The Practice of Self-awareness:
Exploring the Meaning of Self-Awareness as a Professional Process

By

Shelley Weingart
B.A., University of Victoria, 1993

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Faculty of Human and Social Development, School of Child & Youth Care
(Multidisciplinary Masters Program)

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

[redacted]

Dr. Marie Hoskins, Supervisor (School of Child & Youth Care)

[redacted]

Dr. Sibylle Artz, Department Member (School of Child & Youth Care)

[redacted]

Dr. Pamela Moss, Outside Member (Human & Social Development)

[redacted]

Dr. David deRosenroll, External Examiner (Ed. Psych and Leadership Studies)

Supervisor: Dr. Marie Hoskins

ABSTRACT

What is the meaning of self-awareness in professional human service practice? How is self-awareness experienced through the work of helping others? Why does it matter? While recognized as an essential component of effective human service practice across the helping professions, the meaning of practitioner self-awareness as a professional process could be more fully understood. The intention of this study is to develop a descriptive account of the experience of practitioner self-awareness that captures what it means to be self-aware in practice for the individual participants. A quality of reflective inquiry shaped by the values that characterize the experience of self-aware practice, such as openness, respect for uniqueness, and collaborative knowing, is used to elucidate the experience of practitioner self-awareness in human service work. Three front-line professionals working in somewhat diverse areas of the human service field were individually interviewed for this study. Five common themes relating to notion of *balance* emerged from the exploration of the participants' experiences: (1) balancing the personal and the professional, (2) balancing humanness with professionalism, (3) balancing reflection with awareness in the moment, (4) balancing openness with self-protection and (5) balancing comfort with discomfort. A meta-level of reflection involving a discussion of the findings from a synthesized perspective concludes the descriptive section. Personal reflections and the implications of the findings on practice are discussed in the final chapter.

[redacted]

Dr. Marie Hoskins, Supervisor (School of Child & Youth Care)

[redacted]

Dr. Sibylle Artz, Department Member (School of Child & Youth Care)

[redacted]

Dr. Pamela Moss, Outside Member (Human & Social Development)

[redacted]

Dr. David deRosenroll, External Examiner (Ed. Psych and Leadership Studies.)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

For her unwavering support and encouragement, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Marie Hoskins. Her faith in my process helped move me through the uncertainty of it, and for this I am sincerely grateful. My deepest appreciation to Dr. Sibylle Artz and Dr. Pamela Moss for their expertise, guidance and encouragement.

A very special thanks to the three participants for their trust and willingness to share in my journey by sharing their own. Their words breathed life into a difficult and sensitive topic.

On a personal level, I would like to thank my husband, Wade, for his love, encouragement and support, and for always believing in me.

Dedication

This body of work is dedicated to the vast community of helping and healing professionals whose gentle efforts in the care and service of others reminds us that humanity works in quiet ways.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

"We shall not cease from exploration and the
end of all our exploring will be to arrive where
we started and know the place for the first time."

T.S. Elliot
'Little Gidding'

As I sit in my office waiting for my next appointment to arrive, I decide to flip through the file once more just to make sure I have a full understanding of this man's history and current context. The file spells out a criminal history of escalating violence that commenced when this man was a young offender, and has culminated in his most recent offence for which he is currently on parole, the repeated sexual and physical abuse of his two stepdaughters. As I explore the sick and anxious feeling that grows in the pit of my stomach, questions naturally begin to surface in my mind. How could a grown man abuse his children in such a demeaning and egregious manner, and what emotional and physical damage has he done to these girls that may never be repaired? Does he even care about his victims? Don't they have rights? What type of twisted morality convinces someone that abusive behaviour is okay? He must be sick! My own values begin to mount and crash up against the mass of human suffering created by the actions of this man and men like him. How could he do such a thing--How? He could do it to my children one day or to my nieces or nephews! I think about how heartless and cold humanity can be and question whether or not I can now show him the compassion that he so clearly did not show his victims.

This is the professional struggle that much of the human service profession engages in everyday--challenged to maintain an awareness of one's values, beliefs,

attitudes, prejudices and sometimes, managing the feelings of complete and utter disdain that can surface when doing the work of helping others. The work that human service professionals do is difficult and as helping professionals, the most difficult challenge we often face is recognizing when we are not helping. Self-awareness is the only means by which the internal world of the practitioner can be considered in relation to the chosen actions and reactions that occur during the course of the helping relationship. According to Mitchell (1999), a well-developed sense of self-awareness is a survival skill that assists practitioners in remaining on track in professional practice. As indicated in a discussion of her experience of self-awareness through her work with a young boy, Rose Sladde (1996) wrote, "If we are to work with troubled children and youth we have to become aware of who we are as individuals" (p. 82). Without a commitment to self-awareness in our professional role, practitioners run the risk of allowing their experiences and values, as well as the potential biases that arise out of these experiences, from corrupting the efficacy of the therapeutic encounter. Cultivating self-awareness is the principal means by which non-therapeutic contraventions can be avoided in practice. Although it is impossible to eliminate all the effects of life-experiences on professional practice, self-awareness assists the practitioner in recognizing "when their beliefs and attitudes are affecting the helping process in a negative manner" (Rothman, 1999, p. 26).

As professionals, we are constantly forced to make judgments about our clients, including their choice of actions, their areas of need and the appropriate interventions. However necessary to practice, judgment implies the imposition of values and ideals from an external and potentially biased point of view; ultimately, we judge from a

place of what we know. Like our clients, we are subject to our own cultural, religious, and ethnic influences and to our value systems (Rothman, 1999). In a study that looked at the judgment processes utilized in the determination of appropriate interventions for individual clients and client groups (Wedenoja, Nurius, & Tripodi, 1988), judgment and appraisal processes were identified as the "Achilles heel as well as the backbone of clinical practice" (p. 427). Although the authors recognize that judgment and appraisal processes are essential to clinical practice, they noted the occurrence of biases and inferential errors in professional cognitive processes used to determine need. In the diagnosis of disease, if left unattended in the unconscious a "physicians' personal attitudes, biases, fears, emotional reflexes, psychological defenses, and moods can interfere with their abilities to arrive at an accurate diagnosis, prescribe appropriate treatment, and promote healing" (Novack, Epstein, & Paulsen, 1999, p. 517). Despite possessing a unique combination of skills and training, helping professionals can be subject to the same errors in judgment and misconceptions as non-professionals, but at a much greater potential cost than most. If not for an awareness of self, one cannot be sure that the actions taken were for the betterment and benefit of the clients and not the result of biases or unawareness on the part of the practitioner.

The motivation for this study came from my own experience as a human service professional working with challenging populations. Even from my first tentative steps into the professional world, I recall being aware that something so far beyond my understanding of theory and human development was necessary to perform the quality of work that my profession and my clientele demanded. The piece that was

missing for me, something that appeared to be glaringly lacking from my undergraduate education in psychology, was the issue of practitioner self-awareness in human service work. While professionally I felt the push towards a detachment of my personal self from my professional role, an impetus fuelled by a widely held belief in the personal as a extraneous and corrupting factor in the pursuit of professionalism, it seemed to me that the way in which one achieved this level of professional conduct was through an awareness of that which is most personal--the self. This irony compelled me to take a closer look at my own professional practice as well as that of others.

As I dared to look more closely at my way of being and working with clients, it became necessary for my own understanding to describe my experience of self-awareness in practice; to find the words to adequately portray the meaning of my lived-experience of self-awareness as a professional process. While the scope of my interest has widened and my own understanding of self-awareness in practice has deepened, this study is an extension of my original interest in developing a descriptive account of self-awareness that effectively captures what it 'is' to be self-aware in practice and what it means for the practitioner. There is however, one exception--my voice will not be the only one heard. This research is an opportunity to hear different voices that together will form a more comprehensive description of the experience of self-awareness as a professional process. Ultimately then, this research represents a process of mutual self-discovery through the exploration of a shared professional interest and experience.

While developing this topic area, a major challenge for me was to maintain clear and precise thinking with respect to my experience of self-awareness and then to connect these ideas to the literature in a meaningful way. In Chapter 2, relevant literature is reviewed and discussed first in relation to areas in practice where self-awareness is essential, and second, as a means of illustrating the process. The methodology, as well as a full account of my process for arriving at the chosen methodological approach are outlined in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 gives descriptive form to the individual participants' experience of self-awareness as a professional process and a meta-level reflection involving a synthesis of the findings concludes the chapter. In Chapter 5, reflections regarding the descriptions of the experience of self-awareness in professional practice are discussed, and the implications of these findings are explored in relation to practice.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Relevant Literature

> All strong souls first go to hell before they do the healing of the world they came here for. If we are lucky, we return to help those still trapped below.
>
> Clarissa Pinkola Estes

The first step in understanding and gaining insight into others is self-awareness (Locke, 1986). When practitioners fail to develop self-awareness in their practice, they jeopardize the potential of their helping relationships. In essence, when practitioners fail to know themselves as individuals, they limit their ability to know others. According to Kondrat (1999), "professional self-awareness is widely considered a necessary condition for competent...practice" (p. 451). For Corey, Corey and Callanan (1988), this means "counsellors can and should be aware of their biases, their areas of denial, and the issues they find particularly hard to deal with in their own lives" (p. 32). While much of the work involved in self-aware practice begins outside of the helping relationship in terms of the practitioner's own self-knowledge and understanding, it is within the context of professional human service practice that the experience of self-awareness finds meaning.

Practitioner self-awareness informs practice by guiding the direction of the helping relationship, particularly in relation to four main areas of self-awareness essential to the efficacy of the helping professional. These areas include a) an awareness of professional strengths and weaknesses, b) an awareness of values, c) objectivity in helping relationships and d) an awareness of professional roles (Young,

1978). This chapter begins with a discussion of these areas through a review of relevant literature. In the remainder of the chapter, I move through a discussion of an inter-related yet two-fold process: self-awareness in action and self-awareness in reflection on action. While there is a lot of theory that has been generated regarding self-awareness, there is little qualitative data that can deepen our understanding of how practitioners make sense of their own experience of self-awareness, both in and on action.

Awareness of Individual Strengths and Weaknesses

Having an awareness of individual strengths and weaknesses in professional helping roles is an endeavor at the heart of the introspective process (Young, 1999). In the area of social work, Rothman (1999) addressed the importance of knowing personal competencies when advocating for the exploration of personal identity in professionals. For her, personal identity includes an awareness of personal interests and abilities, and individual personality characteristics. Having an appreciation for one's strengths and weaknesses requires brutal self-honesty and unassuming humility. Although there are moments of insight and excitement gained through "self-affirmation", there are also "moments of acknowledgement that, through circumstances both within and without ourselves, we are not the people that we would like ourselves to be or that we have always believed ourselves to be" (Rothman, 1999, p. 71). According to Epstein (1999), being mindful in practice requires humility to tolerate awareness of one's areas of incompetence. Seasoned professionals often differ from their less experienced counterparts in a conscious awareness of personal limitations (Young, 1978).

Beyond having a general awareness of our areas of strength and weakness, it is essential that we also recognize that our strengths and weaknesses are not constant, but are affected by the shifting day-to-day pressures and demands we all experience. When under stress in some area of my life, I may be more distracted in my work; when I am tired or not feeling well, I can be less responsive to the needs of my clients; or when I am feeling despair or anguish in my life, my ability to be emotionally available to my clients may be impaired. In describing the work of therapists, Kottler (1986) notes the inconsistency in helping efforts depending on mood, current circumstances and the preoccupations of the therapist. Apart from a general understanding of the skills and limitations that we bring to the professional role, it is also essential that as practitioners, we recognize when factors in our own life or in our work are causing temporary changes in our ability to function effectively. While often used interchangeably with the term self-awareness (Epstein, 1999), introspection is a process that embodies self-awareness in practice. Having as its objects the internal states of the individual (Prado, 1978), introspection allows the practitioner to be aware of changes in emotional states that can occur both in response to and/or in anticipation of the reactions of the client and independent of clients' behaviour. An awareness of our emotional states could be the first sign for the practitioner to look a little deeper, to question a little further.

Awareness of Values

The second area of self-awareness focuses on the values that one brings to the professional role. As stated by Corey et al. (1988), a worker's "values, beliefs, personal attributes, life experiences and way of living are intrinsically related to the

way he or she functions as a professional" (p. 28). For London and Devore (1988), this means that practitioners should possess self-knowledge that "enables them to be aware of and to take responsibility for their own emotions and attitudes" (p. 311). As one cannot reach adulthood without developing "frameworks of understanding and sets of assumptions that undergird their decisions, judgments, and actions" (Brookfield, 1987, p. 44), it is essential that practitioners have a concentrated awareness of their values and assumptions through their helping work. According to Schulman (1982), "indicators of one's values may be found in his/her beliefs, goals, attitudes, ethics, morals, feelings, thoughts, interests and aspirations" (p. 311). As the filter through which sense and meaning are made of experience, having an awareness of the ways in which our values shape our practice is essential to the effectiveness of our practice. For Ricks (2001), it is because one cannot function apart from their beliefs that one needs to be aware of them. In the field of social work, Rothman (1999) takes this recommendation one step further when she speaks of the "professional obligation" to be self-aware that includes an understanding of the values we bring to our professional role. In describing mindfulness, Epstein (1999) refers to this area as a willingness to set aside categories and prejudices. If not for an awareness of one's values in practice, the practitioner is just reacting to a given situation without proper consideration being given to the subtleties of their language and actions.

Practitioner self-awareness is key to respecting difference when working with clients of different races and cultures than our own. It is through an awareness and understanding of our own beliefs about race and our experience of our culture that we

are better able to recognize and appreciate racial or cultural difference. Without awareness regarding one's implicit understanding and experience of culture and race, the practitioner is at risk of making premature judgments about clients or imposing categories or labels that destroy individuality and distort the distinctness of their situation. For Erikson (1958; cited in Schoen, 1983), the task of the professional is one of "disciplined subjectivity" in which all preconceptions and assumptions must be set aside in order to attend to the uniqueness of the individual. Only by recognizing our cultural assumptions and biases as they surface in practice can we prevent our values from being negatively projected onto our clients or client groups, thereby sabotaging the success of the therapeutic relationship. Because the therapeutic relationship is the primary means by which growth and development occurs, establishing trust and building a therapeutic alliance with the client is critical to the efficacy of practice (Hardy & Laszloffy, 1992). If left unacknowledged, the practitioner's beliefs and assumptions about race may affect the relationship in multitude of negative ways, including giving off "vibes" (Boyd-Franklin, 1989) or mixed and ambivalent messages (Hardy & Laszloffy, 1992).

Given the relevance of cultural difference with respect to the efficacy of helping efforts, professionals must extend and expand their self-awareness so that they achieve a heightened awareness of *self* as a practitioner and *self* in relation to *other* (Boyd-Franklin, 1989). According to Mezirow (1985), it is by bringing one's deeply buried cultural assumptions and beliefs into critical consciousness that one can begin to overcome the projections of these "distorted ideologies". The effective practitioner is "one who has moved from being culturally unaware to being aware and sensitive to

his/her own cultural heritage and to valuing and respecting difference" (Sue & Associates, 1982; cited in London & Devore, 1988, p. 312).

Objectivity in Helping Relationships

The third area of self-awareness focuses on objectivity in helping relationships, which is directly related to the idea of professional distance in human service work. Although the notion of objectivity is included in the discussion of self-aware practice, it is not a state that I ascribe to, as is reflected by the quality of research I have chosen. Objectivity is used here to refer to the ability to respond to client need as something separate and apart from our own need and it involves finding a balance between one's objectivity and subjectivity in practice.

In discussing objectivity in helping relationships, Young (1978) cautions against the over-investment or over-identification with a client, which can lead to a place where objectivity ceases and the pain of our client(s) becomes our own. Kottler (1986) describes the experience of over-identifying with one of his clients when he refers to being "...shell-shocked from the close proximity to other people's battlefields" (p. 7). Although a professional's ability to appreciate and understand the experiences of their clients is essential with respect to recognizing and adequately support the needs of their clients, objective professional practice involves walking a line between being with our clients, in their suffering, and maintaining a degree of emotional distance from them.

Professional objectivity involves recognizing and knowing our own needs and issues as they surface in practice, and keeping these issues separate and apart from our assessment and actions within the therapeutic relationship. An awareness of one's

motivation for entering a given profession is key with respect to remaining objective through work with clients, in that one's motivation may speak to underlying areas of need that could interfere with the ability to be objective (Rothman, 1999). Without a commitment to self-awareness in practice, counsellors will block the progress of the client as the focus of therapy shifts "from meeting the client's needs to meeting the needs of the therapist" (Corey et al., 1988, p. 30). For example, a professional who lacks objectivity may fail to recognize when they are using the client-practitioner relationship to work through personal issues of their own. Problems such as focusing on the needs of practitioner rather than those of the client, an over-identification with the client's issues, and a blurring of the boundaries between practitioner and client, can all be the result of a lack of self-awareness in practice. If not for self-awareness in practice, practitioners may not recognize when they are projecting their own needs and issues onto the client and ignoring the reality of the client's situation.

Objectivity can also be compromised when most of a practitioner's personal needs including the need for love and acceptance are not met outside of work (Young, 1978). Relying on clients to meet our individual needs through our helping relationships with them presents risks to both the client and the practitioner. Apart from impairing the practitioner's ability to deal rationally with clients, particularly when the client may be reacting in a negative or abusive manner, a major cause of burnout can often be directly attributed to an inability or failure to meet personal needs through professional roles (Young, 1978). If as practitioners we are not self-aware, we may fail to recognize when we are trying to meet our personal and social needs through our professional role, ultimately setting ourselves up for

disappointment and potential burnout when these needs are invariably not met. This issue is particularly salient in light of the fact that dealing with resistant and potentially abusive clients is part of the job description of many human service professionals. Self-awareness provides the lens through which the needs of the practitioner can be assessed in light of the client-practitioner relationship. Regardless of the potential ways that a lack of self-awareness can impair professional objectivity, whether through over-identification with clients or a damaging amount of personal need being invested in the professional role, self-awareness is essential to maintaining a level of professional distance in helping relationships.

Awareness of Professional Roles

The fourth area where self-awareness is considered essential in human service practice is in an awareness of our professional roles, which in child and youth care include service provider, protector, teacher and change advocate (Young, 1978). According to the Ethical Standards of Human Service Professionals (1975) proposed by the National Organization for Human Service Education [NOHSE], the roles of the human service professional include caregiver, case manager, teacher/educator, behaviour changer, consultant, outreach professional, mobilizer, advocate, community change organizer, evaluator and administrator. Maintaining an awareness of which professional role is most appropriate to assume in light of the ever evolving context in which human service work takes place, requires an awareness of self as a individual that encompasses and transcends the singular experience of professional objectivity, an awareness of values and an understanding of areas of strengths and weaknesses. A collective awareness of these areas helps the worker to discern what

role is most appropriate to assume in response to the changing situation. For example, practitioners may have difficulty moving from a role that they are more comfortable with, such as the role of protector or caregiver, to one that is less comfortable or natural, like the role of change advocate or mobilizer if they lack a conscious understanding of the origin of their discomfort, as well as an appreciation of their own strengths and weaknesses in relation to the various professional roles required of them as a helping practitioner. As a result, the client's growth is stalled because the practitioner lacks the necessary objectivity to move beyond her/his own discomfort. Self-awareness in practice becomes a skillful and dynamic process that involves an inter-play of various areas of awareness that come together to provide the practitioner with the self-knowledge to adjust their role in response to the needs of the client. Others have also described the experience of practice as a multifaceted and skillful process (Argyris & Schoen, 1974; Brookfield, 1987; Copeland, Birmingham, De La Cruz, & Lewin, 1993; Kottkamp, 1990; Mezirow, 1981; Osterman, 1990).

Self-awareness in Action

In the following section, four theories of practice that involve elements of self-awareness are explored and discussed in relation to each other and to the experience of self-awareness in action. These theories are: reflective practice, perspective transformation, critical thinking and mindfulness. They are introduced here as the starting point for a discussion of process of self-awareness. Through an exploration of these theories a clearer picture of the experience of self-awareness in action will begin to take shape.

The term "reflective practice" has been used by Schoen (1983/1987) and others

(Argyris & Schoen, 1974; Copeland et al., 1993; Dewey, 1933; Kottkamp, 1990; Osterman, 1990) to describe the artful process by which professionals think-in-action. Originating with John Dewey's (1933) theory of reflective thinking that explores states of cognition occurring after a "perplexed, troubled, or confused situation" (p. 106-107), the concept of reflective thinking has been well established in learning and teaching theory. Reflective practice has been defined as a "dialectic process in which thought is integrally linked with action" (Osterman, 1990, p. 134), and therefore, involves a concentrated awareness of self as the actor in a given situation. Described by Schoen (1983) as an "artistic performance", the artistry of the competent professional is largely demonstrated through the ability to manage and restructure large amounts of information while immersed in the uncertainty and complexity of practice. Schoen (1983) differentiates between reflection-in-action (reflection during action) and reflection-on-action (reflection on past events), the latter of which will be discussed in the next section. Schoen's terms are used here to make the same differentiation between awareness that occurs *in* action and *on* action. Bringing previously tacit or implied skill-based knowledge to the surface, reflection-in-action recognizes that "we sometimes think about what we are doing" while we are doing it (Schoen, 1983, p. 54). It involves knowing-in-action and consists of a flow, or a "dialogue" with the situation that Schoen (1983) terms as having a "reflective conversation with the situation". Through one's interactions with the situation, reflective practice recognizes that the practitioner becomes intricately woven into the tapestry of the evolving context. Therefore, the professional's interpretation of the situation must include her/his own contribution to it.

Mezirow (1981) expands on the ideas put forward by Schoen (1983/1987) by highlighting the cultural aspects of awareness. In his critical theory of adult education, Mezirow (1981) describes the experience of perspective transformation as an "emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships" (p. 6). Through this process of advancing critical awareness, the learner begins to reconstitute the structure of their cultural and psychological assumptions to allow for a more comprehensive synthesis of experience. Prompted by a "disorienting dilemma", perspective transformation occurs through a successive series of elements including self-examination, a critical examination of role assumptions, generating options for alternative ways of acting and planning a course of action (Mezirow, 1981, p. 7). According to Mezirow (1981), there are two distinct but connected phenomena relating to the "psycho-cultural" assumptions that must be brought into critical consciousness for perspective transformation to be possible. Both of these phenomena involve an awareness of one's values and beliefs as a vehicle for understanding the experiences of others. The first involves critically examining the feelings that result from the set of internalized cultural assumptions that one possesses. The second relates to unresolved childhood dilemmas that consist of childish assumptions that must be overcome "to permit us to respond effectively to the age-related existential dilemmas of adulthood" (Gould, 1978; cited in Mezirow, 1981).

Reflective practice and perspective transformation are similar in that they involve uncovering accepted or unquestioned ways of being in practice as a means of

transcending reified assumptions and habitual behavioural patterns. Either through the identification of psycho-cultural assumptions that impede perspective transformation or by uncovering tacit or implied skill-based knowledge, each process requires critical self-awareness to reveal what is most common or accepted in our interactions with the world. In addition, both exist as dynamic processes that require a prompting event or "disorienting dilemma" to initiate critical consciousness or reflection, and each recognizes the role that the practitioner plays with respect to the nature and the outcome of the situation. The process of learning that collectively emerges "is one comprising a praxis of action, reflection on action, further action, reflection on the further action and so on, in a continuous loop" (Brookfield, 1998, p. 295). Put another way, there is a back and forth movement between reflection and action, where one's actions are continuously informed by one's reflections on them.

Similarly, Brookfield (1987) describes critical thinking as a dynamic ongoing process that involves the development of authentic frameworks of understanding by critically reflecting on the assumptions underlying our actions, and considering new ways of looking at and being in the world. For Brookfield (1998), "action can be mindful, thoughtful and informed" (p. 295), or what Weick (1983; cited in Brookfield, 1998) has described as "acting thinkingly". With the goal of freeing oneself from habitual patterns of thought and action, critical thinking also occurs after an experience of inner discomfort that prompts a deeper level of critical reflection. However, contrary to reflective practice and perspective transformation, Brookfield (1987) notes that critical thinking is triggered by both positive and negative experiences that allows us to "reinterpret our past actions and ideas from a new

vantage point" (p. 7). Consistent with Mezirow's vision of perspective transformation, critical thinking involves "exploring and imagining alternatives" (Brookfield, 1987, p. 15) to standard ways of thinking and acting that occur through a series of components or principles that comprise the process. These include a trigger event, in which an experience prompts a sense of inner discomfort, an appraisal period involving self-scrutiny and an assessment of the situation, a time of exploration in which "we test out new ways of thinking and acting that seem more congruent with our perceptions of what is happening in our lives" (p.26), and a period of integration, when we begin to find ways to integrate our new ways of thinking and acting into our lives (Brookfield, 1987). For Paul however (1984; cited in Ross & Hannay, 1986), critical thinking is a dialectical process in which the application of any guiding principles is often subject to debate.

The concept of mindfulness relates to reflective practice, perspective transformation and critical thinking, but has some distinct differences as well. According to Epstein (1999), "mindfulness is a logical extension of the concept of reflective practice" (p. 835). Through the practice of mindfulness, thought, feeling, intuition, and sensing becomes intricately linked with action. Langer's (1997) definition of mindfulness contains the components of openness to novelty, alertness to distinction, sensitivity to different contexts, explicit awareness of multiple perspectives and an orientation to the present. For her (1997), "mindlessness" represents the absence of such qualities in practice. Mindfulness is a practice that is founded on the interdependence of memory, action, emotion and cognition (Epstein, 1999; Suzuki, 1980). Being mindful in practice involves a heightened awareness of

one's own mental processes; attentiveness to potential biases and judgments so that one can act in a compassionate and principled manner (Epstein, 1999). Mindful practice assumes a naïve stance towards the understanding of the experiences of others, a curiosity about the unknown and a sense of humility about one's ability to fully appreciate the experiences of others (Epstein, 1999). Thus, much like the theories of reflective practice, perspective transformation and critical thinking, mindfulness is a multifaceted construct. Although it can be said that these theories reflect particular ways of being with the world, mindfulness is more about a quality of being than a principled approached to practice. Mindfulness exists without "boundaries between technical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual aspects of practice" (Epstein, 1999, p. 835), and as such, the totality of the practitioner as an individual is present in the helping relationship. According to Langer and Moldoveanu (2000), "When one is actively drawing novel distinctions, the whole individual is involved" (p. 2). The holistic and very personal approach to practice is consistent with a vision of self-awareness in action that includes awareness that extends beyond affective domains to include a critical understanding of self and self in relation to others. With a focus on consciousness as opposed to an emphasis on behaviour (Epstein, 1999), mindful practice is an artful and integrative process that involves an awareness of all levels of self in relation to the situation, while attending to all aspects of the situation. Although Epstein (1999) describes mindfulness as "a discipline and an attitude of mind", he also indicates that mindfulness can be enhanced and developed in practice through "mentorship and guidance" (p. 838).

Self-awareness in practice, therefore, can be described as a dynamic and purposeful process that intimately links thought and action through a heightened awareness of self as the meaning maker of experience. Not unlike the Epstein's (1999) vision of mindful practice, it is a multifaceted construct that involves an attentiveness or mindfulness in the situation that is achieved through a focus on all aspects of self in relation to other. Similar to reflective practice and perspective transformation where the resulting praxis is comprised of "action, reflection on action, further action, reflection on the further action and so on, in a continuous loop" (Brookfield, 1998, p. 295), the self-aware practitioner engages in a form of reflection in motion where the situation is continuously reflected back against the self and through the self, back to the situation. Although highly subjective in nature, it is through this subjectivity that the practitioner is able to achieve a level of objectivity and responsiveness in helping relationships. Through a process of sustained self-awareness, the practitioner attempts to channel or 'bracket' their values, beliefs, thoughts and feelings as they surface in a negative way in the helping relationship, thereby working to prevent habitual ways of responding that do not reflect the uniqueness of the client's situation. With the overall behavioural objective of refining and developing practice, it utilizes critical self-focused attention to project potential corrupting variables, such as deeply rooted cultural assumptions and unresolved dilemmas from childhood, beyond the therapeutic encounter. Self-awareness in practice requires the practitioner to work from a place of personal honesty and humility that reflects a particular quality of being.

Self-aware practice is necessarily a subjective process, and with subjectivity, comes certain risks. Practitioners actively engaged in a process of critical self-awareness can be at risk of becoming caught in a subjective cycle, where getting outside of the self is difficult; where projecting oneself beyond one's own perceptions can become problematic. Although I acknowledge this potential pitfall in the practice of self-awareness, I believe the risk is somewhat offset by the intention of this process, which is the quality of service and care to our clients. The reason for striving for effective practice through self-awareness is the needs of the client, even if it seems like it is not always about the client. The practice of self-awareness... "begin[s] with the self as the first, but not the only, object of knowledge" (Aronowitz, 1998). The client is an important source of knowledge in self-aware practice, and as such, is never far from the practitioner's thinking. Self-aware practice is not just about the self it is about utilizing one's awareness of self in order to be meaningfully there for others. The self is constantly considered in relation to other, and as such, the process always comes back to the client. With this being said, research really does not have any clear answers on how practitioners are able to step beyond themselves and manage the tensions created by the subjectivity of this process. Further research on how practitioners avoid rampant subjectivity when engaged in critical self-awareness is necessary to clarify this process.

Self-awareness in Reflection on Action

Through self-awareness in reflection on action, the practitioner extends awareness by reflecting on experience and probing deeper into those somehow more telling or poignant moments in practice that are made explicit through consciousness.

According to Ford and Dillard (1996), "self-knowledge ... involves both self-reflection on past remembrances as well as critical questioning of those experiences in the present" (p. 233). As essentially a twofold process, self-aware practice consists of awareness during practice (self-awareness in action), a process that has been discussed in the previous section, and the periods of focused self-awareness that occur in retrospect of practice (self-awareness in reflection on action). Self-awareness in reflection on action is a concentrated and mindful consideration of one's professional actions. It involves critically examining one's thoughts, ideas, beliefs and values in relation to one's choice of actions after the situation has occurred. With respect to self-awareness in reflection on action, there are two areas of particular relevance that will be discussed.

The first area of importance to be explored is the issue of personal growth and development. While the concept of learning may seem inconsistent in a discussion of self-awareness, its relevance particularly with respect to reflection on action necessitates its inclusion here. Although being self-aware and reflective are worthwhile endeavors in their own right, if one could not learn through these experiences, then there would be no way to build upon any of the knowledge that practitioners acquire through practice. Learning through reflection on action involves increasing self-knowledge and understanding in relation to the experience of practice. If experience represents the foundation or stimulus for learning about one's practice, than self-awareness in reflection on action is the part of the process that allows us to develop our professional competence. For Osterman (1990), if learning is to occur in relation to an experience, "the person must make meaning of that event, examine it,

and appraise the activity" (p. 135). According to Westberg and Hilliard (1994), practitioners "...who are reflective during and after events can extract the maximum from their experiences" (p. 278). As a process of self-scrutiny and examination following a situation that has prompted some inner discomfort, the appraisal period identified by Brookfield (1987) is a similar process to the one envisioned here. Whether during times of idle speculation or periods of deliberate critical reflection, reflection on action is an essential aspect of self-aware practice if as professional, we are to learn and grow from our experiences. Although the importance of reflection as means of facilitating learning is well documented in the literature, the meaning that is attached to the experience of self-reflection for practitioners has been given less attention.

The second and most challenging issue relates to the integration of self-awareness in action and self-awareness in reflection on action. Although these processes are interconnected and essentially represent two halves of the same whole, how the two-sides come together to inform and blend practice is unclear. To use terms borrowed from the literature on reflective practice (Kottkamp, 1990), self-awareness in action is accomplished "online" and involves an awareness of self during the experience of practice, which is aided by the learning that has occurred as the result of self-awareness reflection on action. On the other side, self-awareness in reflection on action occurs "offline" during a time when "full attention can be given to analysis and planning for the future without the imperative for immediate action" (Kottkamp, 1990, p. 183). In essence, self-awareness in action involves an integration of all the previous learning and self-knowledge gained through prior efforts including

reflection on action. Although effective professional performance necessitates self-awareness in action, according to Kottkamp (1990) the majority of attempts to facilitate awareness or reflection in action involve teaching professionals techniques concerned with reflection on action. Underlying this approach is the untested assumption that with enough conscious critical reflection, professionals will be able to move from reflection on action to reflection in action. Therefore, the meaning that is attached to the experience of shifting or moving from self-awareness in action to reflection on action for practitioners needs further exploration.

Having identified the areas where practitioner self-awareness is essential to practice, namely an awareness of strengths and weakness, values, the maintenance of objectivity and an awareness of professional roles, this study explores the meaning of self-awareness for professionals by probing practice-based experiences in these areas. Although the literature is replete with studies that illustrate the importance of being self-aware with respect to these areas in practice, the process by which this awareness occurs through the work of helping others and the meaning that professionals assign to it remains unclear. This study also explores the experience of self-awareness from both ends of this process, including the experience of how self-awareness in action and self-awareness in reflection on action become linked to further inform practice. Finally, this study represents a decisive move in the direction of clarifying and understanding the process by which self-awareness is experienced in practice.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

> Pure logical thinking cannot yield us any knowledge of the empirical world; all knowledge of reality starts from experience and ends in it.
>
> A. Einstein, P. Podolsky, N. Rosen

My interest in the experience of practitioner self-awareness is not new--it has been with me everyday of my professional life. This study is a natural extension of my professional commitment to understanding the lived experience of self-awareness in human service practice. Following van Manen's (1992) recommendation regarding turning to a phenomenon that seriously interests us and commits us to the world, I turned wholeheartedly to the experience of practitioner self-awareness. Driven by the question: *How do practitioners engage in a process of self-awareness, both in and on action?*--I attempted to embody this question, living it through my practice, my research and my everyday experience. In turning to others to answer this question, I wanted a methodological approach that honoured the unique and personal nature of the experience, while providing a means by which a common descriptive understanding could be achieved. To capture the authenticity of each participant's experience of self-aware practice, it was important that this research be "a caring act" (van Manen, 1992, p. 5) that remained as much as possible, untainted by my own preconceptions. My own experience of self-aware practice has taught me that finding the words to describe this process is not always easy, consequently, "subtlety and sensitivity" would be required for meaning to come into being (van Manen, 1992). As the co-creator of "'the world' to be studied" (Reason & Rowan, 1981, p. 489;

cited in Heron & Reason, 1997), on some level I also wanted my contribution to be included in the interpretation of meaning, but in a way that did not limit or silence the contributions of the participants. For these reasons, I developed a methodology that is congruent with the experience of self-aware practice in that I used the same kinds of processes of self-awareness that I gained from my literature review to guide how I made certain research decisions. The values that characterize the experience of self-aware practice, such as openness, respect for uniqueness, and collaborative knowing, were used to create my methodology. The resulting methodology, which will be described fully in the next section, is an open, sensitive, and participatory form of reflective inquiry that has shared values with the methodologies of phenomenology, hermeneutics and collaborative inquiry. The parallels between these methodologies and the quality of reflective inquiry used in this study are explored further in the following section through a detailing of my research process.

Research Process

The Interview Process

Three professionals participated in this study--two women and one man. The selection of the participants was based upon the diverse perspective each brings to the topic of self-aware practice, in that comparatively, each had rather different professional histories and roles. Each participant was therefore able to bring something new to the study because their individual experiences were grounded in different professional contexts. Additional criteria for selection were: (a) has an interest in the experience of self-aware practice (b) has experienced self-awareness (c) can articulate her/his experience (d) can relate to the researcher. Essentially,

participants were chosen who were willing to co-investigate an experience that had relevance to their own practice.

In order to attend fully to the uniqueness of individual experience, the interviews were conducted one to one. The research participants were contacted by telephone to arrange an initial individual meeting (the site of this meeting as well as any additional interviews took place at a location that was both comfortable and convenient to the participants and that met the criteria for confidentiality). The participants were fully informed of all aspects of the research and no deception was used. Prior to the start of the interview, the participants were required to read and sign the 'Letter of Consent' (Appendix II), which detailed the purpose/procedures of this study, known risks and benefits, how confidentiality would be maintained, opportunity to withdraw from the study and the access/availability of follow-up support (Creswell, 1998). The participants had the ongoing opportunity to ask any questions or have any concerns addressed. An interview time was scheduled and a location for the interview was determined at the close of the first meeting. The taped interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide suggested by Kvale (1996). The guide contained an "outline of topics to be covered, with suggested questions" (Kvale, 1996, p. 129).

The notion of "co-inquiry--doing research *with* people, rather than *on* them" (Reason, 1998; cited in Bray, Lee, Smith & Yorks, 2000, p. 7) was a guiding principle in the design of this study. The interviews were highly conversational in tone and resembled a relational dialogue of "talking together like friends" (Socrates; cited in van Manen, 1992, p. 100); a cooperative coming together of peers united by a

common professional experience and interest. Open-ended questions (Appendix I) that probed practice-based experiences served as prompts to "exact fullness and completeness of detail" (van Manen, 1992, p. 17) and through which a common orientation to the experience could be found. Although the process was framed by some structure in terms of a loose guide for the focus of the conversations, the questions were open and non-directive, and were used as the starting point for discussion only. The interviews ultimately moved in the direction that the experiences of the participants took them. The interviews involved a fluid, continuous back and forth movement between discussion and reflection, followed by further discussion, and so forth. Throughout the interviews I tried to remain aware of the subtle ways that my words and actions might be silencing the participants or placing limits on the meaning of experience. In other words, by being self-aware during the interviews, I attempted to monitor my words and actions in relation to the words and actions of the participants, adjusting my responses in light of the changing situation. For example, my comments, body language, tone and my reaction to pauses in the conversation, were all taken into account during the interviews.

A debriefing session followed every interview to ensure that any emotional needs of the participants were met. The telephone number of the researcher was also provided to the participants. The participants selected pseudonyms to be used in the data presentation and only the primary researcher had access to the data, which was kept in a secure location. Both the taped interview and the written transcripts of the interviews were kept in a locked file cabinet for the duration of the research.

Investigating Experience

Throughout the interviews, I attempted to balance my role a researcher with my experience as a practitioner in that I constantly worked to find a middle ground between asking questions and probing for more information and just sharing in the experiences of the participants.

Recognizing that interpretation is not 'presuppositionless', in that one cannot step outside of their framework of understanding in the interpretation of meaning (Kvale, 1996), I attempted to have a heightened awareness of my own presuppositions throughout the research process. Predicated on the rationale that research is a subjective process that involves being "strong in our orientation to the object of study in a unique and personal way--while avoiding the danger of becoming arbitrary, self-indulgent, or of getting captivated and carried away by our unreflected preconceptions" (van Manen, 1992, p. 20), it was first necessary for me to clearly identify any assumptions or preconceptions that I had regarding the experience of self-awareness. By approaching the interviews from my "prejudice position" (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998), I was able to be more sensitive to the subtleties of the meaning attached to the experience of self-aware practice for the individual participants because the meaning of my own experience of self-awareness was kept in consciousness. Apart from the more obvious assumption that on some level, self-awareness is alive and well in human service practice and that this experience will be accessible within the research context, I bring to this study several notable assumptions. It is my belief that self-awareness helps practitioners to be culturally attuned and assists professionals in self-care and in the prevention of burnout. I also

believe that self-awareness can be learned and is itself a learning process that develops through practice, and therefore, is not a natural state of being. And finally, I believe that effective practice relies on reflection and a general awareness of self through helping efforts.

Reflecting on Themes

Prior to the transcription of the interviews, I listened to each interview several times trying to get an overall feel for the experience of self-awareness as it unfolded through the conversations. Each interview was then transcribed. Careful attention was given to pauses or moments of silence, inflection, and tone and all were noted in the text. After transcription, the transcripts were read through several times, again with the intention of grasping the overall essence of the experiences embedded in the text. Through this process, I attempted to quiet the many voices that lead me toward interpretation and away from the thing being questioned. As a free-moving and insightful process not fixed or limited by its own structure, exacting a thematic understanding involves "seeing" meaning as it presents itself in experience (van Manen, 1992). This embodied kind of process required me to set aside my own assumptions and to attempt, as near as possible, to enter my participants' experiences. Such empathic understanding meant that I had to suspend my own process of critical reflection long enough to gain an understanding of their experiences. Statements or sentences that appeared to be thematic of the fundamental experience of practitioner self-awareness, that in essence, seemed to speak about something larger and more elemental in the meaning of self-aware practice, were noted and the themes illustrated through these words and passages were articulated. The identified themes were then

taken back to the participants and the 'fit' of the findings was checked against the experiences of the participants. The validated meaning units or themes were then used to construct a large chart and through a form of mapping, the themes were linked, eventually bringing a natural form to larger, seemingly more essential themes. Similar to the hermeneutic circle of interpretation where the meaning of the parts are continuously re-interpreted in relation to meaning of the larger text (Kvale, 1996), moving back and forth between the chart and the transcripts, I reflected on the essential themes that emerged, working to develop them until all the meaning units were reflected and the process of "living relationships of experience" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) were revealed. Continuously revisiting the chart that I used to identify and connect the individual themes helped me to remain cognizant of the separate meaning units while I developed them into larger, more overriding themes of the experience of self-awareness in practice. In other words, I was able to consider the meaning of the different themes as I reinterpreted them in relation to the whole.

Describing the Experience

As previously mentioned, my methodology was a process of critical reflection and self-awareness. On a daily basis I both lived the experience of self-awareness practice and paid homage to it through my research. Moving in between these two perspectives, my reflective processes spun off of each new insight gained through my experience, expanding and stretching my awareness, perpetually re-creating my understanding of my participants' experience of self-awareness. In order to deepen each reflection, I spoke to colleagues about their reflective process in practice,

consulted the internet for practitioners' discussion of self-awareness, and continued to review the literature. All of these processes were recorded in my research journal.

Despite these concrete research strategies, there were also times when I needed to trust in the process of what felt like a non-linear experience. As "a free-floating experience that for some is fraught with fear and uncertainty" (Hoskins, 2001, p. 664), the term groundlessness has been used to describe the experience of remaining in a state of reflection or focused attention where faith in the process becomes the only path through it. During this experience I remained committed to the process of discovery by living my quest for understanding and by not giving into my desire to place limits or boundaries on the process. Reflective journaling helped bring clarity and focus to my writing by allowing me to mentally step-back from the data while still remaining steeped in the experience of it. As in self-aware practice, my internal dialogue served as a constant reminder of what I was trying to do, which in this situation was to keep the lived descriptions genuine for the individual participants and compelling for the reader.

As a "bringing to speech of something" (van Manen, 1992, p. 32), my challenge during this aspect of the process was to remain true to the experience of self-awareness for the individual participants while linguistically transforming the essential themes into a structure that had meaning in the context of their lived experience. Posed with the question, *Is this what the experience is really like?* (van Manen, 1992, p. 99), I moved back and forth between the transcripts and the text, attempting to capture the meaning of the experience of practitioner self-awareness for

the participants, giving voice to how it is lived through their practice of helping others.

Through the process of writing and re-writing I played with words, becoming acquainted with language in a way that was very new to me, a way that was fresh and all consuming, my mind always bending back to the words and phrases that lingered with me, never fully escaping my consciousness. Moving between the verbal structuring of lived-experience and the experience of reflecting on it, my writing served to deepen my journaling and my journaling found focus through my writing. As a form of co-inquiry, I wanted my own voice to be included in the description of self-awareness. Founded upon the thinking that "reflection means to bend back upon or to take up again what we have experienced" (Giorgi, 1983, p. 143), excerpts from my reflective process, in the form of journal entries, are incorporated in the body of the text. These excerpts speak to my role as a co-researcher or co-inquirer in the quest for a shared understanding of the experience of self-awareness and through them, I position myself within the tensions experienced by the participants. As a final validating step, once the descriptions were developed I returned to the participants and asked them how my descriptive results compared with their individual experiences (Colaizzi, 1978). Taking what feedback and reflections the participants provided, I returned to the completed the descriptions and did another layer of reflection as a way of integrating or synthesizing the findings.

Evaluating the Quality of Research

I have attempted to conduct this research with integrity, sensitivity and a genuine respect for the uniqueness of each of the participants' experience. Through this study

I was in relation with my participants by centering myself in the same stresses that they experienced. Kvale (1996) stated that "validity is not only a matter of the methods used; the person of the researcher, including his or her moral integrity is critical" (p. 241). My intent in doing this research has been to construct an evocative and illuminating description of professional self-aware practice that has meaning beyond the lived experience of the individual participants, in that on some level, the reader can resonate with what s/he read. Consistent with the thinking in collaborative inquiry that links the validity of the researcher's propositions to her/his own grounding in the experience about which propositions are being made (Bray et al., 2000), I was better able to work with a methodology that has meaning in the context of my own experience. As a researcher and a practitioner, the shared experience of self-aware practice allowed me to 'be' with the participants, in their experience, while respecting that the phenomenon was unique for each of us. As an interpretive researcher, I acknowledge that although gathering the data was a collaborative process, I was ultimately responsible for organizing, interpreting and presenting the final research. Although the analysis of meaning was largely related to my own interpretation (Creswell, 1998), by checking the evolving descriptions against the lived experience of the participants, and the research literature, the findings were verified beyond the perspective of the researcher (Dukes, 1984; Moustakas, 1994).

CHAPTER FOUR

Illuminating the Process of Self-awareness from the Participants' Perspectives

As mentioned in the methodology section, themes were organized from the taped interviews. Headings for the themes arose from the participants' words. An overarching theme that permeated the sub-themes was the theme of balancing certain tensions that evolve very naturally from the experience of self-aware practice for the participants. The point of primary importance in relation to self-awareness is that these tensions are never fully resolved--in fact they continuously have to be dealt with through an open process of critical self-awareness. If the balance and tension issues could be re-solved then self-awareness would not be necessary--there would be a quick fix so to speak--as practitioners, we could all follow neatly defined formulas for practice. The very nature of practice, the ambiguity that it brings forth, makes it impossible to live with certainty through the experience of practice. Therefore, the participants' experience of self-awareness involved managing these tensions throughout their helping practice. The following themes will be discussed throughout this chapter by using the participants' words: "Let's Put Things into Perspective": Balancing the Personal and Professional; "What More Can I do?": Balancing Humanness with the Professional Role; "Does it Become Knowledge?": Balancing Reflection with Awareness in the Moment; "Issues that are Hard to Deal With": Balancing Openness with Self-Protection; and "Learning to Become More Comfortable With Not Knowing": Balancing Comfort with Discomfort. A summary of each theme drawn from the combined experiences of the participants introduces

each section, which is followed by the individual thematic descriptions of the participants' experiences of self-awareness. As a co-researcher in this study, excerpts from my reflective process have been inserted at the end of the participants' descriptions. The journal excerpts are included as a source of knowledge that is not intended to refute what the participants are saying, but to expand and deepen the meaning of the experience of self-awareness in practice. After the participants' thematic descriptions were developed, I returned to my journal excerpts and did another layer of reflection as a way of further incorporating the participants' experiences. In the final section of the chapter entitled 'Integrating the Findings', the results are discussed from an integrated perspective that includes a comparison to the theories reviewed in Chapter 2.

"Let's Put Things into Perspective": Balancing the Personal and Professional

All of the participants in this study discussed the need for balance in similar and unique ways. They mentioned that the experience of self-aware practice involves managing the tensions that exist between their personal lives and their professional roles in an effort to maintain a balanced perspective on their work. Balancing both areas requires an awareness of how who we are as individuals and how we live our lives, translates into our professional role, and conversely, how our work can impact our personal lives and who we are as individuals. The resulting process is a highly personal experience that involves an ongoing awareness of one's values, beliefs, expectations, experiences, and current life stressors as they relate to practice. By being self-aware the participants discussed how they are able to minimize the

potential for either domain to impact the other in an unfavorable manner because they are able to recognize when it is happening. Examples of times when this kind of focused attention on balance exists for the participants are illustrated below.

Jane

Jane is new to the field of social work. Still in her early twenties, Jane has recently finished university and has started working in Child Protection. Jane liberally draws upon experiences from her personal life when describing her experience of self-awareness. In her words,

> You know TV's have picture in picture...you are talking about something and you have a little trigger go off in your head... so that is how I know that I am being self-aware. I've got that little picture in my head.

For Jane, self-awareness is an active and intimate process wherein her values and biases are constantly kept in check through a picture or mental representation of her own thoughts as they surface throughout the therapeutic encounter.

Through an internal monitoring process that originates with her own understanding and knowledge of self, her awareness of who she is as an individual, allows her to recognize when her values in the form of personal "standards" are being imposed on the client. While remaining attuned to her own values and standards in practice, Jane questions whether or not it is a bad thing for practitioners to have pre-conceived standards in their professional role. As a child, Jane was raised in poverty. "I never went hungry you know... but we had a lot of Kraft dinner when we were young". Jane's mother, a single parent, is still dealing with the financial commitment

of raising her two children because in her mother's words, "[they] had to eat". Bringing the knowledge of that experience with her into her current professional role, particularly the knowledge of the sacrifices her mother made and continues to make in order to have raised her children in the best way that she could, Jane struggles with the values that she sees reflected in the actions of many of the families that are currently on her caseload. As she says,

> I don't understand how people who have more money [than we had] live really poorly. Is it wrong to like, you know if I go into a house and think you've got to smarten up and then I think, okay do I have higher standards because of where I came from? But is that a bad thing for them that I hold those higher standards [because] I know that it can be done from personal experience. You just have to sacrifice all that other stuff.

Jane's experience of living in poverty as a child also means that her professional standards or expectations can be lower as a result. In Jane's words,

> I don't know if it is wrong [but] my standards can be lower. I worked with this family and the claim was that a young mom was super messy and the kids may be lacking whatever, so I go into the house and like wow, my house has been way worse than that. Being self-aware I was thinking, my mother would be proud of me. I don't think they should be involved just because the house was messy.

By recognizing her values and expectations as they surface through her practice, Jane is able to suspend her judgment and approach the situation from a less biased and more balanced perspective.

Jane does not see that it is necessary or even possible to separate her personal values from her professional role because remaining aware of them in practice is somehow enough. As she asserts,

> Isn't that kind of the whole point of being self-aware is to make changes or is just being self-aware enough? If I make that connection with a poor family and I think okay, I am being harsh. I think it makes you, maybe not change because my thought is still there…you have more money than [we] did and look at the way you are living…I still keep that but what comes out is different.

While immersing myself in the transcripts, I wrote:

> In my helping efforts I am reminded that experiences that occur in our professional lives can trigger our own pain, exposing the deep wounds that scar our histories. When we become aware of one of these moments in practice, we realize that we can no longer hide behind a veil of objectivity, for we have revealed our essential humanness.

For me, being aware of my own pain has prompted me to recognize that I too am vulnerable, which makes me a fallible human being not all that different from the clients that I work with. This experience has left me questioning how practitioners

live with the knowledge of their fallibility while still attempting to be effective agents of change in the lives of others.

Austin

Austin draws from over fifteen years of professional experience in the social work field to assist him in his helping efforts. In his professional role Austin counsels and advocates for men and woman involved in the correctional system, providing assistance to help them overcome the personal and social barriers that prevent them from making meaningful change in their lives. In order to balance the tensions that exist between his professional role and who he is as an individual, Austin draws upon his values to help guide and shape his approach to practice. According to Austin,

> There is some intrinsic value in everybody no matter how dysfunctional or negative people may appear. You have to understand that they have deficits that they have to overcome. They may not have been educated properly to really conduct themselves appropriately, so the world may be black to them since that is all they've seen. Generally speaking most of them have been victimized themselves and sure they became perpetrators but they have been victimized as well. They may not have had a fair shot at life in life. [I] cannot think of any person who is consciously a certain way and it is not letting them off the hook or giving them a reason to be a certain way... they know the difference between right and wrong but through socialization or it could through other ways... they are where they are.

Holding onto his belief in the fundamental worth of all human beings, Austin is better able to overcome the barriers to practice that his other values or beliefs may present. In his words,

> Depending on where I am coming from there may be some barriers, some obstacles that I may have to overcome in order to get through to someone or to communicate effectively with some people. There are times that I realize that I may not like certain aspects of an individual... but I still have to work with them.

Austin's values therefore, both facilitate his ability to assist others in the change process, in terms of his belief in the essential worth of all human beings, and serve as obstacles that must be overcome in order for him to work effectively and compassionately with many of his clients. Through a conscious awareness and understanding of his value system, Austin is able to suspend or withhold judgment when the values and beliefs that surface for him in practice are not consistent with the goal of the helping relationship.

Beyond having an awareness of the values that he possesses, both those that support his practice and those that do not, for Austin balanced practice also involves managing the natural tensions between his personal life and his professional role. As a father of two children in a family where both parents work full-time, Austin uses self-awareness to help him manage the stresses and challenges inherent in both his personal life and his professional role. As Austin states,

> I mean you know one of the things when we are looking at parenting... working couples... and you throw in the fact that you

> have a busy job, there is the stress factor. There is no question that the stress levels and additional responsibilities and things like that in our lives affect us in the workplace, just as the workplace can affect us at home--dramatically! If you are exhausted or when you have other pressures or things in your life… that is why you need to be aware. You need to be conscientious of other things you need to do, so that you are more effective. You need to try to get your sleep. You need other outlets… other channels in order to break away from a work environment where there may be a lot of negatives involved in our jobs, like what we are doing. There [are] often a lot of people who are in pain and it is not always easy. It can easily darken the way some people see the world. It isn't all black or white but when you work in a certain environment for so long sometimes it can affect us that way--are all adolescents this way? Are all men like this? Are all women like this? So you have to be very careful. I think it is important that you have to have other outlets other interests in life separate from [work]. I try to work out a couple days a week. Before [I] go home I just go for a walk around the block or [I] might hit a bookstore and read something stupid or irrelevant just to project my mind elsewhere.

Aided by an awareness of his internal cues that signal he is holding onto stress, Austin uses calming self-talk and an overall awareness of his environment to manage

the stress that he experiences at home and at work, again to minimize the impact either has on the other. He says,

> I know if I am anxious, I can feel it in the shoulders... the physical cues. I know that I am tense so that is when [I] have to purposefully step back. Let's put things into perspective... tomorrow may not be like today was. I mean if I know I am going to have a bad day in the morning, I might leave early in the morning to go to work. You know [I] haven't had a lot of sleep and the kids are at the table battling. I may just go. I mean you've avoided that and you are better at work cause you haven't experience that kind of situation.

The words of the participants prompted me to reflect on how I manage to balance my professional and personal life. I wrote:

> I have been feeling quite exhausted lately. I wonder how my physical state and I dare say my emotional state impacts the work that I do with clients. While my energy level is always greatest when working with people, I am still finding it increasingly difficult to find the passion and energy that was once so abundant.

As I reflect on this later, I wonder at what point practitioners can no longer put things into perspective. Given that there is only so much time and energy one person has, I question where the breaking point is between the demands of one's life, including both the personal and the professional domains, and what the practitioner realistically has to give. In these situations do the tools to manage these tensions

change, and if so, how do practitioners know what to do and whether or not their efforts are successful?

Olivia

Olivia draws upon decades of experience to help guide her through the pitfalls and hazards inherent in the landscape that composes her professional practice. As she has for over 20 years now, Olivia works front-line in a community–based agency doing individual and group counselling with youth and adults. For Olivia, human service practice is like a puzzle, the pieces of which are slowly constructed through the evolving relationship between practitioner and client that gently takes form over time. In her words, "it is literally like slowly putting puzzle pieces together." The experience of self-awareness in her practice involves "being aware of the reactions that [she has] in professional associations but that come from a personal place". She further states,

> I think we often react to people on a primal level…just like a primal reaction. Everyone always says how first impressions are important. I think it is often hard to be…I think that you just have to be very aware of what people are giving you and aware of your reaction to it.

Self-awareness involves a "process of corrective self-talk" that for Olivia, means she must "literally correct the way that [she is] thinking when talking to someone" to ensure that her actions are principled and informed. Remaining "in tune" with her "personal barometer" helps Olivia to recognize personal cues that signal when she is being "judgmental", is "really not listening", is "not able to concentrate on what they are telling [her]", or when her values may be negatively affecting the helping relationship.

Reliving my experience of balancing these tensions through the transcripts, I began to question the impact of my professional role on me, as an individual. Reflecting on this issue I wrote:

> Through my work with federal offenders I have come to wear some of the scars of doing hard time--we affect our clients and in turn, are affected by them.

Reflecting on this now, I wonder how as practitioners, we recognize the subtle ways that we are changed through our interactions with our clients and how in turn, our practice is affected by these changes. I am uncertain whether or not it is always for the better, and if not, how do we than manage this change in a way that best supports the intentions of practice?

"What More Can I do Here?":

Balancing Humanness with the Professional Role:

The experience of self-awareness for the professionals in this study involves being in touch with their essential humanness, including their emotions and vulnerabilities through their helping practice. It requires honesty, respect, empathy, humility and the lived understanding that there are limits to our knowledge and ability to assist others in the change process. For them, self-awareness also requires an understanding of the how their humanity intersects with their professional role. In the participants' experience of self-awareness, their ability to be real or genuine with their clients, to connect with them from a place of basic human compassion and caring, must be balanced against their professional ethics and responsibilities, in that professional expectations and abilities can run counter to one's pure desire to help others.

Therefore, balanced practice for the participants means that human compassion and reasoned professional judgment drive helping behaviour, not simply one or the other. As illustrated in the participants' examples outlined below, through self-awareness the participants are better able to understand and deal with their limitations as professionals because they recognize and accept their own vulnerabilities and strengths as human beings.

Jane

For Jane, the experience of self-awareness is not locked away, reverberating in the solitude of individual consciousness; it is lived and breathed in her day-to-day intermingling with others. In her words, self-aware practice involves "a willingness to put it out there", thereby making the struggles and vulnerabilities of the practitioner the focus of critical attention. In Jane's experience it involves "a questioning" and "a doubting" that originates with the self but extends beyond the self to include others. As she states,

> Say if you come out of a group where something really difficult has happened, some people just know to ask you--Did that upset you? That must have been really hard?

Self-awareness therefore, involves an expression of "empathy", of "validating" the difficulties inherent in human service work. Noting that, "some people have it and some people just don't", Jane sees those that lack a commitment to an honest and real practice of self-awareness in their work as "just going through the motions", often without even recognizing that they are not practicing self-awareness in their professional role. She describes this experience using a colleague as an example:

> One lady, she is a nurse who has been there for 22 years…she is miserable and you just think, she doesn't think about what to do anymore, she claims that she has to do it! It is like she does not even know she is not self-aware. She looks after babies under 12 months… I am sure she cares, but…

Without self-awareness, practitioners can lose touch with their humanness in their work and their practice can become mechanical and unfeeling.

For Jane, finding a balance between her own humanness and what is expected of her in her professional role involves a struggle to maintain her identity as a "helper" and "a social worker". In her words,

> As soon as people [hear] Child Protection like you are not a therapist, you know, when in doubt take them out, that is your job, right? And so you protect kids but I don't know, social work is still like in my mind, more the therapy and the group stuff, and helping people change. But in this job your client is the child and the family is second.

In finding a place of comfort that exists somewhere between her job and her desire to help families to change, Jane is compelled to find ways around these professional limits. According to Jane,

> You do it anyway and you just don't tell people. You throw in the counselling for mom when they are not looking. You have to go around it… and if [you] can't do it then you find someone else who can. To help the child I will put them both in counselling and play it

> off like it is just for the child, but [if you don't] you know they are going to lose their kid.

Jane's experience of dealing with professional limitations compelled me to reflect on my own experience of managing my professional limitations. Reflecting on this tension I wrote:

> Today a client became very angry and frustrated in reaction to the changes in the services that we deliver as an agency, and as the individual informing him of these changes, his anger was directed at me. Although he kept asking for clarification, he kept interrupting me, becoming louder and louder and angrier and angrier with each interruption. While I worked to keep my own emotions in-check during this time of mounting physical risk to my safety, I was aware that his anger was at a system that he saw as letting him down, of deserting him in his time of need. Standing on the frontline living the reality of political decisions made far from the life of this man who emerged from prison after 11 years to find the world had changed, sadly I am getting used of feeling powerless.

As I think about the tension between one's desire to help and the professional limits in their ability to do so, I now wonder how practitioners' stay motivated in an environment where their hands are increasingly becoming tied by budgetary restraints and cut-backs? How practitioners, as the enforcers of rules and policies, continue to define themselves in a positive helping way when the clients can view their actions as adversarial to the helping relationship?

Austin

For Austin, self-awareness in professional practice involves a suspension of self through a deep understanding of self in an effort to better understand others. Looking beyond the self in his helping relationships, Austin uses empathy and compassion to centre himself in the experience of others. He describes this experience in the following way:

> Trying to put myself in the other person's environment or shoes. I may not come from that certain walk of life but I try to imagine what that person is going through and what their deficits are based on where they are coming from... some things that they have had to overcome. I try to ask them questions for clarification so that I have a better understanding of where they are coming from. You need some kind of dialogue with a client to have an understanding of where they have been in life... of what their limits are... not just in the cognitive sense but in a financial or social sense.

As the cornerstone of effective human service practice, Austin sees good communication as facilitating and being facilitated by an awareness and deep understanding of self that is manifested through an honesty and genuineness in practice. According to Austin,

> If you are being honest and genuine I don't think [connecting with people] is all that taxing? If you are putting it on, if you are just going through the motions and pretending to be a certain way... acting a certain way to hopefully engage somebody then I

> think that you are going to be exerting a lot more effort as opposed to just trying to be human with people.

Balanced against his humanness in practice, Austin acknowledges the importance of remaining professional in his relationships with clients, which in large part comes from a demonstrated respect for his clients. He asserts,

> You have to be professional, there is no question there, but you have to understand... that you cannot talk like a seasoned professional to a person who may have a limited education. [Clients] might not respect you if you are throwing [out] fancy terminology... [if] you are being elitist.

Therefore, self-awareness for Austin involves managing one's presentation so to achieve a middle ground between the role of learned authority and someone the client can identify with and understand.

For Austin, having an awareness of the reasons why one has entered the profession is also essential to one's ability to be "genuine" with clients. Austin states,

> Are we getting into these fields because we really want to help or are we doing it to make money? What are our reasons for getting into different fields? I think people get into certain field for different reasons... that was one of the things that sometimes bothered me when I was in university--the idea that you could teach skills... you could teach people to be empathetic. But if you are not genuine you can see right through the person... if it is not in your heart clients can see that.

Through an honest and informed dialogue with his clients in which he stated that he "continually revisits" any rules and expectations, Austin struggles to equalize the power inequity that exists within professional helping relationships by balancing his desire to help, against the structural and practical limitations of his ability to provide meaningful assistance. Believing in the individuals' ability to make choices, to practice free will and "self-determination", to exercise their personal power in the life decisions that they make, Austin works to make real to his clients the fact that "they have some power in their life as well." In his words,

> I am not a headhunter. You will have every opportunity within limits. The last thing I want to do is have a person incarcerated... [but] in the end the decision for them to end up in a certain situation with me... they've made that decision... they've come to that.

By sharing in Austin's experience of living with the practical limitations in his role as an agent of change, I began to reflect on how I embrace my own humanness in my professional role. I wrote:

> It is my belief that all change starts with the realization that we are responsible for the direction of our life, and through our decisions, the choices that we make, the course of our life is determined. During those occasions when I have to make punitive professional decisions and I begin to feel like I am betraying my alliance with the client, I am reminded of my own humanness and it comforts me to remember that I can only help people to change, I can't make them.

Taking what I have gained through the participants' experience of balancing the tensions between one's desire to help and the very real limitations in their ability to do so, I am reminded that change ultimately starts and ends with the individual. Through a lived appreciation for the power of individual choice with respect to change, practitioners are better able to define what they realistically can and cannot do.

Olivia

For my third participant, Olivia, human compassion can be a strength and a weakness in her practice. Being in touch with her emotions relates to her ability to remain connected to her own sense of humanness through her helping efforts. In her words,

> I would identify one of my strengths as being rather empathetic or compassionate ... in terms of dealing with my clients, which can often as well also be a weakness... you want to rescue... it is like I have to tell myself there is only so much I can do here.

In a state of suspended self-awareness through which she remains connected to the touchstone of her humanness, Olivia works to balance her desire to help her clients against what is appropriate professionally or what she can realistically do with respect to the change process of others. As she states,

> My heart is bleeding for this person but realistically how can I help and what is the most effective way of helping?... and that is not often what the person wants to hear... and then it is that thing where you feel like well, I've got to give them more... I've got to do more, [but]

> under the circumstances this is all I can do and I understand that they are upset and they want more, but I can't do anything more for them at this point.

In recalling her experience of working with a long-time client, Olivia uses what she refers to as a "mental check-list" to help her discern what is best for the client through a very structured evaluation of the value of the professional relationship. According to Olivia,

> It is very much a process of self-talk and just kind of reflecting--okay, what more can I do here... literally what more can I do? [It is like] a mental checklist--okay what am I missing here? What have I not done that I should be doing or that I should look at doing or maybe there is someone else I could talk to about this. It is really kind of like a check-list... and then when you realize there is nothing... there is nothing more I can do here.

Balancing her desire to meaningfully assist others against what her experience and role as a professional dictates is appropriate means that beyond a certain point in the therapeutic relationship, Olivia must accept that "this is a journey [that they] have to take alone."

Armed with an awareness of the limitations in her knowledge and abilities, Olivia diligently guards against the complacency that can come with experience but that evolves out of a sense of knowing it all, of having reached the height of professional knowledge. As she illustrates through an example,

> I had a client a couple of years ago and I was just convinced that [the issue] was alcohol and drugs. It was like a raging drug addiction and that is what needed to be addressed... and when finally... that last pieces of the puzzle finally came, it had nothing to do with drugs and alcohol... it had to do with sexual abuse. He was one of the most damaged individuals I have ever seen... and I still see him. He is in and out of jail.

Olivia sees self-awareness as a process that involves a "constant awareness of where [her] reactions are coming from". This requires an understanding or an acceptance that as professionals, we do not and will not know it all because ultimately, there is always more to know and learn from out clients and from the experience of practice.

Prompted by Olivia's personal struggle with her professional limitations, I wrote:

> Last week I assessed at least 10 different men for an upcoming program, each convicted of many serious crimes, some particularly more distasteful than others. As I listened to their recollections of their crimes, many cloaked under rationalizations and external blame, I struggled to remain in-check emotionally. I felt repulsed by the actions of these men--the behaviour of damaged men and wounded souls. Looking at the upbringing and history of some of these men was like reading a road map that led straight to a federal penitentiary. More than any other feeling I was left with after this week, was a feeling of sadness; sadness for the victims, the community and the lives that are spent unraveling in a horrible and

> demeaning environment--choices made and consequences the result. I see these men when they get out, some meant for change, others for old patterns of behaviour, while still others, a smaller but still significant proportion, are almost completely dead inside. Being in touch with my own feelings of compassion and understanding, I sincerely want to help these men, but I really question what difference I am making in the face of such pain, of such damage?

As I reflect on this entry later, I wonder how practitioners reconcile the tension between the desire and the ability to help when immediately faced with the overwhelming issues and pain that many clients are dealing with? My own experience has done little to clarify this issue for me. From this perspective, the question is no longer an issue of what more can be done. It now becomes a question of what practitioners possessing a heightened awareness of their own limitations and vulnerabilities believe that they are able to do.

"Does it Become Knowledge?":
Balancing Reflection with Awareness in the Moment

Self-awareness for the participants is experienced in action during practice, and it occurs in reflection on action in retrospect of practice. Reflection represents that aspect of self-awareness that allows the participants to make sense and meaning of experience and through self-reflection, the participants are able to reconsider their professional actions from a critical perspective. Taking the knowledge and self-insight gained through self-reflection back into their professional practice, the participants state that they are able to apply their learning in different ways, further

refining and developing their practice as they go along. Balancing reflection with awareness in the moment means that there is a constant flow between action and reflection, or between the experience of practice and one's reflection on experience. Examples from each participant are offered below.

Jane

In describing how she balances reflection with awareness in the moment, Jane says,

> It creeps back up on me when I am not thinking about it... if say I am having a conversation and I get triggered, and then I think, oh yah! It sneaks up on you.

While suspending critical reflection only to have it "creep in" later, Jane's experience of self-awareness also occurs in the moment. In her words,

> I don't necessarily think about it until I go out and see that family and I am in there talking to them and they say something and I am thinking, okay, I tried this last time but it didn't work. How about here or who do I remember that had a similar conversation and then I try things [differently].

In considering my own experience of self-reflection, I wrote in my journal:

> The more direct and immediate methods that encourage self-reflection, such as journaling and debriefing with colleagues are often lost among the everyday practicalities of our work. What remains are those hidden workings on behalf of reflection that allows awareness to creep in when we do not consciously initiate it.

Pulling the pieces of our experiences together, self-reflection does not always involve a conscious effort to be reflective. For me, reflection can appear to come out of thin air, when something in the world around me twigs my experience, taking me back to a moment in practice. Through these seemingly spontaneous occurrences, I am able to make room for reflection and in turn, use the knowledge and awareness gained through self-reflection to help inform my practice. This idea has left me with more questions than answers about what triggers these reflective moments, how they happen, and why they occur in the first place.

Austin

In describing professional practice, Austin asserts, "We're our only critics." In an environment where much of the work very naturally occurs in isolation, where external checks and measures for professional development may be few and far between, Austin sees critical self-reflection as the primary means by which professional growth and development occur. Through a process of critically analyzing and reflecting on his practice, Austin is able to identify areas of weakness, areas in his practice where self-awareness may have been lacking. The self-knowledge and insight gained through critical reflection become the seeds from which his practice grows and evolves, moving and stretching beyond its current form. As Austin states,

> We can be our own worst critics and I think that is good because if you don't reflect on what you are doing you are never going to get better…you're not going to improve. We always have to constantly engage ourselves in those areas…to better ourselves. Because we can't be effective if we just keep going with the same formula.

Therefore, through reflection Austin is able to develop his professional competence because the learning he has acquired from reflecting on his actions informs the quality of work he is doing with his clients.

In reflecting on my work with federal offenders, I wrote in my journal:

> When facilitating rehabilitative programs for men on federal parole, I recognize that I tend to rush the pauses necessary for reflection after posing a question to the participants. Whether it is nervous tension, a fear that the point I am trying to make won't be made, or a heightened awareness of time brought on by a lack of it, in reflecting on my sessions I notice a tendency to jump in too soon, cutting short the exchange. Bringing this knowledge about myself back into the classroom means that I hear a voice coming from deep inside of me that reminds me to slow down, to let the moment unfold as it needs to.

As I reconsider my excerpt in light of the participants' descriptions, I recognize the importance of being honest and critical through the reflective process if we are to extract anything meaningful about our way of being in practice.

<u>Olivia</u>

Olivia sees self-reflection as being the result and the response of an outside trigger that allows points of awareness to come to the surface. In her words,

> Sometimes it kind of hits me weirdly. I will be in a drug store and something will take me back... did I talk to them about this? I mean it can often happen... it can happen when I am doing my case notes

> and I am actually thinking about what we discussed. It can be in the drug store. It literally can be anywhere, which is very odd. I can be at home and I can wake up in the middle of the night and I just think I need to address this issue with so and so.

Therefore, Olivia's experience of self-awareness does not end when she leaves the world of her work behind; it is threaded through every aspect of her daily activity.

Attempting to balance reflection with her awareness in practice, Olivia questions the conscious or purposeful nature of the process by which awareness through reflection becomes incorporated into her day-to-day practice. As she puts it, "does it become knowledge?" For Olivia, self-knowledge, as a product of self-reflection, is constantly flowing back and forth between the points of action and reflection that collectively comprise the experience of practice. Olivia states,

> I don't see myself reflecting and then consciously bringing what I've learned to another session. I really don't. I think it happens but I am not sure that it is a conscious thing for me.

Through reflection, points of awareness and self-insight become absorbed into her repertoire of professional knowledge, blending very naturally into her practice.

As I reflected on my own experience of how my reflections inform my actions, I wrote:

> I believe that reflection is an essential component of self-aware practice. When I become more aware of how who I am translates to my professional actions, my behaviour changes because I know too much to do anything else. The knowledge and awareness I gain

through reflection is the catalyst for change in my practice.

Practitioners are changed through the experience of thinking about action.

Reflecting further on the participants' experience of reflection as well as my own, I wonder how practitioners avoid slipping into endless thought when reflecting on practice. Reflecting on action can feel like a never-ending process where each new insight suggests new directions for reflection. How do practitioners know when enough reflection is enough?

"Issues that are Hard to Deal With": Balancing Openness with Self-Protection

In the participants' experience of self-aware practice, 'openness' involves being honest with yourself and others about the limits in your ability to help others and effect meaningful change in their lives. Being open also means that when 'issues that are hard to deal with' are encountered in practice, the practitioner does not close herself/himself off in helping relationships, but maintains balance in practice by focusing on the positive moments in their work and by drawing upon support from others, particularly colleagues. Apart from simply respecting the professional chain of accountability, according to the participants, the experience of self-awareness involves an almost innate or instinctual desire to talk about the emotional and practical challenges of practice with colleagues and supervisors. One's willingness to honestly and openly discuss the challenges experienced in practice is balanced or gauged against the emotional safety or supportiveness of the listener. Examples from the participants are illustrated in the following descriptions.

Jane

For Jane, her natural desire to talk about the difficulties she experiences in her work must constantly be balanced against her need to protect herself, both professionally and emotionally. In recalling her experience of watching an interview with a 3-year-old girl who was the suspected victim of sexual abuse, Jane struggles with honestly revealing her true feelings about the experience while trying to present herself as a competent professional in what she perceived as an "unsafe environment". In her words,

> The supervisor called me and said that the [intake] worker had just stopped by and talked to her and said that I seemed really upset. She was concerned that I was really upset. Well it was really disturbing to watch it, actually disturbing for me to talk to the mom afterwards because we could not get a disclosure out of the little girl, so the mom thought, like what do I do? How do I protect her if I don't know who it is or what has happened? She doesn't know anything right, and I was really upset by that and so the supervisor was talking to me and she was like… you know you are going to encounter stuff like that. She was surprised that I was feeling a little weird about it. She asked me if I was going to be okay with it and my first thought was like, I must sound like a complete wuss. I must sound like I've got issues around it. So the first thought in my head was to say no, no, I am fine, though while I am saying that I can hear a little voice in my head saying you are not okay with it! But you are kind of put

> on the spot and you don't want to give a bad impression because I have only been there for three weeks. I just thought, shut up now… I won't ask you about it anymore.

While in large part stemming from her newness in the social work profession, Jane's fears regarding her perceived competence are not unfounded. According to Cherniss (1980a), shortly after starting in the public profession, many professionals find that "one's reputation with colleagues and clients [is] based almost entirely on one's perceived effectiveness" (p. 25). Being left with a lot of feelings of ugliness that cannot be explored safely within her work environment, Jane has learned to "push them aside and deal with them later".

While immersed in the transcripts, I reflected on collegiality in the work place. Regarding these reflections I wrote:

> Increased tensions in work environments create atmospheres that are not conducive to the practice of self-awareness. Alliances seem to naturally evolve, although shared dissention can be common and pervasive. Negativity can spread like a weed and taking risks to change that seems impossible. Suspicion grows from negativity and despair can settle in. The attitude "I'll just do my job and keep to myself" becomes acceptable.

Looking deeper into the descriptions, I recognize how important it is for practitioners to be able to externalize or talk about the feelings of ugliness that can surface for them through practice. However, I question how practitioners reconcile the tensions between openness and self-protection in an unsafe environment that

devalues collegiality. What do practitioners do with these feelings when they are blocked from expressing them?

Austin

Austin uses discretion to strike a balance between being open and decidedly human with his clients and the need to protect the integrity of the professional relationship. For Austin, self-aware practice means that he remains cognizant of his limitations in practice and remains honest with himself and his clients about these limitations. "You have to be professional, there is no question there, but you also have to be open". He goes on to assert,

> We have limits and there are certain things that I cannot do or I am not able to get through to a person or effectively understand where that person is coming from or if I feel it could be a gender issue or things along those areas. I may have to pass that person on to someone else or I may have to go back and do some research to educate myself in certain ways. But once again, I think it is important that you really have a non-threatening manner... to communicate to that person when I feel like I am out on a limb as well, because obviously you are going to lose that person if you are not honest with them.

Therefore, by being open with his clients about his vulnerabilities and limits, he is better able to establish realistic expectations of service for both himself and his clients.

In a challenging job that Austin describes at times as "disturb[ing] [his] sleep," he bears daily witness to the depravity that can exist in human relations. "There are cases where I have dealt with people who have been very cruel to other people." In recalling his experience of working with a young woman who had been sexually abused by family members since the age of four years old, Austin grapples with the emotional upheaval that results from sharing in another's horrific experience of abuse. As he says,

> I found it doubly hard because I have children of my own and picturing my child or any child being four years of age and helpless and in a situation like that... it was heartbreaking. I found it really hard because she wanted to talk to me and I was the first person she had ever addressed these issues with.

Given the difficulty of placing oneself within the centre of another person's pain, of walking with them through the darkest moments of their lives, for Austin the desire to be open with clients can quickly give way to the need to protect oneself. In his words,

> I've known other therapists in the past that would say okay, these are issues that are hard to deal with. A lot of professionals don't want to hear this stuff... because it is painful. We don't so much internalize it but I guess we put... you put yourself into the person's shoes and try to empathize. You try to understand where that person is coming from. It can be difficult. It can burn you out.

Austin therefore, finds it important to "focus on the positives" that exist in his practice. He "capitalizes on" and "maximizes" the positives in his clients through an approach to practice that he describes as bringing "the goodness out in them".

Through Austin's experience I was driven to reflect on my own experience of finding the goodness in my clients. I wrote:

> I first know my clients as a criminal profile. After seeing these individual's sins in writing, I then get to know them as human beings. Without the humanness I would not be able to see the client as a whole person-- a person with problems, pressures and addictions... as an individual with value and human worth.

As I reflect on this experience now, I realize that in order for practitioners to be effective in their work, they must be able to see beyond the actions of their clients to the vulnerabilities or lack of skill that their behaviour stems from. Recognizing the pressures and issues faced by our clients opens up some space for change where our efforts can make a difference, because it gives us something to work with and build upon.

Olivia

For Olivia, the experience of human service practice can be negatively one-sided. In her words,

> We don't see a lot of positive outcomes often and so I think that when there is someone who shows some potential... they actually achieve what they set out to achieve. I think there is a certain amount of satisfaction... personal satisfaction in that because you know you

> played some role. In many cases you just don't see that you've had a positive influence.

In a job that for Olivia, offers few moments of apparent affirmation in terms of all the effort that is invested into helping people through the change process, she has a need to focus on these positive moments, as if some confirmation of the fact that her work actually make a difference in the lives of people. As she says,

> People come to you and they are just broken and sometimes you can watch them put their lives back together and you think- yeah, I've had some impact here and it was very positive in many ways.

Maslach (1982) also emphasizes the importance of accentuating the positive in helping relationship where "problems take precedence to the point where people focus only on what is wrong and forget about what is right" (p. 95). In this challenging context in which one can easily become disillusioned, Olivia identifies external support as essential, as if somehow talking about her experiences makes them more manageable and less disparaging. She says,

> It is thinking out loud basically. Not even so much in terms of an answer to come up with…a solution. Just a matter of someone to listen to what you have been through. Sometimes some of the experiences that we as practitioners see are horrible, you know?

As offering a form of defense against the emotional backlash from her clients, the real "support that [Olivia] gets and continues to get is from [her] co-workers." She describes this experience in the following way:

> It's a matter of sitting down and just detailing what happened on some level with someone else's ear. It is very effective. The actual structured supervision that we may lack from a supervisory position... well, my co-workers... my co-practitioners are very helpful in this area. You *need* to think out loud. You *need* to reflect on what has happened.

While immersed in the participants' descriptions of balancing the tensions between openness and self-protection, I wrote:

> Today a co-worker asked me a question that I think about often, but rarely hear asked--Do you think you are making a difference? Considering the amount of work and energy required to meet my schedule she must have wondered if I thought it was all worth it. Although I quickly responded with some reflexive remarks about the clear difference that the programs I run make for some men... for some youth. But the reality is that I truly wonder sometimes because I don't know what happens in their lives once the program ends. Holding onto what positive feedback I do get, I am able to remember that the work that I do does make a difference, even if just a small one.

Through the words of the participants as well as my own, I am reminded how important it is to remember the positive experiences or re-affirming moments in our helping practice. Not unlike having an awareness of our clients' vulnerabilities or humanness, focusing on the positive experiences in practice gives us something to

hold onto; a place we can work from that gives purpose and meaning to our actions. This idea has caused me to question the relationship between validation that comes from an external source, such as from clients, supervisors or colleagues, and affirmation that is the result of savoring professional successes and drawing upon the positive moments in practice. Practitioners are potentially on dangerous ground where they can get caught up in their own subjectivity or ego and ignore feedback from others. How than do practitioners prevent being trapped in their own subjectivity, particularly when external feedback is inconsistent or completely lacking?

"Learning to Become More Comfortable with not Knowing": Balancing Comfort with Discomfort

The experience of self-awareness for the participants involves managing the discomfort that can evolve quite naturally from the professional role. Whether stemming from an uneasiness with professional power, newness to the helping role, a desire to move faster than the client is willing to, or a heightened awareness of one's faults or limitations in practice, the experience of discomfort for the participants is balanced against an understanding or appreciation of what can reasonably be expected from themselves and others in a professional capacity. Balancing discomfort in practice also involves recognizing their strengths and abilities, utilizing support and guidance from others, understanding that change is a process that is internally driven, and in time, by becoming more confident in the quality of professional support that is provided. The participants' experiences are discussed below.

Jane

As a child, Jane felt powerless. "I never thought when I was growing up, like I was an ugly kid with glasses and braces and I had bad skin. I got teased." It is her experience of powerlessness in her childhood that has resulted in her current discomfort with power in her professional role. In her words,

> As I went through school and did my placement last year at Child Welfare, I think I am uncomfortable with power. I don't know if it is because I am from a very powerless family, like my mom. And so I think, ...I am not comfortable with power because I am not used to it.

Although over time Jane has started to become more comfortable with the power that comes with being a Child Protection Worker, her need for external validation persists. Almost as if needing permission to possess such tremendous power, Jane finds a degree of comfort in being reminded of the reality of her job. As she says,

> I have started to get more comfortable with the power but usually I need to hear it from someone else. Like, this is your job. You are not a social worker anymore. You are a Child Protection Worker. This is the power you have and it is insane how much power.

Jane's newness to the profession has left her wondering on occasion if she is ready for the position that she now holds, particularly since she does not describe herself as a "born helper". In Jane's words,

> [I] second guess [myself] all the time. I think just because I am right out of school and working. Maybe I would do the same thing ten

> years from now. Like I would think, I could have done that better. Right now I think I don't have anything to compare it to so I think I... I don't feel like I am ready.

At times consumed by her own self-doubt around the burden of being responsible for others, particularly when she is observing her more experienced counterparts, Jane engages in an internal struggle that resonates in the very core of her professional being. As she put it,

> Should I have know that... when am I going to learn [what] to do... when am I going to learn what to say?... how does she know to say that at the right moment... when am I going to do this?

By drawing upon the wisdom and support of her more experienced colleagues, Jane says that she is "learning to become more comfortable with not knowing" because her discomfort is normalized within a larger context of professional experience. Through a more reasoned and balanced perspective of what one can realistically accomplish in practice, Jane is better able to live with her discomfort. She states,

> I know that I am not going to know everything... even people who have been there for a long time tell you right at the beginning, don't expect to be on top of your work because you never will be. I think if I learn one thing everyday... just time.

Knowing her strengths and weaknesses as they relate to her practice is "very helpful" for Jane, particularly with respect to her perceived areas of weakness. "I am uncomfortable with all that emotional stuff... like when people cry I am uncomfortable... I don't come from a super affectionate family". By making the

connection between her current discomfort with "emotional stuff" in her professional role and her upbringing as a child, Jane is able to recognize where her discomfort comes from and push beyond it. She describes this experience in the following way:

> Adolescent girls like the one's I work with…they could be crying and [I] could tell that they need a hug, so [I] would ask them, do you need a hug? Even if I was uncomfortable I would still do it.

Acknowledging the importance of knowing those areas of practice that are particularly troubling for her, knowing how to deal with her own discomfort in these situations is an area of less certainty for Jane. As she says,

> The sexual assault thing like little tiny kids that get… little girls that get molested or assaulted… I know I am aware that that stuff bothers me, but I haven't learned how to deal with it.

In reflecting on Jane's experience of discomfort, I wrote:

> The more I learn about myself as a practitioner, the more I realize that I don't know.

Stepping back from our descriptions, I cannot help but wonder how practitioners live with discomfort when they don't know how to reconcile it. What do practitioners do with the uncertainty of the process, or is that just part of the discomfort the practitioner must address?

<u>Austin</u>

Austin's desire to assist his clients must constantly be balanced against the individuals' receptivity or willingness to change. As he puts it,

> You have to be very careful. Right off the bat you want to throw everything on them and protect them and nurture them, but the point is, if you really don't understand where that person is coming from you have to be careful you don't give them the wrong advice or put them in the wrong direction… they may not be ready.

As a process, change must be nurtured and caringly tended to, which for Austin means that he must remember to walk softly during the times when he most wants to run. Austin states,

> You want to do everything for somebody right off the bat. People want quick fixes. They will go to therapists and they will expect a quick fix, you know, wave the wand and I am better, but it doesn't work that way and as professionals, we need to remember that.

By acknowledging his own limitations in his ability to assist others through the process of change, particularly in relation to the power inherent in his professional role, Austin accepts that "there are people that you just can't work with." In his words,

> Sadly enough I've had cases where people just see us as those in control, in power…they can't see beyond that we are enforcers…no matter what, they are not going to let you break through that shell and they may not even give you the opportunity.

Through the understanding that change, regardless of the catalyst, ultimately rests with the individual, Austin attempts to give his clients "tools" for change recognizing that in the end, "a person isn't going to change until they are ready to change."

By sharing in Austin's experience of managing discomfort, I found myself reflecting on my own experience of crossing into discomfort. I wrote in my journal:

> Today I had to call the police because my client, a very young man who was currently on parole, had a warrant out for his arrest. While I have a solid respect and appreciation for the role and responsibilities of the Correctional Service Canada (CSC) and the police, I felt a strong sense of dread after making this call. I understand the need to protect the public, I just felt and feel so conflicted about my actions. On the one hand I am an agent of CSC and obligated to uphold their rules and standards, but on the other hand, I am a human service practitioner driven by a desire to assist these men in making meaningful pro-social life change. Before now I have felt very clear about which side of the criminal justice line I am on, but I am not so certain anymore.

In my own experience, remembering that change rests with the individual has helped me to keep my identity as a helper intact when my professional role requires a more punitive stance or role with my clients. By recognizing our clients' personal choice and freewill with respect to change, we become better able to reconcile the discomfort that comes from making punitive professional decisions because the choice is ultimately made by the client and not us.

Olivia

Over two decades of professional experience has brought Olivia to a place where in her words, "[she is] a lot less tough on [herself] than [she] used to be." Beyond recognizing her own limitations in terms of her ability to support others in their process of change, she accepts them, but not as an inability to juggle the tremendous workload she faces on a daily basis, but as real limits that are inherent in the profession she has chosen for herself. In her words,

> It used to really bother me and I used to find that I would take work home and work overtime and do other kinds of stuff. I no longer do and that is a very conscious choice…I acknowledge that it doesn't matter where you go…sometimes you are going to get excellent service and sometimes you are not, and that is just the way it is…it is a whole bunch of factors. Not that I am trying to make excuses for it, but I don't think that it is a bad thing necessarily…I really don't. I think that my clients at all times get a decent level of service. I am not saying that I am neglectful or negligent in any manner but I think there are some days that they could have got a little bit more…I think that is just the way it is. You are not on the top of your game some days. It is just a factor working in the kind of business that we work in.

Embracing her own humanness has helped Olivia to reconcile those moments in practice where in her words, her "clients could have gotten a little more".

Experience has taught Olivia to "feel confident in the level of service that people get". As she states,

> One thing that I have learned…maybe it is about confidence. I am more confident in the support that I do give and if I do forget something, I don't beat myself up so much because I really do feel that overall, whatever service my clients get from me is decent service. I really don't believe that it is in any way unsatisfactory…so maybe it is a matter of recognizing that I do okay.

Therefore, Olivia's confidence in her abilities serves to neutralize or balance her discomfort in practice through a wider and more accurate perspective of the service that she provides as a whole.

While reflecting on the participants' experience of managing discomfort in practice, I wrote:

> Why is it so difficult to allow myself the same humanness that I so readily embrace in my clients? Becoming elevated to a professional level does not mean that our fallibility is some how left behind. The pedestal upon which many professionals place themselves is dangerously high--it is a long hard fall back to reality.

In review of these descriptions, I recognize that acknowledging fallibility or humanness is not an easy thing for practitioners to do. In my experience there is a real difference between having an intellectual understanding of one's own limitations and being comfortable with them. I have began to wonder if comfort is a dangerous thing when it comes to an awareness of our limitations, or does it lead to complacency or a

lack of empathy in our practice? In other words, if as practitioners we are comfortable with our limitations, do we stop striving in that same way to overcome them?

Integrating the Findings

Observe moderation and balance in all things.

The Sacred Tree

For me, each new insight I experienced through this study seems to lead to a renewal of inquiry and reflection into the practice of self-awareness. As a result, the experience of doing this research has raised as many questions for me about self-awareness as it has answered. In this section, the questions that surfaced for me while sharing in my participants' processes of self-awareness are re-examined through an integrated discussion of the experience of self-awareness for the participants. A comparison to the theories of reflective practice, perspective transformation, critical thinking and mindfulness is included in this discussion.

Similar to Epstein's (1999) vision of mindful practice, the participants experience self-awareness *in* action, as an ongoing process that involves a constant awareness of one's mental and emotional processes so that one acts in a compassionate, informed and ethical manner. Self-awareness is about "acting thinkingly"(Weick, 1983; cited in Brookfield, 1998) and feelingly. Underlying the practice of self-awareness for these professionals is the understanding that when the practitioner is in touch with her/his own values, feelings and experiences, there are more behavioural choices available to them (Lammert, 1986). In Olivia's experience of self-awareness in practice, it involves a process of "corrective self-talk" that guides her behaviour from moment to moment, allowing her to keep her internal world in-check so that her actions most

support the intentions of practice. For Jane, self-awareness in practice involves a constant internal representation of her own cognitive processes, including an awareness of her judgments and values as they surface through her helping efforts, so that a range of behavioural options are available to her that are both appropriate and constructive given the situation. In Austin's experience, self-awareness in action involves a mindfulness or presence in the situation that includes the self as the object of perception. Through this process he maintains an overall awareness of the situation in an attempt to develop the sensitivity and empathy necessary to engage the client in a meaningful therapeutic alliance.

Representing those "special illuminating moments" (p. 374) in practice rather than a continuing process (Lammert, 1986), self-insight occurs in the moment as the participants are living the experience of practice. For them, self-insight also occurs apart from the lived experience of helping others, "creep[ing]" into their consciousness at times when they neither expect nor initiate it. Unlike the theories of critical thinking, perspective transformation, and reflective thinking, the experience of these 'illuminating moments' for the participants can occur in seemingly spontaneous ways without a particularly puzzling or perplexing event to prompt them. Although moments of pointed self-reflection and insight are "triggered by both positive and negative experience" (Brookfield, 1987, p. 7), they also occur in response to ostensibly neutral or irrelevant occurrences that in some way, takes the practitioner back to a particular experience in practice. For Olivia, moments of insight can happen during the course of the daily activities of life, when something triggers her recollection of experience, and for Jane, it sneaks up on her when she is not thinking

about it. As a rather marked divergence from the theories of reflective practice, perspective transformation and critical thinking, further research is needed to clarify what triggers these reflective or illuminating moments for practitioners, how they happen and why they occur in the first place.

For Austin, as for the other participants, self-insight is also cultivated intentionally through periods of focused self-attention in retrospect of practice. Whether the participants are prompted by something in their environment or consciously chose to reflect, reflection on action represents the primary means by which they gain self-knowledge and deepen existing insights, ultimately serving to further enhance or direct any behavioural changes stemming from such awareness. As stated by Osterman (1990), "Professional growth often depends not merely on developing new ideas or theories of action, but on eliminating or modifying those old ideas that have been shaping behaviour" (p. 135). Similar to both the theories of perspective transformation and critical thinking, the participants' experience of reflection involves "exploring and imagining alternatives" (Brookfield, 1987, p. 15) to standards ways of being in practice. Whether through reflective journaling, case noting, debriefing with colleagues, or when triggered by something in their environment, the participants' old ways of being in practice are modified through the reshaping of their previous beliefs and ideals about self and self in relation to other. In Austin's words "...we can't be effective if we just keep going with the same formula."

The experience of self-awareness represents a learning process by which the participants perpetually reinterpret and deepen their understanding of what constitutes

responsible and effective professional practice. Through reflection, knowledge, experience and attitudes are transformed into future action. For them, reflection *on* action is integrated with self-awareness *in* action through "a continual interweaving of thinking and doing" (Schoen, 1983, p. 280). The participants' reflections inform their actions and their actions prompt reflection--each domain extends and expands the other. Consistent with reflective practice (Schoen, 1983), where doing and thinking about doing feed each other and "each sets boundaries for the other" (p. 283), the parameters of reflection on action are defined by the participants' need to apply and test their new knowledge in action. Brookfield's (1987) description of the principles of critical thinking involves a similar relationship between reflection and action. For him, reflection is followed by an a period of exploration in which "we test out new ways of thinking and acting..." (p. 26). The participants' experience of self-awareness involves managing the tensions that exist between action and reflection so that there is a continuous exchange between doing and thinking. In order to keep the process moving, action cannot be stalled by endless reflection (Schoen, 1983), as learning does not happen that way. The continuity of the experience of self-awareness for the participants necessitates that there is a constant balance between action and reflection on action.

An important area of self-knowledge for the participants is an awareness of their limitations and weaknesses in practice. The participants' experience of self-awareness involves an authenticity or humanness in practice that comes from having a heightened awareness of their own professional limitations and being open and honest regarding them. In Jane's words, self-awareness involves a "willingness to put it out

there". Being open in practice means that the participants are vulnerable and fallible in the same way as their clients, in that their limitations are out there, on the table for consideration. By sharing in the participants' experience of openness, I am reminded that living with an awareness of one's fallibility is not an effortless or at all times a comfortable process. According to Brookfield (1987), "being open and honest with oneself and others is arguably the most difficult interpersonal task of adult life [because] ... it entails psychological, political, and economic risks to one's self-esteem and livelihood" (p. 253). Apart from these risks, tensions evolving out of feelings of helplessness and uncertainty that stem from a conscious awareness of systemic and professional limitations, can make the experience uncomfortable and difficult to sustain. In light of the potential challenges and risks of this experience, I began to look deeper into how and why practitioners continue to practice openness in their professional relationships.

The reason practitioners do persist despite the discomfort and risks involved with being open about limitations and weaknesses, is the rewards it produces. Genuineness or authenticity in helping relationships is achieved through an awareness and openness regarding professional limitations. Therefore, the participants' ability to connect with their clients in a meaningful way is impaired by a lack of awareness and openness regarding one's limits and vulnerabilities. As stated by Austin, "if it is not in your heart clients can see that", and it makes a real and noticeable difference to the quality and care of practice. In my own work with federal offenders, having an appreciation of that which makes me most essentially human, my vulnerabilities and weaknesses, helps me to see beyond my clients' behaviours to understand them as

people with limitations and vulnerabilities as well. In other words, by accepting my own humanness I am better able to embrace it in my clients. Knowing the parameters of our professional abilities assists us in knowing where to develop professional competence and it helps us to reconcile those moments when we are unable to help. By trusting in the value of the process, the participants are able to find a degree of comfort with the unfolding awareness of the limits in their knowledge and abilities.

The experience of discomfort for the participants is not limited to an awareness of their professional limitations. For them, discomfort also stems from issues with professional power, newness to the helping role, difficult moments in practice and the negative feelings they can create, professional expectations of self, and from the uncertainty of how to reconcile their own discomfort. Although the participants' descriptions suggest that they become better at dealing with their discomfort overtime, the tensions that exist in practice can never be fully resolved, and therefore, must be continuously managed in practice. Through persistent engagement with their processes of self-awareness, the participants are continually working to overcome the frictions and tensions in practice. Therefore, they experience self-awareness as an ongoing process that that is necessary throughout practice. For Olivia, the perception of self-awareness as a process is encouraged by the understanding that as a helping professional, there is always more she can learn and better understand with respect to her practice and knowledge of self. It involves the lived appreciation that as professionals, we are ourselves, a work in progress.

Balanced against an awareness of the limitations and challenges of doing helping work, the participants recognize the importance of focusing on the positive moments

in their practice, representing those experiences that allow them to remain connected with her/his reasons for doing helping work. In a study by Sparks (1983) that explored some practical solutions for teacher stress, developing a balanced perspective with respect to one's perception of their professional strengths and weaknesses and the experience of teaching as a whole, was identified as being important to the overall health and efficacy of the teacher. Learning to savor professional successes, satisfactions, and the application of strengths draws attention to the positive aspects of the profession, helping to "immunize the individual against some of the unavoidable stressors of the job" (p. 40). Apart from it's role as a more natural coping response, focusing on the positives in practice is both a energizing and reaffirming experience necessary to the healthy functioning of the helping professional. For Olivia, having a balanced perspective of practice means that as practitioners, we recognize that "[we] do okay".

Although there are certain risks related to the subjectivity of this process, including the possibility that practitioners can become so caught up in their own processes that they ignore external feedback, the participants' experiences do not play this out. For them, savoring their personal successes and achievements is not about feeding their ego. It is a way to balance or counter the challenges or negative in practice so that they can continue to define their role in a positive helping way. By seeing the good and the bad in what they do the participants are able to maintain a more balanced approach to their practice. Remembering positive moments in practice is also just one way that the participants immunize themselves against the negativity of practice. Talking about difficult experiences in practice with colleagues and

supervisors, which in itself, is antithetical to the notion of unbridled subjectivity, is also identified by the participants as being essential to a balanced approach to practice. For Parham (1987), the experience of reflective practice also involves "be[ing] open to different points of view" (p. 560) and to consider how these views differ from our own. Owing to the importance of external feedback in the participants' experience of self-awareness, it is unlikely that practitioners will become lost in their own subjectivity if they are actively seeking out feedback from others and respecting what input they do receive.

The overall experience of self-aware practice for Olivia, Jane and Austin is of a dynamic and continuous self-driven process through which they are guided by principles, not procedures. Through this process in which the integrity of the practitioner is key, the values of openness, sensitivity, genuineness, humility and a deep respect for the uniqueness of experience, guide and shape their practice. While the self-aware practitioner strives to become liberated from cultural assumptions (Mezirow, 1981) and to uncover what is most common and accepted about their practice (Schoen, 1983; Brookfield, 1987), the experience goes beyond cultural issues and the understanding of implied knowledge. While similar in nature to the theories of reflective practice, perspective transformation, critical thinking, and particularly Epstein's (1999) theory of mindful practice, the experience of self-awareness for the participants involves a responsible stance towards helping efforts that extends beyond the context of practice, spilling out into all aspects of the practitioner's personal and professional life. At times a challenging process fraught with uncertainty and self-

doubt, the experience of self-aware involves managing discomfort and drawing upon all available resources and supports to maintain a balanced approach to practice.

CHAPTER FIVE

Reflections and Implications

> ....we meet as human beings who have much in common: a heart, a face, a voice, the presence of a soul, fear, hope, the ability to trust, a capacity for compassion and understanding, the kinship of being human.
>
> Abraham Joshua Heschel

Reflections

Reflecting on what I have learned from this study, I am amazed by the apparent complexity and depth of the lived-experience of self-awareness, yet at the same time I marvel in the beautiful simplicity of it. At its most basic and fundamental level, self-awareness is about the pursuit of self-knowledge and understanding--it is lived as a process not an outcome. The experience of self-awareness for the participants is a journey, and it is through a commitment to the lived-experience of self-awareness in professional practice that its lessons are revealed to them. Although difficulties persist, much can be learned from all of the bumps and turns in one's travels, and while variations occur in response to these challenges, our apparent differences may be far less an indicator of dissimilarity than they are a reflection of where we are at in our particular journey.

It was when I was transcribing Jane's tapes that I really heard the angst and self-doubt in her voice. Her words spoke of a struggle that brought me back to a time when I could scarcely hear above the voices of self-doubt that seemed to occupy my mind. Back to when as a new child and youth care worker, I was convinced that someone exceedingly important was going to single me out and tell me that I didn't

belong, that I was an impostor and there was some mistake. While my fears and insecurities have faded over time making the experience of practice a lot more comfortable and manageable for me, as I reflected on Jane's experience of self-awareness in her practice I was reminded that the challenge of living with an awareness of our own limitations or lack of knowledge does not end.

As a child I remember believing that when I reached adulthood, I would finally have all the answers to the questions that seemed to elude me until that point. Upon reaching that magical place, all the holes in my knowledge would somehow disappear, and until that time, I was safe in the understanding that all the answers to my questions would someday come. But when I reached adulthood, I realized that while my life experience afforded me a unique vantage point, I still did not have the answers to many of life's questions and more surprisingly to me was the fact that no one else did either. As someone new to the human service field, Jane is a neophyte wandering through unfamiliar territory and although she has the skills that she needs to find her way, she can't help but feel lost and ill prepared. For beginning practitioners, the realization that they "must ultimately draw on themselves as persons" in doing helping work can be a frightening experience (Corey et al., 1988, p. 33). The difference between Jane and her more experienced counterparts in this study is not so much in their experience of not knowing, but in how each responds to it. According to Duryee, Brymer and Gold (1996), while seasoned practitioners continue to experience times of uncertainty around how to proceed with certain cases, "they are used to this feeling and know that it reflects a challenge to be met rather than proof of ineptitude" (p. 664). Experience has provided Olivia and Austin with an

understanding that has brought acceptance and a sense of peace around the experience of not knowing and with it, the ability to perceive their practice from a balanced perspective. As so aptly stated by Olivia, "...it is a matter of recognizing that I do okay".

As I immersed myself more fully into the lived-experience of self-awareness for the participants, I was consistently brought back to the past, destined to revisit the professional journey that I myself have been on for over ten years now. I remember when I graduated from university with a degree in psychology. My biggest fear at that time was not being able to find a job in my field or even remotely related to my field, which apart from being in the human service profession, I was uncertain exactly what that field would be. As one of thousands of recent graduates with the same education, I felt a sense of anxiety and concern around my job prospects in the professional helping community. When after months of volunteer work I finally secured a position in an open custody facility for male young offenders, some of whom were only a year or two younger than I was at that time, I felt blessed. Finally there was some professional confirmation of the fact that I was a helper, a counsellor, which was a role that I had played with my friends and family for virtually my entire life. I was now a professional helper and I felt validated. Every chance that I had to connect with these youth was a gift that I that I received with great warmth and gratitude. In looking around me I discovered many relatively new professionals as content as I was to be in the same position, but I also saw other individuals for whom the job represented a paycheck and little more. I recall feeling a sense of frustration that these individuals virtually stumbled into something that so many work so long and hard to

achieve. I remember thinking that what was so obvious to me as a professional must be equally evident to the clients.

The importance of being genuine with respect to the practice of self-awareness surfaced again and again in this study, and when one's authentic self is resolved to the position for simple monetary gain or employment security, genuineness becomes a matter of managed self-presentation. Through the participants I have learned that going through the motions of self-aware practice is just that--acting the part without a sense of responsibility to the larger process. The practice of self-awareness involves a deep and real connection to self and to the values of one's profession. Self-awareness without a lived commitment to the experience is a hollow and meaningless endeavor. There is a real and noticeable difference that other professionals and more importantly, our clients can recognize even if we cannot.

Self-awareness is also important with respect to the practitioner's ability to perceive and understand difference. By being self-aware the participants are better able to experience *other* as something separate and apart from the *self.* As stated by Ricks (2001), "the awareness of how the other is filtered through me heightens my awareness of how others differ from me" (p. 2). For the participants, knowing their values, beliefs, and reasons for entering a profession, as well as their strengths and weaknesses in relation to practice, are important areas of self-knowledge with respect to their perception and understanding of difference in helping relationships. According to Lammert (1986), the more the practitioner is "aware of his or her own processes, the more likely he or she is to be aware of the client's processes" (p. 373). In human service practice this means that our ability to appreciate the needs of the

client is enhanced through a process that in Austin's words involves "Trying to put [oneself] in the other person's environment or shoes". It is not only through imagining what it is like to be a particular child, but through "remembering what it was like for oneself when one was the same age involved in the same (or similar) behaviour, cognitive process or emotional state, [that] one begins to engage with the other person in... [an] authentic dialogue and relationship" (Roberts, 2001, p. 13). Through a constant comparison of the experiences of others to our own, meaning is attached to the experience of others through our own experience of the world.

In my reflections on the experience of self-awareness for the participants, I thought about how seemingly well-intentioned and caring professionals can stray from the path of their own self-awareness. Lingering in my thoughts, the words of my participants kept reminding me of one simple yet very revealing fact--human service work is difficult and practitioners do what they can to cope. According to Pines and Aronson (1981; cited in Pines & Aronson, 1983), even highly motivated and committed professionals can lose their spirit because they perform work that is emotionally exhausting, they are generally sensitive to people, and they have a client-centred orientation. Apart from the many challenges practitioners face in the workplace and the fact that having a balanced approach to practice is not limited to managing the frictions in one's professional activities, but requires attention to all areas of the practitioner's life as a person and a professional, the practice of self-awareness is in itself, not without its challenges. To live a commitment to self-awareness through our practice can be a painful and self-effacing endeavor. According to Epstein (1999), "recognition of one's limitations and areas of

incompetence can be emotionally difficult and can invite avoidance in even highly motivated practitioners" (p. 838). Faced with potential inconsistencies between the perceived self and who in fact one is in less idealized terms, even the most readied professionals can buckle under the weight of the commitment and begin to retreat into the self, finding emotional safety under a blanket of self-denial and good intentions. They begin to just *go through the motions.*

In the participants' experience of self-awareness as well as my own, self-aware practice includes a variety of natural and more constructed coping responses to counter the challenges of practice, including the discomfort that can result from an awareness of one's limitations and weaknesses. Apart from the overall need for a balanced approach to practice, the importance of external support as a means of coping with the difficulties of human service practice echoed the loudest in my own experience. According to Strom-Gottfried (1999), "It is incumbent upon professionals to seek and use appropriate consultation to assure that they are practicing with professional and personal competence" (p. 448). Described by Olivia as an "instinctual response", the need to develop external support in the challenging climate of human service work is a strong one. Finding a safe environment in which to explore the feelings of ugliness that surface through our work with people is essential, especially considering that acknowledging these "feelings can result in a decrease in tension and feelings of guilt" (Pope & Tabachnick, 1993, p. 142). Our ability to manage the power inherent in our professional roles, to understand and accept differences, to recognize our strengths and weaknesses, and ultimately, to grow as professionals, is enhanced by external support. Apart from the importance of

self-awareness, which aids the professional in identifying their particular "warning signs that indicate the onset of a problem" (p. 34), Sparks (1983) calls for a reduction in the sense of isolation that can accompany many professional helping roles. In human service practice, fostering a sense of community or having the experience of being part of something that is larger than the self is essential to the prevention of burnout. It also may in fact very naturally come out of the shared experience of self-awareness in professional practice.

The act of engaging in this research, in coming to know the words of the participants as though they were my own, in knowing their struggles and professional challenges in a way that is unique and highly personal, has been an experience in kinship far greater than I could have anticipated. United in the struggles defined by our profession, the shared commitment to the practice of self-awareness in the face of these challenges forms a common thread that connects human service professionals, making the professional community seem a lot smaller and a whole lot closer for me.

Implications of the Study

The accounts of the participants are apt illustrations of the challenges likely to be encountered through the practice of self-awareness, and thus, valuable lessons can be found in these descriptions. One lesson is a reminder that self-awareness is a difficult process marred by self-doubt and uncertainty. A second lesson their experiences show is that despite the challenges of living a commitment to self-aware practice, practitioners persist and they do succeed. A third lesson, which stems from the previous two, is that while the experience of self-awareness is highly self-focused, much can be done from an organizational perspective to support self-awareness from

the beginning of the professional life of a worker and throughout their professional career. Based upon the experience of self-awareness for the participants, several suggestions will be made here that address the issue of self-awareness on the individual level of practitioner, in terms of professional responsibilities to self, and on a larger agency or organizational level. The suggestions are organized in relation to four areas of importance pertaining to the practice of self-awareness, that include professional responsibility, effective supervision, collegiality and preventing burnout. The discussion in each of these areas is centred on what the experience of practice would look like if the quality of self-awareness suggested by this study were taken up within organizations and agencies. It is important to note that these implications are the result of the integration of my own experience in practice, my participants' discussions of self-awareness, and the research literature.

Professional Responsibility

Human service professionals have a responsibility to foster self-awareness and personal growth in their work, recognizing that "when [they] are aware of their own values, attitudes, cultural background, and personal needs, the process of helping others is less likely to be negatively impacted by those factors" (NOHSE, 1975, Statement 36). Professionals also have a responsibility to know themselves before entering the human service profession and to continue to find new and creative ways to encourage self-understanding and personal awareness throughout their helping career. By bringing practitioner self-awareness to the forefront of agency agendas, and by allowing time and space in which one's values and beliefs can be explored in relation to practice, the agency or organization can go a long way in facilitating

practitioner self-awareness. According to Rothman (1999), "Negative stereotypes, biases, and prejudices are often a part of our beliefs and feelings about 'other'" (p. 119). Although certain negative beliefs or biases may be known to the practitioner, at times they are "deeply buried in our subconscious, in our language, in our gestures, and in our behaviour" (Rothman, 1999, p. 119). In an atmosphere that values self-awareness the practitioner is encouraged to dig out these implicit beliefs, stereotypes and prejudices and explore them in relation to the client populations that they encounter in practice, working to uncover the ways in which their thinking may be supporting oppressive and discriminatory treatment towards already marginalized populations. Practitioners should also be encouraged to explore their reasons for entering the human service profession and to understand how these reasons impact client care and the ways in which client problems are perceived (Rothman, 1999).

Practitioners have a responsibility to be aware of their limits with respect to the scope of their professional knowledge and skill base, and only offer services within the range of their abilities (NOHSE, 1975, Statement 26). Having a conscious awareness of professional limitations makes the inevitable experience of not meeting all the client's needs less troublesome and uncomfortable for the practitioner (Sanow & Krahmer, 1983). Practitioners who have idealized beliefs about how their organizations should be working and what they should be able to accomplish with respect to meeting client needs are likely to experience "reality shock" (Kramer, 1974; cited in Maslach & Jackson, 1984). Apart from the role agencies can play with respect to encouraging individual awareness of personal limitations, the limits from an organizational or agency perspective need to be clearly communicated with all

practitioners. According to Sanow and Krahmer (1983), "staff members need to have a conscious awareness of their personal and the system's limitations and learn to feel comfortable in not meeting all the needs a recipient may present to them" (p. 261). The authors suggest that these issues could be discussed at the time of employment interviews, which would not only give applicants some insight into agency policy but it would also allow them to determine if the position fits with their personal belief system and goals for employment. Any changes in organizational policy need to be openly communicated with practitioners so the boundaries of service remain clearly defined. When the agency clearly defines the limits of service, not the individual practitioner, it makes it much easier and a lot less uncomfortable to draw the line for yourself and in turn, for your client(s).

Effective Supervision

Having a balanced perspective on practice requires an awareness of the good and the bad in our practice. It involves knowing and exploring our weaknesses as well as our strengths in relation to practice. However, in many human focused organizations "the job is structured such that the employee seldom hears when things go right for a client, but always hears if things go wrong"(Maslach & Jackson, 1984, p. 148), which can result in the practitioner having a negative or skewed perspective of their practice. When the only positive feedback workers may be getting is surmised from the fact that the client does not return, professional growth and development can quickly become mired. Providing an important source of feedback, through periods of formal and informal supervision, supervisors provide an integral professional development function for practitioners.

similar values are shared both among and between employees and management, and a sense of respect for each other" (p. 150). A sense of trust and emotional safety are also characteristic of a supportive self-aware environment.

Providing time and space for workers to discuss and reflect on their experience of self-aware practice and provide feedback to one another is paramount to the professional development of the worker and ultimately, to the functioning of the agency as a whole. For Maslach (1976; cited in Cherniss, 1980a), susceptibility to burnout is lessened when human service professionals have regular opportunities to discuss their feelings about their work experiences with others who are going through the same or similar experiences. The reflective process itself is enhanced through periods of collegial interaction and dialogue. According to Pugach and Johnson (1988), "interactive reflection" allows for the sharing of knowledge and experience and facilitates cognitive processes foundational to reflection. Supervisors can promote self-awareness and avoid the trap of engaging practitioners in purely intellectual exercises by developing reflective activities that are linked to the experience of practice and the values and principles of their profession. Although many systemic barriers including heavy workloads and isolating role structures block collegiality in human service organizations (Cherniss, 1980a), supervisors can play an important role in overcoming these barriers, particularly when, as in Olivia's words, it may be "just a matter of [having] someone to listen to what you have been through".

Preventing Burnout

In an article exploring the experience of burnout in care-giving professions, Sanow and Krahmer (1983) discuss the change in role perception and role behaviour that has occurred across public agencies in response to the shift in individual rights that has taken place over the last 30 years. While noted as being extreme and not in the best interests of the client, the previous model was "one of an authority figure who has knowledge, resources, and power and a client who has not" (Maslach, 1978). The authors caution that the pendulum has swung to an equally destructive extreme in the current climate where "a large segment of the population no longer views public assistance as some kind of safety net that a caring and affluent society provides; rather it is viewed as something the recipient is entitled to by virtue of being born in this country" (Sanow & Krahmer, 1983, p. 259). This shift has served to heighten public expectations of what caregivers can and should be providing, while not necessarily taking into account the acute emotional stresses intrinsic to the work. Instead of experiencing gratitude and respect from service recipients, practitioners may now experience "open hostility as a representative of the system" (Sanow & Krahmer, 1983, p. 260). Recognizing the discrepancy between the needs of clients and the limitations of the system, many practitioners feel betrayed and unappreciated creating fertile ground on which the seeds of burnout can take root and grow (Sanow & Krahmer, 1983). In this climate of mounting demands and expectations and fewer and fewer resources, self-awareness becomes critical to the healthy functioning of helping professionals and the agencies in which they work.

Actively pursuing balance within our practice requires the ability to recognize and respond to any signs that may indicate that our practice is out of balance. As stated by Maslach (1982), "You must be in good shape yourself truly to give unto others" (p. 95). Apart from having an awareness of internal cues that signal the build-up of stress and tension, it is my belief that practitioners should educate themselves on the signs or symptoms of burnout. Having knowledge and understanding regarding the experience of burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment is essential (Maslach, 1982), but may be incomplete. As stated by Sanow and Krahmer (1983), the ways in which people experience and deal with burnout as a syndrome may be highly individual. For them, burnout is "an intensely personal experience, and it leads to decisions and actions that have profound consequences on both the person and those in the person's environment" (p. 257). Educating staff on the experience of burnout as a process that involves shared and individual symptoms is essential to creating a healthy and self-aware environment within human service agencies. According to Cherniss (1980b), "'Consciousness-raising' must be the first step in any effort to deal with the problem of burnout in a community agency" (p. 159). When one is educated on the symptoms and signs of professional burnout, one is naturally less likely to be complacent in the face of such indicators; ultimately, we know too much. Meeting the needs of clients without falling prey to the experience of burnout requires that the practitioner be strong in mind, body and spirit and the "ability to introspect and understand yourself is critical for coping with burnout" (Maslach, 1982, p. 98).

Closing Comments

Looking back on the findings, I question what all this really means for practitioners, supervisors, researchers, and for those trying to prepare practitioners for practice. This line of questioning is particularly salient in light of the many challenges presented by the process. Living a commitment to self-awareness involves stepping into a perpetual state of discomfort where the ugliness of what is brought forth is never fully escaped. By its' very nature, self-awareness is about immersing oneself in the contradictions and tensions in practice. It operates beneath the surface of practice, in the residual muck and grime of what bubbles up through our helping relationships--the self-aware practitioner is going to get dirty and stay dirty. Apart from the more personal or individual challenges of living the experience, self-awareness requires a substantial organizational commitment that is threaded through every aspect of organizational life; it is not adequately addressed if simply tacked on to the last ten minutes of staff meetings or loosely touched on in supervision. The sensitivity of the experience of self-awareness also raises ethical concerns regarding how supervisors and educators assess or critique individual processes of self-awareness. And finally, self-awareness invites uneasiness regarding how best to advocate for self-awareness in practice without enforcing or imposing such a personal and challenging experience on others, particularly without due consideration of the implications of such a request. With these issues in mind, I realize that it may seem like self-awareness is asking a whole lot of individual practitioners, supervisors and educators, perhaps it may seem, too much to give.

Although I acknowledge the reality of the challenges surrounding the experience of self-awareness in practice, I am left wondering--*What is the alternative*? This entire thesis is structured around the importance of self-awareness with respect to the health and functioning of the practitioner, and the potential consequences to the practitioner, the clients, and the agency as a whole if self-awareness is not actively included in practice. In my experience and understanding of human service practice, the costs of an examined life are far fewer than the consequences of not living one. With an eye towards the dilemma of how best to live, support and facilitate a difficult and highly personal experience such as self-awareness, future research may be best served by exploring these challenges. Another area for future research is the issue of power in human service practice, specifically how self-awareness factors into practitioners' perception and use of their power in helping relationships. Although power was not the focus of this study, tensions stemming from awareness of professional power emerged in relation to all of the participants' experiences of self-awareness.

Before an understanding and appreciation of self-awareness and the difficulties surrounding it can be enacted, there must be an absolute shift in thinking regarding what it means to be professional in human service practice. To embrace self-awareness is to discard the *illusion of separation* born from the notion that we can somehow release ourselves from who we are as individuals when we step into our professional roles. The idea that the personal is separate and generally irrelevant or extraneous with respect to the professional is a stumbling block in our knowledge of self-awareness as a practice-based process, and any threads that still connect us to this

way of thinking about professional practice must be severed before self-awareness will firmly take root in the collective consciousness of the helping community. Through this study I have tried to dispel this illusion by attempting to live the research as self-awareness is experienced in practice. I was true to the process of self-awareness by exposing my limitations and vulnerabilities as a professional, but more importantly, by revealing the person behind the professional.

References

Argyris, C. & Schoen, D.A. (1974). Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Aronowitz, S. (1998). Introduction. In P. Friere, (Eds.), Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage (pp. 1-27). New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

Boyd-Franklin, N. (1989). Black families in therapy: A multisystems approach. New York: Guildord.

Bray, J., Lee, J. Smith, L., & Yorks, L. (2000). Collaborative inquiry in practice: Action, reflection and meaning making. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Brookfield, S.D. (1987). Developing critical thinkers: Challenging adults to explore alternative ways of thinking and acting. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Brookfield, S.D. (1998). Understanding and facilitating moral learning in adults. Journal of Moral Education, 27 (3), 283-300.

Cherniss, C. (1980a). Professional burnout in human service organizations. New York: Praeger.

Cherniss, C. (1980b). Staff burnout: Job stress in the human services. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Colaizzi, P.F. (1978). Psychological research as a phenomenologist views it. In R. Valle & M. King (Eds.), Existential phenomenological alternatives for psychology (Ch. 3, pp. 48-71). NY: Oxford University Press.

Copeland, W., Birmingham, C., De La Cruz, E., & Lewin, B. (1993). The reflective practitioner in teaching: Toward a research agenda. Teaching & Teacher Education, 9 (4), 347-359.

Corey, G., Corey, M., & Callanan, P. (1988). Issues and ethics in the helping professions. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dewey, J. (1933). How we think. Lexington, MA: Heath.

Dukes, S. (1984). Phenomenological methodology in the human sciences. Journal of Religion and Health, 23 (3), 197-203.

Duryee, J., Brymer, M., & Gold, K. (1996). The supervisory needs of neophyte psychotherapy trainees. Journal of Clinical Psychology, 52 (6), 663-671.

Epstein, R. (1999). Mindful practice. JAMA, 282 (9), 833-839.

Ford, T & Dillard, C. (1996). Becoming multicultural: A recursive process of self and social construction. Theory and Practice, 35 (4), 232-238.

Giorgi, A. (1983). Concerning the possibility of phenomenological psychological research. Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 14 (2), 129-166.

Hardy, K.V. & Laszloffy, T. (1992). Training racially sensitive family therapists: Context, content, and contract. Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services, June 1992, 73 (6), 364-370.

Heron, J. & Reason, P. (1997). A participatory inquiry paradigm. Qualitative Inquiry, 3 (3), 274-294.

Hoskins, M. (2001). True grit and the new frontier: Cultivating new ground for psychological research. Qualitative Inquiry, 7 (5), 659-675.

Kondrat, M.E. (1999). Who is the "self" in self-aware: Professional self-awareness from a critical theory perspective. Social Service Review, 73 (4), 451-477.

Kottkamp, R. (1990). Means for facilitating reflection. Education and Urban Society, 22 (2), 182-203.

Kottler, J.A. (1986). On being a therapist. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kvale, S. (1996). Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lammert, M. (1986). Experience as knowing: Utilizing therapist self-awareness. Social Casework: The Journal of Contemporary Social Work, 67 (6), 369-376.

Langer, E.J. (1997). The power of mindful learning. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Langer, E.J. & Moldoveanu, M. (2000). The construct of mindfulness. Journal of Social Issues, 56 (1), 1-9.

Locke, D.C. (1986). Increasing multicultural understanding. Newbury Park, CA: Brooks/Cole.

London, H. & Devore, W. (1988). Layers of understanding: Counseling ethnic minority families. Family Relations, 37, 310-314.

Maslach, C. (1978). The client role in staff burn-out. Journal of Social Issues, 34, 111-125.

Maslach, C. (1982). Burnout – The cost of caring. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Maslach, C. & Jackson, S.E. (1984). Burnout in organizational settings. Applied Social Psychology Annual, 5, 133-153.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). The phenomenology of perception. New York: Humanities Press.

Mezirow, J. (1981). A critical theory of adult learning and education. Adult Education, 32 (1), 3-24.

Mezirow, J. (1985). Concept and action in adult education. Adult Education Quarterly, 35 (3), 142-151.

Mitchell, K. (1999). Survival skills for child care workers. The Child Care Worker, 13 (2), 9.

Moustakas, C. (1994). Phenomenological research methods. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Nakkula, M. & Ravitch. S. (1998). Matters of interpretation: Reciprocal transformation in therapeutic developmental relationships with youth. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

National Organization for Human Service Education (1975). Ethical standards of human service professionals. Retrieved August 30, 2001 from the World Wide Web: http://www.nohse.com/ethstand.html

Novack, D.H., Epstein, R.M., & Paulsen, R.H. (1999). Toward creating physician-healers: Foster medical student's self-awareness, personal growth, and well-being. Academic Medicine, 74 (5), 516-520.

Osterman, K. (1990). Reflective practice: A new agenda for education. Education and Urban Society, 22 (2), 133-152.

Parham, D. (1987). Toward professionalism: The reflective Therapist. The American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 41, 555-561.

Pines, A. & Aronson, E. (1983). Combating burnout. Children & Youth Services Review, 5 (3), 263-275.

Pope, K. & Tabachnick, B. (1993). Therapist's anger, hate, fear, and sexual feelings: National survey of therapist responses, client characteristics, critical events, formal complains, and training. Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 24, (2), 142-152.

Prado, C. G. (1978). Reflexive consciousness. Dialogue, 27 (1), 134-137.

Pugach, M.& Johnson, L. (1988). Promoting teacher reflection through structured dialogue. In H.C. Waxman, H.J. Freiburg, J.C. Vaughn, & M. Weil (Eds.), Images of reflection in teacher education (pp. 30-31). Reston, VA: Association of Teacher Educators.

Ricks, F. (2001, April). Without the self there is no other. CYC-Online. Retrieved August 17, 2001 from the World Wide Web: http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0401-ricks.html

Roberts, A. (2001). Working phenomenologically with children. The Child Care Worker, 9 (4), 13.

Rose Slade, L. (1996). Journal entries. Journal of Child and Youth Care, 10 (4), 79-83.

Ross, W. & Hannay, L. (1986). Reflective inquiry. Journal of Teacher Education, 37 (4), 9-15.

Rothman, J. (1999). The self-awareness workbook for social workers. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Sanow, S. & Krahmer, J. (1983). Staff burnout from a social perspective. Children & Youth Services Review, 5 (3), 255-262.

Schoen, D.A. (1983). The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action. USA: Basic Books.

Schoen, D.A. (1987). Educating the reflective practitioner. San Francsico: Jossey-Bass.

Schulman, E.D. (1982). Intervention in human services: A guide to skills and knowledge. St. Louis: C.V. Mosby.

Sparks, D. (1983). Practical solutions for teacher stress. Theory into Practice, 22 (1), 33-42.

Strom-Gottfried, K. (1999). Professional boundaries: An analysis of violations by social workers. Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services, 80 (5), 439-449.

Suzuki, S. (1980). Zen mind, beginner's mind. New York: Weatherhill.

van Manen, M. (1992). Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy. London, Ontario: Althouse..

Wedenoja, M., Nurius, P., & Tripodi, T. (1988). Enhancing mindfulness in practice prescriptive thinking. Social Casework: The Journal of Contemporary Social Work, 69 (7), 427-433.

Westerberg, J. & Hilliard, J. (1994). Fostering learners' reflection and self-assessment. Core Concepts in Family Medicine Education, 26 (5), 278-282.

Young, S. (1978). Self-awareness. Child Care Work in Focus, 2, 2-3.

APPENDIX A

Research Question(s):

- How do practitioners engage in a process of reflection, both in and on action?
- What does it mean to be engaged in self-aware practice?

Interview Questions:

- Do you feel you practice self-awareness or critical reflection in your professional practice?
- Explain this experience.

- Describe a situation where an awareness of your personal values informed your practice.
- How do you maintain an awareness of your values in your practice?

- Describe a situation where an awareness of your professional strengths and weaknesses informed your practice.
- How do you maintain an awareness of your strengths and weaknesses in your practice, even more transient changes in mood or circumstance that can affect professional competency?
- Do you seek external support during difficult situations in practice? Why or why not? What would facilitate this for you?

- Using an example from practice, describe the experience of maintaining objectivity in your professional role.
- Have personal issues ever surfaced for you as the result of interactions with clients?
- If so, what happened and how did you respond? How do you maintain objectivity in these situations?

- Do you reflect on practice-based experience in retrospect of the experience?
- Describe this experience using an example from practice.

- How do you integrate your learning through reflection into your day-to-day practice?

- When reflecting on practice, is there a point for you when there is no value in remaining in a critical self-reflective stance?
- Describe this experience using an example from practice.

APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA
INFORMED CONSENT BY SUBJECTS TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Note: The University and those conducting this project subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of research participants. This form and the information it contains are given to you for your own protection and full understanding of the procedures, risks and benefits involved. Your signature on this form will signify that you have received this document describing the project, that you have received an adequate opportunity to consider the information in the document, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in the project.

Your involvement is requested in a study entitled: The Practice of Self-awareness: A Phenomenological View of Self-awareness as a Professional Process. This study is being conducted by a graduate student at the University of Victoria in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Masters Degree (School of Child and Youth Care in the Faculty of Human and Social Development). If you have any questions or concerns regarding the research, please contact the student at (905) 523-7460 ext. 116 (work) or (905) 528-3941 (home) or the research supervisor, Dr. Marie Hoskins at (250) 721-7982. The AVP Research (Human Research Ethics Committee) number is (250) 721-7971.

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experience of self-awareness through the day-to-day practice of a human service work. The study will look at the experience of being self-aware through professional practice from the perspective of the practicing professional. While considered fundamental to human service practice, from a research perspective the experience of self-awareness as a recognized aspect of work with people could be more fully understood. Therefore, this study is viewed as being both timely and important.

The selection of participants is based upon the diverse perspective each brings to the topic of self-aware practice (as determined by area of work of each participant). Additional criteria for selection are: (a) an interest in the phenomenon (b) has experienced the phenomenon (c) can articulate her/his experience (d) can relate to the researcher.

As its benefits this study a) allows the participant the opportunity to explore her/his professional practice through an examination of self-awareness as a form of best practice, which could lead to a deeper understanding of 'self' as a professional; b) provides a chance to reflect on the practice of others, thereby allowing the opportunity to develop a greater appreciation of your practice in relation to a larger context; c) may reaffirm and rejuvenate current practice. A potential risk of this study involves the realization of certain insights that you may find self-effacing or contrary to previous perception. The act of being self-aware can be a difficult and challenging experience, even for a readied professional.

Participation in this study requires your involvement in one to two semi-structured interviews and follow-up contact for clarification for an approximate total of 3 hours of your time. In addition, a debriefing session will follow each interview in order to address any emotional needs resulting from the interview. If further support is needed, the researcher will provide you with an appropriate referral for professional counseling which you can access alone or with the researcher.

All information will be recorded anonymously (without reference to your name or identifying information) to be used for research purposes only. Confidentiality of data is also assured, as all data (audio & written transcripts of interview) will be kept in a secure file in the possession of the researcher. Participants will be assigned code names and the names of all third parties mentioned in the research will be coded or deleted. Details regarding participants may be altered to further protect anonymity.

You have the right to refuse to respond to any question that you do not want to answer and can end an interview at point. You can withdraw your participation at any time (data will be destroyed immediately if participation is withdrawn unless permission is given). Participants will be given the opportunity to read the final report.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date:_____

Signature of Researcher: _____

A copy of the consent form will be left with the participant and a copy will be taken by the researcher

VITA

Surname: Weingart Given Names: Shelley Barbara

Place of Birth: Dawson Creek, British Columbia, Canada

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria	1991-1993
Okanagan University College	1989-1991

Degrees Awarded:

B.A. (Honours) – University of Victoria	1993

Honours and Awards:

Diploma in General Studies with Distinction	1991
University of Victoria Alumni Undergraduate Scholarship	1992

PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant the right to lend my thesis to users of the University of Victoria Library, and to make single copies for such users or in response to a request from the Library of any other university, or similar institution, on its behalf for one of its users. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or a member of the University designated by me. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis:

The Practice of Self-awareness: Exploring the Meaning of Self-Awareness as a Professional Process

Author 

Shelley B. Weingart

November 2002