PRESENCE, CLARITY AND THE SPACE OF RECEPTIVITY IN COUNSELLING: SHAMBHALA BUDDHIST COUNSELLORS' NARRATIVES OF EXPERIENCE

by

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Abstract

This study is an inquiry into the experiences of Shambhala Buddhist counsellors. My interest lies in whether the Shambhala Buddhism paradigm of health and basic goodness and the practice of working with emotions affect counsellors in their relationship with clients, have relevance for counselling practice, and pragmatic usefulness for counsellor training. My question is: does the practice and study of Shambhala Buddhism inform their counselling and how is this distilled in action and in interaction? The participants are Shambhala Buddhist counsellors who have a history and depth of experience in both Buddhism and counselling. My research path comprised interviews, a group dialogue and an art-making component. Congruent with counselling and Buddhist approaches, I inquired into these counsellors' stories of experience and practiced mindfulness and openness as my researcher's stance. I did multiple readings of the various texts, investigating the participants' view, presence, and interaction with clients. To analyze and present the findings, I used the Buddhist logic of ground, path, and fruition.

My inquiry outlines how these counsellors' view of basic goodness and self-construct is embodied in practice. Enhanced counsellor awareness, profound empathic connection, attentiveness to self and other and in relationship, and openness without agenda give rise to the conceptual clarity that informs skillful action. It results in an openhearted presence, clarity, and receptivity. Strategically helping clients examine their experience and how their mind constructs that experience shifts clients' relationship to pain, themselves, and others. This enhances clients' self-reflectivity, self-acceptance, and disengagement from fixed patterns and constructed storylines that maintain suffering. This focus helps clients develop greater emotional configurations and more fluid ways of being.
These insights and practices address core, fundamental, and valuable components of counselling. They have great relevance for the relational process and experiential reality of counselling. This research enlarges the conversation on empathy and counsellor competency. It points to the educational significance of incorporating experiential expressive forms and practices of embodied learning to enhance counsellor self and other awareness and the possibility for attunement. This study offers substantive theoretical and practical implications for counselling practice and for the education of counsellors.
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CHAPTER 1 INSPIRATION

“To experience fearlessness, it is necessary to experience fear” (Trungpa, 1984, p. 24).

Meeting Fear

It felt acrid this terror, yet I saw him. Even through it, I saw him; I felt his yearning. His humanity touched mine. We met in that moment, scared into connection. Eight years ago, I met my fear; I met a teacher. Eight years ago I worked as a therapist in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, our offices next to a medical clinic that referred us individuals who had just been diagnosed as being HIV sero-positive and others suffering from cocaine or heroin addiction, many previously jailed, all needing psychological support. The majority of our clients were ‘street-involved people’ living with what I used to call the 3As: AIDS, addiction and abuse. One afternoon while working alone, I was referred a client who was “upset”. This gentleman sat talking with me about what he wanted and clearly he was having an extremely difficult time; he seemed to be suffering withdrawal symptoms. As he related his story, I learnt that he had been released from prison a couple of days ago, that he had knifed a man for money, and was “desperate,” living on the street searching for drugs which had been readily available in prison. He said that he had sought support, i.e.: medication, but both the mental health clinic and the medical clinic refused to prescribe him any. He told me that since his release, the cops had seen him on the street, pulled out their arms and frisked him without cause, which he attributed to being known as dangerous and he described to me how he had spent months in solitary confinement.

At that moment, I too was confined. My office was situated at the end of a long corridor with no escape. The buzzer to call for help was at the other end of the room and I knew I would not make it if I tried. As he recounted his story and spoke of his need, he
became increasingly anxious; his breathing became more constrained as he went on speaking of the people he had killed. Whether what he was saying was true, whether there would have been any actual danger was immaterial. What I felt was my fear and his. Meeting my fear, I sensed that he too was afraid, afraid in the core of his being, perhaps afraid of what he could do, perhaps afraid of my response or more likely, my inability to respond. At the moment of meeting my fear though, all I knew in that instant was that I felt fear in us, inbetween us. And I sensed his incredible yearning.

Clearly his rage at being rebuffed, his anxiety and fear were palpable, as were mine. The threat was real. As he sat in front of me beginning to panic, there was a moment when I connected to the reality of his pain, his essential humanness. I do not remember what exactly transpired between us in that moment when I told him to stop and to breathe together with me, but I do know that I did look directly at him and saw his pain and fear as no different than mine. I met him in his fear; I met him through my own fear. There was our mutual experience of “I might as well be dead.” He had a right to exist, to be seen. Recognizing this, I was able to join him in feeling and tell him I wanted to hear his story. I responded by standing and telling him “stop” and we would work with it. I remember then going through with him, a breathing exercise to calm our beating hearts. It certainly calmed mine. Asking him to breathe with me, I talked him down. The anxiety in the room deflated, he calmed and I sat with him, listening.

He began his story. A story of which I presently have little remembrance, other than it was one of continual abuse as a child and of being lost as an adult, lost in criminal activities, lost in despair. There was the present despair of not knowing what to do. What I remember was his fundamental loneliness, his experiences of dismissal and rejection.
We conversed, he talked, I listened. We agreed to meet again. The next time he visited, he brought with him a book: The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying by Sogyal Rinpoche. He related that he had been to the Buddhist Church at the corner of Hastings and Gore and had met someone who had lent him this book. I was struck then by the uncanny coincidence for I believe I had never spoken with him about Buddhism. How was it that he would receive a Tibetan reference from what I believed was a Chinese Buddhist Church? He came a few days later to see me again before I left to work at UBC.

This story is simple; the point is that it remains an encounter that still resonates for me as a pivotal moment, an incredible learning. I learned that I could be with that rage and fear and could work to contain and ease it. And I ask: What allowed me to be with my own fear and yet see him as more than someone to be afraid of? I do know that my Buddhist practice had made it possible for me to see beyond the layers of hate and anchor myself in the knowing of a fundamental principle: our “basic goodness” (Trungpa, 1991). Had it not been for that and for my understanding of the Buddhist psychology on how we construct our identities, I believe the outcome would have been otherwise. Though this reaction of joining another in their pain may be natural for some, I attribute my ability to connect at that moment to my Shambhala Buddhist practice, which has had a profound impact on me.

Questioning

I see him as one of my teachers. He left me with the stark realization that my Buddhist practice had helped me tolerate incredible feelings, both mine and another’s, and somehow allowed me to stay present with fear. I remain surprised and curious. Was it

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1 Rinpoche is an honorific term that means “Precious One”.
having experienced and known fear? What was this trust, was it a survival response? Yet trust surpassed this fear. Was it trust in myself, trust in him? My curiosity was piqued. I had been practicing Buddhism for just over two years and I wondered, does the practice of Shambhala Buddhism affect other counsellors, does it impact their counselling practice? If so, how? This is the opening point for my research; it leads me to speak of the possibility of learning to be with fear. Counselling practice requires that counsellors be able to tolerate emotions. Shambhala Buddhist teachings are precisely directed toward the practice of fearlessness, an embodied practice of working with fear, not becoming numb or reactive to it. Could there then be pragmatic usefulness to this study?

It has taken me a while to begin this inquiry. Through it, I hope to honor this person who gave me the gift of meeting my fear in his presence and to share with others my learnings from this study.

In this context, I use the word “Buddhism” to refer to the general view shared by many Tibetan Buddhist teachings where Buddhism is seen as “a science of mind and a philosophy of life that addresses the emotions as well as the intellect and offers a basis for understanding the meaning of life and the nature of the world” (Ponlop, 2004), and I use “Shambhala Buddhism” to refer to a specific Buddhist tradition of philosophy and practice. (See Appendix A for further explanation of Buddhist terms and practices). For simplicity sake and without denying the rich diversity of traditions within the helping professions, I use the word “counsellor” to refer to the broad category of mental health professionals that includes psychologists, therapists, analysts, counsellors, social workers and others who work with individuals regarding their emotional issues. I shall speak to Buddhist and psychological theories and practices in more depth in chapter two.
At this point, I would simply like to set the stage for the research inquiry by sharing the reflections that laid the groundwork for this study. I relate these instances as I value the need for self-awareness in counselling and in research; awareness of what we bring to each endeavor is about being transparent and not getting in the way of the process. I include autobiographical vignettes as I situate myself as a participant in the study and recognize that my experiences shape the structure of my presentation and the interpretive stance I take. Further, as I shall investigate the embodied presence of self in relationship, it would be inconsistent and a struggle for me to research from the position of a disembodied voice. Being attentive to my ideas and the formation of my questions permits me to maintain ontological consistency and actively respect alternative positions. Attentiveness to self and one's practice are crucial to counselling. My plan is to do a substantial, careful, and theoretically informed investigation of practice. The Ed.D program in which I am a candidate is a practice-oriented program of study that focuses on lived experience; thus reflections on practice form part of this inquiry.

First thoughts

As I began my process of reflection, I recognized that the 'self' of the counsellor and how counsellors practice or change is a somewhat different focus than the usual focus on the client. Early writings on mental health generally focused on the clients' underlying issues, defenses, neurotic tendencies and ways for the counsellor to work with these concerns to help clients change and improve their lives. As the counsellor's role was originally seen as that of a detached observer, the person of the counsellor was less of a focus apart from those instances where the counsellor had an emotional reaction to either the client or the presenting issue that could get in the way of healing. These feelings were also seen as indicators of the client's own state such that they became ways
for the counsellor to better understand the client. The focus here again returned to the
client. Feminist and postmodern ideas challenged the notion of an objective value-neutral
observer, and as a result there has been a growing emphasis on the client counsellor
relationship such that a good relationship is seen as a necessary healing factor. The self of
the counsellor and the counsellor’s ability to be in relationship in therapeutic ways then
becomes crucial.

Considering these developments and the importance of what we as counsellors
bring to the relationship, I became more attentive to how Buddhism actually speaks to
ideas of the self, and in particular, the Shambhala Buddhist view of basic goodness and
its teachings that emphasize how facing the truth of our lives and trusting in the heart lead
to gentleness and fearlessness as ways of relating and being in the world.

I remembered my first articulation of how my Shambhala Buddhist practice could
be influencing my counselling. A few years ago, I and other colleagues had a supervisor
who visited us to discuss our work. Her approach was narrative therapy; a therapeutic
approach that uses social constructionist ideas and questions how we see our identity in
order to bring forth alternate narratives. As a supervisory tool, she inquired into our work
with clients using this narrative appreciative approach and sought to highlight our stories
of success in what we brought to our work with clients. Rather than the use of humor, an
interest in music, or advocacy for social justice as my colleagues were able to claim, I
was able to say little more than that my belief and trust in basic goodness offered a view
and approach to another as inherently healthy and that my task was to help them see
themselves in that light so that they could believe in possibility; I saw this task as
fundamental and prior to any other skill. From my experiences with clients who
fundamentally at the core of their being were so shattered that the very premise of choice was unimaginable, I had learnt that knowing themselves as good and worthwhile was key to their belief in change or imagining possibility.

I then asked myself, "What is the experience of basic goodness in interaction, how is it translated within that sphere of subjectivity that is counselling?" "Do others see this as valuable?" I remembered my experience of meeting fear and considered how a counsellor's ability to tolerate difficult emotions is important. I wondered, "Does the view of basic goodness help us stay present with another in their suffering?" These reflections formed the basis for this study.

I decided to meet with counsellors and inquire into the influence of Shambhala Buddhism on their interactions with clients. As I wanted to learn how these influences were embodied in interaction and if there were times that were challenging, I designed the study so that I could meet with them both individually and in a group, and use expressive forms to illustrate their lived experience. I was curious whether, from the perspective of the counsellors, such influences were valuable and if so, whether the results would have pragmatic usefulness for other counsellors. I detail the methodology later in chapter 3. But here, I bring forth two vignettes told to me by the research participants as they highlight what is at stake when individuals seek counselling. Let us listen to the words of two of the participants as they speak to the play of emotions and action of basic goodness within a session. As these vignettes speak directly to the issue of staying present in the face of difficulty, I entitle them:

**Not Turning Away**

**Erin:** "I think that I can join with people quite quickly. There is some kind of trust. We go through a lot of clients here, because we are a short-term model. So I see
tons of people and I am with them for a very short period of time. And so you need to join, establish trust, and establish confidence right at the get go because you don’t have a lot of time for monkeying around you know. I remember one night. I had seen the partner of this individual, and the decision was that I should see the man. The first thing that happened which was really bad was when I called him to set up an appointment. He was a shift worker. And I woke him up out of a dead sleep, so that wasn’t good. I don’t normally do this, but I was having an appointment with him and I was going to be alone here, it was after hours. And I walked into the waiting room, and oy, yo yoy. This guy was just steaming with rage. I remember, I was sitting in my office at that time, but I pulled my chair quite a ways away from him because he needed room. And he didn’t stop for 45 minutes. I just kept [saying] ‘tell me more, tell me more’. And I used whatever skills I had and I loved that man by the end of the session. I mean he was just such a formidable rage full guy. But he turned into a teddy bear of a guy and continued to see me over the years. He was ferocious, and it was completely directed at me. I just sat there, and I didn’t lose my feet with that guy, and I think that is what created the relationship that allowed us to work. He was a big guy, a union fighter guy, and I just took my seat.”

This is a vignette from Erin, a counsellor who describes her passion for her work and her steadfastness as grounded in a practice of being authentically present, open and able to relate with another based on seeing the basic goodness in them. Here is a vignette from Edward, a counsellor recognized as an expert in working with family violence.

Edward: “You can’t work with aggression unless you know what gets to you... how do you hold your disgust and your outrage and be present with that, without judging or wincing or moving away from it, and at the same time, become curious about how
another human being could do terrible things to someone else. Even when I am working with the most obnoxious and corrupted difficult people who are irritating me, where you have this person trying to get away from basic goodness, my task, when working with someone who is aggressive, is to assist the person through whatever skillful means, to discover that part of themselves that wants to take a stand against the use of violence. The only way to trust basic goodness is from one’s own experience.”

Though they work with a variety of clients and different issues, these counsellors share one living experience. They are Shambhala Buddhist practitioners working from a belief in another that may be different than how that person sees himself or herself, a belief that may allow another to expand into that vision; it is a belief that, they believe, allows them to be response/able. They offer these instances to demonstrate how their practice of Shambhala Buddhism makes a difference in their counselling practice. These vignettes illustrate the necessity for the counsellor to be receptive and open, to tolerate difficult states and to believe in another. What matters is the creation of a space for the client to imagine another way of being; what is at stake is the client’s own ability to move from a fixed position towards greater freedom.

This leads me to the heart of this inquiry. How we are present with others in counselling and the view we hold of them has great impact on the relationship process. Across counselling orientations, the counselling relationship has been seen as key (Bachelor & Horvath, 2000). Yet the literature on the personal reflections of counsellors is rare as compared to that on theoretical orientations or clients’ issues. I wanted to learn about counsellors’ lived experiences from their perspective. So, I designed the study as an inquiry into how Shambhala Buddhism and its view of basic goodness helps
counsellors tolerate difficult emotions, and be present and attentive. I was curious whether such an inquiry would indicate different ways to be with clients’ emotions and to work with them, and thus benefit other counsellors. I hoped the results would be a support for counsellors in training as they begin their journey and learn how to relate with challenging situations amidst their natural anxiety and confusion. I expand on these points later in chapter 7. More detail on the methodological aspects of this study and my selection of participants follow in chapter 3.

Connections

Before beginning this inquiry I was curious about the points of convergence and divergence between the Buddhist and counselling traditions. Does Buddhism have any relevance for counselling? The abundance of recent works, books, articles, and conferences on psychology and Buddhism demonstrate a deepening conversation. I began looking at how Buddhism and counselling address suffering and deal with problems. Counselling is fundamentally a look into and method of working with suffering. Buddhism’s first noble truth is the reality of suffering. Both counselling and Buddhism share an interest in working with the mind and in relieving suffering; they have similar goals: to face issues and live sanely, similar intentions: to work with emotions in positive ways, and similar practices: attention, compassion and insight. Yet, they differ. The difference becomes evident in their approaches to relieving suffering, demonstrated by how each relates to the concept of self and to pain and pleasure. The fundamental premise in Buddhism is the reality of suffering, the suffering of birth, old age, sickness and death and the suffering of not getting what we want or getting what we don’t want, often the starting point of both counselling and Buddhist practice (Rosenbaum, 1999).
Buddhism actually sees reality as suffering, this inherent anxiety of life as we deal with the transitory nature of existence. In Buddhism, suffering can be transformed through acknowledging impermanence and letting go of our fixed notions of self that we hold onto in our attempts to avoid this anxiety. Counselling, too, sees anxiety as ubiquitous, yet generally addresses its management through a focus on the self by shoring up self-confidence and self-efficacy, and by relaxation coping strategies. How do we understand this construct of the self? How is this mediated in relationship? Thus I begin this inquiry into how Shambhala Buddhism informs counselling practice as seen through the eyes, ears, and heart of practitioners.

Why Shambhala?

Firstly, focusing on one particular framework makes the scope of this inquiry manageable. It is not meant to minimize the differences between the various forms of Buddhism nor present any one tradition as better. Rather, it is the tradition I know best, and it also appears to have the largest western Buddhist community. Another rationale is that the Shambhala Buddhist teachings essentially present how to live and relate with others and are specifically geared to a western mindset rather than the acceptance of another worldview or cultural tradition that may require rigorous adherence to other ways of being in the world unfamiliar to the western context. Further, though Buddhism is fundamentally directed towards individual enlightenment, Shambhala Buddhism is a path directed towards benefiting others, towards social transformation and helping build a sane society. While grounded in core classical Buddhist teachings on suffering, “no-self” and emptiness, the emphasis is on secular action and it offers specific practices that may be useful to counsellors. Its teachings are about bringing sanity to our lives, and living in the
world with dignity and appreciation, with gentleness and fearlessness. Shambhala Buddhism is a tradition within Tibetan Buddhism where the focus in meditation is on transforming difficult emotions (Rubin, 2003). It seems particularly appropriate in light of this inquiry.

In the next chapter I investigate those frameworks that speak of the development of the construct of the self and relationship in counselling and the self in Buddhism. I also present the context and discuss the relevance of the Shambhala teachings within this study. In the third chapter, I explain the process of inquiry and the research methods and in the fourth, fifth and sixth chapters, I present the results of this inquiry. In the last chapter, I discuss implications for counselling practice and the pedagogical and research significance of this study. I begin now with a look into the emphasis that Shambhala Buddhism offers: the vision of sanity and wisdom. What is unique to Shambhala is the focus on basic goodness as the starting point.
CHAPTER 2 INITIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

"Of all psychology’s sins, the most mortal is its neglect of beauty. There is, after all, something quite beautiful about a life" (Hillman, 1996, p. 35).

A place for health

As a Buddhist, the idea of sin has a certain irony. Hillman’s accusation strikes many chords. Brought up as a Catholic, educated in convent schools, with an uncle who studied to be a Jesuit and an aunt who became a nun in a cloistered nunnery, the context of my early learning and first rebellions had to do Catholicism and with sin. But more importantly, why speak of beauty? Hillman wishes to “join psychology with beauty” (p. 37) and suggests that a way to do so is by reaching out and understanding one’s issues as a calling, looking into the health and not the pathology of lives. He decries what he sees as the practice of therapeutic psychology’s emphasis on illness and the self-absorption it seems to foster. Instead he argues for a greater vision of human life and potential.

Echoing those who say psychology has been held hostage by pathology and refocusing on health, Hillman’s striking phrase and great accusation leads me to the central question behind this research: with its view of basic goodness, how does the study and practice of Shambhala Buddhism inform counselling practice? Though I am certainly not on any redemptive mission for counselling, starting from a paradigm of health and view of basic goodness as opposed to starting from illness and pathology can affect how we relate with the individual and what occurs in counselling; it clearly opens the door to sanity. Shambhala Buddhism’s foundational truth is the basic goodness of each of us; this is a perspective of health and trust in basic sanity. It suggests a radical change from those practices of therapy based on a view of the “problematic self” seeking resolution. Not all counselling starts with notion of pathology, yet there are striking differences with the
understanding of that view and the understanding of how the mind works that are relevant for counselling and for how we look at the life of an individual.

I would suggest that sanity and health speak to the realm of wisdom, to the reality and appreciation of being human, to the aesthetic experience of being alive and awake. Similarly, Hillman speaks of psychology’s neglect as the “sin of deadening” (p. 36).

While studying art therapy, I was told once by a teacher that one could consider anesthetic, the numbing of the senses, as the opposite of aesthetic. This phrase little understood by me at the time continues to live in my being; the notion of aesthetic resonates with aliveness, openness of spirit and a sensitivity of heart to the world we inhabit and to our presence within it. Aesthetic is often associated with beauty in a particular way. Here I consider it to be about being awake and aware in the moment. It is the practice of Shambhala Buddhism that has made that come alive for me, which I shall speak to later. Anesthetic is “lacking awareness or sensitivity” (Mish, 1994, p. 44). It is a “palliative” offering “relief” from pain, and relief is often the request of someone who is suffering. Yet health lies in the awakened heart, alive to our humanity, vulnerable and open. The challenge to anesthesia, that “loss of sensation with or without loss of consciousness” is wakefulness. Here is my search for some common ground.

**Personal inquiry**

As my Buddhist and counselling practices evolved, I found myself on parallel paths searching for psychological theories and practices that start with health not pathology, and seeking ways to constructively be awake in openheartedness while counselling. I trained in narrative therapy as it had a social constructionist orientation and looked at individuals with a positive perspective. Rather than locating problems within
the individual, narrative therapy sees linguistic practices and the social context as the site of problem formation and resolution (Lax, 1996). As proposed by White and Epston (1990), narrative therapists use externalizing conversations to unravel problems and their impact, and work towards eliciting an individual’s preferred realities and alternate identities. I found many parallels between Buddhist concepts of how we get caught in maintaining positions, how our minds create fixed identities and the method of narrative therapy in deconstructing mistaken ideas of who or what we are. This approach emphasizes respect and the focus is on helping the client become an active participant in engendering hope. Yet I questioned whether the process maintained a self-focus that could ultimately result in the reoccurrence of issues. Magid states this far more eloquently: “increasing the repertoire of available relational configurations or ‘selves’ at one’s disposal… did not adequately address the potential for a radical reconfiguration of self-centered motivation in light of an awareness of interconnectedness and the realization of the essential emptiness of self-nature” (Magid, 2002, p. 88). I continued looking at other formulations.

Given my practical experience of the Buddhist concepts of how we construct our world, I saw connections with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and its usefulness in helping clients learn how the ways we think affect our situation. CBT works on the premise that we live in a world of ideas, interpretations and assumptions. The focus of therapeutic action then becomes one of working with clients to reframe thoughts, make more realistic appraisals, and change behavior. It is predicated on showing clients how thoughts influence emotions and behavior, and that many thoughts occur outside conscious awareness. This formulation allows clients to become more aware of those
underlying thought patterns that serve to maintain negative lifestyles and emotions. It is a conceptualization that relates well to the Buddhist premise of how the mind works, though Buddhism diverges in how to relate with thoughts (Meadows, 2003). Buddhism sees that we create stories to help us make sense of experience but the problem is that we believe or we relate to these stories in the same way we relate to ourselves, as a single fixed reality, and thus we intensify the struggle.

CBT is useful in helping clients create another way to construct experience. Though CBT assumes that understanding or insight is sufficient to facilitate behavioral change, I found CBT lacked the fullness of the affective component necessary to sustain change. On the other hand, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) practitioners believe that understanding and talking about, or even “working through” issues are not as effective as reprocessing. I became trained in EMDR, which I found useful in helping clients develop an observing aspect to their experiences, and a powerful way to work with trauma. As a process that balances affective processing and distancing, there were many parallels with the Buddhist practice of mindfulness.

While I continued to use these approaches as seemed appropriate, my meditation practice made me acutely aware of the impermanence of beliefs and provided me with the possibility of seeing more clearly. From direct experience through my Buddhist practice, I realized that the personal changes I was experiencing in learning how to relate with my mind and with emotions were inextricably being interwoven into my counselling practice. They impact my ability to be present, affect the lens through which I see and how I relate with another, and allow me to recognize and acknowledge my errors and the ways I could

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2 EMDR: eye movement desensitization and reprocessing is a structured therapeutic methodology designed to help individuals process negative information, events, or trauma, and is based upon dual attention to external stimuli, often eye movements, while processing information.
be less than “good enough”. At times I experience a greater degree of presentness and openness, two factors that seem beneficial to the process and to the clients I were counselling. Then I became aware of the increasing dialogue between Buddhism and psychology. This dialogue is relevant as it illustrates the emphasis on the counsellor’s ability to be present in counselling, a focus of this study into the counsellor’s lived experience. What follows is an outline of that dialogue, the developments in the field of psychology and some conceptual links with Buddhism.

The dialogue

The recent spate of literature on Buddhism and psychology attests to a growing interest on the relationship between these fields. What appears less evident is the actual history of this dialogue that started in the early years of psychology. Epstein (1995) recounts how in the early 1900s, a foremost psychologist, William James, while lecturing at Harvard, saw a Buddhist monk in the audience. James said: “You should be up here not I”, stating that Buddhist psychology would be the psychology everyone would later study. Rubin (1996) outlines the early encounters between Buddhism and western psychology from initial negative perceptions of Buddhist practice as regression to later more lucid and serious attempts at understanding. Many of the leading figures in the field of psychology such as Carl Jung, Karen Horney, and Erich Fromm were noted for their interest in Buddhism, and Buddhist thought has influenced the development of the humanistic psychology of Abraham Maslow (Epstein, 1995). Noting the ethical and compassionate components of Buddhist psychology, Michalon (2001) speaks of the more recent “infiltration” of Buddhism in the fields of medicine, palliative care, psychology, and psychiatry. Let us look at what is being discussed in the more recent literature. The
following overview does not do justice to the depth of development and analysis in these traditions yet will be helpful in providing a basis for discussion.

The dialogue has been consistent and there seems to be increasing and more wide-ranging interest from science to philosophy to psychology. The interest within psychology may be because they share the “self” as a focus; or, perhaps it is because Buddhism specifically speaks to suffering and to its cessation. What appears in the forefront is that Buddhism has certain similarities with psychological cognitive reframing and the observing aspect to self, and it offers useful practices: meditation for attention and self-acceptance, and strategies for cultivating positive attitudes. The question then becomes, how does the counsellor translate this into experience?

The ability to listen means an openness and attention to the present, and has been seen as crucial to all therapeutic practice. Many counsellors attest to the usefulness of Buddhist mindfulness techniques (Hymer, 2004, Meadows, 2003, La Torre, 2002). They relate how it has changed their ability to listen and be with a patient (Michalon, 2001) and describe the value of meditative practice in developing non-attachment, accepting insecurity and letting go of outcome (La Torre, 2002). Also noted is the importance of attention and usefulness of meditation practice to listen well, sustain witnessing, tolerate emotional states as well as to cultivate a wider and simultaneous even attentiveness to both client and self (Speeth, 1982).

Psychoanalytic writers, in particular, place emphasis on the benefits of meditation as a practice of being in the present moment (Hymer, 2004, Epstein, 1995, 1998) and see its non-judgmental openness as similar to the classical analytical position of “bare attention” or “evenly-suspended attention” (Hymer, 2004). “When paying attention in
this way, the analysand’s raw material, the analyst’s physical, mental, and emotional
responses, and the analyst’s associations, need to formulate, and actual formulations all
are attended to with the same impartial attention” (Epstein, 1995, p. 184). Speeth (1982)
values the meditation practice of focused attention in enhancing the counsellor’s ability to
voluntarily initiate an empathic response and to have a sense of the client’s inner
experience, yet maintain emotional independence. Cooper (2004), however, decries the
equivalency made between Buddhist methods and philosophy. He acknowledges the
primacy of attention in both Buddhist and psychoanalytic practice, yet he cogently argues
that recent dialogue on the relevance of mindfulness to the psychoanalytic form of evenly
hovering attention effectively diminishes both the psychoanalytic process of paying
attention to the many layers of experience as well as the Buddhist understanding of
emptiness. Cooper (2004) states that an emphasis on consistent focused attention obviates
the value of distraction, those instances of counsellor inattention that may be a useful
relational mirror of the client’s own issues. Maintaining that the recent literature
minimizes the extent to which both Buddhism and psychoanalysis address subjective
experience and the joining of analyst with the client, he bemoans the lack of a richer,
more creative conversation.

These writers emphasize the usefulness of meditation and offer caveats of how the
practice is not for all, caveats shared by Buddhist teachers. In general, the majority of
articles refer to the usefulness of Buddhist techniques as an adjunct to psychotherapy.
With the Buddhist method there appears to be agreement, with its view of the self there
appears to be sharp differences. For readers untrained in Buddhist practice, the danger
lies in having only a conceptual understanding. It can become a truncation of the richness
of Buddhist teachings, a form of appropriation or a technique rather than a process. In the same way, Buddhism is not a panacea and its practices can be used to avoid experience and maintain a rigid self.

Buddhism does posit one common explanation of the self, unlike general psychological theories. There has been over a century of psychological theory and practice, a bedrock of study and investigation on the self. Corsini and Wedding (2000) provide an excellent overview of the major contributions by many theorists and practitioners. My interest here is with how concepts of the self inform the perspective, presence and action of the counsellor. In the following section, I first discuss the self in Buddhism. Then I provide a broad outline of the shifts in psychological theory and practice on the self concept, the relational turn in therapy, and recent research that points to the increasing importance of the “present moment” of the relationship in counselling.

**The self**

The challenge that Buddhism poses to western forms of psychology is that the concept of the self as a singular, unitary, unchanging entity that provides for continuity is false, and that our belief and very adherence to that notion is the root of our suffering. This may be conceptually easy to understand, perhaps formidably difficult to imagine allowing oneself to experience. Many, however, do misunderstand, thinking no-self means the end of self, or that emptiness is a void. From a Buddhist perspective, emptiness simply refers to being empty of separate, independent existence.

Buddhism speaks of interdependence rather than autonomy, non-dualism rather than separation, impermanence rather than continuity. The Buddhist paradigm is process oriented. It sees our self-concept or belief that we exist as concrete, ongoing, and separate
as mistaken and problematic. "Confused mind is inclined to view itself as a solid, ongoing thing, but it is only a collection of tendencies, events. In Buddhist terminology this collection is referred to as the Five Skandas" (Trungpa, 1987, p. 123). These five skandas are form, feeling, perception, formation, and consciousness. Form is all material things, and this creates the sense of 'I' as separate, the beginning of duality. Feeling is our reaction of like, dislike, or neutrality to what we assume is separate. Perception is discrimination; we make distinctions and judgments of that experience of feeling. Formation is the naming, the conceptual interpretations. Consciousness is simply moments of knowing. Yet, we negate the breaks in our experience that are unfolding and ever-changing. Instead, we make patterns and maintain a seemingly continual stream of thoughts, which gives the illusion of self-continuity.

This is not a polarity where everything is projection. Rather, world and mind arise together. Nor is it a dualistic approach of inside, outside. It is an interplay that is enacted. The interaction of the skandas allows a sense of self with which we identify. This sense of a singular, unchanging entity called the self is our own construction that we are continuously creating as we strive to keep it going. It is not a harmless exercise; it is the source of suffering and a struggle that Buddhism says we need to let go. To obviate confusion, rather than the term self, it may be useful here to speak in terms of self-concept or personal identity, as is appropriate to counselling. In Buddhist terms, it is our belief in and attachment to the "me" that we create that is an issue. Awareness of how we create that process may occur in meditation through the recognition of egolessness. Everything has a permanent, independent existence, even the self-concept we cherish.

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3 Skandas - a Sanskrit word that means heap.
4 Egolessness or selflessness is our recognition of the lack of an inherent unchanging self.
Awareness of how this pattern functions is important. The maintenance of separateness, of outside versus inside, me and not-me, creates illness. Buddhism speaks of non-dualism; it asserts co-dependent origination, “not only is everything part of an interconnected whole, but each ‘thing’ has no fixed or separate identity apart from its myriad mutually causal relationships” (Magid, 2002, p. 21). Yet, clearly there is a person who is meditating. Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche (2002) provides this clarification:

Intrinsically, there is no one there. There is no self as such. But when we start talking about selflessness, what happens is that we think, “There is nothing. If this thing isn’t here, that must mean everything is void.” But that’s not what we’re saying. We are saying there is actually a mind. In fact, it is often said, “Not emptiness of person but emptiness of self” (Mipham, 2002, p. 47).

And here he speaks of the self as created in relationship:

We realize that our life, even when we are by our self, is based on relating with others—that we bring other individuals into creating who we are. We realize that this thing called our self is the bringing together of many things (Mipham, 2002, p. 81).

In psychology, the self has myriad forms and understandings, experiential, perceptual, intrapersonal, interpersonal, self as experience, self as representation, and so on. There is a vast wealth of literature from theorists of diverse traditions and there is no single construct of the self that is common to all forms of psychotherapy or psychology. To imagine so would be a form of reductionism. Yet, the self-concept has often been seen as the most important factor in human behavior.

Self-psychology, as called by its progenitor, Kohut, has a profound influence on therapy (Page & Berkow, 1991). Kohut stated that the self is formed by internalized images and affected by experiences with others, such as a nurturing relationship that creates an empathic bond with the child and affects the development of the self. He argued for the primacy of empathy in developing a consistent sense of self and posited
that the self-construct provides the framework for therapy. “Significant failure to achieve cohesion, vigor, or harmony, or a significant loss of these qualities after they have been tentatively established, may be said to constitute a state of self disorder” (Kohut & Wolf, 1978, p. 414). Though he emphasized the relationship as facilitative and empathy as central, Kohut saw a strong self as one able to withstand disruptions to self-esteem and have a sense of constancy and continuity.

This focus on intra-psychic processes emphasizes the individual self and internal psychological attributes. From this perspective, a cohesive self is the sign of mental health. Outlining how the construct of the self has been studied in light of self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-concept, and self-realization, Page and Berkow (1991) attest to how a cohesive self has been seen as necessary for mental health and self-actualization. More akin to Buddhism, both Carl Roger’s person centered therapy and Fritz Perl’s gestalt therapy focus on integration of self and perception. Rogers saw the self as alone within a private world of experience and placed more emphasis on empathy and the relationship both to bridge this gap and as healing factors in counselling. Focusing on the relationship, Rogers spoke of the client’s need for safety and acceptance as the impetus for healthy transformation. Though the importance of relationship is acknowledged, many forms of counselling emphasize self-realization as the ubiquitous aim for an individual and the function of counselling.

The relationship

The traditional emphasis upon self-realization notwithstanding, there has lately been a shift from an individual focus to a relational process focus. Social constructionism has challenged individualistic orientations. With its emphasis on social and contextual
factors, feminist research and counselling practice has been largely responsible for the increasing emphasis on the self-in-relationship. As studies came to the forefront indicating that development happens within relationship through an interactive process of affective regulation, the relationship became important (Spencer, 2000). The relationship was understood as the mediating factor that allows therapy to take place, as in the analysis of defenses, interpretation, insight and education. Spencer (2000) outlines the relational turn in psychology and psychoanalysis that saw emotional health as formed through the relational process. Within the psychoanalytical field there were two streams of relational models that understood development as contextualized and relational: an "interpersonal relational paradigm" and an "intersubjective" model; a cohesive self remains the goal of therapy for these models.

Feminist practitioners at the Stone Center extended the dialogue from where the relationship was understood as a contributory factor to positing the relationship as the very mechanism for healing; as disconnection is the cause of suffering, reconnection becomes the resolution. They extended this analysis to include unequal power relations within the larger social and cultural context where a "power over" stance is the source of difficulties. In this "relational-cultural model," the goal of therapy is the development of mutually empathic relationships. The intersubjective psychoanalysts maintain self-differentiation as the goal of therapy. There is more congruence between the interpersonal paradigm in psychoanalysis and the feminist relational cultural therapy as both "see the active co-construction of the therapy relationship to be central.

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5 The Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies at Wellesley College is a center that develops programs to foster psychological well-being and prevent psychological distress, and also supports research projects. It incorporates the Jean Baker Miller Training Institute, a feminist research and training center.
Walker and Rosen (2004) explain this further in their presentation of the relational cultural model. They critique relational models that focus on the usefulness of the relationship while maintaining a cohesive self and self-differentiation as the goal of therapy, stating: “the relationship is both process and goal” (p. 6), i.e. it is about being in relationship not mastering a relationship. They posit that personal vulnerability is basic to life and state that therapy can be relationally corrective and healing when the following dimensions are present: both affect and cognition; mutuality and shared power, where power though unequal is shared, or there is not the positioning of the therapist over another; mutual empathy where there is resonance such that the client can see the impact they have on the therapist, which posits the ability of the therapist to be moved by another and to show that; and authentic presence where the therapist is responsive and fully engaged (Walker & Rosen, 2004).

In their move away from a separate self, the relational cultural model becomes akin to Buddhist non-dualism. In their demand for authenticity and mutual empathy, they are speaking of openness, presence and resonance. Both directions appear to be on the forefront of recent research.

**The present moment**

Reporting on research and clinical studies, Stern (2004) writes about the lived experience of “present moments” in relationships that are transformative. Arguing for a radical departure from psychology’s traditional emphasis on the past, he emphasizes the affective connection that happens with “intersubjective consciousness, a form of reflectivity arising when we become conscious of our contents of mind by virtue of their
being simultaneously reflected back to us from the mind of another” (p. xvi). Researching the minutiae of instances of life, Stern records how each passing moment reflects the individual’s psyche and is an instant of both past and future. Transformative moments are those moments when mutual sensing and participating in each other’s experience occurs in the now of therapy.

This intersubjective sharing of a mutual experience is grasped without having to be verbalized, and becomes part of the implicit knowledge of their relationship. The sharing creates a new intersubjective field between the participants that alters their relationship and permits them to take different directions together. The moment enters a special form of consciousness and is encoded in memory. And importantly, it rewrites the past. Changes in psychotherapy (or any relationship) occur by way of these non-linear leaps in the ways-of-being-with-another (Stern, 2004, p. 22).

I am reminded of the instance with which I began this writing. According to Stern, our minds are not separate, independent and isolated. Rather our mental life is co-created. He offers the recent research on infant development, neurophysiology, and “mirror neurons” that allow us to have an “as if” experience of another’s actions, intentions and feelings, as evidence for this capacity of attunement that permits resonance with another. Thus he emphasizes the importance for the counsellor to be able to stay with and explore the present moment.

Interesting connections with Buddhism arise when self and experience are one. In my understanding, this is essentially the point of meditation practice where conceptual mind, interpretive thoughts are the after-print. Stern (2004) though sees present moments as different from meditative states, which he seems to limit to concentration. He defines meditation as “to lose the sense of self and for consciousness to maintain a concentrated focus, relatively impervious to other stimulation” (p. 43). While this may be the practice
through which one is able to be in the moment, I argue that it is a discipline one moves beyond to rest in openness. I detail this later in the explanation of meditation practice.

What is key is that Stern’s emphasis on the experiential rather than cognitive, the unpredictable rather than planned, the implicit not explicit, offers a vision of counselling that allows for in the moment experiencing, a “moment of meeting” (p. 220), and an authentic attunement and responsiveness that is transformative. Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1987) stresses this moment of meeting in the “now:”

If psychotherapy is presented with the emphasis on living in the present moment, working with present problems, not just as regards verbal expression and thoughts alone but in terms of experiencing the actuality of emotions and feelings, then I think that would be a very balanced style... The situation of nowness, this very moment, contains whole case histories and future determinations (Trungpa, 1987, p. 89).

Stern echoes this as he emphasizes experiencing over explanation, the process in the now over the understanding of the past. It is the counsellor’s ability to be in that moment that is vital. Here Trungpa (1987) makes a crucial distinction between someone experiencing the present like an animal or baby and being “awake in the nowness” (p. 204), where one is clear, aware and fully present.

Relating the connections between the Buddhist concept of a lack of a separate self and recent models of the mind, Segall reports on the “developing awareness of the parallels that exist within the Buddhist conception of the nature of mind and the understanding that is emerging through the advances in Western neuropsychology, cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence” (Segall, 2003, p. 2). There has been increasing research on the neurological underpinnings of meditation practice and its impact. Let us look then at meditation practice in the Shambhala tradition.
**Shambhala Teachings**

To begin, it may be useful to give the origin and context of Shambhala teachings that were introduced and taught by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, and to outline how he came to offer these profound Buddhist teachings within a secular frame. Born in Eastern Tibet, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche was an incarnate lama, the Supreme Abbot of the Surmang Monasteries, and a lineage holder in the Kagyü and Nyingma lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. At the age of eighteen, he obtained the degree of Khenpo, which is a degree comparable to a doctorate in theology, philosophy, and psychology. He also studied and practiced traditional arts of calligraphy, poetry, dance, and Thangka painting. With the 1959 Chinese invasion of Tibet, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche fled to India, where he was appointed spiritual advisor to the Young Lama’s Home School by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. In 1963, he attended Oxford University as a Spaulding Fellow, studied Western philosophy, religion and art, and later established his first formal teaching center in Scotland in 1968.

Known as the foremost presenter of Tibetan Buddhism in the west and a pioneer in the translation of traditional Buddhist teachings, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche was a “great scholar, meditation master, artist and poet...renowned for his unique ability to present the essence of the highest Buddhist teachings using forms that made them accessible to his western students” (Ponlop, 2004, p. 62). Eschewing the exotic trappings of Tibetan culture that he believed were a hindrance to westerners truly understanding the dharma, the truth of the teachings, he gave up his monastic robes and became a lay practitioner. From the perspective of the field of counselling with its emphasis on boundaries and ethical strictures against dual relationships, he was a controversial figure and his personal life left him open to criticism.
During the short period of 17 years that he lived in North America before his death in 1987, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche attracted a large sangha.\(^6\) He established over 100 meditation centers worldwide, a monastic abbey, many group and solitary practice retreat centers and founded Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado, a liberal arts university dedicated to contemplative teaching and learning. Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche presented the wisdom of Tibetan Buddhist teachings through the traditional Buddhist path of study, contemplation and practice as he taught courses, three-month seminary retreats, and offered opportunities for students to go on extended study and practice to uncover the awakened state. His published works now comprise the largest collection of Buddhist teachings in English by a single author.

In 1976, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche introduced the teachings of Shambhala, which were terma\(^7\). Presenting the Shambhala teachings within a secular frame open to people of different faiths, he reached out to a larger audience and started a series of weekend trainings designed to introduce the wisdom of Shambhala through the practice of meditation. Proficient in the arts of calligraphy, design, poetry and an ikebana master, he later developed a number of programs that apply the Shambhala principles to traditional Eastern disciplines such as ikebana (flower arranging) and kyudo (archery) and he taught and wrote on Dharma Art, laying the foundation for the exploration of reality, of clear perception through contemplation and creativity.

Even as he continued to foster the practice and study of Buddhism through writing books and giving extended teachings and traditional seminary training for lay practitioners, he focused on bringing the heart of the Buddhist practice of compassion

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\(^6\) Sangha is a Sanskrit word for the community of practitioners on the path.  
\(^7\) Terma is a Sanskrit word meaning received texts.
into action through Shambhala teachings and training. A program of pragmatic methods and enlightened teachings on how to relate with one’s mind and with the world, Shambhala comprises meditation training, culture and practices to maintain an uplifted environment, and cheerfulness and confidence, the antidotes to depression and aggression.

The Shambhala vision, what Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche called the view of the Great Eastern Sun, is the recognition of basic goodness, the wakefulness of the human heart, and the practice of warriorship, the practice of gentleness and fearlessness. The Great Eastern Sun terminology refers to principles of the awakened nature, nonaggression and basic goodness. “Great means having some kind of strength... East is the concept of wakefulness... Sun has a sense of all-pervasive brilliance.” (Trungpa, 1996, p. 9). These principles apply to being awake to the moment, looking directly ahead with clarity and with a sense of appreciation from which trust and the practice of fearlessness develop.

Shambhala training provides a series of contemplative and meditative practices that offer a means to embody these principles, and are based on these teachings. Shambhala teaching proclaims the message of human dignity and basic goodness. It offers a vision of enlightened society based on unwavering gentleness and an appreciation of oneself and the natural sacredness of the world. From this perspective, the bravest warrior is the one who is most open to others and most sensitive to the sadness of his or her own heart (Ponlop, 2004, p. 65).

The essence of Shambhala is the basic goodness that is our fundamental nature, the human capacity to be awake and open hearted, and connected to the goodness that is the ground of our being.
Shambhala training

Shambhala training is one amongst many other wisdom traditions that helps one relate with experience and develop insight and the understanding that leads to acceptance, gentleness to self and kindness to others. I simply offer this explanation of the training, as it is relevant to this inquiry. Shambhala training comprises a series of meditation practice and study weekends open to anyone of any faith or without a faith. Whereas Buddhism starts with suffering, Shambhala training starts with connecting to basic goodness through meditation. The foundational meditation practice in both is shamatha, a mindfulness-awareness meditation.

In shamatha, the focus of attention is on an object, usually the breath, noticing when one’s attention strays and bringing oneself back. Often the practice of meditation is seen as a relaxation technique, a way to simply get rid of one’s preoccupations for a time. But within the classical teachings as explained in the Shambhala tradition, the practice of shamatha is a discipline of being with whatever arises in our mind and not being caught up with it, not being seduced by our thoughts nor trying to extinguish them; it requires neither following nor repressing our thoughts, but simply noticing and returning to the breath. As we maintain the discipline, our mind calms and discursive thoughts lessen. Shamatha meditation is often allied with vipashyana or insight meditation, a practice of awareness, of seeing things as they are. Shamatha-vipashyana meditation also comprises contemplation.

Experiential, not doctrinal, the Shambhala training weekends unfold in a progressive way to allow individuals to engage with the teachings through their

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8 Shamatha is a Sanskrit word that means calm abiding and is the name of a meditation practice.
experiences in meditation. The following is a schematic overview of the training as the meditation practices become more focused and in depth. At the first weekend, which used to be entitled “Ordinary Magic” and is now called “The Art of Being Human,” the teachings introduce meditation as a means to connect with basic goodness, the ground of our human nature that is usually obscured by our discursive mind. As meditation focuses on moving beyond thoughts, we are able to connect to our heart, the felt experience of basic goodness. We discover the sadness and tenderness underlying our fear and experience our “broken heartedness,” our ability to feel and be alive to the present moment, which gives rise to joy. The second weekend entitled “Birth of a Warrior” introduces us to how we use our cocoon of habitual patterns, thoughts and behaviors to hide from our basic anxiety and fear. Using the discipline of meditation to break free of the cocoon, we practice fearlessness, which leads to becoming free from doubt. The third weekend entitled “Warrior in the World” is an introduction to extending that practice of gentleness into our daily lives, and in doing so, we are able to be humble and experience the natural confidence of being real, being oneself. The fourth is “Awakened heart” where we practice extending our awareness and curiosity and the fifth “Open Sky” is the practice of being able to trust that openness. This series of trainings may seem simple and straightforward, yet they are profound. Shambhala training requires that teachers be practitioners trained to transmit the teachings and help others along their path.

There are more advanced meditation weekends and longer retreats that continue the practice of gentleness and fearlessness, ways to connect with the openness that is our basic goodness and with our natural confidence, to appreciate our life and develop compassionate methods for extending oneself and caring for others. The practice is one of
undoing that which impedes us from knowing who we are; it is a practice of developing clear perception. The uniqueness of Shambhala is that the teachings offer further practices to rouse one’s confidence, the energy to be awake, on the spot and present with an open heart. The training is one of moving forward beyond hesitation and fear and connecting to our heart of basic goodness, the innate heart of wakefulness, which allows us to recognize the inherent goodness in our situation, thus enhance our genuineness and appreciation for the world.

Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche often related and compared the Shambhala teachings with Buddhism. While Buddhism is based on individual enlightenment, the focus in Shambhala is on extending the understanding of the nature of our mind into developing social enlightenment and a sane society through specific training. The present Shambhala lineage holder, Sakyong Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche, is responsible for bringing together Buddhism and Shambhala training within the tradition referred to as Shambhala Buddhism. In this study, Shambhala refers to this inseparability of secular and spiritual teachings and training that comprise the Shambhala Buddhist vision and culture. Shambhala Buddhism is a coming together of both the Shambhala and Buddhist lineages to form a body of teachings that are based on awakening our hearts while recognizing the fears and neurotic tendencies that hide our fundamental nature. Through these teachings and training that are based on the practice of meditation, it is possible to develop awareness of our habitual patterns.

**Meditation as embodied knowing**

Meditation as I experience it, is first, a development of reflection, a witnessing that develops as we learn to be with our emotions and thoughts as they arise. Often
meditation is presented as soothing, calming, seemingly offering what one could call a neutering of experience. I would argue that this is not so; it is an embodied experienced knowing. In my practice of meditation, I have been assaulted by my emotions, the volcanic rage of self-righteousness, the numbing as I wander in my thoughts, the self-engagement as I externalize my desires. From my practice, I know that we can begin to recognize projection, the creation of our worlds, see the lenses that inform our desires, our dislikes.

Meditation is, par excellence, an invitation to experience that allows us to plumb the depths of hidden unacknowledged urges and develop an awareness of the constructions we make around our experience. Our minds can achieve some stability in resting, watching the waves of emotions and thoughts. Remaining in the discipline of noticing, touching and letting go, there is a gradual acceptance as we begin to meet our experience unflinchingly, and with tender eyes and a soft heart. It is a practice of loving kindness, being with oneself in one’s myriad illusions, acknowledging, accepting, not rejecting, breaking down the barriers of self imprisoning constructions as they become obvious. This is a practice of being with pure terror, unflinching self-dislike that flip side of narcissistic longing, of being with one’s unease. Touching into feeling, understanding the depth of emotions and moving through them by “leaning into it,” and relating with oneself gently without blame nor shame is a practice of fearless acceptance. This leads to the development of maitri. We gradually see and experience suffering and the way through, as we recognize impermanence and know how we create our experience.

This leads to a heart felt desire to extend ourselves into helping others, where

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9 Maitri means loving kindness. The practice of maitri is developing loving kindness for others.
compassion arises from seeing, feeling, knowing the other as the “same as I”. We learn we can be raw, we realize that vulnerability is strength; we recognize that “broken heartedness” is our gift. We become more humble. As we move away from self-absorption into awareness, we experience maitri and compassion. “What Buddhists have traditionally called compassion is simply whatever action or response flows from that awareness. A compassionate response will not necessarily look like kindness or niceness” (Magid, 2002, p. 79). We detach not from our experience, but from our attempts to make things permanent. Relaxing the struggle, we begin to develop prajna\(^\text{10}\), the ability to see our neuroses, and as moments of understanding occur, clarity shines forth; we touch that genuine heart of goodness and openness, and curiosity manifests itself, the natural arising of wisdom.

From my experience, we begin to understand where and how we get caught as we see our reactions, our internal dialogues, and relate with our fear. We recognize the transience of things. We become aware of the contrast between openness and our usual conceptual ways. The practice creates moments of openness; gaps that help us develop friendliness to our self as we go beyond discursive mind and feel and trust our heart. We develop compassion as we understand how we are all caught in the same obstacles and we recognize how it is possible to transform them by accepting them fully and being real. We have a sense of being worthwhile; we realize the confidence that is not contingent, the confidence not tied to achievement but a simple recognition of the gentleness and joy of our existence. We are able to let go of the struggle to maintain our identity and rest our mind in open space. We begin to know the world as sacred.

\(^{10}\) Prajna means best knowledge. In this context, it is awareness that discriminates conceptually.
Usefulness for counsellors

Sitting quietly, doing nothing, what does this have to do with counselling? “We are what we experience. Presence is knowing directly in the moment that we are what we experience” (McLeod 2001, p. 16). Shamatha meditation is the practice of being present, seeing how our mind works and working with our mind. It moves beyond sitting on the cushion to changing the very texture of our being, inhabiting us another way. The practice allows us to be with emotions that rage, thoughts that annihilate, feelings that seduce. It is a practice of loving kindness, maitri, which is an ongoing never-ending practice that cuts through the ego filled pain of self-absorption, self-deception and self-denigration. It leads to the natural arising of bodhicitta. This release of natural caring without agenda is the unfolding of spacious warmth that is unstoppable. Learning how we cocoon ourselves, we come to better understand what barriers clients construct to protect themselves from pain, learning how to let go and lean into our own pain, we understand the obstacles that we and clients face in being able to move through an issue, learning how to stay with it, we learn how to have a holding environment.

This is a practice of being awake and present that engenders flexibility and being able to work with uncertainty. It offers training in waking up from our conceptual mind twists, our versions of reality, and permits the development of clear seeing. It gives us the view of basic goodness that is profoundly unique and which grounds us in genuineness and appreciation. The present Shambhala lineage holder, the Sakyong Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche, states, “Understanding the wisdom of Shambhala is understanding basic human dignity. There are set principles and practices in Shambhala, but the root of the

11 Bodhicitta is the awakened heart of compassion / the awakened mind of intelligence. It is the essence of wakefulness that is the mind of enlightenment in the ultimate sense.
teachings is simply how to be a decent human being, how to live in a harmonious way.” (Gimian, 1999, p. 211). What impact do these principles and practices and the view of basic goodness have on a counsellor? How we see another is key to our capacity to hear and to listen in a way that is helpful. What are the lenses we are using, where and how are we looking and listening? Let us listen to the stories of counsellors as they speak to the impact of being trained in those practices and as they recount what it means and what this training allows them within the counselling room. Let us begin the inquiry.
CHAPTER 3 BEGINNING THE INQUIRY

"Awareness of self and reality and their interaction is a positive value in itself and should be present in research processes" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 6).

As a researcher, I seek to inquire into the experiences of Shambhala Buddhist Counsellors to understand if and how Shambhala Buddhism informs their counselling, is distilled in action, in interaction, and to articulate their learnings and practices in order to gain a better understanding of its value in working with people. I hope that this study will contribute to a greater understanding of Buddhist approaches that highlight useful positions for counsellors, contribute to practice and theory of the therapeutic relationship and have educational implications for the supervision and education of beginning counsellors. Here, I outline the process of inquiry, which involved interviews, a group dialogue and an art-making process within the group. Before detailing the specifics of recruitment, interview practices, introduction of the participants, and the arts-based component, I want to elaborate on the choice of these methods in relation to Buddhist epistemologies and methodologies.

Buddhist studies, teachings, and inquiries into experience usually follow the logic of ground, path, and fruition where the ground is the basis or starting point and the path is the means of inquiry that leads to the result or fruition. I shall use this framework of ground, path and fruition to describe my research journey and methodology. I start with the ground of personal experience as related through stories, which is relevant to both the counselling and Buddhist traditions.
Ground

The role of stories

As I began this inquiry I questioned how to be congruent with the methodologies inherent in the practice of counselling and Buddhism. It is self-evident that counselling is characterized by the recounting of stories. As clients come into counselling, they relate vignettes, recounting events as they see them, relating what is at issue, what they are experiencing, and their perceptions of how that came about. These stories are anecdotes of personal experience that have significance for them and to which they attribute a certain meaning. They offer memory vignettes that illustrate turning points, vignettes that elaborate instances of transformation or being stuck.

These stories are not conceptual, not abstract. They are stories of personal involvement and the means through which clients make sense of their experience. They demand attention. Describing his training as a psychiatric resident, Coles (1989) relates a pivotal moment when he learnt the importance of listening to clients’ stories from his supervisor: “The people who come to see us bring us their stories. They hope they tell them well enough so that we understand the truth of their lives.” (p. 7), and the process is relational. “Remember, what you are hearing [from the patient] is to some considerable extent a function of you, hearing” (p. 15). For many counsellors, the counselling process is founded upon client and counsellor both listening, uncovering the layers of meaning woven through concrete experience, understanding and often re/interpreting these stories. This is a process of possibility, of collaborative meaning making.

Stories are the ground of counselling practice. But what of counsellors’ stories? How do counsellors understand and make sense of their experience? This study inquires into that very area and is congruent with counselling in using as ground, stories from the
perspective of counsellors. As I sought to talk with counsellors, I decided to conduct interviews to gather stories of their experiences.

In Buddhism, the means of investigating experience starts with oneself.

The Buddhist path is based on trust in the wisdom and insight of each and every person; trust that each person has the capability to find the truth within their own experience, and that it is only within personal experience, beyond concept, that truth can really be known (J. Hayward, January 21, 2005, personal communication).

It begins with mindfulness where valid cognition is attained through paying attention to embodied experience. Buddhism sees theory without practice as remaining in the realm of discursive mind, whereas realization comes from direct experience through practice. Thus knowledge is not confused with reasoning or intellectual constructions; knowing is through experience. Buddhism joins counselling in this focus on direct experience.

In Buddhism and especially in the oral Buddhist traditions where practices are transmitted verbally from teacher to student, stories are the means used to recount and interpret experience. Stories are a way of making manifest how Buddhist practices affect one; it makes the theoretical, practical, and the abstract, concrete. As this inquiry is about how Buddhism is distilled in action as manifested in stories of counsellors’ lived experiences, I outline the role of Buddhist teaching stories to indicate their relevance. It parallels the search for counsellors to tell stories of experience, to relate what it is like in practice. Stories of experience provide the context for their actions and for what underlies their choices.

*Teaching Stories in Buddhism*

Buddhism is replete with stories. Tibetan, as distinct from other forms of Buddhism places great emphasis on biography (Finn, 2003). There is much time and
effort expended in compiling and recording biographies; they are seen as teaching tools and are crucially important within an oral Buddhist tradition such as the Kagyu.

*Ka* signifies oral teachings, or the Buddha’s own teachings, while *gyu* means lineage. This noble line has been likened to a golden rosary, for each of the individuals constituting it is as precious and perfect as the finest gold. Each is a repository of extraordinary realization, learning and attainment... These life stories are therefore more than just history; they are an example which inspires one to follow the path (Huckenpahler, 1990, p. viii).

Here, biography is used as a way to demonstrate the practitioner (teacher)’s lived experience and journey, so that it can inform others of the trials and results of practice, of errors along the way and of how these practitioners worked with the obstacles they encountered. These are not simply detailed records of biographical events in a person’s life. Rather, they are teaching stories, stories that tell of the individual’s training on the path, stories of meaning through experience. They are records of a journey in overcoming obstacles and often follow what Buddhism terms the four noble truths: the truth of suffering, of the origin of suffering, of the goal and of the path out of suffering.

“Namthars” are these biographical stories of lived experience, the retelling of another’s experience of this fourfold process on their path. Namthar literally means “complete liberation”. This clearly shows the intent of Tibetan biography. The central concern is to portray the spiritual development and fruition of the person’s life.... Being a spiritual biography, it serves as a “supreme example for sincere beings”. Seeing the example of how Marpa or Milarepa overcame their personal obstacles can inspire later spiritual practitioners in their own efforts to attain complete liberation. (Trungpa, 1995, p. xxii)

Marpa and Milarepa are two of the most famous teachers in the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. For example, Milarepa is in many ways infamous, as he is known for the evil deeds he had committed in his youth yet he attained enlightenment. His biography is an inspiration for other followers of the path as it details how his recognition of the karmic
effects of his actions inspired him to seek teachings from Marpa, teachings he followed with great austerity and which led him to attain complete liberation.

Shambhala Buddhism is an oral Tibetan lineage encompassing the Kagyu, Nyingma and Shambhala traditions. To be resonant with both counselling and Buddhist traditions required that I investigate and compile stories of lived experience. The Ed.D program of study mentioned in the first chapter, also focuses on the lived experience, on practice. “We can do no better than to recognize that narrative truth is pragmatic truth” (Bochner, 2001, p. 154). Further, as we know in counselling, stories engage us emotionally. This parallels the Buddhist affirmation that we all desire to be happy; our motivation is that we all seek a way out of suffering.

I situate this study as an inquiry into practice, value what Buddhism terms the skillful means of the practitioner, and aim to investigate stories of experience. I situate myself in a position of passionate unknowing and curiosity. I would like to be able to recount embodied narratives that value experience and emotion. The significance lies in moving beyond the theoretical constructions or understandings of Buddhist philosophy or what the field of counselling tries to do, into hearing, understanding and reporting on how that experienced knowledge is distilled into practical action. As the ground of this inquiry is fundamentally that of stories, this led to the natural question of the “path” of inquiry.

Path
This path lies within the narrative tradition: moving from using stories of experience as data to narrative as inquiry.

The path of inquiry in Counselling and Buddhism
In counselling, clients relate experience; the means of investigation begins with listening and is often a self-reflective process for clients as they relate vignettes, instances
of life, their perspective, their stories. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) speak of narrative inquiry as taking place in relationship as “people are both living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories in words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others” (p. 4). As the focus of this study is on the lived experience in the counselling relationship, the self in interaction, and as counselling is a process of self-reflection, I shall engage in a parallel process that is collaborative and self-reflective for the participant.

What is the Buddhist methodology? The Sakyong speaks of the Buddhist approach as “tsema, or ‘valid cognition.’ The approach of valid cognition is to ask, ‘What is truly valid? What is true experience?’ and the practice of meditation develops the ability to see clearly, understand clearly, and stabilize our mind so we can know what’s going on” (Mipham, 2002, p. 2). The Buddhist path is characterized by the search for knowledge through personal experience using the practice of meditation. In the Shambhala tradition, the foundational meditation practice of sheaths is an investigation into one’s experience through the method of being attentive to the present moment, an attention to and acceptance of whatever arises, to seeing clearly without being caught in the rhetoric of our interpretations. It is an embodied practice of mindfulness that develops openness.

Then I questioned how to research the study in a way that would be congruent with my experience of what works in counselling: an experiential practice of openness and unknowing that creates the space for relating and listening, a practice that resonates with the Buddhist practice of mindfulness. As I began this study, I knew I wanted to integrate this practice of openness without judgment in the research process and to do so
with/in a relational space of connection as in counselling. Striving for congruency between what and how I want to study, between the process and the question, I realized this meant that I be present and unknowing and in that sense follow the spirit if not the form of what Bentz and Shapiro (1998) term “mindful inquiry,” an approach of being mindful and aware of multiple perspectives linked to a project of easing suffering. I questioned how my research could reflect a re/telling, a re/presenting of stories, an uncovering of experience and decided to begin a journey that incorporated both individual interviews and a group dialogue. I outline the interview process and group dialogue later in this chapter when I discuss beginning the inquiry.

Striving for congruency between the subject of study, the perhaps ineffable experience of the texture of relationship, and how to re/present that process, I questioned how to create a way for multiple readings and decided to include a process of spontaneous art-making if the participants agreed. “The experience of something that appears ineffable within the context of one type of discourse may be expressible by means of another form of discourse” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 113). Beyond the search for further elaboration through multiplicity, I sought to offer the participants an avenue to recollect their experience through an expressive embodied act.

Art forms are embodied practices. In Buddhist epistemology, knowing is based upon the embodied experience. In Buddhist practice, there is insight beyond words. In counselling, it is often the “aha” moments, the felt understanding that is a knowing, that is insight beyond words, where counselling is an embodied act of presence that is fully cognitive and affective. How then could one convey that heart? Mapping methodological approaches to research, Willis and Smith (2000) describe the causative or explanatory,
the interpretive, the critical and the expressive. They highlight how the “heart” is relevant for expressive orientation: “the imagistic, subjectivised expressive approach required an attentive, even compassionate stance. The researcher consciously needed to be aware of and factor in, in a deliberative way, subjective elements in the experience being researched” (p. 10).

Using arts based inquiry

Maintaining the interpretive impulse of understanding how one makes meaning, I sought to further elucidate what that lived experience of being in action was like, what that experience as an embodied act felt like, and for the participants to make manifest their experience of this challenge. This direction led me to integrate using expressive means to elaborate experienced knowledge in this study. I found Piantanida, Garman and McMahon’s (2000) analytic framework useful and enlightening. They speak of arts based educational research as a still “vulnerable” emerging tradition and discuss their concerns of solipsism wherein the artwork is seen as self-explanatory, thus able to be considered “art” in its own right. They outline five different emphases underlying the use of art as a research modality and call these “threads of discourse” (p. 98), wherein art is used as a “mode of persuasion, of self-exploration and expression, of pedagogy, of knowledge representation and of knowledge generation” (p. 98).

My intention to use art in this study lies within the mode of knowledge representation. Asking the research participants who are not artists to engage in using art to represent issues clearly does not make their productions works of “art” as such, neither is the intent to persuade or develop strategies for learning. Nor is my purpose to offer an opportunity for self-expression or therapeutic catharsis; that is outside the bounds of this
research and would be insulting to the participants, professionals in their field. Attentive
to the solipsistic risks of self-indulgence, self-protection, self-referential or self-
promotion, the focus in this study is not on simple self-exploration. Rather in this study,
the use of art as research is grounded on the possibilities for insights that it may
engender.

I decided the group meeting could provide an opportunity for further dialogue and
an appropriate research based approach to using art. It would offer a shared forum to
discuss and make meaning from that aesthetic form of knowing. Herein lies the
authenticity that maintains methodological coherence and is congruent with the Buddhist
approach for awakened mind and heart. With the participants’ agreement, I asked them to
do a few spontaneous sketches after reflecting on experiences with clients. I call these
“experiential visual snapshots” as they speak to specific moments. This is an approach
that resonates with the practice of “Dharma art” within the Shambhala Buddhist tradition.
Dharma art is the practice of art as a means of understanding how we perceive, relate
with, and what our thoughts are about other things, a practice that leads to clarity of
perception, to seeing the truth, the nature of things as they are. It refers to art that “arises
from an awakened meditative state,” is direct, free from aggression, and reflects an
appreciation for experience (Trungpa, 1996).

As a counsellor who uses both verbal and non-verbal expressive means in
counselling, I know the usefulness of the art process to illustrate qualities of experience
that are indescribable in words. I recognize the value of the embodied act of art-making
to allow for imaginatively re/membering, re/engaging in the moment, for the surprise, the
unknown to be glimpsed, become evident. Art-making as an experiential modality is a
living experience that illuminates the ineffable; it can be transformative. Knowles (2004) sees art as a memory map, an embodied re/presentation and re/interpretation. He argues that the use of art in research lies in its intentionality and transformative possibilities and asserts, as do Barone and Eisner (1997), that the signature or presence of the researcher must be solid, that the art communicates and is accessible. Art can resonate with more understandings, each time it is re/read, re/understood and re/experienced.

The creative re/collection in making art allows for an interactive construction of meaning, an embodied elaboration that is imaginative and reflective, and which may illustrate the heart-felt quality of the encounter. This is a reflective engagement that may lead to thoughtful and perhaps difficult insights. I see the aesthetic as an awakened heart, aware and present. For this to unfold meant that I be open and engaged within that space to have fellow participant travelers join me in unknowing and in allowing this process to be pictured, to be storied.

Process of contact and self-selection

Using the mailing list of the Shambhala Buddhist centre, I sent out letters of initial contact to all counsellors, asking them to indicate their interest in participating and if they would like to suggest the names of any other counsellors. I wanted the participants to be a self-selected group, interested in collaborating, in exploring the subject, in self-reflection, and so I detailed the inquiry process in the initial contact as an invitation to exploration (Appendix B). I asked if they would be willing to share stories about their experiences as a counsellor, stories that reflected their perspective on the influences Buddhist practice may have on their counselling, and stories that recounted their learning journey of integrating these influences. I stated my interest in hearing their recollections.
of challenging moments of personal learning and how their Buddhist practice may have helped them meet the challenges and transform their counselling.

From this initial mailing, four counsellors indicated their interest. One did not immediately reply but later asked to participate and another counsellor, a psychiatrist, initially stated he did not have the time. He later contacted me by email asking whether I had enough participants and agreed to meet for the interview, but was unable to participate in other meetings. Including myself, we are seven participants.

I had no restrictions as to the gender of the counsellors, neither to the type of clientele they work with nor to the style of therapeutic approach they adhere to, insofar as they met the criteria of counselling others in emotional distress. I also determined that it was important to include myself in the process, to reflect upon my own experiences and seek to understand how or in what way my own practice of Shambhala Buddhism was impacting my counselling. In line with investigating practice, my practice therefore becomes the subject of study such that I too become a research participant. I agree with Bochner (2001) that the autobiographical presence is key in that we are inherently part of what we study; our reflections, ways of understanding, and what we notice are grounded in our being. Further, I seek to maintain methodological coherence with the principles of the Ed.D program and with the means of investigating experience in both counselling and Buddhism.

In the counselling process of collaborative re/construction and meaning making, the counsellor's presence and view is vital. In Buddhism, research is inherently autobiographical; the researcher is the self, not an "other" and the subject of study is through oneself. As Varela argues, we actively shape what we see (Varela interviewed by Davis,
A cognitive scientist researching experience and the mind, Varela speaks of being a “respectful observer of what’s in front of me, and what’s in front of me is both material causal explanations and my experience. Both!” (Davis, 1995, p. 31). To imagine otherwise would not be true to the Buddhist tradition. Here, validity is formed in subjectivity. Bringing my experiences and understandings explicitly to the forefront is true to this investigative tradition. Thus, I began this thesis with my story of a counselling experience I lived through, and I now include my profile to reflect the composition of the research participants. As this study inquires into counsellors’ experiences regardless of theoretical orientation, I first provide a composite overview of their counselling and Buddhist training and experience, and then offer more individual introductions. In this thesis I am using pseudonyms.

*The participants: Shambhala Buddhist Counsellors*

The Shambhala Buddhist counsellors who participated in the study have a variety of clinical professional training. Two counsellors are trained as clinical social workers at the Masters and post masters level, one is a psychiatrist, another has a Masters degree in Art Therapy as well as training in counselling psychology, and three others have obtained Masters level counselling psychology degrees. They have all taken specialized training in varying therapeutic practices, such as: eye movement desensitization retraining (EMDR) addictions treatment, the treatment of abuse and trauma, gestalt therapy, emotionally focused therapy and play therapy. Their counselling orientations encompass EMDR as well as psychodynamic, systems, emotionally focused, cognitive-behavioral, narrative, gestalt, solution focused or transpersonal therapy. They work with a variety of clients of all ages, genders and issues: children, youth, adults, families and couples who are
experiencing the widest range of concerns including addiction, suicidal ideation, abuse
and trauma, and they work in a combination of differing areas: mental health, an
employee assistance program, an addictions treatment centre, university counselling
settings; three also maintain a private practice. One has been counselling for twenty-
seven years, two for twenty-five years, the others have between eight and fifteen years of
counselling experience. Three participants have many years of experience in counsellor
training and two are consultants in their specialties.

In terms of Buddhist training, all have done multiple weekend and weeklong
retreats, six have participated in a dathun [a month long meditation retreat] as well as
seminary [a 3 month long retreat], and one also entered a monastic setting and completed
a 3-year retreat. They have been practicing Buddhists from 11 to 33 years. All received
training in being meditation instructors, are authorized to teach meditation and be a
mentor for other meditators, and have taught Buddhist courses as well as differing levels
of Shambhala training.

In all, we are two men and five women working with others to ease suffering. In
his private practice, Edward uses narrative, emotionally focused and cognitive behavior
therapy in counselling adults and teens, individuals and couples. He has a specialization
in issues of anger, working with men who are abusive, and has 27 years of counselling
experience. He also works as a consultant and is a university faculty member. His
connection with Buddhism spans 33 years. Allison has 25 years counselling experience,
uses psychodynamic, systems, and cognitive therapy counselling adults living with acute
and chronic mental health issues, and has worked with children and youth. She has been a
practicing Buddhist for over 24 years. Anne uses gestalt and play therapy, has over 15
years experience as a trauma counsellor, and works with individual trauma survivors in private practice. She also works in a community center with families and with children who are abuse survivors. She began practicing Buddhism 14 years ago. Barbara has 14 years counselling experience and uses EMDR, narrative, cognitive behavior and art therapy. She works in a university counselling center with couples and with individual students dealing primarily with anxiety and depression, and has been a Buddhist practitioner for 11 years. Elaine has 14 years experience as a counsellor and uses EMDR, gestalt and transpersonal psychology. She works in an addictions treatment center, in private practice counselling individuals with a wide range of issues, and has taught in institutes. Her connection with Buddhism spans 24 years. Michael works in a university medical health center as a psychiatrist, maintains a private practice and is a consultant and trainer. He has been a Buddhist practitioner for over 30 years. In her counselling practice, Erin has 25 years experience as a counsellor and uses EMDR, systems and solution-focused methods counselling individuals and couples in an employee assistance agency. She also works as a consultant, seminar leader and trainer and has taught counsellors in training. Her Buddhist practice spans 11 years.

**Beginning the inquiry**

To develop rapport and set the stage for the interviews, I spoke with participants individually about the nature of their participation and the commitment required. I explained the process of individual interviews after which I would return their transcripts to them for their review and interpretation, paralleling a process of interpretative analysis that I would do also (See Table 1 below). Then, after all the interviews, we would meet as a group to discuss our reflections and where, if the possibility arose and if we wished, we
could do spontaneous artwork illustrating experiences with clients. We agreed to hold the individual interviews in their counselling offices for the most part; another decided to meet at the Shambhala centre and one at a mutually convenient location.

Being a member of the Shambhala Buddhist community and a counsellor myself, having met, taken courses, practiced, or taught with many other community members, I wanted to not get caught in philosophical concepts or a known rhetoric. I recognized that I needed to embody the meditative stance of openness and let the conversation unfold in ways that could allow for reflection on experience. Unlike the conceptual understandings of Buddhist philosophy in the literature, unlike hearing stories of Buddhist practices that are useful for clients, my curiosity lay in wanting to know the participants, to hear about their practice of Buddhism and counselling, to understand how they related with clients, and to learn about their work.

*Individual Interviews as conversational texts*

In this process, my intention was to do the interviews mindfully and invite stories that were “thick descriptions” of the quality of the counselling encounter and their individual learning journeys, using open-ended questions to clarify and elaborate. Invitation is “a complex act ... It is about entering the ‘third space’ by being present to it and trusting that the process will unfold—a leap of faith that meaning making activity will unfold dialogically” (Arvay, 2002, p. 213). This recognition required that I help create a context of openness for exploration and that the interview reflect the improvisational dialogue in counselling. While I had originally outlined questions on the impact of their Buddhist practice (Appendix C), I decided instead to allow the conversation to flow, to be responsive, open and curious, to listen within a fundamental position of unknowing,
clearing my mind of preconceptions and becoming instead open to hearing their stories, 
open to whatever arises similar to mindfulness practice, the Buddhism practice of being 
in the moment.

As we started the interviews, it was evident that each had given thought to my 
letter and seemingly awaited my questions. While it was clear that my script of questions 
was the territory we would cover, I let go of them and, structuring the interview to be 
more open-ended, began by asking to hear their stories of how they became Buddhists 
and counsellors. My interest lay in their path. I returned to the questions at the end of 
each interview, asking the participants to review them and see if they wanted to elaborate 
on any point. As the conversations unfolded, the participants reflected on their practice 
in-depth. Each interview had a different texture and resulted in a different focus as they 
responded in their own way to my curiosity about their journey.

**Approach to analysis**

Settling upon a research process that incorporated individual interviews and a 
group dialogue with art-making required that I conceive an appropriate way to understand 
and analyze the variety of resulting texts. For the individual interviews, I did multiple 
readings of the participants’ narratives, initially using a process similar to Arvay’s 
narrative method of multiple readings (Arvay, 2003). I highlighted the text making notes 
on the side as they pertained to each area. Initially, I read for content revising errors in 
spelling and reviewed the material to ensure that I was maintaining client confidentiality. 
At the start of each interview, the participants had agreed to maintain confidentiality, but 
in a couple of instances they referred to their workplaces. Thus I edited out any 
identifying remarks. On the second reading, I read for the position of the counsellor and
for their relationship with the client, noting the counsellor’s attitudes to the relationship, and the client. I looked at what was emphasized, what was listened for, and what was valued within that encounter. Then I did a third reading for the view: of the client, of the counsellor’s role, of the role of emotions, of the process and action of therapy. In the last reading, I highlighted those areas that spoke to their struggles, their learning, moments of integration or moments of recognition and what each thought could be useful. The following table summarizes these different readings of the path of inquiry.

**Table 1  Readings of Conversational Individual Interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First reading: Content</th>
<th>Reading for spelling and typos and to ensure client confidentiality. Reading for the general significance.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second reading: Relational</td>
<td>The self of the counsellor. The counsellor’s encounter with the client What is the counsellor’s attitude to the client? How does the counsellor relate with the client? What is emphasized? What is listened for? What is being communicated? What is valued in the process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third reading: View</td>
<td>What is the counsellor’s view of counseling? Of the role of the counsellor? Of the role of emotions? Of the person of the client? Of the action of therapy? Of problem cause and resolution?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth reading: Interpenetration</td>
<td>Are there specific moments of recognition and areas of integration? Does the counsellor use specific Buddhist skills? What are the struggles? The paradoxes? What grounds, enlives, inspires, and sustains the counsellor?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During this process of analysis, each reading provided valuable information useful for coherence and for my understanding, but each vignette in the transcript spoke to many areas. I decided to put these readings aside in the interim and focus on the felt experience of the messages of the counsellor's presence in the interviews, and what was being communicated. Firstly, I wanted to embody the practice of getting out of my own way by letting go of my original schema, similar to meditation practice in which one goes beyond the surface of discursive mind to let be the natural experience of whatever arises as we connect to our heart. Secondly, the participants’ responses spoke to many themes; all were so interwoven. While separate readings were a useful heuristic device, they did not convey the richness of the interviews. Fidelity to the participants’ stories and respect for their work compelled a different approach. I wanted their voices to speak louder than mine. Thirdly, I had originally outlined this process to the participants, stating that I would ask them to do parallel readings using this framework of analysis.

In recognition of the commitment involved for them to follow this process, the fact that this schema could be an imposition, and the reality that it did not capture the full complexity and heart of their stories, I decided to not ask them to undertake this analysis. Rather, I gave the participants their transcripts and asked that they review them for any errors, to ensure confidentiality and to note if there were areas they would like to elaborate. I included the above table of analysis as an explanation of the process that I would use and to offer it as an opportunity for reflection. No one made any analysis, revisions or suggestions.

I focused then on the questions their transcripts answered as I searched for a way to understand, re/present and make meaning of what each participant was conveying. I
realized that the first participant’s interview could be entitled inspiration, the second, understanding, the third, practice, the fourth, awareness, the fifth compassionate action and the sixth and seventh, making meaning. In retrospect, the interviews themselves mirror the Buddhist path while also reflecting my own research journey in the interview process. I then read, reread and sat with the transcripts many times, listening to their tapes, relating to their experiences with clients. I found myself connecting to the implicit inner meaning behind their stories and realized that their stories embodied ways of practice and experiences of their journeys, which I then spontaneously used as titles for their vignettes. I did later find it useful to return to the above format of view, relationship and specific skills, as a framework to present those vignettes and shall speak to this presentation further in the chapter. But as I listened to their tapes, what resulted was a compilation of stories and explanations that spoke to areas of interaction. The transcripts had led towards an additional reading, an assemblage of vignettes.

It had been a few months since I had met with the participants and recognizing that my absence had been long, I decided to forward each participant their vignettes with the titles as a sign of respect for their work. To set the stage for the group meeting, I asked their permission to compile a set for the group stating: “the sharing of vignettes could allow you and others to reflect or comment on each others vignettes or simply discuss when we meet.” Apart from the one participant who had said he could only participate in the interview, the others were pleased to share a vignette (see Appendix D). Despite being a literal transcript of their words, they stated the vignettes gave them a fresh perspective on their work and made them look better than they thought. I emailed each the set of vignettes. Offering back their stories in a new form, a vignette with a title,
opened another path to review what they had said. This process created an opportunity for self-reflection, an important and central aspect of making meaning.

Group dialogue

For the second part, the participants came to a three-hour group meeting so that we could share our reflections with each other and do some art work if we wished. I was curious as to whether we would speak of our challenges, those places where we met the sharp points of struggling to integrate or embody our practice while counselling. I was nervous about being able to create a trusting context for them to engage in art as a means for them to re/collection, be with/in, express and make manifest their struggles. I was unsure whether they would want to do art or engage in the art process to go beyond the expected. Yet, I hoped that an engagement in art would lead beyond making art to illustrate experience, to art as a way of illuminating experience.

Though all our faces were familiar and we had seen each other at the centre on different occasions, most had not really met or known each other. We began by introducing ourselves as we talked about our various work settings, the issues we deal with and clients we meet. During this initial discussion, many spoke of the organizational difficulties or the loneliness of private practice, yet also expressed appreciation for counselling work. Then, a participant asked whether being a Buddhist counsellor was any different from another and we spoke of how Buddhist practice influenced our work. It became evident that we believed there was a clear demarcation and experiential difference in relating with others both interpersonally and in terms of contextual factors, which one summed up as “living in a place that’s totally groundless because you really
don’t have any footing in the security of the samsaric administration." After this period of discussion, one of the participants stated her desire to do art and we began.

The art process

Some spoke of their fear of doing art and feeling threatened by “not having touched a paintbrush or colors in years,” another encouraged us to “make a mess.” We laughed about relaxing in the moment, letting ourselves have fun, and I outlined the process beginning with short warm-ups. To encourage a free play of movement and a relaxing atmosphere, to undo the idea of making “art” as product and to engage more in the process, I recommended we start by doing some physical stretching movements. We did hand gestures in the air, drawing our names and enjoying the play of movement, and we followed this with some quick sketches. After this, I suggested the following themes and we started our artworks, leaving all verbal discussion till the end.

We first did a playful gesture painting by simply choosing any color and making marks on paper, then a few paintings about feelings. These were: anger, then sadness followed by feeling broken-hearted, the Shambhalian term that speaks to the sense of sadness and openheartedness that is natural. There was laughter, simple exclamations and engrossment in the experience as we worked. After these first paintings on feelings, I spoke of what Pema Chodron (1997) calls the “big squeeze.” In Shambhala Buddhism, there is fundamental trust and a practice of confidence that all situations are workable. At times though, there are those instances when we meet the discrepancy between our good intentions and the “nitty-gritty details of real life situations,” moments of meeting the big squeeze where we find ourselves challenged or struggling to embody being open. I asked

12 Samsaric administration is a reference to any type of organization that maintains territorial ‘ego’ positions.
that we all take a moment and reflect upon a time with a client where we met the big squeeze, be with that experience, allow whatever image or feeling to arise and paint (our feelings of) that experience. We followed this with another painting of our experience of what happened afterwards.

Then we took the time to share with each other the discoveries of meaning we encountered, and the feelings we experienced during the process of creating these expressive visual snapshots. There was a freshness and frankness as we spoke of our challenges and own destructive emotions. Some participants learnt new things about their relationships with their client as they saw differences between their own and another’s painting. Upon doing the artwork, some discovered different layers of what the outcome actually was. Some realized that the outcome they had painted after meeting the big squeeze had not necessarily been positive. There was a pause.

After a while I voiced an idea that had arisen when we were speaking, which was that we do a little painting as a resolution. I had originally thought I would suggest a painting around a moment that had been transformative for a client. But given the poignancy of the felt emotions in the room and the sense that this had been a moment of connection to a difficulty, perhaps a missed opportunity, I suggested a theme of: What would be useful for being in that squeeze with the client? What is that quality that we would want to have, that is needed to transform this? We did this painting, and then entitled it. It was a piece that we all seemed to enjoy doing.

After this last painting, we elected to do a Doha\textsuperscript{13} before ending.

\textsuperscript{13} Doha is traditionally a spontaneous song of liberation arising from a meditative experience. As practiced in Shambhala Buddhism, it is a poem done spontaneously after meditation.
The Doha is a spontaneous poem; it is an example of presence, being present with form. I suggested we reflect upon an experience with a client that was truly transformative.

Rather than individual Dohas, we chose to do a group Doha, which is a process whereby one person starts with a line of poetry and another responds to that line, then another to the second line and on. I acted as scribe as each person offered their line and the others in turn responded to that particular line.

Before ending and just before I began to thank the participants for their generosity, openness and willingness to join in the process so fully, they expressed their appreciation. One participant said she wanted to "say something about how it was so nurturing and how it felt – I mean you created a space, you invited us into and I felt I was like I was away somewhere, like for a week or something and how honoring for you to bring us together because I've wanted to talk with other people, but I never do. I had lots of questions about different things. I never talk with therapists about how our practice meets our work and how our work meets our practice and it felt like when we were doing the artwork it was just exactly how it is for clients. It's like this blank sheet of paper and something emerges and it has meaning and we share it and we might not share it, but it is this continual arising and dissolving, you know and this generosity you're doing in this work."

Another commented on experiencing "a lot of sense of tenderness I thank you, connection. It's really precious." And a third related: "I feel like this will reflect in the work I do for the next period of time and want to keep that continuity, right, but a bit more foundation than I am usually conscious of. It's 11 o'clock there is someone else and there is someone else, there is someone else and, you know, I am focused in the
content. *This becomes more of a shadow and this brings it to the foreground, so thanks.* 

We then ended our meeting and lunched together. After this meeting, I sent each participant the transcript of the group meeting and the photographs of their individual artworks. Then I strove to develop a way to interpret and re/present the meanings derived from the interviews, group conversation and art process.

**Fruition**

Table 2 outlines the path I constructed. The ground of the inquiry is the data that I call texts. This is the data from the individual conversational interviews, the group discussion and the art pieces. The path of the inquiry is the analysis, which comprises the different readings of the interviews, the literature, the art analysis and the selection of themes from the group dialogue. The fruition is the different forms of representation I use to present the findings, which are a panel discussion and a guided art tour. I now detail this process.

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**Making Meaning**

When I started this research, I had a difficult time articulating what influences my Buddhist practice had on my counselling, a partial inspiration for this study. I wanted to
listen to others, explore their journeys, their learning, and the signposts they encountered. So, as I did the individual interviews I did not ask direct questions. Rather, leaving a vast space for them to walk into, I let their stories arise spontaneously, stories of meeting the dharma, stories of their inspiration and of their experience. When the group met, one participant did ask the study question directly. This became the starting point for the discussion that ensued. Moving beyond individual sharing towards collaborative making meaning, the discussion highlighted the essential ways their practice was imbuing their counselling and was the context within which they did the artworks.

From Interpretation to Representation

Taking the wealth of information provided in the individual interviews and in the group meeting, listening and looking for how the information spoke to the Buddhist paradigm and related to theoretical formulations led me to conceive of representing the participants' experiences via a panel discussion. This format provides thematic coherence and a way to make meaning wherein all the participants could speak. It was also a way to honor their voices. I have taken the participants comments directly from their interviews and edited for readability only where necessary. As the interviews were conversational, not all participants speak to all issues and where they do, I have selected representative vignettes. I present this panel discussion in chapters four and five. From the group meeting where the participants made art, I present their artwork and offer an analysis as a guided tour through a gallery. This art exposition is chapter six.

The following table summarizes how each text is analyzed and then presented.
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<th>Texts</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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**Summary of methodology**

In this chapter, I discussed the role of stories in counselling, outlined the Buddhist methodology of using stories as teaching tools, and elaborated on the choice of a coherent methodology for this study. I discussed the relevance of an arts-based component, which is congruent with the Buddhist epistemology of awakened heart. I explained how I contacted the participants and described their background and work settings. I detailed how the participants and I engaged in the inquiry through the interviews, group dialogue and art-making process within the group, and spoke of how our shared approach to these various methods embodied the Buddhist practice of openness. Further, I clarified my approach to analysis, describing the various readings of the interviews and how the art-making evolved. Here, now, is the format for the presentation.

In chapters four and five, I bring forward the participants’ comments and stories from their individual interviews and group meeting and present them in the form of a panel. Chapter six is the presentation of the artwork.

The format mirrors the design of a daylong conference scheduled as follows:
Morning:

- Panel part A and Thematic summary

Break

- Panel part B and Thematic summary

Lunch break

Afternoon:

- Art exposition

Using the above structures, the next three chapters present the voices of the participants.
CHAPTER 4  AWARENESS

"We cannot even begin to commit ourselves to the path of selfless compassion if our mind is unable to sense the sameness of the ground we all stand upon" (Khandro, 2005, p. 41).

In this panel I am both participant and act as moderator. As moderator, I ask questions and make comments; these are in italics. These questions evolved from themes that the participants raised in their transcripts. This is my researcher presence, as I make linkages by asking questions and elaborating on themes; my interpretive stance is seen through the structure I give this panel discussion. I use the threefold logic of ground, path, and fruition to illustrate the basic perspective, the method of practice and the resulting realization. When the participants speak of their view, I see this as the heart or the ground of counselling, when they speak of being in relationship, I see this as presence or the path in counselling, and when they speak of specific techniques, I see this as the fruition or skillful action. The following table illustrates this framework.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Ground</th>
<th>View</th>
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<tr>
<td>Path</td>
<td>Presence</td>
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<td>Skillfull Action</td>
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Panel Discussion- Part 1

Moderator addressing the audience:

Moderator: I am pleased that there is such a large turnout and welcome you all to this panel discussion on Shambhala Buddhist Counsellors' narratives of experience. It is a
pleasure for me to be your moderator. I'd like to begin by introducing this panel of experts to you. I call them experts though they do not see themselves as such, claiming they are simply fellow travelers on this journey in being human. They are counsellors and Buddhist practitioners with many years of experience. The panel members are: Edward, an abuse counsellor and founder of an organization dedicated to ending relationship abuse. Edward works in private practice, as a consultant, and is on a University faculty. Allison is a mental health counsellor with over 25 years experience who works in a community mental health agency. Anne is a trauma and abuse counsellor working in a community agency and in private practice. Michael is a psychiatrist working in a university setting, private practice and as a consultant and trainer. Erin is a counsellor in the employee assistance field, a consultant and trainer. Elaine works in a treatment center as an addictions counsellor and maintains a private practice. Barbara is a counsellor in a university setting. The panel has indicated they would like to have a conversation and has requested that, as moderator, I ask questions or provide summaries as points of reflection at various moments during their presentation. The panel has agreed to present actual examples from their experience in response to the questions. The rationale for this is so that we can all ensure that these are practice based formulations.

Please sit back and enjoy yourself.

Moderator addressing panel: The theme for this panel is: How does your Buddhist practice influence your counselling, how is it filtered through experience, translated into action, and distilled in counselling? We'd like you to cover three main areas. The first is the view, what is the lens you start with in counselling; the second is how are you in
relationship with your client and here we’d like you to address your presence and the relationship process; and the third is what actions do you take as a result.

Erin, would you like to start?

The View / Ground

Erin: Shambhala Buddhism basically becomes a paradigm in a way. It’s a particular view. What is within that view that relates to counselling? Well, absolutely everything. Certainly the whole area of compassion. And the whole area of suffering and basic goodness. I mean, what are we really after in counselling? We’re actually trying to support people and honouring their basic goodness.

Anne: The very first level of Shambhala training is being human, the art of being human and the fact that you are basically good, that basic goodness exists in everyone. And that um, there is kind of more to you than you perceive… my own practice of meditation and study of Buddhist and Shambhala teachings influence me, giving form to the sense I had.

Barbara: You know, Shambhala Buddhism offers a framework of understanding that I think really is profound in terms of counselling. Maybe it’s because I came to it that way, that framework of basic health and basic goodness, knowing it through experience. It is not something you take on, or decide it’s a philosophy that’s important to have. It’s felt.

Edward: The Buddhist view of Buddha nature or the Shambhalian view of basic goodness [is] a fundamental view of human decency that is not devoid in that way of a moral view, not moral in terms of don’t kill but more in the sense of that we innately, all contain goodness.

Michael: While I have to make my living with psychiatry, and…I sort of have to respect what the psychiatric literature says, I fundamentally don’t trust it in a certain way because
I think that what you see depends on how you look, by and large. And so I think that psychiatry, the problem it has, it has a certain way of looking at things. The illness model and so forth I thought was a problem. But my mother tongue is not psychiatry; it is more like trying to understand how do we make the bodhisattva path\(^{14}\) work.

*Moderator:* Well panel, it seems that your Buddhist practice has an impact on how you view people. Do the Buddhist views of egolessness, the inherent lack of solidity in things, and the reality of suffering also inform your counselling?

**Anne:** I think what Buddhism has done so magnificently and better than anybody else is that through meditation practice, one does come to understand how the mind works and how to work with the mind, and that things aren't as solid as we first perceive them to be. Knowing that from the Buddhist teachings and also knowing that from my own experience and practicing, I feel that is something that I bring to the work I do. What I try to teach clients is how to actually be in their experience and own it and then also not be totally defined by it. That is your experience but also it doesn't mean that's all there is.

**Barbara:** What really struck me immediately was the sense that things weren't solid. I could feel my emotions and I could let them go. I didn't have to believe myself. I could see how my mind was creating situations or perpetuating situations or getting stuck in them. I had the sense of freedom...really seeing things were not as solid as I thought.

**Allison:** Things are really not so solid, but unfortunately our clients and we ourselves easily slip into that. The very fact that a person can come in and talk with another person outside the problem area is a beginning step towards that process of allowing more space, allowing another point of view. All of that is about really shifting from a fixed position

\(^{14}\) The bodhisattva path is a path of compassionate action.
to one that things can change. Otherwise there would be no point in the change process, no point in a person coming in, because they would have no hope that it could change.

Anne: When I am with a client and it seems to me that they are breaking apart, seeing their pain and their suffering and where they are stuck and you know that they don’t have to be there. And then, finding ways to help them see that. There is just something different about that.

Elaine: I do believe people are OK the way they are. But sometimes that is such a radical thing to say, when they are so unhappy. You know? And that is a hard place to ride, I think. They are so unhappy. There they are and their only experience they know is the suffering. Their relationship to themselves is through suffering. Saying it’s OK is like whoa. Wow.

Allison: [This] is sort of getting back to what I was saying earlier that in our culture we are not really taught because it isn’t part of our philosophy, our Christian, Judeo-Christian tradition to teach us about egolessness or about going beyond this false self that we identify with, that we are taught to identify with…. I am very, very influenced by the notion of my understanding of emptiness. That to me is a big view in terms of how I see things. Things seem very serious right now and it is a very painful situation that you are in but at the same time there is the possibility of letting go. And how we work with it as Buddhists is through our practice. But how we work with it with our clients can be as creative as you want to be, in terms of letting go, being kinder to yourself, doing things to dislodge or dis-identify yourself with whatever you are fixated on. That all goes back to the notion of egolessness.
Moderator: Thank you panel. We learn that in addition to your view of basic goodness, your view of egolessness or knowing the inherent lack of solidity in things changes how you see the person and relate to their suffering. Could you say more about how that translates into compassion? Tell us, What's Love Got To Do With It?

Anne: I think I have always been a caring person, compassionate. When you see how the teachings [work], you see the amount of suffering in people because of fear or ignorance, or being caught in beliefs and how hard people are on themselves. It just does change how you see people, not only when counselling, but in general.

Elaine: I kind of see that in people, different Shambhala attributes. People are pretty cool in a way, to get through what they have already got through.

Allison: As Buddhists, once you realize that there is something beyond the Hinayana level, you really naturally, your heart just wants to kind of go out and try to be useful or available to people as much as you are able to.

Michael: I remember Trungpa Rinpoche saying that when we work with others we have to recognize them as being like little babies and we are like changing diapers. They are so cute. These babies are so cute and they are naughty as well. And sometimes they squirt little jets of diarrhea in our face as we are changing their diaper. And they are still so lovely, you know, just as they are doing that, so. They are untrained and innocent and into mischief and that sort of stuff. It was his way of saying that we are bigger than the problems that people bring us. And underneath those problems there is still some kind of innocence and naiveté that we can love, and that’s important. Because you love the little creatures even though they act like maniacs sometimes.

15 Hinayana is the level where one works to attain personal freedom
Barbara: That sense of ordinary magic or that sense of sacred world does change how we relate with somebody.

Elaine: It is a privilege [for me] to work in a treatment centre because people are there and you develop kind of a family atmosphere. I become kind of a cranky mom. And I actually am at least as skillful as being a cranky mom, at helping people than being a sophisticated therapist.

Edward: I think of Dilgo Kyentse Rinpoche. I have never been around a human being who seemed to emanate such profound love to rooms of hundreds, that just by seeing him changed one, changed me, certainly in the moment of being around him and the memory of that experience. It’s been helpful to have been around great teachers, which is the other thing, people teach from their presence.

Moderator: Well panel, let us take a moment to recap what you have been addressing. It seems that your practice has been transformative in a fundamental way, in the way you perceive and relate with others. Just in these short excerpts, you state how your practice of Shambhala Buddhism has changed the way you view people. This view seems to be one whereby the goodness of being or the sacredness of all phenomena permeates your mindscape, which translates into relating with the innate basic goodness of another in counselling. Barbara, you describe this learning as an embodied experience. In his 2002 publication, the Sakyong said that view in Buddhism is not a belief system. It is more than simply a change in perspective. Rather it refers to the experience of being awake, the qualities of awakened mind as stable, clear and strong and the recognition of the lack of solidity; it is the ground for the intentional action of compassion. As a panel, you report that this view changes your action, and that your practice changes your connection with.
another such that you relate in a heartfelt way. Anne you state that your Buddhist
practice has changed your view of how suffering is maintained. This view and your
personal experience of how suffering can be transformed has deepened your heartfelt
connection and caring for others. Allison you affirm that the path of compassionate
action naturally arises from Buddhist practice. Elaine, you relate that in a specific work
setting your caring manifests as connecting like a mother. Michael, you share a playful
metaphor and relate that as a result of practice you essentially see another as someone
you can love. And Edward, you describe how your experience of presence is an
inspiration as when one is authentically present there is a quality of compassionate
caring. Could you speak further about your presence in counselling? How is that enacted
through being real, true to the situation, and genuine?

Authentic Presence / Path

Michael: What Shambhala Buddhism has to offer is that you can be a relatively sane
person. What is has to offer is something to the therapist. You know, I teach meditation at
the American Psychiatric Association AGM, and people want me to give them something
to do with their patients. And what I think meditation does is that it allows you to become
the healing instrument. So there [are] no tricks or gimmicks [about] what to do with your
patients. You just be, with as much awareness as you can.

Anne: When I first came into counselling, I came in as I think a lot of people do when
they come into the helping professions- wanting to help people. I wanted to do
something. And now I am aware that my job is really just to create the space for them to
do. I might have some information that they don’t have. Or I might be able to validate
something that they are experiencing because I have worked with other people and could
say I know this about this. But for the most part, it is giving people that unconditional space to work in, and trusting that. Trusting them. Trusting the space.

**Barbara:** Shambhala Buddhism helps me meet the person… just knowing that we are taught basic goodness immediately up front is really fundamental for me.

**Edward:** My legacy from Richard [Buddhist teacher/mentor], and from my heartfelt connection to the dharma and my experience is that, both in therapy and in dharma, there are so many trappings; it is easy to lose authenticity. It is also when one feels one is actually being one-self. And of course from the Buddhist point of view, there is always the trap of ego. So what is the difference between genuineness and simply furthering your own ego? I take trainings and workshops, and try to be and think in skillful and different ways, and those things have a value but they are only tools, and they are only upaya\(^{16}\), if they are engaged by a person. So the trickiness, and this is true for me both in terms of dharma and in terms of therapy, is knowing when one is slipping away from, maybe what we would call in the Shambhala context, authentic presence, which would be also you know, a sense of kind of resting in your bodhisattva quality.

**Anne:** There is a way that you can tell that you are not being true to yourself, or not being true to the situation, not really being present.

**Edward:** It’s more like you [can] tell the difference between being with someone and trying to be in role with the person, basically.

**Anne:** I also think that there is a way that the teachings and the practice mean that you don’t do things in such a mechanical way. You don’t rely on a list of questions. You rely on the relationship more.

\(^{16}\) Upaya is a Sanskrit word meaning skillful means
Moderator: So, it seems authentic presence means being aware, real, and true to the situation. Could you say more about how that affects your connection with a client?

Anne: I think I am not as afraid. Being less afraid of what you see or hear, just trusting that people can open to, not undo the suffering but not be caught, so caught up in it. Powerful.

Barbara: Just about being real, that’s really what it has taught me... to just be myself - like people say not to be afraid of who we are; I think that’s really true. It has really given me... it’s broken away any sense of falsity.

Elaine: There is something about being incredibly honest with people that is such a relief for them. I did an intake last week. And this gal was so loaded, she had needle marks in her throat, you could see a hole right there, and on her arms. She was totally not ready, and I had the lovely job to kick her out basically and to try and find her somewhere else. She was mad as hell because there were kids involved, and she was going to lose her children, huge issues. She kept trying to tell me she wasn’t that loaded, had been more loaded before. But I was just straight with her, and sat her down and talked to her, and said you have to go. And I gave it no gap; there was no gap for her to change it. She de-compensated right in front of me, and I just continued with the discharge. It was a complete relief for her, when I think about it. She just got straight with me and started talking to me, continually crying and the rest of it too, but it wasn’t about let’s make the tears go away, let’s make this a nice situation. It wasn’t a nice situation. I [had] just put another hand grenade in a very broken down life, but that is the way it had to be. I explained why, but people are loaded and they don’t hear you very well. But I explained it clearly enough or got connected, it’s that connection again. I was honest enough and
made enough eye contact and was there with her enough and kept doing what I had to do, that I could tell she was relieved by it, that we were moving into the way the world is. Her preferred view of what should happen wasn’t going to happen. So in terms of connection with people, I think there is something about that kind of raw honesty that provides that. You have to be really strong though. And you have to be brave and you have to really believe that this, that reality is basically going to be, is OK. I think there is [fearlessness and a lot of trust] actually. There is no option.

**Moderator:** So trust is what allows you to be yourself. Is this what you mean by not being afraid, being fearless?

**Edward:** It’s fundamentally you are not afraid to be who you are, the Shambhala definition of warriorship. I think it’s always a process... you don’t ever arrive at it. As I get older, I see places I am still afraid to be with in myself and occasionally with others.

**Erin:** I had that experience in giving seminars as well. I was sent out to do a seminar on the differences between men and women’s communication styles. Our director at the time sold this idea to this company. And I get there and it is like a blue collar, overalls, 7 am and I am thinking oh, my God. What am I going to do? And I had to just think fast. I mean I knew what I was going to do. I couldn’t do it the way I was going to do it, but I was going to do it. But I had the best time. If you give me a room full of men and that quality of presence in me kind of comes out. Right, all these guys, Oh, it was hilarious. You go into a corporate setting and they talk about differences in men and women communication styles and there is a certain amount of decorum that would be present. But with these guys, we are talking about how ball players play with their balls on television, and women. I mean this was the kind of quality of conversation that was going
on. And there is a fearlessness that actually comes over me at times. And there are other times I am totally fearful, but under certain circumstances I experience fearlessness. Which is interesting because it takes me off on a bit of a tangent. I have had a number of peak experiences that involve fearlessness. No, no, that involved absolute fear, total terror, followed by fearlessness. And I think that is kind of all part of it. You meet the challenge from a place of, I am willing to lean into fear at times and experience some degree of fearlessness.

*Moderator:* So we see that authentic presence includes being real, true to the situation acting fearlessly, almost taking a leap of faith, which perhaps is what you mean when you say you trust. These seem quite dramatic steps. *How do you do that?*

*Michael:* [What] Shambhala Buddhism does I think, is we are sort of rousing windhorse and all that is about rousing our own energy. So I see us as being more active and engaged and kind of vigorous than just mindfulness per se.

*Barbara:* For me, there was always the sense of arousing confidence

*Anne:* Just having that sense of whomever I am with in the room. I am much more curious about where people are stuck, how is it they are stuck and where are they stuck and what beliefs they are having about themselves, what feelings they are stuck in. Gestalt theory is experimental and experiential so, I can see where Shambhala Buddhism gives me more courage to go with that more.

*Moderator:* As you act fearlessly, what keeps you grounded? *Is that what you call holding your mind?*

*Edward:* This is where I think meditation practice is helpful for we know the experience

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17 Windhorse is a term for energy that is an expression of basic goodness. It is also a Shambhala Buddhist practice of relaxing into openness and radiating positive energy.
of being here and not being here, falling off the horse and getting back [on] and being able to ride that sense of genuineness in the room.

Anne: What we learn in our practice is about being in the moment, being in the moment, being in the moment.

Michael: I don’t think Shambhala Buddhism specifically speaks to psychotherapy. I think it speaks to how we hold our own mind, right? And how we are with that.

Anne: Certainly, I mean there is a huge level of calmness that I have now. I mean I have always been a fairly calm, laid back person, but I think in the past that’s been driven more from a way of protecting myself, whereas now it feels like that is just a natural part of me. But when I am not practicing I can see how much tighter I get, how much speedier I get, or how much narrower my vision is. How much I become operating less from an intuitive and centered and grounded place and more from my head. I am way less judgmental when practicing. And then all of those things translate into how I see my clients.

Moderator: In speaking of authenticity in action, you have all presented a few themes worth pointing out. As I understand you, authenticity is a result of your meditation practice where you have honed your awareness and ability to notice when you are not present. You express authenticity in being yourself, real, going beyond roles to be true to the moment, compassionately honest; characteristics grounded in your trust in basic goodness, confident that speaking the truth is respect for one’s ability to hear and manage the situation. The Shambhala tradition calls this: warriorship, a practice of courage encompassing gentleness and fearless engagement. Thus, you experience your practice as maintaining your ability to act and be open to a greater view of the situation,
of the person in front of you. How do you see this operating in relationship with a client?

Is openness an expression of how you are in relationship? Is it acceptance and trusting the space?

Erin: First of all the client sees that I am present and open, compassionately open. And that when the grief or the suffering starts to open, I don’t know how I do it, but I just think that I have a way of making the container bigger. So there is enough room in this space for you to experience whatever it is that is going on.

Elaine: Just knowing our own emotions and there is a sense of that spaciousness to receive it.

Barbara: I remain curious, which I think is the one thing I have learned, is to be curious. If there is anything we need to do in therapy is to be curious about the other person. Because it’s a very loving act, right? Being curious means I care, I want to learn more. I am not closing myself off, and saying you’ve got a problem. It’s a very joining act.

Allison: That’s right. I think it is different. It’s not like traditional notions. It has a sense of joining as being empathic and caring and meeting the other person but whatever experience it is, whether it is good or bad, you don’t have to really judge it because when you sit [meditate], you don’t judge what you’re experiencing, you just witness it. So at that point it becomes very “non-critical”. It is that openness and acceptance of the phenomenal world whatever it is.

Anne: For the most part, it is giving people that unconditional space to work in. And trusting that. Trusting them. Trusting the space.

Erin: It really is the depth of working with people. It feels like I am able to experience a deeper opening with people than when I was operating on simply a humanistic level.
There is a difference in the gentleness with which I work where I am more open, more able to go further into suffering, to be with another in their pain. I have a deeper willingness to create the container.

Anne: And the other piece is my level of competence; my work has changed with my practice. Part of the teaching is leaning into your fear and letting go and not trying to control things, trusting the space and the person. That has also influenced my work. I think that that is what the practice allows us to do. It allows us to go beyond ego and just be in a space.

Allison: Yes, they’re inseparable in a way. Because it seems when we practice and we try to tune into that sort of non-conceptual mind, which is essentially the point, to be open to everything, at that point you really do become inseparable, yourself and other. When you see that big picture, when you create that openness in yourself, it is not something you communicate through language; it just is. That opening allows the other person to come into the opening. So, at that point it’s like the joining of minds between teacher and student, at that moment it’s inseparable.

Erin: Whilst recognizing respect for them.

Moderator: It seems that openness is a way of being, whereas trust and respect are how you relate. Do you relate to the client on a more equal basis, and see them as the same as you?

Anne: I think in the past I would say that I enjoyed therapy and I thought I was pretty good at what I did. But through my Buddhist practice I feel that I am a better therapist and more present and open. I am more able to be with the person; become where they are because I know there is no difference between them and myself.
Barbara: Having come to Buddhism through my own suffering, I could really relate with other people's suffering in a far more genuine way than before. I think practice gives us that, knowing we come through it... I think it changed how I saw the person because I never saw the person in front of me like this addict or ... It was always: who they are.

Allison: It is amazing how the response of a person to you is so much based on how they experience you as being there and being open with them. And really being genuine. Because then that breaks down all the barriers of you are the therapist and I am the poor client. Because you are just relating as a human being. And um, I think that when you feel that kind of acceptance from clients you know that you have made a connection. And again it is based on compassion I think, compassion and openness. That they sense it, they trust you and uh, that's so much of what we do here isn't it?

Michael: I think one of the advantages of the dharma is that it very explicitly works with the idea that the apparent duality between myself and another person is only a mirage. And when we sit we notice in fact we are much more connected that we are separate. The analogy that comes to me is: it's like bubbles on a balloon, like a little bubble stands up and says I am separate, I am some big deal. But then another little bubble says you are not separate. You are not separate. I am separate. I am the big deal. You are nothing. And we are all just like those little bubbles on a balloon. And in a way none of us are anything, really. We are all equal, but we are all connected at the same time. It is not like we are part of a big collective consciousness, sort of enduring consciousness, but we are all related in a functional way.

Edward: Too often, psychotherapy is done on people even if it is a deconstructed psychotherapy that has it's own preciousness about it, which aggravates me, as the
language of discourse, blah, blah, blah, gets thick. I think that [it] is more than a
technique, to be with someone and to be genuinely curious about how they experience
their lives and how they do what they do and how they make sense of it, and to let them
be your teacher of that.

**Anne:** As I studied the teachings more, I, there was more room for my clients to grow
beyond how they, how they might have seen themselves and how I saw them even. Um, I
guess it is just like, I think, the potential is limitless. People’s potential is limitless.

**Moderator:** You speak of trust and equality, and express deep respect for your clients.
Can you say more about how you are emotionally with them, and about the Shambhala
way of connecting to a “genuine heart of sadness,” that quality of broken-heartedness,
of resting in heart?

**Anne:** It feels like a place in my heart centre that’s… it’s the way that the practice opens
you, influences you, and changes you. There is a rawness that makes you more available
to other people and present and more heartfelt and I feel that because I have been able to
discard some of my own … That, to me is where the Shambhala teachings come in
because they teach people to be open and to not be afraid of being open, not be afraid of
being with, not be afraid of experiencing the world, not be afraid of letting go of things
that have kept them safe and secure.

**Moderator:** So, it seems that trust and fearlessness actually means you let go and relax
more and you exercise less control. Is this related to the Buddhist middle way of not too
tight, not too loose?

**Anne:** Yeah, not being afraid. Not having to, you know, run from it. Either because oh,
you know, that wouldn’t be professional or I am supposed to be in control or you know,
all those kinds of, that language that you learn in counselling training, maintaining professionalism, and there is this boundary that you are taught to have in a counselling relationship. There is a way that that breaks down and at the same time, when you are broken-hearted and at the same time you still are present. You still hold your position as the therapist as the person that this person has come to you to work with... I have had some clients who were therapists where they did lose that boundary and it was wrong. Because it was about them, you know. And they did step over lines that they should never have stepped over because they weren’t clear enough within themselves, about that level of empathy. And I think it was damaging to their clients rather than supportive. So it is an interesting, interesting place. And to me it is the most critical part of therapy, that place where you can actually meet the client, totally, but yet not become enmeshed, right. Where they still have their...they are who they are, their sense of themselves but they are not alone.

**Barbara:** That is actually one of the things I recognize: the sense of joining but not getting enmeshed. I think there is a different connection, a different notion of joining.

**Moderator:** So being openhearted and caring means that you connect with another’s pain yet you say you do not become enmeshed. You are fully present and connected almost as if there is no boundary but still you maintain your seat as counsellor. Does that impact how you feel and convey empathy?

**Barbara:** Well, there is the sense of the openness and meeting the other; it is not being lost. It is also very different when one is being real, and compassion is different than usual notions of compassion. I have another understanding because of Shambhala Buddhism. There is the usual sense of compassion as being nice. Well, no, compassion is
sometimes just being honest or honesty is compassionate and that is more effective. We get that quicker, a little bit quicker than some of the others therapists. I am not saying they don’t do it, but I think we learn that quicker. And I think that there is a sense of joining, understanding, joining differently or at least experiencing it differently so that meeting the other is meeting the other from that space of, I’ve kind of been there. My rage is as volcanic as yours if not more.

**Allison:** That’s right.

**Elaine:** Working with addicts has been a huge wake up call. They are incredibly difficult to work with in some ways. It is like crazy mind in the Buddhist sense but so turned up; the volume is so high. And what has been difficult about it? Sometimes it is completely useless what I do. I mean I can be as skillful as I want. Big frigging deal, you know. So [there is] a lot of that, a lot of learning the edge of what help can do. Even when I was getting my education, I thought people were basically sane and the whole Rogerian idea of basically good and basically wanting to get healthy and all you have to do is kind of support it and it will happen. I don’t believe that any more, not at all. Which is interesting. I believe there is basic goodness in everybody but I don’t necessarily say that they are healthy, that there is basic health in people. [And] I think support and being there and using paraphrasing and the basic empathy is not good for everybody.

**Anne:** It is hard to articulate because it is experiential. The change. I mean in counselling training you can talk about empathy, you know you need to empathize with the client, blah, blah, blah. But it is so, a lot of it is words and then you would say to the client, yeah, I understand, but maybe you really don’t. But when you really open your heart to someone, there is a way that you actually feel their pain, not where you become
immobilized and you can’t work with them. Right? Or you become scared. It is just that action, being in their shoes somehow, but really feeling that. I think that immediately communicates to the person you are with. And they may not even be aware. I mean sometimes I have clients actually recognize that. There will be some kind of exchange where I can see in their face or their body language that they know that they have really communicated something to me and it has really penetrated me. And sometimes they may not even be looking at me. They may be looking down or away but I think there is a sense of that in the room. Just that. It is hard to articulate that, but it is definitely, I know it’s there. And I know that the clients, my clients pick that up, you know. And sometimes they will come back the next session and say, I don’t know what happened the last session, but... And I think it was that. That’s what happened, that genuine connectedness. 

Elaine: A colleague who also works on addiction and I were watching other counsellors talking about being kind to everybody all the time, being nice and warm and blah, blah, blah, we were both like huh this? about it. And I said ‘why is that? Why would they do that? I don’t get that.’ And she goes ‘because they are lazy.’ And I go, ‘whoa. Like tell me more.’ ‘They don’t want to do the work that is required to do it the other way.’ Oh, my God, she is right. Because cutting through the bullshit means that you are getting to the person, and something real is going to happen. Empathy can be…it’s all soft, soft, soft. Oh, but that is the way most of them are trained. That’s the way I was trained.

Moderator: Let’s pause. It seems that your knowledge that there is a way out of suffering helps you relate to clients in a genuine way, to feel and experience their pain. Will you expand further on how you embody this in interaction? What is the process of working with emotions in relationship like?
Anne: I can experience myself in different ways and they can as well... I was thinking about how we learn a bit in counselling training how to validate and how to reframe things. That is part of counselling training. But I think that when you practice and study [Buddhism], you do those things from a more genuine place. It is not like a, it is not a mental thing, how do I reframe that. It just, it's a heart felt thing. Like it is painful when you hear somebody saying something negative about themselves. It is not intellectually oh, how do I reframe that for them. But it is just like, it hurts when you hear them speaking of themselves in negative ways. And that reframing just comes from the heart instead of in your head. And I think that clients feel that genuineness. And it is not just an exercise. Maybe this is sort of like going back to when we were saying, like the checklist for suicide right? It is no longer a checklist or a technique; it's just real. And I think that clients experience it that way. So even though you are doing the same thing, you are reframing, they get to hear it in a different way and see if it resonates with them. I think there is something different about it, about doing those things.

Allison: I remember other therapists being very curious and asking me how to deal with a clinical situation from a Buddhist point of view, like one young person when I worked in Burnaby. He was from Sri Lanka and he was not my client so I don't know all the details of the history. But the therapist came to me saying, this boy is a Buddhist, but I think he has a very wrong understanding of how to relate to his anger. And so I met with the therapist and the boy and offered a different point of view, that anger wasn’t necessarily something that we should suppress. That was his idea, suppression. Whereas when you practice Buddhism, you realize that you are not either suppressing or following a certain thought or emotion, but you are really just trying to look at it honestly and trying
to relate to it. Sometimes the emotion can speak to you, give you some insight. And then trying as best you can to kind of work with it and then letting it go. But he was really feeling that he couldn’t even allow himself to feel it. And he had a lot of pain. I think his father had tried to commit suicide. So he had a lot of grief and pain [that] he just wanted to bury. I remember talking to the therapist about Pema Chodron’s book, Wisdom of No Escape, which I felt was relevant and she was thrilled with the book. That is just an example I remember back then - a very clear example because this particular boy was a Buddhist. And he actually was thinking about becoming a monk.

Erin: I have another example with a client, where as part of that piece of work, we initially did work on how the storyline got created. But this is just a standard thing I do with people, I say here you are, and something has happened in your life that has caused you a huge amount of suffering. Other things come up in your life that you know, doesn’t spark much of anything, that could even be so much similar, but this has really, really got a hold on you. And I say often when that happens it is because there is some historical pain that is not digested and that this incident is, it is like a laser beam that shines on that original pain that makes this, such a big incident for you. And so with that particular individual I did this kind of thing and this pain was expressed, processed to some degree, and so that came before I got into: Your mind making it up based on how you get caught because of this. Stop it.

Moderator: It seems that because of your view that they are not the problem, there is a genuineness in how you reframe that the client can feel. Your clients experience how you see them, how they impact you. You also say your Buddhist practice is not about not feeling, but about being able to experience fully your feelings and to let go of them. Does
this impact how you help others “lean into pain,” to quote Pema Chodron?

Erin: I am working with a woman whose adolescent daughter was killed in a crosswalk. There was the depth of pain that she needed to plumb and I really hung in there with her until she, she got deep enough into her suffering that she actually processed it. I think that what happens to some therapists is that the client drops into their suffering, there is a point at which the therapist may, without even being aware of it, stop the exploration, because there are so many levels of suffering that need to be really explored. I think I can go pretty far. Because of the nature of our work, sometimes I run into clients in their workplace, and I saw her recently. She was just full of life, full of life. You could just feel that it had lifted off. I really followed Pema’s writings about leaning into it and what I learned about leaning into it, leaning into it, leaning into it. I was very deeply connected to my suffering and then phoo - out the other side would come the joy. So I fundamentally know that.

Anne: I have noticed over the years that some of the work I do is getting pretty heavy. And that is probably because I can go there with people.

Erin: And I watch for indicators that there is emotion going on that isn’t necessarily being expressed, which of course sounds like counselling 101, but I am watching for it. I am watching for it. And when I notice it, I honor it somehow. And ask for a fuller expression of that. Oh, there it is. Now, Tell me more. What is happening now? Whatever you are experiencing now it is OK.

Barbara: I always take a risk and see. Just thinking of this young guy, about managing the anxiety and everything is here, all at the surface level, and then he started telling me something and I just felt his sadness, you know, and I asked him. He said oh no, no, and
then in 10 seconds, he started crying. It was just like a floodgate... It just opened up the
doors to him to relate to the sadness and it was related to the family.

**Moderator:** *Because of personal experience, you can go deeply into issues. Is this simply emotional expression or are you speaking about going beyond catharsis?*

**Allison:** My understanding of that approach is that the western therapist quite often will try to get the person who is suppressing an emotion to actually get in touch with it, which in that sense is related to Buddhism. You know you are getting in touch, you are recognizing it as opposed to sort of burying it under the carpet. But it is not enough to just cathect about it. Because I think that is where there is a lot of release that can happen when you express your feelings and you feel like somebody has heard you, but it seems like there is not a view beyond that, beyond the cathecting in western approaches, I think.

**Erin:** A client came in broken-hearted and that sadness, that openhearted sadness, genuine heart of sadness was in the room and she had some fear and anxiety coming out about abandonment. When she started recognizing that this anxiety was really a desire to flee because she was frightened, I started working with her about leaning into the fear. And it was too big. And so I talked to her about titrating. You know, just, a little bit of fear. I realized that she’s got the genuine heart of sadness, but she doesn’t have a strong back. And so it just puts her vulnerability in tremendous danger in a way because she doesn’t have that counter support. Strengthening her, so that there would be enough support to allow that genuine heart of sadness to be there without fleeing the fear.

**Elaine:** The issue is still for me, *upaya*. There is a time and place for certain feedback and certain ways of being with people.

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18 Upaya is a Sanskrit word meaning skillful means
Thematic Summary

Moderator: Well panel, let us stop here as you have given us a lot to ponder. Your presentations have been rich and thought provoking. It seems that your view of basic goodness and your knowledge that there is a way out of suffering impacts your presence with clients as you relate to their pain with openness. You manifest your openness to their experience through curiosity and respect for their courage. You relate more as equals. You speak of knowing vulnerability as a quality of broken-heartedness. It is a shared experience, and your caring stance has a clarity that is supportive. You maintain both separateness and connection. You feel connected through the heart yet separate, and you do not get enmeshed in their pain. You are there in the picture, but it’s not about you. You are not caught, as it would only become a problem when the connection makes it about you. This empathic support is one of recognition; it is receptive. You use the word “penetration” to express how you receive another’s pain. The vignettes you recount illustrate how you help others delve into painful experiences by making sense of their suffering. This allows you to connect with them compassionately and seemingly in profound ways. You speak of going beyond catharsis. We would like you to explain further what are the Buddhist skillful means you use. In the meantime, I recommend that we take a short break and return in 20 minutes.
CHAPTER 5  PRACTICE

“Awareness is very important. We are here, nowhere else. Since we are here, why not be here?”
(Trungpa, 1996, p. 18)

Panel Discussion- Part 2

Moderator addressing the audience: I trust you have all had a relaxing and invigorating break. The panel will now speak of the specific practices they use in their interactions with clients. But first, I would like to offer a further explanation of the framework of ground, path, and fruition used in this presentation. This threefold logic is a process that can be understood in a linear manner. Yet there may be overlaps, as the process is recursive. When listening to the panel, consider that the panel shines light on one area at a time. We begin this afternoon’s presentation with the panel’s discussion of the Buddhist skillful means they use.

Moderator addressing the panel: Could you speak about the Buddhist practices that you find helpful?

Skillful action / Fruition

Allison: I used a lot of Buddhist influence in how I worked with a quadriplegic woman a couple of years ago. For maybe 4 years she had not gotten out of bed or into a wheelchair. She had disconnected so much to her life, to her present physical life, because she was bedridden. She had given up all activities. Her husband was the only person that would feed her and change her, things like that. She had lost her mother, her father, and a few other people, who were deceased for quite some time, but she maintained a relationship with them almost more so than people who were living. She was caught up with grief and hadn’t let them go. The way I saw her was she literally was
in a bardo\textsuperscript{19}, between life and death. She wanted to think more about the deceased who were drawing her to death versus people who were alive. That was my perspective. The plan was to help her grieve, relieve her depression and reconnect with her life. I used a different letter-writing technique, called unfinished business. The first letter to the person you express all of your feelings both positive and negative. The second is that the deceased writes back to you. This seemed to make a huge difference for her; she was able to put herself in the role of the mother or father. It's like tonglen\textsuperscript{20} in reversing the role. It is not just ego-centered, what I need, but it is why did you do this to me? Why did you abandon me? Why did you abuse me? Then actually being able to empathize with the person she had a grievance with. Though they had not been ideal parents, she knew there was enough love that she could speak from the very best side of the person. It allowed her a lot of emotional expression. This enabled her to understand the hold they still had on her mind; that she was living more in a death situation as opposed to a healthy situation. She worked through a lot, became less depressed, less obsessed with only her pain and able to generalize more. She actually improved.

\textbf{Elaine:} I think it [Buddhism] is likely so integrated that it's hard for me to pick out specific situations. But I mean clearly in places, like I have this gal who is such a mess, the poor sweetie. And she is barely off the street, right. She's just, barely keeping her life together, but would tangent on me once in a while and totally attack me, quite vicious. And it was everything I could do to stay in the room, you know. And tonglen it's like, there is nothing like it. Bodhisattva practice, there is nothing like it. [It was] the only

\textsuperscript{19} Bardo The intermediate state of the life cycle between the present and future lives.

\textsuperscript{20} Tonglen A meditation practice of exchange, an embodied practice where one experiences taking in another's negative energy and exchanging it for positive.
thing that kept me alive in situations like that, short of running out of the room. And also it allowed me to say hey, it’s not OK to talk to me like that. You need to slow down. Let’s calm down. Let’s take 10 minutes. Have a glass of water. Let’s change this because this isn’t OK. So, it also gave me the space to say that as well as stay in the room. Because I get quite frightened when people get super angry.

Barbara: [For me, its] doing tonglen… doing windhorse\(^{21}\) and focusing on basic goodness.

Michael: I think tonglen is great and I think Medicine Buddha\(^{22}\) [Menla] practice is great. All I can say is that what has helped me, what has really helped me most is that I see others as Menla including my patients. I see them as Menla. They are standing there with their begging bowl and their flower and I say thank you. I can do that some of the time. Not all of the time but some of the time.

Anne: I do. Definitely the tonglen, I use that in the practice. I haven’t used drala\(^{23}\) and windhorse much, a little bit broken-heartedness and just being more genuine, being more genuine, and also being able to see you, by being more genuine. Just that increased awareness of my own process and my client’s process and that directly comes from my study and practice. In windhorse you radiate out. Right? Tonglen I do that. Sometimes when I am with a client I’ll just be doing tonglen moment by moment.

Elaine: Practices where we radiate out, basically I do that. I do that quite a bit. The thing is I don’t think about it anymore. It just occurs to me, I don’t really think about it at all.

\(^{21}\) Windhorse is a unique Shambhala Buddhist practice of relaxing into openness, connecting with basic goodness and radiating out.

\(^{22}\) Medicine Buddha practice (Menla) A Tibetan Buddhist visualization practice intended to awaken the connection to our basic healthiness as a healing energy in order to bring health into our lives and to those we try to help.

\(^{23}\) Drala is a unique Shambhala Buddhist practice of invoking energy and connecting to wisdom by moving beyond aggression.
It’s the way I take my seat with people.

**Moderator:** It appears that as well as your ability to stay open and aware, there are specific practices that allow you to be compassionately present with another and to work with the felt energies of yourself and another. Seeing clients as Buddha, relating to them with appreciation, practicing tonglen in which you embody taking in their pain and exchanging it with positive energy, as well as doing the Shambhala Buddhist practices of windhorse and drala to rouse your own energy and radiate goodness. These practices serve to refocus your attention on the positive attributes inherent in others. You see them as no different than you; you can relate differently with their pain, transform your own feelings and stay present with greater equanimity. This is a very embodied way of relating based on how your mind/heart perceives the situation. These are all practices you are doing silently. Does it change what you say and do with a client?

**Anne:** Let me use that example about someone who is talking away and you get some cue about what is underlying. Sometimes I’ll just ask people to stop, and just go inside and I’ll teach them how to do that. Then they see that there is a sadness there they have been covering up. They may not have even known the sadness was there or they knew it was there but it was not, it’s not OK for a variety of reasons. I would be exploring where they learned that their feelings weren’t OK. And how they continue to do to themselves what someone did to them… how did you learn that about yourself? People are often surprised to find out that what they thought isn’t really based on anything other than what was given to them. So, it is a questioning, a tentativeness, teaching people to be attentive to their own selves, their own process and what they do with their process, whether they shut it down or tell themselves it should be done this way or, whether they are
comfortable being with their feelings.

**Barbara:** I think we are actually working with somebody to, in a way training them to relate differently with themselves, right? To not believe [storylines], to actually see where they are going, to actually become more responsible for themselves and their thoughts, to actually have more insight, retraining them to do that.

**Michael:** We have 3 kinds of language possible, maybe more. One is internal dialogue, the other is external dialogue, which are both mostly reflexive, based on dealing with reflex, getting what you want. Then there is a reflective language, which is the language of being able to step aside and look at what is happening in your world. I think developing this reflective language is what we try to do with people, having them reflect on their experience. So, we don’t use Buddhist language but [ask] do you see how what you are doing here may impact on your world. What do you think? What is your mind like? What is your experience like? I feel like there are a lot of little subtleties in this that are so hard to specify.

**Anne:** So with any emotional experience, you know, you can be with that experience but you don’t have to build it. Which is what often happens. Like with shame, the shame is built on stories that we have learned about ourselves and that we have, we carry around with us and we fortify and keep the shame going. And so just being more curious about what that experience is and where does it come from? Does it have a ground or...?

**Moderator:** Let us take a moment and recap. You use an attentive exploration and reflective language to engage the client in a self-witnessing process. It seems that you work toward helping the client develop skills in self-awareness, not just awareness. Could you say more about how that helps the clients see themselves and how you are
involved in shifting identities/identification and creating space?

Anne: I think it is important for people to identify their experience but not be limited by it. And so then the next step being to help someone see that they are more than just “I’m an alcoholic” or “I am from a dysfunctional family” or whatever. That is where the Shambhala teachings are particularly wonderful.

Allison: I definitely think so. When we see somebody in counselling they are identified with their problem, become inseparable from the problem. They suffer so much because either they think they are causing the problem or they are the target of somebody else’s problem. My working with the person in a situation like that, either through my discussions with them or in terms of how I relate to them in the space, is to try to create a situation that allows them to see that there is space around the problem, something beyond their identification or their fixation on that problem.

Erin: I think the reason where meditation comes in in a much more direct way. I am thinking of a client who had a fairly active imagination about what was going on with his partner. He was creating a complete story line. And I worked with him. Really, in a very direct way, by using the principles of meditation to coach him on how delusional the story line was that he was creating. I just worked [like] a sharp instrument right with the story line that his mind was creating. And when he would kind of flow right back into that story line, I was very sharp and to the point about how his mind was creating a story line that was establishing a huge amount of suffering. I was quite conscious in that interaction of, of not going out on any kind of oblique way. I was right there. And then he kind of laughed, you know, because he’d get it. He’d get when he was being completely consumed by that mind.
**Moderator:** In creating such shifts for the client, how do you see it affecting their sense of themselves? What does this do in terms of how they see the future, what they can trust, how they can go **beyond hope and fear**?

**Anne:** Oh, yeah. I think, yeah, but see again that is counselling anyway, just getting people to tap into their own wisdom into their own essence. Is Um, it moves away from hope and fear into just that, you can relax. You don’t have to use hope to get somewhere. You can just actually feel the reality of, that there is something there. You may not know it very well but you know that it is something there, some kind of essence. I mean I think that part of our job is to move away from hope and fear and that is something that the teachings really articulate right? Because when I, when I think about my training as a counsellor, it was to give people hope. Well, then, they were always operating from hope as opposed to like, uh, a real sense of I can do this. I am good, you know. It’s uh, I think that’s a problem, you know, it’s like when we want to give people hope because we know that the opposite, the flip side of that is fear. And that it is not any more meaningful than to be operating from that place, it is just a different...I mean I suppose it is helpful in terms of it is a different word, a more positive word, but if there is no, if it is just hope then people are not going to make it.

**Barbara:** It’s like dependent on whatever happens, rather than that sense of groundedness in themselves that they can do it. That I think is, you know, Shambhala training thing for me, the cocoon and fear and fearlessness is not about not having fear. But the okayness of being scared.

**Moderator:** We see that you work to help clients move away from ownership of their feelings and what they construe as their identity. Creating space around the issue
translates into helping clients move out of identification with or lessen their fixation on the problem. It seems that you create this gap by using your own curiosity to help them engage in a process of self-reflection. And you work towards a fundamental shift in perspective so that they can be free of being trapped by their own mindset. Awareness and knowing basic goodness provide the ground for your trust in their ability. What else do you do to make the situation workable and how is it related to the Buddhist concept of prajna24?

Anne: The more I practice, the more I trust my own voice. And we have talked about the courage and the courage to lean into things more, to trust. Just to trust more. That is a big one for me, trust myself and trust my client, trust the relationship, trust the space, trust stepping in more, being more directive.

Elaine: I am actually doing this kind of challenging and straightforward connecting, on the phone a lot or when people aren’t even clean [and] they come in to see me. And it is really challenging. I am the only one that says no, or what’s going on or you know, what are we going to do about that cutting all over your arm? Or: you have got to eat honey, you have got to eat. You can’t come in here and starve. I talk like that, but I am the only one. I want them to get well. I don’t want them to get sicker, and we do really intensive work. So, somebody who is carving or not eating or is loaded is going to just get sicker... I mean there are some people [who could have a] full blown psychotic break after, cause they are not ready. They don’t even have one toe on the ground let alone a couple of feet.

Barbara: I don’t really believe sometimes our therapeutic skills are skillful means. I think there is a big difference... how to work with certain things, how these things work,

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24 Prajna is the knowledge or wisdom that cuts through ignorance and obscurations of self and other.
like in terms of anxiety and cognitive behavior therapy... I really appreciate a lot of it, but I don’t think they are the skillful means. I think the skillful means is the cutting through, you know, its like saying: what is happening here, really going for the truth, really there, and then skills fall into place.

**Anne:** [In counselling], words come to mind like openness, non-judgmental, not rigid, accepting, gentle, warm. But also, there are times that you need to just cut things and be really pointed. Maybe part of that is just knowing. The tricky part as a therapist, is knowing when to cut things or when to give more space to things. I think I have a sense of how to do that more.

**Elaine:** Buddhist training does help you cut right in there, and just get right down, and a bit of faith too. Although I am saying that not everybody has basic goodness, I absolutely know everybody has basic goodness so. So being able to say hey! You know what? I think you are going to get fucking loaded again if you keep talking like that and treating people like that. To be able to say something like that with all the swear incorporated, I have to know that they have a place in them they can actually hear that. And will do whatever they are going to do with it. I have to let go of the results though, and [Buddhism] has taught me do that.

**Moderator:** Your Buddhist practice allows you to have a certain clarity, to see things as they are and relate with what needs to happen, and to fearlessly challenge clients when necessary for their well-being. Could you give other instances of how this clear knowing of what to do helps you frame your work, i.e. how do you engage in containing and expressing?

**Erin:** I read somewhere that counselling is like being a midwife, breathe, OK, push.
Relax. And I think a lot of that is intuitive in a way, because you need to know when to breathe or you need to know when not to go there. And I also had experiences of very intentionally not asking people to explore, people who are so depressed that exploring their suffering would actually not be a good thing.

Anne: There is always a process. Everyone is different. Sometimes I work to create a fairly tight, contained space for them. And then bring it back open.

Erin: I am thinking of a client that I saw who had seen another counsellor who had done a lot of inquiry into the history of her presenting concerns. And when she came in to me I knew immediately that that was not the way to go with this woman. In a way her ego was so fragile at that point that it needed reinforcement, and I was like, let's get the doctor involved, a much more pragmatic kind of approach with her.

Moderator: So this clarity allows you to create a holding environment and know when to and when not to explore deeply. Could you say more about how you help clients relate with their own emotional needs and habits, and to see through their habitual patterns?

Allison: I am very much into looking at family of origin stuff, relationships. When you approach things from that point of view you are looking at causes and conditions, influences that brought you to this place. Traditionally in western psychology there are all kinds of approaches that would use something like that. Going back to early childhood and looking developmentally and developing insight into why in the present moment you are having these problems. I am always interested in helping people gain insight into how their situation is affected by many different levels, whether it is the present relationship with their spouse or their children, how patterns are being repeated. Habitual patterns. I use that word a lot actually. You have a habitual pattern or a habitual condition, and that
is very much a Buddhist concept. People understand that. To break a habitual pattern, what is it that you can do differently? It is matter of conditioning. You are like this not because you necessarily want to be like this but you have had all these strong influences, a history of alcoholism or history of abuse or history of whatever. So it is no wonder you feel messed up but it doesn’t mean that you have to carry on with that habitual tradition. You can actually break it. I actually look at things more psycho-dynamically like that, and so I think there are all kinds of opportunities to use Buddhist ideas really.

Erin: It’s interesting. I had a client who, who was having a tremendous amount of grief because of a death of a child. And it was many years later, it was an anniversary. And she came in the day before it, dreading the day. She said how the day was going to be so sad she was going to cry all day And I know she dances. Just recently dances. I said why don’t you dance? Dance. Dance the experience. And it led to the next level. For the last I don’t know how many years, every single anniversary date, she’d have this all consuming grief reaction, which I think became habituated. She came back and she had danced. She didn’t dance at home; she went and danced. And how her aliveness, how she came alive, and [she said] there was this kind of discordant feeling, but I danced, But I danced! It was so, so wonderful [to see the change in her] and to really even know when suffering is maybe not as much as habituated, can become habituated.

Edward: It’s like to make space. [Here is an example] with another couple. He said a wonderful thing in our session about 12 days ago. “So what you are saying and I can see now that it’s true, for me, I really need to just be with my fear to overcome that”, and those were his words or very close. Then he slipped back last week, quite a bit. That is distressing for me and I accept it, and realize that I am kind of irritated with it. There is
this beautiful breakthrough and then there is a reconsolidation as it becomes too scary. The thing I have to remind myself of, it’s just like practice. He drifted off into his habitual patterns of defense. [And like practice,] To be able to stay with him, moment by moment in that process: [asking] “So what happens there? You distrusted what you said. I saw you got back? What happened?” I get too impatient. And that’s when I lose it, naturally, which is probably my lack of compassion for myself.

_Moderator:_ It appears that being direct, challenging clients, helping them break free of patterns yet not getting caught up in their difficulties come from your own experience in meditation practice. Could you explain further how the awareness you develop from your practice helps you see clearly another’s issues and be clear about your own issues?

_Anne:_ I think that I am much more perceptive than I used to be. That has come through the practice. I just have more I don’t know whether you would call it intuitive or insight.

_Erin:_ And I think that when people come in I can read them, at whatever level. And if they are kind of stuck here, I can invite them to see what is there down here that might need to be addressed.

_Anne:_ I think that [level of awareness] comes from practice though. Because if you are not self aware, I mean you can have all kinds of ideas about, this is what this person needs, and this is right and I am right. And I think you practice and you just dissolve so much of that stuff. You just, you have to just deal with what is there.

_Michael:_ I am going to write up working with counter-transference through the five wisdoms. So I am not going to change a patient or a client. I am not going to do anything. What I am going to do is try to maintain the wholesomeness of my attitude by

25 Counter-transference: the therapist’s own reactions to a client or client’s issues.
26 Five wisdoms: The 5 Buddha families – each represents a particular aspect of awakened mind.
noticing with my counter-transference when it starts to get stuck in one of the realms, and transmuting that energy through use of the 5 wisdoms, awareness of the five wisdoms.

So, noticing if I am feeling anger. I see it as vajra\(^27\) energy. So, what I would do is transmute my anger into clarity. What do I need clarified. If you have passion for something, recognize what’s really going on there is a search for communication. If I feel jealous, it is just energy that needs to be freed from my own ego. Things like that. So I am going to try and work on the five wisdoms.

**Anne:** Everything is less claustrophobic and everything is less narrow, everything has more potential, everything, you know, it’s just kind of um, more relaxed, just relaxed and that knowledge. Um, I don’t know how I communicate that with clients though. I am wondering if I do. I am not sure how I communicate sacred world. I think I do in a sense, just in the environment of my office, period, there is the sense there. Um, but I don’t know how I do that in a session. Anyway I know that that is true. It can’t not be true.

**Moderator:** So awareness helps in knowing what to do, being clear about your intentions and being able to transform counter-transference feelings. And you speak of the world as sacred. What impact does that vision have with clients and on you personally? Does that make you less goal oriented, not outcome driven?

**Elaine:** You have to believe in the sacredness otherwise, you would want to fix everything. I mean that is the answer to it all, what’s to fix if it is already sacred?

**Anne:** I would say that the practice moves away from being outcome driven. In that you are just more interested in the person’s process and their experience in something, that it may not be what you think they are going to experience or what you imagine or what you

\(^{27}\) Vajra: means indestructible. In this context: mirror-like wisdom, 1 of the 5 innate aspects.
Edward: Being a Buddhist who practices therapy is helpful from the point of view, that ultimately, it’s not your job to fix someone else and life is dissatisfaction cycle.

Elaine: I am totally not invested in outcome anymore. There is a relationship or a connection between Buddhism or Shambhala Buddhism [with] the sense of being less invested, absolutely. It kind of allows it actually. Again, that’s the basic goodness or believing in some sort of faith that things will be ok I guess, or that people are healthy, healthier than they let you know. They basically know how to take care of themselves. It allowed me to kind of be a little less invested in how they are doing and the outcome of a session, for instance.

Erin: I think in the employee assistance field, it is like you are there to get, some people say I am here to get from point A to point B. We set goals, and I think, oh give me a break. What I do is whatever place the person is walking along the road at that point, I kind of feel like I walk along side with them, wherever that is. And it can be at the beginning of their journey or at the middle. But I try through the course of walking along side them, to have them experience something that is more authentic, and possibly deeper. The goal is kind of somewhat irrelevant, for it is often a goal that is based on a false self.

Elaine: Trying to change people, really. Like who the hell are we? Like who am I to tell this person they are not OK, not that I would do it. But you know what I mean, even to imply it could be better this way or that way. The change thing has been the most disturbing for me. That people aren’t OK. When fundamentally I think they are.

Allison: I think first of all, when you look at something not working with a client, they
are maybe not achieving as much as you think they should be or you think they are capable of. Or maybe they are resisting wanting to make changes or whatever. I uh, I don’t have a huge problem with that really, uh, because I think that people move at their own pace. Who am I to really say to somebody that you have to do these things? I mean the only difference is if the person is suicidal or they are in danger of hurting themselves or somebody else and of course you have to intervene and you have to take over and try to get them hospitalized or whatever to protect themselves. But short of that or somebody abusing somebody I think that people need to just be given the respect that they need to make their own choices and if they are not able to or don’t care to go further, then I just take it as a sign that that’s all that they want to do right now, but that doesn’t mean that it is not going to change later. Or even if they go very slow in treatment, I have also seen that. You know, people will resist making changes or taking recommendations to attend this group or do this kind of activity and you see that they just prolong, prolong, and especially the chronic population, this population because that is a symptom of their illness, the negative symptoms of schizophrenia: lack of motivation and all that. But what is actually interesting is if you stay with them for a number of years, like I have been here, left and come back, and then you can see that some of these people actually are making progress. They are changing, their physical appearance changes. And I think it is just a question of allowing them the space and the time to do that. Because in the end it is their relationship with us, with the doctor, with the therapist, with the team, that enables them to, you know, having that kind of trust, to go at their own pace. Even though sometimes we may, they may experience us as pushing them.

Anne: I feel like I don’t have to control things. I don’t have to fix things.
Edward: You are not trying to save anyone, so that there is a benign neutrality and yet tremendous caring.

Moderator: *Does not being invested in outcomes sustain you in your work?*

Anne: Another way that my practice has affected my life is just being able to not feel completely, you know, drained. It gives me a way to rejuvenate and keep going.

Elaine: I have to let go of the results though and [Buddhism] has taught me to do that. I have some sense that things are going to be okay even if they’re not okay. You know what it is? It’s not about me. I can do what I can do, I just help where I can or do what I can and try to connect. It’s more in the moment.

Erin: Being able to tolerate suffering without trying to fix it. I have no intention to fix it. I think that is why I really haven’t experienced burnout for myself.

Anne: The practice certainly does have a way of letting go of a lot of stuff too. But it is more just a sense of well being- a sense of sanity I guess. There is a quote by Trungpa Rinpoche about “insanity is impermanent and sanity is permanent.” And that is such a good thing to remember when things get pretty crazy, and maybe that is back to sacred world. There is a sacred world that holds us. And we can touch into that. We can stop what it is we are doing to be able to feel that, experience that. And so I do that for myself, and naturally I translate that into teaching my clients to do that as well.

Moderator: *Your practice sustains you as your view of the sacredness of the world and inherent health of an individual frees you from the false arrogance of being the person to “fix”. Interestingly, not getting caught in an obligation to fix saves you from burnout. You seem to have a fundamental trust that helps you be humble. Could you say more about humility?*
**Edward:** I think that if your presence doesn’t seem to be creating [change]... to still be able to stay curious: what is happening here? Because, something may not be working but something is happening, since, you know, we are by nature always changing. What is happening if my preferred outcome is not? So, the trap would be to fall into, it’s not working and there is something wrong with me, which is an ego based idea or [it] is working, and there is something great about me. So I think then, the proper view is that, in being present with someone, you are doing something very special but not very unique.

**Michael:** I don’t know if I am a great therapist or a good therapist, a good physician or what. I don’t know if there is any goodness that comes out in my times with people.

**Elaine:** I was working with this older gal, a first nations client, residential school and TB clinic survivor who was at the clinic because she had too many drunk driving charges. We did group therapy and she was insulting, being rude to somebody else. I told her to stop it and she walked out of the room. Then I realized, oh, disrespect, she is my elder. I told the others, I’ll take care of this, go for a break, have a cup of tea and come back in about 15 min. I went to find her. She was sitting in her bedroom and I came in. Remember I am the boss, that is the way the place is run. I said: ‘Can I talk to you?’ And she turned, faced the wall, and gave me her back. I thought well, I guess that’s a no. But I can’t take a no. So I said that. ‘Well, I guess that is a no, but I can’t let that happen, so I am going to sit here and wait until you want to talk to me. And I get what I did. I was disrespectful and I am so sorry that I offended you.’ The Buddhist piece is that I totally got what I did. I don’t know how I said it. But I definitely gave her a real heartfelt apology in terms of why. And I don’t think that she knew why she was so insulted, that she was my elder and I was talking to her in a patronizing fashion. Then I pointed out to
her that there was some way we needed to work together that worked for both of us and I
did have my job to do. And she creeps her chair around so she is facing sideways kind of
talking at me and really mad. Then she turned around and was warming up a bit and
coming back to group. I think the only reason that I ever got through to her was that I
could be so meek about it, and straightforward. 'I laid it on the line, but I so fucked up
and I do that. I really do do that. So, let me know, tell me. You leaving the room really let
me know that I blew it.' And it wasn’t a big deal either. Poor me or I am ashamed of
myself. When she came back I mentioned it to the group too. Which is tricky to do, but I
remember doing it. It made it OK for them to be more honest about what was bothering
them, where they were strong or, you know, just sort of uncovering stuff. I think I do that
quite a bit.

**Michael:** I try to understand the other person’s point of view and even if they are being
difficult, I try to be there and have a fresh mind. How good I am at that I don’t know.

**Edward:** I think that in a way, studying and doing more gets tricky because we get
fooled by our own sophistication.

**Elaine:** I think there is a responsibility there too that I actually do know a thing or two.
And I do know that if a person continues to behave like this they are going to end up like
this.

**Edward:** There really is no protection other than your own persistent willingness to look
at your mind. There really is fundamental personal responsibility that never ends.

**Moderator:** *It appears that not being invested in outcome frees you from being caught in
goal-oriented approaches, a freedom that sustains you. Your view of the world as sacred
incorporates your trust in basic goodness and an awareness of the impediment of*
arrogance or expert positioning. You indicate that this helps you avoid burnout and maintain appreciation, qualities that are crucial for any counsellor. It enables you to acknowledge errors and repair ruptures more easily. Do you see connections between your Buddhist approach and other forms of therapy?

Connections

Michael: There is so much correspondence between what we are taught in psychotherapy and Buddhism. Taking responsibility for ourselves. Noticing how our minds shape our world. So, to me it seems like it is so similar. It is just that most people don’t do meditation practice… This analyst that I see for supervision says a lot of stuff that sounds an awful lot like Buddhism or Shambhala Buddhism. Containment. Be there. It’s all been said before…. at least 2500 years ago.

Allison: I have always said to people, hey, there is relative functioning, relative truth, and then there is absolute truth or enlightenment. And everyone needs to be able to function in the world relatively. So when we talk about people who come to a counsellor or a therapist or a doctor, they are in need, even if it a band aid approach, they need to be able to function better and to relieve some of the pain and isn’t there some merit in that and I say yes, of course there is. Because otherwise these people would be at a much lower level of satisfaction in their lives, right? Quality of life. So I was saying that even though the western approach addresses more perhaps the symptoms and tries to get at an understanding [of] perhaps the impact of the illness or whatever, it is still very useful. There is still a big role for us to play in working with people. And that to me is talking more about relative truth. It is not the absolute level of further evolution on your individual path, but before you can, as they say, before you can become egoless, you
have to have a strong ego. So we are trying to shore up their ego through relative means, right? And who knows. Maybe later in their life or maybe in another lifetime they can take that next leap into further developing. But, I mean I think that is how I experience the western psychology.

**Michael:** My course at the APA as a matter of fact is called meditation for psychotherapists AND the paradigm of health. And while analysis, I think, will always have a unique place in western psychotherapy, my feeling is that the common factors are more important than whether you are an analyst or a cognitive therapist. I mean the movement of cognitive therapy is just as strong, as vital if not more so [than] other forms of therapy. To me the common factors are what is important. And of the common factors, I mean trusting relationship and rousing affect and rehearsing new skills and going back and forth and back and forth between the old way and the new skill and practicing making that leap and also developing reflective language. There are a number of things that sound a lot like meditation. [There is] basic sanity, the goodness of health and seeing the sacred everywhere.

**Moderator:** Are there any last thoughts?

**Michael:** My feeling is that no change in health comes about without meditation in some form. All of what we are doing in life is a search for health. It is just some things are much more effective than others. People can’t do it until they actually know what health is and how to be healthy. And that is what meditation teaches them.

**Thematic Summary**

**Moderator:** I will now highlight themes that the panel has presented.
We have learnt that your vision of the world as sacred and view of inherent basic
goodness appear to fundamentally change how you perceive and relate with yourself and
others. This understanding provides a different texture to your relationships, seen in a
compassionate and loving presence that is yet direct, real and true to the situation. You
appear to have an understanding of empathy that yet allows you to confront issues. Your
awareness of what is happening within you translates into being clear with clients, less
caught up in your own neuroses or theirs. This translates into greater receptivity and
clarity, and is a direct result of your ability to stay present.

Thus your practice realizes itself in self-awareness, acceptance, heightened
attunement to clients and greater clarity of action. You use curiosity and reflective
language to create awareness for your clients. And you use specific practices to cultivate
compassion and be engaged. You seem able to tolerate extreme states of mind yet remain
appreciative of your work. In sum, you appear transformed by your practice; this imbues
your presence and affects your counselling. You relate some fundamental ideas and
experiences of suffering, impermanence, non-duality, lack of solidity, empathy as
receptive - being penetrated, concepts that are highly unusual. Yet above all, you express
this in a celebratory and appreciative way; this may have key conceptual and practical
implications for counselling.

At this point, I recommend that we take a lunch break then visit the art gallery. I
suggest to the audience that you take the time to view the art works of the various panel
members as they elucidate some difficulties these counsellors experience in their work.
The panel has requested that I be your guide for the art tour this afternoon. I feel
honored by the privilege. I have been touched by these art works and by the panel
members' openness in providing them for our viewing. Please join us for the next part of this journey.
CHAPTER 6 ART EXPOSITION

"Caught with both the upliftedness of our ideas and the rawness of what's happening in front of our eyes—that is indeed a very fruitful place" (Chodron, 1997, p. 21).

Gallery Introduction

Guide: Welcome to the art exposition. It is a privilege for me to be your guide for this art show. The counsellors on the panel have discussed with us how they work with clients. Here, they offer us the opportunity to view personal artworks that reveal difficulties they have experienced in their work. Let us begin by noting the layout of the art works. We have before us six different gallery rooms, one for each counsellor on the panel. This will allow you to view and appreciate their individual processes; the art works are experiential visual snapshots of individual experiences with a client.

Each counsellor has done three art works, 2 larger paintings and 1 smaller; the three comprise a sequence. The first two are paintings of meeting the "big squeeze" and its outcome. The big squeeze refers to that moment of confronting a challenging situation where, despite good intentions, it was a struggle for these counsellors to embody being open. This is reflected in the first painting. The second illustrates the outcome, and the third painting is a “response” to the previous two; it is a painting of the quality or feeling needed for resolution. These third response paintings were done after the counsellors discussed their first two art pieces and the process. They completed the visual art inquiry.

Then the counsellors did a spontaneous poem, known as a Doha. One counsellor started with a line of poetry, then another responded and so on. This is their Doha:

I love tunnels
Tunnels are holes in space
Sweeping open
Light, no light, light,
Light at the beginning and at the end
No beginning, no end
I love tunnels.
These counsellors were open enough to explore their struggles, courageous enough to engage in a creative re/collection of their difficulties and interpret their experiences. Their spontaneous descriptions and interpretations are noted in italics next to each work. Before we see their descriptions and hear an interpretive reading, I suggest that you take a moment to appreciate and engage directly with the art works on your own. These counsellors have spoken of the openness with which they try and be present and attentive. In honor of this, you can, if you wish, allow yourself to be present and attentive in a similar manner. To do so, I recommend that as you enter each gallery, you simply drop whatever thoughts may be present, and see an open clear sky in your mind’s eye. Then let yourself relate with the artworks without projecting concepts. Connect with the visual qualities, experience their energy, and be receptive to whatever arises without commentary. Please walk through the gallery rooms and take a look.

**Edwards’ gallery**

![Artworks](image1)

**Allison’s gallery**

![Artworks](image2)
Guide: Let us now take look at the artworks along with the counsellor’s comments.
Edward’s Gallery

“Moving Nowhere”

“I don’t know what represents what, but he was stuck and he could talk about things and not go anywhere with it - other than moving nowhere - it often seems like it.”

“More Space”

“This might be where I hopefully go in some sense. I am still very frustrated being with him, but something has been opened up and there is an awful lot of pain. Although there is pain, there is a lot of space, more space. The pain is the red. He has been very aggressive in his relationship at times and gets caught up in that because he is involved in corporate takeovers and he realizes he does the same thing with his partner that he does – He’s
paid to find the liar in the room and to go after them and he makes a lot of money doing that. He even talked about how it brings things into his relationship and he talked about the fear inside of that process, but he still gets caught up in the same pattern.”

“A Vision by a Stream”

“Nothing was developed conceptually.
It was a vision by a stream.”

Guide: Representing his difficulties with a client’s lack of movement and repetitive patterns, Edward demonstrates his pain and frustration through his use of colors. In the first artwork, we can witness the solidity of the feelings, which are anchored in broad gestures. In the second artwork, the solidity is broken and fragmented as the relationship shifts. Another participant commented: “the movement and energy of the painting is circular as opposed to static.” Through the circularity of the gestures as they spiral inwards, Edward seems to indicate that he felt the client’s awareness but inability to break free of habitual patterns. He saw spaciousness as a way to ease the situation and referred to green as compassion. Though pain in the red color overlays the whole picture,
it is breaking loose and what now becomes evident is a core of inner sadness; the green of compassion accompanies this circular, spiraling motion. Edward speaks of more space. This may refer to his ability to have greater vision or distance and the client’s increasing ability to witness. A shift seems to be occurring with the space of understanding, the space of compassionate accompaniment.

Edward did his third artwork after the group discussion and the previous works were put aside. Yet we can see he used the same colors to represent the emotions, an abstract depiction that has clarity and a simpler organization. Others commented that it was a “sea of color expression,” “with sea anemones,” “liking the little buds on the stems,” and that it was “more fluid.” As we pay attention to the colors in the previous pictures, we can see “emptiness as form”, and space holding all together. The green of compassionate accompaniment separates the circular repeated patterns from the sadness depicted as flower buds. Sadness as a flower bud is somewhat similar to Buddhist iconography where emotions are depicted as ornaments on crown, symbolizing their transformation.

Let us now move onto Allison’s gallery.
"Darkness and Blood"

"I just flashed on an adolescent I used to work with. There was a boy that was so — had so much potential and so sensitive and so wonderful, but he was living with a father who was heroin addicted, and I guess initially the boy didn’t know that he was coming to live with his dad. He discovered that he was using heroin, so he ended up trying to commit suicide and actually they found in him in his bed with — his sheets were covered with blood and so when I think of that image I thought of darkness and blood. So this to me — it was my reaction to the panic of being so — feeling so helpless in that moment. You know in terms of trying to reach out to this kid who was obviously in so much pain, and he ended up going to the hospital and eventually we did some group work with him and family therapy and taken him away from the father and so things got much better for him, but that was kind of that feeling of tightness and not knowing where you go with someone so dark and helpless."
“Movement in Space”

“But then this one is more — when I think about it there is still pain involved, but there is an opening, you know, there is sort of a feeling of movement, but also there is the nudge or the nucleus that there is still a lot to work with in terms of moving that darkness out into space, but there is also hope in terms of what is coming in. So it is not as solid as that.”

“Body, Speech and Mind”

“The idea is more the mixing of the three levels of awareness of red, meaning speech, and the light is like Sambogakaya, that realm of communication and this being more or less space or body and then I think about the blueness as kind of a Dharmakaya level, of going beyond form and sort of uniting space and
so those three levels of body, speech and mind is what it is. It’s more Buddhist.”

Guide: In her first artwork, Allison’s illustrated her highly evocative story of a client’s pain through the dense, pressured tightness of the black gestures symbolizing darkness – the obscuration of emotional pain, the sharpness of the red gesture that is the pain piercing, underlying and commingled with the impenetrable blackness of helplessness, and then the swirling mix of red/black, blood/darkness, pain/hopelessness that induced her feelings of panic and helplessness. The second artwork shows that the outcome is one where the opaqueness of previous feelings is mediated, transformed into gestures that are expansive yet quick, sharp. There is pain/darkness yet space; hope enters the painting through new colors, new actions, with the “movement in space”.

In her third artwork, Allison speaks of the colors of white, red, and blue, referring to the symbolic Buddhist conception of speech, body, and mind all united to create the simplicity and clarity that this artwork illustrates.

Let’s us now move onto Anne’s gallery.
"All Self-Focused"

"This is my squeeze. I realized --- it's all self-focused that's what it is. It's totally about me and my client isn't even in here. It's like when I get squeezed is when I start looking at myself and I get scared and nervous and then I start jumping all over and I am so unfocused, but my client is not even on the page.

I didn't know that until you did yours. At least your client is on the page."

"It just faded"

"With this one client there was no result. I stayed in my squeeze. I just got more scattered and faded to - it just faded away because there was nothing - I never came out of it, so I never met my client. They left."
“Trust the Space, Remember the Magic”

"Mine was trusting the space because that's what happened to me, I got so tight it meant I couldn't trust anything. And then remember the magic.” Others commented on how much they appreciated this painting.

Guide: Anne spoke of her self-absorption as being caught in feeling nervous and afraid. We see in her first image the downward movement converging into a dark central core spiraling inward where all the black arrows point, and dark intensely shaded balls floating around. Anne's reflected on her self-absorption; it is clear that this self-focus for her meant being unfocussed or not present. The direction of her lines indicate the focus on self, their sharpness and depth reflect the intensity. The picture is aesthetically pleasing such that another participant teases her, saying she wants to squeeze that way. Her second artwork reveals the outcome, her energy dissipating reflected in the central core became more open, yet the line remains jagged and the downward marks speak to what she called being scattered. The top half of the picture is covered by similar white lines, fading away off the page, just as the client did. Her insight lies in how self-absorption arising with nervousness, fear and perhaps self-doubt, excludes the client and her resolution was to trust the space, remember the magic. Let us move onto Erin's gallery.
"Annoyance"

"I was annoyed that's what it is, annoyance. I was annoyed with a guy who had no idea of what he was in to talk to me about [laughter] and I basically told him that. What are you talking about? He was one of these people who are just free floating by without any sense of what he was doing. I just felt annoyed."

"Pointed Arrow"

"What I did afterwards was I did this – this was me, like this pointy arrow, [laughter] dagger penetrating his, what I perceived, falseness, and I tried to cushion it with a bit of compassion, green healing energy. Then when he came back the second week he told me that I had frightened him. I suppose that was good."
Guide: Erin related an instance of feeling annoyed and directly questioning a client. In her first artwork, she illustrates this feeling of frustration by the red gestures central on the page. With her second artwork, this changes to direct pointed action; the black arrows is piercing, solid and central, seemingly unshakeable even though surrounded by softness. Others noted the quality of green healing energy, and the fact that the client did return with the parallel shift from being all “over the place” into being focused. Erin expressed a difficulty, feeling “like a lethal weapon at times but it doesn’t happen very often because you need to be very gentle.” In a supportive interpretation, Allison related the colors to the five wisdom energies where the “karma family is green in life energy activity, but the black is a destructive force [and] if nothing else works, that’s what you do,” referring to the wisdom aspect of cutting through. The third artwork is Erin’s feeling of resolution – the pointed dagger is absent, the core is a sun spot of energy encircled by the colors of the rainbow represented as open brush stokes in rhythmic movement, warmth at the center surrounded by the green of compassion, warm edges.

Let us now move onto Elaine’s gallery.
Elaine's gallery

“Make it stop”

“This is my squeeze. It is very literal. It’s like me to paint so literal. This is me and that’s the client, and I was really, really focused on the black and the heaviness and the anger. The client was really enraged, furious and I felt really attacked and really scared and oh, make it stop, make it stop. I really felt unsafe with her and no ground. And this was what my sense was.”

“Blue Pool of Sadness”

“And what we were working with was this pool, the blue of sadness. She was just an incredibly really sad, sad person. I did work with it for a long time actually, and got to something like this where the walls came down. We, I got kind of mired in the sadness though. Yes, It wasn’t a good resolution.

Who knows, but she did change. We went from there where I was getting really scared,
defensive and protecting myself like crazy, losing the client and the connection. I was so into protecting myself - maybe a little overwhelmed in her sadness. There was movement anyway. It was interesting to do this because I didn’t know that that’s where it went until I did this. I had to think about where did that go and I went, oh, yes. It was a very, very sad situation but it did move.”

“The Opening”

“I have no idea what this is. I just started following with the yellow and red for a bit. I don’t paint small. I paint as big as possible. But I really, really enjoyed it and the more I got into it, the colors and the movement I think I see it as sort of energy moving. [There’s] lots of fire.”

Others commented on the energy “dancing.”

Guide: Elaine spoke of the literal quality of her artwork seen in her first artwork with her straightforward depiction of a stick figure enclosed within a frame of self-protection. The frame is solid only on the right side that has the force of her energy pushing away. The base is not solid and the lightness of this gesture reveals she has no footing, nothing to stand on, nothing to support her. Her figure appears unseeing, mouth open in pain and fear “make it stop, make it stop.” Her hands push against the frame that is being pelted by many marks; red, black and swirling blue gestures that represent the client. The client is
present only as emotion symbolized by those full gestures, heavy blobs of black/anger and red/pain in between them, another protective form blocking off the client’s blue/sadness. Here, emotions are defensive measures. Then the outcome where the black walls shift, break open and what is held is the blue sadness that then flows out, a sea of sadness that Elaine found herself caught, “losing the client and the connection.” With her third artwork, Elaine transforms the emotional defensiveness. With the release of energy in dropping that posture, a blue sea of sadness arises.

Let us now move onto Barbara’s gallery.
"Impenetrable"

"The big squeeze. It's as if there is something between us really. Before I was doing it I just felt like there was this huge thing, right in between. It's not so much the color black, but I started with the energy of the color black and I just went into that - there is this wall, impenetrable."

"This Wound"

"Well, mine moved, but I don't know where. It is like the energy all shifted, it just broke apart. But then there is this red thing, like there is this wound right in the middle."
"Fluidity"

"That's true [it's less dense]. There is a lot of fluidity and though it does look like a storm, it's just like, totally okay."

Guide: In her first artwork of the big squeeze, Barbara paints 3 black forms. The left form seems to hang; the edge of its right side has a curved brush stroke, the energy of the movement giving a sense of vibrating with suspense. The middle form has swirling gestures in the bottom half; this swirling movement is echoed in the right form that appears to pulsate. Barbara described the energy of the black form in the middle as making a huge impenetrable wall. In the second picture we see the outcome as the wall of black energy broke apart, and the painting is a series of dabs, instant brush marks of orange sadness, with one long red gash of a wound in the middle now evident. Another counsellor points out how different her last work is from her squeeze, which was dense. In this artwork, there are warmer colors in the center, more heart and more movement. In summary, we can make the following comments.
Art Commentary

Unknowing as the researcher’s stance, unknowing as the participants’ confrontation.

The panel reported that in the beginning, some found the process a bit threatening. Not having touched a paintbrush or colors in years, they wondered what would result. It is true that art-making is not a usual method and can engender anxiety. These counsellors felt anxiety and moved through it; they stepped further into unknowing. Yet throughout, there was shared laughter and camaraderie interspersed with supportive and insightful comments. In their openness to represent their difficulties, these counsellors exhibited courage. They depicted their blockages, fear, helplessness in being with another’s pain and the challenge inherent in just meeting destructive emotions. They documented their struggles. In the Shambhala teachings, vulnerability is courage.

Space appears as a consistent theme. Allison stated, “In the process of doing it I began to notice this space around the form and so I was interested in how space [seen in] the blankness of the paper intersected with the form and what that felt like. It was interesting for me. [There] was often undulating kind of sort of forms and a lot of space in the middle that seem to speak more about myself I think than anything else.” Barbara found it “interesting that we have some of the same thoughts [talking about space]. I notice there was more spaciousness of sadness. For instance, when I did sadness there was much more space than with the anger, with the tightness. I noticed when I was doing anger that it was all projected out. Anger as projectiles. But the sadness has a sense of a lot more spaciousness.” Elaine related: “when I didn’t notice that my paintbrush was getting dry and it was just sort of open on this end, I thought, yeah, that was what was happening.”
Anne and Elaine both acknowledge insights arising directly from the process, stating they did not recognize what had happened in their squeeze until doing the art. Insight arose within the art-making itself for Elaine, and afterwards for Anne as she related her experience in dialogue with the others. Here we clearly see the surprise element that can arise through art-making; it serves as a new creation that paradoxically brings the art maker closer to the experience yet provides the distance necessary for insight. This is somewhat similar to their experiences in meditation, where they related they were able to be with but not stuck in something. In art-making, this element of surprise did allow what was absent to become available to knowing and the significance to become clearer. Anne acknowledges how her self-absorption led to excluding the client as depicted in her portrayal; this resulted in a lack of presence and a loss of connection. The negative aspect of self-focus is interesting when we consider how counselling emphasizes awareness of feelings. Elaine now recognizes that the actual outcome of the squeeze was an overwhelming sadness that made her lose the distance necessary to be truly present. The intensity of absorption seems problematic; it emphasizes the need for more space and the importance of dual awareness, self and client.

There are clear patterns amongst the participants as their paintings demonstrate how movement, fluidity transforms the squeeze. Here, space is an overriding theme, the space of openness that is receptive yet not engulfed; this is the space of compassionate presence. It is the quality needed for resolution as seen in the third artworks. This quality of presence has been a recurrent theme for the panel.
These works are evocative; they are embodied data. Their "signature" and "empathic function" are evident and they exhibit the marks of what Barone and Eisner (1997) see as criteria for arts based research: verité as the works are true to experience of the counsellors and true to Buddhist teachings, vitality as the works communicate affect and are meaningful, aesthetics as they convey insights we can feel, an ethical sensibility that is respectful, verisimilitude as the participants related to the truth of each other's work and utility as these insights have pragmatic value.

This is the end of our gallery tour.

As moderator of today's conference, I would like to make a closing statement.

**Moderator:** Thank you panel members, for your heart-warming presentation of your practice, the struggles you encounter and your ways of working. I believe I can speak for all of us when I say how much we appreciate the warmth and guiding impulses behind your work. We are left both in awe and emboldened by the opportunities your intentions and perspectives offer. We are struck by the difficulties that embodying your practice entails yet encouraged by its simplicity and fundamental humanness.

I thank you, audience members, for your active participation and trust that this is the start of a worthwhile and thought provoking dialogue that will continue.
CHAPTER 7  FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

"In the Shambhala tradition, discovering fearlessness comes from working with the softness of the human heart" (Trungpa, 1984, p. 26).

As I began this inquiry, I had the intention to discover if and how the practice of Shambhala Buddhism affected counsellors in their counselling practice, and how they embodied that in interaction. I was inspired to inquire into whether it helped counsellors tolerate and work with emotions, and was curious to gain an understanding of its value in working with clients. I hoped the results would have educational implications for counsellor training and offer insights for ongoing development.

The Shambhala Buddhist counsellors who were the research participants have a wealth of experience and training in both Buddhist practice and counselling. All are trained in multiple counselling orientations and work with a wide range of clients and issues in a variety of contexts. Some have taught counsellors in various settings and many teach at Shambhala training weekends. The inquiry comprised individual conversational interviews and a group meeting. With participants’ permission, I shared vignettes from the individual interviews with the others. This provided an opportunity for reflection and the context for the group dialogue. At this group meeting, we discussed what was the impact of our Buddhist practice, our sense of whether it made a difference, and we used the embodied practice of art-making to explore challenging moments. This resulted in the experiential visual snapshots you have just encountered.

The participants’ depth of experience and training provide the context for the findings that I now detail. Further, as I had the privilege to be both researcher and participant in this study, I include my reflections on that process. I now present what the participants indicate as the interpenetration of Shambhala Buddhism and counselling, and
my understandings of how this is embodied in interaction. I continue with a look into its value for counselling practice and the educational implications for counsellor training.

**Key findings**

The participants relate that the study and practice of Shambhala Buddhism has fundamentally affected them as individuals through the experience of basic goodness of self and other, and profoundly changed their perspective as they recognize non-dualism and appreciate the world as sacred. It has impacted how they see and relate with themselves and others, and enhanced their ability to work with emotions. This is a result of meditation practice and the experience of emptiness and sacredness, essential Buddhist teachings.

Through the meditation practice of examining mind and experience and noticing habitual patterns and conditioning without judgment, these counsellors describe how they experience gaps and realize the inherent lack of solidity in things, ideas and beliefs. They recognize how attempts to reinforce ideas about themselves are an expression of basic anxiety. This very recognition results in moments of being awake and openhearted. Using specific Shambhala Buddhist practices to be in touch with this openhearted vulnerability, the participants experience a quality of heartfelt receptivity when counselling clients.

The research participants speak of how this practice and study has trained them to be with whatever arises, such that they can relate to personally difficult emotional and mental states, "lean into pain, be with not in," and thus transform these emotions. This training increases their ability for compassionate action and the depth with which they are able to be open to clients, to join and relate with them without getting enmeshed or being outcome driven. This ability to meet another, to see and respond clearly to situations in
front of them arises from not being afraid to be who they are, i.e., connected to basic goodness, and is a direct result of meditation practice. This is the wisdom of the heart.

**The wisdom of the heart**

These points highlight some of their rich insights. What is key is that examining experience through meditation practice reveals how we all construct and reify our sense of self to mitigate the reality of ontological anxiety. These counsellors relax that struggle through practice and study. This recognition of basic anxiety and realization of emptiness allow for a depth of understanding of our common humanity. Connecting to personal vulnerability helps develop a gentler, more accepting and compassionate relationship with clients. Vulnerability is thus a gift; openheartedness becomes a practice.

This practice allows for a space of receptivity; it realizes itself in openness to experience and authenticity of presence. Knowing one's own vulnerability and being present with it helps develop the sense of when to support another. This is the wisdom of the heart. It is the heart of engagement. As the artworks clearly illustrate, difficulties arise when one forgets the lack of solidity, becomes self-absorbed or protective, and is caught in being closed off; the resolution is through remembering, awareness, and reconnecting to openness, to the fluidity of experience, and to spaciousness. These qualities of being and abilities to act as needed in the present are not separate or oppositional; presence and skillful compassionate action are one.

Enhanced counsellor awareness, profound empathic connection, attentiveness to self and other and in relationship, and openness without agenda give rise to the conceptual clarity that informs skillful action. These insights and practices address core,
fundamental, and valuable components of counselling; they offer substantive theoretical and practical implications for counselling practice.

**Practicing the wisdom of the heart**

A major challenge in counselling is for the counsellor to be present with the client's every issue, to be in the now of relationship and connect with the client. I am reminded of the literature where Hymer, (2004), Meadows, (2003) and La Torre, (2002) have noted the usefulness of Buddhist mindfulness techniques to cultivate the ability to listen, be attentive to oneself and another, and to maintain presence amidst difficulty. The research participants attest to this. Corroborating what Speeth (1982) had proposed, the participants also relate how Buddhist practice enhances the natural emergence of deep compassion, the ability to sense another's experience, modulate one's reactions and respond appropriately.

Given the diverse ideas on clients' self-identity in the literature, I would like to delineate how the participants' view impacts on how they relate with the client's self-concept, and the resulting interventions. Articulating how the view of basic goodness is a paradigm of health, these counsellors note what they are attentive to in terms of the client's self-concept and how this focus impacts the client's own self-relationship. They offer specific ways to inquire into the client's self-image that are significant for counselling. I believe these points are worthy of iteration, make a positive contribution to the dialogue on the self-concept and in particular, reveal nuances in interaction from the counsellor's perspective. I now highlight these points.

*Enhance clients' self-reflection*

These counsellors are attentive not solely to the content of the client's discourse.
In their way of working, the research participants move beyond conceptualization as they try to not get caught in clients’ storylines. Rather, these counsellors seek actively to create space between clients and negative self-beliefs or maladaptive interpretations. Questioning how the clients’ view impacts their world and examining how clients and others experience that, the research participants work to help clients shift perspectives. The effort is to align clients into a self-reflective process that would allow them to go beyond the usual and perhaps misguided habitual thoughts and patterns of behavior. By first developing greater self-understanding and acceptance, clients can envisage more possibilities and different ways of being.

*Encourage clients’ self-acceptance*

These counsellors are attentive not solely to clients’ interactions with others.

The research participants notice the client’s attitude and self-relationship as they explore how clients view, speak to, and treat themselves, and how they experience and relate with their feelings. Both rejection and absorption in emotions can impede clients’ relationship to self and others. Discourse on emotions can act to avoid experience. Mental chatter keep issues alive yet serve to distance the self from feeling. These counsellors work to help clients develop a non-judgmental attitude to feelings and to develop a reflective stance on how they relate with their mind/heart.

*Engage clients in opening up to more emotional configurations*

The participants are attentive not solely to the rationale for the clients’ discourse.

Rather, these counsellors help clients lean into their pain, experience and accept emotions in order to change clients’ habitual relationships to negative states of mind and feeling. Inquiring into the clients’ very attachment to the storyline helps clients be present
with and move through their suffering. Exploring the clients’ emotional investment to a particular self-image, these counsellors seek to create greater client self-awareness and less attachment to fixed emotional states. Similar to the meditation practice of touching into and letting go of emotions, these counsellors build in possibility for clients to have more complex and fluid ways of perceiving and interacting. This helps create space for clients to develop a greater emotional repertoire and wider range of interactions with others.

Move beyond catharsis

These counsellors assist clients to lean into pain yet not be circumscribed by their emotional experience. This helps undo the identification with feelings that become fixed into ownership. The participants encourage an understanding of the fluidity of emotions in order to motivate agency.

Move beyond hope

Counselling orientations traditionally value hope. These counsellors help clients to become more self-accepting thus have a larger vision that is not contingent on hope but focused on agency. Clients can develop self-trust, a confidence that is not as dependent on external factors. This stance helps build active engagement.

Move beyond usual notions of empathy

For these counsellors, empathy is an embodied receptive state of experiencing being penetrated by another’s feelings, thus understanding their reactions. Empathic connection is a state of being and understanding; it is knowing. This knowledge results from self-awareness and acceptance, from having met one’s fears and suffering.

“[Compassion is] a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness
well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity” (Chodron, 2002, p. 50). This receptivity is heartfelt and embodied. Attunement and receptivity are not confused with being enmeshed in another’s experience. There is the sense of the client as separate and accompanied, independent and in relationship. These ways of working are a function of being genuine, real, and authentically present.

**Resting in heart**

Resting in heart is how these counsellors speak of presence and the quality of connection with clients. To tolerate clients’ suffering and not turn away arises from meditation practice, which hones their ability be with and mediate responses. It also results from seeing clients as more than how clients present themselves. This is a perspective of health grounded in basic goodness. Recognizing interrelatedness, these counsellors are open to clients’ feeling states and attuned to them. It may well be that appreciating non-dualism allows the recognition that there is nothing to fear.

**Authenticity is necessary for connection**

Being present yet letting go of self-absorption and focusing attention on the client allow these counsellors to be non-defensive and honest. This permits being authentically present.

**Respect is the medium of connection**

The ability to be open and present is a characteristic of connection. The ability to be non-defensive is central to managing difficult client counsellor interactions. These counsellors have related instances where they acknowledged errors and apologized, acts that had manifold positive impacts. They demonstrated that humility and a profound non-
judgmental curiosity are the embodiment of respect. Profound curiosity arises when self-absorption is minimized, when counsellors are not caught in their own issues. It is a manifestation of clarity, of seeing clearly.

*Counsellor self-awareness is the basis for being genuine and clear*

Self-awareness is the basis for being able to be present and to meet another in a genuine connection. Without awareness, self-acceptance and appreciation, one’s issues arise unbidden; they get in the way of openness. This inter/intra awareness provides for openness, the ground of spacious receptivity. Openness and clarity engender curiosity, which is the energy behind counselling practice.

*The space of receptivity is an inter-subjective meeting space of nowness.*

Receptivity and clarity appear critical for attunement in relationship. This is not positing a failure proof relational bond; rupture is inevitable. Misattunement often occurs when a counsellor is not empathically responsive but has a protective stance or defensive posture, which can arise from ignorance, denial or lack of acceptance of one’s own issues. With the art works, the research participants illustrated how becoming self-absorbed, not being aware or not connecting to the strength and courage of vulnerability hindered being present in the now. Self-absorption and self-deception do effectively impede authenticity and cloud the space of receptivity. These counsellors spoke of the differences they experience when they are practicing meditation, how open or closed they are as a result.

*Unique practice aspects*

These are interventions that many counselling traditions would support. Yet, these counsellors relate nuances in practice that are important. While counselling orientations
do help clients to not identify with negative self-images, they usually speak of doing so through inquiring into alternative stories. Focusing on another storyline is content driven. From these counsellors’ Buddhist view, the practice is not to reify another self-concept but to heighten a fluidity of self-in-relationship.

As the research participants work to undo adherence to storylines, they also work to undo clients being caught in emotional reactivity or fixated on a specific self-image. Relational counselling orientations also offer ways to explore clients’ emotional attachments and encourage change, and do so primarily by addressing what is happening in the client and counsellor relationship. Focusing on interpreting these relational interactions is process oriented. Yet these interpretations may remain within the realm of the client-counsellor matrix and not speak readily to external relationships. Though pointing to a repetitive pattern may lead to positive insight, it may not necessarily be empowering if clients experience it as blaming. These counsellors help clients feel their emotions and explore the impact and meaning of their interactions with others in order to encourage a more flexible relational repertoire.

The research participants also articulate further approaches to helping clients work through difficult issues. Clients’ identification of self with their emotions can arise when a counsellor focuses on helping clients claim their feelings. Ownership of feelings does not necessarily mediate emotional reactivity, and understanding causal factors to habitual patterns may not necessarily serve to free clients from them. These may serve to further clients’ self-absorption and re-inscribe clients into patterns where they feel little internal control. Instead, by helping clients examine how they relate with emotions, these counsellors seek to enhance client flexibility.
The emphasis these counsellors place on a heartfelt receptivity and recognition of the value of shared vulnerability is significant. It offers an expanded view of compassion and empathy, where compassionate action is acting in accord with what the situation needs, and empathy is not a projective act of imagination. Projective imagination can lead to conceptual formulations. These formulations may well be useful, but can remove one from the now of direct experience.

Here, I would like to emphasize the space of receptivity, clarity, and the necessity of having a vision beyond the usual empathy. As counsellors, our hearts/mind need to be open to be receptive and to have the clarity that is vital for insight and responsiveness. These counsellors value attentiveness and the ability to stay present with a client. In light of the recent research on the importance of the present moment in counselling, this ability becomes primary. Authentic presence is the basis for the attunement that, as Stern (2004) has shown, is vital to those transformative instances that occur in the present moment.

**Implications for counselling practice and counsellor education**

These counsellors’ paradigm of basic goodness and understanding of self-construct engender unique ways of working with clients and with clients’ self-view.

**Implications for counselling practice**

Working from the principles of mind and heartfelt action, as delineated above, does affect counselling practice. These principles expand practice approaches. They reorient a counselling focus on shifting clients’ relationship to pain, to themselves, and to their experiences by strategically helping clients examine their own experience and how their mind constructs that experience. These are practice interventions that enhance clients’ reflective stance and self-acceptance and encourage clients to disengage from
fixed patterns and constructed storylines that maintain suffering. This focus reorients practice into helping clients develop greater emotional configurations and more fluid ways of being. These practice principles offer an expanded framework and useful strategies for counselling. They are valuable contributions that situate clients in a space of possibility.

Further, this practice orientation is grounded in an understanding and acceptance of self/other, of interdependence, and an awareness of self and other in relation. Counsellor self/other awareness and receptivity give rise to profound connection and conceptual clarity. Empathic attunement that holds the vision of another within a frame of health provides these counsellors with greater flexibility.

What then are the implications for counsellor training? For a counsellor to be present in a way that is open and clear is vital. Openness creates the space of receptivity crucial to empathic attunement. Clarity creates the possibility for insight and seeing clearly what is needed. Self-awareness is the foundation for this openness and clarity. Inner/outer awareness and awareness of the inter-subjective space of relating demands practice in self-awareness. Thus it is crucial for counsellors to become self-intimate, to explore and accept their inner world and to understand and work with their patterns. Heightened self-awareness diminishes self-absorption and increases the ability to stay in the present moment and maintain openness, which creates the space for receptivity.

Awareness can be developed. My interest lies in this possibility for training.

**Implications for counsellor education**

Clearly, some of the teachings and experiences related to Shambhala Buddhist practices are not easily translated into counsellor training. Nor is it my desired outcome
to make everyone a Buddhist, start meditation or go for counselling. The point of interest is that both counselling and Buddhism agree on the importance of awareness and being in the present moment. Given the increasing intensity and pace of practice, there is a need to enhance that ability.

Skills for authentic presence

In the present social and professional context within which counselling occurs, there is growing demand for the use of brief therapy models with a resulting emphasis on problem/skill-based training, to the detriment of training in self-awareness for beginning counsellors (Cozolino, 2004). I echo his concern, and suggest that the brief therapy and outcome driven professional context requires counsellors to be able to connect rapidly with clients. Many counsellors believe that relationship building is a long-term process and resort to strategies as recourse for brief work. I would argue that authentic presence becomes even more important in this context. Authentic presence is vital for connection; connection is crucial for clients’ sense of acceptance and implementation of strategies. While counselling strategies appear paramount, counsellor self-awareness is vital. Authentic presence demands it.

In my work setting, each year I supervise a counselling psychology student doing a practicum in counselling clients, a partial requirement to complete the Masters degree in counselling psychology. As I watch these counsellors in training, I am struck by their desire and commitment to help someone and to be “competent”. Paradoxically, this desire to do well often gets confused with a fear of not doing well; this becomes an anxious struggle that they seem to seek to hide, or to try and work with, under the guise of helpfulness. Ideas of competence seem anchored in a performance model. These ideas
mask underlying natural fears of being able to be with someone in their distress, which, in turn, can mask their very resources. This difficulty can be exacerbated when it mirrors the clients’ dilemma; clients often come to counselling because of their frustrated or unrealistic expectations of self or another.

Problems arise when counsellors are unaware such that they cannot remain present because they are unable to relax and trust themselves, or they deny, fail to recognize, or make superficial acknowledgement of their own issues.

*Developing Counsellor self knowledge*

The need for counsellor’s self-knowledge remains paramount. Given this, it is of interest to look at other models, especially those that work on the self. Buddhism uses meditation as a way to examine experience, cultivate tranquility and insight, and develop awareness. The participants have reiterated that the way to develop self-awareness is through meditation; “it teaches how to be healthy.” I believe that this perspective stems from the fact that meditation is a form of personal training, a “training the mind” (Mipham, 2003). An ongoing continual practice of being with what arises without judgment, it allows one to acknowledge one’s issues while it also incorporates practices to cultivate a heart of compassion, both of which are relevant to counsellors and to counselling practice.

Meditation is an embodied act; it is non-conceptual. It is meeting and examining experience and seeing how the mind works; it is not an analysis of content. Meditation demands that one not become seduced by thoughts nor reject them. The paradox in meditation is that seeing mental constructions, without engaging, dissolves them. This is significant in light of the fact that reflection is commonly understood as a mental
analytical activity; it often entails working with concepts. If reflection leads to engaging more and more in discursive mind, the result can be greater self-absorption or a reification of assumptions.

In counsellor training, there is a focus on developing professional identities, as well as learning theoretical orientations, strategies and interventions, developmental theories and issues, case conceptualizations, cultural differences, communicative skills, behaviors and languages, to name a few. We can regard these as conceptual teachings. Counsellor training does include, amongst others, different pedagogical methods such as Socratic questioning, focus groups, reflective teams, journaling as a self-reflective practice and experiential learning that is often skill application, as well as the use of supervised counselling videotaping to examine counsellor reactions to clients’ situations. There is a focus on skill training, an emphasis that beginning counsellors often seek for security when confronting the difficult situation of being with another’s distress. Skills are necessary. Yet, it is clarity and the space of receptivity that are primordial, that allow for attunement and clear action.

Rethinking empathy

In counsellor training, authenticity can be lost when empathy becomes training in the language of response. Empathy is sterile when not heartfelt. At times formulaic, it can serve to distance the counsellor from actual feeling. When spoken from a position of professional knowing, it can break connection and isolate the client. Reiterating clients’ suffering may even re-inscribe clients more deeply in their pain; it can become collusion in a storyline that is counterproductive. In this way, empathy is not nearly enough; it can reinforce the client’s negative self-narrative. Or it can cater to the client’s false self and
constructed ways of being rather than helping the client into more authentic self-connection. Empathic attunement requires a larger view of possibility. Opening up to feeling and being with another’s experience while holding a greater vision, a position of health and basic goodness, provides more spaciousness.

Some counsellors have stated they were taught the concept but not the means to cultivate “unconditional positive regard” (Meadows, 2003, Welwood, 2002). Similarly, “Freud identified this state of mind, [evenly hovering attention] but never offered positive recommendations for how to cultivate it” (Rubin, 2003, p. 45).

*Embodied learning for self-awareness*

It seems important that counsellor training incorporate practices of embodied learning that would increase self and other awareness and the possibility for attunement. More experiential expressive forms may help counsellors learn to be with non-discursive mind and less caught in self-absorption or interpretive projections. In addition to meditation, other embodied practices for self-awareness may be useful.

These research participants did artworks to embody meeting the big squeeze and came to new recognitions. They were willing to own their blind spots and illustrate that self-awareness is an ongoing process. This study supports the value of art-making as an embodied reflective practice. In the Shambhala Buddhist tradition, there is an emphasis on body/mind synchronicity. Presence and connection are felt experiences. Discursive forms can reinforce absence, distance; embodied practices may be helpful. I would argue that this focus might have pragmatic benefits for counsellor training. It may be useful to investigate more embodied forms of enhancing self-awareness that allow us to be awake to the present moment.
Facilitating self-reflection

Clearly there is a need for counsellors to understand and accept their inner world. Psychoanalysis requires a lengthy personal analysis of the trainee psychoanalyst. Counselling schools often ask that counsellors-in-training seek personal counselling. All of which foster self-awareness. Yet, I believe that there is a missed opportunity here for training if difficult emotional issues crucial to counsellor learning and practice are not explored. Counsellors need to learn more about what issues they could bring to their work, what is a big squeeze, where they are likely to encounter difficulties. When issues arise, can they remain authentically present and not turn away?

Though it is beyond the scope of this thesis to develop training practices, and contextual training realities require using ways that are not prescriptive or formulaic, I suggest that it is important to consider and include more creative practices that would include embodied learning and lead to greater awareness. I would like to highlight three aspects. First, what are the conditions that would facilitate exploration? Secondly, What are some themes that would be important to explore? And thirdly, what could be the path for exploration?

In terms of facilitative conditions, these counsellors have related that the basis for their meditation practice is that of a non-judgmental stance. This attitude is key. For a beginning counsellor, the approach to developing self-awareness clearly must be one of kindness, of not turning away from oneself but welcoming all possibilities. It is crucial to re-conceptualize counsellor competency such that self-exploration is based on becoming curious about one's issues and working with them as possible strengths. It is important to acknowledge that feelings like anxiety and fear are natural responses and part of learning.
Engaging in this process of self-awareness requires starting from a place of acceptance of whatever may arise, seeing exploration as practice, as an acknowledgment and appreciation that our supposed vulnerabilities are actually the source for connection.

Secondly, it may be useful to explore themes such as, how do they relate to issues of power, confrontation, and aggression, to clients’ positive or negative reactions, to feeling terror, attraction? Brainstorm themes of fears, concerns. What are they attached to? What alienates them? What bores them? What are their fantasy images of themselves as counsellors? Do they have an image of competence? What situations are likely catalysts? What are their likely strategies of response? Do they avoid, deny, or become numb, overactive, or intrigued? Cozolino (2004) offers specific exercises for counsellor self-exploration.

Thirdly, one way to investigate these themes would be to bring up the images, feel their response, locate it physically, experience it and simply notice what happens. One could use prompts such as remembered or imagined images, sounds, smells and textures as evocative springboards into feeling, experiencing one’s reactions, thoughts. Body-scan techniques are useful to heighten attentiveness to embodied feeling states. Poetry, art, and with agreement, sharing stories of personal experience, role-playing singular emotions or mixed emotions are ways they can develop awareness and acceptance of their inner world and learn to be in touch with their hearts.

To work with difficult feelings and train in opening up one’s heart, Pema Chodron (2002) suggests experiencing a feeling, remembering how many others are sharing that feeling at the same time; this helps ease the difficulty and expand the horizon from self to other. She offers further practices to cultivate the heart and develop compassion. It is a
form of practice to intentionally evoke and stay with situations that are difficult, to feel the feelings without getting caught in thinking about the what or who, to notice habitual thoughts and question the storyline. Ladner (2004) proposes compassion and extension of self as keys to happiness and offers specific practices for counsellors to foster compassion. Above all, it is the paradigm of basic health and sanity and the vision of basic goodness that provides the frame.

Towards a non-dualistic approach

In addition to conceptual understandings, embodied learning practices for self-awareness are valuable given the experiential reality of counselling practice. It is possible to both train the mind and cultivate the heart. There is an unnecessary dualism and false opposition between presence and skills; both can be learnt and practiced. Uncertainty and difficult feelings are natural in the context of distress. Training programs can be proactive in including embodied practices of connection to such feelings to help beginning counsellors relax with anxiety, with groundlessness, and increase their tolerance for ambiguity or not knowing. Competence includes openness, receptivity and heartfelt engagement as well as therapeutic skills.

A non-dualistic approach that includes both conceptual and non-conceptual ways of learning can enrich counsellor training. Incorporating practices to train the heart along with curricula, theories, and interventions can only serve to help counsellors be awake to the present moment, with clarity.

In counselling, “individuals can only experience their feelings if there is someone there who accepts them fully, names them, and supports them” (P. Wilensky, December 20, 2004, personal communication). This also applies to training. If it is not being done
already, it may be helpful for supervisors, counsellor educators and counsellors to open up the dialogue of professional training and ongoing professional development and re-conceptualize, re-embody competency and vulnerability. This would provide a supportive environment to speak of fear, failure, dread, terror, arrogance, joy, humor...to name and appreciate what has been perhaps stated but left largely unexamined. No training can prepare someone for every instance. Yet, training can help someone enhance the ability to be present, as that is key to relationship.

Ongoing development

Within the context of compassionate action that is at the heart of counselling, the value of ongoing practice and connection cannot be overestimated. Using both an experiential process and discussion of limitations as helpers may have relevance for counsellor self-care and ongoing development. During the group meeting these counsellors confronted difficult issues using embodied practices. At the end, they proposed continuing to meet as a form of professional development and support. It may be useful to foster collegiality between trainees from the beginning, not simply in learning new strategies but about sharing their challenges. Given the isolation of counselling practice, it would help to prepare and encourage counsellor trainees to continue to engage and connect with colleagues.

The above discussion refers to counselling practice and relevant implications for counsellor training. Aspects have emerged that have applications elsewhere, specifically in terms of the quality of the relationship. Here I have offered suggestions for enhancing authentic presence. There are many other professions where being in authentic relation is important, such as teaching, social work, and nursing, to name just a few. Clearly the
contexts for these fields differ. Yet there may be pragmatic usefulness to reflect upon the
culture of competency, its implicit meanings, and to consider including embodied
learning as a path to developing authentic presence within these areas.

**Implications for research**

Beyond the content of this study, there may be significance to the form. The
methodological design I used in this research was an attempt to mirror and integrate a
Buddhist approach. I started with the aspiration to find a way to do the inquiry that would
be congruent with the Buddhist practice of being awake and open to whatever arises, of
not turning away. I wanted my researcher’s presence to be inviting and collaborating,
without imposing. Thus I decided to use a practice of openness, drop the agenda and let it
unfold.

This worked. There were moments, at the beginning of my research, when I found
myself caught in a known rhetoric and needed to let go of it. I was unsure of how to begin
the conversational interview with the research participants. The research participants also
expected a script. Rather than using the original questions, I asked about the beginnings
of their practice. I stayed present to the moment, maintained a stance of openness to their
stories and let these stories emerge without going off into familiar discussions that would
simply confirm preexisting ideas. Being mindful as researcher and having a stance of
openness also led me to share vignettes between research participants.

My researcher’s presence becomes more evident in terms of my choice to offer an
experiential form of investigation to reflect the embodied aspect of Buddhist practice and
Shambhala Buddhism’s emphasis on body/mind synchronicity.

Later, as I read the transcripts, reflected on themes and how to approach the
analysis, I found it necessary to put all aside and return to listening to the tapes, being
attentive to nuances of their voices, the felt experience. When I began writing, it became 
a struggle for me to not overlay their voices with my interpretations. Rather than simply 
relating their statements linearly, the idea for a panel arose as a way to honor their 
original voices and intentions. It allowed me to make a conceptual collage to highlight 
their profound insights. Being attentive to the many themes a statement could point to, 
my researcher’s presence again comes forth in the conceptual framework and in the 
interpretive stance I took in the structure of the panel.

I also had the aspiration to use a Buddhist framework to analyze and present the 
research findings as I looked for intersections between differing counselling approaches 
and the various Buddhist teachings. It was helpful for me to investigate using Buddhist 
logic as a way to more accurately understand and represent what they were saying. Thus I 
used the ground, path, and fruition as the design of analysis and representation. These 
research participants are steeped in Buddhist practice. Using Buddhist logic helped make 
evident the value and inherent simplicity of their insights.

Further, the use of embodied practices in research seems to have methodological 
significance. Using embodied practices as the process for group reflection, in addition to 
individual interviews, appear to offer possibilities for a range of insights. This may merit 
more research.

This study also raises new questions. I am interested in asking non-Buddhist 
counsellors about their experiences with instances of terror, how they relate with difficult 
emotions and what practices they find useful. An inquiry into notions of competency and 
its meaning across counselling orientations could be a fruitful area to study. Another area 
of interest is to ask experienced counsellors what aspects of training were really useful,
what they believe is helpful to learn personally, and what other aspects would have been useful in their early education. A further study would be to initiate the suggested practices for counsellor training and research the results of engaging in such a process for beginning counsellors.

I would like to see more research on counsellors’ ongoing learning and on how counsellors change. The literature on clients’ issues, theoretical formulations, appropriate interventions and on the counselling process is unending. This literature often uses case studies where the client is the focus. Some of the latest clinical literature incorporates practices of mindfulness and acceptance as clinical methods in protocols to use with clients. I suggest it would be a worthwhile and more fruitful exercise to refocus the lens on the counsellor. The present literature on the impact on the counsellor primarily focuses on self-care, on coping strategies, on managing emotionally draining instances, or on vicarious traumatization. There is much that happens before and beyond that. There is much that is extremely positive and rewarding. Kottler (1993) and Cozolino (2004) are amongst those that speak directly to beginners about the two-way process of counselling.

It would be interesting to inquire specifically into how counsellors are moved, emotionally touched, and transformed by their interactions with clients. More studies on the impact of counselling practice on the counsellor can open up the dialogue to our shared humanity, actively diminish the power distinction between client and counsellor, speak to the mutual learning process that is inherent in every meaningful interaction, and likely lead to new understandings of the process of change, a subject that remains an ongoing interest in the field.
This area of ongoing as well as initial learning deserves more attention, for all practitioners.

**Closing reflections**

In a recent discussion at the end of the practicum, a supervisee volunteered to me that what she appreciated in our work together was the “permission” she experienced, permission to try something new, to take risks, to be herself and to make mistakes. Though my preferred emphasis is awareness, perhaps permission is the opening key; through it, we learn to trust, trust another, trust ourselves, and trust that we all survive. Supervision situations can be learning edges, for both supervisor and supervisee, as we enrich our mutual understanding of what our work entails. We can realize that the world of relationships is, after all, a generous place to be, and that requires being true to who we are, our fundamental nature of basic goodness.

This study reveals the impact of a paradigm of health and different view of the client on counselling practice from the perspective of counsellors, particularly in the approach to the client. It is also about how practice is transformed by an ongoing attentiveness to the person of the counsellor and what that means to the counselling relationship. This research offers substantive and valuable approaches to practice. In addition, I believe it points to the value and pragmatic usefulness for restorying the notion of competence. I hope that those who go through training programs may benefit accordingly.
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Appendix A Glossary


BASIC GOODNESS: This refers to the primordial ground of existence that is good. Though our conflicting emotions may obscure this ground, we can always clear that and reconnect with this goodness, our natural inherent purity.

BODHICITTA: “(Sanskrit: the heart/mind of enlightenment). The absolute principle of the essence of wakefulness existing in all beings: our basic nature of ultimate emptiness inseparable from compassion-radiant, unshakable, and impossible to formulate with concepts; also the relative aspiration. Born of glimpsing our absolute nature, to practice the Mahayana and deliver all sentient beings from samsara, out of our compassion” (Mipham, 1998, p. 72).

BODHISATTVA: “This refers to Bodhicitta. The term bodhisattva is used in two major ways, corresponding to two levels: the path of the Bodhisattva and the ultimate realization itself. A Bodhisattva is one who strives to engender within himself a great compassion for sentient beings and achieve full enlightenment himself. A Bodhisattva is thus either one who has achieved virtual enlightenment but has chosen to work for sentient beings through unending chains of reincarnation, or an ordinary individual who has received the Bodhisattva ordination and has thereby resolved to seek his own enlightenment for the sake of sentient beings” (Lhalungpa, 1992, p. 206).

DHARMA: Sometimes known as the teachings, the truth, or the “norm.” It is that truth which clears up our misconceptions and refrains us from continuing to create suffering.

DHARMAKAYA: “refers to enlightenment itself, wisdom beyond any reference point unoriginated primordial mind, devoid of content” (Mipham, 1998, p. 73).

DOHA: “A song in which a Siddha expresses his or her realization” (Patrul, 1994, p. 409).

DRALE: means beyond enemies where the enemy is aggression or that which separates us from the world. Dra means enemy and lha means above (Trungpa, 2004, p. 108); thus it means “energy beyond aggression” (p. 115). And it refers to a unique Shambhala Buddhist practice of invoking energy and connecting to wisdom.

EGOLESSNESS: “Absence of independent or intrinsic existence, either of oneself or external phenomena” (Patrul, 1994, p. 409).


FIVE WISDOMS: “In the Tantric tradition, energy is characterized in five basic qualities or Buddha families… each has an emotion associated with it which is transmuted into a
particular ‘wisdom’ or aspect of the awakened state of mind” (Trungpa, 1987, p. 224).
The 5 wisdoms are vajra: mirror-like wisdom, ratna: wisdom of equanimity, padma:
discriminating awareness or compassionate wisdom, karma: wisdom of all-encompassing
action, and Buddha or the wisdom of all encompassing space.

HINAYANA: “The first of the three yanas [path], in which the practitioner focuses on
basic meditation practice and understanding fundamental Buddhist doctrines such as the
four noble truths, in order to attain individual liberation” (Mipham, 1998, p. 75). The
other two yanas are called Mahayana and Vajrayana.

KAGYU: One of the four major lineages of Tibetan Buddhism.

KLESHAS: are “obscurations, [they] refer to conflicting emotions, neurotic emotion. The
five kleshas are passion, aggression, delusion, jealousy, and pride” (Trungpa, 1991, p.
163).

KYUDO: Japanese archery.

MAHAYANA: “The second of the three yanas... It presents greater vision based on the
union of emptiness and compassion, and acknowledges the universal Buddha nature of all
beings” (Mipham, 1998, p. 77).

MEDICINE BUDDHA PRACTICE: (Menla). A sadhana, a Tibetan vajrayana
visualization practice of invoking the medicine Buddha, the embodiment of healing
energy and a symbol of our basic healthiness. The practice is intended to awaken that
connection to our basic healthiness as a healing energy to bring health into our lives and
to those we try to help.

MENLA: See medicine Buddha.

ORYOKI: A formal Japanese monastic ritual way of eating food that is practiced in
intensive Shambhala Buddhist retreats.

PRAJNA: A Sanskrit term for the best of knowing, sometimes translated as knowledge or
as wisdom, though wisdom is more accurately ‘yeshe’. Pra means best, jna is knowing.
Prajna cuts through ignorance and obscurations of self and other. It is “The natural
sharpness of awareness that discriminates conceptually on the mundane level, and on the
higher level sees through conceptual discrimination itself, so that there is direct
knowledge of things as they are without dualistic overlay” (Mipham, 1998, p. 78).

RINPOCHE: Honorific term, meaning Precious One.

SADHANA: A visualization practice.

SAMSARA: Suffering.
SAMSARIC ADMINISTRATION: One caught up in ego, in maintaining territory.

SANGHA: The community of practitioners on the path.

SHAMATHA: A Sanskrit word meaning calm abiding. It is Shine in Tibetan where shi means peace and ne the place. It is a mindfulness awareness meditation practice.

SKANDAS: A Sanskrit word meaning heaps or constituents often used to refer to the 5 building blocks of experience, form, feeling, perception, formation and consciousness.

SUFFERING 1) the suffering of birth, old age, sickness and death, 2) the suffering of not getting what we want or getting what we don’t want, and 3) the fundamental suffering of anxiety.

TERMA: A Tibetan word for received or discovered teachings. The Shambhala Training Program is based on the Shambhala texts, which are terma discovered by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche.

TONGLEN: A meditation practice of exchange - taking in another’s negative energy and exchanging it for positive.

UPAYA: means skillful means of action.

VAJRA: Sanskrit meaning “diamond, indestructible, thunderbolt... that which is beyond arising and ceasing and hence is indestructible. In particular, it refers to one of the five Buddha families: the vajra family of mirror-like wisdom” (Mipham, 1998, p. 81).

VAJRAYANA: “The third of the three yanas, consisting largely of oral instructions and secret teachings. The vajrayana is considered to be an extension of Mahayana, and presents directly the actuality of fruition” (Mipham, 1998, p. 81).

VIPASHYANA: Insight.

WARRIORSHIP: “The secular tradition of human bravery or fearlessness free from aggression, as opposed to making war; the willingness to examine the ups and downs of our own experience without embarrassment, and find in ourselves the innate human qualities of goodness and wisdom that allow us to help others genuinely” (Mipham, 1998, p. 82).

WINDHORSE: “the bank of self-existing energy and confidence that we experience when we let go of our petty self-concerns; the energy of basic goodness and humanity that radiates through us to others and allows us to help this world” (Mipham, 1998, p. 82). It is also a specific Shambhala Practice of relaxing into openness, connecting with basic goodness and radiating out positive energy.
Appendix B Letter of Initial Contact

(Date)

(Name of potential participant)

Dear

My name is Jennifer Rodrigues and I would like to invite you to participate in a research project I am conducting, entitled Shambhala Buddhist Counsellors’ Narratives of Practice and Learning. The data from this research project will be used for the purpose of writing my thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree from the University of British Columbia.

As a Shambhala Buddhist practitioner and counsellor, I am keenly interested in having a conversation with other Shambhala Buddhist Counsellors about Buddhism and counselling. I am interested in stories that you are willing to share about your experiences as a counsellor. These would be stories that reflect your perspective on the influences of your Buddhist practice on your counselling relationships and stories that recount your learning journey of integrating these influences.

As examples, these influences could include your ability to relate with clients, your ability to witness clients’ pain, and how your practice sustains you. I am also interested in hearing your recollections of challenging moments of personal learning and how your Buddhist practice may have helped you meet the challenges and transform your counselling.

This research involves participation in a preliminary meeting for half an hour, an individual interview of approximately one and a half to two hours and a group conversation of approximately two to three hours. All meetings will be audiotape recorded and transcribed. You will have the opportunity to review your transcript, edit, interpret and provide feedback.

The preliminary meeting will be an opportunity for you to learn about the research process and the nature of your participation. I will explain the relevance of narratives to the Buddhist tradition of oral teaching stories and describe how we shall both do separate interpretive readings of your narrative.

The initial interview will be an opportunity for you to recount your stories and elaborate on the themes mentioned. After I have transcribed the individual interviews, you will have an opportunity to review and edit the transcription of your narrative and do interpretive readings, following the same process I shall use. I may also contact you for a follow-up meeting to discuss the interpretive readings.

The group conversation will be a way for you and other participants to explore your
reflections in greater depth and to discuss or use art, poetry or other expressive forms to capture common themes of your experiences. I shall seek your permission to photograph or use these forms in the research.

The total amount of time required for participation in the research will be approximately 12 to 16 hours over the period of a year.

Your participation in this research project is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time. All data records will be kept confidential and computer files will be password protected. Each participant will have a pseudonym and transcriptions will be coded to ensure confidentiality.

In the group meeting, the identity of the participants will obviously be revealed. Participants will be asked, however, to not refer by name to clients or others during their discussions. Participants will also be asked to not make reference to what is discussed during the group meeting, outside of the meeting.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at

If you are willing to participate in this research project, please phone me at , email me at or indicate your response on the page provided and mail it in the enclosed stamped self-addressed envelope by (2 weeks - date of response). Please keep one copy for yourself. If you know of any other Shambhala Buddhist Counsellors who may be interested in participating, please let me know.

My research supervisor is Dr. Shauna Butterwick, Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Studies, , who can be contacted at or by email at

Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Rodrigues
Counselling Services, UBC
Appendix C Interview Sample questions

Demographics: gender, age, education, ethnic heritage, family status, experience as a counsellor, years since becoming a Buddhist, level of Buddhist practice

**Becoming a Counsellor, becoming a Buddhist**
- Can you tell me a bit about how you came to be a counsellor?
- And what led you to Shambhala Buddhism?
- Would you share with me some experiences that were meaningful for you on your path to becoming a Buddhist? And on your learning to be a counsellor?

**Influence on practice**
- Can you think about an aspect of Shambhala Buddhist philosophy and/or practice that you have been applying in your counselling?
- What has your Shambhala Buddhist practice offered your counselling?

**Learning**
- Can you tell me about some of the experiences in your counselling that have been particularly rewarding?
- Can you think about times that have been challenging?
- How has your Shambhala Buddhist practice influenced your understandings of those experiences?
- When did you first notice yourself using this in your work?
- Can you remember how you knew this was important?
- Can you tell me about how did you learnt to develop that?
- As you think about your own learning, what would be useful to share with beginning counsellors?
- Can you describe how Shambhala Buddhism affects:
  - Your thoughts/feelings about clients, and you as a counsellor?
  - Your clients’ relationships with others?
  - What tells you that?
- What do you suggest is useful for beginning counsellors to learn? And how do you believe they can learn to do so?
Appendix D  Vignettes of the group

COMPASSIONATE PRESENCE

I think I have always been a caring person, compassionate. When you see how the teachings [work], you see the amount of suffering in people because of fear or ignorance, or being caught in beliefs and how hard people are on themselves. It just does change how you see people, not only when counselling, but in general.

And I think I am not as afraid. I have noticed over the years that some of the work I do is getting pretty heavy. And that is probably because I can go there with people. Being less afraid of what you see or hear, just trusting that people can open to, not undo the suffering but not be caught, so caught up in it. Powerful.

I think that I am much more perceptive than I used to be. That has come through the practice. I just have more, I don’t know whether you would call it intuitive or insight. It feels like a place in my heart centre that’s ... it’s the way that the practice opens you influences you, and changes you. There is a rawness that makes you more available to other people and present, and more heartfelt and I feel that because I have been able to discard some of my own ... That, to me is where the Shambhala teachings come in because they teach people to be open and to not be afraid of being open, not be afraid of being with, not be afraid of experiencing the world, not be afraid of letting go of things that have kept them safe and secure.

Noble Heart

Well, it’s like to make space. [There is an example] with another couple. He said a wonderful thing in our session about 12 days ago. “So what you are saying and I can see now that it’s true, for me, I really need to just be with my fear to overcome that”. And those were his words or very close. Then, he slipped back last week, quite a bit. That is distressing for me and I accept it, and realize that I am kind of irritated with it. There is this beautiful breakthrough and then there is a reconsolidation as it becomes too scary. The thing I have to remind myself of, it’s just like practice. He drifted off into his habitual patterns of defense. [And so it’s] To be able to stay with him, moment by moment in that process: [asking] So, what happens there? You distrusted what you said. I saw you got back. What happened? I get too impatient. And that’s when I lose it, naturally.

Being a Buddhist who practices therapy is helpful from the point of view, that ultimately, it’s not your job to fix someone else and life is dissatisfaction cycle.

I think that if your presence doesn’t seem to be creating [change, it’s important] to still be able to stay curious: what is happening here? Because, something may not be working but something is happening, since, you know, we are by nature always changing. What is happening if my preferred outcome is not? So, the trap would be to fall into, it’s not
working and there is something wrong with me, which is an ego based idea or [it] is working, and there is something great about me. So I think then, the proper view is that, in being present with someone, you are doing something very special but not very unique. Too often, psychotherapy is done on people, even if it is a deconstructed psychotherapy that has it’s own preciousness about it, which aggravates me, as the language of discourse, blah, blah, blah, gets thick.

But you are not trying to save anyone, so that there is a benign neutrality and yet tremendous caring.

FEARLESS PRAJNA

I am working with a woman whose adolescent daughter was killed in a crosswalk. [There was] the depth of pain that she needed to plumb and I really hung in there with her until she, she got deep enough into her suffering that she actually processed it. I think that what happens to some therapists is that the client drops into their suffering, [and] there is a point at which the therapist may, without even being aware of it, stop the exploration, because there are so many levels of suffering that need to be really explored. I think I can go pretty far. Because of the nature of our work, sometimes I run into clients in their workplace, and I saw her recently. She was just full of life, full of life. You could just feel that it had lifted off. And I think that when people come in I can read them, at whatever level. And if they are kind of stuck here, I can invite them to see what is there down here that might need to be addressed.

First of all the client sees that I am present and open, compassionately open. And that when the grief or the suffering starts to open, I don’t know how I do it, but I just think that I have a way of making the container bigger. So there is enough room in this space for you to experience whatever it is that is going on. And I watch for indicators that there is emotion going on that isn’t necessarily being expressed, which of course sounds like counselling 101, but I am watching for it. I am watching for it. And when I notice it, I honour it somehow. And ask for a fuller expression of that. Oh, there it is. Now, Tell me more. Whatever you are experiencing now it is OK.

I read somewhere, that counselling is like being a midwife. Breathe, OK, push. Relax. And I think a lot of that is intuitive in a way, you know, because you need to know when to breathe or you need to know when not to go there. And I also had experiences of very intentionally not asking people to explore, people who are so depressed that exploring their suffering would actually not be a good thing.

WISDOM WARRIOR

There is something about being incredibly honest with people that is such a relief for them. I did an intake last week. And this gal was so loaded, she had needle marks in her throat, you could see a hole right there, and on her arms. She was totally not ready, and right off. I had the lovely job to kick her out basically and to try and find her somewhere
else to be. She was mad as hell, because there were kids involved, and she was going to lose her children, huge issues. She kept trying to tell me she wasn’t that loaded, had been more loaded before. But I was just straight with her, and sat her down and talked to her, and said you have to go. And I gave it no gap, there was no gap for her to change it. She decompensated right in front of me, and I just continued with the discharge. It was a complete relief for her, when I think about it. She just got straight with me and started talking to me, continually crying and the rest of it too, but it wasn’t about let’s make the tears go away, let’s make this a nice situation. It wasn’t a nice situation. I [had] just put another hand grenade in a very broken down life, but that is the way it had to be. And I explained why, but people are loaded and they don’t hear you very well. But I explained it clearly enough or got connected, it’s that connection again. I was honest enough and made enough eye contact and was there with her enough and kept doing what I had to do enough, that she kind of, I could tell her being relieved by it, that we were moving into the way the world is. Her preferred view of what should happen wasn’t going to happen. So in terms of connection with people I think there is something about that kind of raw honesty that provides that. You have to be really strong though. And you have to be brave and you have to really believe that this, that reality is basically going to be, is OK. I think there is [fearlessness and a lot of trust] actually. There is no option.

GENTLE EMPTINESS

I definitely think so. When we see somebody in counselling they are identified with their problem, become inseparable from the problem. They suffer so much because either they think they are causing the problem or they are the target of somebody else’s problem. My working with the person in a situation like that, either through my discussions with them or in terms of how I relate to them in the space, is to try to create a situation that allows them to see that there is space around the problem, something beyond their identification or their fixation on that problem. I am very very influenced by the notion of my understanding of emptiness. That to me is a big view in terms of how I see things. Things seem very serious right now and it is a very painful situation that you are in but at the same time there is the possibility of letting go. And how we work with it as Buddhists is through our practice. But how we work with it with our clients can be as creative as you want to be, in terms of letting go, being kinder to yourself, doing things to dislodge or disidentify yourself with whatever you are fixated on. And that all goes back to the notion of egolessness.

Things are really not so solid, but unfortunately our clients and we ourselves easily slip into that. The very fact that a person can come in and talk with another person outside the problem area is a beginning step towards that process of allowing more space, allowing another point of view. All of that is about really shifting from a fixed position to one that things can change. Otherwise there would be no point in the change process, no point in a person coming in, because they would have no hope that it could change. And there would be no point in a therapist working with somebody if there was no hope that something could be shifted. Lack of solidity.