SPIRITUALLY SENSITIVE SOCIAL WORK:
EXPLORING THE PAGAN PATH

by

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ABSTRACT

A description of the Pagan spiritual and religious worldview was developed through phenomenological analysis of data from a qualitative questionnaire that surveyed members of the Atlantic Canadian Pagan community regarding their beliefs, experiences and perceptions. The key beliefs, practices and core issues of the Pagan worldview were identified as: 1) the Divine is immanent in the World; 2) veneration of Nature; 3) interconnectedness of all; 4) magic; 5) honouring of Nature’s cycles; 6) individual spiritual authority and responsibility; and 7) celebration of diversity. Also identified were insights the Pagan worldview can offer to enrich the profession of social work: 1) holistic practice models need to incorporate spirituality; 2) commitment to global social justice fostered by interconnectedness of all; 3) individual and societal change demands spiritual engagement; 4) personal responsibility for spiritual path; and 5) embrace and celebrate spiritual diversity.
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The Universe provides.
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview and Rationale of the Research Question

This research project grew out of a desire to support spiritually sensitive social work with Pagan clients. Paganism is a minority spiritual/religious tradition that tends to be invisible or misunderstood in the mainstream, dominant culture. This invisibility and misrepresentation is the continuation of a long history of oppression and brutality. However, there is change on the horizon as Pagans grow in number and Pagan literature and resources become more widely available through the internet, publishing companies and retail stores (Blain, 1996). Statistics Canada (2003) included a category for Paganism within the 2001 census and recorded 21080 Pagans in Canada. This was a 281% increase from the 1991 census, which was the largest percentage of growth among all the religions during the time period (Statistics Canada, 2003). Statistics Canada (2003) recorded 1210 Pagans in Atlantic Canada in 2001.¹ Atlantic Canada contains Pagan specialty shops, several Pagan networks and groups, and university Pagan associations. Yet, despite this growth in adherents, Paganism appears to have been overlooked by social work and mental health research and literature addressing spiritually sensitive practice with specific spiritual/religious communities (Van Hook, Hugen, Aguilar, 2001; Richards & Bergin, 2000). This leaves Pagans potentially vulnerable when they receive social work service since practitioners may not be knowledgeable about their worldview. This research

¹ These figures may be lower than the actual size of the Pagan population since some Pagans are hesitant to identify themselves as Pagan.
explored Paganism in terms of spiritually sensitive social work provision for Pagan clients.

Social work is being challenged in our diverse society to provide professional service that meets the needs of clients from ever expanding social, economic, cultural and spiritual/religious backgrounds. A holistic consideration and approach to addressing the complex interactions between people and their environments is necessary to assist in problem solving, social change and empowerment (Hugen, 2001a; Hugen, 2001b). The role of spirituality in social work has recently gained prominence within professional literature and research as practitioners work to shape guidelines, theories and models which integrate this essential component into practice. A client's spirituality and/or religion cannot be separated from the social work relationship. Spiritual and/or religious beliefs and practices impact upon clients' lives and the context of the social work relationship. Spiritual and/or religious beliefs and practices help clients construct meaning about the world around them and their own identity, thus shaping their reality and lives (Hugen, 2001a). Spiritual and/or religious worldviews can inform a client's values and attitudes around concepts such as helping relationships, health and illness, individual growth and significant life events, and community development which are central to the social work relationship (Hugen, 2001a; Van Beek, 2000). Professional literature regarding spiritually sensitive practice highlights that workers need to be aware of the key spiritual and/or religious beliefs and practices of a client in order to offer competent, holistic practice that is centered in the client's understanding and experience of reality (Van Hook et al., 2001; Richards & Bergin, 2000; Canda & Furman, 1999; Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999; Pellebon, Anderson & Angell, 1999). The spiritual/religious worldview of Pagans was explored in this research to develop a
description of the key beliefs and practices Pagans identified as essential for a social worker to understand in order to provide spiritually sensitive service.

It is difficult to assign a definition to Paganism and Pagan as there can be, and are, considerable differences in the meaning intended when individuals use the word. Those who are non-Pagan sometimes use the word as a slur, indicating an undesirable deviance from the Christian tradition or as an accusation of satanic worship. The history of oppression and persecution of Pagans by the dominant Christian culture cannot be discussed at length within the constraints of this paper but that history does include forced conversion to Christianity, state and church endorsed torture and murder and past and present accusation and defamation from public religious and political leaders. In an attempt to discredit and destroy Pagan traditions, lies regarding the beliefs and practices of Pagans have been perpetrated for hundreds of years. The most common misrepresentation of Paganism is that it includes satanic or devil worship and encourages practices aimed at harm and destruction. This mainstream misrepresentation is fading as society becomes more open and accepting of alternative spiritual traditions and Pagans can safely discuss their actual beliefs and practices publicly. Safety is being considered here relative to past state and church endorsed persecution. Many Pagans still do not feel safe due to lingering misconceptions about Paganism and fear that they may be the victimized, physically, economically, or emotionally, because of their spiritual path. The misconceptions regarding the terms Paganism and Pagan remain both because of ignorance and sometimes because on an actual intent to defame Pagans.

Even among Pagans, usage differs since in Paganism there is room for multiple traditions and types of practice, with a hesitancy to claim any tradition as 'the only' or 'the right' way (Blain, 1996). Some Pagans identify their spirituality or religion only by
the label Paganism. Others may be part of religious traditions such as Wicca, Druidism, and Asatru and also identify with the larger, inclusive label of Paganism. Pagans do agree that the terms Paganism and Pagan need to be reclaimed so the Pagan path can be accurately represented in society.

One aim of this research was to allow space for Pagans to present their own definition and understanding of their faith. However, a framework in which to begin the research was needed that included an operational definition of Paganism. This required blending elements from several pre-existing definitions and descriptions of Paganism in an attempt to develop a conceptualization that was inclusive of the various understandings of Paganism. The following conceptualization of Paganism for the purposes of this research was developed. *Paganism may be a spiritual and/or religious tradition, or may encompass a multitude of spiritual and/or religious traditions and faiths. These faiths and traditions are polytheistic, pantheistic, or panentheistic and are generally earth-based, venerating nature, usually incorporating animism and spiritism. An emphasis on magic is often present* (York, 2003; Llewellyn, 2002; Carpenter, 1992; Adler, 1986).

This research project created a portrait of how Atlantic Canadian Pagans, in relation to their spirituality and/or religion, construct meaning in their lives. A qualitative questionnaire was employed to explore the Pagan spiritual/religious path. The questions elicited responses that described: the sociodemographic characteristics of Atlantic Canadian Pagans; their self defined spiritualities and religions; Pagan communities; key Pagan beliefs and practices; and their expectations of social work service. This was the beginning of a journey to understand the Pagan path in order to provide spiritually sensitive social work service to Pagan clients. Along the way, the
insight the Pagan worldview can offer to social work was examined. This study had a threefold purpose.

1. Identify key beliefs, practices and core issues of the Pagan worldview necessary for the provision of spiritually sensitive social work practice with Pagan clients. This information can then inform spiritually sensitive social work practice with Pagan clients.

2. Examine insights the Pagan worldview can offer to enrich the profession of social work.

3. Through the previous two goals, contribute to the growing body of knowledge about spiritually sensitive social work.

1.1 Social Work in a Postmodern Context

An examination needs to occur of the social and ideological context in which this discourse about spiritually sensitive social work with Pagan clients takes place. Only recently has it become acceptable and safe for Pagans to discuss their faith openly. The willingness for social work to consider spirituality within practice is also relatively recent. These developments are the result of a paradigm shift that has occurred in society. A paradigm is “the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community” (Kuhn, 1970, p. 175). Paradigms are the framework of ideas through which the world is viewed and understood. Paradigms are social constructions with no reality except that given to them by those who agree upon and operate within their existence (Swinton, 2001). The experience of the world is both influenced by and filtered through the structure of the paradigm. There is also a dynamic flow between paradigms shaping our values, knowledge, and beliefs about our
world and in turn being reinforced by the same. Unless one is actually searching for the paradigm structure, it can be difficult to discern the framework as it is taken for granted and perceived as the nature of reality by those existing within the paradigm (Schriver, 2001). Schriver (2001) stresses the importance for social workers to be aware of the paradigm they function within and engage in “paradigm analysis,” critical thinking around the structure of the paradigm and how it shapes their understanding of the world and thus their practice.

Since paradigms are socially constructed they can be reconstructed through a process referred to as a paradigm shift. At any given time, more than one paradigm is in existence. One paradigm will be traditional or dominant, exerting the most influence in shaping our view of the world. Alternative paradigms, less prominent and influential worldviews, do exist, having grown out of the dominant paradigm as an opposing or dissenting alternative. These alternative paradigms may, over time, displace the formerly traditional paradigm and become themselves the influential and dominant paradigm (Schriver, 2001). The ideas and knowledge born of the old paradigm may not be completely discarded but are “relativized and understood within a different conceptual framework” (Swinton, 2001, p. 61). When a paradigm shift occurs, how we see and think about the world changes (Schriver, 2001). We filter our view of the world through a different framework.

Over the last few decades, a number of thinkers, representing varied academic disciplines, have discussed a world paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism (Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 1998). Immense volumes have been written regarding modernity, modernism, postmodernity and

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2 Static, classic versions of paradigms, theories, and models are presented throughout this paper. There is a greater range of variance within any of the ideological frameworks than presented in this paper.
postmodernism and I do not attempt the treatment of this entire academic recording. What will be offered is a review of some basic concepts required to place this current research question within the context of postmodernism. Modernity is considered to be the child of the Enlightenment. Enlightenment thinkers believed that an objective truth existed. The philosophical underpinnings of the Enlightenment thinkers came to form the dominant paradigm that is understood now to be modernism. Modernism has been identified with "the belief in linear progress, absolute truths, the rational planning of ideal social orders, and the standardization of knowledge and production" (Eagleton, as cited in Harvey, 1996, p. 7). There was a belief that an objective truth existed and humans could discover this truth and develop advanced technologies. The truth would then set people free. Everyone could walk the straight line of progress to a utopia-like state of a life free from want and oppression. Progress would be universally understood, as it too could be objectively determined. Harvey (1996) writes of the Enlightenment project,

The idea was to use the accumulation of knowledge generated by many individuals working freely and creatively for the pursuit of human emancipation and the enrichment of daily life. The scientific domination of nature promised freedom from scarcity, want, and the arbitrariness of natural calamity. The development of rational forms of social organization and rational modes of thought promised liberation from the irrationalities of myth, religion, superstition, release from the arbitrary use of power as well as from the dark side of our human natures. Only through such a project could the universal, eternal, and the immutable qualities of all humanity be revealed (p. 12).

Amber (1996) provides a summary of the core beliefs of the Enlightenment project that formed the modernist paradigm.

1. The human self is equatable to the human mind, human consciousness. Individual introspection can produce direct, objective knowledge of the consciousness.
2. All the world is matter. Matter can be completely identified through the senses and then understood because we are capable of objective reasoning.

3. We can know the ultimate or sum total of truth by sensing and then reasoning out all matter.

4. The world is governed by single, one way causation. The model of a machine can explain the functioning of humans and the world.

5. Given points 1 through 4, it is possible to understand the laws governing the world and thus know how to control the world. We only need the technical power to control the cause and effect.

6. Finally, since humans are able to obtain an objective understanding of themselves and the world and are able to implement technological control of the world, progression to a state of universal "rightness," a state that answers all our desires, is possible (p. 143).

The assumptions embedded in empiricism and positivism determined the treatment of spirituality by the modernist paradigm. Empiricism and positivism refer to epistemological beliefs that all knowledge is gained from sensatory experience or by reasoning from sense experience. Knowledge is limited to what can be observed through the senses. Objectivity by the observer is possible so that which is observable is indeed fact (Schriver, 2001; Swinton, 2001). Empiricism and positivism relegate spirituality to a position of invisibility. Spirituality and the concepts intertwined within it, values, morals, sacredness, and the sacred or divine cannot be observed, tested, measured, and objectively verified. There is also no room within the modern worldview to acknowledge the possibility of acquisition of knowledge through the experiences of spirituality, such as intuition and revelation (Braud & Anderson, 1998).
It would be hard for someone reviewing the twentieth or twenty-first centuries not to see the tragic failure of the Enlightenment or modernist project. Nuclear attacks on civilians, terrorism, mass famines, general social malaise despite plentiful physical and economic resources, and environmental degradation that threatens even our own survival indicate that the "truth" and technology have not freed us from nature or our own human dark sides. The straight line to progress appears to have veered into some uncharted territory. Many refer to this current era or condition in which we live as postmodernity. Flanagan (1996) explains postmodernity as a "conceptual moment, a gathering point for characterising a contemporary culture that is globalised, commodified, de-traditionalised and de-contextualised" (p. 7). Postmodernism is a paradigm that has emerged from the condition of postmodernity. Postmodernism refers to the beliefs, values and techniques that have developed in reaction to the modernist worldview. The failure of the modernist project lead to a rethinking of the beliefs, assumptions, values and techniques propelling the project.

The core of postmodernism is the doubt that any objective "truth" exists (Harvey, 1996). Postmodernists argue that "reality" cannot be objectively observed, measured, and analyzed. The perception of "reality" will always be infused with the preconceived ideas, values and biases of the observer. Postmodernists distrust claims of universal truth, knowledge or values. There is a rejection of meta-narratives, "large-scale theoretical interpretations purportedly of universal application" (Harvey, 1996, p. 9). Postmodern thought encourages deconstruction of meta-narratives. Deconstruction is the critical analysis of a social construction with specific attention to the social, political and economic interests served by it. Goddard (2003) explains, "Rather than asserting a contrasting cosmology, the postmodern perspective is a methodology of deconstruction, exposing the historical, cultural, and linguistic factors as well as the strategies of power
which have shaped successive paradigms.” The process of deconstruction makes evident the privilege a meta-narrative provided for a dominant group and creates space to hear the voices of those that had been silenced within the narrative. Of course, this challenges the social oppression that existed in the social structure and was supported by the meta-narrative (Schriver, 2001; Braud & Anderson, 1998; Robinson, 1998).

Postmodernism contains an inherent conflict of logic. Postmodernism positions itself to challenge all claims to truth, yet proposes its own claim to truth. Postmodernism is in itself a meta-perspective or meta-narrative. The claim of universal relativism is in fact the proposal of an absolute or ultimate truth. Critics of postmodernism have disputed its status as an alternative paradigm. They suggest that postmodernism is only an advanced state of modernism, which extends modernist assumptions rather than offering an alternative (Robbins et al., 1998). Even with the recognition of this internal weakness, a postmodern perspective is useful since it advocates for a stance of uncertainty through which meta-narratives can be examined and unmasked in terms of the power and privilege that they support. The postmodern perspective “provides helpful new tools for recovering diverse and possible valuable experiences and understanding that have been subjugated” (Robbins et. al., 1998).

The growing acceptance of Paganism and Pagans in society results from the postmodernist challenge to meta-narratives and the creation of space for marginalized voices. Within Western culture and society the Christian meta-narrative has dominated. Those outside this narrative were silenced with labels of deviance and even threats to their safety. Interestingly, part of the modernist project was a struggle for separation of religion from science and religion from state, since religion with its emphasis on divine revelation was seen to lack objectivity and oppose scientific and social advancement (Swinton, 2001; Slife, Hope & Nebeker, 1999). The modern scientific method and
medical model successfully displaced religious authority in the construction and presentation of "knowledge" and "truth" (Longo & Petterson, 2002). However, a complete separation between religion and political/social authority never occurred. The Christian meta-narrative maintained a privileged status, becoming the foundation for political values and state laws. Herein lies one of the great ironies of postmodernism. Postmodernist thought both calls for the deconstruction of meta-narratives and at the same time creates space for alternative meta-narratives to be heard. Postmodernism would challenge the claim of universal truth or knowledge by any religious meta-narrative. However, since there is no objective truth, all meta-narratives are equally valid since their validity lies in the experiences and perceptions of their adherents. Therefore, all spiritualities and religions have equal validity and credibility. Postmodernism has created space for open communication about Paganism and allowed for acceptance of the Pagan worldview in larger society. Paganism is increasingly being seen in the mainstream culture as one of many spiritual/religious paths that are all valid and credible ways of creating and finding meaning in life.

Social work developed during the modern period and was shaped by the dominant paradigm but is now being reformed by postmodernist considerations. Margolin (1997) exposes the early assumptions and agenda of social work. These assumptions were born from the modern paradigm. The client was 'broken' in some way, an objective review by an expert could uncover the true cause of the 'problem,' and a scientific or technological intervention could be applied to 'fix' the client. The client's situation or problem, could be viewed, explained, measured, and treated by the truth and techniques provided by the modernist social work perspective. Postmodernists challenge this way of doing business. Foucault, one of the best known postmodernist thinkers, used an historical approach to deconstruct the social sciences. His insights,
and those of other postmodernists, prompted social work to examine itself and make changes. Foucault investigated the genesis of the helping professions and the principles and values guiding the professions (Champon, Irving, & Epstein, 1999). Irving (1999) writes about Foucault's departure from,

...principles on which modernity has been constructed, seeing reality instead as contingent and historical, constructed out of language and cultural codes. There is no knowledge that is true in itself, that is independent of the languages and institutions that we create and invent. Empirical reality does not exist as a universal truth but as unending collection of "stories" that we tell (p. 32).

Truth is something to be understood as "local" or "regional" and perhaps different in each time and place (Lyotard, 1984). This view of truth allows the marginalized perspectives, silenced previously by the meta-narratives, to emerge. Truth needs to be understood as power. Our notions of "truth" are what support power structures and those with power direct what becomes known as "truth" (Pozatek, 1994).

Postmodernism suspects all claims to truth and looks beyond the "truth" to the particular social, cultural, or political interests the claim to truth is serving (Richardson, 1998).

The place of language in constructing "truth" and "reality" is also explored within postmodernist thought. Language is not accepted to represent an objective reality. Meaning is given to words and phrases in a social, cultural context. Language is shaped and shapes people's subjective experiences of the world (Chambon et al., 1999). Social workers cannot assume they experience the world in the same way as clients and they also cannot assume they use language in the same way. Language, since it represents "truth", needs to be considered in terms of power. Language can create marginalization when professional terms or labels are used which indicate deviance or inferiority (Champon et al., 1999). The social worker was assigned the role of expert within the modernist perspective. Social work assessments and evaluations of
a client, their situation or a community were then seen to be credible and certain.

Postmodernism challenges these assumptions and gives rise to an alternative view.

Pozatek (1994) offers a postmodernist critique of the traditional social work assessment process.

In gathering a body of knowledge about a client or a client family, a worker, using professional language, develops a version of who the client is and how the client is functioning in his or her life and relationships; the social worker then offers a set of explanations that attach meaning to the knowledge. The assessment, because of its professional nature, is generally accorded the status of truth and influences the beliefs that begin to develop about the client among all the helpers with whom the assessment is shared. These shared beliefs form the basis for a consensus that, if unchallenged, becomes accepted as true. The problem of this certainty is that the group's beliefs determine what the group considers possible - beliefs can either limit or expand the range of what the group thinks can happen (p. 400)

This postmodernist examination of truth, power and language highlights the importance of spirituality sensitive social work practice with the Pagan client.

Clients of minority spiritual/religious traditions are at risk to have their spiritual/religious worldviews and practices labeled deviant or dysfunctional due to a history of marginalization and silence of their spiritual/religious perspective.

The social work profession has struggled to address the criticisms postmodernists have raised. Postmodernism challenges tradition professional “knowledge, social imagery, and conceptions of the client” (Pardeck, 1994). Social workers are questioning their roles as experts in clients’ lives. New approaches to practice and intervention focus on the client and his/her experience and construction of reality (Pardeck, 1994; Pozatek, 1994; Damianakis, 2001). Truth and facts still exist but in the “limited interpretive domains” (Pardeck, 1994, p. 344). The social worker must consult the client or the community to learn their truth and reality. There is a need for social workers to “recognize and respect the multiplicity of experiences that our clients bring” to the
professional relationship (Pozatek, 1994). There has been the recognition that the client must be heard and her/his story must provide the framework for assessment, intervention and service (Robbins et al., 1998; Pardeck, 1994). It has been in this revision of social work practice within postmodernism that the interest in spiritually sensitive social work has arisen. The client’s reality, the meaning created by their worldview and their lived experiences, needs to frame the context of the professional relationship. A holistic understanding of the client and his/her reality needs to include spirituality.

The application of the postmodern perspective to social work is limited, however. The profession of social work does not advocate for complete relativism. “Truth” and “reality” are not ever entirely determined by an individual client or community. The profession of social work believes in and adheres to a prescribed set of values that dictate practice guidelines. Social work is directed toward the goal of social justice because of a value system that upholds the inherent worth of each person and the right to equality, democracy and self-determination for all people. Social work does not deny, as postmodernism would insist, the existence of a moral universal. Social work is driven by a commitment to moral beliefs and values.

One specific area in which the application of postmodernism is limited within social work is in the consideration of mental illness. Mental illness is a social construction. Mental illness indicates a deviance from “normal” perceptions or behaviour. For example, the mental illness of schizophrenia is defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) as involving the distortions of normal sensory functions and the loss of normal functioning. The range or “normal” differs among cultural or spiritual worldviews. The application of postmodern relativism would result in all perceptions of reality having equal credibility and validity.
These would eradicate the concept of mental illness. A complete exploration of this issue would exceed the constraints of this paper but it can be said that neither social work nor society appear ready to disregard the concept of mental illness. As a society we continue to believe that there are some perceptions and behaviours that result from "illness" and which place individuals and society at risk. Postmodernism has prompted professionals to begin examining the mainstream conceptualization of "normal." The concept needs to be more inclusive of diverse cultural and spiritual worldviews.

1.2 Phenomenological Qualitative Research

The postmodern questioning of modernist assumptions regarding research created fertile ground for new research methodology and methods, particularly in the human sciences. Modernism legitimized only scientific research methods that emphasize objectivity, neutrality, measurement and validity (Schriver, 2001). Postmodernism does not automatically reject the scientific research method but does challenge the "general claim as the 'right' or the privileged form of authoritative knowledge" by any method or theory (Richardson, 1998, p. 348). Postmodernists reject,

... the idea that there are unchanging foundations for the human sciences that reach beyond the shifting sands of history to identify a metaphysical basis or standard for judging our beliefs. They feel that any claim to have found such a basis or standard is simply another historically influenced interpretation, a mere projection of our particular community's viewpoint onto the universe. They contend that it is time to acknowledge the fundamental truth that all our beliefs and values are strictly relative (Robbins et al., 1998, p. 302).

Research could explore "local" truths, localized experiences of reality outside the constraints of positivism and objectivity. In discussing the contributions of
postmodernism to the field of research, Braud and Anderson (1998) highlight the following points:

(a) the recognition that aspects of "reality" may be psychological, socially, and politically constructed to various degrees; (b) the reminder that a plurality of voices — of particular persons, constituencies, ways of knowing and criteria of legitimacy — testify for or against specific knowledge claims; (c) the reminder that some of those voices are privileged, whereas others are marginalized; and (d) the proposal that deprivileged voices be encouraged to speak and that they be listened to with attentiveness and respect (p. 253).

The multiplicity of clients' realities and lived experiences, including previously silenced and marginalized voices, can be acknowledge and examined in research.

Postmodernism, with acceptance of subjectivity and recognition of marginalized voices, legitimizes socially and politically motivated research. This attention and respect for deprivileged voices in itself constitutes social and political action. Acknowledging the truth and stories of marginalized individuals and communities challenges the existing social/political structures and shifts the power balance (Braud & Anderson, 1998).

Postmodernism offers a new alternative research paradigm utilizing qualitative research methods. This alternative research paradigm emphasizes subjectivity, pluralism, and holism. The main assumptions regarding research within this paradigm are highlighted below.

1. There are multiple realities, which are socially constructed.

2. A researcher cannot objectively know the observed.

3. Research is value laden. Our values biases what we research, the methods we choose and the way we analysis and present the data.

4. Universal truths or generalizations are not possible. Only local, or time- and context-bound hypotheses are possible.
5. It is acceptable and valid for research to be concerned with describing, understanding or appreciating individual cases or instances.

6. Quantitative methods are not privileged over qualitative approaches. The nature of the research question determines the most appropriate method.

7. Alternative forms of knowing are acknowledged beyond that which is obtained through sense data. Tacit or personal knowledge and knowledge gained through intuition, direct knowing, and empathic sensitivity are acknowledged as valid (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Braud & Anderson, 1998; Schriver, 2001).

Qualitative methodology, specifically a phenomenological perspective and method, was employed to explore the participants' reality in this research project.

Phenomenology was introduced by Edmund Husserl as a philosophical perspective in reaction to the modernist worldview (Abram, 1996). Abram (1996) explains that, "phenomenology is the Western philosophical tradition that has most forcefully called into question the modern assumption of a single, wholly determinable, objective reality" (p. 31). The core of phenomenological thought is that phenomena can only be understood as they are experienced and perceived by an individual (Abram, 1996; Giorgi, 1997). Giorgi (1997) provides a classic illustration of phenomenological perspective through discussion of a two people viewing a painting. Person A may see a painting and call it ugly while person B may see the same painting and call it beautiful. A phenomenological approach is not interested in the ugliness or beauty of the painting itself but only the experience of the viewer. Ugliness and beauty exist only in the experience of the viewer.

The phenomenological perspective in the human sciences has lead to the development of variety of phenomenological methods. These methods vary significantly in their procedures but share the assumptions and understandings of the
phenomenological perspective. All the methods aim at creating complete, rich and articulate descriptions and understandings of particular human experiences or experiential moments (Braud & Anderson, 1998). The goal of phenomenological research is to uncover the meaning of a phenomenon as perceived by the individual experiencing it. Phenomenological analysis allows the meaning of the text provided by research participants to "emerge" and attempts to remain as true as possible to the voices of the participants in the raw data. A detailed account of the specifics of the phenomenological method applied to the data of this research can be found in the 'Method' chapter.

A phenomenological method was chosen for this research as it was appropriate for exploring the nature of meaning created from spirituality/religion and was consistent with social work values and ethics. A phenomenological method privileged the reality and experience of the participants allowing for genuine 'person in environment' focus. Self-determination and empowerment were honoured through this method, as participants were able to tell their stories, describe the strengths and resources of their worldview and communities, and describe their needs within a social work relationship.

1.3 Location of the Researcher

This research was undertaken with the knowledge that the researcher influences all inquiry. My viewpoint, my "location", influences how I perceive and understand the world, including this research. No objective truth exists as all observation, measurement, and presentation is laden with preconceived assumptions, values and biases. It is important then to "locate" myself to make the audience aware of the assumptions, values and biases under which I had entered this research process. It
needs to be noted that this paper deviated from tradition in academic writing by using
first person pronouns. I was not working under the pretense of absolute objectivity so
felt no need to separate myself from the research process through the use of language
which projected an image of an omniscient observer.

There is an assumption made within much of the phenomenological research I was
able to locate that the researcher can separate preconceived ideas, biases or
assumptions from the process of data analysis. An early term attached to this concept
was “bracketing,” a process in which it is acknowledged that research is entered into
with preconceptions. The assumption is that through this acknowledgement, and with
focused effort, the preconceptions can be suspended for the purpose of analysis
(Spielberg, as cited in Parse et al., 1985). There still appears to be implicit acceptance
that complete objective observation and reasoning is possible by a researcher.

Reflexivity has been offered as the solution to this thorny issue of addressing
preconceptions and biases impacting upon research (Finlay, 2002; Willig, 2001).
Reflexivity is the ability to assess the influences on one’s own thoughts and behaviors.
Researcher reflexivity is the analysis of the researcher's subjectivity and influence in the
research (Finlay, 2002). Reflexivity is “thoughtful, conscious self-awareness” which
when applied to research analysis “encompasses continual evaluation of subjective
responses, intersubjective dynamics, and the research process itself” (Finlay, 2002, p.
532). Reflexivity makes evident the researcher’s contribution to the construction of
meaning throughout the research process. I, as a researcher, constructed meaning
from the responses of my participants. I influenced the research project from the
beginning by making decisions on what question to investigate, which participants to
include, and how to phrase questions.
Finlay (2002) indicates that locating the researcher may even include "engaging in explicit, self-aware meta analysis throughout the research process" (p. 536). There is a danger when engaging in self-aware analysis of infinite regress, unending focus on the unfolding state of the researcher, which then overtakes the research itself (Finlay, 2002). The stream of consciousness of the researcher could easily overshadow the intended focus of the research, which is the participants' experiences and perceptions. Another difficulty with reflexivity is that no person is consciously privy to all the preconceived thoughts, values and biases that influence their view of the world. The ability to be reflexive is limited (Finlay, 2002). Despite these challenges, I find reflexivity an honest approach to phenomenological research as I can make visible my central position in the construction of meaning and truth in this research. My influence on the research began when I chose the questions to ask and continued through to my own preconceived thoughts and values guiding my analysis of the data and the ensuing discussion. In the design and presentation of this research I have tried to maintain balance through acknowledging my location as a researcher without shifting focus from the research itself. I attempted to make myself, my influence and my biases visible while maintaining the main focus of the participants and their reality.

This research was conducted with an explicit social/political objective. I am both a social worker and a Pagan. From my experience in mainstream Canadian society, I believe misconceptions and a pure lack of information about Paganism exist due to historical oppression and current marginalization. This lack of information and misinformation can threaten the quality of social work service provided to Pagan clients. It is hoped that this research provides a basis to support and inform spiritually sensitive social work practice with Pagan clients. Highlighting Pagans and Paganism in an academic research paper and allowing Pagan voices to be heard may have the more
far reaching effect of challenging the structures which support the marginalized position of Paganism and Pagans in society.

1.4 Spiritually Sensitive Social Work

Spirituality and religion are essential terms in the discussion of spiritually sensitive social work. Social work and other helping professions have invested great effort into trying to define the concepts of spirituality and religion. Spirituality has proven to be the more difficult of the two for researchers and practitioners to reach a consensus around. Carroll (1998) clarifies the difference among many of the definitions as the distinction between spirituality-as-essence and spirituality-as-one-dimension. Those definitions of spirituality-as-essence discuss a human spirit or essence. This essence is an intrinsic property that originates from the core of humans and vitalizes their existence. Carroll (1998) summarizes the view of spirituality-as-essence as referring to “a core nature which provides a sense of personal wholeness and an energy that motivates people to actualize their potential for self-development and self-transformation” (p. 4). Examples of such of definitions of spirituality are:

Spirituality refers to the essential holistic quality or being that transcends the merely physical, psychological, social, and political or cultural but incorporates them all ... Finally, spirituality refers to an essence that extends beyond the self, that defies ego boundaries and that allows us to join and revere the mysteries and complexities of life (Saleebery, 2001, p. 474).

... spirituality as the wholeness of what it is to be human (Canda & Furman, 1999, p. 214).

It is the spirit of human beings which enables and motivates us to search for meaning and purpose in life... (Ellison, cited in Swinton 2001, p. 16)
A definition of spirituality-as-one-dimension views spirituality as a part of human experience and behaviour, which is directed to developing meaning, purpose and moral codes around a relationship with the ultimate reality or the sacred or divine (Carroll, 1998). Some examples of this conceptualization of spirituality are:

... spirituality reflects our struggle to find meaning, a working moral sensibility, and purposes that extend beyond selfish, egoistic concerns. (Saleebery, 2001, p. 474).

... spirituality as an aspect of the person that strives for a sense of meaning and purpose (Canda & Furman, 1999, p. 214).

Spirituality, on the other hand, is an internal phenomenon addressing such issues as the search for a sense of meaning and purpose in one's life, one's beliefs about the functioning of the universe, and a personal moral code (Cascio, 1998).

Some conceptualizations of spirituality contain both the meanings of essence and dimension (Carroll, 1998).

The meaning intended by the term spirituality has implications for the application of spiritually sensitive practice. The spirituality-as-dimension view limits spirituality to the concerns of the ultimate reality and transcendence. This transcendence may be through interconnectedness with other people or the ultimate reality (Carroll, 1998). Carroll (1998) notes that the view of spirituality-as-one-dimension can lead to limiting the consideration of spirituality within the helping relationship to explicit religious/spiritual domains. Spirituality-as-essence views spirituality as an ever present force within the helping relationship. It is the vitality that allows for change and growth. As the core essence of the person, spirituality informs all meaning and all relationships.

The definition for spirituality employed in this paper was developed in light of the two distinct conceptualizations of spirituality common in the social work literature as discussed above. I wanted to create a conception of spiritual that was inclusive of essence and dimension. In this paper, spirituality has been conceptualized as the core
essence of human wholeness which motivates an internal phenomenon, common to all people, that involves the search for a sense of meaning and purpose in life; beliefs about the functioning of the universe; personal values and ethics; and morally fulfilling relationships with self other people, the universe, and the ultimate reality or the sacred or divine (Canda, 2001; Hugen, 2001; Saleebey, 2001; Canda & Furman, 1999; Cascio, 1998). The intra, inter, and transpersonal experiences of spirituality are all contained in this definition. The intrapersonal quest is for an integrated and healthy self. Interpersonally, people seek meaningful relationships with individuals and within community. The transpersonal search is for connection beyond the bounds of self with others or the ultimate reality, however it is conceived (Swinton, 2001).

As part of the process of identifying my preexisting assumptions, I note that I believe human beings have a life force, soul or spirit that is the vitality and spark of life, an element of existence that transcends the boundaries of ego, time and space. That is how I envision the core essence of human wholeness. For me, then, spirituality is an individual's response to the experience of spirit (Swinton, 2001). The above definition of spirituality is not dependent upon the belief in a transcendent spirit or soul, however. The definition of spiritual in this paper does assume all people experience spirituality as both essence and dimension. Some people may not identify themselves as spiritual as they may have a different conceptualization of spirituality.

Religion is conceptualized in this paper as the institutionalized and organized external expression of spiritual beliefs, values, and rituals shared by a community (Canda 2001; Hugen, 2001; Canda & Furman, 1999). The definition of spirituality does not assume a religious worldview. Spirituality does not need to be expressed through religion and can be expressed in private personal experience only (Hugen, 2001).
However, this definition of religion does assume a spirituality that precedes external, religious organization.

This research explored the definitions Pagans themselves developed for spirituality and religion. The participants’ definitions are compared to those given above, in the ‘Findings’ and ‘Discussion’ chapters, to determine if social workers and Pagans intend similar meanings when using the terms spirituality and religion.

Spiritually sensitive social work grows out of the relatively recent concern for integrating spirituality as an essential component of holistic practice with clients. Smith (1998) writes about the emerging challenge of addressing spirituality and religion in social work.

Given this post-modern context for social work practice of multiple spiritual realities, the profession faces a profound clinical challenge. It must assist its clientele in addressing the specific subjectivity of religious/spiritual values, while remaining value-free and objective. It must develop explanatory and change theories, as well as models of practice that address the particularity of belief without adopting the belief. All of this must be done in the spirit of inclusion and within the context of client self-determination, the hallmark values of social work (p. x).

Spiritually sensitive social work is conceptualized in this paper as the competent integration of spirituality and religion into practice for a holistic person in environment focus (Canda, 2002; Canda, 2001; Canda & Furman, 1999). Spiritually sensitive practice requires a respect for a client’s spiritual/religious worldview and honours the diverse spiritual traditions that help individuals find meanings and that foster strength and resiliency within individual lives and communities. Inclusion of explicit religious beliefs and issues in the social work relationship can cause more discomfort for social workers than spirituality. This can be assumed to be a function of the potential negative expressions or functions of religion such as fanaticism, intolerance and prejudice (Hugen, 2001b). As well, religion can promote beliefs that undermine coping and self-
esteem (i.e. punitive God) and discourage social action. However, religion can be a source of strengths and promote resiliency and coping. Religious beliefs will be exacting an influence in the helping relationship whether they are explicitly acknowledged or not. The inclusion of a client's religious worldview an extension of their spirituality is essential to spiritually sensitive social work.

1.5 Paganism

Only a brief overview of Paganism is offered at this time. The aim of this research was to create space in which Pagans themselves defined their spirituality/religion and described how it shapes their lives. A much more detailed exploration of Paganism, based on the data provided by participants, is presented in the 'Findings' and 'Discussion' chapters. It is difficult to summarize Paganism or a Pagan ontology or cosmology. Paganism houses a diversity of perspectives, worldviews, beliefs and practices. The Pagan community does not even agree on whether Paganism is a religion, an umbrella term for a group of religions, or simply represents a spirituality or perhaps philosophy. Adler (1986) describes the origin of the word Pagan as deriving from the Latin *paganus*, which referred to a rural, country dweller. As Christianity swept across the West, the rural population was the last to convert, maintaining traditional beliefs and practices, and so were called Pagans. Modern Pagans have now reclaimed the term. Paganism is also used to refer to aboriginal religious systems and in fact most aboriginal or indigenous religions do fall within the operational definition of Paganism employed within this paper, as would other world religions, notably Hinduism (York, 2003). However, few First Nations people or Hindus would identify as Pagan since their
identity is forged with another religious tradition. This is due, in part, to adherents of those faiths having a shared social, cultural, and political historic and current experience. The adherents of Paganism with whom this paper is concerned do not share a historical and current cultural and social context.

The form of Paganism this research is examining is sometimes referred to as Neo-Paganism. Neo-Paganism reflects that there has been a discontinuity of the old religions and traditions due to the assimilation by, and often oppression and forced conversion to, other major world religions, most often, Christianity. The “old ways” are then rediscovered, revived and reinvented to create the Neo-Pagan faith traditions of today (Jordan, 2000). York (1996) writes, “Neo-pagan refers to a new religious movement, one which has re-appeared however much it is based on ancient practice and tradition. Neo-pagan indicates a religious orientation which has emerged in our times or at least in relatively recent times” (p. 160). The three more publicly recognized examples of revived or reemerging traditions are Wicca, Druidism, and Asatru. Wicca, sometimes called Witchcraft, the Craft or The Old Religion, emphasizes the Goddess aspect of the Divine or Sacred and draws from European, particularly Celtic, pre-Christian religious beliefs and practices. Druidism draws on the religious traditions of the pre-Christian Celts from central Europe and the British Isles. Asatru is modeled on the religious traditions of the Norse and pre-Christian Scandinavian cultures (Jordan, 2000; Blain, 1996).

There is disagreement about the reconstruction or revival conceptualization of modern Paganism, as some Pagans do claim an uninterrupted continuity or succession of their tradition and/or family line of beliefs and practice (Jordan, 2000; Blain, 1996). I

3 First Nations individuals, Hindus and members of other world religions were not explicitly excluded from this study. If they identified themselves as Pagan they would have been included in the sample population.
do not dispute that some Pagan traditions may have a traceable line of continuity or succession from pre-modernity. However, I would argue that they did not continue in the same social context in which they began since they were no longer considered the "religion of the region" and may have had to be practiced in private or under secrecy. Significant adaptations to the lived faith would have been made so the adherents could survive in the dominant Christian culture. Given this, Neo-Paganism may be the correct sociological label for the faith traditions explored by this research. However, the term Paganism will be used throughout the paper as this is the term favoured and most widely used by Atlantic Canadian (Neo) Pagans. There is also simplicity in using the term Paganism as it can encompass the concept of Neo-Paganism.

Let us return to the operational definition of Paganism for this paper and examine it in depth. Paganism may be a spiritual and/or religious tradition, or may encompass a multitude of spiritual and/or religious traditions and faiths. These faiths and traditions are polytheistic, pantheistic, or panentheistic and are generally earth-based, venerating nature, usually incorporating animism and spiritism. An emphasis on magic is often present. One element of Paganism not contained in the definition, but important to the consideration of Paganism, is the characteristic feature of most Pagan traditions of strong emphasis on personal responsibility regarding spirituality and morality. Although localized spiritual leaders may exist within traditions, there is no authoritative text or centralized hierarchy for Pagans. Personal responsibility in matters of beliefs, ethics and spiritual practice is stressed (Llewellyn, 2003).

Polytheism is defined by the belief in more than one God (Avis, Drysdale, Gregg, Neufeldt, and Scargill, 1983). The Pagan lived experience of polytheism is much more than this. Pagan polytheism "is grounded in the view that reality (divine or otherwise) is multiple and diverse" (Adler, 1986). The Divine or Sacred can be envisioned and
experienced as God and Goddess or as multiple gods and goddesses. There is an emphasis placed upon the Divine feminine in many Pagan traditions. Pantheism is a concept common to Pagan traditions that identifies the Divine or Sacred as immanent with the Universe as a whole. Divinity or Sacredness can not be separated from Nature and is the process of the Universe (Adler, 1986). Panentheism is the belief that the Divine or Sacred is in the Universe, in Nature, but there is also a transcendent quality of the Divine or Sacred that is more than the Universe, more than Nature (Carpenter, 1992). Polytheism can coexist with either pantheism or panentheism.

Animism, spiritism and magic can coexist with polytheism, pantheism, and/or panentheism. Animism is the view that all of reality has spiritual energy or partakes in the life force of the universe, including animate life, inanimate objects, and natural phenomenon such as dreams. This sharing of the life force or spiritual energy creates interconnectedness between all (Carpenter, 1992; Adler, 1986). Spiritism is an extension of animism with the added belief that communication is possible between those sharing the life force or spiritual energy. Humans can communicate with various elements in Nature and with ancestral spirits (Carpenter, 1992). “Events in nature and in human activity result from the spirits that reside in people and things, and communicating with spirits can lead to influencing them and thereby influencing human events” (Walsh-Bowers, 2000). This indicates the context in which magic needs to be understood as it is the interconnection of all that allows for the change in one part of the whole to effect another part. (Carpenter, 1992). Magic may be the one element of Paganism that is most readily identified in the dominant culture and most misunderstood. Adler (1986) explains magic as, “a convenient word for a whole collection of techniques, all of which involve the mind” (p. 8). These techniques include mobilizing confidence, will and emotion, the use of imagination and visualization, and
the awakening of psychic ability (Adler, 1986). Starhawk (1989) describes magic as, “the art of sensing and shaping the subtle, unseen forces that flow throughout the world, of awakening deeper levels of consciousness beyond the rational” (p. 27). Magic is the process of altering, at will, consciousness and/or the flow of energy in the Universe (Carpenter, 1992; Starhawk, 1989; Adler, 1986).

This project explored the meaning participants create in their lives through their lived faith. Other authors have explored the reasons that Pagans bypass mainstream religions and look for an alternative worldview. It is commonly reported that Pagans have arrived at Paganism after a critical review of postmodern society. They are disillusioned with the social structures and the religions that support them (Harvey, 1997; Hardman & Harvey, 1996; Marron, 1989; Adler, 1986). Emberley (2002) examined the “spiritual walkabout” that many Canadians are embarking upon as they search for “truth” in alternative spiritualities and religions. Emberley points out that the “truths” discovered in the walkabout have the potential to shake the assumptions of modern life and modern consciousness. Marron (1989) writes regarding the Pagan search for meaning and truth, “science and consumerism, the dominant influences on the twentieth century, are providing us with fewer answers and less satisfaction. Many people are realizing that we need to develop spiritual powers and values that have long been neglected” (p. 10). Curott (1998) author and public Wiccan explains her understanding of the postmodern return to pre-modern religious traditions.

These were the unnatural, man-made consequences of a cultural shift that began thousands of years ago, away from the sacred earth, to a distant sky god. The religious beliefs of a culture define its values. Its cosmology has tremendous impact on social and economic institutions, culture, history, the status of women, sexuality and countless other facets of daily life. We have become disconnected from the divine, from the feminine, the earth, and from each other, living a millennial alienation from the sacred. God was separated from man, man was separated from woman, and all were separated from the earth. For too many centuries, each has
existed in painful separation from the others, and the world we have created expresses this terrible alienation. It also expresses our longing for reunion (p. 125).

The search for meaning within their postmodern realities described by the participants in this research is detailed in the 'Findings' and 'Discussion' chapters.

1.6 Theoretical Lens: Transpersonal Perspective and Strengths Perspective

A theoretical approach, utilizing a transpersonal perspective and strengths perspective, was brought to bear upon the questions addressed in this research. The theories through which a question is examined are similar to a lens. The theoretical lens determines the view of the research. The theoretical lens informs choice regarding which information is relevant to the question at hand and is used to explore, explain, and present the data.

This research applied a transpersonal perspective but did not make use of any one particular transpersonal theory. The transpersonal perspective is concerned with our spiritual nature and proposes that there is a transpersonal element to our existence which can extend our sense of self beyond usual ego boundaries. The transpersonal perspective has been applied in various fields and disciplines including psychology, anthropology, sociology, education, and ecology. There has been some initial research within social work to develop a profession-specific transpersonal perspective and theories. The transpersonal perspective provides a conceptual framework for dealing with spirituality in social work practice (Robbins et al., 1998). Transpersonalism recognizes the unique self of individuals but also acknowledges a transpersonal dimension, a dimension of human existence, which is beyond individual ego (Robbins et
al., 1998; Besthorn, 2002). The transpersonal perspective is concerned with “our highest aspirations and potentials and our needs for love, meaning, creativity, and communion with other people and the universe” (Robbins et al., 1998, p. 360). The interconnectedness of people and the universe through our transcendent nature leads to a commitment to social justice as the welfare of all is cojoined (Canda, 1998).

The strengths perspective was also be part of the theoretical lens of this research. The strengths perspective is a radical departure from the modernist practice of social work in which the expert professional sought to identify the deficiencies and dysfunction of clients before offering the cure to these problems. The strengths perspective focuses on the strengths and resources of clients in order to assist them to achieve their goals. Possibilities, not problems, are the focus. A central component of the strengths perspective is the respect and privilege provided within the social work relationship to the client’s view of themselves and their reality (Saleebey, 2002). The strengths perspective frames spirituality as a source of support, resiliency, and resources which an individual or community can draw from.
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 The Secularization of the Helping Professions

There was no estrangement between social work and religion and spirituality during the pioneering years of the profession. Social services and charities consisted of Jewish and Christian outreach to the poor, homeless, and needy (Canda, 2002; Canda, 2001). Developing governmental social welfare systems depended on these religious services and charities (Canda, 2002). Principles of the Jewish and Christian faiths, including charity and compassion, guided landmark social work projects such as the Charity Organization Society, the Settlement House Movement, and the Jewish Communal Service Movement (Canda, 2001; Carroll, 1997). Social work was greatly influenced during its development by the spiritual and religious worldviews and motivation of its early leaders. For example, Jane Addams, a prominent figure in the history of social work for founding Hull House and leading the Settlement House Movement, had studied theology and was motivated by her Christian faith (Bullis, 1996). A gradual departure from its original religious and spiritual focus began within social work in the 1920's (Canda, 2002). Social work severed the connection with spirituality in an attempt to professionalize and compete with other helping professions in an increasingly more secularized society (Canda, 2001). The secular medical model was becoming established as the standard of professional practice in the helping professions and, as such, became central to social work (Carroll, 1997).

The medical model arose out of the Enlightenment, so it emphasizes rationality and empiricism. Prior to the Enlightenment, God and those who spoke with his authority, the church and clergy, controlled the realm of truth. The religious perspective dictated
the existing knowledge base and shaped emerging information "discoveries" (Slife, Hope & Nebeker, 1999). Enlightenment proponents challenged this intellectual control by the church and argued for science and medicine to be based on empiricism and positivism (Swinton, 2001). By the end of the 1800's, science and the medical model had successfully displaced religious institutions as the authority of "factual knowledge" (Longo & Petterson, 2002).

The Modernist paradigm was becoming dominant. Those disciplines and professions that wished to be seen as credible and legitimate adopted the scientific method and the medical model. Social work embraced a secular focus, aligning itself with both. Slife, Hope and Nebeker (1999) suggest that the discipline and profession of psychology "was born of a determination to apply the methods of natural science to human beings" (p. 55). Social work looked to psychology to provide specific theories and treatment methods based on scientific medical research (Carroll, 1997). The growing profession of social work was expanding from community based service into clinical and institutional service. To foster this expansion, the profession accepted the rational, linear, and reductionist worldviews of the medical model and psychology (Baskin, 2002).

The medical model is focussed on disease and illness, rather than health and optimal functioning. The assumption underlying the model is that disease and illness can be overcome "through the development and utilization of universally applicable diagnostic criteria and specialized technical interventions" (Swinton, 2001, p. 49). Empirical research is central to the development of universal methods and treatments to deal with the typical illness, physical or mental, of the average patient (Swinton, 2001). The medical model discounts spirituality because it cannot be scientifically verified,
tested or measured. Spirituality falls outside the realm of scientific knowledge and truth so it is denied relevance in the medical model.

The most influential factor in the secularization of social work was this attempt to legitimize the profession and increase the marketability of social work professionals through identification with the medical model and psychology. However, other reasons did play a role in the move away from the former religious and spiritual foundations of social work. There was a fear that vulnerable clients would be subjected to proselytizing and moralistic judgementalism. It was also sincerely believed that science, the medical model, and psychology could offer new effective remedies and interventions for clients (Canda, 2001). Also, the growing secularization in the greater society, including governmental agencies and programs, placed pressure on social work to divorce itself from explicit religious and spiritual connections (Canda, 2002; Canda, 2001).

The earliest force in psychology and psychiatry was Freudianism, the school of psychological thought developed by Sigmund Freud in the early part of the twentieth century. Freud is considered the father of modern psychology. He introduced concepts still widely accepted today such as the existence of conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious elements of the psyche. However, from the viewpoint of our current time and culture, much of Freud's work is open to criticism (West, 2000). Freud viewed religion and spirituality with suspicion and negativity. This is proving to be a lasting legacy within mainstream psychology. To Freud, religion indicated a neurosis and was merely wishful fantasy (Longo and Peterson, 2002). Freud saw the human need for religion rooted in the early childhood experience of helplessness in a dangerous world. According to Freud, humans create religions so that they can appeal to a benevolent God for help and have an explanation for the uncertainties of life (West, 2000;
Pargament & Park, 1995). Freud proposed that the primary drive in life is striving for pleasure or, at the least, minimizing suffering (West, 2000). Religion serves as defense against suffering the anxiety arising from the uncertainties of life and the feeling of helplessness (Pargament & Park, 1995). Freud felt that religion may alleviate anxiety but is only an illusionary cure that offers nothing more than comfort and solace (Longo & Peterson, 2002; West, 2000; Pargament & Park, 1995). Freud was even more critical of claims of transcendent spiritual experiences. Freud saw these experiences as regression to infancy when there was no sense of separation from the world. Freud proposed that mental health results from a strong ego. The human ego mediates base drives and instincts with conscience and provides our sense of personal identity as a separate self in the world. Spiritual experiences were, to Freud, a pathological episode of self boundary loss (West, 2000). Overall, Freudianism viewed religion and spirituality as indicators of mental unbalance, signifying neurosis, avoidance, and regression.

Freud’s view of religion and spirituality dominated psychoanalysis and psychology in the early twentieth century but there were dissenters arguing a counter viewpoint regarding spirituality. The most notable dissenter was Carl Jung. Jung, once a student and protégé of Freud, embraced spirituality as a healthy dimension of human nature. Jung refused to accept the pleasure principle of Freudianism and postulated that spirituality can also be a primary drive. “Jung saw religion, with or without formal creed, as involving the human quest for a sense of meaning and the developmental process of achieving personal integration and wholeness” (Robbins et al., 1998, p. 166). Jung theorized that humans were able to access both the personal unconscious and a collective unconscious. The collective unconscious is the universal repository of meanings, which Jung referred to as archetypes. Exposure to the collective unconscious creates a sense of transcendence (Robbins et al., 1998). Jungian theory
would eventually influence the later psychological movements of humanistic and transpersonal approaches.

Behaviourism is the second force of psychology, emerging in the 1930’s. Behaviourism arose in contrast to Freudianism and psychoanalysis. Behaviourists objected to the inclusion of non-observable and scientifically unverifiable concepts such as the unconscious mind, dreams and impulses to the discipline of psychology. Behaviourism is deeply entrenched in positivism and empiricism, stressing the application of the objective scientific method to the study of observable and measurable human behaviour. Behaviourism relies on a reductionist, mechanical model of human nature (West, 2000; Walsh & Vaughan, 1996). Behaviourists are concerned with the behavioural responses of humans to the stimuli in their environments. Behaviourism has developed methods of treatment and intervention that can be highly effective in remedying some behavioral problems. However, the scope of behaviourism is limited and unable to encompass some of the most central aspects of human nature such as spirituality.

2.1 The Reemergence of Spirituality and Religion in the Helping Professions

The 1950’s saw the emergence of the third force of psychology, humanistic psychology, which attempted to counterbalance the reductionist tendencies of the previous two forces. Humanistic theorists believed Freud had erroneously created theories of human nature based on clinical studies of neurosis. This resulted in a deterministic theory of human behaviour ruled by an unconscious, instinctual and impulsive drive to seek pleasure and avoid or reduce tension and conflict.
Behaviourism had reduced humans to mere mechanistic responses to environmental forces. Both denied capacity for free choice and spontaneity (Robbins et al., 1998).

In contrast, humanistic psychology proposes that people have the ability to separate themselves from biological demands and societal conditioning in their struggle for wholeness and fulfillment. It employs a holistic perspective in which people are viewed as physical, emotional, mental and spiritual beings (Besthorn, 2001; Garrison, 2001; West, 2000). Humanistic psychology is based on a growth-oriented model that considers health and optimal functioning as well as illness and pathology (Walsh & Vaughan, 1996). It focuses on people's ability to break free of limitations and develop the positive components of human nature such as meaningfulness, creativity, and humor in order to achieve optimal individual growth. This process of growing to optimal potential is referred to as self-actualization (West, 2000; Besthorn, 2001). Humanists believe human behaviour is directed by a drive for freedom, growth, self-transformation and self-actualization. Modern suffering and alienation result from the demands of conformity imposed by the modernist agenda, which limits growth and self-actualization. The goal of therapeutic intervention is to move people beyond social conditioning that restricts their growth toward wholeness and health (Garrison, 2001).

The spiritual dimension is essential to humanistic theory and practice, as it is a source for meaning, value and motivation. However, humanistic theory conceptualizes spirituality as a process of social construction of meaning, contained entirely within the boundaries of the ego-self. The transcendent orientation of spirituality does not indicate to humanists that it has an external referent outside the boundaries of self (Garrison, 2001). "There is no God, for example, toward who mystical impulses are drawn; there is only the mystical impulse. There is no divine order toward which the search for justice could strive; there is only a drive for justice" (Garrison, 2001, p. 93). Modernist
secularization still permeates humanistic thought since humans remain the sole spiritual and moral reference point in the universe (Garrison, 2001). There is no absolute reality beyond subjective existence and experience, so the ultimate or the sacred or divine is located within each individual.

A revision within humanistic psychology occurred in the late 1960's. During the research to establish a standard of optimal wellbeing it became evident that experiences of self-transcendence were correlated to high self-actualization and a sense of self-fulfillment (Robbins et al., 1998). In light of this finding, humanistic theorists, in particular Abraham Maslow, a founding member of the humanistic movement, began to question the inward focus of the theory. Self-transcendence only makes sense in reference to “other”, as an individual cannot transcend ego without orientation to something outside of the self. Maslow and others turned their attention to the human capacity for transcendence beyond the actualized self (Walsh and Vaughan, 1996).

Transcendence refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than as means, to oneself, to significant others, to human being in general, to other species, to nature and to the cosmos (Maslow, as cited in Daniels, 2001, p. 7).

Daniels (2001) emphasizes that Maslow understood transcendence to be a sense of self expanding beyond the ordinary bounds or individual ego or personality in relationship with others. He is not postulating the existence of an ultimate metaphysical reality to which people actually relate or commune with.

Transcendence also means to become divine or godlike, to go beyond the merely human. But one must be careful here not to make anything extrahuman or supernatural out of this kind of statement. I am thinking of using the word ‘metahuman’ or ‘B-human’ in order to stress that this becoming very high or divine or godlike is part of human nature even though it is not often seen in fact. It is still a potentiality of human nature (Maslow, as cited in Daniels, 2001, p. 2).
The new interest in self-transcendence turned humanists toward those experiences that point beyond, trans, the ego-bound personal (Garrison, 2001). Based on this new focus, in 1969, Maslow announced the arrival of the fourth force in psychology, the transpersonal movement (Besthorn, 2001; Robbins et al., 1998). Maslow wrote regarding this shift of focus:

I consider Humanistic, Third Force Psychology to be transitional, a preparation for a still "higher" Fourth psychology, trans-personal, trans-human, centered in the cosmos rather than in human needs and interests, going beyond humanness, identity, self-actualization, and the like. (Wittine, as cited in Cowley, 1993, p. 530).

Existentialism was an influence upon the humanistic and the later emerging transpersonal perspective. Existentialism is a school of philosophical thought originating in Europe, developing through the late nineteenth century into the early twentieth century, which critiques the modern condition and social conformity. Existentialism gained particular momentum during and following World War II (Canda & Furman, 1999; Robbins et al., 1998). Existentialists focus on the crisis of meaning experienced by humans. General social malaise, societal crises and horrors such as wars expose the vulnerability of social conventions and traditional meaning systems such as religion. These meaning systems are shown to be "absurd", mere social constructions, without absolute or ultimate meaning. Crises of meaning also occur in an individual's life as a result of personal crises such as death of a loved one, or loss, or challenges. In the face of suffering a crisis of meaning, each person needs to confront the lack of objective meaning. Human freedom and dignity are paramount and individuals are responsible for determining the subjective meaning of their own lives (Canda & Furman, 1999; Robbins et al., 1998). This meaning is created in a social
context and arises from intersubjective relations between self and others (Canda & Furman, 1999)

Existentialism insists upon the creation of authentic meaning. Authenticity is achieved only through subjective experience of the world. Authenticity is dependent upon experience, experience of self and the experience of self interacting with others in the world. Authenticity results from the intentional creation of a subjective, personal sense of meaning and purpose in the face of suffering and crisis of meaning (Randall, 2001). Suffering arises during a crisis of meaning because humans are driven to create meaning yet know that all meaning is subjective and all meaning systems are absurd, socially constructed without absolute or objective meaning.

Existential suffering, often manifested in feeling of dread, shame, and guilt, is rooted in the problem of alienation within the self, between self and others, and between self and the totality of being. Paradoxically, the human being is impelled to create and discover meaning in the knowledge that all systems of meaning are finite and flawed approximations of a mysterious and often painful reality. This awareness invokes a sense of dread in the face of the absurd. Nonetheless, each person must make choices, create meaning, and learn to survive through his or her own mistakes and the assaults of social pressures toward conformity (Canda & Furman, 1999, p. 158).

Existentialism has been applied to therapeutic intervention within the helping professions. The goal of existentialist intervention is to assist the client in creating authentic meaning (Randall, 2001). The existential social worker encourages clients to courageously assert their freedom and dignity in each moment through the creation of personal meaning, unbound by social conventions and traditional meaning systems. The client is assisted to overcome the institutional forms of oppression and internal barriers that encourage conformity in order to accept responsibility for the creation of a meaning system and satisfying relationships (Canda & Furman, 1999).
The existential perspective is sensitive to spirituality because of the role spirituality has in the process of meaning construction. Religious/spiritual worldviews are a source of prescribed meaning build upon an assumption of an ultimate or absolute truth and system of meaning. Existentialist clinicians would insist that religious/spiritual worldviews must be seen to be merely social constructions and explored and examined as such. Clients are challenged to take responsibility for their role in creating meaning. A force beyond their awareness does not control their meaning. They are free to make choices about the meaning they construct and must take responsibility for their choices (Canda & Furman, 1999).

The search for meaning for those with a religious/spiritual worldview may include the belief in actual transcendent and transpersonal experiences involving a metaphysical absolute. Many existentialists believe this leads to inauthentic meaning. Authenticity depends on actual intimate personal experience and meaning cannot be determined through rational means. These existentialists view humans as limited to an experience of separation within the ego-self identity because there is no absolute or ultimate reality outside subjective existence (Canda & Furman, 1999).

However, there are helping professionals with an existentialist perspective that challenge this limitation of existentialism. They assert that reality beyond subjective self does exist and a direct experience of transcendence and connection with the absolute and ultimate is possible. They believe the separate and alienated ego-self can be transcended to experience an immediate connection with the sacred realm, whether that be God/Goddess, or gods/goddesses, or the underlying connectedness of all life (Canda & Furman, 1999; Robbins et al., 1998; Walsh & Vaughan, 1996).

Logotherapy is an existential holistic perspective that grew out of the Viennese psychotherapy tradition that does recognize the transpersonal potential of humans to
experience an ultimate or absolute reality (Barnes, 2000). Viktor Frankl conceived logotherapy in the later part of the 1920's. Frankl spent three years in German death camps in the 1940's and what he experienced and witnessed during this time created the shape of logotherapy (Barnes, 2000; Fabry, 1996). Frankl's philosophical and practical applications of logotherapy were completely developed by the 1960's (Barnes, 2000). Frankl believed humans are driven by a will to find meaning, or logos. Frankl saw people search for meaning within the horror of death camps and also in the hollow day to day existence of modern life.

Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a "secondary rationalization" of instinctual drives. This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can only be fulfilled by him alone; only then does it achieve a significance which will satisfy his own will to meaning (Frankl, 1984, p. 105).

Logotherapy's purpose is to assist clients to find meaning in their lives.

There are certain tenets and assumptions upon which logotherapy rest.

1. Life has ultimate meaning under all circumstances. Ultimate meaning manifests itself in an awareness of an order in the universe within which we all belong. Ultimate meaning exists outside our subjective experience. It is experienced particularly in moments of deep despair or great bliss. Religious or spiritual traditions label this cosmic order with a name that indicates the divine or sacred, such as God. The non-religious may also label it using such terms as science, evolution or the ecosystem. Ultimate meaning cannot be proved or disproved, it simply must be lived as if it existed. It cannot be verified, unveiled, or captured but humans are driven to pursue it. Frankl extended the existential perspective to include the existence of ultimate meaning but stipulates that it cannot be rationally comprehended, only sensed and experienced. Individuals discover ultimate meaning rather than create it (Barnes, 2000; Fabry, 1996).
2. People have a will to meaning. The will to meaning is the main motivating factor in life. The will to meaning is what allows people to bear the inherent pain and sorrow they will encounter in life. People find meaning in their suffering in order to endure it (Barnes, 2000; Fabry, 1996; Guttman, 1996).

3. People have freedom under all circumstances to find meaning in life. A person may not be free to change his/her circumstances but they do have freedom regarding the meaning they ascribe to the circumstances (Barnes, 2000; Guttman, 1996).

4. Choices are present in each moment of life and we can make meaning choices in each situation. A meaningful life requires making choices between the meaning possibilities of each moment in response to the situation (Barnes, 2000; Fabry, 1996; Guttman, 1996).

5. Each person is unique and of irreplaceable significance (Barnes, 2000; Guttman, 1996).

6. Humans are three dimensional, consisting of body, mind and spirit. All three dimensions must be considered. Frankl criticized the medical model and psychology for reducing humans through disregard of the spirit. The spiritual dimension contains such attributes as will to meaning, goal orientation, creativity, intuition, humor, and conscience. The spirit contains the capacity for transcendence beyond personal boundaries. Transcendence is the experience of relating to others or the ultimate meaning (Barnes, 2000; Fabry, 1996; Guttman, 1996).

What I have called the self-transcendence of existence denotes the fundamental fact that being human means relating to something or someone, other than oneself, be it to a meaning to fulfill or, human beings to encounter. And existence falters and collapses unless this transcendent quality is lived out (Frankl, 1978, pp. 46-47).

Logotherapy’s attention to the spirit as an integral part of the whole person placed the client’s spirituality as the central focus in the professional helping relationship. Frankl’s
acceptance of a reality existing beyond the bounds of self allowed for authentic meaning to emerge from spiritual worldviews and experiences of self-transcendence.

2.2 The Transpersonal Perspective

The transpersonal perspective, the fourth force of psychology, emerged in the late 1960's and was an outgrowth of the humanistic movement and existentialism (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999; Robbins et al., 1998). The transpersonal perspective is a broad term for the approaches to theory and practice that focus on the essence and dimensions of spirituality (Sperry, 2001). Transpersonal refers to spiritual experiences that extend beyond, trans, the boundary of personal self. Ferrer (2001) describes the emergence of the Fourth force.

The birth of transpersonal psychology can be seen as emerging from the encounter between the modern self and the sacred dimensions of life and existence. At a time when personal identity was experienced primarily as an isolated Cartesian ego and spirituality was understood mainly in terms of individual subjective experience, it was probably inevitable that a modern reconnection with the sacred had to be launched through a transpersonal psychology – with “trans” understood essentially as meaning “beyond” (p. 2).

The transpersonal perspective has now also been applied in other disciplines as an alternative theoretical framework to explore spirituality and the nature of consciousness and reality. The transpersonal perspective has gained momentum because the postmodern period has left people searching for alternatives. Traditional sources of meaning have been deconstructed and scientific progress has not resulted in a decrease in emotional and psychological malaise (Cowley, 1993). Cowley (1993) explains.

Even while acknowledging the insecurity and anxiety that can occur when traditional rules and roles disintegrate, it is possible to see that
paradoxically, this freedom from social and cultural constraints has also provided a milieu conducive to an exploration of alternative ways of being. Searching for ways to become more conscious and experimenting with new ways to define what is involved in becoming more fully human have opened up diverse avenues and paths less taken (p. 529).

There is a division within the transpersonal movement revolving around the existence of an absolute or universal truth or reality that needs to addressed before continuing in any further discussion of the perspective. The definition of transpersonal experiences accepted by some transpersonal theorists differs little from than provided by Maslow. For example, “experiences in which the sense of identity or self extends beyond (trans-) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche or cosmos” (Walsh & Vaughan, 1996, p. 17). The existence of an objective reality outside human subjectivity is not indicated as there is only a sense of self expanding. Yet, a great volume of the transpersorial literature and theory implies more than a sense of self expanding and there is an explicit or implicit acceptance of the existence of an absolute or ultimate reality outside human subjectivity. For example, transpersonal experiences have been described as “an expansion or extension of consciousness beyond the usual ego boundaries and the limitations of time and space” (Grof, as cited in West, 2000, p. 33). Self-transcendence has been defined as “a completion and fulfillment of the self in communion with other beings and the Ground of Being, that is, the ultimate and sacred being or reality, that some call God” (Robbins et al., p. 362). The transpersonal approach is described as concerned with “our highest aspirations and potentials and our needs for love, meaning, creativity, and communion with other people and the universe” (Robbins et al., 1998, p. 360). Daniels (2001) objects to the inclusion of an unverifiable absolute or universal into transpersonal psychology as it threatens the scientific standing of the burgeoning field. He is even more critical of the implicit “smuggling” of sectarian spiritual beliefs and assumptions
Daniels accuses some theorists of advocating particular metaphysical and religious doctrine within their theories and models but presenting them as a universal metaphysical absolute, rather than their own sectarian assumptions. This criticism will be revisited later in the paper while reviewing the transpersonal theories of Wilber and Washburn. Daniels warns that any introduction of sectarian beliefs into a theory or model must be explicitly identified as bias by the theorist.

The assumed existence of an absolute or ultimate reality was implicit or explicit in the vast majority of transpersonal literature and research I reviewed while preparing this study. This assumption was notably present in the social work literature incorporating a transpersonal perspective. I, and most Pagans, accept this assumption of an ultimate reality beyond the subjective bounds of human existence. For these reasons, the transpersonal perspective presented throughout this paper will incorporate the work of researchers that adopt a transpersonal approach that is based on the assumption of an absolute or ultimate reality.

The transpersonal perspective challenges both modernist and postmodernist assumptions. Modernism rejects the existence of a non-verifiable metaphysical absolute or ultimate reality, which a large number of transpersonal theorists propose within their work. Transpersonal thinkers also challenge postmodern limitations by asserting that an ultimate reality does exist outside of subjective historical, cultural, linguistic experiences (Goddard, 2003).

... the essential difference between the contemporary postmodern perspective and the transpersonal is that transpersonalism is willing to take a stand within the shifting sands of endless meaning contexts. Foundational to the transpersonalist stand is the contention that the experiences and reports of mystics and advanced practitioners of certain trans-rational and trans-linguistic cognitive modes reveal a *non-mediated*
Reality which includes, yet goes beyond, all previously “constructed” worlds (Goddard, 2003).

A main assumption within the transpersonal perspective is that humans are drawn to experience the ultimate reality beyond ego-self boundaries and the limits of time and space because human potential is fully expressed in relationship or communion with this ultimate reality (Canda, 2001). It is also generally accepted within the transpersonal perspective that each spiritual/religious tradition, and individual, frames the response to awareness of ultimate reality within a conceptual system that arises from their particular historical and cultural context (Goddard, 2003).

The transpersonal perspective is interested in the lived experience of spirituality day to day as well as the moments of higher states of consciousness experienced in moments of transcendence. Transpersonal approaches to theory and practice in the helping professions focus on the spiritual dimension of human nature; the meaning and purpose of life, the nature of consciousness, transpersonal experiences and states, and mystical experiences (Sperry, 2001). The defining principles of the transpersonal perspective have been outlined Takei (2003) as:

1. essential human nature is spiritual;
2. the primary human drive is spiritual seeking. Humans are driven to grow through expanding the awareness of self, others, and the ultimate or sacred or divine;
3. consciousness is multi-dimensional. Differing states or levels of consciousness are possible;
4. rational, conscious thought is not the exclusive path to knowledge and wisdom.
   Alternative ways of knowing exist, such as inner wisdom, intuition, and communion with the ultimate or sacred or divine;
5. Our lives and actions are meaningful. Health and development emerge from following the path uncovered by discovering meaning in our lives.

The transpersonal perspective can enhance social work practice by broadening the scope of practice. "A transpersonal approach to client care encompasses realms of expanding consciousness, unitive social and spiritual connectedness, and human purpose and potentiality" (Leight, 2001). A transpersonal approach allows social workers, from a nonsectarian sectarian perspective, to validate clients' expressions and experience of spirituality and self-transcendence, explore the spiritual/religious search for meaning with clients, and assist clients in mobilizing strengths drawn from their spirituality/religion (Moxley & Washington, 2001). Crises, viewed from a transpersonal perspective, are opportunities for spiritual growth and expansion of consciousness (Cowley, 1993; Canda & Furman, 1999). Transpersonal social work can assist clients in "situations of suffering and existential confusion" by first assisting in fostering the development of a strong, healthy self and then assisting in transcending the bounds of self to "optimize the possibility for transformation to an enhanced transpersonal awareness and creative relations with others" (Canda & Furman, 1999). The transpersonal perspective does not advocate for the abandonment of sense of self. A strong true self, unfettered by the limitations of social conventions and conformity, is necessary for relationship to others and the world. However, this is not the pinnacle of growth and health. The self can then be explored and developed in the context of the larger, ultimate reality. The sense of self may be expanded to include others and the world, the alienation of self may be transcended and relationship with the divine or sacred enhanced, or the separation of self may be seen to be mere illusion and unitary consciousness achieved (Daniels, 2001; Canda & Furman, 1999; Robbins et al., 1998).
The vision of either relationship or communion with the ultimate reality will depend upon the sectarian beliefs of the theorist, researcher, clinician, or client.

The transpersonal perspective is deeply concerned with issues of social justice. A transpersonal approach recognizes the impact of social and economic environments on the ability of people to seek optimal spiritual growth and health. Transpersonal social workers advocate for all people to have adequate and equitable access to resources that support development (Canda & Furman, 1999). Empowerment, the process of taking responsibility for creating meaning and taking action leading to growth, occurs in the spiritual dimension. The transpersonal social worker encourages clients to take self-initiative, challenge social conditioning and conformity, and explore their spirituality and expand their consciousness (Canda & Furman, 1999). Clients are encouraged to create loving, just, and compassionate relationships among others. The imperative for caring relationships is increased within the transpersonal perspective because of the connection between all people through the process of self-transcendence and/or unitary consciousness⁴ (Robbins et al., 1998). Transcendence of self highlights the deep interconnectedness of everything. Individual fulfillment is linked to global harmony. There is equity and justice for none until there is equity and justice for all. The macro practice goal of transpersonal social work is creation of “global conditions of justice and bioecological balance that sustain and support everyone’s spiritual development” (Robbins et al., 1998, p. 385).

Transpersonal social workers engage in holistic practice, incorporating a bio-pyscho-social-spiritual perspective (Robbins et al., 1998). Transpersonal clinical practice demands establishing assessment standards that acknowledge the range of diversity in

⁴ The concept of unitary consciousness is a sectarian belief with origins in Eastern philosophy and religion that is prevalent in the transpersonal perspective.
spiritual expression and transpersonal experiences (Canda, as cited in Robbins et al., 1998). Additions to the conventional skill base of social work are required, including: "openness to transpersonal realms of experience that are healing and transformative; sensitivity to the sacred; knowledgeable and respectful of diverse spiritual paths; and actively engaged in spiritual growth" (Robbins et al., 1998). Assessment tools and standards must be developed that distinguish between transpersonal experiences and periods of spiritual crises linked to transpersonal growth, and mental illness (Robbins et al., 1998). Helping professionals must have the skills and tools to distinguish between "authentic spiritual experience" and abnormal or pathological states (West, 2000). The list of clinical skills and techniques that may be utilized in transpersonal social work include: paradoxical therapy, reality therapy, rational emotive therapy, psychodrama, holistic body therapies, relaxation and breathing methods, meditation, yoga, guided visualization and healing imagery, therapeutic use of symbolism and ritual, biofeedback, self-reflexive journalizing, and art and music therapies. The religious or spiritual symbols, rituals, healing practices and community supports from within the client's particular religious/spiritual tradition can also be used (Canda & Furman, 1999; Robbins et al., 1998).

The general transpersonal perspective, rather than a particular theory, was utilized within this research. The current research data did not require the framework of a specific theory. The more general transpersonal perspective sufficiently framed discourse around issues of spirituality for consideration of the data. The vast majority of specific theories and models that have been developed within the transpersonal movement deal with the development of spiritual consciousness and as such were not appropriate for this specific research data.
One of the key figures in the transpersonal movement is Ken Wilber. Wilber has developed a refined spectrum model of human development that reflects a process of evolution of individuals and the human species as a whole (Besthorn, 2001; Canda & Furman, 1999; Robbins et al., 1998). Wilber proposes that humans are evolving in the areas of cognitive capacities, world views, spirituality and social organization and this will culminate in a state of unitary consciousness for all humanity (Robbins et al., 1998; Besthorn, 2001). Individual development occurs through increasingly more complex, comprehensive stages of consciousness. Individuals are able to incorporate more aspects of reality and more modes of functioning at each level. In the later levels of development, a person experiences trans-egoic stages in which the space-time limits and ego boundary begin to dissolve. The final trans-egoic stage is called the nondual. This is a state of consciousness in which perceived separations and distinctions have been transcended and there is a oneness with all (Besthorn, 2001; Canda And Furman, 1999; Robbins et al., 1998).

Another influential transpersonal theorist, Michael Washburn, is critical of Wilber's theory. Washburn has developed his own theoretical model that conflicts with Wilber's underlying assumptions. Washburn believes human consciousness begins in an original state of pre-differentiated ultimate unity, then moves through a rational mental-ego state that involves separation and distinction from the unity, and finally reunites with the ultimate when the dualism of egoic self is reconciled and resolved (Goddard, 2003). Goddard (2003) discusses the fundamental difference between these models with reference to two guiding narratives common to Western society, the story of progress and the story of the fall. Wilber portrays human consciousness on the path of a progressive advance toward enlightenment. Washburn's model is the story of the fall.
Human consciousness has fallen from a state of unity to division and separation and must move beyond the egoic differentiation to reconnect with the ultimate unity.

The conflict between these two theories highlights the greatest weakness and difficulty within transpersonal grand theory - lack of verification. The concepts proposed in each model are highly abstract and cannot be empirically verified through evidence so neither theorist can "prove" his model to the other. Wilber and Washburn have both created grand theories based on absolutism in the tradition of the modern, scientific paradigm but they cannot be subjected to the verification criteria and tests of empiricism (Goddard, 2003; Canda & Furman, 1999; Robbins et al., 1998). This is a return to the concern expressed by Daniels (2001) regarding the admittance of a non-verifiable metaphysical universal into transpersonal theory.

There are other weaknesses as well in current transpersonal theories. The theories are oversimplified and standardized. Particular and unique experiences and paths of individuals are not accommodated. Critics have argued that the theories are unable to address the diversity of gender, culture, religion/spirituality, sexual orientation, and cognitive abilities and that inherent religious and cultural assumptions are evident in the theories (Daniels, 2001; Canda & Furman, 1999; Robbins et al., 1998). The developmental theories and models reflect the standards of the theorist's own historical and cultural context (Daniels, 2001; Canda, as cited in Robbins et al., 1998). The reliance of the theories and models on linear development would make their application to cultural or spiritual/religious worldviews that do not adhere to a linear conceptualization of time and development inappropriate (Robbins et al., 1998). Wilber's theory can create hierarchies among world religious/spiritual belief systems by positioning them at differing stages of development within the model. For example, Wilber's model would place Buddhism as a more advanced expression of spirituality.
than a monotheistic faith such as Christianity, but would place Christianity as more advanced than shamanistic forms of spirituality and Neo-Paganism (Robbins et al., 1998). Daniels (201) criticizes Wilber for his attempt to position the sectarian Buddhist belief of unitary consciousness as a universal metaphysical reality without any recognition of his own bias. Ferror (2001) comments on this weakness of grand theories.

But the modern spell upon our endeavors is not yet fully exorcised. It persists, for example, in the current prevalence of universalist models to account for spiritual diversity. In a way, most transpersonal perennialist models can be understood as a combination of the abstract universalism of the Western Enlightenment project and a decontextualized Eastern mysticism. Despite their supposedly inclusivist stance, most of the universalist visions in the modern West are reductionistic in that they tend to privilege certain spiritual traditions over others, subverting their explicit intentions of "honoring all truths," and often resulting in an oversimplification, distortion, or limitation of the vast and rich possibilities for the flourishing of the human spirit (p. 3).

Canda and Furman (1999) discuss the potential of transpersonal theories and models to limit a clinician's view. Theory frames our perception of the client, or in the case of this research, the participant. The unique story of each client can get lost in a refined theory or model. "Instead of listening carefully for the particular themes, plots, sequences of events, and interpretations within the client's life story, we may be listening to our internal dialogue based on our own ideal version of a life story" (Canda & Furman, 1999, p.231). This point is important for this research since given the prescriptive, normative nature of the theories and models, there is a risk of judging the 'advancement' of spiritual expression and development of participants based on their responses. This conflicts with the purpose of this research, which is to understand the unique spiritual path of each client.

This paper employs a theoretic lens which includes the transpersonal perspective but does not rely on one particular transpersonal theory or model to partially escape the
above mentioned weaknesses and limitations of the theories and models. However, the very application of the transpersonal perspective, as described within this paper, does incorporate concepts that cannot be tested or verified, the existence of an ultimate reality and the possibility of transcending the subjective existence.

2.3 The Strengths Perspective

The strengths perspective emerged in the 1980’s to challenge conventional social work practice, which emphasized disease, dysfunction and deficit, and to offer an alternative orientation to theory and practice. An emphasis on deficiencies and defects of the client limits the expectations the client and social worker have regarding the outcome of the helping relationship (Goldstein, 2002). The strengths perspective focuses on capabilities, possibilities and solutions (Saleebey, 2002; Schriver, 2001). Client self determination and client responsibility in the search to find forces that can enhance their possibilities and life functioning is central to the strengths perspective. Clients are positioned as the experts in the helping relationship. The meaning they construct in their lives is respected and privileged within the helping context (Saleebey, 2002). The helping relationship centers on the client-determined goals, values, and commitments. Clients are assisted in identifying and applying their strengths in order to solve or resolve the current problems or needs (Shriver, 2001). Clients can then apply their knowledge and skill to identify, access, and utilize strengths in future situations (McQuaide & Ehrenreich, 1997). An empowered client takes control in their life by employing, and expanding, their strengths, assets and resources.

1. Every individual, family, group and community has strengths. Strengths are often developed when facing challenge and adversity so clients that have experienced difficult situations in their past may have developed a number of strengths that can be called upon in the present circumstances.

2. The initial focus of the helping relationship is on the client's strengths, interests, abilities, knowledge, and capabilities. The client provides the information about their strengths by telling their story in their words with their meaning. The client's reality guides the helping relationship. The client is seen in their entirety, not just as a diagnostic label or victim.

3. The helping relationship is one of collaboration, mutuality and partnership. The relationship is transformed from the conventional expert's "power over" to one of "power with" a client. This requires a social worker to see the client as an equal, to allow for client-determined goals, and to encourage co-responsibility within the relationship.

4. Each person is responsible for his or her own decisions and actions.

5. All people have the inherent capacity to learn, grow, and change. It is important that helping professionals not assume they know the highest potential of a client as they may be underestimating a client's capacity.

6. Helping activities should take place in naturally occurring settings in the community. Helping professionals should meet with clients in their communities.

7. The community contains a multitude of resources for individuals. Helping professionals should assist clients to identify and access resources in the community. Naturally occurring resources should be considered first before segregated or formal resources such as mental health or social services.
Strengths are the forces that enhance human possibilities (Saleebey, 2002b). Goldstein (2002) refers to strengths as that which are “energized in response to the travails of living.” Strengths cannot be understood to be absolutes. They are dependent upon the situation in which they exist (Saleebey, 2002; McQuaide & Ehrenreich, 1997). A skill, a strategy, or a resource that leads to adaptation and enhancement in one situation may not do so in another (McQuaide & Ehrenreich, 1997). Certain capacities, resources and assets are commonly noted as strengths and these are: knowledge about self and the world; personal qualities, traits and virtues such as humor, caring, creativity, and independence; talents; cultural narratives; pride; community; resiliency; and spirituality (Saleebey, 2002). Saleebey (2002) identifies spirituality constituting a strength through four major functions: providing comfort and relief in the face of challenge and stress; construction of meaning for life and situations that offers support and encouragement; providing a community of support and resources; and facilitating relationship with the ultimate or the sacred or divine.

Resiliency is intimately related to the strengths perspective. Resiliency is the ability to adapt to adverse circumstances in order to achieve positive outcomes (Norman, 2000; Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999). Resiliency is enhanced by a number of factors, some of which are personality characteristics and others are environmental protective factors (Norman, 2000). The ability to be resilient is, in itself, a strength. The factors that enhance resiliency are also strengths in that they contribute to resiliency. Several factors that enhance resiliency are associated with spirituality, such as self-efficacy, sense of direction or mission, and positive caring relationships (Norman, 2000).

There has been growing interest in spirituality and health. This has been the most prominent area of research applying the strengths perspective to the consideration of spirituality. The insights emerging from this area of inquiry can inform general
application of a strengths perspective to spirituality. Research exploring the connection between religion and spirituality and health has been conducted in several fields including sociology, health education, gerontology, nursing, psychiatry, psychology and social work (Ellison & Levin, 1998). Research indicates that religion and spirituality have a positive effect on encouraging healthy behaviours, preventing illness, and benefiting recovery (Benn, 2001; Ellison & Levin, 1998). Numerous studies report significant relationships between religion and the reduced risk of various physical conditions, including coronary disease and heart attacks, emphysema, cirrhosis and other kinds of liver disease, hypertension and disability (Mueller, Plevak, Rummans, 2001; George, Larsons, Koeing & McCullough, 2000). Religion was also found to be associated with increased longevity (Mueller et al., 2001; George et al., 2000). Better recovery from physical illness was also associated with religious involvement (Mueller et al., 2001; George et al., 2000). Research also indicates that religion is related to the prevention of mental illness, specifically anxiety disorders and depression, and substance abuse. Spirituality is also associated with recovery, and faster recovery, from mental illness and substance abuse (Mueller et al., 2001; Hodge, Cardenas, & Modntoya, 2001; George et al., 2000; Miller, 1998). Religion and spirituality have been correlated with decreased likelihood of suicide and decreased suicidal ideation (Mueller et al., 2001).

Strengths can be drawn from the cognitive, behavioural, social and transcendent dimensions of an individual's spirituality. The following specific functions of spirituality and religion, drawn from all the dimensions, have been suggested to have beneficial effects on health though provision of tangible and intangible resources, fostering resiliency and coping, and facilitating connection with the sacred or divine.
Membership in communities and social networks

Social contact is essential to quality of life and promotes health (Benn, 2001). Public religious or spiritual participation provides an opportunity to develop close social bonds outside of family, through which socioemotional support can be accessed (Van Hook & Aguilar, 2001; Ellison & Levin, 1998). People with high levels of public religious involvement report larger social networks and more interactions with those in the networks than non-religious people (George et al., 2000; Ellison & Levin, 1998).

Social networks that care for the sick

Religious/spiritual beliefs may encourage communities to support those in physical or emotional need. Provision of support may be an explicit part of a religious/spiritual organization's mandate (George et al., 2000). A higher quality of life and better treatment outcomes were demonstrated when people had a strong social network that offered support and care around their health concerns (Benn, 2001). People with high levels of public religious participation report receiving more assistance from others and higher levels of satisfaction with their social support than non-religious people (George et al., 2000).

Avoidance of high risk behaviour based on moral principles

Many religious/spiritual traditions have beliefs that discourage behaviour that would have negative health effects and encourage behaviour that benefits health (Benn, 2001; Van Hook & Aguilar, 2001). Wallace and Forman (1998) investigated the relationship between religion and a broad range of health behaviours among American adolescents. They found a negative correlation between religion and engagement in high-risk health behaviours and a positive correlation between religion and engagement in behaviours that promote health. They attribute this correlation to the socialization that occurs within faith traditions around health related behaviours. Spirituality was
found, among an adolescent sample, to be associated with a lower likelihood of voluntary sexual activity, which reduced exposure to health risks related to pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (Holder, Durant, Harris, Daniel, Obeidallah & Goodman, 2000).

Worship, rituals, and practices

The symbols, rituals, and practices of religious/spiritual traditions provide a feeling of wellbeing and familiarity that leads to relaxation and decreased stress (Benn, 2001; Van Hook & Aguilar, 2001). Prayer and mediation lead to a reduction of blood pressure and heart rate, reduced excretion of adrenaline, and relaxation of the sympathetic nervous system. Also both are effective in the reduction of muscle tension and chronic pain (Benn, 2001; Dull & Skokan, 1995). Rituals and practices may be used in an attempt to change a course of events or alter personal reaction to a course of events. This sense of control can then lessen the degree of stress resulting from the situation (Van Hook, 2001; Dull & Skokan, 1995).

Meaning in life

Religion and spirituality benefit health by creating a sense of meaning regarding the purpose of life and an individual's role in world (Van Hook & Aguilar, 2001; George et al., 2000). A sense of ultimate meaning provides courage, will and motivation to face the challenges of life (Benn, 2001; Frankl, 1984; Frankl, 1878). Also religious/spiritual views help shape the meaning of each moment. The interpretation provided for an event can help an individual persevere to overcome suffering, sorrow, and problems or challenges (Van Hook & Aguilar, 2001; Dull & Skokan, 1995; Frankl, 1984; Frankl, 1978). More than twelve studies have found alcohol/drug abuse is associated with a lack of sense of meaning in life (Miller, 1998).
Promotion of self-esteem and positive self-evaluation

Self-esteem is associated with increased health (Ellison & Levin, 1998). Religious/spiritual beliefs upholding the inherent value of each person can foster self-esteem (Hodge et al., 2001; Ellison & Levin, 1998). As well, the perception of acceptance and love from the sacred or divine can enhance self-esteem (Ellison & Levin, 1998). African American participants in Haight’s (1998) research identified that the acceptance and love of God helped to prevent the internalization of rejection and oppression experienced in a racist society.

Facilitation of connection/communion with the sacred or divine

Those with a religious or spiritual worldview would assert strength is found in connection or communion with the sacred or divine. The ultimate or the sacred or divine, however conceptualized and experienced, is a source from which strength, healing, and life can be drawn (Van Hook & Aguilar, 2001). Ellison & Levinson (1998) note that research is beginning to explore less traditional hypothesis to account for the benefits of spirituality including the operation of subtle bioenergies, morphenetic fields, psi effect, nonlocal consciousness and “divine” or supernatural influences. Haight (1998) postulates that resiliency is strengthened for African Americans through their connection with a higher force. Robbins et al. (1998) identify the social activists Mohandas Gandhi and Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. as individuals who attributed the power to sustain action and change as coming from a universal or divine source.

The discussion of spirituality in the context of the strengths perspective frames spiritual and religious worldviews as sources of strength and resiliency. It needs to be noted that spiritual and religious worldviews and traditions can also be a source of oppression, maladaptive coping strategies, and psychological distress for individuals and communities. Spiritual or religious traditions with a restrictive focus and
condemning deities can create social, emotional and psychological distress for adherents and prevent personal growth (Miller, 1999). For example, certain religious faiths contain condemning and oppressive beliefs regarding homosexuality, which can cause guilt and shame for gay and lesbian adherents and lead to repression of personal expression and growth (Gotterer, 2001). On a macro, global level, spiritual and religious traditions have fostered beliefs and actions encouraging discord and violence. Certain sectarian beliefs and the claim of exclusive access to divine truth can foster in group/out group prejudice and discrimination. Wars and persecution have been based on or ascribed to differences in spiritual/religious worldviews (Hinde, 1999). The focus of some religious/spiritual traditions on “otherworldly” concerns discourages the involvement of adherents in social change for this earthly existence. Social workers need to be aware that a client’s spiritual and religious worldview can be shaping negative and maladaptive perceptions and behaviours as well as positive and life affirming perceptions and behaviours.

2.4 Spiritually Sensitive Social Work

The skills and competencies needed for cross cultural practice are similar to those needed for spiritually sensitive social work. Spiritual/religious worldviews may be a part of a cultural tradition or may be distinct from the client’s cultural context. Regardless, both culture and spirituality shape the meaning created in life and the actions taken. The general principles of culturally competent practice can be applied to spirituality. Canda and Furman (1999) highlight that “competent practice involves more than mere tolerance of diversity. It encompasses active appreciation for diversity” (p. 283).
Several writers in the area of social work and spirituality have identified values, skills and tools necessary for competent spiritually sensitive practice.

1. Provision of a receptive, respectful and supportive environment for exploration of diverse spiritual/religious perspectives and experiences (Edwards, 2002; Richards & Bergin, 2000; Cascio, 1998). A social worker does not need to share a client’s spiritual/religious worldview in order to provide spiritually competent practice but they must be willing to respectfully acknowledge the validity of the worldview and be open to the meanings it provides to the client’s life (Hugen, 2001a).

2. Self-awareness and self-reflection by the practitioner regarding their own spiritual orientation. An understanding of beliefs, biases, or prejudices concerning spirituality and religion is needed to avoid being ineffectual or even harmful to clients. A spiritual bias can be just as harmful as a racist or sexist bias (Sermabeikian, 1994). The worker’s awareness and level of comfort with their own spirituality can enhance their openness to the spiritual issues, experiences and beliefs of clients. There may even be some clients that, due to preexisting beliefs or biases, the practitioner does not choose to work with due to the risk of ineffectuality (Richards & Bergin, 2000; West, 2000; Cascio, 1998).

3. General knowledge of the client’s specific religious/spiritual tradition, beliefs and practices. This includes being aware of resources in the spiritual/religious community for referral (Van Hook et al., 2001; Richards & Bergin, 2000; Canda and Furman, 1999)

4. Respecting and honouring the client’s unique spiritual/religious perspective. Building upon the principles of the transpersonal and strengths perspectives, the client’s own unique worldview should be paramount in the social work relationship (Canda & Furman, 1999). In the case of spirituality, clarity regarding the client’s particular
spiritual perspective is necessary as there can be great variance and diversity in worldviews even among adherents to the same religion or spirituality (Richards & Bergin, 2000; Pellebon et al., 1999).

5. Spiritually sensitive assessment and intervention skills and tools (Derezotes, 1995).

Sensitive assessments allow for a greater understanding of the client’s spiritual perspective (Richards & Bergin, 2000). Assessment tools are needed that differentiate between mental illness and spiritual experiences, spiritual crises, and spiritual emergencies (i.e. peak experiences, near-death experiences, past-life experiences, communicating with spirit guides and shamanic crises) (Sperry, 2001). Baskin (2002) notes that clients are fearful to discuss spiritual experiences or spiritual emergencies with helping professionals in case they are mistaken for mental illness. Skilled assessments are needed that can differentiate between healthy and harmful expressions of spirituality. Harmful expressions of spirituality would include maladaptive religious/spiritual coping and organizational culture of a religion/spirituality that is overly controlling (Pargament, 1997; Lewandowski & Canda, 1995). It is effective to use spiritual interventions that are harmonious with the client’s spiritual perspective when appropriate (Richards & Bergin, 2000).

The influence of both the strengths perspective and the transpersonal perspective is evident in the conceptualization of spiritually sensitive social work. The spiritual dimension is approached as a source of great strength. There is acknowledgement of the role of spirituality in creating meaning, purpose and values; facilitating relationships with self, others, the world, and the ultimate reality; informing behaviours; and providing a community. Spiritually sensitive social work recognizes the potential for spiritual growth through transcendent and transpersonal experiences.
Canda and Furman (1999) investigated the conceptualizations of spirituality in social work and other disciplines and identified these interrelated categories of manifestations of spirituality:

**Spiritual Drives**

Humans experience spiritual drives to encounter the world in meaningful ways. It is human nature to search for the ontological significance, meaning and purpose of life.

**Spiritual Experiences**

Spiritual drives motivate humans to experience the world in a spiritual sense. Spiritual experiences may be found in the mundane or the profound, depending on the experiencer's interpretation of the encounter. Spiritual experiences can range from truly being-in-the-moment to experiences of a connection with a personal God or Goddess.

**Function of Spirituality**

**Perceiving** The drive for spiritual experiences engage all human faculties and capabilities including those faculties of perception that enable people to experience the transcendence of the limits of ego-self, time and space to encounter the ultimate or absolute.

**Interpreting** The drive for meaning engages abilities to create myths, stories and symbols to represent the spiritual search for meaning. Interpretation leads to the establishment of goals, values, and systems for moral and ethical decision making. These then become contents of the spiritual perspective.

**Relating** Humans are driven to engage in relationship with self, others, the world and the ultimate reality, however it is understood. We nourish our spiritual development and transformation through relating. Strategies of intra, inter and transpersonal relating become established.

**Spiritual Development**
Inherent human creativity and resourcefulness propels development that requires expansion of frameworks of spiritual meaning. The goal of development and expansion is integration of experiences into a holistic sense of self in fulfilling relationships with others and the ultimate reality.

**Contents of an Individual's or Group's Perspective**

Spiritual experiences, functions and development form individual or group spiritual perspectives. Specific spiritual experiences are interpreted and become beliefs about the self, the world, and the nature of the ultimate reality. This spiritual worldview changes in response to new experiences and resulting insights about self and the world. There is a dynamic relationship between the contents of the spiritual perspective and the functions of spirituality. The functions are informed and guided by the established spiritual worldview as well as impacting upon them.

The above discussion of the manifestations of spirituality in life highlights how the reintroduction of spirituality to social work is essential. Spirituality is both the essence of a person and an integral part of their life. The spiritual perspective is the lens through which the experiences and perceptions of the world are filtered. The spiritual worldview creates the meaning and purpose of life, the meaning of moments, prescribes behaviours, and facilitates relationships. Spirituality and the spiritual/religious community is a wealth of strength from which tangible and intangible resources can be drawn and coping mobilized. Spirituality, as essence and as a dimension, enables, vitalizes and motivates change and growth. Spirituality needs to be considered in the helping relationship whether the client is an individual, family, group or community (Ver Beek, 2000; Pellebon et al., 1999). Van Beek (2000) notes that spirituality is a powerful force in shaping a community's decisions and actions and can give the community a sense of power and hope. Spirituality will inform the values and goals of the client thus
impacting upon the desired outcome within the helping relationship. Sensitivity to spirituality is needed for genuine client centered practice and for a client-determined focus. Spiritually sensitive social work practice does not make clear differentiation between micro and macro practice goals. Individual fulfillment through the realization of optimal health and wholeness is intimately linked to our connection with others and the universe (Canda, 2001). Spiritually sensitive social workers are guided by transpersonal awareness to advocate for mutual responsibility among people to create global justice (Canda, 2001).

2.5 The Current Research Project

This current research project explored the Pagan worldview in relationship to spiritually sensitive social work through the theoretical lens of the strengths perspective and the transpersonal perspective. Atlantic Canadian Pagans were asked to provide descriptions of their experiences and perceptions within a qualitative questionnaire. This exploration of the Pagan path had a threefold purpose:

1. Identify key beliefs, practices and core issues of the Pagan worldview necessary for the provision of spiritually sensitive social work practice with Pagan clients. This information can then inform spiritually sensitive practice with Pagan clients. Knowledge of core spiritual and religious beliefs and practices is necessary to understand how they influence the meaning constructed by a client about themselves, others, the world and the cosmos. These meanings shape clients’ perceptions, behaviour, and lives (Hugen, 2001a)

2. Examine insights the Pagan worldview can offer to enrich the profession of social work. Exclusive reliance on the scientific method and the medical model is no
longer satisfactory within the profession of social work. Social work professions are beginning to incorporate multidisciplinary and multicultural viewpoints to expand the perspective of the profession (Besthorn, 2001; Koenig and Spano, 1998; Voss, Douville, Little Soldier & Twiss, 1999). Paganism exists outside conventional Western philosophy and thought so it can be a source of refreshing and innovative insights.

3. *Through the previous two goals, contribute to the growing body of knowledge about spiritually sensitive social work.*
CHAPTER III  METHOD

3.0 Design

A qualitative method was employed in this research to search for an understanding of how the participants constructed meaning in their lives. The study was being conducted to develop an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of Atlantic Canadian Pagans. A phenomenological perspective was adopted for the project, focusing on the participants' feelings, perceptions, and meanings. This study gathered descriptive data from the participants about their experiences and perceptions. This study differed from the average phenomenological research since it did not have a single definable experience or event, such as “death of a loved one”, “the experience of loneliness” or “the emotional effect of laughter”, as its subject. Rather, it explored a compilation of related experiences and perceptions of being Pagan in Atlantic Canada. Despite this difference, a phenomenological approach still proved useful for analysis of the data. The study focused on how participants themselves defined and perceived themselves, their faith, their actions, and their expectations. As each question focussed on a separate experience or a unique element of an experience, each question was analyzed and reported upon separately. All questions received phenomenological analysis except those that gathered sociodemographic information. The sociodemographic data was statistically analyzed and reported as descriptive statistics.

The most difficult decision within the design of this project was determining the specific phenomenological method of analysis to be used with the data. Researchers have introduced numerous specific methods consisting of structured steps. Upon review of several of the methods available to researchers, I chose to create from some
of these existing methods, a generic or eclectic phenomenological method of data analysis that is described in the ‘Data Analysis’ section.

Criteria for determining the adequacy and rigor of research methods are important to qualitative research as well as quantitative research. The criteria in quantitative research, reliability and validity are widely known by any researcher. Both have associated concepts in qualitative research. Reliability in quantitative research refers to the scientific trustworthiness, consistency and stability of a method (Bloom & Fischer, 1982). Essentially, reliability is the repeatability of a study. The same conditions should produce the same results. Qualitative research is context based in that it values the particular and the local. There is no claim that a different population or even the same participants at a different time in their lives would produce similar raw data. Auditability is discussed in qualitative research rather than reliability. Strong auditability exists when the trail of decisions made by the researcher throughout the research is clear. It also involves other people being able to follow this trail and arrive at comparable conclusions (Davis, 1997). Auditability is achieved by clarifying researcher motivation and bias, and detailing research methods and analysis procedures (Davis, 1997). I have attempted to be as transparent around motivation, bias and procedures as possible in this research paper. Auditability can be assured through the cross checking of work by research team members or through review by outside evaluators as the research progresses (Schriver, 2001). Neither of these tests for auditability was conducted during this research since there was a research team of one and confidentiality concerns prevented the sharing of raw data.

The rigour and adequacy of quantitative research is also judged by the criteria of validity, both internal and external validity. Internal validity is the appropriateness and accuracy of the method and measures in relation to the intent of the research. External
validity is the generalizability of the findings (Davis, 1997). In qualitative research, credibility and fittingness are parallel criteria. Credibility refers to the “truth” of the findings (Schriver, 2001). High credibility is possible only when the descriptions and interpretations developed through the research process have remained true to the data provided by participants (Davis, 1997). Credibility requires the consideration of typical and atypical elements of the data in descriptions or findings (Davis, 1997). This research created themes for all data and explored diverging perspectives. The test of credibility for this research occurred when tentative findings were presented to an Atlantic Canadian audience during a workshop at the Avalon East Pagan Gathering. This audience, many of whom may have been research participants, were able to determine if I had stayed “true” to the raw data. Fittingness refers to the findings being applicable to another context and other persons. Schriver (2001) suggests that the test for fittingness is to ask the potential audience to whom you would be applying the generalizations emerging from research to if the research findings are applicable to them. As I have indicated previously in this paper, this research does not express the entire diversity of Paganism and its generalizability is limited. Each social worker approaching a Pagan client, or a client of any spiritual/religious tradition, needs to engage in dialogue with the client in order to gain an understanding of that person’s unique experience of their spirituality and/or religion.

3.1 Sample

The sample population consisted of adult Pagans, 19 years of age or older, in Atlantic Canada. Atlantic Canada is comprised of the provinces of New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador. Students
originating from a province outside the Atlantic region but attending an Atlantic Canadian university were included in this study. Students would have spent the majority of the past year within Atlantic Canada and they would have had an opportunity to become part of a Pagan community at their Atlantic university.

Participants were recruited for the study through snowball sampling. I contacted Pagan personal acquaintances. These acquaintances were asked if they wished to participate in the research. They were also asked to provide introduction to other persons and/or Pagan associations and networks through which further potential participants could be identified. Some potential participants in introductory discussion of the research asked if I was Pagan. It appeared that being Pagan provided me with more credibility and engendered a greater sense of trust with potential participants. Through this network of contacts, 68 questionnaires were distributed within the sample population, with 35 distributed in New Brunswick, 23 in Nova Scotia, 5 in Prince Edward Island and 5 in Newfoundland and Labrador. 19 questionnaires were returned resulting in a 27.9% response rate. It needs to be noted that I was informed at the beginning of August that 20 questionnaires, Express mailed together to one address and to be distributed throughout a community, arrived too late to be completed by the requested return date. All 20 questionnaires had been sent to New Brunswick. Only 48 questionnaires were distributed to participants in time to actually be completed and returned by the requested return date. Only 15 questionnaires which could be completed and returned by the requested return date were distributed in New Brunswick. Taking this into account, the return rate is then 39.6%. In retrospect, I realize that a mailed out follow-up reminder to participants may have increased the return rate. Unfortunately, a design flaw within the study was a short time line between distribution of questionnaires and beginning of final analysis, which did not allow time for
a second mail out. A sociodemographic description of the sample population can be found within the 'Findings' and 'Discussion' chapters.

3.2 Questionnaire Construction

I designed the questionnaire used within the study. The Behavioural Research Ethics Board, Office of Research Services and Administration of the University of British Columbia approved the questionnaire for distribution to participants. A sample of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix II.

A questionnaire was employed within this study for a variety of reasons. With only a single researcher and time constraints, a questionnaire allowed for a larger sample to be collected as opposed to an interview study. The interaction with participants in an interview setting may have encouraged deeper, more detailed responses. However, it is possible that the anonymity of the questionnaire encouraged people to be more open in the sharing of their thoughts and experiences. As well, the questionnaire format allowed participants to give lengthy consideration to the responses they wished to provide. Given the complexity of many of the questions, such as the self definition of spirituality and religion, greater articulation within responses may have been possible because of the time and opportunity for reflection.

I developed a first draft of the covering letter and questionnaire. Phrasing in both the questionnaire and covering letter was carefully considered. Since Paganism is comprised of many different spiritual/religious traditions, an attempt was made to use language that would be inclusive of all possible Pagan perspectives. An effort was made to create questions that provided minimum structure but still elicited substantial depth in the responses. The first draft was circulated among four Pagan acquaintances
and three non-Pagan acquaintances for review of phrasing and clarity of questions. Minor revisions were made and the final form of the questionnaire was pre-tested with three Pagan acquaintances. All three felt the phrasing was clear and that the questionnaire could be completed in a reasonable time.

The final version of the questionnaire consisted of a small number of sociodemographic questions and several open ended qualitative questions. The questionnaire was comprised of seven sections, which follow:

**Sociodemographic Information**

Participants were asked age, gender, race/ethnicity, occupation, and years identifying as Pagan. This section was included to offer a view of the diversity within the Pagan community. It also provides a test of whether snowball sampling did result in diversity among participants.

**Spirituality and Religion**

Participants were asked to define spirituality and religion. These definitions are compared, in the ‘Discussion’ chapter, to the definitions of spirituality and religion developed for this paper. Participants were also asked if they considered themselves spiritual and/or religious and what names or labels they applied to their spirituality and/or religion. They were asked about past spiritualities or religions they may have identified with. All of these questions examined the spiritual/religious identities of Pagans and the diversity possible within the larger label of Paganism. These questions attempted to clarify meaning of the words used within the discussion of Pagan spirituality. This need for clarification is necessary since identifying words or labels can carry different meaning for different people and in different contexts.

Participants were also questioned in this section regarding their openness with disclosure of their spirituality and/or religion with family, friends or coworkers. This
question was included to collect participants' experiences and perceptions around disclosure of their faith. Fear or discomfort around spiritual/religious disclosure has been reported by Pagans in other literature and research. This fear or discomfort could have a significant effect within a social work relationship.

Path to Paganism

Participants were asked to describe what attracted them to, drew them to, or called them to Paganism. If raised Pagan, they were asked what in the belief system or community maintained their participation. This question explored how Pagans perceive the value of Paganism in their lives and for their construction of meaning.

Pagan Community

Participants were asked if they felt part of a Pagan community and were asked to identify the support and resources the community offered them. These questions gathered data that provided a picture of how the participants define and experience Pagan communities. The highlighting of supports and resources allowed for a consideration of the strengths that can be drawn from Pagan communities.

Pagan Beliefs and Practices

Two questions were asked of participants. The first was, "What do you feel a social worker would need to know about your spiritual/religious beliefs in order to work sensitively and competently with you? For this question, you may wish to include information about the nature of the divine or sacred, human nature, the meaning/purpose of life, the process of death and/or anything else you feel is relevant?" The second was, "What do you feel a social worker would need to know about your spiritual/religious practices (for example meditation, yoga, and rituals) in order to work sensitively and competently with you?" You may wish to describe the practices, comment on their intended purposes, discuss their effect in your life and/or anything else
you feel is relevant." These questions collected descriptions of the key beliefs and practices of participants' traditions that they identified as necessary to understand in order for a social worker to provide spiritually sensitive social work service.

**Social Workers and Pagan Clients**

Participants were asked if they had ever been a client of a social worker and if the service had been spiritually sensitive. They were also asked if they would anticipate spiritually sensitive service from a social worker in a mainstream institution or agency. They were asked to explain how this expectation would affect the likelihood of them requesting or accepting service. This was an exploration of how Pagan participants had experienced previous service, how they envisioned potential social work service, and how this affected their likelihood to request or accept service.

**Additional Comments**

Participants were given space to provide any additional comments they felt would contribute to the research project. The participants were given the opportunity to step out of the structure imposed by the previous questions and contribute any information they felt would enrich the research findings.

**3.3 Data Collection**

I contacted the first few potential participants in person or by email. They were informed of the research project and asked if they would like to participate. Those accepting the invitation to participate in the research were hand delivered or mailed out a research package. It was also requested that they inform other Pagans about the project, including how to contact me. Many participants were recruited using this networking. And, in fact, some participants asked for multiple research packages so
that they could themselves distribute the packages to acquaintances that wished to participate. Questionnaires were distributed during the last two weeks in June and the first week in July 2003.

In total, 68 research packages were distributed. All participants received a similar research package, which included a covering letter, a questionnaire, a self addressed stamped envelope for return and a small notice asking that completed questionnaires be mailed by July 7 or by July 11. The first 48 questionnaires contained a July 7 notice. A request for 20 questionnaires at the beginning of July necessitated an extension of the return date so those packages included the July 11 notice. However, I was informed during the research process that these 20 questionnaires, Express mailed together to one address to be distributed throughout a community, arrived several days later than their expected date. They arrived too late to be completed by the requested return date.

The questionnaire itself is detailed previously in the ‘Questionnaire Construction’ section and a sample can be found in Appendix II. The accompanying covering letter, a sample of which is in Appendix I, detailed the research project and discussed issues of anonymity, confidentiality and consent. Potential participants were informed that completion of the questionnaire was voluntary. Return of a completed questionnaire indicated consent for the data they provided to be used in this research paper. Confidentiality was assured to the participants as no identifying information was included on the questionnaire and no identifying information appeared in the research paper. An attempt was made to maintain anonymity for participants in the return of questionnaires. However, participants were cautioned that letter postmarks might identify them when questionnaires were returned.

It was this regard for confidentiality and anonymity that dictated the method of data collection. At the beginning of the project, I briefly considered distribution and return of
the questionnaires email. This method would have been more environmentally friendly. However, due to the privacy risks inherent in electronic communication, confidentiality could not be assured with email. As well, anonymity was threatened for participants as many participants had email addresses that would identify them when they returned the completed questionnaire. One participant did return a questionnaire by email as they preferred to type their responses and were not concerned about anonymity in the return of the questionnaire.

3.4 Data Analysis

Phenomenological analysis was performed on data from all questions, except those within the sociodemographic section. The sociodemographic data regarding age, gender and years identifying as a Pagan was statistically analyzed and reported as descriptive statistics. The data for race/ethnicity and occupation was categorized, using categories common to the reporting of such data, and then reported as descriptive statistics. The phenomenological method of analysis that was used is a composite of elements drawn from Schweitzer (1998), Giorgi (1997), and Parse et al. (1985). Analysis occurred in four stages; contemplative dwelling, organizing, interpreting, and describing. Throughout all four stages, the goal was to stay as true as possible to the meanings of the participants while providing a framework in which the raw data could be disseminated to an audience. Each of the individual qualitative questions asked of participants was analyzed separately, in the sequence in which they appeared in the questionnaire. During the review of each individual question, the responses from all the questionnaires were analyzed. Analysis occurred in the four stages as detailed below.
Contemplative dwelling

In this stage the data became known in a holistic sense. Parse et al (1985) describe contemplative dwelling as the undistracted reading of the data text in order to know the text in an "intuitive" way. "Intuiting" the data is to grasp the meaning of the lived experience intended by the participant. I entered into this process, cognizant that I could not assume that I understood the meaning intended by the participant. We could use language differently and assume different meanings from the same words or phrases. I tried to reach as complete an understanding as possible from a consideration of the entire text. After reading the text in its entirety, I then concentrated on only the response provided for the specific question being analyzed at that time.

Organizing

This stage of the process involved breaking the data down into "meaning units" (Schweitz, 1998 & Giorgi, 1997). "Meaning units" are definable, discrete segments of expression. They emerge from a slower, methodical reading of the data. Giorgi (1997) explains, "each time that the researcher experiences a transition in meaning in the description, he or she marks the place and continues to read until the next meaning unit is discriminated" (p.43). Meaning units were marked within each question. Each question was considered in sequence, independent of other questions. Giorgi (1997) also notes that these units emerge to the researcher based on the sensitivities of their particular discipline. In this study, the meaning units were constituted by the criteria of social work analysis, heavily influenced by the transpersonal perspective and the strengths perspective, which together form the theoretical lens of this paper.
Interpreting

Giorgi (1997) discusses a stage in data analysis when the disciplinary value of each meaning unit is made more explicit by description, which is discipline specific. The subjects' everyday language becomes transformed into language relevant to the specific discipline. Within this current method, this stage is called interpreting, as the data was interpreted within the framework of social work theories and categorized by appropriate labels. I reviewed the meaning units and applied a label that contained meaning from a social work perspective, or at least this social worker's perspective. At this stage, the actual language of the participants was subsumed by the categories I assigned based on my interpretation of the meaning units. Their voices do resurface in the research, however, in a later step.

Describing

The title reflects the purpose of this stage of the analysis. This is the stage where a description of the experience is developed by identifying themes emerging from the categories, and identifying patterns that may exist among the themes. The purpose of this research project was to highlight both shared experiences and also diversity within Paganism so all themes were explored. This study is interested in variation, not only agreement, in themes.

The themes were then the foundation of both the 'Findings' and 'Discussion' chapters. The voices of the participants are heard within the 'Findings' chapter as the themes are illustrated by the direct quotes of participants.

A presentation of the tentative findings from the research was presented to 8 Atlantic Canadian Pagans during a workshop at the Avalon East Pagan Gathering on August 10, 2003. This workshop allowed the credibility of the findings to be tested. Did Atlantic Canadian Pagans, including some whom had been research participants, feel the
findings reflected the "truth" of their experiences? Prior to consideration of the findings, the rationale and method of the study was reviewed with the audience. Discussion occurred around the definition of Paganism employed within the research paper. The workshop participants all agreed that the definition provided of Paganism was representative of their conceptualization of Paganism. Review of findings from only the first five sections of the questionnaire were possible due to the time constraints of the workshop and the length of the introductory discussion. Workshop participants also agreed that the findings were credible as they could see their experience of being Pagan represented accurately within the findings. The diversity of, and occasionally opposition among, themes was thought to accurately describe the reality within the Pagan community.
CHAPTER IV FINDINGS

The findings of the analysis of the responses from the 19 participants are presented in this chapter. Excerpts from participant responses appear single spaced in italic font. Excerpts from different participants are indicated by double line spacing.

4.0 Sociodemographic Information

Age

The youngest participant was 20 and the oldest was 67.

![Age of Participants Graph]

Gender

There were 12 female, one of whom identified as transgendered, and 7 male participants.

![Gender of Participants Graph]
Race/Ethnicity

Several participants identified ethnicity rather than race including Celtic, Irish, Scottish, and English/British. Sixteen participants could be identified as Caucasian from their responses. One participant identified as French Canadian and 1 identified as Canadian, so race could not be determined. One participant identified as Caucasian and Inuit.

Occupation

One participant did not answer this question. Some participants listed more than one occupation. Occupations were categorized.
Years Identifying as Pagan

Some participants did not provide an exact length of time they identified as Pagan but provide a time frame such as 20 plus or 60 plus years.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Years</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>50 - 59</td>
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<td>60 - 69</td>
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</tbody>
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4.1 Spirituality and Religion

Definition of Spirituality

Spirituality was conceptualized by participants as body, mind and spirit integration.

_Body is literal, spirit is figurative and mind mediates the two. Spirituality is the cultivation of all three of these planes to make an enlightened human._

Participants conceptualized spirituality as a dimension of human nature.

_For me spirituality is that part of us that feels reverence and that accepts that we are connected to something larger. That yearns to expand beyond the confines of the accepted physical realization of what we are._

Participants indicated that spirituality was individual and self constructed.

_Spirituality to me is something very personal and individual. It is an individual way of connecting to something greater than themselves, whether that be God, Goddess, the trees, the collective energy or the Universe, or whatever. Spirituality is something constant, a part of how you live your life and think about the world._
For me spirituality is strictly a personal belief structure. Individual, respective of anyone else. Basic foundations may mirror others but in a spirituality one has personal freedoms to add or delete from other faiths to create their own spirituality. Spirituality is shared on a very personal level only to yourself or with a few others as it is created mainly by you for yourself.

Participants conceptualized spirituality as beliefs, values, awareness, recognition, a search, a way of life, and cosmic karma.

...how I interact with the world and all its wonders, it's my sense of how everything is connected. It is also beliefs, values, and cosmic karma.

I think its awareness of one's own soul/self.

Awareness of what surrounds us and composes our world (Universe). A connection and interaction with our World/Nature/Life.


It is what you believe in, and how you live your life by your beliefs.

Awareness of the Spirit component or existence and reverence for the Great Spirit.

Spirituality is the awareness and belief in spirits, deities, and the forces and/or energies of nature.

Spirituality was described by participants as concerning the nature of the divine or deities. Also, spirituality was described as concerning the interconnectedness between, and relationships with, the divine, the world, others and self. This interconnectedness included responsibility to the divine, the world, others and self. Participants also described spirituality as a process of growth and progression to enlightenment.

To me, at this point in my life, I believe spirituality to be the sense of connectedness that we as individuals have to our "world" (which to me is all of creation) and our sense of responsibility to keep these connections strong.

Connection to all life – that which we can't see but which binds us, and connection to a higher power. The way in which we define and get in touch with this connection.

The way a person sees himself/herself as connected to the whole – his relationship with the larger "force."

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In my mind, spirituality is a way of life. How we choose to live our lives, how we interact with others, how we treat the Earth and how we recognize that we are part of something “greater” are important elements of my spirituality...I see being spiritual as recognizing the force that permeates all of us – a force that ties us all together into a larger source of energy. Being spiritual to me also means that we recognize the results of our actions and therefore we need to be careful about what we do – whether that is a person-to-person interaction, the manner with which we treat the Earth, etc.

**Definition of Religion**

Religion was conceptualized by participants as a structured and organized external expression of spirituality involving worship and celebration which is shared in community.

*Religion is the science and doctrinal core philosophy (oral or written) behind spirituality. One can have a spirituality without religion but cannot have a religion without a spirituality.*

Religion to me is more structured than spirituality. Religion is a set of practices and beliefs that are shared by others that identify themselves in the same religious community.

**Organized spirituality**

Groups of people who see things the same way or feel the same way about faith.

The worship of something – in my case, the sense of awe when in contact with the natural world.

A set of beliefs and rituals that an individual or group of individuals use to express and/or celebrate their spirituality.

Religion was described by participants as concerning a set of beliefs, practices and rituals, relationship with the divine or deities, transpersonal growth and development, supportive relationships between adherents, and service to others and the World.

*I think that religion is the form or vehicle which we choose as a way to express outwardly our spirituality, a way to support each other day to day, and to be active in service in other ways.*

Communing with the deities, honoring your faith, celebrating life, the Sabots, to eventually become a higher being.

A set of beliefs, maybe shared with a larger group of people.
A religion is a specific spiritual belief or beliefs.

Belief in and practice or particular rites and ceremonies related to the spiritual aspects of existence.

Participants also described the negative nature of religion within their definitions, indicating that it is an artificial contrivance, rigid and limiting, alienating, and absolves people from personal responsibility for their actions.

The biggest thing about organized religion is that it does not promote understanding, original thought and that it only allows one path.

Speaking of “mainstream” religions one participant indicates that, 
... makes it easy to forget our responsibilities here on Earth.

Current Spirituality

All 19 participants identified themselves as spiritual. Two participants did not have names or labels for their spirituality. One participant did have a name for their spiritual tradition but the specific name was not to be revealed to those outside of the particular spiritual community, but could be referred to by the more general label, “The Craft”.
Some participants had more than one name by which they identified their spirituality.
The following names or labels were provided by participants to identify their spirituality: Paganism; Pagan Path; Celtic Paganism; Wiccan; Druidry/Druidism; Earth Worshipper; Earth Centered Spirituality; Theurgist; Neoplatonist; Scientist; Cohesiveness; and Eclectic.

I think I am a very spiritual person, I have a strong connection to the world, nature, and people. I can sense the greatness in all my surroundings. I guess a name for it is Eclectic (Wicca/Pagan/a lot of Eastern thought).

Yes, I am conscious of my spiritual nature – I study daily, meditate, think and work towards the development of what I consider to be my higher self. I was raised Wiccan – consider myself Pagan.

If someone were to ask me what name I put on this, I would say I was Wiccan. However, this in itself is a name only. For many, this means I celebrate 8 Sabbots, do specific things on certain occasions, etc. For me, my Wiccan beliefs mesh perfectly
with being spiritual. It is not a religion that I can turn on and off at will – it is something I live.

If I were to label my sense of spirituality it would be an “Earth Centered Spirituality” centering around the concept of a manifest deity.

Coming from a Celtic background, that's where a lot of my core beliefs come from. No actual title like Asatru though. I just usually say I'm a Celtic Pagan.

Yes, Pagan, incorporating aspects of many paths, but mainly Wicca.

Yes. Druid. Also pagan. Druid specifically, pagan as a general term.

Past Spirituality

Seven participants had never identified with another spirituality. Eight had identified with another spirituality. Two participants had studied other spiritualities but had not identified with them. Some participants had identified with more than one spirituality previously. Participants had previously identified with the spiritualities of: Wiccan; Druidism; Celtic Magic; Voudoo; Buddhism; Christian; Catholic; and Atheist.

Current Religion

Sixteen participants were currently members of a religion, or in some cases, religions. Three participants were not members of a religion. Religions identified by the participants were: Paganism; Wicca; Druidism/Druidry; Order of Bards; Builders of Adylum; and Unitarian Universalist Church.

Past Religion

Sixteen participants had previously been members of another religion, or in some cases, religions. Three participants had not been members of another religion. Past religions identified by participants were: Wicca; Christian; Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Anglicanism, and United Church of Canada.
Disclosure of Spirituality/Religion

Participants differed in their degree of openness to friends, family and coworkers. Some participants were generally open with everyone in their lives. However, participants did indicate that they monitored the audience before disclosure to determine the level of safety in disclosing. Some participants are publicly “out” by displaying their spirituality or religion through Pagan themed jewelry.

I am quite open with family and friends. Druidism is a way of life, as is absolute honesty. In some situations, I may choose non-disclosure if there is concern for a negative result.

Yes I am open about my religion – I do not flaunt it or sensationalize but I certainly do not avoid it when situations arise which cause it to become “an issue.” I am very proud of what I am and feel that it is an important part of my personal path to never feel shame... I feel it is important for pagans to identify themselves as such to increase awareness and acceptance.

Yes if asked. I do not feel I need to be secretive.

I am open to discussing my beliefs with others as they are part of who I am.

I also am constantly surprised by the way some people light up when they see my pentacle. There seem to be a lot of Pagans that are still in the closet.

Some participants chose to disclose only to specific people in their lives whom they had determined would be accepting of their spiritual path. For one participant, there was no person outside the Pagan community who would be considered safe to disclose to.

My family and spouse do not know I am Wiccan. They have strong beliefs and would never understand my beliefs. I am happy practicing my religion in secret. I do not feel safe discussing it with other non-pagans.

With friends yes because most of my friends are pagan. Family not so much because I don’t think they’d understand, and not really co-workers, because it may cause problems in the workplace...

Only partly open. Depends on who, where, and when. I would avoid situations which may lead to conflict or animosity but would openly assist those I believe were genuinely seeking knowledge for valid purposes.
I was fortunate to have an understanding relationship with my parents and brother concerning my choice of religion/spirituality. While I continually find that I educate and correct their misconceptions. My close family have at last accepted that I am not going through a “phase” or dalliance with the occult. However I choose not to disclose my spirituality/religions orientation to my co-workers for safety reasons. Hate crimes and rampant labels of “Satanist” are carried out still and it is safer to not disclose one’s choice of the Pagan path out of fear of persecution.

Other participants also commented that they felt a need to be open in order to raise awareness of Paganism and educate non-Pagans regarding their spiritual or religious path.

Mainly because education is the key – we need to educate people to disarm urban myths, prejudices and just plain uneducated ignorance. Through education comes tolerance and fear/distrust diminishes.

Participants had experiences, after disclosing, in which they were met with non-acceptance, such as family avoiding the topic and former friends abandoning the friendship after disclosure.

Respect and concern for other people’s feelings and comfort level was identified by some participants as a barrier to disclosure.

Because I consider myself a spiritual person, it is often difficult to discuss life issues without some indication of my beliefs and how they influence my actions. However, I also believe that we must respect the feelings of others and I therefore sometimes choose to use very general language when expressing my beliefs. Pagan spirituality and religion are deserving of respect as any other, but I am not comfortable with making statement for “shock value.” So – I am out of the broom closet but I am not waving the broom around.

4.2 Path to Paganism

Participants were introduced to Paganism by books, mentors and friends, movies, the internet, family members, and dreams and visions. One participant had been raised Pagan.
Did not know what I was. Married a pagan woman – Listened to her, her family and her friends and felt an immediate connection with how they see life and the world.

I found out about Wicca on the internet and was instantly intrigued to discover that everything I believed and felt to be true was actually a religion. I was drawn by the respect for the Earth, the equality of men and women, the liberal views of sexuality, the lack of concept of hell or sin. I felt the idea of reincarnation really made sense...

Participants described being drawn or called to Paganism as a result of a need for a spiritual or religious search due to a lack of connection to their previous spirituality and religion. A life crisis preceded this spiritual search for some of the participants. Some participants described feeling an immediate connection with Paganism since it was compatible with their pre-existing beliefs and feelings.

I knew there had to be a reason I could not identify with the Catholic God. I was always into Nature and Science and the Christian Bible seemed a work of fiction to me. I believe in the science of creation and that there are energies constantly flowing from all things. A little over a year ago I was depressed about everything – my job, financial situation, etc. I bought a book on wicca and everything became clear to me.

I felt for years that mainstream religion wasn’t really in touch with the spiritual needs of people nor did it adequately address our responsibilities to each other and to the Earth. I was also dismayed by the hypocrisy demonstrated by the mainstream religions – the notion of teaching tolerance while being intolerant towards specific groups. Since my spiritual beliefs seemed to be at odds with the faith in my family’s household when I was younger, I sought out something that felt more comfortable. Paganism, in my mind, seemed the perfect fit with my belief structure at the time, as unstructured as my beliefs were then...

I was raised to be a complete atheist to the extent that I was embarrassed by anything remotely defined as worship. But I have come to believe that the energy of the world indicate some sense of relationship to the whole, some continuity of consciousness, no matter how delicate. I have found a group of people in my spiritual travels as I moved from one coven to another but it is mainly a personal journey enriched by much thought, meditation, study and interaction with my partner/husband.

... I felt an attraction to Wicca, all the things I read made me feel that it was a natural choice. However when I was older I felt that all the different points of view seemed too much like organized religion. So my eclectic beliefs seemed to grow... So to me Pagan is what I was meant to be.

However, for as long as I can remember I practiced different things without having a name for what I was doing.
I had heard the basic beliefs (Goddess and God, the Rule of Three, etc.) and found myself naturally attuned to them.

Other participants indicated that Paganism provided a connection to their racial or ethnic heritage.

I continued on and am still exploring Celtic myth/legend/history etc. All of which had just felt “right” for me. Paganism not only accepts homosexuality but is thought of as normal as anything else, polarities and such. So what drew me was acceptance for who I am plus makes me feel richer knowing and learning more about my roots.

Paganism provided a sense of well-being and centeredness for participants.

Since I have been a practicing Wiccan, I have been so much happier and centered. It helps bring order to my world and I need that.

Participants identified specific beliefs and practices which attracted them to Paganism or maintained their participation in Paganism, including pantheism, panentheism, and the resulting respect and reverence of Nature or the Earth.

Ever since childhood I have felt at home in nature. I found logic, as well as a deep sense of peace and contentment in the philosophy of living in harmony with nature. I also developed inner strength and stability. As a Druid, I have taken vows to care for and protect the environment. I am also an active and committed member of the community in which I live. Balance, harmony and well-being are the main reasons for my Druid path.

Paganism does not seek to dominate but work harmonically with our world. The concept of a single God is sophomoric. There is no God “per say” but an all encompassing energy that binds us.

Ever since I was very young, I loved nature, plants and animals and in my young childhood perception saw God within them. Calling it “Paganism” is merely a label, a taxonomic requirement. I believe that one’s earth centered perceptions are there all along, one just is surprised to find out that someone put a name on it...

Participants also valued Paganism’s emphasis of personal responsibility for spiritual beliefs and actions and the acceptance and respect of diversity in spiritual paths.

As well there is no real middle guy if you will with my faith. Just me and what I consider to be my definition of higher power(s). None of this confessing to a priest and then have him absolve me in place of the higher power. I am directly involved, giving me responsibility. Thus making it more personal and intimate.
I like the openness and variety that Paganism offers, that it doesn't force you to follow one set of rules or tell you that one path makes you a better person than another. It is natural to me. I also enjoy the belief that spirituality is a life-long learning process, because I truly believe that it shall be for me.

While I continue to have a personal relationship with Christ at the same time as fostering a love for the Old Religion/Ways, I never accepted the notion that Christ, an all-loving and all-accepting man would turn around and dictate that only one religion is the true religion; that there is only one path to God, the Great Spirit etc...I was drawn to the "Pagan" idea that the Divine (or Deities) do not demand sacrifice but rather love and personal responsibility for the Earth.

Participants indicated that the acceptance and respect of diversity among people, particularly the acceptance and celebration of diversity in expressions of sexuality and the emphasis on sexual and gender equality, attracted them to Paganism.

No one passes rules that say that gay people cannot participate, women cannot participate, etc. My feeling is that Pagans embrace each other as equal members of Life and that we all have something to contribute.

Participants also identified Pagan beliefs concerning the Goddess, magic, the Three-fold Law, reincarnation, astrology, Karma, meditation, ceremonial rituals and life long learning and growth as attracting them to the Pagan path.

One story of the path to Paganism detailed a particularly difficult journey. One participant, raised Pagan, related her experience of being forced into the "broom closet" during an abusive marriage. She raised her children on Pagan principles secretly and continued to study Paganism, world religions, history and mythology privately. She has since left the abusive marriage and remarried. Her current husband is now also on the Pagan path and they are able to live openly in their faith.

... we went to the courthouse and were married legally then had a handfasting in front of about 300 of his Catholic family members that night at a bar/hall owned by his friend. His family thought it was beautiful. His mother knows what I am and we get along wonderfully. I respect her faith and she respects mine.
Feel Part of a Pagan Community

Three participants did not feel part of a Pagan community for various reasons, including having no time to take part in community activities, experiencing a lack of response from other Pagans, and living in an area with no identifiable Pagan community.

Not exactly. I don’t know any other pagans and don’t belong to any groups or covens. I surf on Witchvox but you hardly ever get a reply. Pagans mostly keep to themselves I find.

I am not yet involved in it because of hesitation due to shyness but feel that there could be a very supportive Pagan community in Halifax...

Fifteen participants did feel part of a Pagan community. Some of these participants indicated that community could exist outside of a geographical boundary, such as an internet community. Other participants traveled to take part in community events.

Thanks to the Internet, I think it is also possible to feel like a part of the greater national and international Pagan community as well – a feeling that was more difficult to realize 20 years ago. I am in the process of networking with local Pagans in the St. John’s area to get more of them “out of the closet” and participating more with fellow pagans – whether informally or in more structured, coven-based gatherings. However, the local Pagan community has a long ways to grow before I will feel like there is a support community in Newfoundland.

As a whole yes, however I live in a very rural area in Prince Edward Island, and there is not a large Pagan community. I do try to network when possible but time restrains this.

Participants differed in their experience of community. Some participants felt welcomed and respected in the Pagan community regardless of their worldview and perceived that their community accepted diversity in viewpoints. Other participants felt that differences in worldviews created a sense of disconnection among members of the Pagan community. Some participants sought out relationships with those with similar viewpoints within the larger Pagan community.
I have a coven of 15 to 20 individuals who call themselves pagan and have some basic similarities to me. But the differences are still greater – their personalities tend to be fluffier than mine...

I very much feel part of the community, not only because I work very publicly, but also because of the many functioning groups I work with, the community Radio Show I’m involved with. I actually seek out events and friends with compatible belief systems (cause as I’m sure you’ll find – ask 10 Pagans what Paganism is and you’ll get 10 different answers!).

Irregardless if I stay in the background for a while to reflect or to do the opposite I am equally welcomed for my advice or treated with great respect when posing questions or when I show I need some space. Sometimes we have heated debates, we all leave them with more knowledge going in. Understanding your own point and someone else’s even though it may differ or at least still leaving the conversation “agreeing to disagree” with the same amount of respect for all as when started.

Participants indicated that levels of community exist.

Yes. I am currently part of a pagan family (3 generations – 8 person in one home) – A wider circle, our coven (17 or more members). Then the even wider community we meet at Festival and our local shops, Chapters, etc...

One participant noted that involvement in a formal tradition created a greater sense of community than solitary practice.

I do feel part of a community, however not as much as when I belonged to a formal “wicca” tradition. There was greater sense of community as a member of a coven. Now I still feel a part but a sense of disconnect due to the small number of pagans in the local area.

Support and Resources Found in the Community

Participants identified numerous forms of support and resources in the Pagan community. The most widely cited form of support was social and emotional support resulting from friendship, acceptance of one’s worldview, and sense of belonging.

There are many people in the community that I also felt comfortable discussing personal problems with. The closeness of the group meant that we would all lend any support possible.

I enjoy socializing with other pagans – less effort. Not having to explain or “justify.”

The simple feeling that I am not alone.
Those friends currently closest to me – those who have helped me through thick & thin (and visa versa) would very likely not even be acquaintances. We have very little else in common & would likely never have even crossed paths, never mind become sisters. It's this support and sense of community that adds to the appeal.

Opportunity to comfortably share social events with like minded people. A chance to get together for ritual and study and practice our beliefs. The company of other pagans is essential – We find it very upsetting and trying to have to be around “mainstream” people all the time...

Because of the pagan community in this area is relatively un-organized, support and resources are minimal. The strongest link here is the knowledge that there are others who can share joys and concerns and provide friendship.

Participants identified communal worship, ritual and celebration as a source of strength within from the community. Participants also identified opportunities for formal and informal education around Pagan spirituality and religion as a resource within the community.

I belong to a yahoo group called “Wheelhub” where we all pose queries, advice, best wishes etc. As well we have a New age group that meets bi monthly. We discuss various literature, authors and general topics. Varied people pagan and non pagan a like go. Lastly, we also just started a Wiccan/pagan study group that meets bi monthly.

As a coven, we have a variety of interests and this provides a great deal of books we have access to as well as people who send us internet sites and keep us in touch with the larger pagan community. These individuals have a variety of craft skills and ideas for ritual that enrich my life as a pagan.

Professional support from other Pagans was identified as a resource within some Pagan communities. The network for such support has yet to be developed fully in the Atlantic provinces according to one participant.

In places like New York, where many Pagans have positions scattered throughout the corporate hierarchy, it was easy to find people who can offer “soft support,” from one Pagan to another, or support of a more tangible nature such as helping one another with non-Pagan issues that their careers and professional training have prepared them for.
4.4 Pagan Beliefs and Practices

Pagan Beliefs

Participants identified basic approaches and perspectives needed by social workers engaging in practice with Pagan clients. These included never assuming that clients have a Christian worldview, disregarding the misrepresentation of Paganism as involving satanic worship, respecting Pagan spirituality, possessing a basic knowledge of Pagan spirituality, and recognizing the diversity within Paganism and clarifying specific beliefs with clients.

*I feel that in order to be sensitive to Paganism it might help for a social worker to actually be Pagan or an open-minded follower of another spiritual path. (I would not feel comfortable disclosing my personal beliefs to someone who was a skeptical, deconstructionist, what-you-see-is-what-you-get scientist or a closed-minded traditional follower of an institutional religion).*

*It may be too much to ask of social workers that they have anything more than the basic knowledge of the existence of pagan spiritualities, and that pagans, no matter their specific beliefs and practices, follow a valid path. If they are open to the beliefs of clients, and tolerant and respectful, they should be able to provide good service.*

*Be aware that 12 step programs make no sense because there is no greater power than me.*

*They should have read maybe Scott Cunningham books so that they could understand who and what I honor.*

*I do not want ANY social agency trying to dictate Christian morality to me and find any attempt to do so invasive and unacceptable.*

*Most importantly, is what Paganism is NOT I worry about people responding negatively, thinking its linked with Devil worship, or harming or manipulating others.*

*Sometimes our beliefs or perspectives place us outside what society considers “normal.” … With increasing awareness of Pagan beliefs, there is a tendency to accept us, even though we are “different.” We are not different. Only some of our beliefs are. It would be wonderful to accepted without any exceptions. We are not outside of normal society. We are part of it. Simple awareness and acceptance would go far to eliminate fear of prejudice or discrimination.*
The understandings of the basic beliefs of being Pagan, the particular path, the rules that go along with being pagan, and to not think that because the person is a pagan, that they are not a "kook” or “weirdo” because they have selected that path of spirituality. Just common decency as well, and respect for the person’s path.

I think a social worker would need to know a broad spectrum of things about my beliefs, but not necessarily have to know them in a lot of detail. For example, if I were being offered counseling regarding the death of someone close to me, it would not be of any use to me for someone to explain how that person is “in heaven” or “with God” or anything like that. Since I believe in reincarnation, to explain the passing of someone using the concept of finality that is common in Christian religions would prove to be too frustrating and pointless to me… It would of course be very important that the social worker not be critical of my belief structure, no matter how different from their own, or from what they may assume is THE Pagan way.

Participants identified several specific beliefs as core or key to their experience of Pagan spirituality or religion, which social workers would need to know in order to provide spiritually sensitive social work. One belief identified was reincarnation.

... for the departed soul it is simply a new beginning or continuance. We are here to get it right – if now we move on to the next life to continue our quest.

I believe that a person’s spirit never dies it just leaves its body, I consider reincarnation possible and death should not be feared. I also think that grieving should be an expression of joy for you loved ones life.

Many of us see death as something to celebrate not mourn. When someone attempts to convince me I need to grieve I have a difficult time relating.

...I do not see death so much as the end of this life as the start of a new one. This could be said to influence the way I view things.

Afterlife – usually involves reincarnation, in a variety of ways.

Reincarnation, travel by the soul for the personal development of the soul.

Several participants indicated the Law of Three, Karmic Law or Three-fold Rule.

Every action has a consequence – no matter how small that action – we must not act carelessly. “The law of three.”

...the karmic law, that every action good or bad somehow comes back to you...

Knowing that the main foundation is do what you do harm none, every action will be met with a 3 fold law of retribution.

Participants discussed polytheism, pantheism, panentheism, and animism as well as
the resulting reverence, respect, and responsibility for the Earth and Nature.

...the belief in a God and Goddess who are equal and part of the whole that is divinity...

Maiden/Mother/Crone or the Golden Boy/Oak (or holly) King/Sage ...

What is sacred is the “the personhood” of all – the energy in the world, the planet itself.

Deity is within the earth – us – life and it’s cycles.

My personal view of the divine is that divinity is within us and all around us – It is the energy that is life.

... the reverence that is given to the Earth and the environment as a living being...

...to love and to help nurture the earth and other life forms.

Many pagans – most – will consider being environmentally concerned to be part of their religion.

Personal responsibility for beliefs and actions was identified by participants as central to Paganism. This results in an emphasis on individuality and an acceptance and respect of others and their beliefs.

Whatever I choose to do, I try to take in to consideration how it will affect others, and if I feel strongly for it, then I will do it and accept the consequences... I believe that things happen for a reason, but destiny can’t be used as an excuse. We all make decisions everyday which affect our outcome.

He/she should be aware, however, that my behaviour will be based on a much more rigorous value system because without a “godhead” dictating the right and wrongs, personal responsibility for you action must be very considered – there is no one to count on and pray to except my own strength of character and problem solving skills – I worship my own ability to tap into the energies that are there for me.

We are responsible to make the most of our gifts to develop ourselves to reach higher levels of understanding and love.

I do not believe anyone can “save” me it is fully my responsibility to “monitor” myself.

As a parent I “allow” my girls to own their own bodies (tattoo’s, piercings, haircolor are personal choices they are free to make.) I teach them to be strong, loving and always think over what they are basing their actions on, take a stand when you need to, never be afraid to re-evaluate and/or make a change.
It is important to understand that we are very free with our acceptance of others, we honor anyone’s belief system and expect the same treatment... Pagans are very open in their acceptance and we band together despite very different views.

Sexual and gender equality was identified by participants as a key belief within Paganism.

There is a great deal of feminism in Paganism.

Participants identified magic as a belief of which social workers should be aware.

...the belief in magic and the empowerment to create change in our lives and selves through magic.

No such thing as “black magic.” It’s just a force. The wielder determines how its being used. Like money, it can be used to help finance hospitals or to hire a hitman and have someone killed.

Participants discussed the belief of non-hierarchical body and spirit integration, and the resulting acceptance of sexuality, diversity in sexual expression and nudity.

The body and spirit are equal and linked.

I believe sex is natural, and not something that is wrong and dirty. I am not ashamed of my body and don’t think it should be covered at all times (only in some situations)

There is nothing in my belief system that makes sexuality, for instance, and any sexual behaviour a “sin”

A belief in Destiny or preordination of events was identified by participants.

I believe in predestined events in our lives that cannot be circumvented. The minor events on our lives can be changed or altered in advance, but the major events will happen, regardless of what we do.

Participants identified that social workers should be aware that the Pagan concept of family may differ from that of the mainstream culture.

...parenting should be of great concern and interest to a pagan woman but who the father was/is may not be. Multiple fathers may not be an issue. Marriage is a Christian institution – not pagan. Concept of family is broader, more inclusive.

Participants identified that knowledge of the symbolism of the Pentagram and of the use of herbs would be needed to provide sensitive service. Also it was identified that a
social worker would need to understand that Pagans may use drugs for spiritual or religious purposes and would need to be able to differentiate transpersonal experiences from mental illness.

One participant felt that generally in order to work sensitively and competently with clients, social workers should know,

*Not to intrude into areas which are personal and sensitive.*

**Pagan Practices**

Participants identified several practices, and issues surrounding practices, as important for social workers to be aware of in order to provide spiritually sensitive social work. Participants identified the practice of rituals and celebrations.

*I do rituals mostly with other people, but occasionally on my own. They help me feel connected to the people that participate in the rituals in a much more deep way than I connect with many non-pagans. Rituals also help me to feel empowered in situations of difficulty. They connect me not only to the people involved, but also to the divine.*

**Worship and ritual at least on the greater and less sabbats should be respected...**

*The manner in which I conduct ritual would not be important to them, but knowledge of the purpose and general flow of ritual would be useful for them... My thoughts on the use of tools in ritual, where I like to hold rituals, the nature in which I hold rituals (e.g. sky clad rituals are not “sick”) and things like this are all things that a social worker should be aware of and should not be judgmental of.*

*Along with casting a circle and performing various rituals that are complicated to explain to non-Pagans, but basically are used to raise power for a desired result.*

*Also, a social worker should be aware that many Pagans chose to live with the seasons and many of their religions sacred holidays occur simultaneously with newer religions like Christianity: Imbolc = St. Brigid’s Day, Oestre = Easter, Yule = Christmas, Samhain = Halloween. And that this factor may be the source of unrest or anxiety for one who is just new to a Pagan path.*

*Meditation was also identified.*

*The more obviously spiritual practices I engage in such as meditation and rituals help me to feel more complete and empowered. When I meditate or trance, I often use soft music to help quiet my mind, then I relax my body and then imagine whatever I wish or need to do. If nothing else, meditation helps me to relax in both mind and body. I use it*
often before stressful situations or times when I am very nervous such as before an interview or a performance.

But for me it is about gaining an awareness and understanding of your “inner-self” and the interaction with the “outside.”

Participants indicated that social workers should be aware that Pagans may maintain privacy or secrecy around their practices.

That they are an important part of life and help me understand and connect to what I consider the divine, and to all of life, and rejuvenate me. I also feel they make me a better person directly or indirectly. They are also personal and close to my heart and it would be important to me to trust someone before sharing any specific information about them.

I meditate frequently, practice yoga and hold ritual alone and with others. These are private things and not within the “domain” of a social agency.

The pagan religions or rituals are generally practiced in private. Respect for privacy in any situation is a major concern.

The designing, organizing and enacting of ritual(s) is highly important but also may be secret from others like social workers.

Social workers also need to recognize that there will be diversity among individuals in regards to practices.

As well they should be aware that there is a great variation between people and their rituals people are not all the same, what works with one, may not work for another. They (the rituals) will need to be discussed on an individual basis.

Participants identified the practices of magic and divination.

I use my faith to work what we call Magick. Magick isn't like in the movies, it's not swirling pink lights. Magick is will. A social worker would have to know and understand that to understand my base state of being.

I also use Tarrot, and divination of various kinds. Not persay as future telling, but more as a guide in decision making.

How to use tarot would not be important – but being sensitive to my use of tarot would be important as well.

Participants identified that “mundane” activities, such as being in nature, can be spiritual practices for Pagans.
To me the earth is a cathedral. I don’t think I’m alone in this belief. To me, and, I think, to other Pagans, a walk in the sunshine is like worshipping nature.

Meditation, yoga, rituals, walks out in nature, religious discussions, growing plants and listening to music are all ways that I use to feel spiritually connected. Any activity can be made spiritual if done in the right frame of mind, even cooking, cleaning or walking to work. I like to believe that even mundane activities can be spiritual because they are important to my physical body and therefore important for my Spirit. Plus I get much more satisfaction and enjoyment out of tasks like cleaning if I also think about cleansing the space in a spiritual way.

The practices of yoga, reflective writing, positive affirmations and grounding were all identified by participants.

Writing and deep inner study is something I often do. It helps me center my self and get to the base of my concerns.

If someone is very emotionally charged/upset etc. To ground them out. Visualize being a rooted tree and sending the negative energy to “your roots” and then to the earth or taking a shower and as the water washes over you your negative emotions will through your pores and slide down the drain or taking a walk and mentally leave behind negativity in the footsteps behind you for the earth.

Positive affirmations to battle negative thought patterns.

Participants indicated that social workers would need to understand the use of spiritual and ritual items in order to provide sensitive service.

...understand that the pentagram is a good, earth loving symbol that represents the four elements and the fifth spiritual self/energy in a protective circle. Laughter, dance, wine affection, even sex is a part of celebration. There will be candles, incense and chanting – all to raise energy and set mood. Swords and athame (knives) have nothing to do with sacrificing anything – they direct energy and draw circles. There is nothing dark and scary going on the nothing to protect children from so no to be alarmed – just earth worship and people connecting in order to feel uplifted and closer to the “lifeforce”

Participants identified that environmentally friendly choices are a spiritual practice.

Pagans may be aggressive about opting out of the consumerism/garbage/purchasing/crap part of celebration – putting up volumes of plastic, balloons are very disliked, wasting planetary resources.

In providing service, participants indicated that social workers should be aware of Pagan or Pagan-friendly services so referrals can be made appropriately.
If they do not have expertise in it, they should have resources at their disposal to help them understand – or that I can be referred to if necessary

Also a social worker could include the religious community as part of the helping relationship.

To me, the most important information would be the importance of the support and inclusion of my Circle or Coven. If I were going through something as major, difficult or important as to need a social worker involved, I would definitely also need the support of my group present.

Social workers may need to provide space for Pagan practices.

I suppose if a pagan were in someplace other than their own home providing a space where they can practice their ritual activities (be able to light candles, incense etc...) would be sensitive.

One participant identified that a social worker should be aware that Pagans may home school children so they do not face spiritual or religious discrimination.

4.5 Social Workers and Pagan Clients

Previous Social Work Experiences

Eight participants had previously received social work service. Five of these participants noted that spiritual issues had not been a focus in the social work relationship so they could not identify the service as spiritually sensitive or not spiritually sensitive. Three of the participants who had previously seen a social worker identified the service as not spiritually sensitive. The following is a description of one participant's experience with social work service in a mainstream agency:

We gave our daughter up for adoption and we were allowed to give something to her which would only be opened by her at a time when her new parents decided. I gave her a beautiful labradorite crystal and a letter explaining why the adoption, who I was and my beliefs. A week later the letter and crystal was returned to me. Opened and rifled through. A truly horrible experience...
Expectations of Social Work Service

Only one participant did expect to receive spiritually sensitive social work within a mainstream institution or agency. Six participants believed that there was a possibility that they may receive spiritually sensitive social work. Ten participants did not believe they would receive spiritually sensitive social work service in a mainstream institution or agency. Predictably, for most participants, expectation regarding the provision of sensitive service did impact on the likelihood of accepting service.

Some participants indicated that acceptance of service would depend on the attitude, knowledge, and skill of a social worker.

At this time, I'm not sure. I currently live in an area that isn't multi-cultural. There is some intolerance. If I did require service, I would request a social worker who is familiar with the term “Pagan.”

I think with the right intent and general background knowledge of Pagan paths, a social worker could provide spiritually sensitive service if they took the time and care to educate themselves. This factor could/would be a deciding factor in the likelihood that I would request or accept service from a social worker.

I think that if I needed the services of a social worker, knowing whether they were “Pagan friendly” or not would definitely influence my selection of a specific social worker or institution...However, it would be equally acceptable to me if the social worker was sensitive to my beliefs and could draw in other resources if needed. Given the diversity of the Pagan movement, it is impossible for a social worker to be adept in all belief systems.

I do not feel that most would be able to provide a spiritually sensitive service, it would make me less likely to accept or request help, however if they were at least familiar with the basic principles I may be more at ease and not feel like I had to be on the defensive.

Other participants would not accept service due to their expectations.

No I am afraid I would not want them to know my beliefs because I am afraid they may try to use it as something negative. I do not trust them.

Would not request or accept service.

I do not anticipate that any of these could provide any support let alone adequate or conducive aid. For now, till I hear different I believe I would never request or accept service.
Two participants indicated they would accept service since they are accustomed to dealing with people who lack knowledge regarding their spiritual path.

*It would not affect my likelihood to request or accept service however because I am accustomed to dealing with people who know little to nothing about Paganism.*

Another participant indicated that they would accept service and not disclose as Pagan within the social work relationship.

*Personally I would never divulge my Wiccan side to a social worker for fear they would label or misunderstand me. You know, popular culture, movies and all.*

One participant noted that social workers need education or sensitivity training.

*I am sorry to say No I do not believe many social workers would be able to deal well with pagans I believe most should have to sit down with some of us in encounter groups to learn about our beliefs, our lifestyles and how to help pagan families without misunderstanding. The system is designed to work under guidelines strongly influenced by Christianity. Most people would fell fear that the social workers would jump to wrong conclusions (many would) and endanger their family security – affect their children.*

### 4.6 Additional Comments

*I think this is valuable research! It will give pagans more effective care by social workers and help make Paganism that much more understood.*

*Most pagans I have met are accepting, loving and kind. They usually choose a very simple lifestyle and often have unique personalities. They are people to be valued not treated like misfits.*

*In order for a pagan to go to a social worker for spiritual-type help, they (the pagan) would have to already be aware that the “S.W.” had experience in these matters. Going to see a “SW” blindly, is not in our nature because whether we admit it or not, we are wary of others who do not follow the same Path (or we don’t know if they do).*

*I am glad to see someone asking some of these questions perhaps more pagan families can feel less fear in the future if more questions are asked. Are there some pagans who are “out there”? Yes – but there are many “Christians” who are a little different also. Social Services needs to listen more, judge less and remember what is and is not their business – Hey!? They need to be more pagan!*

*Awareness of the pagan community is growing, but even without knowledge of what a Pagan is, acceptance is the key factor. Pagans are simply humans, with human*
emotions. The difference is our attitude or perspective. I.e. – coping with loss or death. Society wants us to be "strong." Funerals are often a sterile and distant way of dealing with death. In fact, some (most) pagans view public display barbaric. Grief is natural. The emotional release of grief is healing. I find it interesting that the focus of this study is about a social worker's spiritual sensitivity to a pagan. Pagans often gravitate to the field of social work. It is their heightened sensitivity and their desire to serve their community which make them ideal candidates for social work.

I found this questionnaire to be very thought-provoking. I am presently seeing a social worker for counselling and my spiritual beliefs do not play a big part in our discussions, although the social worker is open and respectful. I would very much appreciate the opportunity to work with a social worker who is also a trained spiritual counsellor. However, this may not be a practical approach to clinical social work, given the wide variety of spiritual beliefs held by their potential clients.

Also, I think this study is long overdue, and I hope it will raise some acceptance and understanding in the social work field, with respect to Paganism as a way of life.

While central published works like Starhawk’s "The Spiral Dance" and Margot Adler's "Drawing Down the Moon" may add an intellectual and philosophical insight to many Pagan paths, one should not always have to intellectualize spiritual beliefs. These two works are invaluable to a broad understanding or earth based spiritualities like Wicca or Goddess religions. However, there still exists in mainstream culture publications and academically refereed articles that still erroneously perpetuate the idea that Pagans are “Devil worshippers” or “Satanists.” Social workers should be aware that this construction is a politically motivated caricature primarily promoted by Fundamentalist Christians and the Roman Catholic Church and is completely false and misleading.

My personal belief system is different than many others, especially when it comes to things like my interpretation of spirituality and religion. I believe that acceptance of Pagan belief systems is critical from a social worker perspective. I have unfortunately noticed that many Pagans in Newfoundland have a lot of “baggage” associated with them, and unfortunately, this makes Pagan beliefs appear to be associated with social outcasts, rebels or people not comfortable fitting in with mainstream society. This unfortunate “bad press” will prove to be a hindrance in helping “normal” pagans from getting the help and support they need. I hope that through things such as this survey, we can continue to make progress towards a more Pagan-friendly society.
CHAPTER V DISCUSSION

The range in ages and years identifying as Pagan suggest that snowball sampling did manage to produce a diversity among the participants, at least within these demographic characteristics. Almost two thirds of the participants were female. Due to a small sample size and snowball sampling, no generalization regarding the distribution of females and males within the Atlantic Canadian population can be made from this finding. The occupations of the participants seem to indicate what has been observed previously in the survey of Pagans, “while Pagans seem to the casual observer to be ‘counter-cultural’ types, they are, in fact, basically white-collar, middle-class professionals” (Melton, as cited in Adler, 1986, p. 446).

Participants were predominantly Caucasian. This is representative of the larger Pagan community, based on similar findings from previous studies of Pagan communities (Pagan Educational Network, 2001; Adler, 1986). Caucasian spiritual seekers may be drawn to Paganism, in part, due to an attempt to rediscover an ethnic heritage. Modernism encouraged conformity and adherence to a cultural meta-narrative. Localized traditions became absorbed into a meta-culture. Paganism is built upon the traditions and “truths” of regional ethnic religions. In the postmodern period, with an emphasis on localized truth and experience, there appears to be a growing interest in reclaiming cultural identity. Paganism is playing a role in the reclaiming of certain Caucasian ethnic and cultural identities. Most participants identified themselves by ethnicity rather than race and indicated ethnicities which are strongly represented in Paganism’s revived traditions, such as Scottish, Irish and British. One participant wrote,

*I continued on and am still exploring Celtic myth/legend/history etc. All of which has just felt “right” for me...So what drew me was acceptance for*
who I am plus makes me feel richer knowing and learning more about my roots.

Postmodernism's stress of localized meaning and truth may be prompting the recreation of pre-modern ethnic spiritual traditions. Non-Caucasian individuals may be turning to other alternative faiths when dissatisfied with mainstream religions. There are a large number of indigenous or tribal based faiths emerging from particular racial/ethnic traditions that have survived attempts of suppression and eradication, such as Voudon, Macumba, Candomble, and Santeria. These may be more relevant to non-Caucasians who are seeking alternatives. Some of these traditions may fall within the definition of Paganism but most adherents do not identify themselves as Pagan. There is also the possibility that the association of Paganism with racist movements such as Nazism and Neo-Nazism discourages participation by non-Caucasian people. Hitler incorporated some Germanic pagan symbols in Nazi movement propaganda to further rouse nationalist fervour. There was no actual Pagan worldview adopted, just the use of some symbolic trappings (Mayer, 2003). Currently there are a small number of Pagan groups, such as Neo-Nazi Pagans and some Odinists, that embrace the racist ideal of a superior Aryan race or advocate for maintaining the "purity" of the Aryan race. Those with such racist agendas are a minority within the larger Pagan community but can create a negative image for the whole of Paganism.

I discussed the debate around the conceptualization of Paganism as a reconstruction of previous spiritual or religious traditions in the introductory chapter. Some Pagans would resist portraying their tradition as reconstructed or recreated, as they would argue a line of continuity or succession within the tradition. I have had the opportunity since writing that introduction to meet a senior Pagan whom was raised in a predominantly Pagan community with faith beliefs and practices that had been
maintained in the community for as long as anyone could remember. I do feel this is an uncommon circumstance but certainly proved to me the existence of a line of continuity. However, I still would argue that those individuals practicing in the postmodern period would need to make at least subtle adjustments to age-old customs and perspectives due to the massive shift in economic, political and social realities. There may be some Pagan spiritual traditions that have not be recreated but the growing interest in them by the larger world, made possible by ease of global communication and travel, does constitute a revival.

There was marked variance among the participants in their conceptualizations of spirituality and religion as can be seen in the themes identified from their responses. The definitions of spirituality and religion drawn from the social work literature and set forth at the beginning of this research paper do encompass all the various elements of the participants' conceptualizations. Four participants identified religion as negative or potentially negative. Two of these participants did not identify with any religion. The other two participants identified as Pagan and Wiccan. Their comments on the negative nature of religion referenced "institutional" or "mainstream" religion. It can be noted, given the range of responses provided by participants, that clarification of the specific meaning intended by both client and social worker would be useful within the social work relationship.

The responses to the questions concerning current and past spiritualities and religions highlight the immense diversity within the Pagan community. The responses from participants indicated that Paganism is an umbrella concept that can encompass a variety of other faiths as well as being a spiritual or religious path in its own right. Some participants identified their spirituality or religion as only Pagan/Paganism while others explicitly identified as Wiccan and Pagan or Druid and Pagan. It can be assumed that
all participants identify in some manner with the label of Paganism or else they would not have participated in this research project. Ten out of the 19 participants, 53%, had previously identified as Roman Catholic. This result could be misinterpreted as the Pagan community being comprised of a disproportionate number of ex-Catholics. In fact, 43% of Atlantic Canadians are Roman Catholic (Statistics Canada, 2003). The ex-Catholic participant figure was only slightly higher than what would be expected if Pagans left previous faiths proportionate to the religious make up of the Atlantic Provinces and the slight inflated representation may be a function of small sample size.

The themes emerging from responses concerning disclosure of spirituality/religion indicate that Pagans all make very individual decisions in this area of their lives depending on their perception of safety and comfort in disclosure. Three points stood out for me in reviewing these themes.

1. Many Pagans still do not feel safe in disclosing their faith. Even those who are usually quite open monitor their potential audience to determine safety regarding disclosure. This point would be reinforced by participants throughout other sections of the questionnaire. One participant, on the back of the questionnaire, detailed her eighteen year old daughter’s experience of what the family clearly sees as discrimination and oppression. She was the top student in her class throughout high school. She attended her school’s scholarship interviews and was “grilled” for most of the interview regarding her involvement with Pagan associations, which appeared in her volunteer activities section of the application. She was seventh in the scholarship standing when the interviews were completed. This family sees this incident as an example of the religious intolerance and resulting negative consequences that Pagans face.
2. Pagans are sensitive to the need for raised awareness and education around the Paganism in society. They are particularly concerned with the misconceptions that portray their spirituality/religion as evil or negative.

3. Some Pagans are monitoring the comfort level of others before disclosing their faith out of respect for the feelings of the others. This finding is interesting to me since I don’t believe this behaviour is common to adherents of mainstream spiritualities/religions. I question how much this may be a function of internalized oppression and underlying fears for physical and emotional safety rather than mere empathy for others.

The themes regarding disclosure and the above points highlight some issues that can impact upon the social work relationship with a Pagan client. The most evident issue will be one of safety and comfort in disclosing spirituality/religion to the social worker. Skill in providing a spiritually open and respectful environment is necessary to work competently with a Pagan client. The worker having some general knowledge of the Pagan worldview can facilitate this open and respectful environment. The social worker should be cognizant of the fact that a Pagan client may live part or all of her/his life “in the closet” and explore the effect this is having on their health and functioning.

The range of themes found in responses regarding the attraction or call to Paganism highlights the uniqueness of each individual’s spiritual path. People were introduced to Paganism through differing means although books and mentors and friends were the most common means of introduction. Overwhelmingly, participants attributed their attraction to Paganism to two factors, a lack of a cognitive, emotional, or spiritual connection with their previous spirituality/religion and an immediate sense of connection or compatibility of Paganism with preexisting personal beliefs and feelings. It is only logical that the search for an alternative worldview would begin as dissatisfaction with a
previous one. More interesting is the perception and feeling of over half the participants that Paganism was compatible with their preexisting beliefs or experiences of the world. They were indicating that Paganism provided the framework in which to structure preexisting beliefs, knowledge, and perceptions of themselves, the world and the divine or sacred. Participants described this sense of connection or compatibility with Paganism in various ways,

I read up on it, and everything I read, especially about Wicca, fit with my intuitive personal beliefs.

I found out about Wicca on the internet and was instantly intrigued to discover that everything I believed and felt to be true was actually a religion.

Calling it “Paganism” is merely a label, a taxonomic requirement. I believe that one’s earth centered perceptions are there all along, one just is surprised to find out that someone put a name on it.

These comments highlight the need for a social worker to keep in mind that there is a dynamic exchange between lived experience and spiritual worldview. Often the literature focuses on only one direction of the exchange, the influence the spiritual worldview has on lived experience. However, lived experience will also influence the spiritual worldview. For some of the participants in this research, lived experience dictated which alternative spiritual framework they identified with. Lived experience can also strengthen or perpetuate a spiritual worldview or can call it into question.

Most participants did feel part of a Pagan community. This community served as a strength and offered resources in a variety of ways: acceptance and sense of belonging; friendship and social and emotional support; communal worship and celebration; spiritual education opportunities; and services such as Pagan retailers and professional support. As might be expected in the internet age, some participants indicated that community is no longer bound by geography and can encompass people at a distance.
Pre-modern meets postmodern. It was pointed out by participants that the diversity within Paganism can create a feeling of disconnection when viewpoints differ. Some participants seek out those of a similar worldview within the community. One participant identifies that her community could be utilized within an intervention plan if she were a client of a social worker. Other participants also raise the point that social workers should be aware of Pagan or Pagan-friendly referral sources in the community. Pagans themselves are well aware that their community has strengths and supports to offer to them.

Slightly less than half of the participants had been recipients of social work service previously. The majority of the participants that had received social work service in the past had either received service they identified as not spiritually sensitive or service that had failed to address spirituality at all. Failing to address spirituality within the social work relationship would be considered to be an example of poor spiritually sensitive practice based on the definition of spiritually sensitive social work employed within this paper. However, participants did not recognize it as such. Some participants were not displeased with service that did not incorporate their spirituality as they felt the issue they were dealing with did not necessitate the incorporation of their spiritual worldview.

The responses from participants regarding their expectations around any future social work service indicated a lack of confidence in the profession's willingness or ability to provide spiritually sensitive social work service to Pagans. Only one participant expected they would receive spiritually sensitive social work service. Six participants thought it was possible that they might receive spiritually sensitive social work service. Ten participants had expected that they would not receive spiritually sensitive service.
Expectation of service did impact upon the likelihood of accepting or requesting service. Three participants that did not expect sensitive service responded that they would not accept service. These participants had concerns ranging from ineffectual service to a fear of disclosing Pagan beliefs due to distrust of social workers. Another participant indicated they would accept service but would not disclose their beliefs due to fears of being misunderstood or labeled. Two participants would accept service even though they had no expectation of spiritually sensitive social work because they were accustomed to service from professionals that did not address their spiritual worldview. Five participants indicated that the likelihood of accepting service would depend upon the attitude and skill of the social worker. Participants indicated that a social worker would need to be open and accepting of their spiritual worldview and know at least the basic principles of the Pagan worldview.

This brings us to one of the stated goals of this project, to identify the key beliefs and practices of the Pagan worldview required for the provision of spiritually sensitive social work. The responses provided by participants about their beliefs and practices, as presented in the 'Findings' chapter, do not offer a cohesive portrait of Pagan core beliefs and practices. I will attempt to lend some structure to a review of the key beliefs and practices as provided by the participants by placing them in the context of the principles that underlie them. I will also make additions when necessary, from my experience as a Pagan, to clarify some concepts. The only certain statement that can be made regarding the Pagan worldview is that there is no central defining tenet that is shared by all Pagans. This is unique to Paganism as other spiritual/religious traditions have shared, defining tenets. Participants themselves highlighted this point repeated throughout their responses, cautioning social workers to explore and clarify each individual's Pagan worldview rather than make assumptions. One participant noted, ask
10 Pagans what Paganism is and you’ll get 10 different answers. Every individual Pagan does not necessarily believe each of the following principles. Exceptions within established Pagan traditions will be discussed when appropriate. The seven principles suggested within participants responses and common to Paganism are:

1. The Divine is immanent in Nature or the World. This belief is shared among Pantheists, Panentheists, and Polytheists. Panentheists and Polytheists believe also in an aspect of the Divine that transcends Nature or the World. Polytheists worship numerous deities and it is common among Pagans that the feminine is emphasized as well as the masculine within the conceptualization of the Divine or deities. Many Pagans stress gender and sexual equality and equity because all share the Divine life force equally. The Divine is everywhere at all times so Pagans feel that spiritual experiences can be found in everyday activities.

2. Nature and the Earth are venerated due to the presence of the Divine in everything. Reverence and respect are shown to the Earth and Nature. Pagans often emphasize environmental responsibility since abuse of the Earth is abuse of the Divine.

3. There is an interconnectedness among every living thing. Some Pagans are animists and spiritists and see the interconnectedness extending to inanimate objects and phenomena as well.

4. Magic is possible because of the interconnectedness of all things. Practices such as raising energy and casting circles (creating sacred spaces) revolve around the willed intent to utilize the interconnectedness of everything. Divination also is assumed to be possible because of the interconnected web of the Universe. The use of magic, and the type of magic employed, varies greatly across Pagan traditions.
5. The cycles and balance of Nature and of the Earth are honoured. Nature is seen to be in a state of cyclic balance. The belief in reincarnation held by a large number of Pagans emerges from the emphasis of cycles. The cycles of Nature, solstices and equinoxes as well as quarter points between the two, are observed and celebrated by many Pagans. It is believed that the balance of Nature is replicated in the human balance of spirit, body and mind. Illness and disease occurs when these elements fall out of balance. Techniques such as meditation and yoga are employed to help balance the aspects of the self. Since there is no hierarchy within the three aspects, the body is valued and celebrated and many Pagans are open around sexuality and nudity. The Three Fold Rule, Law of Three, or Karmic Law is a common aspect to Pagan traditions and refers to the belief that whatever energy or intent is put out into the world will cycle back to sender, intensified three times.

6. Personal authority and personal responsibility are paramount. Individuals need to create their own spiritual worldview and develop their own relationship with the Divine. Pagans do not feel that their spiritual worldview is the “only” or “right” path since other people need to follow their own spiritual path. Personal authority needs to be balanced with the needs of community, however. A Wiccan guiding creed, which has been adopted by some other Pagans as well, states that an individual is free to do what they wish as long as it harms none. This stresses responsibility to others, community and the World in the exercise of personal freedom. Some traditions, such as Asatru, explicitly stress responsibility to community more than others (Gillette & Stead, 2003). They area of explicitly stated responsibility to community may be one in which the reconstructionist element of (Neo) Paganism is most evident. I believe that the community played a much stronger role in prescribing behaviour in all ancestral Pagan traditions since cohesiveness in
community was essential to the survival of the community and its members. It is only in the postmodern (Neo) Pagan revival that the individual's authority and autonomy becomes paramount.

7. Diversity among people is embraced. Human diversity is seen to be a reflection of Nature's diversity. Those with differing worldviews, sexual orientations, or ancestral heritage are respected and accepted. Participants commented on the tolerance and respect of diversity within Paganism several times throughout the questionnaires. However, there were also participants that indicated that they felt differing viewpoints created a sense of disconnection within the Pagan community. Gillette and Stead (2003) highlight the conflict that can occur between the two Pagan traditions of Asatru and Wicca due to differing worldviews,

The socio-political differences between the two communities cannot be underemphasized and are a major cause for friction between the two communities. The general political tendencies of each community tend to be inflated by the other into the most radical levels. Thus, Asatruar think of Wiccans as communist drug-addicted homosexual nudists on welfare, while Wiccans see Asatruar as militaristic drunken gun-crazy gay-bashing nazis. This is, of course, an exaggeration, but when significant differences do come to the forefront, these stereotypes are brought out to bash each other with and are a major cause of separation between the two communities.

So much for tolerance and respect of diversity. I think it is safe to say that the vast majority of Pagans do value diversity, however, like all principles, the implementation into action is more difficult. The human frailties of ego sometimes overshadow the strength of conviction. A different matter, however, is the Pagan traditions that advance racist attitudes and beliefs. These are minority traditions within Paganism that openly advocate for intolerance and hatred and are no more representative of mainstream Paganism than the KKK are of Christianity.
The postmodern period is marked by the visible, tragic failure of the modernist project. The utopia envisioned by the fathers of the Enlightenment has not unfolded and in its place is globalized alienation, greed, and violence that threatens individual health and well-being and the survival of life on Earth. Postmodernism has created a space for exploration of alternatives to the modernist meta-narratives and worldview. It is possible to construct an individual spiritual worldview, drawn from those elements that resonate with the seeker. Pagans see the traditional, conventional systems of meaning as no longer suitable. The participants clearly expressed dissatisfaction in the ability of the beliefs and values of mainstream religions and society to address their spiritual needs.

The current search for alternative spiritual values may be seen as a response to the great crises that confront our times. We live in a world in which values seen to be constantly failing us and the structures on which many people have based their lives are shifting (Marron, 1989, p. 47).

Pagans have looked back at ancestral traditions for inspiration for the future. It is hoped that the revival of a pre-modern worldview will provide the framework needed for a sense of meaning and purpose and facilitation of relationships with self, others, the world, and the Divine that create individual fulfillment and societal and environmental balance.

The Pagan worldview can offer insights to social work as the profession also struggles with creating systems of meaning in the postmodern period. Social work is being challenged to meet the needs of a growing range of clients, many of who were silenced by the meta-narratives of modernism. Alternative perspectives on practice can offer innovative new views. Incorporating Pagan “knowledge” with social work theory and practice can expand the profession’s conceptualization of the helping relationship.
There are several points where principles common to the Pagan spiritual worldview link to the practice of social work. I offer the following points of linkage for consideration:

1. The movement from a bio-psycho-social model of practice to a bio-psycho-socio-spiritual model. Those advocating for the adoption of spiritually sensitive social work practices by the profession have highlighted the need for a model that considers the spirituality and spiritual dimension of clients. The Pagan worldview supports a holistic conceptualization of individuals as spirit, body and mind. Balance among all three is necessary for optimal living. Baskin (2002) cautions that there has been an undercurrent within social work that limits consideration of spirituality to the area of multicultural practice with “others.” Baskin fears that the emphasis on spirituality as part of a cross-cultural focus only will lead to a failure by social workers to consider the spirituality of clients that do not appear to be multicultural others. The approach to spirituality as only a cultural component is obviously based on the meaning of spirituality as one dimension. Paganism’s acceptance of the existence of a spirit, a vitality that infuses the whole of the person, rejects the limitation of spirituality to merely a dimension. All people are spiritual beings and their spirituality will influence the social worker relationship.

2. Deepening commitment to issues of global social justice. The Pagan worldview sees the Divine in everything and everything is interconnected by energy or a life force. The Rule of Return is a reminder that it is impossible to stand alone outside the web of interconnectedness. Consequences return to everyone based on their intent and actions. Individual fulfillment will depend on being part of the solution for global justice and harmony. Some social work theorists are questioning the humanocentrism of the profession (Besthorn, 2002; Besthorn, 2001; Canda, 2002). The person-in-environment focus has only considered Nature as a backdrop for
human activity. This is a continuation of the modernist perspective, limiting the view of Nature to that of its instrumental value to humans (Besthorn, 2002; Besthorn, 2001). Pantheism and animism advance the argument that Nature must be revered for its intrinsic value and treated with respect.

3. Individual and societal change is possible through spiritual means. The Pagan magical worldview asserts that transformation is possible through concerted will and directed energy to an action. Magic is only possible when the spirit is fully engaged in the interconnectedness of the whole. Individual and societal change demands spiritual engagement. Paganism also recognizes that the knowledge needed for change may come through spiritual ways of knowing such as intuition and tacit knowledge.

4. Every person has the authority and responsibility for their own spiritual path. Social workers need to respect the spiritual choices made by clients in order for the provision of sensitive service. The helping relationship must be determined and directed by the client's spiritual reality and the meaning and purpose that emerge from their spiritual worldview. The social worker also has a responsibility to examine his/her own spirituality in order to expand self-awareness. Spiritual self-awareness is necessary for the provision of competent service.

5. Diversity should be embraced and celebrated. The profession of social work has not yet fully embraced spiritual diversity. Participants in this research indicated they had not received spiritually sensitive social work service. Coholic (2002) discovered that some social workers fear their peers would view them negatively because they incorporate spirituality into their practice. There is a great distance to travel before spiritual diversity is embraced and celebrated in our clients and in ourselves.
CONCLUSION

Spiritually sensitive social work has not resolved its own internal conflict between subjective relativism and absolutism. Like postmodernism, the spiritual sensitive social work perspective positions everything as subjective and relative, making all meaning systems equally valid. This leaves us drifting in moral chaos. The subjective spiritual worldview of the client is positioned as the reality directing the helping relationship and all worldviews are considered to be equally valid and deserving of respect. How does the worker then address worldviews that advocate sexism, racism, hatred and violence?

As a profession we need to be honest about the lack of consistency within our perspectives and models. No matter how much we discuss honouring the client’s subjective truth and reality, we live by a moral and ethical code, as both a society and profession. Certain behaviours are not acceptable based on that code and certain belief systems are discouraged rather than being supported.

Important future research in the field of spiritually sensitive social work would be the exploration of the areas in which individual or community spiritual worldviews contradict the professional values and guidelines of social work. This exploration would need to explicitly address the basis of professional practice values and standards. As a profession we appear to implicitly acknowledge an objective, ultimate ground of reality from which moral and ethical values emerge but discussion seldom takes place around this assumption of moral absolutism.

Research is also needed in the development of spiritual assessment tools. There are times when the client’s “reality” is not an expression of their spiritual or religious worldview but rather a symptom of mental illness or disease. Assessment tools, based on the inclusion of diverse and multiple spiritual traditions and expressions, which can
differentiate between healthy and unhealthy perceptions, experiences and behaviours are needed. These tools are essential for social workers to competently and sensitively assess clients.

Another area important for future research within spiritually sensitive social work is the development of training resources surrounding the incorporation of spirituality into practice. Perhaps the greatest challenge of engaging in spiritually sensitive practice is authentic respect for other spiritual worldviews. There is a difference between tolerance and respect. Tolerance implies the right to choose alternatives and respect implies the acknowledgement of the validity of the alternatives. Western society has not, until recently, encouraged spiritual self-reflection and exploration. I think, due to this lack of exploration, people cling on to their spiritual worldview as a security blanket. It can be frightening to truly embrace the concept of multiple, equally, valid spiritual paths. Ferrer (2001) explains,

But whenever we find a specific pathway that provides us with some freedom and happiness, our minds tend to subtly devalue other paths, even those that seem to be working quite well for others. Our minds construct and impose compelling rational schemes that situate our spiritual choices in a privileged place, thus automatically prejudging other options as inferior (p.3).

Clients will feel the social workers attitude within the helping relationship. Mere tolerance or surface acceptance of a client’s spiritual worldview, rather than authentic respect for their spiritual path will no doubt be perceived as patronizing by clients. True respect of another’s spiritual path may only come from self-awareness and a high level of comfort with one’s own spiritual worldview. It is essential that social workers have the training resources available that encourage the spiritual self-awareness, self-reflection and self-growth needed for the practice of spiritually sensitive social work.
References


York University Press.
Appendix I  Sample of Covering Letter
Despite this, some questions still may not fit your spiritual or religious tradition well. I would ask you to comment upon this within the questionnaire. I encourage you to be as vivid, expressive and creative as you wish within the questionnaire. I am hoping to present as vibrant and as deep a portrait of the belief systems and practices of participants as possible, highlighting similarities and also illuminating the rich diversity. The qualitative analysis of the data you provide can then serve as an information source for spiritually sensitive social work practice. Of course, social workers will always need to explore a client's unique spiritual and/or religious viewpoint, but this research will provide a base for beginning to understand who Pagans are and what beliefs and practices are part of their spirituality/religion.

The information from the questionnaire will be analyzed and presented in my final research paper, which will be available to the public through the University of British Columbia. Your confidentiality is assured within the research paper. Readers of the thesis research paper will not know who has participated in the research as no names or identifying information will be included in the paper. I will also try to maintain anonymity in collecting the completed questionnaires. I need to mention, though, that due to a relatively small sample population in which the questionnaires are being distributed, letter postmarks may reveal your identity to me when I receive a completed questionnaire. However, I will not be recording names or identifying information on questionnaires as they are returned. Please consider this as it may influence your decision to participate in the study, which questions you choose to answer, or your method of returning the questionnaire. Completed questionnaires, which do not contain identifying information, will be stored for five years and then destroyed.

I will be presenting tentative findings from the research at the Avalon East Pagan Gathering taking place August 8 – August 10, 2003. If you request such, I will be able to email you a summary of findings or the entire research paper after September 2003.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You may refuse to answer specific questions within the questionnaire. Return of a completed questionnaire will indicate your consent to participate within this research study.

If you have any concerns or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Frank Tester at the above email address and telephone number. You may also contact me, again at the above email address and telephone number.

If you have any concerns regarding your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at (604) 822-8598.

I value your participation and thank you for your commitment of time and effort.

Sincerely,

Darcy Sarson; BA, BSW, MSW student
Appendix II  Sample of Questionnaire
Spiritually Sensitive Social Work:
Exploring the Pagan Path

This questionnaire will take approximately 60 - 90 minutes to complete. Your completion and return of this questionnaire will indicate that you have given consent for me to use the information in the questionnaire for my research.

Thank you for your participation in this research project.

1. Demographic Information:
   a) Age __________________
   b) Gender __________________
   c) Race/Ethnicity __________________
   d) Occupation __________________
   e) How many years have you identified as Pagan? __________________

2. Spirituality and Religion
   a) How do you define spirituality?
   
   b) How do you define religion?
   
   c) Do you consider yourself to be a spiritual person? If yes, is there any name or label you give to your sense of spirituality?
d) Have you ever identified with another spirituality? If yes, which spirituality?

e) Currently, are you a member of a religion? If yes, what is the name of the religion?

f) Have you ever been a member of another religion? If yes, which religion?

g) Are you open in talking about your spirituality or religion with family, friends, or co-workers? Why do you choose to disclose or not disclose this aspect of your life?
3. Path to Paganism

a) Describe what attracted you to, drew you to, or called you to Paganism. If raised Pagan, what in the belief system or community, maintains your participation?
4. Pagan Community

a) Do you feel part of a Pagan community? Why or why not?

b) If you do feel part of a Pagan community, what support and resources does the community offer to you?
5. Pagan Beliefs and Practices

a) What do you feel a social worker would need to know about your spiritual/religious beliefs in order to work sensitively and competently with you? For this question, you may wish to include information about the nature of the divine or sacred, human nature, the meaning/purpose of life, the process of death and/or anything else you feel is relevant.
b) What do you feel a social worker would need to know about your spiritual/religious practices and their intended purposes in order to work sensitively and competently with you?
6. Social Workers and Pagan Clients

a) Have you ever been a client of a social worker? If yes, did you feel that the service provided was spiritually sensitive? Please describe how it was or was not spiritually sensitive.

b) As a Pagan, do you anticipate that a social worker in a mainstream institution or agency would provide spiritually sensitive service? How would that affect your likelihood to request or accept service?
7. Additional Comments

Please add any comments you feel would contribute to this research.