way out' type solutions.

Moore notes that if psychology is to turn its attention to spiritual needs, the field as we know it would come to an end. He asserts that psychology and spirituality would essentially need to merge into one discipline. What would be the point in

discussing healing without discussing the needs of the soul? To him, caring for the soul includes nurturing one's creativity and imagination, savoring relationships, viewing the body's symptoms as messages of great meaning, and attending to individual wisdom rather than societal messages. Moore's view is a drastic one within the field of psychology though his basic tenet is not all that extreme. Although I agree that our society seems to be suffering from spiritual malaise, it may be unnecessary and unrealistic for psychological and spiritual disciplines to merge. What the field of psychology can do is implement training for counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists in preparation for the various spiritual and religious concerns that will come up in therapy. Therapists need to look at their own spiritual selves and how their views may affect their clients in a positive or negative way. Lastly, counsellors must be aware of the great diversity of cultural and spiritual beliefs about healing lest they get caught up in the limited view that verbal exchange is the only medium through which healing can occur.

In her conceptual paper on the historically patriarchal realm of spirituality, Mary Ballou (1995) reviewed the development of control over knowledge and the need for multiple epistemologies. Reality was once imagined to have one ultimate Truth that could be discovered through scientific means. This view fostered the need to place control over knowledge by opposing any proposed alternative ways of knowing. Ballou described how spirituality has been imagined as something that is separate from the Self and as something that can only truly be known and understood by experts. Ferguson, (cited in Ballou, 1995) observed that the perceived hierarchical power structure of organized religion has deterred Americans in increasing numbers and has fueled the popularity of New Age spirituality. This climate provides a unique opportunity for the psychological community. The public openness to new ideas about

spirituality suggests that more and more individuals may come to counselling with an eagerness to inquire into their spiritual nature. As more people refrain from equating traditional, hierarchical religions with spirituality then the fear of counsellors exploring this domain could also diminish.

Mack (1994) referred to one reason that spirituality in counselling has been so conspicuously absent. The term itself has so many definitions and varied meanings for different individuals, that the field of psychology, which has fought so hard to be recognized as a science, has probably ignored spirit on the grounds of being unobservable and inappropriate for the scientific realm. Mack also noted the hesitancy to discuss spirit as due to the belief that the therapists' "frame of reference would be imposed on the client"(p. 16). However, failure to acknowledge a key aspect of human experience seems more offensive (Mack, 1994).

In an overview of Bergin's 1988 paper, Mack shared her opinions on why spirituality is an aspect of human nature that should not be ignored. She claimed: a) spiritual experiences influence behavior, b) spirituality can provide a moral frame of reference, c) spirituality provides techniques with which to cope with life, and d) spirituality potentially provides an understanding of our brief time here. Discovering meaning in one's life seems to be a universal and pervasive struggle. Since many find meaning in spiritual expression or living in alignment with their soul's desire this seems to be a vital issue that deserves acknowledgement within the field of counselling.

Mack continued by presenting professional implications. As mentioned previously, if practitioners ignore spirituality in counselling, this omission is certainly imposing the bias of the counsellor onto the client. Counsellors must have an in depth awareness of their own model of human development and experience and how this

model influences their counselling. Further, Tjeltveit (1989) noted that a belief system that takes into account all aspects of human experience can benefit research by offering a more full understanding of human functioning (cited in Mack, 1994). In response to the common argument that spiritual concerns are too value-laden for the counselling room, Mack pointed out that the practices of mirroring, cognitive-restructuring and dream interpretation are certainly value-laden judgements regarding what is important in working towards achieving wholeness (Mack, 1994). To assume that any counselling is not value-laden is unrealistic and inaccurate so the inattention to spirituality for that reason is unjustifiable. This is an integral point as the techniques we choose and the style of counselling we use do impose values on the client. In our education we are often reminded to be aware of how our own values may come into play with a particular client or situation. We all have values regarding relationships, sex, money, lifestyle, raising children, substance use, etc. We acknowledge openly that our values in all these areas may be vastly different than the clients we work with yet we counsel individuals in all these areas. Excusing spirituality as too value-laden for counselling is an outrageous claim given the nature of counselling as an intimate and open relationship. Lastly, Mack pointed out to educators that it is essential for all students to become highly aware of their spirituality. While other departments do include spirituality in their curricula, counselling psychology has generally overlooked this need.

Mack outlined several suggestions for future research worth noting here. She mentioned the need for inquiring as to the approaches students and practitioners might take towards spiritual issues. Mack suggested that assessment procedures could be discussed and perhaps the need for an in-depth assessment tool covering the spiritual dimension be considered. Discovering how counsellors distinguish

clients' religious and spiritual issues is a third area for exploration. It would also prove interesting to know how people's understandings of spirituality relate to their thought processes toward life difficulties (Mack, 1994; Suyemoto & MacDonald, 1996). Finally, the field of psychology needs to explore the ways in which the clinician's conceptualizations of spirituality may affect their client's understanding.

Porter (1995) discussed the varied meanings of spirit and the need for counsellors to have some skills to aid people in their spiritual pursuits. The author acknowledged the difficulty for psychologists and counselors to incorporate the spiritual when this would be directly oppositional to the scientific model on which twentieth century psychology is based. One interesting point made by Porter is that an awareness of the body is necessary before any knowledge of a higher self is possible. The part of the self that is independent of the body cannot be known until the body is aware (p. 73). This is a valid point that insinuates that counsellors must aid those they counsel in paying attention to their bodies and its messages. If the feelings that our body communicates to us are ignored or at a low level of awareness, how could the positive feelings of spiritual experience be known to their fullest potential?

Porter introduced the concept of spiritual emergence, or the process of the individual discovering spirituality in his or her life (p. 75). This process of questioning and discovering is potentially a time of great opportunity for the counsellor and individual to explore and grow together. Porter shared that his view of spirituality would require one to open their mind to a outlook on humanity not generally held by popular psychology.

The author further acknowledged that of course there are many who, in having difficulties coping or surviving everyday life are hardly prepared for the "rigors of the spirit" (p. 77). He claimed that the counsellors' primary role then is to aid in healing

and building strong individuals so that they can get to a place where they are ready to take on the challenge of spiritual pursuits. Likewise, counsellors need to know spirit firsthand if they are to serve as spiritual guides. Grof's (1985) opinion, written a decade earlier, parallels this. He noted that the effectiveness of a counsellor in working with transpersonal experiences depended on that counsellors' own stage of consciousness development (p. 375). The openness to new understandings of human development is also critical. Although I agree that a spiritual counsellor may be most effective in working on spiritual issues with a client, it is simply not possible for counsellors to have had all the experiences which they seek to help their client with. Therefore, I would expect that as with any other issue, a counsellor without any personal knowledge of spirit would still encourage and support their client in whatever way possible. On the other hand, I do believe that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for a counsellor with no awareness of or belief in alternate levels of consciousness, to counsel their client on such issues as past life memories or out of body experiences. In regards to Porter's comment on the readiness to deal with spiritual issues, the concept of readiness may differ depending on the client's spiritual orientation or cultural beliefs. This view of attending to needs in a linear fashion may not be appropriate. First Nations people for example, may view the spiritual path as a life long journey and not an aspect of self that can be actualized in isolation of the mental, physical, and emotional selves.

Hillman's (1996) conceptualization of an individual describes a similar outlook to Porter's. Rather than the general practice of viewing humans as working on their growth in a linear fashion as Maslow described, Hillman imagines people as carrying an inner genius (p.9). This wisdom within determines how we interpret and create our lives. According to Porter (1995), the counsellors' role, then, is one of facilitator to the

discovery of this inner wisdom and then as encourager to living in alignment with our spirit within. Incorporating the concept of an inner genius into therapy would be a problem however if the client does not subscribe to the same belief system. While Hillman's conviction about human nature is appreciated, the most respectful way of integrating spirituality into counselling is by inquiring about the client's views and allowing the language of spirituality to be instigated by them.

Anderson and Worthen (1997) noted in Exploring a fourth dimension: Spirituality as a resource for the couple therapist, that the therapist's spirituality can be a strength in counselling. Most therapies attend to the three dimensions of time (events in sequence), space (experience organized through relationships) and story (using language to shape what has occurred into meaning) (p. 4). The authors posited that spiritual therapists likely retain a belief in "a fourth dimension of human experience that includes awareness of the existence of a God or Divine Being" (p. 4). Their distinction between spirituality and religion is that spirituality, "refers to the uniquely personal and subjective experience of a fourth dimension; religion refers to the specific and concrete expression of spirituality." (p. 4-5). The authors extended that the assumptions of the counsellor or people in therapy affect the counselling process. Presumably, a counsellor with a spiritual orientation may subscribe to the following spiritual assumptions; 1) an awareness of God or a Divine Being; 2) a yearning for connection with this Being; 3) that this Being takes an interest in humankind and acts upon our relationships for beneficial change. The authors noted that a spiritual approach to therapy is employed through the way a counsellor listens and responds verbally and nonverbally in the session. For example, upon hearing the couple's issues, the therapist may be asking herself or himself, "what does this express about this persons unfulfilled spiritual longings?" (p. 6). A therapists'

response of compassion and love may also be considered as a spiritual orientation. Anderson and Worthen asserted that when therapy is allowed to venture into the fourth dimension, there are more resources available for both the counsellor and couple. The authors suggested that further research needs to include the application of spirituality into the supervision of marriage and family therapists. They also encouraged exploration of how the couple's perceptions of the fourth dimension influence their therapy. In addition, they pointed out that the potential of misuse of spirituality in counselling is yet another virtually unexplored topic.

Chandler, Holden and Kolander (1992) attempted to define spiritual wellness and described techniques to enhance spiritual health in their comprehensive work on the subject. Having acknowledged the difficulties in defining spirituality, their conceptualization of spiritual is as follows: "pertaining to the innate capacity to, and tendency to seek to transcend one's current locus of centrality, which transcendence involves increased knowledge and love" (p. 169). More specifically, spiritual wellness is thought to be a "balanced openness to or pursuit of spiritual development" (p. 170). The authors proposed a holistic model of wellness that includes the following five dimensions: a) intellectual, b) physical, c) emotional, d) social, and e) occupational. They also contended that optimum wellness involves attention to the spiritual within each of these five dimensions. Assessment of spiritual wellness and counselling interventions were discussed. It was suggested that assessment involves attention to the person's level of development and their functioning within each of the noted dimensions. Where the person stands on a continuum of spiritual repression or spiritual preoccupation also needs to be evaluated. Finally, the spiritual development can be assessed. The authors defined spiritual development as "the process of incorporating spiritual experience that results ultimately in spiritual transformation" (p.

170). Several interventions that may facilitate spiritual development are mentioned: a) meditation, b) visualization, c) rhythmic breath work, d) positive affirmations, and e) dream therapy. In closing, the authors emphasized the ethical guideline that counsellors should not use techniques for which they have not been adequately trained and they remind therapists that clients' cannot move past the helpers' level of development.

Steere (1997) reviewed several different models of incorporating the spiritual into therapy. One model worth noting is the recovery model followed in twelve step programs. Steere conceptualized the twelve step model as indicative of what he described as the "Crisis Model" (p. 201). The Crisis model asserts that spiritual awareness comes after an extreme event or crisis that perhaps jolts one into an awakening or new understanding of their life. The twelve step model is important to recognize as this is an example wherein the healing or personal growth necessary is not approached in isolation from the spiritual. Although there have been many critiques of the 12 step programs, its survival over many decades and its widespread success in helping people cannot be ignored or minimized.

Stander, Piercy, Mackinnon, and Helmeke (1994) addressed the interfacing of therapeutic and religious worlds. They specifically discussed family therapy and spirituality or religiousness, noting how the goals of each may overlap. For example, both family therapy and religion may aim to: a) foster a sense of perspective, b) supply meaning to life, c) provide rituals for connection and change, d) provide social support, e) provide identity and heritage, f) provide structure and ethics, g) support families, h) support positive change, i) look out for emotional and physical welfare of members, and j) educate its members (p. 29). The authors argued that the importance of attending to religious or spiritual issues may be paramount to clients and ignoring the

role of spirituality in their life may be equivalent to ignoring a part of their culture. These authors encouraged the exploration of the client's narrative of his/her own spirituality or relationship to a Spiritual Being. There are suggestions shared as to how family therapy programs can train a religiously sensitive therapist. Their paper goes into detail on using culture as a framework for religious issues, incorporating religion/spirituality into ethics and integrating religion/spirituality throughout curricula. Stander et al. (1994) share Rosenthal's (1990), view that "therapists in training may find it helpful to discuss how their religious beliefs have shaped their views of human nature and hence their beliefs about change in therapy" (p. 38). The above quote describes the aims of this paper, the only difference being the stories obtained will be from counsellors in the community.

A viewpoint not often expressed is the potential damage that spiritual beliefs and practices can incur. In her review on spirituality among adult survivors of childhood violence, Ryan (1998) noted that people can feel abandoned and angry at God, may feel angry at suggestions of forgiveness, and disillusioned by the idea that prayer is all they need to heal. The image of a stern and patriarchal God can also be uninviting for women. Buddhist principles that condone suffering and acceptance of fate may interfere with healing as well (Okamura, 1995, cited in Ryan, 1998). Those who have endured violence as children may feel the hesitancy and sometimes unwillingness of Christian churches to acknowledge their experience. The Judeo-Christian tradition also conveys the subtle message that when bad things happen, it is likely a deserved punishment from God. For all these reasons, some people may not be open to exploring their spirituality and a counselor needs to be sensitive to the wishes and comfort level of each individual.

Ryan addressed however, numerous benefits that spiritual practices can have.

Spirituality can aid in providing meaning for a situation and providing a sense of purpose. Frankl (1962) agreed as he asserted that spiritual life is the only location of freedom or escape from unbearable situations. People may also benefit in their perception of God as a refuge (Moran, 1990, cited in Ryan, 1998). Further, research cited in Ryan (1998) alleged that using feminine spiritual images for victims of male violence and using healing rituals aided women in feeling an increased sense of power and reducing fear.

In their extensive work, *A Spiritual Strategy for Counseling and Psychotherapy*, Richards and Bergin (1997) argued that counselors have an ethical obligation to be educated on how to address spiritual concerns with their clients. The field of psychology as it stands now, is in no way preparing counselors to do so. Thankfully, barriers of the narrow, science-minded period of the 50's and 60's have been gradually broken down and the psychological climate is more open to considering the value of the mystical, spiritual and unexplained than ever before. In an attempt to widen the scope of what is psychologically valid, the authors attempt to synthesize the body of work which pertains to the spiritual but has been generally absent from the literature.

The authors asserted that several religious and spiritual practices can actually be viewed as therapeutic interventions. The practices described as paralleling many therapeutic techniques are as follows:

prayer, contemplation and meditation, reading sacred writings, forgiveness and repentance, worship and ritual, fellowship and service, seeking spiritual direction and moral instruction.

Counsellors often advocate for forgiveness and forgiveness is a concept that is suggested by all world religions (Richards & Bergin, 1997). Seeking out support and

finding people with things in common is often suggested. An extensive body of work indicates that the social support that religious communities provide is associated with better physical, psychological health and lower mortality rates (Richards & Bergin, 1997). Doing service for others in the form of volunteer work for example, may be promoted as a means of reducing isolation, feeling a sense of worth and accomplishment, and providing meaning. Since some of these techniques can be viewed as spiritual, the counsellor needs to consider whether it would be helpful to the client to term these actions as such or not. Some of these techniques are regularly suggested by therapists without thought of the religious connection. If the techniques are suggested within a spiritual context, the authors encourage adopting ecumenical stance. Ecumenical was defined by Richards and Bergin as "an attitude and approach that is suitable for clients of diverse religious affiliations and backgrounds" (p.118).

The value of some of the interventions listed above has been found to be quite significant when researched. Although research on the positive effects of prayer remains inconclusive (Dossey, 1993, Mycullough, 1995, cited in Richards and Bergin, 1997), the use of contemplation, meditation and spiritual imagery, has been found to have substantial positive effects on the mind and body (Benson, 1996, Borysenko & Borysenko, 1994, cited in Richards & Bergin, 1997). Reading sacred writings has been noted as providing guidance, comfort, and insight (Nigosian, 1994; Smart, 1993,1994; Whiting, 1983 cited in Richards and Bergin, 1997). Many studies have outlined the therapeutic power of stories and metaphors (Richards & Bergin, 1997). It follows then that sacred writings would be effective in providing insight given their extensive use of metaphors and anecdotes. These findings are helpful to the therapeutic community as they indicate the value of these methods whether presented within a religious context or not.

Cross-Cultural Counselling and Spirituality

Frame and Williams (1996) shared their knowledge of African American communities and the need to incorporate spirituality into counselling with this population. The importance of viewing people within their own context, recognized largely because of the recent awareness of multicultural counselling, is particularly applicable when attending to the spiritual within counselling. Frame and Williams suggested specific strategies for counselling African American people. They emphasized the importance of the using clients' metaphors, discussing social change, using music, stressing communalism and using proverbs with clients. All of these methods are intricately woven into the overall culture and they are key catalysts for spiritual growth. For example, the use of proverbs as a strategy would include encouraging the person to talk to family members and elders about wisdom handed down to them. This connection to the past and instruction through proverbs may have powerful spiritual and therapeutic benefits. Further, the social change brought on through the civil rights movement is an integral part of African American cultural and spiritual history. The symbolism, music, and song incorporated in social change movements over the years has spiritual meaning (Frame & Williams, 1996). Hence the healing powers of working towards liberation and change within one's community can be phenomenal.

Counselling professionals can learn from a recent article in nursing research which assesses the lived experience of spirituality in Taiwanese women with breast cancer (Chiu, 2000). Chiu's study employed interviews with fifteen Taiwanese women with breast cancer to explore their spirituality. The study revealed four major themes and 12 subthemes as representative of their experiences with spirituality. For the

purpose of brevity, only the four central themes are noted here. The first theme was titled living reality, and was described as having an increased consciousness or awareness which enables them to live with whatever situations they may encounter in a new way. Creating meaning was another main category which allowed these women to acknowledge the significance of creating their own life experience. The third theme called connectedness, represented the spiritual importance of relationships with self, others, and God or a deity. The fourth theme, transcendence, encompassed such experiences as letting go of suffering or opening to life and death and symbolized a self-transformation of some kind for these women. These themes were all connected by the meta-theme of *hsin* which can be translated as "mind" or "heart" (p. 33). As Chiu noted, this study is particularly important as within the relatively small body of literature on spirituality in the helping fields, the majority of these are explored from a Christian perspective. This Christian bias in the literature on spirituality is unfortunate since it is unlikely that the majority of people seeking counselling or interacting with nurses would necessarily identify as Christian. In addition, this research expands and elucidates the experience of spirituality, most certainly necessary in order to comprehend the spiritual lives of clients. This research serves as a reminder that spirituality must be understood within its cultural context and from each individuals unique perspective and experience (p. 27).

The need for counsellors to be cognizant of the spiritual needs of those they seek to help is highlighted in a thesis on what facilitates spiritual connection with First Nations people (Christopher, 1998). Christopher pointed out several differences between First Nations and Western worldviews. The most significant variance is that Western thought, for the most part, conceives of body, mind and spirit as separate entities or even as spirit as something completely outside oneself. These distinctions

between mind, body, and spirit have led to separate disciplines where each focuses on healing one of the parts. This split between spiritual healers, physicians, and psychologists or psychiatrists has been detrimental to those they aim to heal. First Nations worldviews do not understand "spirit" as an isolated concept and see all aspects of a person as involved in the healing process. This difference provides a great challenge to therapists counselling First Nations people.

Another salient contrast between cultures is the Western view of individualism and striving to develop our selves to the fullest versus the First Nations view of achieving balance within themselves, their family, their community, and their culture. Similarly, a First Nations individual is thought to be part of a greater whole and aims to free him/herself from the instinct to indulge one's ego (Christopher, 1998). Christopher further explained that health must be looked at holistically. This notion of holism involves a balance between family, environment, and spirit. In addition, First Nations people aim to nurture all four dimensions of the Medicine Wheel: emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical.

Christopher's study of the critical incidents that facilitate spiritual connection for First Nations individuals revealed 29 categories of such incidents. The most prominent categories shared were: ceremonial activities, elder's teaching and guidance, establishing a connection with nature, prayer, and family connecting. The participants involved in Christopher's study shared that engaging in discussions about their spirituality encouraged further reflection on the significant spiritual events in their lives and deepened their spiritual connection. Given this basic concept of interconnectedness in one's culture, an individual must be considered within the context of his/her community. Unfortunately, the traditional Western view of individual counselling emphasizes a focus on what may be altered within each person to

alleviate their difficulties. These opposing viewpoints would certainly result in very different counseling goals. One necessary strategy in counselling people of this culture is to view the person within context and to recognize the involvement of one's community as a necessary component within counselling.

Thankfully, the multicultural movement has opened the minds of many by emphasizing the vast cultural diversity in our world and the need to consider people within their context. Attending to the spiritual in counselling requires the same sort of awareness. The differences among people of various cultures reminds us also that no one definition of spirituality is appropriate and each person's meaning of spirituality must be valued. A counsellor needs to be very open minded towards, if not educated regarding various religions and forms of spiritual expression. Just as a counsellor would be sensitive to other cultures, one also needs to be comfortable with learning about and respecting various spiritual beliefs.

Research on Spirituality in Psychology

Ryan (1998) explored the spirituality of fifty women who survived childhood violence. The women were given a questionnaire with nine demographic questions and seven open ended questions. The majority of the participants were highly educated and Caucasian. Four were African-American and one had not completed high school. Approximately half reported having no religious affiliation and twenty-one mentioned that they had been in therapy. Given that these participants responded to a survey on spirituality these women may be more spiritual than many survivors of violence. The results of the study indicated that 92% of the women in this study found spirituality important in helping them heal from childhood violence. In response to a question about strength of spirituality before, during, or since the violence, the majority of the women (64%) noted that their spirituality is the "strongest it's ever been and

dealing with the violence involved a spiritual journey" (p. 92). In summary, Ryan found the responses provided insight regarding the connections between childhood violence and their spiritual lives. Five major points are mentioned: 1) abuse by the clergy destroyed trust in the church, 2) manipulation of religious tenets by perpetrators created negative associations with the church, 3) the experience of violence contradicted the church teaching about the power, presence, and protection of God; a sense of abandonment resulted, 4) identifications of abusing parents became attached to God resulting in a negative God image, 5) patriarchal, narrow, or judgemental religious structures intensified a survivors sense of victimization and isolation (p.95-96). Despite all the negative associations the women had with religion, all but four of them considered themselves to be spiritual and described spirituality as playing an important role in recovery. In order of frequency the beliefs about how spirituality contributed to their healing process were: 1) a spiritual agent caused survival and healing, 2) spirituality provided meaning or perspective for the experience of childhood violence, 3) spirituality contributed security, comfort, or peace, 4) hope, strength, and support came from spiritual sources, 5) the women felt accepted and loved by a higher power (p. 96). Given the importance of spirituality in their healing process, these womens' comments serve as a reminder to counsellors to acknowledge the vast benefits our client may be deprived of if we do not welcome spirituality into the counselling room.

Page et al. (1997) examined Self-awareness of participants in a long-term Buddhist retreat. The authors noted how enhanced self-awareness is a value shared by both Eastern and Western societies. Both psychotherapy and retreat participation are ways to enhance self-awareness. Some similarities between these two processes were presented. Page et al. pointed out that psychotherapy and retreats both provide

distraction free environments and a facilitator to guide participants through the process. As well, both processes employ techniques for altering cognitions and both processes require commitment towards self-examination by the participants. On the other hand, there are also marked differences between participation in counselling or retreats. The most apparent differences are the degree of verbal exchange and human interaction that psychotherapy employs while retreats encourage solitude, silence and meditation. Another key difference the authors mentioned is that Western psychotherapy techniques have been studied for effectiveness. The utility of long-term retreats for increasing self-awareness has not been previously documented. This study examined statements related to self-awareness which were written by participants of a four-year retreat at the Kagyu Samye-Ling Tibetan Center in Dumfrieshire, Scotland. The responses were gathered following a strict six-month period of isolation, silence and meditation. By the time of study there were 23 retreatants remaining, 12 women and 11 men. After the six month isolation period the participants were invited to write down responses to three topic areas. They were requested to record the day's activities, reflections of the last six months, and aims or expectations of the next six months. Raters separated the statements according to "internal" statements and "external" statements. "Internal" items were those focused on the self while "external" items were those statements about others or the environment. Two raters were Westerners while the third rater was a non-Western Tibetan Buddhist. After four stages of analysis the raters reached consensus on five themes that encompassed all statements. The themes were: a) happiness/satisfaction, b) struggle leading to insight, c) practice/meditation, d) sense of time, e) goals/expectations. The results showed that the six month period of isolation did not seem to have a detrimental effect on the retreatants. Their responses indicated that this period

enhanced self-awareness and for some increased calmness and peacefulness. Some participants commented that they became more comfortable with themselves and others noted that their "memories, thoughts, feelings, and habitual patterns were revealed to them in a new way" (p. 97). Research into how these nonverbal modes of increasing self-awareness compare to psychotherapy's interpersonal modes of increasing self-awareness is recommended. Further research on the benefits of solitude, meditation, and silence would be fruitful and potentially provide more credence to the vast benefits of various forms of spiritual practices.

Matthew, Matthew, Wilson, and George, (1995) conducted a study measuring materialism and spiritualism with individuals recovering from substance use and involved in either AA or NA. The purpose of the study was to determine the general usefulness of the Materialism-Spiritualism Scale (MMSS) and its value as a scale for those with substance use issues. The scale defines materialism as "the view that all facts (including facts about the human mind and will and the course of human history) are causally dependent upon physical processes, or reducible to them" (p. 470). Spiritualism is defined as "a characteristic of any system of thought that affirms the existence of immaterial reality, imperceptible to the senses" (p. 470). The study included a recovery group that consisted of 62 individuals and two control groups; one group comprised of 20 clergy (CC) and the other consisting of 61 individuals known as the general controls (GC). The Materialism-Spiritualism Scale (MMSS) measures six empirically derived subscales. The subscales of the MMSS are: 1) God; relates to the belief in a God or Higher Power that guides the universe, 2) Religion; looks at faith in the value of religion and religious practices, 3) Mysticism; evaluates beliefs in mystic experiences (visions, transpersonal experiences, etc.), 4) Spirits; examines belief in the existence of spirits and survival of the soul after death, 5) Character; examines

belief in the personal value of altruism, unselfishness, kindness, morality, etc., 6) Psi; relates to belief in the genuineness of paranormal phenomena such as ESP and telepathy. In addition to filling out the MMSS, the control groups were asked to complete the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test (MAST) and the Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST). Sixteen of the general control (GC) group met the MAST criteria for alcoholism and is heretofore referred to as the MAST positive group (MP). Results showed that the recovery group (RG) scored higher on the Mysticism and Character scales than did the general controls. RG also scored higher on the God, Mysticism, and Character scales than the MP group. The RG and GC group was also divided into Christian and non-Christian groups and results showed that Christians scored higher on the God and Religion scales. The authors contended that the results indicate the utility of the MMSS for studying spirituality with those with substance misuse issues. The test-retest reliability and the internal consistency for this instrument are high and suggest that this instrument successfully assesses the different aspects of spirituality listed above. However, the authors recognized that some improvement in language and relevance of some scales is necessary. Further study with various populations to confirm the utility of the MMSS is recommended and would contribute the limited research base in the area of spirituality.

Suyemoto and MacDonald (1996) explored the content and function of religious and spiritual beliefs with twenty-eight undergraduates. The participants (all aged 20-24 and predominantly Judeo-Christian), were solicited from a psychology class. The results indicated seven major content domains of religious and spiritual beliefs: a) beliefs about a higher power, b) beliefs about creation, c) beliefs about a soul d) beliefs about life after death, e) beliefs concerning one's connections with others, f) beliefs about fate, and g) beliefs about supernatural occurrences. Participants were

asked the functions for each of the above content areas and their overall belief system. Numerous functions were presented. Some of the functions of spiritual beliefs were: a) providing connection or combating isolation, b) providing meaning, c) explaining differences between different moralities and personalities, d) explaining the unexplainable, and e) providing hope. The functions listed here give us an idea of the potential psychological benefits of being spiritual. Additional research is needed on which functions contribute to overall positive mental health, if, in fact, they do. Determining which belief systems aid in coping with particular issues would prove interesting as well. Suyemoto and MacDonalds' work is one of the few studies that discussed spirituality and its benefit with a non-professional population.

Bergin (1983) attempted to extract the specificities of positive and/or negative effects of religiousness. His meta-analysis of 24 studies reviewing religiosity and mental health found only slightly positive correlates to religion. There was no support for the correlation of religion and psychopathology. These summaries, however, do not acknowledge the complicated nature of what it means to be religious. Considering religiousness as a single construct is not meaningful. Studying more thoroughly the ways in which people are religious and how these specific attributes may or may not be related to mental well-being though would be a great contribution. Bergin suggested that "religiosity, like intelligence, involves a general (G) factor and several specific (S) factors " (p. 180). This suggestion offers one way of conceptualizing religiousness or spirituality. This type of model may be useful for an assessment tool which aims to ascertain the specifics of what religious attributes or practices contribute to the peace and contentment that many spiritual people claim to feel.

Summary of the Literature Review

Although the area of spirituality in psychology has expanded in recent years

many areas remain virtually unexplored. Given the body of research presented here, the following gaps are apparent. If there is to be greater credibility given to spirituality within the health sciences, more research must be done on the effects of particular techniques that may be named as spiritual (i.e. meditation, prayer, reading sacred text, visualization, yoga, tai chi etc.) The positive implications of feeling a deep sense of spirituality could be explored. Interviewing people of various ethnic backgrounds as to the role of spirituality in facilitating their overall health is another unexplored area. Also it would be useful to ask the public what they would imagine to be spiritual practices or techniques. For instance, many people may name creative pursuits as spiritual practice (songwriting, playing an instrument, gardening, painting, woodworking, crafts etc). Who's to say what spiritual expression is? To then investigate how several of these practices may contribute to overall well-being would be an enormous yet valuable pursuit.

There are many areas of spirituality within the counselling profession that warrant attention. Counsellors need to be interviewed on how they acknowledge spirit, if at all. A discussion with those who have experienced counselling as to whether the counsellor inquired or ever mentioned the spiritual aspect of self would be prudent. Another interesting project would be to ask people who have had counselling experiences how counsellors could aid clients in growing spiritually. Interviewing clients of therapists who do value the spiritual part of the self and asking the clients how this aspect of the counselling experience was helpful or not helpful is a key area for investigation. One could also interview professors in universities and other institutions that teach counselling to inquire about their perspective on spirituality and the self and whether this perspective affects their teaching practice. A fascinating area of exploration is how the counselling profession can learn from the developments

in physics which have unearthed a vast realm of healing possibilities from their current understandings of how humans affect one another energetically.

The focus of this research project is to investigate how counsellors' experiences of religion or spirituality have affected their counselling practice. Both the terms religious and spiritual are used as some individuals may resonate with one word or the other. Also, there is the possibility of having identified as religious at one time of life and identified as spiritual at another time. Both experiences and ways of being are considered valuable to this research. I chose this topic in hopes of gaining a deeper understanding of one of the many ways in which counsellors can affect their clients healing. As counsellors are encouraged to be aware of our own childhood issues or relationship issues so they should be aware of their spiritual development and how those experiences may play out in the counselling room. Much of the writings in the field have been conceptual discussions of how psychology must begin to attend to spirituality in practice. None of the research reviewed has employed narrative methods to try to ascertain the lived experience of spirituality or religion and how individuals make sense of its influence on their lives. Questioning how the spirituality of counsellors may impact clients is an unexplored area and this narrative research will provide a place to begin. This topic will be investigated by analyzing the autobiographical accounts of counsellors experience. A narrative analysis of the stories will be employed and reviewed. The combined meaning of these stories and the implications for counselling and future research will be assessed.

Chapter 3

A Method for Researching Spirituality in Counselling

Researchers Context

I bring a variety of personal beliefs and values to this research originating from my past experiences with religion and my ongoing spiritual development. I have moved away from my rigid Christian upbringing which allowed no room for spiritual exploration. Having lost faith in organized religion I looked to psychology to fulfill my need for understanding human nature. Sadly, my years of education resulted in the realization that science and its pursuit of 'truth' is also undeserving of the worship so many in our society give it. Thankfully, however, my education sharpened my critical thinking skills and provided the opportunity to learn more about other cultures and religions. This learning enabled me to develop a more open mind regarding what it means to be spiritual than my childhood religious beliefs had allowed. One of my core beliefs is that an individual is comprised of a physical, emotional, mental and spiritual parts which all must be nourished in order to grow towards wholeness. This holistic idea of Self was introduced to me as the concept of the Native Medicine Wheel and has since been integral to my understanding of human nature. I believe that these various aspects of the Self are interconnected and do not occur in isolation from one another. There are numerous ways in which an individual may wish to nurture these areas and I encourage individual choice in doing so. The essential Self is capitalized as, for me, it represents our unchanging spiritual being, separate from the personality and impervious to death.

As a counsellor, I am intensely aware of the potential impact my relationship with clients may have on their lives. People are generally seeing a counsellor with some hopes and expectations of moving beyond the pain or dissatisfaction in their

lives. Since the counsellor is the one from whom help is sought, the counsellor is in a position of great power to impact this person's life. This position is a place of honor and must be considered as sacred. My beliefs regarding the sacredness of counselling also come from my experience of feeling energy in the counselling room which I believe to originate from a Source which is usually beyond our awareness. Given my experience and the pivotal role that spirituality plays in my life I am hopeful and eager for all people to feel the sense of peace and reverence for life that connection with Spirit brings.

The theoretical orientations I bring to this process include social-constructivism, feminism, and post-modernism. These values along with my assumptions, experiences, and own narrative regarding counselling and spirituality, will impact on the research. As a feminist counsellor and researcher, I will attempt to bring genuineness, authenticity and a non-expert stance to this process. My adherence to post-modernism means that to me there is no 'right' or 'true' interpretation of a story, in fact, there may be multiple interpretations of a story, each with its own meaning and validity. Social-constructivism in this research refers to the co-constructive process that the researcher and participants are involved in. To further illuminate my position I use a metaphor from Kvale (1996). I enter the research experience as a traveler, one who is on a journey, who wanders through unknown territory, and learns from the people she meets and the stories she hears. The traveler returns with new knowledge and sense of understanding of the places she encountered. The traveler may also be changed herself as the experiences she had may have altered her understanding of herself and her world. This metaphor represents the postmodern constructivist approach to research while the opposing metaphor of a miner symbolizes the positivist stance that knowledge is something to be uncovered and known (p. 4-5). Kvale's

(1996) metaphor emphasizes the significance of the social interaction between co-researchers and this serves as a reminder that although the participants in this study will be writing their stories, the researcher is still co-authoring the stories and not simply collecting them.

To elucidate my own theoretical orientation, I wrote my own narrative to explore the research question for myself. Through reflection and interpretation of my personal narrative I clarified some of my biases and was reminded of their origin. This process was empowering as it provided a depth of insight into my personal growth that I had not had previously and significantly contributed to the ongoing creation of my own spirituality.

Rationale for the Study

One key purpose of this research project is to open up a dialogue among people in the community of counselling professionals. A personal motive for the research is to explore a topic area which was not touched upon in my academic study and to learn from the spiritual counsellors who participated. The key contribution that this paper makes, however, is in affirming and validating the importance of spirituality by choosing to write on this topic. This study also provides examples of how counsellors are incorporating spirituality into their counselling. Counsellors are not doing their best to aid people in their healing process if they are not comfortable or competent in discussing the spiritual concerns an individual may have. Naturally, there may be many people hesitant to discuss spirituality as there are those who are hesitant to share feelings. Being spiritual counsellors does not mean that we force our agenda onto those we counsel. However, when counsellors can begin to acknowledge the spiritual side of every individual and feel comfortable in discussing this aspect of the Self, the growth opportunities for both the counsellor and counsellee

are boundless.

One of the potential reasons that the field of psychology has so blatantly ignored the spiritual may be its hesitance to step down from the pedestal of expertise and prestige which the field is based upon. Once the professional community and the general population let go of the false notion that professionals have to be 'experts' in every topic area, the fear of discussing spirituality in counselling will dissipate. Counsellors have great opportunities to learn from those they counsel as to what spirituality encompasses and, in a field where open-mindedness is a necessity, they must be willing to expand their own understandings and constructions of Spirit.

Rationale for the Method

Qualitative methods are often used when an area of inquiry is so new that there may be uncertainty about which aspects of the area need investigation. Although there has been some research in this area, the depth of information provided by the narrative method employed here contains a richness of experience and highlights the complexity of spiritual development in ways which could not be exposed by other methods. The narrative approach is appropriate as story telling is a natural way of linking events together and this research is interested in how past events are linked to present experience. In addition, the narrative method of research is particularly useful as this approach to understanding people and experiences parallels the way in which individuals construct their understanding of themselves (Cohler, 1982).

As Carolyn Ellis eloquently describes, the attraction to this approach and the purpose in using it lies in its ability to "try to connect social science to literature, academic interests to personal ones, emotions to cognition, and social life to the concrete living of it" (p. 117). Specifically, this is a autoethnographic study, where stories which "focus on the self in social context", are examined (Ellis, 1997, p. 117).

Clearly, this method is ideal for this particular research question since it provides counsellors with an opportunity to voice their experiences with spirituality in counselling while they are emerged in the context. Additionally, this method encourages self-examination and offers participants a way to share the depth and breadth of their experience without restriction. Being asked to share one's story also conveys the significance and value of each person's experience. Participants may feel greater commitment or awareness of how their experiences with spirituality affect their counselling through the activity of writing an autobiographical account. As Freedman and Combs (1996) note, "everytime we share words we give legitimacy to the distinctions those words bring forth" (p. 29).

The narrative method provides "both a process and a product" (Polkinghorne, 1988). The narrative provides a story where events are linked into a meaningful sequence. This story is a product- a re-presentation of the events of a person's life. The process, on the other hand, involves the narrator reconstructing his/her life in a way which conveys the meaning they attach to it (Arvay, 1998). Arvay also asserts that the story construction will be influenced by the context in which it is written, the relationship between the teller and receiver, and the cultural norms of storytelling (p. 62). Similarly, Reissman (1993) believes there to be several levels of narration: life as lived, life as experienced, life as told to the researcher, life as presented to a particular audience in a particular social context for a particular purpose (p. 14). As an additional result of this process, the participants may discover new awareness about themselves or feel more deeply connected to their spirituality. Polkinghorne (1988) examines the relationship between self and narrative construction:

We achieve our personal identities and self-concept through the use of narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding

it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story. We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end, we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives. Self, then, is not a static thing nor a substance, but a configuring of personal events into a historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be (p. 150).

Participants

Co-researchers were recruited by word of mouth to counsellors whom I know in the community and through posting flyers at various sites where counsellors may be employed. The participants were informed of the nature of the research and were willing to write their stories. Having the participants write their narratives lessens the influence from the researcher. In addition, participants may learn from the experience of writing their stories as the process of writing is often therapeutic and tends to aid one in conceptualizing and making sense of their lives. In fact, the construction of one's perceived past, present and anticipated future can be considered an integral part of the adult development process (McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, in press, cited in Lieblich & Josselson, 1997, p. 62). White and Epston expand on the storying process:

In striving to make sense of life, persons face the task of arranging their experiences of events in sequences across time in such a way as to arrive at a coherent account of themselves and the world around them...This account can be referred to as a story or self-narrative. The success of this storying of experience provides persons with a sense of continuity and learning in their lives, and this is relied upon for the ordering of daily lives and for the interpretation of further experiences (cited in Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 10).

Introductory Interview

An introductory interview was conducted with each potential participant wherein the researcher and participant began to establish rapport. The time was also used for the researcher to share the purpose of the study and ascertain whether the participant was comprehensible, articulate, and had a story to tell. The central question the research aims to examine was outlined on a writing guide along with other potentially thought-provoking questions for the participants. The discussion questions are outlined here.

Table 1

Writing Guide Questions

- 1) How do you define spirituality?
 - 2) How do you as a counsellor, integrate your spiritual/religious experiences with your counselling practice?
 - 3) Is spirituality related to optimum wellness?
 - 4) Does spirituality/religion play a role in your own health and well-being?
 - 5) In what ways do you, as a counsellor, incorporate spirituality into your counselling practice?
-

After discussion of the purpose and expectations of participants, consent forms were signed.

The introductory interview and the writing guide provided by the researcher are examples of the co-constructive nature of the research. For example, my decisions

regarding what questions to ask in both the interview and writing guide, my non-verbal behaviour and use of silence in the interviews all contribute to what, when, and how much the participant chose to share. Other personal characteristics that may have affected a participant's openness or lack of it include my gender, age, style of dress and perceived spiritual beliefs. My conscious decisions of how I present the stories and the perhaps unconscious influence of my own experience also exemplify the constructive nature of this research and its findings. In addition, I recognize that the participants stories are affected by their awareness of an academic audience just as my interpretations and presentation reflect this fact. Our voices and narratives would have been different had we been a bunch of counsellors in a circle discussing our experiences with spirituality. As the aforementioned points and examples illustrate, reality is truly created rather than discovered (Tierney, 1997, p. 24).

Participants' Autobiographical Stories

As noted previously, the process of writing a story can be therapeutic and enlightening and may facilitate personal understanding and integration for the participants of how their spiritual experiences have affected their lives. In the introductory interview once all questions were clarified, the participants took the writing guide and were asked to write their story within two weeks and phone the researcher when they were finished. Participants were told to write in whatever mode was most comfortable for them and not to worry about format or handwriting. Some participants found that more time was needed and took up to a maximum of six weeks to complete their stories. All narratives were collected at a location of the participants' choosing once they were completed. This procedure worked well as it allowed the maximum possible freedom and comfort for participants but was not conducive to time restrictions. This autobiographical method also limited the researchers impact on the

narratives although the researcher was very involved in the presentation and analysis of them.

Interpreting the Autobiographies

A story is not a story without all its parts. However, for the sake of analysis some parts of the story must be extracted. The analysis of narratives is a process that has no predetermined steps to follow to ascertain the meaning of the narrative. This analysis borrowed techniques from various researchers in this domain. The analysis consisted of three interpretive readings with each involving attention to a particular theme (personal communication, Arvay, Nov. 12, 1999). The first reading was a narrative summary, where the plot and impressions of the story as a whole were reviewed. The second reading made note of key events or "nuclear episodes" (Lieblich & Josselson, 1997, p. 69). Nuclear episodes are those turning points or critical incidences within the story. The third reading, labelled the interpretive reading, involved analysis of the story in search of the author's meaning and with the intention of interpretation. Questions used to guide the readings are noted in the table below.

Table 2

Researcher's Analysis Guide

Narrative Summary

- 1) What is this story really about?
- 2) What is the timeline for this story?
- 3) How can I summarize this story and convey the same felt sense I get from this narrator?
- 4) Where is it necessary to use the narrators own words to portray his/her experience?

Nuclear Episodes

- 1) What events stand out as significant to this writer?

Interpretive Reading

- 1) How does this person define spirituality?
- 2) How does this person incorporate spirituality into counselling?
- 3) How does the storyteller fit into the story?
- 4) What are his/her gifts?
- 5) What are his/her struggles or challenges?
- 6) What metaphors, core beliefs, or descriptive phrases does the narrator use to enhance his/her story?
- 7) What parts of his/her experiences are shared openly?
- 8) What parts of his/her experiences are not shared?

The last two focused readings extracted themes with meaning in isolation though the themes were also considered in terms of how they fit in to the story as a whole and contributed to the narrative summary.

After reading each narrative at least once, the researcher created a page of columns for each participant's story and began to categorize information. The eight sections were as follows: nuclear episodes, metaphors/core beliefs/images, shared information, information not shared, struggles/challenges, gifts, definition of spirituality, and ways she uses spirituality in counselling. Information noted in these columns was then summarized in written form in either the narrative summary, reading for nuclear episodes, or interpretive reading included in the results section.

Criteria for Evaluating the Worth of the Study

Currently, there is no set way of evaluating the worth of narrative research. For

this study the coherence, verisimilitude, and pragmatism of the autobiographical accounts were assessed. Coherence refers to the narrator's overall goals, structure, and essentially, what a storyteller is trying to say (Reissman, 1993). The coherence of each narrative was evaluated through the member check process. Verisimilitude can be described as "having an appearance of truth or reality" and was assessed through the peer review process (Schwandt, 1997, p. 170-171). Pragmatism refers to how a study may be useful or provide impetus for other work. The pragmatic value of the research is discussed in detail in the discussion section.

As noted, the peer review process was crucial to enhancing the rigor of the research. After analysis of each narrative by the primary researcher, a peer reviewer examined the findings and shared her insights and understandings of each story. She also noted agreement or questioned conclusions where applicable. This process expanded my perspective and improved objectivity.

To maximize coherence and to respect each participants voice as much as possible, at least one member check was conducted with each participant. After the stories were reviewed and analysis was written, the participants were contacted to arrange a time to discuss any reflections, changes or comments they may have. Participants were asked to read the researcher's synopsis with a critical eye to ensure descriptive words, feeling words and overall content was reflective of the their experience. After this validation check a rewrite was done and returned to each individual for any further revisions. If there were significant changes after the participants' second read, a second meeting was arranged and if the changes were minor, the adjustments were given over the phone. Lastly, a final copy of story was returned to the participants for their own keeping.

Chapter 4

Results

Liberty's Story

Liberty is a Caucasian woman in her thirties who currently works with women as an addictions counsellor.

Narrative Summary

Liberty grew up in a Catholic family where going to church and performing various rituals required by the Catholic religion was expected. Other than the family gatherings involved with church attendance, religious practices themselves were generally without meaning for Liberty. As a teen she used the concepts of confession and asking for forgiveness as tools to appease her parents rather than as rituals with potential spiritual significance. Liberty felt she "was a puppet," without freedom to explore various belief systems. These experiences affected her so that today she is opposed to any religious dogmas which place a restriction on human thought, choice, and expression.

Liberty noted that she has been interested in spiritual development since she was eighteen. To aid her in this development, she pursued theological studies which allowed her to form an understanding of how she viewed the universe. In her late twenties, Liberty experienced a period she describes as disconnection to her spiritual self where she experienced a "shattering of the spirit." She states that this depression was a result of a several painful life experiences. During this time she was filled with questions about the meaning of her life, the suffering humans inflict on one another, and a questioning of what the future could bring. Liberty shares the intensity of her distress metaphorically; "during the night my joy had been bound and gagged by an unwelcome intruder!"

From this experience Liberty had the realization that all aspects of her self are connected: her physical, social, emotional, mental and spiritual selves. She now defines spirituality as the "way in which I find meaning and purpose in life." Creating connections and being in relationships is one of the central ways in which she learns about herself and continues to grow and develop self-awareness. She values creativity, art, culture, and history as expressions of spirit and also nurtures her spirit by connecting with nature. Liberty practices her spirituality daily through respect for others, listening to her intuition and gratitude for life. She brings this holistic approach to her counselling practice as she believes that the integration of all aspects of the self lead to optimum wellness. She encourages the women in the psychotherapy group she facilitates to explore and create their own meaning of spirituality in order to discover what spiritual path best fits for them.

Reading for Nuclear Episodes.

One of the significant events in her spiritual development which Liberty shares is her pursuit of knowledge and understanding through theological studies. She cites this period as integral to the formation of her understanding of how the universe works. The examination of various cultures, religions and ethical issues allowed her to discover that her own spirituality blossoms when fed with a diverse blend of art, literature, history, culture, travel, architecture, and discourse.

Another significant event for Liberty was her disconnection from her spirit, or "the shattering of spirit" as she calls it. This disconnection emerged from a period filled with painful experiences and consistent exposure to life's suffering. A young child whom she was close with was diagnosed with an illness, a family member was subject to a violent attack, and the vicarious traumatization from counselling sexual abuse survivors was too much to endure within a short period. She experienced depression,

was filled with questioning, and yet eventually emerged with a renewed realization of the interconnectedness of all aspects of herself. As a result she honors the development and integration of all aspects of self in her own life and in her counselling practice.

Interpretive Reading.

Liberty shares her story regarding her spiritual development from birth to the present day. She comments on her imposed Catholicism and the meaninglessness of religious rituals to her as an adolescent, then she takes us to eighteen where she notes, "Spiritual development has been of interest to me since I was a young woman of eighteen." This announcement of the interest in spirituality since eighteen as the opening sentence however leaves me wondering. What is it about eighteen, was there a significant event that happened at this time which lead to the interest emerging? Perhaps this was the age at which her awareness of options of spirituality emerged. She shares her theological studies as imperative to her spiritual development and the period of the late twenties which resulted in a spiritual emergency as pivotal to her development as well.

One of the challenges to Liberty's spiritual development was a lack of freedom through institutionalized and perhaps parental control. Another challenge was the struggle with painful life experiences with family members and through the vicarious traumatization of counselling sexual abuse survivors. These events led to a period of existential questioning she calls "a shattering of my spirit." Her choice of words speaks to how these events tore her apart, gives the reader the impression she had to pick up all the pieces and put herself back together again.

Liberty uses metaphors to enhance her narrative such as "felt as though I was a puppet", "deadening of my spirit", and "my joy had been bound and gagged by an

unwelcome intruder.” Her image of a puppet enhances my understanding of how she must have felt controlled by her religion or her parents. She was not able to pull the strings or make her own choices. This is suggestive of how important it became to Liberty to make independent decisions and to now encourage others to do the same, to ensure that others are not being controlled like puppets. The deadening of spirit reinforces the imagined dark and desolate time she experienced in her late twenties. Her spirit had been shattered and as a result, died. The many devastating events which occurred seem to have challenged Liberty’s coping to the breaking point. One can only imagine how bleak life must have seemed and what strength it would take for her to move through that painful time. The metaphor of the intruder provides insight into how suddenly this bleak period emerged and also hints at the feelings of violation and lack of control she must have felt. I am left with questions: Was there a loss of faith during this time? How was she able to come back to a place of seeing the beauty in life?

Liberty’s many gifts are apparent throughout her story. Her narrative allows us to see her sense of humor and creativity. Her adherence to independence and freedom of choice is clear. Her commitments to spirituality, self-awareness and learning through connection are apparent throughout. She honors development and integration of the self and shares a deep respect and adoration for all cultures and the beauty and diversity they may have to offer. Her gift of providing a safe, supportive and non-judgemental counselling atmosphere likely contribute to her talents as a counsellor. Liberty’s narrative also indicates a real desire to understand and live in harmony with the universe and all those she encounters.

Member Check.

Meeting with Liberty to share my analysis allowed time for her to review my

words and make any changes she felt necessary and for me to ask the questions which came up from her narrative. There were very few changes to the summary and analysis as Liberty felt I had quite accurately reflected what she had written. In terms of my questions about the significance of eighteen, she answered that the interest in spiritual development was instigated by her freedom from parental control and their imposed values. She moved out of her parents house at eighteen and began to freely explore and create her own spirituality. As a result, Liberty sees freedom as related to spirituality, one must be free to decide their own path. I also had a question relating to her time of spiritual emergency and how she actually emerged from that dark period. She shared that taking time out to get connected with her own resources, such as creativity and writing, accessing support and doing personal work were all imperative in aiding her to come to that place of integration within herself. After making revisions, I returned the second draft to Liberty for her to review and edit once again. This process of checking in has been crucial for me in clarifying my understanding of the narrative and ensuring that I reflect each Liberty's experience as completely as possible.

Personal Reflections.

Upon reading Liberty's story I feel connected to her. Her story is similar to my own and I am aware that because of this I may project particular meanings onto her words that may not be accurate. Our member check goes smoothly and she has very few adjustments to make other than a word here and there. I'm wondering if she doesn't feel comfortable asking me to change my words or if the analysis really is on the mark. She shares that my descriptions have provided some new insights for her and I feel proud. Perhaps the closeness of her story to my own allowed me to more easily get into her skin and imagine what was behind her words. I only hope all the

member checks go this smoothly!

Sukhi's Story

Sukhi is a Caucasian woman in her forties currently working as an addictions counsellor with adult men and women.

Narrative Summary

Sukhi writes her story from the peaceful setting of a Buddhist meditation retreat. She begins writing after three days of meditating for about 6 hours a day. Her story and description of nature and people around her convey the sense of peace that such extended periods of silence must bring. To use her words " Wonderfully today, the whole day and evening is in silence. So here I sit by a window, looking out to a vista of gloriously blooming acacia trees, with anywhere between 5-15 women and I am at peace in the quiet, friendly silence of my sisters, who are all aspiring to reach the Transcendental." The context of Sukhi's narrative is set by many of these picturesque phrases which drew me in to the beauty of her experience and connected me to part of that peacefulness she felt as she wrote.

She portrays herself as a woman with a great commitment to the Buddhist way of life and shares her goal of ordination into the Western Buddhist Order. The process can take years and years and involves a commitment to continually turn away from the mundane aspects of life and try to focus on the Transcendental. One must integrate all parts of the self so that all aspects of one's being are moving in the same spiritual direction. This integration requires clearing all energy blocks by working through any emotional and mental states which do not contribute to one's highest state of consciousness or spiritual evolution.

From Sukhi's story I get the impression that she is a woman who has been driven by her quest for understanding human nature and the nature of existence itself.

She emphasizes that humans are an everchanging flow of processes and that there is no such thing as a "static self." She thinks of a human being "as a vast well which is largely untapped." Her life is dedicated to becoming ever more connected to her vast well of potential and also to encouraging and supporting others in their own individual processes.

In terms of her history, Sukhi briefly mentions the unexpected death of a partner in her late 20's and the marriage a few years later to a visionary artist which subsequently ended in divorce. Although only touched upon, these events seem to have played a pivotal role in her personal growth and spiritual development. The pain and loss she experienced from the death of her partner led her to seek out a way to understand the consistent losses in life. The close contact with the mind of an artist during her marriage, on the other hand, provided her with inspiration and encouragement to explore spiritual and transcendental possibilities. This relationship was more impactful in its inspiration than in the pain of its ending. Sukhi's search for meaning and her interest in the nature of existence took her travelling, took her to school and through psychology, and instigated her interest in anthropology and exploration of the religious beliefs of other cultures, particularly shamanic practices.

Her continued search for understanding eventually brought her to Buddhism, a path which provides her with insights and glimpses into an awareness of the way things really are. She clarifies that Buddhists do not believe in any sort of Creator God, but rather have faith in the fact that the Buddha refined his human nature and obtained Enlightenment. Sukhi's Buddhist practice is based on the Buddha's experience and the experience of many disciples of the Buddha over the last 2500 years, that human beings can obtain Enlightenment with commitment and dedication to overcoming the barriers that prevent us from knowing our true nature. A fact of

Reality that Sukhi emphasizes is that suffering is caused by our failure to see the impermanence in all mundane things. We fail to see that those things that we generally hold dear are all ultimately impermanent and will not bring lasting happiness. Clinging to these impermanent things will eventually bring pain and disappointment when they are lost through separation or death or disintegration. Human beings mostly attempt to get happiness from those things which are incapable of giving it, because those things which they are seeking happiness from are impermanent, insubstantial and unsatisfactory.

Sukhi's spiritual quest seems to have evolved beyond the drive to seek understanding. She has become frustrated and disillusioned with the mundane aspects of this world and aims to place her focus on the Transcendental. She enjoys the freedom her regular meditation practice and retreats bring from the chaos of the world. She seeks out refuge by going to the Buddha, through study of the Dharma, (the teachings of the Buddha) and through Sangha, the community of the Buddha's disciples throughout history and present day mentors and practicing Buddhists. Some additional ways she incorporates her spirituality into her life are through the Buddhist practices of self-reflection, ethical behaviour, vegetarianism, only taking as much material possessions as required, caring for other people, and caring for the body through practices such as Tai Chi, Yoga or Qi Gong.

Sukhi incorporates her spirituality into counselling in various ways. By being present and bringing her whole self to the counselling room, she and her client both experience and contribute to each others' process of evolution within the bigger picture of the Universal process. Her work is an enactment of the 'Bodhisattva Ideal' within Buddhism which encourages individuals to spiritually progress not only for the self but for all beings because there is no progress for self without progress for all.

Sukhi sees counselling as an opportunity to influence people's commitment to personal growth which is a crucial aspect in influencing the Universal process as a whole. Sukhi describes her role as that of a witness, a brave companion, or a handholder of the client on their journey.

As a therapist, she also uses kindness, humour, and compassion. She emphasizes the use of recreation, silence, connecting with nature, meditation, movement, dance, yoga, vocalization and other creative pursuits a client may be interested in exploring. She encourages clients to become aware of their physical self and its health and to become more present in their bodies. When the opportunity presents itself Sukhi also brings other aspects of her spiritual beliefs to the counselling process. In her work as an addictions counsellor, she may aid the client in questioning deluded beliefs regarding what really creates happiness and in questioning their self-destructive behaviours. From the theoretical perspective of Buddhist Psychology, the discussion is about the err in seeking happiness from impermanent things and the human cravings, attachments, greed, and hatred of mundane existence and its resultant suffering.

Reading for Nuclear Episodes.

Sukhi offhandedly mentions her interest in Buddhism while she was visiting Thailand and I sense that this was a significant event in her spiritual growth. Although it was not until many years later that she began practicing Buddhism, this initial contact or intrigue remained located in the back of her mind and continued to influence her once back in Canada. She often noticed temples in Vancouver but thought only Asian people were welcome there. The interest in Buddhism drove her to attend an Introduction to Buddhism course and her connection to the practices of meditation, Dharma study, and devotional ritual began.

A significant event in Sukhi's life that contributed to her questioning of life's meaning was the death of her partner. Little is said other than the mention of this death and I sense that this event acted as an impetus for spiritual growth for Sukhi.

A few years later Sukhi met and married an artist who opened her to the world of creativity and its connection to spiritual growth and wholeness.

Sukhi's interest in understanding human nature and the nature of Reality led her to the study of psychology. Although her major in psychology was disappointing in its lack of mention of higher realms of consciousness and human potential, she completed her degree and complimented her study with a minor in anthropology which satiated her interest in myth and forms of spiritual practice outside of the Western mainstream. Sukhi continued with her education and obtained a M.A. in counselling. Now as a practicing Buddhist, she tries to bring her spiritual beliefs into all aspects of her life.

The many retreats that Sukhi attends likely warrant identification as significant events in her life as well. This consistent reminder of the benefits of spiritual community, the ongoing participation in Dharma study with ordained Buddhists, extended periods of silence and self-reflection, and engaging in Buddhist devotional ritual to engage the heart and emotions, solidifies her dedication to this path.

Interpretive Reading.

Sukhi's narrative is enhanced by its metaphors and descriptive phrases. As noted previously, she likens human beings to a vast well of potential which remains largely untapped. This metaphor captivates Sukhi's core belief in human nature and re-emphasizes the basis for her spiritual direction. Her path to Enlightenment involves clearing away the debris and beginning to tap this "vast well." Her mention of "all of

us in the blissful silence with the calm or chaos of our minds" gives insight into the comfort Sukhi gains from silence and gives us a sense of what meditation may be like; left alone with just the mind in all its calm or chaos. In her description of the counselling process Sukhi shares, "together we are a tiny sphere in the larger process of their and my life, and of the greater universal process as a whole." This metaphor conveys connectedness and is illustrative of Sukhi's counselling philosophy. To end her narrative, Sukhi shares a quote by Shunryu Suzuki which illustrates how she may view the gift of Buddhism and maybe how she views the human process or the counselling process as well. "To give your sheep or cow a large spacious meadow is the way to control him."

There are particular events mentioned within the narrative that may have presented challenges for Sukhi's spiritual growth or may have provided momentum to her spiritual evolution. Considered chronologically, the death of her partner may have been one of her early struggles. The years of seeking to understand human nature and developing personal meaning have likely been a challenge for Sukhi. The separation from her husband is not mentioned directly but I can only assume this was a difficult time. Other potential challenges noted are the death of her father and the illness and death of an aunt.

Upon reading Sukhi's narrative I am left with a few questions. She mentions the need for leaving all those people, places, things, behind which are not conducive to Enlightenment, and I wonder, is there internal conflict around doing so? I also found myself wondering throughout the story, nowhere does she share the challenges of this way of life or any doubt she may have regarding her commitment to the Buddhist lifestyle, do those times of challenge or doubt occur? Because Sukhi gives the impression of such certainty and faith in her path I also wondered, does counselling

present more of a challenge when the client follows a very different spiritual path or has vastly different worldviews?

Many gifts are apparent from Sukhi's story. She portrays a deep commitment to her life choice and faith in her ability to transcend the mundane aspects of human nature. Her story illustrates a perseverance within and a strong sense of individuality. Her desire to understand human nature is a gift that fuels her commitment to both Buddhism and counselling. She places a high value on the process of growing and evolving on this earth and desires to aid others in their own process. Throughout Sukhi's narrative her gifts of gratitude, compassion, and reverence for life are evident. She brings the gift of herself and her personal growth and freely shares these gifts in the counselling process and in all aspects of life.

Member Check

Sukhi and I met twice in order for her to make revisions and assure that my words accurately reflected her narrative. Through our discussion, I was able to gain a more complete understanding of Buddhism and the meanings of her words. She expanded on the concept of the Sangha, or spiritual community, and shared that the Sangha includes all past disciples of the Buddha, the mentoring hierarchy within the Western Buddhist Order, and all present day practicing Buddhists. We discussed the questions of doubt and challenges along her life path and she explained that there are certainly frequent times of challenge, mostly the challenge with one's own psyche. She noted that there are times of internal conflict as coming to terms with the way things really are is totally like swimming upstream. Most of our life consists of forming attachments and it can be very difficult to consistently be aware of the impermanence of these attachments and of our own vulnerability to the pain caused by their loss. She

also elaborated that the Buddha's teaching and the Sangha encourage the exploration of doubt.

Sukhi agreed with the events I had assumed to be challenges in her life and elaborated on her experiences with the death of her parents. Although it was not mentioned in her narrative, Sukhi's mother died fifteen years ago. Her father's death last year was anticipated and during the four years of his illness, Sukhi felt compelled to find something to cope with his eventual passing. The anticipation of being an orphan led her to question the purpose of her own life. It was during the time of her father's illness that she went to the Introduction to Buddhism course and found her spiritual path.

In answer to my question regarding counselling those with very different spiritual paths, Sukhi shared that this is generally not a problem and most clients actually do not have a sense of what their own spirituality is. This discussion helped to deepen my understanding of Sukhi and her path and from our collaborative additions and revisions we both left feeling that her narrative was more accurately understood and shared.

Personal Reflections.

Certainly my summary of Sukhi's words can not convey the feelings which emerge so naturally from her words. I feel inadequate in summarizing her narrative in a way in which feels so devoid of the personal meaning and emotion which her words portrayed. The rich description of the retreat setting and atmosphere allowed me become immersed in the beauty of silence, the beauty of community and the beauty of her quest for Enlightenment. I learned more about Buddhism from the passion in her writing than from a semester long course on Eastern religions. In a sense, I feel aligned with Sukhi in our passion for the spiritual and I feel admiration for her

conviction. Her commitment to the path of enlightenment conjures up a renewed commitment to my own spiritual path.

I also feel peaceful and uplifted after reading Sukhi's story. I am filled with hope and gratitude that there are counsellors out there who so value the spiritual as I do. As a reader I feel that her adherence to the writing guide questions actually detract from her story although the information provided from her answers speak volumes about her counselling style.

Sophia's Story

Sophia is a Caucasian woman in her forties who was born and educated in Czechoslovakia. She is a counsellor at a Christian organization which offers free counselling and welcomes all people regardless of religious affiliation.

Narrative Summary.

Sophia shares her story of spiritual development and the way it relates to her counselling practice by including a personal narrative and by answering the questions in the writing guide directly. Her personal story begins at birth and brings us to the present.

Sophia was a first born girl in Czechoslovakia at a time when boys were more welcomed. Her father was unable to display affection and from birth this lack of attention or interest from him left Sophia feeling unwanted. However, she was provided for as a child and had a loving mother and grandparents. She shares that she was an excellent student with a drive to find a life with "no limits." She pursued psychology in hopes of increasing her understanding of human nature and secured employment for many years in a hospital setting. The hospital job involved more testing than counselling or therapy. Sophia's personal life was a challenge as she raised three children in the midst of an abusive relationship. Much of her life was

lived in denial, anxiety, and fear. Upon coming to Canada, she had a spiritual experience where, while listening to a hymn, came to a realization that the Great Spirit cares for her. She prayed to receive a job at a religious organization and received it. This experience was seemingly predicated by an experience with a seer in Czechoslovakia, who saw a white cross over Sophia's head and said that the vision had something to do with her vocation. Sophia's life focus shifted dramatically as she began reading self help books and took courses on assertiveness. She recognized the need for change in her life and separated from her abusive spouse.

There were other spiritual experiences which also contributed to Sophia's spiritual development. She had an encounter with an eagle, whom was soaring high in the sky and gradually circled closer and closer to her until their eyes met. This was a profound experience for Sophia as she felt the presence of the Great Spirit through that eagle. Some days later after praying to the open sky, she awoke with such bright light shining she felt it was a message from heaven and she felt an indescribable sense of peace.

These spiritual experiences were instrumental in producing a shift in her sense of self. Gone was the anxiety and fear and in its place, joy, calmness and peace. She describes this sense of self in a letter to a friend, "I AM WHO I AM." Sophia later encountered this phrase in the Bible, the same phrase that God used when Moses asked, "Who are you?" She uses prayer, meditation, contemplation and spending time with nature to maintain her spiritual connection. For Sophia, in her tradition, this connection is symbolized by her relationship with Jesus.

Sophia has also witnessed clients have spiritual experiences and realizations. From all these experiences she realizes that "we are one in the Spirit, that we are spiritual beings having human experience." Sophia places a high value on spirituality

and believes that it is "a way of life" which "can be experienced more than described." She brings her whole BEING to counselling and shares her experiences when appropriate. Other ways she incorporates spirituality are by encouraging therapeutic stories, use of prayer, use of guided imagery, encouraging creativity, serving others, and respecting all creation and all moments as sacred. She encourages each individual to come to their own understanding of the Divine and she believes that spirituality is beyond all religions or dogma.

Reading for Nuclear Episodes.

The first significant event that Sophia shares is feeling a lack of attention by her father. Her sharing of this experience implies that this early realization and feeling of rejection has impacted her life in a very deep sense. Two decisions noted in the story that have shaped Sophia's life and are very significant are her quest for "no limits" at the young age of eighteen and the fact that she pursued post secondary education, particularly, psychology. Other poignant events that Sophia shares which affected her spiritual development are her arrival in Canada and her spiritual awakening when she heard the song "We are one with the Spirit." Her determination and searching for something more in her life led her to seek knowledge and direction through self-help books and an assertiveness course. These two pursuits directly contributed to her leaving her abusive spouse, another pivotal event. Finally, Sophia shares another profound spiritual experience of her connection with an eagle whom she imagined to be a messenger of the Great Spirit. The bright light she witnessed some days later after praying the night before conveyed a message from Heaven. "I prayed in the open sky at night that all will be well for all of us and the next morning, there was such a light shining as if Heaven sent me the messages, "Yes, all will be well." The peace I felt when I saw it, is hard to describe." This immense sense of peace she felt from

these experiences contributed directly to a change in her sense of self.

Interpretive Reading.

Sophia's choice to begin her story with the pain of being a first born child yet an unwanted female implies to me that this experience has impacted her development in many ways. I can only assume that this pain has likely plagued her for most of her life. What is left unsaid is how this experience continued to affect her throughout her life after birth and how her spiritual development may have been impacted. After the mention of her birth Sophia jumps to age eighteen. I am left wondering; what was life like for Sophia as a child? what was it like to live in Czechoslovakia post-war? what was her parents relationship like? what is the history of her experience with the Catholic church? I sense that in the answers to some of these questions there is a deeper understanding of Sophia's spiritual development and how she became who she is today.

Sophia openly shares some of her struggles in her narrative. The pain of a distant father and the years of denial, anxiety and fear in an abusive relationship are mentioned. I also question if there was struggle for Sophia after she came to Canada, where her cultural and familial experiences or losses primary to her spiritual development which gained momentum upon her arrival here?

Sophia defines spirituality as a way of life which involves a sense of belonging to the Divine. Spirituality is deeper and broader than any religions and is beyond dogma. She feels that spirituality is more experienced than described. These descriptions reveal Sophia's openness and clearly indicate that her personal spirituality is beyond the usual understanding of religiousness. Particular phrases which Sophia refers to give an even deeper understanding of her sense of spirituality and understanding of her BEING. She mentions the phrase, "I AM WHO I AM." This

phrase gives me a sense of impermanence and peacefulness. She notes that "we are spiritual beings having human experience" and refers to this "human family on Earth." These phrases allude to her understanding of our true nature as human beings, our purpose, and our interconnectedness. Her reference to the eagle as a messenger of Great Spirit gives us insight into Sophia's awareness of the sacredness of all life.

Sophia's apparent gifts are her resilience, her faith, her search for understanding and connection and her openness. Sophia's narrative also conveys her respect for personal choice in spirituality or any life path, her value on creativity and connection and her belief in the potential of all people.

Member Check.

Sophia had an opportunity to read my summary of her narrative and make revisions. There were aspects of the narrative which I had misinterpreted and through our discussion was able to gain a more complete understanding of Sophia's words and her spiritual life. She also answered the questions I had about her childhood, her family life, and any cultural impact that living in Czechoslovakia post-war might have had. Sophia shared that her experience with the Catholic church as a child was very limited. She was baptized there but her family did not regularly attend services. As a child she was quite comfortable and provided for in the material sense and only deprived of her father's attention. The mention of the garden she enjoyed as a child was more significant than I had perceived as, to Sophia, this garden was symbolic of heaven. She has many beautiful memories of playing in that garden and being surrounded by beautiful flowers and many of God's beautiful creatures. She expanded on her experience of immigrating to Canada and explained the journey as an extension of that need or drive to find "something more." Sophia shared that leaving Czechoslovakia and coming to Vancouver Island initially, literally felt like

journeying to the end of the earth only to discover that the journey was an internal one. Our discussion in this second meeting was very beneficial and meaningful for me as I felt I learned so much more about Sophia as a person through the generous sharing of her spirituality.

Personal Reflections.

As I am on my way to meet Sophia for the first time at the Christian organization where she works, I am filled with assumptions about her spirituality based on her association with this organization. My own experience with Christianity leads me to believe that all Christian followers have similar beliefs, often close-minded ones. After our first meeting and discussion of the purpose of the study and the writing guide, I leave her office inspired and hopeful. I find her to be so open-minded, accepting, and respectful of other spiritual practices, I leave feeling guilty (like a good Christian does) for having judged her and hopeful that there are many more out there like her.

I struggled to put words to Sophia's brief paragraph about the pain of being the first born and being an unwanted female. The fact that she begins her story with this information implies to me that this early realization was extremely painful and likely has plagued her for most of her life. There were so many questions I had after reading her narrative, I certainly would not have an accurate picture of Sophia's experience if we had not had the opportunity to meet and discuss her narrative in more depth.

After my second interview with Sophia I went away with the same sense of peace and spiritual inspiration that I had after our first meeting. I am thankful for having met her and having been shown through that experience that my assumptions about Christian religion and its followers are not always accurate. Sophia is the epitome of the type of Christianity that Christ taught, she portrays acceptance, openness, compassion, love, and commitment to being a positive force in our world.

Kathryn's Story

Kathryn is a Caucasian woman in her thirties who works with women in abusive relationships.

Narrative Summary.

Kathryn defines spirituality as "soul making." Her spirituality recognizes the interconnectedness of all living things on our planet. Being spiritual means listening to inner wisdom and releasing inner creativity. Although being spiritual does not require adherence to any one form, it does involve a commitment and daily practice.

Kathryn is a woman who believes spirituality to be an integral part of human nature and yet she has not been free to integrate this belief system with all aspects of her life. She was raised as a pagan, rather than in the dominant religion of our society, was ridiculed and shamed for her spirituality and is still healing from these painful episodes. Kathryn has felt only conditionally accepted as a therapist in the past and has not felt able to bring her whole being into the counselling room until coming to her current place of employment a few years ago. The first three years of her experience as a therapist she was warned by the agency where she worked not to bring her spirituality to work. Kathryn shares that a feminist framework informs her practice and this respect for equality and human rights is also a fundamental aspect of who she is as a person and a counsellor.

Three major events have facilitated her now bringing spirituality into her counselling practice. Becoming employed at the agency which she now works allowed her the freedom to be who she is and be more authentic as a counsellor. Having begun a graduate program in art therapy has enhanced her awareness of the power of creative expression and its spiritual nature. Finally, a woman from a group Kathryn facilitated discovered her spirituality, made assumptions and judgements

regarding it and phoned other women from the group to inform them. This experience was a trigger for Kathryn and she has since implemented a ground rule for all her groups that all forms of spirituality are welcomed and respected.

Spirituality plays a large role in Kathryn's personal life in terms of her own health and well-being. Kathryn shares how her spirituality is a comfort when working with trauma victims as meditation practice "restores the soul" and allows her to let go of all the pain she witnesses. She also uses her own personal spiritual practices such as meditation and ritual to maintain balance and groundedness.

Presently, there are many specific ways in which she incorporates spirituality into her counselling practice. She creates sacred space before clients arrive and sets guidelines in her groups to ensure safety for spiritual discussions. Through the use of art and movement Kathryn has observed a qualitative difference in the room, which is difficult to describe yet these are the moments from which change emerges. She uses intuition to assess her clients and to guide her in sessions. She will also teach meditation to those clients who would like to learn. Kathryn notes that for her, spirituality is a major part of who she is and enters into everything she does. Being spiritual is not easily explainable as it is more experiential and escapes description.

Reading for Nuclear Episodes.

Kathryn structured her story in a way which outlines three significant events over the last two and a half years which led to a change in the way she works as a counsellor. These events, noted previously, were certainly significant and warrant greater elaboration here. Before these events occurred she worked at an agency where she felt stifled spirituality and unable to attend to the wholeness of a person. I would say these years at this agency would be the first significant event which Kathryn shares. I sense that these years of employment instilled enough discomfort in her to

provide the motivation to seek out another job. She was not able to be authentic in this place of employment and that experience was clearly not fulfilling. The first of the three events which Kathryn notes is finding work at her current place of employment. Thankfully, there was an acceptance of the whole person and she felt more free to be who she is. The second event is that Kathryn began a graduate program in art therapy. The program was supportive of each person's spiritual path and the more she worked with art the more aware Kathryn became of spiritual presence in therapy. Despite her increasing awareness of sacred space in therapy sessions, Kathryn remained hesitant to discuss these experiences because of her past experiences. The third event which Kathryn calls a major turning point was when a woman in a long term group she facilitated found out that Kathryn was not Christian. The woman phoned others to inform them and the experience triggered many old memories and fears for Kathryn. The agency she works for however, was supportive in this process and now all groups she facilitates include a ground rule of respect for all religions and spiritual beliefs.

Interpretive Reading.

My sense is that Kathryn has lived with fear regarding spirituality for the majority of her life. She never felt quite safe to be completely who she is. Although she believed spirituality to be an invaluable aspect of life experience and grew up with spirituality as part of her life, she was unable to be open about this aspect of herself until recently. The fear of ridicule, oppression and violence that she grew up with as a result of being 'different' spiritually continued into her adult life. Her employment at an agency which was uncomfortable with counsellors discussing the spiritual realm with their clients triggered this fear and justifiably so as the potential of losing her job was a reality. The institutionalized barrier in our Western world that exists between the

secular and spiritual has no doubt contributed to the judgement Kathryn has experienced on both the personal and professional levels. I am left wondering if the fear of being open with her spirituality has transferred into other aspects of Kathryn's life. As she mentions that her spirituality is part of who she is, it seems likely that until recently Kathryn has never felt free to be completely authentic. I can only imagine what an internal conflict this has been. Has this aspect of her spiritual development affected other aspects of her being?

I am struck by the brevity and structure of Kathryn's story. I initially felt upon reading it that my questions had been too limiting and did not ask all that I wanted to know. I sense that the lifelong fear of sharing her spirituality has affected Kathryn's writing. Only recently has she felt accepted by peers in the counselling field and she may need more time to feel completely free to share who she is spiritually. I am also aware that this interpretation may be completely off base and Kathryn may simply be editing her story given that she has just met me and may not feel comfortable sharing more intimate details of her life with me or with the reading audience.

Some of the metaphors Kathryn uses highlight her beliefs and provide insight into how her spirituality enters her counselling practice. She mentions "sacred space", which indicates the respect she has for the counselling room, process, and every individual who enters her office. She uses the phrases "inner healer" and "inner wisdom" which illustrates her belief in individuals own ability to determine what is best for them and each person's inherent Divinity. Through the mention of the "life-giving force of the Earth" Kathryn conveys her great respect for the Earth and its healing properties. When describing art therapy and its benefits, Kathryn notes that a piece of art becomes an entity of its own and enters into the room. Similarly, she notes a phrase coined by Sean McNiff, that "images become angels." Both these metaphors

suggest to me that creative expression can become a spiritual entity unto its own with great healing potential.

Kathryn's narrative also gives insight into some of her gifts. She is open and non-judgemental, and she is a great supporter and advocate of other women. She displays a commitment to her own spiritual path while remaining respectful of other peoples' spiritual directions. Her intuition and teaching abilities must also be important assets in her various life roles.

Member Check.

The second meeting with Kathryn gave her an opportunity to review my words and make any changes she felt necessary. There were very few revisions but we used the time to discuss particular sections of her narrative in greater detail and she also responded to the questions I had. She elaborated on the depth of the painful childhood experiences which I had not completely grasped. We discussed the meaning of her term "sacred space" and she shared that she has rituals involved in preparing her office which help to set the tone for session and honor the counselling session as a sacred experience. In response to my impression regarding the brevity of her story, Kathryn share that she communicates a lot better and is less inhibited when speaking or using creative expression. This second meeting was crucial for me to clarify questions, receive feedback, and as a result, gain a more complete understanding of Kathryn as a spiritual counsellor.

Personal Reflections.

I felt somewhat awkward after leaving Kathryn's office after our first meeting. She seemed uncomfortable and I felt like maybe I was making her nervous. After reading her story I felt that the writing guide had restricted her and maybe her narrative would have been more telling with little or no direction from me. In our second

meeting she seemed more comfortable and answered my clarifying questions. To summarize my experience with Kathryn, I feel that I know little of her personal spirituality yet I learned much about how she incorporates spirituality into counselling.

Samantha's Story

Samantha is a Caucasian woman in her thirties who works in the medical field and works as a counsellor. As an art therapist, she often counsels women who are recovering from trauma.

Narrative Summary.

Samantha's narrative is presented in a rectangular shaped box with a picture taped on the top. The picture is a beautiful image of a First Nations woman holding a child with the face of a Spirit in the top right hand corner gazing upon them. The image, to me, conveys a sense of connection, bond, presence, and peace. For Samantha the image depicts attachment, connection, and a sense of being sheltered. To her, the image reflects what a sense of God might be like. Within the box is a hand made mobile with a piece of paper explaining the mobile and its meaning. I am touched by the beauty of Samantha's words and the personal meaning of this mobile to her. In addition, there are two slides of her art work which pertain to her experiences with spirituality. I am further touched by the effort and creativity she put into this story making. Within this box is also a handwritten narrative summarizing her spiritual development from childhood to the present day.

After looking at her two slides, I feel even more drawn in to Samantha's spiritual story. The first slide is titled "pictorial lament to God." Samantha describes it as an erupting volcano. She imagined the top flying off and hitting God in the head. This picture expresses her anger at not being seen by God, for not having loving parents, and for not being saved from her father's abuse.

The next slide was done later and illustrates how she feels God as part of her being. Samantha feels connection to God through her awareness of her connection to a younger part of herself, herself as a girl 3 or 4 years old. She remembers feeling connected to God then, having a feeling of "God in her belly." She had a sense of playfulness and joy. Unfortunately, as a result of the abuse she endured, this sensate spirituality became fragmented.

My impression of Samantha's story is that her journey has been about rediscovering what was lost. As noted above, through one of her paintings she shares an image of her childhood spirituality, a picture of a brightly colored being within her adult self. As noted, her childhood trauma robbed her of the opportunity to grow in her experience of God and evolve spiritually. She remembers the feeling of "God in her belly" as a child and has spent a large part of her life so far searching for a sense of connection to God in an integrated adult place. Before she could even begin to create an integrated spirituality, however, she needed to express her anger towards God. As a child Samantha imagined that God must be looking down through the clouds and seeing everyone but her. The other painting is a depiction of her anger towards God for not protecting her. She describes her past image of God as judgemental and critical and it took her a lot of time and courage to come to a place where she was able to express anger towards this fearful entity. Samantha sees a spiritual counsellor who gave her the permission to be angry at God and reminds her that she is still worth of love from God. She realized she didn't have to be a good girl and was given permission to respect her rage. Since having expressed her anger she has felt more free to reestablish a connection with her own unique idea of a Higher Power. She has begun to look at the process of healing from a hardship within a spiritual context as an opportunity and a blessing. This journey has allowed her to see God or spirituality as

a supportive and loving presence rather than a punitive, punishing presence whom resembled her father.

Samantha now has a more integrated awareness of her connection to God which is more consistently present than the childhood sensate spirituality. She carries this awareness of connection into her work with both nursing and counselling. She often feels a spiritual presence which aids her in the counselling process so she is not alone and does not carry the burden of many painful stories by herself. This presence also allows her to be more open and genuine with others in her work. She portrayed her understanding of spirituality in counselling through a delicate mobile with painted paper leaves hanging by threads from it. Her description is that the mobile "symbolizes the gentle presence of God and spirit in the counselling space. It is gentle and moves with the breeze or flow- and is available yet unobtrusive." Her reconnection with God has also enabled her to feel more comfortable and able to discuss spiritual concerns with those she works with although she allows the client to initiate discussions in this area. Her spiritual self is evolving and growing.

Reading for Nuclear Episodes.

Many significant events are apparent from Samantha's story. The most poignant event Samantha shares in her narrative is the abuse she experienced at the hand of her father. The impact of the abuse resulted in a loss of a sense of wholeness and attachment, "soul murder" as she calls it. As a child she felt that God did not see her, that God seemed to see everyone but her. This childhood trauma impacted her spiritual beliefs for many years to come. Her spiritual journey has been aimed at rediscovering and reconnecting with her soul.

Samantha notes that her father mocked her mother for believing in God and I sense that observing this mockery as a child affected Samantha in ways untold in her

story.

The fact that Samantha shared these two paintings relating to her journey speaks to the personal significance these creative expressions must carry. Slide 1 shows the erupting volcano and is symbolic of her anger at God. Coming to the place where she felt free to express this anger was very meaningful for Samantha. Slide 2 illustrates a painting which was done later and represents her childlike sensate awareness of God in her being. Creating this painting must have been very significant as it signifies coming to a realization her fragmented spirituality and an awareness of how she might integrate her spiritual self.

Another impactful event in her spiritual growth as an adult was finding a spiritual counsellor who encouraged Samantha to develop her own unique connection with whatever she defined as God. As mentioned, this therapist validated her anger at God and aided Samantha in reframing her anger as a sacred feeling which was integral to her survival for many years. This encouragement and validation has allowed her to embrace spirituality and realize she is deserving of it rather than be fearful or distrusting of it.

Interpretive Reading.

Samantha shares key phrases, metaphors and core beliefs which provide insight to understanding her own unique spirituality. As a child she imagined God to be like her father, spiteful and judgemental. Unfortunately, these beliefs persisted into adulthood. Samantha alludes to an understanding of God as a protector. Her anger toward God for not providing her with loving parents and not protecting her from her father's abuse implies a belief in a Higher Power meant to protect children. During the process of healing from her trauma, Samantha came to a place where she felt safe expressing anger at God and she expresses a need for vengeance towards a vengeful

entity who did not see her. In describing the second painting Samantha uses the phrase "God in her belly." This phrase is used a few times and is illustrative of her awareness of the felt experience that connection to spirit brings. As she shares the difficulty in putting words to her picture, she seems to be saying the inner spirit is more experienced or felt than described.

Samantha's central challenge or barrier to spiritual development has been overcoming the devastation of childhood abuse and somehow making meaning of her experience. Although she does not go into the depth of her experience or her healing process the struggle of coming to terms with her personal sadness and anger are projected through her narrative. I am left wondering about the other potential struggles which are not shared. Is the ongoing process of finding meaning in hardship a challenge? How does her work with trauma survivors and people in palliative care challenge her spirituality, if at all? Was there a struggle in being able to forgive those who harmed or failed to protect her (her father, mother, God)?

The central way in which Samantha uses spirituality in counselling is by her awareness of God's presence in the room. One of her core beliefs which must impact her counselling is that it is important for people to address their disconnection from meaning or spirituality in their life. At this time, however, Samantha does not initiate discussions of spirituality directly. She mentions that her holding back from broaching the subject may change over time and this suggests that she would like to initiate discussions but something is holding her back. Is there fear surrounding this topic?

The most obvious of Samantha's gifts upon looking at the presentation of her narrative is her creativity. Her story suggests resilience and capacity to take her experiences and use all that she has gained from them. She shares a respect for all emotions and a respect for individuals creating their own sense of a Higher Power.

Her priority of creating a safe holding space for clients and ability to do so is likely one of the great gifts she gives her clients.

Member Check.

Having the time to discuss Samantha's narrative with her was crucial in helping me understand her experience. She expanded on the concept of "God in her belly" which I had misinterpreted. She added information and changed words where it was necessary and answered all the questions in my narrative. She shared that her work with trauma survivors can leave one feeling hopeless but, on the other hand, this work also feeds her own sense of spirituality. She feels renewed hope and faith in Spirit as she witnesses people who have endured so much survive and still manage to see the beauty in life. Samantha noted that forgiveness of her mother and God is a continuing process yet she feels a sense of openness and receptivity towards them which was not present before. In terms of forgiveness of her father she does not feel the need to forgive him. In relation to her counselling practice and spirituality, I presumed that fear may be holding her back from broaching spiritual discussions with clients. She responded that because of her own experience she is very aware that spirituality can be an extremely touchy issue for people and the client must determine the appropriate timing for such a discussion. This second meeting with Samantha allowed me to leave feeling more assured that my summary of her experiences would be representative of her voice in the most respectful and comprehensive way possible.

Personal Reflections.

Initially as I see the box Samantha has put her story in I feel hesitant to open it. I have a sense of this story as immensely personal and sacred, somehow even more so than the others. The image on the box seems to me like a depiction of a protective Spirit. On the other hand though, it may also be seen as a presence borne of the love

between mother and child is shared. I think it is the care in which she packaged the story that sets it apart.

Upon reading the written portion of Samantha's story I felt her words and imagined what aspects of this story were missing. She mentions the abuse and a period of intense anger at God and I feel that what I imagine to be years of her own coming to terms with her spirituality have been reduced to a few words. I feel that there is so much missing and I hope this process has not minimized her experience.

As I read, I feel my own sense of anger and I feel a sense of awe at the strength of Samantha and all those who experience abuse and each person's struggle to find meaning and purpose from a devastating experience. From her story, I am reminded of all those I know who have experienced abuse and this affects my meaning making and felt experience as I read. I am left wondering how this experience of writing and creating was for her. How did she feel after this process? I am regretful that I didn't ask all the participants to include this information. After the second meeting I found this question entering my mind again, was this process triggering her? Could I have been more sensitive in some way? Again I felt a deep respect and empathy for Samantha and all abuse survivors in imagining the challenges of healing from trauma.

Across Story Analysis

The five narratives presented here are very diverse and yet in some ways, similar. An across story comparison yielded the following commonalities among the experiences of these five women. In three narratives, Liberty, Sophia, and Samantha, shared the experience of having no free choice in their spirituality as children. They grew up with an imposed religion which they later abandoned and chose instead to explore and create their own spirituality. For all of them, this lack of freedom as children contributed to their belief in the importance of the client creating their own

spiritual path. A similarity between all five stories was the mention of the importance and sacredness of creativity. All these counsellors encourage clients in various creative pursuits and consider this to be a way of connecting to the spiritual. Each of Sophia, Liberty and Sukhi also noted the spiritual connection that being in nature provides for themselves and suggest being in nature to clients. All but Samantha made specific mention of teaching meditation within counselling or using visualizations and guided imagery. Presumably, these women recognize the spiritual benefit of being silent and allowing the breath, images or internal dialogue to provide guidance.

Liberty and Sophia both distinguished between religion and spirituality in their stories. Kathryn and Sukhi included little and no discussion of childhood experiences, respectively. Sophia, Samantha, and Kathryn acknowledged a diety in their story while Sukhi and Liberty do not. Liberty spoke of her spirituality without any reference to a diety and Sukhi clarifies that Buddhists do not believe in a creator type God. There were actually several ways in which Sukhi's story differs from the others. She emphasized body-mind integration and noted that she encourages physical health and activity with clients. Sukhi noted that Buddhism emphasizes that pain and suffering is caused by the inability to see the impermanence in all things. She reiterated this notion throughout her story and although others may agree, Sukhi was the only one that discussed how delusional thoughts may relate to spirituality or prevent one from focusing on the spiritual. Surprisingly, Sukhi was also the only person who pointed out the importance of spiritual text (the Dharma) and spiritual community (the Sangha).

Four of the five narratives noted the importance of their spiritual practices in aiding them to remain balanced and whole. Similarly, three of the five mentioned that

being spiritually connected was necessary in order to deal with the difficult stories they hear as counsellors.

The most surprising link between stories, given their diversity, was that somehow in each narrative spirituality was linked to trauma or recovering from a traumatic experience. Liberty, for example, found a renewed awareness of her spirituality and the importance of the interconnectedness of all aspects of her being after experiencing a difficult period resulting from an overexposure to trauma. Sophia, whilst living in the fear of an abusive relationship, began to have a spiritual awakening which led to her eventually developing the courage to leave and begin anew. Kathryn's childhood was traumatic directly because of her spirituality being different from the majority. Consequently, her spirituality became linked to fear and only recently has she begun to openly share all aspects of herself. For Sukhi, a number of losses over many years drove her to seek out some understanding of the nature of existence. Her experiences of losing a partner suddenly, the unexpected death of her mother, the prolonged illness of her father, and anticipation of being an orphan were all losses which contributed to her spiritual development. Lastly, Samantha's trauma of childhood abuse halted her spiritual development for many years yet she has now been able to make meaning of her experiences and integrate her spirituality.

This across-narrative analysis exemplifies the uniqueness and quintessential nature of spiritual growth. These women's varied life stories serve as a reminder of the story within all of us. The surprising diversity among these five caucasian women's spirituality reiterates the absolute necessity of respecting each individual's spiritual path.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

These narratives provide insight into the diversity of spiritual development and spiritual beliefs. Just as there is great diversity in the spirituality of these counsellors, so there is great diversity in the spirituality of the many potential clients out there. This is crucial to recognize in the counselling field since counsellors must be open-minded to varied forms of spirituality and comfortable in encouraging the spiritual questioning a client may be experiencing. So many people are seeking meaning and purpose in their life today, acknowledging the spiritual in counselling is imperative to the exploration of these existential questions. Since counsellor training has not generally admitted spirituality into its curriculum, counsellors must take it upon themselves to develop this aspect of themselves at least to the point of being comfortable welcoming the spiritual into sessions. However, for counsellors to competently address clients' spiritual concerns counsellor training institutes must include self-awareness of spiritual development and knowledge of various forms of spirituality as curriculum.

The five narratives presented here are illustrative of the long-awaited alliance between spirituality and psychology. These counsellors find that clients are seeking spiritual connection and also find their own spirituality to be an essential and comforting aspect of the counselling and self-care process. Both the researcher and participants found this exercise of writing a narrative of how their spirituality relates to counselling to be helpful and personally insightful.

Effectiveness of the Writing Guide

Although the stories and interviews provided much depth of information, the process may have been more effective without a writing guide or with different questions. As I was conducting the initial interviews I became aware of the imposition

that the writing guide questions created. A few participants were appreciative of the guidance whereas for others, the questions seemed completely unnecessary. For some the process may have been more meaningful if I had simply asked them to tell me a story about their spiritual experiences and how they related to counselling so they could begin and end freely without feeling tied to answering a few simplistic questions. Without this guide however, I may have made up arbitrary questions at each initial interview and affected each participant's writings in various ways. With this model the participants were asked the same questions and then were free to start, end and answer the questions in any way they wished. In each individual interview, there was emphasis on each participant's personal style and they were invited to create the story in a way which felt comfortable for them. Unfortunately, after receiving the narratives the restrictions and structure of the writing guide were still apparent.

One way on which the questions were not as effective as they could have been was in assessing how past experiences with spirituality may affect the participant in the present. The initial question of "how do you integrate your spiritual experiences with your counselling practice?" was created in hopes of generating thoughts of spiritual experiences from the past through to the present. This additional explanation was given to the participants but may not have been as effective in capturing information since it was not included in the written guide.

The limitations of the writing guide may have been avoided by using an unstructured interview method or by just verbally guiding the participants in the initial interview. The benefits of potential increased depth of information from an unstructured interview however, may not have been outweighed by the hindrances of increased researcher impact. An introductory interview with a few verbalized, general questions to guide the writing would likely have produced the least researcher

influence while maintaining great freedom in direction and depth for the narrator.

Process of Analysis

At several points in the analysis process I experienced frustration in my attempts to summarize these personal narratives. I felt that my words were artificial and not nearly as effective as the originals. How could I possibly capture the individual meaning of these stories in my brief summary of such a valued aspect of their lives? I began to wonder why I was rewording their stories anyway. It seemed like a laborious academic exercise devoid of any meaning. As a counsellor with great respect for the voice and experience of individual, I felt I was going against my principles somehow to seemingly mask their voice and cover it with mine. I was so intensely aware of packaging these women's words for an academic audience that I became defiant and avoided the analysis for months, attempting to come back to it for brief intervals but without much progress. Reflecting on the process now, it is apparent that my personal experiences were coming into play as well. The narratives I found the easiest to summarize and do analysis on were those which were most similar to my life experience. Naturally, my fears of respecting the participant's voice were the greatest when her narrative was greatly disparate from my own.

Eventually, I persevered and made small but significant victories over my procrastination. Through journalling, meditation, and time, I was able to reconcile my values as a counsellor with the needs of the research. I vowed to do my very best to represent each participants' voice and attempted to ensure this through the member checks. After meeting with each participant and encouraging them to edit and revise my words as much as they liked, I felt I had done my best as a feminist and social-constructivist researcher. The member checks were absolutely invaluable as part of the research process as there were usually misperceptions on my part. Even the few

questions I had for each participant expanded my understanding of their spiritual process greatly. The member checks also helpful for me as they provided an opportunity to connect with each of them as people in addition to my connection to their narratives.

Personal Spiritual Development

A personal benefit I experienced from this research process was the impact on my spiritual development. Meeting all of these women and reading their narratives expanded my ideas of spirituality and yet, affirmed my own path. I was fascinated to gain a more complete understanding about Buddhism and I was happily surprised to have my assumptions about the spirituality of a Christian woman shattered. The experiences of these meetings where the focus was on spirituality, counselling or spiritual development, have now significantly contributed to my spiritual narrative. These meetings and narratives had me feeling inspired, saddened, hopeful, joyous, connected, angry, challenged, peaceful, and loved. What a beautiful spiritual process it has been!

The high value these women place on spirituality in their life and in counselling leaves me hopeful that more and more people are recognizing the awesome healing potential of connecting with Spirit. For generations First Nations spirituality and Eastern religions have emphasized the interconnectedness of all aspects of the Self. Our culture and field of psychology is just now becoming more aware of this instinctual drive toward spiritual evolution. This shift in consciousness excites and relieves me.

Relevance to Literature Review

The research findings connect to the ideas presented in the literature review on many specific levels. As many authors have suggested, (Chiu, 2000, Mack, 1994, Ryan, 1998, Stander, Piercy, Mackinnon & Helmeke, 1994), spirituality serves several

functions such as providing a sense of connectedness and meaning. These counsellors noted that spirituality is essential to living the most potentially fulfilling and integrated life possible. Another potentially beneficial function of spirituality noted by the spiritual therapists in this study is the ability to access a fourth dimension in the counselling process (Anderson & Worthern, 1997). Participants' noted that the awareness of spiritual presence or the understanding of the way the Universe works greatly influences the ability to hear traumatic stories and deal with struggle on a day to day basis.

The types of therapeutic techniques these participants use for themselves and their clients are aligned with what research has noted as potentially spiritual techniques (Chandler, Holden & Kolander, 1992, Richards & Bergin, 1997). Those with different spiritual beliefs still used similar techniques which they considered spiritual i.e. meditation, encouraging creativity, emphasis on connection with nature and connection with people. The spiritual benefits of physical health and movement were mentioned in Sukhi's narrative which correlates to Porter's (1995) assertion that people must develop body awareness before they can be aware of the feelings and joys of connecting to awareness beyond the body.

Part of Samantha's spiritual development includes a period of heightened sensitivity and skepticism towards spirituality as a result of childhood experiences. This participants' story aligns with the research findings of Ryan (1998) who stated that women who had experienced childhood trauma may feel abandoned by God, feel angry at God or at suggestions of forgiveness. Both Samantha and Liberty felt the image of a stern and patriarchal God to be alienating.

The across-stories analysis indicated that even within vastly different types of spirituality similarities exist. For example, these participants shared the importance of

openness to all paths and freedom of expression. This commitment to openness connects with the need stressed by cross-cultural research for viewing spirituality within the clients' context and for remaining open to all spiritual paths.

As Moore mentioned in *Care of the Soul* (1992), there are crucial aspects to cultivate in ones' life which are necessary for re-connecting with ones' soul. These counsellors have discovered that cultivating an individual sense of spirituality in one's life brings greater contentment. Moore's notion of inner wisdom is specifically mentioned in one participant's narrative and may be a more pervasive concept than can be revealed by these five stories.

Limitations

Although this study can certainly not be generalized to the general population given the extremely small voluntary sample, the findings still contribute significant learning based on the in-depth personal experiences shared here. Additionally, though this sample of five women was varied in their spiritual experiences and practices, there was little variability of culture. A larger sample which includes men, various ethnic backgrounds, and other significant differences in terms of disability and sexual orientation would prove interesting and likely provide insights into how people with experiences as a minority have reconciled their spiritual beliefs and counselling philosophy.

The method may have been a limitation as writing for some is not necessarily a comfortable mode of expression. One participant clearly stated that she expressed herself more fully and clearly through verbal expression or art. Although this method had the significant benefits of limiting researcher impact and allowing participants time for reflection and contemplation upon their narratives, a life story interview would likely have revealed more depth of information.

Implications for Counselling

This study contributes significantly to the field of counselling, information about counsellors' spiritual development and how it may affect their counselling practice. Assessing one's spiritual development is vital since spirituality is an evolving process and where an individual is on that evolution may affect their abilities to be an effective counsellor to someone with spiritual concerns. Hopefully, counsellors who read the research may be provoked to contemplate their own spiritual development and how their current spirituality affects their practice. The process of writing a narrative assists in self-understanding and self-awareness and thus, becomes part of the spiritual evolution itself.

This research has contributed to the field psychology by validating the importance of spirituality both to those counsellors involved, and to the academic world. Even having flyers posted in several areas where counsellors work titled "Counsellors and Spirituality" seeking people to write on their spiritual development and counselling practice may have sparked thought of the topic in many counsellors minds and affected their development.

The cumulative impact of these narratives is meaningful to counselling practice since all five distinctly different stories depicted how difficult and even traumatic life events contain profound opportunities for spiritual growth. This fact is a substantial revelation for the counselling profession as it reminds counsellors of the spiritual growth potential at the heart of life's most difficult experiences.

The academic world can learn from these autobiographies how counselling education could be adjusted to support counsellors in all aspects of their growth and train them to be the best helpers they can be by including a spiritual component in counsellor education curriculum. Sadly, psychology in this culture, also known as the

study of the human psyche, is essentially ignoring an elemental aspect of human experience and natural human evolution.

Implications for Future Research

Until counsellor training institutions take it upon themselves to include an examination of spiritual development into their curriculum, counsellors must develop their own self-awareness in this area. An investigation into how many counsellors out there have prioritized spiritual development would be prudent. Furthermore, spiritual counsellors, such as the participants in this research, could provide insightful ideas as to how to incorporate spirituality into counsellor training.

As the findings here and previous research has indicated (Ballou, 1995, Ryan 1998), the hierarchy and patriarchy present within traditional Christianity deters many people, particularly women, from involvement in that religion. An analysis of people's reasons for moving away from childhood religious upbringing or more traditional forms of spirituality could further affirm or contradict these preliminary findings.

As the research here revealed that spirituality is an essential aspect of self-care and burn out prevention for counsellors, an inquiry into counsellors use of spirituality to maintain balance could prove to be a important model for counsellors self-care strategies. Given the implication from these findings that spiritual growth may often occur through coping with challenging experiences, a study exploring clients' spiritual questioning and the circumstances under which this questioning arises would contribute significantly to the fields of counselling and psychology.

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Appendix B: Letter of Invitation to Participate

Dear Participant:

This research is being conducted as one of the requirements for Kim Roth for the Master's degree in Counselling Psychology. The research aims to understand how spiritual and religious experiences may affect a counsellor's practice.

Participants will be asked to write a story of their own spiritual or religious experiences that have affected their spiritual growth and perhaps, their beliefs about counselling. Questions to help guide this writing are as follows:

- 1) How do you define spirituality?
- 2) How do counsellors integrate their spiritual experiences with their counselling practice?
- 3) Do you believe spirituality is related to optimum wellness? If so, how?
- 4) Does spirituality play a role in counsellors' own health and well-being?
- 5) In what ways do counsellors incorporate spirituality into their counselling practice?

Procedures

This study consists of two interviews and an autobiographical story. The introductory interview is a brief meeting between the researcher and participant to establish rapport and review expectations of both parties. The participant will then write about their experiences and return the information to the researcher. After the participant has completed their autobiographical writing and the researcher has done the interpretive readings, there will be a second meeting arranged to review the researcher's findings. Each interview will consist of approximately one hour while the writing time required for the autobiographies will be vary for each participant. The

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Witness

Date

Thank you for your willingness to be involved in this research.